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Reading Cavafy through the medical humanities illness, disease and death

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**Reading Cavafy through the Medical Humanities:
Illness, Disease and Death**

By Iakovos Menelaou

King's College London, 2019

Abstract:

This thesis seeks to break new ground in Modern Greek studies and the medical humanities. A reading of Cavafy's poetry through the medical humanities is a new approach that sheds light on many of his poems, and provides a new framework for discussing some of the most celebrated aspects of his work. Cavafy's poems exhibit a broad awareness of medical theories and views of his time, and in turn his writings have something to offer the field of literature and medicine.

The introduction includes a brief historical survey of the medical humanities. It also defines 'additive' and 'integrated' medical humanities and the difference between 'disease' and 'illness'. In addition, it includes some biographical information that show Cavafy's preoccupation with health issues and medical theories in general.

Chapter 1 surveys that death is a prevalent subject in Cavafy, concentrating on death as a result of illness. In Cavafy, death as a result of an unspecified illness attacks everyone: from strong military men to the young.

Chapter 2 revolves around the view of old age as a disease. Cavafy, in a number of poems, presents old age not as a life stage, but as a condition. From that respect, he reflects Jacob Hutter's view that old age is a disease, as expressed in his treatise *That Old Age Is Itself a Disease*.

Chapter 3 focuses on how Cavafy presents dependence as a specific condition rather than a vice or custom. Cavafy explores the consequences of drinking on the individual and shows his knowledge of theories that saw drinking as a condition, like Thomas Trotter's theory in his treatise *An Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical, on Drunkenness*.

Chapter 4 reads Cavafy's homoerotic poems through Richard von Krafft-Ebing's influential book *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Krafft-Ebing asserted that homosexuality is a mental illness accompanied by certain symptoms. This view Cavafy explores in his poetry, even if he does not agree with it.

The conclusion argues that Cavafy's poetry has something to offer the field of the medical humanities.

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To Christina Amelia Menelaou

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Preface

In the Greek-speaking world not everyone knows about poetry. However, almost everyone knows Cavafy. His poetry is part of the national curriculum in secondary education and pupils or students are exposed relatively early to the magic of his poems. He is a poet widely read and discussed outside Greece too, and the analysis of his poetry never reaches an end. Yet there is always something new to say.

Cavafy's preoccupation with the fragility of the human condition, and his attention to illness, disease and death, old age, alcohol consumption and homosexuality continue to attract and challenge the reader. In turning anew to these themes, the thesis draws on the medical humanities to provide a new and integrated framework. I shall argue that turning to the medical humanities provides us with a new perspective and that Cavafy's poetry can be the object of investigation not only of scholars in literary studies and world literature, but also a tool of interpretation for medical practitioners and researchers in the history of medicine.

In the introduction, I discuss the development of the medical humanities through history. Although the term 'medical humanities' was coined in the United States in 1948, the medical humanities followed a different route in the different parts of the world. For example, in the UK the medical humanities developed in the 1990s, while in other countries, like Greece, is still in an embryonic stage. I also discuss how Cavafy can be placed between 'additive' and 'integrated' medical humanities. While the former analyse a specific condition in a literary work, the latter challenge medical students to reclaim the rhetorical elements of an illness experience. Cavafy's poems (even if they do not name the condition) discuss certain conditions, as 'additive' medical humanities do, and they also challenge medical students to see and analyse the rhetoric of his poems, similarly to 'integrated' medical humanities.

Although the connection between life and poetry is not a primary goal in the thesis, in the introduction I also focus on some important biographical information. These pieces of information not only shed light to the poems, but they also show Cavafy's avocation and obsession with medical theories, health and well-being. The poet experienced a long period of bereavement, as many members of his family died and he was exposed to the event of death relatively early — with the death of his father. In Alexandria, where he lived almost his whole life, Cavafy probably read about medical theories, while his cousin, John Cavafy, was a source of medical theories, as he was a medical practitioner. His correspondence with friends and family and his personal notes also show Cavafy's obsession with medical theories and health in general.

Another important element we discuss in the introduction is the distinction between disease and illness. While disease should be seen and described as something objectively measurable that applies to all organisms and connects with a doctor's diagnosis, illness signifies the personal experience and includes a social status. Although Cavafy does not name specific conditions, some of his poems give a very lively depiction of conditions that make us consider that sometimes he alludes to an unspecified illness and sometimes to a disease.

In the introduction I also focus on some medical developments in the nineteenth century, especially by the German bacteriologist Robert Koch on tuberculosis. Tuberculosis became a 'fashionable' disease in the nineteenth century and certain authors referred to this disease in their work. However, although Cavafy points to diseases similar to tuberculosis, he never mentions it clearly.

In Chapter 1, I explain how death has been considered by other critics a basic theme in Cavafy. Nevertheless, going beyond this framework, I also focus on how death can be seen in Cavafy as the next stage of illness, which is another basic theme in his poetry. We also see how Cavafy had been affected by the climate of the city he lived. Alexandria's climate and diseases gave Cavafy a good material to exploit and develop in his poetry.

We also see how the unspecified illness attacks everyone without exception. This unspecified illness is very powerful and can cause death to brave military men, like Manuel Komnenos and the general in 'Στρατηγού Θάνατος'. In addition, the unspecified illness can kill young men who travel and seek their dreams, like Emes in the poem 'Εις το Επίνειον' who dies mysteriously during his journey. We also examine how Cavafy presents his characters lamenting a dead lover or a friend; a common element in medical humanities literature. Consequently, Cavafy's illness poems could be seen as the earliest stage of his death poems.

The chapter surveys how youth, erotic passion and death coexist in Cavafy. In poems like 'Τω Στεφάνω Σκυλίτση', 'Ιγνατίου Τάφος' and 'Εν τω Μηνί Αθύρ', the common element is the death of a youth. In these poems, where Cavafy represents the pattern of illness and death, the reader remains with unanswered questions about the causes. But in any case, they also show the poet's avocation with issues related to health and his interest in medicine.

Chapter 2 focuses on the representation of old age as a disease in Cavafy's poetry. A view that reflects a Jacob Hutter's theory expressed in his treatise 'That Old Age Is Itself a Disease' (1732), and began in Classical Greece. According to Hutter, old age affects the body in the same way as other illnesses. In general, old age is characterised by loneliness, depression and even desolation; elements

we see in Cavafy's old men. Interestingly, the poet's personal notes show his obsession, even fear of old age. In the poem 'Ο Θάνατος του Αυτοκράτορος Τακίτου' we see this equation of old age with disease, through the model of an old man who is reluctant to go to war.

I also examine the symptomatology of old age, as in the poems 'Ένας Γέρος' and 'Η Ψυχές των Γερόντων' we see symptoms like boredom, loss of strength, loss of eloquence beauty and speech, bodily infirmity, wear, depression and marginalisation from the rest of society. The chapter also analyses how poetry is seen as a kind of antidote to old age, focusing on the poems 'Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου· Ποιητού εν Κομμαγηνή· 595 μ.Χ' and 'Πολύ Σπανίως', where poetry can heal temporarily and constitutes a therapeutic agent. I conclude that Cavafy's poems on old age can be read through phenomenology; a philosophical tradition that deals with phenomena.

Chapter 3 revolves around the view that alcoholism is a specific illness; another view Cavafy infused in his poetry. Although others dealt with excessive alcohol consumption before, Thomas Trotter in his treatise *Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical, on Drunkenness* (1804) referred to alcohol consumption as a disease. After Trotter, others expanded on his theories of alcohol consumption and connected alcoholism with dipsomania, mental illness and theories of hereditary degeneration.

In his poems, Cavafy shows the results of excessive alcohol consumption through his protagonists who have a passion for drinking. Although other authors and poets also referred to alcohol consumption, the main difference is that Cavafy represents the pathology of alcoholism. His characters experience the effects of their dependence on alcohol. Some biographical information is useful, as it shows the poet's passion for drinking and his obsession with good and bad quality whisky.

The chapter also examines how alcohol and eroticism are connected in Cavafy. In the poems 'Μια Νύχτα', 'Επήγα', 'Δύο Νέοι, 23 έως 24 ετών' and 'Μισή Ώρα', the reader can see how alcohol helps the protagonists to relive an erotic experience from the past and makes imagination and erotic desire stronger. We also see the symptomatology of alcoholism, as in the poems 'Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι', 'Να Μείνει', 'Μέρες του 1908', 'Οροφέρνης', 'Ένας Νέος της Τέχνης του Λόγου' and 'Μέρες του 1909, '10 και '11', Cavafy refers to exhaustion, flushes, loss of memory, erotic desire, fever, wear of the body and other symptoms.

A thorough analysis of the topic of alcohol consumption in Cavafy's poetry shows that Cavafy saw alcoholism as dependence on alcohol. In addition, alcoholism should be seen as what G. P. Savidis would call a basic theme.

In Chapter 4, I discuss another very important aspect of Cavafy's poetry: homosexuality. Although homosexuality has been discussed in the past too, a new approach through the medical humanities can show new meanings and dimensions in Cavafy's poetry. Cavafy has probably read Richard von Krafft-Ebing's work *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886). A very influential book which equated homosexuality with a mental illness. Even if Cavafy did not agree with this consideration of homosexuality as a mental illness, his poems show that he knew about this theory. According to Krafft-Ebing, homosexuality is a functional sign of degeneration and a psychosexual anomaly. Homosexuals are oversexed people, prone to different neuroses.

In fact, Cavafy's poetry reflects Krafft-Ebing's theory, and his personal notes indicate his familiarity with Krafft-Ebing's views. Sometimes he appears concerned about the results of masturbation and how it could affect his health. It is also important to note that Cavafy's poetry attracted the medical interest early, as Fotis Skouras in his article 'Η σχιζοφρενική έμπνευση στο έργο του Καβάφη' attempts to analyse Cavafy's poetry from a medical perspective.

In one section of the chapter, with the title 'The innateness of homosexuality', I also look at Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' revolutionary ideas on homosexuality. Ulrichs supported homosexuality and spoke about a 'third sex'. In the poem 'Μέρες του 1896', where Cavafy alludes to Ulrichs' views, the reader can see Cavafy's defense line of homosexuality and its presentation as an innate inclination.

The poems '[Την Ψυχήν επί Χείλεισιν Έσχον]' and 'Κίμων Λεάρχου, 22 Ετών, Σπουδαστής Ελληνικών Γραμμάτων (εν Κυρήνη)' are built on the triptych 'homosexuality, young men and death'. The reader can see the death of men in their early twenties, even if sometimes the young age of the protagonists does not allow them to see the possibility of death. Homosexuality is an important theme in the poems, as it is presented as a viral and contagious illness which affects the protagonists' health and well-being in different ways.

In this chapter, I also examine the use of words like 'νόσος' and 'νοσηρός', which are used by Cavafy to point to homoerotic love. I focus on how Cavafy presents the sickness and stigmatisation of homosexuality. Through a thorough analysis of the poems 'Στην Προκυμαία' and 'Έν Απογνώσει', we see how the protagonists enjoy their 'forbidden' and 'stigmatised' love isolated in notorious and infamous places. Sometimes they are trying to save themselves by attempting to escape from this 'stigmatised' love, which was condemned by the conservatism of the nineteenth century society.

In another unit, I also look at the symptomatology of homosexuality. Similarly to old age and alcoholism, Cavafy gives a series of symptoms that accompany homosexuality. As we see through the detailed analysis of the poems 'Ίμενος', 'Το 25^{ον} Έτος του Βίου του' and 'Η Αρρώστια του Κλείτου',

homosexuality is an illness that appears with symptoms like wear and corruption of the body, erotic intensity that captures the body, exhaustion and tiredness, obsession, lovesickness, consistent erotic passion and fever.

Finally, there is a last chapter with all the conclusions. Here, I summarise all the previous chapters and the results of the thesis. In Cavafy, we see an unspecified illness or a disease (old age, alcoholism and homosexuality), but without overt references. I also conclude that in Cavafy there are no mentions of physicians, as even in cases where there is someone trying to offer treatment, this is not a medical practitioner — like the old servant woman in the poem 'Η Αρρώστια του Κλείτου'. The medical humanities enlighten Cavafy's poetry as they offer something new, but Cavafy also gives the medical humanities very good material for investigation.

As regards the order of the chapters, the unspecified illness is discussed in Chapter 1, before proceeding to the analysis of the three conditions: old age, alcoholism and homosexuality. The unspecified illness is something that previous criticism saw, but discussed only at a very superficial level. For example, Martha Vassiliadi (in '«Για τα σκουπίδια κατευθείαν»: νοσολογία, πάθη και πληγές κι ενσώματες ταυτότητες στον ερωτικό Καβάφη') referred to the unspecified illness, as cause of death for Cavafy's young protagonists. However, her approach does not follow any specific theory or the basic lines of the medical humanities. For instance, there is no distinction between disease and illness or the terminology I use in this thesis.

Then, I proceed with the three different conditions that Cavafy presents in his poetry. The theme of old age comes in Chapter 2, as this is a very basic theme in Cavafy and the medical humanities too. In addition, this is a topic which has been discussed widely by Cavafy's previous and prominent critics. Nevertheless, most of the approaches are based on an identification of old age with the poet's fear of old age (like for example Timos Malanos in *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης: ο άνθρωπος και το έργο του*). In this thesis I discuss old age from a totally different perspective, which only the medical humanities can offer. Thus, I give a new interpretation.

Next, in Chapter 3, I proceed with the theme of alcoholism. Although, again, previous critics discussed the topic of alcohol consumption in Cavafy (like for instance, Michalis Pieris in 'Πάθη/passions: a latent poetic collection by Cavafy'), they did not surpass superficial interpretations of the poems. The pathology of alcoholism we see in the relevant poems has not been discussed.

Finally, Chapter 4 analyses homosexuality, another important theme in Cavafy. After the analysis of two important themes through the medical humanities, I proceed with another theme where there are different approaches. For example, Dimitris Papanikolaou's approach through queer

theory gave some very interesting results and new interpretations. Nevertheless, my approach follows a totally different route and gives different results. The chapter on homosexuality comes last, as my intention was to show the results of the medical humanities on other themes, before I proceed with a topic that queer theory discussed extensively.

Finally, this order of the chapters follows a chronological sequence, based on when the three works which are used to analyse Cavafy came to public light: Hutter's in 1732, Trotter's in 1804 and Krafft-Ebing's in 1886.

Reading Cavafy through the Medical Humanities: Illness, Disease and Death.

Introduction

1. The medical humanities in history

What are the medical humanities? When did they appear as a special field of study and research? And what is Cavafy's position, as a much-discussed poet, in the context of the medical humanities? These are questions that one needs to have in mind when dealing with the medical humanities, and especially when attempting to employ such terms to discuss a Greek poet in an emerging field still unfamiliar in the Greek-speaking world.

The 'Association for Medical Humanities' (founded in 2002) explains the goals and the descriptor 'medical humanities' as follows:

The medical humanities primarily include the use of the arts and humanities in medical and healthcare education and the academic study of medicine and healthcare through the arts and humanities. The descriptor 'medical humanities' is taken to include 'health humanities' or 'humanities in healthcare', where 'humanities' includes the arts.¹

Indeed, the medical humanities have become the widely accepted term for the exploration of the relationship between medical science and well-being.² The medical humanities promote literary and other artistic approaches in order to encourage doctors to pay attention to patients' stories, beyond a bare list of symptoms and conditions.³ While the medical humanities' wider use appears in the United States in the 1960s at certain pioneer centres, like Pennsylvania State University, in Britain, according to Evans and Greaves, they 'gained currency' in the 1990s. Gradually, a growing number of medical humanities centres appeared, like the University of Wales at Swansea, Peninsula Medical School at Truro, University College and King's College London, the University of Glasgow and Nottingham/Leicester Medical Schools.⁴ Fox also notes that beginning in the 1960s, the medical

¹ Anonymous author, 'History', https://amh.ac.uk/about_us/history/. [accessed 22 May 2018]

² John Holden, John Kieffer, John Newbigin and Shelagh Wright, 'Where does it hurt?', in *Where Does It Hurt? The new world of the medical humanities*, ed. John Holden, John Kieffer, John Newbigin and Shelagh Wright (London, 2014), 3.

³ Victoria Bates, 'Being human', in *Where Does It Hurt? The new world of the medical humanities*, ed. John Holden, John Kieffer, John Newbigin and Shelagh Wright (London, 2014), 8-11.

⁴ Howell Martyn Evans and David Alan Greaves, '10 years of medical humanities: a decade in the field of a journal and a discipline', *Medical Humanities*, 36:2 (2010), 66-68.

humanities were organised by a small group of people in America with an interest in medical education.⁵

In more detail and focusing on this historical development, Bleakley writes that in 1937 at Vanderbilt University School of Medicine in Nashville, Tennessee, E. E. Reinke had suggested a liberal education in order to expand medical training. Reinke's proposal could be seen as a call for the development of the medical humanities in undergraduate medical studies aiming at stemming the trend 'of producing the doctor who is healer of organs treating patients as experimental animals, rather than a doctor in the ancient meaning of the word'.⁶

The term 'medical humanities' was coined in 1948 in the USA where it 'first developed an identity'. As Bleakley also writes and before him Hurwitz and Dakin,⁷ the historian of science George Sarton first used the term 'medical humanities' in the 1940s in a journal dealing with the history of science. In this article published in *ISIS* in 1948, we see the term 'medical humanities'. In 1951, Van Wyck wrote an article on the importance of the humanities in medical training and 'in 1952, the first major medical humanities curriculum innovation was established in a North American medical school'. Case Western Reserve medical school in Cleveland, Ohio restructured the curriculum on medical studies between the years 1952-57 and introduced a module on the history of medicine. Further developments followed, and 'in 1967, Pennsylvania State University's College of Medicine developed a unique undergraduate medicine programme biased towards community medicine, ethics and spiritual aspects of chronic illness and care' in order to establish the medical humanities. The first Department of Humanities was established within the medical school that taught medical students about religion, history and philosophy, while two years later they added literature. Another achievement in the same year, 1969, was *The Society for Health and Human Values* which appears as an official membership organization in the United States. The Society kept records from 1970-97 now placed at the University of Texas. In 1998, the Society merged with the American Society for Bioethics and the Society for Bioethics Consultation; the result of this merger was the American Society for Bioethics and Humanities. In the 1970s, the debate between a 'warm humanist medicine' and a 'cold scientific understanding' took place; a debate that continued in the following decades (in the 1980s and the 1990s). In his seminal paper on the role of humanism in medicine, Crawshaw challenged the

⁵ Daniel M. Fox, 'Who we are: the political origins of the medical humanities', *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 6: 3 (1985), 327-341 and Graziano Martignoni, Nicola Grignoli, Valentina Di Bernardo, Martina Malacrida, Guenda Bernegger, Fabrizio Barazzoni, Roberto Malacrida, 'Medical humanities: a question style', *Critical Reviews in Oncology/Hematology*, 84 (2012), 1-4

⁶ Alan Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education: how the medical humanities can shape better doctors* (New York, 2016), 12-14.

⁷ Brian Hurwitz and Paul Dakin, 'Welcome developments in UK medical humanities', *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 102 (2009), 84-85

medical profession to respond to the statement that it is mechanical and lacks humanistic character; but the paper did not attract much attention.⁸

A milestone in North America was the foundation of the Institute of Medical Humanities at the University of Texas in 1973, showing interest in literature and medicine and an appreciation for patients' stories. It is also important to note that in 1979, the *Journal of Medical Humanities* was launched as 'an academic community of scholars, researchers and teachers', while in 1988, Arnold Gold and Sandra Gold, with colleagues from the Columbia University College of Physicians and Surgeons founded the Arnold P. Gold Foundation for the development of 'humanistic medical care'. The Sirridge Office of medical humanities opened in 1992 and in 1994 the first website of medical humanities was used by the New York University School of Medicine. Also, in 2009, the electronic medical humanities journal *Hektoen International* was founded.⁹

A strong interest in the medical humanities developed in the United Kingdom too. While the years 1944-45 give a convenient starting point with the art therapy movement, the medical humanities did not start then. Paintings had been used in hospitals for the patients' benefit before. Adrian Hill, the painter who is usually acknowledged as the introducer of art therapy in the UK, used paintings as part of his treatment chronicled in *Art Versus Illness* in 1945. In 1993, The Wellcome Foundation organised the first seminar on arts in health in the UK and in the same year, the General Medical Council issued the first edition of *Tomorrow's Doctors* giving the framework for UK medical schools. Apart from sciences, the General Medical Council encouraged optional modules in history of science and literature. Also, in 1995 a symposium entitled 'Art in Hospitals: Past, Present and Future' was organised by the UK Royal Society of Medicine, and I. C. McManus wrote an article ('Humanity and the Medical Humanities' in *The Lancet*) stressing the role of literature and how important it is 'for the central role of humanities in medical education'. In 1996, Kenneth Calman met the Minister of Health and spoke about the role humanities could have in medicine.¹⁰

Calman and Robin Philipp organised the first major UK conference encouraging the role of the arts in health, the 1998 Windsor conference. Nevertheless, as Bleakley writes, the 1998 and the following 1999 Windsor conferences 'downplayed those aspects of the medical humanities that constituted an academic study of medicine, particularly through disciplines such as history, philosophy, literature', while 'the outcome of the two Windsor conferences was to frame the medical

⁸ Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, pp. 12-15. See also George Sarton and Frances Siegel, 'Seventy-first critical bibliography of the history and philosophy of science and of the history of civilization (To October 1947)', *Isis*, 39: 1/2 (1948), 70-139.

⁹ Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, 17-18.

¹⁰ Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, 24-25. See also Adrian Hill, *Art Versus Illness: A story of art therapy* (London, 1945).

humanities as a ‘healing’ force in the service of medicine, rather than to shape its presence as a force of resistance problematizing the ideal of ‘healing’. But the General Medical Council in a 2003 publication promoted literature, arts, poetry and philosophy as ways to improve the ‘doctor’s ability to communicate with patients, to penetrate more deeply into the patient’s wider narrative, and to seek more diverse ways of promoting well being’.¹¹

In 1998, Deborah Kirklin and Richard Meakin, two London-based GPs, launched a Centre for Medical Humanities at the Royal Free and University College Medical School in London in order to enrich the undergraduate medical curriculum, offer a BSc in Medical Humanities and give postgraduates the opportunity for continuing professional development. Other initiatives in the UK involved: the establishment of a Centre for the Arts and Humanities in Health and Medicine at the University of Durham and a new Institute of Medical Humanities in 1999; the new journal *Medical Humanities* (sister journal to *Journal of Medical Ethics*) and a research colloquium on the medical humanities by the University of Swansea (a university offering the MA in Medical Humanities since 1997) in 2000; another similar colloquium in Wales, a year later; a meeting of the UK Association for Medical Humanities at the University of Birmingham in 2002; and the launch of the medical humanities programme at the Peninsula Medical School (a collaboration between the Universities of Exeter and Plymouth) with the first students’ intake in the same year. While the Peninsula is the only one that has developed ‘a core and integrated model’, medical humanities modules are common in the UK as several universities and medical schools offer medical humanities programmes or research interests. It is also interesting to note that in 2008, the Wellcome Trust awarded two grants in order to set up centres for research in the medical humanities.¹²

Other initiatives from countries other than the USA and the UK also came into view. For example, in Argentina the University of La Plata medical school offered an optional provision in the medical humanities in 1976 and a journal entitled *eã* was launched; strong medical humanities culture develops in Canada, as medical schools include component in their programmes; in Australia the surgeon Anthony Moore described the medical humanities in 1976, while further initiatives followed, as at the University of Sydney Jill Gordon introduced a relevant postgraduate programme in 2003; we also have Robin Philipp’s attempts in New Zealand in the 1990s; and finally countries like Ireland, Italy and Turkey from Europe and Nepal, India and Taiwan also showed an interest in the medical humanities.¹³

¹¹ Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, 28.

¹² Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, 29-32.

¹³ Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, 33-39.

In Greece, according to Bleakley, Batistatou and colleagues have argued that the medical humanities would definitely help medical education through a study of history of medicine, clinical observation and literature.¹⁴ Indeed, Batistatou and the co-authors of an article propose the inclusion of medical humanities material in medical students' training as in the rest of Europe, USA and Australia. Such a humanities course would embody the use of literature, including Greek literature too, and arts, adding richness to medical training and satisfying the communities' social, ethical and scientific needs. Literature constitutes a rich source of information for human emotions and behaviour as images of disease and death are very common in it. This would guide the relationship between the doctor and the patient and also between physicians and other colleagues. Through literature, and the arts in general, the medical student can develop skills on the interpretation of the 'patient language'.¹⁵ Medical humanities could, above all, help medical students address their focus on patients rather than diseases.

Consequently, a reading of Cavafy's poems through the medical humanities might not be just another reading of a well-discussed poet. It would be something new that would break new ground in literature studies and medical studies in Greece. Cavafy could be the vehicle of the medical humanities in the Greek world, as his poems include the human emotions and pain a medical practitioner needs to focus on in order to enrich his medical training and practice, and go beyond the cold results of a diagnosis. Thus, Cavafy's poems can make the medical humanities part of formal medical education and lead Greece to the route of other countries like the USA and the UK. Simply, Cavafy can promote the medical humanities in Greece and help medicine adopt a more humane attitude.

The medical humanities, it is now generally agreed, are needed and they can benefit medical education and indeed wider society, drawing on approaches to medical conditions by scholars from humanities departments, the use of arts and humanities in medical training and education and arts practitioners who inform the public about issues related to the body and illness through literature and other arts. As Bleakley puts it, 'art makes us rethink our lives, to look and think again, to think against the grain'. Thus, medical students and doctors are helped by the medical humanities to think again through a more sensitive perspective. The medical humanities propose a transition from a patriarchal, hierarchical doctor-centred medicine to a patient-centred medicine. Arts and humanities acknowledge the contradictions that lie at the heart of illness and its treatment; doctors need to tolerate the ambiguity in their own practice and patients' words; an ambiguity and uncertainty that

¹⁴ Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, 37.

¹⁵ A. Batistatou, E. A. Doulis, D. Tiniakos, A. Anogiannaki, K. Charalabopoulos, 'The introduction of medical humanities in the undergraduate curriculum of Greek medical schools: challenge and necessity', *Hippokratia*, 14: 4 (2010), 241-243.

constitute the purpose of the medical humanities. Medical practice has long tended to be 'hard-headed, pragmatic and anti-intellectual and also anti-aesthetic.' However, an 'aesthetic self-forming of identity is key to educating quality doctors who will make their mark, for here is the specialist who also comes to shape his or her speciality through innovation. And here is the specialist who specialises in creative approaches to relationship with colleagues and patients.' A medical humanities provision can be successful when based on an education of sensibilities and sensitivities, with humanities scholars who work towards improvement of medical care; cultivation of sensibility is of high importance.¹⁶

Consequently, as Bleakley aptly declares, while practice gains by continuous reflection, the arts can bring further enhancements. Instead of detachment, the doctors can adopt a 'heart-felt involvement with the subject matter as a legitimate research stance' and 'form aesthetic identities through appreciation of clinical images, as a basis to expertise in a specialty.'¹⁷ Interventions by artists could give doctors a new more sensitive perspective of medicine based on a more human model. Through a training enriched by the medical humanities, doctors can develop their sensibility and see patients as voices of suffering and pain, rather than objects of research and diagnoses.¹⁸

Certain texts, like illness narratives, with their focus on the experience of illness, have come to constitute an integral part of the medical humanities. Thus, beyond the fact that the patient can express his experience of pain, these texts could be used in the training of the medical student and the practitioner in diagnosis and treatment.¹⁹ Cavafy's poems is such an example where we see the experience of illness (though not his own), and medical students and practitioners could benefit from this individual experience, and from the way in which Cavafy draws attention to the experience of illness as connected to social experience.

Barker too explains how the arts can help in medicine: they help us understand the difficulties of life in general and concepts like these of health and illness. The use of language and metaphor is important in medical training, especially if we bear in mind that the language of clinical medicine aims

¹⁶ Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, 40, 72-75, 105-106.

¹⁷ Bleakley, *Medical Humanities and Medical Education*, 153.

¹⁸ Other theorists also focus on the benefits a doctor can have from the medical humanities. According to Kirklin, 'only by close and careful observation of the patient can the doctor hope to be successful'. Doctors may fail to see the patient's perspective, as traditional medical education is based on scientific and clinical training. In contrast, arts could enlighten doctors and help them develop a different understanding of the patients and themselves. 'Medical humanities can create a welcome and necessary space to acknowledge the conflicting demands' (Deborah Kirklin, 'Creating space to reflect and connect', *Medical Humanities: a practical introduction*, ed. Deborah Kirklin and Ruth Richardson (London, 2001), 1-5, 7-13).

¹⁹ Anne Whitehead and Angela Woods, *The Edinburgh Companion to the Critical Medical Humanities*, ed. Anne Whitehead and Angela Woods (Edinburgh, 2016), 4-5.

at making a distinction between the doctors and the patients who are treated like the objects of this clinical observation. Focusing on English literature, Barker asserts that it embodies several works that 'can help us to appreciate the human significance of various forms of illness.'²⁰ And of course, next to Shakespeare's stories, we could also add the human situations in Cavafy's poems which also disclose the pain, suffering and pathology of humanity. As Barker declares 'in reading books and poems, in listening to the spiritual enactments of the dramatist, in learning the discipline of studying paintings, sculpture and film we might shape a form of knowledge within us that cannot be found 'out there', but is not to be found 'inside' ourselves, either'.²¹ However, as opposed to prose works, there is a small number of works in poetry. The medical humanities should not forget poetry, since there are poets whose poetry has a medical background and it could be read from a medical humanities perspective.

²⁰ Phil Barker, 'Working with the metaphor of life and death', in *Medical Humanities: a practical introduction*, ed. Deborah Kirklin and Ruth Richardson (London, 2001), 15-30.

²¹ Barker, 'Working with the metaphor of life and Death', 29. Also, according to Richardson, the medical humanities come to bridge the gap between medicine and arts and eliminate the inhumanity of modern medicine proposing a 'clinical detachment' (Ruth Richardson, 'A 'Necessary inhumanity'? the role of detachment in medical practice', *Medical Humanities: a practical introduction*, ed. Deborah Kirklin and Ruth Richardson (London, 2001), 109-134). Glover claims that arts in general are characterised by the interpretation of people and especially literature can shape a doctor's approach (Jonathan Glover, 'On interpretation', in *Medical Humanities: a practical introduction*, ed. Deborah Kirklin and Ruth Richardson (London, 2001), 135-142).

2. Cavafy in between 'additive' and 'integrated' medical humanities

As Vaccarella has argued, the medical humanities may be seen as an exploration of the complexities of human bodies and minds, through a humanistic point of view and a critical perspective on medical education; especially now that modern medicine needs to see the limits of its role and the necessity to understand that links to other forms of praxis could improve the social context of medicine. The medical humanities are based centrally on interdisciplinarity and throw a bridge across the gap between the sciences and the humanities. Focusing on the development of the medical humanities in Britain, Vaccarella notes the debate between 'additive' and 'integrated' medical humanities. Vaccarella asserts that she does not see 'a neat difference between the work of an 'additive' literature and medicine scholar, investigating the depiction of a specific condition in one or more literary texts' on the one hand and 'the 'integrated' work of a clinical communication instructor, who invites medical students to retrieve the rhetorical work embedded in a fictional or genuine account of an illness experience' on the other.²² Although in this project the attempt is not to align with one or the other, there are elements of both categories: through the analysis of the literary texts, we investigate the representation of specific conditions ('additive'), and also the analysis of the texts and their results challenge medical students to focus on the rhetorical elements an illness experience includes ('integrated').

Reading Cavafy within the medical humanistic framework and more specifically through the lens of literature and medicine studies, I am inclined to agree with Vaccarella's statement that such a distinction is not neat. In Cavafy we see that the analysis of the poems in this thesis enlightens the relationship between the arts and medicine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, while his poems offer ground for investigation of certain conditions. Cavafy's poetry presents certain groups of people (the old, the sick, the addicted, and —as understood at the time— the homosexual) treated as inferior people and his poems are frequently accounts of illness experience. What we see in these poems is the personal experience of suffering depicted through the poets' protagonists.

What one also needs to bear in mind is the characteristic of interdisciplinarity and Cavafy's role in the medical humanities. As Vaccarella said, the medical humanities is a field characterised by interdisciplinarity. This interdisciplinarity derives from certain works, like Cavafy's poems which I shall argue can be productively linked to medical humanities literature. Thus, the distinction between

²² Maria Vaccarella, 'Medical humanities: renewing praxis across disciplines', *Status Quaestionis*, 3 (2012), 181-202. On the same distinction, Evans and Greaves explain 'additive' as the re-establishment and promotion 'of the neglected relationship between medicine and the arts', and 'integrated' as an interdisciplinary perspective aiming at reunifying 'the arts and sciences in medicine as a whole and so provide a more rounded and humanitarian approach that rejected the notion of a subdiscipline altogether' (Evans and Greaves, '10 years of medical humanities', 66).

‘additive’ and ‘integrated’ medical humanities is not clear, especially if we bear in mind that they both end up to the same goal: the investigation of a condition through a story; either from a literary text or an account of an illness experience. Cavafy’s poems are indeed such an example that could be also read as accounts of illness experience. They can be even linked with the new literary genre of ‘pathographies’, a form of biography describing a personal condition.²³ What is even more, medical humanities come to shed light on Cavafy’s poems and propose a reading from a totally new angle which unveils new meanings that have not been discussed before.

In the medical humanities, most discussion has revolved around prose authors who use the technique of extended narrative, very frequently refer to a specific condition (and where applicable, a clear cause of death) and who have doctors participating in this narrative. In contrast, in Cavafy’s poetry we never see any doctors and rarely have the naming of a disease. Cavafy is never overt to the extent of prose authors, like Thomas Mann (1875-1955) who openly refers to cholera in *Death in Venice*²⁴ or tuberculosis in *The Magic Mountain*²⁵ or for that matter Greek authors, like Alexandros Papadiamantis (1851-1911) who refers to a cholera pandemic in *Βαρδιάνος στα σπόρκα*²⁶ and Gulielmos Abbot in (1906-2001) *Γη και Νερό*, a novel about leprosy (with references to other diseases as well like acute neurosis, plague and dysentery).²⁷ Comparing Cavafy to other Greek poets, moreover, we have no references to drugs, suicide or venereal disease as in poets like K. G. Karyotakis (1896-1928) or Nikos Kavvadias (1910-1975).²⁸ In any case, Cavafy’s notion about subjectivity on health, illness and death issues, described by Batistatou and Vaccarella as key topics in the medical humanities, is a great asset in the field, because his poems are a rich meditation on certain human conditions like old age, substance abuse, and most famously homosexuality. Thus, Cavafy, with his special distinction and worldwide presence in translation, is in a position that gains a special role in this field of the medical humanities. I shall argue that his universally acknowledged preoccupation with mortality can be discussed more fully with reference to the medical humanities.

Like modern authors who have employed longer narratives, Cavafy’s short poems could enlighten certain conditions and help doctors. Subjectivity in the relationship between doctor and patient restructures a former paternalistic relationship.²⁹ Batistatou stresses how ‘literary studies can

²³ Vaccarella, ‘Medical humanities’, 186, 190-192.

²⁴ Thomas Mann, *Death in Venice and Other Stories*, tr. David Luke (London, 1998).

²⁵ Thomas Mann, *The Magic Mountain*, tr. H. T. Lowe-Porter (London, 1999).

²⁶ Alexandros Papadiamantis, *Άπαντα*, vol. 2, ed. N. D. Triantafyllopoulos (Athens, 1982), 541-640.

²⁷ Gulielmos Abbot, *Γη και Νερό* (Athens, 2010).

²⁸ Kostas Karyotakis, *Battered Guitars: poems and prose*, tr. William W. Reader and Keith Taylor (Birmingham, 2006) and Nikos Kavvadias, *The Collected Poems of Nikos Kavvadias*, tr. Gail Holst-Warhaft (New Jersey: Rivervale, N.J., 1987).

²⁹ Vaccarella, ‘Medical humanities’, 197.

enhance the effectiveness of performance in the narrative aspects of medicine' and how 'literature can be used to yield ethical teaching points'. Proceeding a step further, among the names of foreign authors who were medical practitioners, Batistatou includes the names of Andreas Karkavitsas (1866-1922) and Takis Sinopoulos (1917-1981) (and could have added Manolis Anagnostakis (1925-2005), and Manolis Pratikakis (1943-)) to conclude that such education with a focus on the history of medicine is an important step for the 'avoidance of mistakes of the past', while the 'unmistakably true knowledge may not prove such in the future'.³⁰ Of course, this applies ideally to Cavafy who frequently implies pathological conditions which preoccupied people of his time.

³⁰ Batistatou, 'The introduction of medical humanities', 242.

3. Cavafy's obsession with health and well-being

The medical humanities may still be seen as an emerging field. Especially in Greece, the medical humanities could expand and offer much more in the future. Even for poets well-discussed and analysed, the medical humanities could give further meanings and interpretations that have not been discovered before; and such a case *par excellence* is Cavafy. Cavafy was born in Alexandria, in 1863; his mother, Harikleia, had wanted a daughter with the name Helen. Thus when Cavafy was born, the seventh son of the family, it was not easy for her to accept it.³¹ Perhaps Constantine is the masculine equivalent of the name Helen, as the two names have the same name day.³² His mother dressed him for a long time with girlish dresses, typical of those days. He died of cancer of the larynx seventy years later, in 1933, in the same city and on the same day, while before and after a tracheotomy he lost the ability to speak and had to communicate using paper and pencil.³³

Apart from this adventure with his health, as Vassiliadi observes, Cavafy was exposed to the event of death very early. Cavafy experienced a prolonged period of bereavement, as his mother died in 1899 and by 1902 he had lost several of his relatives including some of his brothers. In addition, his father died in 1870, when Cavafy was only seven.³⁴ Especially his mother's death was an event that shocked Cavafy.³⁵ George, the eldest brother, died in 1900 of a chronic illness,³⁶ while the death of his last brother, John, in 1923, was another shock for the poet, as he was a real companion throughout his life.³⁷

In the letters Cavafy sent to his brother John, it seems that illness was a very common theme. Cavafy's decision to write about illness-related issues to his brother is a strong proof of his preoccupation with illnesses and probably his interest in medical theories of his days. For example, Cavafy writes about their mother's illness in 1883 and the health issues of their brother, Alexander. Cavafy also told John that he was worried about his eyes; an anxiety he shared with Forster too.³⁸ It is

³¹ Sonia Ilinskaya, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: οι δρόμοι του ρεαλισμού στην ποίηση του 20ού αιώνα* (Athens, 2006), 26.

³² Robert Liddell, *Cavafy: a biography* (second edition, London, 2000), 23.

³³ Ahuvia Kahane, 'Cavafy's last act: death, martyrdom, and the problem of bearing witness to the past', *Classical and Modern Literature*, 23 (2003), pp. 143-160. See also Ιλίνσκαγια, *Καβάφης*, 26.

³⁴ Martha Vassiliadi, '«Για τα σκουπίδια κατευθείαν»: νοσολογία, πάθη και πληγές κι ενσώματες ταυτότητες στον ερωτικό Καβάφη', http://www.eens.org/EENS_congresses/2010/Vassiliadi_Martha.pdf, 1-9 [accessed 3 October 2015]. See also Dimitris Daskalopoulos-Maria Stasinopoulou, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κ. Π. Καβάφη* (Athens, 2013), 17.

³⁵ Michalis Pieris, 'Βιογραφικό διάγραμμα', *Εισαγωγή στην Ποίηση του Καβάφη: επιλογή κριτικών κειμένων* (Heraklion, 2006), 3-12.

³⁶ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 102.

³⁷ Michalis Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη* (Athens, 1948), 114.

³⁸ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 39. Also, from March 1926 to January 1927, Cavafy and Forster exchanged four letters all referring to Cavafy's eye inflammation; in Peter Jeffreys (ed.), *The Forster-Cavafy Letters: friends at a slight angle* (Cairo, 2009), 92-95.

also interesting to note that Cavafy kept a full record on Alexander's last illness with medical details: the doctors' opinions differed and Cavafy was responsible to take authority. In regard to this responsibility to trust a doctor, either Christomanos or Vlavianos, Cavafy wrote in a letter of 9 September 1905: 'the idea that —if both were maintained— he would have to pay about £1 doctors' fees per day, and perhaps more would made him complain awfully, and would upset him much, it was an intricate position; and decisions had to be made on the spot, and I did for the best'.³⁹

During the nineteenth century, Alexandria was in economic renaissance and Cavafy's father was one of many Greek traders. Cavafy lived initially in prosperity: the family enjoyed a life of luxury with a big house, a French governess, English nurse, Greek servants, Italian coachman and Egyptian porter. However, this prosperity declined and was gradually replaced by financial problems after the death of the father. In 1872, the family moved to England, where they stayed for about six years. When they returned to Alexandria in 1878, after the fall in the family fortunes, Cavafy was already fifteen years old; he had gone to schools in England and learnt fluent English, with an interest in literature. After his return to Alexandria, Cavafy continued his studies there, while in 1882 the family moved again, this time to Constantinople. The poet's stay in Constantinople was crucial, as he seems to have become aware of his homosexuality. In addition, during his stay there, we see his first attempts at poetry. In 1885, Cavafy returned to Alexandria with his mother and his brothers, Alexander and Paul. He started working in different professions, until 1892 when he became a permanent employee at the Irrigation office until 1922.⁴⁰ These early years, Cavafy wrote some poems which refer overtly to the ageing process which he had not yet undergone like 'Ένας Γέρος' (1894).

In 1907, Cavafy moved to his flat in the ill-famed Rue Lepsius.⁴¹ There, he wrote a great part of his poetic corpus.⁴² It is also interesting to note that his house was very near the Greek hospital.⁴³ This may have given him the inspiration for several of his poems which are illness-related and will be discussed in this thesis. Cavafy himself said that he could not find a better place to live: 'where could I live better? Below the brothel caters for the flesh. And there is the church which forgives sin. And there is the hospital where we die.'⁴⁴

³⁹ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 107. There is also evidence, through Cavafy's correspondence with Forster, that illness-related issues troubled Cavafy a lot. In a letter of 4th August 1922, Cavafy writes about Dr Delta's illness (in Jeffreys (ed.), *The Forster-Cavafy Letters*, 48).

⁴⁰ Pieris, 'Βιογραφικό διάγραμμα', 3-6. See also Ιλίνσκαγια, *Καβάφης*, p. 25 and Liddell, *Cavafy*, 33-35.

⁴¹ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 179.

⁴² Pieris, 'Βιογραφικό διάγραμμα', 8.

⁴³ Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη*, 97.

⁴⁴ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 180.

It is interesting to see the term Cavafy uses for the flesh's desires: 'caters for' which is not a word expressing a satisfaction of fleshly pleasures and desires, but rather a word showing care and cure at some point. It shows a kind of pathology which links with the way Cavafy described homoeroticism in his poetry, as a mental and pathological condition.⁴⁵ Indeed, in these words, Cavafy does not seem to see intercourse only as a pleasure, but something beyond that; something which is analogous to a medical condition and needing cure.

In 1914, Cavafy met Forster and in 1917, he met Aleco Sengopoulos, who later would be his executor. In 1922, he resigned from his job and focused on the completion of his poetic oeuvre. From 1930, Cavafy presented health problems with his larynx; two years later he had been diagnosed with cancer and he went to Athens for treatment.⁴⁶ It was hard for Cavafy to accept this, while after a tracheotomy he was not able to speak at all.⁴⁷ Going back to Alexandria, his condition worsened until he finally died.⁴⁸ That was a really hard period for Cavafy, but according to Rika Sengopoulos, the only day Cavafy cried was the day he entered the Greek hospital in Alexandria, April 1933.⁴⁹ As Sengopoulos writes, when they found him his bag to take to the hospital, the poet wept and said: 'Αυτή τη βαλίτσα την αγόρασα πριν 30 χρόνια, ένα βράδι βιαστικά για να πάω στο Κάιρο για διασκέδαση. Τότες ήμουν υγιής, νέος και όχι άσχημος' (I bought this bag 30 years ago to go to Cairo, one night in a hurry for entertainment. Then I was healthy, young and not ugly).⁵⁰

Cavafy was highly interested in issues related to health and well-being. The comparison between youth and old age and health and illness shows that he was well aware of relevant issues. As Papanikolaou has emphasised, Cavafy had a lively interest in medical theories and treatises of the nineteenth century about homosexuality,⁵¹ but his interests in medical discourse were not confined to that. As Peridis informs us, Cavafy read a lot and was a man of culture and spiritual cultivation; his poetic talent had much to do with his wide knowledge. He mainly studied poetry and history, but he was also good in languages, as he knew English, French and some Italian. He was a person of wide horizons apparent from his table talk.⁵² As Pinchin declares, Cavafy was a company-loving person,

⁴⁵ Katerina Ghika translates Cavafy's words as follows: 'ο οίκος ανοχής θεραπεύει τις ανάγκες της σάρκας'. See E. M. Forster-K. Π. Καβάφης: φίλοι σε ελαφρή απόκλιση, ed. Peter Jeffreys-tr. Katerina Ghika (Athens, 2013), 62.

⁴⁶ Pieris, 'Βιογραφικό διάγραμμα', 9.

⁴⁷ Daskalopoulos-Stasinopoulou, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κ. Π. Καβάφη*, 156-158.

⁴⁸ Pieris, 'Βιογραφικό διάγραμμα', 9-10.

⁴⁹ Alekos Karapanagoulou, *Ο Κ. Π. Καβάφης Ήταν Χριστιανός*; (Athens-Ioannina, 1993), 27.

⁵⁰ Daskalopoulos-Stasinopoulou, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κ. Π. Καβάφη*, 167. My translation of all the Greek quotations.

⁵¹ Dimitris Papanikolaou, 'Ο Καβάφης στον 21^ο αιώνα', *The Books Journal*, 4 (2011), 50-57.

⁵² Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη*, 62-63. Pinchin also informs us about Cavafy's studies in history, before the writing of certain poems in Jane Lagoudis Pinchin, *Alexandria Still: Forster, Durrell, and Cavafy* (Princeton, 1977), 51.

whose love for good conversations delighted his visitors and those who went to Alexandrian coffee shops with him.⁵³ Bonamy Dobrée, a British critic and Cavafy's visitor, describes Cavafy's conversations as follows:

I have met an Alexandrian-with all that implies. Implication, that word is important when thinking of Mr. Cavafy, for his poems are like his conversation, his conversation like Alexandria, and Alexandria is all implication... He may talk of the Alexandrian tram-service, of the Ptolemies, of the use of a certain word in seventeenth-century English: one scarcely knows what is that one has talked to Mr. Cavafy about... both his talk and his poems leave you with a flavour, something you have never quite met before, a sound that remains in the ear...⁵⁴

Thus, it would not be a surprise if Cavafy read and knew about well-established medical theories of his days. In his personal library (of which our record is incomplete), there were treatises on different topics, while science sources were not absent from his personal collection: these included essays by Freud and books by Darwin, like the *On the Origin of Species*.⁵⁵ Most relevantly for our study, we are told of various treatises on medicine and psychiatry sent to him with dedications by the authors, in the last years of his life.⁵⁶ Although we do not have many details about titles and other information, this suggests that medicine in a broad sense was one of Cavafy's interests. And as we shall see in this thesis, he incorporated relevant medical discourse in a significant number of poems.

It is very important to note, that Cavafy's (much older) first cousin was a distinguished medical practitioner in London. John Cavafy, with whom the poet did keep in communication, died in 1901 and his lengthy obituary was published in *The British Medical Journal* on 11 of May.⁵⁷ Thus, Cavafy had a source on medical issues in his own family. John Cavafy graduated from the University of London, taking a first class in Medicine and then his MD. He became a member of the Royal College of Physicians. He was also appointed as Demonstrator in Histology and was elected Assistant Physician and then Lecturer in Comparative Anatomy and Medical Registrar, Physiology and Medicine at St George's.⁵⁸

John Cavafy was the author of several articles. For example, in one of his articles dealing with locomotor ataxy, he describes the case of a patient who suffered from 'bilious attacks', vomiting and epigastric pain, constipation, slow micturition, and loss of sexual potency. This patient, on John's

⁵³ Pinchin, *Alexandria Still*, 77-78.

⁵⁴ Bonamy Dobrée in Pinchin, *Alexandria Still*, 78.

⁵⁵ Charles Darwin, *On the Origins of Species* (Oxford, 2008).

⁵⁶ Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη*, 67, 75.

⁵⁷ Daskalopoulos-Stasinopoulou, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κ. Π. Καβάφη*, p. 46 and Liddell, *Cavafy*, 96.

⁵⁸ Anonymous author, 'Obituary', *The British Medical Journal*, <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2400973/pdf/brmedj08455-0050b.pdf>, 1178. [accessed 14 May 2016]

account, before his marriage had been given to sexual excesses.⁵⁹ As we will see, sexual excesses are something common in Cavafy's homoerotic poems. In some other articles, John deals with the contagiousness of erysipelas,⁶⁰ and the remedial actions of alcohol.⁶¹ And again, as we will see, the issues of contagiousness and alcohol —here as addiction— appear in a certain number of Cavafy's poems.

As Antonakopoulos writes, after the death of his father, from 1874 to 1876, Cavafy lived in London with his family and it is very possible that the adolescent Cavafy was influenced by his older cousin's enthusiasm and wide range of interests. Although salicylic acid had been used before for the treatment of rheumatism, it was John who identified that salicylates reduce fever. Cavafy's admiration for his cousin is apparent in his 'Genealogy', in which he describes his cousin as a very wise man. John's articles had been published in *The Lancet* and the *British Medical Journal*, while in 1881 he became honorary secretary to the section of skin diseases.⁶²

Even though there is no evidence of works by Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Thomas Trotter and Jacob Hutter on Cavafy's shelves —whose theories, as we shall see in the following chapters, may be used to interpret several poems— Cavafy's reading was not confined to the books he owned (and which have now been dispersed). Not a rich man, he read books belonging to his brothers and friends and books from public libraries in Alexandria, in addition to keeping up with foreign periodicals in reading rooms.⁶³ In his correspondence with Foster, there is further evidence that Forster sent Cavafy various books.⁶⁴ Cavafy's thirst for learning, in combination with his deep knowledge of his contemporary ideas, make certain that Cavafy read about medical theories of his time and he infused them in his poetry.

In any case, it is hard to believe that Cavafy was not aware of Krafft-Ebing's theory on homosexuality, along with the broad thrust of Hutter's theory on old age and the debate ensuing from Trotter's theory on alcoholism. Especially on the last two, even if it seems unlikely that he read the original sources, Cavafy was very likely engaged with the sort of the nineteenth century debates they contributed to, medical and literary periodicals dealing with these theories —that he read

⁵⁹ John Cavafy, 'A case of sciatic nerve-stretching in locomotor ataxy', *The British Medical Journal*, 2: 1093 (1881), 928-929.

⁶⁰ John Cavafy, 'Cases of facial erysipelas with low temperature', *The British Medical Journal*, 1: 1213 (1884), 599-600.

⁶¹ John Cavafy, 'Failure of salicin and success of cold packing in a case of rheumatic hyperpyrexia', *The British Medical Journal*, 1: 852 (1877), 510 and John Cavafy, 'On the treatment of ringworm of the scalp', *The British Medical Journal*, 1: 1121 (1882), 939.

⁶² G.N. Antonakopoulos, 'A member of the Cavafy family in 'The Lancet'. The life of Dr. John G. Cavafy (1838-1901)', *Deltos*, 41 (2011), 27-39.

⁶³ Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη*, 64-65.

⁶⁴ Jeffreys (ed.), *The Forster-Cavafy Letters*, 49, 52.

assiduously— or even he heard about these views from a friend or a relative, like his cousin John. Thus, the connection of certain poems with these theories that will be attempted in this thesis, is a new addition to Cavafy's studies and draw out aspects of the relevant poems that have perhaps been insufficiently discussed.

Debates in these three health-related areas —as homosexuality, old age and alcoholism were seen— evidently interested Cavafy. The identification of homosexuality, old age and alcoholism with diseases, each with a set of symptoms, suggests that Cavafy was well-informed about medical views of his day. The symptoms and the overall pathological process revealed in several poems drives us to read these poems with relevant theories, and, as I shall argue, can shed new light on them.

It is important to see Cavafy's interest in these studies, related to diseases, through a discussion he once had with Sareyannis. In discussing different meanings of the Greek word 'αδύνατον', Cavafy gives as an example a visit he once paid to a sick boy's house:

Ευρέθηκα κατά τύχη κάποτε σ' ένα σπίτι λαϊκό, την ώρα που έβγαινε ο γιατρός, που ήρθε να δει ένα άρρωστο παιδί. Ο γιατρός επέμενε στην πόρτα πως έπρεπε να γίνει εγχείρηση. Μα η μητέρα διαμαρτύρετο και του είπε 'Γιατρέ μου, είναι αδύνατον, γιατί το παιδί είναι πολύ αδύνατο'. Πρόσεξε, Γιάννη, τη λεπτή διάκριση: Αδύνατον-impossible. Αδύνατο-faible.⁶⁵

(Once, I went by chance to a modest house, at the time the doctor, who came to see a sick boy, was getting out. On the doorstep, the doctor insisted that an operation was needed. But the mother complained and told him 'my doctor, it is impossible, because the child is very faible'. Pay attention, Gianni, to the slight difference: Αδύνατον-impossible. Αδύνατο-faible).

The above statement shows Cavafy's obsession with medicine and illnesses in two ways: firstly, through the fact that Cavafy uses an example like that, a visit to a sick person, to explain to his interlocutor the different meanings of a word in Greek; and secondly, through his claim that he went to this house by chance, which is not convincing.⁶⁶

Cavafy's obsession with illnesses appears in some of his unpublished notes:

Είναι μια αντίθεσις στους πλούσιους νέους που είναι ή αρρωσιάρηδες και /φυσιολογικώς/ βρώμικοι, ή [[τότε]] με πάχητα /και/ με λίγδες απ' τα πολλά φαγιά, και τα πιοτά/, και τα παπλώματα/.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ I. A. Sareyannis, *Σχόλια στον Καβάφη* (Athens, 2005), 42.

⁶⁶ By chance is also the excuse given by the poet in the poem 'Συμεών' to explain to his friend his visit to Symeon's pillar: η τύχη το 'φερε – κάτω απ' του Συμεών τον στύλο (C. P. Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα: 1877;-1923*, G. P. Savidis (Athens, 2013), 104-105).

⁶⁷ C. P. Cavafy, Κ. Π., *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα Ποιητικής και Ηθικής (1902-1911)*, ed. G. P. Savidis (Athens, 1983), 43.

(There is a contrast between the rich young men who are either sick and /naturally/ filthy or [[then]] with fatness /and/ dirt from the many foods, and the drinks/, and the duvets).

and also:

μπορεί να έχει σπ[ου]δ[αιότητα] που δεν την ον[ομάζει], αλλ' ενστικτωδώς την αισθ[άνεται] και η ανθρ[ωπότης] και όταν υγιάνεις και συ.⁶⁸

(maybe there is an importance that is not named, but instinctively humanity feels it and you feel it too when you are healthy).

Cavafy's notes frequently revolve around issues of health, showing his preoccupation with illnesses, which is reflected in his poetry. In the first note above he makes a comparison, concluding that wealthy young men are physically imperfect to the point even of seeming sick. Even if this is a metaphor, rather than a literal reference, it is interesting to see that Cavafy uses this characterisation to present this comparison. In the second note, Cavafy clearly mentions the importance of health for any human.

Cavafy's obsession with illness and medical theories of his days is also apparent in some of his other prose writings. In a paper titled 'Το κοράλλιον υπό μυθολογικήν έποψιν' (1886), the poet writes about the supposed healing properties of coral:

Έτεροι υμνούν την θεραπευτική επιρροήν ήν ο λίθος ούτος εξησκει επί των ασθενείων του στομάχου, της αιμορραγίας, της οφθαλμίας, και του σεληνιασμού· αν και κατά τον αρχιεπίσκοπον Κύπρου Επιφάνιον τα τελευταία δύο νοσήματα ιατρεύοντο ου μόνον υπό του κοραλλίου, αλλά και υπό του τοπαζίου και ιάσπεως.⁶⁹

(Some others praise the therapeutic attribute that this stone has on illnesses of the stomach, bleeding, ophthalmia, and madness' although, according to the Archbishop of Cyprus Epiphanius, the last two illnesses are cured not only by the coral, by the topaz and the jade).

Of coral, Cavafy comments that it could be beneficial for a series of illnesses, such as stomach-ache, bleeding, ophthalmia, even madness.

Interestingly, in the opening lines of the above note, Cavafy writes that in 1883 corals had attracted the interest of London residents: 'Η καλώς διωργανισμένη και πλουσία έκθεσις κοραλλίων κοκκινοχρόων, μελάνων και λευκών, ήτις τω 1883 εφείλκυσε την προσοχήν των κατοίκων του Λονδίνου'.⁷⁰ Moreover, what Cavafy writes in his note about the therapeutic attributes of stones for patients with ophthalmia is verified in a 1863 source: according to a document written by the priest

⁶⁸ Cavafy, *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα Ποιητικής και Ηθικής*, 65.

⁶⁹ C. P. Cavafy, *Τα Πεζά*, ed. Michalis Pieris (Athens, 2010), 27-28.

⁷⁰ Cavafy, *Τα Πεζά*, 27.

of Saint Andreas in Melapedian monastery, they kept a stone —sapphire— in the monastery, because it was useful and healing for people who had problem with their eyes, and especially ophthalmia patients.⁷¹ Since antiquity stones have been used for several diseases, and as Galen declares stones were the second most effective medicine after natural sources. Especially, stones were used for conditions of the eye or the mouth.⁷²

In another short piece, *‘[Ημερολόγιο από την αρρώστια και τις τελευταίες ημέρες του Μικέ Θ. Ράλλη]’*, Cavafy writes in detail about his friend Mikes Ralli’s typhoid:

Εις απάντησιν με γράφει δύο γραμμάς ο Τόττης—ότι ο Μικές είναι άρρωστος από την Τρίτη βράδυ με θέρμην...

(As a reply, Tottis writes to me two lines—that Mikes is sick since Tuesday evening with fever...)

Ο ιατρός του ήτον ο Μοσχάτος. Τον είπα είναι τρέλλα να εμπιστεύεται εις αυτόν.

(His doctor was Moschatos. I told him that it is madness to trust him).

Με λέγουν ότι ο Μικές ήτο χειρότερα. Τον βλέπω και τω όντι με φαίνεται πολύ abattu. Θέρμη περισσοτέρα. Εκάθητο εις τον καναπέ του sitting-room. Προσεπάθησε να με ομιλήση, αλλά οργήγورا εκουράσθη. Παρεπονείτο ότι είχε πονοκέφαλον. Τέλος μετά ημίσειαν ώραν τον είδα τόσον καταβεβλημένον ώστε τον κατέπεισα να πάγη εις την κάμαράν του και να έμβη εις το κρεβάτι του.

(They told me Mikes was worse. I see him and indeed he looks very abattu. Higher fever. He was sitting on the sofa of the sitting-room. He tried to talk to me, he got tired quickly. He complained that he had headache. Finally, after half an hour I saw him so exhausted and convinced him to go to his room and lie in his bed).

Έκαμαν κονσούλτο με τους ιατρούς Τσαγκαρόλαν και Βαλασόπουλον, και αυτοί ενέκριναν την κούραν και απεφάνθησαν ότι πάσχει από albuminerie.

(They had a consultation with the doctors Tsagarolas and Valasopoulos, and they approved the treatment and decided that he is ill of albuminerie).

Με αυτό τω όντι κατέβη ο ιατρός Μάκης. Τον ηρώτησα, και με απεκρίθη «He is in a very, very bad state-typhoid state», και εφαινέτο ως να μη έτρεφε ελπίδας καλλιτερεύσεως.

(Indeed doctor Makis came down. I asked him, and he replied «He is in a very, very bad state-typhoid state», and it seemed that he did not have any hope of getting better).

⁷¹ Stamatoula Zaranti, ‘Ημυπολύτιμος λίθος ως θεραπευτικό μέσο’, *Deltos*, Issue 24 (2002), 44-46.

⁷² Dimitrios Chr. Koutroumpas, ‘Η φαρμακευτική χρήση γαιών, πετρωμάτων και μεταλλευμάτων κατά τον Γαληνό της Περγάμου’, *Deltos*, 43 (2014), 17-30.

Εκείνος δε διά τας τελευταίας 3 ημέρας κάθε ημέραν είχε δύο, τρεις αιμορραγίας.

(For the last three days and every day he had two, three bleedings).⁷³

Health issues were very important for Cavafy and this is evident in the way he encourages his close friend to find another doctor, as according to him, he would be mad to trust a doctor, like Moschatos. In addition, he describes in detail his friend's symptoms and especially fever, fatigue and headache, while after a consultation of the doctors he asserts that his friend has albuminuria. However, in the next lines of this writing, Cavafy writes that his friend's state worsened significantly, as he finally had typhoid; this was accompanied in the last three days by bleeding. Again, the detailed description gives us the impression that Cavafy had an interest in medicine.

In the diary of his visit to Greece, in June 1901, Cavafy asserts at the very beginning, that 'this is intended to be a diary of occurrences, not of impressions and ideas.'⁷⁴ Indeed, in this diary, written in English, Cavafy seems to be very obsessed with his health, and returns again and again to his well-being. Reading this diary, one could assume that his priority was to keep himself in good health:

I was unwell towards noon, slightly better afterwards, and I felt after a few hours on board much better.

