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The 'Regiment of Pleasure'  
**Cavafy and his homoerotic legacy in Greek writing**

Skordi, Ioanna

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**The 'Regiment of Pleasure': Cavafy and his homoerotic legacy in Greek writing**

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## **Abstract**

Cavafy has been the key inspiration of a line of younger – and very different – Greek writers who employ homoerotic modes. This thesis, covering the years 1905-2010, concentrates on some major examples (Sikelianos, Lapathiotis, Ritsos, Ioannou, Christianopoulos) chosen for their variety of responses to the homoerotic Cavafy. In aggregate these writers, along with Cavafy himself, can be considered a ‘regiment’: the ‘Regiment of Pleasure’, in Cavafy’s term. In presenting these writers in this fashion, I attempt to illuminate both the work of the successors and that of their influential precursor.

In the three broad yet selective chapters that constitute the main body of my thesis, I seek to display the culture-specific elements of the Modern Greek contribution to homoerotic writing, as these can be extrapolated from a critical examination of the poetic legacy of Cavafy, within three themes:

Chapter 1, ‘The Appropriation of Ancient Greek Eros’, delineates the ways in which modern Greek homoerotic writing exploits Greek Love in Plato (*Symposium* and *Phaedrus*) and the *Palatine Anthology*. Chapter 2, ‘Homoeroticism and the Notion of Sin’, approaches literary homoeroticism as associated with sinfulness and confession. Chapter 3, ‘The Favoured Class and Games of Class- Crossing’, examines literary homoeroticism as connected to class barriers. The writers listed above appear as appropriate in each chapter.

Always in relation with the analysis of the discussed writings, I draw as appropriate on queer theory, theories about tradition and reception, and the writers’ historical and social context.

My aim is to show that different aspects of Cavafy’s queer radicalism have been exploited by a diverse range of Greek successors whose work has not hitherto been fully discussed, either in itself or in relation to Cavafy. Seeing his successors as a cluster is something new, as it also is the interpretative discussion of both poetry and prose in this direction.

## **Acknowledgements**

Writing a PhD can be a daunting experience if you are not constantly supported by the right people. I was lucky enough to have the consistent support of various people throughout my PhD studies. The completion of my PhD thesis would not have been possible without their constructive contribution.

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## Table of Contents

- **Preface - 6-14**
- **Introduction - 15-44**
  - Cavafy as a pioneer of the homoerotic: the formation of a (powerful) tradition -15-22.
  - The question of sexual identity - 23-29.
  - Homosexuality or Homoeroticism? - 30-38.
  - 'Queer' and 'homosocial' - 39-44.
- **Chapter 1: The appropriation of Ancient Greek Eros - 45-114**
  - Introduction – 45-49.
  - Cavafy's «πλατωνικός Χαρμίδης» - 50-62.
  - «Με την ιερή που Σ' το θρεψε Πλατωνική μανία»: the case of Angelos Sikelianos – 63-100.
  - Yorgos Ioannou: «δούλος ιερός του έρωτα» - 101-110.
  - Conclusions – 111-114.
- **Chapter 2: Homoeroticism and the notion of sin – 115-216**
  - Introduction -115-122.
  - Balancing between Christianity and homoeroticism in Cavafy's poetry – 123-139.
  - Napoleon Lapathiotis: a strongly anti-Christian animus – 140-157.
  - Dinos Christianopoulos: «...τί θα πει προσκυνημένος» - 158-178.
  - Yorgos Ioannou: The emergence of the 'holy sinner' – 179-194.
  - Yannis Ritsos as penitent and confessor: «Αν άφεση δεν είναι η ποίηση...» - 195-212.
  - Conclusions – 213-216.
- **Chapter 3: The working class as the erotic object: Cavafy and his successors – 217-287**
  - Introduction – 217-236.
  - Cavafy: The eroticisation of the working class – 237-251.
  - Yannis Ritsos: Homoeroticism within (his) leftist ideology – 252-260.
  - Dinos Christianopoulos – «για μια ζωή δίχως φόβο και χλεύη» - 261-276.

- «Στο λαϊκό δεν προσεχώρησα. Το λαϊκό το είχα μέσα μου»: The case of Yorgos Ioannou – 277- 284.
  - Conclusions – 285 -287.
- 
- **Conclusions of the Thesis – 288-293**
  - **Bibliography – 294-309**

## Preface

'Cavafy allows everyone to feel that he has been understood'<sup>1</sup>

I have been following the discussions and critical contributions to the interpretation of aspects of Cavafy with great interest, especially those produced during 2013, the official celebratory year of the poet. In 2013, marking 150 years from the birth of the poet and 80 years from his death, a lot of energy has been exerted on highlighting the great importance of the poet; the impact of his work seems to be more present and relevant than ever.<sup>2</sup>

Writing my thesis during this time, the stimuli were constant and numerous and I continuously had to consider the new production of scholarly work and constantly re-consider my line of critical thinking.

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<sup>1</sup> This statement was made by Daniel Mendelsohn in his discussion with Papanikolaou about Cavafy, in «Στέγη Γραμμάτων και Τεχνών» (Athens, January 12, 2014), as reported in Michael Paschalis, «Η Σμίκρυνση του Καβάφη», review of *Σαν κ' εμένα καμωμένοι: Ο ομοφυλόφιλος Καβάφης και η ποιητική της σεξουαλικότητας*, by Demetris Papanikolaou, *The Athens Review* 6:56 (November 2014): 51.

<sup>2</sup> The year 2013 saw the publication of multiple editions of Cavafy's poems as well as a significant amount of studies on Cavafy. See, for example, Demetres Daskalopoulos, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: Η ποίηση και η ποιητική του* (Athens: Kichli, 2013), Andonis Drakopoulos, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: Το ανοιχτό έργο* (Athens: Topos, 2013), Demetres Demetroules, *Η ανάγνωση του Καβάφη* (Athens: Gutenberg, 2013), Yannis Psychopaidis, *Επάγγελμα: Ποιητής: Εικόνες πάνω στο πρόσωπο και την ποίηση του Κ. Π. Καβάφη* (Athens: Metaichmio, 2013), Yannis Psychopaidis, ed., «Ο Θεός να το κάμει *Sketch*»: *Ο Καβάφης και η πόλη: 18 εικαστικές προσεγγίσεις της ποιητικής πολεοδομίας στον Κωνσταντίνο Καβάφη* (Athens: Gavrielides, 2013), Vasiles Kolonas, *Η πόλις: Ο αστικός χώρος στον Κ. Π. Καβάφη* (Thessalonike: University Studio Press, 2013), Kostas Koutsourelis, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης* (Athens: Melani, 2013), Kostas Voulgaris, ed., *Κ. Π. Καβάφης: Κλασικός και μοντέρνος, Ελληνικός και παγκόσμιος* (Athens: Poema, 2013), etc. For a full list of the new publications on Cavafy see Kostas Agorastos, «Νέες Εκδόσεις για τον Κ. Π. Καβάφη», *Book Press*, October 14, 2013, accessed October 15, 2013, <http://www.bookpress.gr/multipress/teleutaia-nea/nees-ekdoseis-gia-ton-kavafi>.



During this time, I have read work with which I agree, and work with which I could not disagree more, although this is not the place to make more extensive references. In the course of my thesis, I draw on these new points of view whenever appropriate, incorporating them and challenging them, where needed. Because of the thematic character of my thesis, I have admittedly placed particular emphasis on the new studies based on the homoerotic aspect of the poetic corpus of Cavafy. It is this aspect of his poetic corpus that has caused so much controversy throughout the years and continues to do so until this day. Yet, I believe it is important in the preface of my thesis to refer to an important scholarly dispute which struck me and which will help me bring to the fore some important observations having to do with the nature of my study: the hostile review «Η Σμίκρυνση του Καβάφη», by Michalis Paschalis, which comments on Dimitris Papanikolaou's monograph «Σαν κ' εμένα καμωμένοι»: ο ομοφυλόφιλος Καβάφης και η ποιητική της σεξουαλικότητας». This critical review reminded me of why Cavafy's erotic poems, one third of the Cavafian corpus, remain and most probably will remain for a long time the main source of ambivalence and scholarly debate regarding the work of the poet. As far as this topic is concerned, it seems that there are two distinctly differentiated categories of scholarly research; the first, supported by prominent scholars like Maronitis, Manuel Savidis, Jusdanis and apparently Paschalis, express the belief that it is a mistake to take into consideration Cavafy's homoeroticism for the illumination and interpretation of the whole of his oeuvre. In this respect, it also sounds too extreme and far-fetched to characterise the poet's work as 'gay'.

On the other hand, other important scholars like G.P. Savidis, Haas, Pieris, and Syrimis have over the years placed special emphasis on the homoerotic nature of Cavafy's work and its importance for the interpretation of his work as a whole. In his recent monograph, Papanikolaou addresses this issue and takes its analysis a step further, by arguing that Cavafy's poetry has to be openly characterised as 'gay' and it is because of this nature that it has acquired its worldwide influence. Undoubtedly, the worldwide success and timelessness of a writer's work, adding it to what we may describe as 'world literature', owes great deal to the feature of the 'modern' that it carries, and simultaneously to the fact that it enables further discussions based on new theories and approaches. Papanikolaou's exploitation of the scholarly field of Gender and Queer Studies to offer a new reading of the homoerotic Cavafian corpus through this lens, confirms its contemporary relevance.

Even though the scholarly world leans over Cavafy's historic, didactic and even religious poems, and their importance for the totality of his poetry has already been brought to the fore and discussed multiple times, his erotic poems have been studied less systematically -and often treated less sympathetically. This is due to their ambivalent nature, a nature which had to be as discreet as possible in a period of time where being a homosexual was taboo. Therefore, even though objective scholarly research has -of course- pointed out and discussed this basic feature of Cavafy's work, the analytical tools that the contemporary field of Gender and Queer theory offers nowadays in scholarly research, enables scholars like Papanikolaou to offer a modern point of view: the ambivalent character of Cavafy's homoerotic poems is indeed re- studied and re-valued within a scholarly field which seems to be the most appropriate for this attempt.<sup>3</sup> What I argue is that contemporary scholarly research on Cavafy has to be indeed open-minded, not towards the emergence of a «πούστης Καβάφης»,<sup>4</sup> a fact which is obviously there and its importance has been emphasised in a rather different idiom by the poet himself,<sup>5</sup> but towards new theoretical approaches employed for the interpretation of the corpus of the poet.

This thesis, "The Regiment of Pleasure": Cavafy and his homoerotic legacy in Greek writing', attempts to offer a new proposal of reading and approaching the homoerotic poetry of Cavafy, with special emphasis on his influence on homoerotic tendencies in Greek writing. I see the poet as the key inspiration of a line of younger – and very different – Greek writers who are drawn to homoerotic themes. Covering the years 1905-2010, I concentrate on some notable examples (Sikelianos, Lapathiotis, Ritsos, Ioannou, Christianopoulos) chosen for their variety of responses to the homoerotic Cavafy. In aggregate, these writers, along with Cavafy himself,

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<sup>3</sup> By saying so, I do not underestimate the undoubted importance of other approaches, like the psychoanalytical one, for the Cavafian hermeneutical line.

<sup>4</sup> Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ'έμένα καμωμένοι», 90.

<sup>5</sup> I am referring here especially to some Cavafian notes published later on in *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα Ποητικής και Ηθικής*, by G.P. Savidis.

can be considered a 'regiment': the "Regiment of Pleasure"<sup>6</sup>, to use Cavafy's term. In presenting these writers in this fashion, I attempt to illuminate both the work of the successors and that of their influential precursor. This study as a whole approaches - in its own way- the issue of homoeroticism in Modern Greek literature in broad terms, but with reference to a selection of representative authors. I draw inevitably on critical approaches from the West, where the topic has been more easily discussed, and one of the characteristics that I am interested in probing is whether those categories are mapped out clearly in the reality of modern Greek literature, which has a distinctive relation to an ancient past and to the Church, and a possibly different class structure.

This topic constitutes a challenge on multiple levels. No relevant systematic analysis has been carried out thus far, with the important exception of Cavafy. The Greek society's attitude towards this issue is indeed extremely interesting; especially if we observe it through the prism of ancient Greek tradition. In ancient Athens, to take the most celebrated example, homoeroticism was an acceptable feature to an extent that Ancient Greece is all over the world perceived as the starting point of it, as the place and period during which homoeroticism was established. Ancient Greek literature, as a child of its period, reflects society's different attitude towards homoeroticism and thus it is brimful of homoerotic elements. Plato, Sappho, Anacreon, Theocritus, and the *Palatine Anthology*, consist –among others- of fundamental homoerotic readings even in our time. Consequently, research on Ancient Greek homoerotic literature is abundant, with considerable scholarly research from a variety of perspectives (Dover<sup>7</sup>, Davidson<sup>8</sup>, Dowling<sup>9</sup>). Yet, there remains a vast gap when it comes to Modern Greek homoerotic literature. The gap has to do with its collective research and interpretation. In the late nineteenth and twentieth century, a number of notable authors write in homoerotic terms, though, of course, to

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<sup>6</sup> Constantinos P. Cavafy, *Τα Πεζά: (1882-1931)/Κ.Π. Καβάφης*, edited by Michalis Pieris (Athens: Ikaros, 2003), 168. The poem and its significance to the formation of the arguments of my thesis is analysed on page 57.

<sup>7</sup> K.J. Dover, *Greek Homosexuality* (London: Duckworth, 1978).

<sup>8</sup> James Davidson, *The Greeks and Greek Love: A Radical Reappraisal of Homosexuality in Ancient Greece* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Linda Dowling, *Hellenism and Homosexuality in Victorian Oxford* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994).

a smaller extent than in ancient times. However, no scholar to date has endeavoured to delve into this part of Modern Greek literature as a collective theme.

There are indeed scholars and critics who have worked on an individual writer's homoerotic aspect, and this has led to the production and publication of a number of important articles having to do with that aspect. In the course of my thesis, I take into consideration the existing bibliography on the homoerotic aspect of the writers I discuss and, where appropriate, I seek to supplement, develop or challenge it. It is not the case that homosexuality in Modern Greek culture has been avoided as a topic. There have been significant sociological studies on same-sex relationships in contemporary Greece – among others by Yannakopoulos,<sup>10</sup> Kantsa<sup>11</sup> and Kirtsoglou<sup>12</sup>. These theorists have not approached this issue in its literary voices, but mainly in sociological, political, historical and other terms. Hence, the literary field lacks contextually grounded research in this area. This is what I seek to provide, with reference naturally to Cavafy and to some of his successors in Greek homoerotic writing. One may question the reason for this gap and especially in contradistinction with the Ancient Greek literary tradition. Sociological studies on Greek homophobia today have attributed it to these main causes: the Church's clear opposition to homoerotic acts throughout history, the macho position of the majority of Greek politicians, the negative representation of homosexuals through mass media, the police and their homophobic behaviour, the lack of sex education in schools and the

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Kostas Yannakopoulos, 'Cultural meanings of loneliness: kinship, sexuality and (homo)sexual identity in contemporary Greece', *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 18:2 (2010), Kostas Yannakopoulos, 'Wars between Men: Football, male sexualities and nationalisms', *Synchrone Themata* 88 (2005), Kostas Yannakopoulos, 'Male identity, body and same-sex relations. An approach to gender and sexuality', in *Anthropology of Gender*, ed. Sotiris Dimitriou (Athens: Savalas, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> See, among others, the studies by Venetia Kantsa, Vasiliki Moutafi and Evthymios Papataxiarchis (eds.), *Φύλο και Κοινωνικές Επιστήμες στη σύγχρονη Ελλάδα* (Athens: Alexandria., 2010), Venetia Kantsa, 'Visibility': Women, same-sex sexualities and the subversion (?) of gender', in *Revisiting Sex and Gender In Contemporary Greek Ethnography*, eds. Eugenia Georges and Chrissy Moutsatsos, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies* 18:2 (2010): 213-240.

<sup>12</sup> Fundamental is Elisabeth Kirtsoglou, *For the love of women: Gender, Identity and Same-Sex Relationships in a Greek Provincial Town* (London: Routledge, 2004).

negative attitude of governments towards the requests of homosexuals for legislation which establishes their rights. The *raison d'être* of my study is not to engage in a sociological discussion (though some sociological theories are used as they are linked to literature) and, therefore, further reference and explanation of these reasons will not be given here. But it cannot be denied that within this context, homosexuality in Modern Greece, and its literature, has been insufficiently discussed. Modern Greek literature concerning homoeroticism somehow remains in the shadows, as if its very existence is still denied. Many Greeks are not aware of the homoerotic aspect of important poets and prose writers.

This study modestly attempts to fill part of this gap. Its significance lies in its engagement in a discussion of Modern Greek homoerotic literature, on the basis of a cluster of different authors, for the first time. To make the term 'modern' more specific, I must explain that I will refer to Greek literature since Cavafy, the first openly homoerotic writer of modern Greece and still the most important, covering the years 1905-2010. The fact that there is no other similar comparative approach constitutes the main originality of this effort. (It has to be noted however from the outset, that the topic of drama and film lies outside the ventures of this thesis.) I specifically focus on the analysis and close reading of a combination of poetry and prose, as the authors that I will discuss do interestingly cover the topic both in verse and in prose. Cavafy, with his cunning mixture of the two, opens the way for cross-fertilisation between poetry and prose.

The Introduction to my study consists of a clarification of the theoretical models to which I have had recourse in an eclectic fashion, and with no ambition to contribute novel theoretical insights to queer theory in general. The first part of my Introduction is entitled 'Cavafy as a pioneer of the homoerotic: the formation of a (powerful) tradition'. In this section, I embark on a discussion around tradition and reception, in order to define the character of my study and the category into which it fits. At the same time, my study borrows elements of the theory of each category. The aim of this section is to clarify that the writers this thesis incorporates have been chosen based on their conscious Cavafian affinities and linkages. In this direction, my approach acquires the character of a reception study.

A significant part of my Introduction is -as expected- concerned with queer theory. The aim of this section is to approach major and ambivalent terms of queer theory with caution, in order to decipher their usage in my thesis. Terms like 'homoerotic', 'homosexual', 'queer' and 'homosocial' are approached and discussed in order for the reader of the thesis to understand the ways in which each term is used throughout this thesis. At the same time, it is important for the reader of the thesis to understand why I am referring to a 'homoerotic' legacy. There are specific reasons for my choice of this term, which I analyse in my Introduction. It is important to clarify for the outset that I am not a queer theorist; therefore my approach to the terms is eclectic, and based on the purposes of each of my chapters.

Moving on to the main corpus of my thesis, I should begin by explaining that in each of my chapters, Cavafy, as the 'father' of Modern Greek literary homoeroticism, is analysed first. As well as being of obvious importance himself, Cavafy is, I shall argue, the key inspiration of a line of younger writers in homoerotic writing: Lapathiotis, Sikelianos, Ritsos, Ioannou, Christianopoulos. All these writers can be understood as being in a line following Cavafy when it comes to writing the homoerotic. It is clear that there are important Greek practitioners of homoerotic writing, above all Tachtsis, who are not included here. This has occurred due to the fact that scholarly research is engaged in a relevant and rigid analysis to a great extent and in thorough detail; to name one example I shall refer to the recent well-documented PhD thesis of my colleague, Dr Stavrini Ioannidou, who analyses Tachtsis and this aspect of his work in depth.<sup>13</sup> An important writer of homoerotic literature is also Demetrios Capetanakis, who is not incorporated into this thesis due to the fact that he writes in English. Menis Koumandareas, another prominent writer with considerable homoerotic work has also been excluded, as he falls under a different generation, and my thesis does not include writers born after Cavafy's death.<sup>14</sup>

Chapter 1, 'The appropriation of Ancient Greek Eros', seeks to show the conscious connections between the homoerotic literature of ancient Greek times with

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<sup>13</sup>Stavrini Ioannidou, 'Autofiction à la grecque: Greek autobiographical fiction (1971-1995)' (PhD diss., King's College London, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> On the same grounds, my discussion does not include Mitsakis, with his short text, for example, «*Το Φίλημα*» (1892), because he comes before Cavafy.

the homoerotic literature of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this manner, I aim to show the creative appropriation and how the homoerotic literature of the past survives and lives again through its reflections in and productive encounters with the modern homoerotic literature. In doing so, it displays where the differentiation between ancient and modern homoerotic literature lies, but also seeks to show how homoerotic writing in modern times can see itself as an extension of the ancient Greek heritage. Cavafy, Sikelianos and Ioannou constitute the main examples which I draw on. They show how modern Greek homoerotic poetry and prose craftily uses 'Greek love' as inherited from ancient times and as linked to the romantic Platonic idea of love, as expressed in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* especially, and less commonly with the sometimes overtly sexual language of the *Palatine Anthology*.

Chapter 2, 'Homoeroticism and the Notion of Sin' approaches literary homoeroticism as associated with sinfulness. Cavafy, Lapathiotis, Ritsos, Ioannou and Christianopoulos are examined here through this prism. The chapter is occupied with the hostile relationship between Orthodoxy and homosexuality and the effect this has on homoerotic literature. In the first place, it forces literary homoeroticism to be restricted to some hints and be latent. Homoeroticism in literature comes to the surface slowly but vigorously and especially through and after Cavafy. Yet, religious references in the context of homoeroticism play a continuous and perhaps surprisingly central role. A particular focus of the chapter relates to ideas of confession through literature.

'The working class as erotic Object: Cavafy and his successors' is the title of the third and final chapter, which examines Modern Greek literary homoeroticism as connected to class barriers. It examines how class barriers are involved in modern homoerotic literature and how poets and writers face them. Who do they identify with the «απλό και γνήσιο του έρωτος παιδί» and is this «παιδί» socially defined? Is there a class which has a favoured role in their writing, and why? Moreover, what do we mean by 'class-crossing' and what does it have to offer for the interpretation of Modern Greek homoerotic literature? Cavafy, Christianopoulos and Ioannou form a rich basis for this question. Through a productive encounter with their homoerotic *oeuvre*, I question whether homoeroticism can transcend social class in literature and in what ways it becomes the case.

The combination of the three chapters aims at further illuminating the homoerotic strand in Cavafy, through the study of his influences over a cluster of writers. The major unifying feature of these writers, who are very different in other respects, is their kinship with the Cavafian homoerotic corpus. Therefore, this study also deciphers an aspect of Lapathiotis, Sikelianos, Ritsos, Christianopoulos and Ioannou that scholarly research has neglected to a great extent hitherto. In doing so, this thesis offers a proposal for interpretation for Cavafy and his successors. Last but not most importantly, it brings to the fore and draws on a tradition in Modern Greek literature: the Cavafian homoerotic legacy in Greek writing.



## Introduction

### Cavafy as a pioneer of the homoerotic: the formation of a (powerful) tradition

As Beaton argues 'Cavafy stands unassailed today as the first, and in the opinion of many also the foremost, of the Greek poets of the twentieth century'.<sup>15</sup> Yet, when Cavafy, referring to himself in the third person singular, humorously argued that

Cavafy in my opinion is an ultra-modern poet, a poet of future generations. In addition to his historical, psychological, and philosophical worth, the fastidiousness of his style, which at times verges on the laconic, his measured enthusiasm, which arouses mental excitement, his correct syntax, the consequence of an aristocratic disposition, his subtle irony, are elements that generations of the future will enjoy even more (...)<sup>16</sup>

he had no idea that his joshing yet ambitious words were going to become a reality and the subject of so much scholarly research. The growing readership for his work and the large number of important writers whom he has influenced throughout the years have proved the fact that Cavafy is indeed 'an ultra-modern poet' and definitely a poet 'of future generations'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Roderick Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature* (second edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 92.

<sup>16</sup> As translated in English in: Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature*, 96 from the French text: Cavafy selon mon avis est un poète des générations futures. En complément de sa valeur historique, psychologique, et philosophique, la sobriété de son style impeccable, qui touche parfois au laconisme, son enthousiasme pondéré qui entraîne à l'émotion cérébrale, sa phrase correcte, résultat d'un naturel aristocratique, sa légère ironie, sont des éléments que goûteront encore plus les générations de l'avenir (...) (Cavafy 1963: 82-4).

<sup>17</sup> As Beaton points out 'Cavafy's (...) was mostly published privately in Alexandria and, despite a favourable review by Xenopoulos as early as 1904, was not widely known in Athens before the 1920 ' (Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature*, 92).

Beaton argues that

What crucially separates Cavafy from his predecessors in the nineteenth century, and indeed from most of his contemporaries in the early twentieth, is neither his subject-matter nor his beliefs about his art, but an ironic detachment, a sense of the fallibility of human beings and the *relativity* of values, even of those he holds most dear, coupled with a disconcerting sense of humour.<sup>18</sup>

It seems that the constantly increasing reputation and acknowledgment of Cavafy worldwide constitutes a major sort of consideration in the on-going discussion of current scholarly research. At the centre of this scholarly discussion, an important phenomenon occurs: Even though the worldwide significance of Cavafy, his influence over foreign writers and readers and the recognition of his oeuvre as quality world literature are undisputable, his significance in Greek literature and his influences over Greek writers is a topic that is not hitherto clear. This problematic is so present that Lavagnini begun the Introduction of the 2006 special issue of the journal *To Δέντρο*, dedicated to «Διεθνής Καβάφης» with this juxtaposition:

Εάν στην παγκόσμια γραμματολογία ο Καβάφης είναι μία αυτονόητη αξία μεγάλου βεληνεκούς, όσον αφορά τη νεοελληνική υποδοχή του δεν είμαστε (ακόμα...) σίγουροι ότι συμβαίνει το ίδιο.<sup>19</sup>

In the same journal the same problematic is delineated and expanded by Koutsourelis, a scholar who strongly doubts the Cavafian influences and presence in Greek literature.<sup>20</sup> Koutsourelis argues that

(...) το ζήτημα της απήχησης του Καβάφη στο εξωτερικό δεν πρέπει να συγχέεται με εκείνο της προβολής της νεοελληνικής λογοτεχνίας. Κάτι τέτοιο θα

<sup>18</sup> Beaton, *An Introduction to Modern Greek Literature*, 95.

<sup>19</sup> «Ο «Διεθνισμός» του Καβάφη», *To Δέντρο* 145-146 (2006): 5.

<sup>20</sup> See Kostas Koutsourelis, «Μια επιτυχία όχι ανεξήγητη», *To Δέντρο* 145-146 (2006): 35-41. Koutsourelis views on Cavafy were later on further developed and expressed in his book published in 2013: Kostas Koutsourelis, *Κ. Π. Καβάφης* (Athens: Melani, 2013).

είχε νόημα, αν ο Καβάφης ήταν ποιητής αντιπροσωπευτικός, αν το έργο του δηλαδή παρείχε στον ξενόγλωσσο αναγνώστη μια εικόνα πρόσφορη, ώστε μέσω αυτής να μπορεί να κατανοήσει τι είναι και τι επεδίωξε να γίνει η ελληνική λογοτεχνία των τελευταίων δύο αιώνων. Όμως τίποτα τέτοιο δεν συμβαίνει. Καθώς ο Καβάφης στέκει απομονωμένος στη νεότερη ποίησή μας, χωρίς προδρόμους ή επιγόνους, η μοναχική προβολή του στην αλλοδαπή αντί να τρέφει το ενδιαφέρον των ξένων αναγνωστών για την νεότερη ελληνική λογοτεχνική παράδοση, όχι σπάνια, το αποπροσανατολίζει.<sup>21</sup>

Even though I disagree with an amount of points made by Koutsourelis on his discussion about Cavafy, for the scope of my study I shall focus on two of them, as extrapolated from the above extract: the claim that Cavafy is not a representative poet for Greek literature and the claim that he constitutes an isolated case in Greek literature with no successors.

As elaborated in my Introduction, the nature of my study comes per se as an answer to such groundless claims. The example of Cavafy in Greek literature definitely constitutes a cutting-edge exemplum, what we would call in Greek «τομή». His pioneer aspect in terms of thematic, style and language were an amalgam which was previously unknown. It was exactly for this reason that Cavafy was to become a reference point for a cluster of writers who dwelt on different aspects of his daring treatment of homoerotic themes.

Cavafy makes the first Modern Greek effort to transcribe homoeroticism into poetry. In a period during which homosexuality was frowned upon, Cavafy ventured to circulate his 'audacious' and 'degenerate' poetry. His hopes were invested in a future and different generation, one which will be more open-minded and more deliberate, and his revolutionary and visionary example was indeed followed by a series of other Modern Greek writers who built on his daring. The writers that I examine in my study were drawn to his path-breaking homoerotic aspect, forming, I shall argue, a sort of tradition, which draws on Cavafy's poetry in a variety of ways, and confirming the recent assessment of Papanikolaou about Cavafy's poetics of the «ευάλωτος εαυτός»:

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<sup>21</sup>Koutsourelis, «Μια επιτυχία όχι ανεξήγητη», 36.

Από την άλλη, ο Καβάφης καταξιώνεται ως ένας από τους βασικούς συγγραφείς αυτού που θα ήθελα εδώ να ονομάσω «ηθική του ευάλωτου εαυτού». Εννοώ ότι μπορεί κανείς να διαβάσει όλο του το έργο ως μια συνεχή προσπάθεια αυτοπροσδιορισμού και αυτοαναίρεσης, μια διαρκή τεχνολόγηση του εαυτού που αυτοεκτίθεται και αυτογενεαλογείται, δείχνει δηλαδή την οπτική γωνία από την οποία μιλάει αλλά και τις λεπτομέρειες της προσπάθειας να απευθυνθεί –όχι απλώς να μιλήσει, αλλά να μιλήσει για έναν εαυτό σε σύνδεση με τους άλλους, (σ)το παρελθόν, το παρόν και το μέλλον του.<sup>22</sup>

This description fits perfectly into Cavafy's homoerotic poems. It would be neither far-fetched nor ill-judged to argue that the protagonists of the homoerotic poems of Cavafy are either struggling to come to terms with their homoeroticism or proudly and bravely experiencing it. At the same time, this «ευάλωτος εαυτός» is a product of the pressure that one receives from different sources: in my thesis these sources are the Ancient Greek past and the sort Eros which it cultivated, based on one of its major expressors, Plato; the beliefs of the Greek Orthodox Church about homosexual acts; and the sense that social class is a burden. In my thesis, I undertake the discussion of these three selected themes because they bring out some recurrent preoccupations initiated in Greek literature by Cavafy; in doing so, a sort of tradition is created and my aim is to bring to the fore some main features of this tradition. I refer to *a* tradition and not to *the* tradition, following what Summers justifiably, according to my opinion, explains in his book *Gay Fictions: Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition*:<sup>23</sup> there are of course many homoerotic literary traditions.

In approaching the heirs of Cavafy, I have to be careful and avoid a specific 'prejudice'<sup>24</sup> pointed out by T.S Eliot, according to whom scholarly research has greatly insisted on approaching texts with the belief that the originality of a writer lies in the part of his work which does not bring to the fore any affinities with any other writers:

<sup>22</sup>Papanikolaou, *Σαν κ' εμένα καμωμένοι*, 39.

<sup>23</sup> Claude Summers, *Gay Fictions / Wilde to Stonewall: Studies in a Male Homosexual Literary Tradition* (New York: Continuum, 1990), 25.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Stearns Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", in *The sacred wood: essays on poetry and criticism*. (London: Faber and Faber and Faber: Barnes & Noble, 1997), 39-40.

'One of the facts that might come to light in this process is our tendency to insist, when we praise a poet, upon those aspects of his work in which he least resembles anyone else (...).'<sup>25</sup>

Eliot argues that the real importance of a writer and his real 'individuality' is to be found in the dialogue with his ancestors:

(...) if we approach a poet without this prejudice we shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality, most vigorously.<sup>26</sup>

Having these arguments in mind, in the course of my study I emphasise the kinship of the writings I discuss, bringing to the fore the fact that they step onto the giant shoulders of Cavafy. It has to be emphasised that the creative appropriation of the Cavafian homoerotic legacy in Greek writing does not mean that the writings belonging to this category are «καβαφογενή», in the sense that they just try to imitate Cavafy. On the contrary, the writers whom I analyse challenge the Cavafian legacy and come into a creative dialogue with their great ancestor, in a productive way. They do not just adopt certain Cavafian elements having to do with homoeroticism, but creatively elaborate them. In doing so, they manage at the same time to cultivate their own 'individuality' and to become advocates of a homoerotically orientated identity, which was introduced in Greek literature by Cavafy – an identity which is in part collective. The writers I discuss in my study, seen as a cluster, acquire a different meaning and a different interpretation.

One of the most important remarks of Eliot in his influential essay is that

(...) the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. And the poet who is aware of this will be aware of great difficulties and responsibilities. (...) But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', 40.

<sup>26</sup>Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', 40.

<sup>27</sup>Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent", 43.

These important words by Eliot are of particular relevance to a study like mine, as they justifiably point out the fact that my analysis will be two-sided. Allow me to explain: My proposed interpretation of selected writings by Lapathotes, Sikelianos, Christianopoulos, Ioannou and Ritsos as a cluster with common Cavafian joints, approaches, at the same time, the work of the writers as a whole through a different prism. Therefore, it illuminates the understanding of their oeuvre and their influences. On the other hand, however, the same proposal offers a different approach to the homoerotic work of Cavafy, which is also illuminated; its understanding and interpretation also changes, or, at the very least, is viewed through a different prism. What is the purpose of this further illumination, as achieved through the approach to what I shall argue a tradition shaped by Cavafy? The following definition of 'tradition' helps us to extract the answer to this question:

any body of works, styles, conventions, or beliefs which are represented as having been 'handed down' from the past to the present. In practice, this means a specific selection of works arranged according to a certain interpretation of the past, usually made in order to lend authority to present critical arguments.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, a 'certain interpretation of the past is exploited in order to justify and offer 'authority to present critical arguments'<sup>29</sup>. Both past and present, ancestor and successors are intertwined in a way that has a great deal to do with their definition and description.

Other explanations of 'tradition' made clear a juxtaposition that occurs in literary theory between 'tradition' and 'reception'. According to Martindale in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*<sup>30</sup>:

The etymology of 'tradition', for example, from the Latin *tradere*, suggests a –usually benign – handing down of material from the past to the present. 'Reception', by

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<sup>28</sup> Chris Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 600.

<sup>29</sup> Baldick, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 600.

<sup>30</sup> Charles Martindale, "Reception," in *A Companion to the Classical Tradition*, ed. Craig W. Kallendorf et al. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 297-311.

contrast, at least on the model of the Constance school, operates with a different temporality, involving the *active* participation of readers (including readers who are themselves creative artists) in a two-way process, backwards as well as forward, in which the present and past are in dialogue with each other.<sup>31</sup>

The case of Cavafy and his homoerotic legacy in Greek writing constitutes, in my opinion, an example where the meanings of ‘tradition’ and ‘reception’, as differentiated above, blend in a way which manages to further emphasise the importance of Cavafy as a poet, and of his successors as individual writers (‘creative artists’, if we want to adopt Martindale’s characterisation). This happens because, on the one hand, there is -among the writings I discuss- a sense of belonging and an explicit or implicit reference to a common corpus which lends to the writings the possibility of acquiring common features. The writers after Cavafy take comfort in finding themselves part of his «Σύνταγμα». They feel empowered to express themselves more openly and freely. In a way, Cavafy is constantly by their side to back them up, and in doing so, their characterisation as ‘traditional’, in the sense that Eliot defined it, meaning ‘belonging to a tradition’ enriches their possibilities to expand on the topic and take further steps. It is the element of solidarity, which will be emphatically brought to the fore through my three chapters. The homoerotic poems of Cavafy are ‘handed down’, creating a ‘tradition’ which does not restrain his successors; Cavafy does not ‘lock in’ his followers. On the other hand, the Cavafian homoerotic corpus ‘unlocks’ a specific common aspect to writers who are otherwise very different. The tradition that Cavafy foregrounds is a tradition which also encompasses Martindale’s description of ‘reception’, since the Cavafian corpus also proves to be a corpus which enables the successors’ contestation, creative elaboration and further development. Cavafy becomes such a key intertext that it is almost impossible for later writers to treat homosexual or homoerotic themes without quoting him or without referring to him implicitly or explicitly. Cavafy leads the road and leads by example, expressing his ambitions and investing his hopes in the future generations. The poem «Κρυμμένα» is illuminating for Cavafy’s vision about the future and his successors. In my thesis I attempt to approach the different homoerotic applications of the man’s vision:

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<sup>31</sup> Martindale, “Reception”, 298.

Απ' όσα έκαμα κι απ' όσα είπα  
να μη ζητήσουνε να βρουν ποιος ήμουν.  
Εμπόδιο στέκονταν και μεταμόρφωνε  
τες πράξεις και τον τρόπο της ζωής μου.  
Εμπόδιο στέκονταν και σταματούσε με  
πολλές φορές που πήγαινα να πω.  
Οι πιο απαρατήρητές μου πράξεις  
και τα γραψίματά μου τα πιο σκεπασμένα —  
από εκεί μονάχα θα με νιώσουν.  
Αλλά ίσως δεν αξίζει να καταβληθεί  
τόση φροντίς και τόσοσ κόπος να με μάθουν.  
Κατόπι — στην τελειότερα κοινωνία —  
κανέννας άλλος καμωμένος σαν εμένα  
βέβαια θα φανεί κ' ελεύθερα θα κάμει.<sup>32</sup>

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32 C. P. Cavafy. *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα: 1877-1923*, ed. G.P. Savidis. edited by G.P. Savvides (Athens: Ikaros, 1993), 35.



## **The question of sexual identity**

In the preface of my thesis I have extensively referred to the variety of challenges that such a thesis faces. In this section I shall concentrate on its greatest challenge: the definition of the basic terms in play. It is obvious that the terms in use play an instrumental role for the attempted proposal of interpretation of the poetry and the prose I embark on. Therefore, they are the major components and the backbone of the thesis; they function as allies, helping me to engage with varying viewpoints, but, at the same time, they function as enemies, since they are restricting me and exposing me to academic ‘attacks’, in minds where the terms are categorically defined and viewed otherwise, or even cancelled on their whole. And this is what has made queer theory one of the broadest theories, in terms of its flexibility and its multiple uses and applications.

Let it be said from the outset: this thesis does not aspire to contribute novel theoretical insights to the field of queer theory. But I have found many of the debates within contemporary queer theory to be of considerable usefulness. Queer theory as it has evolved takes in very general approaches and discussions having to do with the overall concept of sexuality and identity, and brings into question whether the term ‘sexual identity’ is valid at all. Such discussions around sexual identity, its existence or not and its specific manifestations through different ‘norms’ have been particularly influenced by the work of Judith Butler, and I shall here outline some main points of her theory. The main point of her theory may be illustrated by this quotation:

I’m permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling- blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble. (...) To install myself within the terms of an identity category would be to turn against the sexuality that the category purports to describe; and this might be true for any identity category which seeks to control the very eroticism that it claims to describe and authorise, much less ‘liberate’.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Judith Butler, “Imitation and Gender Insubordination,” in *Inside/out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories*, ed. Diana Fuss (New York: Routledge, 1991), 14.

Butler provides homosexuality as an ideal paradigm to illuminate her annoyed stance about being forced to classify herself under a sexual label. Being a lesbian herself, she receives someone's decision to come out of the closet with a significant amount of scepticism. First of all, she wonders whether someone could in fact completely leave behind the condition of being in the closet, and whether someone is really capable of becoming totally explicit about the status of their sexuality or whether this is a stage that can be never reached. Furthermore, if, constitutionally speaking, someone does indeed come out of the closet by revealing their up until recently hidden sexual status, then the next question which arouses is to which status they are then entering. Put in other words, a homosexual who is in the closet is seeking for something better by coming out of it. Thus, this homosexual has expectations which emerge from his decision to openly state this characteristic of his personality. These expectations cannot be fulfilled. Why is that the case? But because of the apparent and rationally derived observation, that being out comes only if someone has already been in. Put more bluntly,

(...) being 'out' must produce the closet again and again in order to maintain itself as 'out'. In this sense *outness* can only produce a new opacity; and the *closet* produces the promise of a disclosure that can, by definition, never come.<sup>34</sup>

Taking it a step further, the world of this 'disclosure' is nothing more than another closet and apparently 'a return to the closet under the guise of an escape'.<sup>35</sup> As a logical consequence, homosexuals can never be fully revealed. Taking this into consideration, 'gays' and 'lesbians' do not exist and can be characterised as 'impossible identities'.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 15.

<sup>35</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 16.

<sup>36</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender Insubordination," 16.

See also Ann Oakley, *Sex, gender and society*. Michigan: Arena, 1985, 165.

Butler brings to the surface the paradigm of lesbianism, provided as 'a fake or a bad copy'<sup>37</sup> towards the norm of 'heterosexual priority'<sup>38</sup>:

To say that I 'play' at being one is not to say that I am not the 'really'; rather, how and where I play at being one is the way in which that 'being' gets established, instituted, circulated, and confirmed. This is not a performance from which I can take radical distance, for this is deep-seated play, psychically entrenched play, *and this 'I' does not play its lesbianism as a role*. Rather, it is through the repeated play of this sexuality that the 'I' is insistently reconstituted as a lesbian 'I'; paradoxically, it is precisely the *repetition* of that play that establishes as well the *instability* of the very category that it constitutes. For if the 'I' is a site of repetition, that is, if the 'I' only achieves the semblance of identity through a certain repetition of itself, then the I is always displaced by the very repetition that sustains it.<sup>39</sup>

So far so good; but, if we accept the above assertion, then certain considerations automatically emerge. First of all, these repetitions could never be completely identical. Each one could have its special moments, quite different from the previous ones. Therefore, the identity which is produced each time by repetition, has something different to display and so could apparently be characterised as unstable and indefinable. Moreover, at this point emerges a rather interesting observation; namely, if this 'I' is nothing more and nothing less than a produced by the repetition result, then this automatically excludes a pre-existing 'I'. Put in other words, is there an original 'I' or not? This 'I' is every time open to political overlays ('regulatory regimes'), due to its inconsistent nature. The existence of lesbianism applies only in a sphere which does not belong 'to the thinkable, the imaginable, that grid of cultural intelligibility that regulates the real and the nameable'.<sup>40</sup> If lesbians exist only as 'objects of prohibition'<sup>41</sup> then, in political terms, they do not really exist.

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<sup>37</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 17.

<sup>38</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 17.

<sup>39</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 18.

<sup>40</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 20.

<sup>41</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 20.

Actually, since they do not possess a respectable role in a discourse, they could not even constitute prohibited objects and by being excluded from the official discourse, they are accepting the political discrimination. Lesbianism and homosexuality in general could be said to exist only as 'sites of radical homophobic fantasy'.<sup>42</sup>

The core of Butler's theory, as I read it, consists of her discussion of originality and imitation. For most people originality is detected in the heterosexual nature; the origin is heterosexuality. Therefore, homosexuality is just a 'copy, an imitation, a derivative example, a shadow of the real'.<sup>43</sup> Butler comes to the conclusion that there is no such thing as a real sexual identity from which all the other imitations are derived, by using the example of the drag. A drag does not imitate a gender, or a sex, as the terms have been previously explained, but 'enacts the very structure of impersonation by which *any gender* is assumed'.<sup>44</sup> In doing so, drag shows the theatricality and impersonation which occurs in sexual identities. The 'I' which is produced does not copy any original. Butler's approach has of course undergone extensive criticism. Her theory has been charged as 'both voluntaristic and deterministic, idealist and materialist, endowing the subject with too much agency or not enough of it'<sup>45</sup>. Let us attempt to explain the source of this concern. What Butler seeks to do is to reframe the dominant existing stance that a person is nothing more than a historical mandate's accomplishment; these 'regulatory regimes' which Butler mentions are accepted as the norm and the subject is produced within this norm. Butler 'proposes to rethink subjective identifications with the symbolic law as performative acts'<sup>46</sup>:

To avoid impasses of social constructivism that sees the subject as merely an effect of social conditions, Butler stresses the fact that the reiteration of the norm (code) constitutes not only the subject, but also the meaning of the symbolic law. (...) the law itself is produced by the repetition of subjective approximations in time. (...)

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<sup>42</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 20.

<sup>43</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 20.

<sup>44</sup> Feder, Rawlinson and Zakin, *Derrida and Feminism*, 128.

<sup>45</sup> Feder, Rawlinson and Zakin, *Derrida and Feminism*, 128.

<sup>46</sup> Feder, Rawlinson and Zakin, *Derrida and Feminism*, 128.

the law (...) is marked by the 'infelicities' and the infidelities characteristic of performative utterances. The repetition of acts understood as the citation of the law stabilises the form of the law, and, at the same time, produces a 'dissonance' and inconsistency within it. Indissociable from 'irruptive violence,' reiteration sustains and undercuts both the permanence of the law and the identity of the subject.<sup>47</sup>

In the end what most characterises Butler's approach is the sense, as Caplan expresses it that what identity really is (or should be) is 'differentiation': 'it is about affinities based on selection, self-actualisation, and apparently choice'.<sup>48</sup> As Caplan eloquently puts it:

The resulting preoccupation with identity among the sexually marginal cannot be explained as an effect of a peculiar personal obsession with sex. It has to be seen, more accurately, as a powerful resistance to the organising principle of traditional sexual attitudes. It has been the sexual radicals who have most insistently politicised the question of sexual identity. But the agenda has been largely shaped by the importance assigned by our culture to 'correct' sexual behaviour. But politicised sexual identities are not automatic responses to negative definitions. For their emergence, they need complex social and political conditions in order to produce a sense of community experience which makes for collective endeavor.<sup>49</sup>

My discussion of Cavafy and some of his Greek successors seeks to draw out the implications of Caplan's statement in the spirit of Butler. I shall aim to show that, for these authors too, sexuality is not 'so much about who we really are, what our sex dictates'.<sup>50</sup> On the contrary, it is all about 'what we want to be and could be'.<sup>51</sup>

An emblematic *topos* of Cavafy and his successors examined here is that they

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<sup>47</sup> Feder, Rawlinson and Zakin, *Derrida and Feminism*, 128.

<sup>48</sup> Pat. Caplan. "The Cultural Construction of Sexuality (introduction)," in *The Cultural Construction of Sexuality*, ed. Pat Caplan (London: Tavistock, 1987), 42.

<sup>49</sup> Caplan, "Cultural Construction," 47.

<sup>50</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 20.

<sup>51</sup> Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 20.

engage in a discussion of breaking the sexual boundaries that are imposed on people, by institutions, like society, Church, laws, 'morality'. In doing so, this cluster of writers hymn, each in his own way, the pure form of pleasure and eroticism.

Cavafy and his successors are in fact engaged in what we would now read as the question of sexual categories, an interpretive approach which opens up new perspectives. Through their work they show their conviction that sexual categories are actually a burden in someone's life, 'necessary trouble', as Butler eloquently puts it.<sup>52</sup> Such writers pinpoint that eroticism exists in a world of endless possibilities and options. Towards this direction, they appear to celebrate people's sexual rights, differentiation and individuality, in a way that ascribes to their work rather modern undertones.

Texts of Cavafy and other writers can be examined in this light: Butler's idea of performativity, as approached in this section, nicely fits the preoccupation of some of the primary texts that I endeavor to analyze in my thesis. Cavafy and his successors delineate that the repeated play of specific forms of sexuality, that constitute the choice of the protagonists in their work, comes to verify specific erotic 'beings'. Following Butler, 'To say that I 'play' at being one is not to say that I am not the 'really'.<sup>53</sup> Butler's theory of performativity runs through this thesis' chapters, creating a continuum. This perspective makes us read part of the work of the writers that I discuss in different terms. For example, the prose poem «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής» becomes an emblem of renouncing forms of conventional sexual identities, in order to experience pure and real eroticism. Again, Ritsos' preoccupation with masks and multiple personae and Ioannou's ambitions to be part of the working-class men whom he admires and considers to be the elite become an interplay of intentional and unintentional, at the same time, different and differentiated 'roles'. The repetition of these roles and of other roles and interplays that the writers employ in their work ('religious' roles, for example, in «Μύρης, Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.») verifies the own existence such the 'roles'.

The power of this repetition and sway between different 'roles', as delineated in each of my thematic chapters, metaphorically and symbolically breaks the restricting boundaries and enhances the erotic horizon and the possibilities of pleasure.

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52 Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 20.

53 Butler, "Imitation and Gender", 20.

It is under this umbrella that we should precede to the discussion which I undertake in each of my three chapters. But first, the job of the introduction is not done. After commenting on the elusiveness and the abstract nature of the existence or lack thereof of sexual identity in general, it is time to survey some basic terms that I will use throughout my thesis. These terms are highly disputed.

## Homosexuality or homoeroticism?

In his article 'Homoeroticism or Homosexuality: Narcissistic Eroticism'<sup>54</sup> Bergeret sheds light on the term 'homoeroticism' by undertaking a psychoanalytical approach. His analysis and conclusions are undoubtedly useful. Even though my thesis does not delve into the sphere of psychoanalysis, the doctrines of queer theory engage with it to a great extent, making it impossible for the student of the theory not to touch upon this aspect.

In this important and illuminating article, Bergeret contrasts the terms 'homosexuality' and 'homoeroticism', in a significant attempt not only to illuminate their use—and, occasionally, their abuse- but also to distinguish them, an admittedly very difficult and complicated task. It is important for us, the students of the theory, to remember that he does so following the perspectives of a psychoanalyst. Bergeret explains from the outset that one of the greatest difficulties even for a psychoanalyst is to avoid the general pressure, exerted from society, media etc., which promotes the application of the more popular term 'homosexuality' over the later and less widely used term 'homoeroticism'.<sup>55</sup> In doing so, however, we run the risk of applying a term which clearly connotes overt (homo)sexual undertones to scenarios, situations, readings and people (or more accurately, 'protagonists', if we are referring to literature) having nothing to do with overt and direct sexuality.

'Homoeroticism', as Bergeret outlines, is a more complicated thing than 'homosexuality', and he speaks of 'the different mechanisms of the narcissistic register that come into play in the quite particular relational behaviour that should more relevantly be called 'homoeroticism''<sup>56</sup>. In order to avoid further misconceptions of an already often misunderstood topic, Bergeret warns us for the existence of 'very different varieties of homoeroticism, male or female, latent or manifest, in too global a fashion'<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> Jean Bergeret, Lyon, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism? 'Narcissistic Eroticism,'" *Int. J. Psychoanal* 83 (2002) 351-62.

<sup>55</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?", 351.

<sup>56</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?", 352.

<sup>57</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?", 351.



In order to decipher these varieties of the term Bergeret bases his article on the arguments and counter-arguments of Freud and Ferenczi, which took place in their productive discussion at the Third Congress of the International Association of Psychoanalysis (Weimar, October 1911). At the Congress, Ferenczi delineated an entirely different approach to the term homophilia, an approach which justifies the use of the term 'homoeroticism' instead of the term 'homosexuality'.<sup>58</sup> Putting it bluntly, what he actually did was to present and analyse a narcissistic aspect of the term, which, according to Ferenczi, exceeds the sexual one, to which Freud paid his ultimate attention and emphasised to a great extent. Summing up Ferenczi's proposal and innovative perspective, Bergeret mentions that according to Ferenczi 'it was preferable to use the term 'homoeroticism' in order to take into account in a more precise way the affective and relational functioning of the subjects in question'.<sup>59</sup> In order to conclude this argument, Ferenczi took into serious consideration Freud's positions on the topic. He specifically took into consideration Freud's suggestion in his Letter 125 to Fliess (December 1899), where he argues about his theory of the gradual emotional development of all people. Freud famously argued in his Letter that there are three specific stages of personal emotional development and he proceeded to name these stages as 'autoerotic', 'homoerotic' and 'heteroerotic' accordingly.<sup>60</sup> Bergeret, eloquently and wittily pinpoints this development of the Freudian thought and characterises it as the amalgam of Freud's considerations on the topic of hemophilia. Arguably, the conflicted question at this (more advanced) phase is not about defining homosexuality anymore, but about describing and defining homoeroticism.

The emphasis shifts from 'sexuality' to 'eroticism' and for Freud, according to Bergeret, the definition of the term 'eroticism' 'takes on a more general meaning, applicable to the different forms of pleasure experienced'.<sup>61</sup> In doing so, Freud brought to the fore a narcissistic nature, attached to the terms of 'autoeroticism' and

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<sup>58</sup> For the interesting insights of Ferenczi on the topic, see Sandor Ferenczi, *First Contributions to Psychoanalysis*, ed. and trans. E. Jones (London: Hogarth, 1953).

<sup>59</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?," 352.

<sup>60</sup> See Bergeret's elaboration on the Freudian thought: Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?" 351- 352.

<sup>61</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?," 352.

'homoeroticism', and a sexual nature, attached to the term 'heteroeroticism'.<sup>62</sup> By unravelling the development of his theory, we can rationally conclude that the three progressive stages of the eroticism of an individual include both narcissistic and sexual elements. In interpreting Freud's theory, Bergeret points out that the new interpretation that Freud offers to the term 'homoeroticism' and his insistence upon it is actually his solution to the problematic definitions of 'autosexuality' and/or 'homosexuality'.<sup>63</sup> The term 'homoeroticism' appears to be more functional and more inclusive, according to Freud, since it captures and encapsulates both the narcissistic and sexual nature of the individual. It actually seems that both Freud and Ferenczi agree on their belief that the terms 'autosexuality' and 'homosexuality' appear to be problematic, and for the reasons analysed above (and extensively in their works) they have to be replaced by the more adjustable and fitting term of 'homoeroticism'.

As stated by Bergeret, even though 'homoeroticism' appears to be the term which does justice to the describable subjects of the individual, the term is not without a veil of ambiguity.<sup>64</sup> Bergeret offers his own approach to the problematic terminology, explaining the inadequacy of the term 'homosexuality', with reference to the etymology of the word:<sup>65</sup> the second part of the word 'homosexuality', 'sexuality', derives from the Latin verb 'secare', which means 'cutting in two'.<sup>66</sup> This concept fits Plato's myth of the «ανδρόγυνο» perfectly, as well as the creation of Adam and Eve.

On the other hand, the prefix 'homo' originates from ancient Greek and specifically the ancient Greek adjective «ὁμός», meaning 'similar'.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, there is a clear contradistinction which occurs within the word 'homosexuality' and its two parts; it seems that the first part cancels the second one and vice versa.

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<sup>62</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?," 352.

<sup>63</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?," 352.

<sup>64</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?," 352.

<sup>65</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?," 355.

<sup>66</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?" 355.

<sup>67</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?," 355.

At the same time that 'homosexuality' proves to be the wrong word grammatically, the same applies to the word 'heterosexuality'. The scholar explains that 'Likewise, the term 'heterosexuality' constitutes a pleonasm, since all sexuality (division into two sexes) makes the choice of an object of different status obligatory ('hetero')'.<sup>68</sup>

Based on this obvious observation, we shall conclude that the 'fight' of the scholars about the terms has a reasonable base, since their ambiguity expands not only over their meaning and interpretation, but also over the actual and specific existence and creation of the terms. And if the terms are in advance inadequate, that means that the whole discussion which follows, threatens to become pointless and inadequate in advance. At the same time, however, it is because of this ambiguity that the ground is fertile for a great amount of discussions and approaches.

For the purposes of my study, it may be helpful to turn to Mary McIntosh's argument that homosexuals should themselves embrace, for their own reasons, the view of homosexuality as a condition.

In 1968 Mary McIntosh published a controversial article entitled 'The Homosexual Role'<sup>69</sup>. Attention to her argument will help us to unveil the complexity of the terms in question and under discussion. In her study, McIntosh goes against the view of homosexuality as a condition and stands firmly by the position that homosexuality is to be seen as a constructed social role. What is extremely important for my thesis is McIntosh's line of reasoning, which holds that 'much homosexual behavior occurs outside the recognised role and the polarisation between the heterosexual man and the homosexual man is far from complete'.<sup>70</sup>

McIntosh urges us to avoid an obvious trap. Homosexual behaviour definitely

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<sup>68</sup> Bergeret, "Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?," 355.

<sup>69</sup> Mary McIntosh, "The homosexual role," *Social Problems* 16, no. 2 (1968): 182-192.

<sup>70</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 182.

has various and divergent aspects, expressions and connotations. The term 'homosexuality' does not manage to include all of those variations. And indeed, would that even be possible, since any term might actually lay some erroneous and superficial borders – the potential, though, is limitless. Oversimplifications such as polarities under the categories of 'homosexuality' as opposed to 'heterosexuality' are superficial and misleading.

In order to tackle this problematic approach to the terms, psychiatrists, at that time, offered the following definition of homosexuality:

(...) do not diagnose patients as homosexual unless they have engaged in overt homosexual behavior. Those who also engage in heterosexual activity are diagnosed as bisexual. An isolated experience may not warrant the diagnosis, but repetitive (sic) homosexual behavior in adulthood, whether sporadic or continuous, designates a homosexual.<sup>71</sup>

As McIntosh points out, such explanations and descriptions as the above aim at offering a 'solution', to the problematic of the polarisation, by introducing the category of the 'bisexual'.<sup>72</sup> Such an attempt fails, though, because 'bisexual' is also explained as being a condition of which no extensive discussions were made.<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, the uncritical acceptance of the conception by social scientists can be traced to their concern with homosexuality as a social problem.<sup>74</sup>

What is interesting in the above quotation is the fact that the presentation and reception of homosexuality as a condition is motivated and conducted by a society which always sees homosexuality as a problem. The ultimate purpose of this concept is to enact social pressure over the individuals by 'stigmatising' them.

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<sup>71</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 182.

<sup>72</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 182.

<sup>73</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 182.

<sup>74</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 183.

According to McIntosh, since homosexuality and deviancy are perceived as synonymous it is quite obvious to distinguish between 'permissible and impermissible behavior'.<sup>75</sup> It is as if it becomes clearer what society rather objectively perceives as moral and immoral. People acquire the knowledge of what they should avoid, since it is condemned. At the same time, this very fact enables society to distinguish between the two groups of people; those who engage in legal and licit behaviour and deviants.

It for this reason that a further clarification of the term 'homosexual' and related terms and their connotations has to be conducted and taken into consideration from the outset, before proceeding to the corpus of the thesis. What is important to note is that all these different applications of such terms, highly influenced by society's expectations and bias have played a crucial role in the creation, cultivation, development and conservation of a specific role. The most noted facet of the article by McIntosh is in describing and defining this role, the 'homosexual' role:

The creation of a specialised, despised, and punished role of homosexual keeps the bulk of society pure in rather the same way that the similar treatment of some kinds of criminals helps keep the rest of society law-abiding.<sup>76</sup>

The above description of the usage of the creation of such a role puts society as the finger behind the trigger of a sneaky conception in order to 'deter people from drifting into deviancy'.<sup>77</sup> It all becomes a matter of 'social control'.<sup>78</sup> McIntosh emphasises that the construction of this role might function as a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'<sup>79</sup> since it gives people the margins within which they can develop their sexuality. In doing so, this actually works against society's primal intention for social

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<sup>75</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 183.

<sup>76</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184.

<sup>77</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184.

<sup>78</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184.

