

Performance and theatricality in the poetry of C.P. Cavafy



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Abstract

The close relationship between Cavafy and theatre has been widely established. While previous research has comprehensively detailed the inspiration Cavafy has taken from writers and themes of ancient theatre, very little work has been conducted on Cavafy's use of performance and theatre as a whole. The aim of my thesis is to explore how the poetry of Cavafy is informed by theatre and performance, and how these modes are used to subvert and create identities. In addition, theatre and performance are rarely fixed quantities in Cavafy's poetry; instead, they are fluid and can mean a variety of ideas. Theatre, for example, can refer to a building, an event, a code, or a practice. In turn, this means that the way performance and theatre inform Cavafy's poetry is often about the idea of the 'in-between' that is so central to his work. Things are rarely black-and-white, and the grey areas are where the interest lies.

In support of my position, I firstly summarise existing studies on Cavafy and theatre, as well as the references or observations made on Cavafy's dramatic nature or theatricality. In the first chapter, I conduct a comprehensive overview of published literature on Cavafy's work and his interactions with the world of theatre. My review shows that the bibliography of work detailing Cavafy and theatre may be reasonably extensive, but most scholars approach his work from from a text-centric perspective – that is, the ways in which Cavafy used theatrical texts as inspirations for poems, rather than from the point of view of performance. I conclude that, though much has been written on theatre as source material for Cavafy, not enough critical analysis has focused on how theatricality and performance permeate his body of work as a whole. This introduction chapter summarizes the existing landscape of literature on Cavafy and performance, highlights the limitations of existing studies, and identifies an important gap in our existing understanding of Cavafy's poetry. These observations form the rationale for my original analysis, which begins in the next chapter.

I begin my original analysis by introducing the dramatic devices utilised by Cavafy in his poetry, and establishing definitions of theatre, drama, and performance for the purposes of this thesis. The specific dramatic devices I examine in Cavafy's work include staging, props, lighting, sound, explicit mentions of theatre (as a building, activity, institution, or art form) or theatrical events, dialogue, monologue, actors, and spectators, and finally, text, direction, and set design. I use these throughout the thesis to clarify the way Cavafy engages with memory, history, identity, and other such themes from a theatrical point of view. I define theatricality as the inherent theatre of every-day life and drama as the way in which Cavafy acts as a stage director, developing scenes and narration in his poems. I define performance in accordance with the emergence of performance studies; in other words, it encompasses not only theatrical performances, but also rituals, ceremonies, public events and performativity.

The main discussion continues with an in depth analysis of Cavafy's use of the dramatic monologue. The dramatic monologue as a genre lends itself well to the exploration of issues of subjectivity, given its first-person narrative voice. A significant number of Cavafy's poems deal with subjectivity, and are set as dramatic monologues. I detail how Cavafy used the dramatic monologue to revisit and explore some of his oft-revisited themes from new perspectives by utilising it not only as a 'theatrical' genre, but also more widely as a genre that challenges and disrupts preconceptions.

After exploring the specific device of the dramatic monologue, I broaden the scope of my thesis to look at performance overall. The second chapter explores performativity, using J.L. Austin's definition (i.e. 'to say something is to do something') as its starting point. I examine its role as a binding force behind Cavafy's oeuvre and detail various aspects of performativity in Cavafy, divided under the sections of performativity and pledges, performativity and supplication, and gender and sexual identity. The relationship between performativity and sexual identity is a very important tool for underlining the importance of the gay identity in Cavafy. I conclude that performativity is both a formative and a transformative force in Cavafy's poetry and it is very closely related to the issue of identity, with characters using performatives in order to shape and create their identities. As a result, I demonstrate that performativity is both a normative and a subversive force, depending on how – and by whom – it is used.

The third chapter analyses the very close relationship between performance and memory in Cavafy's poetry. Memory is one of the central ideas in Cavafy, and I argue that Cavafy operates as a stage director, dynamically recreating things in the present. This is at odds with the image of Cavafy as the passive dreamer who reminisces about the past that has been portrayed by other scholars. Instead, comparing Cavafy's poems about memory with the genre of the memory play shows that he is concerned more with the present and the physical element than with the past and the reverie.

In the fourth chapter, I argue that Cavafy uses a wide range of performative aspects in his treatment of history that go beyond issues of inspiration from ancient theatre. Specifically, I identify historical characters operating as actors, ceremonies described in terms of theatre, figures of power performatively imposing their version of history, and performative rituals associated with government and power. The chapter ends with a detailed analysis of Cavafy's published poems on Julian the apostate, which I will argue that in many ways serve as a microcosm of Cavafy's performative and theatrical treatment of history. The final chapter looks deeper at the reasons behind the all-encompassing use of theatre and performance by Cavafy in his poetry. I argue that, for Cavafy, performance and theatre equal subversion, and are part of a complex system involving subversion and sensuality/homosexuality. Performative aspects and

techniques are used to signify subversion and in order to subvert – be it subverting heteronormativity or established morals and attitudes in general.

A common denominator between all the chapters is the element of self-reflexivity. Cavafy's poems about memory are not only about what kind of things characters recollect, but also about the very process of recollection and the way memory operates. The same is true of history – Cavafy's approach is not a simple case of using historical events in order to comment on his contemporary reality. Instead, it is also about the process of recording history. Similarly, while performance is used to signify subversion, it also helps us focus on the process of subversion itself.

Thus, while other scholars have chosen to focus on Cavafy's inspiration from ancient theatre and Shakespeare, my approach uses performance as a totality in order to put forward a new concept of the 'in-between', to make the parallel between performance, sexuality, identity and subversion, and to emphasise the modernity and radical nature of Cavafy's treatment of familiar themes.

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Introductory chapter: Towards a definition of performance and its significance in Cavafy studies

The purpose of this thesis is to provide a detailed analysis of the ways in which Cavafy used performance and theatricality in his poetry. The close relationship between Cavafy and theatre is already an established concept: writers have been commenting on Cavafy's poems having theatrical qualities from as early as the first half of the 20th century. In 1933, the year of Cavafy's death, Tellos Agras wrote 'Cavafy's poetry should not be sought from the lyrical angle, but from the angle of drama: a post-Euripedean, realistic drama'.¹ Since then, critics have used terms such as 'dramatic' or 'theatrical' to describe Cavafy's poems with enough regularity to make them common interpretive tropes of his work. The focus has decidedly been on the inspiration Cavafy has taken from writers and themes of ancient theatre or Shakespeare, the use of the dramatic monologue, and other such literary adaptations of theatrical motifs. There is, however, a lack of studies of Cavafy's use of performance and theatre as a whole. My thesis will look at performance as an all-encompassing term in line with performance studies: it will include not only theatricality and drama, but also ritual and performativity, and use it as a central device in interpreting Cavafy's poetry.²

My argument is that Cavafy consciously used techniques and ideas related to performance and theatre throughout his poetry. As a result, performance is central to our understanding of Cavafy. Furthermore, the use of performance is frequently linked to homosexuality and subversion, as I will demonstrate in the last chapter. In addition, the notion of the liminal or 'in-between' that is so essential in Cavafy is often best understood through the prism of performance. My approach of using performance as a totality will put forward a new concept of the 'in-between', make the connection between performance, sexuality, identity and subversion, and emphasise the modernity and radical nature of Cavafy's treatment of familiar themes. This chapter will first focus on a summary of Cavafy's understanding of the term 'theatre' and what kind of works he would have been familiar as an audience member. The term 'performance' will then be defined with the aim of illustrating the parameters of my thesis. Finally, I will survey other writers' works and remarks on Cavafy and theatre – there is little on Cavafy and performance overall – in order to explain where my thesis fits in the bibliography.

The main part of the discussion on Cavafy and performance will start by examining his dramatic monologues. In many ways, the dramatic monologue as a form is the most obviously theatrical aspect of Cavafy's poetry. I define the dramatic monologue in poetry as essentially one half of a conversation – in other words, there is a speaker addressing an interlocutor in a clearly defined setting and space. In his use of the dramatic monologue, Cavafy was chiefly influenced

¹ Tellos Agras, *Κριτικά Α'*, ed. by K. Stergiopoulos. Hermes: Athens, 1980, p. 115. All translations from Greek texts are mine unless otherwise stated.

² These terms will be defined later in this chapter.

by Browning and Tennyson; these influences are addressed, but the primary concern of my argument is to analyse the new insights we can gain into ideas such as national identity, loss, and mourning from focusing on Cavafy's theatrical style.

The next two chapters explore performativity and memory respectively. Performativity is a complex and wide-ranging issue, given that it encompasses and is in dialogue with other ideas.³ As such, it is positioned relatively early in my thesis in order to serve as a foundation for later discussions into memory, history and subversion. Broadly speaking, I follow J.L. Austin's outline of performativity in his philosophical works (i.e. 'to say something is to do something') and the way it has been appropriated by later writers such as Derrida and Butler.⁴ In terms of Cavafy, I look at pledges and promises and the ways in which they operate performatively, as well as how Cavafy's characters use performativity to shape their identities. I will show that performativity, in this case, can be both a normative and a subversive force, depending on how – and by whom – it is used. Memory is one of the most common preoccupations in Cavafy, given that a large number of poems are about looking to the past in order to recover past sensations. My argument is that Cavafy operates as a stage director, dynamically recreating things in the present, as opposed to passively looking back to the past.

Cavafy's treatment of history is among the most widely-discussed by writers, not least given his own description of himself as a historical poet or 'poet-historian'. My position is that Cavafy uses a wide range of performative aspects in his treatment of history that go beyond issues of inspiration from ancient theatre – there are historical characters operating as actors, ceremonies described in terms of theatre, figures of power performatively imposing their version of history, and performative rituals associated with government and power. The chapter ends with a detailed analysis of Cavafy's six published poems on Julian the apostate, which I will argue that in many ways serve as a microcosm of Cavafy's performative and theatrical treatment of history. The final chapter looks deeper at the reasons behind the all-encompassing use of theatre and performance by Cavafy in his poetry. I argue that, for Cavafy, performance and theatre equal subversion, and thus he used performative aspects and techniques in order to subvert – be it subverting heteronormativity, or established morals and attitudes.

In order to better define my position, it is necessary to summarise existing studies on Cavafy and theatre, as well as the references or observations made on Cavafy's dramatic nature or theatricality. Before that, we have to address Cavafy's own remarks on theatre, as well as to briefly examine what kind of theatre he would have been familiar with, not just as a reader, but

³ Performativity features heavily in Cavafy's treatment of history, for example, since it is a force that is very closely linked to power and government. It is also connected to the issue of personal identity, which is explored at various points in my thesis.

⁴ See later in this chapter for the relationship between performativity and performance, and chapter two for more detailed definitions of performativity.

also as an audience member. The famous statement that he is a poet-historian reads as follows in its entirety:

Εγώ είχα δύο ιδιότητες. Να κάνω ποιήματα και να γράψω ιστορία. Ιστορία δεν έγραφα κι είναι αργά πλέον. Τώρα, θα πείτε, πώς ξέρω ότι θα μπορούσα να γράψω ιστορία; Το καταλαβαίνω. Κάνω το πείραμα κι ερωτώ τον εαυτό μου: «Καβάφη, μπορείς να γράψεις μυθιστόρημα;» Δέκα φωνές με φωνάζουν όχι. Κάνω πάλι το ερώτημα: «Καβάφη, μπορείς να γράψεις θέατρο;» Εικοσιπέντε φωνές με φωνάζουν πάλι όχι. Κάνω πάλι το ερώτημα: «Καβάφη, μπορείς να γράψεις ιστορία;» Εκατόν είκοσι πέντε φωνές με λένε μπορείς να γράψεις». ⁵

In 1918, Cavafy also wrote a review of Gregorios Ch. Papamichail's book *Εκκλησία και Θέατρον*. The following excerpt is notable for its perceived negative stance towards theatre:

Με φαίνεται ότι υπερβάλλει ο συγγραφεύς όταν το ονομάζει «ανωτάτην και τελειωτάτην της Τέχνης μορφήν και έκφρασιν». ⁶

There are a few things that can be established from Cavafy's comments. First, he was ostensibly sceptical of theatre – both in terms of himself writing plays and in terms of theatre as an art form overall. If we look under the surface, however, we can establish that these comments indicate that Cavafy had a considerable amount of knowledge of what theatre was. ⁷ From the poems I will examine in my thesis, it is clear that Cavafy understood and utilised theatre in its totality, not just as a text. His poems abound with theatrical structure, direction, set design, and often even lighting and sound that show a close affinity to the art of a dramaturge. The main issue with Cavafy's assertion that he could not have written theatre lies with what precisely he understood by the term 'theatre'. The plays and productions Cavafy would have been familiar with in turn of the century Alexandria were very different to the ones we are accustomed to in the 21st century, and it follows that his understanding of theatre would also have been very different. Alexandria would have potentially been a fascinating place for theatre, given its cosmopolitan nature and its influences from both Arabic and European cultures. In spite of the significant Greek presence in the city, productions mostly catered to Italian and French speakers. Nevertheless, Cavafy would have had a wealth of options, not only in terms of theatre, but opera as well. ⁸

⁵ G. Lechonitis, *Καβαφικά Αυτοσχόλια*, preface by Timos Malanos (Athens: 1977), pp. 19-20.

⁶ C.P. Cavafy, *Τα Πεζά*, ed. by Michalis Pieris. Athens: Ikaros, 2003, pp. 139-140.

⁷ In addition, his early years abound with references to Shakespeare, as well as works directly inspired by Shakespeare. Further, his article 'Ο Σακεσπύρος περί της ζωής' includes Cavafy's own translation of passages from *Measure for Measure*, and also indicates close familiarity with Shakespeare's work overall. For more information on this, and for an extensive review of Cavafy's prose works on theatre, see Efrosini Kostara, *Καβάφης και Αρχαίο Θέατρο*, Patras, 2014.

⁸ Philip Sadgrove, *The Egyptian Theatre in the Nineteenth Century: 1799-1882* (Ithaca Press, Reading: 1996), p. 3.

In ‘Ο Καβάφης και ο Κόσμος του Θεάτρου’, Diana Haas charts Cavafy’s theatre-going experience and habits, from his teenage years (from which we do not have much data) to his later days in Alexandria. By his own admission, Cavafy did not frequent playhouses very often: in 1925, he wrote ‘Είναι πολλά χρόνια που στο θέατρον δεν πηγαίνω διόλου συχνά’.⁹ Haas questioned this assertion by pointing out that it is somewhat more cryptic than it appears on the surface: ‘μήπως στην άλλη όψη της δήλωσης μπορούμε να διαβάσουμε: «πριν από πολλά χρόνια στο θέατρον πήγαίνα συχνά»;¹⁰ It certainly appears that he took in a wide variety of shows when he visited London and Paris in 1897: operas, ancient Greek tragedies, dramas, comedies, as well as popular shows of the day (not necessarily all ‘high culture’, in other words).¹¹ That much we can ascertain from a letter to his cousin living in London, in which he detailed his impressions of the theatrical performances he witnessed in his trip to Europe.¹² Back in Alexandria towards the end of the 1890s, it seems the frequency of his theatre-going had not diminished, in spite of his complaints to his cousin that the scene in Alexandria was not as exciting or varied compared to Paris or London. His diaries indicate a variety of productions attended by Cavafy in another trip in 1903, this time to Athens.¹³ After that, there is less evidence of Cavafy as theatre-goer, at least in his diaries. Haas points out the inclusion of Marika Kotopouli in his list of recipients of poetic collections, but his diaries do not indicate trips to the theatre as frequent as those from the time of his trips to Europe.¹⁴

From this, we can ascertain that Cavafy had a reasonably wide knowledge of theatrical practices from the turn of the century, and it is in this background that his statement that he could never have written theatre is rooted. At the time, theatre – both in terms of the plays written and the productions on stage of older plays – was at a crossroads. The second half of the 19th century saw the emergence of naturalism in literature, pioneered by Emile Zola in his works.¹⁵ In theatre, the movement is arguably best exemplified by the plays of August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen – in particular *Miss Julie* by the former and *The Doll House* by the latter. Since Cavafy had a limited knowledge of theatre from the 1920s onwards, the main theatrical modes he would have been familiar with were naturalism and realism on the one hand, and the more traditional melodramatic theatre on the other.¹⁶ He would not have been familiar with newer, revolutionary

⁹ C.P. Cavafy, *Τα Πεζά*, ed. by Michalis Pieris (Ikaros, Athens: 2003), p. 148.

¹⁰ Diana Haas, ‘Ο Καβάφης και ο Κόσμος του Θεάτρου’, in *Νερά της Κύπρου, της Συρίας, και της Αιγύπτου*, ed. by Michalis Pieris. Cyprus: Cultural Centre of the University of Cyprus: 2013, p. 204.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ See Maria Athanasopoulou, *Κ.Π. Καβάφης: Τα Θεατρικά Ποιήματα*, Kritiki: Athens, 2014, pp. 53-58.

¹⁴ Haas: 2013, p. 207.

¹⁵ See ‘Emile Zola (1840-1902): Naturalism’ in Michael Bell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to European Novelists*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 2012), pp. 294-309.

¹⁶ For naturalism, see Phyllis Hartnoll and Peter Found (eds.), *The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 2003).

modes such as Brecht's Epic Theatre with its goal of disrupting the audience and challenging its experience by making them aware that they are observing a play.¹⁷

It is straightforward to detect parallels between Cavafy's works and naturalistic plays. For instance, a great number of Cavafy poems feature intricate 'sets' and very clearly delineated spaces, where every detail and object described has a particular importance. This is evident in the opening 'stage directions' of 'Μια νύχτα', the multi-dimensional stage of 'Να μείνει', or the objects of 'Ο Ήλιος του απογεύματος', full of ascribed meaning. This kind of practice, if we visualize Cavafy's poems as theatrical sets, is very similar to naturalism, where every detail of a theatrical set had to have a specific function, and was not to be there just for the purpose of lavish decoration, as had been the case previously. In addition to naturalism, the type of theatre that seems closest to Cavafy's qualities as a writer came later. As I will show in later chapters, Cavafy's style as a 'theatrical' poet is often reminiscent of plays with short scenes quickly following one another, where there is little to no 'filler' material, and where there is a density of ideas that gives the impression of no word being indispensable.¹⁸

In any case, as my thesis focuses on performance overall – as opposed to exclusively on theatre or the dramatic – I will turn my attention on clarifying how the term 'performance' is defined before I continue with the literature review. Theatre studies at first centred on the study of drama, 'with a strong performative focus'.¹⁹ The first department in a US university was in 1914 at the Carnegie Institute of Technology – in the UK it was in Bristol in 1947. The second phase began in the 1970s, when drama departments were gradually renamed as theatre studies departments. This move signified a break from text-bound studies of plays. As Christopher Balme has noted 'dramatic texts ... were just one – and perhaps not even the most important – part of a more complex cultural phenomenon'.²⁰ The third phase followed swiftly in the 1980s, with Richard Schechner's emphasis on performance as a term that includes games, sports, rituals and other events, as well as theatre. It is this all-encompassing definition of performance that will be used in this thesis.

The definition of performance is thus markedly broader now than it was in the past, as the amount of events that can be grouped under it has increased seemingly exponentially over the past century or so. In the past – and, it has to be said, up to Cavafy's time as well – if one referred to a performance it can be safely assumed they referred almost exclusively to theatrical or other artistic events. As such, before the emergence of performance studies, the study of a theatre event focused more on aspects like text, direction, set design, and the way they interacted with one another. Nowadays, the study of performance can refer to any number of things as the

¹⁷ See Bertold Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*. Ed. and trans. John Willett. British edition. London: Methuen, 1964.

¹⁸ Indeed, Michalis Meraklis notes parallels between Cavafy and Brecht in 'Ο Μπρεχτικός Καβάφης'.

¹⁹ Christopher Balme, *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Studies* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 11.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

term has gained popularity among scholars in various disciplines. It is no longer exclusive to performing arts, but also employed in literature, the social sciences, and even philosophy.

The result of this relatively rapid growth is that it is surprisingly difficult to come up with a clear and concise definition of the word in an academic context. Indeed, it is often described as an ‘essentially contested concept’, which means that it is used and defined in a variety of ways. The idea of performance as a contested concept was proposed by performance studies scholars Mary S. Strine, Beverly W. Long, and Mary Francis Hopkins in their article ‘Research in Interpretation and Performance Studies: Trends, Issues, Priorities’. They write:

Performance, like art and democracy, is what W.B. Gallie (1964) calls an *essentially contested concept*, meaning that its very existence is bound up in disagreement about what it is, and that the disagreement over its essence is itself part of the essence ... Scholars ... recognize and expect disagreement not only about the qualities that make a performance “good” or “bad” in certain contexts, but also about what activities and behaviours appropriately constitute performance and not something else.²¹

On the surface, this can be frustrating: it seems that, when one wishes to approach the concept of performance, the best definition academics can produce is that it is too complicated and wide-ranging to define it. Performance may not have always been considered an essentially contested concept, and indeed would not have been one in Cavafy’s time, but its current status opens up a multitude of interpretive avenues that can be applied to literature.

Performance Studies: Roots and development, and potential applications to the study of poetry

As is often – perhaps inevitably – the case with new fields, it is not easy to produce an unequivocal definition of what ‘performance studies’ actually is, especially given the way performance is viewed as an essentially contested concept. There is a danger in being over-prescriptive, as this would remove some of its strongest attributes, namely its inclusivity and wide array of applications throughout the arts world. Broadly speaking, it is concerned with the study of performance in its various guises, and this is about as clear-cut as it gets. Given that the word performance can refer not only to dramatic performances on stage but also – among others – other artistic events, sporting events, performance art, rituals and ceremonies, performance studies is a multidisciplinary field that can draw from any one of its single components: Peggy Phelan states that, at its best, the field can combine ‘critical theory, literary studies, folklore,

²¹ Mary Francis Hopkins, Beverly W. Long, Mary S. Strine., *Research in Interpretation and Performance Studies: Trends, Issues, Priorities*, 1990, p. 183.

anthropology, postcolonial theory, theatre studies, dance theory, and feminist and queer studies'.²²

The genesis of the field is one aspect on which scholars tend to agree upon: the term 'performance studies' was coined by theatre director and academic Richard Schechner, and was born out of his collaborations with anthropologist Victor Turner. These collaborations raised a variety of questions on the role of performance in both art and life in general, and the chameleon-like field is partly intended to offer new insights on the diversity of human culture through the prism of performance. As Phelan aptly notes in an open-ended question, 'If the diversity of human culture continually showed a persistent theatricality, could performance be a universal expression of human signification, akin to language?'²³

While performance may well be a universal expression, performance studies has nevertheless been shaped almost exclusively by academic institutions, and is related to the way academia itself evolves in time. Schechner himself notes: 'Theoretically, performance studies is wide open; practically, it has developed in a certain way'.²⁴ Henry Bial asserts that this development is related to and shaped by the corporate model that 'placed increased pressure on all disciplines to assert their relevance in the global marketplace'.²⁵ Schechner, as a result, advocated for the study of performance in rituals and social contexts in university courses and 'suggested a de-emphasizing of literary, text-based criticism in favor of performance-based analysis'.²⁶ The key behind Schechner's suggestions for the way performance studies should evolve as a discipline is his assertion that 'we have to expand our vision of what performance is', and to use and study it not only as an art but as a method of understanding wider 'historical, cultural, and social processes'.²⁷

Joseph Roach's essay 'History, Memory, Necrophilia' from *The Ends of Performance* illustrates a key concept in the way performance studies and theory can be used in the study of Cavafy. He takes as his starting point Samuel Pepys's account in his diaries of his violation of the corpse of Katherine of France. Roach argues that the reports Pepys makes of the 'performance' of his daily life are just as theatrical as his accounts of the stage. On the one hand we have the most private of acts – Pepys's necrophilia – and on the other a very public retelling of it, which as a result made it a public historical event. For Roach, this 'way of thinking about performance ... discloses ... the desire to communicate physically with the past'.²⁸ This physical communication with the past is a central concept to our understanding of Cavafy, given the

²² *The Ends of Performance*, ed. by Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane. New York University Press, New York, 2008, p. 4.

²³ Phelan/Lane: 2008, p. 3.

²⁴ Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, Routledge: 2006, p. 1.

²⁵ Henry Bial (ed.), *The Performance Studies Reader*, Routledge: 2007, p. 5

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Schechner: 2006, p. 9.

²⁸ Joseph Roach, 'History, Memory, Necrophilia' in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. by Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane. New York, New York University Press: 2008, p. 23.

prominence of memory in the poet's work. In a great number of poems, characters rekindle particular recollections by the use of a physical prop – a letter, as in 'Εν Εσπέρα' – or otherwise desperately try to evoke this kind of physical communication. 'Κατά τες συνταγές αρχαίων Ελληνοσύρων μάγων' is a particularly poignant example of the latter. The avenue that Roach opens up in his discussion of Pepys's connection with the past through his performance thus creates a wealth of interpretive options for the way memory and the past are performed in Cavafy's poetry.

Indeed, Roach states that 'the most promising approach to the history of performance resides in the history of memory itself'.²⁹ His discussion focuses on the connections between memory and history, but the key in terms of the study of Cavafy is the connection between history, performance, and memory – concepts that will always be central to our understanding of his poetry. Performance is not necessarily the end, but a means: not many poems are ostensibly *about* performance – though there are examples – but a great number use performance in order to illustrate particular angles or functions of memory or history. In turn, they frequently also comment on that process itself, and in that sense become 'about performance' in a more meta-literary level.³⁰

Della Pollock's 'Performing Writing' discusses ideas that again might be applied to studies of Cavafy's poetry. When she discusses metonymy, she states that it is 'often ... filled with longing for a lost subject/object, for a subject/object that has disappeared into history or time, and for what, in the face of that disappearance, may seem both the inadequacy and the impossibility of evocation'.³¹ A significant number of Cavafy's sensual poems deal with pleasure viewed retrospectively, either by a speaker who recollects past experiences – often trying to cling on to fading memories – or as indicated by the lapse between the time of the setting and the time of writing – as is the case in all the 'Μέρες' poems. In many cases, evocation is the next best thing, as indicated by the speaker of 'Κατά τες συνταγές αρχαίων Ελληνοσύρων μάγων', who resorts to intoxication in order to bring back the image of his long-gone twenty two-year old lover from the past.³²

A particularly fascinating aspect of performance studies – both in terms of the field per se and its relevance to the study of performance in Cavafy – can be found in Jon McKenzie's 'The liminal-norm'. McKenzie identifies the liminal as one of the defining characteristics of performance studies; in other words, it is a field perpetually and self-consciously in between states (for instance, between theatre and ritual, to cite McKenzie's examples), but never belonging to any one in particular. Bial summarises the potential implications of this as follows:

²⁹ Roach: 2008, p. 24.

³⁰ See chapter five on the relationship between performance and subversion for details on this process.

³¹ Della Pollock, 'Performing Writing' in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. by Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane. New York, New York University Press: 2008, p. 85

³² C.P. Cavafy, *Τα Ποιήματα*, ed. by G.P. Savvidis. Athens: Ikaros, 1999, vol. B, p. 92.

‘Because this liminal position is often understood as a space for transgression or resistance (ideas and acts that go against the mainstream), scholars have come to consider social activism a defining characteristic of the field’.³³ There, are of course, problems with this statement: if we are to consider performance studies as an essential field in university study and a component for the broadening of the more traditional disciplines, as Schechner advocates, then it automatically becomes part of the mainstream. The more institutionalised an idea, concept, or practice becomes, by definition the more mainstream it becomes as well.

Regardless of the implications of the whole ‘activism’ facet of the liminality argument, the very concept itself is central to the understanding of Cavafy. For example, his longest and arguably most multi-layered poem – ‘Μύρης: Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.’ – features a character in a liminal position, both physically and intellectually. More particularly, he is put in a position of alienation and self-doubt, which is instigated by his witnessing of the Christian rituals at the memorial service for his friend Myres. Closer analyses of the poem can be found in the chapters on dramatic monologue as well as on memory, but it is worth noting here that is impossible to analyse it properly without discussing the concepts of ritual, the performance of identity, and liminal positions. In this respect, models set out by performance studies scholars and performance theorists will be utilised in order to interpret Cavafy’s poems in all their diversity, without being too page-bound, which is precisely what Schechner advocated against.