We had some bother with the Sanitary formalities. They would not allow us to get on board unless we had first passed through the Port Sanitary office, and declared whether we came or not from plague stricken districts.

Health better.

Awful sun, going to Delos. I was afraid of getting a sun-stroke.

I was back at Phalerum at 1.20 p.m.; but I felt unwell and did not lunch. I was better in the evening.

Stayed at the hotel all the morning. Rather unwell. Better now, but will not go to town.

Stayed in the hotel in the morning. Lunched. Felt unwell at 3 p.m. Decided on not going to town. Much better now. Will dine.

Not being very well still, I did not lunch.

Felt much better in health yesterday afternoon and evening; and quite well this morning.

All during the day I felt as well as I ever was; but towards 8 p. m. I began to feel an oppression on my stomach, and I passed a «nuit blanche» suffering from terrible colics and vomiting all

⁷³ C. P. Cavafy, *Άπαντα τα Πεζά*, ed. Giorgos F. Fexi and Giorgos Papoutsakis (Athens, 1963), 253-258.

⁷⁴ Cavafy, *Άπαντα τα Πεζά*, 259.

the time. I do not know to what ascribe this; probably it was due to a glass of water that I drank at Zacharato's, and that had a stale taste.

Yesterday I stayed indoors all day, as I did not feel quite up to going out. I dined off a plate of soup and 2 eggs in my room.

As I did not feel quite well, I did not lunch. I had a copious tea at 3 — eggs, bread and butter.

At 8 we went to dinner. The dinner tables are spread out on the square opposite the hotel. I did not dine however as my stomach was out of order, owing to the enormous quantity I drank during the day. I felt parched all day and I am sure I must have drunk 15 glasses of water.⁷⁵

Reading the above lines from Cavafy's diary, one sees his permanent, even obsessive fear over his health; he is always worried about health issues and tries to protect himself in different ways. During his stay, he asserted that he felt unwell several times, while on one occasion he claims that drank water which made him vomit and on another occasion the alcohol consumption of the previous night caused him a stomach disorder. At another part of this diary, he says that he is afraid of sun-stroke, because of the sunny weather in Delos, while he is also very careful with his nutrition. Every time he feels unwell, he associates this with his nutrition and stays in the hotel to protect himself.

As Boletsi asserts, Cavafy frequently stops his narrative in order to note the temperature: in total there are thirty-one mentions of the temperature and several other references to weather conditions. According to Boletsi, the poet writes that he suffers because it's very warm, but he suffers more as he forgot his thermometer:⁷⁶ 'It's very warm. But as I have packed up the thermometer, I can't state any figure'.⁷⁷ Boletsi continues, by saying that Cavafy is obsessed with the temperature and the way the weather and certain moments affects his body and mood.⁷⁸

Focusing on these pieces of information, one can see clearly Cavafy's obsession with his health and health issues in general. An obsession, however, and a medical interest that has never been explored in Cavafy, as it happened with other poets, like Alexander Pope (1688-1744) who also had such an obsessive concern. Thus, health can be used as a hermeneutic for reading Pope's poems, since his poor health is frequently reflected in his poetry. As Nicolson and Rousseau write, Pope was seriously concerned about his health. Pope had several health issues, like progressing asthma and

⁷⁵ Cavafy, *Απαντα τα Πεζά*, 259-302.

⁷⁶ Maria Boletsi, 'Η θερμοκρασία της ειρωνείας στον Κ. Π. Καβάφη', *Το Δέντρο*, 193-194 (Athens, 2013), 83-88.

⁷⁷ Cavafy, *Απαντα τα Πεζά*, 292.

⁷⁸ Boletsi, 'Η θερμοκρασία της ειρωνείας στον Κ. Π. Καβάφη', 85.

kyphoscoliosis, while his eyesight was bad and he developed a cardiac condition. In addition, Pope's weight was far below normal and he suffered from piles.⁷⁹

Like Cavafy, in his letters to friends, Pope frequently wrote about his poor health; for example on one occasion, he speaks about his rheumatism in his shoulder that caused him pain. In a letter to another friend (Thomas Sheridan), Pope complains about his eyesight, while writing to Baron Bathurst, he says that the bath he tried together with some other remedies did not help at all his headaches. 'I am in the condition of an old fellow of Threescore, with a Complication of Diseases upon me; A constant Headake; ruind Tone of the Stomach; the Piles; a Vomiting & Looseness; & an Excess of Wind', Pope writes. In another letter to Martha Blount, the poet complains about the strong pains caused by kyphoscoliosis. Like Cavafy, Pope was very preoccupied, and at some point overcautious, over his health, as in a letter to Henry Cromwell he apologises for not meeting him, but his 'continual Illnesses prevent that'.⁸⁰

Nevertheless, while for Pope this anxiety over his health was a result of existing illnesses, as he suffered indeed several serious maladies, with Cavafy, that is not the case. Apart from his experience with cancer, nearly at the end of his life, in most cases his anxiety and concern are not based on anything sure and substantial, but rather to his own obsessive assumptions. His fear mainly derives not from existing and severe conditions, but on the contrary from a random fear over his health; it seems that he was a kind of hypochondriac. As Belli asserts, poets express their emotions to the reader and make their pain a universal statement.⁸¹ This is the case for Cavafy, who —beyond that— expresses his fears and concerns over his health and well-being too. It is also interesting that poetry can prove the ideal tool for the representation of the experience of ill, as a certain number of Cavafy's poems do.⁸²

⁷⁹ Marjorie Nicolson and G. S. Rousseau, *This Long Disease, my Life': Alexander Pope and the sciences* (Princeton, 1968), 52, 57, 69.

⁸⁰ Nicolson and Rousseau, *This Long Disease, my Life'*, 21, 28, 31, 34.

⁸¹ Angela Belli, 'The impact of literature upon health: some varieties of cathartic response', *Literature and Medicine*, 5 (1986), 90-108.

⁸² Sarah Nance, 'An economy of illness: the poetics of women in pain', *Literature and Medicine*, 36: 1 (2018), 164-189.

4. The distinction between disease and illness

We have seen from his private documents that Cavafy the man had an almost obsessive interest in health-related issues and medical theories of his day. We should now address some broader terminological questions, the subject of much discussion in the field of the medical humanities, which have relevance to certain poems by Cavafy. What is 'disease'? What is 'illness'? And what is 'sickness'? Are these three words synonyms? And of course, how do these words relate to Cavafy? For most people, in common speech the three words mean much the same thing; a person or even an animal in an ailing condition.

Although it is hard to clarify the main difference between these three words in daily communication, for the medical humanities the distinction is of high importance. And it is crucial to note that they are three different and distinct terminologies with different characteristics. Hofmann and Boyd describe the terms in detail. As Hofmann declares, the triad 'disease, illness and sickness' has often been applied to bring out medical, personal and social aspects respectively of human lack of well-being. Disease is a health problem that consists of a physiological malfunction resulting in an actual or potential reduction in physical capacities; it is an organic phenomenon independent of subjective opinions or experiences and of social factors. It is epistemically measurable by objective methods.⁸³ A disease is a pathological process and is characterised by the fact that it can be objectively described.⁸⁴

By contrast, illness is subjective and may be interpreted as an undesirable state of health. It consists of subjective feelings, like pain and weakness. Illness is the subjective state of an individual experiencing symptoms; epistemically it can only be directly observed by the subject and indirectly assessed through the individual's reports.⁸⁵ Illness is personal and can exist where no disease can be found; the patient in such cases may offer the doctor nothing to end up with a diagnosis.⁸⁶

Finally, sickness is the external and public mode of lack of health and relates to the position of a sick person in society. It is in essence a social status, reflecting a distinction between the patient (or sick person), and a society that is supposed to recognise and sustain him or even sometimes reject him.⁸⁷ Sickness is a social identity: it is the poor health of an individual defined by others with reference to the social activity of that individual. It is an event located in society and is epistemically assessed by

⁸³ Bjorn Hofmann, 'On the triad disease, illness and sickness', *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy: a forum for bioethics and philosophy of medicine*, 27/ 6:1 (2002), 651-673.

⁸⁴ Kenneth M Boyd, 'Disease, illness, sickness, health, healing and wholeness: exploring some elusive concepts', *Medical Humanities*, 26 (2000), 9-17.

⁸⁵ Hofmann, 'On the triad disease, illness and sickness', 652.

⁸⁶ Boyd, 'Disease, illness, sickness, health, healing and wholeness', 10.

⁸⁷ Boyd, 'Disease, illness, sickness, health, healing and wholeness', 10.

measuring levels of performance with reference to expected social activities. The above distinction between disease, illness and sickness has become very common in medical sociology, medical anthropology and philosophy of medicine and was first applied by Andrew Twaddle in 1967. In recent years, this triad has been worked out and re-defined in 1988 by Sachs and Twaddle again, in 1994, and challenged by Nordenfeld in the same year.⁸⁸

Nevertheless, another, simpler, distinction has been upheld since the 1950s, by Parsons in 1951, 1958, 1964 and Feinste in 1967; this is the binary distinction between disease and illness.⁸⁹ In addition, sociologists like Kleinman in 1988, Posner in 1991 and Turner in 1996 have noted a fundamental difference between the two terms,⁹⁰ making this binary distinction sharper.

Focusing on the binary distinction, Lupton describes illness as the social, lived experience of symptoms and suffering which is innately human. It recognises that bodily processes can show malfunctioning and takes steps to correct situations, for example through treatments. By contrast, disease is not limited to humans, as animals and plants can be diseased, too. Describing someone as 'diseased' shows a lack of humanity, while the term 'disease', as opposed to 'illness', denotes a technical malfunction or deviation from the biological norm which is scientifically diagnosed.⁹¹

Consequently, based on the simplified binary distinction, illness refers to how the sick person and his family and friends respond to symptoms and disability. As doctors pay attention primarily to disease, they have difficulty in dealing with the illness experience, which combines a set of ways in which the sick person perceive, manage, and respond to symptoms and disability. The experience of illness reminds us the limitations, dependencies and ultimate mortality of humanity.⁹²

Although for the purposes of my discussion I cannot set out to judge between the validity of the two frameworks (disease-sickness-illness versus disease-illness), I incline to say that the binary distinction between disease and illness applies better in this thesis, rather than the triple distinction. Generally, it could be said that in the simplified version of the distinction, the terms illness and sickness merge into a single term, while disease keeps its status as the diagnosis of a specialist. For my

⁸⁸ Hofmann, 'On the triad disease, illness and sickness', 651-653.

⁸⁹ Hofmann, 'On the triad disease, illness and sickness', 651.

⁹⁰ Deborah Lupton, *Medicine as Culture: illness, disease and the body* (London, 2012), 86.

⁹¹ Lupton, *Medicine as Culture*, p. 86. Also, Boorse describes disease as the theoretical concept applying indifferently to organisms of all species and to be analysed in biological rather than ethical terms, while illnesses are subclasses of diseases that have features reflected in medical practice and belong to ethics (Christopher Boorse, 'On the distinction between disease and illness', *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 5: 1 (1975), 49-68). For Freund, illness has social, emotional, moral and spiritual implications, while disease refers to the biophysical condition seen from the practitioner's perspective (Peter E. S. Freund, Meredith B. McGuire, Linda S. Podhurst, *Health, Illness, and the Social Body: a critical sociology* (New Jersey, 2003), 147).

⁹² Freund, McGuire, Podhurst, *Health, Illness, and the Social Body*, 147-149, 167.

purposes, the most pertinent distinction is this: that illness is both the pain experience of the patient and his social network's attitude to it (something which we shall see greatly preoccupies Cavafy's poems), whereas disease is the scientific explanation given by the medical community. Illness is the way a normal person interprets an ailment, whereas disease is the way that a specialist sees the ailment.

As we can see, illness is more like a random condition expressed through the patient's personal experience and view and has no scientific validity. In contrast, what makes disease is its scientific validation through a diagnosis. Thus, disease is not random but rather a specified condition with a specialist's intervention. Without saying that Cavafy had in mind such distinctions, in a certain number of poems he speaks of or describes ailing people; this may be seen as the illness experience. He never names a specific disease, and the role of a specialist is absent from his poetry.⁹³ Although Vassiliadi —surprisingly, it might be thought— does not engage with the medical humanities in general or with any distinctions of this kind, her assumption that in Cavafy we only have vague descriptions of illnesses without anything specific suggests that we are to speak of illness, rather than disease, in the poems of Cavafy. As Vassiliadi declares, Cavafy's poems allude to connotations of unspecified fevers or natural causes of death. Especially in his erotic poems, the body is frequently an ailing or wounded body that holds a central role. The disease is never mentioned and it is only a synonym of death which strikes young men.⁹⁴ However, as we shall see in this thesis, disease is also the case in several poems, even if the poet is rarely too overt about specific conditions. While the poet does not name the actual disease, he refers to certain symptoms and theories of his time in such a way that readers connect these poems with specific conditions or disorders like 'old age', 'alcoholism' and 'homosexuality'.

Consequently, one would say the representation of sick people in Cavafy is best seen as relating to the terms 'illness' and 'disease', although there is no poem in Cavafy's poetry mentioning a doctor. Thus, Cavafy's patients seem helpless and unprotected, as an unspecified illness or a disease is ready to defeat soldiers, young and strong men and any other. Even in the poem 'Η αρρώστια του Κλείτου' in which we see that someone is taking care of the ailing youth, that someone is not a doctor as one might expect. In contrast, the person who tries to give treatment to the boy is the old servant woman. Consequently, it seems that purposely Cavafy does not include doctors in his poems.

The background of those poems revolving around illness or disease connects to other nineteenth century representations and the general climate of the century. As Sontag asserts, in the

⁹³ It is worth noting, that major Greek writers e.g. Korais, Karkavitsas, Sinopoulos and Anagnostakis who were medical practitioners, may approach illness-related issues in a different way compared to Cavafy.

⁹⁴ Vassiliadi, '«Για τα σκουπίδια κατευθείαν»', 2.

nineteenth century, consumption was seen as a manner of appearance and it was glamorous for someone to look sickly. The TB-influenced idea of the body was a new model for aristocratic looks, while the romanticising of tuberculosis was the first widespread example of distinct activity. The tubercular look was considered attractive and became a mark of distinction and breeding. Sickness was a way of making people interesting and romantic.⁹⁵

Although in Cavafy we do have this romantic version of illness—in the poem ‘Του Πλοίου’ (On the Ship)⁹⁶ for example—, Cavafy turns away from this rhetoric of the sickly and the romantic version. In addition, the reason of the sickness is absent and tuberculosis is not specified, as the case is in other nineteenth century literature; and this makes Cavafy’s version of presenting illness distinctive.

As we shall see in Chapter 1, through the analysis of certain poems, I intend to show that Cavafy never speaks directly about a specific disease, although the representation of ailing (and prematurely dead) men is a frequent topic in his poetry. Cavafy gives the image of the dying young men as something very common, nevertheless he always leaves readers wondering about the causes. They may suggest consumption for example but do not specify it.

⁹⁵ Susan Sontag, *Illness as Metaphor & AIDS and its Metaphors* (London, 1991), 29-31.

⁹⁶ C. P. Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, tr. Evangelos Sachperoglou-ed. Anthony Hirst (Oxford, 2008), 114-115.

5. Medical developments in the nineteenth century and their reflection in literature

After a historical account of the medical humanities, the distinction between ‘additive’ and ‘integrated’ medical humanities, Cavafy’s obsession with health-related issues and the distinction between ‘illness’ and ‘disease’, it is also important to look at some medical developments in the nineteenth century, especially regarding tuberculosis. It is also important to see how Cavafy diverged from other poets who dealt with medical issues in their work, as he is never too revealing.

In Cavafy’s day, reports from several institutions built for people suffering from leprosy provide historical information, testifying that tuberculosis was the most significant complication and was linked with poor hygiene conditions. As Bynum declares, in the nineteenth century consumption was seen in new ways. New methods in microscopy and bacteriology brought the transition from consumption to tuberculosis; thus, tuberculosis instead of consumption became visible in new ways.⁹⁷

It is true that the nineteenth century marked great progress in the investigation of consumption through some works and theories: for example, in 1819, Laënnec asserted that all phthisis was tuberculous and that tubercles could appear in any organ and were connected with diathesis. Also, in 1865, Villemin announced his outcome, suggesting that tuberculosis was a specific affection and belonged to the class of virulent maladies. However, it was Robert Koch’s discovery that brought a revolution in the medical world.⁹⁸

Koch, a German bacteriologist, came to certain conclusions on consumption. Through new laboratory methods, Koch identified the causes and established that tuberculosis is transmittable from one person to the other as an infection.⁹⁹ In fact, in 1882, Koch discovered the pathogenic bacillus.¹⁰⁰ Based on observations deriving from experiments, Koch concluded that the complexities of consumption were something from the past and it was redefined as the existence of a causal germ in a body. In addition, he gave the disease the new name ‘TB’: Tubercle bacillus. In 1839, another German named J. L. Schönlein introduced the name ‘tuberculosis’, as part of his pathological research in relation to conditions characterised by the formation of tubercles, without wide use; ‘TB’ or ‘tuberculosis’ were the new prevalent names. As Bynum also declares, in the Kochian world-view the new consequence of a bacterial aetiology was the contagiousness of the disease. As the infectious nature of consumption became a common knowledge, the disease was seen as a public health

⁹⁷ Helen Bynum, *Spitting Blood: the history of tuberculosis* (Oxford, 2012), 40, 77, 95.

⁹⁸ Anonymous author, ‘The history of tuberculosis. Schorstein lecture’, *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 3229 (Nov. 18, 1922), 987-988.

⁹⁹ Bynum, *Spitting Blood*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ Hillas Smith, ‘The strange case of Mr Keats’s tuberculosis’, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, 38: 7 (2004), 991-993.

problem. Consumption was a basic factor for the high statistical registers of mortality and was seen as a contagious epidemic.¹⁰¹

Despite the painful premature death, the nineteenth century saw tuberculosis as a fashionable disease. This fashion was a new trend among Romantics, who diverged from the Enlightenment to reach the era of their senses and feelings. John Keats (1795-1821) was among the famous consumptive poets, portrayed as a tragic victim of a dreadful illness. Before dedicating his life to poetry, Keats studied surgery.¹⁰² His early death at the age of twenty five contributed to the picture of the romantic poets of the nineteenth century. According to Smith, although Keats completed his medical studies and gained the status of a medical family practitioner, he decided to leave medicine and write poetry. At that time, tuberculosis was such a common disease, that Keats family lost, apart from John, his two brothers, their mother and an uncle. In 1819 and when John knew about his illness, he wrote his quartet of famous odes.¹⁰³

Dealing with the medical influence in Keats's works, Smith declares that in his poems there are a few mentions of medical issues, however his use of language suggests that he rarely alludes to his studies in surgery. Nevertheless, in some personal statements, Keats declares that medicine had influenced his writing.¹⁰⁴ It is true, as Bynum concludes, in the nineteenth century, consumption, fevers and epidemics of cholera gained an obvious profile through poetry, art, literature and stage.¹⁰⁵

Another striking example of a poet that openly dealt with tuberculosis was the Herzegovinian Croat Antun Branko Šimić (1898-1925). Apart from the fact that there are poems revolving around his experience with tuberculosis, we can also find other overt references to this disease, like his earliest verses entitled *Bacteria*.¹⁰⁶ As we have already said, this is not the case in Cavafy, as he does not speak openly about the actual disease of his protagonists. Consequently, Vassiliadi is partly correct to assume that what we really have in Cavafy is an unspecified illness.

Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* is widely accepted as a realistic depiction of tuberculosis and it maintains a secure place in the field of the medical humanities. Although many doctors saw it as a text giving a misleading overview of tuberculosis and its treatment, it is a powerful text revolving around disease. During the writing of *The Magic Mountain* Mann visited hospitals and laboratories,

¹⁰¹ Bynum, *Spitting Blood*, 96, 109, 110.

¹⁰² Bynum, *Spitting Blood*, 78-79.

¹⁰³ Smith, 'The strange case of Mr Keats's tuberculosis', 991-993.

¹⁰⁴ Hillas Smith, 'John Keats: poet, patient, physician', *Reviews of Infectious Diseases*: Vol. 6, No. 3: May-June 1984, 390-404.

¹⁰⁵ Bynum, *Spitting Blood*, 94.

¹⁰⁶ M-A. Dürrigl, S. Fatović-Ferenčić, "I am living in my own corpse"-the experience of tuberculosis in poems by A B Šimić, *Medical Humanities*, 32 (2006), 4-6.

while he also attended operations and read medical literature. Mann gives descriptions of the meals served at the sanatorium, satirising the entertainment of the patients to spend their time. In any case, as Herwig suggests, despite some literary exaggerations, Mann's novel reflects reality. *The Magic Mountain* was published when the psychological effects of tuberculosis and sanatorium care were considered in medical discourse and is an example of 'disease as social diagnosis'.¹⁰⁷

As with Cavafy's poems on illness and disease discussed later, Mann pays attention to the personal experience; something that a doctor needs to bear in mind. Mann's novel became an object of celebration in medical circles, as it serves as a way of cultural representation and legitimation.¹⁰⁸ In the same way, although Cavafy's poems are not as overt as Mann, they could be seen from a medical humanities approach and become a tool for the doctors to interpret certain conditions, as the poet is frequently very descriptive. Cavafy's interest in medical theories is not only reflected in his poetry, but also it constitutes a source for the doctor to examine the historical evolution of certain conditions from the nineteenth century to nowadays and the way that patients experience their condition.

While the name of no specific disease appears, a more thorough analysis of Cavafy's poetry shows that the applicability of the term 'disease' is not absent from his poems. Although illness is the case in a number of poems, disease is the case in several other poems, especially poems which revolve around the issues of old age, alcoholism and homosexuality and are presented by Cavafy as specific diseases with a series of symptoms. Thus, in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, we will proceed beyond the 'illness concept', extending what Vassiliadi suggested, to show how Cavafy infused elements from, or ultimately derived from Hutter's, Trotter's and Krafft-Ebing's theories in his poems, that old age, alcoholism and homosexuality respectively, are specific medical conditions.

An important additional consideration for any discussion of Cavafy in the framework of the medical humanities is the question, how far may we map out the terms disease, illness and sickness in Greek. Babiniotis sees the above words broadly as synonyms, but explains them as follows: 'πάθησις' as the non-normal condition of the organism or an organ, like kidneys, heart, brain and eyes, 'νόσος' as every disorder and non-normal condition to the body of an organism or even a mental disorder for humans, like ενδημική νόσος, επάρατη νόσος, στεφανιαία νόσος, στερητική νόσος and νόσος των δυτών, αρρώστια as ασθένεια (παιδική/σωματική/ψυχική/σοβαρή/ύπουλη/μεταδοτική) and finally 'ασθένεια' as 'αρρώστια' and the primitive stage of a condition in continuous development.

¹⁰⁷ Malte Herwig, 'Framing the 'Magic Mountain malady': the reception of Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain* in the Medical Community, 1924-2000', *Framing and Imagining Disease in Cultural History*, ed. George Sebastian Rousseau (London, 2003), 129-150.

¹⁰⁸ Herwig, 'Framing the 'Magic Mountain malady'', 138-139, 141-142.

While synonyms in a broad extent indeed, we see that the match πάθηση or νόσος-disease, αρρώστια-illness and ασθένεια-sickness fits well.

I would say that disease is best captured by the words 'πάθηση' or 'νόσος', illness by 'αρρώστια' and sickness by 'ασθένεια', explaining them as follows: 'πάθησις' or 'νόσος' are rather scientific terms, rarely used by most people; in contrast they are frequently used among specialists, especially the first one, when they are proceeding into a diagnosis. 'Αρρώστια' is the living experience as an ill person is most likely to describe himself as 'άρρωστο', rather than 'ασθενής' or 'πάσχων' for example. Finally, only because society sees a sick person as someone without his former strength, I would suggest that the word 'ασθένεια' denotes this lack of bodily 'σθένος'.

Although in his poetry Cavafy uses all three words, 'πάθησις' in the poem 'Πολυέλιος' ('Chandelier'),¹⁰⁹ 'ασθένεια' in the form of the adjective 'ασθενής' in the poem 'Ο Θάνατος του Αυτοκράτορος Τακίτου' ('The Death of the Emperor Tacitus')¹¹⁰ and 'αρρώστια' in the poem 'Η Αρρώστια του Κλείτου' ('Kleitos' Illness'),¹¹¹ for him they are only three different words of the same meaning, as he did not have in mind such distinctions. In all cases, Cavafy describes the living experience of a sick person and never the specialist's diagnosis.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74-75.

¹¹⁰ C. P. Cavafy, *Αποκηρυγμένα Ποιήματα και Μεταφράσεις*, ed. G. P. Savidis (Athens, 2003), 50.

¹¹¹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 156-159.

¹¹² As opposed to Anagnostakis' 'Όλο και πιο γυμνά' (Manolis Anagnostakis, *Τα Ποιήματα: 1941-1971* (Athens, 1986), 148) or Sinopoulos' 'Νεκρόδειπνος' (Takis Sinopoulos, *Νεκρόδειπνος* (Athens, 1972)).

Chapter 1: Death from an unspecified illness

1.1 Introduction

The fear of death is present for adult humans in all societies, is present for children from quite a young age, and the death of a colleague or a contemporary is often a powerful reminder of our own mortality.¹ And one could say that this fear of death is apparent in some of Cavafy's death poems. We see people crying for a beloved dead person, but for their own mortality as well.² Also, if we take for example the unpublished poem 'Εν τῷ Κοιμητηρίῳ' ('In the Cemetery') (1893),³ we have a strong indication of Cavafy's avocation with death.

Melias asserts, conversely, that Cavafy's tomb poems show the poet's imagination, the loss of beauty and the anxiety for the saving of memory; Cavafy seems to accept the power of death and attempts to come to terms with it.⁴ Focusing on the whole corpus of his poetry, Pieris says that death is a prominent topic in both Cavafy's early and his later works.⁵ Also, as noted by Savidis, who characterises death as one of the basic themes in Cavafy's poetry, death signifies the definite end of a series of smaller deaths, compulsive separation and inevitable consequence of bodily corruption.⁶ Tsirimokou too asserts that the atmosphere of nostalgia and recollection dominates Cavafy's poems on death.⁷ Alexandrou declares that Cavafy is characterised by the memory of death and is a 'philosopher of sadness' with a sense of bereavement for decay.⁸

Nevertheless, my approach breaks new ground as it offers a parallel focus on poems on illness and death in conjunction. Death is not seen just as a basic theme in Cavafy, which is the case in previous criticism, but as a consequence and the next stage of another key theme: illness. This can be read through the medical humanities, and Cavafy's poems on death show his preoccupation and interest in medicine. Cavafy explores the medicine of his times, includes certain medical theories and alludes to different epidemics that the modern historian, philologist, and even the doctor needs to

¹ Jill Gordon, 'The response to suffering', in *Medical Humanities: volume one*, ed. Martyn Evans, Rolf Ahlén, Iona Heath and Jane Macnaughton (Oxford, 2008), 86-100.

² This fear of death is also noted by Garoufalas, who writes that although in the poem 'Απολείπειν ο Θεός Αντώνιον' Cavafy gives the impression of a man who faces death with courage, he was afraid of death and also for the future of his poetry after his death (Dimitrios Garoufalas, 'Αναμνήσεις και σχόλια απο τη γνωριμία μου με τον Καβάφη', *Το Δέντρο*, No 193-194, 2013, 33-40).

³ Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα*, 41.

⁴ Alexandros Melias, 'Καβαφικά επιτύμβια: η υφανταγή της δύναμης του θανάτου', in *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: κλασικός και μοντέρνος, ελληνικός και παγκόσμιος*, ed. Kostas Voulgaris (Athens, 2013), 79-82.

⁵ Michalis Pieris, *Χώρος, Φως και Λόγος: η διαλεκτική του «μέσα» και του «έξω» στην ποίηση του Καβάφη* (Athens, 1992), 27.

⁶ Savidis, *Βασικά Θέματα*, 47.

⁷ Lizi Tsirimokou, 'Νεκρομαντική τέχνη: -η επιτάφια καβαφική ποίηση-', in *Εσωτερική Ταχύτητα* (Athens, 2000), 303-322.

⁸ Christos Alexandrou, *Το Εκκλησιαστικό Φρόνημα στον Κωνσταντίνο Καβάφη* (Kallithea, 2016), 63-65.

know. Dimiroulis declares that every new approach and analysis of Cavafy's poetry faces two questions: 'What can be said that has not been told yet in the so many works on the poet?' and 'What can a new approach give?'.⁹ In fact, as we are going to see the medical humanities is not just a new approach, but an approach enlightening a certain number of poems and especially those revolving around illness and death.

In this chapter, through the analysis of a number of poems, we will see the representation of the unspecified illness in Cavafy. As Lupton writes, an illness is considered an unnatural state of the human body, causing physical and social dysfunction, and which must be relieved. In the nineteenth century the sick body was expressed more and more frequently in literature, while disease was used as a recurring motif and theme.¹⁰

By the late nineteenth century, with the development of photographic techniques, doctors documented the manifestation of illness in their patients using photography. Patients were depicted showing their illness, while disempowered male homosexuals and other sexual 'deviants' were sufferers of sexually transmitted diseases and mentally ill, subjected to such recording of their bodies. In the late nineteenth century, parts of their bodies are depicted for the interest of medical practitioners and researchers.¹¹

The description of illness in literature is often termed pathography; a form of autobiography or biography that describes personal experiences of illness. AIDS and cancer are very typical subjects of pathography in our own time, as Hawkins discusses. Pathographies are stories of survival; they describe battles to stay alive and offer us examples of individuals whose ordinary life is under threat. Pathographies may be seen as a special literary genre, describing the human experience of a crisis and have been written increasingly the second half of the twentieth century. An explanation for their popularity in our era is the fact that pathographies are a 'good read'. One might wonder about the existence of pathographies as a literary genre in previous eras. But in fact, they appeared in previous cultures 'in a different form'. As Hawkins argues our modern pathographies find their counterparts in autobiographies revolving around religious conversion. It seems that pathographies replaced conversion autobiographies of previous and more religious cultures.¹² Kearney too sees pathography

⁹ Dimitris Dimiroulis, 'Ο Καβάφης ως κλασικός και ως μοντέρνος', in Κ. Π. Καβάφης: κλασικός και μοντέρνος, ελληνικός και παγκόσμιος, ed. Kostas Voulgaris (Athens, 2013), 21-27.

¹⁰ Lupton, *Medicine as Culture*, 4, 52.

¹¹ Lupton, *Medicine as Culture*, 70-71.

¹² Anne Hunsaker Hawkins, *Reconstructing Illness: studies in pathography* (Indiana, 1999), 1-3, 11, 31.

as a new genre in the second half of the twentieth century, while before this there are only rare examples of the genre.¹³

Of course, Cavafy died in the first half of the twentieth century and one could say that his poems do not belong to this tradition. However, his poems may be seen as a prior stage of pathography, as they indeed describe human passions or πάθη. And in fact, Cavafy explores this in relation to internal passions; something we see through the representation of his poems' protagonists who frequently suffer. The difference with what Hawkins gives as pathography is the fact that in Cavafy we do not have narrative and typical subjects. In contrast, everything is hidden under a veil, challenging the reader to speculate about possible illnesses or causes of death.

Although, clearly, Cavafy did not write a pathography, his surroundings played an important role in his poetry: an important factor that made Cavafy write about illness in his poems is the climate of Egypt. Commenting on the Egyptian climate, Contis asserts that it had specific effects on health, as although sun and warmth are beneficial for well-being in general, they also encourage insects and mosquitoes which are common vectors of disease. Plague, cholera, smallpox and schistosomiasis were the four diseases with the greatest impact on Alexandria; and especially the first two. Plague, which swept Egypt several times before, appeared in Egypt, again, through Alexandria in May 1889 and from that date until 1930, not a year passed without the appearance of plague. Cholera is another environmental disease affecting public health in Egypt. In the nineteenth century, the change from basin to perennial irrigation led to the creation of additional channels that gave water to agricultural areas. In the twenty years before 1900, there were twenty-eight major epidemics of cholera in Alexandria and some attempts to prevent spread were unsuccessful, because of the rapid growth of the city's population. Smallpox epidemics appeared in 1919-20, while Alexandria experienced a new outbreak in 1926. Generally speaking, Alexandria experienced some of the most destructive epidemics that affected mankind.¹⁴

We could see this as the background of Cavafy's poems revolving around illnesses. Although there is no certain mention of any specific disease in his poems, this sort of disease gave Cavafy a kind of inspiration. Cavafy's poems on illnesses are mainly structured on Alexandria's epidemics. As Keeley has emphasised, Cavafy exploited to the full the sensual connotations of his city.¹⁵ However,

¹³ P. J. Kearney, 'Autopathography and humane medicine: *the diving bell and the butterfly*-an interpretation', *Medical Humanities*, 32 (2006), 111-113.

¹⁴ George Contis, 'Environment, health and disease in Alexandria and the Nile Delta', in *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*, ed. Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk (Cornwall, 2007), 227-246.

¹⁵ Edmund Keeley, *Cavafy's Alexandria* (second edition, Princeton, 1996), 43-73 and David Ricks, 'Cavafy's Alexandrianism', *Alexandria, Real and Imagined*, ed. Anthony Hirst and Michael Silk (Aldershot, 2004), 337-349.

rephrasing Keeley, it could be said that apart from the sensual connotations, Cavafy also exploited to the full the morbid and unhealthy conditions of Alexandria. As Jurecic asserts, to fully appreciate the work of certain authors who wrote illness narratives, one needs to bear in mind the circumstances these authors wrote.¹⁶ Indeed, for Cavafy these circumstances are the epidemics of Alexandria.

¹⁶ Ann Jurecic, *Illness as Narrative* (Pittsburgh, 2012), 107-110.

1.2 Illness of soldiers

In Cavafy, illness, and consequently death, attacks everyone without exception. Illness is powerful and makes no distinction. Manuel Comnenus and the unnamed general of the unpublished poem ‘Στρατηγού Θάνατος’ (‘Death of a General’) (1899)¹⁷ are both victims of a mysterious illness. Although the two protagonists were powerful men throughout their lives, now, the unspecified illness make them seem unable to regain their former strength; they are defeated not by any enemy, but by illness. ‘Μανουήλ Κομνηνός’ (‘Manuel Comnenus’) (1916)¹⁸ features a historical protagonist, while the general is a fictitious one, though in a poem characterised by Cavafy as ‘ποίημα εντελώς ιστορικό’.¹⁹ In regard to ‘Στρατηγού Θάνατος’, completed after the disastrous war with Turkey in 1897, one could say that the poem has some element of irony. In addition, Tennyson’s ode on the Duke of Wellington²⁰ is possibly the sort of poem Cavafy knew that deals with a related subject.

The similarities between the two poems make us consider that ‘Μανουήλ Κομνηνός’ is a form of rewriting of ‘Στρατηγού Θάνατος’: the fact that the earlier poem remained unpublished could be seen as an indication that Cavafy was not happy with the result. In addition, the poet’s clarification that the poem on Manuel is an entirely historical one drives us to the following thought: Cavafy wanted to match the characteristics of the fictional general with a real person, such as the Byzantine emperor. So, after he found that this person would be Manuel, he rewrote the poem, according to the new elements.

Using as examples Cavafy’s poems ‘Στα 200 π.Χ’ (In the Year 200 B.C) (1931)²¹ and ‘Εν Δήμω της Μικράς Ασίας’ (‘In a Township of Asia Minor’) (1926),²² Koutsourelis speaks of a transition from confidence to a pathology of decline, reminiscent of Thucydides’ pathology of war.²³ Nevertheless, it is the pathology of an unspecified illness that permeates ‘Στρατηγού Θάνατος’: throughout the poem we have the description of an ailing individual and how he experiences this illness. In the ending lines, people lament for the death of a great man and general, who was the exemplar of virtue.²⁴ The poet makes clear the end of the general, in advance, in the starting lines. The overall narrative seems to be in progress, as apart from the present tense, which shows a continuity at present, the poem follows a linear and gradual process.

¹⁷ Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα*, 73.

¹⁸ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 64-65.

¹⁹ Giorgos Lechonitis, *Καθαφικά Αυτοσχόλια*, εισαγωγή Τίμου Μαλάνου (Alexandria, 1942), 32.

²⁰ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (London, 1969), 1007-1017.

²¹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 204.

²² Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 158-160.

²³ Kostas Koutsourelis, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: δοκίμιο* (Athens, 2013), 42.

²⁴ Sonia Ilinskaya, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: οι δρόμοι προς το ρεαλισμό στην ποίηση του 20^{ου} αιώνα* (Athens, 2006), 89.

The poem on the general starts with the description of fever-like symptoms, it goes on with paralysis and immobility, and ends with death. In that way, the poet keeps the reader in a state of suspense:

Το χέρι του ο θάνατος απλώνει
 κ' ενός ενδόξου στρατηγού το μέτωπον αγγίζει.
 Το βράδυ μια εφημερίς το νέον φανερώνει.
 Το σπίτι του αρρώστου με πλήθος πολύ γεμίζει.

Although fever is not mentioned clearly as a symptom in the poem, the scene of the first two lines, the anthropomorphic description of death in a human shape, extending his hand and touching the general's forehead implies a deadly fever, as the forehead is always an indicator of high temperature for the patient. The fact that the poet uses the forehead and not any other part of the patient's body makes the reader think of a man bedridden with a high fever. Besides, such a severe form of fever is the case in the poem 'Η Αρρώστια του Κλείτου',²⁵ while Cavafy's friend Mikes Ralli died of typhoid fever too.²⁶

By contrast with 'Μανουήλ Κομνηνός', there is a contemporary setting as a newspaper announces the news about the illness of the general. A large crowd goes to see him as they are worried about his health, while the reader becomes part of this crowd as he shares the same interest in the health of the general. The reader of the poem, although knowing in advance the event of death—from the first two lines—, he follows this gradual recrudescence of the general's health, similarly to the rest of the crowd.

In the very next lines, the general seems to be in an even worse condition, as he is paralysed by pain:

Εκείνον τον παρέλυσαν οι πόνοι
 τα μέλη και την γλώσσα του. Το βλέμμα του γυρίζει
 και ώρα πολλή σε πράγματα γνώριμα προσηλώνει.
 Ατάραχος, τους παλαιούς ήρωας ενθυμίζει.

It is clear, now, that the general is gravely ill; he has lost any contact with his surroundings. He is now in a paralysed condition and especially 'his limbs and his tongue'.²⁷ This is also shown through the

²⁵ The poem will be discussed extensively in Chapter 4.

²⁶ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 58.

²⁷ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Daniel Mendelsohn in C. P. Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, tr. Daniel Mendelsohn (New York, 2012), 300.

expression of his face: his eyes are now inert and focus for a long time on ‘familiar things’. These familiar things allude to memories or spoils from previous battles, of his glorious days as a great general. The poet also gives the external point of view; that of a bystander, which makes him, again, one in the many of the crowd. Although almost dead, the general remains ‘serene’ and ‘he recalls the heroes of olden days’. He is defeated by the mysterious deadly illness, however he keeps his prestige and authority. So, this makes him a hero for all people, as even during his last moments, he shows the same bravery he showed in the battles.

In the next lines, the poet gives a different dimension; that of his inner world:

Απ’ έξω—τον εσκέπασε σιγή κι ακινησία.
Μέσα—τον σάπισεν ο φθόνος της ζωής, δειλία,
λέπρα ηδονική, μωρόν πείσμα, οργή, κακία.

According to Pieris, who investigates the dialectics of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’, the former refers to a range of feelings, while the latter alludes to immobility and silence.²⁸ Proceeding a step further, one could say that immobility and silence which make the dialectics of ‘out’ constitute results of the general’s illness, and they appear in the poem after more mild symptoms, like fever we saw earlier; the general is now totally paralysed and ‘covered by silence and stillness’.

Consequently, ‘out’, denoted through fever, initially, and then immobility and silence, signifies the symptoms of a rather psychological ailment, which is shown through the strong vocabulary used for the dialectics of ‘in’: ‘envy for life’, ‘cowardice’, ‘foolish spite’, ‘fury’ and ‘malice’. This range of feelings, that Pieris mentions, imply a sickly psychological condition, which is reinforced by the phrase ‘μέσα—τον σάπισεν’. Mendelsohn’s translation ‘he’s devoured’ does not reflect clearly the strong atmosphere of the scenography, as the general is rotted away by these feelings. The syntax of the Greek original suggests that the general is the object of the sentence, while all these negative feelings, which take the role of a psychological ailment and decompose the general, constitute the subject.

In addition, all these feelings which make the inside world of the general, suggest that although the general shows that he keeps silence waiting for the inevitable, he does not consent to the idea of death. Thus, ‘he’s devoured by envy for life’, especially looking at all his surroundings coming to see him. He is envious and angry, because he is the one dying among so many people. And although according to the poet, the general does not seem to be afraid of death, looking like a real hero, one of the general’s feelings is in fact cowardice. This element redefines the heroic status of the

²⁸ Pieris, *Χώρος, Φως και Λόγος*, 144.

general and makes reader think, that the parallel drawn between the general and the hero is rather extravagant.

In the ending lines, the poem depicts the general's death:

Βαριά βογγά.-Ξεψύχησε.- Θρηνεί κάθε πολίτου
φωνή: «Την πολιτεία μας ερήμαξ' η θανά του!
Αλίμονον η Αρετή απέθανε μαζί του!».

The general 'groans deeply' and dies. The city is not the same now, as according to people's lament, 'his death has ruined the city'. This general who was symbol of virtue and bravery took all virtue with him, since according to the people's speech 'virtue has died with him'. But it could be said that people are wrong, as the general, who was valiant in battle, was perhaps fearful in the face of death in his own bed.

Summarising, the poem is a clear description of an illness. Although there are no details on the name of the illness, the description of the illness is vivid, given through certain symptoms, like fever, paralysis, pains, loss of speech, inertia and immobility. The fact that Cavafy was so overt on the symptoms of the unnamed general was perhaps what made him dissatisfied with the poem. Probably, he found the end of the poem with the mention of the people heavy-handed, and preferred a more elusive outcome. As a result, he rewrote the poem, adapting the general's poem to historical data. The result, many years later, was 'Μανουήλ Κομνηνός', in which we do not have this vivid representation of symptoms, yet in which an ill man, formerly a military man, feels death approaching.

The poem on the general is a clear indication of the experience of pain; so important and common in the literature of the medical humanities. Such an example could be also Denton Welch's autobiographical novel *A Voice Through a Cloud* (1950) which, according to Phillips, demonstrates the experience of pain and reveals the ultimate truth. The work could be seen as a story of suffering and crucifixion. Welch, an autobiographical writer, focuses on the stages of the spirit's liberation from a weak body. Maurice, the protagonist, loses more and more of his identity and seeks some sort of solution in memories of the past.²⁹ As with Welch's protagonist, Cavafy's general is an example of pain and death: we have liberation from an ill body and focus on memories of the protagonist's glorious past.

Manuel I Comnenus, son of John, became emperor of Byzantium in AD 1143. He was a capable military leader who fought successfully against the Turks of Iconium and the Normans of Italy and the Hungarians. However, his defeat at Myrioccephalos in 1174, had very negative consequences for

²⁹ Robert Phillips, "A Voice Through a Cloud": Denton Welch's ultimate voyage', *The Centennial Review*, 15: 2 (1971), 218-228.

Byzantium.³⁰ After this defeat, he was never to have laughed or smiled again.³¹ He died in Bithynia in 1180, during a campaign.³² Manuel was considered one of the bravest and reckless emperors, a great soldier and politician.³³

As Tzouvelis writes ‘Μανουήλ Κομνηνός’ revolves around the end of Manuel’s life who died dressed in ecclesiastical garments and it finishes with a blessedness.³⁴ Poulis asserts that the overall scene in the poem is reminiscent of Cavafy’s own death, as the poet was willing to follow all the formality of Orthodox Christianity, similarly to the protagonist of his poem.³⁵ However, such an approach is rather fanciful and it only seems that Poulis mainly tries to convince readers about Cavafy’s Christianity. Dealing with this poem, Savidis declares that if we do not take for granted Cavafy’s Christianity, we are forced to read the poem from a sarcastic perspective.³⁶ A view which is expressed more clearly by Hirst, who, focusing especially on the last three lines of the poem, asserts that the tone is sarcastic. According to Hirst, irony is the germ of the poem, as Cavafy appreciated Niketas Choniates’ irony, whose chronicle is the ultimate source of the poem.³⁷

In any case, despite the glorious past of Manuel and his ability in politics and strategy, Cavafy decides not to deal with any of these. In contrast, he describes Manuel’s last days, defeated by the mysterious illness which, finally, caused his death. Inevitably, this element could be connected with Cavafy’s obsessions with illness and death:

Ο βασιλεύς κυρ Μανουήλ ο Κομνηνός
 μια μέρα μελαγχολική του Σεπτεμβρίου
 αισθάνθηκε το θάνατο κοντά. Οι αστρολόγοι
 (οι πληρωμένοι) της αυλής εφλυαρούσαν
 που άλλα χρόνια θα ζήσει ακόμη.

Although there is no mention of illness in the above lines, the phrase ‘felt death to be near’³⁸ alludes to an illness. Manuel’s feeling, though, is in contrast to the astrologers’ predictions who said that the

³⁰ Hirst in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, p. 218. See also Paul Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos, 1143-1180* (Cambridge, 1993).

³¹ Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 435.

³² Ilinskaya in Cavafy, *Απαντα τα Ποιήματα*, ed. Σόνια Ιλίνσκαγια (Athens, 2003), 449.

³³ Timos Malanos, *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης: ο άνθρωπος και το έργο του* (Athens, 1957), 316.

³⁴ Spyros Tzouvelis, *Ταξίδι στην Ιστορία με τον Καβάφη* (Athens, 1998), 76.

³⁵ Stephanos Poulis, *Θρησκευτικές Αντιλήψεις του Ποιητή Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη* (Athens, 1989), 87.

³⁶ G. P. Savidis, *Βασικά Θέματα της Ποίησης του Καβάφη* (Athens, 1993), 63.

³⁷ Anthony Hirst, ‘Philosophical, historical and sensual: an examination of Cavafy’s thematic collections’, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 19: 1 (1995), 33-93 and Anthony Hirst, ‘C. P. Cavafy: Byzantine historian?’, *Kambos*, 8 (2000), 45-74.

³⁸ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 64.

emperor would live for several more years. While the emperor is ill and feels that he is dying, the astrologers reassure him that ‘he would live for many years more’.³⁹

It is important to note the verb Cavafy uses to speak about the words of the astrologers: ‘εφλυαρούσαν’. This is a rather derogatory way to describe prophecies. In addition, the brackets in the above lines play a very important role: the characterisation ‘the paid ones’ for the astrologers demonstrate a different kind of prophecy; it is not the result of a natural gift or a religious tradition. Money could be seen as corruption here, since the real motive of these astrologers behind their prophecies was not to tell Manuel the truth about his health, but to take advantage of his trust.⁴⁰ Inevitably, they lied to him, because the only thing they wanted, it was his money.

According to Malanos, when Manuel felt gravely ill, he ignored all the Patriarch’s exhortations to make some final arrangements for the empire’s administration, refusing to admit the possibility of his death. Although death was close, Manuel only believed in the charlatanism of his astrologers.⁴¹ Nevertheless, in the poem, the poet presents a different view: here Manuel seems to disdain the astrologers’ prophecies. Manuel’s rupture with the astrologers is introduced with the conjunction ‘ενώ’ (‘but while’), and his decision to dress with church garments:

Ενώ όμως έλεγαν αυτοί, εκείνος
παληές συνήθειες ευλαβείς θυμάται,
κι απ’ τα κελλιά των μοναχών προστάζει
ενδύματα εκκλησιαστικά να φέρουν,
και τα φορεί κ’ ευφραίνεται που δείχνει
όψι σεμνήν ιερέως ή καλογήρου.

Throughout his reign, Malanos writes, Manuel was not interested in any religious issues, while he indulged in astrology, even during his illness. Only instants before his death was he finally convinced by the Patriarch to sign a document, renouncing astrology. Thus, he joined in a formal and proper way the Orthodox Church. Like Malanos, Hirst writes that Cavafy used as his source Niketas Choniates.⁴² However, Haas notes the fact that Cavafy adopts a rather personal view on Manuel’s death in the poem. According to Haas, Cavafy presents a markedly different view than Choniates.⁴³

³⁹ Martha Vassiliadi in ‘Sentiment de décadence: deux poèmes de Cavafy sur Néron’, http://martha-vassiliadi.papagiannakis.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/14.Vassiliadi_Inalco2001.pdf, 239-247 [accessed 3 October 2015] writes that in the poem one can see the themes of death and oracle.

⁴⁰ The role of money and corruption is also discussed in the poem ‘Ωραία Λουλούδια κι Άσπρα ως Ταίριαζαν Πολύ’ in Chapter 4.

⁴¹ Malanos, *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 316.

⁴² Malanos, *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 317. See also Magdalino, *The Empire of Manuel I Komnenos*.

⁴³ Diana Haas, *Le Problème religieux dans l'oeuvre de Cavafy: les années de formation* (Paris, 1996), 421.

In any case, Cavafy presents Manuel not as one interested in the prophecies of astrologers, but as one who turns to God for salvation; and this is a great difference between Cavafy and Choniates. Hirst is inclined to say, that Cavafy promotes the view that the voice in the poem presents the drama from the Patriarch Theodosius' triumphalist perspective, who was next to Manuel during his illness, and suggests that the poem passes over the fact that the emperor remained attached to astrologers until the end.⁴⁴ Sarcastic or not, in fact, this Manuel's decision to follow all the formality of the Orthodox Church makes the poem distinct from the Choniates source.⁴⁵

It is also very important to look at the role of the Christian garments that Manuel wears in the poem. According to former critics, the role of the garments holds a central role in the poem. For example, Savidis maintains not only that there is no irony in the poem, but that it shows Cavafy's belief in Christianity, as this what the Christian garments signify.⁴⁶

As we have already seen, the poet mentions the illness of Manuel at the outset of the poem; but, there is no mention of a specific illness; and of course he was not particularly old, as the general in 'Στρατηγού Θάνατος' possibly was. This vagueness characterises also the above lines: during his illness, Manuel is presented only remembering 'devout customs of the past'; thus, he is asking for Christian garments to be brought to him to wear. Cavafy gives the image of a dying Christian who seeks the help of God. This is, initially, introduced through the phrase 'but while they kept on talking' in order to show the distance separating Manuel and astrologers and also with the role of memory and recollection of Christian habits, like the wearing of the garments, which come as a sedative medicine.

However, going beyond this Christian approach, it is worth looking at how these Christian habits change Manuel's mood. Although at the beginning of the poem Manuel is presented as a very ill man, now he seems relieved. This is expressed through the use of the verb 'ευφραίνεται', which is translated by Sachperoglou as 'delights'⁴⁷ and in a roughly common way by Mendelsohn as 'is delighted'.⁴⁸ I think that 'delight' does not really represent 'ευφραίνεται', as this is a word with stronger meaning. Manuel rejoices; he is happy. It seems that Manuel is relieved, because he consumed a kind of sedative medicine; and this sedative medicine is the memories of Christian habits and especially, the garments. This Manuel's rejoicing is the result of the Christian garments which work as a drug in the poem; as a placebo.

⁴⁴ Hirst, 'C. P. Cavafy: Byzantine historian?', 54.

⁴⁵ Nicetas Choniates, *Historia*, VII, ed. Immanuel Bekker (Bonn, 1835), 286, 288.

⁴⁶ G. P. Savidis, 'Ένδυμα, ρούχο και γυμνό στο σώμα της καβαφικής ποίησης', in *Μικρά Καβαφικά*, 211-256. In addition, Sareyannis asserts that if Manuel was delighted for personal reasons that he would go close to Christ, he would not ask to wear these garments, as the real believers do not need any garments (Sareyannis, *Σχόλια στον Καβάφη*, 59).

⁴⁷ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 65.

⁴⁸ Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 38.

This happiness is also reflected on the other people next to him:

Ευτυχισμένοι όλοι που πιστεύουν,
και σαν τον βασιλέα κυρ Μανουήλ τελειώνουν
ντυμένοι μες την πίστι των σεμνότατα.

Nevertheless, as Ilinskaya writes, the last line of the poem shows that faithful Christians do not need to wear any garments to show their faith, as they have it in their souls.⁴⁹ Thus, the clothes are just a visible sign of faith, rather than a mere substitute or imposture of it.

Manuel, then, is presented ill, but the name of the illness is not mentioned. Although at the beginning of the poem, he looks exhausted from this illness, in the next lines he mysteriously regains his happiness and is relieved. This happens through his remembrance of Christian habits. The fact that he wears Christian garments comes as a medicine which helps him to die in tranquillity, without aches.

Comparing the two poems, it is apparent that the logic is the same: two former soldiers who won many battles and were symbols of power, bravery and strength throughout their lives are finally defeated by a mysterious illness. Especially, the parallel that the poet draws, with death as being in a human shape makes the outset of the two poems identical. As we have seen, in the case of the unnamed general, 'death stretches out his hand', while in the case of Manuel, he 'felt death to be near'.

Consequently, in both poems, we have to do with this metaphor of an anthropomorphised death, extending his hand to the general or coming near Manuel. The description of this very first scene is very dramatic, alluding to a theatrical performance with death presented on scene next to the ill man. He is approaching, waiting for his death. Juxtaposing the two poems, Haas declares that in 'Μανουήλ Κομνηνός' the consideration of vice and virtue we found in the unnamed general are both absent, while in Manuel there is a Christian perspective which links to repentance.⁵⁰

This Christian aspect is absent from 'Στρατηγού θάνατος', nevertheless another important difference is the detailed representation of all the symptoms of the unnamed general. But one could say that the reason for that is that the general is fictitious and is Cavafy's invention. Although Cavafy does not follow Choniates' source in the poem on Manuel, still this gives him some limits. On the other hand though, the general's poem is fictional and provides Cavafy with the freedom of inventing symptoms of the mysterious illness that kills his protagonist. It also allows him to be more open about conflating the physical and the moral, something which the poem does in a rather heavy-handed way and something which 'Manuel Comnenus' avoids.

⁴⁹ Ilinskaya, Κ. Π. *Καβάφης*, 243.

⁵⁰ Haas, *Le Problème religieux dans l'oeuvre de Cavafy*, 431.

1.3 Illness of young men

The omnipotence of an unspecified illness is not confined to poems where soldiers, symbol of strength and power, are ill and defeated by illness. It also appears in poems where young men are not healthy and vigorous, as would be expected of the young. The poem 'Εις το Επίνειον' (In the Harbour Town) (1918),⁵¹ is a striking example: the protagonist, aged twenty-eight, dies of unspecified reasons. Of course, Cavafy's trend to give clearly the age of young men who are ill appears in other poems as well. For example, in the poems '[Την Ψυχὴν ἐπὶ Χεῖλεσιν Ἔσχον]' ('[My Soul was on my Lips]') (unfinished, undated),⁵² and 'Κίμων Λεάρχου, 22 Ἐτῶν, Σπουδαστὴς Ἑλληνικῶν Γραμμάτων (ἐν Κυρήνῃ)' ('Kimon, Son of Learchos, 22 Years Old, Student of Greek Letters (in Cyrene)') (1928),⁵³ which will be discussed in the chapter on homosexuality, the age of the dying young man is twenty-three.

The young Emes of the poem 'Εις το Επίνειον' is a man travelling to become an incense trader. However, this will not happen, as Emes will mysteriously die, during the voyage. As Pieris sees it, the fatal sea voyage is an ordeal at the dividing line, between the homeland and one of the numerous ports of the great Panhellenic world; between the familiar and the unknown. At the same time the poem suggests an experience intervening between life and death;⁵⁴ as in numerous poems from the *Palatine Anthology* and of course 'Death by Water' in *The Waste Land* by T. S. Eliot.⁵⁵

In fact, on the boat Emes is travelling, it seems that he is a person that nobody knows; he is an unknown among other unknown people:

Νέος, εἴκοσι οκτῶ ἐτῶν, με πλοῖον τήνιον
 ἐφθασε εἰς τούτο το συριακόν ἐπίνειον
 ὁ Ἔμης, με τὴν πρόθεσι νὰ μάθει μυροπώλης.
 Ὅμως ἀρρώστησε εἰς τὸν πλοῦν. Καὶ μόλις
 ἀπεβιβάσθη, πέθανε. Ἡ ταφή του, πτωχοτάτη,
 ἐγίν' ἐδῶ. Ὀλίγες ὥρες πρὶν πεθάνει κάτι
 ψιθύρισε γιὰ «οἰκίαν», γιὰ «πολύ γέροντας γονεῖς».
 Μὰ ποιοὶ ἦσαν τούτοι δὲν ἐγνώριζε κανεὶς,
 μήτε ποία ἡ πατρίς του μετὰ τὸ μέγα πανελλήνιον.
 Καλλίτερα. Γιατί ἔτσι ἐνῶ
 κεῖται νεκρὸς σ' αὐτὸ τὸ ἐπίνειον,
 θὰ τὸν ἐλπίζουν πάντα οἱ γονεῖς τοῦ ζωντανό.

⁵¹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 88-89.

⁵² C. P. Cavafy, *Ἀτελῆ Ποιήματα: 1918-1932*, ed. Renata Lavagnini (Athens, 2006), 309-315.

⁵³ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 182-183.

⁵⁴ Michael Pieris, 'Cavafy and the Sea', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 7: 2 (1989), 273-286.

⁵⁵ T. S. Eliot, *The Poems of T. S. Eliot, volume I*, ed. Christopher Ricks & Jim McCue (London, 2015), 67.

As opposed to the previous poems, in which we have to do with important and brave men, like Manuel and the unnamed general, Emes is nothing like that. He is young, twenty-eight years old, but an unimportant person; a would-be incense trader. According to the poem, the only reason he left his house and he is travelling to this Syrian harbour is 'the intention of learning the incense trade'.⁵⁶

However, his plans will remain incomplete, as 'during the voyage, he fell ill; and as soon as he disembarked, he died'. The question arising here, of course, is what sort of an illness caused the death of the young man. However, one could assume that Emes' cause of death might be an infectious disease common among sailors.⁵⁷

What follows in the poem, is a very short but clear description of the pauper's funeral. This shows that Emes was not rich and, as we have already said, was not someone important. This connects with the fact that nobody knew his parents and his companions on board only learnt about them minutes before he died: 'he whispered something about 'home' and 'very aged parents'. But who they were, nobody knew'. In fact, the way that the poem finishes suggests that Emes was not important even to his parents, as according to the narrator, they will consider him alive. This means that they would never ask about their son or even they did know about his decision to join this boat and go to this Syrian harbour: 'his parents will forever hope that he is alive'.

Although in the previous poems ('Μανουήλ Κομνηνός' and 'Στρατηγού Θάνατος'), we witness the deaths of great men, in this poem we have the opposite: the death of a person that nobody knows. But, the common thing is their illness; or actually the unspecified illness. Without any pieces of information, which might help us to settle on a likely cause of death, Cavafy gives the impression of an unspecified illness attacking men suddenly and without any discrimination: brave and important men, like Manuel and the general, and young men, like Emes. It is also interesting to note that we have no doctors or specialists in these poems, making the atmosphere around these illnesses even more obscure and unspecified.

⁵⁶ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 88.

⁵⁷ For example Nikos Kavvadias in the poem 'Kuro Siwo' mentions malaria (Nikos Kavvadias, *Πούσι* (Athens, 1995), 11) and Papadiamantis in 'Βαρδιάνος στα σπόρκα' refers to cholera (Papadiamantis, *Άπαντα*, vol. 2, 541-640).

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Summarising, disease is normally an objective thing, often triggered by a pathogen, such as a bacillus or a virus, and marked by tell-tale symptoms, a rash or a raised temperature. Illness, on the other hand, denotes something subjective, feelings of malaise or pain.⁵⁸ In the lack of any specifications and objectivity, we conclude that Cavafy's three poems discussed in this chapter so far clearly revolve around an unspecified illness. The general and Manuel defeated so many enemies, however they also share a common end: illness and death. While the expected death for a brave soldier is death in battle, Cavafy's soldiers die of illness.

On the other hand, Emes might not be a soldier who defeated several enemies, but he has youth and travels to seek and fulfil his aspirations. But, again, his end is not different, than the two soldiers: illness and death. According to Vassiliadi, in Cavafy's mausoleum, death is very common for young men and the reason can be an assassination, a wound, a sudden death and of course an illness.⁵⁹ This indeterminacy of causes of death will be expanded on the next part of this chapter.

The three poems discussed above share the same motif: illness and death. Without any specific details about the illness, all the three protagonists die and direct the reader to question how achievement or aspiration can be frustrated by sudden illness and death. In the case of Manuel and the general an unspecified illness prevented them from further glory and perhaps a more glorious death. In the case of Emes, sudden illness and death did not allow him to seek his aspirations and become an incense trader. It is a sudden death indeed for Manuel and the general, as their previous achievements gave them the image of powerful leaders, and the expectation is that they will have similar achievements in the future. For Emes, it is a sudden death too, as his youth is what gives him and the reader the illusion that one day he will fulfill his goal.

All three poems also involve a sense of what sort of response in the form of mourning each death does: mourning for the general is common for all people who lament for his death. As symbol of bravery and glory, the general's death brought sadness to people. Manuel's death is also reason for lament and mourning, as people participate in the mourning; similarly to the general, Manuel is held in esteem. As regards Emes, although he is described as an unimportant person and there is no mention of mourning in the poem as he will die among strangers, the idea of mourning still exists as his parents will not mourn because they do not know about their son's death. It is to the question of mourning that we now turn.