<sup>79</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184.

control, since it encourages what is considered as 'deviance':<sup>80</sup> '(...) there may be a tendency for people to become fixed in their deviance once they have become labeled.'<sup>81</sup>

On the other hand, McIntosh urges homosexuals to welcome and embrace the view of homosexuality as a condition.<sup>82</sup> This happens because labelling, according to McIntosh, cancels the feature of mutuality, which means that labelling does not function as a mutual role. At the same time that it should help to discipline people and dissuade them from falling into the 'wrong' category, it also enables 'homosexuality' to function as a close category, which prevents people to fall again into the category of 'normal' people. In doing so, homosexuals seem to set themselves free from a vain anxiousness:

It appears to justify the deviant behaviour of the homosexual as being appropriate for him as a member of the homosexual category. The deviancy can thus be seen as legitimate for him and he can continue in it without rejecting the norms of the society.<sup>83</sup>

By taking her argument a step further, McIntosh bases the invention of this 'role' on the expectations that people labelled as homosexuals have of themselves and the expectations that others have of homosexuals. These expectations are mainly the following:

(on behalf of homosexuals and others)

- 1) 'a homosexual will be exclusively or very predominantly homosexual in his feelings and behaviour'.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184.

<sup>81</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184.

<sup>82</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184-185.

<sup>83</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184.

<sup>84</sup> McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184.

(on behalf of others, mainly, but also influencing homosexuals' view about themselves)

- 2) 'the expectation that he will be effeminate in manner, personality, or preferred sexual activity
- 3) 'that sexuality will play a part of some kind in all his relations with other men'
- 4) 'that he will be attracted to boys and very young men and probably willing to seduce them'.<sup>85</sup>

In the view of McIntosh, the existence of these expectations leads in a way to their actual fulfilment.<sup>86</sup>

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Glancing back at this sympathetic treatment of the topic in 1968, it is easy to see that McIntosh does not in fact escape the notion of homosexuality as a condition. In that spirit, I generally prefer the term 'homoerotic' when describing the Cavafian poetic and legacy. But in light of more recent debates, it will also be to make reference from the outset to two further terms that I will use throughout my thesis; namely, 'queer' and 'homosocial'.

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<sup>85</sup>McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184.

<sup>86</sup>McIntosh, "The homosexual role", 184-185.

## 'Queer' and 'Homosocial'

Scholars have ventured to approach the term 'queer' from different perspectives. One type of definition of the word may be found in *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms*:

'Even though 'queerness' is most often associated with lesbian and gay subjects, being queer is to resist any models of sexual stability and static identification, albeit with an overarching resistance to 'heterosexual hegemony'<sup>87</sup>.

On the other hand, in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture*<sup>88</sup>, Queer Theory appears to embrace 'all modes of variance (such as cross-dressing) from the normative model of biological sex, gender identity, and sexual desires'. Back in 1998 when Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick was trying to explain in a few simple words what queer theory is, she stated that

It's about trying to understand different kinds of sexual desire and how the culture defines them. It's about how you can't understand relations between men and women unless you understand the relationship between people of the same gender, including the possibility of a sexual relationship between them<sup>89</sup>.

For my group of writers, we also need to move beyond Foucault to embrace Sedgwick's use of the term 'homosocial'. Examples of writers like Sikelianos and Ritsos in the whole discussion are very important and illuminating, because in these cases we do not have an unambiguously homoerotic mode of writing, but at times a 'homosocial' one. Sedgwick codified the term in her innovative book

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<sup>87</sup> Peter Childs and Roger Fowler, eds., *The Routledge Dictionary of Literary Terms* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 195.

<sup>88</sup> John Storey, *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 160.

<sup>89</sup> Dinitia Smith, "'Queer theory' is entering the literary mainstream", *New York Times*, January 17, 1998, accessed March 15, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/01/17/books/queer-theory-is-entering-the-literary-mainstream.html>.



*Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (1985).<sup>90</sup>

'Homosocial desire,' to begin with, is a kind of oxymoron. 'Homosocial' is a word occasionally used in history and the social sciences, where it describes social bonds between persons of the same sex; it is a neologism, obviously formed by analogy with 'homosexual,' and just as obviously meant to be distinguished from 'homosexual'. In fact, it is applied to such activities as 'male bonding,' which may, as in our society, be characterised by intense homophobia, fear and hatred of homosexuality.<sup>91</sup>

On the other hand, and in order to demonstrate the kinship that the terms share, we could argue that Sikelianos and Ritsos, because of their pan-erotic spirit, produced what it may be helpful to call 'queer' writings. From now on, when I use this term within my thesis, I refer to a category which is neither homosexual/heterosexual nor homosocial: it is a pansexual category which encompasses –very consciously, it has been noted- all types of eroticism. Ritsos's *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* constitutes in this sense a very representative example of a 'queer' novel.

Over the years the term 'queer', as an adjective and as a verb, has known various formations and elaborations. At the beginning, the term used to have a degrading meaning, used as a 'term of homophobic abuse'.<sup>92</sup>

Later on, the term was used as 'slang for homosexual'.<sup>93</sup> The elaborations went on to ramify a sort of theory which encompasses 'a coalition of culturally marginal sexual self-identifications'.<sup>94</sup> This all-encompassing term produced 'a nascent

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<sup>90</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between men: English Literature and male homosocial desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015).

<sup>91</sup> Sedgwick, *Between men*, 1.

<sup>92</sup> Annamarie Jagose, *Queer Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press), 1.

<sup>93</sup> Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 1.

<sup>94</sup>Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 1.

theoretical model which has developed out of more traditional lesbian and gay studies'<sup>95</sup> and the other way around: the term produced the theory and within the theory the term came across and experienced new constant developments and definitions.

Multiple discussions on the fluidity of the term agree that

(...) queer is very much a category in the process of formation. It is not simply that queer has yet to solidify and take on a more consistent profile, but rather that its definitional indeterminacy, its elasticity, is one of its constituent characteristics.<sup>96</sup>

Would it be right to characterise Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's interpretation of 'homosocial desire' as a bridge between homosociality and homoeroticism.<sup>97</sup> According to the *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*, homosociality is defined as:

A term which denotes same-sex relationships which are not necessarily sexual. Football terraces, Girl Guide camps, military bases and prisons are usually predominantly or entirely homosocial environments. The term was first used by organizational sociologist Jean Lipman- Blumen in 1976, though it has been popularized by leading queer theorist Eve Kosovsky Sedgwick in her work on 'male homosocial desire' in *Between Men* (1985) and *The Epistemology of the Closet* (1991). Sedgwick argues that the ever-present continuum between male homosociality and homosexuality becomes disrupted in modern society due to new knowledge about sexuality.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 1.

<sup>96</sup>Jagose, *Queer Theory*, 1.

<sup>97</sup> This argument is supported in an interesting dissertation: Vegard Iglebaek, "Masculinities in the television series 'Friends'. A different kind of male friendship?" (MA diss., University of Manchester, 2000), 11.

<sup>98</sup> J.A. Cuddon, *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Somerset, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 600.

Helpful for understanding the concept of homosociality is an article by Sharon R. Bird)<sup>99</sup>. As clarified from the beginning, the focus of the study is the conceptualisation of masculinities in terms of sociality. It is clarified that the term of sociality refers to 'nonsexual interpersonal attractions'. It is emphasised that the concept of masculinity is a quite recent concept, since it began a couple of decades ago<sup>100</sup>, whereas the differentiation between 'normative' and 'non-normative' masculinities is even more recent, as both Bird<sup>101</sup> and Kimmel<sup>102</sup> support. In his theoretical review, Bird finds Connell's studies on masculinities<sup>103</sup> of especial importance, since they 'facilitate a better understanding of how the structural order of gender is maintained'.<sup>104</sup>

Based on the studies of Lipman-Blumen<sup>105</sup>, Bird defines homosociality as the 'non- sexual attractions held by men (or women) for members of their own sex'<sup>106</sup>.

The scholar continues by specifying that these attractions 'promote clear distinctions between women and men through segregation in social institutions'.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Sharon R Bird, "Welcome to the men's club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity," *Gender Society* 10 (1996) 120-32.

<sup>100</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 120.

<sup>101</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 120.

<sup>102</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, "After fifteen years: The impact of the sociology of masculinity on the masculinity of sociology," in *Men, masculinities and social theory*, ed. Jeff Hearn and David Morgan (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

<sup>103</sup> R. W. Connell, *Gender and power: Society, the person, and sexual politics* (Stanford, CA: Stanford Univeresity Press, 1987), 185-86.

<sup>104</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 120.

<sup>105</sup> Jean Lipman-Bluman, "Toward a homosocial theory of sex roles: An explanation of the sex segregation of social institutions," *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture and Society* (1976) 15-31.

<sup>106</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 121.

<sup>107</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 121.

Bird adds, through his study, that homosociality offers distinct limits between hegemonic masculinities and nonhegemonic masculinities defined by the 'segregation of social groups'.<sup>108</sup>

Conceptualising masculinities, according to Bird, is an on-going process, both internal and external: 'The social ideal for masculinity, which in itself is a nonstatic notion, may be internalised (i.e., central to one's core self (...)) or simply interiorised (i.e., acknowledged by the self)'.<sup>109</sup> Therefore, each male comprehends concepts of masculinity attributed by society, as well as 'unique', 'idiosyncratic'<sup>110</sup> concepts, having to do with the person's own gender identity. Bird concludes with an assessment of especial importance for conceptualising masculinity and for generating gender norms:

(...) the presumption that hegemonic masculinity meaning is the only mutually accepted and legitimate masculinity meanings helps to reify hegemonic norms while suppressing meaning that might otherwise create a foundation for the subversion of the existing hegemony.<sup>111</sup>

Bird elaborates three shared meanings which are supported by male homosociality. These meanings are emotional detachment, competition, and the sexual objectification of women. (The last point has no relevance for my discussion and so will be omitted here.<sup>112</sup> As Bird explains, the three meanings constitute features of hegemonic masculinity, though they are not always internal, in the way described above.

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<sup>108</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 121.

<sup>109</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 122. See also the line of thought as elaborated in Chodorow, Nancy. "Gender, Relation and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective," in Hester Eisenstein and Alice Jardine (eds.), *The Future of Difference* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1985): 3-19.

<sup>110</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 122.

<sup>111</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 122.

<sup>112</sup> Bird, "Welcome to the men's club", 122.

Emotional detachment is characterised as ‘withholding expressions of intimacy, serving both hegemonic masculinities and setting personal boundaries’.<sup>113</sup> Moreover, such a characteristic is avoided, in order not to appear vulnerable and sensitive. This concept is also associated with control.<sup>114</sup> On the other hand, the concept of emerging competition contributes to cultivating hierarchy in relationships.<sup>115</sup> In Chapter 3 I will discuss the concept of hegemonic masculinity further, in relation to social class.

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In this Introduction, it has been essential to refer to basic differentiations between the terms ‘homosocial’ and ‘queer’, in addition from the terms ‘homosexual’ and ‘homoerotic’. This happens because all of these terms are used to an extent in the chapters, in discussing the writings, which constitute, in specific aspects, the legacy of Cavafy. As I have already mentioned, and it has to be emphasised again, that the term ‘homoerotic’, due to the characteristics described in the Introduction, is the most adequate to cover the majority of the writings discussed, conveying their erotised essence; the legacy of Cavafy is homoerotic. We shall now explore three different aspects of this legacy.

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113 Bird, “Welcome to the men’s club”, 122.

114 Bird, “Welcome to the men’s club”, 123.

115 Bird, “Welcome to the men’s club”, 123. See also Miriam Johnson, *Strong mothers, weak wives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

## **Chapter 1**

### **The appropriation of Ancient Greek Eros**

#### **Introduction**

In this chapter I attempt to analyse the bonds of the ancient Greek and Modern Greek Eros, as explicitly and implicitly present in Modern Greek homoerotic poetry and prose. I have divided the chapter into three sections, each dedicated to one major Modern Greek author whose work is illuminating for the objective of my chapter; namely, Cavafy, Sikelianos and Ioannou. I choose these three writers because their work undoubtedly has very strong connections with the ancient Greek past, as cases of legitimately opportunistic uses of Plato to foreground Greek love. I discuss Cavafy and Sikelianos as expressing through their work in different ways the idea that the ancient Greek past, as expressed and represented in 'Greek Love' and its major representative, Plato, not only survives, but creates for Modern Greek writers a field of inspiration, challenge, productivity and confrontation. On the other hand, I discuss Ioannou as an example of an anti-Platonic writer who draws rather on the *Palatine Anthology* as a more real and earthy source of Greek love, one with no need for «αρχαιοπρέπεια».

As I am not a classicist, my purpose is not to provide new philosophical approaches or to give an exhaustive account of Platonic philosophy, for which one can look to the abundant Platonic bibliography. It is a study which has to do more with the reception and perception of Greek love by three prominent Modern Greek authors who have some acquaintance with such material. Even though this approach to 'Greek love' is widespread in English studies, it has hardly been touched on, paradoxically, in the case of Modern Greek writers. And even though some references and studies have been made for each writer separately<sup>116</sup>, scholarly research on Modern Greek literature lacks a comparative interpretation of the topic. I believe that the discussion of the bonds with Ancient Greek Eros and specifically Plato offers a different line of understanding and approach to the homoerotic strand in Modern Greek writing and especially for the general comprehension of the work of Cavafy, Sikelianos and Ioannou.

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<sup>116</sup> To these studies I acknowledge the well-documented monograph of Rena Zamarou on Cavafy and Plato, to which I will refer extensively later on.

Blanshard has recently argued that

Democracy could have come into being without Athens, philosophy would have continued without Socrates, the laws of physics have no real need of Archimedes, but modern western homoeroticism without the Greeks is impossible.<sup>117</sup>

It was as early as 1873 that John Addington Symonds writes his essay 'A Problem in Greek Ethics'<sup>118</sup> which he characterises as a 'treatise on Greek love',<sup>119</sup> and drawing on Plato's *Symposium*.<sup>120</sup> At the beginning of his essay, Symonds clarifies the ultimate reason which resulted in considerable scholarly research on homoeroticism in ancient Greece:

(...) here alone in history have we the example of a great and highly-developed race not only tolerating homosexual passions, but deeming them of spiritual value, and attempting to utilise them for the benefit of society.<sup>121</sup>

Lydia Amir defines Platonic love as 'one of the most influential traditions of love in the Western world',<sup>122</sup> and goes on with the important distinction between what French scholars have termed as *amour platonique* and as *amour platonicien*.<sup>123</sup> The first term refers to a sort of a very deep bonding which takes place between

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<sup>117</sup> Alastair J. L. Blanshard, *Sex: Vice and love from Antiquity to Modernity* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 91.

<sup>118</sup> John Addington Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics* (London: Privately Printed for the Areopagitica Society, 1908).

<sup>119</sup> Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, 4. <sup>172</sup> Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, 4.

<sup>120</sup> Symonds, *A Problem in Greek Ethics*, 6.

<sup>121</sup> Lydia Amir, "Plato's Theory of Love: Rationality as Passion," *Practical Philosophy* (2001): 6.

<sup>122</sup> Amir, "Plato's Theory," 6.

<sup>123</sup> Thomas Gould, *Platonic Love* (New York: The Free Press, 1963), 1.

heterosexuals, to the extent that it could be perceived as erotic. Yet, this type of love does not include sexual relations. It would not be far-fetched to equate this term with the term 'homosocial'<sup>124</sup>, which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick codified in 1985, which I have discussed in the Introduction. On the other hand, *amour platonicien* refers to Plato's ideology on Eros, i.e. to the features of Eros according to Plato. It is this second sort of Eros which interests me in the discussion that I will delve into this chapter.

During my research, I personally experienced what has been called 'the research problem of Plato's views of *eros*', based on the claim that 'Plato adapted and modified his doctrines in sequential dialogues'.<sup>125</sup> It is for this reason that I will focus and try to discuss Plato's ideology of Eros, basing myself on his two major dialogues which discuss the topic, the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*, even though Plato makes references on the topic of Eros in other of his works as well, like the *Republic*, *Laws*, etc. I will make references to these works as well, where relevant.

Plato's *Symposium* is undoubtedly the ultimate treatise on love<sup>126</sup>. For the purposes of my chapter I will concentrate on the speech of Socrates on the matter of true Eros, which is presented through the remembrance and display of his discussion with Diotima (201d). Diotima is the woman who initiates Socrates in erotic matters. Socrates argues that he possesses erotic knowledge more than any other knowledge. It is emphasised that erotic desire emerges for something which is missing from us, for something that we lack and therefore long for. Eros per se cannot be characterised as something which is valuable («ἀγαθός») and nice («καλός»), nor as a feature which is disgraceful («αἰσχρός») and bad («κακός»); it is something in between. Therefore, it would be *hybris* to characterise it as a God and

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<sup>124</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 1.

<sup>125</sup> Anne Van de Vijver, "A comparison of Plato's views of *eros* in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*" (PhD diss., University of South Africa, 2009), 2.

<sup>126</sup> Something which is indicated from the outset: Plato's indicative subtitle is «περί έρωτος».



it should be better described as a daimon, a common ‘state of mind’ which characterises both Gods and humans and in doing so it unites them, making them belong to a single group (202b). Eros lusts for beauty and at the same time it lacks beauty: it is always poor, tough, dirty, difficult, not tender and nice at all. Yet, at the same time, it is brave, courageous, manful, forceful, a great hunter and resourceful. It rises and increases when it achieves its goals or it can otherwise die. Eros loves philosophy and is itself a philosopher, in between the wise men and the simple crowd.

Therefore, according to Diotima and Socrates, there is a hierarchy of Eros; heterosexual love holds the lowest step and the Eros of the poets and the creators for their work reinforcing their posterity is the supreme form of Eros, something that, as I will delineate in my chapter, Cavafy, Sikelianos and Ioannou argue as well. By emphasising the importance of the ‘birth’ of the soul in opposition to the ‘birth’ of the body, Socrates creates an environment which brings homoeroticism in a more superior position than heterosexuality, since the former enables someone to give more emphasis to the cultivation of the soul. *Symposium* brings to the fore an erotic ritual of initiation; Diotima wants to initiate Socrates into erotic matters, in the same way that Cavafy, in his own work, refers to the initiates, and in the same way that, in the work of Sikelianos, there are some degrees of initiation («βαθμίδες μύησης»), according to Frangou-Kikilia.<sup>127</sup>

Having said that, my main argument in this chapter is that the Modern Greek writers I discuss turn to the ancients in ways that are always mediated by the modern, and the sort of problematic visible, for example, in the Victorians. In other words – and this is Cavafy’s radicalism – Greek love is being retrieved through a sensibility which is distinctively modern and (of course) opposed to or questioning of Christianity.

Recourse to the ancient Greeks by certain Victorians to validate homoerotic feeling has been extensively discussed: I now attempt to extend this discussion with

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<sup>127</sup>Ritsa Frangou-Kikilia, *Άγγελος Σικελιανός: Βαθμίδες Μύησης* (Athens: Pataki, 2002).

respect to a cluster of Modern Greek writers, who might be seen as closer to ancient Greece, but are in reality more remote from it.

### **Cavafy's «πλατωνικός Χαρμίδης»**

The abundant bibliography on Cavafy undoubtedly contains scholarly research which analyses the work of Cavafy in connection with the ancient Greek tradition and ancient Greek philosophy, from which much of his creative inspiration derives.<sup>128</sup> Of particular importance is the 2005 study by Rena Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων: Πλατωνικά στοιχεία στην καβαφική ποίηση*.<sup>129</sup> I draw upon the importance and the comprehensiveness of these initiatives and my aim here is to focus extensively on the Cavafian poetry as it uses the homoerotic aspect of the Platonic heritage.

I shall argue that Cavafy in his homoerotic poetry constantly enters into a dialogue with the Platonic analysis of Greek eros. Apart from the explicit Platonic references in the Cavafian oeuvre, the epigraph to the poem «Απιστία» (1904), the reference «πλατωνικός Χαρμίδης» in the poem «Εν πόλει της Οσροηνής» (1917) and the reference to Plato in the poem «Ας Φρόντιζαν» (1930),<sup>130</sup> Plato is present – at least by implication – in a number of Cavafy's homoerotic poems. An argument as such has not been pinpointed and analysed extensively hitherto, a feature which reinforces the opinion that this chapter comes to fill in a gap and indeed a very important one. I will attempt to prove that Cavafy is more pervasively Platonic, in the sense of having a homoerotic agenda, than Zamarou suggests.

One of Zamarou's major references in her well-documented monograph on Plato and Cavafy is to the poem «Εν Πόλει της Οσροηνής».<sup>131</sup> The poem is central to the discussion of Plato's 'appropriation' in the work of Cavafy, a characteristic emphasised by the explicit reference to the name of Plato, first of all, and to the title

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<sup>128</sup> See for example Yannis Dallas, *Ο Καβάφης και η Δεύτερη Σοφιστική* (Athens: Stigmi, 1984).

<sup>129</sup> Rena Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων: Πλατωνικά Στοιχεία στην Καβαφική Ποίηση* (Athens: Kedros, 2005).

<sup>130</sup> Zamarou makes reference in her monograph only to these explicit Platonic references, along with a discussion of the poem «Σαλώμη».

<sup>131</sup> Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων*, 43-49.

of one of the Platonic dialogues: *Charmides*. The poem reads as follows:

Απ' της ταβέρνας τον καυγά μας φέραν  
πληγωμένο τον φίλον Ρέμωνα χθες περί τα  
μεσάνυχτα.

Απ' τα παράθυρα που αφίσαμεν ολάνοιχτα,

τ' ωραίο του σώμα στο κρεβάτι φώτιζε η σελήνη.

Είμεθα ένα κράμα εδώ· Σύροι, Γραικοί, Αρμένιοι, Μήδοι.

Τέτοιος κι ο Ρέμων είναι. Όμως χθες σαν  
φώτιζε το ερωτικό του πρόσωπο η σελήνη,  
ο νους μας πήγε στον πλατωνικό Χαρμίδα.

When the poem was first written, in 1916, it had the title «Χαρμίδης», which later on Cavafy chose to change: the poem was finally circulated in 1917, with the far subtler title «Εν πόλει της Οσροηνής».<sup>132</sup> As Zamarou argues, and I agree with this, the fact that Cavafy changes the title of his poem is an intentional and careful choice: the titles of the Cavafian poems play a functional and important role for the interpretation and understanding of the poem as a whole.<sup>133</sup> The reason for Cavafy's choice to finally change the title is, according to Zamarou, that: «(...) ο Καβάφης, ακόμη και στα χρόνια της ανάγνωσης του Πλάτωνος, αποφεύγει να τιτλοφορήσει ποίημά του με κάποιο πλατωνικό όνομα».<sup>134</sup> I would like to emphasise, firstly, the fact that it is difficult for us to define the exact period that Cavafy was reading Plato, in the same way that Cavafy was returning back to his poems again and again re-working and changing them, it is reasonable that he could have been constantly re-reading his books. Based on this, I argue that as far as the relationship between Cavafy and Plato is concerned, Cavafy implicitly utilises the Platonic

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<sup>132</sup>This information was first illustrated in the G.P. Savvidi publications of the poems belonging to the Cavafian Canon: C. P. Cavafy, *Τα Ποιήματα Α' (1897-1918)*, ed. Georgios P. Savvidis (Athens: Ikaros, 1993).

<sup>133</sup> Also in Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων*, 43.

<sup>134</sup> Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων*, 43.

inheritance on Greek Eros even in his contemporary poems. The use of Platonic elements and ideology is not restricted within a specific period of Cavafy's work, but permeates the work of Cavafy as a whole. The argument by Seferis that Cavafy's work should be perceived as a 'work in progress'<sup>135</sup> also moves in this direction.

The fact that Cavafy, according to Zamarou, «αποφεύγει να τιτλοφορήσει ποίημά του με κάποιο πλατωνικό όνομα» has a deeper explanation that the claim that it would seem foreign («ξένιζε») <sup>136</sup> to the reader, because Cavafy, as Zamarou suggests, was distanced at that point from Plato's work and his other protagonists of his erotic poems written in the same period were coming from the «ελληνιστικό-αλεξανδρινό περιβάλλον».<sup>137</sup> The reason for this is that Cavafy wanted to include in his work elements from the ancient Greek past and references to other writers, but wanted to do so in a productive way, not as mere imitation and exploitation of the ancient Greek inheritance. Moreover, Cavafy had another very important reason to change the title «Χαρμίδης»; in 1881 Wilde had published his own poem entitled 'Charmides'<sup>138</sup> where he alluded to Charmides as 'the ideal Hellenic youth'.<sup>139</sup> Cavafy would have been aware of this poem and it seems to me that because of this he decides to avoid using the same title.

Zamarou also argues that

(...) δεν είναι ο «πλατωνικός» Χαρμίδης η αφορμή για τα όσα συμβαίνουν στην ανώνυμη πόλη της Οσροηνής. Αντιθέτως τα βίαια συμβάντα σχετικά με τον Ρέμωνα είναι που ανακαλούν στη μνήμη τον Χαρμίδα, όχι το αντίθετο. (...) Η μορφή του Χαρμίδα έρχεται ως ανάμνηση (ο νους μας πήγε) που βαθαίνει και εξιδανικεύει την παρούσα εμπειρία.<sup>140</sup>

<sup>135</sup> George Seferis, *On the Greek Style: Selected Essays in Poetry and Hellenism*, trans. Rex Warner and Th. D. Frangopoulos (London: Brodley Head, 1966).

<sup>136</sup> Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων*, 45.

<sup>137</sup> Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων*, 44.

<sup>138</sup> Oscar Wilde, *Complete Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>139</sup> Blanshard, *Sex: Vice and love from Antiquity to Modernity*, 101.

<sup>140</sup> Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων*, 45.

I agree with the first part of Zamarou's argument, where she holds that it is the specific incident of a «λαϊκός καυγάς» and a «λαϊκός»<sup>141</sup> protagonist who constitutes the stimulus for the comparison with Charmides to emerge. Yet, I have a strong sense that the last verse «ο νους μας πήγε στον πλατωνικό Χαρμίδα» does not elevate Rhemon to the ideal figure of the ultimately handsome Charmides, but the other way around: ancient Charmides comes to the present and survives through the figure of Rhemon. Therefore, Rhemon and Charmides become one and the same and are at the same time two faces of the same person. Unlike Hyacinthus, Charmides was not connected to Plato by a divine or a noble nature. On the contrary, the way that Plato refers to him in his so-called dialogue gives emphasis to the carnal exaltation and stimulation that the body and the physical appearance of Charmides bring out in Socrates when the two meet. Blanshard emphasises the important differentiation of the *Charmides* and the *Symposium* and the *Phaedrus*:

The sheer force of passion that swept Socrates at the sight of Charmides has proved embarrassing for many. It seems hard to reconcile the Socrates of the *Charmides* with the restrained pedagogue of *Symposium* or the *Phaedrus*. (...) *Charmides* threatens to expose the carnal nature of Greek love.<sup>142</sup>

Cavafy would have been aware of such discussions around the 'scandalous content' of *Charmides* because it had been used as a main argument against 'the rise of Hellenism in Victorian England'.<sup>143</sup> Therefore, it is not «τα βίαια συμβάντα σχετικά με τον Ρέμωνα (...) που ανακαλούν στη μνήμη τον Χαρμίδα» but the specific reference to the word «σώμα» (τ'ώραίο του το σώμα) along with the reference to the «ερωτικό πρόσωπο». The speaker of the poem, as another Socrates, is aroused by the exquisite physical appearance of Rhemon and because of the carnal stimulation, Charmides is the most appropriate figure for a comparison; not Hyacinthus, not Endymion. This argument is also reinforced by the intentional choice of the verb «πήγε» in the verse «ο νους μας πήγε στον πλατωνικό Χαρμίδα», as

<sup>141</sup> See the reference to a «λαϊκό συμβάν»: Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων*, 48.

<sup>142</sup> Blanshard, *Sex: Vice and love from Antiquity to Modernity*, 101.

<sup>143</sup> Blanshard, *Sex: Vice and love from Antiquity to Modernity*, 101.

opposed to the conscious choice of the verb «ανέβαινε», in the verse «ο νους μου ανέβαινε στα ιδανικά» of «Τυανεύς Γλύπτης» (1911), where the suggestion of a spiritual ascent is explicit.

We have seen how Cavafy's apparent allusion to Plato in «Ἐν πόλει της Οσορηνής» is less clear than it seems. Let us turn to an unfinished poem in which a celebrated poem attributed to Plato is actually quoted in the title. And because this is a poem by (supposedly) Plato which was then embedded in the *Palatine Anthology*, this gives us a great opportunity to exploit Plato and the *Palatine Anthology* as a polarity in Greek love. The poem [Την ψυχὴν ἐπὶ χεῖλεσιν ἔσχον]<sup>144</sup> (1918) follows the same line with «Ἐν πόλει της Οσορηνής»: Plato is 'brought down' to a setting which could be described as «λαϊκό» because of the incorporation of the words «ταβέρνα» and «καυγάς». The speaker of the poem destroys from the beginning of the poem every sense of romanticism, using in an ironic way anti-poetic words and expressions. I argue that this shall be considered as a conscious dig at Platonism, and even maybe against the Sikelianos circle. Cavafy seems here to be very consciously (and too directly) laying claim to the true Platonic inheritance:

Τίποτε απολύτως το ρομαντικό  
 δεν εἶχεν ὅταν με εἶπεν «Ἴσως να  
 πεθάνω». Τώπε για αστεῖσμό. Ἐτσι που  
 θα το πει εἴκοσι τριῶν ἐτῶν ἓνα παιδί.  
 Κ' ἐγώ -εἴκοσι πέντε- ἔτσι το πήρα ελαφρά.

Τίποτε (ευτυχῶς) της ψευτο-αισθηματικῆς  
 ποιήσεως για να συγκινηθοῦν κομπῆς (αστεῖες)  
 κυρίες  
 που για τίποτα στενάζουν.

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<sup>144</sup> C. P. Cavafy, *Ατελή Ποιήματα: 1918-1932*, ed. Renata Lavagnini (Athens: Ikaros, 2006), 309-315.

In this «λαϊκό» setting the protagonist is a child («παιδί») and not an adolescent («έφηβος»). Yet, the atmosphere of the poem changes in the third stanza, bringing in mind the poem «Μέρρες του 1896»<sup>145</sup> and the sudden switch towards the end. A similar switch happens to this poem as well, in the second stanza and specifically in the lines referring to Plato:

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  
 μέλος· που θάρρεψα - όπως λέγουν οι θείοι  
 σίχοι  
 του Πλάτωνος - που η ψυχή μου ανέβηκε στα χείλη.

Motivated by his fear and instinct that he might indeed lose his beloved, the speaker of the poem rushes to the room where his ill lover lies and kisses every part of his body. The emphasis to the «και κάθε, κάθε μέλος» brings to mind the reference to the «λαγόνες» of Pantarkes and the statement of Phidias' admiration, as I discuss later on in relation to Sikelianos. The last two lines of the stanza refer to the lines: «Τήν ψυχὴν Ἀγάθωνα φιλῶν ἐπὶ χεῖλεσιν ἔσχον. Ἦλθε γάρ ἡ τλήμων ὡς διαβησομένη», included in the *Palatine Anthology* and attributed to Plato<sup>146</sup>. At this point I agree with Zamarou in supporting that through the action of kissing, the speaking voice desires in a way to transfer life to his beloved, and I disagree with Lanagnini who makes a connection with the popular expression «με τη ψυχή στο στόμα».<sup>147</sup> We should also note that this scene is suggestive of the Last Rites.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 166.

<sup>146</sup>The Greek Anthology, I, Cambridge, Mass./London, 1970, p. 166

<sup>147</sup> Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων*, 51.

<sup>148</sup> See also the end of *The Greek Anthology*, I, Cambridge, Mass./London, 1970



The reference to the «θείους στίχους» of Plato elevates the deed of the lover and idealises it by comparing it with Plato's ideal sort of Eros, as given in the *Symposium*, where Socrates supports that pure feelings of Eros lead the lover to deeds of sacrifice and bravery for his beloved. The use of the verb «θάρρεψα» points out towards this direction, having as a basis the noun «θάρρος», strength. At the same time, adding to the arguments of Zamarou who discuss the superiority of «θείους στίχους» towards the ironically given «ψευτο-αισθηματική ποίηση»,<sup>149</sup> I would like to suggest that with the reference of the «θείοι στίχοι» of Plato Cavafy conveys his own belief about the superiority of homosexual love over heterosexual love.

Moving away from these two cases of explicit references to Plato, I would like to refer to the unpublished prose poem «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής»,<sup>150</sup> the title of which I have chosen to give to my whole thesis. The text reads as follows:

Μη ομιλείτε περί ενοχής, μη ομιλείτε περί ευθύνης. Όταν περνά το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής με μουσικήν και σημαίας· όταν ριγούν και τρέμουν αι αισθήσεις, άφρων και ασεβής είναι όστις μένει μακράν, όστις δεν ορμά εις την καλήν εκστρατείαν, την βαίνουσαν επί την κατάκτησιν των απολαύσεων και των παθών.

Όλοι οι νόμοι της ηθικής - κακώς νοημένοι, κακώς εφαρμοζόμενοι - είναι μηδέν και δεν ημπορούν να σταθούν ουδέ στιγμήν, όταν περνά το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής με μουσικήν και σημαίας.

Μη αφήσης καμίαν σκιεράν αρετήν να σε βαστάξη. Μη πιστεύης ότι καμία υποχρέωσις σε δένει. Το χρέος σου είναι να ενδίδης, να ενδίδης πάντοτε εις τας Επιθυμίας, που είναι τα τελειότατα πλάσματα των τελείων θεών. Το χρέος σου είναι να καταταχθής πιστός στρατιώτης, με απλότητα καρδιάς, όταν περνά το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής με μουσικήν και σημαίας.

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<sup>149</sup>Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων*, 52-53.

<sup>150</sup>Cavafy, *Τα Πεζά*, 168.

Μη κλείσει εν τω οίκω σου και πλανάσαι με θεωρίας δικαιοσύνης, με τας περι  
 αμοιβής προλήψεις της κακώς καμωμένης κοινωνίας. Μη λέγης, Τόσον αξίζει ο κόπος  
 μου και τόσον οφείλω να απολαύσω. Όπως η ζωή είναι κληρονομία και δεν έκαμες  
 τίποτε δια να την κερδίσης ως αμοιβήν, ούτω κληρονομία πρέπει να είναι και η Ηδονή.  
 Μη κλείσει εν τω οίκω σου· αλλά κράτει τα παράθυρα ανοικτά, ολοάνοικτα, δια να  
 ακούσης τους πρώτους  
 ήχους της διαβάσεως των στρατιωτών, όταν φθάνη το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής με  
 μουσικήν και σημαίας.

Μη απατηθής από τους βλασφήμους όσοι σε λένουν ότι η υπηρεσία είναι επικίνδυνος  
 και επίπονος. Η υπηρεσία της ηδονής είναι χαρά διαρκής. Σε εξαντλεί, αλλά σε εξαντλεί  
 με θεσπεσίας μέθας. Και επί τέλους όταν πέσης εις τον δρόμον, και τότε είναι η τύχη  
 σου ζηλευτή. Όταν περάση η κηδεία σου, αι Μορφαί τας οποίας έπλασαν αι επιθυμίας  
 σου θα ρίψουν λείρια και ρόδα λευκά επί του φερέτρου σου, θα σε σηκώσουν εις τους  
 ώμους των έφηβοι Θεοί του Ολύμπου, και θα σε θάψουν εις το Κοιμητήριον του  
 Ιδεώδους όπου  
 ασπρίζουν τα μαυσωλεία της ποιήσεως.

It is noteworthy that such a modern and ground-breaking poem for the period can be largely based on the ancient Greek tradition, with Platonic undertones. The speaker of the poem appears to be a rebel who goes against the «καθεστυκυία τάξη». The speaker of the poem, like another Socrates, gives the impression that he has the absolute knowledge over the erotic matters and therefore he gives a 'speech', an 'account' about them, in an extract which could harmonically fit into the *Symposium*; yet it shall be surely characterised as more monologic and didactic.

According to the speaker of the poem, *hedone* should be celebrated and everyone should acknowledge its power and domination over the life of a person. It has to be stated that at this point Cavafy goes against the Platonic ideology on Eros as stated in the *Phaedrus*, where he demonstrates Socrates referring to a twofold desire that dominates all people: an inherent desire for hedone and an acquired opinion (δόξα), which is based on the apprehension and realisation of reality and leads us to aim for the best in our lives. Sometimes this twofold nature which exists among all people comes to an inside agreement and balance, and other times it creates an inner fight because one direction dominates the other or vice versa. In doing so, two features come to the fore: prudence («σωφροσύνη») and hubris («ὕβρις»); prudence when reason and tendency for the best dominate and hubris

when the person follows deliberately and limitlessly the desire of his body for constant hedone, for the hedone of the beauty and the hedone of the beauty of the body.

For Cavafy, hedone should undoubtedly dominate over «σωφοσύνη» and this does not constitute hybris, but a liberating act.<sup>151</sup> The importance of hedone is so great that it should constitute the «σύνταγμα» based on which a state should be ruled. «Σύνταγμα» refers to a 'battalion', which emphasises the masculinity of Greek love, though it also shades into 'constitution' and also might imply «συνταγές» too, in the way that the word is used in the poem «Κατά τες συνταγές αρχαίων Ελληνόσυρων μάγων».<sup>152</sup>

Not only should it be legitimate for someone to give in to all the pleasures of the flesh, but, more than that, it should be the profound and ultimate law for the creation and organisation of every society. The speaker makes a distinction between the antithesis of «οι νόμοι της ηθικής» and «το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής»; the former leads, mistakenly according to the speaker, to the restrictive feelings of guilt («ενοχής») and responsibility («ευθύνης»). «Ηθική» and «αρετή» are clearly given as burdens, restricting free and authentic expression and in doing so they get invalidated and underestimated as values. The ultimate 'duty' of someone, given in the text with the momentous word «χρέος», is to always follow his desires, without resisting at all. The «χρέος» for hedone becomes as important as the «χρέος» to protect one's country in the recognised poem «Θερμοπύλες»<sup>153</sup>, since the poet significantly uses this specific word to indicate someone's responsibilities.

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<sup>151</sup> Hedone, even though differently defined, is liberating in Sikelianos as well, as we shall see later on.

<sup>152</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 202.

<sup>153</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 10.

The speaker of the poem<sup>154</sup> connects the complete giving into hedone with bravery and courage in the same way that Plato in his *Symposium* displays Socrates supporting that the ultimate features of homosexual Eros are power and bravery and he argues that it is because of this reason that he praises it and he makes an encomium about it. It is a feature that Cavafy often brings to the fore to the poems of his canon as well, and in particular to the poems «Επήγα»<sup>155</sup> in which we find the verses «Κ' ήπια από δυνατά κρασιά, καθώς που πίνουν οι ανδρείοι της ηδονής» and in the poem «Πολυέλαιος»<sup>156</sup> and the verses «Γί' άτολμα σώματα δεν είναι καμωμένα αυτής της ζέστης η ηδονή». In the end of the poem «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής» we come across the idea that, according to the speaker, by allowing yourself to be freely sexually expressed you are worth of surviving time and be remembered after your death because this very feature, let alone duty, makes you worthy of poetic depiction in «τα μαισωλεία της ποιήσεως» and also constitutes a denial that homoeroticism is effeminate. The idea that someone is worthy of being transferred into a poetic context and by this to gain posthumous fame is also present in the poem «Πέρασμα»<sup>157</sup> in which we come across the following verses: «Κ' έτσι ένα παιδί απλό γίνεται άξιο να το δούμε, κι απ' τον Υψηλό της Ποιήσεως Κόσμο μια στιγμή περνά κι αυτό – το αισθητικό παιδί με το αίμα του καινούριο και ζεστό». This idea is originally mentioned by Socrates in *Symposium* where Plato presents Socrates referring that Eros is the best co-operator of human beings to conquer mortality.<sup>158</sup> Socrates also claims that creators love and proceed to their creations motivated by their will for immortality and posthumous fame, a dominating feature among poets too and a characteristic which Cavafy often refers to. Socrates argues about the ways that a mortal human being can claim immortality and this is by

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<sup>154</sup> Very much in style of Platon Rodokanakes (1883-1919) and his *De Profundis*. As the editor Nasos Vayenas states in the Introduction of the book referring to Rodokanakes: « (...) διακρίθηκε ως μία από τις πλέον ενδιαφέρουσες μορφές του ελληνικού αισθητισμού». Therefore, it is a shame that scholarly research has neglected him to a great extent.

<sup>155</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74.

<sup>156</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74

<sup>157</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 100.

<sup>158</sup> See the next page and footnote 160 for the elaboration of this argument and specific references to Plato's text.

leaving behind something new which is the same with the old self which is leaving; poems, photographs, images, statues, epigrams and so on can be possible inclusions of this rule.

The call for a total yielding to the «Επιθυμίας, που είναι τα τελειότατα πλάσματα των τελείων Θεών», as well as the references to «αι Μορφαί»<sup>159</sup>, «έφηβοι Θεοί του Ολύμπου» and «το Κοιμητήριο του Ιδεώδους», explicitly bring to mind Socrates' myth in Plato's *Phaedrus*, having to do with the claim that every *erastes* falls in love with an *eromenos* who has the features of the God that the soul of the *erastes* used to follow and support. According to the myth, each soul incorporates this remembrance of the ideal Beauty and every time a person falls in love, they seek to cultivate in the soul of *eromenos* the same characteristics of the ideal beauty that their God possessed and which they remember very well, since Eros triggers the mechanisms of memory. Because of these references, the text acquires a clearly homoerotic character; behind the negative aspects of the society and its restrictions we can clearly interpret that the text refers to heterosexual society.

Cavafy's *mise en scène* is craftily created in such a way that enables us to imagine the speaker of the poem to orate before an audience. This is reinforced by the fact that the speaker uses colloquial Greek and the second person plural in addressing his audience, indicating that he refers and actually gives advice to an amount of people and definitely he refers to more than one person. This group of people shall be identified with the 'initiates', people who, according to Cavafy, are being authentic to themselves and are consciously giving in to the urges and calls of their body, looking for the ultimate hedone. As we will see later on, Sikelianos also refers to a category of initiates, who have more or less the same characteristics. The origins of these initiates are to be sought in Plato's *Republic*.

The ancient poet bases on these certain features and values of people the foundations of his ideal society. If the ideal citizens according to Plato's *Republic*

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<sup>159</sup> Cavafy's preoccupation (like that of von Aschenbach in *Death in Venice*) is with the mortal who can ascend «στα ιδανικά» (Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 58).

might be compared with the initiates of Cavafy, then Plato's ideal 'Republic' should be paralleled with Cavafy's ideal «Σύνταγμα». Therefore, the words «πολιτεία» and «σύνταγμα» function synonymously, since both Plato and Cavafy in «Πολιτεία» and «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής» respectively offer their suggestion for the formation of the foundations and the organisation of the institutions of their ideal state.

The Cavafian reference to «Σύνταγμα» and to the virtue of bravery which the lovers have to demonstrate recalls an abstract coming from the *Symposium* and specifically from Phaedrus's speech. Taking into consideration the total sum up of the Platonic elements found into this poem, I believe that behind Cavafy's choice to use the expression «Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής» lies the following part from Phaedrus's speech in the *Symposium*:

(...) and in the selfsame way we see how the beloved is especially ashamed before his lovers when he is observed to be about some shameful business. So that if we could somehow contrive to have a city or an army composed of lovers and their favorites, they could not be better citizens of their country than by thus refraining from all that is base in a mutual rivalry for honor; and such men as these, when fighting side by side, one might almost consider able to make even a little band victorious over all the world. For a man in love would surely choose to have all the rest of the host rather than his favorite see him forsaking his station or flinging away his arms (...).<sup>160</sup>

According to Phaedrus the ideal state or army should consist of lovers. The reason for this is that lovers would have been trying their best to impress their beloveds with their generous and brave deeds, without showing cowardliness in any possible way and protecting their beloveds until death. Bravery is a virtue that Eros infuses to people; and it is this sort of bravery which is perhaps the Platonic element which Cavafy draws on most emphatically.

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160 Plato, *Symposium*, in the Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.01.0174%3Atext%3DSym.%3Apage%3D179> (accessed 17 January 2018). The ancient Greek text reads as follows: «εἰ οὖν μηχανή τις γένοιτο ὥστε πόλιν γενέσθαι ἢ στρατόπεδον ἐραστῶν τε καὶ

παιδικῶν, οὐκ ἔστιν ὅπως ἂν ἄμεινον οἰκίσειαν τὴν ἑαυτῶν ἢ ἀπεχόμενοι πάντων τῶν αἰσχυρῶν καὶ φιλοτιμούμενοι πρὸς ἀλλήλους, καὶ μαχόμενοί γ' ἂν μετ' ἀλλήλων οἱ τοιοῦτοι νικῶεν ἂν ὀλίγοι ὄντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν πάντας ἀνθρώπους. ἐρῶν γὰρ ἀνὴρ ὑπὸ παιδικῶν ὀφθῆναι ἠλιπῶν τάξιν ἢ ὄπλα ἀποβαλὼν ἤττον ἂν δῆπου δέξαιτο ἢ ὑπὸ πάντων τῶν ἄλλων, καὶ πρῶτου τουτεθνάναι ἂν πολλάκις ἔλοιτο. καὶ μὴν ἐγκαταλιπεῖν γε τὰ παιδικὰ ἢ μὴ βοηθῆσαι κινδυνεύοντι— οὐδεὶς οὕτω κακὸς ὄντινα οὐκ ἂν αὐτὸς ὁ Ἔρως ἔνθεον ποιήσειε πρὸς ἀρετὴν, ὥστε ὅμοιον εἶναι τῷ ἀρίστῳ φύσει (...).» Ioannis Sykoutres, ed. *Platonos Symposium* (Athens: Kedros, 2005), 178e.

**«Με την ιερή που σ' το θρῆψε Πλατωνική μανία»: the case of Angelos Sikelianos**

The deep relationship of Sikelianos with the ancient Greek past is well known.<sup>161</sup> Throughout his work Sikelianos exploits the ancient Greek past and especially ancient Greek mythology to convey the continuity between the ancient Greek ideal and modern Greek reality. His life, dedicated to the promotion and revival of the Delphic celebrations and of what he called the «Δελφική ιδέα», leaves no doubts that Sikelianos endorsed in his oeuvre his life's ideals, calling for «την εθνική εκείνη πνευματική ενότητα». However, an acknowledgement of Sikelianos's homoerotic dimension is relatively a new observation; 'relatively', because there has been already a study of certain of his poems and specifically of «Παντάρκης» (1914)<sup>162</sup> in comparison with some Cavafian homoerotic poems<sup>163</sup> which, in doing so, brought already to the fore the presence of homoerotic elements in the work of Sikelianos. But what has never been argued is that Sikelianos himself suggests a homoerotic or at least homosocial reading of his sequence «Αφροδίτης Ουρανίας» (1914-1929).<sup>164</sup>

I will proceed here to a demonstration and illumination of the homoerotic aspect in the work of Sikelianos, by focusing on his dialogue with Plato's ideas on Eros, as expressed in his *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. At the same time, in my effort

<sup>161</sup> See Andreas Phylactou, *Ο μύθος και η λύρα Ο αρχαιοελληνικός μύθος στο «Λυρικό Βίο»: Συμβολή στη μελέτη των πηγών και της ποιητικής του Αγγελου Σικελιανού* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 2003) and Edmund Keeley, 'E Melaloprepes Phone: O Sikelianos kai e Ellenike Mythologia', in *Mythos kai Phone ste Synchrone Ellenike Poiese* (Athens: Stigmi, 1987), 61-91.

<sup>162</sup> Angelos Sikelianos, *Λυρικός Βίος, Β'*, ed. Geogrios P. Savvides (Athens: Ikaros, 1966), 122-126.

<sup>163</sup> Seferis was the first to compare «Παντάρκης» with the Cavafian poem «Η Κηδεία του Σαρπηδόνο»: George Seferis, *Δοκιμές Α'* (Athens: Ikaros, 1981), 401. Ritsa Frangou-Kikilia compares «Παντάρκης» with the Cavafian poem «Εικών Εικοσιτριετούς Νέου Φτιαγμένη από Φίλον του Ομήλικα, Ερασιτέχνην»: Ritsa Frangkou-Kikilia, *Πέντε μελετήματα για τον Άγγελο Σικελιανό* (Athens: Theoria, 1984), 160-195. For a detailed comparison of the poem of Sikelianos with the poem of Cavafy «Τυανεύς Γλύπτης» see Liana Giannakopoulou, «Η Γλυπτική στην Ποίηση του Σικελιανού», *Anti 749* (2001), 36-37 and Liana Giannakopoulou, «Καβάφης και Σικελιανός», *Nea Estia 154:1761* (2003), 635-651.

<sup>164</sup> Angelos Sikelianos, *Λυρικός Βίος, Β'*, ed. G.P. Savidis (Athens: Ikaros, 2003).



to better define and clarify this element in Sikelianos, I will proceed to relevant comparisons with Cavafy and Ioannou. Interestingly, Sikelianos emerges as a surprising instance of where the 'Greek love' of Plato simply cannot be kept out. In other words, Sikelianos constitutes a representative exemplum in Greek literature where Platonism cannot readily be invoked without some element of the homoerotic.

Sikelianos's broad knowledge of Plato is documented by the multiple references to Plato in his *Πεζός Λόγος*.<sup>165</sup> Eva Sikelianou argues in her autobiography that her husband «Περιέγραφε τη γνωριμία του με τον Πλάτωνα και ιδίως με τους προσωκρατικούς και με όλα τα κατάλοιπα των αρχαίων ελληνικών έργων, που έχουν φτάσει στα χέρια μας». At the same time Sikelianos gives his opinion about Cavafy, whose work he admired and supported. He mentions in his correspondence to Marios Vaianos that

(...) Έτσι, για τον κύριο Καβάφη έχω μεγάλη συμπάθεια και εκτίμηση, χωρίς να πρέπει και να γράψω κριτική γι' αυτόν, πράγμα που δεν έκαμα ποτέ και που, προπάντων σήμερα για μένα, θα ήτανε σαν αναχρονισμός.<sup>166</sup>

Also, Sikelianos makes in the volumes of his *Πεζός Λόγος* specific reference to the Cavafian poems «Τυανεύς Γλύπτης» and «Τα Άλογα του Αχιλλέως»<sup>167</sup>, poems that he admires. In the case of the relationship of Sikelianos and Cavafy in particular, we can talk about perception and contribution to the tradition of Platonism.

Between 1914 and 1929 Sikelianos writes a group of twenty-one poems, a poetic sequence which he later entitles «Αφροδίτη Ουρανία». The title of the poetic collection refers to the twofold distinction of the nature of Aphrodite as «πάνδημος»

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<sup>165</sup> Angelos Sikelianos, *Πεζός Λόγος, Ε'*, ed. G.P. Savidis (Athens: Ikaros, 1985), 345.

<sup>166</sup> C. P. Cavafy, *Επιστολές στο Μάριο Βαϊάνο*, ed. E. N. Moschou (Athens: Estia, 1979), 38.

<sup>167</sup> Angelos Sikelianos, *Πεζός Λόγος, Β'*, ed. G.P. Savidis (Athens: Ikaros, 1980), 40.

and «ουρανία». The distinction is introduced in the *Symposium* and particularly in the speech of Pausanias, who makes reference to the existence of two Aphrodites and therefore to the existence of two sorts of Eros. The «Ουράνια» Aphrodite is older than the other one, her father is Uranus and she does not have a mother. On the other hand, the «Πάνδημος» Aphrodite is younger and her parents are Zeus and Dione. The Eros which is a co-operator of the first one is called «ουράνιος Έρως» and the Eros which is a collaborator of the second Aphrodite is the «πάνδημος Έρως». These two sorts of Eros have different characteristics: «πάνδημος» Eros is connected with negative features; it is the sort of love that random and nefarious human beings feel for mortal bodies, without properly appreciating the value of the soul. Because of the reason that in the birth of «πάνδημος» Aphrodite participated a woman and a man, Zeus and Dione, «πάνδημος» Eros has women as the objects of its erotic desire; emphasis is given only to the raw sexual instincts and their fulfilment. According to Pausanias, this is an undervalued sort of 'earthy' Eros, which is expressed towards women or children, in a wrong way, without aiming anything superior or deeper: a pointless and flagitious sort of Eros.

On the other hand, the Eros of the «ουράνιας» Aphrodite is the respectable sort of Love in Ancient Greece, a pure, authentic and decent feeling, where human beings are concerned primarily for the soul and not for the body and therefore the expression of this love remains away from lewd acts. Because of the fact that in the birth of this Aphrodite no feminine took part, men who are characterised by this sort of love are falling in love with other men, because they understand that males are by nature cleverer and stronger. Apart from homoeroticism, it is under this category of love that Pausanias lists the pure love of an older man towards a child and the love of a child towards an older man (pederasty). These expressions of love are vindicated, honoured and recommended in ancient Greece, according to Pausanias in the *Symposium*.

Therefore, Sikelianos's choice to give this title to this group of poems is not random, because the poems that the collection includes are pieces of a deep and divine Eros towards Beauty in general. More specifically, some of this poetry of Sikelianos can be characterised as 'uranian', in the modern sense of the word. The modern term 'uranian' was introduced in 1864 to describe a 'third sex', a sex in between homosexuals and heterosexuals, and was used especially by Edward

Carpenter and John Addington Symonds to describe people (especially poets and artists) who were characterised by an exquisite love of beauty above class and gender barriers.<sup>168</sup> This beauty is present in the poetry of Sikelianos in its many expressions: nature, life, women, men, religion, ancient Greek past, Eros, Hedone. In the first poem of the collection, which is also entitled «Αφροδίτης Ουρανία» we come across the following lines:

Του πόθου ως λυέται ολόγυρά μου η  
ζώνη, του λυτρωμού μου η μυστική  
ποριά  
βρίσκει το μάγο πνέμα, που με  
ζώνει την ηδονή σαν πέλαο τη  
στεριά.

The position of the word «ηδονή» at the beginning of the poetic collection marks its central use for the interpretation of all the following poems and also takes a word central to Cavafy's poetry and poetics. But the word «πόθος» seems to be indicative of carnal lust; since it is a word that Cavafy never uses, Sikelianos at this point appears to be far more daring than Cavafy. Even though the words «πόθος» and «ηδονή» in these instances have no clear homoerotic overtones, poems included in the collection, like «Παντάρκης» and «Γιάννης Κητς», in association with the title of the collection, gives us the impression that the words refer to all kinds of Eros. Apart from this, as indicated before, Sikelianos clearly states his admiration for Cavafy and for his work.

Therefore, especially the word «ηδονή» might be consciously used to indicate a connection with the Cavafian corpus. For Cavafy, homoeroticism is an elevating feature, which means that someone is strong enough to experience a life full of hedone and remain authentic to his desires. It is a *modus vivendi* that he promotes

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<sup>168</sup> The term was later on identified with homosexuals. For more information of the 'intermediate sex' see Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex: A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: TheClassics.Us, 2013).

through his poetry and therefore the word *hedone* has been ascribed with homosexual undertones. «Ηδονή» is a feature of brave and unique people; it is a mark of excellence: «Κ' ήπια από δυνατά κρασιά, καθώς / που πίνουν οι ανδρείοι της ηδονής»<sup>169</sup>, «Γι' άτολμα σώματα δεν είναι κατωμένη / αυτής της ζέστης η ηδονή»<sup>170</sup>. In the above lines, Cavafy's «ηδονή» is related to a sense of violence and risk, which derives from the adjectives «ανδρείοι» and «άτολμα». Furthermore, Cavafy's «ηδονή» is a characteristic which makes someone's life worthy of poetry and, thus, transcribed into art (See the poem «Πέρασμα»). On the other hand, the use of the word «ηδονή» in Sikelianos refers to both homosexual and heterosexual love and, within the definition of 'uranianism', it actually refers to the deep erotic feelings that dominate a person before the idea of Beauty, found in all things (in the spirit of «Αλαφροίσκιωτος»). Having said that, «ηδονή» in Sikelianos is different from «ηδονή» in Cavafy, in the sense that in Sikelianos the word does not have only a homosexual meaning: it would be ill-judged to suggest that there is a possible homoerotic reading of the «Αφροδίτης Ουρανίας» sequence as a whole. Yet, in one poem, «Παντάρκης», Sikelianos does give surprisingly open expression to homoerotic sentiment in a way that builds on what is just a hint at the Uranian in general.

The poem «Παντάρκης» was written in 1914 and has been characterised by Vivette Tsarlamba-Kaklamane as «ένα από τα αισθαντικότερα και αρτιότερα σικελιανικά ποιήματα»<sup>171</sup>. Sikelianos puts the ancient Greek expression «ὁ παῖς

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169Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74.

170Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74.

171Angelos Sikelianos, *Ανέκδοτα ποιήματα και Πεζά*, ed. Vivet Tsarlampa-Kaklamane (Athens: Estia, 1989), 224.

καλός»<sup>172</sup> as the motto of the poem, which was a famous expression that the creators used to engrave on the ancient Greek vases, paying tribute to the beauty of the young boy who was coloured on the vase. As Sykoutres mentions:

Οι απλοϊκοί ακόμη αγγειογράφοι εστόλιζαν τα αγγεία των με τα ονόματα των ωραίων εφήβων της ημέρας (ο δείνα καλός), όπως τώρα οι λαϊκοί άνθρωποι με τις φωτογραφίες των κινηματογραφικών αστέρων και των διαφόρων μας.<sup>173</sup>

The motto of «Παντάρκης» is central to the poem: by giving this epexegetis to the title, Sikelianos indicates delicately from the beginning the theme that will occupy him in his poem.<sup>174</sup> The poem begins with a detailed description of nature, which is described in a way that can be characterised as sensual: nature plays significant role in the arousal of the senses.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> For the definition of the term «καλός» as used in the ancient Greek literature Dover offers the following explanation: ' (...) the word *kalos* (...) means 'beautiful', 'handsome', 'pretty', 'attractive' or 'lovely' when applied to a human being, animal, object or place, and 'admirable', 'creditable' or 'honourable' when applied to actions or institutions.' And he goes on by offering a considerable distanglement which immediately stresses the 'carnal' angle of Sikeliano's poem: 'It must be emphasised that the Greeks did not call a person 'beautiful' by virtue of that person's morals, intelligence, ability or temperament, but solely by virtue of shape, colour, texture and movement' (page 16).

<sup>173</sup> Ioannes Sykoutres, *Πλάτωνος Συμπόσιο* (Athens: Kaktos, 1934), 50.

<sup>174</sup> Sikelianos consciously alludes to the Platonic dialogues; in specific, the motto of the poem brings to mind the *Phaedrus*, which has the explanatory subtitle «περί καλού ηθικός – περί του ωραίου ηθικός», where Plato promotes the idea that Beauty does not exist without ethos and the other way around. Therefore, we assume that the adjective «καλός» of the motto of the poem «Παντάρκης» does not refer only to the exquisite physical appearance of the youth, but also to his prudence and his morality.

<sup>175</sup> See Angelos Sikelianos, «*Η Φύση και η Αποστολή του Λυρισμού*», *Nea Estia* 108:1281 (1980).

This highly stimulating environment constitutes Sikelianos's own *mise en scene* to introduce the erotic «έφηβος» Pantarkes, which brings to our mind the multiple references to the 'ephebes' in the poetry of Cavafy. In Cavafy, ephebes are youths on the borderline of becoming men, they have an exquisite physical appearance, and constitute objects of homoerotic admiration.<sup>176</sup> Most striking of all is that in Cavafy's «Ιωνικόν» (1911)<sup>177</sup> and «Ένας θεός των» (1917)<sup>178</sup> a divine element is applied to 'ephebes' and they are presented as gods. The description of the ephebe Pantarkes corresponds to these features and he is presented as such.

Consider these stanzas of the poem:

(...)