Tracey C. Davis succinctly demonstrates the breadth that is needed in our definition of the word ‘performance’:

Performance studies embraces this heterogeneity as the means to understand living in bodies. Sometimes the experience of a body is sensory, sometimes highly abstracted by medicalization or otherwise. Our bodies both form and are formed by our identities; our identities, in turn, citationally reflect our surroundings and circumstances. As we negotiate life as social beings – sometimes but not always consciously, sometimes but not always overtly – we perform.³⁴

In *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*, Erika Fischer-Lichte notes that people studying theatre already have some sort of pre-conceived notion of what theatre is, although defining the concept of theatre – both in the academic world and society in general – is getting more and more difficult the more disciplines start claiming aspects of performance. Theatre is now increasingly being used metaphorically, although as Fischer-Lichte notes the tendency to use theatre as a ‘wide-ranging metaphor’ can be traced back to antiquity.³⁵ The term ‘theatricality’ is closely tied to this, and it is described by Fischer-Lichte as ‘one of the most

³³ Bial: 2007, p. 5

³⁴ Tracey C. Davis, *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*. Cambridge: 2008, p. 7.

³⁵ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Routledge Introduction to Theatre and Performance Studies*. Routledge: 2014, p. 8.

pervasive concepts in ... scholarly work over the past few decades'.³⁶ As a term, its definition has been broadened alongside that of the term 'performance'. Now, 'it is used both for a variety of performances – for example, scholars writing about ritual describe rituals as 'theatrical – and for *mise-en-scenes* beyond the theatre'.³⁷ Given the way theatricality and performance studies have developed, there can be no single one theoretical approach that could cover every eventuality. As Fischer-Lichte observes, 'there is no universal formula or theory'.³⁸

Performativity was first put forward by J.L. Austin in *How to Do Things with Words*, and, put simply, can be described as 'to say something is to do something'.³⁹ For example, Austin suggests 'I do', as spoken in a wedding ceremony, and the process of naming a ship as instances of performative utterances, since 'I do' equates to the action of marrying one's partner.⁴⁰ In his discussion, Austin famously attempted to isolate performativity from theatre, by writing that a performative is not successful if spoken by an actor on stage, since language on stage is used 'not seriously, but [is] in many ways *parasitic* upon its normal use.'⁴¹ In *Signature Event Context*, Derrida challenged the notion that theatre is, by definition, parasitic: 'Is not what Austin excludes as anomalous, exceptional, 'non-serious', that is, *citation* (on the stage, in a poem, or in a soliloquy), the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a 'successful' performative? In other words, a performative is only recognised as successful through repetition. Just as an actor's speech on stage is a citation of a script according to Derrida, a couple saying 'I do' in a wedding ceremony are also performing a similar citation. It is only recognisable as a performative because uttering the phrase in similar circumstances in the past has acquired meaning.

I will elaborate more on Austin's theories, and how they can be used in poetry, in the introduction to chapter two. As far as the relationship between performance and performativity is concerned, it can be confusing in certain cases – for example, a 'performative' can be a speech act in philosophy, but simply an adjective of the word 'performance' in theatre.⁴² The idea of theatricality – in its narrow sense of 'relating to theatre' – can provide a useful link. To return to Austin's example of 'I do' in the occasion of a wedding, Kosofsky-Sedgwick and Parker write of 'marriage *itself* as theater': 'like a play, marriage exists in and for the eyes of others'.⁴³ Furthermore, 'like the most conventional definition of a play, marriage is constituted as a spectacle that denies its audience the ability either to look away from it or equally to intervene in

³⁶ Fischer-Lichte: 2014, p. 10.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

³⁹ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. by J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), pp. 1-6.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 5-6.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁴² Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.), *Performativity and Performance* (Routledge: New York, 1995), p. 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

it.’⁴⁴ A performative needs a certain type of performance in order to be felicitous: it has to be uttered in front of the right audience or witnesses for example, and it is also reliant on the words uttered to be *recognised* as signifying a performative, through repetition of past occasions. A sense of the theatre, therefore, provides a link between performativity and performance: one cannot say ‘I do’ in a wedding without this sense of theatricality – the appropriate setting, witnesses, officials and audience are required, just as in a theatrical performance.⁴⁵

The link between performance and poetry is particularly multi-faceted, since – regardless of the fact that performance studies is an emerging field – poetry and performance have been closely related for thousands of years. From Aeschylus to Shakespeare and beyond, theatre was mostly in verse for instance. Stretching even beyond ancient theatre, there are the ancient Greek and Indian epic poems, which would have been performed in gatherings in what were the first examples of ‘performance poetry’. Indeed, excerpts from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* are still performed to this day in parts of South Asia in an oral tradition that has been kept alive, in contrast to the Western epics.

Furthermore, it is particularly interesting from a performative point of view that these recitations often take place in front of a tapestry that represents various points in the story. The tapestry thus serves as a backdrop and an essential accompaniment to the performance, not dissimilar to theatrical scenery. This type of performance defies classification – it is of course neither ‘straight’ poetry nor ‘straight’ theatre, and there are strong ritualistic elements as well – and this blurring of boundaries is exactly the sort of environment that performance studies thrives in. Peggy Phelan, for example, notes that ‘the diversity of human culture [shows] ... a persistent theatricality’, and as a result performance can be ‘a universal expression of human signification, akin to language’.⁴⁶ The connection between poetry, ritual, and performance is central to many scholars’ work, such as Gregory Nagy’s *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond*, which examines the links between performance and the composition of Homer’s epics.

There is a difference, naturally, between the ancient epics and modern poetry: namely, that the former were designed to be recited and performed, before the age of printing and reading. Poetry has undergone a journey towards the printed page, where public readings and performances became more incidental than essential to a poem. In *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, Charles Bernstein notes that, from the second half of the 20th century onwards, public poetry readings have become more popular, especially since ‘more and more poets have used forms whose sound patterns are *made up* – that is, their poems do not follow

⁴⁴ Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick: 1995, p. 11.

⁴⁵ It can also be useful to consider W.B. Worthen, who defines ‘dramatic performativity’ as ‘the relationship between the verbal text and the conventions ... of behavior that give it meaningful *force* as performed action.’ (W.B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*, Cambridge University Press: 2003, p. 3)

⁴⁶ Phelan/Lane: 2008, p. 3.

received or prefabricated forms.’⁴⁷ There is, however, a difference between these poems and Cavafy – namely, that they were mostly designed explicitly as performance poems, unlike Cavafy’s, which were designed to be read.⁴⁸ As far as Cavafy’s own readings go, there are no recordings. Constantine Phytaras attests: ‘he never read his poems to us; not even one line did he speak’.⁴⁹ Myrriotissa, on the other hand – not necessarily in contradiction to Phytaras – said: ‘Τα πιο γνωστά πράγματα ξέρει να σ’ τα παρουσιάζει σαν καινούρια, έτσι καθώς τα ντύνει με της τέχνης του την ωραιότητα.’⁵⁰

Performance in Cavafy: an overview of existing studies

So far, the connection between poetry and performance is obvious enough, and indeed there is an abundance of books and articles examining poetry that was originally meant to be performed, such as Nagy’s work. In the case of Cavafy’s poetry, which is naturally intended for reading as opposed to performing, the theatricality of certain works, and the often dramatic nature of his poetic techniques has already been noted by various critics, starting with Tellos Agras’s remark from 1933 I quoted earlier. The references to theatre and drama are particularly abundant in the discussions of Cavafy’s treatment of history, which is what Michalis Meraklis had in mind when he wrote that ‘it seems that Cavafy had an intensely theatrical sense of things’.⁵¹ Cavafy’s theatrical understanding of history has also been examined by Helen Catsaouni, in her article ‘Cavafy and the Theatrical Representation of History’, and by Yannis Dallas: in *Cavafy and History*, he mentions Cavafy’s theatrical tendencies and refers to terms like direction, plot, and characterisation.⁵² Meraklis clearly saw theatre as occupying a central role in our understanding of Cavafy – it was important enough for his book to be titled *Dramatic Conflicts in Cavafy*, but more recently he also explored the affinities between Cavafy and Brecht in the article ‘Ο Μπρεχτικός Καβάφης’: among other things, he identifies a certain ‘*verfremdungseffekt*’ (alienation effect) in the ‘λόγια και θεατρικά’ of ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’. That is because the spectators are aware of the fact they are witnessing a performance, but also allow themselves to be carried away by said performance. Meraklis is correct to an extent – Brecht’s intention was indeed to make the audience aware they are watching theatre and not reality, but Brecht also wanted this effect to make the audience question their position and take action. The spectators of the ceremony of ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’ do not take action – they do

⁴⁷ Charles Bernstein (ed), *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, Oxford University Press: 1998, p. 6.

⁴⁸ Indeed, ‘Εν Τῷ μηνί Αθύρ’ is written in such a way that reading it aloud obscures one of its main points, which is the attempt made by the speaker to decode the eroded writing on an ancient tombstone.

⁴⁹ Constantine Phytaras, ‘Το 1928 ή ’29 στην Αλεξάνδρεια’ in *Hartis*, 5/6 (1983), pp. 545-547.

⁵⁰ *Μυρτιώτισσας Άπαντα*, Alvin Redman Hellas, Athens: 1965, pp. 313-315.

⁵¹ Michalis Meraklis, ‘Δραματικές Συγκρούσεις στον Καβάφη’ from *Τέσσερα Δοκίμια για τον Κ.Π. Καβάφη*. Athens: Kastaniotis Editions, 1985, p. 70.

⁵² Yannis Dallas, *Cavafy and History*, Hermes: Athens, 1986.

not try to bring about social change, as Brecht would have had them do, but are happy to observe the spectacle.⁵³

The treatment ancient theatre, and in particular Aeschylus, has received in Cavafy has also been extensively discussed in a number of books and articles, chiefly Savvidis's 'Cavafy versus Aeschylus' from the first volume of *Μικρά Καβαφικά*. The most comprehensive study of ancient theatre in Cavafy – not only in his poetry but also his prose – can now be found in Efrosini Kostara's recent doctoral thesis *Καβάφης και Αρχαίο Θέατρο*. It has been a valuable addition to the Cavafy bibliography, as it extensively covers ancient theatre from Aeschylus to the late Hellenistic and Roman times, as well as the presence of other tropes of ancient drama in Cavafy.

Like Tellos Agras, another early critic to have discussed Cavafy's dramatic or theatrical tendencies is Timos Malanos, who noted that Cavafy's poems can be presented as a play, or at least a scene from a play.⁵⁴ The idea of theatrical space, scenery, and language, was explored in greater depth by Michalis Pieris in his more recent *Χώρος, Φως και Λόγος: Η διαλεκτική του «μέσα»-«έξω» στην ποίηση του Καβάφη*. Pieris offers extensive categorisation of poems based on the type of space Cavafy describes or implies, and often approaches them from a theatre technician's point of view – be it a set designer or lighting designer. The way Cavafy uses space and light is charted throughout Cavafy's life, with a notable emphasis on the way Cavafy started to develop from the almost exclusively allegorical or metaphorical use of light to an altogether more multi-dimensional and theatrical function.⁵⁵ Along similar lines – albeit with a different focus, as we shall soon see – Maria Athanasopoulou recently published *Κ.Π. Καβάφης: Τα Θεατρικά Ποιήματα*, which takes Cavafy's 'theatrical' poems as a starting point in an – admittedly, brief – exploration of Cavafy's engagement with performance.

Other scholars have looked at performance from different angles, namely the more recent multi-faceted interpretations of the term, as opposed to the strictly theatre or drama-based studies. For example, performativity is a concept closely related to performance – and, in particular, the new ways of defining performance, both from an academic and practical point of view. It will be used extensively in this thesis: at first, in order to explore the topic of identity in Cavafy, and in particular how individuals shape their identities – whether intentionally or unwittingly – through the medium of repetition and performance; and secondly, to shed new light on the much-discussed function of history in Cavafy's poetry, from rituals of governmentality to the way power and knowledge operate in relation to the public.

⁵³ See Michalis Meraklis, 'Ο Μπρεχτικός Καβάφης' from *Νερά της Κύπρου, της Συρίας και της Αιγύπτου: Σπουδή στον «θεατρικό» Καβάφη*, Cyprus: Cultural Centre of the University of Cyprus: 2013, pp. 124-130.

⁵⁴ Timos Malanos, 'Τα Πρότυπα της Καβαφικής Φόρμας' in *Ο Ποιητής Κ.Π. Καβάφης (Ο άνθρωπος και το έργο του)*, Govostis, Athens, 1933, pp. 153-161

⁵⁵ Michalis Pieris, *Χώρος, Φως και Λόγος: Η διαλεκτική του «μέσα»-«έξω» στην ποίηση του Καβάφη*, (Athens: Kastaniotis Editions, 1992), pp. 233-234.

There have already been articles on performativity in Cavafy, such as ‘How to do Things with Poems: Performativity in the Poetry of C.P. Cavafy’ by Maria Boletsi.⁵⁶ Pantelis Michelakis also looks at various kinds of performance in Cavafy, in his case in one particular example in the article ‘Performances and Epitaphs in C.P. Cavafy’s “Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400”’. The main thesis is that ‘the poem addresses questions related to literary production and reception with the help of two particular tropes, the epitaphic and the performative’.⁵⁷ He argues that the ‘immediacy and familiarity’ with which the young man addresses Aeschylus in his speech ‘brings Aeschylus back to life’.⁵⁸ This is in line with Boletsi’s claim that Cavafy wanted to use poetry in order to revive visions and memories, not just to record and represent them.⁵⁹ Michelakis also identifies various theatrical aspects in the poem, which serve as a useful summary of Cavafy’s utilisation of dramaturgical techniques in general in his poetry: ‘the dialogic character of the poem, the existence of characters with different points of view, the presence of an actor, the oral delivery of literary poems, the presence of a backdrop against which the characters speak, the juxtaposition between self-perception and reality, the emotive language used’.⁶⁰

In addition, there is an abundance of smaller articles exploring particular facets of Cavafy and drama, Cavafy and theatricality, or the way Cavafy himself interacted with his contemporary theatre world. Kostas Nitsos, in ‘Καβάφης ο Δραματικός’ from 1973, points out that the dramatic nature of Cavafy’s poetry and Cavafy’s links to theatre have been noted from an early stage by Agras, Malanos, Dimaras, and Sareyannis. According to Nitsos, the fact that Cavafy claimed that he would never be able to write theatre ‘proves that Cavafy knew the meaning and demands of the theatrical form’⁶¹. Nitsos lists Cavafy’s ties to theatre by way of plays he had read and his associations with actors (including past lovers and Alekos Sengopoulos), and says that ‘what’s important is that Cavafy writes with a clearly theatrical feel. The setting of his poems is theatrical ... Their imagery is theatrical. Their action theatrical. A multitude of other elements is clearly theatrical’.⁶² Konstantinos Pitsakis, like Nitsos, notes Cavafy’s early engagement with Shakespeare, both as a translator and as inspiration for poems in ‘Ο Κ.Π. Καβάφης και το Θέατρο’.

In 1933, K. Th. Dimaras chose to speak of acting in Cavafy in the eponymous article ‘Η Ηθοποιία του Καβάφη’. Taken by itself, the title is arguably somewhat misleading as Dimaras uses the word ‘Ηθοποιία’ to examine the ways in which Cavafy portrays the subject in his

⁵⁶ This will be referred to more extensively in the chapter on performativity.

⁵⁷ Pantelis Michelakis, ‘Performances and Epitaphs in C.P. Cavafy’s “Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400”’, University of Bristol: 2009, p. 1. Accessed from www.lsa.umich.edu

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁵⁹ Maria Boletsi, ‘How to do Things with Poems: Performativity in the Poetry of C.P. Cavafy’. *Arcadia: International Journal of Literary Studies*. 41: 2, 2006, p. 403.

⁶⁰ Michelakis: 2009, p. 6.

⁶¹ Kostas Nitsos, ‘Καβάφης ο Δραματικός’ in *Θέατρο* vol. 32 (March-April 1973), pp. 8-9

⁶² *Ibid.*

poetry. As many scholars do, he divides poems into categories, for example noting the poems narrated in the first person ‘in order to render the subject more vividly’.⁶³ As for Diana Haas, in ‘Ο Καβάφης και ο κόσμος του θεάτρου’ she offers a portrayal of Cavafy as a participant in his contemporary theatre scene, a route that has also been partly pursued by Athanasopoulou. Haas again notes the familiarity we have of Cavafy as a reader of texts (mainly Shakespeare, for instance), but far less has been written about his practices as a theatregoer in terms of watching performances or associating with actors.

The role of tragedy in Cavafy’s work has been analysed by Elena Patrikiou in ‘Τα τραγικά ποιήματα του Καβάφη ως ασκήσεις θεατρικού ύφους’. She explores the role of theatre in the form of tragedy in Cavafy’s work, and talks of the ‘tragic’ poems, both finished (whether published or not) and unfinished. The opening premise is the question of which poems are inspired by tragedy one way or the other. She notes that ‘the repudiated and hidden poems can offer us more than the 154 official poems, a fact that leads us to suspect the extent to which the poet valued his own ability to use the tragic tradition as poetic inspiration’.⁶⁴ This is an important observation in the context of Cavafy and theatre in general, as it specifies the limitations of focusing only – or mainly – on the poems that show an outwardly dramatic inspiration. The most significant aspects of Cavafy as a poet that uses drama, theatre, and performance are not on the surface but require a different type of analysis, one that is provided in this thesis. Patrikiou’s conclusions are that tragedy both attracts, but also somehow repels Cavafy, and also that he cannot appropriate it to a style that is completely his own. Furthermore, Cavafy is ‘interested in dramatic concoctions, technical solutions, and directorial innovations.’⁶⁵ These are precisely the sort of categories one should be looking at when examining the role of theatre in Cavafy’s work from all angles, and this is where scholarship is somehow lacking.

Michalis Pieris, who is at the forefront of scholars who prefer to focus on the ‘now’ of Cavafy’s involvement with theatre,⁶⁶ has recently compiled these short articles – together with other elements of Cavafy studies, including visual ones – in *Νερά της Κύπρου, της Συρίας και της Αιγύπτου*, which now serves as a compendium of the various views of Cavafy as dramatic or theatrical by critics who have only focused on small parts of the puzzle. It brings all the disparate elements together more or less chronologically, but is also an indication of how limited the bibliography of Cavafy and theatre can be: though it is naturally not those small articles’

⁶³ K. Th. Dimaras, ‘Η Ηθοποιία του Καβάφη’ in *Σύμμικτα Γ’* (Γνώση, Athens: 1992), pp. 59-66. First edition 1933, accessed from Michalis Pieris (ed.), *Κύπρου, της Συρίας και της Αιγύπτου*, Θ.Ε.Π.Α.Κ., 2013. Dimaras also addresses the much-discussed topic of ironic distance in ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)’: ‘Does Cavafy agree or disagree with the young men of Sidon? The discussion is completely fruitless if it is limited to the text. We cannot get anything out of the poem other than the exquisite portrayal of the young men’ (75).

⁶⁴ Elena Patrikiou, ‘Τα τραγικά ποιήματα του Καβάφη ως ασκήσεις θεατρικού ύφους: Δοκίμιο για την καταγωγή της καθαφικής θεατρικότητας’ *Παράβασις* 4, Athens: Ergo, 2002, pp. 273-294. Accessed from Pieris: 2013, p. 168.

⁶⁵ Patrikiou: 2013, p. 172.

⁶⁶ In other words, he pursues the idea of Cavafy as a writer who uses important dramatic techniques regardless of whether a particular work is explicitly inspired by a dramatic text or not (which, in Cavafy’s case, would exclusively mean ancient theatre).

function to provide us with a complete picture of Cavafy and theatre and performance, the questions they raise are mostly left unanswered due to the lack of a comprehensive study.

In general, there seems to be a common denominator among studies of the dramatic Cavafy, or theatre and Cavafy. On the one hand we have the majority, who have focused on specific aspects in smaller studies – Catsaouni and history, Savvidis and Aeschylus, Patrikiou and tragedy, and so on. These studies are mostly grounded on ancient theatre and the way Cavafy interacts with it. On the other, there are those who attempt more all-encompassing studies of Cavafy and theatre. They acknowledge that the view of Cavafy as ‘dramatic’ is widespread, but also that a great deal of these views is often made in passing by scholars who are focusing more on other aspects of his poetry. The common denominator is that they then proceed to offer lists of theatrical poems, numerous mentions of ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)’, analyses of the way Cavafy interacted with particular playwrights and used texts as inspirations, and various other ways in which he was inspired or influenced by theatre (normally ancient). In other words, a great deal has been written on theatre as a source or base material for Cavafy, and not enough on the way theatricality and performance permeate his poetry as a whole, even when a poem is not explicitly or outwardly theatrical.

Two of the closest examples of a comprehensive study of Cavafy’s engagement with theatre and performance are also the two most recent, namely Athanasopoulou’s book on Cavafy and theatre and Kostara’s thesis on Cavafy and ancient theatre. They are both cases in point of the patterns and limitations of existing studies. Admittedly, the reason Athanasopoulou’s book is somewhat limited in scope is that it is based on a series of lectures, and not intended as a comprehensive overview. She notes that, in most cases, the matter of theatre and Cavafy is approached from a text-centric perspective, meaning the ways in which Cavafy used theatrical texts as inspirations for poems. There are fewer instances in which the issue is approached from the point of view of performance, or in other words referring to the inherent ‘stage direction’ and other theatrical factors that Cavafy’s poems utilise. One would expect from this observation that she would shift her focus on that inherent stage direction and some close analysis of poems that exhibit this kind of phenomenon, but about half of the book focuses instead on the more familiar topic of the textual inspirations for Cavafy’s theatrical poems. Athanasopoulou’s study is at its most useful when she discusses Cavafy’s relationship with his contemporary theatre, including the original observation that modern – as opposed to ancient – theatre features in only two instances in Cavafy’s poetry.⁶⁷

When she does approach the topic in the second half of the book, there are observations on ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’ and on the unpublished – and unfinished – ‘Τυρανόκερτα’, interspersed with lists of poems that mention theatre and some brief commentaries on

⁶⁷ Those instances are the unpublished ‘Στο Θέατρο’ and ‘Απ’τες Εννά’, where theatre is only mentioned in passing as a building. I will discuss those examples later in the thesis.

unpublished poems. There is, sadly, no overarching study of Cavafy and theatricality beyond those isolated commentaries, irrespective of the observations within. From the canonical poems, it is only the very obvious theatrical ones that are analysed in depth, like ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’ or of course the quintessential ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)’. Athanasopoulou, then, promises more than she delivers in this book, covering already familiar ground in detail without sufficiently breaking free from the discussion of Cavafy as an interpreter or modifier of pre-existing theatrical texts. As for Kostara’s thesis on Cavafy and ancient theatre, it offers an extensive analysis of Cavafy’s engagement with ancient theatre, from the way he used it in his poems to his prose pieces and the extent to which he attended performances of ancient theatre. One of its strongest points is the research into Cavafy’s lesser-known works – whether unpublished poems or prose pieces – and the resource it now provides for them. The focus of my thesis is different – Kostara concentrates on ancient theatre, as opposed to performance as a whole or Cavafy utilising modern dramatic techniques.

The bibliography on Cavafy and theatre has also been enriched recently by Gonda van Steen’s ‘Arthur W. Pinero and Cavafy the Dramatist: The Parallel Quest for the Quality Play’, from 2015. Van Steen’s view of ‘Cavafy the Dramatist’, and the comparison with a contemporary playwright mirrors my comparison between Cavafy and Tennessee Williams in chapter three. Along the same lines as my thesis, van Steen has observed that ‘Cavafy’s feeling for action and gesture, his calibrating of plot twists and reversals, and his elliptic, laconic treatment of some subjects are ... truly theatrical.’⁶⁸ In addition, my chapter on the dramatic monologue in Cavafy features a discussion on ‘Συμεών’ and its relationship to Tennyson’s ‘St. Simeon Stylites’, which was also the topic of David Ricks’s ‘Cavafy’s Quarrel with Tennyson’ from 2016.⁶⁹

The intention, however, is not merely to provide a handy list of dramatic techniques present in Cavafy’s poetry. On its own, such a list is, at most, interesting, but somewhat superficial. Indeed, Michelakis’s article on ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)’ is particularly fascinating in relation to performance studies because of its claim that the theatricality of the poem is not just ‘the employment of specific performative techniques into a literary context’ but ‘an epistemology which, although more readily associated with the theatrical stage, it can also be used for thinking about poetry’.⁷⁰ From this, the next step is ‘to conceptualize the poem as

⁶⁸ Gonda van Steen, ‘Arthur W. Pinero and Cavafy the Dramatist: The Parallel Quest for the Quality Play’ in *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Department of English, Georgia State University, Volume 48, Number 2, Fall 2015, p. 74.

⁶⁹ The bulk of my chapter was written before the publication of David Ricks’s article, and in any case the focus of the discussions is different. Ricks approaches the subject from the point of view of Tennyson’s reception in Greece and the ‘competition’ Cavafy offers, not only in ‘Συμεών’ but also in ‘Δευτέρα Οδύσσεια’ and, to a lesser extent, ‘Ιθάκη’. My focus is on the dramatic monologue as an aspect of performance in Cavafy, what it can teach us about the way characters construct their identities, and how Cavafy offers a commentary on the whole process as a result.

⁷⁰ Pantelis Michelakis, ‘Performances and Epitaphs in C.P. Cavafy’s “Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400”’, University of Bristol, p. 7.

performance enables us to see it not as an artefact but as an event'.⁷¹ This is, in a sense, an extension of Austin's performativity, and what it can mean if we view the poem itself as a speech act: starting from the thesis that 'every encounter with a poem [is] unique and unrepeatable', Michelakis argues that when 'the young man positions himself in relation to Aeschylus, he does not merely describe an action. He performs that action'.⁷² The influence of performance studies can also be seen in Michelakis's mention of the liminality of the poem's setting – the exploration of the concept of liminality has very much been a product of performance studies, for instance as outlined in Jon McKenzie's 'The liminal-norm'.

The way performance studies is useful in the study of the blurring or collapsing of boundaries is discussed by Marvin Carlson in his introduction to Erika Fischer-Lichte's book *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. He writes: 'Essential to this project, and to the shift from art object to art event, is the collapsing of binaries, headed by that of subject and object, or in the case of performance, spectator and actor', and goes on to mention 'liminality, dissolving of boundaries, continually shifting perspectives, and the privileging of dynamic process over the stable work' that have been the focus of American performance theorists.⁷³ In the book, Fischer-Lichte is particularly interested in the complex relationship between actors and spectators:

Traditionally, the role of a gallery visitor or theatregoer is defined as that of either an observer or spectator. Gallery visitors observe the exhibited works from varying distances without usually touching them. Theatregoers watch the plot unfold on stage, possibly with strong feelings of empathy, but refrain from interfering.⁷⁴

Fischer-Lichte's context is Marina Abramovic's performance art events where those boundaries were transgressed, but this can also open up new avenues in the interpretation of Cavafy. The relationship between spectator and actor has not often been given its full due in discussions of Cavafy, apart from perhaps in discussions of 'Νέοι της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)', which features a similar kind of transgression by a spectator and influence of an actor's work, thus blurring the boundaries between the two. The way this operates in the broader context of Cavafy's poetry as a whole, however, is a further facet of performance that will be examined in this thesis.

Terminology in Cavafy and points of departure

⁷¹ Pantelis Michelakis, 'Performances and Epitaphs in C.P. Cavafy's "Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400"', University of Bristol, p. 7.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Marvin Carlson, 'Perspectives on Performance: Germany and America' in Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*. Routledge: 2008, p. ii.

⁷⁴ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A New Aesthetics*, trans. by Saskya Iris Jain. Routledge: 2008, pp. 2-3.

It is abundantly clear from the examples found in the bibliography on Cavafy and theatre that in most cases the matter is approached from a text-centric perspective – that is, the ways in which Cavafy used theatrical texts as inspirations for poems. There are fewer cases in which the issue is approached from the point of view of performance – this is both in terms of the inherent ‘stage direction’ and other theatrical factors that Cavafy’s poems utilise, and the wider scope of the theatricality of life mentioned above. The various theatrical devices Cavafy utilises will also be introduced alongside a discussion of his engagement with performance and theatricality and the way it develops as he matures as a poet.

The narrower view of performance as a theatrical practice thus serves as the starting point in this thesis. As mentioned earlier, the view of Cavafy as a ‘theatrical’ poet is a reasonably widespread one – though not necessarily the dominant or canonical one – among scholars. It would be impossible to analyse performance in Cavafy without considering theatricality, which, despite the multitude of articles and ‘theatrical’ interpretations of his work, has not as of yet been the main tool for interpreting Cavafy’s poetry as a whole.

