

Enclosed: Welcome to 1990; 1989-1990 & the Little Green Men;
The Pharisees Prayer; Bird songs.

March 1, 1990

Dear Dimitris,

How are you, and what are you doing these days? Con Castan told me you had been to Greece, but had recently returned. I, on the other hand, plan to go to Greece this year with my wife---but not to Leros, I'm afraid. We want mainly to go to Crete, and the dates must be very late September to early October (say 26 Sept to 6 Oct). Do you know if the museums and classical sites will be open for tourists about that time? I ought to show my wife something of mainland Greece too, the places I saw back in 1957 -- Mycenae, Epidavros, Delphi at least. We were thinking of hiring a car in Crete, but I rather enjoy the local buses on the mainland -- or I used to; I don't know if things have changed in that respectsince 33 years ago. My modern Greek is rudimentary, but I shall brush it up before September.

On the other hand I have been studying Ancient Greek intensively over the last 4 months. I can now read Homer with some fluency, and am also delighted with pseudo-Anakreon and many of the epigrams in the Anthology, some of which I have copied out by hand into one of my Greek course books. Here are two of my favorites:

Ναυηγού τάφος εἶμι. σὺ δὲ κλέε. καὶ γὰρ ὄθ' ἡμεῖς
ὠλομεθ', αἱ λοιπαὶ νῆες ἐποντοπόρουν.

καὶ τοῦτο

οὔτ' ὅτι θνατὸς εἰς καὶ εφάμερος. ἀλλ' ὅταν ἄστρον
μαστεύω πυκινὰς ἀμφιδρόμους ἔλικας,
οὐχέτ' ἐπιψαύω γαίης ποσίην, ἀλλὰ παρ' αὐτῶι
Ζανὶ θεοτρεφέος πίμπλαμαι ἀμβροσίης.

Sorry for the bad typing: I have borrowed an old Greek typewriter from the Classics Dept, and the ribbon is uncertain, and my handling of the machine even more so. I can't see any point to "smooth breathings," even in Ancient Greek, and so tend to leave them out as useless clutter. But the poetry! The sailor's tomb one seems to express the good tough ethic of the human race---sail on, you survivors! The other one is attributed to PTOLEMAIOS, who I think must be Claudius Ptolemy the astronomer; I am an amateur astronomer myself, and I understand what he's saying. I am a dying animal, and yet, when I contemplate the stars and understand their cunning orbits I also feel like a timeless god.

What do you think of the brave new world we have been living in for the last 6 months? Tyrannies toppling everywhere. I have started a wall-newspaper on the notice board just outside my room in the Michie Building. In fact I put up a notice last June, comment built round the newspaper picture of the massacre in Beijing. This was promptly vandalized by a Marxist student. This year I am putting

up notice after notice, and there is no serious vandalism. The Marxists are keeping very quiet now, their tails between their legs. No more flamboyant red posters round the uni, only the occasional timid poster IS SOCIALISM DEAD? I am not inclined to rub it in ---well, just a little---because what the world needs now is forgiveness and healing. Marxism is revealed as a toothless paper tiger, and they now have no hope of taking over this English Department or indeed of influencing many students at all. In my own classes -- especially in Romantic Poetry---I am stressing that we are living in an era rather similar in feeling to 1789 (Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive)---before the French Revolution went badly totalitarian and began cutting off heads.

If only the casualties of that revolution could look down on earth now---Lavoisier, Bailly, Condorcet---the scientists, the optimists...Condorcet never lost his optimism for the future perfectibility of Man, even when the other faction were closing in on him, and he was forced to commit suicide. The Revolution, after 200 years, seems at last to be succeeding in the way it should have gone from the start.

I enclose two items from my wall-newspaper this week, plus two (?) recent poems. I don't know if the Pharisee thing should be called a poem, it's more like a sketch or monolog in doggerel (no metre, only rhyme). The bird-poem is not very good, but it's my attempt to capture the exact rhythm of that bird-call I heard one year, and one year only, in the Brisbane dawn. It was the most beautiful bird-call I have ever heard---it had something of the quality of the "Dance of the Blessed Spirits" from Gluck's Orpheus---I mean the flute solo in that piece. A summons from another world. I can still whistle the bird call from memory.

Well, my wife and I are going to Europe this year, June-October. June and most of September we'll be in Britain, August probably in the USA. I am editing an H.G. Wells novel, First Men in the Moon, and important texts are in Britain and America. The Greek trip will be made on our way home.

We are both in good health; in fact, I feel younger this year than I did three or four years ago! I walk two miles a day, to the uni and back, and I climb trees with agility. I have to do the latter, as we have had a mango crop of 608 Bowen mangoes in three trees, and I had to get every one down by hand.

That's too much about me. Tell me how things are with you, what you are doing, thinking, etc. Now I've got to walk to work and give a class.

All the best,

Yours,

David Lake