

## Translation of Cavafy's poem

What are we waiting for assembled as one in the market place?

It is the barbarians who are coming today.

Why in the Senate is there such lethargy?  
Why do the Senators sit without legislating?

Because the barbarians are coming today.  
What laws will the Senators now make?  
The barbarians once here, will legislate.

Why has our emperor risen so very early this morning,  
and why does he sit waiting by the city's main gate  
upon his throne, solemn, in state, wearing the crown?

Because the barbarians are coming today.  
And the emperor is waiting to receive  
their leader. Indeed, he has even prepared  
a scroll to give him. Therein he inscribed  
many titles and honourable names.

Why have our two supreme consuls and the praetors come out  
today in their scarlet, their embroidered togas?  
Why do they wear bracelets with so many amethysts,  
and rings sparkling with brilliant glittering emeralds?  
Why today do they carry priceless canes  
elegantly worked in silver and gold?

Because the barbarians are coming today  
and things such as these dazzle the barbarians.

Why don't our distinguished orators come forward as always  
to make their speeches, and say what they have to say?

Because the barbarians are coming today  
and they're bored with eloquence and oratorical harangue.

Why all of a sudden such restlessness  
and why this confusion? (How serious people's faces have become).  
Why do the streets and squares empty so very quickly,  
with everyone returning to their homes so lost in thought?

Because night has fallen and the barbarians have not yet come.  
And some, just returned from the borders,  
they said that the barbarians are no longer.

—  
And now, what of our genesis without barbarians?  
These people, they were a solution of sorts.