⁵⁸ Roy Porter, 'What is disease?', *The Cambridge History of Medicine*, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge, 2006), 71-102.

⁵⁹ Martha Vassiliadi, «Le discours muet du corps: les jeunes morts de C. Cavafy», in A. O. Jacovides-Andrieu (éd.), *Actes du XVIII^e colloque international des néo-hellénistes des universités Francophones: le corps dans la langue, la littérature, les arts et les arts du spectacle néo-helléniques*. Université Paris X-Nanterre, 15-16-17 Mai 2003.

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Mourning is a common topic in medical humanities literature. As Elsner declares dealing with Proust, the depiction of mourning in *Recherche* stages ‘the experience of the self’s and the other’s body as making the narrator aware of difference, separation and a loss of control, and this experience constitutes the beginning of mourning’.⁶⁰ Illness, age and death are common features in Proust. Through the death of Albertine, Proust gives a painful description of mourning, while the grandmother’s weak body affects the development of mourning too. As Elsner writes, Proust’s writings emerge during an era characterised by significant advances in medicine. Elsner also asserts that the narrator in Proust mourns for different people and in different places suggesting an external dimension and a Freudian framework, while views by Abraham and Torok are also reflected. Generally speaking, the *Recherche* shows a range of mourning scenarios.⁶¹ Through the medical humanities, Elsner shows how mourning is used to express emotions. Such is the case in Cavafy who also shows the grief and sadness of his protagonists, as death is a prominent feature in his poetry. Cavafy’s protagonists frequently mourn for a dead friend or even a lover; a common feature in medical humanities literature.

According to Danforth, who focuses on the death rituals of Greeks in traditional communities, death has the power to disrupt the everyday world, emphasising the precarious, unstable quality of our lives; death causes terror ‘because of its utter and perfect silence’.⁶²

It could be said that Danforth’s words can illuminate Cavafy’s representation of death. First because Cavafy himself expressed great admiration for the μαιρολόγια, as we can see in his review of N. G Politis’ *Εκλογαί*⁶³ and, indeed, in the majority of his death poems this terror is represented through the lament and sadness for a dead person; either by his family or, more often, a lover. Focusing on the review of Politis’ *Εκλογαί*, Cavafy asserts that it will please those who are interested in Greek traditional poetry: ‘θα ευχαριστήσει πιστεύω τους ενδιαφερομένους εις την λαϊκή μας ποιήσι-είναι με προσοχή μεγάλη καμωμένη, έχει σημειώσεις επεξηγηματικές του θέματος κάθε τραγουδιού’.⁶⁴

Cavafy refers to some songs from each category, but according to his words the Μαιρολόγια attract him more than any other group of songs as he likes the atmosphere of death and lament:

⁶⁰ Anna Magdalena Elsner, *Mourning and Creativity in Proust* (New York, 2017), 41.

⁶¹ Elsner, *Mourning and Creativity in Proust*, 57-76, 88, 91-94, 165.

⁶² Loring M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (New Jersey, 1982), 30-31. It is also interesting to note, however, that Danforth’s book attracted the interest of critics and several reviews have been written; some of them critical about the fact that he generalises too much about customs from one part of the Greek-speaking world. See for example Peter Loizos, rev. ‘The death rituals of rural Greece by Loring M. Danforth’, *Man*, New Series, 19: 4 (1984), 684-685.

⁶³ Cavafy, ‘[Εκλογαί από τα τραγούδια του ελληνικού λαού]’, Καβάφη, *Τα Πεζά*, 111-127.

⁶⁴ Cavafy, ‘[Εκλογαί από τα τραγούδια του ελληνικού λαού]’, 111.

Την σειρά των «Μοιρολογιών» επίσης θα την ήθελα με περισσότερα άσματα. Απ' όλη μας την δημοτική ποίηση τα μοιρολόγια μ' ελκύουν πιάτερο. Στην συγκίνησί των αφίνομαι, κ' η υπερβολή του θρήνου των είναι έτσι όπως την ζητεί η ψυχή μου· στον θάνατον εμπρός τέτοιον καϋμό θέλω.⁶⁵

Cavafy's statements above show his respect for a traditional Greek view of death—sometimes at odds with Christianity. For example, in the poem '27 Ιουνίου 1906, 2 μ.μ.' ('27 June 1906, 2 P.M.') (unpublished, 1908),⁶⁶ bringing the topic sharply into the present day, he presents a mother crying for her son who has been hanged by Christians (the British). Thus, he alludes (with some irony, because this mother is not Greek and not a Christian) to the lament that follows death in the Greek tradition, as especially the mother's lament for her dead child is of high importance in the tradition of the folk songs.⁶⁷ As Alexiou asserts, the lament for the dead is essentially functional and it is a part of a complex tradition of rituals and beliefs and it cannot be studied without connecting it with the ritual to which it belongs.⁶⁸ Lament was mainly a responsibility of the next of kin, but throughout antiquity the custom of hiring or compelling strangers to lament developed.⁶⁹

According to Fishman, female lament constitutes an emotive and expressive genre that voices an individual's personal πόνος.⁷⁰ Female lament for the dead is an expression of a painful and sorrowful experience and a protest against the power of the dominant patriarchal society. Women's lament tradition is a means of cultural power in a male-dominated community.⁷¹ In her book, Holst-Warhaft also dealt with the female lament.⁷² As Holst-Warhaft declares, men may sing laments, but women are in most cases the makers of lament, showing their closeness to the dead through their position, physical contact and touching. The lament of women is a social institution opposing the male council which is the source of making public decisions, since women have a superior knowledge of pain through childbirth. In addition, the loss of a male relative leaves a woman in emotional distress and affects her role in the community.⁷³ Challenging Danforth's term 'marginalisation', Holst-Warhaft

⁶⁵ Cavafy, '[Εκλογαί από τα τραγούδια του ελληνικού λαού]', 122.

⁶⁶ Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα*, p. 91.

⁶⁷ Guy Saunier (ed.), *Ελληνικά Δημοτικά Τραγούδια: τα μοιρολόγια* (Athens, 1999), 58.

⁶⁸ Margaret Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, revised edition by Dimitrios Yatromanolakis and Panagiotis Roilos (Lanham, 2002), 3.

⁶⁹ Alexiou, *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*, 10.

⁷⁰ Andrea Fishman, 'Thrênoi to moirólógia: female voices of solitude, resistance, and solidarity', *Oral Tradition*, 23: 2 (2008), 267-295.

⁷¹ Fishman, 'Thrênoi to moirólógia', 268, 284.

⁷² David Ricks, rev. 'Dangerous voices. Women's laments and Greek literature by Gail Holst-Warhaft', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 12: 1 (1994), 157-159.

⁷³ Gail Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices: women's laments and Greek literature* (New York, 1992), 35-38.

asserts that the graveyard is the women's dominant public space and they have a natural authority over the rituals of death.⁷⁴

Nevertheless, Cavafy seeks to explore this beyond the limits of Greek folk culture through the model of the homosexual lover, who frequently laments in Cavafy's poems. Such an example is the poem 'Μύρης· Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ' ('Myres· Alexandria, A. D. 340') (1929).⁷⁵ Although a pseudo-historical poem, the historical background appears in the title: AD 340 in Alexandria. This is a period of conflicts, twenty years before Julian's reign, who attempted to impose the return to paganism.⁷⁶ Because of this background and the contradiction between Christianity and paganism, the poem has attracted the interest of many critics, like Ilinskaya,⁷⁷ Poulis⁷⁸ and Karapanagopoulos.⁷⁹

As we can see in the poem, the poetic ego places himself at odds with Christianity. Yet Cavafy goes beyond the limits of Greek folk poetry, as the main theme of the poem is a homosexual young man dying and the sadness of his lover. The poem starts with the announcement of Myres' death and also by making clear the narrator's religious beliefs:

Την συμφορά όταν έμαθα, που ο Μύρης πέθανε,
πήγα στο σπίτι του, μ' όλο που το αποφεύγω
να εισέρχομαι στων Χριστιανών τα σπίτια,
προ πάντων όταν έχουν θλίψεις ή γιορτές.

The fact that the speaker was informed by someone else about Myres' death, drives us to the inference that Myres died suddenly or, possibly, that the narrator had become estranged from Myres. Such a surmise becomes stronger, especially if we bear in mind the shock of the narrator, which is expressed through the very first line: 'when I heard the tragic news'.⁸⁰

In the next part of the poem, the narrator is one among many; after he goes to Myres' house, he faces what he thinks is the Christian relatives' hostility:

Στάθηκα σε διάδρομο. Δεν θέλησα
να προχωρήσω πιο εντός, γιατί αντελήφθην
που οι συγγενείς του πεθαμένου μ' έβλεπαν

⁷⁴ Holst-Warhaft, *Dangerous Voices*, 41.

⁷⁵ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 186-191.

⁷⁶ Edmund Keeley, 'Η οικουμενική προοπτική', in *Εισαγωγή στην Ποίηση του Καβάφη*, ed. Μιχάλης Πιερής (Herklion, 2006), 321-346.

⁷⁷ Ilinskaya, *Καβάφης*, 269.

⁷⁸ Poulis, *Θρησκευτικές αντιλήψεις του ποιητή Κων/νου Π. Καβάφη*, 70.

⁷⁹ Alekos Karapanagopoulos, *Ο Κ. Π. Καβάφης ήταν Χριστιανός;* (Athens-Ioannina, 1993), 52.

⁸⁰ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 186-190.

με προφανή απορίαν και με δυσαρέσκεια.

As Sareyannis writes, although the narrator went to lament his dead friend, he becomes, or thinks he becomes, a person viewed negatively.⁸¹ He is isolated and stands in the corridor. Although one could say that this is what the narrator thinks and how he interpreted their attitude when they saw him.

In the very next lines, the narrator sees Myres:

Τον είχα σε μια μεγάλη κάμαρη
που από την άκρη όπου στάθηκα
είδα κομάτι· όλο τάπητες πολύτιμοι,
και σκεύη εξ αργύρου και χρυσού.

In the above lines, while the narrator sees his dead friend for the last time, he seems impressed by some material elements, showing Myres' and his family wealthy life; these are: 'precious carpets' and 'vessels made of silver and gold'.⁸²

After that, the narrator is presented to lament for his dead friend; isolated in a corner, as being excluded by the rest of the society in the house:

Στέκομαι κ' έκλαια σε μια άκρη του διαδρόμου.
Και σκέπτομαι που η συγκεντρώσεις μας κ' η εκδρομές
χωρίς τον Μύρη δεν θ' αξίζουν πια·
και σκεπτόμαι που πια δεν θα τον δω
στα ωραία κι άσεμνα ξενύχτια μας
να χαιρέται, και να γελά, και ν' απαγγέλλει στίχους
με την τέλεια του αίσθησι του ελληνικού ρυθμού·
και σκεπτόμαι που έχασα για πάντα
τον νέον που λάτρευα παράφορα.

Although not necessarily in a physical way, the narrator claims that he and Myres were lovers. This becomes apparent through the narrator's memories, as crying at 'one end of the hallway', he remembers their 'lovely, brazen night-long parties', while he also laments 'his beauty' and 'the young

⁸¹ Sareyannis, *Σχόλια στον Καβάφη*, 100.

⁸² Although Kosofsky Sedgwick says that Myres was involved in a group of young pagan aristocrats, such an assumption is misleading as the narrator looks impressed by the wealthiness of Myres' house (Eva Kosofsky Sedgwick, 'Cavafy, Proust, and the queer little gods', in Roilos, *Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2010), 1-19).

man he ardently adored'. It is also interesting to note that the narrator's position in an isolated corner of the house represents a homosexual's position, more generally, in a wider society.

In the next lines, we have the description of Myres' last moments and his attachment to Christianity:

Κάτι γρηές, κοντά μου, χαμηλά μιλούσαν για
την τελευταία μέρα που έζησε-
στα χειλη του διαρκώς τ' όνομα του Χριστού,
στα χέρια του βαστούσ' έναν σταυρό.-
Μπήκαν κατόπι μες στην κάμαρη
τέσσαρες Χριστιανοί ιερείς, κ' έλεγαν προσευχές
ενθέρμως και δεήσεις στον Ιησούν,
ή στην Μαρίαν (δεν ξέρω την θρησκεία τους καλά).

In the above lines, Myres is presented as a frightened person who seeks cure for his illness through faith (something similar we see in 'Ιγνατίου Τάφος', where the protagonist changes his name and lifestyle and follows a life near God and according to Christian values). Although as we are going to see in the next lines, Myres was a good man in a fight with other people, in contrast, here, he is only a weak man, who had 'upon his lips constantly the name of Christ' and 'in his hands, clasping a cross'. As Ricks declares, the narrator is a bystander who feels his paganism under threat. His claim that he does not know very well Christianity is implausible, while his marginal position alludes to that of a catechumen in the early church.⁸³ From the information that the narrator collects from the old women at Myres' house, it seems that Myres' last days and hours were spent in the transitional world which, according to Christian tradition, marks the transition between this world and the next. Myres' illness works as a separate world, or as an interim stage, between life and death. It is also a reminder of his Christianity and Myres is praying as a proper Christian.

In the following lines, the poet becomes more detailed on the occupations and the interests of this group of friends that he and Myres were members of:

Μα ζούσεν απολύτως σαν κ' εμάς.
Απ' όλους μας πιο έκδοτος στες ηδονές·
σκορπώντας αφειδώς το χρήμα του στες διασκεδάσεις.
Για την υπόληψη του κόσμου ξένοιαστος,
ρίχνονταν πρόθυμα σε νύχτιες ρήξεις στες οδούς

⁸³ David Ricks, 'Cavafy and the body of Christ', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 27: 1 (2001), 19-32.

όταν ετύχαινε η παρέα μας
να συναντήσει αντίθετη παρέα.

Although Myres was a Christian, the others accepted him in their group. And Myres was always one of them, as he 'led his life exactly' as the others did. In addition, Myres was 'more given to sensual pleasures than any' of them, 'squandering his money lavishly on amusements'.

Whereas for a Christian this life could be characterised as sinful, Myres did not do anything to avoid it; he joined the company and lived exactly as all of them. For the narrator, it seems to be a surprise that his Christian friend lived such a sinful life and this is evident in the use of the connective 'μα' ('but' or 'however'), which introduces the proper Christian values to the life that Myres lived. Moreover, Myres was 'oblivious of his reputation in society', as 'he threw himself readily into nocturnal street-brawls, when our group of friends chanced to encounter a hostile company'. Initially, here, we can see that the turbulent life that this company lived included brawls and fights. This implies that this company was an illegal one, going during the nights and doing all these things a notorious gang does: drinking, having homoerotic sex freely and fighting with other gangs.

Also, the characterisation 'hostile' for the opposite group of friends suggests another gang, possibly a Christian one; we could assume that, based on the fact that apart from Myres, in the narrator's gang they were all pagans. A different gang should be determined according to similar motives: religious motives. This also explains the fact that Myres 'never spoke about his religion'; on the contrary, although from a Christian family, he was attached to a pagan set.

In the last part of the poem, the narrator appears disappointed, as he realises that Myres was always a Christian. The narrator, as a bystander, sees that Myres was never one of them. Myres was a Christian, who lived, finally, as a pure Christian. This identification disappoints the narrator, as now he realises that his dead lover 'was drifting away from him' and 'he, a Christian, was being united with his own kind'. Although Myres lives, according to the narrator, as one of them, now he sees that he never abandoned his Christian background; this is also evident earlier in the poem as we have seen, where Myres is presented to pray to God as a Christian. But now the distance between the narrator and his dead lover becomes more apparent, as the former decides to leave the 'dreadful house' of Christians 'before Christianity could distort the memory of Myres'. The narrator's way out from the house signifies his decision to protect the memory of a pure and sensual experience.⁸⁴ The word the speaker uses to describe the house of the Christians, 'φρικτό' ('dreadful'), suggests that the house is plagued by Christianity and he resists infection by it. While initially the Christian relatives of Myres

⁸⁴ Pieris, Χώρος, Φως και Λόγος, 154.

saw the narrator as a possible threat for Myres and their Christianity, now is the narrator who sees them as a threat to his paganism.

In any case, we have certain characteristics for the dead person: homosexual young man who lived in excesses. This includes, sinful 'Greek love' and involvement in fatal brawls. This model of young man is very frequent in Cavafy and inevitably, the question arising is how did Myres die. Myres may have died stabbed during a brawl, because as we have already seen he was always willing to fight against other gangs or even he could be also the victim of one of those pandemics that swept Alexandria. But in fact, through the way Myres turned away from his pagan friends and asked the care of his Christian family, the reader can assume that in Myres' mind Christianity is the sole cure; something that Cavafy's poem invites to consider without necessarily forcing us to agree.

On a secular view, dominant in medical practice especially from the eighteenth century, medical thought saw death as the absolute fact: the end of the disease and of life.⁸⁵ This understanding of death as absolute fact appears in Cavafy's poetry too, because his death poems can be understood fully only, with a parallel focus on the illness poems. Every ill person in these poems is under a death sentence, and notions of recuperation are absent. In other words, illness poems could be seen as an earlier stage of death poems, though that is not to suggest that the latter succeeded the former in Cavafy's career. It is the idea of illness that precedes the idea or event of death, which makes this relation possible in Cavafy. Indeed, if we bear in mind the poems analysed earlier in this thesis and which revolve around illness, death seems to be the reasonable consequence of any of the illnesses described.

As Hawkins writes, the image of illness as a separate world is a striking element of the extent to which serious illness and death have been excluded from ordinary life. Illness and disability, as depicted in various pathographies, convey a different and separate world with different rules, routines, values and goals. As seen by Hawkins, this world of illness lies beneath the safe surface of the world of appearances. After a recovery from a leg injury, Sacks experienced 'a deeper sense of the horror and wonder which lurk behind life and which are concealed as it were, behind the usual surface of health'. Hawkins also characterises Mandell's pathography as a reflection of the journey myth that is accompanied by the myth of rebirth. Based on the terminology of neuroscience, Mandell writes about the transition 'from a life of extroversion and competitiveness to a life of inwardness and detachment'. In several pathographies, the author focuses on the cultural legacy, as a memory of lost collective rituals. These pathographies exploit the myth in a more or less casual manner.⁸⁶ Similarly, in Cavafy, illness is not only a major and permanent subject in his poetry, but something which makes

⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic: an archaeology of medical perception* (London, 2003), 172.

⁸⁶ Hawkins, *Reconstructing Illness*, 82.

his protagonists distinct and different. One particular aspect which we will discuss extensively in Chapter 4 concerns poems in which illness and death are associated with young homosexual men (as Myres and the narrator), who do not follow the 'normal' heterosexual model and in that sense already live in a separate world. These people behave and act, following what Hawkins said, in a marginal world excluded from ordinary life, similarly to the narrator in 'Myres' who laments —a kind of— in isolation.

There is a strong distinction between a healthy condition, which is ordinary life and a sickly condition, which is out of ordinary life. According to Carel, a healthy body is transparent and taken for granted. We do not stop to consider any of its functions, because as long as everything is going smoothly, they constitute part of normal bodily operation. By contrast, an illness is an abrupt, violent way of revealing the intimately bodily nature of our being. Illness distances us from the biological body, which now becomes alienated, erratic and source of pain and disability. The lived experience of the lived body becomes painful and treacherous, since illness removes the body's transparency and problematises it; the body becomes the focus of concern. Inevitably, death is a central problem for humanity and especially for ill people.⁸⁷

⁸⁷ Carel, *Illness*, 31, 86, 106.

1.4 Youth, erotic passion and death

We have seen that the theme ‘illness and death’ is the prevalent in Cavafy’s poems ‘Μανουήλ Κομνηνός’, ‘Στρατηγού Θάνατος’ and ‘Εις το Επίνειον’, while ‘Μύρης’ Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ’ is a poem where we see explorations of mourning beyond the limits of Greek culture. However, Cavafy’s avocation with death is also evident in his tomb poems, where, according to Alexiou, we see a morbid fascination and promise the resurrection and immortalization of youth and beauty, through poetry.⁸⁸ Proceeding one step further and following methods of the medical humanities —something that Alexiou does not do, even if she describes the atmosphere of those poems as morbid—, it could be said that the morbidity or simply illness constitutes cause of the death in these poems.

Vassiliadi claims that illness and death of those close to him made Cavafy include these subjects in his poetry. She also writes that in some poems an unspecified illness drives to erotic memory.⁸⁹ For instance, his two closest friends died very young: Stephen Schilizzi died at nineteen years old in 1886, while Mikes Ralli died of illness at the age of twenty three in 1889.⁹⁰ For Ralli, who died of typhoid fever, Cavafy left a chronicle in Greek, in the form of a journal,⁹¹ while for Stephen an elegy was written by the poet.

The close friendship between Schilizzi and Cavafy is shown in the number of letters that survive in the Cavafy Archive. They first met in Cavafy’s house on Rue Mahmoud Pasha el Falaki; this is also where he first met his other close friend, Ralli.⁹² Although such biographical details demonstrate the friendship between the two young men, we have no clear indication about the cause of Schilizzi’s death. However, his young age makes us believe that an illness was most probably the reason of his death. Interestingly, Cavafy wrote the poem in the year of Schilizzi’s death, in 1886.

In the unpublished poem ‘Τω Στεφάνω Σκυλίτση’ (‘To Stephanos Schilizzi’) (1886),⁹³ Cavafy attempts to show that the Schilizzi’s death will not separate the two friends:

Στέφανε, δεν σ’ εχώρισεν από ημάς το μνήμα·

In addition, in the concluding lines, Cavafy says that even after his death, Stephen will still live with them:

⁸⁸ Margaret Alexiou, ‘C. P. Cavafy’s ‘dangerous’ drugs: poetry, eros, and the dissemination of images’, in *The Text and its Margins: post-structuralist approaches to twentieth-century Greek literature*, ed. Margaret Alexiou and Vassilis Lambropoulos (New York, 1985), 157-195.

⁸⁹ Vassiliadi, ‘«Για τα σκουπίδια κατευθείαν»’, 3-4.

⁹⁰ Daskalopoulos-Stasinopoulou, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Καβάφη*, 25, 27, 28.

⁹¹ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 58.

⁹² Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 530.

⁹³ Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα*, 26.

Πλην όχι. Είσαι μεθ' ημών. Του τάφου σου ο λίθος
πέπλον ψιλόν, διαφανές, δια ημάς θα είναι.

According to Cavafy in the poem, friendship is eternal and cannot be affected by death. So, he will remain friend with Stephen even if the latter is dead now. It could be said that although the poem and biographical elements do not enlighten the cause of Stephen's death, his young age alludes rather to the direction of an illness. Besides, it is worth noting, that Stephen died in 1886; three years after a cholera epidemic broke in Egypt, in 1883. The above lines are more clearly Christian in inspiration, as we see the phrase 'μεθ' ημών' that alludes to the hymn 'Μεθ' ημών ο Θεός'. Something we do not see in later poems, which seem to be at odds with Christian values. Yet, one could say that the word 'διαφανές' in the poem is in contrast with 'σκεπάζουν' in 'Ευρίωνος Τάφος' ('Tomb of Eurion'),⁹⁴ where the tomb is covered by flowers. However, in the case of his friend, apparently Cavafy chose to show that the tomb will be 'diaphanous',⁹⁵ like a window with the view and hope of their permanent friendship.

In that year, the area of Mecca suffered a cholera epidemic, which was spread in Egypt and caused the death of 58.000 Egyptians. In the summer of that year, French and German governments sent scientific teams to investigate in Alexandria. Koch identified a microorganism in the intestinal walls of cholera victims that he thought might be responsible for the disease; as the cholera waned in Egypt, Koch moved to Calcutta, where he found the same microorganism. In a series of articles published in 1884, Koch announced his opinion that a bacterium called *Vibrio cholera* caused cholera. Interestingly, influenza, a respiratory disease starting from central Asia, was spread in Alexandria and Cairo in December 1889 from traffic across the Mediterranean. Although influenza was usually a mild infection, the majority of people affected in this pandemic meant a large number of deaths, especially when influenza was joined by pneumonia.⁹⁶

As Atalic declares, the nineteenth century saw cholera as a major miasmatic disease, and it was treated with sanitation and not with quarantines. Cholera pandemics appeared in 1817, then 1826-1837 and 1841-1859; later outbreaks appeared in 1863-1874 and one last in 1881-1896. The last outbreak killed 100 000 Egyptians.⁹⁷ As Schilizzi died in 1886, we can assume that he was one of these 100 000 victims of the last outbreak. Atalic also mentions that commissions from European countries went to Egypt to investigate on the cholera pandemics, in 1883: a British commission in Cairo, a French commission in Alexandria and finally a German commission under the guidance of Koch. Koch with his

⁹⁴ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 60.

⁹⁵ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 254.

⁹⁶ J. N. Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics: their impacts on human history* (Santa Barbara, California, 2005), 303.

⁹⁷ Bruno Atalic, '1885 cholera controversy: Klein versus Koch', *Medical Humanities*, 36 (2010), 43-47.

commission were based in the Greek Hospital of Alexandria.⁹⁸ Bearing in mind that, we might consider that Cavafy knew or even met members, especially, of the German commission, as the Greek Hospital could be the obvious place for the medical care of Greeks living in Alexandria.

In Alexandria of the nineteenth century, cholera epidemics were a usual phenomenon.⁹⁹ Cholera was a constant threat to Egypt, as there were ten epidemics between 1831 and 1902. In fact according to Kuhnke, urban and rural communities drew their water from the Nile, which was frequently polluted. Especially the cholera epidemic of 1831 killed within two months 150000 of the estimated population of the three and a half million, while cholera and yellow fever posed greater threats. Smallpox was another threat in nineteenth century Egypt, as one-third of children died of smallpox each year.¹⁰⁰

By 1840s Egypt was under a new system of irrigation, which was directed to bring more water supplies to agricultural lands. Muhammed Ali, who was in power, was determined to bring his country on a higher economic level. He promoted cotton as a cash crop that would bring Egypt money and consequently the construction of new irrigation systems to water the cotton. The resultant low levels of water supplied to towns increased the risk of cholera infection, since town residents were forced to reuse their limited supplies, in which some human excretions could be found.¹⁰¹

Apart from Stephen's death, in March 1891, Cavafy's second brother Peter, the eldest in Alexandria, died suddenly at the age of forty, while in the same month in that year his uncle also died. In 1902, at the age of fifty his brother Aristides, who was ill, died too.¹⁰² Finally, at the age of fifty his brother Alexander also died of typhoid.¹⁰³ These biographical details show that Cavafy had a strong background on illnesses and death, which gave him sources and material to use in his poetry. In addition, Alexandria and Egypt in general was a place where illnesses certainly appeared and a sense of vulnerability was natural. In any case the mysterious death of young men in some of Cavafy's poems could be seen in connection with these elements, as the Alexandria of Cavafy's times was a place where illnesses were a usual cause of death. Thus, on the following pages we should analyse in some detail those poems in which we have the announcement of a young man's death.

⁹⁸ Atalic, '1885 cholera controversy', 43.

⁹⁹ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 39.

¹⁰⁰ LaVerne Kuhnke, *Lives at Risk: public health in nineteenth-century Egypt* (Oxford, 1990), 49.

¹⁰¹ Hays, *Epidemics and Pandemics*, p. 232-233.

¹⁰² Daskalopoulos-Stasinopoulou, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Καβάφη*, 28, 52.

¹⁰³ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 107-108.

Of course, the death incidents from his personal life were not the only reason, why Cavafy dealt with the issue of death and illness in his poetry. However, these pieces of biographical information constituted a good source and material for the poet to infuse in his poems.

In one personal note, Cavafy writes of one man that he has died of ηδονή:

Δεν σε εγν[ώριζα]. Ίσως σε είδα και ί[σως] η ωραία
σου μορφή μέ έκα[με] να στ[αθώ] αλλά αυτό θα ήτο προ
π[ο]λ[λ]ών μ[η]νών, διότι ήδη από π[ο]λ[λ]ών μ[η]νών ήσο
κλ[ι]νήρης], ασθ[ενών]. Ο θάν[ατος] σου με συνεκί[νησε].
και με συγκί[νησι] ανέγ[νωσα] την περ[ι]γρ[αφή] της
ωρ[αίας] κ[η]δ[είας] σου—λευκής με λ[ευκά] άνθη, με
όλ[η]ν την αριστοκρατία της πόλ[εως] ακολουθώσαν αυ-
την και τιμ[ώσαν] σε. Και συ απέθ[ανε] 17 ετών από την
ηδ[ονή]. Ηδ[ονή] μεγ[άλη] και αθώαν και ποι[ητική].

απέθ[ανε] 5.2.1901

ετάφη 6.2.1901¹⁰⁴

(I did not meet you. Maybe I saw you and maybe your beautiful
shape made me stand but this could be
many months ago, because since many months you were
bedridden, ill. Your death touched me
and with movement I read the description of
your nice funeral—white with white flowers, with
the whole aristocracy of the city following
and honouring you. And you died 17 years old of
pleasure. Great and innocent and poetic pleasure.

died 5.2.1901

buried 6.2.1901)

In this rather odd passage, Cavafy admits that he did not know the young man in question, while the emotion provoked by his death seems to be prompted by a textual item, a newspaper story, which was likely written in the vein of cliché. One could read this note as precursor of the poem 'Καισαρίων' ('Caesarion') (1918),¹⁰⁵ in which the poet does not know the man he imagines, but he

¹⁰⁴ G. P. Savidis, 'Ανέκδοτα σημειώματα ποιητικής και ηθικής', in *Μικρά Καβαφικά*, 127.

¹⁰⁵ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 84-87.

made him 'beautiful and sentimental', giving him a 'dreamlike, genial grace'.¹⁰⁶ Yet, the 'white flowers' in the note could be also connected with the poem 'Ωραία Λουλούδια κι Άσπρα ως Ταίριαζαν Πολύ' ('Lovely Flowers and White Such as Befitted Well') (1929).¹⁰⁷ Obviously, dying of ηδονή is rather a metaphor, but for Cavafy it also links with the diseased concept of homosexuality we will discuss in Chapter 4. This view of a young bedridden man dying of passion, as depicted in the above note is reminiscent of Kleitos in 'Η Αρρώστια του Κλείτου' ('Kleitos' Illness') (1926),¹⁰⁸ who is bedridden and dies of passion but also other poems presenting dead young men, like 'Ιγνατίου Τάφος' (Tomb of Ignatius) (1917).¹⁰⁹

In 'Ιγνατίου Τάφος', the change from one religion to another is the basic theme. According to Poulis, who approaches the poem from a Christian perspective, the poet intends to show that real life is life close to faith and Christ. Only then a person can live happily; when he becomes a Christian and lives in the tranquillity and safety of Christianity.¹¹⁰ Commenting on this transition of the protagonist into Christianity, Savidis declares that it signifies a spiritual renaissance and renouncement of former sinful life.¹¹¹

Indeed, the religious background of the poem is very strong and inevitably the poem should be seen in connection with Christian values. However, after a second reading the question which arises is: why did Ignatius change his religion and become a Christian?

The poem starts by presenting Ignatius repentant of his former life:

Εδώ δεν είμαι ο Κλέων που ακούσθηκα
στην Αλεξάνδρεια (όπου δύσκολα ξιπάζονται)
για τα λαμπρά μου σπίτια, για τους κήπους,
για τ' άλογα και για τ' αμάξια μου,
για τα διαμαντικά και τα μετάξια που φορούσα.
Άπαγε· εδώ δεν είμαι ο Κλέων εκείνος·
τα εικοσιοκτώ του χρόνια να σβυσθούν.

A young man from Alexandria speaks from the tomb and refuses his previous life in luxury. He asserts that here, in the tomb, he is not that Cleon anymore, who became famous in Alexandria for his houses, gardens, horses, chariots, jewels and expensive clothes. He, finally, asks people to forget the twenty-eight years he lived in this luxurious way.

¹⁰⁶ Translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 84-87.

¹⁰⁷ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 192-195.

¹⁰⁸ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 156-159.

¹⁰⁹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 92-93.

¹¹⁰ Poulis, *Θρησκευτικές Αντιλήψεις*, 84-85.

¹¹¹ Savidis, 'Ένδυμα, ρούχο και γυμνό στο σώμα της καθαφικής ποίησης', 211-256.

Although there is no direct reference to excesses, the life that the young man describes links with relevant extremes. In truth, this young man says that for twenty years he was mainly interested in all the luxuries of life and we could assume pleasures of life as well implying addictions, such as alcohol, and in general an unhealthy lifestyle.¹¹²

It is also interesting to note, that the young man's persistence in his appearance and being good-looking presupposes a kind of narcissism. This young man was a narcissist, because he liked himself in an abnormal way, and everything he did in his life was directly associated with his image and how he looked. He felt proud of his houses, his belongings and good looks, and he was wearing nice and expensive clothes. This narcissism, which suggests that he was attracted to himself, may allude to homosexuality.

In 1915, narcissism was considered one of the most essential characteristics of 'inversion', a term which was used by Freud in the 1920s.¹¹³ According to Orrells, the relationship between inversion and narcissism becomes firmer and firmer. Freud's oscillation between 'homosexuality' and 'inversion' reflects the tension at the heart of Freud's conceptualisation of narcissism. On the one hand, narcissism is a desire of another who is just like oneself and as homosexuality suggests, a relationship of sameness. But, on the other hand, narcissism is the desire of the boy who identified himself with his mother, who then desires a boy, suggesting that the narcissist trend is one of another, as 'inversion' means.¹¹⁴ It is important to note, the poem was written in 1916 and published a year later.

As it is set by Freud, 'at the very beginning of mental life, the ego is cathected with instincts and is to some extent capable of satisfying them on itself. We call this condition 'narcissism' and this way of obtaining satisfaction 'auto-erotic.'" So, as the ego is auto-erotic, it shows no interest in the external world, but it has need of experiences undergone by the instincts of self-preservation. By getting hold of the libido by itself, an individual sets himself as the sole love-object. Thus, by desexualizing or sublimating the libido of the id, the ego works in contrast to the purposes of love; this constitutes an important amplification of the theory of narcissism.¹¹⁵

Bearing in mind the above theories connecting narcissism with inversion and also the date of the writing and publication of the poem, which is very close to the development of these theories, we can see the connection between homosexuality and narcissism in Cleon's attitude and behaviour. Moreover in the poem, the protagonist's ten-month examination of conscience cannot completely emancipate itself from the narcissism of the preceding year. Such narcissism, of course, is not absent

¹¹² The issue of addiction will be discussed in Chapter 3.

¹¹³ The terms 'invert' and 'inversion' go earlier to Marc-André Raffalovich in the 1890s. See for example, Ivan Crozier (ed.), *Sexual Inversion: a critical edition, Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds (1897)* (New York, 2008), 123, 212.

¹¹⁴ Daniel Orrells, *Classical Culture and Modern Masculinity* (Oxford, 2011), 254.

¹¹⁵ Sigmund Freud, *The Essentials of Psycho-Analysis*, tr. James Strachey (London, 2005), 212-213, 467.

from other Cavafy's poems, as 'Ο Καθρέπτης στην Είσοδο' ('The Mirror in the Entrance') (1930)¹¹⁶ is a striking example of a narcissist young man who 'approached the mirror and looked at himself, straightening his tie' while 'the old mirror now rejoiced and prided itself that perfect loveliness had been bestowed upon it for a few minutes'.¹¹⁷

In the second part of 'Ιγνατίου Τάφος', the young man reveals his new identity:

Είμ' ο Ιγνάτιος, αναγνώστης, που πολύ αργά
συνήλθα· αλλ' όμως κ' έτσι δέκα μήνες έζησα ευτυχείς
μες στην γαλήνη και μες στην ασφάλεια του Χριστού.

He says that his new name is Ignatius and although late, in the last ten months he lived close to God, in tranquillity and safety. Returning to the initial question, why the protagonist changed his life and religion becoming a faithful Christian, one could say the answer is an illness. As we have already said, he was probably a narcissist and homosexual. Although it is notable that the latter is not mentioned here, we have a word-play through the protagonist's narcissism and the use of the verb 'συνήλθα' ('came to my senses').¹¹⁸ Ten months ago, the poem incites us to speculate, he realised that he was ill. Maybe he coughed blood or suffered a similar illness. So he decided to renounce his previous life in sin and become a reader of Holy Scripture. Thus, one could say that 'συνήλθα' suggests a sense of recuperation from a life in sin to a life close to God, alluding also to the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24).

As seen by Ricks, Cavafy through Cleon and the re-naming of himself, shows us how Christianity is working through the years. While Cleon's achievements are nothing much, his Christians aspirations are high. By adopting the name Ignatius, which makes a word-play on *ignotus*, Cleon looks for anonymity, but he also chooses the name of St Ignatius of Antioch who was among the most exemplary of the early martyrs.¹¹⁹

In regard to the last months the protagonist lived, one could say that Ignatius was a late-comer, as from the age of twenty-eight, he was a Christian for ten months. As very aptly Ricks suggests, Ignatius came to himself and the body of Christ almost too late, same as Augustine who lamented that he had loved the church too late. In addition, the period of ten month is not random; Ignatius had time to live out the gestation of a regenerate child in Christ, renouncing at the same time the former life of Cleon.¹²⁰

¹¹⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 196-198.

¹¹⁷ Translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 196-198.

¹¹⁸ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 92.

¹¹⁹ Ricks, 'Cavafy and the body of Christ', 19-21.

¹²⁰ Ricks, 'Cavafy and the body of Christ', 22.

To sum up, Cleon or Ignatius is a young man who died at 28. For twenty-eight years, he lived as a narcissist and fell in love with himself; this suggests also homosexuality. In the last ten months of his life, he fell sick. He is happy that at least even at the end of his life, he lived close to God. The reason of his death could be an illness, probably tuberculosis or another contagious disease. After he found out he tried to live like a proper Christian looking for treatment in Christian values and adopting a new lifestyle according to Christian ethics. In any case, 'Ιγνατίου Τάφος' could be seen as a case poem in which we have the following issues: youth, passion, illness and death.

As in the case of Ignatius that there must be some sickness which works on his body and his mind, and which the poem subtly declines to specify, something analogous is to be found in the poem 'Εν τω Μηνί Αθύρ' ('In the Month of Athyr') (1917).¹²¹ The poem starts with a voice reading an inscription on the tomb of a young man. The overall scene indicates that he did not know the dead young man; he only found his tomb, by coincidence most likely, probably in a place like a museum:

Με δυσκολία διαβάζω	στην πέτρα την αρχαία.
«Κύ[ρι]ε Ιησού Χριστέ».	Ένα «Ψυ[χ]ήν» διακρίνω.
«Εν τω μη[νί] Αθύρ»	«Ο Λεύκιος[ς] ε[κοιμ]ήθη».
Στη μνεία της ηλικίας	«Εβί[ωσ]εν ετών»,
το Κάππα Ζήτα δείχνει	που νέος εκοιμήθη.
Μες τα φθαρμένα βλέπω	«Αυτό[ν]...Αλεξανδρέα».
Μετά έχει τρεις γραμμές	πολύ ακρωτηριασμένες·

According to the poem, we have the following important details about the young man: his name was Leucius and he was a Christian from Alexandria, who died very young —as KZ shows—, at the age of 27.¹²² In addition, there is another piece of information which should not be ignored by the reader of the poem; this is the month Leucius died: Athyr (Hathor). Apart from the fact that the month is the title of the poem, it is repeated in the third line of the poem, and as we will see, in the last line. Athyr is the third month of the ancient Egyptian calendar, corresponding to October or November.¹²³

One could say that the young age of Leucius possibly alludes, again, to an illness as cause of death; like for example pneumonia or tuberculosis which are more common in cold months. The risk of transmission of tuberculosis appears to be greatest during the winter months,¹²⁴ while pneumonia

¹²¹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 92-93.

¹²² As Hirst writes in his commentaries on Cavafy's poem, KZ is 27 in Greek numerals (in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 220).

¹²³ Hirst in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 220.

¹²⁴ Auda Fares, 'Seasonability of tuberculosis', <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3068579/>. [accessed 15 January 2016]

is associated with physical strain and exposure to cold and wet.¹²⁵ Technically, November or October, as Egyptian month Athyr suggests, are not winter months but autumn months; but in any case, cold is a common element between the two seasons and could cause such illnesses. Interestingly, especially pneumonia resembles a cold and like a cold often develops as a result of sudden changes of the temperature of the surfaces of the body; and November or October are months which present these changes. It is worth noting also, that cold and other respiratory infections may be seen as factors in predisposing to pneumonia.¹²⁶

Yet, the mention of the month Leucius died links to an Egyptian tradition; this is the writing of the death's month on the tomb. According to Scheidel, Egypt has been the source of a greater number of public references to the month of death, than any other region of the Roman world outside Rome itself. While such inscriptions come from a Christian background, some of this evidence extends farther back in time. According to sources dealing with demography in Roman Egypt, in the month Athyr in the twentieth year of an unnamed emperor —possibly 7 November 154, 8 November 179 or 9 November 211—, there was a kind of disaster of uncertain nature. The fact that about ninety percent of the victims were children and women suggests an accident, like the collapse of a building or a fire, rather than an epidemic or an attack. However, other tombstones that refer to the month of Athyr can be dated from different years and do not relate to this event. In addition, it is worth noting that inscriptions from Terenouthis —a city not far from Alexandria, which is Leucius' city— show that the percentage of deaths of people aged 20-49 is higher in the month Athyr.¹²⁷ All this suggest that the protagonist of Cavafy's poem may indeed have died of a cold-related illness.

Another important detail relating to Athyr is the fact that this month took its name from the goddess Hathor,¹²⁸ the goddess of love, mirth, social joy, music, dance and the necropolis.¹²⁹ Apart from the pun on 'άθυρμα' and 'θύρα', that one could say the month suggests, the connection between the goddess and Leucius in the poem is apparent, if we bear in mind her attributes. Firstly, Hathor is goddess of the necropolis and Leucius is dead. In addition, her other attributes like love and social joy, constitute the basic characteristics of Leucius' life, which appear in the ending lines of the poem:

μα κάτι λέξεις βγάζω- σαν «δ[ά]κρυα ημών», «οδύνην»,
κατόπιν πάλι «δάκρυα», και «[ημ]ίν τοις [φ]ίλοις πένθος».
Με φαίνεται που ο Λεύκιος μέγਾਲως θ' αγαπήθη.

¹²⁵ Anonymous author, 'Pneumonia', *The American Journal of Nursing*, 25: 2 (1925), 138-139.

¹²⁶ Anonymous author, 'Pneumonia', 138.

¹²⁷ Walter Scheidel, *Death on the Nile: disease and the demography of Roman Egypt* (Boston, 2001), 3, 23-24.

¹²⁸ Hirst in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, p. 220.

¹²⁹ Tove Neville, 'Past threatened by Aswan Dam', *The Science News-Letter*, 78: 5 (1960), 74-75 and Zahi Hawass, 'Tombs of the pyramid builders', *Archaeology*, Vol. 50, No. 1 (1997), 39-43.

Εν τω μηνί Αθύρ ο Λεύκιος εκοιμήθη.

Focusing on the eroticism of the above lines, Dellamora asserts, those who commissioned the original tomb refer to themselves as ‘friends’, alluding to a conventional male homosociality. The same word carries a coded, personal signification of a group of young men ‘joined by the shared sensations and effects of male intimacy’.¹³⁰ Also, Dimaras and Haas declare that through the constant elaboration of details, we proceed to the hidden or visible signs of eroticism.¹³¹

In fact, in these lines the poem has a homoerotic character which derives from the words ‘friends’ and of course the phrase ‘was deeply loved’. The word ‘friends’ is used in the masculine plural and Dellamora is right to say that we have to do with a male homosociality. The parents have no role in this inscription, likewise any female presence. The inscription only refers to friends, like a secret and outlaw organisation. In addition, the use of the adverb ‘μεγάλως’ (‘greatly’) to show the way that friends loved Leucius denotes not just love, but a kind of intense and passionate eroticism; this is the same intensity we will see analysing the poem ‘Ιμενος’ (‘Imenos’) (1919),¹³² and especially in the phrase: ‘μιαν έντασιν ερωτική, που δεν γνωρίζει η υγεία’. Consequently, ‘μεγάλως’, here, suggests this same erotic intensity which is revealed only through homoerotic love. In this group of young men they are all occupied by the same homoerotic passion. This suggests a kind of contagion that we are going to see in the poem ‘Στην Προκυμαία’ (‘On the Jetty’) (1920).¹³³ Another interesting element is the fact that in this poem, and as opposed to Myres, the young men are Christians. Concluding, Athyr demonstrates not only when Leucius died but also how; his death may be the result of the season and a cold disease.

Youth and beauty, basic themes in Leucius’ poem, become reasons of praise in the poem ‘Για τον Αμμώνη, που Πέθανε 29 ετών, στα 610’ (‘For Ammones, Who Died Aged 29, in 610’) (1917).¹³⁴ As noted by Savidis, this is purely a tomb poem and relates to the dead people during the Balkan Wars.¹³⁵ However the homoerotic character of the poem is the prevalent element. The intellectual level and education of the dead young man seems less important than his beauty. Raphael, another poet, should start by praising Ammones’ poems, but mainly his beauty.

The title of the poem provides us with an important element, which is the age of Ammones, who died at twenty-nine years old; and again, the protagonist was a young man. Bearing in mind the

¹³⁰ Richard Dellamora, ‘Greek desire and modern sexualities’, in Roilos, *Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2010), 121-142.

¹³¹ C. Th. Dimaras, tr. Diana Haas, ‘Cavafy’s technique of inspiration’, *Grand Street*, 2: 3 (1983), 143-156.

¹³² Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 114-115.

¹³³ Cavafy, *Ατελή Ποιήματα*, 95-99. The poems ‘Ιμενος’ and ‘Στην Προκυμαία’ will be discussed extensively in Chapter 4.

¹³⁴ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 94-95.

¹³⁵ G. P. Savidis, ‘Ποιήματα ποιητικής του Καβάφη’, in *Μικρά Καβαφικά*, 281-311.

young age of Ammones, it seems that the most possible cause of death is a deadly illness. According to Alexiou, this is a poem with poetic and erotic themes and historical elements, placed in the context of the Arab advance.¹³⁶ This opinion is also expressed by Ilinskaya in her commentary on the poem, asserting that the title, and especially the chronology in the title —610—, alludes to the years before the invasion of the Arabs in Alexandria (641-642).¹³⁷ The poem should be placed during this period of the Arab conquest that dominated Egypt in the mid-seventh century.¹³⁸ Interestingly, the name of the dead young man, Ammones, could be seen as an allusion to the god Ammon,¹³⁹ while Raphael, which is the name of the other poet, suggests that he was a Coptic.¹⁴⁰

Nevertheless, staying on the date in the title of the poem, I think that apart from the obvious relation to the years before the Arabs' invasion, this date could enlighten the reason of Ammones' death; something that previous critics did not attempt to do. Indeed, during the seventh century, Egypt was repeatedly attacked by bubonic plague and also by smallpox; Egypt of the seventh century was therefore characterised by a diseased environment.¹⁴¹ And of course, this is a new element in the analysis of the poem.

In addition, according to Little, the years before the seventh century and especially in the summer of 541, bubonic plague, a deadly infectious disease, broke out in the Egyptian port city Pelusium, and quickly spread to Alexandria. The disease remained virulent there for about two centuries, and it was accompanied by certain symptoms, like fever (a symptom we will see, again, in the poem 'Η αρρώστια του Κλείτου'). The disease was called Justinianic plague. There are written sources dealing with the Justinianic plague, in the wider region of the Mediterranean in general: for example, Evagrius 'Scholasticus' refers to a plague broke out in 594, in Antioch; Gregory of Tours writes about a plague in 590, in Rome; and finally, other sources, refer to a later plague in North Africa in 599 and 600.¹⁴² In fact, the Justinianic Plague occurred in waves between 541 and 750,¹⁴³ while it is also worth noting that it began in Egypt¹⁴⁴ and from Alexandria it spread all over the Mediterranean.¹⁴⁵

Stathakopoulos also refers to Pelusium as the place the disease entered the Byzantine Empire in 541. Contemporary authors like Procopius, Evagrius, John of Ephesus, Agathias and Theophylactus

¹³⁶ Alexiou, 'C. P. Cavafy's 'dangerous' drugs', 187.

¹³⁷ Ilinskaya in Cavafy, *Άπαντα*, 452.

¹³⁸ Alexiou, 'C. P. Cavafy's 'dangerous' drugs', 187.

¹³⁹ Hirst in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 220.

¹⁴⁰ Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 452.

¹⁴¹ Scheidel, *Death on the Nile*, 10.

¹⁴² Lester K. Little, 'Life and afterlife of the first plague pandemic', in Little, *Plague* (Cambridge, 2007), 3-32.

¹⁴³ Jo N. Hays, 'Historians and epidemics: simple questions', in Little, *Plague* (Cambridge, 2007), 33-58.

¹⁴⁴ Robert Sallares, 'Ecology, evolution, and epidemiology of plague', in Little, *Plague* (Cambridge, 2007), 231-289.

¹⁴⁵ Michael G. Morony, 'For whom does the writer write?' the first bubonic plague according to Syriac sources', in Little, *Plague* (Cambridge, 2007), 59-86.

Simocatta described the symptomatology of the disease including characteristics such as fever and buboes in the groin, axilla and cervical region. Although during the two centuries of the disease in the Mediterranean not all the waves are attested alike, 'there were about eighteen plague waves'. In 541 when the disease appeared in Pelusium it was spread in Egypt, North Africa and Palestine and was 'attested in Gaza, the Negev and Alexandria'. In any case, the disease appeared also in Egypt between the years 669-673, 683-687, 713-715, 732-735 and 743-744 too.¹⁴⁶

Therefore, by placing Ammones' death in 610, Cavafy alludes not only to the years before the Arabs' invasion into Alexandria, but also to the years during bubonic plague in Alexandria, and the Mediterranean in general. Although the poet does not present any signs of illness in the poem, the young age of Ammones, in combination with the year of his death, alludes to an illness, as a possible cause of death and most likely the bubonic plague; something that has not been identified before.

Cavafy's preoccupation with the thematology of illness and death dominates the poem, while the historical background can offer us a new reading following the principles of the medical humanities. Although without this historical setting, the poem 'Ωραία Λουλούδια κι Άσπρα ως Ταίριαζαν Πολύ' ('Lovely Flowers and White Such as Befitted Well') (1929)¹⁴⁷ revolves around the same thematology of illness and death, while passion through the form of an erotic trio is also present. In this poem, the reader can see a contemporary setting and the atmosphere of rebetika, and the attempts of a young man to have back his lover. Although the lost lover returned to him, he died in less than three months after their re-union. The poem, according to Petkou, presents obvious elements of funeral ceremonial.¹⁴⁸

The poem starts by introducing the protagonist, visiting the coffee-shop he used to go with his dead friend:

Μπήκε στο καφενείο όπου επήγαιναν μαζί.—

The place of action is a coffee-shop. As Gumpert writes καφενείο is one of Cavafy's preferred sites for the elaboration of his narratives, at once poetic and erotic; here the 'love affair begins, or ends'.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Dionysios Stathakopoulos, 'Crime and punishment: the plague in the Byzantine Empire, 541-749', in *Plague and the End of Antiquity: the pandemic of 541-750* (Cambridge, 2006), 99-119.

¹⁴⁷ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 192-195.

¹⁴⁸ Efi Petkou, 'Οι καθαφικές τελετουργίες και η πολιτισμική ταυτότητα του ελληνισμού', http://www.eens.org/EENS_congresses/2010/Petkou_Efi.pdf, 1-11. [accessed 15 December 2014]

¹⁴⁹ Matthew Gumpert, 'Freedom within the margin: the café in the poetry of Cavafy', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 9: 2 (1991), 215-235.

Indeed, as we can see, the café is the place where the dead lover announced to his friend that they should separate, because another rich young man wanted him and convinced him by offering a wealthy and materialistic life:

Ο φίλος του εδώ	προ τριών μηνών του είπε,
«Δεν έχουμε πεντάρα.	Δύο πάμπτωχα παιδιά
ήμεθα—ξεπεσμένοι	στα κέντρα τα φτηνά.
Στο λέγω φανερά,	με σένα δεν μπορώ
να περπατώ. Ένας άλλος,	μάθε το, με ζητεί».
Ο άλλος του είχε τάξει	δυό φορεσιές, και κάτι
μεταξωτά μαντήλια.-	

Money plays a very important role in his decision; something usual for people of low social rank, when they are in between two potential lovers.¹⁵⁰

As Pieris declares, the third person of this story not only poisons this relationship, but also he eliminates it for three months:¹⁵¹

Για να τον ξαναπάρει	
εχάλασε τον κόσμο,	και βρήκε είκοσι λίρες.
ήλθε ξανά μαζί του	για τες είκοσι λίρες·
Μα και, κοντά σ' αυτές,	για την παληά φιλία,
Για την παληάν αγάπη,	για το βαθύ αίσθημά των.—
Ο «άλλος» ήταν ψεύτης,	παληόπαιδο σωστό·
μια φορεσιά μονάχα	του είχε κάμει, και
με το στανιό και τούτην,	με χίλια παρακάλια.

Pieris continues, that after the relationship is poisoned, it cannot find its former clear character, since the re-union is based on the social and political status of wealth and now lacks its previous clearness.¹⁵² In fact, 'the other' proved to be a 'liar' and 'scoundrel'¹⁵³ and the protagonist could now be described in the same way, as he follows his methods.

In the following lines, the poet asserts that the dead young man, now, does not need money or nice clothes:

¹⁵⁰ C. Capri-Karka, *Love and the symbolic journey in the poetry of Cavafy Eliot and Seferis* (New York, 1982), 92.

¹⁵¹ Michalis Pieris, 'Έρωσ και εξουσία: όψεις της ποιητικής του Καβάφη', *Μολυβδο-κονδυλο-πελεκητής*, 6 (1997-1998), 37-57.

¹⁵² Pieris, 'Έρωσ και εξουσία', 51-52.

¹⁵³ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 192-195.

Μα τώρα πια δεν θέλει	μήτε τες φορεσιές,
και μήτε διόλου τα	μεταξωτά μαντήλια,
και μήτε είκοσι λίρες,	και μήτε είκοσι γρόσια.
Την Κυριακή τον θάψαν	στες δέκα το πρωί.
Την Κυριακή τον θάψαν	πάει εβδομάς σχεδόν.
Στην πτωχική του κάσα	του έβαλε λουλούδια,
ωραία λουλούδια κι άσπρα	ως ταίριαζαν πολύ
στην εμορφιά του και	στα είκοσι δύο του χρόνια.

As Pieris writes, after his lover's death the poetic subject returns to his former values and real feelings. Death brings the relationship back where it was left before the interruption by the rich man, which is the pure erotic relation between two poor young men loving each other.¹⁵⁴ Savidis declares, also, that through the white and virgin flowers the dead young man is abandoned by the vain clothes' necessity.¹⁵⁵ Thus, it could be said that he returns to the 'clear sensual pleasure' we also see in the poem 'Μέρες του 1896' ('Days of 1896') (1927)¹⁵⁶ and we are going to discuss in Chapter 4.

In the ending lines the protagonist's visit to the tavern suggests that he used to go to this tavern for meeting other men and earning money, alluding to the motif of male prostitution:¹⁵⁷

Όταν το βράδυ επήγεν—	έτυχε μια δουλειά,
μια ανάγκη του ψωμιού του—	στο καφενείο όπου
επήγαιναν μαζί:	μαχαίρι στην καρδιά του
το μαύρο καφενείο	όπου επήγαιναν μαζί.

The protagonist was probably a man who was selling his body for money or as is set in the poem 'to earn his bread', suggesting an outlaw who is hiding during the day and gets out in the evenings. Also, here, there is a very strong contrast, deriving from the characterisation of the café as 'black', conveying a sense of danger, like the exhaustion of the organism we see in 'Μέρες του 1909, '10, '11' ('Days of 1919, '10, '11'), through the phrase 'λαϊκή κραυπή'.¹⁵⁸ While the flowers the protagonist placed on

¹⁵⁴ Pieris, 'Έρωσ και εξουσία', 52-53.

¹⁵⁵ Savidis in 'Ένδυμα, ρούχο και γυμνό', 211-246.

¹⁵⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 166-169.

¹⁵⁷ Savidis in 'Ένδυμα, ρούχο και γυμνό', 239.

¹⁵⁸ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 186-187.

the tomb are white and symbolise the dead's beauty, youth, and their pure love, the café is black, because it is a place where everything, including love, revolves around money and power.

Attempting to find the possible cause of death in the poem, again, the young age of the dead man would suggest an illness; something very common in Cavafy, as we have seen. As Vassiliadi writes, the illness which —is cause of death in the poem— is not mentioned, but it is equal to the final event of death and mainly attacks men of exceptional beauty from Alexandria. The body's afterlife overpowers the real and imaginary story of the body and eliminates the function of senses, like touch, smell, sight, and hearing.¹⁵⁹ In any case, Vassiliadi returns to the issue of the unspecified illness as cause of death in the poem.

It is easy to see that the financial state of the young men was not the best. Thus, poverty could be connected, indeed, with the death in this poem. According to Gordon, poverty is the most common cause of death and disease. This is the prominent reason of ill health on the planet, of reduced life expectancy and disability. Premature death is a common outcome of poverty and poverty is a disease, indeed, as it can kill and maim.¹⁶⁰ Besides, as Butterly writes chronic and persistent food insecurity and the resultant malnutrition deprives an individual of developing in a healthy way.¹⁶¹

In the poem, poverty is indeed presented through the lack of food, as in the ending lines the protagonist went to the café for a job that would bring him his bread —even if one would say that there is a sense of exaggeration in his words— and through lack of nice clothes, as the dead young man went with the rich man only for the new clothes and the luxurious kind of life. Although lack of new and nice clothes would not kill someone, lack of food could be a cause of death, indeed.

¹⁵⁹ Vassiliadi, '«Για τα σκουπίδια κατευθείαν»', 3-4.

¹⁶⁰ Dave Gordon, 'Poverty, death and disease', in *Beyond Criminology: taking harm seriously*, ed. Paddy Hillyard, Christina Pantazis, Steve Tombs, Dave Gordon (London, 2004), 251-266.

¹⁶¹ John R. Butterly, 'The basic necessities of life: nutrition, water, and sanitation', in *Diseases of Poverty: epidemiology, infectious diseases, and modern plagues*, ed. Lisa V. Adams John R. Butterly (Hanover, New Hampshire, 2015), 82-106.

1.5 Conclusions

Death is a permanent subject in Cavafy as it appears in historical or pseudo-historical poems, in which though we have more or less a clear cause of death; old age, murder or death during a battle, as in the Homeric poems. But in the poems discussed in this chapter the reader remains with unanswered questions about the causes of death, as an illness, which is not mentioned, constitutes the cause of death. Thus, the most intriguing element is the mystery of death behind the death of Cavafy's protagonists. While former critique dealt with these poems, it failed to show the medical background. However, as we have seen through the medical humanities approach we followed in the chapter, new readings arise and enlighten the poems.

In 'Μανουηλ Κομνηνός' and 'Στρατηγού Θάνατος', we see the death of brave military men. Nevertheless, while one would expect these men to have a glorious death in battle, they die defeated—almost humiliated— by illness. Previously strong and powerful men are now bedridden, not wounded by an enemy, but struck by an unnamed malady. Manuel and the general still enjoy the respect of their people, yet they cannot change the fatality of their illness.

Young Emes in the poem 'Εἰς τὸ Εὐνείον' does not enjoy the respect of other people and even if he dies, his parents will believe that he is still alive. Nevertheless, he is young and he plans his life. He has an aspiration he wants to seek and fulfil and he is full of life, if we only focus on his age. However, the illness and its fatality again disrupts everything and Emes ends up dead far from his parents and his home. Although young, he is another victim of the unnamed illness which so frequently brings death in Cavafy's poetry. Of course, Myres' sudden death is another example of Cavafy's young men who die, and his death shocked the narrator and presumably his lover.

In 'Ἰγνατίου Τάφος' we see a very significant change: the protagonist not only abandons his previous life in sin, but becomes a reader of the Scriptures; he becomes a real Christian similarly to Myres where though we have a third-person narrative. The reason is an unspecified illness and although his transformation did not heal him, according to his words he is happy that even late, he turned to God and lived according to Christian values.

As regards the poem 'Ἐν τῷ Μηνί Αἰθύρ', we explained that beyond the results of previous critique, the title in combination with medical and historical pieces of information suggests that the young Leucius died during winter because of a cold-related illness. Also, the poem on Ammones could be read with other historical information that shed light and show its medical background, as Ammones very likely died of plague. As regards the poem 'Ὠραία Λουλούδια καὶ Ἄσπρα ὡς Ταίριαζαν Πολύ', the poor financial state of the young men denotes that their well-being is under threat.

Chapter 2: Old age: life stage or illness?