To avoid further complication, let us for the moment consider what theatricality means in this context and how I will use it in my thesis. In particular, it can be easy to confuse the terms ‘theatrical’ and ‘dramatic’, especially considering that critics have sometimes used them interchangeably in the past. Maria Athanasopoulou has differentiated the terms as follows: theatricality is ‘*theatrum mundi*, the inherent theatrical character of everyday life events’, and dramatic nature: ‘the linguistic conventions of creating a dramatic space and *dramatis personae* in literature’.⁷⁵ Both have a place in the study of Cavafy: a great number of poems can be said to explore this ‘inherent theatrical character of everyday life events’, from the almost monumental theatricality of the ceremonies in ‘*Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς*’ to the intimate staging of a ritual that takes place in ‘*Καισαρίων*’ and the sensual poems’ often obsessive focus on art and memory. The terms of course are not mutually exclusive – a poem can easily be both theatrical and dramatic by these definitions, since Cavafy can often be seen as a dramaturge of sorts who takes great care in creating a figurative dramatic space in his poems. For instance, the opening of ‘*Μια Νύχτα*’ reads uncannily like a stage direction in terms of the delineation and description of space, which in turn plays a major part in the characterisation of the poem’s speaker.

Christopher Balme, on the other hand, speaks of theatricality as a rapidly expanding interdisciplinary term not dissimilar from performance: ‘Theatricality is an interdisciplinary cultural, rather than a narrowly aesthetic, perspective on a wide range of phenomena’.⁷⁶ This somehow seems at once more precise and vaguer than Athanasopoulou’s ‘*theatrum mundi*’ definition. It does seem, however, that the latter – if not necessarily the latest trend among performance theorists – is more useful and informative as far as the study of Cavafy goes. This is

⁷⁵ Maria Athanasopoulou, *Κ.Π. Καβάφης: Τα Θεατρικά Ποιήματα*. Athens: Kritiki, 2014, p. 16.

⁷⁶ Balme: 2008, p. 90.

evident from the way Balme continues, when he states that theatricality is not restricted to performances in the theatre, but can for example be ‘observable in the realm of politics, where all political activity seems to be stage-managed for the television cameras’.⁷⁷ For the purpose of my thesis this is ground already covered by the term ‘performance’ and its various manifestations and ‘protean’ nature, to borrow Balme’s term. After all, to take Fischer-Lichte’s cue, it is impossible to produce a ‘one-size fits all’ definition. Thus, as far as my study on Cavafy is concerned, the way Athanasopoulou defined theatricality is sufficient.

Since the starting point of my thesis is the various dramatic devices utilised by Cavafy in his poetry – before broadening the scope to look at performance overall – it is essential to list the terms and where they occur in his work. Firstly, we have staging and the delineation of space. This includes the poems where there is an explicit ‘stage’ on which the action takes place. In a number of occasions this is described in great detail (e.g. ‘Μια νύχτα’), whereas in others it is left to the reader to infer the use of space in the poem’s action. A good example of the latter is ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’, whose action takes place in the sculptor’s studio and the different spaces he takes the interlocutors to. To this category we can also add the sub-category of ‘set-design’, which groups together poems where characters consciously create a certain setting or atmosphere, in a manner not dissimilar to stage directors. ‘Για να’ρθουν’ is an example of this, and so is ‘Καισαρίων’. This category is particularly important in the discussion of memory in Cavafy.

Tightly bound to staging and space is the issue of props. They feature in a number of ways, from the coin of ‘Οροφέρνης’ to the forgotten and neglected furniture in ‘Ο Ήλιος του Απογεύματος’. Lighting has already been widely discussed in Cavafy, with the ubiquitous lamps and candles in his work, while there is also the element of sound, evident in ‘Φωνές’, ‘Απολείπειν ο θεός Αντώνιον’, or ‘Στην Εκκλησία’ for example. There are, furthermore, various instances where characters in Cavafy’s poems play an actor’s part, whether this is explicitly stated – as in ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)’ or otherwise implied, as in ‘Λάνη Τάφος’ or ‘Εν απογνώσει’. Finally, there are also explicit mentions of theatre, and instances of either dialogue or dramatic monologue. The former can be seen in ‘Περιμένοντας τους Βαρβάρους’ and ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)’, while the latter is a device used by Cavafy throughout his creative life, as in ‘Συμεών’, ‘Σοφιστής Απερχόμενος εκ Συρίας’ and ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’, among others.

These dramatic devices will be discussed at various points throughout the thesis. According to Christopher Balme, ‘Today, the concept of ‘theatre’ can refer to: (1) a building; (2) an activity (‘going to’ or ‘doing’ theatre); (3) an institution; and, (4) more narrowly, an art form. In the past, theatre was often used as a synonym for drama’.⁷⁸ The main constitutive elements of theatre, or ‘theatrical event’, to put it more precisely in today’s terminology, are the

⁷⁷ Balme: 2008, p. 90.

⁷⁸ Balme: 2008, p. 1.

actors/players, the spectators, and the space. Discussions of theatricality before the emergence of performance study focused more on aspects like text, direction, set design, and the way they interacted with one another. Today, these form only a small part and are indeed not even strictly necessary for a theatrical event to take place. As such, these categories will be interspersed in various chapters as a means, as opposed to the end of the discussion. That is, they will be used in order to clarify the way Cavafy engages with memory, history, identity and other such themes from a theatrical point of view.

For instance, Balme writes: ‘In performance studies, one is more likely to study the performance aspects of a church service or a political rally than a dramatic text’.⁷⁹ This reads like a perfect summary of Cavafy’s use of theatricality and performance and his development as a ‘theatrical’ poet. The fact that he sometimes used dramatic texts as an inspiration (especially in his early period) is arguably only a small part. ‘Στην Εκκλησία’ essentially describes those ‘performance aspects’ of a church – it is seen as a theatre in terms of a building and everything associated with it is very much a performance, and ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’ operates in a similar way – it abounds with descriptions of the performance aspects of what is essentially a political rally/ceremony.

In general, performance – in its wider sense – is not a theory that I will apply from the outside to Cavafy. Rather, as I argue in my thesis, it is an intrinsic quality that can be found in a great number of his poems, and can point us both to new readings in some cases and to ways of interpreting Cavafy’s work as a whole. I propose, then, to use performance as a term that encompasses the concepts mentioned above. Theatricality will be used both in the sense of the inherent theatre of every-day life (and the way this features in Cavafy’s poetry), and in terms of the multitude of instances where Cavafy acts as a stage director in the way he develops the scene and narration in his poems, by using a variety of dramatic devices. I will keep the discussion of poems in individual chapters, with the following exceptions: ‘Μύρης· Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.’, ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)’, and ‘Στο Θέατρο’. The latter two are pivotal poems in Cavafy’s work – not least because they both have the word ‘theatre’ in the title – and are vital both to the discussion of performativity in chapter two and subversion in the last chapter. ‘Μύρης· Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.’ will mostly be discussed in relation to memory, but I will also show that we can gain important insights by comparing it to Cavafy’s dramatic monologues. Given the multi-layered meaning of the term ‘performance’ it makes sense to start from Cavafy’s textual engagement with theatre in the form of the dramatic monologue. This, in itself, also contains further aspects of dramatic technique and it is a format the poet kept returning to at various points in his life, and I will now turn my attention to it in the following chapter before delving into the deeper layers of performance after that.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

Chapter one: The dramatic monologue in Cavafy

Introduction

The dramatic monologue as a poetic genre has elicited much discussion, not least because it can be applied to a wider variety of poems than it would appear on the surface. The first examples of the dramatic monologue are generally considered to be Robert Browning's 'Porphyria's Lover' and 'Johannes Agricola in Meditation', both from 1836. Tennyson is the other poet closely associated with the formation of the dramatic monologue: central to the form – and to Cavafy's appropriation of it, as we shall see – is his 'St. Simeon Stylites', written shortly after the Browning poems in 1842. Browning and Tennyson, however, did not create the dramatic monologue out of thin air – they were instead responsible for its popularity and widespread use in poetry, and its establishment as an academic descriptor.

In this chapter, I shall argue that the potential for character study the dramatic monologue offers is merely the starting point for Cavafy's artistic preoccupations.⁸⁰ With the dramatic monologue, his sense of the theatrical comes fully to the fore. He uses a very precise delineation of space – often a liminal kind of space – to explore the dynamics between poetics, art, and audience; and to examine national and individual identity and subjectivity. Furthermore, dramatising certain situations in the form of the dramatic monologue offers a greater degree of immediacy to the issues in question: liminality, identity, subjectivity, alienation, loss, mourning, Art, the Artist, patrons and audience are all explored from a perspective that allows us to expand the way we normally view them in Cavafy's poetry. It is not 'just' about theatrical devices, therefore – it is performance of the self, whether this 'self' is directed towards national identity, the artist's role, coping with loss, or whatever other issue that concerns Cavafy's characters.

According to Katerina Karatasou's *Λανθάνων Διάλογος: Ο Δραματικός Μονόλογος στη Νεοελληνική Ποίηση*, the term has been in use since at least 1857 (however sporadically), and was established as a literary genre in 1897.⁸¹ A more accurate description, then, would be that Tennyson, and Browning in particular, took a form and developed and refined it into a poetic type, inspired by examples in theatre as well as poetry. The definition of the dramatic monologue has undergone gradual and subtle changes from the moment it was first established. Before reviewing the ways it has been perceived by critics over the years, I will attempt an intuitive definition of the major characteristics of the dramatic monologue, based on widely accepted pre-existing examples, such as Browning's 'My Last Duchess'. For the purposes of my thesis, then, I will define the dramatic monologue as follows: first, obvious though it may sound, the dramatic

⁸⁰ Traditionally, critics used to view the dramatic monologue as a piece of character study, where the speaker involuntarily reveals aspects of their personality.

⁸¹ Katerina Karatasou, *Λανθάνων Διάλογος: Ο Δραματικός Μονόλογος στη Νεοελληνική Ποίηση*. Gutenberg, Athens: 2014, p. 28.

monologue is a genre consisting of poems featuring a monologue delivered by one speaker who is a fictional character and quite distinct from the poet. In many poems it is possible to identify the voice of the poet with the voice of the narrator to varying degrees, but the dramatic monologue is all about a precise setting: the voice we hear in our mind when we read is of a specific character in a specific scene, not just a disembodied ‘poetic voice’.

Second, it must be one side of a dialogue; that is, we must be able to sense the presence of an interlocutor, silently listening and reacting to the speaker’s words. It does not necessarily have to be a single person listening, but the number must be small enough to be able to participate in the dialogue: the dramatic monologue is a spontaneous utterance, distinct from a prepared speech to a crowd. It is often incomplete inasmuch as it is a snapshot in time from a bigger conversation. Third – and this is closely related to the first point by way of the precise setting – we must be able to picture the characters in a physical space, instead of as disembodied poetic voices. In the case of the dramatic monologue, the scene is set not by description, but from what we can infer from the characters’ words and, by extension, movements. It is, in a way, quite theatrical in that sense – a snapshot of a precisely located dialogue minus the stage directions.

One of the first critics to have discussed the dramatic monologue extensively was S.S. Curry, whose book *Browning and the Dramatic Monologue: Nature and Interpretation of an Overlooked Form of Literature* was published in 1908.⁸² In his opening remarks, Curry confirms the initial assumption that the dramatic monologue evolved gradually instead of suddenly springing into life with the poems of Browning and Tennyson.⁸³ Curry continues by making important distinctions between dramatic monologue and theatre: ‘The dramatic monologue, however, did not arise in opposition to the play, but as a new and parallel aspect of dramatic art. It has not the same theme as the play, does not deal with the expression of human life in movement or the complex struggles of human beings with each other, but it reveals the struggle in the depths of the soul.’⁸⁴ We are arriving, then, at the *raison d’être* of the dramatic monologue as understood by early 20th century critics: the purpose is to reveal the inner workings and motives of a character’s mind. These are normally revealed in an involuntary way, since, as we saw earlier, it is not a prepared speech with rehearsed rhetoric but more of a spontaneous utterance:⁸⁵

⁸² It is interesting that the genre is described as ‘overlooked’ by Curry in his title. It implies that, though it was in its infancy as far as critical attention was concerned, it was already reasonably established as a type of poetry.

⁸³ S.S. Curry, *Browning and the Dramatic Monologue: Nature and Interpretation of an Overlooked Form of Literature*, The University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1908, pp. 10-11.

⁸⁴ Curry: 1908, p. 11.

⁸⁵ This has been questioned by later critics in particular examples. Ralph W. Rader, in ‘The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms’ argues that the Duke in ‘My Last Duchess’ does not gratuitously, casually, and involuntarily reveals his personality – as was commonly accepted by critics at the time – but rather does so in a more calculated way and for a specific purpose (Ralph W. Rader, ‘The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms’ in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 3 No. 1, Autumn 1976, University of Chicago Press p. 136).

Like the speech, the monologue implies one speaker. But an oration implies an audience, a platform, conscious preparation, and a direct and deliberate purpose. The monologue, on the contrary, implies merely a conversation on the street, in the shop, or in the home. Usually, only one listener is found, and rarely is there an assembled audience or the formal occasion implied by a speech. The occasion is some natural situation in life capable of causing spontaneous outflow of thought and feeling and an involuntary revelation of motive.⁸⁶

Gradually, towards the latter half of the 20th century, critical focus started to shift from the relationship between the speaker and the interlocutor – as well as their relationship with the poet’s voice – to the relationship with the reader as well. The reader is able to interpret situations and the speaker’s voice from a different perspective to the interlocutor’s, and this interrelation brings an additional form of dialogue into the mix. For example, Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor, in her article ‘The Pragmatics of Silence, and the Figuration of the Reader in Browning’s Dramatic Monologues’ writes: ‘In responding, in interpreting, the reader is transforming the monologue, at the metacommunicative level, into a kind of dialogue.’⁸⁷ It is not necessarily immediately clear how the reader’s participation as such can make a practical difference in our understanding of a poem, but it does come into play in certain ‘borderline’ cases, where a poem does not necessarily fit all the criteria for a dramatic monologue. As we shall see, the way ‘Μύρης: Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.’ is interpreted by Karatasou is one such example.

Karatasou herself defines the dramatic monologue in various stages, though not necessarily in a comprehensive manner. She writes: ‘Dramatic monologues, though they are monologues in terms of their composition, give the impression of a certain dialogue’.⁸⁸ In addition, she clarifies the distinction between the dramatic monologue and the soliloquy. The dramatic monologue, as defined earlier, is essentially a snapshot of a dialogue and features a character talking to a silent interlocutor who sometimes reacts to and affects the speaker’s utterance. A soliloquy, on the other hand – though not less theatrical in the strict sense of the word, given its importance in Shakespearean drama in particular – is a character’s interior thoughts shared with the audience, spoken out loud only as a dramatic device instead of as part of a play’s dialogue. Karatasou comes to a similar conclusion, outlining that the dramatic monologue is not only about the fact that there is an implied interlocutor, but one can also feel the influence of said interlocutor in the narrator’s speech, as opposed to the unaffected soliloquy.⁸⁹

Evgenia Sifaki, in ‘Self-Fashioning in C.P. Cavafy’s “Going back Home from Greece” and “Philhellene”’ offers a more succinct definition of the dramatic monologue as a genre: according

⁸⁶ Curry: 1908, p. 101.

⁸⁷ Jennifer A. Wagner-Lawlor, ‘The Pragmatics of Silence, and the Figuration of the Reader in Browning’s Dramatic Monologues’, *Victorian Poetry*, vol. 35, no. 3 (Fall 1997), West Virginia University Press, p. 294.

⁸⁸ Karatasou: 2014, p. 33.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 34-35.

to her, dramatic monologues are ‘poetic texts whose utterance is framed and contextualised by a dramatic situation (social and/or historical) and performed by a ‘speaker’ who is other than the poet, “generally addressing an audience (though this itself may be an ambiguous entity), accompanying his or her speech with appropriate gestures, varying intonations, and a range of theatrical strategies”’.⁹⁰ The extent to which the audience of the dramatic monologue is an ambiguous entity is in itself a contentious point, and part of a larger point of contention among critics: many poems are monologues, but not all of them are ‘strict’ dramatic monologues, if we may call them that. In the case of Cavafy, this difference is important, since there are often very subtle variations in the narrative voice between poems, and the way the narrative voice interacts with its surroundings can thus play a large role in the way we interpret the poem.

In ‘The Dramatic Monologue and Related Lyric Forms’, Ralph W. Rader addresses the issue of distinguishing between the dramatic monologue and other poems in monologue form. Examples of the latter, for Rader, are poems like Tennyson’s ‘Ulysses’, and T.S. Eliot’s ‘The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock’. Rader writes: ‘The most general difference between the two groups is that the actor-speaker in the second group is not a simulated natural person in contrast with the poet but an artificial person projected from the poet, a mask through which he speaks’.⁹² This is a useful distinction, especially as a filter: it would be both impractical and of little academic value to indiscriminately view poems as dramatic monologues as long as there is a character ‘speaking out’. On the other hand, my personal feeling is that ‘Ulysses’ fits the criteria of the dramatic monologue far better than ‘Prufrock’, so perhaps this distinction by Rader is more subjective than would appear on the surface. Rader calls poems like ‘Prufrock’ ‘mask lyrics’ or ‘indirect lyrics’.⁹³ The issue, in any case, is not to categorise poems as an end in itself, but to observe what the genre of the dramatic monologue can tell us about particular poems by Cavafy.

Rader is also an example of later 20th century critics who do not view the dramatic monologue simply as a character study – in other words, we should be looking beyond the question of what the speaker reveals about their personality, and towards the relationship with the reader and the poet as well. Rader believes in combining two apparently contradictory approaches: ‘These poems are most adequately seen as both determinate artistic constructs and as embodiments, in different senses, of real experience.’⁹⁴ This is important, as it would be unnecessarily restrictive to narrow our view of the dramatic monologue as exclusively a subjective experience independent of the poet, or as a construct controlled tightly by its creator.

⁹⁰ Evgenia Sifaki, ‘Self-Fashioning in C.P. Cavafy’s “Going back Home from Greece” and “Philhellene”’. *Synthesis* 5, Fall 2013, accessed 10/08/15 from synthesis.enl.uoa.gr, p. 29.

⁹¹ Cornelia Pearsall, *Tennyson’s Rapture: Transformation in the Victorian Dramatic Monologue*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 19.

⁹² Rader: 1976, p. 140.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p. 133.

If we combine both approaches, we can both react to the speaker in a dramatic monologue as an, in effect, ‘real’ person, and as someone dependent on the poet.

Cavafy treats the dramatic monologue in a variety of ways. It is possible to view his dramatic monologues from the point of view of a straightforward psychological character study, but they also display a number of typical Cavafian traits: the liminal setting (both temporal and in the sense of geography), the place of the artist in society, the inner mechanics of art and inspiration, and the sense of identity and belonging are all ideas that feature heavily in his dramatic monologues. Thus, I will show that Cavafy used the genre of the dramatic monologue to revisit and explore some of his ‘trademark’ themes from new perspectives by utilising it not only as a dramatic genre that relates to theatre, but also more widely as a genre that challenges and disrupts preconceptions.

Space, voice, and the artist in ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’

Cavafy’s dramatic monologues always pose issues beyond the initial analysis of the relationship between speaker and interlocutor and what we can deduce about their personalities and motives. ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’ is arguably the most Browning-esque poem by Cavafy, not least given its similarities with the ubiquitous ‘My Last Duchess’. The similarities are primarily centred upon the ekphrastic nature of the two poems, and have already been noted by critics⁹⁵: the Duke is giving the envoy a tour of his gallery in Browning, while Cavafy’s sculptor is similarly providing a guided tour of his studio, with descriptions of each work of art. The fictional sculptor of Tyana, in turn, bears a more than passing resemblance to Claus of Innsbruck his counterpart in ‘My Last Duchess’. The much-quoted final lines of ‘My Last Duchess’ are

Notice Neptune, though,
Taming a sea-horse, thought a rarity,
Which Claus of Innsbruck cast in bronze for me!⁹⁶

The third stanza in ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’ is exclusively concerned with the sculptor’s description of his current project to make a Poseidon, with particular focus on the ancient god’s horses. The reference to Poseidon/Neptune in Cavafy is surely a tribute to Browning – as A.E. Stallings notes, ‘The “Sculptor from Tyana” seems to be a previous incarnation of Claus of Innsbruck from “My Last Duchess”: he is even working on a Neptune Taming a Seahorse!’⁹⁷

⁹⁵ See Liana Giannakopoulou, ‘Moulded by Eros with skill and experience: sculpture and the male body in the poetry of Cavafy’ from David Ricks and Michael Trapp (eds.), *Dialogos: Hellenic Studies Review*, vol. 7 (Routledge: 2000), p. 94.

⁹⁶ Robert Browning, *Poems selected by Douglas Dunn*. Faber and Faber, London: 2004, p. 4.

⁹⁷ A.E. Stallings, ‘These Cavafys: What they Mean’ in *The Yale Review*, 2010, p. 134.

The sculptor is clearly a charming and confident man, which is evident from the very beginning, as he states with (false?) modesty that he is no novice. In addition, his charm can arguably also be reflected in the rhyming in the poem, which is not necessarily obvious and sneaks up on the reader: witness ‘Ρέα’ and ‘παναρχαία’ for instance, which, due to the difference in spelling, works better when read out loud as opposed to on the page; or, as the sculptor lists his creations, ‘Σκιπίων’ in line ten rhymes with ‘Πομπηϊόν’ in the previous line – only the latter is not at the end of its line, but in the middle. The order in which the sculptor describes his works is presumably related to the way they are located in his workshop, but it is also arguably in ascending order of importance. He mentions in the beginning that he is always in demand: ‘κ’εδώ αγάλματα πολλά / με παραγγείλανε συγκλητικοί’;⁹⁸ and as a result we can infer that the first works he describes, such as Pompey the Great or Scipio Africanus, are examples of similar commissions by the senators.

Next, we have the unfinished Patroclus and the yellowish fragments of Caesarion. This is where the voice of the sculptor and that of Cavafy begin to align: it is hard to miss the erotically charged subtext of the line ‘ολίγο θα τον ξαναγγίξω’ for example, referring to Patroclus, but the connection is not only because of a certain homoerotic undertone. As Liana Giannakopoulou notes, the tone by the sculptor here ‘brings to mind how Apollo looks after the body of the dead Sarpedon in “Η κηδεία του Σαρπηδόνοσ”, which Cavafy was still working on’.⁹⁹ The importance of Caesarion, on the other hand, in Cavafy’s poetry can never be overestimated – the eponymous poem (which Cavafy would have been working on when ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’ was written), with its self-reflexivity and exploration of poetics holds the key to understanding the function of memory, creation, performance and art in general across Cavafy’s poetry, as we shall see in a later chapter.

This self-reflexivity can also be found in ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’, and not only by association. Patroclus and Caesarion were important figures in Cavafy’s poetry, so it is naturally no coincidence that they are also found in the sculptor’s workshop. Their position in the poem – and in his workshop as a result – is after the presumed commissions of important Roman historical figures. They are highly personal – Caesarion in particular. Why else would he be in this list, and mentioned by the sculptor to his visitors, especially when the sculpture is in fragments? Certainly not because of any historical significance – as Cavafy himself wrote in ‘Καισαρίων’, only a few lines can be found about Caesarion in history.¹⁰⁰ No senator would have commissioned a statue of Caesarion, unlike the other historical figures preceding him in this poem. The positioning next to Patroclus is a further clue – all the important Roman historical figures, as mentioned above, are grouped together in the first part of the stanza. Caesarion, on the other hand, belongs next to Patroclus, a figure belonging to myth and fiction. This, then, is not the historical Caesarion that

⁹⁸ Cavafy: 1993 vol. A, p. 46.

⁹⁹ Giannakopoulou: 2000, p. 95.

¹⁰⁰ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 73.

the sculptor is working on; it is the same ‘ιδεώδης’ figure as the one that ‘visits’ the narrator of ‘Καισαρίων’.¹⁰¹

This can also be proven by the importance of sculpture in Cavafy’s poetry, which provides a further connection between ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’ and ‘Καισαρίων’ – in the latter, Cavafy uses the word ‘moulded’ in the line ‘κ’έτσι πιο ελεύθερα σ’έπλασα μες στο νου μου’.¹⁰² Giannakopoulou touches upon this when she notes the connection between the two poems by way not only of Caesarion in general but sculpture in particular.¹⁰³ The reason sculpture is so important in Cavafy’s poetry, therefore, is that often, the beauty of young men is described in terms of statues. In ‘Έτσι πολύ ατένισα –’, for instance, we have an image of poetry playing the part of sculpture by putting together different parts in order to create an ideal of beauty. The link to sculpture is made explicit by the line ‘Μαλλιά σαν από αγάλματα ελληνικά παρμένα’.¹⁰⁴ ‘Στου Καφενείου την Είσοδο’ features a depiction of Eros as sculptor:

Κ’ είδα τ’ ωραίο σώμα που έμοιαζε
σαν απ’ την άκρα πείρα του να τό’ καμεν ο Έρωσ –
πλάττοντας τα συμμετρικά του μέλη με χαρά.¹⁰⁵

Therefore, since sensuality and homosexuality are connected with sculpture, they are also connected to the Patroclus and Caesarion of ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’ by extension.

The notions of space and audience are particularly significant in this poem: as we saw above, we get a very precise picture of the sculptor and his clients walking around the studio. This sense of specificity is essential to the dramatic monologue: in ‘My Last Duchess’ for instance, we can vividly picture Browning’s duke and the envoy walking around the gallery, just as we can very precisely locate the sculptor from Tyana walking from sculpture to sculpture with his guests in his gallery. In the case of ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’, however, the people the sculptor addresses are relatively anonymous. The reader does not get any indications of their personality or individual characteristics – it is more about the speaker and his address, which is arguably not the first time it has been delivered. Therefore, in this case, it works more as an address to the reader. In other words, the reader becomes more identified with the speaker’s audience than usual. This creates a certain degree of tension: we are perhaps becoming somewhat complicit in the systems of power that govern the relationship between the sculptor and the potential patrons he addresses. By extension, we are not only complicit in the dealings in Tyana, but it also becomes easier to take the scene as a metaphor for our own historical context. With the use of

¹⁰¹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 73.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ The conclusion to this line of thought is that ‘Καισαρίων’’s statue emerges as a new, integral creation among the bits of yellow marble’ (Giannakopoulou: 2000, p. 95).

¹⁰⁴ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 87.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

the genre of the dramatic monologue in this case, Cavafy makes the reader more involved in the action by identifying them with the speaker's interlocutors; at the same time, we are not only invited to examine the dealings in Tyana literally, but to use them as a metaphor in our own situations – we are not only transported to Tyana but invited to actively take Tyana with us, so to speak. In addition, the way Cavafy depicts the sculptor moving across his studio mirrors the way a theatre director would set a scene: the stage in this case is the sculptor's workshop, and the props are the statues and unfinished fragments. Significantly, each item described on this kind of stage has an importance to the meaning of the poem. Cavafy thus mirrors contemporary theatre directors, who transitioned from naturalism, who – unlike naturalism – wanted each prop and function of a set to have a particular meaning relating to the plot or the characters.¹⁰⁶

Producing and defining Hellenism: 'Φιλέλλην' and 'Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα'

The dramatic monologue as a genre always lends itself well to the exploration of issues of subjectivity, given its first-person narrative voice. A significant number of Cavafy's poems deal with subjectivity as well, and as such it is not surprising that he chose to set them as dramatic monologues. More specifically, Cavafy often concerns himself with the dramatic creation of characters' subjectivity, which is then directed outwards, often in competition – or dependence – to their surroundings and environment. In other words, one of the central issues is also communication – or lack thereof. The theatricality of the dramatic monologue is not the end in itself for Cavafy – he is not merely concerned with a vivid and dramatic depiction of a situation. This depiction is directed towards dramatising subjectivity and the way characters attempt to define or construct their identities. That, in itself, is not far from the way the dramatic monologue has been viewed by critics since the beginning. One of the main questions is always about how the speaker's identity is portrayed, but this question's focus has subtly changed throughout the years. Initially, it was about how the speaker gradually reveals aspects of their personality and identity throughout the monologue. This revelation was normally involuntary, since the dramatic monologue is not a pre-planned speech, but a spontaneous outflow that partly depends on the space the characters are in, and the nature of their interlocutors. The focus has gradually shifted to the way subjectivity and identity is constructed by the poet.