Περίδροσα τα βλέφαρα, διάπλατα εκράτει ο  
στοχασμός και δεν τα ζύγωνε ύπνος·  
τόσο ήτανε ποτιστικός των αρωμάτων και  
γλυκός ο δείπνος...

Ο λυχνοστάτης τρίφλογος, στο τρίποδο  
στητός μες στ' αργαστήρι,  
εφώταε το συλλογισμό τ' αντρός που στην παλάμη  
του είχε γείρει...

Κι ο εφηβικός πενταθλητής εδιάνευεν  
αργός στ' ολύμπιο μάτι,  
ανάμεσ' απ' τα σύνεργα, γυμνός, μπροστά απ' το  
τρίφλογο του λυχνοστάτη.

Με τη γαλήνη και τη θεία νοτιά ο τεχνίτης  
έμενε κι αγρύπνα,

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<sup>176</sup> Ekdawi makes a distinction between 'ephebes', 'boys' and 'youths' in Cavafy's homoerotic poetry. For an interesting and revealing discussion see Sarah Ekdawi, "Cavafy's mythical ephebes," in *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek Poetry: Essays in Memory of C.A. Trypanis*, ed. Peter Mackridge (London: Frank Cass, 1996), 33- 52.

<sup>177</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 70.

<sup>178</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 88.

στα μυστικά συμπόσια συνηθισμένος με τους  
 θεούς που εδείπνα...  
 (...)

It is the sexualised component of nature which lifts the mind of the speaker to the eroticised ancient Greek past and the word *symposia* leads the reader to think of Plato's *Symposium*. Along with the mind of the speaker, the mind of the reader is elevated to a different world, the world of the ancient Greeks.

Phidias appears to be lost in thought: he cannot sleep and stays awake in the night, in his atelier. The poem reminds the Cavafian *mise en scène*, since «ο λυχνοστάτης τρίφλογος, στο τρίποδο στητός» can be paralleled with the lit lamp of the Cavafian poem «Απ' τες εννιά» (1918).<sup>179</sup> Both function as mediums for memory and the imagination to be activated and create the proper mystic ambiance for the awakening of the senses. Emphasis is given, for example, in both poems to the sense of smell and «αρώματα», and for sensual feelings of hedone to come to the fore. The speaker in the poem of Cavafy also sits all alone in his own place and appears to be lost in his own thoughts, when:

Το είδωλον του νέου σώματός  
 μου, απ' τες εννιά που άναψα την  
 λάμπα, ήλθε και με ήυρε και με  
 θύμησε κλειστές κάμαρες  
 αρωματισμένες,  
 και περασμένη ηδονή – τι τολμηρή ηδονή!

Through the warmth and the light of Phidias's lamp, appears the statue of the naked young athlete, Pantarkes, and grasps the attention of the sculptor, like another Cavafian «Καισαρίων» (1918):<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 78.

<sup>180</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 84.

(...)

Κι όπως τα μάτια εσήκωσε κ' είδε ψυχή τον  
 Έφηβο χορτάτη  
 απ' την ολύμπια σιγαλιά κι απ' τη νυχτιάν  
 οπόσβηγε μυρωδάτη,

το βλέμμα, οπού της ηδονής συνήθισε ως  
 αιτός το δρόμο,  
 κατέβασε στα στήθια του, στα χέρια, στους λαγόνες του,  
 στον ώμο,

κι αναλογίστη: Ολύμπιον, ω Δία, αν αναστήσω  
 Σε, δική μου ας είν' η χάρη  
 να γράψω μόνο στου ποδιού Σου μια γωνιάν: «Είν'  
 όμορφο ο Παντάρκης παλικάρι! ...»

At the sight of the youth as transmuted in art, Phidias's soul rejoices and illuminates. Sikelianos's choice at this point to use the word «Έφηβος», with an initial capital letter, is not random, since in this way he captures the human and at the same time divine nature of the youth, as well as the admiration and the pure love that the creator feels for his creation and for the youth it respectfully represents. The category of the Ephebes is significantly come across also in the poetry of Cavafy, invested again with a twofold substance: human and divine characteristics; and as such they are admired, loved and adored. Also, the reference to the word «Έφηβος» unites the poem «Παντάρκης» of Sikelianos with the poem «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής» of Cavafy, which has some of the same characteristics. The word endorses something ideal which brings to the mind Plato and his Forms. I assume that both Cavafy and Sikelianos aimed at incorporating within a word the specific Platonic feature and the word «Έφηβος», with a first capital letter serves this purpose in the work of the two poets. This observation reinforces my argument that Cavafy and Sikelianos share the view that even though the reality might be unsatisfactory, someone can always 'elevate' their mind to the ideal; Plato's theory on homoerotic love represents the ideal.



The viewing of the statue stimulates the sculptor and allows feelings of admiration and *hedone* to grow. The gaze of the sculptor playfully wanders around all the parts of Pantarkes's body and desire increases. The hedonic stimulus that Phidias experiences at the view of his creation and through the artistic process itself his statue which represents the ideal Beauty of the epebe Pantarkes, may be compared with the Cavafian poems «Τυανεύς Γλύπτης» (1911)<sup>181</sup>, «Ενώπιον του αγάλματος του Ενδυμίωνος» (1916)<sup>182</sup>, where the speaker of each poem gets stimulated and relives hedonic moments at the view of a statue or of an image.

Following the same Platonic line is also the poem «Τυανεύς Γλύπτης» (1918). The speaker of the poem is a sculptor from Tyana, who, according to his words, is famous for his statues. In the poem he makes reference to his creations, of which he is proud, and mentions the care, dedication, love and attention to detail which characterises his sculpting. The attitude that the sculptor holds towards his work is reminiscent of Socrates's references in the *Symposium* to the tendency of human beings and especially poets and other craftsmen to pursue immortality through the work that they leave behind. The last stanza of the poem reads as follows:

Μα να το έργον μου το πιο αγαπητό

που δούλεψα συγκινημένα και το πιο προσεκτικά· αυτόν, μια μέρα του καλοκαιριού  
θερμή

που ο νους μου ανέβαινε στα ιδανικά,

αυτόν εδώ ονειρεύομουν τον νέον Ερμή.<sup>183</sup>

It is obvious that Cavafy with these last verses brings the poem to its climax and the sculptor utters these words with an explicit emotional peak. The importance of this «νέος Ερμής» is so great for the sculptor that the statue «αισθηματοποιείται» for his creator, using an important verb that Cavafy uses in his poem «Στον ίδιο χώρο»

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<sup>181</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 58.

<sup>182</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 80.

<sup>183</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 60.

(1929)<sup>184</sup>:

«Σε δημιούργησα μες σε χαρά και μες σε λύπες: με τόσα περιστατικά, με τόσα πράγματα.

«Κ' αισθηματοποιήθηκες ολόκληρο, για μένα».<sup>185</sup>

The thrill that the sculptor feels when he views this specific statue shall be compared with the feelings of the speaker of the poem «Κάτω απ' το σπίτι», who, when wandering around the house where he enjoyed the man of his erotic feelings confesses that «η υπόστασίς μου όλη απέδιδε την φυλαχθείσα ηδονική συγκίνηση», whereas the nearby surroundings «αμέσως ωραίσθηκαν απ' την γοητεία του έρωτος». It is the Eros that with its «εξάισιαν ισχύν» changes everything. Evidence of this emotional climax in the last stanza of «Τυανεύς Γλύπτης» is the characterisation, «το πιο αγαπητό», which is ascribed to the statue, but mostly the adverbs «συγκινημένα» and «προσεκτικά», which produce and increase it.

In this poem, the viewing of the statue of Hermes and the warmth of such a summer day pushes up the mind of the sculptor to the realm of the Ideal: «ο νους μου ανέβαινε στα ιδανικά». The Platonic undertones of the verse are evident. The verb «ανέβαινε» is not put here accidentally, since it also creates the feeling of an ascent, of a progression to perfection.

The verb «ονειρεύομουν» which we come across in the following verse «αυτόν εδώ ονειρεύομουν τον νέον Ερμή» indicates that, in the same way that the can become conscious and denatured into the form of a dream, similarly, according to Plato, the soul can remember in this life the ideal love with a God that a human being experienced in the pre-existence. Instead of the verb «ονειρεύομουν» we could come across in the same place the verb «ενθυμούμουν», a strongly Platonic verb, which is significantly often found in the homosexual poetry of Cavafy which places emphasis on the erotic functions of memory. In the poem «Επέστρεφε» (1912), for example, we come across the verses:

<sup>184</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 196.

<sup>185</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 196.

κ' επιθυμία παλιά ξαναπερνά στο αίμα· όταν τα χείλη και το δέρμα ενθουμούνται, κ' αισθάνονται τα χέρια σαν ν' αγγίζουν πάλι. Επέστρεφε συχνά και παίρνε με την νύχτα, όταν τα χείλη και το δέρμα ενθουμούνται. <sup>186</sup>

Finally, the adjective «νέος» which is applied to describe Hermes might also have a Platonic connection, in the sense that a 'new' Hermes presupposes an 'old' Hermes; therefore, the 'old' Hermes is the ancient Greek God that the sculptor had in mind, 'remembered' in his own way and tried to fuse his ideal Beauty in the statue that he created, in his effort to make it as similar to his ideal God as possible. This 'new' Hermes is made following the sculptor's aim to recreate the ideal Beauty and Form that he somehow experienced again as a soul without a body in the pre-existential phase, according to the Platonic myth of the *Symposium*.

A special reference has to be made to the admiration that the sculptor shows for the parts of Pantarkes' body. What Sikelianos does at this point is a technique that Cavafy would not proceed to, as Seferis noted. On the other hand, Cavafy would proceed to a description of the beloved's facial characteristics, like his eyes and his lips, avoiding becoming more sexually explicit and direct by referring to specific body members. On the contrary, Sikelianos reference to the «λαγόνες» of the youth is indicative of the fact that the sculptor looks improperly – or at least frankly – at the young man.

A second and very important level of analysis and interpretation is interwoven in the last two stanzas of the poem; surprisingly, it has not been the subject of the critics' attention. The references to the «αιτός» and to Zeus suggest and leave the world of ancient Greek mythology wide open for the reader. More specifically, the two words function as key-words which hint at and 'unlock' in the poem the most known homoerotic incident of the ancient Greek mythology: the abduction of Ganymede. According to the myth, Ganymede was the prince of Troy and a youth very famous for his exquisite physical appearance. Zeus fell in love with him, transformed into an eagle, abducted Ganymede and brought him to Olympus in

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<sup>186</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 72.

order to constantly be close to him, making him immortal.<sup>187</sup>

This myth attracted the interest and the attention of many creators, who tried to capture into their art the supreme beauty of the youth and his abduction by Zeus, an extreme move which was the symbol of extreme lust. As Blanshard comments:

Plato accused the Cretans of inventing the story to legitimise pederastic desire. In the *Phaedrus* Plato argued that there was nothing sexual in this story, the ascension of Ganymede was a metaphor for the pure souls' love of divine beauty.<sup>188</sup>

Sikelianos goes along with this interpretation of Plato and attempts as a creator himself, to incorporate it into his poem and specifically as the key for the interpretation of the last two stanzas of his poem. He compares the ideal beauty of Pantarkes with the ideal beauty of Ganymedes, which could make even Gods become erotically 'possessed' and fall madly in love, in the way that Plato very tangibly describes in *Phaedrus*. Sikelianos' choice to compare Pantarkes with Ganymede is innovative and characteristic, since in the Cavafian poetry the handsome protagonists might be compared to Hyacinthus or Endymion but not to Ganymede. It has to be noted that the figure of Ganymede has been captured in a much more sexualised way in his artistic depictions, than Hyacinthus and Endymion.

The last stanza of the poem reveals the identity of the sculptor; the protagonist of the poem is Phidias, who, according to the myth, undertook the task of creating a huge statue of Zeus at the temple of Olympian Zeus in Athens. Therefore, Sikelianos' craftiness is identified in the fact that he represents Phidias, in taking charge of this task, becoming Zeus himself; In the same way that Zeus was tortured by erotic feelings for Ganymede and he wanted to take action and he did, Phidias also is lashed by his own erotic possession about Pantarkes and the only way to

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<sup>187</sup> For more information on the appropriation of the myth of Ganymede see Blanshard, *Sex Vice and love from Antiquity to Modernity*, 131-133.

<sup>188</sup> Blanshard, *Sex: Vice and love from Antiquity to Modernity*, 131.

express it and set himself and his feelings free is to proceed to the action that he has in mind and write the expression on the feet of the statue of Zeus. In doing so, Sikelianos displays Phidias as a sort of victim who, simultaneously with this undertaking of the creation of the statue of Zeus, also undertakes the burden to carry off the Father of the Gods' purpose and task, and release, through his art, not only his own erotic tension, but Zeus' as well.

But the analysis of the last stanza should not be restricted, since before our eyes lies a third level of interpretation and approach to the meaning of the poem; We, the readers, know that the famous statue of Zeus that Phidias created was taken away from the temple and transferred to Constantinople, around AD 391. There, in AD 462, it was destroyed by a fire. Consequently, Sikelianos, with his writing, tries himself to resurrect («αναστήσει») not only the statue, but the erotic feelings and instincts of both Zeus for Ganymede and Phidias for Pantarkes. The same happens with the poetry of Cavafy, who again tries to relive, through his writing and his memory, erotic meetings and feelings of lust. The origins of this technique may again be interpreted via a Platonic lens. Plato holds that creators share a major common characteristic: their seeking for immortality through their work which constitutes monuments of themselves. Their Eros for ideal beauty survives death through the medium of their works.

Last but not least, I would like to refer to the interplay which occurs with the triptych of the words «παις (motto) – Έφηβος – παλικάρι». I argued elsewhere on the significance of the word «Έφηβος», stated with a capital E, which includes both divine and human innuendos and it could be paralleled to an extent with the Platonic ideal *Μορφαί*, in the same way that Cavafy also uses the word in his poetic and erotic manifesto of «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής». Yet, the similarity which «παῖς» and «παλικάρι» have has to be pointed out at this point. They are definitely words which do not include a divine substance; not only they refer only to the human aspect of the beloved person, but also the element of sensuality and eroticisation within them is quite increased.

The ending of the poem with the reference «ο Παντάρκης παλικάρι» is a translation of the motto «ο παις καλός». Therefore, the poem acquires a circular

impetus and, in doing so, not only it comes closer to Cavafy as far as this technique is concerned (the last line comes to explain or repeat the title – in this case, the motto), but also in terms of the *σκαίος έρωσ* that moves towards the orders of *Πάνδημος Αφροδίτη*, according to Plato. Having said that, the «Παντάρκης παλικάρι» acquires tangible characteristics, like those of the Cavafian «πλατωνικός Χαρμίδης».<sup>189</sup> Sikelianos was to return to the homoerotic aspect of Plato in a later phase of his career, marked not only by personal setbacks, but by the tragic death of a leading Plato scholar.<sup>190</sup> Sikelianos dedicates a poem to Ioannes Sykoutres.<sup>191</sup> The poem constitutes an encomium to the dead Sykoutres (1901-1937), who made a considerable scholarly research, analysis and translation of ancient Greek literature. Among other studies, we owe to Sykoutres the first adequate critical translation into Modern Greek of Plato's *Symposium*, published in 1934. What has to be emphasised at this point, is the fact that Sykoutres came in for a 'war' against him, having to do with the introduction of his translation of the *Symposium* and mainly his clear references to the feature of pederasty in ancient Greece. A massive wave of negative criticism was aroused against him, which was initiated and strongly represented by other scholars, the journal «Επιστημονική Ηχώ» and, of course, the Church. The culmination of the reactions against him was the fact that he was «διαφθορέας των ηθών», as another Socrates, and of being a homosexual himself. Sykoutres' response to his categories came with the publication of his famous text «Η εκστρατεία κατά του Συμποσίου. Τα κείμενα και οι κολουροπώλαι», published in 1937. Yet in the same year, being devastated, among others, by the extremely negative criticism and attack, he committed suicide at the young age of 36. It was, therefore, to be expected that Sikelianos, with his admiration for Ancient Greece and Plato, would have been intrigued, challenged and inspired by

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<sup>189</sup> A similar interplay to the one of these three terms (παις-Έφηβος-παλικάρι) in «Παντάρκης» we come across in the poem of Cavafy «Μέρες του 1909, '10 και '11».

<sup>190</sup> In his poetic collection «Νέκυια Β'», including poems written between the years 1930 and 1945. It has to be clarified that, along with «Αφροδίτη Ουρανία», the poetic collection «Νέκυια Β'» was made up of poems from this specific period, but was not conceived as a whole.

<sup>191</sup> Maria Athanasopoulou in her book about the Greek sonnet, has pointed out the importance of this particular poem for Sikelianos and for the interpretation of his whole oeuvre: Maria Athanasopoulou, *Το Ελληνικό Σονέτο (1895-1936): Μια Μελέτη Ποιητικής* (Thessaloniki: University Studio Press, 2011), 183-188. Angelos Sikelianos, *Λυρικός Βίος, Ε'* (Athens: Ikaros, 1968), 11.

the case of Sykoutres. I shall argue that Sikelianos utilises both Cavafy and Sykoutres as the 'bridges', roughly speaking, to reach the ancient Greek past and Plato, specifically, as one of its greatest philosophers and representatives.

The poem reads as follows:

Στο μυστικόν ανήφορο τον ύστερο που επήρες  
ψηλά στον Ακροκόρινθο, να ξάστραψαν μπροστά Σου,  
ως στην κορφή της Άσκησης, σα να 'ταν μια οι τρεις  
Μοίρες Α, πώς εχτύπα δυνατά, την ώρ' αυτή, η καρδιά  
Σου !

Κάτου στον κάμπο ταπεινές φωνές, πικρές και  
στείρες, στη χλαλοή τους έσμιγαν ανόσια τ' όνομά  
Σου.

Απάνω εκεί, σα ν' άνοιγαν οι αιώνιες του  
Πηγάσου φτερούγες, του άνεμου γλυκά πως  
έπαιζαν οι λύρες !

Κι α ! πώς θε να 'ταν δυνατό, σα γύριζες και  
πάλι στον όχλο, για την άνιση που σε  
καρτέραε πάλι, όλο Σου το αίμα μονομιά  
ξοπίσω να μη φύγει,

με την ιερή που Σ' το θρεψε Πλατωνική μανία,

βαθιά προς την απόκρυφη του Ηράκλειτου Αρμονία

που απάνω κι απ' το θάνατο την αφουγκρώνται οι Λίγοι;

In a Cavafian manner, the poem of Sikelianos reaches its climax in the lines of the last stanza. The poet in these lines refers to the 'holy' blood of Sykoutres, which is permeated throughout by the Platonic madness. The reference to this kind of madness is not random, since with this reference Sikelianos alludes to Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*, where Socrates holds that the human being who falls in love acts as if they are mad, but this madness is to be considered a divine gift and not a

negative characteristic of a person who foolishly falls in love («μανίας, θεία μέντοι δόσει δεδομένης»). In like manner, Sikelianos displays Sykoutres as possessed; in doing so hinting at his detractors who accused him, as Socrates was accused, of 'corrupting the youth'. Sikelianos comes to support Sykoutres and displays him being possessed by a divine gift. This divine gift is Sykoutres's talent and charisma in the accuracy of his work. He appears to be in a very intimate relationship with his work, as if he is in love, in the 'divine' sense, mentioned in *Phaedrus*. Along with «Πλατωνική μανία», Sikelianos admires Sykoutres also for his knowledge and application of «του Ηρακλείτου Αρμονία». At this point, Sikelianos refers to the philosophical theory of Heraclitus, who held that the balance comes as a result of a battle of opposites; this fight can be internal or external, between the opposite powers and tendencies existing inside all human beings and reflected at the same time in the external world. It has to be pointed out that the reference to Heraclitus in a way weakens the Platonic focus of the poem, perhaps showing that Sikelianos is a bit inhibited over the homoeroticism issue,<sup>192</sup> unless we read the Heraclitus point as a quiet pointing to bisexuality, with «Λίγοι» echoing Cavafy's use of the initiates.

Sykoutres appears to be one of the 'few', of «οι Λίγοι», who comprehend and are characterised by these two philosophical features; they combine the 'Platonic madness' with the 'Heraclitean harmony' and therefore they reach the top point of the hierarchy of the ideal citizens, a peak which is occupied by philosophers and poets, according to Plato's *Symposium* and *Republic*. These few people shall be also identified with the 'initiates' of Cavafy, with whom they have the same characteristics: Platonic madness, Heraclitean harmony, authentic and free expression of themselves and their feelings and pure, conscious devotion to hedone. This hedone is mental of course in the case of Sykoutres. Yet, Sikelianos admires in Sykoutres the fact that he is a pure admirer of ancient Greek Eros, which considers hedone as a great deal.

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<sup>192</sup> Plato had also supported a similar ideology in his *Symposium* with the myth of the threefold soul: the soul has three parts; the first one appears to be a charioteer and the other two appear to be two horses, but totally antithetical. The white horse is prudent and obeys its master, whereas the black horse is arrogant and does as it wishes. This inner fight takes place inside every human being at the view of the person who is the object of their Eros.



### Yorgos Ioannou: «δούλος ιερός του έρωτα»

As a teacher of Modern Greek philology and a translator of ancient Greek literature, Ioannou was greatly interested in and knew ancient Greek literature and thought well and especially the *Palatine Anthology*, from which he was later to translate. The importance that Ioannou gives to it is obvious from the fact that when asked about his most important work he referred to his translations from ancient Greek.<sup>193</sup>

However, Ioannou's attitude towards the ancient Greek tradition and Plato, as a major representative of this tradition, is radically different from that of Cavafy and Sikelianos; he follows a different line. As I will argue, Ioannou may in fact be seen as an anti-Platonic writer, using the *Palatine Anthology* by preference as a more realistic counter-balance to idealised notions of 'Greek love'.

This is a conscious decision, based on his wider opinion about tradition and the ancient Greek past. When asked in an interview about his opinion about tradition Ioannou gave the following strongly worded response:

Νομίζω ότι έχουν επιβιώσει λίγα πράγματα, από κείνα που άλλοτε κυριαρχούσαν, από τους «τρόπους» που θεράπευαν τις υλικές και πνευματικές ανάγκες και παραδίνονταν αθόρυβα, απ' τη μια γενιά στην άλλη. Καλό είναι λοιπόν να τα προσέξουμε, να τα μάθουμε. Δεν νομίζω πως αναβιώνονται. Το πολιτιστικό και οικονομικό πλαίσιο εκείνης της εποχής έχει πέσει σ' ερείπια. Μια «αναβίωση» είναι σχεδόν γελοία, αφού δεν εκφράζει πια τίποτα. (...). Κι αυτό είναι ανίερο.<sup>194</sup>

Taking a realistic approach, Ioannou argues that emphasis should be given to the creation and cultivation of a Modern Greek civilisation, rather than the revival of

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<sup>193</sup> Yorgos Ioannou, *Ο Λόγος είναι μεγάλη ανάγκη της ψυχής (1974-1985)*, ed. Yorgos Anastasiades (Athens: Kedros, 1996), 28.

<sup>194</sup> Ioannou, *Ο Λόγος είναι μεγάλη ανάγκη της ψυχής*, 94.

the ancient Greek past. At the same time, Ioannou's ideal Modern Greek civilisation should keep and exploit some of the elements of the ancient Greek past:

Δεν πιστεύω κατ' αρχήν πως αυτός ο νέος ελληνικός πολιτισμός, που τόσο τον έχουμε ανάγκη, είναι τόσο ανύπαρκτος όσο λέμε. Ίσως είναι ακόμα στο πλάσιμό του, ίσως δεν τον έχουμε συνειδητοποιήσει, αλλά υπάρχει. Δεν πιστεύω ακόμα πως η δημιουργία του μπορεί να στηριχθεί στην παράδοση. Να ενισχυθούν τα στοιχεία που έχουν επιβιώσει, να τα μελετήσουμε και να τα αποκτήσουμε, αφού περάσουν απ' τους ψυχικούς μας μαιάνδρους, κι όχι να κολλήσουμε πάνω σ' αυτά σαν χαλκομανίες. Να περάσουν δηλαδή απ' όλα τα κόσκινα κι ό,τι μένει.<sup>195</sup>

Especially in the case of Ioannou, I would like to apply and employ a term which to my knowledge has never been used, either in the study of Modern Greek literature, or in studies of the work of Ioannou. In 1997 Wilhelm Emilsson published his doctoral thesis entitled *Epicurean aestheticism: De Quincey, Pater, Wilde, Stoppard*.<sup>196</sup> In the Introduction, Emilsson proceeds to a very interesting distinction between what he calls Epicurean Aestheticism as opposed to Platonic Aestheticism:

In this thesis I examine a neglected sensibility I call 'Epicurean Aestheticism' and argue that since this temperament is characterised by a willingness to adapt to the flux of modernity it must be distinguished from the more familiar, escapist form of Aestheticism I call 'Platonic Aestheticism'. While Platonic Aesthetes continue the Romantic attempt of trying to counter modernity with a variety of idealist and absolutist philosophies, Epicurean Aesthetes adopt materialistic and relativistic strategies in their desire to make the most of modern life.<sup>197</sup>

As opposed to Cavafy and Sikelianos, who could be characterised based on specific writings as Platonic Aesthetes, Ioannou is clearly, with his individual and innovative approach, an Epicurean Aesthete. His homoerotic writings have nothing to

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<sup>195</sup> Ioannou, *Ο Λόγος είναι μεγάλη ανάγκη της ψυχής*, 95.

<sup>196</sup> Wilhelm Emilsson, *"Epicurean aestheticism: De Quincey, Pater, Wilde, Stoppard"* (PhD diss., The University of British Columbia, 1997).

<sup>197</sup> Emilsson, *"Epicurean aestheticism"*, 27.

do with a romantic approach or with homoeroticism as connected with an elevating feature. On the other hand, in his writings connected with the ancient Greek past we see a representation of wittily raw language and description, very down-to-earth. By combining characteristics of his predecessors, Cavafy and Sikelianos, his efforts lean to the direction of pointing out and acknowledging the fact that homosexual love should be dealt in even terms with heterosexual love; he seeks for equality and not for superiority and spirituality, committed to the human needs of homosexuals in Greek society. Even though he appreciates the ancient Greek Eros and acknowledges its importance, he consciously wants to cut the bonds, which he believes force us to go backwards. In doing so, Ioannou decides to enter a new dialogue with the *Palatine Anthology*, with its sometimes provocative eroticism. He shows in this way an ironic stance towards the romanticism and the idealism of the Greek love of Plato.

It was the genre of prose which gave Ioannou the opportunity to cultivate his own voice as a writer. In his prose he chose to write in a more 'open' and explicit way than in his poetry. Therefore, even though Ioannou was at an earlier point in his career the prisoner of a false sort of Platonism, he hereafter clearly begins to follow his own path and find his own original characteristics as a writer: even though he remains close to his Modern Greek influences and allies, he consciously wants to cut the bonds with the ancient Greek past. It should not be far-fetched to support that Platonism in Modern Greek literature is more cultivated under repression, as it seems that Ioannou dares to translate from the *Palatine Anthology*, once he leaves his job and in the more indulgent atmosphere of the «μεταπολίτευση». It is in 1979 that Ioannou becomes confident enough about his own Modern Greek identity, without feeling tradition as a burden, but as a creative source of inspiration. Therefore, he decides to proceed to a translation of the pederastic and audacious poems of the twelfth book of the *Palatine Anthology*: *Στράτωνος Μούσα Παιδική*.<sup>198</sup>

Yatromanolakis argues that Ioannou chose to translate specifically the *Μούσα*

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<sup>198</sup> Straton, *Στράτωνος Μούσα Παιδική*, trans. Yorgos Ioannou (Athens: Kedros, 1979).

*Παιδική*, because of his personal interests.<sup>199</sup> He also emphasises Ioannou's own words, according to which he chooses this specific book, because of the «καλλιτεχνική αρτιότητα των επιγραμμάτων» and the «ιδιάζουσα ηθική τους».<sup>200</sup> I would argue, furthermore, that Ioannou chose to translate this specific book because of the close affinity it displays with the Cavafian corpus. My argument is reinforced by the words of Ioannou himself in the Introduction of his translation, where he mentions that:

Η σκληράδα της ζωής στις διάφορες περιπτώσεις και φάσεις της, καθώς και το ερωτικό αδιέξοδο, δίνεται με χίλιους τρόπους, πράγμα που τους χαρίζει γενικότερο πνευματικό και ανθρώπινο ενδιαφέρον, όπως ακριβώς συμβαίνει και με την ποίηση του Κ.Π. Καβάφη.<sup>201</sup>

It seems that Ioannou saw in *Στράτωνος Μούσα Παιδική* what he appreciated most in Cavafy: the variety of the homoerotic scenarios and the expression of an erotic melancholy.<sup>202</sup> What Yatromanolakis argues is that Ioannou's translations of the poems are to be characterised as 're-creations':<sup>203</sup> «Είναι (...) ένα απολύτως προσωπικό κείμενο του Ιωάννου (...) μετά από αυτόν δεν μπορεί κανένας να επαναλάβει το εγχείρημά του».<sup>204</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Yorgis Yatromanolakis, «Ο Γιώργος Ιωάννου ως Μεταφραστής Κλασικών Κειμένων», in *Με τον Ρυθμό της Ψυχής: Αφιέρωμα στον Γιώργο Ιωάννου*, ed. Nasos Vagenas, Yannis Kontos and Ninetta Makrynika (Athens: Kedros, 2006), 284.

<sup>200</sup> Yatromanolakis, *Με τον Ρυθμό της Ψυχής*, 284.

<sup>201</sup> Ioannou, *Στράτωνος Μούσα Παιδική*, 8.

<sup>202</sup> Ioannou studied in depth the affinities of Cavafy with *Στράτωνος Μούσα Παιδική*. In the Third Poetic Symposium, held in Patra (July 1-3, 1983), which was dedicated to Cavafy, Ioannou made a talk entitled «Ο Κ.Π. Καβάφης και το XII βιβλίο της *Παλατινής Ανθολογίας*, ήτοι η *Παιδική Μούσα* του Στράτωνος».

<sup>203</sup> Yatromanolakis, *Με τον Ρυθμό της Ψυχής*, 290.

<sup>204</sup> Yatromanolakis, *Με τον Ρυθμό της Ψυχής*, 290.

It is clear that Ioannou, hidden behind the various ancient Greek writers represented in *AP XII* and their protagonists, experiments with his own homoerotic writing, giving his own traces of expertise. In doing so, he becomes as a writer more and more 'open' and explicit: he studies ancient Greek homoerotic discourse and grows up with its auspices, fully capable of adopting the characteristics of the ancient Greek homoerotic poetry and to give them to the readers combined with modern Greek elements: this concludes with the production and use of words like «καυλωτικός», and so on.

The translation of *Μούσα Παιδική* leads Ioannou to a re-evaluation of the ancient Greek tradition which departs from Plato. It becomes clearer now to his eyes that the ancient Greek homoerotic past and modern Greek homoerotic present have distinct continuities, especially in the obscenity which Cavafy's poems had rejected, in a way that no one else –and definitely not he himself – had understood. Based on the claims of Ioannou about Cavafy in the Introduction of his translation, interestingly, he seems to be emphasising, not the carefree and guilt-free nature of Greek love, as found in the *Palatine Anthology*, as its element of «καημός» such as we find in Cavafy later. It seems that Ioannou has in mind his Cavafian influences when he proceeds to the translation of the poems. As a result of this, we conclude that the poems of the twelfth book of the *Palatine Anthology* are translated through a Cavafian lens and take on a Cavafian nature, rather than their ancient Greek one.

Moreover, Ioannou stresses that from this point onwards he will use the ancient homoerotic tradition at his side to intrigue the readers. In doing so, the translation of *Στράτωνος Μούσα Παιδική* becomes Ioannou's own manifesto and a project which changes his horizons:

Ενίοτε, για λόγους εκφραστικούς, αφήνουμε μέσα στο μεταφρασμένο κείμενο φράσεις ή λέξεις αμετάφραστες. (...) Από μεταφραστικά δείγματα της δουλειάς μας αυτής, που έχουμε κατά καιρούς δώσει, διαπιστώσαμε ότι τα «έξεργα» αυτά ή μάλλον τα τριμμένα αυτά απομεινάρια που ενσωματώνονται εδώ στη νεοελληνική μετάφραση, όπως καμιά φορά συμβαίνει στις αναστηλώσεις με τις κατάφορτες χρόνο και βλέμματα παλιές πέτρες, οι λέξεις, λέγω, αυτές λειτουργούν και θέλγουν τους αναγνώστες.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> Straton, *Mousa Paidike*, 13

Based on this new understanding that he earned through the translation of *Στράτωνος Μούσα Παιδική*, just five years before his death, Ioannou seals his life and the majority of his writing career with his longest poetic synthesis, consisting of four parts: «Δούλος ιερός του έρωτα».<sup>206</sup> To my surprise, scholarly research has neglected this poem and its significance for the interpretation of the poetics of Ioannou. It broadens and specifies simultaneously the horizons and angles of the interpretation of his work, giving us the impression that we clearly hear the poet's voice behind the verses. The reader and the researcher of Ioannou are struck by the extent of the poem; it is indeed the longest poem of Ioannou. Moreover, unlike the rest of his poems, this poem is divided into four parts, as if we have four acts of an ancient tragedy. As opposed to Cavafy, who started with longer poems and moved on with the standard form of his short poems, Ioannou picks up the Cavafian poetic form at the beginning of his poetry and at the end of it chooses to differentiate himself and adopt a more discursive mode of poetry. It is no accident that Ioannou chooses to lengthen this poem, after the mediation of his prose, since he came to the conclusion that he could better fuse his thoughts and feelings into a more discursive mode. In any case, the fact that Ioannou returns to the genre of poetry after his dedication to genres of shorter prose and brings out this poem with this homoerotic subject matter, stresses the importance for the study of this poem, as well as the deconstruction of the myth that Ioannou should be mainly studied as a prose author, rather than as a poet.

The speaker of the poem has a secret relationship with someone who is probably married and definitely in another formal relationship, as one verse indicates: «βάλε το ταίρι σου να μου τα πει ξεκάθαρα».<sup>207</sup> The speaker was away on a trip and now returns, longing for his next assignation with his beloved, feeling possessed with erotic frenzy. Because of the fact that it has been a long time since he enjoyed his beloved's company, his feelings constitute a «μαρτύριο» for him. He confesses that Eros is his priority and all that he constantly thinks about: the beginning of the journey, the journey per se and the destination. All his moves and actions are motivated by his lack and need of Eros and by the fulfilment that he feels in the very thought of his beloved:

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<sup>206</sup> Yorgos Ioannou, *Τα Χίλια Δέντρα και άλλα ποιήματα* (Athens: Kedros, 1988), 97-102.

<sup>207</sup> Ioannou, *Χίλια Δέντρα*, 102.

Γυρνώντας από το  
ταξίδι θα βρω έναν  
έρωτα.  
Πηγαίνοντας στο  
ταξίδι θα βρω έναν  
έρωτα.  
Καλύτερα στο γυρισμό να βρω τον  
έρωτα, να τον φέρω γρήγορα σπίτι.<sup>208</sup>

The speaker appears to be possessed by the «πλατωνική μανία» that Sikelianos mentions in his poem dedicated to Sykoutres. He is burning with the flame of Eros, and it is the absence of the beloved which increases his passion, just as in the *Symposium* Diotima and Socrates declared that human beings experience strong erotic feelings for whom or for what they lack. Following Plato's dialogue *Phaedrus*, the speaker himself considers his erotic madness and torture as a divine gift:

Υποχείριος θάμαι του  
έρωτα. Ποτέ μονάχος πια,  
δούλος ιερός του έρωτα.<sup>209</sup>

It is obvious that in his late poetry, having developed his prose, Ioannou becomes considerably more 'open' and more 'modern', we might say. Most importantly, what he manages to do is to combine elements from both Cavafy and Sikelianos: the reference to himself as a «δούλος ιερός του έρωτα», and I stress the word «ιερός», alludes to the nobility and the respect with which Sikelianos utilises in his work the ancient Greek tradition. Moreover, it moves towards the direction of «Αφροδίτης Ουρανίας», whose Sikelianos, as we have already seen, is a supporter. On the other hand, the speaker confesses that he is «μουλιαγμένος με λαγνείας οράματα», without feeling anymore «την επανάσταση της σαρκός μου». Admittedly, the

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<sup>208</sup> Ioannou, *Χίλια Δέντρα*, 97.

<sup>209</sup> Ioannou, *Χίλια Δέντρα*, 98.

reference to the «λαγνείας οράματα» brings to the mind the Cavafian «ινδάλματα της Ηδονής». The word «λαγνεία» and the explicit reference to the needs of the flesh constitute the main characteristics of the *σκαίος έρως*, which «Αφροδίτη Πάνδημος» represents, according to Plato. This is also the most basic difference of Cavafy and Sikelianos, based on the Platonic views of the homoerotic love that they incorporate into their work. As we have seen, Ioannou's late poetry manages purposefully to distinguish this difference and to exploit in the same poem Platonic elements from both Cavafy and Sikelianos. It seems that Ioannou constitutes the 'bridge' between those two and Plato the 'platform' for this merge to successfully take place.

In his book *Καταπακτή* (1982) Ioannou includes a brief text entitled «Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα»<sup>210</sup>, where he makes a direct reference to the writings of Epicurus on love:

Δεν μπορεί παρά να συμφωνήσει κανείς με τον Επίκουρο, ο οποίος θαυμάζοντας τις παράλογες, ακατάληπτες και ωσάν μαγικές κραυγές, που βγάζουν οι άνθρωποι κατά τη στιγμή του έρωτά τους, τις αποκαλεί «ιερά ανακραυγάσματα».<sup>211</sup>

Ioannou gives emphasis on this expression, «ιερά ανακραυγάσματα», because of their simultaneous internal and external function. Ioannou explains that when a man unconsciously and genuinely screams at the moment of erotic climax, a «ξέφρενη τελετουργία»<sup>212</sup> takes place: the screams which come out of the man's mouth return to him through his ears and are transferred to all the main organs of the body, making the man even more excited, aroused and capable of an erotic climax.<sup>213</sup> Interestingly enough, Ioannou uses a Platonic expression in order to describe the man's ultimate erotic exaltation and production of these screams:

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<sup>210</sup> Yorgos Ioannou, «Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα», in *Καταπακτή* (Athens: Gnose, 1982), 27-30.

<sup>211</sup> Ioannou, «Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα», 27.

<sup>212</sup> Ioannou, «Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα», 29.

<sup>213</sup> Ioannou, «Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα», 28



«ωσάν από ιερή μανία κατελιημμένους».<sup>214</sup> What Ioannou does at this moment is a direct employment of what it has characterised as 'Epicurean Aestheticism': Aestheticism is brought down to earth from the Platonic ideals and is ascribed, following the Epicurean writings, with a more carnal flavour. I have a strong sense that Ioannou at this point brings to the table a direct reference to the Platonic ideal only to cancel it at the same time, since it employs the Platonic comparison into an Epicurean context of ideas on Eros. In this vein, he follows the traces of the Cavafian legacy, who was the first who delineated this feature and elaborated it, in the poem [Την ψυχὴν ἐπὶ χεῖλεσιν ἔσχον]. However, at the same time, Ioannou cultivates this idea and notion to a greater extent, building on the Cavafian legacy and appears to be, in doing so, clearly anti-Platonic; he leans towards Epicurean Aestheticism.

In the same sense that in [Την ψυχὴν ἐπὶ χεῖλεσιν ἔσχον] it is as if through the kiss the protagonist tries to transfer his soul to his beloved,<sup>215</sup> in this short text Ioannou proceeds to a similar expression of an image, presented in a raw, carnal way, having nothing to do with the «ψευδοαισθηματική ποίηση». These «ιερά ανακραυγάσματα» are finally transferred to the phallus, as if they are the blood which gathers in the area and creates the erection. And through the phallus they want to enter the other person, they want to be transferred into the foreign flesh. This is the external ritual which takes place at the time of the erotic climax:

«Γι' αυτό ο έρωτας είναι ένωση, γιατί το αίμα κάνει κύκλωμα μέσα από το άλλο σώμα και κουρασμένο ξανάρχεται στο δικό του.»<sup>216</sup>

In a rather Cavafian manner which recalls the famous Cavafian line of the poem «Απολείπειν ο θεός Αντώνιον» (1918)<sup>217</sup>: «με φωνές εξαίσιες, με κραυγές»,<sup>218</sup> Ioannou refers to the «ιερά ανακραυγάσματα» as «οι εξαίσιες εκείνες κραυγές, τα

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<sup>214</sup> Ioannou, «*Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα*», 28-29.

<sup>215</sup> It would be very interesting for someone to conduct a comparative study in conjunction with the importance of the kiss and lips in Whitman.

<sup>216</sup> Ioannou, «*Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα*», 28.

<sup>217</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 34.

<sup>218</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 34.

ανεπανάληπτα ιερά ανακραυγάσματα».<sup>219</sup> At the same time he proceeds to a delineation of the power of discourse, through a comparison of the hedonic value of these shouts with the hedonic value of the words. In doing so, writing is assimilated with an erotic intercourse, an erotic ritual. Therefore, aside from a redemptive function, as I will support in my chapter about homoeroticism and sinfulness, emphasis is also given on the erotic –indeed hedonic- ecstasis that can be ascribed through, or rather beyond words.

Ioannou's ending of the text «Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα» with the encouraging line «Μακάριοι οι πιστοί στα ιερά ανακραυγάσματα κάποιας βραδιάς»<sup>220</sup> reinforces the notion of the 'initiates' to the authentic ritual of love making and also shall be compared with the commands of Cavafy's poem in prose «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής», where people are encouraged to experience *hedone* as much as possible, without committing to any laws, prohibitions or prejudices.

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<sup>219</sup> Ioannou, «Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα», 29.

<sup>220</sup> Ioannou, «Ιερά Ανακραυγάσματα», 30.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have read key poems by Cavafy, Sikelianos and Ioannou, in the terms of their engagement with ancient Greek tradition, a topic which sheds important light on the theme of homoeroticism in their work. Therefore, I have tried to provide answers to questions such as whether Modern Greek authors face ancient Greek tradition as a burden and as a restrictive force which defines their own production, and consequently, if they move forward following the direction that their ancestors gave them or if they consciously differentiate themselves and provide traces of their own original modern Greek voice. In order to better illustrate my conclusions, I shall take each author separately, giving my concluding findings, proceed to comparative observations between them and sum up, as I will do for each of the following chapters of my thesis.

The relationship of Cavafy with poetic tradition is stated by the poet himself and it has been noted in the relevant section of this chapter. As Rena Zamarou argues in her monograph about Plato's influence on Cavafy, if there is no extensive research for their kinship this is due to the coded nature of the relationship. In fact, in his explicit comments about Plato, Cavafy appears to disagree with specific points of Plato's philosophy and ideology. Therefore, as an addition to Zamarou's arguments, I have argued that Cavafy does not simply adopt Platonic views, but engages in a dialogue with writings and exploit it in the way that he believes it is more appropriate. Therefore, he steps on the Platonic views on homoerotic love, but unites them with his own views on the topic, and in doing so provides a more legitimate and validated version of Plato, according to Cavafy. On the other hand, I shall also state that Cavafy roughly speaking disagrees with Plato's views on the position of poets and poetry in an ideal society, as well as with Plato's opinion on the importance of the pre-Socratic poets, something which he states clearly. Therefore, to do justice to his ancient Greek ancestor, he uses in his poetry the part of Plato's ideology with which he agrees; his views on homoerotic love. I have argued that Cavafy's homoerotic poetry is implicitly and constantly permeated by Platonic ideology on homoerotic love, at the relevant section. I come to the conclusion that, for Cavafy, Plato is an ally

very important and distinct, who has not been extensively discussed in Zamarou's monograph, even though clearly hinted out with the poems «Ἐν πόλει της Οσροηνής» (1917) and [Την ψυχὴν ἐπὶ χεῖλεσιν ἔσχον].

The inclusion of Sikelianos in a chapter like this one and within a thesis of this sort may cause some surprise, in the same way that reaction might be caused for the inclusion of Ritsos. What are the reasons for this possible reaction? Apparently, the fact that Sikelianos happens to be a heterosexual poet, married for many years and a poet who has hymned the love for women to a great extent in his work. Therefore, the observation that Sikelianos has homoerotic poems as well is indeed a surprising observation that, roughly speaking, has never been clearly stated. Of course, there has already been a study of some of his poems and specifically of «Παντάρκης», as compared with some Cavafian homoerotic poems, namely «Τυανεύς Γλύπτης» (1911) and «Εικῶν εικοσιτριετούς νέου καμωμένη ἀπὸ φίλον του ομήλικα ερασιτέχνην» (1928), which, in doing so, brought to the fore the presence of homoerotic elements in the work of Sikelianos.

But what has never before been argued is that Sikelianos himself suggests a homoerotic reading of his sequence «Ἀφροδίτης Ουρανίας», something which is implied by the title of the sequence as well as by the motto «ὁ παῖς καλός» of the poem «Παντάρκης». This and some other poems by Sikelianos can be read in a homoerotic way or – at least – in a homosocial way; it is this interpretation and invention of the 'queer' Sikelianos that shall be considered innovative and one of the major contributions of this chapter. The existence of a 'queer' Sikelianos has an explanation; like Ritsos, Sikelianos is pan-ecumenical and pan-erotic and it is under these all-encompassing terms that a 'queer' perspective is not only validated, but also required.

The case of Ioannou seems to be far more conflicted than the one of Cavafy and Sikelianos. This occurs because the path of his writing career includes many genres (poetry, prose, translation) and at each different period and genre of his writing he distinctly follows different tendencies regarding this issue, including a tendency to realism, which may seem to be at odds with a Platonic idealisation of eros. He experiments extensively in his attempt to figure out and define his own

characteristic way of writing and he proves to be multi-faced. Therefore, in studying his work I took into significant consideration the chronological order of the writings as well as the genre to which they belong, coming to an amount of specific overall conclusions.

Ioannou, influenced by Cavafy to a great extent, begins his work by writing poetry. He follows the Cavafian poetic form of short poems, with lyrics which lean more to prose, without the feature of rhyme in most of his poetic corpus. Following Cavafy again, as far as the content is concerned, Ioannou's poetry is reserved and transfers the torturing feelings of a 'closeted', protagonist, who struggles in his guilt, in his shame and in his search for approval from society. It is in this sort of poetry, indebted to Cavafy's, that Ioannou proceeds to the use of elements of the Platonic ideology of homoerotic love.

In his prose, Ioannou becomes more revealing and therefore less Platonic, since the glorious ancient Greek past and its representative ancestors are not needed any more; Ioannou stops seeking validation and definition of the Modern Greek homoeroticism by moving backwards and emphasising its glorious ancient Greek origins. Consciously and purposefully, he decides that his homoerotic voice as a writer has to cut its bonds with the past, which was previously used as a cover, and has to be ascribed and attributed a more modern identity, based on the contemporary.

In 1979, towards the end of his career Ioannou as a writer became more 'mature' and produced a bold translation of the *Μούσα Παιδική*. This constituted the boldest example of his effort to modernise Modern Greek homoerotic literature through recourse to the ancient past. In his translation, he uses tradition as a foundation to create and express his own modern voice. This is a feature that he clearly attempts to cultivate in his prose as well, leaving behind the tradition as much as possible, and experimenting with his expression in new paths. The new genre (prose) comes also with new writing techniques and horizons.

It is, I believe, in his 1980 poem, «Δούλος Ιερός του Έρωτα», that Ioannou most

fully marks out his homoerotic voice, combining his experimentations in different genres and his ancient and Modern Greek influences. This poem is both his most Platonic and the most Cavafian; the protagonist clearly states that he feels like a «δούλος ιερός του έρωτα», in a Platonic manner, whereas this ancient Greek originated feeling is ascribed to every day modern Greek situations, in a Cavafian manner. Therefore, Ioannou's craftiness manages to capture, at the end, within his homoerotic discourse, a realistic approach, which, at the same time, carries along with it the ideal Platonic and ancient Greek utopianism.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Homoeroticism and the Notion of Sin**

#### **Introduction**

We may question it, we may find it self-glorifying or self-excusing, we may search for errors of fact in it, yet we regard it in its own terms – precisely, as a confession – as true to the self in ways that other discourses never can be.<sup>221</sup>

In the part of Chapter 1 discussing Ioannou, it becomes evident that it is in fact hard to disentangle an idea of ancient ‘Greek love’ from the language and preoccupations of Christianity. However, in this chapter I provide a new approach to the homosexually orientated writings of Cavafy, Lapathiotis, Christianopoulos, Ioannou and Ritsos as associated with the strict religious environment of the Greek Orthodox setting. My aim is to discuss how, throughout their oeuvre, homoeroticism is intertwined with what may too simply be described as their religious feelings, emerging from their upbringing. Greek Orthodoxy has always been a strong opponent of homoeroticism. Quite recently, in 2016, the Archbishop of Cyprus Chrysostomos II made some provocative statements, arousing many discussions around the regressive attitude of the Greek Orthodox Church regarding homosexuality, characterizing homosexuality as «φρούτο που πρέπει να αντιμετωπιστεί», and homosexuals as «ξετσίπωντους». He has also mentioned the ‘need’ for schools to be created that they fight the ‘anomaly’ of homosexuality.<sup>222</sup>

This example is representative of the Church’s austere attitude towards homosexuals and of the fact that the Church is an institution which for Greeks commands particular respect and authority and is associated with the very idea of being Greek. In the wider world, there has been much academic discussion

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<sup>221</sup>Peter Brooks, *Troubling Confessions: Speaking Guilt in Law and Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 110-111.

<sup>222</sup>«Αρχιεπίσκοπος για ομοφυλοφιλία: «φρούτο» που πρέπει να αντιμετωπιστεί». Politis online, 01 November, 2016, <http://politis.com.cy/article/archiepiskopos-gia-omofilofilia-frouto-pou-prepi-na-antimetopisti> (assessed in 16/01/2018).

concerning an admittedly ‘hot’ topic: homosexuality and religion.<sup>223</sup> Even though the topic of Christianity and homosexuality has attracted scholarly research worldwide as well as in Greece,<sup>224</sup> there is a lack of scholarly analysis regarding the ways in which Greek literature captures the relationship between homosexuality and religion. This chapter aspires to provide an approach to this less-examined topic. My discussion is not primarily biographical: I do not aim at examining my writers’ relation to Greek Orthodoxy outside of their writings, though I shall make references to relevant aspects of their lives. Yet, these writings, covering the period from the late nineteenth century to today, show more continuity than change in the tension between Orthodoxy and homoeroticism. I study the writers having in mind this context and what circumstances they are writing in. I point out their confrontation and, more interestingly, their subversive adaptation of the Church’s view of homoeroticism as «αμαρτία» and «κουσούρι». This feeling of presenting and promoting -through their work- disapproved actions and thoughts, can be the root of powerful paradoxes in creative writing.

The conceptual framework I seek to employ in this chapter draws on Orthodox praxis itself and in particular the notion of confession. Confession, in a loose sense, but sometimes as connected with sacramental confession in particular, occurs as an imperative need for the writers, both as an honest urge and as an artifact to create their own form of literature. In doing so, I emphasise such writers’ views on the redemptive function of writing.

At this point, reference should be made to Yip’s studies, whose results help to discuss the paradigms of Modern Greek writers. Yip holds that being gay and being Christian are ‘two social roles’, to which different characteristics are ascribed, making them in most cases incompatible. The attitude of these Greek writers, however, can

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<sup>223</sup> See for example the books: *Homoeroticism and Religion*, edited by Richard Hasbany (1989), *Coming out in Christianity: Religion, Identity and Community*, by Melissa M. Wilcox (2003).

<sup>224</sup> See Richard Griffiths, *The Pen and the Cross: Catholicism and English Literature: 1850-2000* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010). As far as Greek Orthodoxy and Literature are concerned, scholarly research has to display the book *Πίστη και νεοελληνική λογοτεχνία: Η αναζήτηση του Θεού στη λογοτεχνία μας* (1990) which is the only collective book so far to my knowledge.



be taken to prove the opposite, since in their mind both 'roles' are faced as pieces constituting parts of the puzzle of their identity. While Christianity sees homoeroticism as an enemy and a sin, writers from devout backgrounds like Ioannou, Christianopoulos and Ritsos appear to acknowledge that in some sense their lives are lived in a Christian framework. At the same time, that the homosexual aspect in their oeuvre is dynamically there, exactly as with their religious feelings which are undeniable in their work – despite the fact that none of these writers tend to be approached in relation to Christianity or by critics with a strong Orthodox allegiance.

In the article 'Attacking the attacker: gay Christians talk back'<sup>225</sup> Yip studies the cases of sixty gay male Christians in partnership. His conclusions and insights are employable in the interpretation of the attitude of the studied writers. Yet, the discussion on Yip's grounds becomes problematic as far as two major points are concerned: can we indeed characterise the writers as consciously gay or as consciously Christian?

It is a fact that in the case of some writers a twofold distinction concerning the 'openness' of their sexuality is apparent: at the beginning of their oeuvre they may choose to be cryptic, whereas in their later writings a provocative and revelatory tendency takes place. One of the reasons for this phenomenon, apart from the fear of social prejudice, has a religious substratum, found in the religiously imbued notions of 'guilt' and 'shame'. I argue that it is highly apparent through specific writings what Yip found out in his sociological/ religious research: 'Gay Christians often experience a substantial amount of guilt and shame when they first become aware of their sexuality.'<sup>226</sup>

Interestingly, it seems that such writers face their writings as a means to 'come out'. I shall argue in this chapter that if writing is their own way for reconciliation and in some cases for the satisfaction and secret pleasure of taking the 'less-travelled road', which has to remain, more or less, hidden, then confessional writing is also a *rite de passage* for writers to 'come out'. My argument

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<sup>225</sup> Andrew K. T. Yip, "Attaching the Attacker: Gay Christians Talk Back," *The British Journal of Sociology* 48:1 (Mar., 1997): 113-127.

<sup>226</sup> Yip, "Attacking the Attacker," 113.

presupposes the existence of a 'closet', responsible for the emergence of the imperative need for coming out. The Greek Orthodox Church is a prime reason for this closet. It would not be far-fetched to claim that the writers I discuss experience the Church as the closet itself, since most of them are by upbringing and sensibility deeply religious or at least conscious of the hold that religion has on people, regardless of their sexual orientation.

Apart from the Church-as-closet scheme, the text itself can be considered as a closet: writers have to express themselves within the restricted context of a 'textual closet', brimming with the hazard of the existing literary norms. The horizon of expectations of contemporary Greek readers constitutes a hindrance for these writers, creating a 'textual closet', which the writers have to overcome, in order to express themselves freely. Simultaneously, this 'textual closet' is nothing more than a creation of the writers themselves for their purposes to be served; the closet is '(...) to some extent, built into its own project'.<sup>227</sup> My analysis dwells on the argument that the discussed writers constitute 'closet cases', since they are 'both hiding and showing the secret life of homoeroticism',<sup>228</sup> with a surprising -at times- narcissistic emphasis.<sup>229</sup> Confessional writing helps the writers to tackle both the 'Church as a closet' scheme, by confronting the institution from within, with one of its own sacramental rituals and at the same time the 'textual closet', by re-inventing and adapting a form of writing with a new thematic to serve their own purposes.

The emergence of those two feelings ('guilt' and 'shame') also need to be treated as a narrative strategy, which Cavafy, to begin with, might have adopted from his familiarity with Victorian autobiographical writing. Buckton makes reference to the way that writers like Edward Carpenter, John Addington Symonds, Oscar Wilde and E.M. Forster take advantage of an

(...) intersection between secrecy as a narrative strategy deployed in Victorian autobiographical writing, and the emergence of same-sex desire as a particular site, or

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<sup>227</sup>Yip, "Attacking the Attacker," 47.

<sup>228</sup>Yip, "Attacking the Attacker," 39.

<sup>229</sup> Thus, the 'skeleton in the closet' and the closet itself with its double significations, are functioning for the writers as *camerae obscurae*, giving them the chance to display their real image.

'subject', of secrecy in nineteenth – and early twentieth – century British culture.<sup>230</sup>

In the same way, Greek writers like Cavafy and Ioannou apply the same narrative strategy to their first writings, what Papanikolaou describes as 'words that tell and hide'. Therefore, the feeling of guilt and shame that the stigma of being gay creates in the Greek Orthodox environment leads to the employment of the characteristic of 'secrecy', which can be compared to what Foucault writes of 'silence':

Silence itself – the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name (...) – is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over – all strategies. There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak of them are distributed which type of discourse is authorised, or which form of discretion is required in either case.<sup>231</sup>

The 'authorised type of discourse' for Carpenter, Symonds, Wilde and so forth, seems to be confessional writing. Confession is used as a means to express this 'secrecy'. autobiography is considered a 'genre', then confession constitutes a 'subgenre' of autobiography, which enables writers to define their identity and can be seen as 'constitutive of the self'.<sup>232</sup>

Following Saunier's definition of autobiography as applicable to Cavafy's contemporary, the highly religious writer Alexandros Papadiamantis:

(...) πρέπει (...) να χρησιμοποιηθεί εδώ όχι στην κυριολεξία... αλλά με την έννοια του 'προσωπικού' που αφορά δηλαδή όχι τα γεγονότα της ζωής, παρά τις φαντασιώσεις, τις έμμονες ιδέες, τους προσωπικούς μύθους.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Oliver S. Buckton, *Secret Selves: confession and same-sex desire in Victorian autobiography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, c1998), 1.

<sup>231</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: Volume I: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage Books, 1990).

<sup>232</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 10.

<sup>233</sup> Guy Saunier, «Μερικές μεθοδολογικές παρατηρήσεις και προτάσεις για τη μελέτη του Παπαδιαμάντη», *Διαβάζω*, no. 165, 8 April, 1987, 52.

Confessional writing is employed by the writers as a narrative technique to convey this realm of private («προσωπικό») and bring it from the private sphere to a non-private sphere, from private in public, in order to make poetry and literature. Even though confessional writing is connected with and started from religious writing (see, for example, *The Confessions* of St. Augustine), it became eventually autonomous and ‘downright necessary in the modern literary mindset’, establishing and manipulating a ‘social need’, let alone a social outcry. As Brooks argues:

Truth of the self and to the self have become the markers of authenticity, and confession – written or spoken – has come to seem the necessary, though risky, act through which one lays bare one’s most intimate self, to know oneself and to make oneself known. <sup>234</sup>

I shall argue that the writings that I study in this chapter fall within the category of confessional literature, since their aim is to bring to the fore the writer’s ‘personal truth’.

Throughout my chapter, I take into consideration a distinction that Brooks emphasises, first suggested by de Man in his *Allegories of Reading* and using the terms of J.L. Austin: ‘constative’ confession and ‘performative’ confession. If the ‘constative’ angle of confession is ‘the sin or guilt to which one confesses’<sup>235</sup> and the ‘performative’ angle of confession is ‘the elusive and troubling *action* performed by the statement “I confess”’, then, in the case of the writers I discuss, homoeroticism constitutes the constative aspect and certain literary and poetic narrative techniques (codes and secrecy, for example, at their first writings) constitute the performative aspects. Writing is seen as a means which leads to confession and creates confession: it is their agent for catharsis, their way to express their guilt and to heal their wounds.

The question at stake here is the following: If writing is the way writers employ to express their inner secret selves and compose their identity in exposing its

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<sup>234</sup> Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 21.