2.1 Introduction

'That Old Age Is Itself a Disease';¹ this is the title that Jacob Hutter (1708-1768), an unknown doctor and pharmacist who later worked in his native Transylvania, gave his dissertation in 1732. Daniel Schäfer gives a full account of Hutter's theories: Schäfer's works are important for the full understanding of the thesis that old age is a disease. And, as we will see in this chapter, this is an opinion reflected in certain of Cavafy's poems, presenting old age as a kind of illness. Hutter's dissertation alludes to or quotes judgements from antiquity, like Plato's equation of childhood and old age, Aristotle's psychopathological characterisation of old people as greedy and Terence's and Seneca's satirical descriptions of old age as a kind of illness.²

Hutter, like other authors of the eighteenth century, quoted a particular passage from Terence's *Phormio*, in which the old Chremes replies to his brother Demipho, saying that the illness he is suffering from is old age itself. This opinion of an illness called 'old age' has affected common concepts of senility even up to our day. The assumption that old age is an illness is associated with the controversy about longevity and immortality and the question if life should be prolonged by medication. In his dissertation, Hutter claims that old age should be seen as a kind of illness, because it reduces a person's strength, disrupts the functions of the body and limits movement, in the same way other illnesses do. Also, Hutter refers to malfunctions of the body, part of the disease 'old age', like loss of warmth, malfunctioning of muscle fibres, decrease in fertility and also decline of mental and emotional capacities.³

Hutter starts his treatise with a short introduction (Prooemium) and then proceeds to the main part of the treatise, which is divided in thirty-six sections.⁴ But as Schäfer argues, the treatise may be separated into three main parts: the physiopathology of old age, the afflictions and illnesses associated with old age and finally the notion of the cure. In fact, by equating old age with illness, Hutter repeats his professor, Friedrich Hoffmann, who himself described old age as a kind of disease.⁵ These theories of disease and old age began in classical Greece and especially with Hippocrates and

¹ Jakob Hutter, *Tractatio Medica Qua Senectus Ipsa Morbus Sistitur. Das Ist: daß das alter an und vor sich selbest eine Kranckheit seye*, Halle an der Saale, Jo. Christian Hilliger, 1732.

² Daniel Schäfer, *Old Age and Disease in Early Modern Medicine*, tr. Patrick Baker (2011), 11 and Daniel Schäfer, "That senescence itself is an illness': a traditional medical concept of age and ageing in the eighteenth century", *Medical History*, 46 (2002), 525-548.

³ Schäfer, "That senescence itself is an illness", 525-526, 537-538.

⁴ Hutter, *Senectus Ipsa Morbus*, 5-44.

⁵ Schäfer, "That senescence itself is an illness", 537-542.

revolved around the questions whether old age is a natural or a pathological condition and if it is an illness in itself.⁶

According to Schäfer, ancient and medieval etymologies emphasised cultural-historical concepts and interpretations. For example, as Aristotle asserted, the Greek word for old age, 'γήρας', derives from 'γή', meaning earth. In that way, the term suggests the impending fate of elderly; an earthly grave. Again, ancient Latin poetry named the last stage of old age as 'silicernium' (a funeral feast), while 'silicerni' were the protagonists. In addition, Galen explains 'πέμπελος' as deriving from 'πομπήν πέμπεσθαι' ('to be sent to a funeral procession'). He also sees 'senium' as a path to death, related to the philosophical discussion of the period, especially Cicero and Seneca, and the Greek myth according to which Charon is one of the only figures who is an old man. Isidore's derivation of 'senex (old man) a sensus diminution (diminution of the senses)' is another example of 'this back-loaded interpretation of old age' and the support that was given in Christian culture. Ancient Greek culture's view of the ideal of the beautiful and good is captured by the idea of a youthful and athletic body. By contrast, old age means physical debility and ugliness and is depicted in poetry with grey hair, wrinkles, lack of teeth and other similar signs. Ancient poetry and tragedy lament the old man's weakness, social isolation, while old people are usually portrayed as sorrowful and resigned. Comedians like Aristophanes and Plautus mock old people, by presenting them stingy and ready to criticise and tyrannise young people; Aristotle considers the elderly incapable of friendship, pessimistic, irate and mistrustful.⁷

The views mentioned in the *Hippocratic Corpus* constituted the basis of the theory of old age which was expanded by Aristotle.⁸ From the observation of the greying of hair in some diseases, Aristotle concludes that 'disease is nothing other than acquired old age', whereas old age is a natural disease. Old age and disease differ in the fact that only old age can claim to be natural. It is also worth noting that Aristotle, following Plato, distinguished between violent death and natural death. Natural death is result of a natural old age and a continual decline of life.⁹

However, it is understandable that if such an assumption is removed from its original context it can be misinterpreted. Thus, Terence simplified Aristotle's deduction through the following form: old age is itself a disease, while Cicero said that old age should be seen like a disease. In response, Galen maintains that old age is not a disease, but a natural and unavoidable process.¹⁰

⁶ A. Ritch, 'History of geriatric medicine: from Hippocrates to Marjory Warren', *Journal of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh*, 42 (2012), 368-374.

⁷ Schäfer, *Old Age and Disease in Early Modern Medicine*, 15-17.

⁸ Ritch, 'History of geriatric medicine', 369.

⁹ Schäfer, *Old Age and Disease in Early Modern Medicine*, 19-21, 31. See also Robert Garland, *The Greek Way of Death* (New York, 2001), 13-14, 18-19.

¹⁰ Schäfer, *Old Age and Disease in Early Modern Medicine*, 20.

Late ancient texts, like those of the Byzantine Greek physician Paul of Aegina, are clearly based on Galen's assumption. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that the Byzantine Alexander of Tralles and the Arab Haly Abbas interpreted old age in the context of their fever theory as a natural kind of phthisis or marasmus. Alexander asserted that physicians should confront old age and 'real' marasmus, although there is no cure for them. His theory, applying to both 'real' and 'natural' marasmus was seen as a proof in early modern times that old age is indeed an illness.¹¹

As Schäfer also asserts, in the thirteenth century the anonymous author of *De Retardatione accidentium senectutis*, accepting Galen's view of old age as a natural process, agreed with Aristotle's assumption that the ageing process change through diet or secret medication. While he did not maintain clearly that old age equalled disease, he suggested that if the same phenomena which mainly connect to senility were supposed to occur earlier in life, they would be called illnesses. Aristotle's opinions were also used by Western medicine from the High Middle Ages until the seventeenth century. In addition, Terence's statement on old age as an illness was also widely read in the Middle Ages and known outside medicine.¹²

By around 1500, the disease 'old age' became a popular literary theme, because of certain hostility to senility in this era and the influence of humanism, which idealised authors of the ancient world like Terence and Seneca. For instance, Erasmus wrote a poem for the Basle physician Gulielmus Copus about the sufferings of old age, while Ambroise Pare (1510-1590) referred to old age as being a type of illness. This view of old age as illness broke down the Galenic construction of natural old age, emphasising the concept of illness. According to Schäfer, old age was treated in an unsympathetic way from the Renaissance; this negativity against old age was reflected in art and literature, while old age was a theme in many general medical works. The infirmity and weakness of old age were mainly seen in comparison to the previous stages of life, when the body was still healthy.¹³

Research on old age, Ritch explains, benefited from the contribution of French medicine in the nineteenth century. In 1854, Charles Durand-Fardel's treatise attempted to cover the whole field of disease in old age and connect pathology with accurate diagnosis, while in 1866, Jean Martin Charcot recognised that specific diseases, like osteomalacia and brain atrophy, appear indeed in old age. Charcot also claimed that conditions occurring at any time of life present special characteristics in later life. It is worth noting that Charcot's writings had been translated into English in 1882, as there was lack of papers on old age and disease in English. Daniel Maclachlan's treatise (1863) was among the few papers on the subject. Maclachlan included dryness and wasting in the physiological changes of old age, but he did not agree that death resulted from age alone. Finally, in the very first decades of

¹¹ Schäfer, "That senescence itself is an illness", 530.

¹² Schäfer, "That senescence itself is an illness", 530-531.

¹³ Schäfer, "That senescence itself is an illness", 531-532, 545-548.

the twentieth century, Ignatz Leo Nascher published some papers on the subject, concluding that the length of a person's life depends on the mode of life and diet. Nascher saw disease in old age as totally distinct from disease in maturity, and he strove for the establishment of geriatrics as a specialism.¹⁴

Generally speaking, as Bromley asserts in his introduction to gerontology, during the third age there are changes in a person's life that affect the body and mentality. After retirement, people encounter a lot of changes in their daily activities, social contacts and standards of living. The increased chances of disease make people disengage from their social commitments and interests. The reason of this disengagement is the inability to correspond to the physical and psychological demands. In fact, old age could be seen as an individual's diminished ability to front affairs of life.¹⁵

The human condition in old age is characterised by bodily decrepitude and reduction in functional abilities. This condition worsens through several other pathological disorders, including mental ones. Physical illness in old age causes psychological stress, because of pain, anxiety and general frustration. Thus, depression becomes a common mental disorder in later life,¹⁶ affecting people aged between 65 and 75.¹⁷ In depression, the elderly feel hopeless, despair and anxious without a good reason.¹⁸ This symptomatology is what we see in Cavafy and especially poems revolving around old age, like 'Ένας Γέρος' ('An Old Man') (1897)¹⁹ and 'Η Ψυχές των Γερόντων' ('The Souls of Old Men') (1901).²⁰ Although 'the souls' in the latter poem are slightly more enigmatic because they take on the qualities we associate with old men, in all these poems we see the boredom and loneliness of old men who sit 'all alone' in noisy coffee-shops or feel 'weary of the miserable life they must endure'.²¹

The risk for elderly people of developing a mental illness is high²² and depression in old age is frequently associated with a poor prognosis.²³ Depression is a major psychiatric disorder in old age and is divided into two categories: psychotic or endogenous and reactive or exogenous. The former is caused by factors within the person and the latter is attributed to stress imposed on the person. However, it is difficult to clarify if depression in old age is endogenous or exogenous.²⁴ Anxiety and depression in old age may be ignored, although they are treatable. Sometimes, depression in old age

¹⁴ Ritch, 'History of geriatric medicine', 370-372.

¹⁵ D. B. Bromley, *Human Ageing: an introduction to gerontology* (London, 1988), 23.

¹⁶ Bromley, *Human Ageing*, pp. 70-71. According to Bromley, dementia is another basic mental disorder in old age. In addition, as Bromley asserts, depression is sometimes diagnosed mistakenly as dementia.

¹⁷ Anonymous editorial, 'Depression in old age', *The British Medical Journal*, 1: 6017 (1976), 1031.

¹⁸ Bromley, *Human Ageing*, 247.

¹⁹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 4-5.

²⁰ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 6-7.

²¹ Translation by Sachperoglou, Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 4, 6.

²² Bromley, *Human Ageing*, 255.

²³ P. H. Millard, 'Depression in old age', *British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition)*, 287: 6389 (1983), 375-376.

²⁴ Bromley, *Human Ageing*, 247.

may be noticed, but remains untreated because of young people's attitude about the illnesses of old age.²⁵

According to Bromley, the elderly may be isolated by their contemporaries because of physical incapacity and from younger adults even more. 'Desolation' is even more serious than isolation and is associated with grief and apathy following the loss of a close relationship. 'Desolation' means that the old person is left alone, neglected and forsaken. 'Desolation' is a kind of emotional deprivation, implying that there is no one to confide.²⁶ Social isolation may be further enhanced by loss of initiative or because of disorders and other diseases, like arthritis or neurological disorders.²⁷ Quinodoz declares that although all people may have a feeling of loneliness, it becomes stronger as we grow older. It is a painful feeling, especially when we realise that nobody could live our life. Elderly people may experience this strong feeling of solitude when they face the fact of being old and closer to death and this is extremely anxiety-provoking. It is worth noting that some people as they grow old begin to feel persecuted by external persecutors or even lose interest in other people; they withdraw into themselves.²⁸

Above all, Bromley writes, the adjustment to the prospect of death is not always an easy process for old people. The idea of death can cause anxiety and other emotional reactions like anger, depression and guilt. Preparation and psychological support could help to alleviate such feelings. In old people the prospect of death has developed slowly and without proper adaptation to the circumstances, the awareness of death could evoke fear associated with isolation, loss and rejection.²⁹

On this awareness of death Quinodoz explains that apart from the fact that older people have to face unexpected illnesses, the gradual awareness that they are growing old means that they have to think of their own death. The end of their life causes upset and disruption to their body and on the way they feel about things. As opposed to young people, old people do not have illusions as they see the end of their life as something in the near future. Simply, what causes anxiety to the old people is the mortal condition of human beings and the inevitability of death.³⁰

Until the middle of the twentieth century, only a small minority of elderly, the healthy and wealthy, could enjoy economic security and a wide variety of activities.³¹ In addition, until the last

²⁵ Margaret M. Gullette, 'Ageism and social change: the new regimes of decline', in *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: what does mean to grow old*, ed. Thomas R. Cole-Ruth E. Ray-Robert Kastenbaum (Baltimore, 2010), 319-340.

²⁶ Bromley, *Human Ageing*, 142.

²⁷ No author, 'Depression in old age', 1031.

²⁸ Danielle Quinodoz, *Growing Old: a journey of self-discovery*, tr. David Alcorn (New York, 2010), 41, 87-88

²⁹ Bromley, *Human Ageing*, 294-295.

³⁰ Quinodoz, *Growing Old*, 41-42.

³¹ Ronald J. Manheimer, 'The five people you meet in retirement', in *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: what does mean to grow old*, ed. Thomas R. Cole-Ruth E. Ray-Robert Kastenbaum (Baltimore, 2010), 206-224.

quarter of the twentieth century, old age meant deterioration and a series of unalterable changes. Decline was seen as inevitable and disorders were viewed as senility; a term which signified the natural course of growing old.³² In the nineteenth century, during Cavafy's time, life expectancy was short, but generations were long; this meant that there was a small population of elderly people spread among a significantly larger younger generation.³³ This is an element we see in the poem 'Πολύ Σπανίως' ('Very Seldom') (1913),³⁴ as the poet contrasts the isolation of the old man who walks alone in the narrow streets to the group of youths who like his poems. Especially in the second half of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth century the health needs of the elderly were marginalised and gained recognition and inclusion only slowly. Later, the situation improved somewhat, since specialised medical literature on ageing was published with increased frequency.³⁵

³² Gene D. Cohen, 'Creativity and aging: psychological growth, health, and well-being', in *A Guide to Humanistic Studies in Aging: what does mean to grow old*, ed. Thomas R. Cole-Ruth E. Ray-Robert Kastenbaum (Baltimore, 2010), 182-205.

³³ Steven Ruggles, 'Multigenerational families in nineteenth-century America', *Continuity and Change*, 18: 1 (2003), 139-165.

³⁴ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 66-67.

³⁵ Christoph Conrad, 'Old age and the health care system in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries', in *Old Age from Antiquity to Post-Modernity*, ed. Paul Johnson and Pat Thane (New York, 1998), 132-145.

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What cumulatively emerges from the relevant poems is a sense, that Cavafy does not see any option or any chance for changing the inevitability of old age. The description of old age in his poems is very pessimistic and equated with disease. Old age is seen as a miserable stage of life. Old people are described as depressed, wretched and infirm human beings who have no hope or aims in life. Cavafy was one of the poets who saw and described old age as a malady, perhaps most vividly expressed in 'Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου· Ποιητού εν Κομμαγενή· 595 μ.Χ' ('Melancholy of Jason, Son of Kleander, Poet in Commagene, A.D. 595') (1921).³⁶

Old age not only appears in Cavafy as a malady, but permeates the whole corpus of his poetry.³⁷ As we will see, the theme of old age appears in early unpublished poems like the repudiated 'Ο Θάνατος του Αυτοκράτορος Τακίτου' ('The Death of the Emperor Tacitus') (1897).³⁸ More precisely, old age is the cause of Tacitus' death in this poem. But death, as a consequence of old age is also present in other poems, like 'Λυσίου Γραμματικού Τάφος' ('Tomb of the Grammarian Lysias') (1914),³⁹ 'Είγε Ετελεύτα' ('If Dead Indeed') (1920)⁴⁰ or the unfinished poem 'Σαμίου Επιτάφιον' ('Epitaph of a Samian') (1925).⁴¹

In 'Σαμίου Επιτάφιον', the dead man who is also the narrator of the poem asserts that he lived 'well into old age'.⁴² Inevitably, especially if we bear in mind his words in the poem that he worked even as an old man, his death should be seen as a consequence of old age.

According to Malanos, it could be said that Cavafy was born old, while he also declares that the poet was afraid of old age and death.⁴³ Through this phrase, the poet alludes to the limitations of time. Watching the burned-out candles, the poet feels that old age comes closer to him; and this makes him upset.⁴⁴ Even at the age of thirty, Cavafy seems to have been anxious about old age and death.⁴⁵

What seems to have preoccupied Cavafy particularly is the shameful condition of the old. To take one area we know to have been of interest to Cavafy in early years. As Edward H. Griffin writes, in the Homeric poems there are indications which make us believe that the Ancient Greeks had little

³⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 130-131.

³⁷ Pieris, *Χώρος, Φως και Λόγος*, 27-28, 156.

³⁸ Cavafy, *Αποκηρυγμένα Ποιήματα και Μεταφράσεις*, 50.

³⁹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 60-61.

⁴⁰ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 118-121.

⁴¹ Cavafy, *Ατελή Ποιήματα*, 215-226.

⁴² Translation by Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 376.

⁴³ Malanos, *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 22-23.

⁴⁴ T. Ch. Evdokas and O. Lambrakis, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: ψυχαναλυτική φιλολογική προσέγγιση* (Athens, 2010), 50-51

⁴⁵ Polis Modinos, 'Ο Καβάφης όπως τον γνώρισα', in *Κύκλος Καβάφη*, ed. Kostis Skalioras and Maria Kirtzaki (Athens, 1983), 210.

respect for old age. For instance, Achilles refers to the ill-treatment of Peleus, his father, who did not join the expedition to Troy and stayed at home, because he was too old and ill. Also, Laertes, Odysseus' father, was now living on a farm in the country of Ithaca in self-imposed poverty and hardship.⁴⁶

This disrespect for old age, although with not such intensity, is something we find in Cavafy too. Reading Cavafy's poems on old age, one could say that these disrespectful classical depictions of old age are not absent from poems like 'Ένας Γέρος' and 'Η Ψυχές των Γερόντων', that we are going to discuss in this chapter extensively. Cavafy's old men are infirm and weak people, living in isolation, even if they are presented to be at crowded places, like coffee-shops. They cannot get involved with the rest of society and they only live with the memories of their youth. Focusing on Cavafy's contemporary and rival Palamas, Doxas declares that he hated and was afraid of old age, expressing μισογεροντισμό;⁴⁷ this could be the case for Cavafy too.

Cavafy describes old age in a negative way reminiscent of descriptions of the classical tradition. According to Finley, apart from the heroic respect to old age, as reflected in Nestor whose antiquity is carefully documented and who represents an ideal completion of the heroic life, there is an underlying disdain at a number of levels. This perspective is reflected in the use of specific negative epithets to describe old age, like 'χαλεπόν' and 'λυγρόν'. These epithets place old age in a negative context, alluding to death, disease, wrath and grief, characterising old age as dreadful.⁴⁸ Such negative characterisations of old age, one could also see in Cavafy.

Fowler asserts that as the literature of Hellenic Greece broadens the imaginative view of the human condition, themes relevant to old age appear with the tragic element dominant. Bearing in mind the fact that the Greeks emphasised on the joy of free exercise of mind and body, old age could not be seen differently, than a time of tragic wasting. This element is evident in the riddle of the Sphinx: 'what creature ...goes on four feet in the morning, on two at noonday, on three in the evening?'. A thought which is expanded by the chorus in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, lamenting their aged state.⁴⁹

This theme of course goes far broader than ancient Greece. In 1978, Sohngen and Smith did a survey of 'images of old age as presented in poetry' and selected and published 127 poems listed under 'old age' in *Granger's Index to Poetry*.⁵⁰ The two researchers assumed that the poems would differ if the narrator was having the role of an older person or observing old age from the 'outside'.

⁴⁶ Edward H. Griffin, *Old Age in Literature and Life* (Baltimore, 1924), 11.

⁴⁷ Angelos Doxas, *Παλαμάς: ψυχολογική ανάλυση του έργου του και της ζωής του* (Athens, 1959), 144-147.

⁴⁸ M. I. Finley, 'Introduction: the elderly in classical antiquity', in *Old Age in Greek and Latin Literature*, ed. Thomas M. Falkner and Judith de Luce (New York, 1989), 1-20.

⁴⁹ David H. Fowler, Lois Josephs Fowler, and Lois Lamdin, 'Themes of old age in preindustrial western literature', in *Old Age in Preindustrial Society*, ed. Peter N. Stearns (London, 1982), 19-45.

⁵⁰ Klaus Peter Jochum, "Old men ought to be explorers': the poet and old age', *Old Age and Ageing in British and American Culture and Literature*, ed. Christa Jansohn (Münster, 2004), 15-28.

Nevertheless, such a distinction proved false, since the portrait of old age in the majority of the poems was negative, with only some minor differences between these two narrative points of view. The description of physical characteristics is mainly negative, focusing on the loss of beauty and strength, baldness, the decrepitude of skin and skeleton, physical infirmity and altered size. In addition, social and emotional losses were also very obvious, since the older person is frequently alone and isolated. This isolation is usually attributed to the loss of loved people, while the lack of employment and usefulness makes the old person lose hope.⁵¹ Such elements we see in Cavafy's old men where there is a consistent negative description of old age.

In one of his most famous personal notes, Cavafy asserted that he was a poet of old age. As opposed to other poets who wrote their best works in their youth, Cavafy declared that he was not inspired by events immediately, but only when the years pass:

Κατά γενικών κανόνων οι μεγάλοι συγγραφείς και ποιηταί έγραψαν τα καλύτερα τους έργα εις ηλικίαν νέαν, προ του γήρατος. Τα ζωηρότερα γεγονότα δεν μοι εμπνέουν αμέσως. Χρειάζεται πρώτα να περάσει καιρός. Κατόπιν τα ενθυμούμαι και εμπνέομαι.⁵²

(Generally speaking the great authors and poets wrote their best works in youth, before old age. The liveliest events do not inspire me immediately. It needs time to pass. Later I remember them and find inspiration).

Cavafy's obsession with old age is also evident in his following words:

Ο τεχνίτης και όταν ακόμα γηράσει, μπορεί να βρίσκει ενδιαφέρον και θερμή στη ζωή, χάρις στο ίδιο του το έργο. Είναι μέσω του έργου του που θα παρηγορηθεί, για το κακό που του επιφυλάσσουν τα χρόνια του γήρατος.⁵³

(The artist even when he grows old, he can find interest and warmth in life, because of his own work. It is through his work that he will be comforted, for the badness that the old age years keep for him).

It is not only that Cavafy refers to the old age of an artist, but moreover the fact that he denotes that old age reserves something bad for him. One could say that Cavafy associates old age with negative thoughts and feelings; old age is something bad in his mind. The only thing that seems to function as a kind of consolation for the artist is his work. This is an element we see in 'Πολύ Σπανίως' in which

⁵¹ Mary Sohngen and Robert J. Smith, 'Images of old age in poetry', *The Gerontologist*, 18 (1978), 181-186.

⁵² Lechonitis, *Καβάφικα Αυτοσχόλια*, 19.

⁵³ Cavafy in Malanos, *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 259.

young men recite the old man's poems and in 'Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου' Ποιητού εν Κομμαγηνή' 595 μ.Χ' in which the poetic ego seeks some sort of medication to poetry.

The question with which we now need to engage is what useful a medical humanities reading of Cavafy's poems on old age can offer that is new. Focusing on Thomas Mann's *Death in Venice*, English has argued that it is a useful text for the medical humanities, as it shows the ageing process very effectively, in a way that it could be a source for medical practitioners. *Death in Venice* combines disease, decay and death and their relationship to art. However, ageing undermines art, the inspiration for writing and disease. Thus, as English writes, these themes would not be related without ageing, which is the link connecting them together. *Death in Venice* is a story about disease, giving the protagonist a special point of view on his life and the inspiration to create art. Also, Aschenbach, the protagonist in the novella, experiences certain symptoms, like fatigue which makes him sit down and other 'physical signs of aging'.⁵⁴

These are elements we find in Cavafy's poetry too, as the symptomatology of a disease, the special viewpoint of an old man on his own life —especially on pleasures he did not enjoy as a young man— and the role of art, but in Cavafy as a kind of recognition of the old man's poetry, are basic themes in his poems revolving around old age. Consequently, in the same way that Mann's works are a useful tool for the medical practitioner dealing with old age, this is the case for Cavafy too, as his poems provide us with a comprehensive depiction of old age including certain feelings and difficulties of old age.

The medical humanities suggest a new reading of Cavafy's poems on old age. Although the relevant poems have been discussed by previous critics, like Savidis⁵⁵ and Malanos,⁵⁶ the suffering of human nature and especially elderly people has been analysed only at a very superficial level and without the thoroughness of the medical humanities. Previous critics have seen those poems as a depiction of Cavafy's personal preoccupation with old age, but the medical humanities come to show that Cavafy is also a poet with some knowledge of medical theories which are infused and manifested in his poems. Thus, going beyond the outcomes of previous critics, we are going to see that Cavafy's poems on old age can give the reader a new perspective through the medical humanities. Cavafy's protagonists are not just old men who experience the miserability of old age, and maybe reflect the poet's personal fears, but manifestations of the pathology of old age and depictions of old age as a disease.

⁵⁴ David English, 'Understanding aging: a medical humanities approach to 'Death in Venice'', *Berkeley Undergraduate Journal*, 20: 1 (2008), 1-35.

⁵⁵ In *Βασικά Θέματα*.

⁵⁶ In *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης*.

2.2 The representation of old age as a disease

Apart from the fact that the personal notes mentioned above show clearly Cavafy's obsession with old age, they constitute evidence that he perceived old age not as a normal stage of human life, but as a miserable condition which in some significant sense lies outside the sphere of life. As it is set by him especially in the second note, poetry (or art in general) is perhaps the only authentic consolation for old age. This negative perception of old age is not only reflected in his notes. In contrast, his poems are frequently a reflection of this understanding of old age. In a certain number of poems, Cavafy perceives and depicts old age as a deadly condition; or more precisely as a deadly disease.

The equation of old age with a deadly disease is the subject of the repudiated poem 'Ο Θάνατος του Αυτοκράτορος Τακίτου' ('The Death of the Emperor Tacitus') (1897). The poem starts by announcing the illness of Tacitus:

Ειν' ασθενής ο αυτοκράτωρ Τάκιτος,
Το γήρας του δεν ηδυνήθη το βαθύ
τους κόπους του πολέμου να αντισταθή.

Cavafy introduces the reader to the subject of the poem from the very first lines, by saying that Tacitus 'is ailing' and 'in his deep old age he was unable to resist the ravages of war'⁵⁷. Interestingly, the word 'ασθενής', which is used in the poem to describe Tacitus' poor health, does not appear in Cavafy's collected poems.⁵⁸ Without any specific pieces of information about Tacitus' health, the only thing Cavafy says is that he is ill. Cavafy also attributes Tacitus' illness to the fact that he is an old man and he cannot stand up to the strains of war.

In the following lines, Cavafy provides the reader with the place of Tacitus' death:

Εις μισητόν στρατόπεδον κατάκοιτος,
εις τ' άθλια τα Τύανα-τόσω μακράν!-

Tacitus fell sick and died in Tyana, in Asia Minor, far from his homeland. The word 'κατάκοιτος' ('bedridden'), which is used by Cavafy to describe Tacitus' illness, gives the impression of a long period of malady. It recalls a person who is ill and is unable to rise from the bed. In any case, it is not a malady

⁵⁷ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 231.

⁵⁸ It appears in the following repudiated poems: 'Αοιδός' ('Bard') (as 'ασθένεια') in Cavafy, *Αποκηρυγμένα Ποιήματα και Μεταφράσεις*, 26, 'Η ψήφος της Αθήνας' ('Athena's Vote') (as 'ασθενείζ') in Cavafy, *Αποκηρυγμένα Ποιήματα και Μεταφράσεις*, 32-33, 'Φωναί γλυκείαι' ('Sweet Voices') (as 'ασθενής') in Cavafy, *Αποκηρυγμένα Ποιήματα και Μεταφράσεις*, 36 and 'Τα βήματα των Ευμενίδων' ('The Eumenides' Footfalls') (as 'ασθενή') in Cavafy, *Αποκηρυγμένα Ποιήματα και Μεταφράσεις*, 51.

which causes death just in a few days. Also, it is worth noting, that this word does not appear in any other poem of Cavafy. One could say that by using the word ‘κατάκοιτος’, Cavafy intends to create a verbal play with Tacitus’ name: ‘Τάκιτος’ and ‘κατάκοιτος’. The word ‘κατάκοιτος’ alludes to Tacitus’ name and insinuates his fate: he would die after a long period of being bedridden. Also, the name Tacitus means ‘silent’ as it derives from the Latin verb ‘taceo’ which means ‘I am silent’.

Also, the use of the adjectives ‘μσητόν’ (‘hateful’) and ‘άθλια’ (‘miserable’) to describe the camp and Tyana, respectively, could imply Tacitus’ reluctance to succeed the emperor Aurelian, who was assassinated.⁵⁹ As Peridis claims, the Senate, which did not want Tacitus anymore, voted for war against the Goths and sent him as the leader of legions to Asia Minor, where he finally died.⁶⁰

Tacitus’ reluctance to go to Tyana is more evident in the second half of the poem, in which Tacitus ‘curses in his agony on the spiteful Senate’:

την φίλην ενθυμείται Καμπανίαν του,
τον κήπον του, την έπαυλιν, τον πρωινόν
περίπατον-τον βίον του προ εξ μηνών.-
και καταράται εις την αγωνίαν του
την Σύγκλητον, την Σύγκλητον την μοχθηράν.

The Senate is spiteful, because what it wanted to achieve was Tacitus’ death. The war against the Goths was a good means to succeed in their plans. Tacitus died, remembering his villa in Campania,⁶¹ with its gardens and his morning walk. According to the poem, this is the life Tacitus had six months ago (‘προ εξ μηνών’).

Six months ago, Tacitus left his villa to fight against the Goths. Even if the reader bears in mind that Tacitus travelled for about a month to reach Tyana and stayed there for another month until he ailed, this period of six months which is given in the poem could be seen as an indirect reference to the length of Tacitus’ illness. One could say that he was ‘κατάκοιτος’ for a period of four months roughly, before he finally died. By mentioning of this six months period, Cavafy provides us with another important element, which directs us to the conclusion that Tacitus’ illness lasted for a long period and his death was not a sudden event.

Cavafy’s poem does not give a specific name of disease. It only says that Tacitus is ill and too old to engage in warfare. In that way, Cavafy connects the death of Tacitus exclusively with senility and implies that the name of Tacitus’ malady is senility itself. This should be seen as the reason of

⁵⁹ Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 522.

⁶⁰ Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη*, 149.

⁶¹ Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη*, 149.

Tacitus' death in the poem. Cavafy does not refer to any other details. He explains Tacitus' weakness to fight and be vigorous in this campaign against the Goths, as a result of his senility. An illness which, after it kept Tacitus bedridden for a long period, finally caused his death. One could say that while Tacitus should have earned the right to *otium*, this does not happen; something which the old men in Cavafy never seem to get the chance to enjoy. In the poem "Ένας Γέρος", which we will discuss extensively in the following part of the chapter, this becomes a key element. While the old man seems to have some leisure time and visits the coffee shop, it is not something he enjoys as it seems more like a chore that exhausts him.

2.3 Symptomatology of old age

Cavafy's perception and depiction of old age as a specific disease is further developed with the representation of a series of particular symptoms. The symptoms of old age, as a specific disease are clearly denoted in the poem 'Ένας Γέρος' ('An Old Man') (1897); a work clearly dealing with old age.⁶² For Arseniou, the character of the poem, apart from representing old age, alludes to repressed impulses of youth.⁶³ Peridis noted that Cavafy was doubtless inspired by a poem of Jean Lahor with the same title, a point developed by Malanos.⁶⁴

Malanos claims that the inspiration derives from Lahor's poem with the same title (the poem 'Le vieillard', from the collection *L'illusion*),⁶⁵ and the two old men of the poems present significant similarities. They only differ in the fact that Lahor's old man is a bystander of others, while Cavafy's old man is of himself. Malanos focuses on the beginning and the end of the two poems which are identical indeed, presenting an old man bending on a table and sleeping as he lives in boredom.⁶⁶ It could be said that Cavafy's poem is almost a free translation of Lahor's poem.⁶⁷

However, beyond the similarities between the two poems and the fact that Cavafy was familiar with French poetry, we need to bear in mind that Jean Lahor, pseudonym of Henri Cazalis, was a physician. Thus, it could be said that Cavafy turned to his poetry in order to study the pathology of old age as described by a poet who is also a physician. Apart from being a poem clearly alluding to a French poem by a poet-physician, 'Ένας Γέρος' is also evidence of Cavafy's preoccupation with medical theories.

The poem comprises six three-line stanzas. In the first stanza, the poet introduces a lonely old man in a noisy café:⁶⁸

Στου καφένιου του βοερού το μέσα μέρος
σκυμμένος στο τραπέζι κάθεται ένας γέρος·
με μιαν εφημερίδα εμπρός του, χωρίς συντροφιά.

By presenting a lonely old man ('χωρίς συντροφιά') in a noisy café ('βοερού καφενείου'), Cavafy creates a strong antithesis. The loneliness of the old man becomes more intense, since he is alone in a place where everyone goes to speak with other people and socialise. As opposed to that, the old

⁶² Savidis, 'Ανέκδοτα σημειώματα ποιητικής και ηθικής', 112.

⁶³ Elisavet Arseniou, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: η Αξία της Ποίησης* (Athens, 2016), 39.

⁶⁴ Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη*, 174.

⁶⁵ Jean Lahor, *L'illusion* (Paris, 1888), 240.

⁶⁶ Malanos, *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 293.

⁶⁷ See also E. Politou-Marmarinou, 'Ο Καβάφης και ο γαλλικός παρανασισμός: θεωρητικές απόψεις για την ποίηση', *Παρουσίαση*, 2 (1984), 71-81, on Cavafy's relationship with French poetry and Lahor.

⁶⁸ Ilinskaya, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 84.

man of the poem is alone ‘with his head bent over a table and his newspaper in front of him’.⁶⁹ As described by Cavafy in the poem, the café is a noisy place, implying that this is a place where people go to meet their friends and talk. Instead of that, the old man has no friends and nobody talks to him. He sits alone with a newspaper.

The first three lines describe the misery and loneliness of old age. The image of the old man sitting in a noisy café describes an atmosphere of isolation or even desolation and abandonment. The old man only holds the newspaper; he does not really read it, since his head is ‘bent over the table’. Nobody comes closer to him. The description of the old man seems to be the description of a person who is disappointed by the ending of his life.⁷⁰ In fact these are symptoms of depression. And although Cavafy does not clearly mention depression, the old man’s behaviour in the café alludes to such symptoms.

This disappointment becomes stronger in the next stanza:

Και μες στων άθλιων γηρατειών την καταφρόνεια
σκέπτεται πόσο λίγο χάρηκε τα χρόνια
που είχε και δύναμι, και λόγο, κ’ εμορφιά.

In these lines, the old man remembers his youth; these are the years he had ‘good looks and strength and clever things to say’. The poet describes even more clearly the misery of old age, not only by characterising the old age as ‘άθλια’, but also by presenting the old man remembering his past.⁷¹ In that way, the poet implies that the old man has nothing to do, than thinking of his former life. Currently, he lives in boredom and depression. In addition, the old man seems to regret the things he did not dare to do when he was young. That is why Cavafy presents the old man thinking: ‘how little he enjoyed the years’. Now, although he wants to do what he did not do during his youth, he cannot because he lost his ‘good looks and strength and clever things to say’; characteristics only of youth.

In truth, here, Cavafy gives three more symptoms of old age. These are: loss of vigour or physical strength, loss of eloquence which also presupposes a mental disorder affecting an individual’s speech and finally loss of beauty, since his appearance now is wretched and affected by years.

In the next stanza the man appears to realise that he is old and has lost his strength:

Ξέρει που γέρασε πολύ· το νοιώθει, το κυττάζει.
Κ’ εν τούτοις ο καιρός που ήταν νέος μοιάζει

⁶⁹ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Robert Pinsky in David Ricks (ed.), *Modern Greek Writing: an anthology in English translation* (London, 2003), 143-144.

⁷⁰ Evdokas and Lambrakis, Κ. Π. *Καβάφης*, 46.

⁷¹ Evdokas and Lambrakis, Κ. Π. *Καβάφης*, 46.

σαν χθες. Τι διάστημα μικρό, τι διάστημα μικρό.

The old man is aware and confesses his situation. His consciousness is denoted in the first line: 'he knows he's quite old now'. According to Evdokas and Lambrakis, the verb 'νοιώθει' shows that the old man senses he grew old, while 'κυττάζει' shows that he can see himself. These two verbs are very important. 'Νοιώθει' alludes to his poor health and lost strength. He senses that he is not young; inevitably he lost his strength and health. In addition, by saying 'κυττάζει', Cavafy makes reader imagine that the old man is in front of a mirror watching himself and comparing how he once looked. Nonetheless, 'it seems like yesterday when he was still young'. The old man thinks of his youth: 'how quickly, how quickly it slipped away'. Although he knows that he is old now, the old man does not seem to accept that the years passed so quickly, and he reminds himself that when he was young it was like yesterday.⁷²

In the next stanza of the poem, the old man feels that he has been deceived by prudence:

Και συλλογιέται η Φρόνησις πως τον εγέλα·
και πως την εμπιστεύονταν πάντα —τι τρέλλα!—
την ψεύτρα που έλεγε: «Αύριο. Έχεις πολύν καιρό.»

The old man thinks that Prudence or logic deceived him, because he always trusted her. Also, he characterises Prudence as folly and liar.⁷³ Here, the old man shows, again, that he regrets for things he did not do when he was young. Then, Prudence obstructed him from doing things that his young instinct was tempting him to do. One could say that we have a conflict between prudence and instinct. When he was young, his instinct was telling him to try new things and gain experience. But prudence was blocking him, by saying that he can try the next day since he is still too young. But now, the old man sees that Prudence is a liar and folly.

In the following stanza, Cavafy presents the old man remembering the joys he was deprived of:

Θυμάται ορμές που βάσταγε· και πόση
χαρά θυσίαζε. Την άμυαλη του γνώσι
καθ' ευκαιρία χαμένη τώρα την εμπαίζει.

⁷² Evdokas and Lambrakis, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 47.

⁷³ Evdokas and Lambrakis, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 47.

The verb 'βάσταγε' is prominent here, since it denotes that he sacrificed his joy.⁷⁴ In addition, 'βάσταγε' presupposes the conflict between his instinct and prudence, we saw analysing the previous stanza. Although he was ready to follow his instinct and try new things which give joy, his prudence was advising him not to proceed. Thus, as a young man, he 'suppressed impulses', because prudence used to prevail over instinct. Consequently, he did not enjoy his life, as he would like to.

Here, Cavafy refers to a fifth symptom of old age, the absence of erotic drive. 'Ορμές' ('impulses') suggests sexual pleasures. This is what he was been long deprived of and now mourns. He lost the opportunity to satisfy his sexual impulses, because he followed the wrong route of prudence. Now he is old and apart from the fact that he has not these strong impulses, he is tortured by the thought that once he could have more intense sexual action. The malady that Cavafy proposes here, old age, eliminates impulses and desire for sexual pleasure. It is worth noting that there is a gradual reduction with age in frequency of all types of sexual behaviour, while the absence of adequate stimulus may contribute to the reduction of sexual activity.⁷⁵

By saying, that 'every chance he lost ridicules his brainless prudence another way', Cavafy intends to show that the old man mocks and laughs at himself.⁷⁶ It seems that Cavafy attempts to create the following imagery: the old man sits alone and smiles in the corner of a café; but his smile is not a smile of happiness. It is a sarcastic one. Now, he sees that he should not follow Prudence's advice. In contrast, he should listen to the voice of his instinct. But since he did not do that, he is mocking himself.

Finally, the old man falls asleep:

... Μα απ' το πολύ να σκέπτεται και να θυμάται
ο γέρος εζαλίσθηκε. Κι αποκοιμάται
στου καφενείου ακουμπισμένος το τραπέζι.

As we can see, all these thoughts in connection with his old age exhausted him; he does not want to remember. The only way for the old man to get rid of this weariness and dizziness is to sleep⁷⁷ 'on the table in the noisy café'. In fact, dizziness and sleep should be also seen as a sixth symptom of old age, which could be connected with the symptom of bodily infirmity, as the latter causes dizziness and makes the old man sleepy.

⁷⁴ Evdokas and Lambrakis, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 48.

⁷⁵ Bromley, *Human Ageing*, 66.

⁷⁶ Evdokas and Lambrakis, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 48.

⁷⁷ Evdokas and Lambrakis, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 48.

In the last two stanzas of the poem, there is another strong contradiction. In the penultimate stanza, the old man is presented as remembering, that when he was young not only did he have so many impulses, also had the spiritual strength to restrain them with his prudence. As opposed to his youth's strength, in the last stanza of the poem, the man cannot even think, since he feels dizzy. Thus, the strength which characterised him during his youth has been replaced by inability and weakness, symptoms of his senescence. While in the previous stanza, the man was a strong person who could defeat his impulses, now he is a miserable old man, who gets exhausted only by thinking.

In the poem, depression, loss of strength, loss of eloquence, loss of beauty, lack of drive and erotic desire, dizziness accompanied by bodily infirmity and sleep are symptoms of the protagonist's disease: 'old age'. A similar series of symptoms experienced by an individual appears in the poem 'Η Ψυχές των Γερόντων' ('The Souls of Old Men') (1901).⁷⁸ These two poems denote that nothing could change when someone is growing old, juxtaposing old age with temporary youth.⁷⁹ 'Η Ψυχές των Γερόντων' begins by making a distinction:

Μεσ τα παληά τα σώματά των τα φθαρμένα
κάθονται των γερόντων η ψυχές.

The splitting of the self into two distinct elements alludes to the form of a marked antithesis, between soul and body, as Roilos says. Old men are described as 'idiosyncratic subjects', separated into two independent entities, which are the 'reified body' (or skin, as Cavafy mentions in the last line of the poem) and the 'personified soul' which assumes some grotesque characteristics.⁸⁰

Here, it is important to look at the way Steven Connor explains the function of skin. As opposed to the other parts of the body, 'the skin is not detachable in such a way that the detached part would remain recognisable', because 'the skin always takes the body with it'. As Connor also asserts 'the skin connects, and connects with everything'. Also, there is 'a close relation between the skin and the activity of thought', while certain emotions like 'shock, trauma, grief, fear, anxiety and shame' could be seen as states the skin reveals. From this perspective, the skin becomes the 'vehicle of feelings'.⁸¹ Consequently, what Cavafy suggests in the poem is at odds with Connor's description

⁷⁸ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, pp. 6-7. According to Tzouvelis, a poem that shows Cavafy's anxiety of old age (Spyros Tzouvelis, *Ταξίδι στην Ιστορία με τον Καβάφη* (Athens, 1998)), 101. It is also worth noting that commenting on Cavafy's essay «Αι σκέψεις ενός γέροντος καλλιτέχνη», Savidis asserts that in this essay and the poems «Ένας γέρος» and «Η Ψυχές των γερόντων», the reader encounters thoughts on old age from an external consideration (Savidis, 'Αι σκέψεις ενός γέροντος καλλιτέχνη', in *Μικρά Καθαφικά*, 151).

⁷⁹ Anastasiadis in *Ο Καβάφης και οι Νέοι*, ed. D. N. Maronitis (Athens, 1984), 43.

⁸⁰ Panagiotis Roilos, 'The seduction of the real: personification and mimesis in C. P. Cavafy', in Roilos, *Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2010), 219-244.

⁸¹ Steven Connor, *The Book of Skin* (London, 2004), 29, 35, 99.

above which manifests the connection between skin, body and feelings. In contrast, Cavafy's description depicts body and skin in a condition of dissociation with soul, as they function independently. Through this metaphor, Cavafy shows the miserability of old age in a very intense way.

These lines give a rather miserable description, like the description of the old man in the previous poem. The bodies are portrayed as old and worn-out, clearly denoting how much they have been affected by years. And this is the first symptom of old age in this poem. The souls are just sitting in them. The use of the verb 'κάθονται' shows that souls do not move. They are not doing anything; they just sit or dwell in the body.

In the next lines, the reader sees an atmosphere of boredom, where the souls are further estranged from their bodies; they do not seem to communicate at all. The souls dwell in the bodies in a situation of apathy. This estrangement is more evident in the next lines:

Τι θλιβερές που είναι η πτωχός
και πως βαρρουνται την ζωή την άθλια που τραβούνε.

The souls are characterised by the poet as 'θλιβερές' ('sorry', 'pathetic' or 'miserable'), because of 'the miserable life they must endure'⁸². The souls are bored, living such a life. We have seen analysing the previous two lines that the souls only sit or dwell in the body, without doing anything. Nevertheless, the fact that the poet, now, says that the souls are bored with their miserable life shows that they would like to do something different. They would like to move, for instance, but they cannot, because of the inability of the bodies they 'τραβούνε' ('endure'). Again, depression appears as a symptom of old age, through the boredom that the souls experience.

Although the object of the verb 'τραβούνε' is 'ζωή' ('life'), one could say that this is an indirect means for the poet to create a very representative scene; almost a violent one: reading the poem, the reader can imagine an anthropomorphised soul to 'drag' ('τραβά') an old body, almost dead. This shows the divergence between soul and body.

As in 'Ένας Γέρος', in which the poet still wants to do things he did not do when he was young, but cannot any more because he has lost his strength, in 'Η Ψυχές των Γερότων', the souls would like to move, implying that they want to abandon their situation of immovability. But, again, they cannot, because their bodies are not young and strong. Alike the previous poem, this poem describes bodily infirmity as another symptom of old age. Besides, the verb 'τραβούνε' presupposes strength. And souls are still strong enough to drag their bodies along. Again, we have a contradiction between soul,

⁸² For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 7.

which is still strong and would like to do things, and body, which is old and unable to meet the needs of soul.

In the following lines of the poem, the souls are presented as upset and contradictory:

Πως τρέμουν μην την χάσουνε και πως την αγαπούνε
 η σασιτισμένες κι αντιφατικές
 ψυχές, που κάθονται —κωμικοτραγικές—
 μες στα παληά των τα πετσιά τ' αφανισμένα.

The souls 'tremble lest they lose' their lives and they are characterised by the poet as 'σασιτισμένες' ('upset') and 'αντιφατικές' ('contradictory'). Nevertheless, there is no real fear of death, as one could assume, but rather a longer than normal status of senility. This is implied in the ending lines of the poem, in which the word 'σώματα' ('bodies') has been substituted by the word 'πετσιά' ('skin'), and the characterisation 'φθαρμένα', by that of 'αφανισμένα'. This transformation of the words in the poem denotes a continual transformation on the body or more clearly decay, but no approach of death.

'Αφανισμένα πετσιά' ('ravaged hides') is a rather cruel description which makes more obvious the misery of old age. Definitely, not a nice word to describe the condition of an old man, 'πετσιά' suggests a very negative view of old age and the miserability of old men in general. To a certain extent offensive and disrespectful, 'πετσιά' does not allude to human beings but rather to clear skins without personality.⁸³ In addition, the word 'κωμικοτραγικές' ('tragicomic') in dashes insinuates an external point of view; how a young person sees old age. Although someone younger would feel sorry for the dreadful condition of an old person, he would also laugh watching him unable to move or do basic things in life, like walking. In addition, the bystander characterises old men's souls as tragicomic, because he probably knows: although the old man is afraid of his life, there is no real fear, since the old man who is 'patient' of his senility, is a condemned to live in a protracted state of old age without death.

Through the unusual emphasis on skin and of course his refusal to use the word 'δέρμα', Cavafy makes stronger the estrangement between body and soul in old age. As opposed to the souls of old men which are afflicted by the bodily weakness and they are condemned to live in boredom, the young men's bodies are strong enough to satisfy any needs and desires of the souls. There is no estrangement. Although he can see the bodily weakness of the old man and commiserates with him,

⁸³ Babiniotis explains the word as the natural outer integument of a human's or an animal's body, synonym to 'δέρμα'. He also gives the idiomatic phrase 'μένω πετσιά και κόκκαλο' as a phrase showing someone's weakness, while 'πετσιά' can also denote something that has hardened—became tough. Of course, the tough flesh of the old man in the poem opposes the fresh flesh of youth.

a young and strong man finds it comic to watch a person who cannot do things that he himself could easily do, because he cannot understand his bodily weakness. One could also say, that this estrangement between body and soul in old age, which is absent in youth, since body and soul communicate between each other, constitutes an indirect reference to the generational chasm. However, it also alludes to a comment by Valerie Gillies, poet and cancer survivor, that in cases of trauma body, mind and spirit disconnect.⁸⁴ And indeed, old age in the poem appears as a moment of trauma where there is disconnection between spirit and body.

To sum up, the presentation of old age in Cavafy's poetry can be enlightened by recourse to the medical humanities literature, since, once we examine the poems more closely in this light and not in a moralistic spirit as former critique did, we see that old age is embodied as a kind of disease with certain symptoms which are unflinchingly described, and which run counter to the culturally respected presence of old age in Cavafy's Greek world. While 'γέροντες' according to its traditional meaning, denotes respected persons held in high esteem by the rest of society, in Cavafy's poetry 'γέροντες' are only miserable figures who have nothing of the authorities and respect of this traditional understanding. As depicted in the two poems analysed in this unit, the symptoms of senility are depression, loss of vigour, loss of physical strength, loss of beauty and wear, lack of any erotic impulses and dizziness with sleepiness. One could say that Cavafy's approach of old age is a rather phenomenological approach.

According to Carel, who has focused and developed the phenomenology to illness into a 'patient toolkit', phenomenology can provide patients with certain tools to reflect on and expand their understanding of their illness. As Carel writes, a phenomenological resource could help patients in a way that they would examine their illness and its impact in their lives. Without asserting of course that Cavafy was aware of such phenomenological approaches, the description of old age in his poetry is structured in such a way that he not only examines old age as a malady, but in addition he gives certain symptoms. Indeed, Carel claims that while a specialist attends to symptoms as diagnostic tools, a patient sees the illness as a central figure of his life, while at the same time he attends to symptoms as pervasive.⁸⁵

In addition, another step of this toolkit that Carel suggests, is how the illness changes one's 'being in the world', a term used by Heidegger to show the human being in the widest sense. This is the step when an illness changes one's being in the world, as illness enforces a distance from daily routine. And of course, if we look at the old man in the poem 'Ένας Γέρονς', we can see that we have such an example, of a man who lost his vigour and strength and probably the position he enjoyed in

⁸⁴ Laura Severin, 'Redefining the poet as healer: Valerie Gillies's collaborative role in the Edinburgh Marie Curie Hospice quiet room project', *Literature and Medicine*, 33: 1 (2015), 184-201.

⁸⁵ Carel, *Illness*, xvii-xviii.

the society as a young man. A position which has been altered into a marginal role reflected through his loneliness at the coffee-shop. The phenomenology of the illness describes life-altering symptoms,⁸⁶ and Cavafy is very descriptive in the way that symptoms of old age are embodied in his poetry.

As outlined by Carel, phenomenology is important, because it focuses on a person's own experience and sees illness as a way of living, experiencing the world and interacting with other people. Phenomenological approach is a philosophical one, as it advocates and focuses on the description of lived experience and consciousness, as we cannot experience anything outside our experience.⁸⁷ Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition of the early twentieth century and deals with phenomena, instead of the reality of things. Focusing on the experiences, it examines how phenomena appear to consciousness and the encounter between consciousness and the world.⁸⁸

Phenomenology may be used to order and describe the experiences of illness and provide an account of the embodied nature of illness. In addition, it can describe changes to agency and interaction to the environment, asking how patients experience their disorder as the focus is on the ill person. Phenomenology examines illness as a disruption of the body and explains experience as a fundamental and embodied part in a certain environment. Illness causes disruption of the lived body, interrupting one's relation with the environment.⁸⁹

According to Merleau-Ponty, perceptual experience constitutes the foundation of subjectivity, as the kind of creatures we are depends on the types of experiences we have and is defined by the actions we perform. The body is 'the origin of the rest, expressive movement itself, that which causes them to begin to exist as things, under our hands and eyes.' Merleau-Ponty understands the body and perception as the core of personality or subjectivity, while to think of a human being is to think of an understanding, feeling and thinking animal.⁹⁰

Returning to Cavafy's representation of old age in the poems discussed, one can see a lively description of certain symptoms which can be illuminated by reference to this phenomenological tradition, as Cavafy's old men distance themselves from their environment. They experience their malady from a very personal point of view and one could say that the description of old age in these poems is rather subjective and reflects personal experiences and feelings.

⁸⁶ Carel, *Illness*, pp. xx, 11 and Havi Carel, 'Phenomenology as a resource for patients', *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 37 (2012), 96-113.

⁸⁷ Carel, *Illness*, 12.

⁸⁸ Havi Carel, 'Phenomenology and its application in medicine', *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*, 32: 1 (2011), 33-46.

⁸⁹ Carel, 'Phenomenology as a resource for patients', 100.

⁹⁰ Merleau-Ponty in Carel, 'Phenomenology and its application in medicine', 35-37.

2.4 Poetry as antidote to age

We have seen how Cavafy emphasises the individual, in what might be termed a phenomenological approach. Cavafy's old men are persons without strength and impulses. It seems that the role of masculinity is minimised or even vanishes. Masculinity is totally absent from these poems, while these old men live only with the memories of their youth. As Skouras writes, Cavafy sees old age with such revulsion, because the decline and wear of the body is a decline of erotic desires and impulses too. To justify on that, Skouras⁹¹ focuses on the first two lines of the poem 'Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου· Ποιητού εν Κομμαγηνή· 595 μ.Χ' ('Melancholy of Jason, Son of Kleander, Poet in Commagene, A. D. 595') (1921),⁹² a poem whose central character is not in fact old by normal standards:

Το γήρασμα του σώματος και της μορφής μου
είναι πληγή από φρικτό μαχαίρι.

Inevitably, the question arising is whether there is an antidote to this condition of old age or not. Is there a cure or medicine that could relieve these old men?

The answer is given in the same poem by the poet:

Εις σε προστρέχω Τέχνη της Ποιήσεως,
που κάπως ξέρεις από φάρμακα·
νάρκης του άλγους δοκιμές, εν Φαντασία και Λόγω.

Είναι πληγή από φρικτό μαχαίρι.—
Τα φάρμακα σου φέρε Τέχνη της Ποιήσεως,
που κάμνουνε —για λίγο— να μη νοιώθεται η πληγή.

The speaker is a poet who laments the miseries of ageing, as he perceives the loss of his former beauty as wounds from a merciless knife. Through the application of its medicines, poetry can heal temporarily a disease afflicting an artist. As Jusdanis claims, art works as a therapeutic agent and its prescriptions are effective, if only for a short time. In the poem, poetry helps the poet to experience erotic pleasure, by escaping from old age and its reality.⁹³ Consequently, the reader can assume that the poet, through the therapeutic agency of poetry, suggests some sort of placebo (a topic that we

⁹¹ Fotis Skouras, 'Η σχιζοφρενική έμπνευση στο έργο του Καβάφη', *Deltos*, 12 (1996), 5-7, 10-13. The article was first published in *Ελληνική Ιατρική*, 9 (1935), 748-760.

⁹² Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 130-131.

⁹³ Gregory Jusdanis, *The Poetics of Cavafy* (Princeton, 1987), 86-87.

saw in ‘Μανουήλ Κομνηνός’ and will also see in Chapter 3 on alcoholism). In any case, the poem is a very rare case where the idea of taking medicine is alluded to.

The poet ‘appeals to’ the ‘Art of Poetry’ to ‘numb the pain in Imagery and Word’,⁹⁴ reminding Tennyson’s poem V from *In Memoriam*, where we also see such references to ‘drugs’ and ‘numbing pain’: ‘like dull narcotics, numbing pain’ and ‘in words, like weeds, I ‘ll wrap me o’er’.⁹⁵ According to Ricks, the reader can see ‘a similar mixture of emotions’ in the two poems, while Tennyson’s wording is echoed by Cavafy.⁹⁶ In ‘Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου’ Ποιητού εν Κομμαγηνή’ 595 μ.Χ’, the poetic ego seeks its ‘soothing drugs’ that help ‘to benumb the wound’. It seems that the ageing of the poet’s body is more like an imaginary process existing in his mind. Thus, poetry is the fictitious medicine that could help him feel better; a placebo that could give him an escape from his misery. The reader of the poem can assume that Jason suffers from melancholy, as the title clearly suggests, but he does not need or seeks a different treatment, like a real medication. Although he admits that he ‘can endure it no more’, he only turns to poetry as the soothing medicine he is looking for.

Melancholy is a term or ‘label for a nosological category’. According to Matthew Bell, melancholia came to be replaced in mainstream psychiatry around 1900, but it did not disappear entirely. It is still in use ‘on the margins of psychiatry, as, for instance, in psychoanalysis’. ‘Melancholic depression describes a series of symptoms which are similar to depressive illness’. Although melancholia’s symptoms are central to the definition of depression, as a nosological term or category ‘it has been reduced to a mere adjective’. While the term ‘melancholia’ has been marginalised by twentieth-century psychiatry, psychiatrists proceeded with ‘a disease construct, depression, that shared its core psychological symptoms with the melancholia observed by Hippocrates’ thousands of years before. In fact, during the last hundred years, as Bell asserts, we became more comfortable with the word ‘depression’.⁹⁷

‘Melancholia was part of medical theory and practice’ and as a term it appeared in the medical writings ‘attributed to Hippocrates and his school’. It was through medical texts and practices that later antiquity gained knowledge about the disease. As regards the Greek origin of the word (μέλας+χολή=black+bile) was dependent on medicine, while two hundred years prior to Hippocrates’ use of melancholia, the word ‘χολή’ had a psychological use ‘in the sense of anger’ in poetry. In

⁹⁴ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 131.

⁹⁵ Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*, ed. William J. Rolfe (Boston and New York, 1895), 7.

⁹⁶ David Ricks, ‘Cavafy’s quarrel with Tennyson’, in *The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Europe*, ed. (London/New York, 2017), 339-356.

⁹⁷ Matthew Bell, *Melancholia: the western malady* (Cambridge, 2014), 33-35.

Galenism, melancholia went beyond the disease and psychological level and obtained ‘potential applications’ beyond medicine in other fields like ethics and poetry.⁹⁸

Modern writers adopted different positions, ‘on the politics of the melancholy malcontent’, while the literary malcontent incorporates ‘a certain style and tradition of poetic self-presentation’. Poets were attracted to ‘the idea of the melancholy genius as a way of imagining and presenting themselves’, in a pattern we see in Jason. The melancholy artist became a commonplace in early modern period and since the Renaissance melancholia was a basic theme in literature;⁹⁹ an idea we see manifested in ‘Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου’.

One may assume that Jason is a poet unable to think of what to write; a poet who is looking for inspiration but experiences writer’s block. A condition that poets and authors—in general— not only experience but also express in their writings. For example, as Leader writes, William Wordsworth’s poem (1770-1850) ‘Resolution and Independence’ is a poem whose theme is ‘blocked literary creativity’, while another example is Coleridge (1772-1834) whose ‘poetry betrays signs of blockage’. In addition, some of his poems are incomplete;¹⁰⁰ similarly to Cavafy’s ατελή ποιήματα. Even if one would say that it is an overstatement to see Jason as a Cavafy’s alter ego, in fact Cavafy’s ατελή are poems that the poet wanted to work more before publishing (suggesting such a blockage that Coleridge experienced), similarly to Jason, the protagonist of his poem who cannot write and asks for ‘φάρμακα’.

In addition, the word ‘φάρμακον’ Cavafy uses, appears in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. As Leader explains, ‘Socrates’ attack on writing begins with an Egyptian myth of origins. This myth tells of the god Theuth (alias Hermes), the inventor, among other things, of number, calculation, geometry, astronomy, and above all writing’ who offers ‘writing as a gift to King Thamus or Ammon, the Egyptian Zeus’. The interesting element, is the fact that φάρμακον, apart from ‘recipe’, also means ‘drug’, ‘and this is clearly Thamus’s view of writing’.¹⁰¹ A view that Cavafy’s Jason shares, as he asks for Art’s ‘drugs’.

Alexiou also declares that in the Platonic dialogues, Socrates has the persona of φαρμακεύς frequently. To the question ‘what exactly are poetry’s *pharmaka*’, Alexiou asserts that it is an ‘artificial fluid’ which is ‘potentially good’ and of course ‘dangerous’. For Jason, in the poem, the only escape is ‘the drugs of poetry’.¹⁰²

This role of art as sedative is also the subject in the poem ‘Πολύ Σπανίως’ (‘Very Seldom’) (1913),¹⁰³ in which the issue of old age is again in the centre. Speaking of the title of his poem, ‘Very

⁹⁸ Bell, *Melancholia*, 39, 43.

⁹⁹ Bell, *Melancholia*, 152-153.

¹⁰⁰ Zachary Leader, *Writer’s Block* (London, 1991), 167, 186.

¹⁰¹ Leader, *Writer’s Block*, 220-221.

¹⁰² Alexiou, ‘C. P. Cavafy’s ‘dangerous’ drugs’, 177, 189.

¹⁰³ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 66-67.

Seldom', Cavafy mentions that it constitutes a commentary on the poem. According to Cavafy, the recognition of an artistic work, through the years and different generations, is a characteristic of really significant works and it appears very seldom; there are just a few works which attract the interest of later generations.¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, Papanikolaou proposes a very different reading, through a homoerotic and sexual perspective. Papanikolaou sees the poetic ego fantasising about young men who enjoy his erotic poems. According to him, it is a poem on self-abuse, the body and desire.¹⁰⁵

Focusing on the poem, Jusdanis declares that although the old poet is about to die, he will not be forgotten, as his poetry lives among the young men. His work outlives the old poet, as he is read, studied and criticised by later generations.¹⁰⁶ Yet, as Savidis claims the poem should be seen as a presentation of Cavafy's own prospects in the future.¹⁰⁷ Indeed, since the poem portrays the old age of a poet and young people who read his verses, inevitably one could say that Cavafy expresses his own hope: that his poems will be read by young people in later generations, and this softens the misery of old age.