Two key poems that exemplify these ideas are 'Φιλέλλην' and the hidden 'Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα'. Both are particularly close to Browning's models of the dramatic monologue: apart from 'Τυανεύς Γλύπτης', 'Φιλέλλην' has also been described as especially linked to Browning by various critics. For example, it has been compared to Browning's 'The Bishop Orders his

¹⁰⁶ See, for example, the famous 1911 collaboration of Gordon Craig and Konstantin Stanislavski in *Hamlet* at the Moscow Arts Theatre. Craig's set was plain and changed from scene to scene by the use of large abstract screens. The idea behind them was to provide 'a spatial representation of Hamlet's state of mind'. (See Christopher Innes, *Directors in Perspective: Edward Gordon Craig*, Cambridge University Press: 1983, pp. 165-167) Everything on the set had a function and an importance, and was not there just to 'set the scene'.

Tomb at St. Praxed's Church' by Edmund Keeley and David Ricks.¹⁰⁷ Sifaki, for her part, calls it 'Browningesque' and notes that Cavafy inherited a 'characteristic usage of syntax and punctuation' from Browning.¹⁰⁸ 'Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα' is, in a way, a sister poem to 'Φιλέλλην': they both attempt a definition, or recreation, of what it means to be Greek by their main characters, and as such it is significant that Cavafy chose the form of the dramatic monologue to explore this idea. Both poems focus on signifiers of Hellenism and subjectivity, and critics of the latter half of the 20th century have focused on subjectivity in particular as an integral part of the dramatic monologue that was previously ignored by earlier writers. Sifaki, for instance, writes: 'The dramatic monologue as a genre dramatises the provisional and precarious nature of subjectivity'.¹⁰⁹

This dramatisation in 'Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα' is at once somewhat unusual and typical for Cavafy. It is noteworthy for being set outdoors in a natural setting, away from Cavafy's favoured cities with their alleyways or semi-darkened rooms. It is also noteworthy for mentioning Greece by name as a geographical place – something extremely rare for Cavafy.¹¹⁰ The silent Hermippos and the speaker are travelling back home to Syria after an unsuccessful visit to Greece, where – though they are philosophers and sophists – they were meant to feel unwelcome due to their (partly) non-Greek cultural heritage. The tension is felt right from the beginning, as the title itself has been called 'paradoxical' by Diskin Clay: 'How can a Greek return home by leaving Greece?'¹¹¹ This is where the setting plays a part and almost becomes an extra character in this scene: the ship where the dialogue takes place is an embodiment of an in-between, liminal space, having left Greece behind but not quite in Egypt or Syria yet. This 'in-betweenness' is typical for Cavafy: very rarely do we see things that are exclusively one or the other in his poetry, and that includes the use of performance and theatre. Theatre is never exclusively a building, an event, a performance, or the theatricality of everyday life; it is used to emphasise different things. In this case, the setting reflects the situation – or predicament – of the two partly Greek and partly Egyptian and Syrian characters:

είμεθα Έλληνες κ' εμείς – τι άλλο είμεθα; –
 αλλά με αγάπες και με συγκινήσεις της Ασίας
 αλλά με αγάπες και με συγκινήσεις
 που κάποτε ξενίζουν τον Ελληνισμό.¹¹²

¹⁰⁷ Keeley says it could be instead titled 'The King Orders his Coinage in the Land of Near-barbarians' to emphasise the similarity. (in Keeley, *Cavafy's Alexandria*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 33). Also see David Ricks, 'How it Strikes a Contemporary: Cavafy as a Reviser of Browning'. *Kambos: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 11, 2003.

¹⁰⁸ Sifaki: 2013, p. 29.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 30.

¹¹⁰ In 'The Silence of Hermippos', Diskin Clay observes that only two poems mention 'Greece proper' in Cavafy's canon: 'Ο Δημάρατος' and 'Το 31 π.Χ. στην Αλεξάνδρεια'. See Diskin Clay, 'The Silence of Hermippos: Greece in the Poetry of Cavafy', *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 3, 1977, p. 97.

¹¹¹ Clay: 1977, p. 109.

¹¹² C.P. Cavafy, *Κρυμμένα Ποιήματα 1877; - 1923*, ed. by G.P. Savvidis. Athens: Ikaros 1993, p. 96.

This dramatic monologue feels different to ‘Τουανεύς Γλύπτης’. In the latter, we do not get the sense that the sculptor’s delivery is affected in any way by the reactions of his interlocutors, who, one would assume, are potential patrons of his work and silently take the back seat in the artist’s tour of his workshop. In ‘Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα’, however, we can sense a much closer rapport, even tension, between the speaker’s words and his interlocutor’s reactions. These reactions very much influence the content and delivery of the speaker’s monologue at various points: whereas he starts with an optimistic, even relieved, tone, that they are returning to the familiar waters of Cyprus, Syria, and Egypt, he has to interrupt himself due to Hermippos’s reaction, or non-reaction:

Γιατί έτσι σιωπηλός; Ρώτησε την καρδιά σου,
όσο που απ’ την Ελλάδα μακρυνόμεθαν
δεν χαίροσούν και συ,¹¹³

Hermippos is silent – this has been interpreted as a sign of disagreement with the speaker which, in turn, pushes the speaker to express his opinions and relief of having left the unwelcoming Greece more forcefully. They are not Greeks, but they are not quite ‘others’ either – they are in this in-between state of not belonging in either place. Sifaki sees a certain tension and uncertainty in the speaker’s delivery. Does he mean that ‘as true Greeks the two friends ought to admit that they are not truly Greek? Is he saying that origin is irrelevant to identity and that Greeks are identified by their superior ethos?’¹¹⁴ The question of what Hellenism means to the speaker exactly is thus not particularly straightforward. The word ‘ελληνοπρεπής’ is a key of sorts, since it implies that he advocates a “properly Greek” attitude or manner. Without the interaction with Hermippos and his reactions, the speaker would not have spontaneously changed his tack and started expounding on his particular philosophy on what exactly makes someone Greek.

The way Hellenism is analysed and defined – or even performatively ‘produced’ – in this poem is dependent on the form of the dramatic monologue. For Sifaki, readings that celebrate Cavafy and Browning for their ability to ‘condense long chapters of history in a few lines of poetry’, however valuable, are incomplete.¹¹⁵ The utterances of Cavafy’s speakers are not merely aimed at involuntarily revealing aspects of themselves – Cavafy frames them in such a way as to question ‘the discursive context without which their utterances would not have been made possible in the first place’.¹¹⁶ The context in this case is Hellenism, and they are both challenging and criticising its prescriptive nature – on the one hand they are outsiders, ‘barbarians’ to varying degrees, but on the other they are also dependent on the concept of Hellenism and what it means from the point of view of identity. The issue of identity, and the way in which it is produced, is a

¹¹³ Cavafy: 1993, p. 96.

¹¹⁴ Sifaki: 2013, p. 35.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 32.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

complex one and is based on the evolving conversation between the Greek and the ‘barbarian’ elements. As Anthony Dracopoulos has observed, in Cavafy’s depictions of the Hellenistic period, ‘the one (i.e. the Hellenic) is in constant contact and conversation with the other (the non-Hellenic), leading to different ways of articulating identity.’¹¹⁷

The question that follows is whether the characters have successfully challenged that prescriptive nature, and whether (and in what way) they have managed to redefine Hellenism for their purposes and according to their identities. Keeley claims that, for Cavafy, the Greek character is ‘the virtue of seeing yourself for what you are’.¹¹⁸ This is easier on paper than in practice, however: the way the characters in ‘Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα’ see themselves is not that straightforward. The speaker contrasts his idea of being properly Greek, which he does not elaborate upon, with the other Eastern kings who put on a Greek exterior and are mocked and discriminated against for that:

Δεν μας ταιριάζει, Έρμιππε, εμάς τους φιλοσόφους
να μοιάζουμε σαν κάτι μικροβασιλείς μας
(θυμάσαι πώς γελούσαμε με δαύτους
σαν επισκέπτονταν τα σπουδαστήριά μας)
που κάτω απ’το εξωτερικό τους το επιδεικτικά
ελληνοποιημένο, και (τι λόγος!) μακεδονικό,
καμιά Αραβία ξεμυτίζει κάθε τόσο
καμιά Μηδία που δεν περιμαζεύεται,
και με τι κωμικά τεχνάσματα οι καημένοι
πασχίζουν να μη παρατηρηθεί.¹¹⁹

The speaker is thus caught in the middle in a rather peculiar way, discriminating against the ‘fake Greekness’ put upon by other non-Greeks in a manner that precisely mirrors the discrimination he himself faced in Greece for his outsider status. On the one hand he is disappointed to have been discriminated against by the Greeks, and on the other he has discriminated against others based on his judgement that they were not Greek enough. That he did face discrimination can be deduced from his admission that they have ‘αγάπες και συγκινήσεις / που κάποτε ξενίζουν τον ελληνισμό’.¹²⁰ In addition, Sifaki observes that when the speaker uses the pronoun ‘we’, he means philosophers like them, not all Syrian-Greeks.¹²¹ Their image of Greekness is therefore filtered through their identity as philosophers and sophists – it is important to emphasise the latter title as well because the reference to ‘σπουδαστήρια’ clearly implies that they are also

¹¹⁷ Anthony Dracopoulos, ‘Ταυτότητα και Διαφορά: Με Αφορμή τον Ελληνισμό του Σεφέρη και του Καβάφη’ in *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)*, Vol. 15 (2011), p. 123. My translation.

¹¹⁸ Keeley: 1976, p. 108.

¹¹⁹ Cavafy: 1993, p. 96.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ Sifaki: 2013, pp. 37-38.

teachers, which makes the derogatory attitude towards the ‘barbarian’ kings that visit them even more puzzling, or even perhaps slightly disturbing. Sifaki explains this filtering through their status as philosophers as follows: ‘To reclaim Hellenism, he has to undermine this system so as [to] open up a new space for himself; acting properly Greek is thus a description of a self; but the philosopher’s self is always an open-ended process’.¹²²

The speaker and protagonist of ‘Φιλέλλην’ is one of those very kings that the speaker of ‘Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα’ would have mocked for a perceived lack of Greekness. The poem is a dramatic monologue from the point of view of the ruler, who commissions a craftsman – Sithaspis – to make a commemorative coin. The critics have indeed normally viewed the king as a non-Greek, much as the speaker of ‘Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα’ would have described. He is an Eastern monarch and is identified as yet another ‘barbarian impostor with false pretensions to partaking in Greek culture’.¹²³ Martin McKinsey, in ‘Where are the Greeks? Revisiting Cavafy’s “Philhellene”’ summarises their position thus: ‘A lover of Greek culture? In the end, we may find ourselves wondering if “Philistine”, rather than “Philhellene”, might not be the best title for the poem’.¹²⁴ There is, unquestionably, a certain degree of irony towards the king, but this is certainly not all there is to the poem. It is significant, for instance, to consider the claim by Alekos Sengopoulos that Cavafy himself saw the king in a rather sympathetic light.¹²⁵ This contradicts writers like Keeley who talk of the speaker’s ‘unlettered aspiration’ and ‘cultural affectation and imitation’, which make him a ‘barbarian pretender’ and a ‘parody of the Hellene he aspires to be’.¹²⁶

McKinsey, however, identifies the monarch with Cavafy himself. He thus reads the poem more allegorically – in his reading, modern Greeks are identified to an extent with barbarians, since they were themselves looked down upon by Western visitors, such as the British. This is a somewhat tricky position: it might be tempting to identify the ruler with Cavafy, but it should be remembered that the ruler is the one who commissions the making of the coin, not the maker himself. In other words, he cannot really be identified with the artist figure. Sifaki dismisses McKinsey’s interpretation as too reductive and underestimating ‘the complications of the dramatic monologue as a genre’.¹²⁷ Regardless, this raises questions about the poet’s voice in the dramatic monologue. In this case, given that the poem is about the production of a work of art, it would be impossible not to see some Cavafy in there at least. Therefore, it would make sense to accept McKinsey’s point that there is a certain identification between poet and speaker,

¹²² Sifaki: 2013, p. 39.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Martin McKinsey, ‘Where are the Greeks? Revisiting Cavafy’s “Philhellene”’, originally in the introduction of Martin McKinsey, *Hellenism and the Postcolonial Imagination*, Fairleigh Dickinson Univ Press, 2010. Accessed 10/08/15 from www.lsa.umich.edu, p. 2.

¹²⁵ G.P. Savvidis, *Μικρά Καβαφικά Β*, Athens: Hermes, 1985, p. 265.

¹²⁶ Keeley: 1976, pp. 33-34.

¹²⁷ Sifaki: 2013, p. 39.

especially if we consider the fact that the making of the coin is not at all dissimilar from the way Cavafy constructs his own poems.

Significantly, the monarch ordering the making of the coin requests for a naked youth to be depicted on the other side:

Κάτι πολύ εκλεκτό απ' το άλλο μέρος,
κανένας δισκοβόλος έφηβος ωραίος.¹²⁸

It would be tempting, as a result, to read an implicit homosexuality on the ruler's part, particularly given the significance of the naked youth in general in Cavafy's erotic poems. David Ricks points out the ruler's 'aesthetic discernment' about the coin's design, of which the image of the naked youth is an example. According to Ricks, this kind aesthetic discernment is enough to support the assertion that he is 'not un-Greek', as opposed to Keeley's and others' readings.¹²⁹

From the monarch's tone we can infer that Sithaspis, the interlocutor and craftsman, interrupts with a question – either that or the speaker anticipates a possible question or objection, which would explain the impatient and more agitated and emotional tone:

Και τώρα μη με αρχίζεις ευφρολογίες,
τα «Πού οι Έλληνες; » και «Πού τα Ελληνικά
πίσω απ' τον Ζάγρο εδώ, από τα Φράατα πέρα»¹³⁰

This is also reflected in the structure of the poem: the opening fifteen lines are tidier and more self-contained, practically every single one ending in a full-stop. What follows is messier, characterised by enjambement and a less structured jumping from point to point. Sifaki notes that 'he seems to be improvising here' compared to the more structured and prepared arguments of the first half of the poem.¹³¹ The way he scornfully refers to the sophists can be put in direct opposition to the philosopher/sophist of 'Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα', who would have been one of those people to describe this Philhellene as a barbarian. These two dramatic monologues thus form a sort of dialogue with one another, with the speakers and their contradictory (and sometimes self-contradictory) characters establishing a certain counterpoint of ideas.

The interpretation of the two poems as forming a counterpoint is also reinforced by the liminality of the setting in 'Φιλέλλην' as well. Its position far away from Greece is emphasised by the monarch's objection to Sithaspis above, but its significance as an outpost away from the Greek mainland is not only in the similarity to Cavafy's position in Egypt. It also sits between

¹²⁸ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 43.

¹²⁹ Ricks: 2003, p. 143.

¹³⁰ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 43.

¹³¹ Sifaki: 2013, p. 42.

Rome and the Parthian empire, a rival and occasional war enemy of the Romans. McKinsey notes that ‘the picture that emerges from Cavafy’s poem is of a small buffer state occupying an uncomfortable middle-ground between two great hemispheric and occasionally warring powers’.¹³²

Sifaki opposes an objective reading of the poem, as being ‘in danger of identifying too readily with the author’s sarcasm, and dismissing the king as a merely pompous and pretentious character, someone pathetically trying to rise above his status.’¹³³ A ‘subject-centred’ reading that focuses on the speaker’s subjective experience (the way he has experienced prejudice for a perceived lack of Hellenism, which in turn is combated by taking extra care to ‘follow the rules’ of Hellenism) does, in this case, produce a deeper interpretation, not least in the way it puts forth the poem as a sort of counterpoint to ‘Επάνοδος από την Ελλάδα’. In addition, the monarch’s directions for the construction of the coin can be seen as an attempt to construct his own identity and place in the Greek-speaking world: to almost literally carve his place, so to speak. The coin is a physical object, and as a result a physical manifestation of his identity. Its function in the poem thus reflects the process of performatively shaping one’s identity and having a physical say in that process.¹³⁴ We cannot deny the presence of irony, but irony is not the be-all and end-all of the poem – or, if it is, it could equally be directed towards the reader as well: ‘why should the reader assume he can distinguish between those who ‘really’ have access to Greekness, are capable of ‘knowing’ it and have the right to ‘love’ it and those who do not?’.¹³⁵ We have to question our automatic assumption of putting ourselves at a higher level to the one of the characters of the poem, a more omniscient and objective level. By framing these issues with the use of the dramatic monologue, Cavafy uses performance to challenge readers: we are invited to question and re-examine our own position.

The two poems and their discussion of the Hellenic identity are also in dialogue with ‘Ηγεμών εκ Δυτικής Λιβύης’. The latter is not a dramatic monologue, but it is worth examining briefly for the light it can shed on ‘Επάνοδος...’ and ‘Φιλέλλην’. The ruler from the poem’s title is well-liked in Alexandria due to his impeccably ‘Greek’ behaviour:

Άρεσε γενικώς στην Αλεξάνδρεια,
 τες δέκα μέρες που διέμεινε αυτού,
 ο ηγεμών εκ Δυτικής Λιβύης
 Αριστομένης, υιός του Μενελάου.
 Ως τ’ όνομά του, κ’ η περιβολή, κοσμίως, ελληνική.¹³⁶

¹³² McKinsey: 2010, p. 12. (page numbers referring to the PDF version from umich.edu)

¹³³ Sifaki: 2013, p. 43.

¹³⁴ See next chapter on how performativity plays a role in individuals shaping and creating their own identities.

¹³⁵ Sifaki: 2013, p. 43.

¹³⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B. p. 74.

The omniscient narrator, however, reveals that the ruler's external behaviour is an act - in reality he is terrified of being exposed as a 'barbarian', as the second half of the poem shows. Unlike the ambiguity of 'Φιλέλλην', where the extent to which Cavafy's attitude is ironic is not clear, the condemnation of the ruler is overt:

Μήτε βαθύς στες σκέψεις ήταν, μήτε τίποτε.

Ένας τυχαίος, αστείος άνθρωπος.¹³⁷

In reality, then, the ruler from Western Libya, like the one in 'Φιλέλλην', would have been among the characters treated with contempt by the sophists of 'Επάνοδος...' It is interesting to note the more unequivocal condemnation reserved for the Libyan ruler, and to temper it by considering E.M. Forster's observation that Cavafy was not interested in racial purity, but in a mixture of different races, where each one could contribute to the Greek element as well as be influenced by it.¹³⁸ It is not the potentate's 'foreignness' or his 'otherness' that is frowned upon. Rather, it is his refusal to partake in the cultural give-and-take by pretending to be something he is not. When viewed in this light, the ruler of 'Φιλέλλην', in turn, emerges in a more positive light: he is a man fully aware of the games of power and confident in the meaning of his actions.

A further point from 'Επάνοδος...' and 'Φιλέλλην' in terms of my thesis is related to the characters' definition of their identities. They partly shape their identities in a performative manner: the speaker of 'Επάνοδος...' says they are Greek but adds a significant postscript, namely that they have 'Asian loves and passions'. This is effectively a declaration in the Austinian manner,¹³⁹ since, if he says they identify with being Greek in such a way, then that does make them Greek from the point of view of his utterance. This Greekness is also reinforced by the rest of his monologue, where ironically he proceeds to mock the 'μικροβασίλεις' in much the same way as the 'proper' Greeks would have mocked the speaker's own Asian characteristics. His behaviour is thus both straining against and reinforcing the norm of what 'normal' or 'proper' Hellenism is supposed to be like. As for the king in 'Φιλέλλην', he goes one further: the performative shaping of his identity is literal, as the end product will be the coin that will itself act as the physical incarnation and signifier of this identity. Therefore, through this performative shaping that is brought to the fore by the use of the dramatic monologue, the characters are straining against the context – Hellenism, in this case – that frames their discourse. They are trying to make an impact – to reshape it, modify it, mould it at the same time as they are reshaping their own identities.

¹³⁷ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B. p. 74.

¹³⁸ E.M. Forster, 'The Poetry of C.P. Cavafy', in *The Mind and Art of C.P. Cavafy: Essays on his Life and Work*. Athens: Denise Harvey & Company, 1983, p. 13.

¹³⁹ From J.L. Austin's definition of performativity of 'to say something is to do something' in *How to do Things with Words*. See chapter two for full definition.

The dramatic monologue as a competitive genre: Cavafy vs. Tennyson

A different kind of straining against the context that frames one's identity can be found in 'Συμεών', which is also among the hidden poems. Unlike the previous poems examined here, which clearly stand under the influence of Browning, 'Συμεών' is more influenced by Tennyson, and is indeed a reply to Tennyson's model. The poem brings to the fore a certain antagonism with and is a veiled response – partly, indeed, an attack – to Tennyson's 'St. Simeon Stylites'. There is no doubt that Cavafy disapproved of Tennyson's depiction of the eponymous saint in his 'St. Simeon Stylites'. He wrote that 'it was a very difficult task – a task reserved, perhaps, for some mighty king of art – to find fitting language for so great a saint, so wonderful a man'.¹⁴⁰ The implications of this are twofold: it shows that Cavafy thought it somewhat blasphemous of Tennyson to tackle the subject of Simeon – and, in particular, in the manner that he did, casting Simeon as the speaker in a dramatic monologue. Furthermore, that same sentence also sheds some light as to why Cavafy would have shied away from publishing his own *Simeon*, since it is reasonable to assume he would also consider himself unworthy of tackling such a topic.

David Ricks has noted that Tennyson 'did not profess a historically informed knowledge of Simeon.'¹⁴¹ Tennyson's Simeon is cast in an unforgiving, often ironic light: he is portrayed as arrogant, competitive and self-indulgent, at once proclaiming himself 'the basest of mankind' and at the same time feeling superior to 'the silly people' that worship at the foot of his pillar.¹⁴² He looks down on them metaphorically, as well as literally. In his customary declamatory tone, he proclaims 'I am a sinner viler than you all', only to continue in a condescending way: 'I think you know I have some power with heaven'.¹⁴³ For an ascetic of such self-proclaimed piety, he is a little too concerned with his image, even after thirty-five years on top of the pillar. In short, this is a deeply human, flawed Simeon, far from Cavafy's concept of a wonderful man. Not only that, but the very title of Tennyson's poem would have been considered blasphemous – people only become saints after their death, whereas Tennyson's Simeon has the audacity to constantly refer to his attempts to achieve sainthood. From this, we can see why Cavafy disapproved of Tennyson's tone and 'common, vulgar manner'.¹⁴⁴

'Συμεών' features a number of mature Cavafy trademarks: it is set in a period of uncertainty, during a time of conflict between paganism and Christianity, and the main content of the poem is framed between opening and closing stanzas that turn inward and examine the position of poetry. This framing, far from being a defect, is the key to a deeper understanding of the poem as a response to Tennyson, and its position alongside such Cavafy masterpieces as

¹⁴⁰ C.P. Cavafy, *Ανέκδοτα Πεζά*, ed. M. Peridis, Athens, 1963, p. 74.

¹⁴¹ David Ricks, 'Cavafy's Quarrel with Tennyson' in Leonee Ormond (ed.), *The Reception of Alfred Tennyson in Europe*, Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, p. 350.

¹⁴² Alfred Lord Tennyson, *Selected Poems*, ed. by Aidan Day, Penguin: London, 1991, pp. 88, 91.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.* pp. 91-92.

¹⁴⁴ Cavafy: 1963, p. 74.

‘Καισαρίων’, which is also self-reflexive and discusses poetics, albeit in a different light. One of the most significant departures from Tennyson is the setting: it too is a dramatic monologue, but with a twist: Simeon is nowhere to be seen, and the speaker is one of the ‘silly people’, as Gregory Jusdanis has observed.¹⁴⁵ Ostensibly, the alteration is simply a spatial one: we see things from below, not from on top of Simeon’s pillar. It was typical and ingenious of Cavafy to create his own unique point of view by having a witness of Simeon’s pillar address an interlocutor about his own reactions. The setting also achieves a higher degree of historical perspective than Tennyson – it allows Cavafy to show greater specificity with references to geographical places, individuals (both real and fictional) and time. Therefore, even in the most rudimentary aspects of the poems, Cavafy has at once distanced himself from Tennyson’s treatment and offered a critique with his trademark irony: the alterations mean it can no longer be considered blasphemous or lacking historical imagination.

Thematically, on one level at least, ‘Συμεών’ seems to be similar to ‘Μύρης: Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.’ Both speakers are pagans who feel out of place in an essentially Christian situation – the alienation in ‘Μύρης...’ is emphasised by the repetition ‘ξένος εγώ, ξένος πολύ’, before the feverish end describes the speaker’s world practically crumble before him.¹⁴⁶ There is a similar feverish intensity in ‘Συμεών’, when the speaker feels equally alienated in the presence of Christian worship:

την ψυχική γαλήνη των δεν είχα –
 κ’ ‘ετρεμα ολόκληρος και υπόφερνα
 κ’ έφριττα, και ταραττομουν, και παθαινόμουν.¹⁴⁷

This is worth noting because it is quite unusual compared to Cavafy’s usual restraint, which is in evidence elsewhere within the same poem, as well as the rest of his work of course. For Ricks, it exemplifies the existential crisis of the speaker that is prompted by the sighting of the saint, and the realisation that he had been concerning himself with trivial matters: ‘It takes some guts to admit this, as the interlocutor’s worldly reaction shows.’¹⁴⁸ Furthermore, the above passage is also notable because it is a direct echo of Tennyson’s ‘St. Simeon Stylites’, when Simeon describes his physical hardships:

In hungers and in thirsts, fevers and cold,
 In coughs, aches, stitches, ulcerous throes and cramps.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Gregory Jusdanis, ‘Cavafy, Tennyson and the Overcoming of Influence’, in *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 8, 1982-83, p. 129.

¹⁴⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 81.

¹⁴⁷ Cavafy: 1993, p. 104.

¹⁴⁸ Ricks: 2016, p. 352.

¹⁴⁹ Tennyson: 1991, p. 88.

It is typical and subversive of Cavafy to echo a passage from Tennyson that comes directly after a line he would surely have disapproved of: ‘Thrice multiplied by superhuman pangs’.¹⁵⁰ ‘Superhuman’, of course, is the key word here, since it encapsulates Simeon’s propensity to regard himself as superior to other people, on a par with saints and angels.¹⁵¹

The similarities to ‘Μύρης...’ are significant when considering the position of ‘Συμεών’ in Cavafy’s canon and the reasons it was excluded. It is reasonable to assume that Cavafy may have felt that the same pagan/Christian polarity and idea of alienation was explored in greater depth in ‘Μύρης...’ which would arguably make ‘Συμεών’ somewhat redundant if it was to be included in the collection. Of course, setting a poem during the time when Christianity was taking over from paganism is not the end in itself – the main issue is not the contrast between the religions in themselves, but rather the opportunities this setting offers for creating characters that live in the margins of society, or are unsure about their identity and position. In that respect, the speaker in ‘Συμεών’ goes through a similar identity crisis to the speaker in ‘Μύρης...’, when the latter’s self-perception is shaken to its very core by Myres’s re-absorption into Christianity.

The similarities to ‘Μύρης...’, however, do not tell the whole story as far as the content of ‘Συμεών’ is concerned. We saw earlier that ‘Συμεών’ is comparable to ‘Καισαρίων’ in that they both look inward to the art of poetry. Jusdanis argues that ‘Συμεών’ is first and foremost concerned with ‘the questions it raises over the role of poetry’ rather than a more straightforward ‘commentary on the transformations of a pagan-Christian society’.¹⁵² From this point of view, the major issue is not Simeon’s position as a saint – indeed, that is not alluded to at all in the poem – but, as Jusdanis puts it, ‘his attainment of the Absolute through his supreme act’.¹⁵³ It is this confrontation with the Absolute, rather than paganism vs. Christianity, that makes the speaker question his own values: ‘Α, Μέβη, τι Λιβάνιος! Και τι βιβλία! / και τι μικρότητες’.¹⁵⁴ This exclamation shows that the confrontation has made him view art and poetry as rather petty in the grand scheme of things – whatever aspirations a poet may have, they are rendered meaningless next to the afore-mentioned attainment of the Absolute. We could even say that it was the existential doubts that led the speaker to Simeon’s pillar in the first place – he may tell Mebes that he ended up there by chance, but in reality the pillar was a certain distance from the city, so he would have had to go out of his way to see it.

Admittedly, Jusdanis may overstate the self-reflexive aspects of the poem, but this interpretation holds another key for Cavafy’s position against Tennyson, as well as the position of the poem outside the canon. At the end of the poem, the speaker returns to the initial topic and

¹⁵⁰ Tennyson: 1991, p. 88.

¹⁵¹ Along the same lines, it is significant that, at the end of the poem, he addresses the angel as “brother”.