<sup>235</sup> Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 21.

authentic markers through the narrative technique and strategy of confession, then who constitutes the addressee of their confession? And, at the same time, who plays the role of the confessor and who the role of the penitent? The act of confession coincides with '(...) the emergence of the modern sense of selfhood and the individual's responsibility for his or her actions, intentions, thoughts – and for the acts of speech that lay them bare'.<sup>236</sup> Therefore, I come to the conclusion that in the cases of the writers that I study, the poetic and literary 'I' seems to pursue both roles.

At first sight, the protagonists of the writings appear to confess 'illegitimate' actions. At a second glance, however, I believe that the protagonists confess in reality to themselves in the same way that a monologue can be addressed «εις εαυτόν» - playing both the roles of the confessor and the penitent and seeking understanding from others who are characterised by the same features. Yet, they themselves carry the mark of the society and religion in which they are nurtured – they themselves confess by being motivated by the guilt they feel inside, in order to set themselves free.

Originally, the aim of the act of sacramental confession, as established by the Church, was to bring people closer to God, by stressing the importance of following Christ's teachings and reconciling with the Christian community. In the case of homoerotic literature, the aim of confession is primarily to give a forum of speech for 'the love that dare not speak its name',<sup>237</sup> attempting to make homoeroticism noticeable, and eventually accepted, first of all by the writers themselves and thus, we might say, creating the idea of a rather different kind of community. 'Through art the actual physical experience of erotic pleasure can somehow be relived',<sup>238</sup> and it is exactly this very reliving that seems to be the target of writers through the employment of the narrative sub-genre and technique of confession. In the case of Cavafy, confession presupposes remembering; the first may be considered as the 'constative' angle and the latter as the 'performative' one.

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<sup>236</sup> Brooks, *Troubling Confessions*, 5.

<sup>237</sup> The expression belongs to Lord Alfred Douglas, in the poem 'Two loves' (1896).

<sup>238</sup> Sarah Ekdawi, "The Erotic Poems of C.P. Cavafy," *Kambos: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 1 (1993): 28.

Writers seek reconciliation with themselves and with others. Let me add that it does not seem far-fetched that they might by extension seek some kind of reconciliation with the Church itself. In doing so, confession makes the writers feel empowered and leads to self- elevation. This is achieved because of the fact that they remain authentic to themselves, gradually becoming aware of the pieces which constitute their identity and of the markers which constitute themselves. Consequently, homosexuality is presented in their writings in a laudatory way, against the attitude of «οι τα φαιά φορούντες και περί ηθικής λαλούντες».<sup>239</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> This verse comes from the poem «Θέατρον της Σιδώνος (400 μ.Χ.)» (1923). Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 144

## **Balancing between Christianity and Homoeroticism in Cavafy's poetry**

‘Below, the brothel caters for the flesh. And there is the church [St. Savvas's] which forgives sin. And there is the hospital where we die.’

There have been many studies regarding the religious aspect of Cavafy.<sup>240</sup> Recently, the preface of his translator Valassopoulo, printed in the Cavafy-Forster letters, is illuminating: ‘He is almost always an impartial observer of history with, perhaps one exception – his zeal for the Christian and more especially the Orthodox Church to which he belongs.’<sup>241</sup>

Despite the numerous points that have been expressed concerning the constitutive parts of Cavafy's Christianity, especially in the Eastern Orthodox form to which the poet was heir, its connection with homoeroticism remains still an unknown territory for scholarly research, despite the relevant scattered points that have been made here and there. I shall try here to find out where the (homo) sexual ideology of Cavafy meets up with his religious ideology, stressing their interrelation; this relationship functions organically as constitutive of what has been expressed by Dallas as «καβαφική θεολογία» as a whole and its importance to the understanding of the religious aspect of Cavafy is paramount. At the same time, I shall try to figure out where the narrative technique of confession is evoked and the fact that, as I argue, in Cavafy we come across the first modern Greek traits of a confessional poetry in the sense directed to ‘coming out’.

As far as the Cavafian poems set in ancient times are concerned (and by ‘ancient times’ I mean the ancient Greek world, late antiquity and Byzantium) the homoerotic element interlopes too in this «χοάνη» which is called «βυζαντινισμός»,

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<sup>240</sup> Among these, I make special reference to Haas and her exhaustive study *Le problème religieux dans l'oeuvre de Cavafy*: (Diana Haas, *Le problème religieux dans l'oeuvre de Cavafy: Les années de formation (1882-1905)*, Paris: Sorbonne, 1996).

<sup>241</sup>Edward Morgan, Forster *The Forster-Cavafy Letters: Friends at a Slight Angle*. American Univ in Cairo Press, 2009, 8.

as a part «του ελληνικού και ρωμαϊκού ειδωλολατρικού κόσμου» and as a part «του κοσμοπολίτικου μηχανισμού του καισαρισμού και των διαιτημάτων και εθίμων της Ασίας». Often, the poems of Cavafy show the opposition of the pagan and Asiatic way of life, full of indulgence and luxury, with the strict and severe way of the life which Christians are supposed to follow, but most of them in the poetry of Cavafy fail.

A subtle example of such an opposition is the poem «Τα Επικίνδυνα» (1911).<sup>242</sup> The protagonist is Myrtias, who is characterised as «εν μέρει εθνικός, κ'εν μέρει χριστιανίζων». By displaying these two features, he represents his epoch («επί βασιλείας αυγούστου Κώνσταντος και αυγούστου Κωνσταντίου») – The Byzantine Empire has not yet taken root and in those days, pre-Nicene times, Arian Emperors were in power. In commenting the poem, Savvides provides accurately the period that the poem refers to: «Η εποχή: 337-350 μ.Χ., κατά την διάρκεια της συμβασιλείας των δύο γιων του Μεγάλου Κωνσταντίνου και της Φάυστας, Κώνστα Α' και Κωνσταντίνου Β'». <sup>243</sup> I quote Myrtias's words according to the poet:

Δυναμωμένος με θεωρία και μελέτη,  
εγώ τα πάθη μου δεν θα φοβούμαι σα δειλός.

Το σώμα μου στες ηδονές θα  
δώσω, στες απολαύσεις τες  
ονειρεμένες,  
στες τολμηρότερες ερωτικές επιθυμίες,

στες λάγνες του αίματός μου ορμές,  
χωρίς κανέναν φόβο, γιατί όταν θέλω –  
και θάχω θέλησι,  
δυναμωμένος ως θάμαι με  
θεωρία και μελέτη-

στες κρίσιμες στιγμές θα  
ξαναβρίσκω το πνεύμα μου, σαν  
πριν, ασκητικό.

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<sup>242</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 62.

<sup>243</sup> Cavafy, *Τα Ποιήματα Α'*, 145.



The poem is built upon an important opposition: the antithesis of body and soul/spirit, «σώμα» and «πνεύμα». Kallistos Ware asserts that:

(...) Greek Christianity is heir to a double inheritance: to the Hebraic-biblical tradition, which is strongly holistic in its understanding of the human person, and to the Hellenic-Platonist approach, which – without being strictly dualist, except in rare instances – makes a firm differentiation between soul and body. This Platonist influence accounts for an unresolved tension in many Greek Christian texts, although it certainly does not provide a full explanation for the distinctive character of early Christian teaching on the body and sexuality.<sup>244</sup>

In «Τα επικίνδυνα»<sup>245</sup> Cavafy follows the Hellenic-Platonist approach<sup>346</sup> rather than the Hebraic-biblical tradition and dissociates the body from the soul/spirit, but not completely. They are presented as two different and distinct entities, but they are not independent, since the fact that the spirit is empowered with theory and study enables the person's body to make conscious decisions and move towards different directions, according to the person's will.

«Θεωρία» and «μελέτη» are also two pagan terms with a Platonic and especially neo-Platonic flavour, which appears to be someone's medium to stop being «δειλός»; through these factors the spirit and the mind are cultivated and empowered. Linking the poem with Chapter 1 of my thesis, it has to be emphasised that a poem like this shows Cavafy's awareness that we cannot – as perhaps Symonds and others dreamt of – simply return to a pre-Christian Golden Age.

According to Myrtias, «δειλός» is someone who resists the desires and the needs of his body; he does not remain authentic to himself and becomes a slave of behaviours and expressions that the society and the Church approve. On the other hand, someone also needs «δύναμη» and «θέλησι» to lead a monastic and strict life,

<sup>244</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The orthodox way* (New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), 91.

<sup>245</sup> Cavafy, *Collected Poems*, 62.

<sup>346</sup> See Rena Zamarou, *Καβάφης και Πλάτων: Πλατωνικά Στοιχεία στην Καβαφική Ποίηση* (Athens: Kedros, 2005).

whereas leading a life full of hedone, according to his pagan aspect, seems to be a flawless and effortless way of living, which his Christian side condemns and therefore these activities are followed for Myrtias with great fear at the same time. The word «ασκητικός» which is given to the empowered by «θεωρία και μελέτη» spirit comes in strong juxtaposition with «ηδονές», «απολαύσεις ονειρεμένες», «τολμηρότερες ερωτικές επιθυμίες» and «λάγνες του αίματος ορμές», words and expressions referring to the body. Myrtias appears to be an antinomian, but in his own diplomatic way.

Myrtias appears to analyse the way of thinking behind his actions and demonstrates his inner struggle between his pagan and Christian self. Expressing his thoughts/ words in the first person singular, he also addresses himself. Myrtias' words are similar to a confession, since Myrtias opens up his soul and his way of thinking and acting. The motivation of Myrtias to proceed with these words, which are apologetic and unapologetic at the same time, is that he might have been critically asked about his way of life or he might have been struggling with his twofold religious identity.

In doing so, Cavafy at this point echoes Browning and his poem 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation', written in 1836 and set in the Reformation period.<sup>347</sup> Both poems encapsulate the belief of the speakers, Myrtias and Johannes Agricola accordingly, that they have to live their lives freely and bravely give in to the sexual desires of their flesh, among which homoeroticism is also included, considered to be sins, because of the fact that before death («Τα επικίνδυνα») or after death ('Johannes Agricola in Metitation') they will return and keep their Christian faith and its promised rewards (Paradise). It is at this very point that being Christian and homosexual are portrayed indeed as two social roles, as I have discussed in my chapter's introduction and following Yip's terminology. Both Browning and Cavafy are challenged by the plausible compatibility of these two social roles, a compatibility that they actually cancel-out. The protagonists of their poems are swapping roles; they consider themselves Christians, but at the moments when they give into temptation, their Christian 'role' pauses. Yet, it remains there for them to return to when they

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<sup>347</sup> For further elaboration see Maria Tombrou, «Καβάφης και Μπράουνινγκ», *Nea Estia* 153: 1756 (2003): 787-809.

think that it is the time to do so or when they feel they have to.

A similar motif appears in «Ιγνατίου τάφος» (1917)<sup>348</sup>, another representative poem which engages into the same discussion and shows to what extent and for how long the poet was occupied by this topic. Moreover, the idea of erasing the past evokes the custom of a ‘general confession’ before reception into the Church. The poem constitutes an epigram on Cleon’s (later on known as Ignatius) tomb, which states that the deceased does not want to be remembered as a rich and self-indulgent man, namely Cleon, leading an extreme life for twenty-eight years, but as a Christian, namely Ignatius, living happily for ten months «μες στην γαλήνη και μες στην ασφάλεια του Χριστού». The epigram states that even for his last ten months, Cleon came back to his senses, «συνήλθε». Most probably his conversion to Christianity was a result of his realisation that he was going to die, but he seems to support that his pagan twenty-eight years offered him an extreme life that in the end was not making him happy; it is his ten months of Christian life that made him happy, juxtaposing their «γαλήνη» and «ασφάλεια» to «τα επικίνδυνα» of pagan life. The essential difference between the life that Ignatius used to have and the life he chose to have towards the end of his life, is given very eloquently with his two names. As Ricks elaborates:

His birth name and his baptismal name pull in different directions: Cleon, from Κλέος, glory is a *nom parlant*. (...) In assuming the name Ignatious, evoking ignotus, Cleon ostensibly seeks anonymity (and, as the sound-patterning suggests, to be pure, αγνός). But he also adopts the name of perhaps the most exemplary of the early martyrs, S. Ignatius of Antioch.<sup>349</sup>

This conscious distinction of the names, tokens of the way of life (or death?) each time the protagonist chooses, is a tangible example of the protagonist twofold nature, that of the ‘holy sinner’. Yet as Ricks supports: ‘This sinner’s purifying is far from

<sup>348</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 92.

<sup>349</sup> David Ricks, “Cavafy and the Body of Christ,” *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 27:1 (2001), 21.

complete. (...) Ignatius struggles to renounce the memory of his body's sensuality in order to graft himself into the body of Christ'.<sup>350</sup>

It is exactly this struggle and this inner fight, which is presented as an after-death public confession and renunciation, which purifies most the protagonist. The protagonists were Pagans for themselves, for their bodies and their bodies' instincts; they were Christians for others, for their own souls and their souls' remembrance.

On the other hand, as far as the Cavafian poems set in contemporary time are concerned, Cavafy follows a twofold attitude: in some poems the attitude of the protagonists is restrained and full of guilt, as far as their homoeroticism and their expression of it are concerned, whereas in some other cases the protagonists feel transcendent and superior because of the same reason. In 1915 the poet writes the poem «Ομνύει»<sup>351</sup>, which reads as follows:

Ομνύει κάθε τόσο ν'αρχίσει πιο καλή ζωή.

Αλλ' όταν έλθ' η νύχτα με τες δικές της συμβουλές,  
με τους συμβιβασμούς της, και με τες υποσχέσεις  
της· αλλ' όταν έλθ' η νύχτα με την δική της δύναμι  
του σώματος που θέλει και ζητεί, στην  
ίδια μοιραία χαρά, χαμένος, ξαναπιαίνει.

The use of the present tense in the poem aims to transfer to the reader the sense of the consecutive deed of regretting and deciding to change way of living and at the same time the continual vanity of those regrets and decisions. The desires of the body win in the end and prove to be superior to the protagonist's thinking and logic. The matter of the «θέληση» is again pointed out here, but this time it is what the body wants that determines the actions of the protagonist. The fact that the

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<sup>350</sup> Ricks, "Cavafy and the Body of Christ," 22.

<sup>351</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74

protagonist believes that he is not leading a «καλή ζωή» reveals his own beliefs about the right way of living, beliefs that most probably are strongly influenced by contemporary society and the Church. The protagonist «ομνύει», a verb which is not the obvious one we would use in a Church setting - «ομνύει» to whom? The technique of the poem brings to mind the ritual of a confession. The protagonist is a penitent tormented by recollections of sin. He regrets his actions and his way of life, he confesses to himself and by extension to the reader, seeking for forgiveness and he promises to himself, not to repeat his sins. Yet, the passions and the will of his body are much stronger than the will of his soul, of his society and of his religion. «Χαμένος», he gives in again and again. His sins are taking place on late hours, at night. Like criminals, this sinner makes his moves at night; a time that seems appropriate for dangerous deeds, condemned by society and the Church, and therefore obliged to remain hidden. In the poem «Τα Επικίνδυνα», «θεωρία και μελέτη» were the external facts possessing major power and being able to impose the will of the soul and the spirit over the will of the body; in this poem it is the «νύχτα» which is the most powerful external factor and which makes the will of the soul weaker than the desires of the body. In both cases, even though in «Ομνύει» it is not clearly stated, the reader has a strong sense that only «κρίσιμες στιγμές» can most possibly make the difference, offering to the protagonists the most powerful motivation to change their way of living towards what they themselves consider «πιο καλή ζωή».

The adjective «χαμένος» that we come across in the final line of the poem «Ομνύει», as well as the whole sense of weakness and vanity that the poem pours out, transfer to the reader the point that he who gives in («ενδίδει») to the desires of his body, is weak and mistaken. The poem though «Επήγα» (1913), which was chosen by the poet to be the following poem to «Ομνύει», gives the exact opposite sense, since the two last lines read: «Κ' ήπια από δυνατά κρασιά, καθώς / που πίνουν οι ανδρείοι της ηδονής». The protagonist here recognises that the man who follows the instincts of his body and gives in to its desires, without questioning them, is the really brave one. This man does not allow to himself to get restrained by his instincts, and therefore he is free: «Δεν εδεσμεύθηκα. Τελείως αφέθηκα κ' επήγα». Similarly, the poem «Πολυέλαιος» (1914)<sup>352</sup> which follows, referring to «μια λάγνη πάθησις, μια

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<sup>352</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74.

λάγνη ορμή» supports that: «Γι' άτολμα σώματα δεν είναι καμωμένη / αυτής της ζέστης η ηδονή». <sup>353</sup>

The study of religious feeling in Cavafy in connection with homoerotic feelings would be incomplete without reference to the poem «Μύρης· Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.» (1929) <sup>354</sup>. The title is eloquent about the time and the place the poem refers to AD 340, which was according to Hirst

a time of great political and religious upheaval: the civil war between the sons of the emperor Constantine the Great, and the religious confrontation within Christianity between Orthodoxy and Arianism. <sup>355</sup>

Based on this tormented historical period, Cavafy comes up with a poem where the religious balance is sensible, reflecting efficiently its backbone period. At the same time, the incident of the poem is located in Alexandria, Cavafy's 'sensual city'. In combining this specific time and place, the poet achieves to offer a coherent 'eroticisation' of a strongly religious incident. This dramatic monologue is delivered by Myres's lover; the speaker is a pagan and Myres was a Christian. Now that Myres is dead, his lover attends his funeral which takes place at Myres's house and is a traditional Christian funeral with the formality which Myres's wealth requires. Myres's lover sees the Christian ritual and funeral habits with a derogatory eye, stating from the outset of the poem that «αποφεύγω να εισέρχομαι στον Χριστιανών τα σπίτια, προ πάντων όταν έχουν θλίψεις ή γιορτές». <sup>356</sup>

This poem also belongs to the group of Cavafy's poems which discuss the authenticity of one's conversion before death. It is built upon the contrast of Myres's twofold identity. The speaker Myres was a Christian whose life was the same of a Pagan, brimful with luxury, entertainment, riot and pleasure; the speaker even

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<sup>353</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74.

<sup>354</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 186-190.

<sup>355</sup> Anthony Hirst, *God and the Poetic Ego: the Appropriation of Biblical and Liturgical Language in the Poetry of Palamas, Sikelianos and Elytis*. (New York: Peter Lang, 2005).

<sup>356</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 186.

emphasises that Myres was «απ' όλους μας πιο έκδοτος στες ηδονές»<sup>357</sup> and that he did not care about what the others thought about his outrageous life («Για την υπόληψι του κόσμου ξένοιαστος»)<sup>358</sup> Even though Myres's company knew of his Christianity, it was never considered a problem and it was never strongly present, since Myres was living a provocative and 'loud' pagan life and his Christianity was left behind and put in second place, as if it was of minor importance for Myres or as if it was a characteristic of himself of which he was not proud of and content. Regardless of his overtly pagan life, there were moments that come to the speaker's mind at the time of his lover's funeral that Myres distinctly brought his Christianity to the fore and differentiated himself from the rest of the company:

Ποτέ για την θρησκεία του δεν μιλούσε.

Μάλιστα μια φορά τον είπαμε

πως θα τον πάρουμε μαζί μας στο Σεράπιον.

Όμως σαν να δυσαρεστήθηκε

μ' αυτόν μας τον αστεϊσμό: θυμούμαι τώρα.

Α κι άλλες δυο φορές τώρα στον νου μου  
έρχονται. Όταν στον Ποσειδώνα κάμναμε  
σπονδές,  
τραβήχθηκε απ' τον κύκλο μας, κ' έστρεψε αλλού το βλέμμα.

Όταν ενθουσιασμένος ένας μας  
είπεν, Η συντροφιά μας νάναι  
υπό  
την εύνοιαν και την προστασίαν του μεγάλου,  
του πανωραίου Απόλλωνος — ψιθύρισεν ο

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<sup>357</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 188.

<sup>358</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 188.

Μύρης (οι άλλοι δεν άκουσαν) «τη εξαίρέσει  
εμού». <sup>359</sup>

The speaker of the poem compares the experiences that he had with Myres when the latter was alive with the new Myres that is revealed to him after his death; he compares the Myres that he saw and lived with to the Myres he is hearing about from the people with whom Myres had lived his last moments:

Κάτι γρηές, κοντά μου, χαμηλά μιλούσαν  
για την τελευταία μέρα που έζησε –  
στα χείλη του διαρκώς τ' όνομα του  
Χριστού, στα χέρια του βαστούς' έναν  
σταυρό. <sup>360</sup>

It is the differences of these two versions of Myres and the religious contrast that occurs between these two versions that creates to the speaker of the poem strong feelings of defamiliarisation. Do the old women tell the truth or are their words imbued with religious prejudice which pushes them to reproduce the events accordingly? The reading of the poem has two possible paths of interpretation. On the one hand, the poem can be seen as belonging to the Cavafian poems which discuss the theme of religious conversion before death. Following this line, Myres can be compared with Manuel Komnenos and Ignatius. On the other hand, and this is more accurate, the subject matter of the poem is not the authenticity or not of Myres's conversion during difficult moments, but the feelings of defamiliarisation that the speaker feels towards Myres. The complete alienation of the speaker is dramatically given through the lines:

Αόριστα, αισθάνομουν

σαν νάφευγεν από κοντά μου ο

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<sup>359</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 189-190.

<sup>360</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 188.



Μύρης· αισθάνομουν που ενώθη,  
 Χριστιανός,  
 με τους δικούς του, και που γένομουν ξένο εγώ, ξένο πολύ.<sup>361</sup>

With the separated letters of the expression «ξένος εγώ, ξένος πολύ»<sup>362</sup> the poet conveys to the reader the suffocating feeling which captivates the speaker and forces him to make an emphatically dramatic exit from Myres's house.

Myres confesses sacramentally and is reconciled, whereas the speaker of the poem can only confess his anxieties in a looser sense in the poem «Των Εβραίων (50 μ.Χ)» (1919):<sup>363</sup>

Ζωγράφος και ποιητής, δρομεύς και  
 δισκοβόλος, σαν Ενδυμίων έμορφος, ο Ιάνθης  
 Αντωνίου.

Από οικογένειαν φίλην της Συναγωγής.  
 ελληνισμό, με την κυρίαρχη προσήλωσι  
 σε τέλεια καμωμένα και φθαρτά άσπρα μέλη.

Και γένομαι αυτός που θα ήθελα

πάντα να μένω των Εβραίων, των ιερών Εβραίων, ο υιός.»

Ένθερμη λίαν η δήλωσις του. «Πάντα

να μένω των Εβραίων, των ιερών Εβραίων

-> Όμως δεν έμενε τοιούτος διόλου.

Ο Ηδονισμός κ' η Τέχνη της  
 Αλεξανδρείας αφοσιωμένο τους παιδί  
 τον είχαν.

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<sup>361</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 190.

<sup>362</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 190.

<sup>363</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 112.

I shall argue that this poem with a protagonist of Jewish ancestry can be read as part of the same (Judaeo-) Christian versus pagan dialogue. Even though Ianthes, son of Antony, is Jewish, he appears to be with his behaviour «εν μέρει εθνικός». The joints of the poem are intertwined around a strong contrast; the Jewish origins of the protagonist and his pagan way of life. This contrast is apparent from the beginning since in the first lines the readers are strikingly surprised from the portrayal of a well- educated and wealthy protagonist who has a Greek name and his physical appearance is so exquisite which enables the poet to make a comparison with Endymion, but comes from a Hebrew family.

The tribute that the poet pays to the protagonist at the beginning of the poem, presenting him as the perfect 'catch', combining intellectuality, sensibility and beauty, adds the youth to the series of the Cavafian Alexandrian youths and ephebes, displaying the same characteristics (examples of poems). Therefore, the sensual and senses arousing nature of the youth is craftily elaborated from the beginning and predisposes the development of the poem. On the contrary, his Hebrew identity is given in connection with his family («από οικογένειαν φίλην της Συναγωγής») <sup>364</sup> which might suggest that Judaism (and by implication) Christianity is more like a tradition and a way of life that he inherited from his family, an inherent 'identity' and the voice of the protagonist to be heard and Ianthes' confessing words are given in quotation marks. The protagonist indeed refers to the twofold dimensions that exist in his life; his identity is double. On the one hand, he passes his life seeking for the pleasure of the senses, sexual experimentation and satisfaction in perfectly crafted sensual bodies. He characterises his pagan way of life, his «ελληνισμό», as «ωραίο» and «σκληρό»; <sup>365</sup> «σκληρόν» in the sense that Cavafy wrote in the poem «Πολυέλαιος»<sup>366</sup> that «Γι' άτολμα σώματα δεν είναι καμωμένα αυτής της ζέστης η ηδονή» <sup>367</sup> a way of life which is also at points frustrating.

It is based on this realisation that Ianthes proceeds to a declaration that he

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<sup>364</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 112.

<sup>365</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 112.

<sup>366</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74.

<sup>367</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74.

wants to leave behind his hedonical and flesh-bound way of life and just be an honest Jew, making his family proud, fitting in the way he was raised and in the norm. Even though according to Iannes a decent Hebrew is «αυτός που θα ήθελα πάντα να μένω»,<sup>368</sup> the dominant impression is that he wants to do this mainly for his family, in order to keep them happy. I complement this impression based on three arguments: First, as I have mentioned earlier, the ‘informed’ reader of the poetry of Cavafy starts getting into suspicions from the very first reference to the Hebrew family of Iannes; whereas all the other details given in the first lines of the poem are describing Iannes per se, his religious aspect is given in terms of his family; we implicitly get the knowledge that the protagonist is consequently and inherently a Hebrew too.

After the first reference to his family from the speaker of the poem, Iannes himself is presented to state that «οι τιμιότερες μου μέρες είν’ εκείνες που την αισθητική αναζήτησιν αφίνω». The word «τιμιότερες» is a word with specific connotations in the poetry of Cavafy, which plays a crucial role in the cases of two other poems in the poetry of Cavafy: «Ευρίωνος τάφος» (1914)<sup>369</sup> and «Δύο νέοι, 23 έως 24 ετών» (1927)<sup>370</sup>. The protagonist of the first poem, one of Cavafy’s epigraph/epitaph poems, is Eurion, a beautiful twenty-five year old youth, of excellent education and background, a feature which is stated not only with his studies and work, but first of all with his family roots. He is characterised as «παιδί αλεξανδρινό», a characteristic which refers most probably to his hedonic way of life and to homoeroticism, which is an aspect of it. Whereas his work is going to survive his death, the last verses of the poem, the «επιμύθιο», reads as follows: «Χάσαμεν όμως το πιο τίμιο – την μορφή του, που ήταν σαν μια απολλώνια οπτασία». The adjective «τίμιο» here, which is indeed given in its superlative form, «το πιο τίμιο», refers to the exquisite physical appearance of Eurion, which is, according to the poet, the most decent, authentic and pure feature and token of Eurion and at the same time the most precious characteristic for the poet; it is, let us not forget, a sheer source of inspiration for the creation of the poet’s work.

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<sup>368</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 112.

<sup>369</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 60.

<sup>370</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 168

The poem «Δύο νέοι, 23 έως 24 ετών» (1927) is situated in a «καφενείο», where the meeting of two poor lovers is about to take place. The poem begins with one of those waiting for the other for quite a long time, being lashed out with torturing thoughts on his «παραστρατημένη ζωή». However, his lover finally comes and all the devastating thoughts disappear before his image and before the news that he had won at gambling a considerable amount of money:

Τα έμορφα τους πρόσωπα, τα εξαίσιά τους  
 νειάτα, η αισθητική αγάπη που είχαν μεταξύ  
 τους, δροσίσθηκαν, ζωντάνεψαν, τονώθηκαν  
 απ' τες εξήντα λίρες του χαρτοπαικτείου.

Κι όλο χαρά και δύναμις, αίσθημα και ωραιότητα  
 πήγαν – όχι στα σπίτια των τιμίων οικογενειών  
 τους (όπου, άλλωστε, μήτε τους θέλαν πια):

σ' ένα γνωστό τους, και λίαν ειδικό, σπίτι της διαφθοράς  
 πήγανε και ζητήσαν  
 δωμάτιον ύπνου, και ακριβά πιοτά, και ξαναήπιαν.<sup>371</sup>

At the same time that Cavafy praises and elevates the «αισθητική αγάπη» of these two lovers, with an apparent sympathy towards them, he juxtaposes «τα σπίτια των τιμίων οικογενειών τους» with the «σπίτι της διαφθοράς». The lines are saturated with a feeling of bitterness, which encapsulates the torturing thoughts of the protagonists, as if the words of the poet come straightforwardly from the mind of the turbulent protagonists. Their 'decent' Christian families expelled them from their houses, condemning their homoeroticism and their deviation from the norm and its integral ethics. This should definitely be one of the obsessive thoughts that one of the lovers had whilst waiting for his partner.

Therefore, with the reference to their «παραστρατημένη ζωή», «τίμιες οικογένειες» and «σπίτι της διαφθοράς» we, the readers, might actually get the words of their families' negative criticism towards them. These words stigmatised the

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<sup>371</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 168.

protagonists and thus swirl into their minds and are therefore reflected on the bitter and unfair feeling which part of the poem brings to the fore, using the above phrases. On the other hand, the uplifting attitude of the protagonists towards their relationship encapsulates the way that they themselves perceive their love.

There is an apparent intertextuality between the poems «Δύο νέοι, 23 έως 24 ετών» and «Των Εβραίων (50 μ.Χ.)» connected with the words that are used in both cases. The protagonists of the poem «Δύο νέοι, 23 έως 24 ετών» cherish their «αισθητική αγάπη» and sacrifice their families and houses to live according to the way they want to. In doing that, they do not obey to the calling of their families to return to «τιμότητα». On the contrary, lanthes, the protagonist of «Των Εβραίων (50 μ.Χ.)» embraces and adopts, but not definitively, the admonishments of his family and his inner struggle towards the free sexual expression of himself as opposed to the ethics and respect that this 'decent' Christian family imposes, tilts towards the latter.

Because lanthes wants to follow the paradigm and the tradition of his family that he loves and wants to honour, the words that he utters are actually the words that he must have heard so many times coming from his family. Therefore, it is his family's Jewish beliefs that are heard when he is presented to say «οι τιμιότερές μου μέρες είν' εκείνες που την αισθητική αναζήτησιν αφίνω (...) και γένομαι αυτός που θα ήθελα πάντα να μένω· των Εβραίων, των ιερών Εβραίων, ο υιός». Whereas in the poem «Δύο νέοι, 23 έως 24 ετών» the youths accept their nature, lanthes is in denial, a denial which seems to take place only for the eyes of his family, as the poet hastens to clarify in the end: «Όμως δεν έμενε τοιούτος διόλου. Ο Ηδονισμός κ' η Τέχνη της Αλεξανδρείας αφοσιωμένο τους παιδί τον είχαν».

Cavafy provides the first modern Greek homoerotic coming-out/ confessional way of writing, and in doing so he at times echoes the idea of confession in the Church. His protagonists give him an artistic forum of speech and he is capable of feeling for every protagonist, playing his role well and speaking the 'honest truth' on his behalf, what Demaras has wittily characterised as «η ηθοποιία του Καβάφη».<sup>372</sup> Providing different approaches in his ancient time poems and in his contemporary time poems, he attempts to show the inner struggle of his speaker to remain

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<sup>372</sup> Konstantinos Th. Dimaras, «Η ηθοποιία του Καβάφη», in *Symmikta C'* (Athens: Gnosi, 1992).

authentic to himself and at the same time compromise with the 'social roles' that he has undertaken: homosexual, Christian or Pagan? The honest failure of this is a great source of poetry for Cavafy and hides the glory, as the poet concludes in the poem «Νόησις» (1918)<sup>373</sup>. Although Cavafy has many poems which delineate a confessing substratum, the Cavafian poems which are related to Christianity are, interestingly, not really among them: in fact, they are all about people who are somehow thwarted by Judaeo-Christian ethics. It seems, in my view, that Cavafy was not ready to embrace homoeroticism as an alternative to Christianity. The point which actually concerns Cavafy seems to be whether the two could ever be compatible. In this sense, Cavafy demonstrates a contemporary echo. For some of Cavafy's precursors, Christianity can be gaily cast aside – somehow, we have the feeling that Cavafy thinks this option is not possible for a Greek. It is interesting to see how Cavafy's successors took over this kind of coming-out narrative and how confessional they are. Cavafy's younger contemporary Napoleon Lapathiotis provides a striking example.

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<sup>373</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 78

### **Napoleon Lapathiotis: a strongly anti-Christian animus**

In this section I delve into the homoerotic poems of Napoleon Lapathiotis (1888–1944), a Greek writer of Cypriot origin. His life and work caused much scandal, challenging contemporary society and the Orthodox Church in particular. I discuss the development of his homoerotic poetry as associated with developments in his religious feelings, a topic which has been neglected. Lapathiotis holds a distinctive attitude towards homoeroticism and religion, creating a sensitive balance with mutual interactions, especially in light of his demand to be excommunicated from the Church. Though Lapathiotis is considered a minor poet in comparison with his contemporary Cavafy, whose work he admired, he was not without influence and was an innovator *sui generis*, in terms of content and poetic techniques, especially in negotiating the expression of homosexual feeling as associated with religious belief or its disavowal. He promotes a ‘religion of the Body’ influenced by French decadence and Wildean aestheticism, yet he does so with references to Christian sacraments and especially the notion of confession.

In sharp contrast to anything we can find in the life and work of Cavafy, in 1927 Lapathiotis embraced the communist ideology and declared himself an atheist. Indeed, that same year he sent Chrysostomos, the Archbishop of Athens, a letter asking for his own excommunication from the Greek Orthodox Church:

(...) να σας παρακαλέσω να με διευκολύνετε στον διακανονισμόν μιας υποθέσεως, χαρακτήρος εντελώς προσωπικού—που αφορά τας σχέσεις μου με την εκκλησίαν (...) Η χριστιανική θρησκεία—όχι μόνον η ορθόδοξος, αλλά εν γένει η χριστιανική—όπως επίσης και κάθε άλλη θρησκεία—μού έχει αποβεί τελείως περιττή. Κρίνω άσκοπο να εκθέσω τη σειρά των σκέψεων που με οδήγησαν έως εκεί. Αφορούν εξ ολοκλήρου τον προσωπικό μου τρόπο τού αντιλαμβάνεσθαι τα πράγματα (...)<sup>374</sup>

Lapathiotis often created scandals in his life, tempting others and falling into temptations himself. As early as 1910, when he was 22 years old, there was the

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<sup>374</sup> Nikos Sarantakos, «Ναπολέων Λαπαθιώτης: Ανοικτή επιστολή στον Αρχιεπίσκοπο των Αθηνών»,

<http://www.sarantakos.com/liter/lapathiotis/arxiiep.html> (accessed March 17, 2014).

scandal of the magazine *Anemone* when Lapathiotes published his poem «Κι έπινα μέσ' άπ' τα χείλια σου ...» causing a huge scandal because of its audacious verses and homosexual content.<sup>375</sup> To give but one characteristic example, which encompasses all the points made by hostile critics, I quote a brief excerpt from an article of Spiros Melas in *Εστία* (May 29, 1910), entitled «Η σάρκα! Η σάρκα!» Here, Melas addresses the public prosecutor, denouncing the homosexual content of poems published in *Anemone*, and specifically of a poem by Lapathiotes, which was the most outspoken<sup>376</sup>:

Ποιόν έστησαν υπόδειγμά των; Τον Όσκαρ, τον Ουάιλντ των δικαστηρίων και των σκανδάλων, ή τον ποιητήν και τον αισθητικόν; Είναι φανερόν, από τα έργα των, ότι το πρώτον: Διότι οι δράσται παρομοίων βαναυσουργημάτων είναι αδύνατον να είναι μαθηταί του ποιητού, ο οποίος ανήγαγε τον νόμον της ωραιότητος εις νόμον ηθικής, κηρύξας ότι «ηθικόν είναι παν ό,τι ωραίον». Οφείλετε λοιπόν να εξακριβώσετε τα πράγματα και να διδάξετε εις τα ψυχοπαθή αυτά όντα, ότι το πνεύμα και η τέχνη δεν είναι δυνατόν να έχουν καμίαν σχέσιν με τας βαναύσους ορέξεις διεστραμμένων φύσεων, και ότι δεν επιτρέπεται ατιμωρητί να στεγάζονται υπό την επικεφαλίδα ονομάτων, τα οποία ψιθυρίζουν με κατάνυξιν αι Παρθένοι του Ελικώνος, αι βδελυρότεραι των ασθενειών.<sup>377</sup>

The so-called *Anemone* scandal is called a 'social' scandal by Marina Lypourle in the 2001 edition of Lapathiotes' poems.<sup>378</sup> But it was also a religious one, a fact that is obvious through the numerous points of the criticism which emphasise the 'immorality' and the public indecency of the verses in question. Dissatisfied with this incident, in 1914 Lapathiotes published in «Νουμάς» his «Μανιφέστο», in which, once again with audacious formulations and a rebellious attitude, he declared that

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<sup>375</sup> For further reading on the issue of "the scandal of 'Anemone'," the fuss it created and the sharp critique that the poet accepted on the homosexual content of the poem, see the comments of the editor Yannis Papakostas in Napoleon Lapathiotes, *Η ζωή μου: Απόπειρα συνοπτικής αυτοβιογραφίας* (Athens: Stigmi, 1986), 198–201.

<sup>376</sup> The poem which caused by far the most negative discussions was that by Lapathiotes, though the magazine also included "provocative" poems of homosexual content by Echteras Adonis and Manoles Magkakes. However, the most overt poem was the one by Lapathiotes, and for this reason it has drawn the greatest amount of interest.

<sup>377</sup> Spiros Melas, «Η σάρκα! Η σάρκα!», *Εστία* (Athens), May 29, 1910, first edition.

<sup>378</sup> Napoleon Lapathiotes, *Ποιήματα* (Thessaloniki: Zetros, 2001).



(...) Έχω μέσα μου αίμα ηρώων. Μην ακούς όσα λένε οι μικροί. Είναι ανίδεοι από βίαιους παλμούς και ψηλά πετάγματα, κοιτάνε πολύ προς τα Κείμενα και Καθιερωμένα. Την ψυχή τους δε σφυρηλάτησε τ' Όνειρο, δεν καθαγίασε η Σκέψη. Ξέρουνε ένα «πρέπει» και τίποτ' άλλο· είναι η πιο μουγγή εκδήλωση της Ζωής (...) Τρικυμίζει μέσα μου το Θείο Πνεύμα της Καταστροφής. Να ρίξουμε ό,τι ξέρουμε για ψεύτικο και για πλαστό, να σεβαστούμε μοναχά ό,τι στέκεται Ιερό και ό,τι καθοσίωσεν η Αγνή Έμπνευση.<sup>379</sup>

In his «Μανιφέστο» Lapathiotis, unlike Cavafy, makes use of language with explicit religious connotations, like «καθαγίασε», «Θείο Πνεύμα» and «Αγνή Έμπνευση». He goes against the norms and tries to encourage a re-establishment of the order by proclaiming new, provocative and subversive topics in literature and society, triggering new writers to proceed to literary and social rebellion, not least rebellion against organised religion in its Greek Orthodox form. It was to be expected that this kind of text caused many responses, negative and supportive, again creating an enduring discussion around Lapathiotis.<sup>380</sup>

The «Μανιφέστο» of Lapathiotis was a predecessor to his self-imposed excommunication. Just as Dallas has argued that the religious element in Cavafy should be taken as if it belongs to a *sui generis* «θεολογία» and «ιδεολόγημα»<sup>381</sup>, traces of a «λαπαθιώτικη θεολογία» and «λαπαθιώτικο ιδεολόγημα» are also apparent in the corpus of Lapathiotis.<sup>382</sup> In this sense, Lapathiotis could have been described as a heretic given his will to officially leave the Orthodox Church, strongly motivated by his developing communism and atheism.<sup>383</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Napoleon Lapathiotis, «Μανιφέστο», *Noumas-524* (April 19, 1914).

<sup>380</sup> For a detailed account of the relevant reactions going to both directions, condemning and supporting, see Napoleon Lapathiotis, *Η ζωή μου* (Athens: Kedros, 2009), 205–212.

<sup>381</sup> Yannis Dallas, *Ο Ελληνισμός και η θεολογία στον Καβάφη* (Athens: Stigmi, 1981).

<sup>382</sup> This characteristic of the poetic oeuvre of Lapathiotis falls within the features which are common in the Athenian school of neo-romanticism, of which Lapathiotis has been claimed by Diktaios to be the greatest emblem, among other writers like Ouranes, Karyotakes and Agras (Ares Diktaios, *Ναπολέων Λαπαθιώτης: Η Ζωή του—το έργο του* (Athens: Gnose, 1984), 38.

<sup>383</sup> At the same time, Lapathiotis was a huge admirer of Papadiamantes (Napoleon Lapathiotis, «Απόκοσμο αγριολούλουδο απά στο ρημοκλήσι», *Kallitehnes*, 1911), 336.

I will begin my analysis with an early poem by Lapathiotis, entitled «Χριστουγεννιάτικη Αγωνία»<sup>384</sup> written between 1905 and 1919:

Ως πότε τη λαχτάρα μου σιμά σου θα  
σωπαίνω; Ως πότε θα χαμογελώ μένα λυγμό  
στα χείλη;

Πότε θ' αστράψει ο πόνος μου και το δυστυχισμένο  
παράπονό μου, σαν του αφρού το κλάμα, θα σου στείλει; ...

Ως πότε πια τ' αγριωπά τα κύματα θα πνίγω  
που ξεχειλίζει μέσα μου μια απελπισμένη βρύση;

Μη με κοιτάς τόσο γλυκά, Χρυσέ μου ... Ακόμα λίγο  
και ο πόνος μου, που πνίγεται βαθιά, θα ξεφωνίσει  
...

Πώς μοιάζουν τα χειλάκια σου χλωμό χλωμό  
κεράσι, κι είναι η ψυχούλα σου απαλό, γλυκό γλυκό  
μετάξι ... Δε με θωρείς, που όλο γελώ μην τύχει και  
προφτάσει καμιά δροσιά στο βλέφαρο και μου  
γλυκοχαράξει;

Και τα ματάκια Σου γελούν στον πόνο μου  
τριγύρω, σαν πεταλούδες χαρωπές στο  
πεθαμένο κρίνο ...

Στην αγκαλιά μου σαν τρελός μια νύχτα θα σε σύρω,  
και ώρες εκεί τα κλάματα, που Σου 'κρυψα, θα χύνω  
...

Μ' απόψε είναι Χριστούγεννα! ... Δεν έχει τόπο η θλίψη  
... Μέσα στα γέλια να πονεί κανένας είναι τρέλα ...

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384 Lapathiotis, *Ποιήματα*, 52.

Σε μια γωνιά η αγάπη μου το κλάμα της θα κρύψει.

Άλλη βραδιά, καρδιά μου, κλαις ... Απόψε, Πόνε, γέλα ....

This poem is an early but representative exemplum of the way the poet employs the religious theme to convey sensuality. The title of the poem refers clearly to Christmas, one of the most important celebrations for Christianity, associated with happy moments. Yet, the speaker is in despair and Christmas makes him feel worse, since he compares the happiness that he should have been feeling with the sadness which captivates his heart; the question at stake here is what leads the speaker to these bitter and desperate feelings? I argue that the reason behind his frustration is the untold love that lashes out on his soul, deep feelings of desire and attraction that remain unspoken to the person who evokes them. The case in which the protagonist has revealed his feelings to the person of his interest, but his feelings are not returned, also seems valid. In both cases, the poem discusses a one-sided and unfulfilled love which torments the soul of the speaker and constitutes the reason for his «καημός». The religious aspect invades the poem in terms of its *mise en scene*. The address of the poem includes the address of the speaker to the person of his interest, whose presence is not real at the time that this happens, and on the other hand the address to Christ. We might visualise the speaker before the image of Christ («Μη με κοιτάς τόσο γλυκά ...,» «Δε με θωρείς, που όλο γελώ ...»), maybe in a Church («Σε μια γωνιά η αγάπη μου το κλάμα της θα κρύψει»), on the day of Christmas, in the so-called «εσπερινός της αγάπης».<sup>385</sup> These two addresses mingle in the poem and are consecutively referred to in an entangled manner that is not clear to someone who hears the poem. The verses of the poem serve the reader and facilitate them in understanding what is going on, reinforcing the feeling that the articulation of the poem is something ‘private,’ subject to the inner considerations of a tormented soul and written to be read privately, in closure, quietly. When the speaker refers to Christ, following the religious and liturgical language, he uses adjectives and pronouns which begin with a capital letter: «Χρυσέ μου», «τα ματάκια Σου», «που Σου ‘κρυψα». On the other hand, when he refers to his person of interest, the relevant adjectives and pronouns are significantly given with a lower-case letter: «σιμά σου», «θα σου στείλει», «τα χειλάκια σου», «η ψυχούλα σου».

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<sup>385</sup> This is what the Orthodox Church calls mass on the day of Christmas in the evening.

Therefore, the poem interestingly unfolds around a chiasmic scheme, since in the first and the third stanzas the addressee is the person of the speaker's interest and in the second and fourth stanzas the addressee is Christ. In following this technique, Lapathiotis consciously complicates the addressees of the speaker so the poem concludes in a fusion of their substances—Christ is eroticised and the human is deified. The person of the speaker's interest constitutes a projection of Christ and Christ constitutes a projection of the person of the speaker's interest. In the last stanza, the speaker personalises the pain of his soul and addresses it by giving the word in a capital letter again: «Πόνε». Even greater than the speaker's feelings towards the person who interests him and the comforting figure of Christ, is the pain which dominates his existence and the speaker therefore idealises it and stresses its significance in his life by equating it with the figure of his two Gods: the object of his desire and Christ. By being the last deified substance by the speaker, it seems that it is the pain which puts the overall stamp on the life of the speaker. The context of the last stanza has ironic nuances, since the speaker juxtaposes the «τύπους» with the «ουσία». Christmas is supposed to be a joyful celebration. Therefore, he has to hide all of his pain and sadness behind a fake smile which is more appropriate for the occasion. In this sense, the last stanza of the poem brings to mind the Cavafian poem «Μύρης- Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.»<sup>386</sup> in which are also ironic allusions to the «τύπους» that the Church follows faithfully, in a way that «ουσία» remains out of it.

In another early poem, entitled 'Nirvana',<sup>387</sup> also written between 1905 and 1919, the poet promotes the 'religion of the body.' Many of his poems praise the body, the flesh and the accomplishment and pursuit of its desires. The poem is dedicated by the poet to the *agnus Dei*:

Πού είστε, Καιροί—ω παλιοί, ω μακριοί

-κι όμως πόσο  
χρυσοί, μες στη γλαυκότεατη ενός πελάου  
που 'πλεα

ολάσπρη βάρκα

<sup>386</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 186.

<sup>387</sup> Lapathiotis, *Ποιήματα*, 110.

και στο νόημά σου ακόμα δε μ' υπόταχνες, ω  
Σάρκα, κι ήμουν εμπάρθενος, ω Εσύ, κι ήμουν  
αγνός, ω Εσύ...

(Ανάσαινα μονάναπνα τη Ζωήν, όπως  
κρασί, κι απολάβαινα νοερά κι αμμουδιές  
και πάρκα, κι άγνωρος από κορμί, κι  
ανίδεος από σάρκα, είχα ακέραιη την ψυχή  
και γνώση τη μισή.)

Αποθυμάω σα μια λευκότατη και σα μιαν ιερότη,

—έτσι σαν πως αυγερινό δροσό μέσ' από  
κρίνα— μια πρώτη αγάπη πρώτου ανθρώπου,  
σε μια πλάση

πρώτη ...

... Κι όμως εμένα με τρυγάει, Κορμί, η δικιά σου  
Πείνα, κι ωσά λαμπάδα καιούμενη μπρος σε κόνισμα,  
θερμή, μ'ανεβαίνει η Προσευκή, σε Σένα—το Κορμί.

The speaker brings the two different phases he went through in his life to the fore. At an earlier stage of his life, when he was young, he followed a prudent and respectful way of living, staying away from the quests of the Body and the Flesh, and, by extension, close to religion and its teachings. The speaker addresses this self with feelings of admiration and respect: «ω Εσύ», «ω Εσύ...», recognising that he refers to an aspect of his life which is lost forever. The parenthesis which follows the first part of the poem and consequently the first phase of the life of the speaker functions as an «ιντερμέδιο» between the two different phases. The speaker recognises and admits that in the previous phase enjoyment was only «νοερή» based on imagination and not on practise and actions. He was imagining enjoying sexual encounters in «αμμουδιές» and «πάρκα», but he did not have the actual experience of it, since he was constrained by religion. In doing so, he confesses that, after all, he had «ακέραιη την ψυχή και γνώση τη μισή». The stanzas of the poem which follow the parenthesis refer to the present self of the speaker. He states that

he longs for his old «λευκότατη ιερότη»; he compares his first pure self with Adam and Eve and their innocent feelings («μια πρώτη αγάπη πρώτου ανθρώπου»), and his transition to the full knowledge as the Fall of the human from the Paradise they possessed and lived in («σε μια πλάση πρώτη ...»), to real life and its vanity. Even though this is the case, the speaker surrenders to a new God, the Body, and confesses to it. The prayer of the speaker transcends him and sends him up to what he worships—the body. The last verses of the poem indicate that full knowledge is acquired by the speaker when he learns to give in to the desires of his body, when he proceeds to actions, gaining experiences, following the lust of the flesh. Even though the speaker of Lapathiotis seems to be satisfied with his choice to devote himself to the desires of the flesh, the work of the poet as a whole conveys a deep feeling of desperation and loneliness in the path that he follows. It seems that the choice of the speaker of Lapathiotis for the full knowledge that giving in to desires offers, instead of the «ακέρατη ψυχή» promised by a prudent Christian life, has a price to be paid.

Three years after his self-excommunication, in 1930, Lapathiotis wrote the poems «Άσμα Ασμάτων»<sup>388</sup> and «Εκ Βαθέων».<sup>389</sup> «Άσμα ασμάτων», as is clear from its title, refers to the book ‘Song of Songs,’ which is based on a tradition of Near Eastern erotic poetry, consisting of seventeen chapters which praise love as an institution («θεσμός») blessed by God. A second interpretation makes an allegorical reference to the union of Christ and His Church. Lapathiotis cites the last two chapters (16 and 17) of the ‘Song of Songs’ as the epigraph of his poem: «Ιδού ει καλός, ο αδελφιδός μου, και γε ωραίος· προς κλίνη ημών σύσκιος, δοκοί οίκων ημών κέδροι, φατνώματα ημών κυπάρισσοι».<sup>390</sup> Religiously related mottos are very often used by the poet, revealing that the *oeuvre* of Lapathiotis as a whole is preoccupied with the theme of religion even after him leaving the Church. It seems that his act did not constrain him to inner torment. For the poet, the key word of the passage is «αδελφιδός», which is characterised as «καλός» and «ωραίος»—the whole poem

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<sup>388</sup> Lapathiotis, *Ποιήματα*, 202.

<sup>389</sup> Lapathiotis, *Ποιήματα*, 214.

<sup>390</sup> For the whole text of Solomon’s “Song of Songs” in ancient Greek and in modern Greek see Yorgos Seferis, trans., *Άσμα Ασμάτων* (Athens: Ikaros, 1972), and for further interpretation and analysis see the recent monograph Gianni Barbiero, *Song of Songs: a Close Reading*, trans. Michael Tait (Boston: Brill, 2011).

unfolds around him, constituting a tribute to this partner, an anthem to the object of love and adoration:

Κι έφεγγαν τα μάτια Σου, Καλέ  
μου, μες στη μαύρη νύχτα του  
Κυρίου,  
κι ήτανε χυμένη στη μορφή  
σου σα μιαν ηδονή του  
μαρτυρίου·

κι έλεγαν τα μάτια Σου, Καλέ  
μου, σα για μιαν αλάθητη θυσία,  
—κι όλη μας η κάμαρα, Καλέ  
μου, φάνταζε βαθιά, σαν  
εκκλησία·

κι ήρθανε τα χέρια Σου, Καλέ μου,  
τα λευκά χεράκια τα γλυκά μου,  
κι έμειναν ακίνητα, Καλέ μου,

σαν πουλάκια, μέσα στα δικά μου.

Κι όλη νύχτα, τρέμοντας, Καλέ μου,  
μες στο βουβαμό του μυστηρίου,  
λιώναμε, κι οι δυο, σα δυο  
λαμπάδες, την Αιώνια Δόξα του  
Κυρίου....

Based on the passage of the Song of the Songs, Lapathiotis comes up with a poem in which he employs the motif of conjugal love or the love of Christ for his Church to convey homosexual love, the love of the speaker for his lover. The second verse, «μες στη μαύρη νύχτα του Κυρίου», evokes the poem 'Dark Night of the Soul'<sup>391</sup> by Saint John of the Cross. The poem refers to the journey of the soul from

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<sup>391</sup> For an interesting insight into the poem see Georgia Harkness, *The Dark Night of the Soul: a Modern Interpretation* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1948).

the body to its union with God. This journey is called 'the dark night' because of all experiences a religious crisis, since it starts doubting its faith in God. 'Dark Night of the Soul' is separated into two books and the successive stanzas connote the different steps of this 'night'. The first book represents the first phase, the purification of the senses, whereas the second represents the most difficult phase, the purification of the spirit, which leads to spiritual growth and union with God. The protagonist in the poem of Lapathiotis, and in his work in general, seems to experience this 'dark night of the soul', since he doubts his faith and eventually refuses it. Yet, the unfolding of the poem «Άσμα Ασμάτων»<sup>392</sup> reveals that the speaker believes in and proceeds to the purification of the senses through homosexual love, which is based on authentic desire. By evoking the Spanish poem of the sixteenth century, Lapathiotis reveals that his work also has a Western flavour, indebted to Wilde and other Western writers, and akin to the Roman Catholic flavour of Christomanos.<sup>393</sup> In a similar vein, when the poet refers to «μιαν ηδονή του μαρτυρίου», he brings to mind the eroticising of the martyrdom of St. Sebastian who is characterised as 'an enduring homo-erotic icon'<sup>394</sup>, an argument which is reinforced by his artistic depictions.

We should pay attention to the fact that when the speaker refers to the person who constitutes the object of his love and lust, he employs words starting with a capital letter: «τα μάτια Σου», where the possessive pronoun «Σου» begins with a the troubles and the obstacles the soul faces to be united with God. It is as if the soul capital letter, and «Καλέ μου» and «Χρυσέ μου», where the two adjectives used to characterise his loved one also begin with a capital letter. In the poem,

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<sup>392</sup> Lapathiotis, *Ποιήματα*, 202

<sup>393</sup> For further details on the relationship of Christomanos and Lapathiotis, see Lapathiotis, *Ποιήματα*, 9–10. I shall also note the friendship and mutual interaction and influence of Sikelianos and Lapathiotis (see again Lapathiotis, *Ποιήματα*, 10). It would be very interesting for a comparative study to be undertaken on the religious parallels on Sikelianos and Lapathiotis, something which is not stated in Korfis's monograph on Lapathiotis and the relevant comparative chapter on Sikelianos and Lapathiotis: Tasos Korfis, *Ναπολέων Λαπαθιώτης: Συμβολή στη μελέτη της ζωής και του έργου του* (Athens: Prosperos, 1985), 93–101.

<sup>394</sup> Charles Darwent, "Arrows of Desire: How did St Sebastian become an Enduring, Homo-erotic Icon?" *The Independent*, February 10, 2008, <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/features/arrows-of-desire-how-did-st-sebastian-become-an-enduring-homoerotic-icon-779388.html> (accessed March 17, 2014).



though, the speaker also makes reference to God, to whom he explicitly refers to twice with the address «του Κυρίου» (the Lord)<sup>395</sup>. The speaker sanctifies the person of his lust, even deifies him. In doing so, he recognises his huge importance in his life and therefore applies to his loved one a divine element. The poet simulates the sexual intercourse of the speaker with his lover with a sacred ritual. To describe lovemaking he employs vocabulary which explicitly refers to worship; the Passion of Christ is compared to the perverse pleasure that sexual ‘martyrdom’ brings the lover of the speaker, while his eyes betray a «αλάθητη θυσία», bringing to mind Christ’s own sacrifice for the sake of humanity. Attention should be paid to the adjective «αλάθητη», which can also be read ironically towards the sacrifice of Christ. The room where the erotic night takes place is purified to such an extent it makes it comparable with a church, evoking the Cavafian poem «Στην εκκλησία», where emphasis is given by Cavafy to the exaltation of the senses in the «κατανυκτική» atmosphere of a Byzantine Church. He denotes that sexual intercourse with the person who constitutes the addressee of his lust and desire—and consequently the person who constitutes the speaker’s own personal God—creates the same sacred devotion and awe («κατάλυξη») created by religious ritual. He compares the deep and sacred meaning of an authentic relationship to the sacrifice of Christ; this constitutes a ‘far-fetched’ move by Lapathiotis. Given the fact that the publication of «Κι έπινα μεσ’ απ’ τα χείλια σου ...» in 1910 created such a huge social and religious scandal, with this poem Lapathiotis is consciously and dangerously close to blasphemy, in a way which could have brought about prosecution. Finally, in the last stanza of the poem the comparison of the religious mystery with the sacred sexual intercourse reaches its climax; the two lovers «λιώνουν σα δυο λαμπάδες» with their hedone perpetuate and honour the glory of God. I would like to conclude with Lapathiotis’s poem «Εκ Βαθέων», also published in 1930, which offers a different approach to the issue of homoeroticism as associated with religious feelings:

Λυπήσου με, Θε μου, στο δρόμο που  
πήρα, χωρίς, ως το τέλος, να ξέρω το

<sup>395</sup> This technique constitutes a profound feature in the poetry of Lapathiotis. In many of his poems we observe that the words ascribed by the poet with a great significance are given with a capital letter, since the poet idealises them. Apart from the poem «Εκ βαθέων», the poem «Δάκρυα» is another great example of the technique Lapathiotis uses to refer to the person who is the object of his passion with adjectives and pronouns starting with a capital letter, in the same way that someone would refer to God and Saint.

πώς,  
—χωρίς να' χω μάθει, με μια τέτοια  
μοίρα, ποιο κρίμα με δένει, και ποιος ο  
σκοπός!

...

Λυπήσου με, Θε μου, στην απόγνωσή μου  
λυπήσου τη φλόγα που μάταια σκορπώ

—λυπήσου με μες στην αγανάκτησή  
μου, να ζω δίχως λόγο και δίχως σκοπό

....

The poet found his way to the title after much deliberation, as the multiple publications of the poem with different titles betray. Among those titles we come across «Σε ένα Θεό, εάν αυτός υπάρχει», which reminds us of Palamas's own doubting attitude to religion. In fact, we could say that Lapathiotis attempts to continue Palamas's dialogue with Christ, who was also 'seriously troubled by the question of belief',<sup>396</sup> but in an eroticised manner this time. As the last title «Εκ βαθέων» implies, in this poem Lapathiotis proceeds to a confession *de profundis*. The title refers to Psalm 130, one of the seven penitential psalms, in which the psalmist cries to God in deep sorrow, asking for mercy. The title also brings to mind

Oscar Wilde's poem 'De Profundis'<sup>397</sup>, in which he first mentions and then indicts incidents from his relationship and way of life with Douglas, which lead him to prison, and after that he points out the spiritual growth he acquired in prison, dismissing religion as a source of solace. Lapathiotis makes his confession to a God whose very existence he doubts. According to the Church, the ritual of confession has to be based on true Christian feelings—deep faith in God and authentic repentance for

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<sup>396</sup> Anthony Hirst, *God and the Poetic Ego: the Appropriation of Biblical and Liturgical Language in the Poetry of Palamas, Sikelianos and Elytis* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), 42.