The poem is divided into two parts. The first part starts by introducing the old man, who enters his house pensive:¹⁰⁸

Εἶν' ἕνας γέροντας. Εξηντλημένος και κυρτός,
σακατεμένος απ' τα χρόνια, κι από καταχρήσεις,
σιγά βαδίζοντας διαβαίνει το σοκάκι.
Κι ὁμως σαν μπει στο σπίτι του να κρύψει
τα χάλια και τα γηρατειά του, μελετά
το μερτικό που ἔχει ἀκόμη αὐτός στα νειάτα.

The poem starts by describing the appearance of the old man. He is described as 'worn out and stooped, crippled by the years and by abuses'.¹⁰⁹ Similarly to the description of old age in 'Ἡ Ψυχὴ των Γερόντων', the adjective 'σακατεμένος' ('crippled') is a rather cruel expression to describe someone; especially an old man. The characterisations 'εξηντλημένος' ('worn out') and 'κυρτός' ('stooped') could be seen as a reasonable description for an old man. Especially 'κυρτός' suggests the usual posture of an old body which lacks the strength and vividness of youth. However, 'σακατεμένος'

¹⁰⁴ Cavafy in Lechonitis (ed.), *Καβάφικα Αυτοσχόλια*, 28.

¹⁰⁵ Dimitris Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ' Εμένα Καμωμένοι»: ο ομοφυλόφιλος Καβάφης και η ποιητική της σεξουαλικότητας (Athens, 2014), 66-68.

¹⁰⁶ Jusdanis, *The Poetics of Cavafy*, 49.

¹⁰⁷ Savidis, 'Ποιήματα ποιητικής του Καβάφη', 290-291.

¹⁰⁸ Malanos, *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 85.

¹⁰⁹ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 67.

implies a greater degree of violence, more so perhaps even than English 'a broken man'. The verb 'σακατεύω', as Babiniotis writes, can be used as threat to disable someone by hitting him or even causing severe injuries.

An important element is the fact that the old man is 'σακατεμένος' not only by the years, but also by abuses. This implies that the old man lived a vicious life, since 'καταχρήσεις' ('excesses') we see in the same line allude to addictions, like alcohol and drugs.¹¹⁰ And at some point, these abuses could be seen as a basic reason for his miserable situation. Possibly, as it is implied in the poem, if the old man was not addicted to 'καταχρήσεις', he would not be 'σακατεμένος'. It is interesting to note that, chronic poisoning from the prolonged use of alcohol causes a degeneration of the blood-vessels that tends to hasten the signs of old age.¹¹¹

The cruelty in which the poet characterises the old man continues in the next lines. The poet writes that he 'slowly crosses the narrow street' and when he goes home, he hides 'his wretchedness and his old age'. Especially, the expression 'τα χάλια' ('wretchedness') shows the poet's repulsion for old age. The first part of the poem finishes, by presenting the old man thinking: 'he ponders on the share of youth which still belongs to him'. In that way, and especially the use of the verb 'μελετά' ('he ponders on'), suggesting also 'μελέτη θανάτου', shows that the old man knows that young men read his verses and tries to focus on that in order to find a kind of consolation and a sedative.

In the second part of the poem, the pessimistic thoughts are replaced by other, consolatory thoughts:¹¹²

Έφηβοι τώρα τους δικούς του στίχους λένε.
 Στα μάτια των τα ζωηρά περνούν η οπτασίες του.
 Το υγιές, ηδονικό μυαλό των,
 η εύγραμμη, σφιχτοδεμένη σάρκα των,
 με την δική του έκφανσι του ωραίου συγκινούνται.

The old man of the poem is happy that young men know his poems. The verb 'λένε' shows that the young men not only read his poems, but recite them. The old man sees that as a kind of achievement in his miserable situation. The next three lines, which describe the young men, contradict the portrayal of the old man in the first part. As opposed to him, young men are 'υγιείς' ('healthy') and they have 'lively eyes', 'sensuous minds' and 'firm bodies'. According to Peridis, the depiction of the old man,

¹¹⁰ Addiction will be analysed extensively in the next chapter.

¹¹¹ Louis Faugeres Bishop, 'The relation of old age to disease, with illustrative cases', *The American Journal of Nursing*, 4: 9 (1904), 674-679.

¹¹² Malanos, *Ο Ποιητής Κ. Π. Καβάφης*, 85. Also, according to Malanos, the first stanza of «Πολύ Σπανίως» repeats the weariness of the old man in «Ένας Γέρος». The old man of «Ένας Γέρος», who cries for his lost youth, becomes the old man of «Πολύ Σπανίως» who finds consolation in the reading of his poem by young people.

who enters his house to hide his wretchedness, opposes the last lines of the poem, in which young people recite his poems outdoors.¹¹³

One could say that here, we have a double antithesis. Initially, we have the contrast between age and youth, through the descriptions of the old man and young men who recite his poems. Secondly, we have the contradiction of the 'inside' element and the 'outside' element.¹¹⁴ The 'inside' represents the image of the old man who goes back to his home, whereas the 'outside' reflects the liveliness and strength of young men who enjoy their lives outdoors; far from their house.

Nonetheless, above all, we have the contrast between sickness and health. Sickness is represented by the description of the old man who is 'εξητλημένος' and 'κυρτός', whereas health is represented by the description of the young men who have 'υγιές ηδονικό μυαλό' and 'σφικτοδεμένη σάρκα'. In addition, the 'inside' situation or status of the old man could be seen as an indication of isolation and depression and consequently as a symptom of old age; again symptoms we saw in the previous unit.

The last line of the poem constitutes the key to the consolation of the old man. According to the poem, young men 'are stirred by his manifestation of Beauty'. The verb 'συγκινούνται' which refers to the feelings of young men reciting the old man's poems, indirectly, it also reflects his own feelings, knowing that young men recite his verses. 'Συγκινούνται' refers to the feelings of both: young men and the old man, who are stirred by the same 'manifestation of Beauty'; the same poems. This is a kind of poetry which is meant to be read by young people.¹¹⁵ Beyond what we have seen in the poems 'Ένας Γέρος' and 'Η Ψυχές των Γερόντων', in 'Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου· Ποιητού εν Κομμαγηνή· 595 μ.Χ' and 'Πολύ Σπανίως' Cavafy infuses a new element: this is the role of art as a kind of antidote to old age. Although art is not a medicine and does not cure senility, it offers a pleasure to the old man and it works as a temporary analgesic.

Analysing the art of Elizabeth Layton, an artist who began her work in 1977, at the age of 68 years old, Bartholome asserts that much of her adult life was a continual battle with depression. Her drawings depict her grief and depression, showing that she used art as a means of self-transformation and healing and led herself into mental health. Among her subjects are ageing, depression, illness, death or even the AIDS epidemic. As Bartholome claims, Layton's drawings constitute an ideal instrument through which to explore the meaning and significance of ageing. Layton together with Bartholome organised her drawings into seven categories of ageing, including: experiences of loss, preparing for death, dealing with bodily decline, illness and disability, planning for future incapacity,

¹¹³ Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη*, 175.

¹¹⁴ Pieris analysed in depth this contradiction between 'in' and 'out' in Cavafy's poetry, through a series of poems in *Χώρος, Φως και Λόγος*.

¹¹⁵ Charalambidis in *Ο Καβάφης και οι Νέοι*, 14.

remembering and taking the time to notice and enjoy life's simple pleasures, finding ways to maintain creativity and a sense of social involvement and finally serving the young and living for the future. According to Bartholome, Layton saw her work not as a legacy of herself as an artist, but as a gift to those she would leave behind.¹¹⁶

In truth, some of the issues that Layton raises in her paintings to describe old age are the same with some of the issues that Cavafy arises in his old age poems. Initially, we have the same symptoms of grief and depression, malady, bodily decay and disability. In addition, in 'Πολύ Σπανίως', a similar concern to Layton's prospect to give a gift to later generations, appears in the prospect of the old man in the poem to leave some poems which will be read by next generations.

¹¹⁶ William G. Bartholome, 'The diminishing world of the aging person: the art of Elizabeth Layton', *Literature and Medicine*, 13: 1 (1994), 42-46.

2.5 Conclusions

The psychology and phenomenology of old age in Cavafy's poetry is manifested in the poem 'Ο Θάνατος του Αυτοκράτορος Τακίτου', which equates old age with disease. As Cavafy implies, Tacitus died of senility. This phenomenological approach focusing on the results of old age on the individual becomes more apparent in a series of symptoms in the poem 'Ένας Γέρος'. The poem starts by presenting the loneliness and desolation of old age. This loneliness and desolation become evident through the portrait of the old man, who is sitting alone in a noisy café. By thinking of his youth, the old man shows that he has nothing better to do, than remembering his strength and looks several years ago. This is the period, when he used to restrain his 'ορμές' ('impulses'). The old man of the poem experiences old age as a kind of malady with the following symptoms: depression and desolation, lack of any sexual desire and bodily infirmity and dizziness causing sleep.

'Ορμές', the mark of youth and sexual desire, oppose his current miserable situation. Now, he sees that he should have followed his instinct and have gained new experience. He should not have obeyed his prudence, which has been proved to be a liar. Thus, his 'ορμές' for more sexual desire remained unsatisfied. And he regrets not using these impulses, because he used to believe that there is a lot of time for him to do it in the future.¹¹⁷ Thus, he wonders how different his life would be, if these 'ορμές' had been satisfied by now. But in contrast, he cannot do anything, because as an old man, he has no impulses. He is ill, and in addition he is lonely and lives in despair, since the years of his youth passed so quickly.¹¹⁸

In 'Η Ψυχές των Γερόντων' the phenomenological approach to old age is based on the antithesis: soul versus body. The inability of the body, which is old and weak, moves the soul, which still wants to move and do things, to boredom and depression. The poem gives a rather descriptive image of anthropomorphised souls enduring their bodies. The scene is characterised by the viewer-poet as tragicomic. The symptoms in this poem are similar to the previous one: depression causing boredom, bodily infirmity and also worn-out bodies which are affected by the years.

In 'Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου' Ποιητού εν Κομμαγηνή 595 μ.Χ', in which the speaker uses the language of medicine, Jason is a poet who experiences the ageing of his body, although not an old man by normal standards, like wounds of a knife. Art, and especially poetry, works as temporary medicine for him; a placebo that can 'numb the pain' of his melancholy and functions as an escape from his writer's block.

In 'Πολύ Σπανίως', Cavafy gives the thoughts and feelings of an old man who lost his youth and beauty because of excesses and of course, senescence. He finds consolation in his poetry which

¹¹⁷ Lawrence Supino, 'Τα γηρατειά στην ποίηση του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη', http://latistor.blogspot.co.uk/2010/08/blog-spot_07.html. [accessed 23 January 2017]

¹¹⁸ Lawrence Supino, 'Τα γηρατειά στην ποίηση του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη'.

is read by young men; and although he cannot have any relations with them anymore, his poetry constitutes the link between him and them. With this description of art as a sedative, the old man of the poem feels that he achieved something, since his own opinion or idea of beauty which is reflected in his poems it also attracts young men's interest. Although the poet can do nothing to prevent the effects of old age, at least he will offer his poetry to later generations. This seems beyond the reach of the unfortunate, whose culture will fall to the Arab invasions.¹¹⁹

Thus, in the poems discussed in the chapter, the reader finds basic characteristics of old age, such as infirmity, disorientation, weakness, boredom and above all depression and desolation. In all of this Cavafy emancipates himself from the more moralising staged sort of death we see in 'Tacitus', in favour of viewing the dying process as a longer process. The poet becomes, at some point, bleak in his description of old age, but one could say that his portraits represent reality.

Old age (and its harbingers in infirmity) seems to make the narrator of the poems scared, because they deprive him of the opportunity to have youth and communication with other young people. He considers that senescence isolates people, keeping them far from any pleasure; this situation causes despair and pain to the old person.¹²⁰ And although Cavafy does not speak overtly about isolation and depression in old age, we have seen through the analysis of the poems that there are serious indications and implications which allude to these elements.

In general, the symptoms of old age that Cavafy describes in his poems recall the general disorders summarised at the start of this chapter. Lack of any communication, physical infirmity preventing socialisation, mental disorders like depression (or melancholia in Jason's case) and also desolation are basic characteristics of senility. Cavafy infuses all these elements in his poems, as in terms of symptoms of a malady named 'old age'.

In addition, a notable element in these poems by Cavafy is the absence of any real fear of death. Cavafy rather describes the protraction of old age; a continually progressive senility which will never finish. A death fails to come. As we have seen analysing 'Η ψυχές των γερόντων', although the souls are afraid that they will lose their lives, this fear is not real. In association with the other poems analysed in the chapter, Cavafy's old men do not seem to be afraid of death, but they are victims of the disease 'old age' and its symptoms from which the old men suffer.

¹¹⁹ Lawrence Supino, 'Τα γηρατειά στην ποίηση του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη'.

¹²⁰ Lawrence Supino, 'Τα γηρατειά στην ποίηση του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη'.

Chapter 3: Dependency: alcoholism understood as disease

3.1 Introduction

Although alcoholic beverages have been known since antiquity, the concept of chronic alcoholism as a disease and not a vice or cause of other disease, developed only within the modern era.¹ The first half of the nineteenth century saw chronic drunkenness, coming to be understood as alcoholism, as a medical disorder;² something that Cavafy presumably knew. According to Porter, Thomas Trotter (1760-1832), a physician who studied medicine at Edinburgh University, was the first who outlined some of the viewpoints and strategies adopted later by other researchers, such as C. von Brühl Cramer (d. 1821), J. E. D. Esquirol (1772-1840) and Magnus Huss (1807-1890). Trotter's work *Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical, on Drunkenness*, published in 1804 went through further editions and was translated into other languages. Trotter clearly defines drunkenness as a medical condition and excessive drinking as a disease. Great part of his treatise focuses on symptoms and consequences of this syndrome. Although drunkenness had figured in several writings since antiquity, still Trotter's treatise is characterised by 'its own novelty'. Bernard Mandeville (1670-1733), George Cheyne (1671-1743), Erasmus Darwin (1731-1802) and also John Coakley Lettsom (1744-1815) had dealt with the topic before him, however Trotter presents directly a medical view of the condition, defining excessive drinking as a disease.³

From the very beginning of his work, he writes: 'in medical language, I consider drunkenness, strictly speaking, to be a disease.'⁴ This view is later formulated by Trotter into the area of psychiatry; and this is probably original. Trotter's treatise is a landmark in the history of thinking about drunkenness, alcoholism and addiction.⁵ As Bynum says, Trotter defined drunkenness as a disease bringing actions and movements in the living body. He also divided drunkenness into acute and chronic effects, while his prescription for treatment was complete abstinence.⁶ Trotter, and some other physicians in Victorian Britain, saw also excessive drinking as cause of other diseases, like dropsy, gout, apoplexy, epilepsy, and even insanity.⁷

¹ William F. Bynum, 'Chronic alcoholism in the first half of the 19th century', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 42 (1968), 160-185.

² Roy Porter in Thomas Trotter, *An Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical on Drunkenness and its Effects on the Human Body*, ed. Roy Porter (London, 1988), xiv.

³ Porter in Trotter, *An Essay*, xii-xv.

⁴ Trotter, *An Essay*, 8.

⁵ Porter in Trotter, *An Essay*, xv-xvii.

⁶ Bynum, 'Chronic alcoholism', 168.

⁷ Peter McCandless, "'Curses of civilization': insanity and drunkenness in Victorian Britain', *British Journal of Addiction*, 79 (1984), 49-58.

After Trotter, Brühl-Cramer listed a whole argumentation for the analysis of alcoholism as disease, choosing *Trunksucht* ('alcoholism'/'dipsomania') as its designation.⁸ He argued that the inclination to excessive drinking was a symptom of a physical disease, while he also recommended treatment with physical medicines.⁹ According to Brühl-Cramer, the real reason that people drink excessively is that they have a disease: dipsomania. Moral exhortations in relation to excessive drinking are profitless, because it is a physical ailment and not a mental or moral one. The first stages of this disease result in increased activity of the nervous system, but the final stages end in torpidity and listlessness. Brühl-Cramer believed that an attack of dipsomania is analogous to an acute attack of chronic gout, while he divided dipsomania into the following categories: periodic, decreasing, intermittent and continuous.¹⁰

From a different perspective, that of mental illness, Esquirol assimilated habitual drunkenness to the category of monomania, noting the close relation between drunkenness and insanity.¹¹ Esquirol accepted an American claim that a great percentage of insanity in the United States originated in alcohol and claimed that the same was true for Europe too. Esquirol asserted that there was a particular mental disease manifested by an inability to abstain from intoxication.¹²

Finally, Huss, who saw the issue as a clinician, investigated sensory, motor and psychic disturbances, and offered a particularly acute account of the neurological symptoms of the chronic alcoholic: nausea, convulsions, ringing, of the ears, vertigo and so on.¹³ Huss accepted previous physicians' claims as correct, however, according to him, none of them gave a sufficient concept for what the physician saw in his practice. He gave alcoholism a strictly clinical definition, asserting that it is a chronic disease which corresponds to chronic poisoning. There is also a series of chronic symptoms, which were called *alcoholismus chronicus*; these symptoms do not necessarily connect to organic changes of the nervous system.¹⁴

It is also interesting to note, the belief that parental intoxication could be a major cause of hereditary disease. This view was adopted by many medical men in the nineteenth century. According to this theory, drunken parents could inherit any or all of the alcohol related diseases, like epilepsy, crime and insanity to their children. Other physicians supported the inheritability theory in connection to the Biblical command that the sins of the fathers would be visited upon the sons. In the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, physicians elaborated the relationship between drink and heredity. In

⁸ Friedrich-Wilhelm Kielhorn, 'The history of alcoholism: Brühl-Cramer's concepts and observations', *Addiction*, (1996) 91 (1), 121-128.

⁹ Porter in Trotter, *An Essay*, xiii.

¹⁰ Bynum, 'Chronic alcoholism', 170-171.

¹¹ Porter in Trotter, *An Essay*, xiii.

¹² McCandless, "Curses of civilization", 50, 53.

¹³ Porter in Trotter, *An Essay*, xiii.

¹⁴ Bynum, 'Chronic alcoholism', 181.

turn, a theory of hereditary degeneration was expressed by Benedict Morel (1809-1876). According to Morel, degenerations are deviations from the normal human type, which deteriorate progressively towards extinction. Morel's theory influenced several others in Germany and Austria, but Krafft-Ebing, whose consideration of homosexuality as a mental disease influenced extensively Cavafy (this is the subject of Chapter 4), was the one who was affected significantly by this theory of degeneration, and focused on the study of criminal psychology and sexual deviation. He viewed criminality and sexual perversions as marks of degeneration resulting from inherited conditions of the nervous system.¹⁵

Degeneracy theory came into its own in the mid-nineteenth century as an explanation for every human ill, from idiocy to urban crime. The hope was that removal of 'degenerates' from society would eliminate crime. Among others, alcoholism and poverty were blamed on the degeneration of human stock caused by the corrupting results of urbanisation and industrialisation. 'Antipathic sexuality' like alcoholism, insanity and idiocy was explained as an expression of an already defective nervous system.¹⁶

It is also worth noting though, that before Trotter, and especially, between the seventeenth and eighteenth century, wine was seen as a remedy. For instance, William Cullen (1710-1790), in his *Treatise of the Materia Medica*, discusses the benefits of alcohol, the influence of climate and soil on grapes, and wine's potential to work as both a stimulant in the first instance and as a sedative over a longer period. Cullen (like Saint Paul: 1 Timothy 5.23) also outlines the medical uses of alcohol, and especially wine, which has certain therapeutic benefits as medicine. Alcohol is seen as stimulating appetite, encouraging digestion and perspiration and a purgative. Several practitioners supported wine's use in medical practice, but when one of Cullen's students, John Brown (1735-1788), praised wine therapy, this was upheld by a personal illness narrative. Diagnosed with gout and recommended by Cullen to restrain himself from alcohol, Brown worsened and decided to modify his treatment including stimulants.¹⁷

The first systematic and clinical opinion of intoxication was given by Benjamin Rush (1745-1813), a highly respected physician of his times who studied the physical effects of alcohol. The most important element in his description of inebriety was the connection between drinker and drink defined as 'addiction' to distilled liquors. Rush and followers of the 'temperance movement' promoted two main points that became important in the nineteenth century temperance movement: firstly they

¹⁵ W. F. Bynum, 'Alcoholism and degeneration in 19th century European medicine and psychiatry', *British Journal of Addiction*, 79 (1984), 59-70.

¹⁶ Francis Marc Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality* (London, 1996), 36-37.

¹⁷ Jonathan Reinarz and Rebecca Wynter, 'The spirit of medicine: the use of alcoholic in nineteenth-century medical practice', in *Drink in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Susanne Schmid and Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (London, 2014), 127-139.

established that alcohol causes deviant physiology and behaviour, and second, inebriety was a disease. Especially the latter was a kind of slogan of the movement.¹⁸

On the effects of alcohol, William Carpenter (1813-1885) declared that there are peculiar effects upon the blood, like the coagulability of the fibrine, as if alcohol is mixed with fresh arterial blood, it darkens its colour. Carpenter asserted that alcohol, undergoes rapid absorption into the system and affects the stomach. In addition, the alcoholic odour of the breath is a sufficient indication that the alcoholic vapour is exhaled from the lungs in the act of respiration, while depressive character is another result of excessive alcohol consumption. Carpenter gave a list of the consequences of alcohol consumption, notably diseases of the nervous system, like *delirium ebriosum* and *delirium tremens*.¹⁹

Trotter, whose theories as we have said have been expanded by others later, dedicates a whole chapter to the phenomena and symptoms of alcoholism. According to Trotter, some conditions of the body mark and accompany ebriety: 'the head nods, the walk is tottering', while 'the countenance looks inflame, the eyes glare' and also 'the vision is double'. Intoxication or drunkenness is the delirium which succeeds the immediate use of fermented liquors and wine, while alcohol possesses a chemical operation in the human body. Also, Trotter connects ophthalmia, an eye disease, with alcohol consumption, as it is very common with wine-bibbers. Also, Trotter says that the use of alcohol has a powerful effect on bodies, since an intoxicated individual may do things he never would have thought in a state of sobriety, because he is in a state of delirium like any maniac.²⁰

According to Brown, since alcoholism was perceived in narrowly physicalistic terms, the power to define the alcoholic person became a central goal in any attempt to influence both public opinion and legislation. The close link between the disease concept of alcoholism and efforts to legislate the control of the alcoholic is of high importance, as it demonstrates the potential of certain kinds of medical thought to generate paternalistic solutions to a social problem. By excluding moral factors from their understanding of alcoholism, Turner and Crothers denied the alcoholic the status of a moral agent and were able to compare the power to control the alcoholic with the power to quarantine the contagious. Although this nineteenth-century medical view could be seen as unjustifiable and unworkable, the problem of mixing threats with therapy for the alcoholic has by no means been resolved.²¹

¹⁸ Joseph W. Schneider, 'Deviant drinking as disease: alcoholism as a social accomplishment', *Social Problems*, 25: 4 (1978), 361-372.

¹⁹ William B. Carpenter, *On the Use and Abuse of Alcoholic Liquors, in Health and Disease* (Philadelphia, 1860), 29, 34-63.

²⁰ Trotter, *An Essay*, 14-30, 41, 56, 60, 81, 92.

²¹ Edward M. Brown, "What shall we do with the inebriate? Asylum treatment and the disease concept of alcoholism in the late nineteenth century", *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 21 (1985), 48-59.

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From the representation of old age as a disease with certain symptoms we saw in Chapter 2, in this chapter we are going to focus on substance abuse as another condition relating to ill health and which appears with a series of symptoms and characteristics in Cavafy. As Vassiliadi has noted, in one of his notes Cavafy writes that the poet through the hypothetical experience and imagination can transfer himself into another dimension, creating a new experience. Explaining Cavafy's words, Vassiliadi declares that the distance between reality and dream is established by the imagination of the poet, while Cavafy was long in thrall to the pleasures of an artificial paradise: alcohol. In Cavafy, as Vassiliadi observes, this mechanism of alcohol consumption reveals to the poet an imaginary world between the past and present.²²

In the unfinished poem 'Θάταν το Οινόπνευμα' ('It Must Have Been the Spirits') (1919),²³ Cavafy addresses this with unusual directness:

Θάταν το οινόπνευμα που ήπια το βράδυ,
θάταν που νύσταζα, είχα κουρασθεί όλη μέρα.

As Vassiliadi asserts, intoxication plays an important role in the poem and the poet is like a painter who describes the furniture, through a cinematographic intuition. This description gives the poem the character of an internal monologue.²⁴ Proceeding a step beyond this seemingly overt example of the workings of intoxication presented as disabling —and at the same time, enabling— of the imaginative faculty, I will, through the analysis of a series of other poems, see how Cavafy deals with what we now term substance abuse in his poetry and how familiar he was with certain medical theories on alcoholism.

In any case, as we will see through the analysis of some key poems, Cavafy was likely to have had some acquaintance with these debates and the claims that alcoholism was a sort of abuse. The use of certain words, like 'αλκοολισμός' ('alcoholism') in the unpublished poem 'Μισή Ώρα' ('Half an Hour') (1917)²⁵ demonstrates Cavafy's knowledge of —if not close familiarity with— the whole discourse. At the same time, his representation of alcohol consumption with consequences for the individual, or even specific symptoms makes us believe that Cavafy was aware, at least in general terms, of the theories of Trotter and possibly others. Moreover, Cavafy's representation of alcohol

²² Martha Vassiliadi, 'La Poétique de l' Ivresse chez Constantin Cavafy', http://martha-vassiliadi.papagiannakis.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/12.Vassiliadi_Inalco2002.pdf, 389-403. [accessed 3 October 2015]

²³ Cavafy, *Ατελή Ποιήματα*, 75-84.

²⁴ Vassiliadi, 'La Poétique de l' Ivresse chez Constantin Cavafy', 396.

²⁵ Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα*, 101.

consumption has nothing to do with previous depictions in the Anacreontic tradition, familiar in a Modern Greek form by Athanasios Christopoulos (1772-1847), whose subjects are love, wine and all the joys of a happy life.²⁶ The only exception in the whole of Cavafy's corpus is his repudiated poem, rather in this Phanariot tradition, 'Βακχικόν' ('Brindisi') (1886),²⁷ in which the poet repeats the phrase 'δότε να πλώ' ('give me to drink') celebrating alcohol.

Christopoulos praises love and wine, pretending that he is persistently hurt.²⁸ His lyrics are a lighthearted praise of alcohol, without further depth.²⁹ In contrast, Cavafy's depiction of alcohol consumption is reminiscent of earlier poetry that relates alcoholism as addiction, like Edgar Allan Poe's (1809-1849) 'The Black Cat'; a poem, in which the narrator writes under the influence of alcohol.³⁰ Moreover Cavafy is particularly aware of French poetry and poets like Paul Verlaine (1844-1896) and Charles Baudelaire (1821-1867). Verlaine had a fatal dependence on alcohol.³¹ Characterised as an 'absinthier poet', Verlaine was the first and most famous poet who associated disruption, isolation and absinthe.³² Verlaine depicts a haziness result of alcohol, while some of his biographical scenes are due to the excessive use of alcohol.³³ Baudelaire also sees substances like alcohol, hashish and opium as sources of inspiration that give man courage.³⁴ Although in his extensive correspondence Baudelaire does not mention his heavy use of alcohol and other stimulants, once he tells his mother that he consumes alcohol because he is hungry and has nothing to eat.³⁵ Also, according to Samuel, Poe and Baudelaire were victims of alcohol and hashish respectively, while Baudelaire consumed opium too.³⁶ In addition, Baudelaire declares that alcohol is 'an escape from the restricting morality of a bourgeois society', while defending Poe's drinking says 'that the major reason for a poet's alcoholism is his desire for spiritual inspiration.'³⁷

These addictive attributes of alcohol are what we see in Cavafy too. Alcoholism was perceived by Cavafy primarily as a form of dependence: what we see in his poems is the passion of the drinker

²⁶ K. Th. Dimaras, *Ιστορία της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας* (Athens, 2000), 236, 238.

²⁷ Cavafy, *Αποκρηυγμένα Ποιήματα και Μεταφράσεις*, 17.

²⁸ Linos Politis, *Ιστορία της Νεοελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας* (Athens, 1998), 133-134.

²⁹ Giorgos Andreiomenos in 'Εισαγωγή' Athanasios Christopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, ed. Giorgos Andreiomenos (Athens, 2001), 72-75.

³⁰ Steve Murphy, 'Haunting memories: inquest and exorcism in Baudelaire's 'La Corde'', *Dalhousie French Studies*, 30 (1995), 65-91.

³¹ Robert Storey, 'Verlaine's Pierrots', *Romance Notes*, 20: 2 (1979-80), 223-230.

³² David M. Earle, "Green eyes, I see you. Fang, I feel": the symbol of absinthe in "Ulysses", *James Joyce Quarterly*, 40: 4 (2003), 691-709.

³³ Philip Stephan, 'Verlaine and Baudelaire: two uses of obscured lightings', *The French Review*, 35: 1 (1961), 26-35.

³⁴ Hans Derks, 'Opium in and for la douce France', in *History of the Opium Problem* (Brill, 2012), 379-394.

³⁵ Marc-A. Christophe, 'Jeanne Duval: Baudelaire's black venus or Baudelaire's demon?', *CLA Journal*, 33: 4 (1990), 428-439.

³⁶ Dorothy J. Samuel, 'Poe and Baudelaire: parallels in form and symbol', *CLA Journal*, 3: 2 (1959), 88-105.

³⁷ Henry Haswell, Baudelaire's self-portrait of Poe: 'Edgar Allan Poe: sa vie et ses ouvrages', *Romance Notes*, 10: 2 (1969), 253-260.

for alcohol and his attachment to the erotic illusions generated by excessive alcohol consumption. Indeed, it may be said that alcoholism is presented in his poetry as a pathological condition, as several poems are characterised by certain elements of dependence. Georganta refers to other cases in Modern Greek literature where we see the appearance of alcohol like Christopoulos and Romos Philyras (1898-1942) who refer to alcohol in a symposiastic atmosphere, while Palamas and Miltos Sachtouris (1919-2005) use alcohol in metaphorical ways.³⁸ However, as opposed to these superficial uses of alcohol, Cavafy refers to the pathology of alcohol and its consequences to his characters.

As already mentioned, illness is a personal matter, in which an individual experiences something amiss. According to Gordon, it is a state of disturbance in the normal functioning of an individual, including the state of his organism as biological system and of his personal and social adaptation. Disorders associated with alcohol or even smoking can involve a measure of blame and social disapproval. A personal experience is a symptom, and it constitutes a sign to the self; a sign that the self can read. A symptom automatically alerts a person that something is wrong.³⁹ The Greek word 'symptoma' means an occurrence, but when symptom applies to medical cases it means a change in a person's physical or mental condition because of a disorder.⁴⁰ Such elements appear in Cavafy and his reader inclines to say that the poet describes alcohol consumption as an addictive process, in which the poetic ego reads the symptoms of his dependence on his self.

Alcoholism has been defined as a condition in which drinking damages mental, physical and social health, while mental disturbance incorporates syndromes like delirium tremens, alcoholic hallucinosis, Korsakoff's psychosis, simple dementia, Wernicke's encephalopathy, pathological jealousy and most commonly depression with suicide as a possibility. While alcoholism has been characterised as a chronic disease affecting all classes, dependence to alcohol is a term used to describe the very severe form of alcoholism, when an individual suffers from a drug-dependency syndrome. And as we will see through the analysis of certain poems in this chapter, to a certain extent this representation of alcoholism is what we see in Cavafy's poetry. Alcohol addiction has been called a metabolic disease and successful treatment means that the addict should be advised that he is suffering from a disease which precludes any return to normal drinking.⁴¹

At the empirical level, as Elster declares, certain substances like caffeine, nicotine and alcohol have the potential to induce addictive behaviour, while there are three stages of addiction. First, the

³⁸ Athina Georganta, *Ο Οίνος στην Ποίηση*, Vol. 3, ed. and tr. Athina Georganta (Athens, 1995), 11-21.

³⁹ Gordon, 'The response to suffering', pp. 86-100. See also Martyn Evans, 'Music, interrupted: an illness observed from within', *Medical Humanities Companion, volume one: symptom* (Oxford, 2008), 14-26.

⁴⁰ Carl-Edvard Rudebeck, 'The body as lived experience in health and disease', in Evans, *Medical Humanities*, 27-46.

⁴¹ Anonymous author, 'Treatment of alcohol addiction', *The British Medical Journal*, Vol. 2, No. 5455 (1965), 184-185.

drug acts on the brain's receptors to release dopamine, second, there is a process of neuroadaptation, when the brain adjusts to the drug, and finally, if a person gives up the drug he will experience the negative effects of adaptation without the compensatory effect of the drug. Culture also plays an important role in the whole process, as it ascribes the label of addiction, while at the same time culture may create the norms that label addictive behaviours as desirable yet actual addiction as undesirable. Elster also says that once a person becomes addicted, society attaches the stigma of addiction.⁴² 'Alcohol addiction' may be considered synonymous with 'alcohol dependence'.⁴³ Physical dependence suggests an adaptive state that manifests itself by intense physical disturbance, while at the same time, the addicted person is both psychologically and physiologically dependent, suffering from the dependence syndrome.⁴⁴

Addiction is a pathological love between the person and the addictive object, Fatayer says, a passion that kills and a social-cultural invention. It is a social construct created by the culture as a given goal. Facts show that people are addicted to anything like a social cognition, a vulnerable emotional makeup, a possible chemical imbalance in the body. Fatayer also writes that addiction is a social action driven by desires and promoted by the culture one lives. Addiction acquires many cognitive and emotional elements and is about an ill mind and a troubled self residing in a body.⁴⁵

As Laing declares, the problem is that after a certain period the brain adjusts to the presence of alcohol affecting the central nervous system. The production of excitatory neurotransmitters increases, so that normal activity can be maintained. Laing also asserts that this neuroadaptation is what causes addiction, as it makes the drinker require alcohol in order to function. Inevitably, alcohol addiction affects the drinker's physical and social selves, visibly damaging their life, as jobs are lost and relationships spoil. Also, there are accidents, arrests, injuries and even the drinker might be neglectful. Hepatitis, cirrhosis, fatty liver, gastritis, stomach ulcers and various types of cancer are only some of the conditions associated with long-term alcoholism.⁴⁶

Alcohol is an intoxicant and a central nervous depressant, which affects the brain by interfering with the activity of neurotransmitters. As Laing continues, alcohol's effects can be divided into two categories: positive reinforcement and negative reinforcement. In positive reinforcement, alcohol activates the pleasure-reward routes, but in negative reinforcement, the inhibitory neurotransmitters depress activity in the central nervous system, while excitatory neurotransmitters,

⁴² Jon Elster, 'Emotion and addiction: neurobiology, culture, and choice', *Addiction* (New York, 1999), 240-270.

⁴³ George E. Vaillant, *The Natural History of Alcoholism: causes, patterns and paths to recovery* (Harvard, 1983), 27.

⁴⁴ Jerome Jaffe, Robert Petersen, Ray Hodgson, *Addictions: issues and answers* (London, 1980), 59, 103.

⁴⁵ Jawad Fatayer, 'A clinical sociology perspective', *Journal of Applied Social Science*, 2: 1 (2008), 88-93.

⁴⁶ Olivia Laing, *The Trip to Echo Spring; why writers drink* (Croydon, 2013), 28-29.

which stimulate it, are blocked by alcohol. Both reinforcements drive to alcoholism, but as the addiction progresses it is negative reinforcement that takes the main role.⁴⁷

Alcohol affects the brain in many ways, such the havoc it wreaks on the drinker's ability to recollect the past — a point that has obvious relevance to Cavafy's poetry. Alcohol can overwhelm the brain's ability to lay down memories, most strikingly in the kind of amnesia known as blackouts. According to Laing, these blackouts constitute a consequence of alcohol's interactions with the hippocampus, the memory centre of the brain. Heavy and continuous consumption of alcohol affects cognitive function (reducing the ability of concentration), aphasia, emotional instability and alcohol-induced dementia. In addition, Laing states that alcoholics are often deficient in thiamine, vitamin B1, which can result in severe cognitive impairment and is responsible for neurological disorders and symptoms like amnesia, confusion, confabulation and hallucinations.⁴⁸ Generally speaking, failings of memory are present in a number of Cavafy poems, like 'Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι' ('The Next Table') (1919)⁴⁹ and 'Ένας Νέος, της Τέχνης του Λόγου — στο 24^ο Έτος του ('A Young Man of Letters—in his 24th Year') (1928).⁵⁰

The World Health Organization in 1969 turned to 'dependence' as a term to replace 'addiction'. Dependence is described as a psychic and physical state, result of the relation between a living organism and a drug. Watson writes that addicts show a difficulty in 'bringing reason effectively to bear on their choices'.⁵¹ Dependence is the term I use in this thesis, as it describes better the relation between the drinker and the substance (alcohol). It also depicts the effects of alcohol on Cavafy's protagonists, who frequently see alcohol consumption as an escape and opportunity to live again or remember an erotic experience.

The stimulating effect of alcohol is well known. Anxieties and fears, which sometimes repress behaviour, are then limited and the intoxicated person less likely to be influenced by possible unpleasant consequences. Alcohol is characterised by dose-related effects on the central nervous system, causing also physiological changes in the brain which lead to physiological dependence. As defined by the World Health Organisation, physical dependence is an adaptive state that manifests itself by intense physical disturbance, while withdrawal symptoms are also very likely to appear. So, an individual dependent on alcohol is psychologically and physiologically dependent and is suffering from the alcohol dependence syndrome.⁵² Hyde asserts that alcoholism comes from alcoholics

⁴⁷ Laing, *The Trip to Echo Spring*, 26-27.

⁴⁸ Laing, *The Trip to Echo Spring*, 138-139.

⁴⁹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 104-107.

⁵⁰ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 174-175.

⁵¹ Gary Watson, 'Disordered appetites: addiction, compulsion, and dependence', in *Addiction*, ed. Jon Elster (New York, 1999), 3-26.

⁵² Jaffe, Petersen, Hodgson, *Addictions*, 99-100, 103.

themselves and an alcoholic is someone who cannot control his drinking once he starts. Alcoholism includes a sense of mental obsession and a physical compulsion, as an individual is obliged to move with mysterious forces greater than him. It is addictive, because alcohol possesses a person who cannot run his life anymore. The only experience becomes alcohol consumption.⁵³

As we will see in this chapter, the representation of alcohol abuse in Cavafy revolves around the idea of dependency. It is experienced by the poems' protagonists with specific symptoms, like fatigue, dizziness and delusions and is presented as a passion which occupies and controls a person. Alcohol is needed, since it is a basic way to facilitate the remembering and reliving of former erotic experience or even to live out new experiences, even if these are not necessarily consummated physically.

⁵³ Lewis Hyde, *Alcohol and Poetry: John Berryman and the booze talking* (Dallas, 1986), 1-19.

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Some pieces of information from Cavafy's biography are not out of place, as they point to what some of his contemporaries identified as a proclivity for drinking. Papadakis, alluding to Pieris' analysis of the poem 'Μισή Ώρα', suggests that Cavafy's erotic passion was not his only passion, as there are some other passions, like that for alcohol.⁵⁴ A similar view is expressed also by Manuel Savidis who declares that Cavafy was a passionate drinker, smoker and gambler; an image which certainly relates to certain poems.⁵⁵ Some biographical details enlighten this passion of Cavafy for drinking.

As Liddell asserts in his biography of Cavafy, in the streets Rue d'Anastasi and Rue Mosquée Attarine, there were several cafés and houses Cavafy used to go. There, he sometimes slept with Greek boys, while occasionally, sometimes in company, he got drunk first in one of the bars in the area. Liddell also says that after Cavafy dined at home and stayed with his mother for a couple of hours, he used to spend an hour with a friend, and sometimes, he used to go late in the evening to a house in the Attarine quarter or to a café near Custom House. The next day, Cavafy would suffer from hangover, mental perturbation and an upset stomach. Cavafy's passion for drinking is also obvious in his custom to offer whisky to his young visitors, as many young people used to go to his house because of the poet's generosity with his whisky. However, he was very careful not to give them the best quality. As Liddell writes, Cavafy named his second-rate whisky 'Palamas whisky',⁵⁶ alluding to his rivalry with the poet Kostis Palamas (1859-1943). Cavafy liked drinking raki, standing at low bars where he could approach others with questions.⁵⁷ The Billiards Palace was one of Cavafy's favourite places for drinking; a place that many young men used to visit.⁵⁸

In Cavafy, alcoholism is a form of dependency, because as we will see alcohol consumption seems to be a necessity and the only way to live or relive the erotic experience. As Bynum writes the use of strong drinks is initially the effect of free agency and becomes a necessity. The drunkard can no longer control his drinking impulses.⁵⁹ Cavafy never refers to the exact symptoms that physicians and researchers on alcoholism in the nineteenth century described, but, the symptoms of his protagonists could be seen as a poetic or artistic representation of this idea of alcoholism as dependency; as with other authors in the same century, who saw and presented alcoholism from their perspective.

For instance, Ernest Dowson (1867-1900), according to Yeats, ruined his life 'in dissipation and drinking'. According to other sources, Dowson was a 'psychopathic case', who 'mingled his religion

⁵⁴ Stamatios Papadakis, 'Αλκοόλ και λαγνεία στα πάθη του Καβάφη', 22 Δεκεμβρίου 2009, <http://blogs.sch.gr/stpapakis/archives/3877>. [accessed 20 November 2015]

⁵⁵ Manuel Savidis, 'Cavafy through the looking-glass', 05 December 2014, <https://www.lsa.umich.edu>. [accessed 5 December 2014]

⁵⁶ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 68, 167. See also Michael Haag, *Alexandria: city of memory* (Yale, 2004), 90-93.

⁵⁷ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 167.

⁵⁸ Haag, *Alexandria*, 97.

⁵⁹ Bynum, 'Chronic alcoholism', 167.

with alcohol and drugs', while his 'writings bear evidence of excited nerves and narcotics'. In addition, he used to consume substances and make love in houses of prostitution. Dowson was a heavy drinker and this passion is reflected in his works.⁶⁰ In addition, Arthur Symons' (1865-1945) periodical *The Savoy* included poems by decadent poets like Mallarmé and Verlaine in his translations and poems by Dowson and Lionel Johnson (1867-1902), another decadent poet who died of drink.⁶¹

In some cases, a poet has even constructed an entire poem or even oeuvre on his own addiction to drink, as in the case of John Berryman (1914-1972) who was an alcoholic and this addiction is evident in his work. For example, focusing on Song 29, Hyde sees certain symptoms of alcoholism, like black-out which is a phenomenon of heavy drinking and anxiety; symptom of withdrawal, but also of active alcoholism.⁶² Analysing 'Eleven Addresses to the Lord', Djos claims that we see Berryman's obsessive concern with spiritual deterioration, while 'the power of irreconcilable opposites should be no surprise to anyone familiar with the conventional perspective on creativity and addiction'. As with Berryman, the alcoholic may dread dying, but he does not want the remedy.⁶³

With the inclusion of alcoholism in his poetry, inevitably, Cavafy is among the writers who belong to this tradition. From a personal perspective, Cavafy adopted the view of Trotter, and other nineteenth century authors on alcoholism, that alcoholism is a form of disease and gave certain symptoms to his protagonists in order to suit the needs of his poems. In some cases, he includes elements which make alcoholism look like addiction in the strict sense.

⁶⁰ Russell M. Goldfarb, 'The Dowson legend today', *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 4: 4 (1964), 653-662. On the relationship between Dowson and Cavafy, see also Despina Charalambidou-Solomi, *A Study in Decadence: the love poetry of Ernest Dowson and C. P. Cavafy* (PhD Thesis, University of Athens, 1997).

⁶¹ Anne Margaret Daniel, 'Arthur Symons and the Savoy', *Literary Imagination*, 7: 2 (2005), 165-193.

⁶² Hyde, *Alcohol and Poetry*, 1, 10-12.

⁶³ Matts G. Djos, *Writing Under the Influence: alcoholism and the alcoholic perception from Hemingway to Berryman* (New York, 2010), 29-34.

3.2 Alcohol and eroticism

As we will see in this section, Cavafy frequently connects eroticism with alcohol consumption and the stimulus it gives to the imagination. Alcohol helps the protagonists of the poems to relive an erotic experience from the far past. Such use of alcohol has been noted by Trotter who stressed on the powers of imagination after alcohol consumption and how imagination becomes more vivid.⁶⁴ Loneliness accompanied by alcohol consumption, as a means to recall erotic experience, is the main subject in the poem 'Μια Νύχτα' ('One Night') (1916).⁶⁵ The poem is divided in two halves of six lines each. The first part of the poem starts with the remembrance of a passionate night, as Papanikolaou observes:⁶⁶

Η κάμαρα ήταν πτωχική και πρόστυχη,
κρυμμένη επάνω από την ύποπτη ταβέρνα.
Απ' το παράθυρο φαίνονταν το σοκάκι,
το ακάθαρτο και το στενό. Από κάτω
ήρχονταν η φωνές κάτι εργατών
που έπαιζαν χαρτιά και που γλεντούσαν.

The act took place, years ago, in a 'shabby and sordid, concealed above the seedy tavern',⁶⁷ but, as Papanikolaou states, the sex of the two lovers is not revealed.⁶⁸ The poet describes a notorious neighbourhood. In addition, the corruption, an element that permeates the whole of the poem, becomes even more intense in the last two lines, in which we have the shouts of some labourers who are playing cards and drinking. According to Skordi, the scenography suggests 'the λαϊκό environment' through this 'reference to the rough manners of workmen'.⁶⁹ Although we have no clear mention of alcohol consumption, Cavafy's description of men playing cards, and the use of the verb 'revelling' leads to this direction. In addition the notorious neighbourhood and the labourers who drink and play cards is meant to suggest the two young men's natural surroundings; this is where they belong too. Possibly, this is their usual spot for their meetings. This working-class in the poem is the same as that of the two lovers.

⁶⁴ Trotter, *An Essay*, 14.

⁶⁵ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 70-73.

⁶⁶ Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ' Εμένα Καμωμένοι», 205.

⁶⁷ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 70-73.

⁶⁸ Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ' Εμένα Καμωμένοι», 206.

⁶⁹ Ioanna Skordi, 'The Regiment of Pleasure': Cavafy and his Homoerotic Legacy in Greek Writing (PhD Thesis, King's College London, 2018), 271.

In the next part of the poem, we have the resurgence of memory as a tool through which the poet experiences again this love:

Κ' εκεί στο λαϊκό, το ταπεινό κρεββάτι
 είχα το σώμα του έρωτος, είχα τα χείλη
 τα ηδονικά και ρόδινα της μέθης-
 τα ρόδινα μιας τέτοιας μέθης, που και τώρα
 που γράφω, έπειτ' από τόσα χρόνια!,
 μες το μονήρες σπίτι μου, μεθώ ξανά.

Analysing the poem from its homoerotic perspective, Papanikolaou declares that the isolated chamber at the start of the poem is replaced by the lonely home in the end.⁷⁰ The protagonist is able to relive these passionate moments and with such intensity, that he is once again intoxicated by them many years later.⁷¹

Mann, Hermann and Heinz declare that alcohol desire and withdrawal symptoms were basic parts of the meaning of addiction and of the destructive effects of alcohol consumption 'battled by the temperance movement in the nineteenth century'. In several countries, temperance movements were urged by the excessive consumption of alcohol, which was unlimited by some cultural traditions and appeared especially problematic among poor working class families. Nevertheless, there was an important difference to current concepts of alcoholism. The temperance movement suggested that an individual who consumes excessive amount of alcohol would suffer from alcohol-related problems, without assuming that alcoholism could affect primarily certain vulnerable groups of people.⁷²

In the poem, the poet presents alcohol as the means not only to remember a sexual experience several years ago, but also as a tool, through which he can re-live again his passionate love in his imagination. This suggests an understanding of alcoholism, as dependency or a pathological condition. As we can read in the poem, the narrator characterises the lips of his lover as 'rosy', and this is a result of alcohol consumption; or as one could say, this ruddiness of the lover's lips is a sign of alcohol consumption. Yet, alcoholism is meant, here, to be a kind of dependency, because this is the mechanism through which the protagonist seeks to recall former happy days; days in love. Alcohol is the presupposition to relive or simply to remember this love from years ago. It becomes a necessity in order to go back to his youth or even a compulsion.

⁷⁰ Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ' Εμένα Καμωμένοι», 206.

⁷¹ Capri-Karka, *Love and the Symbolic Journey*, 50.

⁷² Karl Mann, Derik Hermann, Andreas Heinz, 'One hundred years of alcoholism: the twentieth century', *Alcohol&Alcoholism*, 35: 1 (2000), 10-15.

In the first part of the poem, the protagonist remembers that passionate night in the far past. His decision to speak about the notorious tavern, in which labourers play cards and drink shows the place of his meeting with his lover. After they consumed alcohol they went to the nearest place they could find, a sordid chamber, to enjoy their love. Thus, alcohol is presented as a magical ingredient which makes them prompt to sexual experience. As Georganta asserts of the relation of alcohol and Modern Greek poetry, alcohol accompanies and also completes love, since Bacchus' divine drink promotes erotic experience or even makes easier the remembrance of a former erotic experience, offering the illusion of this love.⁷³

Georganta's insight is reflected in this poem too. On the one hand, alcohol promotes erotic experience, since after the consumption of alcohol the two young lovers went to an isolated room to have intercourse. On the other hand, the poet, now at a later stage of life, uses the magic of alcohol in order to revive the same love. In the poem, Cavafy raises the idea of habitual and solitary drinking, through the representation of a man sitting alone and drinking in order to travel to the past and his memories. He used to drink years ago as a young man enjoying the erotic experience; and he also drinks years after as a lonely man to recollect those memories.

As Jusdanis declares, imagination plays a crucial role in this 'transmutation of sense conception', as the creative force that enables the artist to modify and shape the past into different patterns. The transmutation of the situation is manifested through the remembrance of this erotic experience which replaces the former living erotic experience. This also denotes a transfer of the protagonist from the condition of habitual drinking with his company and lover into a new condition of habitual and solitary drinking which forces him to recruit imagination. The imagination, as Jusdanis asserts, can perceive truth and also fashion it in new ways. It is a double function to view reality and invent in an attempt to understand the world and change it. Imagination in Cavafy apart from serving as the poet's chief tool in the creation of art is the main link between reality and desire.⁷⁴ But what Jusdanis perhaps does not emphasise is that this act of imagination is not necessarily calm, but entails a surrender of the self, here to alcohol.

This representation of alcoholism as a form of dependence is evident in another poem, in which there are clear references to the consumption of heavy alcohol. Even if the consumption of wine could be considered a metaphor, this is not an accidental metaphor. This is 'Επήγα' ('I Went') (1913),⁷⁵ and as Jusdanis says the pleasure originates from fantasy, while erotic experience is divided, in a similar way to the previous poem into half real and real:⁷⁶

⁷³ Georganta, *Ο Οίνος στην Ποίηση*, 18.

⁷⁴ Jusdanis, *The Poetics of Cavafy*, 15-16.

⁷⁵ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74-75.

⁷⁶ Jusdanis, *The Poetics of Cavafy*, 96.

Δεν εδεσμεύθηκα. Τελείως αφέθηκα κ' επήγα.
 Στες απολαύσεις, που μισό πραγματικές,
 μισό γυρνάμενες μες στο μυαλό μου ήσαν,
 επήγα μες στην φωτισμένη νύχτα.
 Κ' ήπια από δυνατά κρασιά, καθώς
 που πίνουν οι ανδρείοι της ηδονής.

The poem starts with a strong indication of withdrawal and abandonment. This is evident in the phrase 'I let go completely',⁷⁷ which in the original Greek has much stronger meaning: 'τελείως αφέθηκα'. The phrase denotes that the poetic ego abandoned any attempt to save himself from calamity. He consents to the negative consequences of his action and does nothing to prevent it. In the next lines, the poet refers to 'partly real pleasures'. An element which alludes to the effects of alcohol to heavy drinkers; they lose control and do not keep contact with reality, as the imaginary level is now more evident than the true.

According to Nehamas, the passive 'δεν εδεσμεύθηκα' leads to the stronger 'αφέθηκα' that governs completely the subject that gradually emerges in the text. The subject depends on the act of abdication without resembling much with a subject. And of course, this occurs, since he is dependent on alcohol. In addition, as Nehamas declares, the poem suggests that these pleasures have a life of their own, independent of the subject's control and that at least a part of this subject is outside itself. Despite the title, the poem does not integrate its subject, but in contrast, it depends on an equivocal relationship between choice and submission or inside and outside.⁷⁸

The clear indication of alcohol consumption appears in the last lines in which the poetic ego asserts that he 'drank of potent wines, such as the fearless in their sensual pleasure drink'. Through this strong metaphor, the poet reveals that he consumed 'potent drinks'. We do not have to do with normal drinks that most of people usually drink, but 'potent drinks'. These are drinks that only some people can consume and enjoy: people who are used to constant and customary alcohol consumption. In these ending lines, the poet makes a very strong metaphor, in order to show that he consumed really heavy drinks, as he is one of those people. The use of the metaphor here is a metaphor used of love.

Dealing with this poem, Georganta declares that alcohol is plentiful in Cavafy's poetry, while love may be seen only as an illusion offered by alcohol. In that way, Georganta connects love closely with alcohol consumption, suggesting that if the poetic ego does not drink first, he cannot fantasise

⁷⁷ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74-75.

⁷⁸ Alexander Nehamas, 'Memory, pleasure and poetry: the grammar of the self in the writing of Cavafy', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 1: 2 (1983), 295-319.

the erotic experience. The tavern, common place in Cavafy's poems, is the background of this sexual experience. Through the phrase 'potent drinks', the forbidden and dangerous erotic pleasure has been established.⁷⁹ Incidentally, this Cavafy's reference to 'potent drinkers' is reminiscent of Callimachus' reference to water-drinkers. According to Callimachus, wine and water are both sources of poetic inspiration, but of different kinds, as water has significance as a symbol of inspiration only if it comes from a sacred fountain. Water is not a literary symbol for Callimachus and what matters is its source. Relevant to that is also Cratinus' assumption that wine is the source of good poetry, whereas all the rest —water drinkers' poetry included— is bad poetry.⁸⁰ And Cavafy, here, seems to give the advantage to wine against water. The poem combines erotic experience with the consumption of alcohol. Approaching the poem from a rather abstractly aesthetic artistic perspective, Sengopoulos states that Cavafy wants to say that if an artist reaches the level of excess, he should not stop, as this is a part of art.⁸¹

But, the erotic element is not absent from the poem. In contrast, it is implied in the poem and revives only, after the alcohol consumption as memory and imagination. The medicalisation of alcoholism in the poem becomes apparent through the relation of 'potent drinks' and 'partly real pleasures'. As with the previous poem ('Μια Νύχτα'), the consumption of alcohol helps the poet to travel to a new dimension; that of the imagination. Once again, alcohol is the tool which makes him remember and relive a former experience or even to create a new one, totally imaginary. This imaginary condition can only be achieved by heavy alcohol consumers, as Cavafy asserts in the poem. The poem represents alcohol as dependence, as it causes effects to the drinker who is abdicated and dependent on alcohol.

As opposed to 'Επήγα', in which alcohol helps the narrator to imagine former loves and relive them, the poem 'Δύο Νέοι, 23 έως 24 Ετών' ('Two Young Men, 23 to 24 Years Old') (1927),⁸² depicts a real erotic interaction —not in memory— between two young men. In this poem, alcohol launches erotic desire.

The poem starts by presenting a young man, sitting alone in a coffee shop:

Απ' τες δεκάμισυ ήτανε στο καφενείον,
και τον περιμένε σε λίγο να φανεί.
Πήγαν μεσάνυχτα—και τον περίμενεν ακόμη.

⁷⁹ Georganta, *Ο Οίνος στην Ποίηση*, 151.

⁸⁰ Peter E. Knox, 'Wine, water, and Callimachean polemics', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, 89 (1985), 107-119.

⁸¹ Aleco Sengopoulos, 'Διάλεξις περί του ποιητικού έργου του Κ. Π. Καβάφη', in *Εισαγωγή στην Ποίηση του Καβάφη: επιλογή κριτικών κειμένων*, ed. Michalis Pieris (Heraklion, 2006), 47-56.

⁸² Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 168-171.

πήγεν η ώρα μιάμισυ· είχε αδειάσει
το καφενείον ολοτελώς σχεδόν.

The coffee shop is a common place in Cavafy's poetry and in combination with the tavern we saw earlier in 'Μια Νύχτα', they form an atmosphere alluding to alcohol consumption. According to Georganta, especially tavern is a very usual place in Modern Greek poetry in general.⁸³

Gumpert declares that the café 'is one of Cavafy's preferred sites for the elaboration of his narratives at once poetic and erotic'. 'Here the love affair begins or ends', 'the rendezvous succeeds or fails' and 'the protagonist waits, drinks, remembers', and writes poetry. The café is, for Cavafy, a poetic and erotic establishment 'for discursive freedom, like sexual freedom'. And even if one considers that coffee shop is rather a place that has nothing to do with alcohol consumption but only coffee—as its name suggest—, it is worth noting that Gumpert writes that Cavafy's café is both tavern and tabernacle, in which eros is worshipped. 'Καφενείο' and 'ταβέρνα' constitute places where Cavafy acolytes practice rituals, waiting and recollecting.⁸⁴

Indeed, the above lines represent an individual sitting in a café for one hour and a half, waiting for his friend; although midnight, the friend did not show up. In the next lines, the poet refers directly to alcohol consumption:

Βαρέθηκεν εφημερίδες να διαβάζει
μηχανικώς. Απ' τα έρημα, τα τρία σελίνια του
έμεινε μόνον ένα: τόση ώρα που περίμενε
ξόδιασε τ' άλλα σε καφέδες και κονιάκ.
Κάπνισεν όλα του τα σιγαρέτα.
Τον εξαντλούσε η τόση αναμονή. Γιατί
κίόλας μονάχος όπως ήταν για ώρες, άρχισαν
να τον καταλαμβάνουν σκέψεις οχληρές
της παραστρατημένης του ζωής.

Here, Cavafy describes an addict who lives a rather vicious life. Apart from the fact, that it is clearly said in the poem that his life 'had gone astray', this individual wastes more of his money on 'coffee and cognac', while he 'smoked all his cigarettes'.⁸⁵ A person who spends his money on alcohol and

⁸³ Georganta, *Ο Οίνος στην Ποίηση*, 15.

⁸⁴ Gumpert, 'Freedom within the margin', 215-226.

⁸⁵ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 168-171.

coffee could be seen as an addict: he has no control of his actions and he only wants to satisfy his desires and need for alcohol.

In addition, in the above lines, the poet furthers the medicalised view of alcoholism, through the exhaustion which characterises the protagonist. Although according to the poem 'he was exhausted by such lengthy anticipation', it is most possible to see this fatigue as a result or symptom of alcohol consumption. This exhaustion could be seen as a kind of dizziness and is associated with the quantity of alcohol the individual consumed. His loneliness in combination with the consumption of alcohol could be considered the reason of the 'disturbing thoughts'.

Nevertheless, when he saw his friend approaching him, this individual is relieved and forgets all this fatigue:

Μα σαν είδε τον φίλο του να μπαίνει-ευθύς
η κούρασις, η ανία, η σκέψις φυγάνε.

Ο φίλος του έφερε μια ανέλπιστα είδησι.
Είχε κερδίσει στο χαρτοπαικτεϊόν εξήντα λίρες.

Τα έμορφα τους πρόσωπα, τα εξαίσιά τους νειάτα,
η αισθητική αγάπη που είχαν μεταξύ τους,

δροσίσθηκαν, ζωντάνεψαν, τονώθηκαν
απ' τες εξήντα λίρες του χαρτοπαικτεϊού.

In the above lines, we see a striking change of form, as the long block of lines with which the poem begins is here broken up. The boredom and miserable condition of the protagonist turns to totally different feelings, because of the appearance of his friend that functions as a medicine. The arrival of the friend disrupts the initial form of the poem, as he repulses fatigue and negative thoughts, both results of alcohol. In addition, the news that the friend won sixty pounds playing cards makes the protagonist even happier and the two of them are now 'refreshed, rejuvenated, invigorated'. It is worth noting, that although alcohol consumption can make pleasant feelings for a few hours, prolonged consumption leads to a gradual deterioration in mood.⁸⁶ As Trotter asserted, an infirm man can be invigorated with wine and a timid man becomes courageous.⁸⁷ And one could say this is the case in Cavafy's poem which clearly reflects Trotter's view.

⁸⁶ Jaffe, Petersen, Hodgson, *Addictions*, 105.

⁸⁷ Trotter, *An Essay*, 17.

In the following lines, Cavafy makes the representation of alcoholism as dependence:

Κι όλο χαρά και δύναμις, αίσθημα κι ωραιότης
πήγαν—όχι στα σπίτια των τιμίων οικογενειών τους
(όπου, άλλωστε, μήτε τους θέλαν πια):
σ' ένα γνωστό τους, και λίαν ειδικό,
σπίτι της διαφθοράς πήγαινε και ζήτησαν
δωμάτιον ύπνου, κι ακριβά πιοτά, και ξαναήπιαν.

