

CAVAFY IN ALEXANDRIA

*He's hidden everywhere here; not as he looks
in his photographs but in his psyche, habits —
in his stylized diffidence, conservative decadence.
I glimpse, detect him frequently: at night
walking quickly down an alley close to the walls'
shadow; afternoon in a tearoom alone glancing over
the edge of his foreign newspaper, his eye glasses;
mornings at his desk in the crowded clerical
bureaucracy where I must go to regularise my papers.
He shows up behind one face or another in any
of his private poems: they're in his glances.
I may, one afternoon or evening, be introduced,
(perhaps approached by him for staring) he sitting
on the end edge of a canope, stiff in his correct,
if shabby suit and tie, turned-in toes; peering from
spectacles out of his other-world expectancy. I feel
nervous about what to say then, what to talk about. Yes!*

MEDITERRANEAN LANDLORD

*Up and at my early morning chores
of household, workroom, I corner eye him
on his bare porch, stare hard his void
as though his eyes were eyeless. Not
sea nor splendid sun sees he but land —
though stony, by the sea, his own —
with new constructions on it. He
also eyes the fields of others sown
with corn round our bay and silently
spites all that honest labour.*

*His head's too big for that reptilian body,
bald as the giant turtle and snap beaked
his nose, too. All squat there, he's
neither white nor weather-black but dark
and dour, a bulge-eyed toad of calculations.*

*All round here the stony land was once
his hard farmed father's. He doesn't work its
surface now but sells off plots to strangers
to build their seaside summer houses. For this
he sits back days to count, recount his makings.
He's my landlord. I'm his tenant but can't afford
to buy or build—a mere mote in his visions.
I've never seen him take a swim or wear
a suit. The clothes he's worn look the same
these twenty years. he never buys the paper;
collects news from others, like the taxman.*

*He did once work, when this was his father's land
just like other farmers round here; did tend
their goat-herd on the mountain up behind.
Now our sea dingle's in, he's sold his goats
and squats and plots from meal to meal.
Some dark strain's devouring him within.*

*When I'm slow with the rent he's darker still
and when I pay, his teeth gnash out his smile.
His colourless, eyeless eyes then glitter.*