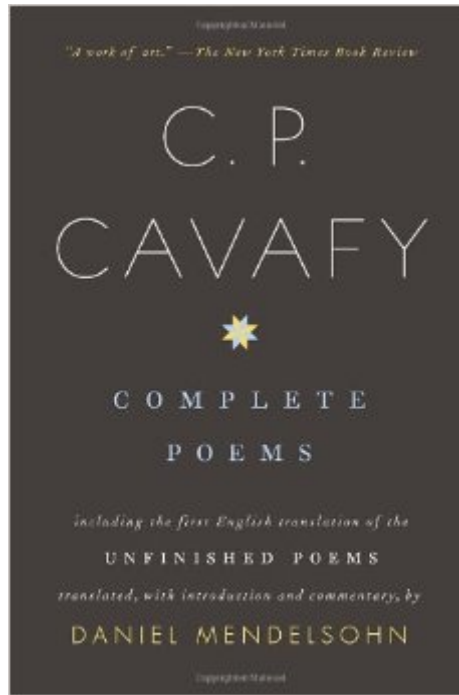


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Complete Poems



Synopsis

An extraordinary literary event: Daniel Mendelsohn's acclaimed two-volume translation of the complete poems of C. P. Cavafy—including the first English translation of the poet's final Unfinished Poems—now published in one handsome edition and featuring the fullest literary commentaries available in English, by the renowned critic, scholar, and international best-selling author of *The Lost*. No modern poet so vividly brought to life the history and culture of Mediterranean antiquity; no writer dared break, with such taut energy, the early-twentieth-century taboos surrounding homoerotic desire; no poet before or since has so gracefully melded elegy and irony as the Alexandrian Greek poet Constantine Cavafy (1863–1933). Whether advising Odysseus on his return to Ithaca or confronting the poet with the ghosts of his youth, these verses brilliantly make the historical personal—and vice versa. To his profound exploration of longing and loneliness, fate and loss, memory and identity, Cavafy brings the historian's assessing eye along with the poet's compassionate heart. After more than a decade of work and study, Mendelsohn—a classicist who alone among Cavafy's translators shares the poet's deep intimacy with the ancient world—gives readers full access to the genius of Cavafy's verse: the sensuous rhymes, rich assonances, and strong rhythms of the original Greek that have eluded previous translators. Complete with the Unfinished Poems that Cavafy left in drafts when he died—a remarkable, hitherto unknown discovery that remained in the Cavafy Archive in Athens for decades—and with an in-depth introduction and a helpful commentary that situates each work in a rich historical, literary, and biographical context, this revelatory translation is a cause for celebration: the definitive presentation of Cavafy in English.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I had already bought the two-volume hardcover edition. (It is a pity that this edition is not also in a hardcover form considering it is slightly revised.) I have no more than a smattering of modern greek; but I have eleven different english translations of at least the Canon. Comparing Professor Mendelsohn's translation of "The God Abandons Anthony" (my favourite) with those and the original greek, I find his exemplary. N.B. Professor Mendelsohn's surname IS spelt with only one "s"---consult your own image of the cover.

This new translation has extensive notes. It's very helpful. If you love Cavafy, you will love this new translation. If you are unfamiliar with Cavafy, this is a great introduction.

I must say that I am partial to the Edmund Keeley/Philip Sherrard translations. Simply put, they are more accessible, poetic and evocative. I admit that Mendelsohn has done a yeoman's work in looking anew at the poems and offering these translations and he must be commended. However, they are mostly clunky, oblong and cumbersome, however "accurate" they may academically be. The introduction makes a very clear case for the approach but in practice I find it unconvincing. All that said, I am still glad I bought the book. The more Cavafy the better!

Mendelsohn has completely retranslated all of Cavafy into English. As he says in the Introduction, [Cavafy's poetry is] "deeply, hauntingly rhythmical, sensuously assonant when not actually rhyming. It seemed to me worthwhile to try to replicate these elements whenever it was possible to do so." Since I know no Greek, my previous exposure to Cavafy has been the Dalven translation, and while the latter adequately captures the sense of Cavafy's poems, the Mendelsohn translations are remarkable for their blend sense and sound. To pick one small example from hundreds of pages, the poem "Second Odyssey" begins: A second Odyssey and a great one, too, / greater than the first, perhaps. But alas, / without a Homer, without Hexameters. Mendelsohn's lucid introduction and detailed notes are essential for the modern American reader with no special background in Hellenic and Hellenistic culture and the Greek diaspora. I now appreciate much of Cavafy far more deeply than I did before. Altogether the book is an amazing amalgam of scholarship and art. Between the freshness of the poetry and the wonderful annotations it's hard to find a poem that doesn't "work," and many more now seem extraordinary.

Mendelsohn provides a thorough and thoughtful discussion of Cavafy's poetry: the historical background for Cavafy, his Hellenistic interests, his use of demotic and classical Greek, his preferred subjects. The analysis of Cavafy's style, his attention to meter and rhyme is especially helpful and of particular interest is the history of the "unpublished poems," poems translated into English here for the first time.

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