¹⁵² Jusdanis: 1982-83, p. 132.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Cavafy: 1993, p. 104.

perfunctorily continues the discussion on poetry with Mebes after his reflections on Simeon. This return to the subject of poetry, which frames the core of the poem, is the feeblest validation of poetry's role yet in Cavafy's canon. Normally, poetry and art reign supreme in various situations: as preservers of ideal beauty and youth (such as in 'Πέρασμα', 'Να μείνει' or 'Γκρίζα'), tools for rekindling past sensations ('Θυμήσου, σώμα...' or 'Έτσι πολύ ατένισα –'), or simply as a form of therapy or healing ('Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου, ποιητού εν Κομμαγηνή· 595 μ.Χ.'). As Peter Mackridge observes, 'for Cavafy, art has the power to complete what is incomplete in life.'¹⁵⁵ 'Εκόμισα εις την Τέχνη' confirms this:

Ξέρει να σχηματίσει Μορφήν της Καλλονής·
 σχεδόν ανεπαισθήτως τον βίον συμπληρούσα,
 συνδυάζουσα εντυπώσεις, συνδυάζουσα τες μέρες.¹⁵⁶

In 'Συμεών', however, poetry is meaningless and insignificant when faced with the Absolute of Simeon's act. The implications for our purposes are twofold: Cavafy offers a subtle criticism of Tennyson, in the way it is implied that poetry cannot hope to match the actions of so great a man; and furthermore, the fact that poetry is portrayed as powerless is inconsistent with the rest of Cavafy's canon – an inconsistency too great, perhaps, if 'Συμεών' was to be included in the canon next to the poems mentioned above.

A final point to consider is the element of comparison and competition. Tennyson's Simeon is an intensely competitive man, who wants to outdo other saints as well as differentiate himself from the rest of mankind by his actions. Cavafy, once again, uses Tennyson's own idea against him: the theme of competition appears in Cavafy's 'Συμεών' as well, when the speaker talks about different poets: 'Απ' τον Λιβάνιο πιο ελληνομαθής είναι βεβαίως. / Όμως καλλίτερος κι' απ' τον Μελέαγρο; Δεν πιστεύω'.¹⁵⁷ It is this superficial comparison that prompts him to dismiss the pettiness of his pursuits. Competitiveness is therefore viewed in an unfavourable, even ironic, light. On the one hand we've got an ascetic with his supreme action of communing with God for thirty-five years, and on the other we've got two sophists debating who the better poet is. This dismissive portrayal of competition between poets – both among themselves and with critics – can be interpreted as yet another corrective against Tennyson: a subtle parody on his depiction of the competitiveness of Simeon.

The dramatic monologue as a vehicle for mourning, and the strange case of Myres

¹⁵⁵ Peter Mackridge, Introduction to C.P. Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, trans. by Evangelos Sachperoglou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, reissued 2008), p. xxi.

¹⁵⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 33

¹⁵⁷ Cavafy: 1993, p. 104.

The issue of identity is central even in the dramatic monologues that seem to have grief or loss as the main theme. Two such dramatic monologues are ‘Λάνη Τάφος’ and ‘Για τον Αμμώνη, που Πέθανε 29 Ετών, στα 610’. The latter can be seen as a ‘behind the scenes’ look at Cavafy’s ‘tomb’ poems that feature epigrams, such as ‘Ιασή Τάφος’ or ‘Ιγνατίου Τάφος’ for instance. The latter two are both special cases because, even though they both consist of the epigrams on their eponymous tombs, they are also in the first person and thus fulfil a certain amount of the criteria for a dramatic monologue. This is true of ‘Ιασή Τάφος’ in particular, since it features a direct address and reference to the passer-by reading the tomb epigram in its final lines:

Διαβάτη,
αν είσαι Αλεξανδρεύς, δεν θα επικρείνεις. Ξέρεις την ορμή
του βίου μας. Τι θέρμην έχει. Τι ηδονή υπερτάτη.¹⁵⁸

The address narrows down the intended audience to Alexandrians who are familiar with the lifestyle. The interlocutors thus become specific in a way typical of the dramatic monologue, and this sets the ground better for eliciting a particular reaction from Alexandrian readers. In other words, what we have is a dramatic monologue with the dead man as speaker and passer-by as interlocutor. A central issue that emerges out of this dynamic is, again, identity, and specifically the Alexandrian identity in this case.

The point here is not to treat epigrams as dramatic monologues, though it is certainly significant that Cavafy cast both this and ‘Ιγνατίου Τάφος’ as a first person address. It is to compare them with ‘Για τον Αμμώνη...’, which features the commissioning of such an epigram, and is a dramatic monologue in the more strict sense as well. The speaker – belonging to the circle of friends of Ammones, we would deduce – addresses Raphael, a poet who is to write a few lines on the death of his fellow poet Ammones. The natural assumption here would be that, since this is a monologue by a close friend of Ammones, we would get a more intense sense of the grief and mourning that would accompany the death of a loved one. The focus is elsewhere, however: we get little by the way of reminiscences of what Ammones was like with his group, or the times they had together. The focus again switches to questions of identity and belonging.

The only personal descriptions of Ammones are confined in a relatively short space – the end of line 5, when he is defined as ‘τον δικό μας’, and the second stanza that follows:

Βέβαια θα πείς για τα ποιήματά του –
αλλά να πείς και για την εμορφιά του,
για την λεπτή εμορφιά του που αγαπήσαμε.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁸ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 79.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

In this case, Ammones is valued more for his beauty than for his poetry, which is mentioned but in a somewhat offhand manner. The emphasis is very much on his personal beauty, given the repetition and the personal way it is described, with the speaker saying that was his beauty they loved. However touching the description of Ammones's beauty may be, the main focus of the poem is on Raphael's task of composing those verses to commemorate Ammones. The fact that it is a direct utterance from a close friend of the deceased does not make the expression of grief any more intense than in the other epigram poems. The crux is rather on the focus on the Greek language being used to express 'Egyptian feeling' and the subtle tension this creates, and, much as in 'Ιασή Τάφος', the meaning of the Alexandrian identity.

The circle of Ammones's close friends is rather like the 'κράμα' of 'Εν Πόλει της Οσρονηής'. The latter describes their circle as follows: 'Είμεθα ένα κράμα εδώ. Σύροι, Γραικοί, Αρμένιοι, Μήδοι'.¹⁶⁰ The friends of Ammones are perhaps somewhat less diverse, but still a mix nonetheless: 'Ammones' is an Egyptian name, Raphael a Coptic one, and of course the language of their poetry was Greek. The main tension is on expressing Egyptian feeling in a foreign language, as Greek is described here: 'Το αιγυπτιακό σου αίσθημα χύσε στην ξένη γλώσσα'.¹⁶¹ As James Nikopoulos notes: '[The speaker] does not merely praise his poetry or use of language, but he specifies Greek, an important distinction in a poem that heightens the awareness of difference between Egyptian sentiment and foreign languages'.¹⁶² This then, is not dissimilar to the way the speakers of 'Φιλέλλην' or 'Επάνοδος...' were trying to define and recreate their identities vis-à-vis the idea of Hellenism: in this case, Greek is the vehicle for the expression of a very much Alexandrian sentiment, and this is what the fictional poet Raphael – himself not a Greek – must balance in his work on the epitaph of Ammones.

So far, we have been focusing on Cavafy's 'strict' dramatic monologues, as Rader would classify them. The issue becomes slightly more complicated if we examine poems that do not fit all the criteria that would classify them as a dramatic monologue, such as 'Μύρης: Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.' The way its narrator tries in vain to reclaim the identity of Myres from the clutches of Christianity is similar to the events of 'Λάνη Τάφος'. Of course, the latter does feature the Christianity/paganism dichotomy or existential crisis of 'Μύρης...', but it is similar in the way the speakers try to come to terms with the loss of a loved one, and the way they are trying to define the identity of the loved one in particular.

Unlike 'Μύρης...', 'Λάνη Τάφος' is an example of a strict dramatic monologue, with a very clear sense of speaker and interlocutor acting out a scene in a particular space. In this case, the setting is the eponymous tomb of Lanes, where Markos is mourning the death of his loved one. We get the feeling that the speaker was also someone close to Lanes, though not to the same

¹⁶⁰ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 83.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² James Nikopoulos, 'Cavafy's Greek (in Translation) in *C.P. Cavafy: The Typography of Desire*, C.P. Cavafy Forum 2009, accessed 15/11/15 from lsa.umich.edu.

extent. He is both trying to console Markos and himself when he says: ‘Τον Λάνη που αγάπησες τον έχεις πιο κοντά σου’,¹⁶³ and in the loving description of the picture that follows. The rest of the poem is concerned with a reminiscence by the speaker about the making of that picture, from which, in turn, an image of the character and personality of Lanes emerges quite powerfully by the end:

Μα ο Λάνης σου δεν δάνειζς την εμορφιά του έτσι:
και σταθερά εναντιωθείς είπε να παρουσιάσει
όχι διόλου τον Υάκινθον, όχι κανέναν άλλον,
αλλά τον Λάνη, υιό του Ραμετίχου, Αλεξανδρέα.¹⁶⁴

The final line emerges with considerable poignancy, given what came before. It presumably closely – if not exactly – mirrors the epigram on the tomb itself, and at the same time reiterates Lanes’s identity as reclaimed by the man himself in no uncertain terms. As a dramatic monologue, ‘Λάνη Τάφος’ does express grief more intensely and persistently than ‘Για τον Αμμόνη...’, but again this idea of expressing, redefining or creating your identity takes centre stage by the end.

Reclaiming an identity is an altogether much more complicated proposition in ‘Μύρης...’, which Karatasou analyses from the point of view of the dramatic monologue. In this case, I would argue that Karatasou is too liberal with her definition of the dramatic monologue, since there are significant objections to classifying ‘Μύρης...’ as a dramatic monologue. One such objection is the nature of the interlocutor in the poem – if indeed there is one. It could be claimed that the presence of the reader as interlocutor is enough in this case – especially since we have moved past the interpretation of the dramatic monologue as exclusively a poem about a speaker who involuntarily reveals facets of their personality – but this does not solve the problem. Who is the narrator talking to? There is no trace of a physical presence – it could be an internal stream of thoughts as the memories appear to him gradually, or we could even imagine him writing a diary entry with the very same words. There is no evidence of a physical interlocutor who participates through their reactions or movement – if we are to assume an interlocutor, they are silent and non-participatory. This contrasts with the interlocutor of ‘Συμεών’, who elicits a wide range of responses and reactions from the speaker, and is even named, or the people the sculptor of Tyana is showing around, who are active participants in a setting that is all about physical space and movement.

A major – perhaps even the most significant, from the point of view of the dramatic monologue as an element of performance – characteristic of the dramatic monologue is that it allows us to precisely locate the character(s) in their space or setting. We can vividly picture

¹⁶³ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 78.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Browning's Duke and the envoy walking around the gallery, just as we can very precisely locate the sculptor from Tyana walking from sculpture to sculpture with his guests in his gallery. Similarly, all the other dramatic monologues by Cavafy examined in this chapter have this very specificity of setting. This kind of precision is absent in 'Μύρης...', which is a further stumbling block for considering it a dramatic monologue. This is aside from the fact that there is no trace of an interlocutor in the speaker's delivery. Indeed, as the example of the speaker potentially writing in his diary shows, we cannot, in theory, even be certain that 'Μύρης...' is a monologue at all. This is Rader's next point as well: 'A further characteristic property of these poems is the fact that the speaker does not speak to anyone palpable within the poem'.¹⁶⁵

In addition, the poem features a complex relationship between different time frames (the time of narration vs. the different times narrated in the speaker's memories), but, unlike other dramatic monologues, it is not grounded in the present. In other words, it lacks a specificity of setting. In poems like 'Επάνοδος...' or 'Τυανεύς Γλύπτης', we not only get a very clear picture of the characters' space – the ship and the sea in the former, the sculptor's studio in the latter – but that space also practically becomes an extra character. This dimension is completely absent in 'Μύρης...'. I would argue, then, that these two characteristics combine to disqualify 'Μύρης...' from being a 'proper' dramatic monologue, despite any similarities it may have. It is, however, possible to apply some of the properties of the dramatic monologue to the poem in order to gain any possible new observations.

Karatasou observes: '[The speaker's] initiative to go to his loved one's funeral can be explained as a last farewell to the dead. With this act, however, he saw Myres in relation to a world that, though he undeniably knew of, he did not want to use as a context to understand Myres.'¹⁶⁶ The picture the narrator had of Myres was incomplete, and the poem presents him at a time when he is not only mourning, but trying to understand. His monologue is delivered from a vantage point of uncertainty and doubt, not only about Myres's identity, but also his own identity and memory itself.

The poem will be examined in greater detail in the chapter about memory in Cavafy – for now, I will focus on whether its reading can be enhanced by seeing it as a dramatic monologue, as Karatasou attempts to do. She observes that, at the point where the speaker comments that he didn't think Myres's Christian identity has a particular importance (and mentions how he never spoke about his religion and that they were joking they'd take him to the serapeion), his narration in the present is 'fortified by the activation of memory'.¹⁶⁷ This time completely in the present, the narrator's view of Myres changes before our very eyes as it is enriched – or tainted, depending on one's point of view – by the new memories that come to the fore. It is worth noting

¹⁶⁵ Rader: 1976, p. 141.

¹⁶⁶ Karatasou: 2014, p. 170.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

that the narrator did not understand Myres's displeasure at the time with their joking – it is a retrospective interpretation that comes in the present, based on the advancing recollection of various details, such as an expression on Myres's face, or a throwaway comment.

Reading 'Μύρης...' as a dramatic monologue opens up new possibilities: it is not only about how Myres is remembered by the narrator, or the identity crisis the narrator suffers as a result of the way he re-examines the past after the trigger of Myres's funeral. It also becomes a comment on the mechanics of remembering. As Karatasou notes, 'the narrator has not only changed the way he remembers *Myres*, but also the way he *remembers*'.¹⁶⁸ This is a striking reading: through the mechanics of narration, we can uncover a new layer of the way Cavafy treats memory in this poem. It is presented as a protean, fickle concept – it changes not only the way people remember particular events, but also its own mechanism mid-stream. This is not necessarily a bleak reading. It may initially appear that everything – including the speaker's own memory – crumbles before our very eyes, but Karatasou's interpretation of 'Μύρης...' also brings a positive twist: 'We saw that the narrator of 'Myres' begins with certainties that gradually collapse, but arrives, at least, at the threshold of understanding'.¹⁶⁹ The narrator 'does not leave the Christian house because he lost or thinks he lost Myres. Rather, he loses Myres (as an object of certain knowledge) because he has to leave the dead end of the narration he was led to by the 'we knew of course' of line 31. And in a sense, thanks to the shipwreck of the narration, he gains Myres as a person of the open drama of the understanding that his monologue consists of'.¹⁷⁰ Myres, then, has lost part of his identity in the eyes of his friend, and in the process his friend has come to some shattering realisations about his own identity and existence. However, the speaker also arrives at a new sense of understanding of Myres and his relationship with him, a type of understanding that one hopes would, in time, erase this sense of existential angst.

Conclusions

We have seen that on a more literal level, Cavafy's sense of the theatrical is fully to the fore in his dramatic monologues. This becomes obvious from a quick comparison between the poems examined in this chapter and the dialogic 'Περιμένοντας τους Βαρβάρους'. Outwardly, because of this dialogic form, it is Cavafy's most theatrical poem, at least to the casual observer. It does, however, stand in stark contrast to the realistic and intense character study of Cavafy's dramatic monologues. In the latter, the speakers gradually reveal a wealth of information about their situation and character, and we gain an insight into the very core of their mental workings

¹⁶⁸ Karatasou: 2014, p. 176.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.* p. 270.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.* p. 176.

on a par with naturalistic theatre. In addition to that, the poems not only reveal information about the speakers' characters and situation, but also engage in multi-layered discussions on the very nature of concepts such as identity and memory. 'On the other hand, the two speakers in 'Περιμένοντας τους Βαρβάρους' are anonymous, so to speak – they could be anyone. There are no details about their personalities that can be observed or otherwise inferred from their discussion, even though of course they are placed in a specific setting with particular details – an ancient town with senators, consuls, orators and other similarly Roman attributes. The only aspects described in detail are the consuls' elaborate attires and jewellery, but the speakers are as faceless and non-descript as an ancient chorus. This distance provides an alienating, rather than immersive effect,¹⁷¹ quite the opposite of, say, 'Τυανεύς Γλύπτης', which, even though it is completely different thematically, draws the reader in its world instead of keeping them at arm's length.¹⁷²

The speakers in 'Περιμένοντας τους Βαρβάρους' are, in other words, a sort of an ancient Greek chorus (albeit with modern elements of course) – distant, uninvolved, emotionless observers and commentators on the action, as opposed to active characters immersed in a situation, revealing aspects of their personality as they go along. Efrosini Kostara, for instance, also lists 'Περιμένοντας τους Βαρβάρους' as 'χορικά' – in other words, the dialogue between two members of a Greek chorus.¹⁷³ This is consistent with the 'epic' interpretation of the speakers in the poem as nameless, passive observers that do not reveal anything about themselves, as opposed to active protagonists like the speakers and interlocutors in Cavafy's dramatic monologues. In 'Περιμένοντας τους Βαρβάρους', Cavafy is not interested in doing a character portrait, creating an eerie and distancing effect instead – they sound almost like disembodied voices speaking in a void, in spite of the details offered about their surroundings and the people in their community (senators, consuls etc.).

The function of the dramatic monologue, on the other hand, goes beyond the mere character study or the sense of Cavafy being 'theatrical'. It is a tool that allows us to explore with greater immediacy issues like liminality, identity – be it national or more personal – Art and the role of the Artist, as well as subjectivity and the relation between a poem's characters and their creator. Cavafy's dramatic monologues owe a great deal to the example of Browning, though Cavafy is more succinct with his mise-en-scene. Furthermore, the medium of the dramatic

¹⁷¹ For this type of alienation in Cavafy, see Michalis Meraklis, 'Ο Μπρεχτικός Καβάφης' in *Τέσσερα Δοκίμια για τον Κ.Π. Καβάφη* (Athens: Kastaniotis, 1985)

¹⁷² The word 'alienating' here should not be taken to have negative connotations: it does not imply that Cavafy strived for a realistic effect but somehow failed. Rather, it refers to the so called 'alienation effect' (Verfremdungseffekt) of Brechtian theatre, which stood in direct and deliberate contrast to the naturalist theatre of Ibsen and other late 19th century playwrights. Brecht's thesis was to create 'epic theatre', a theatre for the people that was not about identifying with particular characters or attempting to portray situations realistically, but rather make the audience fully aware that they are watching theatre. As such, the aim was to distil themes with simplicity and directness.

¹⁷³ Efrosini Kostara, *Καβάφης και Αρχαίο Θέατρο*, Patras, 2014, p. 476.

monologue brings Cavafy's antagonistic relationship with Tennyson's poetry to the fore with the hidden 'Συμεών'. It is no surprise that it is a form he returned to at various points throughout his work, and uses it to explore some of his familiar themes from different perspectives, and to challenge and disrupt preconceptions.

Chapter two: Performativity in Cavafy

Introduction

An analysis of performance in Cavafy cannot be complete without an in-depth look at performativity and the way it operates in his poetry. The idea of performativity in Cavafy is applied somewhat anachronistically, since the term was invented by J.L. Austin in the 1950s. By Austin's own admission, he was merely inventing a name for a phenomenon that was already evident: 'The phenomenon to be discussed is very widespread and obvious, and it cannot fail to have been already noticed, at least here and there, by others'.¹⁷⁴ In this chapter, I will look at various aspects of performativity in Cavafy, divided under the sections of performativity and pledges, performativity and supplication, and sexual identity.

From Austin's first definition of the term, through Derrida's iterability, to its use in gender studies, performativity is a wide-ranging subject that has been embraced by performance theorists and philosophers alike. The way it relates to performance is more complicated than it appears on the surface, but it permeates Cavafy's poems in various guises, and as such it is important to explore its possibilities in my thesis. In this chapter I will show how Cavafian characters use it to physically affect the world around them, to shape and produce their identities, and will examine its role as a binding force behind Cavafy's oeuvre.¹⁷⁵ The other main argument is that performativity can be both a normative and a subversive force, depending on the context. The issue of performativity of power and its political implications will be explored in detail in the chapter on history. An exposition on performativity as analysed by Austin is necessary, before I move on to its uses in Cavafy.

Austin's thesis on performativity in *How to Do Things with Words* is in many ways striking and original. The first outline of the performative is when he describes utterances that are defined as follows: 'they do not "describe" or "report" or constate anything at all, are not "true or false"; and the uttering of the sentence is, or is a part of, the doing of an action, which again would not *normally* be described as, or as "just" saying something'.¹⁷⁶ In other words, the simplest definition of the performative utterance is that 'to say something is to do something'. The examples offered by Austin are also very simple, partly to allay fears that his thesis is paradoxical:

¹⁷⁴ J.L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, ed. by J.O. Urmson and Marina Sbisa (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 1

¹⁷⁵ As we shall see later, the idea of characters shaping their identities is closely related to the gay identity in general. The use of the term 'gay identity' is anachronistic, but, I believe, appropriate in Cavafy's case. While, in the majority of situations, it might not be advisable to apply the phrase's contemporary context of sexuality to literary works or people from the past, in Cavafy's case it makes sense: his poems not only work in a contemporary context, but indeed seem to anticipate later views and depictions of sexuality.

¹⁷⁶ Austin: 1975. p. 5.

“I do” ... as uttered in the course of the marriage ceremony, “I name this ship the *Queen Elizabeth*” – as uttered when smashing the bottle against the stern, “I give and bequeath my watch to my brother” – as occurring in a will ... [and] ”I bet you sixpence it will rain tomorrow.” In these examples it seems clear that to utter the sentence (in, of course, the appropriate circumstances) is not to *describe* my doing of what I should be said in so uttering to be doing or to state that I am doing it: it is to do it.¹⁷⁷

The most interesting, and arguably contentious part of the definition is almost thrown off in an off-hand manner in the parentheses. A large part of Austin’s argument that follows is devoted to the discussion of the ‘appropriate circumstances’ and is particularly important in relation to performativity in Cavafy’s poetry.¹⁷⁸ It is essentially all about extraneous circumstances, or the context in which the performative was uttered. It would be tempting to suggest that, from the moment Austin first outlines the theory of the performative, he spends a considerable amount of time back-tracking, given his systematic discussion of the appropriate circumstances and the way he tries to build a fort around the idea by excluding objections. These appropriate circumstances are as follows:

For naming the ship, it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name her, for (Christian) marrying, it is essential that I should not be already married ... for a bet to have been made, it is generally necessary for the offer of the bet to have been accepted by a taker ... and it is hardly a gift if I *say* “I give it to you” but never hand it over’.¹⁷⁹

Regardless of whether we interpret such rigorous analyzing of exceptions and pre-requisites for the theory as back-tracking or not, Austin has so far reached a series of interesting and eminently reasonable conclusions. The distinction of the extent to which a performative can be unhappy is very clear and extensively discussed. The first category consists of ‘misinvocations’ and ‘misapplications’ of the procedure – where the procedure has not been carried out 100% correctly and is thus void – the second of ‘misexecutions’ – where the utterance of the performative has been carried out correctly but the act has been ‘vitiating’ by what Austin calls ‘flaws’ or ‘hitches’ – and the third of abuses, of which an insincere promise is the prime example. This is not the end of Austin’s theories on speech acts: later in the book he introduces the concepts of locution, illocution, and perlocution, which are closely related to the doctrine of the performative. Roughly speaking, locution is what is actually being said, illocution is the intended effect of the speaker on their interlocutor, and perlocution is the actual effect (psychological or otherwise) on the interlocutor.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁷ Austin: 1975, pp. 5-6.

¹⁷⁸ Derrida had a number of objections to Austin’s appropriate circumstances – these will be mentioned in the discussion of Cavafy’s poetry where appropriate.

¹⁷⁹ Austin: 1975, p. 9.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.* 121

Pledges and promises

Maria Boletsi has written on performativity in Cavafy in her article ‘How to do Things with Poems: Performativity in the Poetry of C.P. Cavafy’. She uses Austin’s theories in order to identify speech acts in various Cavafy works, and as tools for examining whether poems can function as performatives in their entirety. Her aim is not to exhaustively explore performativity in Cavafy, but focuses instead on infelicitous performatives and their patterns. A key observation is that ‘one cannot help noticing that infelicitous speech acts in Cavafy outnumber felicitous ones. Promises are broken, orders are not executed, prayers are not heard, warnings are not taken seriously’.¹⁸¹ In my investigation of performativity in Cavafy, I plan to first focus on the more straightforwardly Austinian facets of the term, and so I will use Boletsi’s theory as the starting point in this section. I will, therefore, examine unfulfilled pledges and promises in Cavafy before broadening the scope to include additional facets of performativity.

The erotic act, which is always homosexual in Cavafy’s mature output, is usually either hidden in public or performed in secret.¹⁸² Boletsi identifies a discrepancy between intention and action in the erotic poems and uses her focus on infelicitous performatives to underline the point that Cavafian characters frequently act against their intentions. By extension, she infers that the body’s desire to pursue hedonism is stronger than a character’s resolutions about his life. It is not always as clear-cut as ‘characters acting against their intentions’, however: there are cases, even in the more straightforwardly Austinian examples of performativity in Cavafy’s poetry where the characters’ *truest* intentions are indeed followed, as I will proceed to show.

By ‘straightforwardly Austinian’, I mean poems that feature pledges and promises that are broken – a number of Cavafian characters for instance make pledges to live life a certain way, but these pledges are rarely followed. A classic example of this can be found in ‘Ομνύει’:

Ομνύει κάθε τόσο ν’ αρχίσει πιο καλή ζωή.
 Αλλ’ όταν έρθ’ η νύχτα με τες δικές τες συμβουλές,
 με τους συμβιβασμούς της, και με τες υποσχέσεις της.
 αλλ’ όταν έρθ’ η νύχτα με την δική της δύναμι
 του σώματος που θέλει και ζητεί, στην ίδια
 μοιραία χαρά, χαμένος, ξαναπιαίνει.¹⁸³

¹⁸¹ Maria Boletsi, ‘How to do Things with Poems: Performativity in the Poetry of C.P. Cavafy’, (Arcadia: International Journal for Literary Studies. Volume 41, Issue 2, December 2006), p. 399.

¹⁸² In the cases where it is performed in public, it is mostly performed using a certain ‘code’, so as not to be in full display, as I will discuss later.

¹⁸³ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 62.

The poem draws attention to performativity right from the beginning, since the utterance ‘I vow’ is an archetypal example of Austinian performativity – to say ‘I vow’ is to actually vow, and from that point on one has to look at the context and circumstances in order to determine whether the performative is a felicitous one. Technically speaking, a vow that has been broken would come under the ‘abuse’ category of infelicitous performative. There is nothing in the context to indicate that the procedure of the vow was not carried out correctly, so it is not a misinvocation, and making a promise to one’s self which is then broken is a classic example of what Austin would call ‘breach of commitment’.¹⁸⁴ In other words, even though there was no intent to break the pledge at the time that it was made, the character’s resolution was too weak to carry it out correctly afterwards. The main takeaway by Boletsi in this case is as follows: ‘The force of the erotic seems stronger than the force of the linguistic performance. These two are in fact placed here in opposing camps’.¹⁸⁵ Boletsi is not wrong, but I would argue that there is more to this poem – from a performative point of view – than a case of desires pitted against resolutions.

The very title of the poem, for example, can be seen as ironic when viewed in the light of the failed performative of the vow. Panagiotis Roilos makes this point when he notes: ‘Cavafy’s final preference of the title “He Swears” over the original “Lust” indicates a deliberate ironic exposure of the desiring subject’s persistent inability to perform successfully the speech act denoted by the verb of the title’.¹⁸⁶ Cavafy’s revision of the title, therefore, adds an extra element of depth – by focusing on the performative and the irony it produces as a result – over the more straightforward original. At the same time, the sensual nature of the poem is never in doubt: significantly, it is one of seven poems with a gap in the middle of each line, a gap that according to Peter Mackridge is an indication of its sensual subject matter.¹⁸⁷

As an extension of the concept of the protagonist’s infelicitous promise to himself, it could be argued that the whole poem operates as an unhappy performative: it could, for instance, essentially be summarised as ‘he vows every so often to start a better life, but he never ends up true to his word.’ This ‘every so often’ is very important as it signifies, of course, repetition. According to Derrida, it is this very repetition that performatives need to acquire strength and become parts of convention. For Derrida, a performative is meaningless without the notion of iterability. In other words, a promise – regardless of its result – is not a promise unless it is recognisable by association to previous examples or iterations:

Could a performative statement succeed if its formulation did not repeat a “coded” or iterable statement, in other words if the expressions I use to open a meeting, launch a ship

¹⁸⁴ Austin: 1975, p. 24.