<sup>397</sup> Oscar Wilde, *De Profundis* (Mineola, New York: Dover, 1996).

someone's sins. Given these feelings as granted, and only in this case, the confession can be 'successful', which means that the person can be forgiven by the priest who is authorised by God, and the reunion of the penitent with God can be achieved. Having in mind the previous titles of the poem, as well as the whole corpus of the work of Lapathiotes, it is apparent that the speaker of the poem lacks these feelings. Therefore, the confession is invalid. Confession serves Lapathiotes mainly to convey the ironic perspective of the speaker towards the feelings of repentance caused by religion and its repressions.

It has to be clarified that the outcry of the speaker to *a* God and not *the* God does not include any feelings of guilt regarding his homoeroticism, because the speaker of Lapathiotes does not have them.<sup>398</sup> The speaker perceives his meaningless life as the greatest cause of his «καημός», which motivates him to confess. The constant feeling of *vanitas vanitatum* lashes out the speaker, who feels that he wastes his 'fire' («φλόγα») brazenly and without beneficial result. Bearing in mind the whole poetic corpus of Lapathiotes, the poem «Εκ Βαθέων» might as well be perceived as an erotic poem, since the speaker seems to be tortured by the lack of a permanent erotic partner, who will give to his life the meaning he is so desperately looking for. Without his partner, the speaker feels that he wastes himself among pointless sexual encounters which satisfy his body but leave his soul lonely. Finally, bearing in mind the fact that Lapathiotes wanted this poem to be the first of his poetic collection, we can conclude that he emphasises the confessional function of his poetry as a whole, which is faced as a means for a tormented soul to be expressed.

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<sup>398</sup> Lapathiotes was open about his homoeroticism: «... ποτέ, σε καμιά στιγμή της ζωής μου, δε θεώρησα ελάττωμα, την υλικήν αποστροφή μου στη γυναίκα, και την έλξη μου από το ίδιο μου το φύλο...». From Lapathiotes's personal notes, dated May 26, 1930, as quoted in Lapathiotes, *Ποιήματα*, 15. Also, for Lapathiote's misogyny and conviction for the superiority of man, see Korfis, *Ναπολέων Λαπαθιώτης*, 77–78.

**Dinos Christianopoulos: «...τί θα πει προσκυνημένος»**

Even though there is a large time gap between Lapathiotes and Christianopoulos, Christianopoulos seems to be an apt example of the cultivation of both elements of Cavafy and especially Lapathiotes, when it comes to the relationship between Christianity and the homoerotic. Christianopoulos, the only living author discussed in this thesis, picks up the thread from Cavafy and Lapathiotes, with whose work he is familiar<sup>399</sup> and provides new perspectives to the way homoeroticism is represented in Modern Greek poetry. Following the example of Lapathiotes, now in the even more repressive years following the Second World War, Christianopoulos kicked off his writing career with the creation of a series of scandals, provoking society and the Church; His connections with religion are deep and undisputable; In the recent volume of «Έντευκτήριο» (October/December 2011), dedicated to Christianopoulos, Yorgos Cordomenides informs us that as a child, when Greece was under Axis occupation, Christianopoulos survived because of the common meals of the pietist organisation Zoe (1942-1945).<sup>400</sup> In 1943 he subscribed to the magazine «Ελληνόπουλο», where he published poems with the nickname «Χριστιανόπουλο»<sup>401</sup> and in 1947 he changed his original surname, Demetriades, to Christianopoulos, a surname indicative of his religious preoccupations.<sup>402</sup> His first poetic collection *Η εποχή των Ισχνών Αγελάδων*<sup>403</sup>, printed with his own money and published in 1950 became immediately a best-seller and because of its audacity – part of which is its Biblical title – the book created a huge negative fuss around the new poet.<sup>404</sup> Cordomenides mentioned that the poetic collection

(...) προκαλεί αντιδράσεις από τον Τύπο, τους κύκλους των λογοτεχνών, του Πανεπιστημίου (κυρίως από καθηγητές – ανάμεσά τους ο Ι.Θ. Κακριδής, ο Γιερός, ο

<sup>399</sup> See the references Christianopoulos makes about Cavafy and Lapathiotes in his booklet *Το επ' εμοί*: Dinos Christianopoulos, *Το επ' εμοί* (Athens: Mpilieto, 1993), 56-60.

<sup>400</sup> Yorgos Cordomenides, «Χρονολόγιο Ντίνου Χριστιανόπουλου: ένα πρώτο σχέδιασμα», in *Entektirio (Aferoma Dinos Christianopoulos)* 24:95 (2011): 8.

<sup>401</sup> Cordomenides, «Χρονολόγιο», 9.

<sup>402</sup> Cordomenides, «Χρονολόγιο», 9.

<sup>403</sup> Dinos Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα* (Thessaloniki: Ianos, 2012), 11-31.

<sup>404</sup> Cordomenides, «Χρονολόγιο», 10.

Αγαπητός Τσοπανάκης- και λιγότερο από συμφοιτητές), των κατηχητικών (υπό τη σιδηρά ηγεσία του πατρός Λεωνίδα Παρασκευόπουλου, επί χούντας μητροπολίτη Θεσσαλονίκης) αλλά και από το συγγενικό περίγυρο.<sup>405</sup>

The climax of the reactions against him came with the second publication of the same poetic collection, where:

Αμέσως επεμβαίνει η Γενική Ασφάλεια Θεσσαλονίκης και κατάσχει το βιβλίο, επειδή σε ένα ποίημά του αποκαλούσε τους αστυνομικούς «μπασκίνες· ταυτόχρονα, αποπέμπεται και από τη χριστιανική κίνηση της «Ζωής».<sup>406</sup>

Biblical protagonists, religious settings, modern anachronisms and a latent or obvious eroticism saturated his first poetic collection *Εποχή των ισχνών αγελάδων*<sup>407</sup> (1950). Referring to the poems of the collection, Christianopoulos explains:

Τα έγραφα δεκαεννιά και είκοσι χρονώ, όταν ήμουν στα κατηχητικά. Έχοντας εμποτιστεί από το θρησκευτικό περιβάλλον, ζώντας όμως και σε μια σύγκρουση μαζί του, δεν είχα γνωρίσει ακόμα τον έρωτα και βρισκόμουν σε διαρκή έξαψη. (...) Από τον Καβάφη, που διαπότισε τη ζωή μου και την αισθητική μου και λιγότερο την ηθική μου, διδάχτηκα την τόλμη της εξομολόγησης (...) από τον Έλιοτ δέχτηκα τη χριστιανική αγωνία (...). Οι δύο επιδράσεις αλληλοσυγκρούονταν, τόσο που ένιωθα σαν κακός μαθητής του Καβάφη· έτσι όμως δημιουργήθηκε ένα νέο χαρμάνι που με ικανοποιούσε και με εξέφραζε.<sup>408</sup>

It was in this spirit that he came up with poems like «Μαγδαληνή»<sup>409</sup> where he blasphemously presented Magdalene in love with the eroticised Christ, in provocative

<sup>405</sup> Cordomenides, «Χρονολόγιο», 10.

<sup>406</sup> Cordomenides, «Χρονολόγιο», 10.

<sup>407</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 11-31.

<sup>408</sup> Christianopoulos, *Το επ' εμοί*, 9-10.

<sup>409</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 12-13.

verses like

Ξέρω, είναι πολύ αυτό το μύρο για τη  
μετάνοια, ωστόσο για τον έρωτα είναι λίγο.  
Κι αν μια μέρα ασπαστώ το χριστιανισμό, θα 'ναι για  
την αγάπη του·  
κι αν μαρτυρήσω γι' Αυτόν, θα 'ναι η αγάπη του που θα  
μ' εμπνέει.

Γιατί, κύριε, ο έρωτας μού ανάβει την πίστη κι η  
αγάπη τη μετάνοια  
κι ίσως μείνει αιώνια τ' όνομά μου σα σύμβολο  
εκείνων που σώθηκαν και λυτρώθηκαν ότι  
ήγάπησαν πολύ.<sup>410</sup>

Whereas in the poem «Εκατόνταρχος Κορνήλιος» (1950)<sup>411</sup> of the same collection, the Centurion Cornelius prays to Christ (or before the image of Christ) for the health of Antonius, his favourite slave, with words like «Κύριε, μην απορείς για την τόση μου πίστη· η αγάπη μού υπαγορεύει την πίστη» and «Όμως κάν' τον καλά, μόν' αυτό σου ζητώ, τίποτ' άλλο. Θα 'ταν ανήθικο κάθε άλλο που θα τολμούσα να σου ζητήσω». Eros triggers «μετάνοια» and «προσευχή». The protagonists, being aware of their 'immorality', do believe that they are going to be forgiven because of their deep feelings of erotic love, a feature obvious in the case of Magdalene towards the eroticised figure of Christ and a latent, but strongly present characteristic in the case of Cornelius. Indeed, the poems do represent the inner struggle of the protagonists, accepting, on the one hand, the 'indecent' of their love and, on the other hand, believing that the quality of their true love can justify its genre. At the same time, these first poems predispose the theme which is meant to occupy the work of Christianopoulos at length, what Kavvadas has eloquently expressed:

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<sup>410</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 13.

<sup>411</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 11. Also, see the analysis of the poem in the third chapter of my thesis, discussing the connotations of the same poem as far as the category of social class is concerned.

Στο εξής η ποίησή του θα κινηθεί ανάμεσα σε δύο κυλιόμενες πέτρες: η πρώτη θα είναι η ανάγκη ενός κορμιού, πλασματική αλλά αναγκαία έξοδος από τη μόνιμη οδό της μοναξιάς, και η δεύτερη θα είναι η θρησκευτική πίστη. Ο ποιητής παλεύει ν' αποφύγει τη νυχτερινή περιπέτεια, γιατί είναι απόλυτα πεπεισμένος ότι αμαρτάνει. Η φυγόκεντρος κίνηση ανάγκης- διλήμματος-αμαρτίας/ δοκιμασίας-λύτρωσης-ανάγκης γίνεται γύρω από τον μόνο άξονα που σταθεροποιεί το σύστημα: την Ποίηση.<sup>412</sup>

The protagonists of Christianopoulos's first collection constitute multiple personae for the poet, reinforcing the confessional mode of the collection and of the whole of his work. As he himself states, following the technique of Cavafy: «Τα πρόσωπα από την Αγία Γραφή, την ελληνική μυθολογία και το Βυζάντιο αποτελούν προσωπεία των εξομολογήσεών μου.»<sup>413</sup>

It is for this reason that his protagonists are to be distinguished from the author; because they become autonomous from the author, being at the same time his creature; they are represented by the author and they represent the author, offering him the voice he needs to express himself and his poetry.

The poem «Νύχτα, χάρισέ μου ένα κορμί»<sup>414</sup> from the collection *Ανυπεράσπιστος Καημός*, will be analysed in detail in my next chapter on homoeroticism and social class. The poem is also important for the purposes of this chapter too. The last verses of the poem read as follows:

Νύχτα, χάρισέ μου ένα κορμί,έστω και  
για μισή ώρα, για ένα δεκάλεπτο· σου  
τάζω πρώτα  
πρώτα το κορμί μου,  
σου τάζω το μέλλον μου,

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412 Christos Kavvadas, «Σημειώσεις για την ποίηση του Ντίνου Χριστιανόπουλου», in *Enteuktirio (Afieroma Dinos Christianopoulos)* 24:95 (2011): 42.

413 Christianopoulos, *Το επ' εμοί*, 11.

414 Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 61.

σου τάζω κάτι περισσότερο: την ψυχή μου-χάρισέ μου ένα κορμί.<sup>415</sup>

In these lines the speaker declares his conviction about the omnipotence of his body towards his soul, by characteristically referring that he even redeems his soul to satisfy the ‘hunger’ and the ‘thirst’ of his body. In Cavafy, homoerotic feelings and encounters are hard to be found and satisfied, and thus they are mostly idealised by stressing their authenticity and bravery in expression against a « (...)κοινωνία που ήταν σεμνότυφη πολύ» and «συσχέτιζε κουτά».<sup>416</sup> Nonetheless, the Cavafian protagonist also feels guilt because «υπέπεσε εκ νέου», and «ομνύει κάθε τόσο ν’αρχίσει πιο καλή ζωή».<sup>417</sup> In the end though, his efforts to change his way of living and expressing his sexuality are in vain, since «όταν έρθει η νύχτα, με τις δικές της επιταγές, στην ίδια μοιραία χαρά χαμένος ξαναπηαίνει». Christianopoulos, on the other hand, chooses to stay away from utopianisms as far as the expression of homoeroticism is concerned in his poetry, looking for the fulfilment of his soul, being tired from the sole satisfaction of his body and the constant pursuit of the hedone for his flesh. In his essay on Lapathiotes, Christianopoulos writes:

Σήμερα βέβαια ξεπεράστηκε κι ο Λαπαθιώτης κι η εποχή του, και καταντάει λίγο αναχρονιστικό να καταπιάνεται κανείς με τα θέματα αυτά. Κι όμως, σε πείσμα κάθε μοντερνισμού, ο Λαπαθιώτης καταφέρνει να επιβιώνει, ίσως γιατί είναι ο πρώτος που πίσω από τη μουσική των στίχων του ξεσκεπάζει ένα δράμα ηθικό και μας αναγκάζει να δούμε σε τι ερείπια οδηγούν τα πάθη. Αυτό το λάγγεμα που γίνεται θρήνος, αυτή η μέθεξη πουκαταντάει ολοφυρμός, αυτοί οι «νικημένοι της ζωής» που είναι πιο αυθεντικοί από τους «ανδρείους της ηδονής», αποτελούν την πιο γνήσια προσφορά του Λαπαθιώτη, ιδίως σήμερα που η αισθητική ζυμώνεται όλο και πιο πολύ με την ηθική.<sup>418</sup>

Christianopoulos’ example reverses his own words, since his poetry follows the path of Lapathiotes and abolishes conventional distinctions between themoral and immoral.

<sup>415</sup>Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 61.

<sup>416</sup>The verses come from the Cavafian poem «Μέρες του 1896»: Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 166-168.

<sup>417</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74.

<sup>418</sup> Christianopoulos, *Το επ’ εμοί*, 24-26.



Yet, he goes a step further; he appears to be rawer, far from romanticism and closer to realism. However, there is also a sort of romanticism to the use of religious language like «τάζω» and the idea of grace. As the verses from «Νύχτα, χάρισέ μου ένα κορμί» indicate, the protagonist of Christianopoulos is tortured by the lack of a sexual partner to satisfy his sexual needs and the value of his soul does not matter before the satisfaction of his body, which he achieves in such a difficult manner. The titles of his two subsequent poetic collections «*Το κορμί και το σαράκι*» (1964)<sup>419</sup> and «*Το κορμί και το μεράκι*» (1970) are evident of the poet's dedication to the body and the fulfilment of its desires. Yet there is a «σαράκι» which torments the soul of the speaker and does not allow him to enjoy his «μεράκι», making a life like this one for a Christian a living hell.

The protagonist of Christianopoulos admittedly remains faithful to his religion, following the strong religious beliefs of the poet. Christianopoulos's protagonist is a Christian and does not doubt his faith, in juxtaposition with the work of Cavafy, where emphasis is given to religious continuity, without a strong Christian presence in the protagonist's identity and in juxtaposition with the work of Lapathiotis, where the protagonist constantly doubts and challenges his faith. Yet, Christianopoulos cannot by any means be characterised as «ευσεβής», since he does not fit into the broad sense of the term, which is to obey the doctrines and the teachings of the Church. On the contrary, he appears to be disappointed by the attitude of the Church towards homosexuality, and this contributes to the «αιώνιο παράπονο»<sup>420</sup> that his protagonist obsesses over. However, he does not for a second doubt his faith in God and religion in the broader sense, away from human interventions, priests and the Church. Indeed, in his work, the poet makes references to God and priests very often. The majority of his references are made to God, whom he often addresses, and in their majority they are motivated by the speaker's honesty and the strong

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<sup>419</sup> Christianopoulos, *Μικρά Ποιήματα* (Thessaloniki: Ianos, 2011).

<sup>420</sup> The expression is borrowed from the poem «Το αιώνιο παράπονο» (1958), included in Christianopoulos' poetic collection here discussed, «Ανυπεράσπιστος Καημός»: Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 58.

presence of God in his life: In the poem «Βολέματα καταστροφής»<sup>421</sup> we find the verses:

Μα πάνω στου σπασμού την  
αποθέωση, που εκμηδενίζει κάθε  
άλλη ομορφιά,  
να' χω τη δύναμη να πω «Κύριε, όχι άλλο» (...) <sup>422</sup>

In the poem «Επέτειος»<sup>423</sup> the line «και Κύριος οίδε τί θα γίνει»<sup>424</sup> in an untitled poem of the collection «Το κορμί και το σαράκι» the verse «Θεέ μου φύλαγε απ' την κακιά στιγμή»,<sup>425</sup> in the poem «Νεκρή πιάτσα»<sup>426</sup> the line «Θέ μου, συγχώραμε, μεγάλο λόγο θα πω», in the poem «Στο λαϊκό κέντρο»<sup>427</sup> the verse «Πώς άντεξα, Θεέ μου, και δε χύμηξα (...)»<sup>428</sup>- just to mention a few references. Even though, without another phrase like 'forgive me', «Θεέ μου» could be just a colloquial exclamation, it is worth noting that Cavafy would never allow that. References to priests are rarer, since the poet is always suspicious towards priests and the Church in general as a human institution. Characteristically, I quote an untitled poem of the collection «Το κορμί και το μεράκι», in which the ironic mood is apparent:

ξέρω πενήντα αδελφές στο  
Βαρδάρι δυο παπάδες  
δυο  
κουμμούνες

<sup>421</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 60.

<sup>422</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 60.

<sup>423</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 63.

<sup>424</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 63.

<sup>425</sup> Christianopoulos, *Μικρά Ποιήματα*, 25.

<sup>426</sup> Dinos Christianopoulos, *Η Νεκρή Πιάτσα: Πεζά Ποιήματα (1977-1989)* (Thessaloniki: Nikolaide, 1990).

<sup>427</sup> Christianopoulos, *Η Νεκρή Πιάτσα*, 43.

<sup>428</sup> Christianopoulos, *Η Νεκρή Πιάτσα*, 43.

δυο καρφιά  
αδύνατο να γίνουν σωματείο

as well as the poem [ευαγγελική εκκλησία], where the poet, begins in a way which reminds us of Cavafy's «Στην Εκκλησία» (1905-1915)<sup>429</sup> and its synaesthesia (combination of the exalted senses) in the environment of a Byzantine Church. In the case of this poem, Christianopoulos might be ironic towards a different Church (a Protestant one) and finishes with illustrating his suspicions and disappointment towards the hypocrisy in the words of the preacher:

ήταν τόσο γλυκιά η  
χορωδία τόσο υποβλητικό  
το όργανο τόσο ευλαβική  
η μουσική  
όλα τα χάλασε ο ιεροκήρυκας,<sup>430</sup>

As it is obvious from the above verses the protagonist in the poetry of Christianopoulos experiences guilt about his deliberate and 'immoral' way of living, recognising that his life is dominated by the power of the erotic desires of his body at the peril of his soul. He considers this attitude as «κατάντια» and he appears to be disappointed in himself. Therefore, the dominant theme of his poetry is indeed «(...) η εφήμερη ομοφυλοφιλική σχέση και το ερωτικό πάθος που οδηγεί στην ταπείνωση και τη μοναξιά».<sup>431</sup>

Poems like «Επέτειος» (1958)<sup>432</sup> engage in a discussion which involves these feelings; the speaker confesses:

«Δεν ξέρεις τί  
ζητάς», (...)

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<sup>429</sup>Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 64.

<sup>430</sup>Christianopoulos, *Μικρά Ποιήματα*, 31.

<sup>431</sup>Demosthenis Kourtovik, *Έλληνες Μεταπολεμικοί Συγγραφείς* (Athens: Patakis 1999): 274.

<sup>432</sup>Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 63.

«σε χάλασαν οι τόσες  
 διαψεύσεις, σ'έκανε εύκολο η  
 απελπισία,  
 έπαψες να πιστεύεις πια στον έρωτα: σε  
 κλαίω» (...)  
 όμως εγώ είμαι αδύνατος  
 άνθρωπος, η σάρκα μου πεινάει,  
 θέλει να φάει,  
 το αίμα μου κρύνει, θέλει να ζεσταθεί.<sup>433</sup>

As the above lines indicate, the protagonist considers his obsession with the body and the flesh as a weakness which derive from his constant disappointment in life and his search for authentic mutual love. As opposed to the speakers of Lapathiotes, who blamed God for their pointless life, the speaker of Christianopoulos blames his own self and recognises that he is a «αδύνατος άνθρωπος», who gives in to sexual Instincts and needs of his body. The speakers of Lapathiotes and the ones of Christianopoulos, however, share a common feature, which is despair over a pointless life. Similarly, in the poem «Σταυρούπολη» (1959)<sup>434</sup> from «Ανυπεράσπιστος καημός», the speaker wonders «Τί γυρεύω εγώ σ'αυτές τις νύχτες» and continues with providing the answer to his torturing considerations, which are reminiscent of related ones in the poetry of Lapathiotes:

Γυρεύω να επενδύσω την καρδιά  
 μου· Δεν τα αντέχω πια αυτά τα  
 βλέμματα,  
  
 Στοιβάχτηκαν πολλά παράπονα στα μάτια  
 μου, Τα χαμόγελά μου πικρίζουν,  
 Το πρόσωπό μου έγινε ολοκαύτωμα.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 63.

<sup>434</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 63.

<sup>435</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 64.

Religion and homoeroticism in the poetry of Christianopoulos are both strongly present in an inextricable way. In this very sense, the poet aims at promoting homoeroticism and religion as two indisputable parts of the identity of his protagonists, as happens for example in the Cavafian poem «Των Εβραίων» (1019-1933),<sup>436</sup> analysed before. The protagonists of Christianopoulos are both Christians and homosexuals, without themselves doubting either of these two 'social roles', even though they are experiencing the fear of hell. Cavafy in «Νόησις» (1916-1918)<sup>437</sup> recognises the vanity of his remorse because all of his experiences contributed to the creation of his work. Christianopoulos embraces and celebrates his feelings of guilt, which contributed to a realistic work, promoting, in the opposite way, the 'ethics' in eros. And it seems that this is his biggest difference from Cavafy; his poetry is to a greater extent than Cavafy's subject to an ethical code, whose failure in the erotic life of the protagonist causes him torturing considerations about the created imbalance between his ethics and his actual life. In an interview in 2005, Christianopoulos has said:

(...) η ποίησή μου είναι διαβρωμένη από ένα πλέγμα τύψεων και ενοχών. Γι' αυτό δεν μετανιώνω καθόλου. Αυτό μπορεί να οφείλεται στη θρησκευτική μου αγωγή, μπορεί να οφείλεται και σε κάποιες οικογενειακές δεοντολογίες, ιδίως από τη μητέρα μου, μπορεί να οφείλεται και από τα νιάτα μου που τα πέρασα στα κατηχητικά, αλλά οπουδήποτε και αν οφείλεται είμαι πολύ ευχαριστημένος που το φορτώθηκα, γιατί αυτές οι τύψεις και αυτές οι ενοχές δείχνουν πολύ καλά ότι ο έρωτας ούτε ειδυλλιακή κατάσταση είναι ούτε αποτελεί μια αμοραλιστική περιοχή. (...) ο Καβάφης είναι ερωτικός ποιητής που δεν τον ενδιαφέρει καμιά τύψη και καμιά ενοχή. Συνεχίζει δηλαδή τους αρχαίους Έλληνες που δεν τους ενδιέφερε η ηθική στον έρωτα. Αντίθετα εμένα με τρών σκουλήκια και, για το παραμικρό πράγμα που κάνω, μέσα μου έχω ένα δυλιστήριο ηθικής.<sup>438</sup>

In the line of Lapathiotis, Christianopoulos uses religious references and liturgical language in a provocative manner that challenges the religious feeling of the readers. The most common reference that Christianopoulos makes to

<sup>436</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 112.

<sup>437</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 78.

<sup>438</sup> Makes Karayannis, «Να πληρώνεις με το ίδιο σου το αίμα, αυτά που είπες ως μεγάλες ηθικές αρχές», *Avgi* (1.1.2005), accessed December 12, 2014, [http://mkaraYannis.blogspot.co.uk/2007/02/blog-post\\_5985.html](http://mkaraYannis.blogspot.co.uk/2007/02/blog-post_5985.html).

religious life is «προσκύνημα». He uses the reference to this action, which originally has religious connotations and it implies the demonstration of respect and awe towards God and Saints, to convey the protagonists' sexual actions towards their lover, connecting it again with feelings of «κατάλυξη».

The poem «Προσκυνήματα» (1969),<sup>439</sup> from «Ανυπεράσπιστος καημός», is a characteristic example. The poem reads as follows:

Από μικρός συνήθισα να  
προσκυνώ χέρια παπάδων, ιερές  
εικόνες·  
μετά το γύρισα σε πόδια αγαπημένα.  
Τώρα μπερδεύω τί θα πει προσκυνημένος.<sup>440</sup>

This brief poem combines the two different meanings that the protagonist ascribes to the word «προσκύνημα» and at the same time it conveys the two different 'social roles' that the speaker 'performs'.<sup>441</sup> To venerate the hands of the priests and icons is an attitude that the speaker had and got used to it «από μικρός», falling within the norms of his contemporary society, its traditions and habits; being raised in a very religious society has made him to face Christianity as an innate feature. The verb «γύρισα» connotes the second phase in the life of the speaker, which also constitutes the trademark for his growing up. The reference to «πόδια αγαπημένα» which he worships is a submission scene which comes under the fetishistic tendencies in the poetic corpus of Christianopoulos. In the last verse of the poem the speaker playfully provides the negative word «προσκυνημένος», the meaning of which, according to him, he confuses. The speaker feels «προσκυνημένος» first of all to the Church, as a human institution, as the ironic reference to «χέρια παπάδων» implies.<sup>442</sup> On the other hand, he also feels «προσκυνημένος» towards the sexual partners that he has had, whom he supplicates to offer him hedone and accept his vices; the term

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<sup>439</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 96.

<sup>440</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 96.

<sup>441</sup> Evoking Judith Butler and her theory on the performance of gender.

<sup>442</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 96.

«προσκυνημένος» reveals feelings of a lost dignity and authority; in this case, the speaker with his actions could have been subservient to the Church and to his lovers - yet both fulfil innate needs and offer him pleasure. It seems that what oppresses him is what he adores.

In a subsequent poem in prose, entitled «Ύμνος στην μπότα» (1977)<sup>443</sup> in *Νεκρή Πιάτσα*<sup>444</sup>, we come across the lines:

Θέλουν προπάντων όλους εμάς, που είτε νοερά (οι περισσότεροι) είτε και φανερά (μερικοί τολμηροί) σκύβουμε και λατρεύουμε αυτά τα βάρβαρα ινδάλματα μιας μυστικής θρησκείας των τσαλαπατημένων.<sup>445</sup>

In the expression «θρησκεία των τσαλαπατημένων» we understand that the protagonists of Christianopoulos promote the 'religion' of the people who seek sexual gratification through the masochistic acts of their subjugation to their 'masters'. This is a 'secret' religion, as secrecy contributes to the creation and conservation of fetishes. Therefore, the «θρησκεία των τσαλαπατημένων» worships its 'masters', who are not only people with sexual power over others (see also active towards passive homosexuals), but are also objects which function as fetishes; in the poetry of Christianopoulos, «στολή, μουστάκι, μπότες» are the ultimate fetishes which arouse the protagonists. Even though he appears to 'worship' the person who satisfies his sexual expectations, in reality he acts for his own pleasure, to satisfy his own ego; this is understood by a panoramic vision of the poetry of Christianopoulos, by detecting and picking up the points in which he contradicts himself: «όσο σε λατρεύω / τόσο διαφθείρεσαι», argues in an untitled poem of «Το κορμί και το μεράκι», «και μη θαρρείς πως είσαι τίποτα / επειδή σε προσκυνώ», he supports in an untitled poem of «Το κορμί και το σαράκι»<sup>446</sup> whereas in «Νεκρή πιάτσα» he claims that « (...) πάντα ένα κάθαρμο θα με φέρνει πιο κοντά στην κάθαρση, χωρίς να ξέρει τί καλό μου κάνει».<sup>447</sup>

<sup>443</sup> Christianopoulos, *Η Νεκρή Πιάτσα*, 8.

<sup>444</sup> Christianopoulos, *Η Νεκρή Πιάτσα*, 8.

<sup>445</sup> Christianopoulos, *Η Νεκρή Πιάτσα*, 8.

<sup>446</sup> Christianopoulos, *Μικρά Ποιήματα*, 71.

<sup>447</sup> From the poem «Αίσθημα»: Christianopoulos, *Νεκρή Πιάτσα*, 29.

In his second poetic collection *Ξένα Γόνατα* (1954)<sup>448</sup> Christianopoulos includes the poem «Μυστικός Δείπνος» (1952)<sup>449</sup> as the second poem of the collection, and we may take this as a clearer example of liturgical reference:

Άλλο δεν επιθύμησα – μονάχα  
τα κουρασμένα πόδια σου να πλύνω.

Να 'ναι η κάμαρα ζεστή, κι απ' τις  
κουρτίνες να πέφτει η αντηλιά του  
δειλινού.

Ευλαβικά τις αρβύλες θα σου βγάλω,  
τις λασπωμένες, και ζεστό νερό θα  
φέρω μες σε βαθιά λεκάνη, και θα  
σκύψω  
να σε υπηρετήσω ταπεινά.

Μα όταν, σηκώνοντας τα βρώμικα  
απονέρια, γεμάτα απ' την αγάπη μου,  
αντικριστούμε,  
μες την ανατριχίλα των ματιών μου δε θα  
βρεις αυτό που τα απονέρια ετούτα  
μαρτυρούνε.<sup>450</sup>

The speaker seeks and finds pleasure in offering his services to the person who constitutes the object of his desire. The title «Μυστικός Δείπνος» forces the reader to see behind the lines of the poem a clear connection and comparison with the Last Supper. It is as if the speaker uses the religious references as an allegory to foreground his own sexual actions. Christ himself washed the feet of his disciples, to show how each human should love and take care of others. The protagonist of the poem employs this religious allusion to display his own deep feelings of respect and love towards his lover, whom he wants to sexually take care of. The poem is

<sup>448</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 35-52.

<sup>449</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 36.

<sup>450</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 36.



enriched with language ascribed with religious connotations - «ευλαβικά»,<sup>451</sup> «να σε υπηρετήσω ταπεινά»<sup>452</sup> - conveying a feeling of awe. The speaker compares himself to Christ and he also compares his own sexual actions to His sacred actions. In doing so, he sees himself as Christ and proceeds with his actions motivated by deep love. The verb «επιθύμησα» of the first line indicates that the speaker enjoys this action of offering his services and taking care of his lover and wants to do it again and again. As the last stanza implies, the dirty water is full of the speaker's love, something which is not betrayed by the «ανατριχίλα των ματιών»<sup>453</sup>; however, the connection with the Last Supper equalises the action of the speaker with the sacred deed described in the New Testament. At the same time, this poem is evident of the fact that the speaker is prone to a fetishist and masochistic behaviour, from which he derives sexual pleasure; «πόδια» and «μπότες» become in these lines the objects of adoration and it is obvious that the speaker views his action of washing his lover's feet as an implication that he serves his 'master' and thus performs his 'derogatory' role in a sexual game of power and authority. It is not clearly stated that this action in fact ever took place; therefore, another line of interpretation could suggest that it perhaps lies at a mystical stage of intimacy which has not yet been attained.

This poem is one of many by Christianopoulos that is daring and can even be considered blasphemous. Indeed, this poem could be likened to Kirkup's poem, entitled 'The Love that Dares to Speak its Name'<sup>454</sup> published in 1976 in *Gay News*, where a Roman centurion engages in sexual intercourse with the dead Christ and references are also made to many other sexual relationships of Christ. The poem was prosecuted for blasphemy and after a famous trial the editor of *Gay News* was given a suspended prison sentence. Even though Christianopoulos' way of writing did not reach the extremities of Kirkup's poem, it has been one of the most extreme and innovative for contemporary Greek society. There is no doubt that Christianopoulos employs homoeroticism in his work in a way which is considered provocative, especially because it is a topic which he discusses very overtly and in a raw way,

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<sup>451</sup>Christianopoulos, *Ποήματα*, 36.

<sup>452</sup>Christianopoulos, *Ποήματα*, 36.

<sup>453</sup>Christianopoulos, *Ποήματα*, 36.

<sup>454</sup>James Kirkup, "The Love that Dares to Speak its Name," *Gay News*, December 1976.

stressing it to its limits by adding fetishist and masochistic elements, something that occurs only in «Δεμένος ώμος»<sup>455</sup> of Cavafy and nowhere in Lapathiotis. It is in the poem «Ατμόσφαιρα 1949»<sup>456</sup> of the poetic sequence «Ο Αλλήθωρος»<sup>457</sup> that we come across a relevant comment on his poetics:

Θα με μνημονέψουν σ' εφημερίδες μ' ευνοϊκά  
σημειώματα κι ύστερα θα με ξεχάσουν· ευνόητο,  
μια κι έλειψε η πνοή των παλαιών από τους  
στίχους μας  
και μένει τώρα μοναχά η εμπειρία τους;

Likewise, the first poems of Christianopoulos and especially «Εποχή των ισχνών αγελάδων»<sup>458</sup> are brimful with Cavafian influences.<sup>459</sup> However, as his work evolves, the poet comes to set himself apart from the strong Cavafian influence and following more the greater licence of Lapathiotis, he tries his own hand at providing his own stamp. In doing so, he becomes the first Modern Greek writer who employs the topic in such a way and it is at this point that his individual voice is heard, away from the strong voices of his predecessors.

As I have shown above, Christianopoulos appears to be more influenced by Lapathiotis rather than Cavafy, in terms of the extrovert and provocative way of writing. Yet, there is a huge difference; in the case of Lapathiotis, the connection is made by a writer who denies Christianity. Lapathiotis promotes his own religion of the body, considering it one of the most sacred parts of his poetry. On the other hand, the relationship which Christianopoulos employs in his oeuvre between homoeroticism and religion is sketched by one who remains, in his own fashion, a Christian, and whose work can, accordingly be thought of as in a real sense confessional as opposed to simply defiant. Therefore, even though the two writers elaborate the same technique of making at the same time homosexual and religious

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<sup>455</sup> Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα*, 106.

<sup>456</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 103.

<sup>457</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 103-127.

<sup>458</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 11-31.

<sup>459</sup> See Iatrou, Maria, Phd thesis on *Εποχή των Ισχνών Αγελάδων*, focusing on the Cavafian elements of Christianopoulos' first poetic collection.

references, they do so to different ends: Lapathiotes follows this technique to challenge contemporary norms, cast doubt on religion and highlight the sanctity of homosexual love, whereas Christianopoulos does so to express the equal importance of these two parts of his identity in his life, without doubting either of these parts. Christianopoulos presents homoeroticism and Orthodox religion as two elements of which neither can be exorcised. For him homosexual love is sacred too.<sup>460</sup> The religion of the body and of masculinity are also apparent in his work, as well with the equation of his lover with God and at times the speaker's own equation with God (which could be considered blasphemous), confirming that God and religion exist even in the most vulgar things and can ennoble, even render them divine. The procedure of *theosis* of the beloved one, a poetic characteristic that Christianopoulos borrows and expands mostly from Lapathiotes, serves the purposes of his confessional writing; the speaker feels inferior than his beloved one, feels the need to serve him and behave in a submissive way, since the superior beloved one, like a priest or like Christ, has the power to cleanse and redeem him. Ioannou also exploits this topos in his poetry («Το Βάρος Του») and in his prose («Επιτάφιος Θρήνος») as well.

Once more the poet uses allusion to the Last Supper in his poem «Τα πάθη τα σεπτά»<sup>461</sup> which belongs to his next poetic collection, *Νεκρή Πιάτσα* (1998):

Μεγάλη Πέμπτη. Πάλι ο Χριστός θα πλύνει τα πόδια των δώδεκα, και πάλι ο Πέτρος θα του πει «Κύριε, όχι μόνο τα πόδια μου αλλά και όλο μου το σώμα». Δώδεκα αγάπες είχα κι εγώ στη ζωή μου, μα κανενός δεν αξιώθηκα να πλύνω τα πόδια. Κανένας Πέτρος δε βρέθηκε για μένα. Ακούω το ευαγγέλιο του μυστικού Σου δείπνου, και ξαφνικά φωτίζομαι: χίλιες φορές καλύτερα που δεν αξιώθηκα. Σκηνές υπέρτατης θυσίας και ταπείνωσης, ας μην τις μαγαρίζει η καύλα μου με απομιμήσεις.<sup>462</sup>

The protagonist, reminding us of Ioannou's «Επιτάφιος Θρήνος»<sup>463</sup> which takes place on a Good Friday, attends the Liturgy of Holy Thursday and this creates

<sup>460</sup> Through the employment of this technique he emphasises the sanctity of homosexual love and his deep Christian faith which co-exists with every aspect of his life.

<sup>461</sup> Christianopoulos, *Η Νεκρή Πιάτσα*, 44.

<sup>462</sup> Christianopoulos, *Η Νεκρή Πιάτσα*, 44.

<sup>463</sup> Yorgos Ioannou, *Επιτάφιος Θρήνος* (Athens: Kedros, 2007).

thoughts in him which have to do with his erotic life, which it seems tortures him and of which he is thinking of even in Church, during holy mass. He proceeds again to a comparison of himself with Christ – this comparison derives from the sacred deed of Christ washing the feet of his disciples during the Last Supper and the response of Peter to Christ's deed that he is offering not only his feet, but his whole body to be washed, a move which Peter of course does not intend to take on the erotic charge that the poet finds in it. The protagonist ascribes to the scene sexual connotations and feels jealous of this incident, since he himself would have enjoyed and would have been aroused to experience the same incident. Therefore, based on his fetishes, he believes that it would be a great honour for him to do the same even for one of his twelve lovers; the strong verb «δεν αξιώθηκα» conveys the importance which this move would have had for the speaker. The speaker longs for the emergence in his life of a lover who, in the same way as Peter, will be willing to let him wash his whole body and not only his feet, and, by extension, let him fulfil and make reality all his erotic fantasies and desires, which are mostly based on sexual games of power.

The second stanza of the poem comes to cancel the first one, since the hearing of the Gospel of Holy Thursday makes the protagonist realise and acknowledge the «υπέριστα θυσία και ταπείνωση» (see «αλάθητη θυσία» in Lapathiotis) of Christ, which, proves the love of God for humans. Therefore, he decides that he is not allowed to desecrate the importance of the sacrifice and the humiliation of God by comparing it to his sexual life, motivated by his 'shabby' instincts. Yet the vulgar language that the poet uses in the last verse forges the decision that the speaker made in the second stanza and in association with the the speaker considers that he could be seen as a «απομίμηση» himself of Christ, or of a Christian. The speaker has already done in the first stanza what he decides to avoid in the second one, and thus, he has already 'defiled' the sacred deed of Christ. The poet, indeed, has also already done this in the poem «Μυστικός δείπνος»<sup>464</sup> which precedes this poem, and in that sense, this poem is a sort of palinode. Bearing in mind that homoeroticism and religion are the most basic topics in the poetry of Christianopoulos and are interwoven in his work, we come to the conclusion that the second stanza of this poem binds to sarcastic and ironic notions for the whole of the

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<sup>464</sup>Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 36.

writer's work and it does not constitute by any means a statement of his poetics. On the other hand, the poem as a whole might describe the relation that the poet has with homoeroticism and religion, since both are interwoven in his life and are of great importance; there are times, however, that the former appears to be superior to the latter and that the latter dominates and exceeds the former.

Over a long career, Christianopoulos has been consistent in his approach to the subject. From his first poetic collection *Εποχή των Ισχνών Αγελάδων*<sup>465</sup> (1950), where the poet is influenced by Cavafy to a great extent, the rest of his work, including his last poetic collection *Παράξενο, που βρίσκει το κουράγιο κι ανθίζει* (2010)<sup>466</sup> negotiates the same topics in the same way, following mostly the path of Lapathiotis. Mainly erotic, submissive, provocative, blasphemous and deeply religious at the same time and rather confessional and raw, Christianopoulos is undoubtedly modern:

Είμαι, αλήθεια, προκλητικός; Δεν ξέρω. Μ' αρέσει να προκαλώ τους υποκριτές. Ξέρω πάντως ότι είμαι εξομολογητικός. Και μια εξομολόγηση που βγαίνει απ' τη συντριβή είναι σαν το νερό που, όσο αδύνατα κι αν στάζει, τρώει σιγά σιγά την πέτρα. Δε φταίει το νερό που στάζει, αν η πέτρα σιγά σιγά φαγώνεται.

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<sup>465</sup>Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 11-31.

<sup>466</sup>Dinos Christianopoulos, *Παράξενο, που βρίσκει το κουράγιο και ανθίζει: Ποιήματα 2005-2010* (Nicosia: Aegean, 2010).

### Yorgos Ioannou: The emergence of the 'holy sinner'

Yorgos Ioannou was a deeply religious person, raised in a traditional religious family, in Thessaloniki, a city permeated by a Byzantine spirit and notable churches<sup>467</sup>. In terms of occupation, Ioannou, like Christianopoulos, became a member of the pietist organisation «Zoe» and as a child used to go to the common meals («συσσίτια») that the organisation offered and its catechesis. At a later stage the author became an executive of the organisation, who, according to his words «ποτέ δεν έχασε το κριτικό του πνεύμα, ίσως και το χιούμορ του», staying at this position only for one year, due to his disagreement with the official stance of Zoe about the Civil War.<sup>468</sup>

His poetry constitutes a restrained attempt to express himself and is characterised by the same features as far as his sexuality is concerned. As Lazares eloquently states:

Ο φόβος του Ιωάννου στην πρώιμη δημιουργική του φάση έχει άμεση σχέση με την αμαρτία και την ενοχή – είναι ένας φόβος θρησκευτικός. Αυτός που μιλάει (στα περισσότερα ποιήματα) αισθάνεται πως έχει το στίγμα του κολασμένου επάνω του, γι' αυτό ζητά με πάθος τον εξαγνισμό – τη λύτρωση.<sup>469</sup>

Lazares and other scholars have pointed out from the outset the confessional tendency which saturates the poetry of Ioannou, which becomes more and more outspoken in his later prose. The poetry of Ioannou introduces to the reader a speaker who tries to open up himself and be let to confession: In the poem «Τότε που έλειπα»<sup>470</sup> for example, from the collection *Ηλιοτρόπια*<sup>471</sup> (1954), we come across

<sup>467</sup> In *Το δικό μας αίμα* he characterises Thessaloniki as «η βυζαντινή πόλη του Βορρά» (Ioannou, *Το δικό μας αίμα*, 51).

<sup>468</sup> See Vasilios N. Makrides, "Orthodoxy in the service of anticommunism: the religious organization Zoë during the Greek civil war," in *The Greek Civil War: Essays on a Conflict of Exceptionalism and Silences* (2004): 159-175.

<sup>469</sup> Nikos Lazares, «Το μούδιασμα του φόβου. Σημειώσεις πάνω στην ποίηση του Γιώργου Ιωάννου», *Planodion* 7, Summer 1988, 383.

<sup>470</sup> Lazares, «Το μούδιασμα του φόβου», 384.

<sup>471</sup> Yorgos Ioannou, *Τα Χίλια Δέντρα: και άλλα ποιήματα* (Thessaloniki: Ipsilon, 1982), 12.

the verses:

κάτι έχουν δει και που δε  
λέει να πάρει τέλος, Θε μου.

In the poem «Παγίδα»<sup>472</sup> of *Τα χίλια δέντρα* (1963) the verses

Έκρυψα τις κινήσεις μου  
επιμελώς και είμαι διαβασμένη  
εφημερίδα Σε τί παγίδα μ'  
έκλεισες, Θεέ μου!

In the poem «Για όνομα θεού!»<sup>473</sup> of the same collection the verses

κάνω νοήματα απελπισμένα σε άλλα  
μάτια σε μάτια που μπορούν να με  
γλιτώσουν εγκαίρως -για όνομα θεού!  
απ'την ανείπωτη αυτή την τυραννία

In the poem «Αυτά τα άσπρα χέρια»<sup>474</sup> the verses

Κι έψελνα κάποτε τις Κυριακές στην  
εκκλησία... Τί να 'γιναν οι τόσες προσευχές;  
Πού είν' ο άγγελός μου;  
Τί σχέση έχω εγώ μ'αυτή τη νύχτα;

And in the poem «Η Κατάρα του»<sup>475</sup> the lines

Απέξω να περνά ο Επιτάφιος  
τα αυτοκίνητα να σταματούν, η άνοιξη να  
σκύβει· και μέσα στο δωμάτιο εμείς

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472 Ιοαννου, *Τα Χίλια Δέντρα*, 15.

473 Ιοαννου, *Τα Χίλια Δέντρα*, 17.

474 Ιοαννου, *Τα Χίλια Δέντρα*, 13.

475 Ιοαννου, *Τα Χίλια Δέντρα*, 14.

πρόκληση στην κατάρα του πέρα από κάθε μέτρο». <sup>476</sup>

Through his attempts to speak and confess, the speaker is self-flagellated and exposed; the purpose of this is to gain forgiveness, though at times he does not believe that he deserves forgiveness or that forgiveness will come even after confessing, because of the gravity of his sins. He is aware of the fact that he is exposed before the public, since his confession is not addressing a priest nor is made «εις εαυτόν». It is the punishment of exposure and social outcry and the challenge of a public confession which gives the Christian Ioannou the motivation to proceed to a literary confession; of particular significance for my discussion is the poem «Το βάρος του» <sup>477</sup> (*Τα Χίλια Δέντρα*), which reads as follows:

Ζητώ τους μυστικούς  
Χριστούς στα τέμπλα και τους  
νάρθηκες.

Αυτό που έβλεπα παιδί ξανά με συνταράζει.

Μες στα σκοτάδια τον πατέρα μου  
ζητώ, διψώ για τη στοργή του κάθε  
βράδυ.

Από το βάρος του γυρίζοντας τρεκλίζω.

Κάθε καινούρια γνωριμία με γελά.

Ούτε ο πατέρας ήταν, ούτε ο Χριστός μου. <sup>478</sup>

Just one year before the poem was written, Ioannou lost his beloved father. This poem combines within it the writer's feelings of loss and at the same time his considerations on his unsuccessful efforts to find his soul mate. The speaker of the poem experiences this frustrating struggle, a martyrdom which he confesses, seeking for his fulfilment. The poem makes reference to Ioannou's Christian

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<sup>476</sup>See also Ioannou's *Επιτάφιος Θρήνος*, where the writer comes back to the topic with a different approach this time, not feeling guilty but participating as well in Christ's resurrection.

<sup>477</sup>Ioannou, *Τα Χίλια Δέντρα*, 76.

<sup>478</sup>Ioannou, *Τα Χίλια Δέντρα*, 76



Origins «Αυτό που έβλεπα παιδί ξανά με συνταράζει», a verse which evokes Cavafy's poem «Πέρασμα» and the verse «Εκείνα που δειλά φαντάσθη μαθητής, είν' ανοιχτά, φανερωμένα εμπρός του». Special attention should be paid to the use of the verb «συνταράζει», evident of the speaker's strong and tormented feelings which he associates with the awe he experiences in a Church, before the image of Christ. His soul longs for the «μυστικούς Χριστούς», sought out «μες στα σκοτάδια». The speaker of Ioannou suffocates in his own prison and walls («τείχη»). He confesses his sexual agony, his agony for affection, which constitutes a burden («βάρος») which lashes out through the speaker. The partner that he is so desperately looking for is one that he will lead him to fulfilment, in the same way that he was experiencing a variety of strong, deep and pleasant feelings in the presence of his father or in his presence in church, staring at the image of Christ. The consoling figures of Christ and his father become one and the same; at the same time, they represent the ideal figure that the speaker looks for at a partner. This constitutes an eloquent example of the way the speaker of Ioannou combines deep religious feelings with sexual urges in his poetry, and at the same time he suffocates in his attempt to express himself freely and convey the «βάρος» of his soul.

Yet, it is his prose that offers us more fertile ground for two purposes in the scope of this chapter: firstly, to delve into a discussion about the ways in which Ioannou mixes religion and homoeroticism and, secondly, to listen to his confession more clearly. In 1981 Ioannou published a prose collection *Επιτάφιος Θρήνος*<sup>479</sup>. The title story predisposes the reader for the religious nuances which penetrate the collection. In the first novel the protagonist comes from the provinces to Athens and finds accommodation in a hostel («πανδοχείο»), during the days of Easter. He stays in the same room with three other men, whose names are «Λουκάς» and «Πέτρος» - the protagonist chooses to introduce himself as «Ματθαίος». The short story focuses on Good Friday and the course of the Epitaphios, which the view of the hostel allows the protagonist to watch. With the company of his hostel roommates, Loukas and

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<sup>479</sup> Yorgos Ioannou, *Επιτάφιος Θρήνος* (Athens: Kedros, 2007).

Peter, Matthaios observes the Epitaph and its journey in the central roads of Athens and back to the church, paying special attention to the crowd which follows the Epitaph, constituted by the priests, soldiers, and young people. The crowd is described ironically and emphasis is given to its hypocrisy; it seems that the

people follow the day's custom, without understanding the deeper message of the day.

The procession begets sensual feelings in the narrator, who carefully observes the people and the process. In a Cavafian manner, Ioannou's neat way of writing is revealing more of the things that are meant, rather than what it is said. Therefore, the protagonist provides the reader only with the necessities and gives space to the reader's imagination to run wild. The religious scenes and proceedings are interwoven with sensuality, in a way which is also familiar from Lapathiotes and Christianopoulos. However, the emerging and budding erotic feelings which seem to go hand in hand with religious feelings lean to a latent sensuality, instead of an overt emphasis on sexuality, as in the cases of Lapathiotes and Christianopoulos. Pieris eloquently synopsis Ioannou's debt to Cavafy, by pointing out the feature of «ηδονική γραφή» that both make use of:

Πρόκειται για την απλή συνταγή της ηδονικής γραφής, όπου ο αμετανόητα ερωτοπαθής συγγραφέας (...) περιγράφει το καθημερινό θαύμα και το καθημερινό δράμα με την υψηλή τέχνη της κατακτημένης απλότητας. Από αυτή τη σκοπιά, ο Ιωάννου είναι ο πιο καθαφικός πεζογράφος της εποχής μας.<sup>480</sup>

«Επιτάφιος Θρήνος» unfolds around two basic scenes: the incident of the procession and the following incident of the erotic 'rendezvous' of two lovers, which takes place to the protagonist's next room of the hostel. Loucas, Peter and Matthew gain access to the erotic meeting of the lovers due to the slots of the internal door, which provide them a restraint, but adequate view to the next room. The transition to the second scene takes place harmonically; at the same time that the procession of the Epitaph fades away and the Epitaph is led to the church, the two lovers start to take off their clothes; at the same time that the religious scene is in recession and pauses, the erotic incident embarks on unfolding. Senses were already stimulated by the careful observance of the procession of the Epitaph, motivated also by the feeling of awe that Holy Friday infuses to the Christian protagonist. Yet, the stimulation of the senses rises decisively through the description of the erotic scene.

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480 Michalis Pieris, «Δίπτυχο για τον Γιώργο Ιωάννου», *Με τον ρυθμό της ψυχής: Αφιέρωμα στον Γιώργο Ιωάννου* (Athens: Kedros, 2006), 55.

Even though the narrator makes sensual comments for the female body, he gives special emphasis on the exquisite body of the young male lover («το εξάισιο σώμα του»). The beauty of the male lover as he lays on the bed is connected by the narrator to the inwrought to the Epitaph figure of Christ, produced by a homoeroticising tendency towards the figure of Christ:

(...) εκείνος ξάπλωσε στο γκριζωπό σεντόνι του ξενοδοχείου, που αμέσως έλαμψε ολόλευκο, και μελετήσαμε το σώμα του προσεχτικά με τις διάφορες χαρακιές της δύναμης, όπως κεντάνε το Χριστό στον επιτάφιο (...).<sup>481</sup>

The sexual encounter failed to be fulfilled at first and it is semantically only at the time of the Resurrection that manages to be accomplished:

Όμως το πρωινό, την ώρα που πυκνώνουν στην εκκλησιά οι υπαινιγμοί για την Ανάσταση, κι ακούγονται γκρίνιες γλυκιές και ανυπόμονες, «Δείξον (και δείξον) ημίν ως προείπας, Χριστέ την Ανάστασιν», μας ξύπνησαν οι δονήσεις του υπαξιωματικού, που ολόλαμπρος σαν ήλιος νέος και αήττητος, μας φώναζε να δούμε και του ζεύγους την ανάσταση, που σ'ένα όλο ευλυγισία σύμπλεγμα σφάδαζε πάνω στο σουσταλίδικο κρεβάτι του. (...) Και μόνο εγώ κι ο υπαξιωματικός χαρήκαμε υπέρλαμπρα, είδαμε ως οι μυροφόρες πρώτοι την Ανάσταση, που άλλωστε μας άξιζε, είχαμε ξενοχτήσει μες στον πυρετό, αγνοί κι αμόλυντοι, κι ύστερα πήγαμε κι από την εκκλησιά, να προσκυνήσουμε κι εμείς τον επιτάφιο, φιλώντας όπου είναι οι χαρακιές της δύναμης, μεριές μεριές στο στήθος μέχρι κάτω στην κοιλιά. Χαραματιές για να παραφυλάς τα δρώμενα στο διπλανό δωμάτιο.<sup>482</sup>

As in the poetry of Lapathiotis, Ioannou here intertwines religion with sensuality; the procession of the Epitaph and the Resurrection are connected with the sexual encounter. Resurrection is the climax; similarly, the climax of the sexual encounter, its fulfilment after an unsuccessful attempt, comes along with the Resurrection and

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<sup>481</sup> Ioannou, *Επιτάφιος Θρήνος*, 18.

<sup>482</sup> Ioannou, *Επιτάφιος Θρήνος*, 21.

constitutes the Resurrection itself, not only for the couple, but also for the voyeurs.<sup>483</sup> The late book *Καταπακτή*<sup>484</sup> offers particular opportunities to be read in the light of a confessional technique. *Καταπακτή* constitutes a collection of short texts, which should be compared to the *Σημειώματα Ποιητικής και Ηθικής* of Cavafy and to the *Στοχασμοί* of Lapathiotis. Like them, Ioannou's brief texts in *Καταπακτή* use the first person singular and are written in a confessional mode. *Καταπακτή* is one of Ioannou's last works in prose and its importance lies to the fact that the texts included offer revealing insights for the whole of his work, shedding light on its interpretation and poetics.

The tense confessional character of *Καταπακτή*, apart from the first person singular in which the texts are written, is enshrined by their outspoken consistency and their explicit language.

It is in this collection of brief confessional notes written in a raw and overt manner – in an 'honest' or giving the sense of a 'potential honest' way, we might say, as it is appropriate and necessary for a confession- that we come across Ioannou's text «Οι δικοί μου άγιοι»<sup>485</sup>. The text constitutes an explanatory text, which offers the reader some important and useful guidelines on how to conceive and perceive the feature of 'sanctity' and its often references in Ioannou's work. «Οι δικοί μου άγιοι» should be seen in conjunction with Ritsos's *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωώνυμων Αγίων*<sup>486</sup>, since Ioannou and Ritsos provide in these texts their own views on the elements which sanctify someone. These elements are synonymous in the two writers and their origins were first traced in the poetry of Cavafy.

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<sup>483</sup> We should notice the connections that «Επιτάφιος Θρήνος» has with Sikelianos' poem «Στου Οσίου Λουκά το Μοναστήρι» (Angelos Sikelianos, *Λυρικός Βίος Ε*, edited by G.P. Savvidis (Athens: Ikaros, 1997), 80); the 'superficial' religious feelings of women on a Good Saturday, the comparison of Christ with Adonis, and therefore the creation of a pagan-Christian mix, as well as the climax which occurs with the appearance of Vangelis, marking the Resurrection, justify a sound comparison with Ioannou's story «Επιτάφιος Θρήνος».

<sup>484</sup> Yorgos Ioannou, *Καταπακτή: Πεζά Κείμενα* (Athens: Kedros, 1996).

<sup>485</sup> Ioannou, *Καταπακτή*, 49-52

<sup>486</sup> Yannis Ritsos, *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωώνυμων Αγίων* (Athens: Kedros, 1986).

Even though the protagonists of Ioannou in his early poems and short stories collections are undisputedly strongly religious, in *Καταπακτή* Ioannou begins his text with a surprisingly undermining statement about Christian religion and Christian saints: «Δεν εννοώ, βέβαια, αγίους χριστιανικούς· τέτοιοι δεν υπάρχουν μέσα στον ξεπεσμό και στο κλόνο – ξεπεσμό θρησκευτικό». It is not until *Καταπακτή* that Ioannou refers to Christian religion with interrogatory terms.

At this stage of his life Ioannou's stance towards the Church and religion is indeed very different from the beginning. It is not an accident that the collected poems of Ioannou published in 1982 bear the dedication «τω αγνώστω Θεώ», bringing in mind Lapathiotes' agnosticism and doubts on his faith. Moreover, in the poem «Δούλος ιερός του έρωτα», published for the first time in 1980, Ioannou follows a way of writing which was so far unfamiliar from him and so familiar from Christianopoulos: the speaker of the extensive poem cries out for his other half, seeking him desperately, with masochistic references («έστω για να με φτύσεις, έλα κάποτε»), mentioning the rebellion of his flesh («η επανάσταση της σάρκας») and connecting the erotic relationship with a martyrdom («μια γεύση απ' το μαρτύριο»). Admitting that he is a slave of eros, he deifies his beloved one that he is looking for. Love per se is his God and only Love can save him. At the same time, he feels secure in his current martyrdom, in a way that at the same time he does and does not want to be rescued.

He recognises the 'decay' of Christian faith and life in his contemporary period, pointing out a personal disappointment about this fact and proving his critical spirit towards his religion. Therefore, he illustrates his preference and his admiration for the «κατά κόσμον» αγίους, ανθρώπους γεννημένους για το μαρτύριο και αποδεχόμενους σιωπηλά αυτό». Ioannou's emphasis is put upon the martyrdom of some people, in the way that he defines it later on, and upon the attitude of these people towards their martyrdom. According to Ioannou, it is through life torments that someone is sanctified and through their dignified, honest and brave attitude these people acquire something divine.