Και σαν σώθηκαν τ' ακριβά πιοτά,
και σαν πλησίαζε πια η ώρα τέσσερες,
στον έρωτα δόθηκαν ευτυχείς.

Invigoration is promoted into vigour and replaced the previous exhaustion of the poem's protagonist. After the two young men meet, they regain their strength and go to a notorious place to drink and make love. According to the poem, the two young men did not go to their family homes, as they have been excluded by their family; this is an indication of how homosexuality was seen by society in the past, as their families possibly did not want them because of their erotic trend.⁸⁸ But it is also an indirect way for the poet to speak about their trend to alcoholism. As Gordon asserts, some illnesses such as smoking and alcoholism can incorporate a measure of blame and social disapproval.⁸⁹

With the sixty pounds from the card game, the two young men ordered and consumed expensive drinks and got drunk again. The expensive drinks replace the cheap cognac he was drinking before. But in any case, the expensive drinks are result of the lover's win in cards game, as opposed to the cheap cognac, that should be seen as their most usual drink. Expensive drinks possibly allude to champagne, a luxury drink that they seldom enjoy. Especially, the use of the verb 'ξαναήπιαν' ('drunk again') suggests a long drinking session mirroring the initial one, but now followed by a last part that shows the chance to stop drinking without avoiding the hangover of the following day.

As in the previous lines of this poem in which the protagonist of the poem spent more of his money on alcohol, here their first action after the one of them won these sixty pounds was to find a place for drinking. In addition, they did not choose any common drinks, but expensive drinks, showing their desire and passion for drinking. Yet, the fact that probably they used to live on little money, since they were disinherited by their families, shows that they always wanted to drink from these special

⁸⁸ Homosexuality is the topic in the next chapter.

⁸⁹ Gordon, 'The response to suffering', 86-100.

alcoholic drinks. But due to their financial difficulties they could not. Nevertheless, now they are going to satisfy this passion.

Alcohol is here a substance which launches erotic impulses, since 'once they'd run out of expensive drinks, they abandoned themselves blissfully to love'. Here, alcohol is an ingredient which makes stronger and more intense erotic desire. The use of the verb 'δοθήκαν' ('given to drinking') is important as it shows that the consumption of alcohol made the two young men lose control and contact with reality.

To sum up, in this poem alcoholism is meant as dependence manifesting and promoting eroticism, as the two young men after they drunk a lot, they lost control and gave themselves to eros. There the poem ends and Cavafy refuses to show us the hangover. In that way, the poet stresses the meaning of dependence, suggesting that the goal which was intoxication and then love was fulfilled. The ending of the poem without description of the hangover could be also seen as loss of any communication with the surrounding; at the end, the two young men are totally lost in their love. They cannot even remember their actions and the only important thing is to make love.

Yet, what it is implied here is the fact that consumption of alcohol drives a person to dizziness and loss of control. These are symptoms which give alcohol characteristics of specific illness. Dizziness is shown through the fatigue of the poem's protagonist who drinks alone in the café, waiting for his lover and through the lovers' giddiness after they drunk the expensive drinks. On the other hand, loss of control is shown again through their intercourse, since it happened only after they got drunk—, but also through the thought of the two young men to spend all their money on drinks.

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As opposed to the representation of homosexuality (which we will discuss in the next chapter), where Cavafy never mentions the word ‘homosexuality’ —as obviously, did not exist in Greek during his time—,⁹⁰ in the representation of alcoholism as a dependence, there is an unpublished/hidden poem that we can find the word ‘alcoholism’ and is the strongest evidence of Cavafy’s preoccupation with the subject. This is the poem ‘Μισή Ώρα’ (‘Half an Hour’) (1917).⁹¹ Consequently, the reader of this poem, although Cavafy does not clearly give an explanation for alcoholism’s meaning, can assume that the poet alludes to the discourse on alcoholism, during the eighteenth and the nineteenth century.

Interestingly, the word ‘αλκολισμός’ or ‘αλκοολισμός’ does not appear in the Greek dictionary of the Ακαδημία Αθηνών, only in Demetrakos’ dictionary, also published in 1933. In his dictionary, Babiniotis writes that the word appears first in Greek in 1894, a good half-century after its first English appearance, while the adjective ‘αλκοολικός’ appears in 1897. Presumably, other learned words like ‘οινοπνευματίασις’, which Demetrakos explains as chronic poisoning of excessive alcohol consumption — synonym to ‘αλκοολισμός’, or even ‘οινοποσία’, which Babiniotis explains as consumption of wine beyond the normal, were more common then. Between 1894 and 1917, the date of the poem, there is a gap of 23 years which is not a great one. This element shows Cavafy’s interest in medical terms and medicine in general and also that he was looking for information about alcohol consumption, and possibly, other illnesses. He was probably one of the very first who used this word in Greek, and moreover in poetry.

According to Bynum, ordinary language lacked a word for a diseased condition involving excessive dependence on alcoholic beverages, or a morally neutral word like ‘alcoholic’, because simply there was no such a concept. It was only in the early decades of the nineteenth century that physicians began to consider alcoholism as a disease and attempted to create the appropriate terminology.⁹² In addition, it is also worth noting, that alcoholism as term was designated by Huss between 1849 and 1852.⁹³ Thus, Cavafy’s decision to include this word in a poem shows his attempt to deal with contemporary issues of his times, and especially issues which relate to the illness concept of alcoholism. Nevertheless, the fact that this poem was never published shows that Cavafy possibly decided to speak about alcoholism in a more indirect way; something which is evident in other poems which allude to alcohol, without any clear reference.

⁹⁰ A surmise deriving from a Cavafy’s note. The poet uses in a Greek note the English word ‘homosexual’. See chapter on homosexuality. We incline to believe, that the Greek version of the word ‘homosexuality’ appeared in Greek in the late nineteenth century or even the early twentieth century, and after the studies of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and the publication of *Psychopathia Sexualis* in 1886.

⁹¹ Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα*, 101.

⁹² Bynum, ‘Chronic alcoholism’, 160-161.

⁹³ Kielhorn in ‘The history of alcoholism’, 122, asserts that Huss invented the term ‘alcoholism’ in 1849, while Porter in Trotter, *An Essay*, xiii, gives as designation year by Huss the year 1852.

Focusing on ‘Μισή Ώρα’, Pieris asserts that the poem reveals a passion for alcohol. According to Pieris, this poem constitutes a rare example of liberating passion, which shows the vigour of fantasy and the power of thought, and that the poet managed to fashion strange pleasures with the help of magical ingredients.⁹⁴ The poem starts as follows:

Μήτε σε απέκτησα, μήτε θα σε αποκτήσω
 ποτέ, θαρρώ. Μερικά λόγια, ένα πλησίασμα
 όπως στο μπαρ προχθές, και τίποτε άλλο.
 Είναι, δεν λέγω, λύπη. Αλλά εμείς της Τέχνης
 κάποτε μ’ έντασι του νου, και βέβαια μόνο
 για λίγην ώρα, δημιουργούμεν ηδονήν
 η οποία σχεδόν σαν υλική φαντάζει.

As Keeley has argued, the setting and the action of the poem bring us back to familiar territory: a brief encounter and a few words between strangers and an approach without any physical contact. The poet says that he is sorry the encounter did not progress, but ‘the imagination is free to move on stage without strong competition from an actual physical reality’. In addition, according to the poem for those who serve Art, ‘this allows the mind to create an erotic pleasure’, which proves to be ‘total’ or ‘perfect’, thanks to the agency of ‘μάγο οινόπνευμα’,⁹⁵ that we are going to see in the next part of the poem.

Interestingly, as Trotter declares, alcohol, and especially wine, makes the imagination stronger; an element we see in Cavafy. Trotter writes as follows: ‘the first effects of wine are, an inexpressible tranquillity of mind, and liveliness of countenance: the powers of imagination become more vivid’.⁹⁶ The connection between Trotter’s assumption and Cavafy’s poem is clear, as both refer to the role of imagination.

It is worth noting that the combination of alcohol and erotic pleasure in the poem alludes to the tradition of compatibility of wine and sex which was a popular part of English culture, throughout the eighteenth century.⁹⁷ Also, by asserting that ‘we who belong to Art create a pleasure that gives the impression of being almost real’,⁹⁸ the poet makes the reader think of the classical tradition, which

⁹⁴ Michalis Pieris, ‘Πάθη/passions: a latent poetic collection by Cavafy’, *Kambos*, 17 (2009), 79-100.

⁹⁵ Keeley, *Cavafy’s Alexandria*, 55-56.

⁹⁶ Trotter, *An Essay*, 14.

⁹⁷ Fritz-Wilhelm Neumann, ‘Claret at a premium? Ned Ward, the true Tory defender of fine wives?’, in *Drink in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Susanne Schmid and Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (London, 2014), 47-58.

⁹⁸ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 328.

saw wine as a source of inspiration for the poet.⁹⁹ With the difference though, that in Cavafy this is manifested in a modern idiom, as Cavafy combines this element with homoerotic experience.

Although the speaker has not yet mentioned anything about the consumption of alcohol apart from his visit to the bar, his passion for alcohol appears in the next lines of the poem:

Έτσι στο μπαρ προχθές—βοηθώντας κιόλας
πολύ ο ευσπλαχνικός αλκολισμός—
είχα μισή ώρα τέλεια ερωτική.
Και το κατάλαβες με φαίνεται,
κ' έμεινες κάτι περισσότερο επίτηδες.
Ήταν πολλή ανάγκη αυτό. Γιατί
μ' όλην την φαντασία, και με το μάγο οινόπνευμα,
χρειάζονταν να βλέπω και τα χείλη σου,
χρειάζονταν να 'ναι το σώμα σου κοντά.

Keeley suggests that the poem reinforces the following implication: 'that experience requires a sense of the loved one's physical presence to be completed', in the last two lines of the poem:¹⁰⁰ 'I needed to see your lips as well, needed to have your body close to me'. Apart from the fact that alcohol is seen by the poet as a source of inspiration, it is also seen as something with magic attributes. Alcohol is described in the above lines as a magical drink with consequences to the drinker, since after its consumption the poet has illusions; now he can see his lover. In that way, Cavafy proceeds to a medicalisation of alcoholism, because he not only refers to the excessive drinking by its name — alcoholism—, but also he gives an image of alcoholism rather lively.

Apart from that, the adjective used by Cavafy to describe alcohol is rather unexpected: 'merciful'. According to the poet, alcohol is merciful as it comes 'with a good deal of help'. Babinotis gives as a synonym of 'ευσπλαχνικός' the word 'στοργικός'. Indeed, the word suggests affection and care; a sense of self-medication. Alcohol is merciful in a way that the addict sees it as the only help and a sort of self-medication.

Hyde declares that alcohol has many uses and all of them change depending on an individual's drinking patterns. Thus, it can be a relaxant and social spirit or even a medicinal. It is described medically as a sedative hypnotic or anaesthetic and relaxes sensations and control. In that way, the

⁹⁹ Rolf Lessenich, 'Romantic radicalism and the temperance movement', in *Drink in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Susanne Schmid and Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (London, 2014), 81-90.

See also the repudiated poem 'Βακχικόν' (1886) (Cavafy, *Αποκηρυγμένα Ποιήματα και Μεταφράσεις*, 17).

¹⁰⁰ Keeley, *Cavafy's Alexandria*, 56.

person is not able to sense creatively.¹⁰¹ As Elster writes, generally speaking, addicts consume addictive substances in public, and seek other addicts in an attempt to convince themselves that their behaviour is normal. The alcoholics attempt to rationalise the need for drinking, spending time with other drinkers. At the same time, many social norms are intertwined with certain beliefs about the effects of alcohol. For example, in the past in Italy, wine was seen as a nourishment; in pre-Revolutionary Russia —and elsewhere—, alcohol was often prescribed by physicians as iatrogenic and it could be used for its medicinal properties; and finally, in the 1900s France, alcohol could be even seen as the cure for alcoholism.¹⁰²

In Cavafy the use of the word ‘merciful’ here suggests such explanation of alcoholism, as a beneficial substance and self-medication. As Lolli writes, alcohol becomes a source of pleasure and an effective way of removing pain, as feelings like security, love and warmth give an escape from reality,¹⁰³ as Cavafy implies through the use of the epithet ‘ευσπλαχνικός’. This is a phase in which self-esteem increases and anxiety is eliminated, because alcohol is a pleasurable and painless escape.¹⁰⁴ As Gorman explains, the addict may use such substances to mask depression, suggesting a form of self-medication.¹⁰⁵

Cavafy’s epithet alludes to such a consideration of alcohol, as the drinker sees it not as a threat, but rather as something beneficent. Grahame-Smith explains that there are cases when people go to their doctors or seek drugs, because of psychological disturbances, like anxiety and depression. Nevertheless, in many cases these act more as placebos.¹⁰⁶ Cavafy’s understanding of alcohol as helpful and merciful denotes that too. A placebo situation, when the addict sees the substance as his medicine.

Apparently —to make a point that we shall develop later—, Cavafy’s homosexual characters are frequently victims of society, as they live marginalised and stigmatised by the rest of society. Then the homosexual turns to the mercy of alcohol. Discussing John Cheever, Olivia Laing declares that he lived in a painful situation, as he was attracted by men too. These desires could affect his social status and Laing sets the question: ‘who wouldn’t drink in a situation like that, to ease the pressure of maintaining such intricately folded double lives?’. Alcohol was an ingredient that could protect him

¹⁰¹ Hyde, *Alcohol and Poetry*, 4-5.

¹⁰² Elster, ‘Emotion and addiction’, 251, 256-257.

¹⁰³ Giorgio Lolli, ‘Alcohol addiction’, *The American Journal of Nursing*, 48: 8 (1948), 505–507.

¹⁰⁴ Lolli, ‘Alcohol addiction’, 506. Babiniotis gives as synonyms of the word ‘ευσπλαχνικός’ the words: ‘πονόψυχος’, ‘συμπονετικός’, ‘στοργικός’, ‘σπλαχνικός’. The word ‘ευσπλαχνικός’ we see in the poem, an alternative use, also means ‘caring’ and ‘compassionate’.

¹⁰⁵ Mary Gorman, ‘Substance abuse’, *The American Journal of Nursing*, 98: 11 (1988), 66-68.

¹⁰⁶ D. G. Grahame-Smith, ‘Self-medication with mood-changing drugs’, *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 1: 3 (1975), 132-137.

from shame and inferiority.¹⁰⁷ In fact, this could apply to Cavafy too, as we know his passion for drink and homoerotic love. In this case, alcohol is a sort of self-medication and placebo indeed, since it is an escape from problems of his everyday life and reality.

One could say that alcoholism —here— implies an aesthetic doctrine, and indeed this could be seen as a reasonable explanation, as the poet associates poetic inspiration with alcohol consumption. Alcoholism sounds here as an artistic movement, like Parnassianism. Nevertheless, it is more a physical experience alluding to pathology, as ‘αλκολισμός’ combines with ‘οινόπνευμα’, which is not the most usual way to speak about alcoholic beverages. Especially, if we bear in mind the magical attributes of ‘οινόπνευμα’, which are denoted through the adjective ‘μάγο’ (‘magical’) and also the idea of ‘πνεύμα’ (‘spirit’), it is rather possible to consider it a medicine. Cavafy, purposely, uses ‘οινόπνευμα’ instead of another word describing alcoholic beverage, like ‘ποτό’ and ‘αλκοόλ’ or even by naming the exact drink, like ‘κρασί’ and ‘ρακί’.

‘Οινόπνευμα’ is used as a medical term associating with ‘αλκολισμός’. The difference is while the latter is the name of addiction or illness of the poem’s protagonist, the former is the name of his medicine or substance which makes him feel better. ‘Οινόπνευμα’ is used by Cavafy, because it includes a slightly different meaning, as it refers to the beneficial or chemical use of alcohol in general, like putting on the skin. On the other hand, words like ‘πιετό’ are more common and they allude to the negative aspects of alcohol.

The poet wanted to experience erotic pleasure with the person he met a couple of days ago. Nevertheless, the fact that he cannot experience the lover’s erotic pleasure makes him look for alternatives. The best alternative is found in alcoholism, as it offers the poet a substitute through his imagination. In the poem, Cavafy presents alcoholism as an addiction which causes illusions to the patient, and in this case erotic illusions. The poetic ego in this poem is a lonely person who can only experience love, when he is intoxicated, like an addict. This also suggests that he is dependent on this imaginary kind of love, since it is the only way to meet his beloved and satisfy his erotic impulses.

In this section, through the analysis of the erotic poems in which alcohol plays a role, we sought to bring out how Cavafy presents alcohol as a condition with all the basic characteristics of dependence. In that way, the poet reflects views of the nineteenth century on alcoholism. In addition, especially through the mention of the word ‘alcoholism’ in the poem ‘Μισή Ώρα’, we can trace elements of Cavafy’s interest in medicine. This term, which was relatively a new one, and possibly not widely spread among people, was known to Cavafy and was included in one of his poems. His decision to keep this poem unpublished shows his decision not to speak openly about alcoholism. Possibly, he

¹⁰⁷ Laing, *The Trip to Echo Spring*, 55.

thought that his readers, who were not very familiar with medical terms, would not appreciate the obvious medical background of the poem.

3.3 Symptomatology of alcoholism

We have seen in the previous section of this chapter, that alcohol functions as a means for the poetic voice to relive erotic memories or even to live a new erotic experience. In this section, we will see that alcohol is perceived by the poet not only in general terms as dependence, adopting Trotter's view, but also as a condition which is accompanied by a series of symptoms. We have also seen that some of the symptoms of alcoholism are dizziness and a kind of oneiric experience, or simply imagination's elation.

The erotic element prevails in two other poems, in which the symptomatology of alcoholism is presented with bodily effects. These are the poems 'Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι' ('The Next Table')¹⁰⁸ and 'Να Μείνει' ('Has Come to Rest'),¹⁰⁹ both published in 1919. In these two poems we have the same symptom: 'έξαψις' ('flush'). Following the strong erotic atmosphere in 'Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι', Sachperoglou translates the word as 'erotic excitation',¹¹⁰ while Mendelsohn as a 'flaring of desire'.¹¹¹ In any case, such translations are very reasonable and indeed reflect clearly in English the intense eroticism of the poem.

Approaching 'Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι' from this erotic view, Roilos declares that the role of memory is so strong that past and present are united as one; an opinion which gains more validity if we bear in mind the speaker's sense that he once had an erotic experience with the specific individual in the poem.¹¹² Nevertheless, if the poem is seen from a different perspective, 'έξαψις' might allude to a specific symptom: to a kind of fever which is the result of alcohol and dominates over the body. Of course, the erotic element is not underestimated; however this 'έξαψις' should be also seen in connection with alcoholism.

Starting with 'Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι', the poetic ego proceeds to a clarification:

Δεν είναι διόλου έξαψις ερωτισμού.

In that way, he makes readers seek other reasons for this specific symptom, as the poet excludes 'erotic excitation'.

In the following lines, the speaker gives some details, like the place he is and his drinking habits:

Και μονάχα προ ολίγου μπήκα στο καζίνο·

¹⁰⁸ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 104-107.

¹⁰⁹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 110-113.

¹¹⁰ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 105.

¹¹¹ Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 82.

¹¹² Panagiotis Roilos, 'Επιθυμία και μνήμη στο έργο του Καβάφη', *Νέα Εστία*, 1761 (2003), 607-623.

δεν είχα ούτε ώρα για να πιω πολύ.

The poet says that he entered the casino ‘just a little while ago’;¹¹³ a place where someone goes for gambling. Inevitably, such a place presupposes alcohol consumption, an element verified in the very next line by the poet who asserts that he ‘didn’t even have the time to drink a lot’. Behind these words of the poet, there is a strongest meaning: this is the passion for alcohol. The fact that he says that he did not have the time to drink a lot implies that this is what he usually does when he goes there. Every time he goes to this gambling house, the poet sees it as an opportunity for gambling and drinking.

Besides, by asserting that he had this ‘έξαψις’ (‘flush’) even before he drank, it is rather a symptom of deprivation; in a similar way that an addict needs his dose. The poet seems to be dependent to alcohol, who needs some drinks to recover from this fever of ‘έξαψις’. Here, we have a medicalisation of alcoholism, as the poetic ego feels fever or ‘έξαψις’, if we borrow the actual word from the poem; symptom which possibly passes after the consumption of alcohol.

Yet the last lines of the poem, in which the poet seems to remember eventually the identity of the individual who came into the gambling house and attracted his attention, presuppose that the poetic ego has recovered from this fever, after the consumption of some drinks:

Κι αν δεν θυμούμαι, που—ένα ξέχασμα μου δεν σημαίνει.

Α τώρα, να, που κάθησε στο διπλανό τραπέζι
γνωρίζω κάθε κίνησι που κάμνει—κι απ’ τα ρούχα κάτω
γυμνά τ’ αγαπημένα μέλη ξαναβλέπω.

While initially the poet cannot recognise who is the young man who entered into the gambling house, after his statement that he did not drink a lot, he asserts that he now remembers this young man. The poet, although not mentioned in the poem, remembered this young man, because he was drunk. In that way, Cavafy gives the reader the symptom of memory loss, which again passes after the poetic ego consumes alcohol.

In the poem ‘Να Μείνει’ instead of the adjective ‘έξαψις’ the poet uses the verb ‘είχαμεν εξαφθεί’. And, again, although there is a strong erotic atmosphere in the poem which makes this flush or fever resemble an erotic one, similarly to the previous poem it is their dependence on alcohol, of both the poetic ego and his partner that caused this symptom.

Initially, there is a denotation of a place; a wine tavern:

¹¹³ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 104-107.

Η ώρα μια την νύχτα θάτανε,
ή μιάμισυ.

Σε μια γωνιά του καπηλειού·
πίσω απ' το ξύλινο το χώρισμα.
Εκτός ημών των δυό το μαγαζί όλως διόλου άδειο.
Μια λάμπα πετρελαίου μόλις το φώτιζε.
Κοιμούντανε, στην πόρτα, ο αγρυπνισμένος υπηρέτης.

The wine tavern alludes to alcohol consumption, although this is not mentioned in the poem. In addition, the fact that the poet mentions that they stayed until late in this tavern implies that they lost any sense of time. He cannot even give the exact time, as he assumes it would be about one o' clock or maybe one thirty. This loss of contact with time should be seen as a result of alcohol consumption too.

The late time is also implied, apart from the clear indication that midnight is well-passed, from the fact that the only two people in the tavern were the narrator and his lover. All the others left well before and the two of them stayed in the tavern and continued drinking. Also, according to the poem, the servant was still there, but struggling not to fall asleep. So, while everyone else left the tavern, the two lovers stayed there drinking; this shows their passion for alcohol, as they did not leave even after they stayed alone in this wine tavern.

In contrast, the excessive alcohol consumption made them lose all sense of time, as we have already seen above and caused them erotic desire and fever:

Δεν θα μας έβλεπε κανείς. Μα κιόλας
είχαμεν εξαφθεί τόσο πολύ,
που γίναμε ακατάλληλοι για προφυλάξεις.

Τα ενδύματα μισανοίχθηκαν—πολλά δεν ήσαν
γιατί επύρωνε θείος Ιούλιος μήνας.

In the above lines, clearly, the poet asserts that the two lovers were flushed. One could say that this flush was the result of erotic desire, as in 'Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι', or even of the summer, since, according to the poem it was July. Nevertheless, this is a rather superficial explanation given by the two lovers in the poem. This flush is a symptom of alcohol consumption. However, as opposed to the previous poem in which 'έξαψις' is the result of alcohol's deprivation, in this poem 'έξαψις' came after

they drank. But either way, 'έξαψις' is associated with alcoholism and constitutes a symptom of their condition.

In 'Να Μείνει' alcoholism is presented as dependence and is accompanied, again, by specific symptoms. Initially, we have this 'έξαψις', which is the link connecting to the previous poem. We have the loss of contact with time, as the poetic ego seems uncertain about time. And also although the two lovers did not lose totally contact with reality, they do not really care about the consequences of their intercourse, because although all the customers left the tavern, the servant was still there. In any case, the wine tavern of the poem, similarly to any other tavern, is a public house for everyone. The poet declares that the two of them were 'behind the wooden partition',¹¹⁴ saying, indirectly, that nobody would see them; but he gives another superficial explanation, result of the excessive alcohol consumption. In fact, the alcohol made them lose control and their bodies were left to the erotic desire which was increased by alcohol.

Although the erotic element is not directly present in the poem 'Μέρες του 1908' ('Days of 1908') (1932),¹¹⁵ there is still a strong representation of alcoholism. The protagonist of 'Μέρες του 1908' is an impoverished young man and a regular habitu  of the caf , where he goes to play cards:

Δυο, τρία, σελίνια την ημέρα κέρδιζε, δεν κέρδιζε.
Από χαρτιά και τάβλι τι να βγάλει το παιδί,
στα καφενεία της σειράς του, τα λαϊκά,

Some lines after that, Cavafy refers to 'the awful all-nighters':¹¹⁶

σαν γλύτωνεν απ' το φριχτό ξενύχτι,

Inevitably, Cavafy's description in this poem alludes to alcohol consumption. The young man in 'Μέρες του 1908' lives in an unhealthy way, as he visits caf s, plays cards and probably for escaping from this 'awful all-nighters' consumes great quantities of alcohol. In addition, bearing in mind the poor financial state of the individual one could assume that he consumes low quality alcohol, harmful to his health.

¹¹⁴ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 110-113.

¹¹⁵ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 206-207.

¹¹⁶ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 206-207.

The poem could be seen as a case where someone actually dies of drink. The working-class protagonist, although ‘quite lettered’, could not find a work with a decent salary. Thus, he ended up ‘in the lowly cafés of his social class’ and succumbed to hard drinking and death:

Α μέρες του καλοκαιριού του εννιακόσια οκτώ,
απ’ το είδωμά σας, καλαισθητικά,
έλειψ’ η κανελιά ξεθωριασμένη φορεσιά.

From what is discussed above, one might think that the topic of alcohol is confined to Cavafy’s poems set in the present day. This is not the case. The portrait of the alcoholic king Orophernes is the prevalent subject in the poem ‘Οροφέρνης’ (‘Orophernes’) (1916).¹¹⁷ The poem has been characterised by Cavafy as a historical one and praises the beauty of Orophernes which contrasts with his low character.¹¹⁸ According to the poem, alcoholism presents a specified symptom: fatigue or exhaustion. Critics have already dealt with this poem, but in fact none of them saw Orophernes’ weakness and inability in the poem, as symptom of alcoholism.

Keeley asserts that ‘Οροφέρνης’ reflects the same erotic emphasis that characterises Cavafy’s image of Alexandria, with the difference that here the poet identifies the ‘Greek way’ with a knowledge of sensual pleasure. However, it becomes clear that Orophernes will remain Asiatic in his heart.¹¹⁹ Vrisimitzakis comments on the protagonist’s persistence in a lustful way of life and drunkenness, but he does not proceed to any further analysis of symptoms.¹²⁰ On the other hand, Capri-Karka characterises Orophernes as a historical figure of minor importance, who failed as a leader. The basic reason which made Cavafy write about him was his exceptional beauty.¹²¹ Nevertheless, Capri-Karka underrates the role of alcohol and dependence, in general, in the poem. It could be said that Cavafy chooses Orophernes as the central figure of the poem, because he wants to present the effects of alcoholism on an individual and his volition.

This appears in the following lines in which Orophernes is depicted as an alcoholic, who experiences the negative results of alcoholism:

και στην Συρία ξέπεσε, μες στο παλάτι
του Δημητρίου να διασκεδάζει και να οκνεύει.

¹¹⁷ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 48-52.

¹¹⁸ Lechonitis, *Καβαφικά Αυτοσχόλια*, 31.

¹¹⁹ Keeley, *Cavafy’s Alexandria*, 113.

¹²⁰ Giorgos Vrisimitzakis, *Το Έργο του Κ. Π. Καβάφη*, ed. G. P. Savidi (Athens, 1975), 45.

¹²¹ Capri-Karka, *Love and the Symbolic Journey*, 44.

Για λίγο βγήκε απ' την λαγνεία κι απ' την μέθη,
 κι ανίκανα, και μισοζαλισμένος
 κάτι εζήτησε να ραδιουργήσει,
 κάτι να κάμει, κάτι να σχεδιάσει,
 κι απέτυχεν οικτρά κ' εξουδενόθη.

As we can see in the above two parts from the poem, Orophernes could be characterised with the following adjectives: idle, dizzy, unable and exhausted. All these characteristics, which give the image of a weak person, constitute results of alcoholism. According to the poem, Orophernes enjoys 'idleness', 'lechery', 'stupor', he is 'half-dazed' and he is planning to do something but 'he failed pitifully and was overwhelmed'.¹²² His passion for alcohol prevents him from doing very basic things in life, as he is dizzy and he cannot fulfil his plans. Orophernes is someone who lost his liveliness and he gets exhausted with no serious reason. The word 'μέθη' (drunkness), we see in 'Οροφέρνης', is a word that the reader finds also in the poem 'Ο Δαρείος' ('Darius') (1920).¹²³

Excessive alcohol consumption causes several disorders, reduced liveliness, brightness of mind, inclination towards irritability, timidity, exhaustion, tremor and sweating; even, alcohol shortens life.¹²⁴ Also Trotter claims that a basic effect of alcohol is loss of voluntary motion and delirium, which are associated with debility and exhausted excitability.¹²⁵ Especially, the symptoms of reduced liveliness, brightness of mind and exhaustion are very obvious in the poem 'Οροφέρνης', showing Cavafy's familiarity with the discourse around alcoholism.

This medicalised version of alcohol consumption, causing 'φθορά' ('wear' or 'corruption') and inevitably death is also present in another poem, this time in the present: 'Ένας Νέος, της Τέχνης του Λόγου—στο 24^ο Έτος του' ('A Young Man of Letters—in his 24th Year') (1928).¹²⁶ In this poem, alcoholism is interwoven with the theme of homosexuality. The poem represents very clearly the notion of 'φθορά'; a term we will discuss in the chapter on homosexuality too. In this poem though, 'φθορά' is more evidently associated with alcoholism, since the reader sees a person who not only drinks incessantly, but also he, again, presents specific symptoms of alcoholism.

In the first three lines, the poet introduces the reader into the nervous condition, almost mental, of the poem's protagonist:

¹²² For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 48-53.

¹²³ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 124-127.

¹²⁴ Kielhorn, 'The history of alcoholism', 124-125.

¹²⁵ Trotter, *An Essay*, 31.

¹²⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 174-175.

Όπως μπορείς πια δούλεψε, μυαλό.—
 Τον φθείρει αυτόν μια απόλαυσις μισή.
 Είναι σε μια κατάστασι εκνευριστική.

According to the poem, the protagonist 'is consumed by half-fulfilled erotic pleasure' and 'he is in a nerve-racked state'.¹²⁷ As we will see in the homoerotic poems, homosexuality is presented as a mental illness which destroys and wears down a person. The protagonist experiences a nervous condition.

In the following lines the poet abides in the erotic element of the poem:

Φιλεί το πρόσωπο το αγαπημένο κάθε μέρα,
 τα χέρια του είναι πάνω στα πιο εξάισια μέλη.
 Ποτέ του δεν αγάπησε με τόσο μέγα
 πάθος. Μα λείπει η ωραίας πραγμάτων
 του έρωτος· λείπει η πραγμάτων
 που πρέπει νάναι κι απ' τους δυό μ' έντασιν επιθυμητή.

(Δεν είν' ομοίως δοσμένοι στην ανώμαλη ηδονή κ' οι δυο.
 Μονάχ' αυτόν κυρίεψε απολύτως).

Firstly, and especially in the last two lines of the above ones, Cavafy refers to the consequences of homosexuality characterised here as 'ανώμαλη ηδονή', we are going to see next: the homosexual cannot control his body, since his sickly passion occupies his body and he is now controlled by an abnormal passion.

Nevertheless, something is missing: the fulfilment of erotic desire. The intercourse can only occur, when both people have the same intensity for making love. The protagonist cannot experience love, because his beloved does not have the same intensity for 'aberrant pleasure'. Thus, he is looking for alternatives, such as alcohol. Something we met in the previous unit of this chapter, as alcohol is the main substitute in order for the individual to experience love:

Και φθείρεται, και νεύριασε εντελώς.
 Εξ' άλλου είναι κι άεργος· κι αυτό πολύ συντείνει.
 Κάτι μικρά χρηματικά ποσά
 με δυσκολιά δανείζεται (σχεδόν

¹²⁷ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 174-175.

τα ζητιανεύει κάποτε) και ψευτοσυντηρείται.
 Φιλεί τα λατρεμένα χειλή· πάνω
 στο εξαίσιο σώμα—που όμως τώρα νοιώθει
 πως στέργει μόνον—ηδονίζεται.
 Κ' έπειτα πίνει και καπνίζει· πίνει και καπνίζει·
 και σέρνεται στα καφενεία ολημερίς,
 σέρνει με ανία της εμορφιάς του το μαράζι.—
 Όπως μπορείς πια δούλεψε, μυαλό.

The protagonist of the poem 'wears himself down' and 'he's completely unnerved'. He is in a pathological state; he is very nervous. And one could say that the reason is his homosexuality. Yet, in the poem is said that 'he kisses the beloved lips' of his lost lover, but obviously this happens only in his imagination and of course after he consumed quantities of alcohol. Thus, initially, it could be said that because of alcohol, he imagines things. Nevertheless, from a different perspective it could be also said that the poem speaks of him drinking after intercourse, as it to forget. One could assume that while he drinks to forget, the result is rather the opposite: he remembers all this passion he experienced once even clearer.

In addition, the declaration that the protagonist is a drunkard reverses the initial belief that his pathological nervous condition is the result only of his homosexuality. The repetition of the phrase 'he drinks and smokes; drinks and smokes' shows that the role of alcohol is prevalent in the poem. The nervous state of the protagonist is a result and symptom of alcoholism. He does not do anything else; in contrast, as it is asserted in the poem, he 'trails all day in and out of cafés', because he is ill of alcoholism and he experiences certain symptoms of his dependence as this nervous condition is.

Yet, the fact that the poet uses a verb with strong meaning, like 'σέρνεται' ('trails') to show his regular visits to the coffee shops make us believe that the protagonist is corrupted by alcohol consumption. He lost his strength, he is weak and this is another result and symptom of alcoholism. Due to the loss of his bodily strength, he cannot walk properly; in contrast, he trails. And although he is in such an awful state, he still goes to the cafés 'wearily dragging' in order to drink.

Also, by the use of the word 'άεργος' instead of 'άνεργος', he does not only attempt to show that the protagonist was unemployed, but also that he was not willing to find a job. For 'άεργος' denotes the person who does not want or try to find a job.¹²⁸ So, the protagonist is 'άεργος', because he does not try to find a job; and the reason is his state of weakness described above. To sum up, the

¹²⁸ Babiniotis explains 'άεργος' as someone who does not work because of a personal choice. Synonyms are 'lazy' ('τεμπέλης') and 'idle' ('φυγόπονος'). In contrast, 'άνεργος' is someone who cannot find a job, despite his attempts. Demetrakos explains 'άνεργος' as ο μη ενεργός, ο αδρανών, ο ανέργαστος, ο μη εργαζόμενος and 'άεργος' as ο αργός, ο μη εργαζόμενος, ο οκνηρός.

‘φθορά’ of the protagonist constitutes combined result of his homosexuality and his addiction to alcoholism.

In addition, the representation of alcoholism is accompanied by certain symptoms, as follows: loss of strength and weakness, boredom, illusions and definitely nervousness. Interestingly, the poem starts and ends in the same way, as the poet repeats the same verse. This is a kind of solicitation or even a sign of desperation, as the alcoholic individual asks from his ill mind to work as better as it can. The mind is harmed by alcohol, but the protagonist requests to do whatever it can.

The issue of ‘φθορά’ is also present in ‘Μέρες του 1909, ’10 και ’11’ (‘Days of 1909, ’10 and ’11’) (1928),¹²⁹ in which a young man experiences similar symptoms to ‘Ένας Νέος, της Τέχνης του Λόγου-στο 24^{ον} Έτος του’. The poem describes the life of a young man, son of a sailor, who works for a blacksmith. His life is such awful that his hands are always ‘grimed with rust and oil’. During the night and after he finished his job he used to ‘sell his body for a few shillings’.¹³⁰

This homoerotic reference becomes more obvious in the following lines of the poem, in which the poet admires the beauty of this young man. But unfortunately, according to the poem such beauty ‘went to waste’, since ‘no statue or painting of him was ever made’. However, in the last three lines of the poem, Cavafy gives us some important information:

στο παλιομάγαζο ενός σιδερά ριχμένος,
γρήγορ’ απ’ την επίπονη δουλειά,
κι από λαϊκή κραπάλη, ταλαιπωρημένη, είχε φθαρεί.

Initially, the young man is ‘ριχμένος’ (‘thrown’) into the shop. It seems that he is not willing to go there, he is ‘thrown’ like an object. He did not go to the shop, but on the contrary he is ‘thrown’ in the shop. From this description, the reader can assume that he is very weak and lost his strength. Second, he felt quickly tired from the job, which was hard anyway, but also because of ‘debauchery’.

Although there is no clear indication in the poem about alcohol consumption, the poet’s statement that the young man was tired because of ‘λαϊκή κραπάλη, ταλαιπωρημένη’ (‘cheap, wretched debauchery’) leads the reader in this direction. Besides, ‘κραπάλη’ is perceived rather as a general state of corruption, including excessive alcohol consumption and sitting up late. Consequently, we could say that the protagonist of the poem was, again, ill of alcohol and that his fatigue is a symptom of alcoholism. He gets quickly exhausted because his ‘κραπάλη’ harmed his health. Besides the use of the epithets ‘λαϊκή’ and ‘ταλαιπωρημένη’, is very effective and strong in meaning —

¹²⁹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 186-187.

¹³⁰ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 130-131.

especially in the Greek original text—, as they clearly give a description of the protagonist's condition. Inevitably, he has no strength, since he goes to the shop and trails himself, in the same way of the protagonist in the previous poem. Also, 'λαϊκή' not only refers to a middle class habit, but also that this man seems to spend all his wages on a single day; result of his dependence on alcohol and passion for drinking and once again for possibly badly produced drink. The two epithets could be easily descriptive of the protagonist, as 'λαϊκός' and 'ταλαιπωρημένος'.¹³¹

¹³¹ There are three more poems that deal with 'κραϊπάλη', by naming it directly. These are the following acknowledged poems: 'Ένας θεός των' ('One of Their Gods') (1917), 'Από την σχολή του περιωνύμου φιλοσόφου' ('From the School of the Renowned Philosopher') (1921) and 'Μέσα στα καπηλειά—' ('In the Wine Taverns—') (1926).

3.4 Conclusions

Not only alcohol but alcoholism is what G. P. Savidis would call a basic theme of Cavafy's poetry. In the poems analysed in the first section of the chapter, we saw that alcoholism is strictly associated with the erotic element. Eroticism seems to be feasible only after the consumption of alcohol. As described by Cavafy, an individual passionate with alcoholism seeks alcohol, as the tool to relive previous erotic experiences or as a means to live a new intercourse.

As we have seen in the second section, certain symptoms, like fatigue, weakness and boredom are associated with alcoholism. Thus, in this case, Cavafy seems to draw a parallel between alcoholism with a specific illness, reflecting Trotter's view that alcoholism is indeed a disease. Even the word 'κραυπάλη' is used by Cavafy not only to describe a vicious kind of life, but also as an indirect means to speak about alcoholism. In all the poems where Cavafy uses 'κραυπάλη', he points to the excessive consumption of alcoholic beverages by the poems' protagonists. The word 'κραυπάλη' could be seen as an alternative name of alcoholism.

To the question whether alcoholism is, for Cavafy, dependence or a specific illness, we could answer in the following way: alcoholism may indeed be an illness, as Cavafy mainly reflects views of the nineteenth century that named alcoholism as a specific illness. Nevertheless, aware of the discourse on alcoholism and the treatises of Trotter and others, Cavafy perceived alcoholism essentially as dependence on alcohol, even when it provokes erotic experience. Consequently, alcoholism should be characterised rather as a dependence.

Cavafy's protagonists are dependent on alcohol psychologically and physiologically and deprivation makes them suffer the consequences of alcohol dependence syndrome. A series of symptoms and also recollection of former erotic experiences after alcohol consumption, make the dependence syndrome strong in these poems. It seems that his protagonists cannot live the life they want without alcohol, as this is the only way to live again their erotic experiences. Consequently erotic experience depends on alcohol and the role of imagination, while the symptomatology of alcohol consumption makes the dependence syndrome in these poems a prevalent characteristic.

In addition, one could say that Cavafy is interested in the way alcohol encourages and brings out dependence, as his protagonists seek alcohol although its consequences are adverse. In the poems discussed in the chapter, while the symptoms and negative consequences of dependence are manifested in different ways, it seems that the protagonists are rather indifferent to these. They only see alcohol as an escape and exit to a different world; the world of hallucinations.

Cavafy presents his protagonists as victims of alcohol consumption and shows the relation between the human organism and the substance consumed, which is a basic and prominent characteristic of dependence. Trotter and others presumably gave Cavafy the basic framework of the

disease concept of alcoholism, which he exploited to the full and adopted to the reality of his poems. Thus, his characters are people dependent on alcohol.

Chapter 4: Homosexuality and the discourse of medicalisation

4.1 Introduction

Does Cavafy characterise homosexuality as a sickly passion? And, how far was Cavafy affected by the medicalisation of discourse about homosexuality (notably in relation to ‘inversion’) in the nineteenth century? Biography does not get us very far, while although a queer theory approach, like Papanikolaou’s, takes into consideration the disease concept of homosexuality in the homoerotic poems, it tends to follow a different line of argument. For example, although medical theories on homosexuality are mentioned at a general superficial level (like the views of Raffalovich and Krafft-Ebing)¹, they are not discussed as fully as they will be here. In fact, Cavafy’s work was being viewed medically early, as in 1935 Skouras wrote the article ‘Η σχιζοφρενική έμπνευση στο έργο του Καβάφη’; an article which is not referred to by Papanikolaou. Initially published in the medical journal *Ελληνική Ιατρική* in 1935, Skouras seeks to analyse Cavafy’s poetry from a medical perspective.² The article has been republished in *Deltos* in 1996³ with an introduction by Antonakopoulos, which has the title ‘Μια ψυχιατρική μελέτη της εποχής του μεσοπολέμου για τον Κ. Π. Καβάφη’.⁴ The republication of the article and Antonakopoulos’ introduction is an indication of the medical interest in Cavafy’s poetry.

A medical humanities approach enlightens these homoerotic poems, as it helps us to see the ramifications behind certain Cavafy’s references or characterisations of homosexuality, like ‘sickly passion’ we see for example in the unfinished poem ‘Στην Προκυμαία’ (‘On the Jetty’) (as ‘νοσηρόν μας πάθος’)⁵ and the poem ‘Έν Απογνώσει’ (‘In Despair’) (as ‘την νοσηρά ηδονή’)⁶. The medical humanities can help us to understand that the association between homosexuality and sickness that Cavafy gives —and sometimes resists— in these poems is not simply a personal view but an artistic response to views widespread in nineteenth-century discourse.

According to Orrells, the nineteenth century saw numerous and competing reifications of same-sex desires and masculinities. Theories of sexual inversion that spoke about female brains trapped in male bodies interact with theories of homosexuality dealing with masculine men who have intercourse with other masculine men. Foucault’s depiction of the sodomite as a ‘temporary aberration’ and the homosexual as ‘species’ provides the homosexual with a minoritised identity and

¹ See Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ’ Εμένα Καμωμένοι», 95-96, 101.

² Fotis Skouras, ‘Η σχιζοφρενική έμπνευση στο έργο του Καβάφη’, *Ελληνική Ιατρική*, 9 (1935), 748-760.

³ Fotis Skouras, ‘Η σχιζοφρενική έμπνευση στο έργο του Καβάφη’, *Deltos*, 12 (1996), 5-7, 10-13.

⁴ G. N. Antonakopoulos, ‘Μια ψυχιατρική μελέτη της εποχής του μεσοπολέμου για τον Κ. Π. Καβάφη’, *Deltos*, 12 (1996), 5.

⁵ Cavafy, *Ατελή Ποιήματα*, 99.

⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 140.

describes homosexuality as hermaphroditism of the soul, in terms of gender inversion.⁷ This suggests that the male is a non-male trapped within a male body. Even though, as David Halperin asserts, more flexible theories of sexual orientation have now come to the fore and we cannot ignore that the inversion theory of homosexuality has been superseded by theories of sexual orientation, independent of relevant degrees of masculinity and femininity that took place during the latter part of the nineteenth century.⁸ In any case, inversion was a term used in the nineteenth century to describe homosexuality and there is evidence that Cavafy knew about this discourse.

The critic who has dealt most extensively with the issue of homosexuality in Cavafy is of course Papanikolaou. In a series of articles, like “‘Words That Tell and Hide’: revisiting C. P. Cavafy’s closets’,⁹ and his book «Σαν κ’ Εμένα Καμωμένοι»: ο ομοφυλόφιλος Καβάφης και η ποιητική της σεξουαλικότητας,¹⁰ Papanikolaou focuses on Cavafy’s homosexuality. Nevertheless, as Papanikolaou himself declares in his book, the basic element on which he builds is Foucault’s theory.¹¹ By contrast, the keystone of this chapter on Cavafy’s homosexuality goes back into Cavafy’s own time and Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s (1840-1902) theory that homosexuality is a mental illness.

Beyond Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’ (1825-1895) view about the innateness of homosexuality (discussed in the chapter) —which of course defends homosexuality— I shall attempt to show how homosexuality is presented in Cavafy’s work as a sickly and stigmatised condition, recalling Krafft-Ebing. Through the analysis of specific poems, we intend to show that, again, Cavafy alludes in general terms to Krafft-Ebing who also spoke about symptoms.

According to Schaffner, Krafft-Ebing’s theories, in the 1880s, were ‘the first and most influential attempt to describe and classify the modern sexual perversions’ and set in train the medicalised discussion of homosexuality. The importance of his theories lies in his definition that perversion is every expression of the sexual instinct that does not correspond with the purpose of nature and is classified as a disease.¹² Krafft-Ebing declares that ‘antipathic sexuality is the total absence of sexual feeling for the opposite sex’, concentrating ‘all sexuality in its own sex’. It is a purely physical anomaly, because the sexual instinct does not correspond with the primary and secondary characteristics.¹³

⁷ See Michel Foucault, *The Will of Knowledge: the history of sexuality: 1*, tr. Robert Hurley (London, 1998), 43.

⁸ In Orrells, *Classical Culture*, pp. 28-33.

⁹ Dimitris Papanikolaou, “‘Words that tell and hide’: revisiting C. P. Cavafy’s closets’, *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, 23: 2 (2005), 235-260.

¹⁰ Dimitris Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ’ Εμένα Καμωμένοι». The article above corresponds to the third chapter of this book.

¹¹ Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ’ Εμένα Καμωμένοι», 74.

¹² Anna Katharina Schaffner, *Modernism and Perversion* (Hampshire, 2012), 45, 47.

¹³ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, tr. Franklin S. Klaf-intr. Joseph LoPiccolo (New York, 2011), 35.

Krafft-Ebing was a pioneer in the medical study of sex, when sexology was still at an embryonic stage.¹⁴ He attempted to explain homosexuality in a medical way: ‘sexual instinct —as emotion, idea and impulse— is a function of the cerebral *cortex*. Thus far no definite region of the cortex has been proved to be exclusively the seat of sexual sensations and impulses’; ‘the cerebral cortex, by means of preconceived or reproduced sensual ideas, reacts on the reproductive organs, including hyperaemia, production of semen, erection, ejaculation’; ‘the centre of erection is an intermediate station placed between the brain and the genital apparatus. The nervous paths which connect it with the brain probably run through the *pedunculi cerebri* and the *pons*.’¹⁵

In his attempt to explain sexual inversion as part of a medicalised theory, Krafft-Ebing states: ‘these cerebral anomalies fall within the domain of psychopathology. The spinal and peripheral anomalies may occur in combination with the former; but as a rule they affect persons free from mental disease’.¹⁶ Krafft-Ebing’s opinions are important, because they enlighten Cavafy’s homoerotic poems, and especially the poems which equate homosexuality with sickness. These theories apart from the fact that they constitute a medicalised view of homosexuality in the nineteenth century, offer us a basic tool to understand and explain Cavafy’s persistence to depict homosexuality not only as a stigma, but also as a special illness.

In general, homosexuality became a frequently represented perversion in modernist literature. Thomas Mann was influenced by Krafft-Ebing’s views on homosexuality.¹⁷ And of course, this shows that Cavafy was not the only who read Krafft-Ebing’s opinions on sexual inversion. Krafft-Ebing’s theories became very popular among authors and the public in general, and other psychiatrists attempted to develop his opinions on homosexuality.¹⁸

As Mondimore explains, the status of homosexuality as a specific illness, which is echoed in Cavafy’s poetry, was valid until 1976: up to that date, homosexuality was classified by the American Psychiatric Association among mental disorders. Disorders are characterised by subjective discomfort or in the case of certain mental disorders, changes in normal subjective experiences.¹⁹ After Krafft-Ebing, others dealt with homosexuality, attempting to explain it from a different perspective. As Mills writes, Foucault’s analysis of the interaction between the body and institutions has been very influential among feminists and queer theorists from the 1980s onwards,²⁰ possibly because

¹⁴ Schaffner, *Modernism and Perversion*, 58, 60.

¹⁵ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 17.

¹⁶ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 36.

¹⁷ Schaffer, *Modernism and Perversion*, 173-174.

¹⁸ Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, psychiatry, and the making of sexual identity* (Chicago, 2000), 43.

¹⁹ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 3.

²⁰ Sara Mills, *Michel Foucault* (London, 2004), 81.

Foucault's aim was to intervene in specific struggles of disenfranchised and socially suspect groups such as prisoners, mental patients and homosexuals.²¹

This is not to say that Papanikolaou ignores or is unaware of the medical writings of Cavafy's time. In contrast, he declares that Cavafy's poetry alludes to medical discourse around homosexuality, and in particular the emerging field of sexology. Papanikolaou also asserts that the whole discussion on homosexuality became known during the nineteenth century, since there were many publications for a mass audience; thus it was impossible that Cavafy did not know about it.²² However it is worth noting, that sexology, as Papanikolaou mentions, is just one dimension of Krafft-Ebing's theories, as he was primarily a psychiatrist determined to show that homosexuality was a mental disorder. Krafft-Ebing's aim was to show that homosexuality as a mental illness is accompanied by symptoms, like other mental illnesses. In that respect, it may be seen in the same conceptual framework as the preceding chapters of this thesis.

Apart from the fact that Papanikolaou speaks about the book *Sodome*,²³ with which Cavafy was familiar and which narrates the story of a homosexual who goes mad, he notes that Cavafy's agony in his personal writings is a common anxiety for homosexuals of that time. From what Papanikolaou suggests, we should consider that Cavafy read Krafft-Ebing and other relevant writings of the nineteenth century which medicalised homosexuality.²⁴ Especially, if we bear in mind the date of the writing of 'Πολυέλαιος' ('Chandelier') (1895),²⁵ which is the earliest poem in which Cavafy describes homosexuality indirectly as illness through the phrase 'λάγνη πάθησις' ('lustful passion' by Sachperoglou),²⁶ we can see it as evidence on which translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (first published in 1886), the poet possibly read. This is the authorised translation of Krafft-Ebing's book by Charles Gilbert Chaddock, one year earlier; in 1894.²⁷

However, even if one argues that Cavafy did not read the actual book by Krafft-Ebing, we should consider that Cavafy should have read other sources referring to Krafft-Ebing's theories on homosexuality, during that time: for example, Moll's work *Les Perversions de l'instinct genital* in 1893 which comes with a preface by Krafft-Ebing²⁸ and Ladame's *Inversion sexuelle chez un dégénéré traitée*

²¹ Jana Sawicki in Mills, *Michel Foucault*, 81.

²² Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ' Εμένα Καμωμένοι», 108-109, 125,127.

²³ Henri d' Argis, *Sodome* (Paris, 1888).

²⁴ Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ' Εμένα Καμωμένοι», 121-122, 130, 133,135-136.

²⁵ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74-75.

²⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 75. Although Sachperoglou translates 'πάθησις' as 'passion', we have to do with a totally different context than 'πάθος'.

²⁷ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, tr. Charles Gilbert Chaddock (London, 1894).

²⁸ Albert Moll, *Les Perversions de l'instinct genital: étude sur l'inversion sexuelle basée sur des documents officiels*, avec une préface du R. V. Krafft-Ebing (Paris, 1893).

avantageusement par la suggestion hypnotique in 1891.²⁹ Of course other sources, like Garnier's *Idées de grandeur* in 1878, before *Psychopathia Sexualis*, also refer to theories by Krafft-Ebing on diseases of the sexual organs³⁰ and Cavafy might have them in mind, while Raffalovich's *Uranisme et unisexualité* in 1896³¹ (one year after 'Πολυέλιος') clearly refers to *Psychopathia Sexualis*. Other later sources that refer to Krafft-Ebing and Cavafy could be aware of are: Garnier's *Les Fétichistes, pervers et invertis sexuels, observations médico-légales* (1896),³² Féré's *L'Instinct sexuel, evolution et dissolution* (1899),³³ Portemer's *Les Érotomanes, étude médico-légale* (1902),³⁴ Laurent's *Sadisme et masochisme* (1903),³⁵ Ballet's *Traité de pathologie mentale* (1903),³⁶ Bonnet's *Étude critique sur la classification des maladies mentales* (Toulouse, 1903),³⁷ Gallus' *L'Amour chez les dégénérés, étude anthropologique, philosophique et médicale* (1905)³⁸ and finally Laupts' *L'homosexualité et les types homosexuels* (1910).³⁹

It is also possible that Cavafy may have read reviews of Krafft-Ebing's book in journals, like *The American Journal of Psychology*,⁴⁰ *The British Medical Journal*⁴¹ and the *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*.⁴²

As Papanikolaou also argues, Cavafy wrote when homosexuality was seen as παθογένεια.⁴³ Nevertheless, Papanikolaou does not make any sustained attempt to connect Cavafy's poems with these views, which established homosexuality as a kind of illness in the nineteenth century. He only discusses such views as part of the historical background against which Cavafy wrote.

My study seeks to break new ground in the analysis of the discourse of homosexuality in Cavafy's poetry, by showing how a reading of certain Cavafy poems can be enhanced by referring to

²⁹ Ladame Paul-Louis, *Inversion sexuelle chez un dégénéré traitée avantageusement par la suggestion hypnotique* (Paris, 1891).

³⁰ Paul-Émile Garnier, *Idées de grandeur dans le délire des persécutions* (Paris, 1878).

³¹ Marc-André Raffalovich, *Uranisme et unisexualité: étude sur différentes manifestations de l'instinct sexuel* (Paris, 1896).

³² Paul Garnier, *Les Fétichistes, pervers et invertis sexuels, observations médico-légales* (Paris, 1896).

³³ Charles Féré, *L'Instinct sexuel, evolution et dissolution* (Paris, 1899).

³⁴ A.-E. Portemer, *Les Érotomanes, étude médico-légale* (Paris, 1902).

³⁵ Émile Laurent, *Sadisme et masochisme* (Paris, 1903).

³⁶ Gilbert Ballet, *Traité de pathologie mentale* (Paris, 1903).

³⁷ Georges Bonnet, *Étude critique sur la classification des maladies mentales* (Toulouse, 1903).

³⁸ Gallus, Dr Gallus, *L'Amour chez les dégénérés, étude anthropologique, philosophique et médicale* (Paris, 1905).

³⁹ G. Saint-Paul Laupts, *L'homosexualité et les types homosexuels* (Paris, 1910).

⁴⁰ Anonymous author, rev. 'De l'inversion de l'instinct sexuel by Chevalier; Die krankhaften Erscheinungen des Geschlechtssinnes by Tarnowski; Physiologie de l'amour by Gley; Le fétichisme dans l'amour by Binet; Psychopathia sexualis by Krafft-Ebing', *The American Journal of Psychology*, 3: 2 (1890), 251-252.

⁴¹ Anonymous author, rev. 'Psychopathia sexualis with special reference to contrary sexual instinct: a medico-legal study by R. von Krafft-Ebing, Dr. Chaddock', *The British Medical Journal*, 1: 1695 (1893), 1325-1326.

⁴² Dr Dumas, rev. 'Psychopathia sexualis, étude médicolégale by R. Von Krafft-Ebing, Émile Laurent, Émile Csapo, *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, 42 (1896), 106-107.

⁴³ Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ' Εμένα Καμωμένοι», 246.

Krafft-Ebing's theories. These theories enlighten Cavafy's homoerotic poems and give us the appropriate means to interpret and analyse certain notions, like the idea of homosexuality as sickness, which appears more often in Cavafy's poetry than we might think.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the category 'homosexual' appeared in western societies. Although before people experienced homosexual love, they did not view themselves as homosexuals.⁴⁴ In fact, as term, homosexuality did not exist before 1869. The word 'homosexuality' appeared for the first time in a pamphlet, written by Karl Maria Kertbeny (1824-1882), which had the form of an open letter and was sent to the German minister of justice; the word in German is 'homosexualität'. A new penal code was drafted and 'a debate had arisen over whether to retain the section of the Prussian criminal code which made sexual contact between persons of the same gender a crime'. Kertbeny was among those, who started developing the concept of sexual orientation.⁴⁵ 'Sexual inversion' was the term used most commonly in the nineteenth century, denoting a wide range of deviant sexual behaviours, of which homosexual desire was a logical but indistinct aspect, while 'homosexuality' focused on the narrower issue of sexual object choice.⁴⁶

Almost everything we know about people who had same-sex experience and lived before the mid-nineteenth century derives from accounts of several criminal convictions.⁴⁷ As Foucault writes 'in the eighteenth century, sex became a 'police matter'; a policing which was expressed through 'the necessity of regulating sex through useful and public discourses'. The courts could condemn homosexuality in the same way as infidelity and bestiality.⁴⁸ From the 1840s, physicians interested in mental illnesses recorded in medical journals descriptions of people who were persistently attracted by people of the same sex. In the mid-nineteenth century, people spoke for the acceptance of homosexuality in society and the repeal of laws against homosexuality.⁴⁹ As White declares, in the nineteenth century homosexuality was considered degenerate, evil and demonic, and homosexuals were gender-traitors, class-traitors and dangerous conspirators against health and work.⁵⁰

By the end of the nineteenth century German physicians published reports and theories on homosexuality, while by the turn of the century, certain scientific studies appeared, examining the lives of people attracted by the same sex.⁵¹ The end of the nineteenth century is identified by most

⁴⁴ Lupton, *Medicine as Culture*, 30.

⁴⁵ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 3.

⁴⁶ George Chauncey, 'From sexual inversion to homosexuality: medicine and the changing conceptualization of female deviance', *Salmagundi*, 58/59 (1982/1983), 114-146.

⁴⁷ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 27.

⁴⁸ Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge*, 24-25, 38.

⁴⁹ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 27.

⁵⁰ Chris White in *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: a sourcebook*, ed. Chris White (London, 2002), 116.

⁵¹ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 34.

historians as a crucial transitional period in the conceptualisation and social experience of homosexual relations, and suggested that the religious model of homosexuality was replaced by the medical model of homosexuality.⁵²

Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* was a compendium of more than two hundred case histories of people who showed 'the various psychopathological manifestations of sexual life'. And although the book is a medical approach of homosexuality, in the very first pages the author discusses some religious aspects of sexual life, in general: 'Christianity raised the union of the sexes to a sublime position by making woman socially the equal of man and by elevating the bond of love to a moral and religious institution'. As we can see, Krafft-Ebing considers sexual love in relation to the couple man-woman; an opinion which is justified, through the Christian model: 'From the moment when woman was recognised the peer of man, when monogamy became a law and was consolidated by legal, religious and moral conditions, the Christian nations attained a mental and material superiority over the polygamic races, and especially over Islam'. Interestingly, in his homoerotic poems, Cavafy almost always speaks about the love of two same age adults and he is far from the tradition of Ottoman pederasty. Inevitably, in favour of the Christian model, Krafft-Ebing challenges his readers to compare the two religions, using directly the phrase 'compare the two religions', concluding that 'in comparing the various stages of civilisation it becomes evident that, despite periodical relapses, public morality has made steady progress, and that Christianity is the chief factor in this advance'.⁵³ In fact, Krafft-Ebing claims that morality is represented in the relationship between a man and a woman as this is reflected only in the Christian model.

Krafft-Ebing proceeds further by noting the common elements between religion and sexual love:

religion as well as sexual love is mystical and transcendental. In sexual love the real object of the instinct, *i.e.*, propagation of the species, is not always present in the mind during the act, and the impulse is much stronger than could be justified by the gratification that can possibly be derived from it. Religious love strives for the possession of an object that is absolutely ideal, and cannot be defined by experimental knowledge. Both are metaphysical processes which give unlimited scope to imagination.⁵⁴

Through this identification between religion and sexual love and also through the Christian model man and woman, Krafft-Ebing, indirectly, asserts that any other form of sexuality is abnormal.

⁵² Chauncey, 'From sexual inversion to homosexuality', 114.

⁵³ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 2-3.

⁵⁴ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 5.