¹⁸⁵ Boletsi: 2006, p. 401.

¹⁸⁶ Panagiotis Roilos, *C.P. Cavafy: The Economics of Metonymy* (University of Illinois, 2009), p. 80.

¹⁸⁷ Peter Mackridge, Introduction from Cavafy/Sachperoglou: 2008, p. xxxi.

or a marriage were not identifiable as *conforming* to an iterable model, and therefore if they were not identifiable in a way as “citation”?’¹⁸⁸

In linguistic terms at least, the character’s promise is not weakened every time he reiterates it; quite the opposite. The discursive power of the performative is actually increased by the repetition, which is what Derrida argues in his theory of iterability. It is the performance itself as a momentary act, which in this case is distinct from the discursive performative, that becomes more and more uncertain the more it is repeated (since the resolution of the vow is weaker the more it remains unheeded). Therefore, in this context, broken promises are also important – just as important as the ones that are kept – because they strengthen the performative’s structure through repetition.¹⁸⁹ At the same time, if we focus exclusively on the results of the character’s promises, we would be disinclined to believe that he would stay true to his next vow: it is only logical, after all, to mistrust someone who does not have a great track record of staying true to his word.

It appears, therefore, that at the heart of this poem we have this dichotomy between different facets of a character’s identity – Peter Anton for example writes of ‘the nagging anxiety over the divided self’ when discussing the poem.¹⁹⁰ Cavafy himself also points in that direction in his ‘Ars Poetica’: ‘a state of feeling is true or false, possible and impossible at the same time, or rather by turns’.¹⁹¹ It may be that he wrote ‘Ars Poetica’ in 1903 – as opposed to the poem’s publication date of 1915 – but the date would certainly coincide with the poem’s gestation period in its original version, and in any case the affinity between the above sentence and the poem’s thematic content is striking.

It is possible to reconcile the viewpoints if we delve deeper. As we have already seen, the poem describes a situation which opposes the character’s pledge, with the ‘better life’ he promises himself contradicted by the allure of physical pleasure. It is not a coincidence, however, that the latter is described by Cavafy in performative terms as well:

Αλλ’ όταν έρθει η νύχτα με τις δικές της συμβουλές,
με τους συμβιβασμούς της, και με τις *υποσχέσεις* της¹⁹²

The poem, then, is not just about the unhappy performative of the character’s pledge to himself. Boletsi’s interpretation, and Anton’s description of the poem as a work that ‘exposes the

¹⁸⁸ Jacques Derrida, ‘Signature Event Context’ in *The Margins of Philosophy* trans. by Alan Bass (Chicago: Harvester Press, Chicago, 1982), p.326.

¹⁸⁹ Unlike Austin, Derrida is more interested in a performative statement’s function – and the way it acquires meaning and significance – and less in its results or whether the correct procedure has been adhered to.

¹⁹⁰ Peter Anton, *the Poetry and Poetics of Cavafy: Aesthetic Visions of Sensual Reality*, (Harwood Academic Publishers, Switzerland, 1995), p. 285.

¹⁹¹ Quoted in Peter Anton: 1995, p. 285.

¹⁹² Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 62. Emphasis mine.

weakness of will, now projected in the form of excuse' only tell one part of the story.¹⁹³ 'Ομνύει' is also about a clash of performatives, with the character's pledge and the night's promises of hedonism and sensual pleasure competing against each other. When considered from this point of view, it is hardly surprising that the character fails to keep his pledge, since it appears quite superficial compared to what we can assume is his natural state of homosexual desire. Since the main performative of the poem is rendered infelicitous by its exact opposite, the poem also describes a situation that is the exact opposite of what the character intends. By giving in to temptation there is, therefore, a repetitive ritualistic performance of the notion of 'the opposite'. This ritualistic performance creates more than a situation: it shapes and creates a body – not literally, of course, but through the performative shaping of the body fulfilling its desires. It is a reminder that the subject does not have a fixed identity that is fully in control, acting out its intentions. This is because, with every iteration, this identity is moulded and constructed further by repeating or subverting social norms and customs.¹⁹⁴ Even at this most straightforwardly Austinian instance of performativity in Cavafy's poetry, performativity emerges as a power turned towards the body, a force with physical implications, as opposed to merely notional ones.

The later 'Των Εβραίων (50 μ.Χ.)' is likewise related to the theme of the Austinian pledge that is not followed, albeit somewhat more indirectly than 'Ομνύει'. Its main character, Ianthes, is a typical Cavafian young man. The poem frames a statement by Ianthes between an introduction and denouement by a narrator, who describes Ianthes in an almost loving way: 'Ζωγράφος και ποιητής, δρομεύς και δισκοβόλος, σαν Ενδυμίον όμορφος'.¹⁹⁵ Ianthes himself, however, regards his Jewish heritage – on a superficial level at least – as the most important thing about him. It is worth quoting the middle section of the poem in full in order to clarify the two contrasting and competing strands of his identity (Hellenism and Judaism) as well as the role performativity plays:

«Η τιμιότερές μου μέρες είν' εκείνες
που την αισθητική αναζήτησιν αφίνω,
που εγκαταλείπω τον ωραίο και σκληρόν 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 δήλωσίς του. «Πάντα

¹⁹³ Anton: 1995, p. 285.

¹⁹⁴ The issue of social norms and of performativity acting in both a normative and a subversive way has been discussed extensively by Judith Butler in particular, and will be dealt with in greater detail in the section on sexual identity.

¹⁹⁵ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 15.

να μένω των Εβραίων, των ιερών Εβραίων – »¹⁹⁶

Performativity is signalled at two key points: the phrase ‘θα ήθελα’ by Ianthes, and the way it is described as a ‘δήλωσις’ by the speaker. The pledge by Ianthes to his Jewish heritage contradicts the lifestyle of an aesthete, but the latter wins the battle, in the same way as the promises of the night subdue the central character’s vow in ‘Ομνύει’.¹⁹⁷

The narrator’s comment at the end of Ianthes’s statement is important on a number of levels. Firstly, it is clear that the speaker’s attitude towards Ianthes’s pledge is highly ironic, as is clear by the comment ‘Ενθερμη λίαν η δήλωσις του’. This gentle mocking by the narrator emphasises the more general irony present in the poem, namely the one borne out of the way Ianthes insists on trying to go against his desires. The dichotomy between desire and outward intentions has been noted by Liana Giannakopoulou: ‘In Cavafy’s poetry one must be faithful to one’s nature, and there is always a pervasive irony in the cases of young lovers who want to reject it’.¹⁹⁸ The narrator does not even have the patience to fully quote the pledge: its first part is repeated word-for-word, but is hastily interrupted by a hyphen so that the speaker can then contradict Ianthes’s pledge. The hyphen itself should not be brushed aside as a mere aesthetic device that signifies the interruption. Rather, it is part of a larger-scale expressive medium that alerts us to something altogether more secret: as Dimitris Papanikolaou notes, ‘Cavafy used the hanging dash at the end of seven of his titles, and in all of them the dash stands for the mark of the unsaid, symbolizing the homosexual subtext of the poem’.¹⁹⁹ Papanikolaou admittedly only refers to the highly expressive use of the hyphen in Cavafy’s titles, but given the context of the poem it certainly makes sense to interpret this hyphen in a similar way. After all, the lines that follow it – and indeed conclude the poem – are:

Όμως δεν έμενε τοιούτος διόλου.
Ο Ηδονισμός κ’ η Τέχνη της Αλεξανδρείας
αφοσιωμένο τους παιδί τον είχαν.²⁰⁰

This could be interpreted as a highly emotional interruption – the hyphen is in a way the natural climax after the speaker’s ironic comment, especially if we consider Nasos Vayenas’s comment that ‘It is through irony that Cavafy’s poetry communicates emotion’.²⁰¹ The observation by

¹⁹⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 15.

¹⁹⁷ Maria Margaronis has described Ianthes as a ‘cousin’ of Myres, due to the thematic similarity between the tension between the two characters’ cultural heritage and their lifestyle. (Maria Margaronis, ‘Mixing History and Desire: The Poetry of C.P. Cavafy’ from *The Nation*, July 2009)

¹⁹⁸ Giannakopoulou: 2000, p. 91. In this context, by ‘rejecting one’s nature’ I mean the way Ianthes tries to reject his desires.

¹⁹⁹ Dimitris Papanikolaou, “‘Words that tell and hide’”: Revisiting C.P. Cavafy’s Closets’ in *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* vol. 23 (2005), p. 258.

²⁰⁰ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 15.

²⁰¹ Nasos Vayenas, ‘The Language of Irony (Towards a Definition of the Poetry of Cavafy)’ in *The Mind and Art of C.P. Cavafy: Essays on his Life and Work* (Athens: Denise Harvey & Company, 1983), p. 107.

Vayenas may be general and not specific to this poem but it is highly apt in this context. After the degree of irony by the narrator, it is no surprise to find out in the end that Ianthes remained devoted to hedonism and the sensual lifestyle of Alexandria.²⁰²

We have then, a case of infelicitous performative, in this case an unfulfilled pledge or promise. The intention of the speaker to carry it through is undeniably there – indeed it is partly the seriousness and solemnity of the intention that is gently mocked by the poem’s narrator – but the power of hedonism is superior. In this case, therefore, we can see what Boletsi means when she notes that Austin believed in an intentional subject as the origin of the speech acts, but the subjects that utter the performatives in Cavafy are not in full authority over them. ‘The subject is both the producer and the effect’ of the performative because the performatives partly help form the subject’s identity.²⁰³ It is sensuality, in this case, that is in full authority, and the failure of the character’s pledge to himself – the infelicitous performative, in other words – helps form his identity as a ‘devoted child’ to sensuality. There is, moreover, a certain theatricality in Ianthes’s declaration: this is evident firstly in the way it is dramatised by having him address someone (perhaps an unknown interlocutor, or the speaker himself, or the reader as well) in the first person; and secondly, to borrow a phrase from ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’, his pledge was more ‘λόγια και θεατρικά’, in the final analysis, than genuine (despite the genuine intentions at the time when they were uttered). In turn, this element of theatricality in every-day speech can be linked to Derrida’s theories and the way they differ from Austin’s. Let us consider Derrida’s objection to Austin again: ‘Is not what Austin excludes as anomalous, exceptional, ‘non-serious’, that is, *citation* (on the stage, in a poem, or in a soliloquy), the determined modification of a general citationality – or rather, a general iterability – without which there would not even be a ‘successful’ performative?’²⁰⁴ Thus, according to Derrida, there is ‘a pervasive theatricality common to stage and world alike’²⁰⁵, and this pervasive theatricality also informs Cavafy’s poetry, even when it appears to be at its most introspective.

Performativity and supplication

A prime example of theatricality in an ostensibly introspective work is ‘Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου· ποιητού εν Κομμαγηνή· 595 μ.Χ.’ which features insistent supplications to art and poetry to save the speaker from the atrocious wounds of old age. On the surface, it is a poem of internal struggle and of a certain sense of oppressive, even claustrophobic, malaise. It is,

²⁰² This is the same kind of sensuality that is emphasised by Iases in his tomb, in the eponymous poem. The words used in this case are ‘ηδονή υπερτάτη’, to describe this Alexandrian lifestyle that Ianthes also succumbs to. Given the similarities between the two poems in the way they refer to the sensuality and hedonism of Alexandria, it may not be entirely coincidental that the characters have such similar-sounding names.

²⁰³ Boletsi: 2006, p. 404.

²⁰⁴ Derrida: 1982, p. 325.

²⁰⁵ Parker and Kosofsky-Sedgwick: 1995, p. 4

nevertheless, permeated by a performativity that brings an unexpected form of physicality to the introspective musings. The precise wording of the supplication in the poem is ‘εις σε προστρέχω, Τέχνη της Πουήσεως’,²⁰⁶ and the verb ‘προστρέχω’ is very important: the closest English rendering is ‘to call upon’, ‘recourse’, or ‘appeal’. It is, therefore, a performative, even in the strict Austinian sense of the term: in this context, to say ‘I call upon’ is the equivalent of actually calling upon. Whether it is a successful performative or not is not necessarily easy to discern. At first glance, the drugs offered by art can only numb the wound ‘for a little while’, as the last line shows.

It is important in this context to note the difference between performativity and performance. Performativity is not, or should not be, synonymous with a straightforward theatrical performance for example. In other words, performance is a one-off act, while performativity is not something that is produced on the spot by an ‘actor’ without reference (either explicit or implicit) to previously established conventions.²⁰⁷ When seen in this context, the main point of ‘Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου...’ is not whether the performative is successful or not in one particular instance. We have to move beyond the premise that memory and art offer temporary relief from the ravages of the passage of time. Alexander Nehamas places the poem ‘in a context of works slowly moving away from earlier sensuality ... along with poems that gradually reveal a growing awareness that merely having experience is secondary to making something out of it, (in particular, a text)’.²⁰⁸ The transitory nature of the ‘drugs’ of art is tragic – the almost throw-away ‘for a little while’ emphasises the lack of permanence of the performance. It is a snapshot in time, unlike the performative with its citational context and dependence on repetition of norms. The speaker, evidently aware of the long-term futility of his supplication to art, appears resigned to the fact that, even though he cannot endure the pain of aging, the metaphorical drugs of art can only do so much to help. His supplication is obviously not a one-off: it has happened before and it will happen again, and that brings forth the question of how much longer the mind will be able to summon the art of poetry to act as a temporary analgesic.

It is particularly noteworthy, as well as a point of departure from Austin’s model, that there is no physical interlocutor in this instance. Whereas Austin’s examples largely depend upon the interpretation of the performative utterance by the interlocutor, or the effect the utterance has – such as the warning ‘there’s a bull in the field’ – Cavafy’s Jason Kleander directs his performative utterance at an incorporeal substance (the art of poetry) instead of an actual person.

²⁰⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 30.

²⁰⁷ As per Judith Butler: ‘Performance as “bounded act” is distinguished from performativity insofar as the latter consists in a reiteration of norms which precede ... the performer’ (Judith Butler, ‘Critically Queer’ in *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Duke University Press, 1993), p. 24.). Also see Jon McKenzie, ‘Genre Trouble: (The) Butler Did It’ in *The Ends of Performance*, ed. by Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane (New York University, 1998), p. 225.

²⁰⁸ Alexander Nehamas, ‘Memory, Pleasure and Poetry: The Grammar of the Self in the Writing of Cavafy in *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2 (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), p. 317.

In this sense, it arguably operates more as a prayer, with Art as a deity or god-like figure.²⁰⁹ This arguably throws a spanner in the works because immediately we do not have the traditional Austinian model of locution, illocution and perlocution. On a basic level, in this case the art of poetry plays the part of the interlocutor and responding by producing the metaphorical drugs that soothe the pain of ageing.²¹⁰ In a sense, the art of poetry itself can take action through performativity, and that can be a radical notion. On this topic, Jonathan Culler has observed: ‘The notion of literature as performative contributes to a defence of literature: literature is not frivolous pseudo-statements but takes its place among the acts of language that transform the world, bringing into being the things that they name.’²¹¹ Jason Kleander may only have received temporary pain relief, but the poem itself transcends this by *enacting* this kind of pain relief across the years.²¹²

Moreover, the poem depicts a character on his own, using performativity not only in order to create a situation, but also to effect a physical presence out of an incorporeal entity. The poem is, after all, about something decidedly physical – ageing and the effect of the passing time on the body – which is described again in physical terms, using the metaphor of the wound and the knife. Performativity is thus again a practice that turns towards the body, as we saw in ‘Ομνύει’. In this instance we do not only have the physical body of the poem’s character, but the body of the text itself, given that the performative is directed at ‘the art of poetry’ – and, by implication, the text at the end.

So far, I have deliberately focused on characters on opposite ends of the age spectrum in order to outline two major ways in which performativity features in Cavafy’s poetry. On the one hand, we have young characters performatively shaping their identity – either intentionally or unintentionally, through the opposite of what they pledge – as in ‘Ομνύει’ or ‘Των Εβραίων (50 μ.Χ.)’. On the other, the old man of ‘Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου...’ uses performativity in order to physically affect the world around him. Cavafy’s performativity, therefore, goes beyond the discussion of whether a performative statement is felicitous or not: it shows the essence of people *doing* things with words in ways that have far-reaching implications. It is not just about whether a promise is kept or not, it is about producing and shaping an identity, and about having a physical say in the world.

²⁰⁹ This is not dissimilar to the way characters in other poems pray in order to avert a disaster: note the old servant in ‘Η αρρώστια του Κλείτου’ seeking recourse to an idol to save Kleitos, or ‘Δέησις’, as we shall soon see.

²¹⁰ On a somewhat more meta-literary level, it is the reader who plays the part of the interlocutor, thus establishing a certain theatrical give-and-take between text and reader.

²¹¹ Jonathan Culler, *Literary Theory: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford University Press: 1997, p. 97.

²¹² Ralf Haekel analyses performativity in a similar way in his discussion of W.B Yeats’s ‘Among School Children’: ‘a given poem not only *refers* to something it talks about but *enacts* it at the same time’. (From Ralf Haekel: ‘Performance, Performativity, and the Medium of Poetry: W.B. Yeats’s “Among Schol Children”’ in *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* vol. 64. Issue 3, p. 265)

A different type of supplication can be found in the much earlier ‘Δέησις’, whose title is translated as ‘Supplication’ by Evangelos Sachperoglou and ‘Prayer’ by Keeley and Sherrard. The poem is ostensibly very simple, but features a twist in the formula normally used for performative utterances. A sailor’s mother prays to an icon for her son’s safe return from sea, unaware that he has already died in a shipwreck. The prayer will obviously be an unsuccessful one, but the status of the performative from an Austinian point of view is not necessarily clear. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses this very issue in her article ‘Cavafy, Proust, and the Queer Little Gods’. She cites Austin’s example of making a bet after a race is over as an instance of a void performative, where it has not been carried out properly by all participants.²¹³ From the point of view of the prayer, however, it is ‘not infelicitous at all, since it *has* effectively gotten prayed, even if its supplication cannot be granted by the being to whom it was uttered’.²¹⁴

We have, therefore, a partly valid performative that unfortunately cannot be carried out by the interlocutor (in this case, the Virgin Mary as represented by the icon). In the middle of it all is the icon, which represents the tragic irony of the situation: as Kosofsky Sedgwick observes, ‘even supposing the prayer to be “happy”, the poem is steeped in the unhappiness of its performative situation’.²¹⁵ She then cites the icon listening, solemn and sad, ‘trapped in the temporal dislocation that afflicts this particular act of prayer’.²¹⁶ This temporal dislocation is one example of the hidden complexities performativity can uncover and clarify.

From an Austinian perspective, the temporal dislocation is not paradoxical – after all, the circumstances for a performative to be successful are not all present: one cannot effectively pray for a loved one to come back safely if the loved one has already come to grief, in the same way as one cannot declare a public attraction open if someone else has already done so, or one cannot bestow a name upon a child if said child has already been named. The poem itself is full of the sad irony of the situation, beyond the ponderous symbol of the grieving icon. Indeed, this early poem from 1898 – one of the very few 19th century poems in Cavafy’s published corpus – in many ways looks forward to Cavafy in his full artistic maturity: its structure is strikingly reminiscent of the much later ‘Το 31 π.Χ. στην Αλεξάνδρεια’. Both poems deal with irony in certain ways – ‘Δέησις’ with the classic model of tragic irony, where the audience is aware of facts hidden from the characters, whereas the latter poem ironises a tragic situation (Antony’s defeat) in a comic manner, with the bumbling peddler in the middle of the commotion. Both poems are in rhyming couplets – four and five respectively – and the rhyming relies heavily on homophones, such as ‘κερί’ and ‘καιροί’ in ‘Δέησις’ and ‘κόμη’, ‘Κόμμι’ and ‘κόμη’ in ‘Το 31 π.Χ. στην Αλεξάνδρεια’:

²¹³ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, ‘Cavafy, Proust, and the Queer Little Gods’ in Panagiotis Roilos (ed.) *Imagination and Logos: Essays on C.P. Cavafy* (Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 17.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*

Απ' την μικρή του, στα περίχωρα πλησίον, κόμη,
και σκονισμένος από το ταξίδι ακόμη

έφθασεν ο πραγματευτής. Και «Λίβανον!» και «Κόμμι!»
«Άριστον Έλαιον!» «Άρωμα για την κόμη!»²¹⁷

This kind of rhyming singularity draws attention to itself and is unusual for Cavafy.²¹⁸ It is always a sign of irony, which is reinforced by the sometimes jarring emjambement, again utilised in the same way in the two poems. When framed in this structure, the performative – or attempted performative, in any case – of the woman in 'Δέησις' is steeped in a sense of foreboding: it cannot escape the feeling that something is about to go wrong. It is important to remember at this point that Cavafy's poetry in general is unusually tightly-knit and interconnected: though poems work perfectly well in isolation, they are often informed, shaded, or otherwise clarified and enriched by their connection and contact to one another, both among the published and the unpublished poems. Performativity thus does not only work in isolation – it is a force that permeates (often subtly and imperceptibly) Cavafy's poetry with the potential to transform the way it is interpreted.²¹⁹

'Επέστρεψε' and 'Για νά' ρθουν –' are two further examples of Cavafian supplication or invocation. Kosofsky Sedgwick notes that while neither poem includes the phrase 'I invoke', 'it's clear that by the end of each poem, some specific ritual has been enacted that, at the beginning, had not yet been'.²²⁰ She contrasts these rituals to invocations in Proust, where they are 'mentioned by name ... alluded to, or brought into presence by some descriptive tour de force' in Proust.²²¹ According to Kosofsky Sedgwick, even though neither poem explicitly uses the phrase 'I invoke', they are examples of what Austin would call 'invocation' if invocation is 'included, as it ought to be, among the limited number of speech acts he referred to as explicit performative utterances'.²²²

'Για νά' ρθουν –' will be analysed in the next chapter in the discussion of memory and theatrical effects, mainly in relation to its use of (and play on) light and shadow. From the point of view of performativity, it also reads as a more relaxed and – ironically, given its emphasis on dim lighting – less dark counterpart of 'Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου...'. The invocation may not be as explicit, but as Kosofsky Sedgwick notes there is a clear ritual taking place in the course of the poem, with the lighting of the candle and the way its dim light is intended to aid the fantasies about 'love's shadows'. However, whereas the speaker in 'Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος

²¹⁷ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 47.

²¹⁸ Phrase coined by Jack Kelly. (Conversations with Jack Kelly, August 2015)

²¹⁹ The full implications of this will be explored in the next section on sexual identity.

²²⁰ Kosofsky Sedgwick: 2010, p. 10.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

²²² *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Κλεάνδρου...’ is using performativity to physically effect the world around him, and speaking in very tangible terms, ‘Για νά’ ρθουν –’ offers a stark contrast: here, performativity is only clustered around reveries, shadows and fantasies, instead of physical wounds and drugs.

As for ‘Επέστρεφε’, the sensation of past desires is called upon to return often in no uncertain terms. The repetition of *Επέστρεφε συχνά και παίρνε με*²²³ – including the repetition of the sound of the vowel ‘Ε’ – is an explicit invocation. Even though the word ‘επέστρεφε’ is not as strict a performative as the ‘I seek recourse’ of ‘Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου...’ it is, in this case, bound by the same conventions since it clearly relates to performativity. Cavafy’s poetry abounds with similar examples: ‘Γκρίζα’, as we will see in the next chapter, ends with a supplication to memory to keep the images of the past as they were. In this discussion, ‘Επέστρεφε’ is a bridge between the tangible physicality of ‘Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου...’ and the intangible, more abstract, and more passive reveries of ‘Για νά’ ρθουν –’. ‘Επέστρεφε’ is also talking about fantasies, but it is calling upon a *sensation* to return in a physical way:

όταν τα χείλη και το δέρμα ενθουμούνται,
κ’ αισθάνονται τα χέρια σαν ν’ αγγίζουν πάλι.²²⁴

Performativity in this case is closely linked to affect theory. The poem does not conjure up old memories out of thin air: they are physical memories awoken in a body transformed by time, a body that one gets the feeling is less and less able to delight in physical sensations. That much is evident in the supplication to ‘come back’ itself – it would not have been necessary to plead with that sensation to come back in the past. As Sara Ahmed notes, ‘bodily transformations might also transform what is experienced as delightful. If our bodies change over time, then the world around us will create different impressions.’²²⁵ Affect theory is also relevant to ‘Για νά’ ρθουν –’. The key is the quintessentially Cavafian image of the candle – not the candlelight used to evoke ‘love’s shadows’ in this case, but the physical object itself. Given its role in the character’s reveries and fantasies, it becomes an object of pleasure by association. That is, it becomes associated with the very feelings it evokes:

To experience an object as being affective or sensational is to be directed not only toward an object, but to "whatever" is around that object ... for instance, if you receive something delightful at a certain place, then the place itself is invested with happiness, as being what good feeling is directed toward.²²⁶

²²³ Cavafy: 1999 A, p. 60.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*

²²⁵ Sara Ahmed, ‘Happy Objects’ in Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*, (Duke University Press: 2010), p. 31.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Even in the case of an ostensibly very passive poem – the character just sits back and waits for his fantasies to visit – the image of the candle can bring an unexpected element of concrete physicality to the fore. In contrast to the reveries of ‘Για νά’ ρθουν –’, the sensation invoked in ‘Επέστρεφε’ is assigned a rather active part: the phrase ‘Επέστρεφε συχνά και παίρνει με’ appears, with one minor variation in three out of the poem’s eight lines, no doubt emphasising the plea that it comes ‘often’. In this context, the key is ‘παίρνει με’ – the verb is both very active and also highly sexualised. The sensation thus not only comes back, but also plays an active, sexual part, and shows once again that performativity in Cavafy can be used to affect the world and the characters’ surroundings physically.

Sexual Identity

A poem that operates in a highly sexualised context is ‘Στο Θέατρο’. It is one of the most important poems in terms of performativity of sexual identity in Cavafy, and I would also argue a pivotal poem in his development and in our understanding of the totality of his work. Given its content, it is a remarkably early poem – dating from 1904 – and, significantly, is a hidden poem, not part of the published canon. Papanikolaou refers to 1904 as ‘an important year for Cavafian poetics’ in the context of the erotic poems as a whole.²²⁷ Keeley also identified it as a key year for Cavafy’s development as a poet.²²⁸ It is astonishing that this poem is the contemporary of such works as ‘Φωνές’, ‘Επιθυμίες’, or ‘Τα Παράθυρα’, with their very pronounced ‘early Cavafy’ feel. ‘Στο Θέατρο’ marks the starting point of the issue of sexuality in Cavafy, which Papanikolaou argues was gradually ‘transferred to the center of his poetry’.²²⁹ This transfer began with the hidden ‘Στο Θέατρο’, and performativity plays a large part in the process:

Βαρέθηκα να βλέπω την σκηνή,
και σήκωσα τα μάτια μου στα θεωρεία.
Και μέσα σ’ ένα θεωρείο είδα σένα
με την παράξενη εμορφιά σου, και τα διεφθαρμένα νιάτα.
Κι αμέσως γύρισαν στον νου μου πίσω
όσα με είπανε το απόγευμα για σένα,
κ’ η σκέψις και το σώμα μου συγκινήθηκαν.
Κ’ ενώ εκοίταζα γοητευμένος
την κουρασμένη σου εμορφιά, τα κουρασμένα νιάτα,
το ντύσιμό σου το εκλεκτικό,
σε φανταζόμουν και σε εικόνιζα,

²²⁷ Papanikolaou: 2005, p. 238. It is also worth noting that 1904 was the year that Cavafy first used the name ‘C.P. Cavafy’ in that form.

²²⁸ Keeley: 1976, p. 46.

²²⁹ *Ibid.* 237

καθώς με είπανε το απόγευμα για σένα.²³⁰

This poem features a public performance of characters' sexuality. Furthermore, it is not just any kind of public – it is the theatre, where the performance on the actual stage is of less importance than the performance of the speaker's sexual reality as he is gazing up to the boxes at the sensual young man. Both characters are, in a sense, performing something private in public – that is, the performance is not altogether evident to 'the public' per se, but it is nevertheless present, as the setting of the theatre cannot fail to emphasise. The young man the narrator is gazing at is performing the part of the leading man of the narrator's fantasies, and performing his sexual identity insofar as his 'tired beauty' allows the speaker to deconstruct this image and infer precisely why the young man is tired. As for the narrator, his performance is more internal – he becomes a sort of stage director picturing the young man in scenarios of his choosing.