The biggest part of the text is dedicated to the category of those who are effeminate and are constantly stigmatised by other people. Even though people might admire them for their «πνεύμα» and «ευφράδεια», they will be never seen

detached from their ‘ridiculously’ and ‘condemnable’ effeminate manners («κουνιούνται με παιδική αφέλεια», «κελαηδούν με την πολύχρωμη φωνίτσα τους»)<sup>487</sup>. The importance that Ioannou places on this category is revealed by the fact that the writer provides extensively his own thoughts in the passive voice and into quotation marks, wanting maybe to give the impression that he confesses directly to this group of people and that he honestly provides all of his exact thoughts, word by word, reinforcing the plausibility of his text:

Το τί σας περιμένει κακομοίρηδες ούτε που μπορείτε να το φαντασθείτε (...). Θ’αγιαστείτε μέσα στη χλεύη και στο διασυρμό. Θα είστε τέλειοι, αλλά θα είστε οι τέτοιοι. Θα προσφέρετε άπειρα, αλλά δεν θα τα θεωρούν ποτέ αρκετά για να σας συγχωρέσουν το ένα, το ανύπαρκτο, βέβαια, ένα σας. Θα σας ζητούν να τους κάνετε αυτό για το οποίο σας κατηγορούν, και μετά θα λένε δημόσια ότι μόνο εσείς κάνετε κάτι τέτοιο. Από κάθισμα σε κάθισμα κι από γωνία σε γωνία θα περιφέρεστε μες στα φώτα και στις σκιές τους. Όμως κάθε φορά που τα πουλημένα τομάρια θα σας λεν «τί δίνεις;», να ξέρετε πως αυτό θα ’ναι μια μαλαματένια ψηφίδα στον μυστικό ουρανό του ψηφιδωτού σας. Και κάθε φορά που θα εξαφανίζονται και θα σας αφήνουν σύξυλους, μολονότι εσείς τίποτα δεν παραλείψατε, ακόμα και το χώμα που πατούσαν είχατε γλείψει, εσείς θα ανεβαίνετε ένα ακόμα σκαλοπάτι με τα πληγιασμένα, τυλιγμένα σε μπατανίες, πόδια σας. Όμως θαρσείτε, γιατί αλλιώς θα σας αποτελειώσουν πριν από την ώρα σας.

The bitterness of the writer is apparent in these words, as well as the fact that he is probably talking from personal experience. Their martyrdom is given through two strongly negative words, «χλεύη» and «διασυρμός». Regardless of their possible greatness, they face other people’s most negative attitude and they experience exclusion, condemnation and humiliation, as if they are the biggest criminals or the biggest sinners. Nothing makes them capable for forgiveness and their feelings of exclusion and loneliness are increased in love affairs, where they accept all the categories and all the responsibility for their ‘inappropriate’ and ‘vulgar’ actions. The torturing feeling of loneliness and exclusion which seems to lash out the narrator is developed in the passage «Της μοναξιάς και της εγκατάλειψης» of the same collection. As with this case, Ioannou links these negative feelings to homosexuality and to the secret relationships that it imposes, while at the same time the partner

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<sup>487</sup> Ioannou, «Οι δικοί μου άγιοι», 50.

might have an official heterosexual relationship.

The anger of the writer against people's unfair reaction is obvious through the characterisation «πουλημένα τομάρια». On the contrary, the sympathy of the writer towards this group of people is evident in the encouraging and praising expressions «θα είστε τέλειοι», «αυτό θα 'ναι μια μαλαματένια ψηφίδα στον μυστικό ουρανό του ψηφιδωτού σας» and «εσείς θα ανεβαίνετε ακόμα ένα σκαλοπάτι». The words of Ioannou conclude in a warm call to homosexuals and maybe, by extension, to his own self too: they have to show courage and be strong in enduring their martyrdom. The text goes on with providing synoptically the other categories of sanctified people according to Ioannou, who are the people who spend their lives looking after their sick loved ones and those in unhappy marriages.

The passage closes with the words of the narrator:

Σας φιλώ τα πόδια, αδέρφια μου, σας φιλώ τα μέλη σας όλα. Μόνο εσείς μ' ενδιαφέρετε, οι άλλοι είναι όπως τα ζώα, τα δέντρα και τα φυτά του κόσμου τούτου. Ωραίοι, αλλά συνήθεις – του σωρού.

The comment acquires special importance under a comparative angle which draws parallels with Lapathiotis, Christianopoulos and Ritsos. First, the hypothesis that these words could be attributed to Ritsos and Christianopoulos seems not far-fetched at all.

Ioannou in «Οι δικοί μου άγιοι» defines the categories of people whom he himself considers as saints and he calls them «αδέρφια μου»; this characterisation brings to mind the address «σύντροφοι» of the leftist ideology and saturates a humanist pan-ecumenical character in the work of Ioannou, two characterisations that are widely met in the writings of Ritsos and of Lapathiotis.

The gesture that Ioannou describes, the kissing of the feet, recalls the Last Supper, where Christ washed the feet of his disciples. In a similar vein, Ioannou shows his love and devotion to his brothers; homosexuals are considered his brothers too. His gesture of kissing the feet, which had as explained religious connotations, acquires for Ioannou sexual connotations too, which are pointed out in the phrase «σας φιλώ τα μέλη σας όλα». This phrase brings to mind the fetishist poetry of Christianopoulos and especially the poem «Γονυκλισία» and the poem

«Μυστικός Δείπνος»<sup>488</sup>, where the poem discusses the same topics, expressing them in a similar way.<sup>489</sup>

Following Cavafy, Ioannou emphasises his insistence on the differentiation from the crowd and the mass. In a similar vein as the poem «Η πρόσθεσις» by Cavafy, Ioannou here proclaims that he is interested in the people who suffer from and at the same time are sanctified by their martyrdom and he adds himself into this category of people; as far as other people are concerned, people «του σωρού» are not of interest to either for Cavafy or Ioannou. However, Cavafy is clearly identified in his poem with one of these 'different' people and therefore, he would have definitely been described as one of Ioannou's own saints, in the same sense that he was described by Ritsos as the «μέγας αναμάρτητος».<sup>490</sup> Yet, does Ioannou see himself as a saint? In the same passage he provides the answer: «Για μένα που δεν είμαι, βέβαια, άγιος, παρά μονάχα των αγίων θαυμαστής, εδαφιαίος ενίοτε προσκυνητής (...)».<sup>491</sup> As I discuss later on, Ritsos in his *Εικονοστάσιο Αωνύμων Αγίων* is of the same opinion about himself and even though he proceeds to the sanctification of other people, refuses to be self-declared a saint.

In the same collection, special attention should be paid to the text «Στη δύσκολη ώρα»<sup>492</sup>. In a highly confessional mood, the narrator proceeds to an account of his life and admits his fears of impending death. Ioannou takes advantage of a common topos in literature, where before death the narrator proceeds to a confession, giving an account of his life deeds, making special reference to his mistakes and seeks consolation in his Christian faith and reunion with God. This

<sup>488</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 36

<sup>489</sup> See the analysis of Christianopoulos's poem in the section about Christianopoulos, which comes earlier in this chapter.

<sup>490</sup> See the analysis of *12 ποιήματα για τον Καβάφη* in the chapter.

<sup>491</sup> Ioannou, *Καταπακτή*, 66-67.

<sup>492</sup> Ioannou, *Καταπακτή*, 51. A different approach is presented in the poetry of Ritsos, where he identifies the poet with the Christ, see John Kittmer, "The uses of Greek Orthodoxy in the early poetry of Yannis Ritsos." *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 33, no. 2 (2009): 180-203.



topos has been also exploited by Wilde, in his famous text written in prison before his death, in which his conversion takes place and he realises the importance of the teachings of Christ. As I have shown, Cavafy also makes use of this topos in several poems, like «Τα Επικίνδυνα»<sup>493</sup> (1905-1915), «Μανουήλ Κομνηνός»<sup>494</sup> (1905-1915), «Ιγνατίου Τάφος»<sup>495</sup> (1916-1918) and Ioannou's attitude «στη δύσκολη ώρα» seems to be exactly the opposite of the one Cavafy displayed in these poems. Firstly, Ioannou's poems have a different emphasis than Cavafy's when it comes to the issue of one's repentance for their life of pleasure in the face of death, for the adoption of a more consoling «ασκητικό» spirit. On the contrary, Ioannou claims that one's honest and daring experiencing of their erotic desires and the realisation and recognition of this very fact before the coming of death is a great consolation:

Μεγάλη ανάπαυση πρέπει να παρέχει και η επιτυχημένη θήρευση των πολύ τολμηρών ηδονών. Αν είσαι άνθρωπος που δεν έβαλες νερό στο κρασί σου, που κυνήγησες ανένδοτα το δύσκολο ερωτικό ιδανικό σου και το παγίδευσες άπειρες φορές – αν είσαι τέτοιος άνθρωπος, πρέπει κανονικά να νιώθεις αρκετή γαλήνη. Μόνο που παράλληλα θα νιώθεις - γι' αυτό είμαι βέβαιος - μετανιωμένος που δεν έκανες χίλιες φορές περισσότερες τόλμες, τότε που ήσουν σε θέση.<sup>496</sup>

At this point, Ioannou comes closer to Cavafy's repudiated poem «Δυνάμωσις»<sup>497</sup> and to the hidden poem «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής»<sup>498</sup>, where Cavafy also elaborates a similar extreme antinomian version of one's attitude. It is because of this that most probably Cavafy decides not to include these poems in his Canon, with the hope that «Κατόπι — στην τελειότερα κοινωνία — / κανένας άλλος καμωμένος σαν εμένα/βέβαια θα φανεί κ' ελεύθερα θα κάμει»

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<sup>493</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 62.

<sup>494</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 64.

<sup>495</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 92.

<sup>496</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 186.

<sup>497</sup> C. P. Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα: 1877-1923*, edited by G.P. Savvides (Athens: Ikaros, 1993), 50.

<sup>498</sup> Cavafy, *Τα Πεζά*, 168.

At some points, Ioannou's attitude follows the steps of Lapathiotes rather than those of Cavafy; Ioannou eventually condemns the Christian religion and displays a rebellious reaction towards it, albeit he admits that he is afraid of God. He renders the literary topos of conversion before death in also stating that religion is only consoling throughout someone's good and pleasant moments and that its consoling function vanishes into thin air throughout someone's tormented time. For the strongly Christian Ioannou, it is a great deal to write the following words in a provocatively raw manner:

Η θρησκευτική πίστη είναι, βέβαια, αποκούμπι για όλο το διάστημα της ζωής που τα πράγματα πηγαίνουν καλά, μα όμως είναι δυνατό να εξακολουθείς να ασπάζεσαι τα μυθολογήματα –ωραία μυθολογήματα, δεν λέω- της θρησκείας και της εκκλησίας και στη δύσκολη εκείνη ώρα, όπου τα πάντα έχουν σοβαρέψει και σκοτεινιάσει; (...) Α, φτωχέ, φτωχέ φίλε, η θρησκεία είναι που παρέχει τις πιο απογοητευτικές βεβαιότητες.<sup>499</sup>

With his literary confession, Ioannou chooses to condemn himself for the lack of confession and honesty in his work as a whole. Ioannou offers insights to the interpretation of his own work and explains his insistence on «βιωματική λογοτεχνία» and on confessional writing, by stating his preference for this sort of writing. In an extract which might have been conveniently taken from Ritsos's *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων*, Ioannou refers to the actual action of sacramental confession and argues:

Έπρεπε να δουλέψεις πολύ σκληρότερα, να μην αφήσεις τίποτα από όσα συλλογίστηκες ή διαισθάνθηκες, που να μην αποδώσεις. Έπρεπε να αδειάσεις το τομάρι σου, να το στραγγίσεις, να το στραγκουλίσεις, να μην του αφήσεις καμιά ικμάδα να καταναλώσει από μόνο του, να το ζουπήξεις, ώσπου να μιλήσει, να κραυγάσει, να βγάλει φθόγγους ιερούς, αποκαλυπτικούς, καταλυτικούς, ντροπιαστικούς, που να σε χώσει μες στη γης από την καταισχύνη. Αχ, γιατί δεν τα έκανες όλα αυτά; Γιατί τουλάχιστο δεν προσπάθησες να τα πλησιάσεις;<sup>500</sup>

In *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα Ποιητικής και Ηθικής* Cavafy consistently refers to the external factor of authority which influences his poetry and functions as a great hindrance to his free expression:

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499 Ioannou, *Καταπακτή*, 65.

500 Ioannou, *Καταπακτή*, 65.

Μ' επέρασεν από τον νου απόψε να γράψω διά τον έρωτά μου. Και όμως δεν θα το κάμω. Τί δύναμη που έχει η πρόληψις. Εγώ ελευθερώθηκα από αυτήν· αλλά σκέπτομαι τους σκλαβωμένους υπό τα μάτια των οποίων μορφή να πέση αυτό το χαρτί. Και σταματώ.

Οι άθλιοι νόμοι της κοινωνίας –μήτε της υγιεινής, μήτε της κρίσεως απόρροιας- με μίκραιναν το έργον μου. Εδέσμευσαν την έκφρασί μου· μ' εμπόδισαν να δώσω φως /και συγκίνησιν/ εις όσους είναι σαν κ' εμένα καμωμένοι.<sup>501</sup>

Correspondingly, Ioannou makes reference to the external factors which prevented him in the provision of his true thoughts and feelings in his work. Each confession is difficult to be made; in the case of a public confession through writing, the restrained factors increase, as well as the bravery and the will of the penitent and the importance of confession:

Ποτέ δεν ήταν το έργο σου ολότελα ανεπηρέαστο, ποτέ δεν ήσουν μόνος σου, αυτό κι εσύ, βυθισμένος μέσα στις γραμμές και τα σχήματα, που πρόσφεραν στο νου σου αυτά που ήθελες να συνταιριάξεις. (...) Και όμως γι' αυτούς που ούτε θυμάσαι τα ονόματά τους έπνιξες τη φωνή σου και έκανες πως δεν βλέπεις ή δεν ξέρεις πολλά από τη ζωή. Και προπαντός κουκούλωσες ένα σωρό πράγματα από αυτά που τυραννικά σε απασχολούσαν. Βασικός ογκόλιθος, πάντα μες στη μέση, στάθηκε το σπίτι σου. Μήπως διαβάσουν αυτοί καμιά ξεκάθαρη ομολογία σου, κανέναν έστω σκοτεινό χρησμό σου (...). (...) Περισσότερο φοβήθηκες κάτι άλλο στη ζωή σου. Το συνδυασμό της ταυτόχρονης αποκάλυψής σου στην υπηρεσία σου και στην οικογένειά σου.<sup>502</sup>

To conclude, Ioannou has exploited the Cavafian elements in such a way that he clearly goes a step further and he differentiates himself. He is definitely more confessional in his writing than Cavafy. Whereas Cavafy's protagonists cannot find the way to solve their self- flagellating feelings, as in the poem «Ομνύει» for example, Ioannou provides the solution, which is confessional writing *par excellence*; by

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501 Ioannou, *Καταπακτή*, 72.

502 Cavafy, *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα*, 36.

confessing, one can be forgiven and purified. Both make use of what Pieris has called «ηδονική γραφή», a sensual way of describing people and events, in a very simple way, which gives what has to be given to the readers, but at the same time holds back what has to be held back.

Both are based on the «βίωμα». Yet, Ioannou elaborates «βιωματική λογοτεχνία» to a greater extent than Cavafy, especially in his prose. Cavafy's «ηθοποιΐα», as Demaras has named it, enables him to express himself as each time protagonist would have done and in doing so he becomes a master in constructing portraits, a characteristic which, as we have seen, Christianopoulos uses too. Ioannou, on the other hand, along with Ritsos, as I will illustrate later on, deconstructs himself as a person, providing through his writings his own aspects, something that consciously does, because, as he supports «ο λόγος είναι μεγάλη ανάγκη της ψυχής». Both praise the sinner and believe that he constitutes a type of martyr. Their protagonist, with his struggle, his inner and outer struggles, is led to purification. Both writers attempt to work out the two 'social roles' together; that of the homosexual and that of the Christian. They comprehend the problems, the multiple difficulties, and it is this struggle that they want to represent in their writings, a 'holy' struggle, a struggle for authenticity. At the same time, however, Ioannou exploits elements from Lapathiotis too, since in his last writings he demonstrates great disappointment in the Church as well as doubts about his faith.

**Yannis Ritsos as penitent and confessor: «Αν άφεση δεν είναι η ποίηση...»**

In 1963 Ritsos published the collection *12 ποιήματα για τον Καβάφη*<sup>503</sup> which were written to celebrate 100 years from the birth of Cavafy<sup>504</sup>. As Massimo Peri notes «(...) στα 12 ποιήματα ο Καβάφης είναι ο υποχρεωτικός δρόμος για την ανάγνωση, και υποδεικνύεται σαφώς από το συγγραφέα».<sup>505</sup> The first poem is entitled «Ο χώρος του ποιητή» and as the title implies the poem makes an effort to sketch Cavafy's home in which the poet works and creates. The poem revolves around Cavafy and his fellow-speaker, who is Ritsos's persona, in Cavafy's study. The last verses read as follows:

(...) Κι εκείνος

πανούργος, αδηφάγος, σαρκικός, ο μέγας αναμάρτητος,

ανάμεσα στο ναι και στο όχι, στην επιθυμία και τη μετάνοια, σαν ζυγαριά στο χέρι του θεού ταλαντεύεται ολόκληρος, ενώ το φως του παραθύρου πίσω απ' το κεφάλι του τοποθετεί ένα στέφανο συγγνώμης κι αγιοσύνης.

«Αν άφεση δεν είναι η ποίηση, -ψιθύρισε μόνος του- τότε, από πουθενά μην περιμένουμε έλεος».<sup>506</sup>

The verses begin with a strong opposition; Cavafy is 'sly', 'voracious' and 'carnal', three strongly negative adjectives which define a devilish sinner. The words are connected with the seven deadly sins, which 'according to tradition are: pride, covetousness, lust, envy, gluttony, anger, sloth or *accidie*'<sup>507</sup>. At the same time

<sup>503</sup>Yannis Ritsos, «12 ποιήματα για τον Καβάφη» in *Ποιήματα 1938-1971* (Athens: Kedros, 1975).

<sup>504</sup>Massimo Peri, «Καβάφης/Ρίτσος», in *Αφιέρωμα στον Γιάννη Ρίτσο*, edited by Aikaterini Makrynika (Athens: Kedros, 1981), 258.

<sup>505</sup>Peri, «Καβάφης/Ρίτσος», 258.

<sup>506</sup>Ritsos, «12 ποιήματα για τον Καβάφη», 179.

<sup>507</sup> Van A. Harvey, *A Handbook of Theological Terms* (New York: Touchstone, 1997), 223.

Cavafy is also characterised as «ο μέγας αναμάρτητος». The question at stake here is: how is it possible that someone might be both «πανούργος», «αδηφάγος» and «σαρκικός» and at the same time «ο μέγας αναμάρτητος»? It seems that with the three negative adjectives Ritsos draws upon society and Church's beliefs about Cavafy's kind of poetry and at this point describes Cavafy's poetry using borrowed terms by criticism towards the latter's work. On the other hand, behind the ultimate definition of «ο μέγας αναμάρτητος» lies Ritsos's own view on the poetry of Cavafy. Ritsos, who, as mentioned before, is in this poem personified by Cavafy's fellow-speaker does justice to the poetry of Cavafy and offers a neat description of the poet's religious feelings in the verses:

ανάμεσα στο ναι και στο όχι, στην επιθυμία και στη μετάνοια,  
σαν ζυγαριά στο χέρι του θεού ταλαντεύεται ολόκληρος,  
ενώ το φως του παραθύρου πίσω απ' το κεφάλι του  
τοποθετεί ένα στέφανο συγγνώμης και  
αγιοσύνης.<sup>508</sup>

Ritsos recognises that the attraction of Cavafy's homosexual poetry lies in the very fact that his poetry falls between sin and repentance, the fulfilment of the body's desires and their condemnation. Cavafy's poetry of «ταλαντεύσεις» locates the poet as a 'scale at God's hands', which sometimes is tilted in favour of the poet as a sinner and sometimes in favour of the poet as a penitent. And indeed, the poetry of Cavafy as analysed in this chapter contains poems where homoeroticism is embraced and praised and poems where homoeroticism causes guilt and remorse.

The fact that for Ritsos Cavafy is characterised as «ο μέγας αναμάρτητος» is explained in the last two verses of the poem, where Ritsos puts to the mouth of Cavafy the words: «Αν άφεση δεν είναι η ποίηση, (...) τότε, από πουθενά μην περιμένουμε έλεος»<sup>509</sup>. In assigning these words to Cavafy, Ritsos demonstrates his own poetics and views on the function of poetry and literature in general. He

<sup>508</sup> Ritsos, «12 ποιήματα για τον Καβάφη», 179.

<sup>509</sup> Ritsos, «12 ποιήματα για τον Καβάφη», 176.

considers literature a means to confess, a forum to express yourself freely and beyond that a medium for forgiveness to be claimed and achieved. In writing poetry, you expose yourself, proceeding to a fight against your inner instincts to bring them to the fore and confront them critically, in order to make literature. Consequently, writing serves the same purposes as confessing; if you see it seriously and you remain true to what you say, if you open your heart and confront your fears, displaying your inner contradictions and your moral dilemmas, then, as in confession, you can claim forgiveness. At the same time, it is as if your sins are forgiven, because of your brave and painful strength to share them with the readers and expose yourself to them.

At this point Ritsos differentiates his work from Cavafy's; Cavafy's protagonists in his poems set in contemporary time often experience remorse and guilt for their homoeroticism. Yet, the poet does not convey the idea that poetry can provide the much desired absolution («ἀφεση»). Therefore, at this point, Ritsos puts his own beliefs in Cavafy's mouth. Cavafy's feature of decadence promoted in his poetry locates the decayed person as the protagonist. Closed in his walls, the Cavafian protagonist cannot find a way of salvation. Kallistos Ware in describing the Orthodox rite of confession maintains the importance of the 'laying-on of hands':

In the ancient practice, to signify a transfer of guilt the penitent at confession laid his hand on the neck of the priest; today, to symbolize Christ's gift of forgiveness, a reverse gesture occurs with the priest placing his stole and his hand on the penitent's head (Hausherr 1990, XXV).<sup>510</sup>

Ritsos puts himself in the position of a priest who hears the confession of the poet not only as his interlocutor, but through his oeuvre as well. At the end of the discussion, the confessor offers to the penitent forgiveness by embracing his 'sinful' work, rather than condemning it, bringing himself close to Ioannou's views and away from Lapathiotis' ones, who cannot see the Church embracing sinners.

Ritsos' role as a confessor and at the same time as someone who attempts to express himself giving the impression that we have to do with an autobiography is most fully elaborated in his prose rather than in his poetry and his late long novel

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<sup>510</sup> Irene Hausherr, *Spiritual Direction in the Early Christian East*, trans. Anthony P. Gythiel (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1990).

*Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων*<sup>511</sup>, which is, at least on the face of it, his most confessional piece of work. *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* was published from February 1983 to February 1985. In its nine volumes Ritsos unfolds his surrealistic craftiness, shifting between poetic discourse and prose, in a genre which falls within the categories of esoteric-mnemonic monologue and stream of consciousness. The series has been described as autobiographical, because of its wide biographical references identified with incidents in the life of Ritsos himself. The protagonist is «Αρίοστος ο προσεκτικός» (Ariostos the careful). Ariostos constitutes a created figure, a persona which the person who is given as the narrator, namely Ion, uses, which constitutes a persona for Ritsos himself.

The series caused controversies in the critical perception of its time. Though contemporary audience embraced each volume with outstanding enthusiasm and made it a best-seller critics largely lashed out against the style. They were struck by the explicit sexuality of the volumes, which was criticised as being similar to pornography. Having received this wide wave of criticism concerning their overt sexual references and their general modernistic style, strikingly there are no important critical references to the homosexual elements of the volumes.

Even quite recently, Ritsos's series continued to create a fuss around it: in an article published in the Greek newspaper *Τα Νέα* on 12 May 2001, entitled «Ρίτσος αυτός ο... άγνωστος»<sup>512</sup>, Roderick Beaton reviewed the «Ανθολογία Γιάννη Ρίτσου»<sup>513</sup> edited by Chrysa Prokopaki in 2000. The eye catches a small note dedicated to the absence of adequate critical attention to the homosexual elements in Ritsos work:

Γιατί (για να φέρω μια λεπτομέρεια αρκετά ασήμαντη, αλλά ενδεικτική) να αποσιωπηθεί, και πάλι εδώ, η έκδηλη ομοφυλοφιλία που προκύπτει σε ποιήματα από τη δεκαετία του '60, και που δηλώνεται ακάλυπτα στα όψιμα πεζά;<sup>514</sup>

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<sup>511</sup> Yannis Ritsos, *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* (Athens: Kedros, 1986).

<sup>512</sup> Roderick Beaton, «Ρίτσος αυτός ο... άγνωστος», *Τα Νέα*, May 21, 2001, 33.

<sup>513</sup> Chrysa Prokopaki, ed., *Ανθολογία Γιάννη Ρίτσου* (Athens: Kedros, 2000).

<sup>514</sup> Beaton, «Ρίτσος αυτός ο... άγνωστος», 33.



This statement scandalised the feelings of some of Ritsos' admirers who rushed to respond. Indicative of this reaction is the answer of the Greek philologist Dimitris Patilas. He published in *Ριζοσπάστης* on 27 May 2001 an article entitled «Γιάννης Ρίτσος: Ποιητής-μύθος αληθινός»<sup>515</sup>. In this article Patilas provides a severely opposed response to Beaton, against what he perceived as a scandalous and groundless position: the queer presence in Ritsos' oeuvre:

Έχω διαβάσει – δε λέω κιόλας πως έχω μελετήσει σε βάθος όλο το έργο του – και δε βλέπω πού στηρίζεται ο κ. Μπήτον ώστε να μιλά περί ύπαρξης «έκδηλης ομοφυλοφιλίας» που αποσιωπάται ως πλευρά του έργου του Ρίτσου. (...) Μήπως, στην τρυφερή, πράγματι, σχέση του Ορέστη προς τον Πυλάδη, στο ομώνυμο θεατρόμορφο ποίημα του Ρίτσου, δοσμένη άλλωστε από τον αρχαίο τραγικό μύθο;

Μήπως, στην εξύμνηση του ανδρικού λαϊκού κάλλους; Δεν έχει άραγε υμνήσει το σώμα της αγαπημένης και τον ετεροφυλικό έρωτα από την «Εαρινή συμφωνία» έως τα «Ερωτικά» και στα όψιμα πεζά του «Εικονοστασίου Ανωνύμων Αγίων»; Ποια είναι εκείνα τα ποιήματα που υπαινίσσονται, έστω, τέτοιο θέμα. Και ποια είναι τα «αποκαλυπτικά» σχετικά χωρία στο *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων*; Γιατί ο «οξυδερκής κριτικός» δεν αναφέρει ούτε μια πειστική παραπομπή; Δεν είχε να υποδείξει πλευρές του Ρίτσου πολύ σημαντικές, ώστε να γίνουν αντικείμενο μελέτης; Γιατί άραγε εστιάζει την προσοχή του, τόσο ανώδυνα, σε ένα τέτοιο – επιτρέψτε μου- σκανδαλοθηρικό και ανυπόστατο – κατά τη γνώμη μου – θέμα, υπό το πρίσμα μάλιστα τάχα μιας απομυθοποίησης και υπό το πνεύμα των «μεταμοντέρνων ιδεών»;<sup>516</sup>

I aim briefly to bring to the fore the linkage of homosexual and religious elements in the series as a whole, pointing out the ways in which Ritsos mixes homoeroticism and religion and presents them in an intertwined fashion and in a confessional mode.

Ritsos' connections with Christianity are undisputable, something which is obvious both in his poetry and in his prose; *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* is

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<sup>515</sup> Dimitris Patilas, «Γιάννης Ρίτσος: Ποιητής- μύθος αληθινός,» *Ριζοσπάστης*, May 27, 2001.

<sup>516</sup> Patilas, «Γιάννης Ρίτσος: Ποιητής- μύθος αληθινός».

indeed brimful of religious incidents, based on Ritsos's upbringing 'in the conservative environment of Monemvasia'<sup>517</sup> referring to 'the rituals of prayer and the festivals of his childhood'.<sup>518</sup> As Kittmer notes: 'The Ritsos family, being among the wealthiest landowners, were patrons of the Church and Ritsos' father was a church warden'.<sup>519</sup>

The title of the series is not chosen by accident; According to the *New Dictionary of Christian Theology*:

The holy icons, then, are more than just sacred art; they express in visual form the central doctrines of the faith and are therefore created as an act of loving religious devotion with prayer and spiritual preparation and in conformity with a strict tradition in their presentation. Moreover, since they are an integral part of Orthodox worship, they can be fully understood only in that context. As the worshipper stands surrounded by the icons of Christ, of the Mother of God and of the saints and the events of the history of man's salvation, he is vividly made aware of the reality of both the community of saints and the loving economy of God. The icons become windows on to the divine, through which his prayers ascend and through which God manifests his power by miracles of healing and answers to prayer.<sup>520</sup>

Ritsos clarifies that the *Εικονοστάσιο Αωνύμων Αγίων* he creates with words, is one which does not include known saints, but anonymous ones. He glorifies the simple people and their everyday life, paying attention to all its aspects, recognising the great role that eros and sexuality play within it. It is in this spirit that homosexual and queer incidents are also presented in the series, with different every time protagonists: let me mention a few of these incidents: a man in the audience of a

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<sup>517</sup> John Kittmer, "The uses of Greek Orthodoxy in the early poetry of Yannis Ritsos," *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* Vol. 33 No 2 (2009): 182.

<sup>518</sup> Kittmer, "The uses of Greek Orthodoxy," 182.

<sup>519</sup> Kittmer, "The uses of Greek Orthodoxy," 182.

<sup>520</sup> Alan Richardson and John Bowden, ed., *A new dictionary of Christian Theology*, (London: SCM Press, 2009), 275.

theatrical performance watches an actor dressed as a woman, causing the audience's laughter. The protagonist starts running away from the theatre afraid that the people will start noticing his own effeminate side, a boy secretly fantasises about male workers, two handsome men shyly flirt at a workers' demonstration with «χαμηλωμένα τα μάτια» and finally decide to give into their sexual temptation and leave together; two men engage in mutual masturbation, one of them feels guilty about it and starts shouting that they have committed a sin, Ariostos kisses a male friend on the mouth and makes him feel ashamed about it, boys dance very closely to together while aroused, knowing that they have to deny their feelings which they cannot yet define, but know that they have to hide them and be extra careful. In a voyeuristic scene a boy's sexual exaltation and erection is produced by the view, smell and sense of two other boys, feeling at the same time guilty and ashamed towards God and his ill mother.

The narrator falls upon the multiple characters with deep, pure Christian love and through this love the characters are displayed as saints, whom the narrator venerates, embracing their sinfulness, as contemporary society and the Church would regard it. Ariostos's aim is to find the «ερωτοπλάνταχτη αλήθεια». <sup>521</sup> In this effort, this «ηδονοβλεψίας των πάντων» <sup>522</sup> wonders:

Κι ουδέ που μάθαμε τί να 'ναι εκείνο που τ' ανθρώπου το πρόσωπο τελειώνει. Η υποταγή του τάχα στην πεθύμια του; Η αντίστασή του τάχα στην πεθύμια του; (...) Α, ναι, η επιθυμία, η ερωτική επιθυμία, μοίρα του καθενός μας. (...) «γιατί αμαρτία η συμφωνία με την επιθυμία μας;» <sup>523</sup>

The narrator's protean and panerotic nature allows everything, forgives everything as long as it is genuinely wanted, embraces everyone and everything, especially those considered as sinners and actions considered as sins, sanctifies simplicity and authenticity.

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<sup>521</sup> Yannis Ritsos, «Ο Αρίστος αρνείται να γίνει Άγιος», in *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* (Athens: Kedros, 1986), 53.

<sup>522</sup> Ritsos, «Ο Αρίστος αρνείται να γίνει Άγιος», 53.

<sup>523</sup> Ritsos, «Ο Αρίστος αρνείται να γίνει Άγιος», 53.

As the narrator confesses in the ninth volume of the series, behind all the different characters of the nine volumes, a variety of poses and aspects of the narrator himself are hidden. Referring to the narrator Ion, the protagonist Ariostos admits:

Δε μου 'κανε πια κέφι ν' αλλάζω πόζες μπροστά του, να εντείνω την περιέργειά του, την αμηχανία του, να του αρέσω, να τον προκαλώ, να τον ερεθίζω, να τον εξοργίζω, να τον φέρνω σε αδιέξοδο. Με όλες αυτές τις μεταβολές μου, απ' τη μια μεριά ανακάλυπτα κάποιες άγνωστες πτυχές μου, απ' την άλλη κόντευα να χάσω τον εαυτό μου, να μην ξέρω ποιος είμαι ανάμεσα σε τόσους διαφορετικούς ρόλους που έπαιζα (...).<sup>524</sup>

With these words, Ritsos echoes the views of Cavafy who in *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα Ποιητικής και Ηθικής* questions the same topic:

Αλλά με περνά απ'τον νου τώρα, - αυτό είναι αληθής ανειλικρίνεια; Η τέχνη δεν ψεύδεται πάντα; Ή μάλλον όταν η τέχνη ψεύδεται το περισσότερο, δεν είναι τότε που δημιουργεί και το περισσότερο; Όταν έγγραφα εκείνους τους στίχους, δεν ήτο κατόρθωμα της τέχνης; (...) Την στιγμήν που έκαμνα τους στίχους δεν είχα τεχνητήν ειλικρίνειαν; Δεν εφантаζόμην με τέτοιον τρόπον, που να ήταν σαν τω όντι να έζησα στην εξοχή;<sup>525</sup>

On the other hand, apart from his Cavafian elements, in *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* exploits features introduced by Lapathiotis, also enabling a comparison with the oeuvre of Lapathiotis. By using a surrealistic style, Ritsos blurs in his prose humans and angels, in a scale which goes both up and down, in a representation of Jacob's ladder. Heaven is accessible to earth and earth is accessible to heaven: angels co-exist with humans and humans become saints through the simplicity and authenticity of their lives. For instance, in the sixth volume, entitled «Όχι μονάχα για σένα»<sup>526</sup> we come across the passage «Οι δυο μου άγγελοι στο κουρείο»<sup>527</sup>, where the speaker

<sup>524</sup> Ritsos, «Ο Αρίστος αρνείται να γίνει Άγιος», 66-67.

<sup>525</sup> Cavafy, *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα Ποιητικής και Ηθικής*, 43.

<sup>526</sup> Yannis Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για εσένα», in *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* (Athens: Kedros, 1986).

<sup>527</sup> Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για εσένα», 11-19.

narrates his idea for a new novel, entitled «Οι άγγελοι του Μεταξουργείου»<sup>528</sup>, in which the protagonists will be two angels. His purpose is not to convey «δυο μεταξουργιώτες μάγκες αγγελοποιημένους, αλλά δυο πραγματικούς Αγγέλους»,<sup>529</sup> whom he places «στο κουρείο, στο τσαγγαράδικο, στο λαϊκό ξενοδοχείο της οδού Σανταρόζα, στο στιλβωτήριο της Ομόνοιας ή και στο μπορντέλο της Προαστίου, εκεί με καμιά Λειλά και κανέναν Γιώτη» and also «μια Κυριακή απόγευμα στο στάδιο Καραϊσκάκη, σ' ένα σπουδαίο ματς ποδοσφαίρου».<sup>530</sup> The angels that the narrator wants for his protagonists are engaged in all the simple activities humans do, mixing with humans and as it is apparent the narrator gives them a special place in the life and the activities of the working class. Ion points out their exquisite physical appearance and establishes them as homosexual icons, in the same way that he presents working class as the sexually ideal class; he displays them wandering around naked and narcissistically admiring their own beautiful naked bodies. At the same time, the narrator pinpoints their innocence, akin to their divine nature, since «κατάλαβαν πως δεν είναι σωστό να τριγυρνάνε τσίτσιδοι ανάμεσα σε ντυμένους και άφτερους ανθρώπους και να σκανδαλίζουν (ποιός ξέρει γιατί;) τον κοσμάκη».<sup>531</sup>

At the same time, he acknowledges that the narcissistic behaviour his angels have is caused by the human nature that they also have and consists a projection of humans' attitude towards them:

Αυτό το μέρος, δηλαδή πως το αόρατο γίνεται ορατό παίρνοντας πονηρά τις δικές μας συνήθειες, θα πρέπει να το αναπτύξω ιδιαίτερα με πολλούς τρόπους και σε πολλές περιπτώσεις κοινωνικές, φιλοσοφικές, αισθητικές.<sup>532</sup>

Therefore, Ion's angels display both divine and human characteristics, like Cavafy's 'ephebes'. They are presented in an ideal fashion, constituting sexual objects and they are visible only from the initiates and the worthy:

Έτσι ήσυχος πια και ξαναμμένος στρώνουμε ως τα μεσάνυχτα και γράφω τούτο το

528 Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για εσένα», 12.

529 Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για εσένα», 15.

530 Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για εσένα», 15.

531 Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για εσένα», 16.

532 Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για εσένα», 16.

κεφάλαιο για τους αόρατους Αγγέλους μου, πάντα ορατούς για μένα κι ας μην είμαι παιδί, ούτε καν ερωτευμένος. Όχι· είμαι ερωτευμένος μαζί τους, γι' αυτό είμαι βέβαιος πως τώρα θα τους δείτε κι εσείς με τα δικά μου μάτια. Μα ξέχασα να πω: ο κυρ Αντώνης, ο μπαρμπέρης, έβλεπε τους Αγγέλους, επειδή είχε ένα μικρό τριαντάφυλλο στ' αυτί του.<sup>533</sup>

In the chapter «Οι δυο μου άγγελοι στο κουρείο» Ritsos makes an effort to illustrate his angels by also pinpointing their 'vagueness', their being in between divine and human nature, attempting to emphasise «το πρόβλημα αντίθεσης και σχέσης του αόρατου και ορατού, του αόριστου και ορισμένου, του αφηρημένου και συγκεκριμένου».<sup>534</sup> In doing so, Ritsos at this point reminds us of Cavafy's «Ιωνικόν», where Cavafy stresses the element of the co-existence of humans and pagan gods, as well as the co-existence and the continuum of pagan gods with Christianity, as well as of «Ένας Θεός των», where a pagan god wanders among humans, ascribed with human characteristics and is only recognised by the initiates.

It has been maintained by Papantoniou that Ritsos in his work identifies himself with Christ, by referring to the work of Ritsos as a whole and by giving examples of his poetry. Yet, the ninth volume has the eloquent title «Ο Αρίοστος αρνείται να γίνει Άγιος»; we find a section entitled «Αυτοαγιασμός; Ούτε», in which the following extract is found:

Συχαίνουμαι τους ανθρώπους που κορδώνονται για τις όποιες αρετές τους. Μόλις κάνουν να περηφανευτούν για δάύτες τις χάνουν πάραυτα. Εγώ μιλάω μονάχα για τα λάθη μου, τις γκάφες μου, τις κουζουλάδες μου. Κι όχι μονάχα τα ομολογώ μα και τα δείχνω πολλαπλάσια, μεγεθυσμένα. Έτσι τιμωρώ τον εαυτό μου, εξαγνίζομαι, ησυχάζω. Έτσι αυτοαγιαζομαι στην ταπεινοφροσύνη μου. Μα όχι, όχι. Αρνούμαι παντάπασι να με αγιάσουν ή ν'αυτοαγιαστώ. Κι ίσως η μόνη πραγματική αγιοσύνη μου να 'ναι η άρνησή μου ν'αγιασώ.<sup>535</sup>

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533 Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για εσένα», 19.

534 Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για εσένα», 16.

535 Yannis Ritsos, «Ο Αρίοστος αρνείται να γίνει Άγιος», in *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* (Athens: Kedros, 1986), 64.

This passage is fundamental for the interpretation of *Εικονοστάσιο Αωνύμων Αγίων*, for two reasons: firstly, it clarifies what the term ‘saint’ means for the narrator and in which sense it is used both in the title and in the content of the novel. Secondly, it constitutes a clear statement of poetics, which draws upon the methodology and the technique the narrator uses in the ennealogy. Ritsos’s saints are the sinners; people who constantly make mistakes, but at the same time have the courage to admit them. According to the narrator, even greater importance and sanctity is given to the people who, regardless of their virtues, make a conscious decision to refer to the bad aspects of their life, to punish themselves and claim forgiveness. In this way, these people free themselves and through confession gain a clear consciousness again. On the other hand, the narrator states that he himself makes a conscious decision to focus on the negative aspects of his life, his mistakes and irrationality and demonstrate them through his writing to an even greater extent. He takes advantage of his writing as a medium to confess, and confession is the solution that his soul longs for. By making specific reference to deeds in his life that he is not proud of, or to the deeds of which society or the Church might not approve, the narrator dignifies and sanctifies himself, through the martyrdom of public confession. By going a step further, the narrator might be characterised as innocent and a saint, in the same sense that Cavafy is, as illustrated in Ritsos’s *12 ποιήματα για τον Καβάφη*. Even though they are considered sinners by society and the Church, they are capable of forgiveness, because of their brave public confession through their writing.

The fact that *Εικονοστάσιο Αωνύμων Αγίων* is a confessional novel is reinforced by the references to the ritual of confession. In the fourth volume, «Ίσως να΄ναι κι έτσι», the following lines are found:

Μα όταν μιλάς μόνος τα λες όλα και για όλους, και μην έχοντας άμεσο ακροατή μπροστά σου, λες και πράματα ανήκουστα, «παράξενα πράματα», με άφοβες λέξεις που δε θα τις ξεστόμιζες ποτέ ούτε μπροστά σ’ ένα φίλο σου, ούτε σε γιατρό, ούτε σ’ έναν ποιητή.<sup>536</sup>

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<sup>536</sup> Yannis Ritsos, «Ίσως να΄ναι κι έτσι», in *Εικονοστάσιο Αωνύμων Αγίων* (Athens: Kedros, 1985), 75.

Another example of reference to the act of confession is included in the same volume:

(...) μα τί στο διάολο μόνο ανακλαστικά θα ζω όλα τούτα μπαίνοντας νοερά στη θέση του Γώγου, του Αλέκου, του Τέλη, του Πέτρου, του Βαγγέλη; Ή μήπως είναι τα δικά μου και τα βάζω στα λόγια και στις πράξεις του ενός και του άλλου γιατί δε θα μπορούσα να τα ομολογήσω σα δικά μου; Και μήπως όλα όλων δεν είναι

δικά μου και όλα τα δικά μου δεν είναι όλων; Μια πάστα είμαστε όλοι· γι' αυτό σου 'λεγα «ο κόσμος είναι ένας» (...).<sup>537</sup>

Even though the references occur throughout the series, it is in the ninth volume that they come to a climax; In the passage «Επανεμφάνιση του φωτογράφου μου», the narrator refers to a 'photographer' who seemed to pursue all his actions and capture all the 'images' of himself:

Χώρια εκείνο το μυθικό μαύρο ράσο όπου έχωνε το κεφάλι του ο φωτογράφος κι επειδή δεν τον έβλεπες, νόμιζες πως κι εκείνος δε σ' έβλεπε και μπορούσες άνετα να ξεκουμπώσεις το βρακί σου, ή, σαν σε σκοτεινό εξομολογητάρι, να ομολογήσεις τρομερές αμαρτίες που δεν έκανες ή ν' αποκρύψεις άλλες τρομερότατες που έκανες.<sup>538</sup>

This imaginary photographer of Ariostos, seems to be Ion, his alter ego and the persona of Ritsos himself. It is Ion that created Ariostos and presented him engaged in many different occasions and as Ariostos admits at this point that he was

ο ευέλικτος ακόλουθος (...) που παρότρυνε τη δική μου ευελιξία και γινόμουνα εξαιτίας του πολύπλοκος, πολυπρισματικός, πολυδιάστατος, σχεδόν μαγικός για να τον θαμπώσω και να τον παραπλανήσω, δηλαδή μου ανέπτυσε εξάισιες υποκριτικές δυνάμεις ειλικρίνειας.<sup>539</sup>

Therefore, Ion at this point, or Ritsos, or -eventually- the narrator's own self, appears to function like a confessor who encourages himself, the confessant, to shed

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<sup>537</sup> Ritsos, «Ίσως να 'ναι κι έτσι», 127.

<sup>538</sup> Ritsos, «Ο Αρίοστος αρνείται να γίνει Άγιος», 67.

<sup>539</sup> Ritsos, «Ο Αρίοστος αρνείται να γίνει Άγιος», 65.



light on all the possible aspects of his life, by writing them and making literature. It is very interesting and innovative the way that Ritsos links the function and the work of a photographer to the function of a priest at the time that he confesses, where the procedures of an old-time photographer are compared to a Catholic ritual of confession: «σκοτεινό εξομολογητάρι» refers to a closed and restricted confessional where a Catholic confession takes place. In a Catholic confessional the person can remain anonymous and unseen even by the priest, whereas in the Greek Orthodox rite of confession the person who confesses and the priest can see each other and have contact. Ritsos chooses at this point to refer to the Catholic rite of confession because the complete anonymity that it secures and helps people to confess even the most awful actions, decreasing the factor of shame and increasing the factor of courage and determination. In the same way, the narrator of *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων*, hiding behind his multiple personae, feels more secure to proceed to a confession de profundis, without being afraid that he is going to be recognised and stigmatised.<sup>540</sup>

I have attempted to illustrate that Ritsos, especially in his novel *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων*, promotes a redemptive function of literature, first suggested in his poetry, *12 ποιήματα για τον Καβάφη*, the fact that the writer can confess to himself and forgive his sins through his own writings. Ritsos, like a chameleon, expresses aspects of himself by using many different personae. In doing so, the narrator of *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* achieves to make things more complicated, avoid his complete exposure and confuse the reader about the genre his series belongs to; is it a semi-autobiography or an autofiction? All these different personae of the narrator meet up in the last volume of the series, on the last page and the self-reflective expression, written with separate letters for emphasis: «αυτός είμαι». Therefore, the series constitutes an expression of the narrator's inner struggle to recognise and accept all the different aspects of himself. Regardless of his quite subversive way of writing, Ritsos never goes against religion or the Church. As with Ioannou, he sanctifies and praises simple, authentic people, who are experiencing their own everyday martyrdom in their inner struggle and their fight against the heteronormative society; homosexuals belong to this category. For Ioannou,

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<sup>540</sup> At this point, Ritsos, as well as Lapathiotes, recall Christomanos and his writings' Roman Catholic flavour.

homosexuals are actually the main category of these people, whereas for Ritsos, homosexuals are a part of all these people that his ecumenical and humanistic nature embraces.

## **Conclusions**

In this chapter I have aimed at demonstrating the development of Modern Greek homosexual writing in relation to the presence of (Orthodox) Christianity, a neglected topic in Greek literary criticism. The contribution of Cavafy to the topic is fundamental, since we trace in his work the first Modern Greek coming-out narrative, setting the tone for what is to follow. The feature of «ηθοποιΐα» that Demaras attributed to Cavafy, however, enables the poet to hide behind his protagonists; at the same time, Cavafy speaks through their position, a code that he inherited from the Victorian literature in order to express himself and being simultaneously careful not to expose his inner truth to a great extent. It is, I believe, pointless for the research on Cavafy to attempt to provide an answer to the ever-lasting question: Was Cavafy a Christian? The important thing has been acknowledged: Cavafy's charm lies in the fact that he provides an oeuvre which enables him to go back and forth in historical and religious continuity. At the same time, Cavafy achieves to reinforce his modern character, since his protagonists are representative of modern dilemmas and considerations relating to the homoerotic. Therefore, in his erotic poetry Cavafy achieves an insight into a complex Greek homoerotic identity: traditional and modern, pagan and Christian, repressed and confessional.

Lapathiotis knew Cavafy and admired him and his work. Yet even though the two poets develop the same topics in their work, Lapathiotis chooses to take a different path. His relationship with Christianity seems to define his poetry; in the poems of his first phase, 1905-1919, he is more romantic and the speaker of his poetry seems to engage into religious considerations without doubting his faith. At the same time, Lapathiotis' poetry is provocative to the extent that he eroticises Christ and he deifies the person of his desire, mixing up their entities and perplexing heaven and earth. In his second poetic phase, starting from 1920 onwards and specifically in his poems after his self-excommunication from the Greek Orthodox Church (1927), the speaker of Lapathiotis is still tortured with existential and religious considerations, failing to become an atheist. On the other hand, he constantly confesses his lack of love and a permanent erotic partner and his body's tiredness of the multiple ostensible erotic relationships. Taking a step further from Cavafy, Lapathiotis' protagonist does not struggle to accept himself as a homosexual going against the

heteronormative society and to come to terms with all the aspects of himself, but, to clarify his religious feelings and to deal with his loneliness and torturing existential thoughts. It is important to acknowledge Lapathiotes' own innovative role.<sup>541</sup> Cavafy and Lapathiotes define the tradition of Modern Greek homosexual writing that their successors build on.

Christianopoulos has been influenced both by Cavafy and by Lapathiotes. Especially in his first poems and his first poetic collection *Εποχή των Ισχνών Αγελάδων* the Cavafian influences are obvious. In his poetic development, however, he comes closer to Lapathiotes and he provides a more straightforward and provocative confessional writing. What is interesting about Christianopoulos, which makes him different than the others, is that he manages to balance in his work two automatically antithetic aspects of someone's personality, homoeroticism and Christianity. Yet, he shows with every opportunity his disagreement with the strict attitude of the Greek Orthodox Church towards homosexuals. He is such an antinomian that he comes up very often with a fetishistic and masochistic poetry, everything for a celebration of someone's instincts and a satisfaction of all the body's desires. Again, similarly to Lapathiotes, his poetry represents a tortured person who lacks love and affection, even though he has many erotic adventures.

There are indeed some similarities between Ioannou and Christianopoulos, in the sense that both depict men who come to terms with their homoeroticism and religiousness, as two social roles that can co-exist. As Judith Butler would urge us to recognise, although this is a stance which comes across in the work of Christianopoulos as a whole, Ioannou's oeuvre follows more deliberate stages of coming out: at the beginning and his first poetic collections, Ioannou provides a hesitant and repressed speaker, trying to figure out where his homoeroticism comes fits in, in terms of his Christianity. Indeed, in his poetry Ioannou comes closer to Cavafy and his own introvert protagonists.

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<sup>541</sup> It has to be pointed out that especially Christianopoulos, as I argue in my thesis, is greatly influenced by Lapathiotes. Even though at the beginning of his writing career Christianopoulos leans more towards Cavafy, he later on exploits elements from Lapathiotes to a greater extent.

However, in his late prose we observe a significant development and maturity of his protagonists, since they start to express their sexuality, accepting it in the circles of their Christianity at the same time. In a way which likens to Lapathiotis, Ioannou seems to equate to an extent the beloved with Christ. And then, we come to *Καταπακτή*, where the writer becomes as confessional as it gets and bravely offers insights for the whole of his work, being open about his own homoeroticism and about his disappointment in the Orthodox Church. Indeed, Ioannou, following Cavafy's «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής», wishes that he had sinned more during his life.

Ritsos, on the other hand, belongs to his own category and one might encounter scepticism as to whether he (not least as a married man) should be discussed in a chapter like this one and in comparison to previous writers. Yet, Ritsos's *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* with its antinomian way of writing, which appears to be an unconventional autobiography or a semi-autobiographical novel with metafictional elements, justifies the discussion of Ritsos in this chapter. As *12 ποιήματα για τον Καβάφη* verifies, Ritsos engages in a discussion on whether Cavafy can be characterised as a sinner or not, to conclude that he is «ο μέγας αναμάρτητος». His *Εικονοστάσιο* comes to embrace and 'forgive' all the 'sinners', in the name of paneroticism and pan-ecumenical love, acceptance and celebration. Writing, for both Ritsos and Ioannou, becomes a way of salvation, whereas for Cavafy there is no way of liberation.

It is clear that these writers have indeed affinities, but also differences, since each builds upon and challenges the tradition, consisted of Cavafy and Lapathiotis and, at the same time, converses with the topic as is negotiated in the synchronic axis, consisted of Christianopoulos, Ioannou and Ritsos. Greek writings, covering the period from the late nineteenth century to the

late twentieth century, show more continuity than change in the tension between Orthodoxy and Homoeroticism.

### Chapter 3

#### The working class as erotic object: Cavafy and his successors

##### Introduction

My aim in this chapter is to show how social class interacts with homoeroticism in selected writings by Cavafy, Christianopoulos, Ioannou and Ritsos. I am especially interested in the social class which features most in their writings and thus constitutes their favoured class, namely, the working class. The writers depict their protagonists in a particular social milieu and delineate through their *oeuvre* homosexual incidents stemming from a specific social background. Their preference for the lower class is indicative of their belief that among the tough conditions that lower class life imposes, purer feelings can emerge.

People of the lower classes are on this view purified through their hardships. Cavafy, Christianopoulos and Ioannou share the opinion that these tormented people are the most worthy of reference in their work, praising their hard life. In a similar vein, homosexuals of the time were experiencing arduous conditions, full of concealment, restraint and constraints on their free expression. Therefore, the poets and the authors through their *oeuvre* compare people coming from lower classes to homosexuals, based on their oppressed life, which makes them down-to-earth, decent and dignified. By contrast, the bourgeoisie and upper classes are perceived as pretentious and hypocritical. Their luxurious life makes them ridiculous and very often leads them to the conclusion that they can purchase love.

All the writers discussed in this section belong to the middle class, though Ioannou emerged from an originally peasant background. Thus, we are not originally given a perspective from the insight into lower class life and how homoeroticism is expressed within it.<sup>542</sup> They delineate through their writings how -for them- the

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<sup>542</sup> Gagnier's chapter 'Representations of the Working Classes by Nonworking-Class Writers: Subjectivity and Solidarity' in *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* offers interesting insights towards this direction (Regenia Gagnier, *Subjectivities: A History of Self-Representation in Britain, 1832-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 99-137).

working class constitutes the sexually ideal class. At this point emerges the topos that workers, with their exquisite bodies, forged by hard work, and with their unviolated masculinity consist the ultimate object of homosexual admiration, or even exaltation. This topos is also valid on heterosexual terms, yet in a homosexual context it becomes strongly fetishised and dominant. Hence, such writers who do not have working class origins are not only stimulated and sexually excited by the workers and by their tough life, where, according to them, truth lies, but see them as their ideal. For them, lower class men constitute a special group, which has authenticity as its foundation. Only a few initiated and trustworthy people from outside can ever hope to enter such a group. These writers desire to become members of this special and superior group.

My analysis dwells on games of power and authority. I am interested in sketching how the power factor functions, exerted by an authority over the protagonists and, specifically, over love. Power and authority are mutable, and each text that I discuss can be differently approached. However, my discussion will point to some common lines all the writers follow. I intend to delineate the agreement with and the deviations from these lines. The mutable factors of power and authority give birth to the terms of 'social class' and 'class-crossing' in the way that I apply them for the purposes of my study. It would be a mistake for someone to attempt to apprehend them leaving aside their connections with sexuality and in particular with queer sexuality. Therefore, for the definition of the term 'social class', as used in my section, I follow Sinfield in

taking "class", approximately, as comprising hierarchies of wealth, income, status, educational attainment, and cultural sophistication, along with their markers in attire, décor, and general lifestyle<sup>543</sup>

I also examine how this term is perceived when it comes to homosexual scenarios. Thompson's definition of 'class' is also helpful here, as, according to him, class

(...) happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs.<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>543</sup> Alan Sinfield, *On sexuality and power*. (Columbia University Press, 2004), 138.

<sup>544</sup> Edward Palmer Thompson, *The making of the English working class* (New York: Pantheon Books, a division of Random House, 1963), 9.



The above definition could have been used to describe homoeroticism and I will attempt to indicate throughout this section that homosexuals and the working class are displayed through these texts in a fashion which has many common points. The term 'working class', as I use it in this chapter, embraces people 'engaged in, or dependent on, manual labour'<sup>545</sup>. The references that I make have to do mostly with the urban working class.

Going a step further, I also aim at demonstrating how these texts as a group ask whether and how homosexual love can rise above social class and can enable the crossing between classes, both up and down. As boundaries can in some cases be flexible or even eliminated, they can also prove impermeable. To discuss these cases I use the term 'class - crossing', with which I cover the emblematic feature of interchangeability of roles among social classes, roles that are each time established according to contemporary social convictions about power and authority. I use the term 'class - crossing' instead of the more acknowledged term 'cross- class',<sup>546</sup> because I want to give emphasis on this very volatility which takes place among social classes, which often leaves the road open for crossings of the upper classes to the lower classes and vice versa. I also prefer the term 'class - crossing' having in mind the queer theory term 'gender - crossing'.<sup>547</sup> In doing so, I perceive social class as analogous; both categories have a major common characteristic: interchangeability. However, it has to be emphasised that interchangeability is an ideal state that is never actually being reached, even though the attempts are multiple. As I argue, the Cavafian legacy brings to the fore a melancholy which emerges from the constant sense that engulfs the speaker, namely that changing places is not in fact possible.

Queer theory has not adequately studied the connection between class and homoeroticism. A significant contribution towards this direction, however, was made

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<sup>545</sup>John Benson, *The Working Class in Britain: 1850-1939* (London: Longman, 1989).

<sup>546</sup>Sinfield, *On sexuality and power*, 139

<sup>547</sup>The term indicates the possible crossing between the male and the feminine gender and the roles that are given to them by each society.

by Judith Butler in 'Merely cultural'<sup>548</sup> (1997), by Mariam Fraser in 'Classing Queer: politics in competition'<sup>549</sup> (1999) and in 'Heterosexism, misrecognition, and capitalism: A response to Judith Butler'<sup>550</sup> (1997), as well as, on a larger scale, by Rosemary Hennessy in *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*<sup>551</sup> (2000). The above scholars lean to the direction that 'heteronormativity is absolutely central to the bourgeois ideology of expressive and coherent self-hood'.<sup>552</sup> They also come to the conclusion that, as Yvette Taylor mentions in the article 'Queer, but Classless?'

(...) sexuality and class are written on the body and cannot easily be discarded or refashioned at will: not so much performative subversions as entrenched material dispositions-signs to be read, understood (and misunderstood) by those in 'the know', those with the social, cultural and economic capital to decode and decipher and even degrade these appearances.<sup>553</sup>

Such discussions study sexuality (and homoeroticism as an expression of it) as connected with capitalism. As far as the Left has been studied in association with sexuality and in particular homoeroticism, even fewer attempts have been. I name two of those significant attempts: the article 'Queer Theory, Left Politics'<sup>554</sup> by Hennessy (1994) and the recent book *The Reification of Desire: Toward a Queer Marxism*<sup>555</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> Judith, Butler, "Merely cultural." *Social text* 52/53 (1997): 265-277.

<sup>549</sup> Mariam, Fraser, *Classing queer: Politics in competition Theory, Culture & Society* 16, no. 2 (1999): 107-131. <sup>501</sup>Fraser, Nancy. "Heterosexism, misrecognition and capitalism: a response to Judith Butler." *New Left Review* 228 (1998): 140.

<sup>550</sup>Rosemary, Hennessy, Rosemary. *Profit and pleasure: Sexual identities in late capitalism*. Routledge, 2002.

<sup>551</sup> Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure*, 95.

<sup>552</sup> Yvette Taylor, "Queer, but classless?." *The Ashgate research companion to queer theory* (2009): 199-218.

<sup>553</sup> Taylor, "Queer, but classless?", 199

<sup>554</sup> Rosemary Hennessy, "Queer theory, left politics" *Rethinking Marxism* 7, no. 3 (1994): 85-111.