As we can see, there was no divergence between Christianity and Krafft-Ebing's view on intercourse between persons of the same sex. In contrast and at some degree, Krafft-Ebing used Christianity to justify his views. Interestingly on the very first pages of his book, Krafft-Ebing writes that Christianity raised the union of the sexes to a sublime position by making man and woman equals, while Christianity is considered the chief factor in the progress of public morality.⁵⁵ In any case and as deriving from that statement, Krafft-Ebing, in line with Christian teaching, considered unproductive love as abnormal. As Fr Morelli asserts in our own day, Genesis reveals that with the creation of Adam and Eve, man was created with two models of being: male and female; inevitably, heterosexual marriage is the only proper social context for sexual relationships.⁵⁶

Likewise, Fr Thomas Hopko writes, that homosexuals hold that they are called by God to struggle against their homoerotic tendencies, in the same way that all people are called to struggle against the sinful passions which they found themselves. In addition, it is clear that the Orthodox Church identifies solidly with those Christians, who consider homoerotic orientation as a disorder and disease and homoerotic actions sinful and destructive. To justify this claim, Fr Hopko alludes to Biblical passages, and especially Leviticus 20:13, Romans 1:26-27 and 1 Corinthians 6:9-11. The homosexual Christian needs to battle rigorously against his passions, through a ferocious fight against his sins. Interestingly, like all temptations, on this reading, homoeroticism can be cured and people who have intercourse with people of the same sex can cease, because with God all things are possible. When a Christian is ready to fight his impulses and believes in God and has assistance also from his friends and family, the genuine desire will be healed.⁵⁷ Apart from the fact, that Fr Hopko gives a clear overview of Christian views on homosexuality, the most striking element is the identification between Christian teaching and Krafft-Ebing's opinion on the diseased concept of homoeroticism. In both cases, intercourse between persons of the same sex is acknowledged as a disease condition and cure or healing is possible.

Psychopathia Sexualis could be considered a masterpiece in the classification of sexual deviations from the standpoint that the purpose of natural instinct is procreation.⁵⁸ Partly thanks to Krafft-Ebing's book, homosexuality was connected to the study of mental illness for the next eighty years. All the individuals described in the relevant section of this book are indeed involved in some kind of sexual activity, with people of the same sex. Nevertheless, the range of behaviours is wide and

⁵⁵ Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 3.

⁵⁶ Fr George Morelli, 'Understanding homosexuality: an Orthodox christian perspective', <http://www.antiochian.org>. [accessed 12 February 2017]

⁵⁷ Fr Thomas Hopko, 'The homosexual christian', http://www.orthodoxresearchinstitute.org/articles/ethics/hopko_homosexual_christian.htm. [accessed 21 January 2014]

⁵⁸ Jörg Hutter, 'The social construction of homosexuals in the nineteenth century', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 24:3-4 (1993), 73-93.

required a broad conceptual category to include them all. The context in the descriptions of Krafft-Ebing demonstrates his desire to emphasise the bizarre and perverse aspects of individuals.⁵⁹

As Oosterhuis declares, in our day homosexuality is seen as a same-sex object-choice. For Krafft-Ebing homosexuality was an inversion, characterised by biological and psychological mixture of masculinity and femininity. Homosexual behaviour was connected to an inverted gender identity, like transvestism and transsexuality. Echoing Westphal who asserted that homosexuality was ‘an inborn inversion of the sexual feeling, while being conscious of its pathological nature’, Krafft-Ebing declared that this disorder dominated the way of thinking and feeling completely. In Krafft-Ebing’s view, the sexual instinct is a function of the cerebral cortex.⁶⁰

As Krafft-Ebing argues, in the case of homosexuals we have to do with a malfunction of this cerebral centre:

that the cerebral centre is developed under other conditions, quite independent from the peripheral sexual organs (including the sexual glands), is evident from the cases of hermaphroditism (at least, so far as pseudo-hermaphroditism is concerned), in which the law referred to above remains intact in the sense of mono-sexual development, analogous to the sexual glands.

The role of the cerebral cortex is very important in Krafft-Ebing’s theory:

the central point of the sexual mechanism is the cerebral cortex. It is justifiable to presume that there is a definite region of the cortex (cerebral centre), which gives rise to sexual feelings, ideas and impulses, and is the place of origin of the psycho-somatic processes which we designate as *sexual life*, *sexual instinct*, and *sexual desire*.⁶¹

As Mondimore says, several cases in *Psychopathia Sexualis* are individuals whom a modern psychiatrist would diagnose as having severe mental illnesses, like schizophrenia and psychotic depression, but who incidentally happen to be homosexual too. In any case, Krafft-Ebing does not hesitate to propose a theory of causation for homosexuality, declaring that it is an anomaly of psychosexual feeling which could be described clinically, as a functional sign of degeneration. Words like ‘*neurasthenia*’ and ‘*neuropathic*’ appear again and again through the book.⁶² Of one case, Krafft-Ebing writes: ‘aged thirty-three, servant, was admitted suffering with delusions of persecution and

⁵⁹ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 35-36.

⁶⁰ Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*, 48, 59-60.

⁶¹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 19, 229.

⁶² Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 36.

neurotic sexual impulses'; or in another case, he writes: 'twenty-six years of age, suffered from neurasthenia'. And he concludes that 'the majority of homosexuals are in a painful situation'.⁶³

Mondimore also explains degeneracy theory, asserting that although it was rooted in the late eighteenth century, it came into its own in the middle of the nineteenth century, as an explanation for every human weakness from mental retardation to urban crime. It was believed that 'degenerate classes' were responsible for the majority of criminal activities and it was hoped that removal of these classes from every society would eliminate crime. According to this theory, 'antipathic sexuality', including alcoholism, insanity and idiocy, was considered an expression of an already defective nervous system. Krafft-Ebing claimed that individuals with antipathic sexuality became active sexually earlier in life and their sexuality was stronger than the normal. Because physical love between homosexuals was exaggerated, homosexuals were prone to neuroses, neurasthenia and insanity. They were oversexed, but also asthenics and incapable of mature relationships and prone to mental illness. In addition, Krafft-Ebing connected masturbation with homosexuality, asserting that neurasthenia urged by masturbation could cause perverse sexuality. The conclusion of Krafft-Ebing's theory was the consideration of heterosexual and procreative sexuality as the only and natural model. In the nineteenth century, generally, psychiatry saw homosexuals as outcasts and mentally ill, and many homosexual people, men and women, sought treatment based on an unsustainable theory.⁶⁴

During the 1880s, Krafft-Ebing treated some homosexuals looking for a cure through electrotherapy, hydrotherapy or hypnosis. After he published his therapeutic results many homosexuals went to him with the request to cure their sexual perversion.⁶⁵ Krafft-Ebing proposes 'the lines of treatment, when antipathic sexual instinct exists' like 'prevention of onanism and removal of other influences injurious to the sexual life'.⁶⁶ It is worth noting that even earlier in the nineteenth century, most homosexuals never wondered why homosexual relations were proscribed. They never

⁶³ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 50, 265, 383.

⁶⁴ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, pp. 36-39. It is also worth noting that Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) dispensed with 'degeneracy' theory as a theory that could explain homosexuality. He discounted it as a theory, stating that degeneration was a term threatened to disappear from scientific terminology (in Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 49). In addition, according to Freud, although homosexuality is not an advantage, it is nothing to be ashamed of; it is not a vice or degradation. Also it is not possible to substitute homosexuality in a person with heterosexuality (in Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 73, 76)

⁶⁵ Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*, p. 155. See also Richard Dawson, *Straight Jacket-A Conversion Cure: Homosexual Conversion Therapies from Late Nineteenth Century to Modern Day* (London, 2008), 25, 38. Guy Hocquenghem also writes that we could distinct the different therapies into four categories: 1) surgical therapies, like lobotomy, 2) Pavlov method, which intends to create to the patient repulsion for his sex, 3) methods like hypnosis and psychotherapy and 4) chemical methods with LSD and hormones (in, *Ιστορική Εικόνα της Ομοφυλοφιλίας*, tr. Antigone Gogou (Nefeli, 1983), 148-149).

⁶⁶ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 299.

thought that they might be innocent and considered themselves weak, sick and freakish and their prospect was to be cured.⁶⁷

Only later did Krafft-Ebing admit that his medical conception was one-sided, and that homosexuality was not so much a disease, but rather a biological and psychological condition which had to be accepted as a deplorable but natural fate. In any case, at the end of the nineteenth century, when homosexuals began to organise themselves, they referred to Krafft-Ebing as a scientific authority who was on their side and he indeed supported their rights.⁶⁸

As Hutter asserts, psychiatry supplied a concept of mental illness as a threat to the social order. Thus, a qualified professional body of scientific knowledge was needed in order to make a constructive contribution to the stability of social order. The selective proof of guilt shows the psychiatricisation of the penal code, while in the German speaking countries, especially Krafft-Ebing was seen as the main representative of the natural-scientific instrumental patterns of interpretation.⁶⁹

Apart from this perception of homosexuality as a mental disease, the homosexual experienced another negative consequence: the stigmatisation of a conservative society which is also reflected in Cavafy's poetry. Mondimore explains that stigma refers to bodily signs expressing something unusual and bad about the moral status of the signifier. People who belong to an unusual or morally bad group carry the stigma of being stigmatised. Even in our days, homosexuality is still seen by some people as something with negative consequences, and homosexuals face several risks by society. Stigmatisation could cause pain, as it could be accompanied by exclusion from the heterosexual society, marriage and parenthood. The feeling of shame and embarrassment are the most known results of being stigmatised homosexuals.⁷⁰

As Warner asserts, sodomy in earlier years was seen as a sin like fornication and not the sign of an identity. Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century this shame deepened into stigma.⁷¹ One could also say that the stigma was as great as before, but the idea that certain men are fated to be that way differs. It is worth turning to the study by Havelock Ellis (1859-1939) and John Addington Symonds (1840-1893) *Sexual Inversion*.⁷² They ask what a sexual inversion is: a diseased condition which qualifies its subject to the lunatic asylum or a natural monstrosity. As expressed by Wahlert and Fiester, the stigma and the shame attached to homosexual people have an undeniable historical legacy, reflected in our readings and renderings of gay people in the medical field even in our days.⁷³

⁶⁷ Graham Robb, *Strangers: homosexual love in the nineteenth century* (London, 2003), 175.

⁶⁸ Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*, 172-173.

⁶⁹ Hutter, 'The social construction of homosexuals', 84, 77-78.

⁷⁰ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 170-171.

⁷¹ Michael Warner in Lance Wahlert and Autumn Fiester, 'Queer in the clinic', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 34 (2013), 85-91.

⁷² Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion* (New York, 1975).

⁷³ Wahlert and Fiester, 'Queer in the clinic', 87.

Discrimination and stigmatisation could make homosexual people feel the need to hide or be invisible.⁷⁴

Relevant to the issue of stigmatisation is the important parallels that exist between queer people and people with illness. According to Myers, both incorporate a norm and varying degrees of deviance from that norm and significant risks in personal, social, and professional spheres, shame and guilt. 'Coming out' about a disease is always risky, because as several studies showed stigma accompanies invisible and visible illnesses, although the latter is characterised by less stigmatisation. Especially, when a disease is not obvious it is easier for the patient to keep it secret, and this is a result of the fact that 'normals' see people who are stigmatised as less than human. According to Myers, 'concealability' is the initial and the most important dimension of stigma. As she declares, 'similar to the common societal assumption that everyone is straight because heterosexuality is the norm, people assume that everyone who is not visibly macerated or otherwise disfigured by illness is healthy'.⁷⁵

For example, Myers asserts, there is no more practical reason for a person with illness to 'proclaim his health status to the person beside him on an airplane' than there is for a homosexual person to 'inform the same passenger of his sexual preference'. In cases like these, the person with invisible illness does not choose to 'pass as much as he is merely observing the boundaries of privacy and self-disclosure that most of society accepts as desirable'. As opposed to the person who does not mention illness, since there is no reason, 'the person who passes deliberately conceals his condition because he perceives a threat of stigmatisation'.⁷⁶

Homosexuality was interpreted and placed by the medical model and some homophile organisations as a form of psychiatric disability. As Sherry declares, even in 1999 Leanne McCall Tigert emphasised the shame, isolation and feelings of frustration and powerlessness that a homosexual experiences in society.⁷⁷ As Crandal and Moriarty argue, 'disruptiveness or the extent to which a particular stigma interferes with a person's everyday life is a critical dimension of stigma' and 'the stigmatised will go to great lengths to prevent their stigma from being disruptive'; when the degree of disruptiveness is low, the threat of stigmatisation is low too.⁷⁸

Guilt and shame are emotions that the majority of homosexuals describe, because they perceive 'their deviance from the norm to be beyond their control and recognise societal pressures to

⁷⁴ Nancy J. Hirschmann, 'Queer/fear: disability, sexuality, and the other', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 34 (2013), 139-147.

⁷⁵ Kimberly R. Myers, 'Coming out: considering the closet of illness', *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 25: 4 (2004), 255-270.

⁷⁶ Myers, 'Coming out', 257.

⁷⁷ Mark Sherry, 'Overlaps and contradictions between queer theory and disability studies', *Disability and Society*, 19:7 (2004), 769-783.

⁷⁸ Myers, 'Coming out', 260.

put others at ease with their difference'. Like queer people who mimic the norm of heterosexual relationships, ill persons feel compelled to mimic healthy people. Queer and ill people, commonly, live in two different worlds: the former in a straight and homosexual world, and the latter in a healthy and ill world.⁷⁹

As early as 1935 Skouras wrote about the poet's 'weird sexuality', as Cavafy excluded women totally from his sexual life. The poet knew about his 'disadvantage' and did his best to organise his life in a way that he could satisfy this 'low level passion'. According to Skouras, Cavafy suffered because of his homosexuality, a 'περιφρονημένη ερωτική ροπή'. Cavafy's homoerotic passion was strong like an addict's dependence. Skouras, obviously influenced by the terminology and views of his time, comments on Cavafy's 'sexual perversion' as a person attached to his sinful memories who lives an isolated life; Skouras concludes that Cavafy was suffering from a 'sexual autism', as he experienced non-natural pleasures and non-understandable to the contemporary reader. Yet, as Skouras also says, Cavafy is an example of a bizarre and isolated individual, who shows the importance of the pathology for artistic creation.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Myers, 'Coming out', 264-265.

⁸⁰ Skouras, 'Η σχιζοφρενική έμπνευση', 10, 13.

4.2 Homosexuality and well-being

A prominent element in Cavafy's poetry is the use of the word 'νόσος' ('illness') and its derivatives like 'νοσηρός' to refer to a mental state.⁸¹ According to Vassiliadi, in Cavafy's poetry these words are associated exclusively with homoerotic love.⁸² On the other hand, 'αρρώστια', as is represented in the poem 'Η αρρώστια του Κλείτου' ('Kleitos' Illness') (the poem will be discussed in detail later in the chapter), alludes to physical illness experienced by an individual with bodily effects or symptoms. And indeed, as we will see in this chapter, certain poems from Cavafy's corpus revolve around the received opinion that homosexuality is a kind of illness. As Alexiou states, Cavafy's poetic perception of pleasure challenges and inverts the conventional values of nature and society.⁸³ Erotic themes present a remarkable consistency from the very beginning of his poetry.⁸⁴

Haas observes that when Cavafy writes about homoerotic love, he always uses phrases like 'ανώμαλη ηδονή', 'του αίσχους ηδονή', 'νοσηρά ηδονή', 'ερωτική ροπή', 'λίαν απαγορευμένη και περιφρονημένη'. As Haas declares the subject of law versus pleasure in connection with the role of society and health has been discussed on a theoretical level by Margaret Alexiou, who asserts that Cavafy's kind of love was seen as forbidden, stigmatised, unnatural, infertile and sick.⁸⁵ The poem 'Έν τη Οδώ' ('In the Street') (1916)⁸⁶ is the first poem which raises the issue of well-being in an erotic context; an issue which preoccupied Cavafy since 1905, as appears in a personal note in December of that year.⁸⁷

Οι άθλιοι νόμοι της κοινωνίας — μήτε της υγιεινής, μήτε της κρίσεως απόρροια— με μίκραιναν το έργο μου. Εδέσμευσαν την έκφρασί μου· μ' εμπόδισαν να δώσω φως και συγκίνησιν εις όσους είναι σαν κ' εμένα καμώμενοι.⁸⁸

(The miserable laws of society —neither hygiene, nor result of judgement—made my work smaller. They binded my speech· they prevented me to give light and emotion to those who are made like me).

⁸¹ Kokolis notes three cases where the derivatives of 'νόσος' appear in Cavafy's collected poems: the adjective 'νοσηρός' in the poem 'Έν Απογνώσει' and the adverb 'νοσηρώς' which appears twice in 'Ίμενος (X. A. Kokolis, *Πίνακας Λέξεων των 154 Ποιημάτων του Κ. Π. Καβάφη* (Athens, 1976), 51).

⁸² Martha Vassiliadi, '«Για τα σκουπίδια κατευθείαν»', 1-9.

⁸³ Alexiou, 'C. P. Cavafy 'dangerous' drugs', 157-195.

⁸⁴ Margaret Alexiou, 'Eroticism and poetry', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, 10: 1-2 (1983), 45-65.

⁸⁵ Diana Haas, 'Νόμος και έγκλημα στην ερωτική ποίηση του Καβάφη', *Μολυβδο-κονδυλο-πελεκήτης*, 7, 2000, 119-145. Haas refers to the opinion of Margaret Alexiou in 'C. P. Cavafy's 'dangerous' drugs', 172.

⁸⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 98-99.

⁸⁷ Haas, 'Νόμος και έγκλημα', 126.

⁸⁸ Cavafy in Haas, 'Νόμος και έγκλημα', 122. Papanikolaou refers to a common agony for homosexual people in the Western world (Dimitris Papanikolaou, '«Η νέα φάσις του έρωτος»: ο νεωτερικός λόγος της σεξολογίας και ο Καβάφης', *Επιστημονική Επετηρίδα της Φιλοσοφικής Σχολής*, 12 (2010), 195-211).

Cavafy, in this note, seems to declare that some rules set by conservative society constitute an obstacle for his poetic work. These are foolish rules, because in truth they have nothing to do with hygiene as most people used to believe. Cavafy opposes the general climate of his era, that homosexuality is a form of mental illness. He claims that this nineteenth century revulsion against homosexuality cannot be justified by hygiene, as it is not an illness. In addition, such a consideration has no value in Cavafy's mind, as it lacks justification and critique. It is only a position accepted by the majority of people then. It is not hygiene itself that made homosexuality an illness, but rather the prejudice of the conservative society.

In fact, 'υγιεινή' in the above Cavafy's writing alludes, directly, to Krafft-Ebing, who writes about unhygienic conditions of sexuality: 'cure of the neurosis (neurasthenia) arising out of the unhygienic conditions of the sexual life'.⁸⁹ This allows the inference that Cavafy was familiar with Krafft-Ebing's writings. However, while Krafft-Ebing asserts that perverted sexual life is an unhygienic condition, Cavafy declares that homosexual does not relate to hygiene.

As Tellos Agras asserted, the 'somewhat wan' face of the protagonist in 'Εν τη Οδώ' relates to a 'pleasure, which in an unhealthy and wasteful way is gained' in the poem 'Ιμενος' ('Imenos') (1919),⁹⁰ and it is confirmed by Cavafy's equation of homosexuality with 'sickly passion' in the unpublished poem 'Στην Προκυμαία' ('On the Jetty') (1920).⁹¹ Of course, some such cases seem to refer to self-abuse. One could say that the sickliness —but sickliness of the female object— appears in the mid-nineteenth century writings of other authors.⁹² Nevertheless, Cavafy was the first Modern Greek poet to connect homoerotic love with sickliness and presumably studied medical theories about homosexuality. Thus, he effectively infused in his poems these theories that give them a medical background.

According to Alexiou, as opposed to Plato who proposed the expurgation of 'νοσηραὶ ἡδοναὶ' ('sick pleasures') and the subjugation of 'ἀγαθαὶ ἡδοναὶ' ('virtuous pleasures') to law in the interests of the soul's 'υγεία' ('health'), Cavafy's unpublished poem 'Δυνάμωσις' (1903)⁹³ deconstructs the meaning, since the spirit can be strengthened by violating law and custom and by transgressing the 'established, inadequate norm'. Cavafy's poetic perception of pleasure opposes traditional values.⁹⁴

⁸⁹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 299.

⁹⁰ Translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 99.

⁹¹ Tellos Agras, *Κριτικά (Α' τόμος): Καβάφης – Παλαμάς*, (Ερμής, 1980). Cavafy, *Ατελή Ποιήματα*, 95-99.

⁹² For instance, Spyridon Vasileiadis' (1845-1877) *Γαλάτεια* (Spyridon Vasileiadis, *Γαλάτεια* (Athens, 1924)) refers to a woman who represents wildness and hostility; she is the femme fatale who makes two brothers fall in love with her. As in his other writings, Vasileiadis presents woman as a source of malice (Georgia Ladogianni, 'Ο εραστής, ο καλλιτέχνης, και το έργο του. Ο μύθος του Πυγμαλίωνα στη *Γαλάτεια* του Σπ. Βασιλειάδη', http://www.eens.org/EENS_congresses/2010/Ladogianni_Georgia.pdf, 1-10 [accessed 21 February 2015]).

⁹³ Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα*, 83.

⁹⁴ Alexiou, 'C. P. Cavafy's 'dangerous' drugs', 175.

According to Robinson, in the late nineteenth century there was a significant poetic corpus which included same-sex desire and expressed a distinct poetic voice. Superficially, there are several common elements with Cavafy's poems, like historical Greek motifs, mythological references and the idealisation of the male body.⁹⁵ Cavafy's perception of his sexuality is typical of this period and presents well-established Victorian strategies for writing about sex. Nevertheless, an important distinction can be made between Cavafy and other homosexual European contemporaries, especially looking at French poets with homoerotic themes like Jean Lorrain (1855-1906) and Laurent Tailhade (1854-1919). Although Cavafy referred to prostitution in his poetry, unlike them, he does not refer to pederasty linked to prostitution, as his love is between people of similar age or it is the memory of an old man, of desire for younger adults.⁹⁶

Seeing society's prejudice, Cavafy revealed his erotic preferences most openly only after 1918 and through a gradual process. Certain poems written before 1910 were not issued until many years later, while some others were not published at all.⁹⁷ Most likely the poet disclosed his erotic trend then because he was more confident and established, as society and people's attitude about homosexuality had not changed dramatically. As Yourcenar suggests, Cavafy's erotic poems deal with forbidden and disapproved love in the nineteenth century, while the use of the first person appears after 1917. In his erotic poems, Cavafy was inspired by a romanticised perception of homosexuality, which was also an abnormal erotic experience and 'νοσηρή' ('sick').⁹⁸

In his personal notes, there are significant testimonies, in which Cavafy is influenced by the general climate of the nineteenth century that saw homosexuality as a kind of illness. Cavafy seems to worry particularly about the results of masturbation. For instance, in March 1887, he writes:

Και όμως βλέπω καθαρά το κακό και την αναστάτωση που προξενούν στον οργανισμό μου οι πράξεις μου. Πρέπει, αλύγιστα, να επιβάλω στον εαυτό μου ένα τέρμα έως την 1^η Απριλίου, διαφορετικά δεν θα μπορέσω να ταξιδέψω. Θα αρρωστήσω και πως θα περάσω τη θάλασσα, και πως, αρρωστημένος, θ' απολαύσω το ταξίδι μου; Τον περασμένο Ιανουάριο μπόρεσα να κρατηθώ. Η υγεία μου αποκαταστάθηκε αμέσως. Δεν είχα πλέον παλμούς. Οι Κανόνες μου με βοηθούν υπό τον όρο να εφαρμόζονται σωστά... Παραδίνομαι στη λήθη (κάποτε με τη

⁹⁵ Christopher Robinson, 'Cavafy, sexual sensibility, and poetic practice: reading Cavafy through Mark Doty and Cathal O' Searcaigh', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 23: 2 (2005), 261-279.

⁹⁶ Robinson, 'Cavafy, sexual sensibility, and poetic practice', 261-279.

⁹⁷ Capri-Karka, *Love and the Symbolic Journey*, 19-20.

⁹⁸ Marguerite Yourcenar, 'Κριτική παρουσίαση του Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη', in *Εισαγωγή στην Ποίηση του Καβάφη: επιλογή κριτικών κειμένων*, ed. Michalis Pieris (Heraklion, 2006), 221-231. See also French original: Marguerite Yourcenar, 'Introduction', in *Présentation critique de Constantin Cavafy, 1863-1933 suivie d'une traduction des poèmes* (Paris, 1978).

βοήθεια της φαντασίας) για λίγο και κατόπιν συμμορφώνομαι προς τους Κανόνες ως ένα σημείο. Αλλά έτσι, οι Κανόνες δεν είναι αποτελεσματικοί.⁹⁹

(But indeed, I can see the damage and the upheaval my actions cause to my organism. I must, strictly, impose an end on myself, by 1st April, otherwise I will not be able to travel. I will get sick and how will I pass the sea, and how, sick, will I enjoy my journey? Last January I was able to restrain myself. My health was restored immediately. I didn't have pulse anymore. My Rules help me under the term to be applied properly... I give myself to oblivion (sometimes with the help of fantasy) for a while and then I comply with the Rules up to a point. But in this way, the Rules are not effective).

Especially in the first two lines of this note, Cavafy seems to be worried about the results of his own actions. Here, Cavafy alludes to self-abuse and Krafft-Ebing's assumption that masturbation could cause homosexuality. According to Krafft-Ebing, masturbation's result could be very negative as it could cause lost of interest in the other sex, preference of masturbation instead of the natural way of satisfaction and even homosexuality. Masturbation was a vice which should be avoided and inversion was just one of its worst consequences.¹⁰⁰

Krafft-Ebing writes of masturbation: 'very frequently the cause of such temporary aberration is masturbation and its results in youthful individuals'; 'thus we find homosexual intercourse in impotent masturbators or debauchees'; 'this defect influences the morals, the character, fancy, feeling, and instinct of the youthful masturbator, male or female, in an unfavourable manner, even causing, under certain circumstances, the desire for the opposite sex to sink to nil; so that masturbation is preferred to the natural mode of satisfaction'.¹⁰¹

Obviously, there is a connection between Cavafy's note and Krafft-Ebing's assumption. Initially, Cavafy struggles to prevent himself from an action or even habit, implying self-abuse, causing only negative results to his health. This is a fear resulting from Krafft-Ebing's declaration that masturbation is an ominous action with certain consequences. Also, Cavafy says that when he can hold himself back, he does not have pulsation. Possibly, Cavafy means that he does not have the intensity or palpitations of a nervous condition. Finally, he writes that with the help of fantasy ('φαντασίας'), he can keep a distance from self-abuse and applies his personal 'Rules'. Krafft-Ebing explains how self-abuse affects fancy or desire for the other sex.

Conolly Norman (1853-1908) asserted that in masturbation the vice can be permanent and he also cites Krafft-Ebing to the effect that in 'three or four cases at the most the condition did not seem

⁹⁹ Cavafy in Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Καβάφη*, 46.

¹⁰⁰ Chauncey, 'From sexual inversion to homosexuality', 130.

¹⁰¹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 188-189.

to have originated in masturbation'.¹⁰² In addition, in a writing of 1867, an anonymous author declared that masturbation could cause mental aberrations and reactions of an overstrained nervous system, which could lead to hysteria and hypochondriasis.¹⁰³ Harvey Kellogg (1852-1943) wrote about suspicious signs of masturbation including a general debility, consumption like-symptoms, premature and defective development, love of solitude failure of mental capacity and unnatural boldness.¹⁰⁴

It is very likely that Cavafy not only knew about this discourse on masturbation and certainly the whole discourse about homosexuality during his times, but believed that masturbation would harm his health.

Some days later in the same month, Cavafy writes:

Αμάρτησα εκ νέου. Καμμιά ελπίδα δεν υπάρχει παρεκτός αν σταματήσω. Θεέ μου βοήθα
με.¹⁰⁵

(I sinned again. There is no hope, unless I stop. God help me).

Although in this note, Cavafy's words sound more like a moral scruple, the fact that he says that 'there is no hope, unless I stop' includes some sort of danger to his health. Besides, as we have already said, Krafft-Ebing referred to the Christian model in order to justify his theories.¹⁰⁶

In another note, Cavafy asserts that 'he has to be saved', reminding the poem 'Εν Απογνώσει' ('In Despair') (1923),¹⁰⁷ which will be analysed in this chapter:

Να σωθώ, να σωθώ, να σωθώ! Φτάνουν τα βασανιστήρια όπου κυλιέμαι τώρα και που
φθείρουν τον οργανισμό μου, λευκαίνουν τα μαλλιά μου και μου δίνουν μιάν όψη
φρικώδη.¹⁰⁸

(To save myself, save myself, save myself! Enough with the tortures where I welter now and
wear my organism, whiten my hair and give me a horrible shape).

In the above note, and especially with his reference to some sufferings which corrupt or wear himself out, Cavafy alludes to Krafft-Ebing who also spoke about the consequences of masturbation and homosexuality:

¹⁰² Conolly Norman in Ivan Crozier, 'Nineteenth-century British psychiatry writing about homosexuality before Havelock Ellis: the missing story', *Journal of the History of Medicine*, 63 (2008), 65-102.

¹⁰³ Crozier, 'Nineteenth-century British psychiatry writing', 76.

¹⁰⁴ Vern L. Bullough, 'Homosexuality and the medical model', *Journal of Homosexuality*, 1:1 (1976), 99-110.

¹⁰⁵ Cavafy in Περίδης, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Καβάφη*, 46.

¹⁰⁶ See page 158.

¹⁰⁷ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 140-141.

¹⁰⁸ Cavafy in Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Καβάφη*, 47.

twenty-six years of age, of the upper class, was arrested for having practiced masturbation in a public park. By heredity heavily tainted; skull abnormal; was peculiar from earliest youth; psychically abnormal;.¹⁰⁹

As we can see, the connections between Cavafy's note and Krafft-Ebing's original words from his treatise are obvious as both refer to the consequences of masturbation. In addition, Krafft-Ebing speaks about a degenerate person with an abnormal skull, while Cavafy speaks about whitening of the hairs and a horrible shape.

In another note, Cavafy asks how he can cure his heart:

Να στ.(αματήσω) τώρα, να στ.(αματήσω) τώ.(ρα). Βο.(ήθεια), βο.(ήθεια). Τό.(λμη) πρ.(έπει)! Του Θεο.(ύ) [...]. Και πως ιατ.(ρευθεί) η κρδ. (καρδιά) μου. Και η κα.(τάπτωσις) η βε.(βαία) εάν εδώ. Βοή.(θεια), βοήθε.(ια). Τι θέσ(ις) [...] Ενθ.(υμού) την προσ.(μονή) της 17.8 και την απτ.(απογήτευσιν). Ενθ.(υμού) πως υπέφερεν η κρδ.(καρδιά) έπειτα από [...] 17.8.¹¹⁰
(To stop now, to stop now. Help, help. Boldness it must! Of God [...]. And my heart will be cured. And the certain exhaustion if here. Help, help. What a position [...] Remember the expectation of 17.8 and the disappointment. Remember how the heart suffered after [...] 17.8).

As Malanos declared, Cavafy fought against his passions and struggled to tranquillise them, because he believed that he would harm his health.¹¹¹ This is reflected in the above personal notes, as we see Cavafy's attempt to repress his passions and also his fear for his well-being.

Bearing in mind the above personal notes of Cavafy, it is worth noting that even if he personally did not perceive homosexuality as a kind of illness, the fact that he refers to homoerotic love connecting it with the symptoms of an illness, makes the reader believe that Cavafy was influenced by this opinion. It is also interesting to note, at some time in 1886 or 1887, Cavafy wrote to his friend Spyros that he was ill from an overdose of pleasure.¹¹² And as we will see below, these elements appear in his poetry.

In another of his personal notes, Cavafy refers to the death of a young man, asserting that the cause of his death was 'ηδονή' ('pleasure'). Another important element in this Cavafy's personal note is the use of the word 'κλινήρης' ('bedridden') which is never used in his poetic corpus:

¹⁰⁹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 292.

¹¹⁰ Cavafy in Peridis, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Καβάφη*, 47.

¹¹¹ Timos Malanos, *Ο Καβάφης Απαραμόρφωτος* (Athens, 1981), 24.

¹¹² Liddell, *Cavafy*, 57.

Δεν σε εγν[ώριζα]. Ίσως σε είδα και ί[σως] η ωρ[αία] σου μορφή με έκα[με] να στ[αθώ] αλλά αυτό θα ήτο προ π[ο]λ[λ]ών μ[η]νών, διότι ήδη από π[ο]λ[λ]ών μ[η]νών ήσο κλ[ιν]ήρης, ασθ[ενών]. Ο θάν[ατος] σου με συνεκί[νησε]. και με συγκί[νησι] ανέγ[νωσα] την περι[ι]γρ[αφή] της ωρ[αίας] κ[η]δ[είας] σου- λευκής με λ[ευκά] άνθη, με όλ[η]ν την αριστοκρατία της πόλ[εως] ακολουθώσαν αυτήν και τιμ[ώ]σαν σε. Και συ απέθ[ανε]ς 17 ετών από την ηδ[ονή]. Ηδ[ονή] μεγ[άλη] και αθώαν και ποι[η]τική.¹¹³

(I did not meet you. Maybe I saw you and maybe your beautiful shape made me stand but this should be many months ago, because since many months you were bedridden, ill. Your death touched me and with movement I read the description of your nice funeral—white with white flowers, with the whole aristocracy of the city following and honouring you. And you died 17 years old of pleasure. Great and innocent and poetic pleasure).

As we can see, Cavafy claims that he was thrilled by the funeral of a boy, who died at seventeen years old of 'ηδονή'. It is rather naïve to consider that Cavafy believed that someone could die of pleasure. But in any case, in the above lines Cavafy refers to the nineteenth century equation of homosexuality with illness. And although there is no direct reference to homosexuality in the above words, they include certain erotic elements, especially in the first lines, in which Cavafy admires the beautiful shape of the sick boy.

Papanikolaou notes that Cavafy showed great interest in medical works.¹¹⁴ Indeed, if we bear in mind the connection between Cavafy's personal notes with Krafft-Ebing's treatise, it is reasonable to believe that Cavafy not only was well aware of these opinions and the whole discourse around homosexuality in the nineteenth century, but also he became familiar with the most important writings of this period. Apart from Krafft-Ebing, Cavafy was very likely to have read Ulrichs' theories on the innateness of homosexuality, probably looking for a view supporting the naturalness of homosexuality. Ulrichs, indeed, defended homosexuality as an innate impulse that has nothing to do with mental or other disorders. A view that Cavafy shared and we should discuss before we proceed with the detailed analysis of Krafft-Ebing's theories.

¹¹³ Savidis, 'Ανέκδοτα σημειώματα', 127. The note is also mentioned on page 66.

¹¹⁴ Papanikolaou, 'Ο Καβάφης στον 21^ο αιώνα', 49-57.

4.3 The innateness of homosexuality

The innateness of homosexuality connects to the authentic love we will discuss in the section ‘symptomatology of homosexuality’. It is an authentic kind of love, independent of nineteenth-century restrictions. The homosexual follows his sexual trend and his inborn instinct, without accepting the limitations of a conservative society.

Ulrichs was the most outspoken person that referred to the acceptance of homosexuality in society. Ulrichs invented a whole vocabulary to describe homosexuals and his ideas were revolutionary. Starting from his consideration that sexual orientation is inborn, unchangeable and therefore ‘natural’, Ulrichs attempted to change anti-homosexual attitudes in Europe. He believed that sexual orientation is a stable and inherent characteristic, while homosexuality is a valid and natural form of human sexual expression.¹¹⁵ He attempted to unite homosexuals to come out of their isolation, creating the ‘Uranist Union’; something which made him the founding father of homosexual rights.¹¹⁶

As Mondimore declares, Ulrichs lived when sexual contact between people of the same sex was seen as a crime against nature. At his own expense, he published a series of monographs between 1864 and 1869, using the pseudonym ‘Numa Numanitis’. Convinced that his own sexual attraction for men was inborn and natural, Ulrichs attempted to find the characteristics of the formation of the sexual organs in the embryo. He believed that it is possible to speak about a ‘third sex’: a female soul in a male body.¹¹⁷ Ulrichs claimed that homosexual men are women in spirit.¹¹⁸

Since there was no vocabulary for this concept, Ulrichs invented one, using as basis a passage from Plato’s *Symposium*. Ulrichs used the words ‘Uranier’ and ‘Dionäer’, which have been later simplified to ‘Urning’ and ‘Dioning’, to denote what we now call homosexual and heterosexual men.¹¹⁹ Although very isolated in the beginning, Ulrichs founded a tradition based on the belief that homosexuality was biological and therefore ‘natural’.¹²⁰

As Mondimore argues, the German Jewish physician and sexologist Magnus Hirschfield ‘stepped forward to take up Ulrichs’ work’. Hirschfield’s personal motto was ‘Justice through knowledge’ and he edited the first scientific journal on homosexuality (the *Yearbook for Sexual Intermediates*) publishing research on homosexuality. In 1897, Hirschfield also launched the Scientific

¹¹⁵ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 27.

¹¹⁶ Robb, *Strangers*, 181.

¹¹⁷ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 28-29. Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) rejected this idea of a ‘third sex’, claiming that psychoanalytic research opposes the separation of homosexuals from others as a group of a special nature (in Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 29).

¹¹⁸ Hubert Kennedy, *Karl Heinrich Ulrichs: a pioneer of the modern gay movement* (San Francisco, 2002), 63-64.

¹¹⁹ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 29.

¹²⁰ Rainer Herrn, ‘On the history of biological theories of homosexuality’, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 28:1-2 (1995), 31-56.

Humanitarian Committee to promote the rights of homosexuals in Germany. The first action of the group was to demand the decriminalisation of homosexuals.¹²¹

The theme of innateness and the fact that homosexuality is inborn constitutes the subject of Cavafy's poem 'Μέρες του 1896' ('Days of 1896') (1927),¹²² in which also Cavafy describes the fear of disgrace which can be overwhelming for a homosexual. The title of the poem, and specifically the denotation of the year 1896, alludes to some movements which flourished in that year in Germany, like Wandervogel which was attacked by a series of trials between 1907 and 1908. During the times of a clear distinction between the genders, such movements organised campings and challenged established and traditional views.¹²³

According to Ekdawi, the poem should be read in connection with the poem 'Τείχη' ('Walls') (1897),¹²⁴ in which we have the imprisonment of an individual by mysterious builders, and also Oscar Wilde who went to gaol from 1895 to 1897. 'Μέρες του 1896' should be read in the context of Wilde's imprisonment and Cavafy's parallel self-censorship. The object of this censorship was the kind of love for which Wilde was imprisoned. Ekdawi declares that the timing of Cavafy's return to the theme of Wilde's imprisonment may be connected to an incident in 1924.¹²⁵

In the January of 1924, Lagoudakis attacked Cavafy for the publication of the poem 'Πριν τους Αλλάξει ο Χρόνος' (1924),¹²⁶ and the spelling of 'Υόρκη' without aspirate (with ψιλή). Lagoudakis' attack on Cavafy caused the reaction of intellectuals supporting Cavafy; thus a lecture by Lagoudakis was cancelled. In March of the same year, intellectuals also published protest against Lagoudakis, who used very strong language against Cavafy.¹²⁷

'Μέρες του 1896' starts by describing a man's humiliation and vilification by society, because of his homosexuality:

Εξευτελίσθη πλήρως. Μια ερωτική ροπή του
λίαν απαγορευμένη και περιφρονημένη
(έμφυτη μολοντούτο) υπήρξεν η αιτία:
ήταν η κοινωνία σεμνότυφη πολύ.

¹²¹ Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 232.

¹²² Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 166-169.

¹²³ Hocquenghem, *Ιστορική Εικόνα της Ομοφυλοφιλίας*, 85-86.

¹²⁴ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 12-13.

¹²⁵ Sarah Ekdawi, 'Days of 1895, '96 and '97: the parallel prisons of C. P. Cavafy and Oscar Wilde', *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook*, 9 (1993), pp. 297-305. See also Sarah Ekdawi, 'The erotic poems of C. P. Cavafy', *Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek*, 1 (1993), 23-45. On Wilde's case, see also Peter Gay, *Modernism: the lure of heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and beyond* (London, 2007), 61.

¹²⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 146-147.

¹²⁷ Daskalopoulos-Stasinopoulou, *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Καβάφη*, 102.

The man of the poem ‘was disgraced completely’, because of an innate ‘sexual inclination of his, strongly forbidden, and much despised’.¹²⁸ Although the poet does not speak directly about homosexuality, his overall description of an innate sexual inclination which was forbidden and disputed, inevitably alludes to homosexuality. The fact that this sexual tendency is characterised by the poet as innate, implies that in truth it is not his fault. Homosexuality is not an option, but his nature.¹²⁹

In the following lines, the poet refers to the consequences of this innate inclination for the man and his isolation from the rest of society:

Έχασε βαθμηδόν το λιγοστό του χρήμα·
κατόπι τη σειρά, και την υπόληψι του.
Πλησίαζε τα τριάντα χωρίς ποτέ έναν χρόνο
να βγάλει σε δουλειά, τουλάχιστον γνωστή.

The protagonist of the poem has lost his reputation. He spent all his money and he could not find a proper job. It is worth noting that the poem, here, is reminiscent of Wilde’s case.

As Ekdawi writes, by 1896 Wilde had lost his money, while his belongings of his house in London had been sold at public auction. Wilde also lost his social status, as Cavafy also describes, and his artistic and private reputation.¹³⁰

This climate of isolation continues in the next lines of the poem:

Ενίστε τα έξοδά του τα κέρδιζεν από
μεσολαβήσεις που θεωρούνται ντροπιασμένες.
Κατήνησ’ ένας τύπος που αν σ’ έβλεπαν μαζί του
συχνά, ήταν πιθανόν μεγάλως να εκτεθείς.

Sometimes, he used to find money from ‘shameful deals’. Since nobody wanted him to work, the protagonist of the poem became an illegal person in order to live. He was the type of a person that if someone was talking to him, it was very possible to be exposed.

However, according to the poet, it would be unfair if we focus only on the social exclusion of the protagonist, because of his homosexuality. As the poet asserts, it is worth noting his beauty:

¹²⁸ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 166-169.

¹²⁹ In *Ο Βίος και το Έργο του Καβάφη*, 42-43, Peridis associates this innate specificity with Cavafy’s own sexual experience as homosexual. A similar view is expressed by Peridis for the poem ‘Έν Απογνώσει’, in which although Cavafy does not use first person narration, again, he refers to personal feelings.

¹³⁰ Ekdawi, ‘Days of 1895, ‘96 and ‘97’, 301.

Αλλά όχι μόνον τούτα. Δεν θάτανε σωστό.
 Αξίζει παραπάνω της εμορφιάς του η μνήμη.
 Μιά άποψις άλλη υπάρχει που αν ιδωθεί από αυτήν
 φαντάζει, συμπαθής· φαντάζει, απλό και γνήσιο
 του έρωτος παιδί, που άνω απ' την τιμή,
 και την υπόληψί του έθεσε ανεξετάστως
 της καθαρής σαρκός του την καθαρή ηδονή.

As opposed to the rest of the society who condemned and isolated the protagonist of the poem because of his homosexuality, the poet focuses on his beauty. As the poet asserts, 'there is a different aspect' and a 'point of view' to see the protagonist of the poem, apart from his social exclusion. This is the memory of his beauty. He is a 'genuine child of Eros, who without hesitation' he placed above everything else 'the pure sensual pleasure of his pure sensual flesh'.

In the narrator's words, the reader can see not only sympathy for the protagonist, but also an explanation suggesting that he did not do anything to deserve social exclusion; all he did was to satisfy his sexual pleasures, following his inborn nature, like any other young person.

In fact, the poem presents two different views of the same person: the opinion of society and the opinion of the narrator. The poet characterises the flesh and the pleasure of the protagonist as 'καθαρή' ('clean'), because it was an inborn pleasure and, of course, pure. It links with hygiene we saw earlier when discussing the poet's note. Cavafy claims that homosexuality has nothing to do with hygiene. So, this homoerotic pleasure is clean from any unhygienic conditions. As opposed to society, he does not see something immoral or abnormal in that, because he believes that the protagonist only followed his innate tendency.

This is evident in the last two lines of the poem:

Απ' την υπόληψι του; Μα η κοινωνία που ήταν
 σεμνότυφη πολύ συσχέτιζε κουτά.

The narrator considers that the protagonist lost his reputation, because 'society was prudish in the extreme' and 'made stupid correlations'. He declares that society's conservatism and stupidity destroyed a person, by excluding him from any social activity and from finding a proper work.¹³¹

¹³¹ Diana Haas, 'Around the revisions of Cavafy's 'Σ' ένα βιβλίο παλιό-' ('In an old book-'), 1922-1929', in Roilos, *Imagination* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2010), 245-261. Also, dealing with the poem 'Τείχη' ('Walls'), Nehamas refers to the antithesis between a powerless subject and a hostile objective world (in Nehamas, 'Memory, Pleasure and Poetry, 301). Indeed, this is also the situation in 'Μέρες του 1896' ('Days of 1896'), as the protagonist seems unable and powerless to protect himself from the hostility of such a conservative society.

In 'Μέρες του 1896', Cavafy's attitude on homosexuality is obvious, since he shows the situation from a different perspective.¹³² Possibly the gap of thirty-one years between the publishing of the poem (1927) and its setting which is shown in the title (1896) could be seen as a period of process for Cavafy. The poem was published only six years before Cavafy's death, possibly when for Cavafy it was easier to defend homosexuality.

¹³² Capri-Karka, *Love and the Symbolic Journey*, 86.

4.4 Homosexuality, young men and death

To elaborate on the concept of homosexuality as sick in Cavafy and Krafft-Ebing's theories, we may focus on the poems '[Την Ψυχὴν ἐπὶ Χεῖλεσιν Ἐσχον]' ('[My Soul Was on my Lips]') (unfinished, undated, but perhaps 1918)¹³³ and 'Κίμων Λεάρχου, 22 Ἐτῶν, Σπουδαστὴς Ἑλληνικῶν Γραμμάτων ἐν Κυρήνῃ' ('Kimon, Son of Learchos, 22 Years Old, Student of Greek Letters (in Cyrene)') (1928),¹³⁴ in which we see the representation of homosexuality as a disease. A common element in these poems is the young age of the protagonists which is given clearly: twenty-three and twenty-two respectively.

The title '[Την Ψυχὴν ἐπὶ Χεῖλεσιν Ἐσχον]' is taken from the *Palatine Anthology* and an epigram ascribed to Plato, which makes reference to the effeminate dramatic playwright Agathon, whose victory party after he won the tragic competition, is the setting for Plato's *Symposium*.¹³⁵ Indeed, the poem is a homoerotic one, as in a first person narrative, the poet describes the illness and death of his lover:

Τίποτε ἀπολύτως τὸ ρωμαντικὸ
δεν εἶχεν ὅταν με εἶπεν «ἴσως νὰ πεθάνω».
Τῶπε γιὰ ἀστεῖσμό. Ἔτσι πὺ θὰ τὸ πει
εἴκοσι τριῶν ἐτῶν ἓνα παιδί.
Κ' ἐγὼ —εἴκοσι πέντε— ἔτσι τὸ πῆρα ελαφρά.
Τίποτε (εὐτυχῶς) τῆς ψευτο-αισθηματικῆς ποιήσεως
γιὰ νὰ συγκινηθοῦν κομπῆς (αστεῖες) κυρίες
πὺ γιὰ τίποτε στενάζου.

The poet clearly gives his age and his lover's age: twenty-five and twenty-three. The young age is the reason why, according to the poet, the two of them saw the possibility of the lover's death 'casually'.¹³⁶ The description suggests that the lover has recently learned about his illness and that it could cause his death. There was nothing romantic, when the lover announced to the narrator that he might die; in contrast 'he said it as a joke' and it was not any kind of 'mock-sentimental poetry that moves the fashionable ladies (laughable ones) who sigh and moan over nothing'. Although the young man in the poem learned for his poor health, the young age does not allow him to see the potential of this illness. Similarly to the strong and brave men we discussed before (Chapter 1) who defied death in battle but they died after attacked by an illness, the young men in the poem cannot realise that this illness could

¹³³ Cavafy, *Ἀτελὴ Ποιήματα*, 309-315.

¹³⁴ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 182-183.

¹³⁵ Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 649.

¹³⁶ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 393.

be a deadly one indeed. They believe that in their youth they could not die, because they are healthy and strong as youth suggests. They seem unable to understand the change of their condition: from healthful youth, they are placed now in a sickly condition which disrupts their lives.

This only happens in the next part of the poem, in which the narrator, after he left the house, realises that, indeed his lover may die:

Κ' εν τούτοις όταν βρέθηκα έξω απ' την
 πόρτα του σπιτιού
 με ήλθε η ιδέα που πράγμα αστείον δεν ήταν.
 Μπορούσε και ν' απέθνησκε. Και με τον φόβο αυτό
 ανέβηκα τες σκάλες τρέχοντας, ήτανε τρίτο πάτωμα.
 Και χωρίς ν' ανταλλάξουμε κανένα λόγο,
 τον φίλησα το μέτωπο, τα μάτια του, το στόμα,
 το στήθος του, τα χέρια του, και κάθε, κάθε μελος·
 που θάρρεψα—όπως λέγουν οι θείοι σίχοι
 του Πλάτωνος—που η ψυχή μου ανέβηκε στα χείλη.

Here, the poet sees the possibility of his lover's death. As soon as he gets out of the house, he understands that the condition of his friend is a deadly one and 'he could indeed be dying'; 'and with that fear in mind' the narrator 'climbed the steps at a run'. Although the illness is not mentioned, the narrator knows that the outcome may be death; this explains his fear and hurry to go back to his lover. Moreover, the realisation of the seriousness of this illness is the case for the ill lover, whose overall description in this second part of the poem has nothing to do with his former attitude where he mocked his illness. He behaves as a condemned to death who only accepts passively the erotic passion of the narrator. While the narrator 'kissed his forehead, his eyes, his mouth, his chest, his hands, and every single limb', the lover does not react and the overall scene sounds rather like extreme unctio. Actually, he has no active role in the poem, as he is like a bedridden person and an object of the narrator's care. Especially the kissing of the forehead which comes first in this scene reminds an ill person, who is confined on bed.

According to Vassiliadi, there is a convention which creates a dramatic narrative; the event of death appears in the poem as something threatening and sudden. In addition, there is a progression in stages of the passion which transforms the erotic desire into a feeling of curse.¹³⁷ Indeed this progression of passion that Vassiliadi notes is the case for the illness as well. Initially, the two young

¹³⁷ Vassiliadi, 'Le discours muet du corps', 468.

men are laughing at the possibility of death, but gradually they realise that this could happen; it is not a joke as they first thought, but rather a future event, result of the deadly illness.

The next stage of this progression is the lover's death in the final lines of the poem:

Δεν πήγα στην κηδείαν. Ήμουν άρρωστος,
Μονάχη της τον έκλαψεν αγνά,
επάνω στο λευκό του φέρετρον, η μάνα του.

As we can see, death is the final result of this illness, once again. The white colour of the coffin alludes to the young age and the pallid beauty of the dead man, as in the poem 'Ωραία Λουλούδια κι Άσπρα ως Ταίριαζαν Πολύ' we have already discussed. The above lines demonstrate the lonely lament of the mother, as the narrator did not attend the funeral.¹³⁸ Nevertheless, the question which arises is why the narrator did not go to the funeral, especially when the dead person is his lover whom he loved so much. His passion for his dead lover was expressed in the previous part of the poem, where the narrator is worried about his lover's condition and he kisses every limb of his.

The answer to this question is given clearly by the poet: 'I was sick'. As becomes apparent the issue of this illness does not end with the death of the young lover. The protagonist is now the new victim of this illness which seems to be viral and contagious. The fact that he did not go to the funeral is not trivial; in contrast, it shows that the illness —transmitted to him probably by his dead lover— afflicted him and most likely caused him the same symptoms with his lover who was bedridden.

The poem is based on the triptych: homoerotic love, illness and death. Attempting to identify the name of this viral illness, one could say that it is homosexuality, which, as we are going to see later in the chapter, is repeatedly presented by Cavafy as a contagious illness. Although the absence of any specific information about the poor health of the two young men, the condition of pathology, for both the lover and the protagonist, obstructs them from doing certain things in life. In the case of the dead lover, although the protagonist kisses every single limb of his, he does not react giving the impression of a nearly dead man who cannot correspond to his surroundings. In the case of the protagonist, we see that his illness prevents him from doing something important: to go to his lover's funeral.

The illness and death of a young man, here given in a remote historical setting, is also the theme of the poem 'Κίμων Λεάρχου, 22 Ετών, Σπουδαστής Ελληνικών Γραμμάτων (εν Κυρήνη)', in which we have, again, the same triptych: homoerotic love—illness—death. In the title, apart from the name (Kimon son of Learchos), his age (twenty-two), and that he is a student of Greek letters, there is a place name in brackets: Cyrene. The poem starts with a quotation of the dead man's words:

¹³⁸ Petkou, 'Οι καθαφικές τελετουργίες', 1-11.

«Το τέλος μου επήλθε	ότε ήμουν ευτυχής.
Ο Ερμοτέλης με είχε	αχώριστον του φίλον.
Τες ύστατες μου μέρες,	μ' όλο που προσποιουνταν
πως δεν ανησυχουσε,	ένοιωνα εγώ συχνά
τα μάτια του κλαμένα.	Σαν νόμιζε που λίγο
είχ' αποκοιμηθεί,	έπεφτεν ως αλλόφρων
στης κλίνης μου το άκρον.	Αλλ' ήμεθαν κ' οι δυό
νέοι μιας ηλικίας,	είκοσι τριώ ετών.
Προδότις είναι η Μοίρα.	Ίσως κανένα παθος
άλλο τον Ερμοτέλη	νάπαιρνεν από μένα.
Τελείωσα καλώς·	εν τη αμερίστω αγάπη».

In the above lines, the dead person speaks in the first person as often in Greek epigram. He claims that he died happy, as he had Hermoteles next to him, especially during his last days. He could see Hermoteles worried about the situation of his health as according to his words 'when he believed I was asleep for a while, he threw himself distraught upon the edge of my bed'.¹³⁹ Definitely, Hermoteles' anxiety could be interpreted as anxiety for the forthcoming event of his lover's death. Consequently, death is, again, the most possible result of this illness in Hermoteles' mind. Although we have no specific information or characteristics about the nature of this illness, we only know one thing: that the patient is clearly bedridden. This suggests a severe illness which, as in the previous poem, prevents a person from doing basic things in life. Of course, Hermoteles' fear becomes true, as the patient speaks after his unavoidable death, through this epitaph.

In addition, the subject of a contagious illness is not absent from the poem, as the word that the narrator uses to describe Hermoteles' anxiety is rather unusual: 'αλλόφρων'. The word derives from 'άλλος' and 'φρήν' and is translated in English as 'distraught' by both Sachperoglou¹⁴⁰ and Mendelsohn.¹⁴¹ Obviously, this word suggests a situation of madness or a nervous condition; in other words, a mental illness. This is not irrelevant to the fact that the two young men are homosexuals, and the fact that homosexuality was considered in the nineteenth century as a mental illness by Krafft-Ebing. As in the previous poem where the protagonist's lover was ill and after him the protagonist, in this poem the narrator dies of an illness which is also transmitted to Hermoteles. Hermoteles also presents some very initial symptoms of this illness, like his abnormal anxiety which affects his mind. As Linder asserts literary madness (the representation of fictional characters suffering from a mental

¹³⁹ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 182-183, unless mentioned in a footnote.

¹⁴⁰ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 131.

¹⁴¹ Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 105.

condition) manifests ‘illness, suffering, pain, and trauma’ and they lead ‘to borderline experiences’.¹⁴² One could say that such a borderline experience is what we see in the poem.

The fact that the narrator mentions his age and Hermoteles’ age, ‘we were both young men of the very same age, three and twenty years old’, demonstrates that the illness could attack both of them, as it happened, although they were really young. This illness attacks young men, showing that it makes no differentiation between old and young, weak and strong. The epitaph finishes with the narrator admitting his happiness, again, for being with Hermoteles.

In the next part of the poem the plot becomes rather complicated and maybe confusing:

Το επιτύμβιον τούτο	Μαρύλου Αριστοδήμου
αποθάνοντος προ	μηνός στην Αλεξάνδρεια,
έλαβα εγώ πενθών,	ο εξάδελφος του Κίμων.
Με το έστειλεν ο γράψας,	γνωστός μου ποιητής.
Με το έστειλ’ επειδή	ήξερε συγγενής
ότ’ ήμουν του Μαρύλου:	δεν ήξερε άλλο τι.
Ειν’ η ψυχή μου πλήρης	λύπης για τον Μαρύλο.
Είχαμε μεγαλώσει	μαζύ, σαν αδελφοί.
Βαθιά μελαγχολώ.	Ο πρόωρος θάνατός του
κάθε μνησικακίαν	μου έσβησ’ εντελώς...
κάθε μνησικακίαν	για τον Μαρύλο—μ’ όλο
που με είχε κλέψει την	αγάπη του Ερμοτέλη,

Focusing on the above lines, we can see that the dead young man’s name is not Kimon Learchou, as one would expect after reading the title and then the afterlife words as epitaph, but Marylos son of Aristodemos. Kimon is cousin of Marylos and they grew up together having an ideal relationship, as ‘if they were brothers’. However, their relationship was challenged and it was turned into ‘feelings of malice’ or ‘rancour’, because they both loved Hermoteles. As Tzouvelis writes, the plot is complex, because the recipient of the epitaph is the cousin, Kimon, who also gives the title of the poem. In addition, Kimon is the main narrator, who speaks about his rivalry with Marylos in regard with Hermoteles; initially, Kimon’s lover. Although the structure of the poem is complex, Tzouvelis writes, is a very common Cavafy’s technique.¹⁴³ Pieris declares that the poem is based on an erotic triangle,

¹⁴² Birgit Bunzel Linder, ‘Metaphors unto themselves: mental illness poetics in contemporary Chinese poetry’, *Literature and Medicine*, 33: 2 (2015), 368-392.

¹⁴³ Tzouvelis, *Ταξίδι στην Ιστορία με τον Καβάφη*, 60-61.

but there is another person contributing to the narrative; the unnamed poet who is also a person that Kimon knows.¹⁴⁴

The fact that such an epitaph-letter was sent to Kimon by a poet he knew, presupposes a kind of mockery on the part of Marylos, as the content of the letter is nothing else but Marylos' self-praise and self-satisfaction for possessing Hermoteles. It seems, he attempts to mock his cousin that it was he the one who had Hermoteles and no one else. Nevertheless, Kimon claims that he is very sad, now, and that Marylos' 'untimely death blotted out completely any feelings of malice'. Kimon seems to forget any differences between him and Marylos, as he is 'deeply saddened'. Marylos' death is untimely and sudden, as he seemed young and healthy before the appearance of the illness. No one would expect that a twenty-three year old man would fall ill with a life threatening illness.

In the last part of the poem, Kimon admits that although he could have Hermoteles back, he will not try to proceed to any attempt:

που κι αν με θέλει τώρα	ο Ερμοτέλης παλι
δεν θάναι διόλου το ίδιο.	Ξέρω τον χαρακτήρα
τον ευπαθή που έχω.	Το ίνδαλμα του Μαρύλου
θάρχεται ανάμεσό μας,	και θα νομίζω που
με λέγει, Ιδού είσαι τώρα	ικανοποιημένος·
Ιδού τον ξαναπήρες	ως εποθούσες, Κίμων·
Ιδού δεν έχεις πια	αφορμή να με διαβάεις.

According to Kimon in the above lines, now, and after the death of his cousin, he knows that it could be much easier to be Hermoteles' lover as he always wanted; however he will not attempt to have him back. As Pieris asserts, Marylos, even dead, has the power to rival Kimon, but his death works in the opposite way as Kimon is now freed from any feelings of malice and envy. After the death of his cousin, Kimon realises that his love story with Hermoteles is over and he cannot rely on an illusion to be happy. This is the only way to save himself from the voice of dead Marylos who is still able to affect and torment him.¹⁴⁵

However, the important element in these lines is the reason preventing him to do any efforts: 'ευπαθής χαρακτήρας'. Sachperoglou translates the phrase as 'his sensitive nature',¹⁴⁶ while Mendelsohn also uses the word 'sensitive'¹⁴⁷ to describe narrator's character. Nevertheless, it is important to stress here, that, as we have already seen, the actual word used by Cavafy is not

¹⁴⁴ Pieris, 'Έρωσ και εξουσία', 37-57.

¹⁴⁵ Pieris, 'Έρωσ και εξουσία', 49.

¹⁴⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 131.

¹⁴⁷ Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 105.

‘ευαίσθητος’ which is best reflected in English with ‘sensitive’; it is ‘ευπαθής’ which suggests a kind of pathology: ‘susceptible’, as if to an illness. Especially as an adjective to describe Kimon’s character, it could be said that it alludes to a mental condition, like homosexuality.

Beyond that, here, Cavafy returns to the issue of contagion and to the perception of homosexuality as a kind of mental illness. This representation of homosexuality as mental illness is reflected in the poem through the possible illusions that Kimon admits might have: ‘the image of Marylos will always come between us’. Kimon gives the impression that if he is again with Hermoteles the ghost of his dead cousin would come to him protesting. This is given in a rather lively way, introduced with ‘ίδού’ which appears three times in the ending lines of the poem: ‘look here, now you’ re satisfied/look you’ ve got him back/look, you no longer have a reason to malign me’.¹⁴⁸ Beyond Marylos’ death, the subject of contagion appears through Hermoteles, initially, who has an abnormal anxiety, and now Kimon who presents symptoms of a mental illness: homosexuality.

¹⁴⁸ Translation by Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 153-154.

