

Astronautilia

Jan Křesadlo

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Jan Křesadlo is one of several pen-names of the psychologist, poet and author Václav Jaroslav Karel Pinkava (1926–1995). Among his many his accomplishments is the *Astronautilia*, a 6575-line science-fiction epic poem... in Homeric Greek.

There was limited printing of the work, with a facing Czech translation, shortly after his death, but with the kind help and permission of Křesadlo's son I am able to present the opening of the poem here, taken from a PDF version of the handwritten manuscript. There are a few places where I'm afraid I may be misreading Křesadlo's handwriting. The work includes a glossary of modern and sci-fi terms. I've footnoted such words in the selection. I have made bold to correct accenting in a few places.

Before starting, you will want to read the English translation of the **prologue**.

ἀρχόμενος πρῶτον Μουσῶν χορῶ εἰξ Ἑλικῶνος
εὔχομαι ἐκπάγλως καὶ Ἀπόλλωνι ἄνακτι
Μουσάων ἄρχοντι καλῶ ἰδὲ δαίμον' ἀοιδῶν
ὄφρ' εἴποιεν ἐμὴν κόσμον γλαφυροῖο πόρευσιν
5 θαύματα πλανήτων καὶ ἀνδρῶν ὄμβριμα ἔργα
οἷα τε δειξάμενοι πλέομεν δνόφερον διὰ χάσμα
πλοίαρχος μὲν ἐγὼ καὶ ἐμοὶ ἐρίηρες ἐταῖροι
Μανδὺν ζητοῦντες καὶ μῆλον κοσμοθεωροῦν.
ἔσπετε νῦν ἡμῖν τάδε, ὦ θεός, ἡὲ θέαιναι.
10 ποῦ ἀρχὴν γε λάβοιμι τίδε πρότερον καταλέξω;
εἰρωτᾶς ὅτις εἰμί τέ μοι κλυτὸν οὔνομα ζητεῖς.
τοίγαρ ἐγὼ φήσω· ἐπεὶ ἐσόμενός γε ἰκανῶ
οὐχὶ κεν ἐκφωνεῖν δύνασαις, χαλεπὸν δὲ τόδ' ἐστί.
ἀλλὰ γε εἵνεκα σεῖο θέλω ἐτέρως καλέσασθαι.
15 Οὐδένα πλοίαρχόν περ ἐπὶ κλησιν κεκαλήσθω
ὥς εἰν βίβλοισιν μυστηρικὸν ἄνδρ καλοῦσι
τολμηρόν· Νήμω καπιτᾶνον Ῥωμαῖστί τε.

οὕτως μὲν κέλεσον μετατιθεῖς ἤματα πάντα.
 ἀστυνόμος μὲν ἐγὼ ἐν ἔσσηνένω πτολιέθρω
 20 κοίραμος ἀστυνόμων ἰδὲ καὶ ταγός· μοὶ δὲ πίθονται
 πάντες ἀστυνόμοι ἐν Μητροπόλει καλιπύργω.
 αὐτὰρ μοι λύπη γέγονεν χαλεπὴ δέ τε πρῆξις
 ποῦ δ' ἀρχὴν γε λάβοιμι τίδε πρότερον καταλέξω;
 25 δυσμαθεὶς τόδε πρῆγμα ἔγωγε κακῶς συνίημι·
 ἐξισωσεάς φασιν φυσικοῖσιν ἔνειναι
 λυγράς· κβαντιακῆς γε θεωρίας ἀπόδειξιν
 αὐτὰρ γράμματα λυγρά γ' ἐξισώσων χαλεπαίνων
 δείκνυται ὡς τίδε δεῖ εἶναι ὄν κοσμοθεωροῦν.
 εἰ μὲν οὐτίς ἔη γε φύσις κόσμον ὀροῶσα
 30 κόσμος εὐρυπόρος οὐκ ἂν δυνάσαιτο ὑπάρχειν
 οὐ χρόνος οὐ ζακενὸν οὐχ ὕλη οὔτε τι ἄλλο.
 ἀλλὰ τι μὲν σκοπιὴν αἰὲν δεῖ ἔχειν παρατηροῦν.
 τίς κεν ἀνθρώπων τὸ λάβειν θνητῶν δυνάσοιτο;
 οἶδε σοφοὶ ἐσόφιζον αἰεὶ περὶ κοσμοσκοπιῆς·
 35 τίς γε φύσις εἴη καὶ ζῶν κοσμοθεωροῦν
 ἀλλ' οὐ δὴ τις πρῆξις ἐφαίνετο τοῖς φρονέουσιν.

Here is an example of Křesadlo's handwriting, from the index. As you can see he has a fondness for some antiquarian ligatures.

❖ Τὸ ἔργον εὐρητήριον ❖

Αν. α.	Προίμιον. Τὰ περὶ μῆτις κοσμοθεωροῦντος καὶ περὶ Μαινδέτος. ἢ τῆς ἀστρονομικῆς ἀρχῆς.	2
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²¹καλιπύργω free variation on καλλιπυργος?

²⁶κβαντιακός *quantum* as in "quantum physics."