<sup>555</sup> Kevin Floyd, *The reification of desire: toward a queer Marxism* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

(2009) by Kevin Floyd. Hennessy's article discusses the reasons that 'the Left is noticing queers now'<sup>556</sup> and engages in a discussion around power and sexuality, with a debt to Foucault and Butler. Hennessy's contribution occurs in the clarification of the distinction between avant-garde queer theory and materialist queer theory, a post-Marxist materialism.<sup>557</sup> Floyd attempts to discuss the innovative potential of what he calls a 'queer Marxism', stating the impasse which existed between those two (the area of Queer and the area of Marxism) through the nineties and the expected lack of bibliography.<sup>558</sup> He '(...) understands Marxism and queer theory as forms of critical knowledge, as critical perspectives on social relations that operate from a subordinated situation within those relations'.<sup>559</sup> *Sexuality and Power*<sup>560</sup> (2004) by Alan Sinfield constitutes a basic reading which undertakes the discussion around the role that power has in the expression and shaping of sexuality, emphasising homoeroticism. Sinfield argues that 'all sexual relations in our society are about power over another or the submission to the power of another'<sup>561</sup> a definition which sheds light on the term of class - crossing. Sinfield identifies the reasons that fetishise the 'power differentials' in 'gay fantasies and in the stories about gayness that circulate':<sup>562</sup> First, he mentions what I call and perceive as the 'norm of the fantasies'; that means that even the world of the fantasies has some standards that have the true desires human beings as a prerequisite. In addition, Sinfield claims that fantasies are nothing more than another creation of the way the society is established; that means that they are subject to the power factor and the regimes that each time define ourselves, our 'social beings'.<sup>563</sup>

Such discussion is rare when it comes to my Greek authors: the element of the social class and consciousness in their *oeuvre* as connected to homoeroticism would

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<sup>556</sup> Hennessy, "Queer theory, left politics", 87.

<sup>557</sup> For the clarification see Hennessy, "Queer theory, left politics", 93-99.

<sup>558</sup> Floyd, *The reification of desire: toward a queer Marxism*, 4.

<sup>559</sup> Floyd, *The reification of desire: toward a queer Marxism*, 3.

<sup>560</sup> Sinfield, *On sexuality and power*, 1.

<sup>561</sup> Sinfield, *On sexuality and power*, 1.

<sup>562</sup> Sinfield, *On sexuality and power*, 1.

<sup>563</sup> Sinfield, *On sexuality and power*, 2.

be automatically very restricted, since this is generally a topic that has not been studied satisfactorily. As far as Cavafy is concerned, I have to mention the studies of Michalis Pieris, who was largely occupied with the element of 'έρως και εξουσία'<sup>564</sup> in his research about Cavafy. He pinpoints in Cavafy's work the determinative existence of an exterior powerful factor:

«ένας τρίτος παράγοντας που ελέγχει, επιτρέπει, ματαιώνει, αλλοιώνει, ταλαιπωρεί, εκφυλίζει, αρπάζει, δηλητηριάζει την ερωτική επιθυμία ή την ερωτική σχέση, ακόμα και τη μνήμη μιας ερωτικής σχέσης».<sup>565</sup>

This factor in the poetry of Cavafy is given by Pieris as «ο χρόνος, το χρήμα, η πολιτική και η εκκλησιαστική εξουσία και η σεμνότυφη κοινωνία»<sup>566</sup>. As my chapter unravels, I come quite often to a dialogue with Pieris's studies, aiming at sketching the position of the homosexual love towards this external power. I also have to mention another relevant article, written by Peter Mackridge and entitled «Έρωτος, τέχνη και αγορά στην ποίηση του Καβάφη»<sup>567</sup> (1998-9), which offered important stimuli for this chapter. When it comes to Yorgos Ioannou, I have to acknowledge the contribution of Georgia Pateridou's article «Η επιθυμία του λαϊκού: Η περίπτωση του Γιώργου Ιωάννου»<sup>568</sup> (2010). Last but not least, regarding Christianopoulos, the article 'The poetry of Dinos Christianopoulos: An Introduction'<sup>569</sup> (1979) by Kimon Friar, attempts an uneven –yet very interesting- comparison of Cavafy and Christianopoulos and therefore it will be mentioned appropriately.

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<sup>564</sup> Michalis Pieris, «Έρωτος και εξουσία: όψεις της ποιητικής του Καβάφη», *Molyvdo-kondylo-peleketes* 6 (1998- 9): 37-57, Michalis Pieris, ed., *Η ποίηση του κράματος. Μοντερνισμός και διαπολιτισμικότητα στο έργο του Καβάφη* (Ηράκλειο: Πανεπιστημιακές Εκδόσεις Κρήτης, 2000), Michalis Pieris, «Έρωτος και εξουσία: Καβάφης, Ελύτης», *NeaEstia* 1812 (2008): 1087-1104.

<sup>565</sup> Pieris, «Έρωτος και εξουσία: όψεις της ποιητικής του Καβάφη», 37.

<sup>566</sup> Pieris, «Έρωτος και εξουσία: Καβάφης, Ελύτης», 1088.

<sup>567</sup> Peter Mackridge, «Έρωτος, τέχνη και αγορά στην ποίηση του Καβάφη», *Molyvdo-kondylo-peleketes* 6 (1998- 9): 58-74.

<sup>568</sup> Georgia Pateridou, «Η επιθυμία του λαϊκού: η περίπτωση του Γιώργου Ιωάννου,» *Utopia* 90 (2010): 161- 171.

<sup>569</sup> Kimon Friar, "The poetry of Dinos Christianopoulos: An Introduction," *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 6 (1979): 1, 59-67.

### **The contested concept of hegemonic masculinities**

The theory around hegemonic masculinity, in the same way as queer theory, has proved to be extremely compelling through the decades. To the same extent that it has been applied to different fields, proving its multiple nature it has also accepted various criticism based on the arguments of its core. However, this concept constitutes a fertile field for a specific line of thought to be unraveled which draws the literary threads of Cavafy, Ioannou, Christianopoulos and Ritsos together. The ideas which originated the concept go back to the early 1980s and have since then dominated masculinity studies and critical studies of men. It has first started its elaboration with relation to the field of Australian education, studying social inequality in high schools. The most instrumental and systematic work on the concept has been made by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell.<sup>570</sup> Yet, it is not until the article 'Towards a New Sociology of Masculinity' in 1985<sup>571</sup> that this concept was more systematically developed and analysed, offering important points of critique having to do with the male-role sex literature. The same article offers interesting insights about a new suggested model constituted by various masculinities and connections of power.

### **Hegemonic and subordinated masculinities**

The aforementioned opposition of terms has been brought to the fore in the field of political sociology. In terms of power, it is suggested that there is a group of people which exerts an excessive amount of power over other groups of people and especially women. In other terms, this analogy suggests that there is a 'dominant group'<sup>572</sup>, which is entitled as 'the pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity)

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<sup>570</sup> It has been argued by scholars such as Messerschmidt 2000 that the theory elaborated by Connell on masculinity is the most influential theory about men and masculinities: J. W. Messerschmidt. *Nine lives: Adolescent masculinities, the body, and violence*. Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000.

<sup>571</sup> T. R. Carrigan, W. J. Connell, and J. Lee. "Toward a new sociology of masculinity". *Theory and Society* 14 (5): 551-604.

<sup>572</sup> Raewyn Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, "Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept", *Gender and Society* vol 19 No 6 (December 2005): 832.

that allowed men's dominance over women to continue'.<sup>573</sup> What has to be understood, is that hegemonic masculinity was not considered to be the norm, but was ascribed to a minority of people, to a cast of people. This group of people seemed to demonstrate a specific combination of behaviours. On the other hand though, these specific behaviours were considered 'normative'.<sup>574</sup> They were ascribed to an 'elite', a special group of men that all the other males ought to have had as their wanted category to join:

It embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men.<sup>575</sup>

On the other hand, all the other kind of masculinities which differ from the wanted ideal masculinity of the elite, are considered secondary masculinities. Hegemonic masculinity has been seen as creating by differentiation specific kinds of subordinated masculinities. Specific characteristics of 'complicit masculinity' <sup>576</sup> were attributed to men who were benefiting from patriarchy, but at the same time did not demonstrate the traits of dominant masculinity: 'Hegemony did not mean violence, although it could be supported by force; it meant ascendancy achieved through culture, institutions, and persuasion'.<sup>577</sup>

Connell and Messerschmidt acknowledge that the nature of such a concept might be considered problematic, due to its abstract and fluid features. Therefore, when rethinking the concept, they pinpoint this problematic area:

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<sup>573</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 832.

<sup>574</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 832.

<sup>575</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 832.

<sup>576</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 832.

<sup>577</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 832.

Hegemonic masculinities therefore came into existence in specific circumstances and were open to historical change. More precisely, there could be a struggle for hegemony, and other forms of masculinity might be displaced by new ones.<sup>578</sup>

The concept of hegemonic masculinities has been applied to different fields, for example in education, in terms of understanding classroom life, in criminology, in mass media, and in sports, to name but a few. Especially in the last two massive fields, mass media and sports, this concept was used to explain and maybe define 'both the diversity and the selectiveness of images'<sup>579</sup>. In other words, hegemonic masculinity served to create, bring to the fore and highlight certain symbols of masculinity, which corresponded to the ideal traits of masculine dominance. Those symbols were circulated by mass media and sports, and as a result established and reproduced. It has to be pointed out that the concept of hegemonic masculinity was also employed in the process of understanding violent and homophobic incidents in the specific fields.<sup>580</sup>

Based on the wide exploration of the concept and its broad application to primary fields especially in the decade after its formulation, Connell and Messerschmidt conclude that:

the analysis of multiple masculinities and the concept of hegemonic masculinity served as a framework for much of the developing research effort on men and masculinity, replacing sex-role theory and categorical models of patriarchy.<sup>581</sup>

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<sup>578</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, "*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*," 832- 33.

<sup>579</sup> This argument is supported and elaborated in Messner and Sabo 1990: M. A. Messner and D. Sabo, eds. *Sport, men, and the gender order: Critical feminist perspectives*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics Books, 1990.

<sup>580</sup> For interesting insights in this specific area, see F. J. Barrett "The organizational construction of hegemonic masculinity: The case of the U.S. Navy". *Gender, Work and Organization* 3 (3): 129-42.

<sup>581</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, "*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*," 834.

The wide employment and application of the concept resulted in the expansion of the concept, in terms of the results of hegemony, its mechanisms and dynamics, its diversity and the on-going changes.<sup>582</sup> Studies have demonstrated that even though it was considered that violence was not connected to hegemonic masculinity, specific patrons of aggression related to the pursuit of masculinity were acknowledged.<sup>583</sup> In relation to this, other studies demonstrated that the application of hegemonic masculinities in specific fields such as professional sports, damaged the victors emotionally and physically.<sup>584</sup> On the other hand, research has exerted a lot of energy in finding out and bringing to the fore mechanisms of hegemony. These mechanisms reveal a great deal about the multiple ways that hegemony constitutes the substratum of specific situations happening in important, large fields. For example, in the field of sports and as they are projected through mass media, research has commented on the “pageantry” of hegemonic masculinity as happening in television broadcasts.<sup>585</sup> In addition, research has elaborated on specific tactics that have been named as “censure”, which subordinated groups are accepting.<sup>586</sup> Through the mechanisms of “censure” we may comprehend the “informal name calling by children to the criminalisation of homosexual conduct”.<sup>587</sup> To take it a step further, other studies have pointed out some invisible mechanisms of hegemonic masculinity (as opposed to the above visible mechanisms), revealing, for example, how dominant masculinity might be taken away from the case of possible

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<sup>582</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, “*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*,” 834.

<sup>583</sup> J. L., Bufkin, Bias crime as gendered behavior. *Social Justice* 26 (1): 155-76 and J. W. Messerschmidt, *Crime as structured action: Gender, race, class and crime in the making*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1997.

<sup>584</sup> This is documented and supported in the pioneering research of M. A. Messner, *Power at play: Sports and the problem of masculinity*. Boston: Beacon, 1992.

<sup>585</sup> D. Sabo, and S. C. Jansen. “Images of men in sport media: The social reproduction of gender order”. In *Men, masculinity, and the media*, edited by S. Craig. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1992.

<sup>586</sup> P, Roberts, “Social control and the censure(s) of sex”. *Crime, Law and Social Change* 19 (2) (1993): 171-86.

<sup>587</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, “*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*,” 834.



censure.<sup>588</sup>

The important fact that 'gender orders construct multiple masculinities'<sup>589</sup> has been greatly investigated and confirmed. In other words, there is not a specific patron of just one kind of solid masculinity. According to specific studies, it has been proved that there are different and various models of masculinities, defined by facts as class, generation, etc.

Diverse masculinities<sup>590</sup> were also created and spotted in the military, for example. Therefore, even specific institution may cultivate various masculinities. In his research related to class, Gutmann (1996) focuses on the urban working class of Mexican men and concludes that many models of masculinity (four, to be accurate) can be detected, which are at the same time interwoven and challenged by other social divisions.<sup>591</sup> Last but not least, this variety and diversity of masculinities is also adjustable to change. This happens because of the fact that hegemony itself is a product of change; it is historical and it is developed and cultivated through different circumstances every time. Masculinities, as a product of this on-going and adjustable hegemony, are also results of constant change.<sup>592</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> For further insights on the invisible mechanisms of hegemonic masculinity, see D. Brown, "Complicity and reproduction in teaching physical education". *Sport, Education and Society* 4 (2): 143-59 and M. Consalvo, "The monsters next door: Media constructions of boys and masculinity". *Feminist Media Studies* 3 (1): 27-46.

<sup>589</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, "*Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*," 835.

<sup>590</sup> M. Ishii-Kuntz, "Balancing fatherhood and work: Emergence of diverse masculinities in contemporary Japan". In *Men and masculinities in contemporary Japan*, edited by J. E. Roberson and N. Suzuki. London: Routledge Curzon, 2003 and P. R. Higate, *Military masculinities: Identity and the state*. London: Praeger, 2003.

<sup>591</sup> M. C. Gutmann, *The meaning of macho: Being a man in Mexico City*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

<sup>592</sup> R. Morrell, "Of boys and men: Masculinity and gender in southern African studies", *Journal of Southern African Studies* 24 (4): 605-30.

### **Attacking hegemonic masculinity**

The fluid nature of the concept of hegemonic masculinity and its abstract and not descriptive features, have opened the road to many critiques. Connell and Messerschmidt in rethinking the concept, mention five specific patterns of criticism that the concept accepted, in order to figure out what has to be retained and reformulated.<sup>593</sup> The first problematic area of the concept, which attracted negative criticism, is that 'the underlying concept of masculinity is flawed'.<sup>594</sup> It has been argued that the underlying concept of masculinity is abstract and confusing, without paying the necessary attention to the factors of power and domination to the extent that it does not contribute to the understanding of masculine power. On the other hand, it has been also supported that the concept is flawed because it puts at its core the character of men and, at the same time, it is based on an imaginary unification as related to a non-functional reality. Following this poststructuralist approach and as opposed to the previous realist one, it is supported that the concept does not focus on a specific poststructuralist kit and, therefore, the discursive construction of identities is not promoted. Following this line of poststructuralist thought, it has been argued that masculinity as a concept encompasses gender as a heteronormative concept which supports the differences between males and females and does not pay attention at all to the variety and diversity which occurs within the gender categories. In doing so, it was supported that the concept promotes 'a dichotomisation of sex (biological) versus gender (cultural) and thus marginalizes or naturalizes the body'.<sup>595</sup> In rethinking the concept, Connell and Messerschmidt counter-argue that the flourishing of research around the field of masculinities is based on the 'not reified or essentialist'<sup>596</sup> underlying concept of masculinity. They add that the concept has been the substratum for a variety of social constructions, of which ethnographers and historians have benefited. This fact, they support, comes in juxtaposition with the argument about 'essentialisation' or 'homogenisation' of the concept.<sup>597</sup> Moreover,

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<sup>593</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 836.

<sup>594</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 836.

<sup>595</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 836.

<sup>596</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 836.

<sup>597</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 836.

the scholars emphasise that the exploration of masculinities has started from people with female bodies. The scholars also emphasise that the kinship between bodies and social processes<sup>598</sup> constitutes a central theme to the concept, and they proceed to clarify that Masculinity is not a fixed entity embedded in the body or personality traits of individuals. Masculinities are configurations of practice that are accomplished in social action and, therefore, can differ according to the gender relations in a particular social setting.<sup>599</sup>

The scholars appear to agree with Brod's observation as related to the dichotomisation of experiences of men and women, that what needs now to be done is to follow a different approach to gender, a relational one, instead of entirely leaving aside the concept of gender and masculinity.<sup>600</sup> The second huge category of criticism which the concept of hegemonic masculinity accepted had to do with its so-called ambiguity and overlap.<sup>601</sup> Who actually represents hegemonic masculinity? This was the actual question raised by a specific group of scholars, towards that critical direction; especially through the lens that a great number of men, who are connected with social power, do not by any means represent what is described as ideal masculinity.<sup>602</sup> On the other hand, according to studies, the men who were represented as hegemonic models did not appear to have the ideal masculine traits. To this form of criticism, Connell and Messerschmidt argue that ambiguity should be considered important as a mechanism of hegemony itself. They elaborate that

At a society-wide level (...) there is a circulation of models of admired masculine conduct, which may be exalted by churches, narrated by mass media, or celebrated by the state. Such models refer to, but also in various ways distort, the everyday realities of social practice.<sup>603</sup>

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<sup>598</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 837.

<sup>599</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 836.

<sup>600</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 837.

<sup>601</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 838.

<sup>602</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 838.

<sup>603</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 838.

Based on this line of thought, they conclude that:

(...) hegemonic masculinities can be constructed that do not correspond closely to the lives of any actual men. Yet these models do, in various ways, express widespread ideals, fantasies, and desires.<sup>604</sup>

On this view, the observed overlap between the masculinities can be created by the social agents which contribute to their construction and elaborate that an amount of blurring is expected when hegemony is effective.<sup>605</sup>

Thirdly, the concept of hegemonic masculinity was found flawed based on what has been called as the 'problem of reification'.<sup>606</sup> In some studies, it has been supported that the concept reifies power or toxicity and that power is constructed from 'the direct experience of women rather than from the structural basis of women's subordination'<sup>607</sup>, with emphasis on a possible distinction between 'patriarchy' and 'gender'. Connell and Messerschmidt support that 'the institutionalisation of gender inequalities, the role of cultural constructions, and the interplay of gender dynamics with race, class and region'<sup>608</sup> has to be taken into consideration towards tackling with this sort of criticism. In this direction, the two scholars demonstrate an amount of studies which show that reification is not the case. Some studies, endorsing this line of criticism, have connected hegemonic masculinity with violence and crime.

In the same studies, it has been claimed that hegemonic masculinity is represented by men who are completely 'unemotional, independent, non-nurturing, aggressive, and dispassionate'.<sup>609</sup> This criticism steps on an analysis of McMahon,

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<sup>604</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 838.

<sup>605</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 839.

<sup>606</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 839.

<sup>607</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 839.

<sup>608</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 839.

<sup>609</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 840.

in which a circular argument is supported: The behaviour of men repeats itself in a specific given model of masculinity, which at the same time constitutes both the reasoning and the cause for such behaviour. Connell and Messerschmidt support that this argument constitutes the substratum of what has been called as a 'crisis in masculinity'<sup>610</sup>, which resulted in the construction of new types of masculinities, such as the 'alpha male', etc.<sup>611</sup> They take it a step further and clarify that violence and other negative characteristics do not always go hand to hand with hegemonic masculinity, because hegemony presents many elaborations. For example, '(...) one of the most effective ways of being a man' in certain local contexts may be to demonstrate one's distance from a regional hegemonic masculinity'.<sup>612</sup> As Connell and Messerschmidt conclude in discussing the problem of reification, it has to be understood that

(...) there is nothing conceptually universalizing in the idea of hegemonic masculinity. Coordination and regulation occur in the live social practices of collectivities, institutions, and whole societies. The concept of hegemonic masculinity is not intended as a catshall nor as a prime cause; it is a means of grasping a certain dynamic within the social process.<sup>613</sup>

Fourthly, the criticism towards the concept has doubted the masculine subject, raising the question 'how men conform to an ideal and turn themselves into complicit or resistant types, without anyone ever managing to exactly embody that ideal'.<sup>614</sup>

Connell and Messerschmidt support that hegemonic masculinity can be adopted by men whenever they like to do so. At the same time, men can decide to stay away from it. Therefore, masculinity should be seen as representing 'not a

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<sup>610</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 840.

<sup>611</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 840.

<sup>612</sup> M. Wetherell., and N. Edley, "Negotiating hegemonic masculinity: Imaginary positions and psycho-discursive practises", *Feminism and Psychology* 9 (3): 335.

<sup>613</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 841.

<sup>614</sup> Wetherell and Edley, "Negotiating", 337.

certain type of man but, rather, a way that men position themselves through discursive practices'.<sup>615</sup>

Therefore, has hegemonic masculinity to do only with structure and not with the subject at all, as Whitehead argues<sup>616</sup>, Connell and Messerschmidt disagree with this argument and bring to the fore the close relation of practice as connected to gender relations. If the 'multidimensionality of gender relations'<sup>617</sup> as connected with the occurrence of gender relations is taken into account, then the two scholars argue that 'it is impossible to regard the subject constituted within those relations as unitary'.<sup>618</sup>

Finally, the fifth area of major concern around the concept of hegemonic masculinity has to do with 'the pattern of gender relations'<sup>619</sup>, with references to a self-reproducing form. Connell and Messerschmidt support that in order for a specific model of hegemony to be maintained they are required both 'the policing of men as well as the exclusion or discrediting of women'.<sup>620</sup> Demetriou in his studies recognises and steps on the historicity of gender and elaborates on two different types of hegemony, the internal and the external one.<sup>621</sup> The former refers to the establishment of men's dominance over women through the institutions and the latter refers to the social status of a group of men over another group of men. In his study, Demetriou elaborates on the blurred lines defining the relationship of the two, both in the initial concept as well as to its current applications.

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<sup>615</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 841.

<sup>616</sup> S. M. Whitehead, *Men and masculinities: Key themes and new directions*, Cambridge, UK: Polity (2002): 93.

<sup>617</sup> R. W. Connell, *Gender*, Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, (2002): 100.

<sup>618</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 843.

<sup>619</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 844.

<sup>620</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 844.

<sup>621</sup> D. Z. Demetriou, Connell's concept of hegemonic masculinity: A critique. *Theory and Society* 30 (2001)(3): 337-61.

It is important to understand the connection that internal hegemony appeared to have with an 'elite' group of men, who were represented by hegemonic masculinity. Demetriou in his study challenges the concept of a 'dualistic representation of masculinities', in which

(...) subordinate and marginalised masculinities are seen as having no impact on the construction of hegemonic masculinity. Nonhegemonic masculinities exist in tension with, but never penetrate or impact, the hegemonic masculinity.<sup>622</sup>

Demetriou argues that hegemonic masculinity is discursive, and it actually exploits from other masculinities whatever considers that supports its on-going domination. Therefore, hegemonic masculinity consists of many interwoven models of masculinity, which define and empower the mechanics of external hegemony. This happens through a 'constant process of negotiation, translation, and reconfiguration'.<sup>623</sup>

It has to be emphasised that not only by Demetriou, but also by other prominent scholars, the contribution of subordinated and marginalised groups to the cultivation and definition of hegemonic masculinity, is acknowledged. This acknowledged contribution had led to protest masculinity, which could be described as

(...) a pattern of masculinity constructed in local working-class settings, sometimes among ethnically marginalized men, which embodies the claim to power typical of regional hegemonic masculinities in Western countries, but which lacks the economic resources and institutional authority that underpins the regional and global patterns.<sup>624</sup>

Demetriou's research becomes of particular importance since he presents hegemonic masculinity as hybridisation, 'capable of reconfiguring itself and adapting

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<sup>622</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 844.

<sup>623</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 844.

<sup>624</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *"Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,"* 847- 48.

to the specificities of new historical conjunctures'.<sup>625</sup> This concept is studied by the scholar in terms of homosexual masculinity in Western societies, arguing that heterosexual men might adopt certain aspects of homosexual men's lives and in doing so conclude to further hybridisation of gender practice, by blurring the lines even more. Connell and Messerschmidt acknowledge the validity of Demetriou's suggested hybridisation. Yet, they challenge and doubt its 'hegemonic' nature, proposed by the scholar, 'at least beyond a local sense'.<sup>626</sup>

Last but not least, Demetriou's arguments are based on the observation that there is more than one masculinity and, therefore, the term 'hegemonic masculinity' might actually be misleading. The case is that we have to speak about various hegemonic masculinities, using the plural number:

Because every ethnography discovers a distinctive gender culture, every life-history study uncovers unique trajectories of men's lives, and every structural analysis defines new intersections of race, class, gender, and generation, it is logically possible to define "a thousand and one" variations of masculinity.<sup>627</sup>

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<sup>625</sup> Demetriou, "Connell's concept", 335.

<sup>626</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*, 845.

<sup>627</sup> Connell and Messerschmidt, *Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept*, 845.



### **Cavafy: The eroticisation of the working class**

In *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα Ποιητικής και Ηθικής* Cavafy writes:

Με αρέσει και με συγκινεί η εμορφιά του λαού, των πτωχών /νέων/. Δούλοι, εργάται, μικρουπάλληλοι του εμπορίου, υπάλληλοι των μαγαζιών. (...) Είναι μια αντίθεση στους πλουσίους νέους που είναι (...) αρρωστιάρηδες και /φυσιολογικώς/ βρώμικοι (...).<sup>628</sup>

The above note, written in 1908 and first published in 1987, illustrates the social attitude the poet transfers to a number of his poems, set in the ancient or the contemporary world, showing a clear preference for people – especially youths – of the working class. Proceeding to a comparison between poor and rich youths, the poet gives the last group pejorative labels («αρρωστιάρηδες» and «βρώμικοι») and his language when he refers to them is impregnated with sarcasm. In the following poems, mainly from Cavafy's collected poems, I attempt to display how Cavafy's convictions about social class are connected in his poems with homoeroticism.

In the poem «Η Αρρώστια του Κλείτου»<sup>629</sup> (1926), Kleitos's class is indicated by his educational background: «με αρίστην αγωγή, με σπάνια ελληνομάθεια». His wealth is also implied by the fact that his family has servants and he himself was raised by one. Kleitos lies in the bed sick with fever, but also because of the fact that his partner has abandoned him. His lover was a young actor, and thus the two lovers did not belong to the same class. The name of the actor is not given, reinforcing the sense of his social anonymity and insignificance. Power ostensibly belongs to Kleitos, because of his higher social status. Nonetheless, the relationship of the two men reverses the standard expectations, and it is the actor who exerts power over Kleitos, making him ill by his decision to leave him. Love annihilates the features that society has applied to class. In displaying the actor as the authoritative figure in this relationship, the poet alludes to a class - crossing.

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<sup>628</sup>C. P. Cavafy, *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα Ποιητικής και Ηθικής (1902-1911)*, ed. by G.P. Savidis (Athens: Ermis, 1983), 118.

<sup>629</sup>Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 156.

The features of class are mixed up and reversed. Illness has the same function in the poem; it overpowers Kleitos, despite his social prominence: «Τον ηύρε ο πυρετός/ που φέτος θέρισε στην Αλεξάνδρεια». Illness and love make no social discriminations.

A different class case is sketched in «Μέσα στα καπηλειά»<sup>630</sup> (1926). The word «καπηλειά» does not leave much to the imagination about the class that dominates the poem: the working class. The settings mentioned in the first verse, «καπηλειά» and «χαμαιτυπεία», constitute places where people of the working class reside. The speaker states that he is not currently a resident of Alexandria, but he now lives in Beirut. The reason is that he was abandoned by Tamides. The latter chose to be partner of the son of the Eparch. The poem is not cryptic about Tamides' intentions: «κ' επήγε με του Επάρχου τον υιό για ν'αποκτήσει / μια έπαυλι στον Νείλο, ένα μέγαρο στην πόλιν». The basis of Tamides's decision is clearly his personal interests. In doing so, he is in a way redeemed. The speaker, like Tamides, belongs to the working class. The adjective «εξαίσιος», attributed to Tamides, does not have social connotations, but connotations concerning physical appearance. The class - crossing in this poem goes as follows: Tamides, a youth of the working class, makes an effort to escape his class and, by repurchasing himself, to enter a new class. The Eparch's son offers Tamides benefits to obtain him. Power is exerted by Tamides over the Eparch's son, from the lower class on the upper class. Irrespectively of social class, a person's inherent nobility can be rescued and established by dignity and decency.

Class is approached very differently in the poem «Πριν τους αλλάξει ο χρόνος»<sup>631</sup> (1924), which takes place in a contemporary setting. Two youths, aged twenty-four, are forced to part, not because they want to do so, but because of «βιοτικές ανάγκες» and «περιστάσεις». Both youths belong to the working class and are evidently poor. In order to survive, one of them chooses to emigrate and thus they are separated. The poem pinpoints that even though their sexual attraction had been significantly reduced, separation was not desired by either of them. Destiny, as an artist, chose to divorce them, in order to rescue their feelings and their image from

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<sup>630</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 160.

<sup>631</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 146.

omnipotent Time. The fact that the two youths belong to the same class does not guarantee the harmonious stability of their relationship. It constitutes the main factor which causes their separation. In this poem as well, authority and power play a very important role, not only to the construction, but also to the existence of the relationship. The circumstances, i.e. the fact that both of them belong to the working class, and Destiny, are the authorities to which love is subjugated.

Something similar happens in terms of social classes and class - crossing in «Ωραία λουλούδια κι άσπρα ως ταίριαζαν πολύ»<sup>632</sup> (1929), once again in a contemporary setting. The protagonists of the poem are two young men who belong, once again, to the working class. The first verse refers to the place in which they used to go: «Μπήκε στο καφενείο όπου επήγαιναν μαζί». This place («καφενείο») constitutes a Greek traditional setting where people of the working class go. The words of one of them when he addresses his lover are indicative of their economic position and determinative for the whole development of the poem:

Δεν έχουμε πεντάρα. Δυο πάμπτωχα παιδιά  
 ήμεθα – ξεπεσμένοι στα κέντρα τα  
 φθηνά. Στο λέγω φανερά, με σένα δεν  
 μπορώ να περπατώ. Ένας άλλος, μάθε το,  
 με ζητεί.

Once again, the fact that both youths belong to the same class does not function in a unifying manner. On the contrary, it constitutes the reason for their separation. The lover of the speaker, who is now dead, chooses to abandon him because he is poor, or, more precisely, because they are both poor.

He is promised by another man – who significantly remains anonymous

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<sup>632</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 192. Interestingly enough, this poem can be studied on equal terms with rebetika songs. The theme, the language (i.e. «παλιόπαιδο») and the metre are respectively close to the ones of rebetika songs.

throughout the poem and is referred to just as «άλλος» - « (...) δυο φορεσιές και κάτι μεταξωτά μαντήλια». Therefore, in order to gain these things he was promised, he prefers to abandon his lover and follow the richer man. Later on, the lover returns to his previous lover because he is offered money to do so. The young boy attempts to leave aside his own class and to enjoy the life of a different class. The end of the poem displays the vanity of his efforts. He cannot escape the power of omnipotent death and is buried in a humble coffin («πτωχική κάσα»). Death restores social order. The adjectives «πάμπτωχα» and «πτωχική» occupy crucial places in the poem, being put at the beginning and at the end of it respectively. The same function is embodied in the word «καφενείο», which also appears in the first and last verse. With its popular connotations, it implies that both men have not escaped their social class. Finally, the references to the richer youngman, whom the boy has chosen to follow, as «ψεύτης» and «παληόπαιδο» indicate Cavafy's derogatory stance towards rich men and aristocracy in general. High social status does not go hand to hand with nobility of manners. The protagonist, regardless of his humble origin, shows the nobleness of his feelings by placing some «ωραία λουλούδια κι άσπρα ως ταίριαζαν πολύ» in the coffin of his dead partner, a symbol of his pure love for him.

If what I am attempting in relation to the above poems is to focus on the lover that ends up dead and analysing how he crosses between classes, Pieris in «Έρωσ και εξουσία: όψεις της ποιητικής του Καβάφη» does exactly the same and, at the same time, the opposite. Pieris proves the existence of class- crossings in the poem by studying it from the perspective of the lover who loses his partner because of the «άλλος». Pieris provides a legitimate argument when he claims that

(...) το ερωτικό υποκείμενο συγκρούεται συνειδητά, προσπαθεί μάλλον ν'ανταγωνιστεί τον «άλλο», τον τρίτο παράγοντα που επεμβαίνει και εκμαυλίζει το αντικείμενο του έρωτος. (...) το ερωτικό υποκείμενο, πέρα από την απώλεια του ερωτικού του συντρόφου, χάνει ακόμα και εκείνο το στοιχείο της ηθικής αξιοπρέπειας.<sup>633</sup>

The two approaches to the poem, mine and Pieris's, have at their centre a different protagonist of the poem, but eventually come to the same conclusion;

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<sup>633</sup> Pieris, «Έρωσ και εξουσία: όψεις της ποιητικής του Καβάφη», 49-50.

even though some class-crossings were attempted and tempted, the reality of death restores the order of things and reminds both protagonists that social class cannot be escaped. Following the words of Mackridge: «Ο έρωτας υπερνικάται προσωρινά από το χρήμα και εν συνεχεία κυριαρχεί και πάλι, για να ηττηθεί τελικά από το θάνατο». <sup>634</sup>

In «Λάνη Τάφος» <sup>635</sup> (1918) the protagonists are Marcus, who comes from the upper class, and dead Lanes, a simple youth of exquisite beauty. Marcus laments for dead Lanes and the narrator of the poem reminds him of an event which took place when Lanes was alive:

Θυμάσαι, Μάρκε, που έφερες από του  
ανθυπάτου το μέγαρον τον Κυρηναίο  
περίφημο ζωγράφο,  
και με τι καλλιτεχνικήν εκείνος πανουργία  
μόλις είδε τον φίλο σου κ' ήθελε να σας  
πείσει  
που ως Υάκινθον εξ'άπαντος έπρεπε να τον κάμει  
(μ' αυτόν τον τρόπο πιο πολύ θ' ακούονταν η εικών του)

Μα ο Λάνης σου δεν δάνειζε την ομορφιά του  
έτσι· και σταθερά εναντιωθείς είπε να  
παρουσιάσει  
όχι διόλου τον Υάκινθον, όχι κανέναν άλλον,

αλλά τον Λάνη, υιό του Ραμετίχου, Αλεξανδρέα.

The above verses indicate a possible class - crossing desired by the two of the protagonists, which in the end never takes place because of Lanes's refusal. Rich Marcus is able to pay a famous painter to come all over from the Proconsul's palace to paint Lanes. The attention is drawn to the characteristics that are ascribed to the painter; he is a famous painter, with artistic guile. Cavafy connects the prominent

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<sup>634</sup> Mackridge, «Έρωσ, τέχνη και αγορά στην ποίηση του Καβάφη», 69.

<sup>635</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 90.

figure of the painter with skulduggery and immorality. This immorality stems from the fact that the painter aims at persuading the two protagonists to allow him to draw Lanes as somebody else, someone recognised and well-known: Hyacinthus. The poet adds the line in brackets to sarcastically explain the deed of the painter, which correlates to the painter's belief that in doing so his painting will become more known. The fact that the painter is reminded of Hyacinthus as soon as he meets Lanes illustrates the exquisite beauty Lanes possesses. The plural number in the phrase «νας πείσει» shows that the painter tried to persuade not only Lanes, but Marcus as well, who also seemed to have his own doubts about the painter's decision. The last stanza indicates that Lanes strongly refused to deny his origins and to pretend to be someone else. Lanes reacts with dignity and pride of who he is. By his denial, he refuses to become known and famous, he refuses to abandon his social status and enter another one. His honest and authentic attitude is juxtaposed to the «πανουργία» of the famous painter. Lower class acts with morality, whereas upper class is connected with immorality. The first stanza of the poem illustrates the poet's agreement to the deed of Lanes. The attitude of Lanes is vindicated since the painting of his original image can aptly remind Marcus of him, after his death. In doing so, Lanes's beauty survives and resurrects. The poet recognises that the image of authentic Lanes, «υιό του Ραμετίχου, Αλεξανδρέα», «(...) διατήρησεν ότ' είχε που ν' αξίζει, (...) ότ' είχες αγαπήσει».

In Cavafy's poem «Ιασή τάφος»<sup>636</sup> (1917) the beauty of the dead lases is praised. His exquisite beauty has been the reason for the young boy's fame. It was also the factor which aroused the admiration of the others: «Μ' εθαύμασαν βαθείς σοφοί· κ' επίσης ο επιπόλαιος/ οαπλούς λαός». These lines indicate a transcending of class barriers, under the omnipotent beauty of a youth. In so doing, Cavafy appears to be romantic and utopian. On the other hand, this line is indicative of the existence of class barriers, since to be transcended automatically means that they are there.

As the poem unfolds, order is replaced and the realistic approach vanishes the previous utopianism: «Μα απ' το πολύ να μ' έχει ο κόσμος Νάρκισσο/ κ' Ερμή,/ η καταχρήσεις μ' έφθειραν, μ' εσκοτώσαν». As with the reference to Hyacinthus in «Λάνη τάφος», the reference here to Narcissus and Hermes indicates how mythology intersects with the poetry of Cavafy. Lanes's refusal to be painted like

<sup>636</sup>Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 90.

Hyacinthus may also be the result of Lanes's strong opposition to be painted in an effeminate way, like the mythological figure of Hyacinthus, who was Apollo's lover and a symbol of pure and ultimate beauty. Iases's comparison with Narcissus and Hermes also legitimates the distinction between simple people and intellectuals and at the same time its cancellation. Narcissus was a non-prominent man who became prominent in the end because of his ultimate beauty and thus constitutes a symbol. Hermes, on the other hand, combines human and divine elements, coming closer to the ideal symbol of admiration by intellectuals.

At the end of both poems meets the word «Αλεξανδρέα» and «Αλεξανδρεύς»; in «Λάνη τάφος» the word is included in the verses: «(...) να παρουσιάσει (...), όχι κανέναν άλλον, αλλά τον Λάνη, υιό του Ραμετίχου, Αλεξανδρέα» and in «Ιασή τάφος» the poem ends with the verses: «Διαβάτη,/ αν είσαι Αλεξανδρεύς, δεν θα επικρίνεις». Both protagonists are proud of being Alexandrians, a characteristic which rises above class boundaries. Beauty and Alexandrianism can transcend social class. Dignity and authenticity, as elevating values, enable this transition, irrespective of social class. Though in both cases death comes, in «Λάνη τάφος» the beauty of Lanes survives death because of his dignity and authenticity and in «Ιασή τάφος» Iases continues to be charming and seductive to the passer-by, even after his death.

If we accept the claim of Caires and Ekdawi that 'Alexandrian' in Cavafy is synonymous with the word 'homosexual'<sup>637</sup> then we conclude that the protagonists remain authentic and seek to be defined and understood through their homoeroticism, presented in both poems as a synonym of dignity and authenticity. Yet, Ricks in 'Cavafy's Alexandrianism' debates the meaning of the word 'Alexandrian' in Cavafy and proves that Caires' and Ekdawi's argument seems to be inadequate. According to Ricks, in the case of «Λάνη τάφος» the feature of 'Alexandrianism' brings together two people from different ethnic backgrounds: Egyptian Iases and Roman Marcus. I shall add that in the same poem 'Alexandrianism' also brings together people from different social backgrounds,

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<sup>637</sup> V. A. Caires, "Originality and eroticism: Cavafy and the Alexandrian epigram", *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 6 (1980): 136 and S. Ekdawi, "Cavafy's mythical epebes", in P. Mackridge (ed.), *Ancient Myth in Modern Greek Poetry*, London: Routledge, 1996, 36.

prominent Marcus and non-prominent Lanes. In the poem, 'Alexandrian' takes on some prominence as the last word of the poem, with a suggestion that it is in every way Lanes' real identity, one with more power than any mythological dolling-up could ever have', whereas «Ιασή τάφος» proves that 'there is, however, a price to be paid for the Alexandrian life', and the use here of the word 'Alexandrian' in the second person singular creates a 'conspiratorial tone', seeking for understanding and approval by the rest of the Alexandrians.

The poems that I have discussed up to now belong to Cavafy's collected poems. But a discussion of the topic, without reference to Cavafy's uncollected poems, would not be complete. In the Canon, Cavafy uses as his protagonists mainly youths from the lower classes and mainly from the working class, as far as his contemporary settings are concerned. In the unfinished poems though, he goes a step further, and we come across references to an 'underclass'; references to criminals. This fact may sound weird when it comes to Cavafy and may explain the reason that those poems were intentionally left out of the Canon. Diana Haas in «Νόμος και έγκλημα στην ερωτική ποίηση του Καβάφη» mentions that in his unfinished poems we come across the pattern of crime in three poems, namely «Η Είδησις της Εφημερίδος» (1918), «Έγκλημα» (1927) and «Συντροφιά από Τέσσαρες» (1930).<sup>638</sup> The poem «Συντροφιά από Τέσσαρες»<sup>639</sup> is of particular interest for the scope of this chapter:

Το χρήμα το κερδίζουν βέβαια όχι τιμημένα.

Μα έξυπνα παιδιά κ' οι τέσσαρες, τον τρόπο  
βρίσκουνε και γλυτώνουν απ' την αστυνομία.

Χώρια απ' την εξυπνάδα, είναι πλέρια  
δυνατοί. Γιατί τους δύο έχει ενώσει ο δεσμός της  
ηδονής. Τους άλλους δύο έχει ενώσει ο δεσμός  
της ηδονής.

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<sup>638</sup>Diana Haas, «Νόμος και έγκλημα στην ερωτική ποίηση του Καβάφη», *Molyvdo- kondylo-peleketes*, 2000(7): 133.

<sup>639</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 281-284.



Πολύ καλοντυμένοι όπως αρμόζει σε  
 τέτοια ωραία παιδιά·  
 και θέατρο και μπαρ, και το αυτοκίνητό τους,  
 και κάποτε ταξίδι  
 τίποτε δεν τους λείπει.

Το χρήμα το κερδίζουν βέβαια όχι  
 τιμημένα, ενίοτε με τον φόβο μην φάνε  
 μαχαιριά, μην πάνε φυλακή.  
 Μα έλα που η Αγάπη  
 μια δύναμη έχει που το ακάθαρτό τους  
 χρήμα το παίρνει και το πλάθει  
 στιλπνότατον, αγνό.

Το χρήμα δεν το θέλει κανείς από αυτούς  
 δικό του, ιδιοτελώς· κανείς τους δεν  
 μετράει φιλάργυρα, χονδρά· ποτέ δεν  
 σημειώνουν  
 αν φέρνει ο ένας λίγα ο άλλος τα πολλά

το χρήμα τους κοινό το έχουνε για να  
 είναι καλοντυμένοι, για νάχουν να  
 ξοδιάζουν, να κάνουν την ζωή τους

καλαίσθητη, ως αρμόζει  
 σε τέτοια ωραία παιδιά για να βοηθούν τους  
 φίλους, κ' έπειτα, σύστημά τους, τι δώσαν να  
 ξεχνούν.

In this poem Cavafy is as contemporary and as modern as it gets. The four youths – «παιδιά», as he calls them, adjusting his vocabulary to the context of the poem – are evidently criminals and their money for surviving is the product of their illegal actions. In any case, the speaker of the poem does not blame or condemn them at all. On the contrary, he praises them; he calls them «έξυπνα παιδιά» in a way which reveals his understanding and affection towards the youths, as well as his approval for their actions. Because of the fact that the youths of the company are couples and they are connected with the sacred to Cavafy «δεσμός της ηδονής», the speaker of the poem states that they are «πλέρια δυνατοί». They enjoy a good life,

since they are «Πολύ καλοντυμένοι όπως αρμόζει σε/ τέτοια ωραία παιδιά· και θέατρο και μπαρ,/ και το αυτοκίνητό τους/τίποτε δεν τους λείπει». This particular position of the poet comes in contradiction with society's reality which is given by the poet eloquently in the following verses of «Ρωτούσε για την ποιότητα»: «όπου πουλιούνταν κάτι πράγματα/ ψεύτικα και φθηνά για εργατικούς».<sup>640</sup> Reality does not correspond with what «αρμόζει» to the poor but very handsome youths. The adjective «εργατικοί» indicates that in the collected poems Cavafy promotes a feeling of respect towards the working class; if Cavafy had made the connections of the 'underclass' with homoeroticism in the collected poems, then there was the danger to promote that in the Greek dominant world homoeroticism is connected with criminality. Moreover, the word «εργατικός» is an antipoetic word, politicised to an extent (evoking i.e. «εργατική τάξη») and the use of it constitutes one of Cavafy's innovations.

What differentiates these youths from the rich, «μαλθακούς» youths that Cavafy mentions with loathing in his 1908 note is the fact that these youths are «ανδρείοι» in two senses: firstly, they have learned to survive and to earn their money dangerously, but this very fact was something that society and its «βιοτικές ανάγκες» have forced them to do and secondly, the youths act similarly to the speaker of the poem «Επήγα», who admits that in the way of his life «(...) ήπια από δυνατά κρασιά, καθώς/ που πίνουν οι ανδρείοι της ηδονής».<sup>641</sup> In doing so, the protagonists of the poem «Συντροφιά από Τέσσαρες» gain the speaker's sympathy and respect. For the exact opposite reasons, the rich youths mentioned on the note do not deserve his lenient feelings. Nevertheless, «(...) η Αγάπη/ μια δύναμη έχει που το ακάθαρτό τους χρήμα/ το παίρνει και το πλάθει στιλπνότατον, αγνό». Pure love, since the youths are «ομοίως δωσμένοι στην ανώμαλη ηδονή»<sup>642</sup> purifies their dirty actions.

The most interesting part of the poem begins from the verse «Το χρήμα δεν το θέλει κανείς από αυτούς» and unfolds until the end of the poem. Through these lines the youths raise themselves above materialistic thoughts and needs, before their inner

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<sup>640</sup>Cavafy, *The Collected poems*, 198.

<sup>641</sup>Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 74.

<sup>642</sup>Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 174.

need for selflessness, a behavior that again differentiates them from the rich youths Cavafy dislikes. In these verses, Cavafy appears to be a nonconformist and could be even described as antiauthoritarian and anarchist, since he goes against not only the «νόμοι της ηθικής»<sup>643</sup>, but also against the laws of society. I acknowledge the argument that such a claim sounds extreme and far-fetched; allow me to elaborate: if Cavafy at this point cannot be seen as anarchist and antiauthoritarian, then he can definitely be seen as revolutionist and «αριστερίζων». To this position contribute the references to «το χρήμα τους κοινό», reminiscent of communism and of the feature of collective ownership («κοινοκτημοσύνη»), emblematic in the leftist ideology, and «για να βοηθούν τους φίλους», where «φίλοι» can be compared to «σύντροφοι» or even to the ‘comrades’ of the utopian Whitman. Finally, the reference to the «σύστημα» can also have political echoes, bringing in mind the «κομμουνιστικό σύστημα», etc.

To recapitulate, in this section I discussed the features of Cavafy’s social aspects it bears on homoerotic feeling. In his collected poems the sympathy and his tender feelings towards the poor youths are evident and he juxtaposes poor youths to the rich youths, whom he describes in a degrading manner. The protagonists of his homosexual scenarios belong mainly to the working class, which he chooses as his favored one. The erotic scenarios, as connected to social class, vary. In «Η αρρώστια του Κλείτου»<sup>644</sup> (1926), the noble Kleitos has been abandoned by his lover, who is an actor, and Kleitos lies in bed sick. The relationship sketched in this poem reverses the established by society power regimes, since the actual power is not exerted by the upper class over the lower class, but vice versa. Love seems to follow its own patterns, which have nothing to do with society’s convictions. This game which takes place enables a class-crossing, exchanging the roles society embedded to each class.

In «Μέσα στα καπηλειά»<sup>645</sup> (1926) the two lovers belong to the working class and one of them, Tamides, chooses to follow the son of the Eparch, in his effort to transcend his social class and enjoy the luxuries of another one. In «Πριν τους αλλάξει

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<sup>643</sup> The lines belong to the poem «Το Σύνταγμα της Ηδονής» (Cavafy, *Τα Πεζά*, 168).

<sup>644</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 156.

<sup>645</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 160.

ο χρόνος»<sup>646</sup> (1924), two youths of the working class need to part due to «βιοτικές ανάγκες»<sup>647</sup>, whereas in «Ωραία λουλούδια κι άσπρα ως ταίριαζαν πολύ»<sup>648</sup> (1929), the two protagonists, both belonging to the working class, part because one of them is promised some benefits by a richer man. Later on, the youth returns to his previous poor lover because he is offered money, but, in the end, death arrives and he is placed in a humble coffin. Even though the lover, who is now dead, tried to switch social positions, motivated by his personal interests, the truth of his death comes to verify the truth of his social status, proving Cavafy's strictness towards people who are not authentic and decent to themselves and to their lives. The same purpose is served by both «Λάνη τάφος»<sup>649</sup> and «Ιασή τάφος»<sup>650</sup>, as indicated above.

Finally, in Cavafy's unfinished poems, the poet strikingly discusses the pattern of crime, making reference to an 'underclass', an 'underworld' which has strong connections with criminality. The poem «Συντροφιά από Τέσσαρες» (1930) sketches Cavafy's approval for young criminals, since they are motivated by the unfair society. In the unfinished poems Cavafy follows a revolutionary approach, which brings him close to the beliefs of the leftist ideology.

In the remaining sections of this chapter I discuss the way this facet of Cavafy's inheritance plays out in the work of Christianopoulos and Ioannou. I am interested in the ways their oeuvre comes into a fertile dialogue with Cavafy's approach towards poor and rich youths and towards social class in general. Based on the themes I discuss above, I will study first of all if Christianopoulos and Ioannou have indeed been influenced by Cavafy in the social aspect, as expressed through their work, and, if, after all, Christianopoulos and Ioannou display an 'innovation to evade the burden of influence'.<sup>651</sup>

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<sup>646</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 146.

<sup>647</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 146

<sup>648</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 192.

<sup>649</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 90.

<sup>650</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 90.

<sup>651</sup> David Ricks, "Cavafy's Alexandrianism", in *Alexandria Real and Imagined*, ed. by Michael Silk and Anthony Hirst (London: Centre for Hellenic Studies, 2004), 337.

### **Yannis Ritsos: Homoeroticism within (his) leftist ideology**

At first glance and without further consideration, someone would expect that the case of Ritsos should not be missing from a discussion of social class, bearing in mind his overt leftist convictions. Ritsos's engagé poetry has captured the interest of scholarly research and therefore has been already analysed in a well-documented way.<sup>652</sup>

Yet, for the scope of my chapter, Ritsos will not be discussed as a primary example, but rather as a foil to the more anguished presentation of the working class male that we come across in Christianopoulos and Ioannou. It has to be emphasised that Ritsos's approach to people of the working class has nothing to do with the Cavafian legacy, since it is consciously produced within the commands of the Left Party and the requirements that it fulfills for the poetry which has to serve its purposes. Therefore, as it has to be clarified and is to some extent rather obvious, Ritsos does not take up the poignant sympathy of Cavafy for such people, but rather identifies with writers in accordance to his leftist ideology and beliefs. At the same time, it is his leftist ideology and beliefs, which function as a hindrance and impede him from adopting this particular Cavafian stance, through which I have approached homoeroticism in this chapter.

The cases of Christianopoulos and Ioannou appear to be rather different from the one of Ritsos, since, as stated previously, they delineate more agonising scenarios which include working class males; the men of the working class in Christianopoulos and Ioannou are displayed in a tormented way, since they are struggling with the real hardships of life. What elevates their spirits is the fact that they remain authentic to their homoerotic urges and they experience love and hedone in the way that they want to. This very fact enables incidents of class-crossing to be attempted, in the sense that I have analytically described in the sections of my chapter about Christianopoulos and Ioannou respectively.

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<sup>652</sup> See, for example the following: George Pilitsis. "Yannis Ritsos: A Poet of Resilience and Hope." *The Journal of Modern Hellenism* 17 (2000): 91-105, Demetris Tziouvas. "Between tradition and appropriation: mythical method and politics in the poetry of George Seferis and Yannis Ritsos." *Classical Receptions Journal* (2016): clw018, Demetris Maronitis. "Poetry and Politics: The First Postwar Generation of Greek Poets." *The Journal of Modern Hellenism* 3 (1986): 91-104, and many more.

It has to be stated, however, rather emphatically, that the relevant scenarios in Christianopoulos and Ioannou conclude to failure, since the class-crossing is attempted but failed; it does not become a reality. In doing so, the protagonists of Christianopoulos and Ioannou follow the Cavafian line and fall within the Cavafian legacy. Because of this very fact, constant melancholy and anxiety are caused, what has been termed by Christianopoulos as «καημός». Moreover, in delineating those features, the protagonists of Christianopoulos and Ioannou demonstrate the same background mindset of their poet, first initiated by Cavafy: a tendency which moves away from romanticism and utopianism and moves towards realism and radicalism. It is in this sense and towards this direction that Cavafy, Christianopoulos and Ioannou fall within the same sort of tradition, defined by the pioneering and daring spirit of the oeuvre of Cavafy.

On the other hand stands the case of Ritsos. The example of Ritsos does not correspond to the aforementioned aspect of the Cavafian legacy, the delineation of his protagonists, or to the elaboration of the different scenarios. In the oeuvre of Ritsos, working class males are presented in a celebratory tone, in a way which appears definitely erotic on the one hand, but through a romantic and lyric approach. Therefore, when the class-crossing is attempted, it is successfully and a priori, based on the commandments of the Left Party and its ideology, achieved. As a result of this, consequently and consciously, there is no sense of melancholy or «καημός» in the scenarios of Ritsos, but rather a sense of joy and cheerful atmosphere, which justifies, let alone requires, the appearance of an eroticisation tendency. Because of this reason, this aspect of Ritsos' poetry and prose categorises him into a different sort of tradition and legacy. This tradition is formed by the Left.

His *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωρύμων Αγίων*<sup>653</sup> is permeated by the author's leftist beliefs, yet in contrast to the official ideology of the KKE, generates a panerotic queer approach, with humanistic ecumenical touches. The homosocial/ homosexual elements shall be read through this lens.

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<sup>653</sup> Yannis Ritsos, *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωρύμων Αγίων* (Athens: Kedros, 1986).

*Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* has caused critical controversies. Though the public embraced each volume with outstanding enthusiasm and made it a best-seller of its time, academics and critics largely lashed out against the daring of the content and of the narrative style. Both were new for Ritsos, especially in the light of his leftist ideology, his energetic participation in the proceedings of the left party and his often committed poetry. Yet, critics were struck by the explicit sexuality of the prose volumes, which was criticised as being expressed in vulgar terms, in a way that at times bordered on pornography. Having received this wide wave of criticism concerning their overt sexual references, strikingly there are no important critical references to the homosexual elements of the volumes. Homosexual elements in the *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* do not have a marginal role and must be taken seriously into consideration to comprehend adequately the worldview of Ritsos, which is craftily and very fully expressed in these nine volumes. Ritsos' writings are brimful with his obvious leftwing social beliefs. *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* interests us to the extent that it views homoeroticism through a leftist lens.

Ritsos, though, has some important affinities with Cavafy. To begin with, Ritsos expresses a similar to Cavafy opinion towards poor and rich people, emphasising their differences through an ironic eye. Throughout *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* the author makes references to «ψευτοαριστοκρατία» and «ψευτομαγκιά»<sup>654</sup>, as juxtaposed to simple people, who are exquisite and noble in their rough nature:

(...) μα κείνοι που δε γνώρισαν ποτέ τη φτώχεια, τη στέρηση, την εκμετάλλευση, την καταπίεση, όταν διαβάζουν τη λέξη σημαία ή ελευθερία στραβομουτσουνιάζουν (οι καλαίσθητοι) και λένε: «τί μεγαλοστομίες, πολιτικολογίες, συνθηματολογίες» και κάνουν πίσω, όπως κάνουν πίσω μπροστά στον εχθρό, αν δεν συνεργάζονται κιόλας μαζί του. Μα ποιός τους λογαριάζει; Ποιός γράφει για δαύτους; Δεν πα να κουρεύονται.<sup>655</sup>

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<sup>654</sup> Ritsos, «Ίσως να 'ναι κι έτσι», 86.

<sup>655</sup> Ritsos, «Ίσως να 'ναι κι έτσι», 86.

Moreover, in the eighth volume of the *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων*, Ritsos includes a poem entitled «Για Επισκευή», which had been previously published in 1972 in his poetic sequence *Χειρονομίες*:

Να φωνάξεις τον υδραυλικό, να φωνάξεις τον  
ηλεκτρολόγο,  
να φωνάξεις τον ξυλουργό, το σοβατζή, το  
χτίστη• - ο τοίχος,  
η σκάλα, το τραπέζι, το ταβάνι, ο καναπές,  
πέφτουν• το κρεβάτι  
και το εκκρεμές - να φωνάξεις τον - να  
φωνάξεις - Όλη νύχτα  
οι βρύσες τρέχουν• δε μ' αφήνουνε να κοιμηθώ• -  
έστω μόνο  
να δω τα χέρια τους, τ' αθλητικά τους  
φανελάκια, λεκιασμένα  
απ' τα εργαλεία, απ' το χοντρό μηχανόλαδο, τον  
ασβέστη,  
απ' τη ντομάτα που κολάτσισαν στο φως της  
αυλής, ή απ' τη γύρη  
ενός λουλουδιού που τους έδωσε κρυφά η γριά  
υπηρέτρια.<sup>656</sup>

This poem's reappearance in *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* is rather challenging since it opens new horizons concerning its interpretation. What seemed far-fetched in terms of interpretation in the first appearance of the poem, a homoerotic approach, this time seems to be suggested by the author. Ritsos reintroduces the poem by putting it in the different context of *Εικονοστάσιο Ανωνύμων Αγίων* and challenges the readers to make a new reading, this time in homoerotic terms.

The poem proceeds to a parade of manly manual occupations. The pronoun «τον» in the phrase « - να φωνάξεις τον - » is not at the centre of the poem without reason, since the poem revolves around fantasising male workers. The workers keep

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<sup>656</sup> Ritsos, «Λιγοστεύουν οι ερωτήσεις», 13-14.



their anonymity and the only element which defines them is their social class; they belong to the working class. Nuances of masculinity are also present here, since the rough life of workers has been strongly connected with it.

In depicting protagonists from the working class Ritsos brings to mind the homosexual poetry of Cavafy who takes his protagonists from the same milieu. Cavafy, in a similar way, claims that out of their hard life and rough manners can emerge the purest form of homoeroticism. In the case of Ritsos, the preference for the working class men could be also linked to his leftist political beliefs, which promotes «συντροφικάτα», pure feelings of comradeship. Ritsos, like Cavafy, makes reference to working class settings: «δρόμους», «ταβέρνες», «μπορντέλα»,<sup>657</sup> «υπαίθριοι σινεμάδες»,<sup>658</sup> «φτωχογειτονιές»<sup>659</sup>, «σκοτεινά καφενεία»<sup>660</sup>, etc. The idea of masculinity applied to working class men gives masculine traits to these settings. The fact that people from the upper class visit these places too means that these settings combine classes and illuminate class barriers.

To move on from the prose of Ritsos, we observe that in the poetic oeuvre of Ritsos we come across a great number of short poems which constitute an indicator of the poet's ideological elaborations on working class, as related to the projections of masculinity. Ritsos in these poems proves himself to be the master of an eroticised working class, presented in such a way, which exalts fantasy. In doing so, the poet steps on the ideal male beauty as promoted though working class and reproduces the masculine symbols of the lower classes.