4.5 Sickliness and stigmatisation of homosexuality

The stigmatisation of homoerotic love is a basic element in Cavafy's poetry. As we have already noted, in Cavafy the word 'νόσος' and more precisely its derivatives, like 'νοσηρός', imply homoerotic love. In fact, Cavafy uses this word not only to connote homosexuality, but also as a means to express the sickness of homoerotic love; a view widespread in the nineteenth century.

The adjective 'νοσηρός' is used in the unfinished poem 'Στην Προκυμαία' ('On the Jetty') (1920)¹⁴⁹ as a description of 'πάθος'. And again, pathos is not just a denotation of sexual pleasure or love; it is something stronger. In Cavafy, pathos is strictly associated with pathology and homoerotic love which was seen and described as an illness. Thus homosexuality is a state of pathology, since it is equated with illness. The very first line of the poem is marked by a romantic atmosphere:

Νύχτα μεθυστική, στα σκοτεινά, στην προκυμαία.

This romanticism is reflected through the characterisation of the night as 'intoxicating',¹⁵⁰ and the placing of the action on a jetty, during the night. The next element the reader would expect is the appearance of the two lovers and this happens in the next lines of the poem:

Κι έπειτα στο μικρό δωμάτιον του πορνικού
ξενοδοχείου-όπου δοθήκαμε πλήρως στο νοσηρόν μας πάθος· όλες
τις ώρες, στον «δικό μας» έρωτα-
ως που τα τζάμια γυάλισαν με την καινούρια μέρα.

Indeed, the erotic element is very evident, but we do not have to do with a 'normal' kind of love. In contrast, we have the description of a sickly love expressed through the adjective 'νοσηρός'. As the poet asserts, the two lovers gave themselves 'completely to their unwholesome passion', alluding to homoerotic love. Also, it is interesting to note the place where this intercourse takes place; it is 'the little room of a tawdry hotel'. Especially, the Greek word 'πορνικό' has a very strong meaning, as it signifies an immoral situation. The word does not appear in a collected poem and one could say that it is a word beyond Cavafy's limit. They have intercourse not at their home or in a decent place, but in a small room of a notorious hotel suggesting also a kind of a dangerous laboratory. They enjoy their love in a place disapproved by the rest of society. This is a 'tawdry' place that accommodates different sexual trends that diverge from the normal imposed by conservative society. The 'tawdry hotel' is not

¹⁴⁹ Cavafy, *Ατελή Ποιήματα*, 95-99.

¹⁵⁰ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 360.

for everyone, as it is dangerous for society's well-being and apparently people's reputation. Society sees those entering this hotel as outcasts who do not care about their health and practise homoerotic love. In that way, Cavafy connects unhealthy and homosexual love with disreputable places, making intense the element of immorality and stigmatisation. This is how people used to see homoerotic love during Cavafy's days. As opposed to heterosexual love of a lawful couple that would take place at their home, the forbidden love between two men can only take place in an infamous hotel.

Moreover, the intercourse is characterised by the poet as "our own' love' in quotation marks to show the distinct element of this sick eros. It is not like any other love, it is their own love, because the poet refers to a different kind of love which opposes the norm of heterosexuality. We have to do with something which is distinct from the majority of people; this is the sick kind of a stigmatised love between two homosexual men and it is characterised as 'their own'.

In addition, one could say that Cavafy implies here a contagious kind of illness. 'Our love' somehow evokes to a virus of love spread among homosexuals and such a view is met within Krafft-Ebing who speaks about affliction in sexual inversion: 'in individuals afflicted with sexual inversion, in themselves, the perverse sexual feeling and inclination may be complicated with other perverse manifestations'.¹⁵¹ In fact, by echoing Krafft-Ebing who refers to homosexuals as people suffering from 'perverse sexuality', Cavafy goes beyond the innateness of homosexuality we saw before.

'Νοσηρά ηδονή' is what suggests the sickliness of homosexuality in the poem 'Εν Απογνώσει' ('In Despair') (1923):¹⁵² 'ηδονή', instead of 'πάθος' in this case, is characterised as 'νοσηρά'. As Haas claims, this poem indicates the phenomenon of stigmatisation.¹⁵³ The poem is divided in three parts. The first and second parts consist of five lines and the third one four. The poet infuses strong erotic references from the first part of the poem:

Τον έχασ' εντελώς. Και τώρα πια ζητεί
στα χείλη καθενός καινούριου εραστή
τα χείλη τα δικά του· στην ένωση με κάθε
καινούριον εραστή ζητεί να πλανηθεί
πως είναι ο ίδιος νέος, πως δίδεται σ' εκείνον.

The homosexual protagonist of the poem has lost his lover and tries to find consolation 'upon the lips of every other new paramour'.¹⁵⁴ He has intercourse with several different men, intending to find a

¹⁵¹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 291.

¹⁵² Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 140.

¹⁵³ Haas, 'Around the revisions of Cavafy's', 245-261.

¹⁵⁴ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 141.

kind of substitute. In truth, the protagonist of the poem lives in despair since he lost his partner, and tries to 'make himself believe he's found that same young lover', through fleshly pleasures with other young men. He lives in an illusion; every time he meets someone else he thinks 'that he yields to him'. The protagonist created an imaginary setting in order to convince himself that he did not lose the one he really loved. This imaginary setting takes place every time he encounters and has sexual contact with a new man. According to Jusdanis, the poetic subject attempts to re-create the lover through his imagination which is the link between physical need and reality. Imagination is also an important factor in the creation of art.¹⁵⁵

Here, Cavafy returns to the issue of contagion. This is implied through the intercourse of the protagonist with several other strangers. It seems that in his attempt to satisfy his sick passion and find a replacement for his lost lover, the protagonist is depicted as a desperate for love individual and, possibly, carrier of an infectious disease who is dangerous for the other people. Everyone who makes love with him is likely to get this contagious illness; this sickly passion which brought him to this awful situation.

The second part of the poem begins in the same way. Nonetheless, here, we have the important equation of homosexuality with illness:

Τον έχασ' εντελώς, σαν να μη υπήρχε καν.
 Γιατί ήθελε — είπ' εκείνος— ήθελε να σωθεί
 απ' την στιγματισμένη, την νοσηρά ηδονή·
 απ' την στιγματισμένη, του αίσχους ηδονή.
 Ήταν καιρός ακόμη — ως είπε — να σωθεί.

In the first line of this part, the protagonist seems to realise that he will never be back. This is evident in the simile 'as if ceased to exist'. As opposed to the previous part, in which the phrase 'he lost his friend completely' is accompanied by his effort to satisfy his fleshly pleasure in intercourses with other men, in this part the young man whom the protagonist loved in the past seems to be like a distant memory ('σαν να μη υπήρχε καν').

In the next lines of the second part, the reader finds the explanation to the question why the lover left the protagonist of the poem: 'because he wanted —so he said— he wanted to be saved/from such stigmatised, wasteful carnal pleasure,/from such a stigmatised, carnal pleasure of shame./There was still time —so he said— from him to save himself'. Initially, like the previous poem, we have the

¹⁵⁵ Jusdanis, *The Poetics of Cavafy*, 15-18.

consideration of homosexuality as a kind of illness. This is evident, again, in the use of the adjective ‘νοσηρά’ describing the noun ‘ηδονή’ (‘sickly pleasure’).

Also, the poet repeats the phrase ‘ἀπ’ την στιγματισμένη’ (‘from such a stigmatised’), denoting not only the unhealthy character of his love — the homoerotic love, but also the confrontation of this love by the conservative society of the nineteenth century. It is a phrase with very strong meaning as stigmatisation, here, suggests a mark or even a stamp on the body. A stigma could be for example, a slave’s tattoo or a saint’s stigmata. But in contrast, in this case we have to do with something different; this is the renouncement of homoerotic love by society. Stigmata in this poem are not obviously sainthood’s stigmata and definitely not a slave’s tattoo. They are the stamps that society attaches to homosexuals, by seeing them as abnormal individuals who disrupt nature’s order. Thus, homosexuality was seen by people, during this period, according to the poem, as a stigma. This becomes even more intense in the phrase ‘pleasure of shame’, as it is translated by Sachperoglou.¹⁵⁶ A similar translation is given by Mendelsohn: ‘in its shame’.¹⁵⁷

One could say that the poet, here, by the use of stigma to describe homosexuality alludes firstly to the way people saw homosexuality, during his time. Nevertheless, on the other hand it could be also said that stigma could be seen as an insinuation of a medical condition, and especially venereal disease. And this element could explain society’s reaction or even fear of this kind of stigmatised love.

Especially important is the use of the verb ‘να σωθεί’ (‘to be saved’ and ‘to save himself’), which is repeated in the second and the last line of the second part. Inevitably, the lost lover of the protagonist left in order to save himself from an illness, as homosexuality was seen, and its consequences. He left, because he wanted to abandon a sickly pleasure which could harm his health. In addition, this is the verb Cavafy used in one of his personal notes where he explains that he should save himself from his sufferings, as his actions harm his health, his hair and his looks.¹⁵⁸ If we read the poem closely with Cavafy’s personal note, we can see that the verb ‘να σωθεί’ is related to an individual’s health and we can read it in a medical way, as it clearly refers to how he can save himself from his illness. In the note Cavafy explains how he thinks he can save himself from a pathological condition, in the same way his protagonist struggles to do.

Nevertheless, in the use of the verb ‘to be saved’, there is another strong implication. Cavafy, here, alludes to the persecution of homosexuals in the nineteenth century, which was accompanied by punishments and prosecutions.

The most famous victim of the criminalisation of homosexuality was Oscar Wilde whose prosecution and trials in 1895, as already mentioned, were a watershed among writers and activists

¹⁵⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 141.

¹⁵⁷ Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 115.

¹⁵⁸ See page 169.

interested in the social and legal status of same-sex desire.¹⁵⁹ Besides, it is interesting to note that in a nineteenth century source (1831), Deacon apart from characterising same-sex desire as a sin against nature describes it as a dreadful crime, of which the inevitable consequences are death to those convicted of it and also permanent infamy.¹⁶⁰ In Britain, it was only in 1861 that capital punishment for sodomy was replaced by a prison term of ten years to life.¹⁶¹

As Haas aptly asserts, the lost lover left in order to be saved from society's stigma and adopted the same language as society uses to explain his departure.¹⁶² In order to justify this view, Haas gives Cavafy's own commentary on the poem:

Αυτός για να φθάσει στο σημείον 'να μην υπάρχει καν' είναι μισός homosexual μόνον. (Και τέλος η έλξις της γυναικός είναι σύνηθες φαινόμενον στον κόσμον). 'Του αίσχους' δεν το λέγω εγώ· το λέγει στην έξαψί του αυτός. Άμα πει 'σωθεί,' μπορεί να πει 'του αίσχους'. Έπειτα είναι εις νευρική κατάστασι. Θέλει να ξεκάμει. Θέλει να λυτρωθεί. Γυρεύει και arguments για τον εαυτό του. Η δριμύτης των λόγων του, εξηγεί την απόγνωσι του άλλου. Έπειτα λέγει 'του αίσχους' στην έννοια των πολλών, οι πολλοί έτσι το θέλουν· πορνικοί και τα λοιπά.¹⁶³

(This to come to the point 'not to exist at all' is half homosexual only. (And finally the attraction to woman is a usual phenomenon in the world). 'Of disgrace' it's not me saying this· it is he saying this in his 'flush'. If he says 'to be saved', maybe he says 'of disgrace'. Then he is in a nervous condition. He wants to finish. He wants to be free. He is looking for arguments for himself. The sharpness of his speech justifies the despair of the other. Later he says 'of disgrace' in the meaning of the many, this is how the many want it; whorish et cetera).

It is interesting to focus on two elements from Cavafy's note on his poem. The first is his comment that the man who seeks to be saved is in a nervous condition. The second is his assumption that this is how most people see it. In the above words, Cavafy reflects the opinions of his own time. Homosexuality was seen by the majority of people as an illness. The person in this commentary not only believed what conservative society wanted to but he also adopted society's language; for that reason he is in a nervous condition, implying that he is convinced of his illness: a mental disorder called 'homosexuality'. This is a strong element of the medicalisation of homosexuality. And it is important that Cavafy uses the medicalised word 'homosexual' in his commentary, resorting to English and showing also his familiarity with foreign nineteenth-century writings on homosexuality. In addition,

¹⁵⁹ White in *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality*, 26.

¹⁶⁰ Edward E. Deacon, 'Digest of the criminal law of England', in *Nineteenth-Century Writings on Homosexuality: a sourcebook*, ed. Chris White (London, 2002), 27.

¹⁶¹ Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature*, 37.

¹⁶² Haas, 'Around the revisions of Cavafy's', 254.

¹⁶³ Cavafy in Haas, 'Around the revisions of Cavafy's', 254-255.

we could assume that the Greek term ‘ὁμοφυλόφιλος’, which was possibly introduced into Greek late in the nineteenth century, or even later, was not well known;¹⁶⁴ this explains why Cavafy does not use the Greek term. Besides, as we have noted already ‘homosexuality’ as a word appeared for the first time in German, in 1869.¹⁶⁵ Thus, the fact that Cavafy uses the English version of the word should not be a surprise, especially if we bear in mind what Mondimore writes: ‘The ancient Greek and Latin languages have no word that can be translated as *homosexual*, largely because these societies did not have the same sexual categories that we do’.¹⁶⁶

Interestingly, Cavafy gives the image of a nervous person on the point of losing his sanity. Again, Cavafy’s words are reminiscent of Krafft-Ebing’s words: ‘of becoming nervous (neuarsthenic) and insane as a result of this enforced abstinence’.¹⁶⁷ All this justification and the attempt of the homosexual person to save himself from the homoerotic impulses that are reflected in Cavafy’s words, also suggest the abstinence that Krafft-Ebing mentions; the attempt of an individual to restrain himself from the abnormal impulses.

Finally in the last part of the poem, the protagonist seems to lose totally his former lover:

Τον έχασ’ εντελώς, σαν να μη υπήρχε καν.
 Από την φαντασίαν, από τες παραισθήσεις
 στα χείλη άλλων νέων τα χείλη του ζητεί·
 γυρεύει να αισθανθεί ξανά τον έρωτά του.

As opposed to his friend who left to save himself from homosexuality and society’s hostility, the protagonist of the poem continues his ‘abnormal’ and ‘forbidden’ sexual activities. In truth, here we have the contradiction of two different characters: the friend afraid for his health and stigmatisation by society because of his homosexuality, and the protagonist who ignores all the dangers and does not defer to the conservatism of his times. The protagonist is much more risqué than his friend. He lives in a new state of hallucinations, as he attempts to live again the same passion but with other young men. Although the narrator ‘lost his friend completely’, he finds a substitute ‘through his imagination, through his hallucinations’. Since he knows that his lover will never be back, he sees his imagination and hallucinations as an escape from his misery.

¹⁶⁴ As we have already explained, the word ‘homosexuality’ appeared for the first time in German. It appeared in a pamphlet written by Karl Maria Kertbeny in 1869, while —interestingly— there is no word in Ancient Greek and Latin that can be translated as ‘homosexual’ (Mondimore, *A Natural History of Homosexuality*, 3). The fact that the word appears in Demetrakos’ dictionary make us believe that it appeared in Greek between the years 1869-1936.

¹⁶⁵ On page 157.

¹⁶⁶ Mondimore, *Homosexuality*, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 230-231.

While the protagonist's lover is compelled by society to abandon such a sickly love, the protagonist is obsessed with this kind of love and cannot give it up. Compulsion and obsession could be seen as two characteristics of homosexuality; both results of the conservative society's beliefs. For a repressive society made the protagonist's lover to believe in a pathological condition of homosexuality affecting the body and the mind. Obsession, which is reflected in the protagonist's persistence in enjoying such a stigmatised love, alludes, again, to a pathological condition in which the homosexual 'patient' cannot give up; it seems that the protagonist is dependent on this sickly love.

Yet, the starting line of this part is exactly the same with the previous part, denoting that their separation is definite. According to the poem, the protagonist 'lost his friend completely' 'from his imagination and illusions'.¹⁶⁸ The realisation of the loss of his friend happens gradually and in the last part, it becomes clear. Although the protagonist 'seeks his lover's lips upon the lips of other youths', in truth he is looking for the passions he felt for him; not for the lover himself. The lover does not exist in his mind any more, but what still exists is the passion and love he felt for him.

This is implied in the last line of the poem: 'endeavouring to experience his lover's love once more'. The protagonist is not looking for his former lover. He is looking for the strong love he felt once. What remains alive in his mind is the passion for him. One could say that here, we have the contradiction between eros which is eternal and flesh which is temporary. According to the poem, eros will always exist, as opposed to flesh which is affected by the passing of years.

So far, in these poems Cavafy attempts to grapple with the idea that homosexuality is to be equated with illness, an opinion expressed by psychiatrists, above all Krafft-Ebing during the nineteenth century. Cavafy succeeds in representing this equation in his poetry, through the use of the adjective 'νοσηρός'. In addition, especially in the second poem analysed in this unit, Cavafy raises another important aspect of homosexuality in the nineteenth century: stigmatisation. For conservative society of his times saw homosexuality as a stigma and a homosexual would inevitably be stigmatised. As Jusdanis writes, the poet feels threatened by society, while for him homosexuality is an expression of his artistic creation. This suggests a kind of 'antagonistic relationship' between him and society.¹⁶⁹ Thus, stigmatisation could be seen as the result of this 'antagonistic relationship' between the homosexual poetic ego and the heterosexual society.

¹⁶⁸ In my translation. I disagree with Sachperoglou's translation 'through his imagination, through his hallucinations' in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 141, and Mendelsohn's translation 'in his imagination, in his hallucinations' in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 115. I think that the full stop after 'καὶ' made Sachperoglou and Mendelsohn to finish the meaning of the sentence at this point. But I believe that we have a kind of διασκελισμός, and the meaning continues to the next sentence. In my opinion, the second sentence is an explanatory comment to the previous sentence: 'He lost him completely, as if he never existed. From his imagination and from his illusions'.

¹⁶⁹ Jusdanis, *The Poetics of Cavafy*, 24.

4.6 Symptomatology of homosexuality

We have seen that stigma is used by Cavafy as a tool to depict the sickliness of homosexuality and the way the nineteenth century conservative society saw homosexuality. As a specific illness, and a shameful one, homosexuality was according to the poems analysed in previous unit, reason for stigmatisation. However, this is just one aspect of homosexuality in Cavafy. It is also interesting to see how ‘patients’ feel about their homosexuality. The stigmatised status of homosexuality was given to homosexuals by society, but how do homosexuals themselves experience their difference? In fact, in certain poems, Cavafy presents homosexuality as accompanied by a series of symptoms, clearly alluding to his readings of Krafft-Ebing’s theory.

‘Every case of genuine homosexuality has its etiology, its concomitant physical and psychical symptoms, its reactions upon the whole physical being’; this is what Krafft-Ebing mentions of the symptoms of homosexuality.¹⁷⁰ And in Cavafy, homosexuality can be characterised by symptoms, as in the collected poem ‘Ιμενος’ (‘Imenos’) (1919)¹⁷¹ which is divided into two parts. The first part consists of the following five lines:

«...Ν’ αγαπηθεί ακόμη περισσότερον
η ηδονή που νοσηρώς και με φθορά αποκτάται·
σπάνια το σώμα βρίσκοντας που αισθάνεται όπως θέλει αυτή—
που νοσηρώς και με φθορά, παρέχει
μιάν έντασιν ερωτική, που δεν γνωρίζει η υγεία...»

As Koutsourelis declares, the diseased character of the protagonists makes them aesthetically superior, as they are able to offer love to the brave ones they dare to experience this.¹⁷² The outset of the poem denotes intense eroticism and especially homoerotic love. Although Cavafy does not clearly speak about homosexuality, there are strong hints at it. The very first sentence of the poem, ‘Ν’ αγαπηθεί ακόμη περισσότερον’, which gives the poem this strong eroticism, is followed in the next line of the poem by the words ‘νοσηρώς’ and ‘φθορά’. And again, this is a clear allusion to Krafft-Ebing’s description of the homosexual’s decay, we saw earlier in the introduction of this chapter. Especially the first one, the adverb-form of the word ‘νοσηρός’ we encountered in the previous unit, insinuates homosexuality. Indeed, this ‘pleasure which is gained in an unhealthy and wasteful way’,¹⁷³ could not be a heterosexual erotic intercourse. A pleasure, or ‘ηδονή’ as Cavafy says, which is

¹⁷⁰ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 295.

¹⁷¹ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 115-116.

¹⁷² Koutsourelis, *Καβάφης*, 55.

¹⁷³ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 114-115.

characterised as unhealthy and wasteful is a homosexual one. As Papanikolaou asserts, if we bear in mind the rest of Cavafy's poetry, we know what sort of love the poet speaks about.¹⁷⁴

In the poem, pleasure is characterised as unhealthy and wasteful because it contradicts a healthy kind of love, such as heterosexual love is; and inevitably, bearing in mind all the medical approaches of Cavafy's time on the subject, it is perceived by the majority of people as a kind of illness. This is a sick eros, which opposes the normal: the heterosexual love. Similarly to any illness, homosexuality constitutes an unhealthy condition which wastes or even 'φθείρει' (the Greek verb is much stronger in meaning) the body; and this should be seen as a first symptom of homosexuality.

In addition, Cavafy asserts that this sick eros occupies the body rarely. The choice of the adverb 'rarely'¹⁷⁵ in the third line of the poem is very important. Homosexual love of an authentic or innate kind is presented by Cavafy as a rare phenomenon, because some homosexuals try to defeat their homoerotic impulses in order to follow the principles of a conservative society. Moreover, this sick pathos or pleasure not only occupies, but it also controls the body. Here, Cavafy attempts to draw an analogy: like any illness which makes a body weak and infirm, homosexual love is accompanied by its own characteristics or, to set it more clearly, symptoms. In the original sense of the word, a symptom means a change in a person's physical or mental condition, because of an illness. Symptoms are about illness and signify bodily experiences which affect life and are considered abnormal.¹⁷⁶ Thus, the capture of the body by a sickly lust and passion becomes another basic symptom of homosexuality.

In the fourth line of the poem, Cavafy repeats the two basic words which accompany this unhealthy condition of pleasure: 'νοσηρώς' and 'φθορά'; key words in Cavafy's denotation of homosexuality. The verb 'παρέχει', which could be translated as give or offer and accompanies these elements, again alludes to the symptoms of this illness: the corruption of the body. And indeed, one could say that 'φθορά' alludes rather to the corruption of the body, since it is a word which recalls something tangible. Although Cavafy hints at 'διαφθορά', which alludes to divergence from moral values, the use of 'φθορά' points to the physical wear. Thus, it is used by Cavafy twice in this poem to show the vulnerability of the human body. In fact, Cavafy proposes here that homoerotic love is accompanied by 'φθορά' on the body.

¹⁷⁴ Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ' Εμένα Καμωμένοι», 238.

Especially this line from Cavafy's poem alludes to Shakespeare's sonnet 129, and more specifically to the very first lines of the sonnet: 'Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame/Is lust in action;' See William Shakespeare, *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford, 2002), 639. For discussion of this complex phrase see Sidney Burris, 'Past reason hunted, or living with sonnet 129', *Agni*, 62 (2005), 209-220; Carol Thomas Neely, 'Detachment and engagement in Shakespeare's sonnets: 94, 116, and 129', *PMLA*, 92: 1 (1977), 83-95; J. Bunselmeyer, 'Appearances and verbal paradox sonnets 129 and 138', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 25: 1 (1974), 103-108).

¹⁷⁵ The word 'σπάνια' appears also in the title of Cavafy's poem 'Πολύ Σπανίως', which has been analysed in Chapter 2.

¹⁷⁶ Rudebeck, 'The Body as lived experience', 36.

In the closing line of the first part, Cavafy refers to ‘an erotic intensity that healthy love does not experience’. Here, it is even more apparent that the poet refers to a sick eros, since he asserts that it is accompanied by such a great erotic intensity that it cannot be found in any other kind of love; implying heterosexual love. This erotic intensity, apart from opposing healthy love, could be seen as another symptom of the illness ‘homosexuality’ and a clear indication that Cavafy read Krafft-Ebing who writes: ‘the majority of homosexuals are in a painful situation. On the one hand, there is an impulse towards persons of their own sex that is abnormally intense’.¹⁷⁷ Thus, Cavafy’s poetic view that homosexuals present intense erotic impulses seems to be a reflection of Krafft-Ebing’s opinion.

Cavafy is reminiscent of Krafft-Ebing’s writings who also wrote about ‘abnormally increased sexual desire’: ‘practically speaking the sexual instinct never develops in the normal, sane individual that has not been deprived by intoxication (alcohol, etc.) of this reason or good senses, to such an extent that it permeates all his thoughts and feelings’; ‘besides these graver manifestations of pathological sexuality we find also milder and more numerous gradations of hypersexuality’.¹⁷⁸ Inevitably, this abnormal erotic intensity that Cavafy describes in his poem alludes to Krafft-Ebing’s description on the hypersexuality of homosexuals.

In the second part of the poem, Cavafy explains that what is given before is nothing else than a part of a longer epistle, written by someone named Imenos:

Απόσπασμα από μιαν επιστολή
του νέου Ιμένου (εκ πατρικίων) διαβοήτου
εν Συρακούσας επί ασωτία,
στους άσωτους καιρούς του τρίτου Μιχαήλ.

As mentioned in the poem, the outset constitutes an ‘extract from a letter’. This explains why Cavafy uses the quotation marks and dots.¹⁷⁹ Besides, by placing the first part of the poem in quotation marks, Cavafy indicates that he presents the words and views of someone else and not his own. In addition, by using the quotation marks, Cavafy intends to stress a specific element: the fact that Greek love survived the theocracy of Byzantium. He submits the words from a longer letter of a young man, named Imenos, who comes of a patrician family. This denotes that Imenos’ family was a well-known and famed family. Although the poem reflects the views of nineteenth century psychiatry on

¹⁷⁷ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 383.

¹⁷⁸ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 46-47.

¹⁷⁹ Something which is also noticed by Alexiou in ‘C. P. Cavafy’s ‘dangerous’ drugs’, 185. The quotation marks and dashes in the opening stanza indicate that this fragment is a part of a document, while the second stanza is explanatory to the first.

homosexuality, Cavafy gives a different historical background; this is the reign of the Byzantine emperor Michael III (842-867).¹⁸⁰

The choice of placing the letter during the reign of this emperor serves the needs of the poem. According to Mendelsohn, Michael III, son of the emperor Theophilus and empress Theodosia, was known for the intensity of his decadent pursuits. He was caught up in political intrigues from earliest childhood and was known for his contempt for religion. He inherited the throne as a child and when he grew up, became known for his dissoluteness. In his greediness for pleasure and his disdain for the right exercise of kingship, he resembled Nero. Michael was a devotee of drink and horse racing, whose nickname was 'the Drunkard'.¹⁸¹

Alexiou also expresses a similar opinion, asserting that the choice of Michael III is not accidental and alludes to his frivolity, drunkenness and impiety. Compelled by his mother, Michael abandoned his mistress and married Eudokia on becoming emperor. He made Basil, a palace groom, co-emperor, after they planned together the death of his uncle, Caesar Bardas. Later, Basil murdered Michael, married his widow and became sole ruler. The choice of Sicily is also not coincidental. According to Alexiou, Michael was successful in his campaigns in the east against the Arabs, but he could not prevent them in the west. By the end of his reign, Syracuse was the one of the two Sicilian cities which remained under Byzantine control.¹⁸²

In addition, Alexiou asserts that Cavafy's choice of a Sicilian patrician as the author of the fragment could be read from an ironic perspective. Firstly, the lack of condemnation constitutes a favourable comment upon Michael, whose thirst for pleasure was 'νοσηρός' και με 'φθορά'; and secondly, the intensity of erotic pleasure represented in the protagonist of the poem, Imenos, could not save Sicily from the Arabs any more than it saved Michael from being murdered. Third, the name 'Imenos' suggests the Ancient Greek word "Ιμερος" ('God of sexual passion').¹⁸³

So, Cavafy places one 'notorious for debauchery', as Imenos is, 'during the debauched times of Michael III'. In that way, he succeeds in making even more intense the depravity and immoral element and its defiance of Christian morality. The parting of the poem into two parts signifies two different historical periods. The first part, although not mentioning the nineteenth century as the background of the poem, presents significant views and theories on homosexuality which were evolved in this century and they characterised it as a specific kind of mental illness. The second part of the poem makes clear that the person who wrote the letter lived in the Byzantine era and not in the nineteenth century, as one might consider reading only the first part of the poem. By combining

¹⁸⁰ Ilinskaya in Cavafy, *Άπαντα*, 452.

¹⁸¹ Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 456-458.

¹⁸² Alexiou in 'C. P. Cavafy's 'dangerous' drugs', 186.

¹⁸³ Alexiou in 'C. P. Cavafy's 'dangerous' drugs', 186.

two different historical periods, Cavafy intends to show that homosexuality seen as an illness has long been epidemic, especially among his own race. Also, the symptoms of homosexuality in the poem are: ‘φθορά’ or bodily wear, capture of the body by the sickly passion or love which now controls totally the flesh and abnormal erotic intensity.

Similar symptoms appear in the poem ‘Το 25^ο Έτος του Βίου του’ (‘The 25th Year of his Life’) (1925).¹⁸⁴ Capri-Karka asserts, that in this poem one can see ‘the painful sides of homosexual love affairs’. The protagonist had a brief sexual encounter with a young man in a tavern, but then he disappeared. Now, he goes to this tavern ‘sick’ for this lost lover waiting for him.¹⁸⁵

Cavafy introduces the reader into a rather corrupt atmosphere; this is the discreditable surroundings of a tavern:

Πηγαίνει στην ταβέρνα τακτικά
που είχανε γνωρισθεί τον περασμένο μήνα.
Ρώτησε· μα δεν ήξεραν τίποτε να τον πουν.

According to the poem, a man ‘visits regularly the tavern’,¹⁸⁶ where he met someone a month ago. After their first meeting, they did not meet again and the protagonist of the poem asks for his friend, but nobody knew anything to say.

In the next lines of the poem, the protagonist sees that he probably met an unknown person:

Από τα λόγια των, κατάλαβε πως είχε γνωρισθεί
μ’ ένα όλως άγνωστο υποκείμενον·
μια απ’ τες πολλές άγνωστες κ’ ύποπτες
νεανικές μορφές που απ’ εκεί περνούσαν.

In the above lines the narrator characterises the lost friend in an interesting way: ‘άγνωστο υποκείμενον’. Sachperoglou translates this as ‘unknown individual’¹⁸⁷ and Mendelsohn as ‘unknown character’.¹⁸⁸ But none of these translations represents the real meaning of the phrase. For ‘υποκείμενον’ is used in the Greek language in a derogatory mood. We do not have to do with a man or a woman; we have to do with a ‘subject’ which is unknown to all people. In that way, the poet implies that this person is a low class person for whom nobody cares and possibly a corrupt person.

¹⁸⁴ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 152-155.

¹⁸⁵ Capri-Karka, *Love and the Symbolic Journey*, 81.

¹⁸⁶ For the English quotations of the poem, I use the translation by Sachperoglou in Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 152-155.

¹⁸⁷ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 152-155.

¹⁸⁸ Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 127.

His anonymity and corruption could be linked with his homosexuality, since homosexuality was a shameful kind.

The overall description suggests that the young man was one of those people who take advantage of vulnerable people like the protagonist.¹⁸⁹ He was possibly a criminal, not just because homosexuality was a criminal offence, but because the tavern is a home for low life or as the poet puts it 'υποκείμενα'. The consideration of homosexuality as a criminal offence is also discussed by Krafft-Ebing: 'the laws of all civilised nations punish those who commit perverse sexual acts'; 'the moralist sees in these sad facts nothing but the decay of general morality, and in some instances comes to the conclusion that the present mildness of the laws punishing sexual crimes, in comparison with their severity in past centuries, is in part responsible for this'.¹⁹⁰

After that, the poet describes the persistence of the protagonist to stay in this tavern and wait for his lost friend to appear again:

Πηγαίνει όμως στην ταβέρνα τακτικά, την νύχτα,
και κάθεται και βλέπει προς την είσοδο·
μέχρι κοπώσεως βλέπει προς την είσοδο.
Ίσως να μπει. Απόψ' ίσως ναρθεί.

The narrator repeats the first line of the poem, by saying that the protagonist 'visits the tavern regularly at night'. Also, he 'sits and gazes towards the doorway', because 'his friend might come in' this night. Although nobody knew anything about the lost friend, the protagonist persists in waiting for him; he hopes that he will see him again. Until this point of the poem, there is no reference to homosexuality or even any erotic implication, but the narrator, indirectly, introduces the reader into a homoerotic atmosphere, which will be much more intense in the next lines of the poem. This implication derives from the phrase 'μέχρι κοπώσεως' ('till he tires').

Isolated from any context this specific phrase could be seen as any kind of fatigue; for instance fatigue after a long day, fatigue after a difficult activity or even work. Nonetheless, the protagonist of the poem does not really do anything; he just sits in a tavern and expects to see his friend. Thus, his fatigue should be attributed to another factor. Bearing in mind Cavafy's obsession of presenting homosexuality as kind of illness (although one could say that this is rather an opinion of people of his time and not his own belief) and the next lines of the poem in which we have a medicalisation of homosexuality, the protagonist's fatigue should be seen as a symptom of this specific illness:

¹⁸⁹ Capri-Karka, *Love and the Symbolic Journey*, 81.

¹⁹⁰ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 333-334.

Κοντά τρεις εβδομάδες έτσι κάμνει.
 Αρρώστησεν ο νους του από λαγνεία.
 Στο στόμα του μείνανε τα φιλιά.
 Παθαίνεται απ' τον διαρκή πόθον η σάρκα του όλη.

As we can see, in the last three weeks the protagonist goes to the tavern, hoping that he will meet his lost friend, again. According to the poem, 'his mind is suffering from lovesickness'. Here, we have a clear reference to the medicalisation of homosexuality and its consideration as a mental illness. Especially the use of the phrase 'διαρκή πόθον' ('endless need') shows a very strong and continual feeling for love. Endless or continual need insinuates a chronic medical condition, in which a patient suffers from prolonged symptoms and ache. The need for love is continual, suggesting an abnormal condition that a homosexual experiences more acutely than others. Again, Cavafy is reminiscent of Krafft-Ebing's views: 'one of the most important anomalies of sexual life is an abnormal presence of sexual sensations and presentations from which necessarily arise frequent and violent impulses'.¹⁹¹ As we can see, Cavafy recalls Krafft-Ebing by reproducing his claim on the frequency of the erotic desire to homosexuals.

Cavafy, directly, asserts that the protagonist of the poem is sick and suffers from unhealthy homoerotic passion. All this suggests the 'λάγνη πάθησις' that Cavafy mentions in his poem 'Πολυέλαιος' ('Chandelier'). Cavafy alludes to an illness, called 'λαγνεία', and it is not different than homosexuality which comes together with symptoms, like fatigue.

Cavafy's characterisations of homosexuality recalls Krafft-Ebing's theory of pathologisation of homosexuality and his suggestion of physical causes. According to Hutter, Krafft-Ebing spoke about a cerebrally determined neurosis, result of a diseased constitution of the nervous system. Sexual instinct is pathological or perverse if not following the purpose of nature.¹⁹² 'Λαγνεία' in the poem is an alternative name of homosexuality, a kind of neurosis, if we are meant to use Krafft-Ebing's words, and this also explains the use of the verb 'παθαίνεται', which is a word with strong meaning. It denotes a patient who experiences his illness with bodily effects.

The two of them met a month ago, as we have seen at the beginning of the poem, but the symptom of fatigue and the lovesickness appeared in the last three weeks. This is shown through the regular visits of the protagonist to the tavern during this period. According to the poem, 'that's what he's been doing for almost three weeks'. Thus, we can conclude that the protagonist fell sick a week after their first meeting. His regular visits to the tavern suggest obsession and certainly this could be seen as another symptom of a mental illness, as homosexuality was characterised.

¹⁹¹ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 46.

¹⁹² Hutter, 'The social construction of homosexuals', 78.

The phrase ‘the kisses linger on his mouth’ apart from making clear that we have to do with homoerotic love, it denotes that the protagonist still remembers the intercourse of their first meeting, suggesting also a kind of infection. In the next line of the poem, Cavafy uses the verb ‘παθαίνεται’. Sachperoglou translates this verb ‘aches’,¹⁹³ while Mendelsohn gives a different interpretation: ‘is suffering’.¹⁹⁴ Although both translations give adequately the meaning of the Greek word, none of them incorporates the passiveness that the Greek original encompasses.

The most common form of the verb is ‘παθαίνω’. Nevertheless, Cavafy transforms the verb into ‘παθαίνεται’ (in the third person singular). In that way, Cavafy intends to show the excess of passivity on the ‘patient’; the erotic intensity. It seems that Cavafy, again, wants to demonstrate that this illness, called ‘homosexuality’ —as is perceived by the medical society—, occupies and controls the body of a person; symptoms we saw analysing the previous poem. It does not allow a patient to reclaim the control of his body, alike the protagonist of the poem whose ‘all of his flesh aches from endless need’. His flesh is occupied by homoerotic passion which makes him ‘παθαίνεται’. The passiveness of this transformed verb is a poetic technique of Cavafy to show the passivity of the homosexual ‘patient’, when is occupied by sickly passion.

After that, the poet returns to the protagonist’s obsession and desire to meet again his lost friend and have intercourse with him:

Του σώματος εκείνου η αφή είν’ επάνω του.
Θέλει την ένωση μαζί του πάλι.

The protagonist still feels the body of his lost friend, since ‘that body’s touch is still upon him’. Also, ‘he craves to be united with him’. This explains his obsession and persistence to visit regularly the tavern. This is the only place that they can meet again.

In the last six lines of the poem, Cavafy implies the prejudice against homosexuality. As opposed to ancient Alexandria in which homosexuality was a normal phenomenon, in the Alexandria of Cavafy’s time, homosexuality was shameful:¹⁹⁵

Να μην προδίδεται, το προσπαθεί εννοείται.
Μα κάποτε σχεδόν αδιαφορεί.—
Εξ άλλου, σε τι εκτίθεται το ξέρει,
το πήρε απόφασι. Δεν είν’ απίθανον η ζωή του αυτή

¹⁹³ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 152-155.

¹⁹⁴ Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 127.

¹⁹⁵ Haag, *Alexandria*, 71.

σε σκάνδαλον ολέθριο να τον φέρει.

The protagonist of the poem 'tries not to betray himself'; he tries to hide his homosexuality. However, sometimes 'he becomes almost indifferent', because he is well aware of 'what he's exposed to'. It is possible 'this life of his will lead him to ruinous scandal'. Indeed, for the conservative society of the nineteenth century, apart from being a mental illness, homosexuality was a scandal. Any relationship outside of a lawful marriage is sinful and forbidden, let alone a relationship between two men. In any case, apart from the symptoms of 'φθορά', erotic intensity and the control of the body by an abnormal love and intensity which appeared as symptoms in 'Ιμενος', 'Το 25^ο Έτος του Βίου του' presents two other symptoms which are fatigue and obsession.

Another symptom of homosexuality can be detected in 'Η Αρρώστια του Κλείτου' ('Kleitos' Illness') (1926)¹⁹⁶, in which homosexuality is perceived as illness, again. In the first part, which has five verses, Cavafy introduces the protagonist of the poem:

Ο Κλείτος, ένα συμπαθητικό
 παιδί, περίπου είκοσι τριώ ετών—
 με άριστην αγωγή, με σπάνια ελληνομάθεια-
 είν' άρρωστος βαρεία. Τον ηύρε ο πυρετός
 που φέτος θέρισε στην Αλεξάνδρεια.

As we can see in the above lines, Kleitos is a young man with high education and presumably from a high class and well-known family. He lives in Alexandria and caught the fever which has swept in the city. According to Mendelsohn, we are probably meant to imagine the action of the poem around the fourth century A.D., when 'pagan and Christian forms of worship flourished side by side'.¹⁹⁷ This sounds a very logic view, especially if we bear in mind the appearance of the pagan servant woman who is the protagonist of the second part of the poem, and wavers between the two religions.

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that such illnesses, as described in the poem, were very common during Cavafy's time, too. For instance, in 1918 there was an epidemic of typhoid in Egypt and especially in the area of the Suez Canal.¹⁹⁸ Also, as already mentioned, in 1889 Cavafy's friend Michael Ralli died of typhoid fever, while typhoid was also the reason of death of Cavafy's brother Alexander, in 1905.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 156-159.

¹⁹⁷ Mendelsohn in Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, 482.

¹⁹⁸ Haag, *Alexandria*, 122.

¹⁹⁹ Liddell, *Cavafy*, 58, 108. Vassiliadi also connects Kleitos' fever with Michael Ralli's fever (in Vassiliadi, «Για τα σκουπίδια κατευθείαν», 3).

In the second part, however, which consists of four verses, the initial situation of a usual illness is disrupted. Cavafy gives some more information about Kleitos' illness, combining it with an emotional disappointment. In addition, Cavafy refers to the agony of the young man's parents.

Τον ήύρε ο πυρετός εξαντλημένο κιόλας ηθικώς
 από τον καύμό που ο εταίρος του, ένας νέος ηθοποιός,
 έπαυσε να τον αγαπά και να τον θέλει.
 Είν' άρρωστος βαρειά, και τρέμουν οι γονείς του.

As we have already said, one could say that the young man of the poem is possessed by a fever which was very common in Alexandria. However, in fact the reason of Kleitos' illness should be seen in connection with his psychological indisposition, result of his emotional disappointment. The fact that Cavafy also denotes that during that period the young man was mourning for his separation with his lover makes reader believe, that there is a different explanation: the fever is result of Kleitos' separation from his lover. Thus, Kleitos' illness should be connected with psychological reasons. Even Karapanagopoulos who struggles to interpret the poem from a Christian perspective, believes that Kleitos' illness is partly physical and partly mental.²⁰⁰

Again, Cavafy proceeds to a medicalisation of homosexuality, by presenting fever as a psychosomatic symptom. Indirectly, Cavafy intends to show that as a mental illness, homosexuality affects the body of a homosexual-patient by causing symptoms like fever. It could be said that the pandemic of fever, which by coincidence swept through Alexandria, was the explanation that Kleitos' parents gave to their son's illness; this explains their agony, as well. The parents do not know about their son's homosexuality and interpret his condition through familiar ground. As Glover writes, the interpretation of someone's face is inseparable from what we believe about him. The narrator in Marcel Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* makes this view clear in the depiction of Swann; a friend of his parents. The narrator sees as very important fact that Swann moved in the exalted society in Paris; something the parents do not know and inevitably they see a different person than the narrator.²⁰¹ The narrator in the poem knows more about Kleitos than his parents. While the narrator implies the condition of Kleitos, a half psychic half physical illness connecting to homoerotic passion, the parents believe that their son is suffering from a physical disease.

As Chauncey says, in the nineteenth century changes in theories concerning sexual deviance, like homosexuality, paralleled those concerning mental illness in general. Thus, doctors believed that

²⁰⁰ Karapanagopoulos, *Ο Καβάφης ήταν Χριστιανός;*, 44.

²⁰¹ Glover, 'On interpretation', 135-142.

nervous disorders had a somatic basis and showed somatic symptoms.²⁰² So, we could assume that Kleitos is presented by Cavafy as a homosexual who experiences his illness, homosexuality, with a bodily symptom: fever.

Kleitios' homosexuality is more evident in the original Greek text, in which Cavafy writes: 'Τον ήγυρε ο πυρετός εξαντλημένο κιάλας ηθικώς/απ' τον καυμό που ο εταίρος του, ένας νέος ηθοποιός,/έπαυσε να τον αγαπά και να τον θέλει'. Cavafy becomes very descriptive here, purposely. Not only he says 'ο εταίρος του' ('his companion'), but moreover he explains that he is 'ένας νέος ηθοποιός' ('a young actor') 'who έπαυσε να τον αγαπά και να τον θέλει' ('ceased to love and want him'). Cavafy is clear: Kleitos' lover is a young man who does not love and want him any more. It is interesting to note, that his lover is not a person from the high society, like Kleitos. In contrast, he is characterised as 'εταίρος', a rather derogatory characterisation. Also, he is an actor; a profession which was not much appreciated, as it was mainly connected with people of a lower class and questionable morals.

In addition, Cavafy's decision to say that Kleitos' lover was an actor reflects Krafft-Ebing's assumption that homosexual men are attracted by actors, dancers, athletes and statues, and they are ready for the greatest sacrifice for their beloved. Krafft-Ebing writes: 'He is capable of the greatest sacrifice for him, and experiences the pangs of unhappy, often unrequited, love; he suffers from the disloyalty of the beloved object, and it is subject to jealousy, etc. The attention of the male-loving man is given only to male dancers, actors, athletes, statues, etc.'.²⁰³

The similarities between Krafft-Ebing's statement and Cavafy's poem are obvious. Firstly, Kleitos' lover is an actor, which is one of the professions that Krafft-Ebing declared that attract homosexual men. A second basic element which brings Cavafy's poem closer to Krafft-Ebing's theory is the fact that he adopts the latter's opinion that homosexuals suffer for the beloved object. This is shown in the representation of Kleitos illness and the fact that he suffers an unrequited love. An element we saw in the previous poems too, in which the protagonists are in a desperate condition because they love without receiving love.

In the last part, the poem switches to a contrast between paganism versus Christianity. This is achieved through the presentation of the old servant woman who takes care of Kleitos. Haas speaks of her unsuccessful attempt for exorcism of the malady.²⁰⁴ She worries about the young man's health and prays for him. Nevertheless, she prays as a pagan secretly, because she now lives in a Christian house. The old servant woman, a former pagan and now a Christian since she entered the house of a

²⁰² Chauncey, 'From sexual inversion to homosexuality', 129.

²⁰³ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 240.

²⁰⁴ Haas, *Le Problème religieux dans l'oeuvre de Cavafy*, 431.

Christian family, prays as a pagan showing that she never abandoned her former religious beliefs; but in contrast, she was forced to become a Christian.

Nevertheless, this old servant woman is not only the housekeeper of the house; she is like a personal nurse for Kleitos, as she is the one who raised him (‘και μια γριά υπηρέτρια που τον μεγάλωσε’), and possibly she look after him since he was a child and every time he was ill. She is also the one, who tries to cure his illness (‘παίρνει κρυφά κάτι πλακούντια, και κρασί, και μέλι’). This idea of a personal nurse was very familiar to Cavafy, as he himself had a personal nurse as a child.²⁰⁵ Obviously her decision to take sweets, wine and honey allude to a pagan ritual, as it seems like an offer to gods for the cure of Kleitos. Nevertheless, we should not ignore the therapeutic attributes of the two materials she uses: wine and honey. Cavafy, here, suggests that the old servant woman takes these ingredients to the idol she believes in as a pagan for blessing and a kind of offer, and then she is planning to offer them as medicines to Kleitos.

Wine had long been considered as a medicine. As we saw in the chapter on alcoholism, especially in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century, wine was used extensively in medicine.²⁰⁶ As for honey, according to Zecchi, its role in Ancient Egypt encompasses a variety of contexts, ranging from economy to religion and cosmetics to medicine. Honey includes a series of therapeutic properties, and in particular, it was used in Egyptian medical remedies to heal different diseases. In addition, Amon who was the recipient of the honey offering was evoked in order to send away the disease.²⁰⁷ Since ancient times, honey has been used successfully for the treatment of infected wounds, because of its antibacterial activity and was known for its antimicrobial properties.²⁰⁸ Honey is a bactericidal for many pathogenic organisms.²⁰⁹ Thus, ironically, one could say that this old servant woman was also a nurse for Kleitos and uses wine and honey as medicines in an attempt to cure him, but ineffectively, as Kleitos’ illness is not physical only.

²⁰⁵ According to Liddell, Cavafy’s father made a great deal of money, and spend it freely: there were several Greek servants in their house, his children had an English nurse and a French tutor. In addition, on one of the family’s journey Constantine was escorted by his nurse. In Liddell, *Cavafy*, 24.

²⁰⁶ Jonathan Reinarz and Rebecca Wynter, ‘The spirit of medicine: the use of alcoholic in nineteenth-century medical practice’, *Drink in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, ed. Susanne Schmid and Barbara Schmidt-Haberkamp (London, 2014), 127-139.

²⁰⁷ Marco Zecchi, ‘On the offering of honey in the Graeco-Roman temples’, *Aegyptus*, Anno 77, No. ½ (Gennaio-Dicembre 1997), 71-83.

²⁰⁸ Paulus H. S. Kwakman, Johannes P. C. Van den Akker, Ahmet Güçlü, Hamid Aslami, Jan M. Binnekade, Leonie de Boer, Laura Boszhard, Frederique Paulus, Pauline Middelhoek, Anje A. te Velde, Christina M. J. E. Vandenbroucke-Grauls, Marcus J. Schultz, and Sebastian A. J. Zaat, ‘Medical-grade honey kills antibiotic-resistant bacteria in vitro and eradicates skin colonization’, *Clinical Infectious Diseases*, Vol. 46, No. 11 (Jun. 1, 2008), 1677-1682.

²⁰⁹ I. E. Haffjee and A. Moosa, ‘Honey in the treatment of infantile gastroenteritis’, *British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition)*, Vol. 290, No. 6458 (June. 22, 1985), 1866-1867.

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The symptoms of homosexuality as deriving from the three poems analysed in this section, can be summarized as: fever, inability of the 'patient' to control his body because of vehement passion, intense and abnormal erotic desire, corruption or wear of the body, fatigue and obsession. Cavafy suggests not only that homosexuality is an illness, as it was maintained by specialists during his time, but moreover it comes with certain symptoms. Besides, symptoms in homosexuality was something noted before Cavafy by Krafft-Ebing, who as we have already said gave Cavafy the background of this medicalisation of homosexuality.

According to Krafft-Ebing, 'the statement of homosexuals is remarkable, that the adequate sexual act with persons of the same sex gives them a feeling of great satisfaction and accession of strength, while satisfaction by solitary onanism, or by enforced coitus with a woman, affects them in an unfavourable way, making them miserable and increasing their neurasthenic symptoms'.²¹⁰ This reference to symptoms by Krafft-Ebing could be seen together with the symptoms that Cavafy described in his poems. Again, through the representation of homosexuality's symptoms, Cavafy reflects Krafft-Ebing's view that homosexuality, like other illnesses, causes a series of consequences for the homosexual.

²¹⁰ Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 231.

4.7 Conclusions

Cavafy's homosexuality is a subject which always attracted the critics' interest, and often hostile interest in his own time, as it became reason for rumours and parody.²¹¹ And whatever the approach to Cavafy's poetry, homosexuality becomes a central topic. However, my emphasis differs from previous accounts, as I have mainly attempted to connect Cavafy's homoerotic poems with the nineteenth-century medical background that saw homosexuality as a kind of illness, to show how responsive he is to this discourse, and how it fits with the general preoccupation with sickness which the other chapters of this thesis discuss.

As we have seen, in the poems '[Την Ψυχὴν ἐπὶ Χεῖλεσιν Ἔσχον]' and 'Κίμων Λεάρχου, 22 Ἐτῶν, Σπουδαστὴς Ἑλληνικῶν Γραμμάτων (ἐν Κυρήνῃ)' young homosexual men are dying of an illness. The two poems are based on the scheme: homoerotic love-illness-death. In the poems we also see the theme of contagion, and the representation of homosexuality as a deadly mental illness. The young men in the two poems are bedridden because of this illness and condemned to death.

In this chapter, I have also attempted to show the sickness and stigmatisation of homosexuality in Cavafy's poetry. In the poems 'Στην Προκουμαία' and 'Ἐν Απογνώσει' we see the characterisations 'νοσηρό πάθος' and 'νοσηρά ἡδονή' respectively that give homoerotic love the sickly status. The sickness of the protagonists' love, in combination with the notorious hotel as the place the young men enjoy their love in the poem 'Στην Προκουμαία', is also indication of their stigmatised love which is clearly mentioned in the poem 'Ἐν Απογνώσει'.

Of course, the representation of homosexuality as an illness means a series of symptoms, that Cavafy also included in his poetry and he alludes to Krafft-Ebing's theories. Cavafy describes the pathology of homosexuality through the poems 'Ἴμενος', 'Το 25^{ον} Ἔτος τοῦ Βίου τοῦ' and 'Ἡ Ἀρρώστια τοῦ Κλειτοῦ'. It seems that homosexuality is a mental illness which is accompanied by symptoms like obsession, fever, corruption or wear of the body, sick love that controls the body, great and abnormal erotic intensity and fatigue. A very interesting element in these poems is the fact that Cavafy does not write about epidemics, but about the personal experience. Even in the poem 'Ἡ Ἀρρώστια τοῦ Κλειτοῦ' where we see the appearance of an epidemic, which could easily be seen as Kleitos' cause of death, Cavafy effectively makes clear that this is not the reason of Kleitos' death. Although the epidemic mentioned in the poem killed many people, Kleitos died of something else. In that way, Cavafy makes Kleitos' suffering more personal and drives the reader to the personal experience of illness through Kleitos.

Thus, in a close reading with Krafft-Ebing's treatise, and especially his theory about homosexuality, I have set out to show that in some poems Cavafy describes homosexuality in a way

²¹¹ Dimitris Daskalopoulos, *Παρωδίες Καβαφικῶν Ποιημάτων 1917-1997* (Athens, 1998), 13-14.

that is influenced by, responsive to, but not the prisoner, of such a discourse. An influence and preoccupation we also see in the poet's personal notes too.

Nevertheless, as we have also seen in the poem 'Μέρες του 1896' Cavafy defended homosexuality and considered it an innate inclination alluding to Ulrichs' views; and this is Cavafy's defense line of homosexuality. The protagonist of this poem followed his innate orientation which is pure, because it does not break rules of hygiene and health which are more authentic than those that govern the conservative nineteenth century society. In any case, the fact that Cavafy described homosexuality as a kind of illness should not be seen as a personal belief, but rather a reflection of his preoccupation with such theories and how society saw homosexuals.

Conclusions

Why is a medical humanities approach helpful to analyse Cavafy? To whom is such an approach useful? How do the medical humanities break new ground in the research of Cavafy's poetry? Death is ever-present in Cavafy's poetry, as we have noted in Chapter 1; what has been discussed rather less is illness and disease. Initially, as we have seen in this thesis, my overall approach to Cavafy has drawn on four main strands that have become central to the field of the medical humanities: Hutter's theory that old age is a disease and not a stage of human life; Trotter's theory that alcohol consumption is a disease; Krafft-Ebing's theory that homosexuality is not a sexual tendency but a mental illness; and, as an overarching framework, the distinction between illness and disease which has been drawn since the 1950s by Parsons and in the 1960s by Parsons and Feinstein and has been refined by later theorists.

The four themes discussed in this thesis fit in the medical humanities, as they reflect certain medical theories. Cavafy does not refer superficially to certain conditions, but gives a series of symptoms and characteristics that enlighten the personal experience of pain and suffering in the light of these medical theories.

In Cavafy's poetry, the absence of physicians and the mysterious death of his protagonists from illnesses which are not usually specified makes us consider that his poems revolve around illness rather than disease.¹ Illness should be seen as the personal experience of a patient, and it is this with which Cavafy's poems tend to be concerned and manifest. In these poems, in the absence of any details about the protagonist's illness or even cause of death, let alone of a physician's diagnosis, Cavafy puzzles his readers about this condition; such poems are 'Στρατηγού Θάνατος', 'Μανουήλ Κομνηνός' and 'Εις το Επίνειον'. When Cavafy proceeds a step further to look back on the death of a protagonist, as in poems like 'Ιγνατίου Τάφος', 'Εν τω Μηνί Αθύρ' and 'Ευρίωνος Τάφος', the cause of death is not mentioned; or to be more accurate, the reason is the unspecified illness which permeates Cavafy's poetry.

When Cavafy refers to what in much modern medicalising discourse had come to be viewed as a specific disease like old age, alcoholism and homosexuality, he is rarely overt. Apart from the poem 'Μισή Ωρα' in which we find the word 'αλκολισμός', he does not name the condition. While he gives certain symptoms and descriptions which make us connect the poems with these specific conditions, again, he does not refer to doctors at all. For example, in the poems 'Πολύ Σπανίως', 'Ένας Γέρος' and 'Η Ψυχές των Γερόντων' we see a representation of old age reflecting Hutter's view that old age is a disease; in poems like 'Θάταν το Οινόπνευμα', 'Επήγα' and 'Δύο Νέοι, 23 έως 24 Ετών',

¹ As opposed to other modern texts like Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*, translated by H. T. Lowe-Porter (London, 1999) and Denton Welch's *A Voice Through a Cloud*, (London, 2004).

we see Trotter's nineteenth century medical theory that extensive alcohol consumption is a medical disorder; and finally another nineteenth century medical view is reflected in poems like 'Η Αρρώστια του Κλείτου', 'Ίμενος' and 'Κίμων Λεάρχου', in which we have Krafft-Ebing's influential study that homosexuality is a mental illness.

Returning to the questions set earlier in the conclusions, we can see that a medical humanities approach is useful, in that it can bring to the surface aspects of Cavafy's general preoccupation with the vagaries of the human condition. Cavafy read and was preoccupied—even obsessed—with health issues and, seemingly, medical theories of his time; something we see in his personal notes. Cavafy's reader should not ignore for example the characterisation of homosexuality as a sick passion which troubles the protagonists in a number of his poems. Several such poems reflect Krafft-Ebing's surmise that homosexuality is a disorder. Thus, a parallel focus on Krafft-Ebing and Cavafy shows that the medical humanities enlighten homoerotic poems. For example, the poem 'Η Αρρώστια του Κλείτου' has not hitherto been read as engaging with the discourse about homosexuality as a mental illness. While in the past, critics spoke about Kleitos' illness and his homosexuality, they never connected them apart from some very superficial references to Kleitos' illness, partly mental—partly physical. Or the poem 'Ίμενος', where critics have not elaborated on references like 'νοσηρώς' and 'φθορά' as marking Cavafy's connection with Krafft-Ebing's theories on homosexuality.

Similarly, Cavafy's old men are not just a sign of the poet's fear of and preoccupation with old age. In contrast, they reflect a certain medical theory, through a series of symptoms. The symptomatology of old age we see in the relevant poems suggests that Cavafy, as in the case of homosexuality, was familiar with theories that interpreted old age not as the final stage of life, but as a disorder. For example, 'Ένας Γέρος' does not depict just an isolated old man who sits alone in a coffee-shop; and of course, it is not only a Cavafy's fear of old age as has been suggested. Beyond that, the old man in the poem and most of Cavafy's poems on old age are expressions of the signs and symptoms of old age. The old man is a symbol of pathologisation who experiences the symptoms of his condition: fatigue, depression and dizziness. While previous critics spoke about the condition of Cavafy's old men in general, they did not analyse the pathology in the poems.

In those poems where Cavafy refers to substance abuse, the poet reflects another medical theory that helps us interpret these poems and proceed a step beyond former critique. In some of these poems, alcohol consumption is not only a trend or passion, but a medical disorder, dependence, expressed through Cavafy's men who drink assiduously. For example, the character of the poem 'Δύο Νέοι' experiences fatigue, boredom and is in a miserable condition, while the 'flush' ('έξαψις') in the

poems 'Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι' and 'Να Μείνει' and 'φθορά' in poems like 'Μέρες του 1909, '10, '11' are all symptoms of the dependence on alcohol that earlier discussions have not dwelt on.

The medical humanities enlighten Cavafy's poetry, because they give something new: the poet's general awareness of medical theories and the way these theories are embodied in his poems. This approach is breaking new ground, as there is no other interpretation of Cavafy through the medical humanities. No previous work has viewed the weakness of Cavafy's old men, the passion of Cavafy's protagonists for drinking and the passion of his male protagonist for homoerotic intercourse as linked to nineteenth-century discourses relating to certain conditions and diseases.

Nevertheless, it is not only the medical humanities that enlighten Cavafy: Cavafy has something to bring to the medical humanities too. Cavafy adds powerful examples of poems to the canon of poems revolving around illness, even if some of his poems dwell, for example, on addiction in a quieter way than some modern literature revolving around substance abuse. In the same way, some of his homoerotic poems express the stigmatisation of homosexuality and its consideration as an abnormal condition disrupting the normality of a conservative society.

In the introduction of this thesis, we noted Vaccarella's distinction between 'additive' and 'integrated' medical humanities and her acknowledgement that a clear distinction is not possible.² The former suggests the investigation of a condition through literary texts, the latter the work of a clinical instructor who challenges medical students to analyse the rhetorical work in an illness experience. A clear distinction fails, as both 'additive' and 'integrated' medical humanities, help us to understand the personal experience of illness. Cavafy's poems are literary texts that invite the reader to investigate specific conditions, but they are also descriptions of illness experience that urge medical students to analyse the symptoms and other signs. Although Cavafy makes illness and disease basic topics of his poetry that should not be ignored, very strangely they were not among the 'basic themes' in his poetry identified by his pre-eminent student, G. P. Savidis.³

Finally, Cavafy's analysis through the medical humanities is not just a new interpretation, but a new approach that shows a new way of reading, which could be applied to other Greek poets too. In the same way the analysis of Cavafy's poetry through the medical humanities brought new meanings which can help the philologist and the medical practitioner, a reading of other poets like Karyotakis, Romos Philyras (1898-1942), Kavvadias, Anagnostakis and Vasos Lyssarides (1920-) through the medical humanities could also bring new enlightening results.

² See pages 21-22.

³ In Savidis, *Βασικά Θέματα*.

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