The function of theatre itself is therefore central to the way performativity operates in this poem. The main interest is in the boxes rather than the stage. There are notional similarities to this elsewhere in Cavafy: for example, in 'Καισαρίων', the speaker is exclusively interested in a character from the margins and footnotes of history, as opposed to the protagonists about whom many lines have been written.²³¹ The stage operates as a highlight for Cavafy: we have a staged text being performed, but it is ignored and pushed to the background, and this in turn only draws more attention to the fact that the boxes showcase staged society. The use of the theatre is important not in relation to theatre itself, but 'theatre as a projection of the public sphere, as a space of public gatherings and exchanges'.²³² The interest of the speaker, therefore, wanders from one stage to another as he fantasises about the young man in the boxes. It is all about staged society and the theatricality of everyday life.

It is important to consider the nature of the speaker's fantasies. The young man in the box is described as possessing 'διεφθαρμένα νειάτα'.²³³ Keeley and Sherrard translate this as 'dissolute', and it could also easily mean 'corrupt', 'depraved' or 'decadent'. This kind of identity is normally performed through codes and conventions in Cavafy. In this case, it is putting on a metaphorical performance for the speaker in public. The public nature of this performance is not left in doubt since the young man in question has been talked about before: 'γύρισαν στο νου μου πίσω / όσα με είπανε το απόγευμα για σένα'.²³⁴ He is, therefore, very much 'out there' – we can infer that the things the speaker heard were moral judgements, but they are subverted into something positive in the performance he stages. Morality, in this case, operates in a performative way – it is imposed and regulated by the people in charge who have

²³⁰ Cavafy: 1993, p. 88.

²³¹ Furthermore, the line 'είδα σένα με την παράξενη εμορφιά σου' from 'Στο Θέατρο' is virtually identical – both grammatically and notionally – to 'ήρθες συ με την άοριστη γοητεία σου' from 'Καισαρίων'.

²³² Athanasopoulou: 2014, p. 94.

²³³ Cavafy: 1993, p. 88.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

the power to do so (such as the ‘τα φαιά φορούντες, περί ηθικής λαλούντες’ of ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)).²³⁵ These people impose a certain performative set of expectations on what being a man should be: from the moment a person is declared ‘a man’, he is expected to behave like one, for instance (among other things) not to engage in homosexual activity.²³⁶ The construction and recognition of gender identity, therefore, operates performatively, through repeated performances and references to previous iterations.²³⁷

The significance of the lines ‘γύρισαν στο νου μου πίσω / όσα με είπανε το απόγευμα για σένα’ is immense, not only as an indicator of the public nature of the performance. The context of those things the speaker was told is perhaps somewhat vague, but we can assume it is society gossip about the young man’s homosexuality, and thus would initially carry a negative connotation. The speaker, however, takes these rumours and subverts them by using them as fuel for his fantasy. This subversion is also signalled by the use of the word ‘γύρισαν’ – its initial meaning is ‘returned’, but can also mean to turn, or turn around. In other words, the speaker takes what he heard about the young man in the boxes, and turns it around in order to fuel his desire. Papanikolaou notes the significance of this when he observes: ‘The most powerful move of the poem is to turn the public denunciation into an intensifier of desire. In a radical move that has to be thought of as subverting the very dynamic of the social condemnation of homosexuality, the poem turns the whispers into a titillating narration’.²³⁸ When the homosexual identity was performed in public, as it is here, it was – and still is in some cases – often performed in ‘code’ or with hidden signals. People would signify their identity through certain items of clothing, for example. (This was especially true in early 20th century Alexandria according to Sareyannis, where ‘an imitation of Victorian-age morality reigned supreme’).²³⁹

‘Στο Θέατρο’ has the same function in Cavafy’s oeuvre, especially given that it was hidden behind such ‘respectable’ poems as ‘Φωνές’ or ‘Τα Παράθυρα’. Sareyannis again notes the significance: ‘Cavafy hid and fortified his whole work behind the curtain of ‘Κερίά’. He never published the same dangerous poem twice when he lived’.²⁴⁰ Sareyannis’s point is about the published poems, whereas ‘Στο Θέατρο’ of course remained unpublished, but we can view it as

²³⁵ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 43. There will be a discussion on ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ and its relation to ‘Στο Θέατρο’ and other poems in the last chapter, in the context of subversion.

²³⁶ This is a strict performative even in an Austinian sense, since the people who dress in grey mentioned in the poem are the ones ‘authorised’, so to speak, to impose these rules.

²³⁷ The issue of the performative nature of gender in poetry has been addressed by Cyrena N. Pondrom in ‘T.S. Eliot: The Performativity and Gender in *The Waste Land*. As an example, she addresses the section of *The Waste Land* titled ‘A Game of Chess’, where the female speaker is identified as female, but the narrator’s gender is not specified. As a result, ‘the narrator is constructed as male (this time in the role of husband) by what he refuses or fails to perform of the gender expectations his own actions summon into the poem from its surrounding community of discourse.’ (From Cyrena N. Pondrom, ‘T.S. Eliot: Performativity and Gender in *The Waste Land*, in *Modernism/Modernity*, Vol. 12 no. 3, Johns Hopkins University Press: September 2003, p. 431.

²³⁸ Papanikolaou: 2005, p. 246.

²³⁹ I.A. Sareyannis, *Σχόλια στον Καβάφη* (Athens: Ikaros, 1964), p. 49.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

an extension to that argument. If a ‘respectable’ poem like ‘Κερίά’ is serving the function of the curtain, behind which the more daring poems can go more unnoticed, ‘Στο Θέατρο’ can be seen as standing in the wings, hidden even further from the public, illuminating and further clarifying the connections in Cavafy’s work. It is the first in a series of poems that deal with homosexual desire – in increasingly explicit terms, it has to be said – and uses performativity to subvert, in the form of (homo)sexual identity and fantasy. A further aspect of fantasy that links the poem to later works can be found in the line ‘την κουρασμένη σου εμορφιά, τα κουρασμένα νειάτα’²⁴¹. The object of the speaker’s fantasies is thus ‘marked’ by his homosexual identity if you know how to decode the signs. Peter Mackridge mentions the fact that ‘homeroetic code-words are frequently used in Cavafy’s poetry’,²⁴² and in this case it is ‘κουρασμένη εμορφιά’ that triggers the speaker’s ‘decoding’.²⁴³

Given the year it was written and the moralising society of the time (as noted by Sareyannis above), it is no wonder that ‘Στο Θέατρο’ was hidden. Along the same lines, it is also worth noting that it has an unusual degree of specificity in its setting, which sets it apart from Cavafy’s other theatrical poems.²⁴⁴ That is, it refers specifically to Cavafy’s contemporary theatre. Maria Athanasopoulou observes that it is one of only two poems in Cavafy’s output to refer to his contemporary theatre, with the other one being ‘Απ’ τες εννιά –’.²⁴⁵ I would argue that ‘Στο Θέατρο’ is even more unique, however, and stands completely on its own. The difference is not only that it was not published, compared to ‘Απ’ τες εννιά –’ – the reference to theatre is quite extensive and all-encompassing, pervading as it does all aspects of the poem. In ‘Απ’ τες εννιά –’, the word ‘theatre’ is incidental inasmuch as it is used in passing by the narrator: he refers only to theatre as a building and it highlights the sense of alienation as his local streets have become unrecognizable to him. ‘Στο Θέατρο’ on the other hand, has the only reference to be found in Cavafy’s poetry to a contemporary production, even though the main interest of course is elsewhere.²⁴⁶ This, alongside the poem’s unprecedented (for its time in Cavafy’s chronology) treatment of homosexual desire, is a further reason that makes it an outlier in Cavafy’s tightly integrated canon, and is arguably an additional reason explaining its exclusion.

The fact is, however, that despite its exclusion – and maybe even because of it in a way – ‘Στο Θέατρο’, thanks in part to the role of performativity in it, plays a major part in Cavafy’s

²⁴¹ Cavafy: 1993, p. 88.

²⁴² Peter Mackridge, Introduction from Cavafy/Sachperoglou: 2008, p. xxiii.

²⁴³ A major point that can be inferred from this is that the performance of what one might anachronistically call gay identity is an intrinsic, rather than circumstantial, part of Cavafy’s poetry. Given that art and sex are inextricably linked in Cavafy, it is no surprise that ‘Στο Θέατρο’ presents them in such a way, with art upstaged by the speaker’s fantasies. For more analysis of the codes used in the expression of homosexuality, see last chapter on subversion.

²⁴⁴ In this case I am using the word to denote primarily the poems that either have a setting in the theatre or are directly theatre-inspired.

²⁴⁵ Athanasopoulou: 2014, p. 93.

²⁴⁶ The interest is in the ‘theatre as a public sphere’, as mentioned earlier, which serves as a perfect metaphor for the signals, codes, and conventions of performing the homosexual identity in public.

gradual unveiling of his treatment of the homosexual identity. It is the poem that kick-starts the discourse of sexuality as a central issue in Cavafy's poetry, and anticipates later poems on the same subject. Savvidis identifies 1922 as a further turning point in this discourse: 'Until now, apart from the border-line case of 'Καισαρίων', none of the modern stage directions we have read directly reveal the sex of the object of love or eroticism. This does not explicitly happen until 1922 – in the 106th out of the 154 official poems'.²⁴⁷

'Θέατρον της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)' dates from 1923, just after that watershed year. It was mentioned above in terms of the performatively imposed rules by 'τα φαιά φορούντες'. The relation between the poems by the use of the word 'theatre' in the titles is neither superficial nor coincidental. The later poem also makes an explicit parallel between theatre and the performative nature of sexual identity. In this case, the speaker describes himself as a 'young man of the theatre', which is telling in more ways than one.²⁴⁸ Evidently he is a skilled actor at disguising his true identity in public. The nature of this identity is not up for debate – he circulates

Στίχους της ηδονής της εκλεκτής, που πηαίνει
προς άγονην αγάπη κι αποδοκιμασμένη.²⁴⁹

These lines have to be framed in the context of 1923 – one year after the first wholly unequivocal reference to homosexual love – and in relation to the way 'Στο Θέατρο' operates. As a result of this, 'Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...' is not just about a character putting on a mask in public to cloak his true identity. It is about the subversive power of poetry, it becomes almost an allusion to the way Cavafy himself surreptitiously circulated his verses with great care, until they almost unnoticeably infiltrated the mainstream heteronormative society. Performativity in this poem is at first glance a mainstream, normative force (through the 'code of conduct' performatively imposed by those in power), as opposed to a subversive one. At the same time, however, the main character is also performatively shaping his identity, this time in a subversive way.²⁵⁰ It even involves the word 'κρυφά' – hidden, that is, like 'Στο Θέατρο'. The importance and magnitude of this gradual infiltration was noted by Sareyannis, both in his comments quoted earlier and in the way he described Cavafy as a person as 'almost pathologically shy' and wrote 'the more I think of the magnitude of his natural shyness, the more I admire Cavafy as a person'.²⁵¹

²⁴⁷ G.P. Savvidis, *Τα Βασικά Θέματα της Ποίησης του Καβάφη* (Athens: Ikaros, 1993), p. 54. Savvidis is referring to 'Σ' ένα βιβλίο παληό –'. Peter Mackridge, in his introduction to Sachperoglou's translation of Cavafy's canon, argues that the first unequivocal reference to the gender of the loved one is in 1919 in 'Του πλοίου', but if one is being very strict one could claim that the gender of the speaker is not completely obvious (even though there is no doubt, contextually, that the lovers are both male).

²⁴⁸ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 43.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ See the last chapter for a longer discussion on the relationship between performance and subversion in Cavafy and an analysis of how 'Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...' is a key poem in that regard.

²⁵¹ Sareyannis: 1964, p. 48.

Conclusions

With this, we come full circle to ‘Επήγα’, the sister poem of ‘Ομνύει’. There are formal differences between the two poems: for example, ‘Επήγα’ does not feature the space in the middle of the lines like ‘Ομνύει’, and is written in the first person. Thematically, however, they are very similar, in the same way as Ianthes was described as Myres’s ‘cousin’ earlier. Performativity is not as major a feature in ‘Επήγα’, but we can find its traces through the connection to ‘Ομνύει’. In both poems, the characters surrender themselves to pleasure, the one in ‘Επήγα’ willingly compared to the reluctance of the protagonist of ‘Ομνύει’. The traces of performativity in ‘Επήγα’ are not only because of the thematic link of the night – and its ‘promises’, as ‘Ομνύει’ performatively depicts it – but also because of the last pair of lines that so annoyed Seferis:

Κ’ ήπια από δυνατά κρασιά, καθώς
Που πίνουν οι ανδρείοι της ηδονής.²⁵²

Seferis wrote about these lines: ‘Οι «ανδρείοι της ηδονής» μ’ ενοχλούσαν από την αρχή ... μου φαίνεται πως αυτού του είδους οι «ανδρείοι» άφησαν στον Αλεξανδρινό μια κακή ρυτίδα’.²⁵³ Seferis misses the point: while there is arguably nothing ontologically braver about preferring homosexual love in and of itself, Cavafy frames the lines in the context mentioned above: where society imposes all sorts of sexual and gender roles, and passes moralising judgments. In other words, it is framed in the context of performativity as a normative force that imposes rules through repetition. At the same time, the metaphorical action of ‘drinking strong wines’ has an element of ritual about it, and ritualistic performance is a key feature of performativity. In this context, Papanikolaou situates it within a group of erotic poems specifically designed as ‘keys’ for Cavafy’s entire corpus in terms of uncovering and producing a sexual identity in a subversive way.²⁵⁴

Performativity in Cavafy, therefore, is not only about whether characters make felicitous or infelicitous utterances – it is a force with wide-ranging personal and social implications. On a basic level, people use it to shape or even produce their identities, as in ‘Των Εβραίων (50 μ.Χ.)’ or ‘Ομνύει’. When a Cavafian character makes a pledge to be a certain way, and then proceeds to contradict it, he is performatively living out the opposite of his intention, and this ritualistic performance of the opposite shapes and creates a body and its identity. From young characters performatively shaping their identity, on the other hand we have older characters using performativity to create situations and to effect a physical presence, either from something as incorporeal as a memory (which then turns into an active sensation in ‘Επέστρεφε’) or as abstract

²⁵² Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 63.

²⁵³ From *Μέρες Ε*, quoted by G.P. Savvidis in *Ο Καβάφης του Σεφέρη* (Athens: Estia, 1993), p.141.

²⁵⁴ Papanikolaou: 2005, p. 245.

as the art of poetry, as in ‘Μελαγχολία του Ιάσωνος Κλεάνδρου...’. When the interlocutor during a performative utterance is not another person, as in the straightforward Austinian model, but a concept, a memory, a sensation, or an icon, the boundary between Austin’s serious and non-serious performatives is blurred, and a new type of performativity is born: one that operates with one foot in the ‘real’, physical world, and another in a more intangible realm that a character is trying to interact with, often in a – paradoxically – physical way.

When performativity is mentioned in relation to gender and sexual identity, it is a very important tool for underlining the importance of the gay identity in Cavafy. Repetition, in a similar sense to citationality, is a key part of Cavafy’s poetics, especially the later we get. Cavafy works and reworks the issues of sexuality, love, and desire, and performativity plays a key part in this in the way it alludes to the fact that the gay identity is an essential, as opposed to circumstantial, part of Cavafy. Performativity, all things considered, is both a formative and a transformative force in Cavafy’s poetry. It is present in an Austinian way in ‘Ομνύει’, by association in its sister poem ‘Ἐπήγα’, and via the pivotal hidden work ‘Στο Θέατρο’ it informs all the variations on the theme of homosexual love and desire that were to follow. From the opening premise that it helps form people’s identities (whether in a normative or a transgressive way), to the conclusion that it produces a new discourse on sexuality and desire, it is a power that shifts Cavafy’s work on its axis ever so slightly, but enough to make us look at it afresh.

Chapter three: Memory Plays: Cavafy's Dramatic Representations of Memory

Introduction

The idea of memory is closely tied to performativity, given the latter's repetitive nature and reliance on a collective memory of previous iterations. The main aim of this chapter is to show that memory in Cavafy operates in a highly dramatic way, and that his characters are not the passive voyeurs that most critics have so far described. The sub-genre of the 'memory play', as has been defined in discussions of the theatre of Tennessee Williams and others, will form the starting point of my analysis. It will be used as a point of contrast to Cavafy's theatrical conception of memory, and to illustrate Cavafy's modernity in this matter (compared with the more traditional Williams). It is difficult to provide a precise definition of 'memory play', since it is not a strict term. Tennessee Williams used it to describe *The Glass Menagerie*, stating in the production notes: 'Being a "memory play", *The Glass Menagerie* can be presented with unusual freedom from convention'²⁵⁵. The work's narrator, whose flashbacks are the main action of the piece, also refers to it as a memory play at various points. This has led to critics considering the memory play as a sub-genre that includes works beginning with a narration by the protagonist and developing as flashbacks to action in the past. For instance, Paul T. Nolan states that, in a memory play, 'the world of the drama *is* the memory of a single character, the narrator-protagonist'.²⁵⁶ For the purposes of my discussion, I will refer to the memory play as a performance that normally begins and ends with a narration from the present, framing the bulk of the action, set in the past, which in turn comes from the internal world of the narrator-protagonist. I will argue that comparing the framework of the memory play to Cavafy's poetry provides new insights into the way memory operates; for this reason, I will start with a comparison between Williams and Cavafy before focusing exclusively on the theatrical function of memory in the latter's work.

Poetry was important to Williams as a tool for expressing the interior psychic world of a character, and by extension there is a close relationship between poetry and memory. When he explores memory in his work, Williams often turns to poetry, either in the form of self-consciously 'poetic' and lyrical narrations (such as by *The Glass Menagerie*'s protagonist) or even a performed poem, as in the climax of *The Night of the Iguana*. Cavafy, by contrast, goes the other way: this chapter will show that a great number of his poems can be interpreted as 'memory plays', but this parallel will accentuate the inherent theatricality of his work as a starting point and focus on the interpretation of Cavafy as a radical director, rather than an introspective dreamer.

²⁵⁵ Tennessee Williams, *The Glass Menagerie from A Streetcar Named Desire and Other Plays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), p. 229

²⁵⁶ Paul T. Nolan, 'Two Memory Plays: *The Glass Menagerie* and *After the Fall*' in R.B. Parker (ed.), *The Glass Menagerie: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc, 1983), p. 145.

Memory is a very important topic in studies of Cavafy, and it is not surprising that it has already been widely discussed by commentators. The theatricality of Cavafy's take, however, has been relatively overlooked and will open up new avenues of interpretation. At this point, a brief look at the way memory is usually interpreted by Cavafy scholars is necessary. Roderick Beaton, for example, compares Cavafy to Proust in his eponymous article, and starts from the premise that both writers 'are fundamentally concerned with exploring the nature of time and its relation to memory and art'.²⁵⁷ Beaton's view is that Cavafy's treatment of memory is mainly a passive one, focusing on reverie and the past: 'For Cavafy the raw material for art, then, has first to be internalized ... and then to become part of the past, where memory and imagination can work upon it'.²⁵⁸

Beaton's interpretation is a valid one, and its archetype is the Cavafy of 'Ἐκόμισα εἰς τὴν Τέχνην', who writes 'Κάθομαι καὶ ρεμβάζω'.²⁵⁹ The poem focuses on the connection between memory and art, which is a vital one in any discussion of Cavafy. Gregory Jusdanis, for instance, similarly observes that memory is inseparable from the artistic process'²⁶⁰. Alexander Nehamas makes an analogous point when he writes that 'what seems to be needed is not simply remembering but also the realization that what is remembered is to be written about, that it must be the source and content of poetry'.²⁶¹ The focus on the passivity of Cavafy where memory is concerned has largely overshadowed the alternative angle. Beaton's Cavafy is 'wholly passive', sitting and daydreaming Proustian reveries.²⁶² To borrow Beaton's own disclaimer, this is a legitimate view of Cavafy, but so is the alternative one of Cavafy as a 'technourgos' in the *present*, acting as a master stage director where memory is concerned. Beaton indeed later concedes that the poet's role is not always passive, and the chapter will push this view to its natural conclusion.

For Christopher Robinson, sensuality in Cavafy is portrayed 'as a fragmented, fleeting impetus to art, at least when filtered through the transforming power of memory'.²⁶³ Robinson's description of memory as a 'transforming power' is the key here – it is a transforming power precisely because Cavafy uses it to dynamically recreate events in the present, as opposed to passively looking back to the past. Jusdanis makes a similar point, stating that 'memory in Cavafy serves as a defense against the decay of time'.²⁶⁴ He sees these moments of remembering as temporary and brief felicitous instances – 'in order for experience to be irrevocably salvaged it

²⁵⁷ Roderick Beaton, 'Cavafy and Proust' from *Grand Street* vol. 6, no. 2 (Winter 1987), p. 131.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

²⁵⁹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 33.

²⁶⁰ Gregory Jusdanis, *The Poetics of Cavafy: Textuality, Eroticism, History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 90.

²⁶¹ Alexander Nehamas, 'Memory, Pleasure and Poetry: The Grammar of the Self in the Writing of Cavafy' from *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* vol. 1, no. 2 (October 1983), p. 310.

²⁶² Beaton: 1987, p. 134.

²⁶³ Christopher Robinson, *C.P. Cavafy* (Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1988), p. 7.

²⁶⁴ Jusdanis: 1987, p. 92.

must be elevated to the absolute realm of aesthetic form, it must be transformed into art'.²⁶⁵ The approach of this chapter expands on this and suggests that the method of this defense against decay is one of a stage director who dynamically recreates events in the present, as opposed to a Proustian dreamer who sinks into reverie. As Yannis Dallas writes of Cavafy, 'αντί για εμπνεύσεις και συλλήψεις, μιλά για «εργασία», «δούλεψι», «τεχνική»'.²⁶⁶ Dallas makes this point in a different context – contrasting Cavafy to Solomos – but it is in line with the view of Cavafy in this chapter as a 'technourgos', being more about technology and the present as opposed to reverie and the past.

In order to advance the argument of Cavafy as a stage director and 'technourgos' recreating things in the present, I shall briefly put it in context of Tennessee Williams's poetic treatment of memory in his plays. It is evident that Williams, even in his theatrical works, always thought in terms of poetry. For example, he sent a note of thanks to actor Alexander Nicol after a production of *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, praising him for having the quality 'which I think of as "the poem of the play"' – the poetry of the man who is not competing'.²⁶⁷ It is not a coincidence that Williams kept thinking of and describing his plays in poetic terms, and this poetry comes to the fore especially when the plays are concerned with memory. The recourse to poetry is evident above all in *The Night of the Iguana* and *The Glass Menagerie*, with the former featuring a poet reciting his last work, which is about loss and the passage of time. The protagonist of the latter is also a poet, and a more fanciful one at that – indeed the memory play that is *The Glass Menagerie* abounds with poetic flights of fancy that are in many ways the polar opposite of Cavafy's normally restrained style.

It is worth noting in passing, therefore, that we can detect a certain inversion of styles when comparing the poetic output of Cavafy and the dramatic output of Tennessee Williams: the former conceives of memory in dramatic terms and uses his poetry to flesh it out in a concise, ostensibly 'un-poetic' fashion, whereas the latter is the dramatist who keeps seeking recourse to poetry in his plays when discussing memory. The logical extension of this argument would be to claim that Williams internalises memory by using the intimate medium of poetry at various points in his work, whereas Cavafy goes from the internal world of the remembered past to the physical recreation in the present. Indeed, as we shall see later, Cavafy's characters start from an internalised premise and continue by trying to have a physical say in the process.

Voluntary and involuntary recollections

²⁶⁵ Jusdanis: 1987, p. 92.

²⁶⁶ Yannis Dallas, 'Ο Καβάφης και η Καλλιτεχνική Εμπειρία', in Michalis Pieris (ed.), *Εισαγωγή στην Ποίηση του Καβάφη*, (Crete: Crete University Press), p. 311.

²⁶⁷ Albert J. Devlin, 'Writing in "a place of stone"' from Matthew C. Roudane (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Tennessee Williams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 109.

In his analysis of memory in Cavafy, Jusdanis observes that ‘often the poet addresses memory in a manner reminiscent of the epic’s invocation of the muse’.²⁶⁸ We can indeed see this in ‘Γκρίζα’, but the poem is much more than a straightforward invocation or recourse to the past. Firstly, it corresponds particularly closely to the structure of the memory play sub-genre. It is clear why it fits the mould: both ‘Γκρίζα’ and *The Glass Menagerie* open with a narration by the main character in the present, flash back to action in the past – during which the character is one of the protagonists – and end with a reflection from the present again. This reflection by the speaker of ‘Γκρίζα’ indicates a further way the poem can be seen as a ‘memory play’ – if we take the word ‘play’ as a verb as opposed to a noun, the poem’s invocation at the end signals the beginning of a ‘playing out’ of memory in the present. The flashback in ‘Γκρίζα’ is among the most clearly delineated in Cavafy’s poetry, given the space and use of ellipses. The past events are narrated with extreme concision, essentially amounting to “We loved each other for a month, then he left and we never saw each other again”. This concision, tied with the reflection that his lover’s face will have lost its beauty by now, shows that the past events are not nearly as important as what is made of them in the present and its interaction with the past. This is further emphasised by the transitional passage:

Θ’ ασχήμισαν – αν ζει – τα γκρίζα μάτια.
Θα χάλασε τ’ ωραίο πρόσωπο.²⁶⁹

This transition is very important because it paves the way for the final reflection of the narrator, and points the reader towards the crux of the poem. It is not merely about the recollection of past events. It is a complex relationship between past and present, joined together by the medium of memory and performance:

Μνήμη μου, φύλαξέ τα συ ως ήσαν.
Και, μνήμη, ότι μπορείς από τον έρωτά μου αυτόν,
Ότι μπορείς φέρε με πίσω απόψι.²⁷⁰

On one level, the performance is the result of the supplication to ‘bring back’ the past events – they are recreated and performed in the present. On another level, the performance is not fully successful: it does not bring back the past verbatim, it can only bring back whatever it can. The performance of the character’s memory is akin to a performance in the theatre: memory in this case takes the role and function of the script, which, rather than being set in stone, provides a basic framework for the performance. The performance, in turn, is different every time, with different cadences to different words, different emphases to various events, and, equally importantly, a different reception by the audience. This all points to the fact that the poem – as

²⁶⁸ Jusdanis: 1987, p. 90.

²⁶⁹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 92.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

indeed are many other examples in Cavafy – is not just about the specific situation it is describing. The plead with memory to save whatever is left from past events, and to bring them back is also a comment on the very function of memory; a look at how memory operates.

There is a link here with ‘Θυμήσου, Σώμα...’, with its emphasis on the experiences that were cut short or left unfulfilled. The main connection to ‘Γκρίζα’ is that they both feature the same type of invocation to memory, an invocation that is not only about looking to the past, but about recreating in the present as well. In this short poem of only two sentences and eleven lines, the word ‘θυμήσου’ occurs three times, and is to be found in the two most conspicuous places of the poem – the opening ‘Σώμα, θυμήσου’, and the ending that mirrors the first line by reversing the order as ‘θυμήσου, σώμα’.²⁷¹ It is significant that these last two words also form the title of the poem with an ellipsis, which consolidates the feeling that this process of turning to memory in an almost desperate attempt to preserve past desires and sexual encounters is a repetitive one that offers the speaker solace in old age. The ellipsis is both a sign of repetition, with the ending taking us back to the beginning every time, and an indication of the distance that memory has to traverse in order to perform the recollection. This kind of circularity can be seen as vicious – if the end takes us back to the beginning every time, this ‘performance’ of memory that the character seeks never fully materialises in the way it was intended. What we get instead is a series of rehearsals, in the sense that memory sets the scene repeatedly.

The discussion of the invocations to memory in these two poems would be incomplete without Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s observation that ‘in a number of poems the candidly autoerotic invocation of this figure, alchemized by memory, also more or less simply constitutes Cavafy’s account of his writing vocation’.²⁷² The figure, in this case, is Eros, and although the invocations in ‘Γκρίζα’ and ‘Θυμήσου, Σώμα...’ are not specifically to the ‘queer little gods’ Kosofsky Sedgwick discusses, her comment on the auto-eroticism and alchemy of memory is notably relevant to this discussion. In particular, this type of self-referential alchemy of memory is a kind of performance that transcends the image of Cavafy as a passive dreamer.²⁷³

A very important line in ‘Θυμήσου, Σώμα...’ is the one pleading with memory to also remember those desires that were frustrated and not fulfilled: ‘θυμήσου ... κ’ εκείνες τις επιθυμίες ... που ... κάποιο τυχάιο εμπόδιο τις ματαίωσε’.²⁷⁴ In other words, the emphasis is not only on preserving, but also on *creating* in an act of retrospective performance and re-imagination. On the one hand, then, we have recollection, and on the other, recreation, as the two major driving forces of the poem. In this sense, ‘Θυμήσου, Σώμα...’ is a sort of ‘sister poem’ of ‘Γκρίζα’. The ‘ό,τι μπορείς’ of the latter is also present in the former, accompanied and enhanced

²⁷¹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 95.