Decency, authenticity, purity, rawness in manners, no education in the most cases and engaging into manual labour are the traits that Ritsos ascribes to the male 'heroes' of his poetry. They are unknown, they belong to the masses. At the same

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<sup>657</sup> Ritsos, «Λιγοςτεύουν οι ερωτήσεις», 10.

<sup>658</sup> Ritsos, «Λιγοςτεύουν οι ερωτήσεις», 91.

<sup>659</sup> Ritsos, «Ο Γέροντας με τους χαρταιτούς», 20.

<sup>660</sup> Ritsos, «Όχι μονάχα για σένα», 12.

time, their 'ideal' beauty in masculine terms, in reproducing the 'ideal men' of the working class (and of the Left Ideology, to take it a step further), makes them to stand out and 'conquer' impressions and feelings.

One of the most emblematic poems of Ritsos which conveys the aforementioned beliefs and ideology is the poem «Τα Πρότυπα», from to the collection «Επαναλήψεις» (written 1969). The poem reads as follows:

Ποτέ να μην ξεχάσουμε – είπε – τα καλά διδάγματα,  
εκείνα της τέχνης των Ελλήνων. Πάντοτε το ουράνιο  
δίπλα δίπλα  
με το καθημερινό. Δίπλα στον άνθρωπο: το ζώο και το  
πράγμα – ένα βραχιόλι στο βραχίονα της γυμνής θεάς· ένα  
άνθος  
πεσμένο στο δάπεδο. Θυμηθείτε τις ωραίες παραστάσεις

στα πήλινά μας αγγεία – οι θεοί με τα πουλιά και με τα  
ζώα, μαζί κι η λύρα, ένα σφυρί, ένα μήλο, το κιβώτιο, η  
τανάλια·  
α, και το ποίημα εκείνο που ο θεός όταν τελειώνει τη δουλειά  
του βγάζει τα φουσερά του απ' τη φωτιά, μαζεύει ένα ένα τα  
εργαλεία μες στ' αργυρό σεντούκι του· μετά, μ' ένα  
σφουγγάρι σκουπίζει το πρόσωπο, τα χέρια, το νευρώδη του  
λαιμό, το δασύ στήθος.

Έτσι, καθάριος, ταχτικός, βγαίνει το βράδυ, στηριγμένος  
στους ώμους των ολόχρυσων εφήβων – έργα των χεριών  
του που 'χουν και δύναμη και σκέψη και φωνή· βγαίνει στο  
δρόμο, πιο μεγαλόπρεπος απ' όλους, ο χωλός θεός, ο θεός  
εργάτης.<sup>661</sup>

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661 Ritsos, *Ποιήματα 1938-1971*, 96.

The last reference of the poem to «θεός εργάτης» constitutes the amalgam of the spirit of Ritsos in his poetry. According to his poetry, the simple men, belonging to the working class, who are working hard and face difficult conditions having a work based on manual labour, are the ones who at the same time display something divine. It is in this ideology that Ritsos comes close to the ideals that Cavafy follows in his own poetry. Both poets bring their poetry down to earth, with everyday protagonists, but their target is to hymn the authenticity and the raw manners of these people. In the way that Ritsos presents the worker in the poem, it is obvious that he follows the contemporary 'ideal' male – symbol of the working class, making references to «νευρώδη λαιμό» and «δασύ στήθος». At the same time though, he makes this noble comparison of this worker with the «ολόχρυσοι έφηβοι», part of the work of the worker, as understood. And this reference makes a clear and wit transition to the idea that the worker himself should be described as «θεός εργάτης». Moreover, the references to poetry and to a poem, make it clear that for Ritsos as well, as well as for Cavafy, this protagonists belong the best to their poetry and to their own work.

It is true that Ritsos makes this comparisons with the raw beauty of a man, most of the times of a worker with poetry and poems. It is his belief that poetry should capture this ideal beauty and those people should be its protagonists. Another example of this ideology of Ritsos is the poem «Σώματα», which reads as follows:

Σώματα ηλιοκαμένα, νεανικά – μαυροκόκκινο χόμα  
 – κάποτε στο βαθύ τους τρίχωμα ή και μέσα στους  
 πόρους λάμπουν οι κύβοι του αλατιού, τόσο που  
 τρέμεις

μήπως και μείνουν οι ποιητές χωρίς φωνή.<sup>662</sup>

The poem «Κάλλος», with its eloquent title, makes references once more to the hard life of workers and to their beauty, which is idealised in the eyes of poetry and makes them the perfect protagonists for a poem:

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662 Ritsos, *Ποιήματα 1938-1971*, 34

Το κάλλος του γυμνού σπορέα –  
 όχι απάντηση, βέβαια,  
 κλείσιμο της ερώτησης.

Οι ασβεστωμένοι τοίχοι λάμπουν.  
 Επάνω στο σκαμνί η τανάλια,  
 Τα βγαλμένα καρφιά, το σφυρί.

Επάνω στο τραπέζι

τα εσώρουχα και τα σαντάλια.<sup>663</sup>

This poem, as well as others by Ritsos, for example the poem «Η θυγατέρα του βουνού»<sup>664</sup>, «Απογύμνωση»<sup>665</sup>, «Αύγουστος»<sup>666</sup>, «Πρίσματα»<sup>667</sup>, etc. all convey the same ideals. Some words, for example the word «τανάλια» are even common, as well as the topos of the protagonist of the poem taking off his clothes, in order for his «δασύ στήθος» to shine. Therefore, we could conclude to some general observations about the specific ideology that Ritsos wants to promote not only in his prose, but also in his poems. This ideology is similar to the one of Cavafy. According to Ritsos, the male body is presented toned and muscular, as if it belongs to an ancient Greek statue. Ritsos manages to present the ideal male beauty as connecting elements of ancient Greek gods and workers of everyday life, who struggle to earn their money and at the same time enjoy life. (This is a very different case of reception from those discussed in Chapter 1 above.) However, this noble amalgam of traits is also connected to an eroticised flesh, a body which exalts fantasy and desire.

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<sup>663</sup> Ritsos, *Ποιήματα 1938-1971*, 35.

<sup>664</sup> Ritsos, *Ποιήματα 1938-1971*, 125.

<sup>665</sup> Ritsos, *Ποιήματα 1938-1971*, 103.

<sup>666</sup> Ritsos, *Ποιήματα 1938-1971*, 31.

<sup>667</sup> Ritsos, *Ποιήματα I*, 29.

**Dinos Christianopoulos – «για μια ζωή δίχως φόβο και χλεύη»**

Christianopoulos' homoerotic work includes many references to the lower class and specifically the urban working class. In the earlier poems of Christianopoulos, he tends to be more Cavafian and therefore more discreet in the way he elaborates homoerotic scenarios. Later, Christianopoulos began cultivating a rawer and even obscene style, and it is within this elaboration that we come across more open references to Left Ideology, as connected with homoeroticism. In the poetic sequence «Το κορμί και το σαράκι» (1964), made up of untitled poems, the following verses are found:

σαν τους αριστερούς σας αγαπώ αδέρφια  
μου κι αυτοί κι εμείς διαρκώς  
κατατρεγμένοι  
αυτοί για το ψωμί – εμείς για το κορμί

αυτοί για λευτεριά – εμείς για  
έρωτα για μια ζωή δίχως φόβο και  
χλεύη

σαν τους αριστερούς σας αγαπώ αδέρφια  
μου παρόλο που κι αυτοί μας  
κατατρέχουν.<sup>668</sup>

The addressees of the above verses are homosexuals, whom the speaker warmly calls «αδέρφια μου». In doing so and in using the first person plural when he refers to this group, the speaker adds himself to this group of people. The poem sketches contemporary society's stance towards homosexuals, by delineating their disadvantaging position. They are compared to communists, which in the contemporary Greek context were downtrodden. Like communists, homosexuals face an aggressive attitude, but for a different reason: «(...) για το κορμί/ (...) για έρωτα/ για μια ζωή δίχως φόβο και χλεύη». Homosexuals are placed in an even more

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<sup>668</sup>Dinos Christianopoulos, *Το κορμί και το σαράκι* (Paiania: Mpilieto, 1985), 1.

disadvantaged position, since they are persecuted by communists as well. Christianopoulos shows sympathy towards marginal and tormented groups of people, i.e. homosexuals, communists, working class people. As juxtaposed to the poetry of Cavafy, this poem indicates another important parameter of Christianopoulos's oeuvre: the agony of the leftists. Whereas Cavafy's political ideology is not pointed out directly through his poems, Christianopoulos's leftist ideology is apparent. His poetry and prose not only constitute a free expression of his sexual preferences and leanings, but an expression of his ideological ones. His recent poem «Στη νέα παραλία»<sup>669</sup> (2010) is representative:

Ο νεαρός που με πλησίασε  
 μου 'κανε προπαγάνδα για τον Μάο  
 αλλ' όταν φτάσαμε στο πιο λεπτό μας ζήτημα  
 ήταν ξεκάθαρος: «Είμαι του Μάο, βέβαια,  
 αλλά όταν εγώ γαμάω, θέλω λεφτά».

«Έτσι βουλιάξατε την  
 επανάσταση» του απάντησα  
 πικρόχολα  
 κι εξαφανίστηκε.

The poem outlines an incident where a left-wing youth discusses Mao Tse Tung with the speaker of the poem. The poem's speaker recognises that the youth is trying to proselytise for communism. The speaker is not a communist, as the use of the word «προπαγάνδα» indicates, as well as the second person plural of the following verb «βουλιάξατε». When the discussion comes about the sexual intercourse, which is neatly given as «το πιο λεπτό μας ζήτημα», the leftist youth declares that, irrespective of his communist ideology, which –by extension – supports the unification of the workers under their common fight towards capitalistic society, he needs to be paid to proceed. The raw language of the verse «Είμαι του Μάο, βέβαια, αλλά/ όταν εγώ workers under their common fight towards capitalistic society, he needs to be paid to proceed. The raw language of the verse «Είμαι του Μάο, βέβαια, αλλά/ όταν εγώ

<sup>669</sup> Dinos Christianopoulos, *Παράξενο που βρίσκει το κουράγιο κι ανθίζει* (Lefkosia: Aigaion, 2010): 19.

γαμάω, θέλω λεφτά» connects in a blunt and realistic way the leftist youth with prostitution. In doing so, Christianopoulos displays through his writings too what was indicated in Cavafy's unfinished poems as 'underclass' and 'underworld'. Yet, the attitude towards the youth is this time different than in Cavafy, since the speaker blames and condemns the youth for his illegitimate behaviour. The speaker's disappointing and bitter answer indicates Christianopoulos's own belief about the failure of the communist/ proletariat international revolution, based on individual interests which prevented the dedication to the cause.

What Christianopoulos does at this point, which differentiates him from Cavafy, is that he dares to reveal that homoeroticism exists within the area of communism, even though it is by tradition strongly condemned by communists. Likewise, we come across Christianopoulos's daring when he places homosexual incidents in religious scenarios.

For Christianopoulos, the Thessalonian locale is almost always important. For example, in «Σάββατο βράδυ»<sup>670</sup> (1959), from «Ανυπεράσπιστος καημός» (1960), Christianopoulos specifies the topographical settings of his homosexual poetry:

Απ'το Βαρδάρη ως το Συντριβάνι

κι από τον Πύργο ως την πλατεία  
Δικαστηρίων, σε ψάχνω σ'όλα τ' αγοραία  
πεζοδρόμια,  
έφαγα όλα τα γιαπιά για να σε βρω.

Μην είσαι σε κανένα σινεμά,  
μην παίζεις σε κανένα σφαιριστήριο  
ή τάχα ποια ρουφήχτρα να σε χαιρείται,  
σε ποιό δωμάτιο, σε ποιό πάρκο, σε ποιό κέντρο;

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<sup>670</sup> Dinos Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα* (Thessaloniki: Ianos, 1985), 66.

The reference to Vardar Square is basic for the poetry of Christianopoulos and for the work of other authors, like Yorgos Ioannou. Vardar Square functions in a similar way as Omonoia Square<sup>671</sup> connoting cruising areas the former of Thessaloniki and the latter of Athens. The use here of Vardar Square is specified for two reasons: first, it constitutes a known homosexual and heterosexual cruising area in Thessaloniki, where people of the lower classes hang out, secondly, it is bad for one's reputation to be seen there at late hours and thus it is generally avoided by people of the upper class. As Satrazanis argues: «Είναι πάντως άξιο προσοχής το γεγονός πως στη συνείδηση τόσο του κατοίκου της Θεσσαλονίκης, όσο και μερικών άλλων από άλλες πόλεις, κυριαρχεί η ερωτική αντιμετώπιση της πλατείας Βαρδάρη».<sup>672</sup> Yorgos Ioannou, who will be discussed later on, also comments on Vardar Square, connecting the square with social class: «Οι μικροαστοί, όταν δεν έχουν δουλειά, αποφεύγουν να διασχίζουν αυτούς τους δρόμους (...) διαρρέουν γρήγορα για να μη κακοφημισθούν».<sup>673</sup>

Vardar Square permeates Christianopoulos's *oeuvre*. In his most recent collection «Παράξενο, που βρίσκει το κουράγιο κι ανθίζει» (2010) we come across the poem «Περσικά δώρα»<sup>674</sup> (2009-2010), in which we are explained the Persian origins and history of the word Vardar. The last stanza of the poem functions as an «επιμύθιο» and verifies the importance of the motif, not only for Christianopoulos's *oeuvre*, but also for the city of Thessaloniki, a city which Christianopoulos promotes through his work as an erotic city, something like Cavafy's Alexandria: «Αρβύλες και Βαρδάρη, λοιπόν, τα δύο ανεκτίμητα περσικά δώρα προς την ερωτική Θεσσαλονίκη· αυτήν που ξέρει να αισθάνεται μονάχα ό,τι λατρεύει».

The fourfold reference to «Βαρδάρη», «Συντριβάνι», «Πύργο» and «πλατεία Δικαστηρίων» is not random, since, if we visualise it on a map, it gives the four basic zones of Thessaloniki. In doing so, the speaker reinforces his argument that he

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671 For a further analysis of Omonoia Square see the discussion of Yorgos Ioannou later on in this section.

672 Andonis Satrazanes, «Η πλατεία Βαρβάρη στο πεζογραφικό έργο του Γιώργου Ιωάννου,» *Thessalonike* 3 (1992): 314.

673 Yorgos Ioannou, *Το δικό μας αίμα* (Athens: Kedros, 1978), 34.

674 Christianopoulos, Dinos. *Παράξενο, που βρίσκει το κουράγιο κι ανθίζει* (Nicosia: Aigaion, 2010), 13.



searches for love, for sexual satisfaction, or even for his soulmate in all of Thessaloniki. From Vardar Square, with its cruising associations, to «Συντριβάνι», a more respectable area, and from «Πύργο» to «πλατεία Δικαστηρίων», places that have connections with the factor of power and authority, the speaker of the poem seems to map his erotic quests. The comment about «αγοραία πεζοδρόμια» connotes homosexual prostitution. Whereas for Cavafy homosexual prostitution is a means of earning money for a person excluded from jobs perceived as more respectable (see the poem «Μέρες του 1896»<sup>675</sup> (1927)), for Christianopoulos's writings, homosexual prostitution often constitutes a path for homosexuals to express themselves freely and enjoy homosexual erotic encounters in a period in which this was condemned and hard to find.

It would be unacceptable for «όλα τα γιαπιά» to be missing from the protagonist's search, since they constitute the places where workmen can be found with beautiful bodies formed by the tough conditions of their work, emblems of masculinity and sexual attraction. The settings that are mentioned later on, «σινεμά» and «σφαιριστήριο» indicate places which - at that time- had a popular connotation and involved activities that were connected to working class people. Thus, the speaker of the poem looks for his lover to these humble places, where people of labour and hard work can be found. Moreover, it was an open secret that people (homosexuals) from all the classes visited these places to meet new men. These areas can be described as cruising areas, where social boundaries are eliminated and games of class crossing can easily take place. Cavafy's poetry hints at this too; in the poem «Μέσα στα καπηλειά», for example, a reasonable question emerges: Where did Tamides and the Eparch's son meet up? Furthermore, the verse «ή τάχα ποια ρουφήχτρα να σε χαίρεται» provides the idea that someone else might have stolen the lover that the speaker seeks for, in a similar way that the Alexandrian refers to the «άλλος» in the poem «Ωραία λουλούδια κι άσπρα ως ταίριαζαν πολύ»<sup>676</sup>.

Christianopoulos's sarcasm towards bourgeois men is delineated through

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<sup>675</sup> See Elena Chouzoure, *Η Θεσσαλονίκη του Γιώργου Ιωάννου: Περιπλάνηση στο χώρο και στο χρόνο* (Athens: Patakes, 1995).

<sup>676</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 166.

«Κοσμικοί νέοι»<sup>677</sup> (1959), a poem belonging to the poetic sequence  
 «Ανυπεράσπιστος καημός» (1960):

Μάτια τυραννισμένα αυτοί δεν  
 έχουν ούτε χαμόγελο πικρό, ούτε  
 πρόσωπο  
 που από καημό κρυφό να 'χει σκεβρώσει.

Τους βλέπεις: τραγουδάνε επιπόλαια,  
 μπαίνουν σε κούρσες, διοργανώνουν  
 πάρτυ, μιλούνε για τον Φρόντ και τα  
 σινεμά –  
 άψογα λόγια και χειρονομίες.

Δεν έχουν το δικό μας το  
 παράπονο, τέλεια ανύποπτοι στην  
 ομορφιά τους, σχεδόν αθώοι στην  
 επιτήδευσή τους, στους έρωτές  
 τους μάλλον νόμιμοι.

Μάτια τυραννισμένα αυτοί δεν έχουν.

The poem is permeated throughout by the division of 'us' and 'them', the self and the other. The category in which the speaker adds himself is characterised by youths that have tormented eyes, bitter smile and face which has apparent on it the traits of a secret sorrow and complain. The 'other' is constituted by youths who have the opposite features, «κοσμικοί νέοι», as the title implies, connoting their belonging to the upper class by the adjective «κοσμικοί».<sup>678</sup> These youths sing superficially,

<sup>677</sup> Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 65.

<sup>678</sup>In the case of the poem «Μεγάλη συνοδεία εξ ιερών και λαϊκών», Cavafy's employment of the word «λαϊκός» serves the clarification of the distinction between the people who have religious duties (priests) and the people that do not have religious duties. The adjective «κληρικός» and «κοσμικός» function similarly; the former connotes religious responsibilities/duties, whereas the latter implies none of these. In this sense, the title of Christianopoulos's poem «Κοσμικοί νέοι» can refer specifically to the youths that have nothing to do with religious roles.



ποιός ξέρει τί να γίνεται μέσα τους

σε τί νερά βρήκε ν' αράξει το τραγούδι

η γριά ξενοσκουπίζοντας, ο πατέρας στο  
νησί τα χαρτιά για το Βέλγιο στην τσέπη

μπροστά                   στο  
ηλεκτρόφωνο            μια  
ρημαγμένη γενιά  
ακούει μ' ένα μούδιασμα  
κρυφό το χρονικό της

The poem refers to the appearance of jukeboxes in Greece around 1960. When they first appeared, youths were impressed and inserted coins again and again to enjoy the selected musical recordings. This poem refers to one of these incidents, where two «λαϊκά παιδιά» listen to music in awe. The poet wonders what they are thinking and he concludes that they are probably thinking of their family's poverty («η γριά ξενοσκουπίζοντας»), their father's exile because of his leftist ideology («ο πατέρας στο νησί») and their decision to emigrate for a better life («τα χαρτιά για το Βέλγιο στην τσέπη»). As shown here, Christianopoulos is highly occupied with the matter of social class and he shows great sympathy towards poor youths. It is because of this reason that they arouse the poet's sexual attraction; not only because of their often exquisite bodies forged by their work and of their rough beauty, strongly connected with the sense of masculinity, but also because of their hard conditions of life, elevating and making them more sympathetic.

Finally, the case of the poem «Νύχτα, χάρισέ μου ένα κορμί»<sup>680</sup> (1958) also promotes homoeroticism as transcending social classes and social boundaries:

Νύχτα, χάρισέ μου ένα κορμί,  
να χορτάσω κι απόψε την έξαψή μου,

<sup>680</sup>Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 61

να σκοτώσω κι απόψε την απόγνωσή μου  
 (...)

Νύχτα, χάρισέ μου ένα κορμί,  
 δεν εξετάζω αν το στήθος είναι όμορφο, αν  
 τα μπράτσα είναι ψημένα στη δουλειά,  
 ούτε και νοιάζομαι για των ματιών το χρώμα,  
 όνομα, επάγγελμα και ηλικία.

(...)

Christianopoulos takes lower class people and especially youths seriously in his homosexual writings, and not the rich who deny their homosexuality. Human needs rise above class barriers and social divisions, also enabling class crossings. When the speaker of the poem states that «δεν εξετάζω αν το στήθος είναι όμορφο,/ αν τα μπράτσα είναι ψημένα στη δουλειά», at the same time, he means the opposite: «εξετάζω αν το στήθος είναι όμορφο,/ αν τα μπράτσα είναι ψημένα στη δουλειά». However, because of his sexual despair, he is forced to bypass these features. Last but not least, the reference to the late hours of the «νύχτα», which the speaker here personifies, seems to express both Cavafy and Christianopoulos to the same significant extent. As noted in the section about Cavafy, he places his poetry in two major categories of settings: ancient times and contemporary times. Christianopoulos also takes advantage of the ancient milieu to situate his poetry, and this he is surely inspired by Cavafy. His strong connections with religion, stemming not only from his life experience but also from the religious tradition of his hometown, Thessaloniki, allow him to exploit through his poetry a religious context, as we have seen in Chapter 2. The class implications emerge in a following poem, «Εκατόνταρχος Κορνήλιος»<sup>681</sup> (1950), from Christianopoulos's first poetic collection *Εποχή των ισχνών αγελάδων* (1950):

Κύριε, μην απορείς για την τόση μου  
 πίστη· η αγάπη μου υπαγορεύει την  
 πίστη.  
 Δε σε παρακαλώ για το Νικήτα ούτε για το Χαρίλαο

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<sup>681</sup>Christianopoulos, *Ποιήματα*, 13.

μήτε για το Νικόλαο που δεν πρόφτασε να βαρεθεί τις  
προσευχές·  
τον Αντώνιο κάνε καλά, τον  
Αντώνιο. Όταν ήταν μικρός και  
ελεύθερος,  
ασχολούνταν κι αυτός με τα γράμματα και τις τέχνες·

ήταν κάτοχος της αρχαίας ελληνικής και του άρεζε να παίζει  
ακορντεόν. Όμως τώρα είναι δούλος μου – μη ρωτάς πώς.

Έχω εξουσίαν επάνω του του δεσμείν και του λύειν.

Μπορώ να τον κάνω ό,τι θέλω·

μπορώ ακόμα και να τον λευτερώσω, αν και μου είναι  
οδυνηρό·  
εξάλλου εργάζεται αποδοτικά με τη μεγάλη του  
ρώμη. Γι' αυτούς, Κύριε, τους λόγους και γι' άλλους  
πολλούς κάνε καλά τον Αντώνιο, το δούλο του  
δούλου σου.

Αν παραστεί ανάγκη, μπορεί να γίνω και χριστιανός.  
Όμως κάν' τον καλά, μόν' αυτό σου ζητώ, τίποτ' άλλο.  
Θα 'ταν ανήθικο κάθε άλλο που θα τολμούσα να σου  
ζητήσω.

The poem constitutes the prayer of the Centurion Cornelius for his slave, Antonius, who is ill. The title of the poem states the social position and status of Cornelius; he is the Centurion. Strikingly, the poem presents the Centurion praying for the saviour of his slave. Antonius constitutes a special category of a slave, since he was not born one. He was a rich young man, who used to have the same intellectual interests and activities like Cornelius: «Όταν ήταν μικρός και ελεύθερος/ ασχολούνταν κι αυτός με τα γράμματα και τις τέχνες./ ήταν κάτοχος της αρχαίας ελληνικής και του άρεσε να παί/ζει ακορντεόν». Special attention should be paid to the last verse mentioned above, indicating that Antonius knew how to play the

accordion. The accordion constitutes an element which is anachronistically added to the context of the poem, showing the playful tendency of Christianopoulos to combine historical scenery with modern touches.

The poem states openly the matter of authority and power, which Cornelius has over Antonius: «Όμως τώρα είναι δούλος μου – μη ρωτάς πώς./ Έχω εξουσίαν επάνω του του δεσμείν και του λύειν./ Μπορώ να τον κάνω ό,τι θέλω». Taking this for granted, why does he pray for Antonius, why does he pray for this particular slave? The answer is detected in the words of Cornelius: «η αγάπη μου υπαγορεύει την πίστη. (...) Αν παραστεί ανάγκη, μπορεί να γίνω και χριστιανός./ Όμως κάν' τον καλά, μόν' αυτό σου ζητώ, τίποτ' άλλο./ Θα 'ταν ανήθικο κάθε άλλο που θα τολμούσα να σου ζη-/ τήσω». Cornelius implicitly states here that he has feelings for Antonius.

The adjective «ανήθικος» illustrates the nature and character of those feelings. Cornelius's erotic attraction towards Antonius is not based only on Antonius's «μεγάλη (...) ρώμη», as Cornelius mentions, but also on Antonius's intellectual profoundness. On this ground, Antonius genuinely noble origin enables him to enjoy the same upper social status as Cornelius, even though Antonius is now enslaved. Antonius's education and his previous intellectual activities permit Cornelius to face him on equal terms and differentiate Antonius from the other slaves. This is the reason that Cornelius prays specifically for his beloved Antonius: «Δε σε παρακαλώ για το Νικήτα ούτε για το Χαρίλαο/ μήτε για το Νικόλαο που δεν πρόφτασε να βαρεθεί τις προ-/σευχές/ τον Αντώνιο κάνε καλά, τον Αντώνιο».

Antonius rescues his personal pride, dignity and elegance, irrespective of his social decline, and this is what makes him attractive to Cornelius. Cornelius, on the other hand, displays the nobility of his feelings by recognising God as the ultimate authority, who is above him: «κάνε καλά τον Αντώνιο, το δούλο του δούλου σου» and by stating the moral limits and dilemmas he faces: «Θα 'ταν ανήθικο κάθε άλλο που θα τολμούσα να σου ζη- τήσω». In this religious context, Christianopoulos eliminates class boundaries. The same happens with social classes in the historical context that Cavafy often exploits.

**«Στο λαϊκό δεν προσεχώρησα. Το λαϊκό το είχα μέσα μου»: The case of Yorgos Ioannou**

In his collection of essays *Ο της φύσεως έρωας*<sup>682</sup> (1986), which constitutes a study mainly of Cavafy, along with Papadiamantes and Lapathiotis, Ioannou sheds light on Cavafy's homoerotic poems in a revolutionary way as far as the hitherto bibliography is concerned; this revolutionary way offers also a new interpretation of Cavafy's preference for people who belong to the working class. Ioannou emphasises that the reason which led to the negative reactions towards the homoerotic corpus of Cavafy is the fact that he is obviously a passive homosexual and this is the most condemned homosexual category: «Ο Καβάφης ήταν ομοφυλόφιλος. Και ολοφάνερα ήταν παθητικός ομοφυλόφιλος. Αντιλαμβανόταν τον έρωτα μόνο ως παράδοση στον ισχυρό και στον ωραίο άντρα»,<sup>683</sup> «Είναι θαυμαστής των αρρενωπών και αθλητικών τύπων. Και αυτούς αναζητά είτε μέσα στη ζωή είτε μέσα στην ιστορία και στη φαντασία του. Και, κατά κάποιο τρόπο, συνεχώς αναφέρεται σ' αυτούς».<sup>684</sup> Ioannou argues that Cavafy had in mind that the perfect man has to have the above characteristics, because of the poet's belonging to the category of the passive homosexuals. The ideal object of sexual exaltation for passive homosexuals is someone who appears to be rather masculine, in terms of appearance and behaviour. Due to this fact, the hard working man of the working class, with his muscular body and the raw manners is the best stimulator for the passive homosexual.

Is this the case? If this seems to be the truth for the poems of Cavafy that are set in contemporary scenarios, this generalised and simplified observation is not entirely the case for the sensual poems of Cavafy that are set in ancient times. In those poems the speaker also praises the personality of the person he faces as the object of his admiration and love, as well as the dignity and honesty of his character,

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<sup>682</sup>Yorgos Ioannou, *Ο της φύσεως έρωας*, (Athens: Kedros, 1986).

<sup>683</sup>Ioannou, *Ο της φύσεως έρωας*, 104.

<sup>684</sup>Ioannou, *Ο της φύσεως έρωας*, 107.



features that are commonly connected with the lower classes. This is also the case for the distinction between the religious/historical and contemporary poems of Christianopoulos, who can also be described through his poetry and prose as a passive homosexual. Christianopoulos easily falls within the category of the masochists too; his poetic persona seems to prefer sadomasochist homoerotic encounters, enjoying the sexual power which is exerted over him. At this point, I must also mention the poem «Ο Δεμένος ώμος»<sup>685</sup> (1919) of Cavafy, in which the Alexandrian comes closer to a masochistic approach too.

In the following extract Ioannou provides an explanation for the reason that intellectuals, with their arrogant appearance and diplomatic behaviour, do not attract the Cavafian protagonists, displaying at the same time his own stance towards them:

Ο κυρίαρχος λόγος των καβαφικών μελετητών – ο κυρίαρχος, λέω – της αποστροφής τους προς την αποδοχή της παθητικής ομοφυλοφιλίας του Καβάφη, είναι ότι έχουν περιφρονηθεί ή αγνοηθεί τελείως από αυτό το είδος που λέγεται παθητικοί ομοφυλόφιλοι και που με τόση επιμονή άλλους φίλους τους και γνωστούς τους τους κυνήγησε. Δεν πρόκειται να ισχυρισθώ βέβαια, ότι είναι όλοι τους άσχημοι και γι' αυτό. Όχι! Αλλά πρόκειται να πω ότι είναι όλοι τους λόγιοι, διαβασμένοι, αφοσιωμένοι στα γράμματα, πλαδαροί, παραμορφωμένοι, τύποι σοφών νέων, και αυτά τα πράγματα – πώς να το πω; - δεν τραβούνε ερωτικά τους παθητικούς ομοφυλόφιλους, που έχουν σπάνιο γούστο και είναι εξαιρετικά δύσκολοι.<sup>686</sup>

The above extract echoes Cavafy's note in *Ανέκδοτα Σημειώματα Ποιητικής και Ηθικής* to a great extent. Whereas Cavafy negatively comments on upper-class people, Ioannou here is focused on educated people, who are presented as having the same characteristics which Cavafy ascribes to people of the upper classes. The language that Ioannou uses in this extract to analyse Cavafy, confess his own stance towards educated people, a conviction which becomes of particular importance from the moment that he himself belongs to the group of intellectual and educated people.

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<sup>685</sup>C. P. Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα: 1877-1923*, edited by G.P. Savvidis (Athens: Ikaros, 1993), 106.

<sup>686</sup>Ioannou, «Ο της φύσεως έρωας», 105-106.

Not randomly, he engages in his prose relevant circumstances, negotiating his protagonists' inclusion in this group, whereas at the same time they face working class as their desired class. In juxtaposition, Ioannou praises in this extract the passive homosexuals, presenting them as a superior group of people, not accessible to non-worthy individuals: «(...) έχουν σπάνιο γούστο και είναι εξαιρετικά δύσκολοι». Likewise, both working class and homoeroticism are delineated on honorary grounds and are displayed as elect groups.

Having referred to Ioannou's essays, I will attempt to approach his mature prose, which offers fertile ground to analyse the author's use of social class and also indicate possible class - crossings. I will start with the story «Λιμενικά Λουτρά»,<sup>687</sup> which belongs to his short story collection *Η Σαρκοφάγος* (1971) and in which the protagonist narrates how and why he used to hang out when he was a young boy at the port with the men who worked there. The story becomes revelatory on the reasons that motivate the narrator's visits to the port:

Σιγά σιγά εισχώρησα και μες στα κύτη των καραβιών, όχι τόσο για να μαζεύω σιτάρι, κριθάρι ή καλαμπόκι, όσο για να βλέπω. Με οδηγούσαν διάφοροι νεαροί εργάτες που με είχαν συμπαθήσει. (...) έπιανα μια άκρη για να θαυμάζω τη σκληρή χειρονακτική δουλειά που ποτέ μου δεν έχω χορτάσει να βλέπω.

Ξεφοβήθηκα τις δυνατές φωνάρες τους, τις αγάπησα μπορώ να πω, και γρήγορα κατάλαβα πως τα απότομα λόγια τους δεν είχαν καμιά κακία, κατ' αντίθεση προς τις σιγανές φιδίσιες φωνές διαφόρων μορφωμένων που αργότερα γνώρισα.<sup>688</sup>

The protagonist states that he chooses to be present at the port not because there is any real practical need, but because he wants to observe the workers secretly and carefully. He admires the roughness of their work and manners. In the last lines of the extract Ioannou insists on the comparison between lower and upper class. The loud voices of the workers are compared to the discretionary voices of the intellectuals that the narrator meets later on, who are pretentious and hypocritical.

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<sup>687</sup>Yorgos Ioannou, *Η Σαρκοφάγος: Πεζογραφήματα*.(Athens: Kedros, 1988), 65-71.

<sup>688</sup>Ioannou, *Σαρκοφάγος*, 66.

The phrase «ξεφοβήθηκα τις δυνατές φωνάρες τους» brings to the mind the poem «Μια νύχτα»<sup>689</sup> of Cavafy, where the poet makes reference to the rough manners of workmen: «Από κάτω/ ήρχονταν οι φωνές κάτι εργατών/ που έπαιζαν χαρτιά και που γλεντούσαν». In the case of the Cavafian poem, irrespective of the worker's rough manners, pure love emerges «στο λαϊκό, το ταπεινό κρεββάτι» of one poor and sordid room. Cavafy's and Ioannou's notion of the «λαϊκό» meet up. The «λαϊκό» environment is for Cavafy and Ioannou the best scenery for love to dominate and be expressed in its purest facets.

The verb «εισχώρησα» that Ioannou uses in the above extract indicates that the working class is a sort of a superior group in which you have to be initiated to enter. In doing so, the impression of a special group is created, for which someone has to make a significant effort to get in and it is worthy for someone to attempt so. The protagonist and the workers cultivate a good relationship, by making jokes and teasing each other. Their relationships become really intimate, since they organise «γυμνικούς κολυμπητικούς αγώνες».<sup>690</sup>

In the middle of the story the lens of the narration changes and the narrator is now a grown up, who starts visiting public baths, praising the wonderful young bodies of working class youths:

(...) όλοι τους εξαιρετικά γεροδεμένοι νεαροί, που μόλις είχαν σχολάσει απ'τη βαριά δουλειά τους. (...) Οι μύες σ'όλο το κορμί τους έπαιζαν και γυαλοκοπούσαν. Καταλάβαινες κάτω απ' το δέρμα το εκλεκτό κρέας, το διαλεχτότατο μοσχαρακι. Σου 'ρχόταν να δαγκάσεις μια γερή δαγκωνιά.<sup>691</sup>

At the beginning, no one comes close to the narrator. After some hesitant discussions and the narrator's often visits to the baths, a friendly atmosphere is cultivated. The scene is described in such terms which exemplify an initiation ceremony, a rite de passage. The narrator makes efforts to become an initiate of this special group. The men are skeptical and suspicious concerning the narrator's

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<sup>689</sup>Cavafy, *The Collected poems*, 70.

<sup>690</sup>Ioannou, *Σαρκοφάγος*, 66.

<sup>691</sup>Ioannou, *Σαρκοφάγος*, 69.

inclusion and they submit him to an initiation in order to be accepted. In the end he manages to «πολιτογραφηθεί ανάμεσά τους». The verb that the text uses recalls the Cavafian poem «Το πρώτο σκαλί»<sup>692</sup> (1899) and the verse: «Και δύσκολο στην πόλι εκείνην είναι και σπάνιο να σε πολιτογραφήσουν». Later on, the narrator compares the bohemian circles of people and the majority of intellectuals («καλλιτέχνες») to hard working people. The superiority of the latter group is praised by the narrator in juxtaposition to the first group, in which he adds himself too. The narrator not only states that no would dare to enter this circle of workmen. It is obvious that the narrator's hard behaviour towards intellectual people is imbued with irony and disappointment, stemming from their oft-pretentious attitude.

In 1980 Ioannou publishes *Ομόνοια 1980*,<sup>693</sup> in which he engages in a discussion about the Square, giving what was correctly indicated on the back cover of the book as a «ντοκουμέντο εποχής και συνάμα ενθύμιο».

The book explores the contemporary to Ioannou Square, demonstrating the changes over time and emphasising Omonoia's «μυστική ζωή»<sup>694</sup>, responsible for its bad reputation. The author admits that he is a «θαμώνας και εραστής της Ομόνοιας»<sup>695</sup> and thus he discusses both the crowd and its «ποικιλίες των ανθρώπων»<sup>696</sup> and the place, believing that the former defines the latter and vice versa. He makes reference to the «καφενεία», «λαϊκούς συνοικισμούς», «λαϊκά σινεμά», «λουτρά», «δημόσια ουρητήρια» of the Square, as the best scenery for its mystic life and the «τυπολογία του λαϊκού» to unravel. When discussing the crowd of Omonoia, Ioannou makes special reference to the Square as a cruising homosexual area: «Βέβαια, το φαινόμενο που είναι περισσότερο συνδεδεμένο στη συνείδηση του κόσμου, με την Ομόνοια, είναι η ερωτική αναζήτηση, ιδίως η ομοφυλόφιλη ερωτική αναζήτηση».<sup>697</sup>

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<sup>692</sup>Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, 6.

<sup>693</sup>Yorgos Ioannou, *Ομόνοια 1980* (Athens: Kedros, 197).

<sup>694</sup>Ioannou, *Ομόνοια*, 14.

<sup>695</sup>Ioannou, *Ομόνοια*, 28.

<sup>696</sup>Ioannou, *Ομόνοια*, 26.

<sup>697</sup>Ioannou, *Ομόνοια*, 28.

Ioannou disagrees with this established conviction about Omonoia, since, according to him, homosexuals just constitute another part of the crowd and are «φιλήσυχοι»<sup>698</sup> regardless of what society believes. Later on, he praises the group by pointing out that the rest of the people follow at a later stage their way of dressing up, even though at the beginning they condemned it.

Omonoia, according to Ioannou, offers a place where people co-exist. All sorts of people are met in the Square, spending their time there, or passing by; heterosexual and homosexual, policemen and criminals<sup>699</sup>, Athenians, foreigners and provincials, bourgeois and working-class people. The Square acts, first, in a unifying manner, uniting the opposites.

As Pateridou argues:

Η Ομόνοια επιλέγεται για την αναγνωρισιμότητά της ως χώρος όπου το λαϊκό επιδράμει στο αστικό ανοιχτό τοπίο και ανασυνθέτει τη δομή του κατ' αναλογία με τη φυσιογνωμία του ίδιου του έργου, που θέτει την επαρχιακή του διάσταση ερωτηματικά απέναντι στην αστική, πολιτική πεζογραφία αλλά και ευρύτερα απέναντι στις σαφείς κατηγοριοποιήσεις.<sup>700</sup>

The fact that in this place the contraries co-exist does not mean by any means that they blend. Each above mentioned group of people views Omonoia through a different prism, which has to do with its own characteristics. Therefore, in terms of class:

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<sup>698</sup>Ioannou, *Ομόνοια*, 28.

<sup>699</sup>Ioannou, *Ομόνοια*, 58. What Ioannou gives here in terms of social classes (lower Vs upper classes). Ritsos gives it in terms of sexuality (homoeroticism Vs heterosexuality): «Γιατί, πρέπει να ξέρεις πως, κάποτε, από μια κλειδαρότρυπα, μπορείς να δεις άφοβα ολόγυμνον τον έρωτα, πως από μίαν ελάχιστη τρύπα φυλακής μπορείς να δεις ολόκληρο τον ουρανό».

<sup>700</sup>Georgia Pateridou, «Η επιθυμία του λαϊκού: η περίπτωση του Γιώργου Ιωάννου,» *Outopia* 90 (2010):162.

(...) μέσα από ένα φτηνό ξενοδοχείο της Ομόνοιας, όπου διαμένεις με διάφορους λαϊκούς τύπους, η κίνηση της πλατείας φαντάζει πολύ περισσότερο αποκρυπτογραφημένη στα μάτια σου και είναι ήρεμη και φτωχική, ακόμα και πληκτική τις γιορτές και τις νύχτες. Ενώ όταν κατεβαίνεις από το καλοβαλμένο σπίτι σου, όλα εδώ σου φαίνονται μυστηριώδη και σκληρά και ύποπτα.<sup>701</sup>

Secondly, the Square is a means to cleanse and heal one's soul, a veritable «ψυχοθεραπευτήριο».<sup>702</sup> Ioannou explains that if someone is tired of the hypocritical manner of the upper classes and wants to be atoned and purified, Omonoia appears to be both the purgatory and the truth. Omonoia constitutes:

Αντίδοτο (...) εναντίον πάσης δεξιώσεως σε σαλόνια απαστράπτοντα, με πολυελαίους, χαλιά, τουαλέτες κυριών και στριμμένα στόματα ή εναντίων οικογενειακών εορτών, όπου η πάστρα, η σωφροσύνη και η ηθικότητα που επέδειξαν διάφορες παλιές παλουκοπηδήχτρες ήταν άνευ προηγουμένου (...) – από όλα αυτά, λοιπόν, ακόμα και με τα ρούχα εκείνα, φύγε δρομέως, ξέφυγε, και έλα εδώ να πλατσουρίσεις και να ευχαριστηθείς. Θα δεις, άλλωστε, και άλλους ομοιοπαθείς σου να καταφθάνουν· αυτοί μάλιστα να χώνονται σε καταγώγια ή σε σινέ καταγώγια, όπου εσύ δεν μπαίνεις. Δεν λέω να μην πας στις υψηλές κοινωνικές εκδηλώσεις, να πας, αλλά μετά τρέξε εδώ να ξεπλυθείς με ειδική λάσπη, καλό θα σου κάνει.<sup>703</sup>

Cavafy, Christianopoulos and Ioannou choose their settings with great attention, in order to serve their goals. Omonoia and Vardar Square have similar functions. Both constitute cruising areas, with strong homosexual presence and connections with prostitution. Moreover, these areas are representative of what Cavafy, Christianopoulos and Ioannou would describe as «λαϊκό». These areas function as a «λαϊκός προμαχώνας», from which bourgeois or aristocracy pass by, without achieving to corrupt its character. The same function is ascribed to «καφενεία», «λαϊκά σινεμά» and «λουτρά», where “οι ταπεινοί, ακάθαρτοι χώροι είναι

<sup>701</sup> Ioannou, *Ομόνοια*, 132.

<sup>702</sup> Ioannou, *Ομόνοια*, 133-134.

<sup>703</sup> Ioannou, *Ομόνοια*, 133-134.

σαν να αποκαθαίρονται αισθητικά αλλά και ηθικά, γιατί στεγάζουν γνήσια αισθήματα και συνευρέσεις ενάντια στους καθωσπρεπισμούς και στις ευαισθησίες”. σαν να αποκαθαίρονται αισθητικά αλλά και ηθικά, γιατί στεγάζουν γνήσια αισθήματα και συνευρέσεις ενάντια στους καθωσπρεπισμούς και στις ευαισθησίες”.<sup>704</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> Pateridou, «Η επιθυμία του λαϊκού: η περίπτωση του Γιώργου Ιωάννου,» 163.

## Conclusions

When it comes to the eroticisation of the working class, Christianopoulos and Ioannou are consciously post-Cavafian. They show a preference for lower classes and especially the working class, the favoured one in their work, and their object of erotic exaltation and admiration. As Pieris notes, «στον Καβάφη η κοινωνική απόβλεψη είναι έντονη και δεδομένη».<sup>705</sup> This is obvious both in the Cavafian poems which are set in the contemporary world, and in those set in the ancient world, being more extreme in his unfinished poems, justifying even crime, because he is «οργισμένος με το κοινωνικό και οικονομικό σύστημα».<sup>706</sup>

When it comes to Pieris's statement that «Στον Καβάφη έχουμε ένα περίεργο «ταξικό μίσος» για τους πλούσιους»,<sup>707</sup> I would like to comment that Cavafy's hatred can be directly seen only throughout the 1908 note and his unfinished poems that I discussed in this chapter and not generally in his poetry. In this vein, Cavafy's note and unfinished poems come closer to the writings of Christianopoulos and Ioannou and promote the existence of an 'underclass', which is also apparent in Christianopoulos and Ioannou, mainly in terms of prostitution.

Cavafy's poetry embraces two kinds of relationships: same-class and different-class relationships. What is really interesting is when one social class tries somehow to enter another one, what I gave in this section with the term 'class - crossing'. In the cases of different class relationships, authority and power can be exerted by the individual of the lower class over the individual of the upper class (as in «Η αρρώστια του Κλείτου», «Μέσα στα καπηλειά», etc.). These relationships can lead to catastrophe, as well as the same class relationships, which do not succeed because of «βιοτικές ανάγκες», economic problems (as in «Πριν τους αλλάξει ο χρόνος», «Ωραία λουλούδια κι άσπρα ως ταίριαζαν πολύ»). For a better life, lower-class protagonists are

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<sup>705</sup> Michalis Pieris, «Έρωτας και εξουσία: Καβάφης, Ελύτης», *Nea Estia* 1812 (2008): 1098.

<sup>706</sup> Pieris, «Έρωτας και εξουσία: Καβάφης, Ελύτης», 1099.

<sup>707</sup> Pieris, «Έρωτας και εξουσία: Καβάφης, Ελύτης», 1098.



forced to separate, to emigrate, to choose a richer partner, to be thrown into prostitution. In the cases of Christianopoulos and Ioannou, the class-crossings appear to be more limited, mainly because their writings are almost completely oriented and dedicated to lower classes.

My interpretation, as given in this chapter, aims at showing Cavafy's innovation in sketching several cases of homosexual love, with protagonists from contemporary and ancient times, in contradistinction to Christianopoulos and Ioannou. If we compare Christianopoulos's most recent poetic collection «Παράξενο που βρίσκει το κουράγιο κι ανθίζει» (2010) with his previous ones, we come to the conclusion that, roughly speaking, Christianopoulos makes use of the same homosexual patterns, because he believes in their significance in the corpus of his work. Until *Καταπακτή* (1982) Ioannou, both in his poetry and prose, cultivates the same moderate stance. It is in *Καταπακτή* and in specific short stories like «Βρεφών κοίτες»<sup>708</sup> that a more provocative Ioannou reveals, with a new writing which he did not live to develop.

Homosexuality in Cavafy transcends social class, since it constitutes for the poet an elevating feature, ascribed with nobility and decency («Ιασή Τάφος», «Λάνη Τάφος», etc.):

Για τον Καβάφη, η ηδονή που απορρέει από τον ομοφυλοφυλικό έρωτα συνδέεται οργανικά με την Τέχνη. Κατά την αντίληψη του Καβάφη, ο ομοφυλοφυλικός έρωτας και η τέχνη μπορούν, στην καλύτερη περίπτωση, να ξεφύγουν από τις δυνάμεις που διέπουν την κοινωνία, την ιστορία και τη φύση. Ο ομοφυλοφυλικός έρωτας, όπως και η τέχνη, είναι «αφύσικος» και «άγονος», εφόσον δεν οδηγεί στη βιολογική αναπαραγωγή. Οι «τολμηροί», «δυνατοί» στίχοι είναι απόρροια της συνειδητής και επίμονης πρόκλησης εναντίον της φύσης και της κοινωνίας μέσα από την αποφυγή κάθε έρωτα «της ρουτίνας».<sup>709</sup>

This is the case with Christianopoulos and Ioannou too. The choice of humble settings («λαϊκά καφενεία», «λαϊκοί συνοικισμοί», «λουτρά»), as well as the employment of Omonoia and Vardar Square, as explained above, contributes to this purpose, since they locate, first of all, the existence of class boundaries, to eliminate them, later on, and give the chance for class - crossing to take place.

<sup>708</sup>Ioannou, *Καταπακτή*, 43-47.

<sup>709</sup>Mackridge, Peter. «Έρωτας, τέχνη και αγορά στην ποίηση του Καβάφη», *Molyvdo-kondylo-peleketes* 6 (1998-9): 71-72.

## **Conclusions of the Thesis**

My three selected themes have sought to bring out some recurrent preoccupations in the homoerotic dimension of Cavafy which are elaborated by his successors. Putting their writings together and discussing them in association with the homoerotic work of Cavafy, brings to the fore an important side of the Cavafian legacy.

In Chapter 1, 'The appropriation of ancient Greek Eros', I endeavoured to discuss some key cases of Modern Greek appropriation of the ancient past: Cavafy, Sikelianos and Ioannou, as three major representatives of modern Greek literature who exploit ancient Greek literature as an ally and a medium, with the aid of Cavafy, consciously differentiate themselves and provide traces of their own modern Greek voice. Plato and his well-known ideology around Eros, especially in his *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, along with the *Palatine Anthology*, are the key reference points for such Modern Greek writers concerned with homoeroticism. Cavafy employs Plato, implicitly and explicitly, to a greater extent than Rena Zamarou delineates in her monograph, and does so following two antithetical yet complementary directions, a feature which is obvious only through the prism of Greek homoerotic tradition; namely, as a conscious reaction to the ancient Greek poet and as an ally from the past, someone that has been misunderstood.

In the case of Sikelianos, based on a new suggestion for interpretation of the poem «Παντάρκης», I followed the poet's imposed lens of reading on the reader and I concluded that, even though the poet was inclining towards it and hinting at it, no scholar to my knowledge has clearly stated it hitherto: the 'queer' Sikelianos is a topic for further discussion. The discussion of the chapter finishes with the case of Ioannou, whose interpretation was drawn from several different genres of his writings: poetry, prose and translation. As opposed to the homoerotic line followed by Cavafy and Sikelianos, I argue in my chapter that we can characterise Ioannou as an anti-Platonic writer, using the erotic poems of the *Palatine Anthology* for reference. Taking it a step further, if I am allowed to use a broad generalisation which could be applied in the case of Modern Greek literature too, I support that the Modern Greek homoerotic voice in literature is divided into two broad categories that are represented through the selection of the writers endorsed in my chapter: Cavafy and Sikelianos

represent the older line which at the same time incorporates traces of the most recent and up-to-date line, an interpretative path which falls under the umbrella literary term of Platonic Aestheticism, whereas the more recent approach of Ioannou falls within the category of Epicurean Aestheticism.

In Chapter 2, 'Homoeroticism and the Notion of Sin', I undertake the discussion of selected homosexually orientated writings by Cavafy, Lapathiotis, Christianopoulos, Ioannou and Ritsos in conjunction with their religious feelings, as they are defined by their deeply religious upbringing within Greek Orthodoxy. Even though homoeroticism as associated with religion is a topic extensively referred to in scholarly research worldwide, in Greece there is a lack of scholarly analysis regarding the ways that Modern Greek literature captures key elements of homoeroticism and religion. In order to discuss this broad topic, I employ the conceptual framework of 'confession', as connected with sacramental confession and the imperative need for the writers to express themselves.

In this chapter I place emphasis on the redemptive function of literature, which I associate with a procedure of 'coming-out of the closet' which is imposed by the institution – among others – of the Greek Orthodox Church. The feelings of exclusion and rejection that the protagonists of the writers experience constitute the enactment of a liberating act which is the process of writing. I study the Church-as-closet scheme and the 'textual closet', whereas I envisage the protagonists of the writings I discuss as 'closet cases', which are both hiding and showcasing the secret life of homoeroticism. I define confessional literature as the literature which aims at revealing and bringing to the fore one's authentic self and inner true identity, and define as such all the selected writings of the writers I discuss, regardless of the literary genre to which they belong : confessional literature becomes their unifying genre. Consequently, confession appears to be a literary sub-genre of autobiography and also a technique that the Greek writers I discuss employ in order to create literature.

The selection of writings that I discuss, covering the period from the late nineteenth century to today, bring to the fore more continuity than change in the tension between Orthodoxy and homoeroticism. Notwithstanding, throughout this

writing period two different stances are contrasted and two writing directions are observed: Cavafy and Lapathotes incorporated into their works protagonists who are brimful with dilemmas and considerations, which emerge from the constant tension created by the two 'social roles' of being a Christian and a homosexual. This source of anxiety, guilt and 'shame', does not achieve to eliminate either of these social roles, but it definitely causes a sort of crisis for the definition of the protagonists' identity. In the case of Lapathotes, this feature is very powerful, since his troubled relationship with Christianity seems to define his poetry. On the other hand, Ritsos and Christianopoulos add these two naturally antithetic aspects of one's personality into their work: homoeroticism and Christianity. On the other hand, Ioannou tips the balance far against the Church in his writings.

In the third and last broad theme covered by my thesis, in Chapter 3, I explore the interaction of social class with homoeroticism in selected writings of Cavafy, Christianopoulos and Ioannou and conclude that the working class features most in their writings and thus constitutes the Modern Greek writers' favoured class. I bring into question why this is the case and through interpretation of extracts both in poetry and prose I conclude that this is not irrelevant to the fact that all the writers discussed in my chapter belong to the middle class and appear to have a certain considerable amount of antipathy for people coming from the upper classes, to whom they, stereotypically, attribute pretentious attitudes. Moreover, their protagonists appear to have a common target, which is to enter the world of working class men and boys.

Cavafy, Christianopoulos and Ioannou shared an inner conviction that a person's purification is accomplished and achieved through the struggles one experiences throughout their life. The struggles and hard life of working class people were compared – most overtly by Christianopoulos- with the struggles and hard life of homosexuals within a heteronormative society. The aim of the Modern Greek writers I discuss was to reveal the hardships of these people. It was admittedly interesting that the working class came first in terms of value, honesty and authenticity, whereas the people of the upper classes, with their hypocrisy and pretentious attitude, end up on the bottom of the same scale. Furthermore, Modern Greek homoerotic literature does not escape the sexual stereotype that the working class is the sexually ideal class because of the men's exquisitely muscular, strong and dirty bodies, deeply ascribed with a virgin touch of pure masculinity. As such,

they constitute the ultimate erotic 'objects', the ultimate sources for admiration and exaltation of the senses. They are presented in the writings of the writers I discuss as a special group of people, the 'elite', a precious cast of people, which is closed and can be entered only by the initiated. It was obvious in my chapter that the protagonists of the writings actually desired to become members of this special and superior group, and they were prepared to be subordinated and dominated to this end: sexual exaltation was the result of and the reason behind this willingness for domination. Analogous with the acknowledged term of 'gender-crossing' in queer theory, dwelling on games of Power and Authority, I employ the term 'class-crossing' to denote how homosexual love can rise above social class and enable crossing between classes, both up and down, also based on the concept of hegemonic masculinities. While in some cases boundaries can be flexible and even eliminated, they can also prove impermeable. I discuss social class as associated with homoeroticism having in mind this great common feature between the Modern Greek literary representations of social class within homoeroticism and vice versa, which I term in my chapter as 'interchangeability', as also extracted from the theories of hegemonic masculinities. I defined interchangeability as the ability of authority and power to be exerted by the individual of the lower class over the individual of the upper class and vice versa. In Cavafian poetry I encounter many cases of class-crossing. Notwithstanding, in the writings of Christianopoulos and Ioannou such scenarios were not widely present, because their writings are almost completely orientated and dedicated to the lower classes. This is a different stance by the writers, which show that the successors of Cavafy do not blindly imitate him, but elaborate on his points creatively.

Through a careful examination of Christianopoulos and Ioannou as consciously post-Cavafian, the chapter concludes with a further specification of Cavafy's pioneering innovation, as far as the direction of his social glance is concerned. I demonstrate that this «κοινωνική απόβλεψη», as Pieris terms it, occurs both in the Cavafian poems set in the contemporary world and in the ancient world, being more extreme in his unfinished poems, where Cavafy comes across as an antinomian, even justifying crime. On the other hand, my chapter proves Cavafy to be the innovator and pioneer of what Pateridou has described as the «τυπολογία

του λαϊκού», which Christianopoulos and Ioannou follow and build on. The term «λαϊκός» in the corpus of Cavafy is not ascribed with the leftist connotations it acquired later on in the writings of the other two writers. Yet, in Cavafy, we come across the first traces of a taxonomy which has at its lower level the poor and simple people: «λαϊκός» as in «του λαού». At the same time, Cavafy begins delineating hatred towards people of the upper classes which can be identified mostly in his 1908 note and in his unfinished poems, which his followers bring to the fore to a greater extent. Taking it a step further, the three writers, with Cavafy again as the starting point, bring to the fore the antipoetic existence of an 'underclass', strongly apparent also in terms of prostitution. Despite the brave attempts of Christianopoulos and Ioannou to suppress their 'master', as the chapter concludes, Cavafy's delineation of same and different class relationships reveals his ability in sketching several cases of homosexual love, in contradiction to Christianopoulos and Ioannou. This variety of scenarios leads me to the conclusion that, in Cavafy, homoeroticism transcends social class, but only temporarily.

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Undoubtedly, a thesis which includes the name of Cavafy in its title faces the high possibility of being considered as a repetition and reiteration of important observations and arguments already made. This impression has definitely increased since the year 2013 which was officially declared as a celebratory year of Cavafy and, therefore, has marked the production, publication and circulation of a considerable amount of Cavafian studies, offering different prisms of discussion and interpretation. In commenting on Cavafy's wide acknowledgement and spreading abroad worldwide interest around his name and his work, Papanikolaou argues:

Μοιάζει λιγάκι σαν η εποχή των Καβαφιστών να έχει τελειώσει, και να έχουμε πλέον μπει στην εποχή των ... Cavafistas. Και εννοώ με αυτό ότι ένας διεθνής, πολυφωνικός, πολυπρισματικός και σίγουρα ομοφυλόφιλος Καβάφης γίνεται αντικείμενο συζήτησης, θαυμασμού και αναδημιουργίας, σύγκρισης με άλλους καλλιτέχνες του 20ού αιώνα και δυναμικής ανάγνωσης, μ' έναν τρόπο που ξεπερνά τη στατική έκδοση των κειμένων του, ή τους μικροφιλολογικούς καβγάδες για το μήκος των στίχων του.<sup>710</sup>

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710 Papanikolaou, «Σαν κ' εμένα καμωμένοι», 38.

Cavafistas, therefore, can be also considered the writers and other artists – and that includes Greek writers –who dared to enter a creative dialogue with him. Modern Greek homoerotic literature appears to be a ‘committed’ literature, with specific purposes to serve. The biggest contribution and simultaneously constituting component of the Cavafian legacy in Greek literature is the calling and the demand for solidarity among the writers occupied with homoerotic writings, on the road of promoting homoerotic expression and, through this, homoerotic rights, by arming a Regiment: the Regiment of Pleasure. The careful choice and combination of my three thematic chapters and the specific homoerotic feelings into which they delve, have brought to the fore and reinforced this element of solidarity, which is a paramount unifying feature in my chosen corpus. The three types of homoerotic and homosocial feelings that I analyse in my thesis form a conscious voice of reaction towards the bourgeois society and its culture, its restrictions and its prejudices.

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