Millet.
Writing Exercise #3

Here is a literal translation by Keeley and Sherrard © of C.P. Cavafy’s poem, Very Seldom. You’ll notice, among other things, that it’s prose and lacks several components we expect in a poem. But it is accurate.

Very Seldom

An old man—used up, bent,
Crippled by time and abuse—
Slowly walks along the narrow street.
But as he goes inside his house to hide
The shambles of his old age, his thoughts fix
On the share in youth that still belongs to him.

His verse is now quoted by young men.
His images come before their lively eyes.
Their healthy, sensual minds,
Their shapely, well-knit bodies
Stir to his vision of the beautiful.

Now read the loose version of this poem on page 32 of The Eloquent Umbrella, 2003 edition. The author here has evidently gone after a different purpose in his translation.

Take one page and compare these two versions of Cavafy and discuss what strikes you about them. Comment on the differences, what your thoughts are on those differences, and discuss what you preferences are, and why.

(The phonetic Greek version would look like this:

Αν ολδ μαν\\ufffdυσεδ υρ, βεντ,
Χριππλεδ βγ τιμ ενδ αβυσε\\ufffd
Σλοωψ ωελκσ αλουν τηε ναρρουσ τρεε\r
Βυτ εσ ηε ψηοε ινσιδε ηησ ιουσε ρ ηνδε
Τηε ηηαιμβλεσ οφ ηησ ολδ εψε, ηησ ηηνψητς φιξ
Ον τηε ςηαρε ιν ψουτη ηηατ στιλ βελνγς το ηημ.

Ηησ ςερςε ιο νοκ ρυοτεδ βγ ψουνγ γμεν.
Ηησ ιψηες ςομε βεφοψε ςηεηψ ηιψελψ έψες.
Τηεη ρεαληης, ςενυαζ, μινδα,
Τηεη ρηαπει, οελλ–κνιτ βοδιες
ςτιρ το ηησ ςηιηζ οφ τηε βεαυτψινλ.)