²⁷² Kosofsky Sedgwick: 2010, p. 9.

²⁷³ It should be noted that Kosofsky Sedgwick develops her idea in terms of performativity, and of invocation as a performative utterance.

²⁷⁴ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 95.

by the creation of new memories in an interactive relationship with the past. It is, therefore, a true ‘give-and-take’ – we need no reminder of the fallibility of memory, with past events gradually being eroded by time, but in this case memory also gets its own back in a way, by recreating completely new experiences.

In addition, the inversion of ‘σώμα, θυμήσου’ in the beginning to ‘θυμήσου, σώμα’ at the end is not merely a symmetrical effect. It makes a big difference regarding the emphasis of the poem: the focus is completely different than it would have been if the phrase was repeated verbatim in the end. As it is, the emphasis is firmly on ‘σώμα’ as the word that bookends the poem and echoes in our ears after the end. The emphasis, in other words, is on the physical aspect – it is on the body, not on memory as an incorporeal entity. This is not the style of a passive dreamer or voyeur, as Cavafy has often been portrayed. It is an indication that he was firmly focused on the present, and on the process of having a physical say in the world around him. Kostas Ouranis, writing in 1927, was a rare example for that time of a critic who read Cavafy’s sensual poems as considerably more active and participatory than the common view that saw recollection and passiveness. He observed: ‘Αντίθετα προς τη γεύση της στάχτης που αφήνει στους άλλους κάθε έρωτας που πέρασε, [ο Καβάφης] διατιρούσε από τον καθένα μια γεύση γλυκότητας’.²⁷⁵ This remark by Ouranis is important regarding the sweetness that he mentions. The way that this sweetness is retained by Cavafy is through the action of recreating in the present through performance, as opposed to passively reminiscing about the past.

Cavafy’s use of punctuation, of which ‘Θυμήσου, Σώμα...’ offers one example, shows a further way in which he conceives of memory dramatically. For example, let us take the following use of the ellipsis and hyphen in ‘Μέρες του 1903’:

Δεν τα ήυρα ξανά – τα τόσο γρήγορα χαμένα...
Τα ποιητικά τα μάτια, το χλωμό
το πρόσωπο ... στο νύχτωμα του δρόμου...²⁷⁶

The punctuation here has multiple functions. It can be taken as stage directions, with the speaker recalling his past lover in ‘real time’, as the fragmented memories gradually appear to him. At the same time, it can indicate the intensity of emotion concealed behind the words. Furthermore, if we also take the repetition into account, the punctuation and hesitations can seem analogous to an actor listening to a prompter, or trying to memorise lines.

This latter interpretation is also the most far-reaching in the context of Cavafy and performance. The poems that reminisce about past sensual encounters are not merely recalling

²⁷⁵ Kostas Ouranis, ‘Ο σεξουαλισμός του Καβάφης’ (1927) in *Κ.Π. Καβάφης: Κριτικές Μελέτες*, ed. by Giorgis Pikros. Athens: Neos Stathmos, p. 26.

²⁷⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 96.

stories, and Cavafy is not merely ‘interested’ in theatre. Instead, he uses tools from the dramatist’s craft to flesh out the idea of memory from mere introspection to a multi-dimensional entity: in the case of ‘Θυμήσου, Σώμα...’, the repetition and inversion of words suggests a sense of trying to memorise oneself into a new part, and trying to remember the words for said part, much as an actor learning a new role. For Cavafy, therefore, there is an analogy between getting back to one’s memories and the process of an actor learning a role.²⁷⁷ The recourse to memory cannot bring back events verbatim, or literally ‘as they were’ so to speak, and the actor in a similar way will never give the same performance twice, even after the role is learned. This can take the form of various subtle nuances that differ from performance to performance - small alterations of the script for instance, or differences in reception by different audiences.

To take the parallel further, the first stanza of ‘Εν απογνώσει’ illustrates an extension of this ‘playing out’ of memories:

Τον έχασ’ εντελώς. Και τώρα πια ζητεί
 στα χείλη καθενός καινούριου εραστή
 τα χείλη τα δικά του. στην ένωσι με κάθε
 καινούριον εραστή ζητεί τα πλανηθεί
 πως είναι ο ίδιος νέος, πως δίδεται σ’εκείνον.²⁷⁸

The memory of the character’s ex-lover haunts the above lines, with their desperate sense of self-deception as he tries to revive the memories by super-imposing them into different people. The caesura could be interpreted as an indication of the chasm between this self-deception and the reality of the meaningless encounters he is clinging to. In other words, the character is engaging in an act of performance by attempting to super-impose the memories he had of his old lover on every new sexual experience. This dichotomy between fantasy and reality is both poignant and indicative of this sense of ‘hybrid time’ in Cavafy’s poetry. That is, the character seeks to super-impose certain elements of the past – like his ex-lover’s lips, for example – on things from the present. He tries to create a certain physical union between the past and present that is more complex than mere reminiscences, or the ‘simple’ attempt to travel back in time. Furthermore, the character’s desperate search for a person to fit the role of his former lover suggests a series of rehearsals without arriving at a fully satisfactory performance in the end. This kind of wishful thinking by the character of the poem can be very akin to theatrical representation. The new lovers are, for him, playing the part of his old lover, but clearly not successfully enough.

The involuntary triggering of memory is not always a benign influence in Cavafy. As mentioned earlier, a grey opal makes the speaker of ‘Γκρίζα’ reminisce about an old love and plead with memory to bring back as much of it as possible. Juxtaposed with ‘Γκρίζα’ is ‘Εν

²⁷⁷ There is also a link to performativity, which relies on repetition in order to acquire importance and meaning.

²⁷⁸ Cavafy: 1999, p. 40.

Εσπέρα’, where the speaker is prompted to read an old love letter by a ‘resonance’ of the days of sensual pleasure with a particular lover. So far, so Proustian – the picture up to this point corresponds closely to Beaton’s view of Cavafy’s treatment of memory as passive. Once again, memory is triggered involuntarily, and subsequently rekindled by the theatrical use of a prop – the letter, in this case. It is this theatrical use of the prop that changes the angle, with the speaker actively trying to effect and affect things in the present, as opposed to idly reminiscing about an old love. Edmund Keeley does hint at this when he writes that the speaker then goes out on his balcony ‘to reassure himself that the images he has just celebrated are not merely the product of a fanciful nostalgia but belong to the history of a living reality made up of streets and shops that he can still actually see’.²⁷⁹ This rekindling does not have the desired effect, however, and the speaker is plunged into a melancholy that he tries to shake off by going to the balcony to distract himself with the sights and sounds of the city.

The staging of this poem is thus multi-dimensional and is divided into two acts: the first one in the enclosed space where the speaker is reminiscing, which ends when the lights literally go down – and the second one, a denouement on the balcony, that accentuates the modern, the technological, and the present-day movement of bodies in a physical space (in this case the traffic in the streets and the shops). Analysing ‘Εν Εσπέρα’ from this perspective emphasises a different angle of Cavafy’s take on memory. Where many critics focus on reminiscence, reverie, and the past, the use of performance and drama as an interpretative tools brings it firmly to the present: in a complex world where technology, modernity, physicality on the one hand, and memory, reminiscence and loss are intertwined.

‘Να μείνει’, ‘Μια νύχτα’ and ‘Μακρυνά’

‘Να μείνει’ offers a different, more multi-layered kind of staged performance of memory:

Η ώρα μια την νύχτα θά’τανε,
ή μιάμισυ.

Σε μια γωνιά του καπηλειού·
πίσω απ’ το ξύλινο το χώρισμα.
Εκτός ημών των δυό το μαγαζί όλως διόλου άδειο.
Μια λάμπα πετρελαίου μόλις το φώτιζε.
Κοιμούντανε, στην πόρτα, ο αγρυπνισμένος υπηρέτης.

Δεν θα μας έβλεπε κανείς. Μα κιόλας
είχαμεν εξαφθεί τόσο πολύ,

²⁷⁹ Keeley: 1976, p. 53.

που γίναμε ακατάλληλοι για προφυλάξεις.

Τα ενδύματα μισοανοίχθηκαν – πολλά δεν ήσαν
γιατί επύρωνε θεός Ιούλιος μήνας.

Σάρκας απόλαυσις ανάμεσα
στα μισοανοιγμένα ενδύματα·
γρήγορο σάρκας γύμνωμα – που το ίνδαλμά του
είκοσι έξι χρόνους διάβηκε· και τώρα ήλθε
να μείνει μες στην ποίησιν αυτή.²⁸⁰

The setting is particularly theatrical, with the stage divided into two levels: the main part of the tavern, and the corner behind the wooden partition where the two lovers are. This division between foreground and background, as well as the ubiquitous Cavafian lamp, which provides the only light for this scene,²⁸¹ are not incidental – they are elements intrinsic to the way Cavafy fleshes out memory with dramaturgical techniques that become more and more subtle and complex the later the work is. It features one of the most vivid reminiscences of a sexual encounter. The stage direction is quick-paced and precise: late at night in a wine tavern, only two men remaining, with the bartender asleep. The stage is divided into two spaces: the main part of the tavern, and the corner behind the wooden partition where the two lovers are.

The description of the sexual encounter in ‘Να μείνει’ is quite explicit by Cavafian standards, and this is offset by the poem’s ending, where it is revealed that the occasion took place twenty-six years ago, and has traversed all this time in order to come to rest in poetry. Therefore, the occasion was valuable on at least three counts: the literal, in other words the enjoyment of the physical sensation when it took place in the tavern; the recollection, which has been repeated across time and characteristically has remained powerful – or has perhaps embellished or magnified the intensity of the moment – despite the passage of time; and the act of writing it down in a work of art. Indeed, Gregory Jusdanis notes that memory in Cavafy is not redemptive by itself. It may offer temporary relief against the effects of the passage of time, but it is only the act of writing, of committing memory to paper, that offers any sense of true redemption.²⁸² Chioles summarises the poem quite memorably when he writes that the poet ‘deals in Mnemosyne pure and simple, and turns the tables on his art that will be served up and consumed at the lush banquet of memory, even if it is only at a wine-shop in the wee hours’, but this leaves out a whole new facet of the poem.²⁸³ This redemption is achieved not by simply

²⁸⁰ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 14.

²⁸¹ Like most performances of memory in either Cavafy or Williams, it is dimly and atmospherically lit.

²⁸² Jusdanis: 1987, p. 95.

²⁸³ John Chioles, ‘Stoicism, skepticism, and the unhappy consciousness in the poetry of Cavafy’ in Panagiotis Roilos (ed.), *Imagination and Logos: Essays on C.P. Cavafy* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2010), p. 184.

reminiscing about the past and writing it down; instead, the performance described in the poem has ‘traversed twenty-six years’ and is being re-enacted in the present in a dynamic way.²⁸⁴

‘Να μείνει’, therefore, like ‘Γκρίζα’, can also be described as a memory play: its setting is very theatrical, given the lighting and the division of the stage into foreground and background. Furthermore, its framing in the present at the end makes reference to itself as art, exactly as *The Glass Menagerie* does through the figure of its narrator/creator. But where *The Glass Menagerie* offers an ultimately tragic outlook on redemption through poeticising memories, ‘Να μείνει’ is altogether more radical. It is not about the futility of memory, it is about memory as a starting point for the creation of a subversive work of art; subversive not only because of its focus on homosexual desire, but also because of a new concept of time. This new concept of time emerges in the poem’s ending: the mention of the poetic in the last line of the poem is not just about poetry, but an indication of a certain continuous present, with the image of the encounter traversing twenty-six years not as a stale recollection, but almost as a living entity that keeps recreating itself: it is the making of self and of embodied feeling in the present, as opposed to mere recollection in the past.²⁸⁵

The act of writing down a memory also plays a big part in ‘Μια νόχτα’ (1915), which begins with a six-line stage direction:

Η κάμαρα ήταν πτωχική και πρόστυχη,
κρυμμένη επάνω από την ύποπτη ταβέρνα.
Απ’ το παράθυρο φαίνονταν το σοκάκι,
τ’ ακάθαρτο και το στενό. Από κάτω
ήρχονταν η φωνές κάτι εργατών
που έπαιζαν χαρτιά και που γλεντούσαν.²⁸⁶

This opening has striking similarities with a variety of Tennessee Williams sets. There is *The Glass Menagerie*’s ‘The apartment faces an alley and is entered by a fire escape’,²⁸⁷ or *A Streetcar Named Desire*’s ‘The exterior of a two-storey building on a street in New Orleans ... The section is poor ... The houses are ... weathered grey with rickety stairs ... Faded white stairs

²⁸⁴ This idea of redemption also features in *The Glass Menagerie*. Tom has ‘created’ the play, in an – ultimately failed – attempt to redeem himself by poeticising his memories into a work of art.

²⁸⁵ This idea of hybrid time, with the recollection as a living entity recreating itself, builds upon Roderick Beaton’s interpretation of time in Cavafy in ‘The History Man’: ‘In the process of making poetry, the transcendent present can only ever be the moment of writing; the present of writing is made transcendent by the permanence of the written text, while all lived experience, no matter how burningly recent, belongs at that moment to the past ... But by a complementary process, experiences which the poet himself seems to regard as sordid and trivial in fact ironically become the raw material of “high art”’. (Roderick Beaton, ‘The History Man’, from *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, Vol. 10, Nos. 1 & 2, Spring-Summer 1983, p. 31) As illustrated, the idea of hybrid time in ‘Να μείνει’ goes beyond this.

²⁸⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 59.

²⁸⁷ Williams: 2000, p. 233.

ascend'.²⁸⁸ The similarities are so striking that they render the stage directions practically interchangeable. More importantly, the language of Cavafy's poem is exactly the same as a playwright's stage directions. This creates a certain effect for the reader that one would not necessarily expect to find in a poem. It reinforces the narrative, as opposed to the lyrical, method of Cavafy's writing, by focusing solely on setting the scene concisely, with no superfluous flights of fancy, and, more importantly, filled with telling details. These details do not only set the tone or create a certain mood, but also provide vital clues for characterisation, exactly as an expert playwright uses stage directions.

Equally striking is the contrast between the lowly setting and the almost lofty quality of the sensual reminiscence. The memory itself is not lofty – in fact it is typical of Cavafy's 'sensual' writing, with phrases like 'το σώμα του έρωτος' and 'τα χείλη τα ηδονικά'.²⁸⁹ What elevates it into loftiness is the act of writing, as in 'Να μείνει'. Writing has multiplied the value of the experience, since it is both preserved forever as art and will serve as fuel for future memory triggers:

...Και τώρα
που γράφω, έπειτ' από τόσα χρόνια!,
μες στο μονήρες σπίτι μου, μεθώ ξανά.²⁹⁰

In discussing the poem, Keeley speaks of 'a kind of fulfilment that transcends time':²⁹¹ indeed, the meticulous care with which the narrator sets the scene in the stage directions, emphasising various sordid details, anchors the scene firmly in the time it took place; yet at the same time it ensures that the dynamic recreation of the memory 'after so many years' remains powerful and vivid. Cavafy, in this case, emerges firmly as a director recreating things in the present, as opposed to a passive dreamer of the past.

'Μακρυνά' stands in stark contrast to the vividness of the memories committed to art in 'Να μείνει' and 'Μια νύχτα'. This is the opposite extreme: the performance is stuttering, never quite able to take wing as the memory is too faint and distant to make an impression upon the present. Every line apart from the last one in each stanza is broken at least once by hyphen and ellipses, as the speaker struggles to piece together the recollection, unsure of himself: 'Εκείνη του Αυγούστου – Αύγουστος ήταν; – η βραδυά'.²⁹² The obvious parallel is with the punctuation and repetition in 'Θυμήσου, Σώμα...' and 'Μέρες του 1903', and with the notion of the actor trying to memorise a role. Given that the speaker struggles to locate the setting with any precision, it is also reminiscent of a stage director in an early process of deciding the setting of a performance.

²⁸⁸ Williams: 2000, p. 115.

²⁸⁹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 59.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁹¹ Keeley: 1976, p. 52.

²⁹² Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 61.

The only thing that remains intact is the conclusion that the lover's eyes were indeed a deep blue. The poem, therefore, is not about the content or nature of the recollection. It is about the process of recollecting itself: it is staged as a drama that turns its attention to the function and role of memory and how it operates. Keeley corroborates this point in *Cavafy's Alexandria*: 'The force of the poem, the element of drama in it, is intended to reside in the act of recollection itself ... This small drama ... makes recollection, rather than the specifics of what is recollected, the governing theme'.²⁹³

In terms of the content, the only thing that remains is the recollection of the blue eyes: not the time, nor place, nor the situation, so vividly described in 'Να μείνει' by contrast. If further proof was needed that memory is not enough without the redemptive power of art and the act of committing the memory to paper, this is it. That, after all, is why so many of Cavafy's retrospective poems invoke memory to 'come back often'.²⁹⁴ Its value as mediator between experience and art through a certain performance is immeasurable. Repetition is the key: on the one hand in the guise of the theatrical rehearsal and actors memorising their roles, and on the other as performance and imitation. 'Να μείνει' is an apt example, with the image of a body from the past traversing twenty-six years in a performance repeating itself.

Memory and performance in 'Καισαρίων', 'Ο ήλιος του απογεύματος' and 'Μύρης: Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.'

The nature of reminiscence in Cavafy's poetry seen from these angles points towards an image of Cavafy as a dynamic stage director who focuses on the present and on the physical, as well as technological (staging, lighting, photography) aspects when discussing memory. 'Για νά' ρθουν –' is another Cavafy poem that reads like a note from a director or set designer:

Ένα κερί αρκεί. Το φως του το αμυδρό
αρμόζει πιο καλά, θά' ναι πιο συμπαθές
σαν έρθουν της Αγάπης, σαν έρθουν η Σκιές.

Ένα κερί αρκεί. Η κάμαρη απόψι
να μη έχει φως πολύ. Μέσα στην ρέμβην όλως
και την υποβολή, και με το λίγο φως –
μέσα στην ρέμβην έτσι θα οραματισθώ
για νά' ρθουν της Αγάπης, για νά' ρθουν η Σκιές.²⁹⁵

²⁹³ Keeley: 1976, p. 60.

²⁹⁴ See 'Επέστρεφε' in Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 60.

²⁹⁵ Cavafy: 1979, vol. B, p. 23.

The subject of lighting in particular dominating the short poem: we find ‘candle’ and ‘light’ in line one, ‘shadows’ in line three, ‘candle’ in line four, ‘light’ in lines five and six, with ‘shadows’ being the last word of the poem in line eight.²⁹⁶ The speaker is creating the right sort of atmosphere in a deliberate manner in order to facilitate fantasising about ‘love’s shadows’. Given the repetition of the word ‘ρέμβην’, it would be tempting to read the poem in contradiction to my previous points on Cavafy dynamically recreating things in the present. The word ‘σκιές’, however, can also point to a different direction: it is in many ways the key to the poem – Cavafy could have used a different word for the figures the speaker is reminiscing about, but ‘shadows’ underlines the theatricality of the work. It stands both for the recollection of past visions and as an allusion to the dim lighting of the set that will facilitate them. The word, therefore, stands both for the projection of memory, fears and desires, and as a feature of a setting created in the present by specific circumstances and devices. The person using these devices can also alter them, thus making them move and seem alive. This has a great number of Cavafian parallels, most famously perhaps in ‘Καισαρίων’:

Και τόσο πλήρως σε φαντάσθηκα,
που χθες τη νύχτα αργά, σαν έσβυνεν
η λάμπα μου – άφισα επίτηδες να σβίνειι –
εθάρεψα που μπήκες μες στην κάμαρά μου²⁹⁷

Admittedly, ‘Καισαρίων’ is more concerned with artistic recreation and imagination rather than memory per se, but the staging necessary in order for the imagination to work is indicative of Cavafy the ‘dramatist’ setting the stage for his characters and situations. ‘Καισαρίων’ occupies a central place in Cavafy’s canon, and is so intricately constructed around the ideas of time and memory that it deserves more than a passing mention. First, it is worth exploring the aforementioned idea of ‘hybrid time’ in greater depth. As mentioned above in relation to ‘Έν απογνώσει’, the Cavafian poems that come under the ‘memory play’ category feature a complex relationship between past and present that goes beyond the mere attempt to travel back in time using one’s memory. To interpret them using the tool of the ‘memory play’ aids and clarifies this: the way *The Glass Menagerie*’s narrator interacts with the past is, again, not linear – he travels back and forth in time, creates new memories or embellishes old ones, and carries with him the baggage of his past which keeps revisiting him. This is evident in the sentimental last narration, where he says:

I would have stopped, but I was pursued by something. It always came upon me unawares, taking me altogether by surprise ... I pass the lighted window of a shop where perfume is sold. The window is filled with pieces of coloured glass, tiny transparent bottles in delicate colours, like bits of a shattered rainbow. Then all at once my sister touches my shoulder. I

²⁹⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 23.

²⁹⁷ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 73.

turn around and look into her eyes... Oh Laura, Laura, I tried to leave you behind me but I am more faithful than I intended to be!²⁹⁸

Sentimental as it may be, it does indicate at the same time a more complex view of time and the past than it initially appears. Defining this complex view of time can, in turn, shed new light on Cavafy, and with that in mind it is tempting to consider Elizabeth Freeman and her concept of erotohistoriography. She defines it as follows:

Erotohistoriography is distinct from the desire for a fully present past, a restoration of bygone times. Erotohistoriography does not write the lost object into the present so much as encounter it already in the present, by treating the present itself as hybrid. And it uses the body as a tool to effect, figure, or perform that encounter.²⁹⁹

This description applies to ‘Καίσαριών’, as the speaker almost encounters, as opposed to creates, the image of Caesarion in the present.

The Cavafian examples analysed earlier show that the similarity between Cavafy’s poems and the notion of the memory play is not only superficial – the term is not used merely to point out affinities or differences between the two. Indeed, the analysis of Cavafy’s poems through the prism of the memory play hints at a unique concept of time, a certain ‘hybrid time’ where the present and the past are interconnected, and influence each other in a non-linear way. Beaton describes the concept of time in ‘Καίσαριών’ as follows: ‘From the opening lines, two kinds of time, or two perceptions of time, are set up simultaneously. Both belong to the past, and both are precisely defined, but with different frames of reference ... the achievement of the rest of the poem is to engineer a convergence between the two sorts of time which had first been set up as parallel.’³⁰⁰ This hybrid view of the present is the crux of ‘Καίσαριών’, a poem which seems custom-made for Freeman’s notion of erotohistoriography.

The starting point is the narrator’s first physical encounter with the past in the shape of the Ptolemaic inscriptions. The encounter is fairly dry and does not offer any stimulation of note. What interests the narrator is not what has been said about the past, but what has not been said, which is why he is immediately attracted by the ‘insignificant’ mention of Caesarion. Robinson notes that the structure of the poem is ‘essentially dramatic’, referring to its division into three stanzas depicting three quite distinct situations (leafing through collection, coming across reference, and having the vision).³⁰¹ The rest of the poem is concerned with the performance of Caesarion’s appearance, which is more complex than writing a past character into the present, or

²⁹⁸ Williams: 2000, p. 313.

²⁹⁹ Elizabeth Freeman, ‘Time Binds, or, Erotohistoriography’ from *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Duke University Press, 2010), p. 95.

³⁰⁰ Beaton: 1983, pp. 33-34.

³⁰¹ Robinson: 1988, p. 82.

conjuring someone up. The first hint of this is the use of the verb ‘ήρθες’, which of course implies that the encounter is not merely effected by the act of writing, but that Caesarion came almost out of his own accord. The scene-setting is masterful and multi-layered – the narrator naturally lets the lamp deliberately go out in order to set the right kind of stage for Caesarion’s appearance. There is a parallel here with the use of the word ‘σκιές’ in ‘Για νά’ ρθουν’ – the figure of Caesarion is partly the product of the elaborate set-design, where the use of shadows is key. Of course, he himself is also a shadow – he appears in the present as a ghost, a sense which is enhanced by the way the scene is set almost like a séance.

Therefore, by considering the affinity with ‘Για νά’ ρθουν’, we can infer a certain word-play by Cavafy on the word ‘σκιές’, and this is not the only example – or indeed, the most obvious one – in ‘Καισαρίων’. After all, is it a coincidence that Caesarion’s beauty is defined as ‘αόριστη’? On one level, it is of course indefinable and difficult to describe – he is an idealised youth that is the product of a complex interaction between the present and past. At the same time, however, the use of ‘αόριστη’ hints precisely at that complex interaction, and underlines the fact that the poem is about time and the past – as in the aorist. When Caesarion comes to life, he brings with him a different concept of time, which is underlined by that pun.³⁰² Furthermore, he brings with him the continuous sense of the whispers from the past – ‘ψιθύριζαν’, which is the only verb in a different tense to the previous use of the aorist. All this focus on time as a hybrid makes ‘Καισαρίων’ a memory play from a different point of view: not as a corresponding structure, with a narrator framing a scene from the past that is his memory, but as an exploration on the concept of time: it is indeed among the most multi-layered expositions of the present as a sort of hybrid in Cavafy. The sensual pleasure the narrator elicits from the encounter is a further correspondence to erotohistoriography. As Freeman notes, ‘erotohistoriography admits that contact with historical materials can be precipitated by particular bodily dispositions, and that these connections may elicit bodily responses, even pleasurable ones, that are themselves a form of understanding’.³⁰³

This type of bodily interaction with the past, and the way memory and history elicit bodily responses is a further recurring Cavafian theme. Lauren Berlant, in her discussion of aesthetics, writes: ‘Aesthetics ... provides metrics for understanding how we pace and space our encounters with things, how we manage the too closeness of the world and also the desire to have an impact on it that has some relation to its impact on us.’³⁰⁴ In a similar way, the characters who create art in Cavafy, and that would include in a roundabout way the narrator of ‘Καισαρίων’, are not just about recording their experiences, or understanding the past through the medium of memory. At

³⁰² Robinson succinctly notes two distinct forms of time: historical time (closed, unchanging), and everyday personal time, ‘which is “open-ended”, ephemeral’ (84). Later: ‘Historical time is the eternal present: personal time is a succession of actions which pass and are lost ... art is both part of personal time and aspires to the permanence of historical time’ (85).

³⁰³ Freeman: 2010, pp. 95-96.

³⁰⁴ Lauren Berlant, ‘Affect in the Present’ from *Cruel Optimism* (Duke University Press, 2011), p. 12.

the same time, they have a say in the whole process, entering a whole other dimension of the historical – a certain sense of embodied history or memory. The almost physical encounter with the ghost of Caesarion is one example of this, but there are also more concrete ones. For instance, the characters often literally move in that process, like in ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’, which revolves around a tour of the artist’s studio; a tour that, tellingly, also includes the figure of Caesarion in the form of an unfinished sculpture. The narrator interestingly cannot resist the deliciously ambiguous pun about ‘retouching’ Patroclus³⁰⁵, a retouching that also happens in a meta-literary way, apart from the obvious ones: ‘Τυανεύς Γλύπτης’, after all, predates ‘Καισαρίων’ by some three years and it is not a stretch to picture these fragments as analogous to poems that were reworked. This physical movement in these poems shows that they are not just about how the world impacts the individual, but also about how the individual impacts the world, and this in Cavafy includes the past when it is part of hybrid time. ‘Καισαρίων’ is a prime example of this, given the way the past is created anew. At the same time, of course, this physical movement is a theatrical touch, since the reader imagines the characters moving across a certain stage in much the same way as one would imagine theatrical characters while reading and trying to picture a script.

By contrast, Beaton’s reading of ‘Καισαρίων’ focuses on the Proustian involuntary memory trigger of the brief mention, and overlooks the very important mention of the lamp: ‘άφισα επίτηδες να σβήνει’.³⁰⁶ In looking for ‘an equivalent role to Proust’s involuntary memory’, Beaton does not take into account the obvious element of stage direction of the lamp.³⁰⁷ ‘Καισαρίων’ is therefore a particularly important example in the discussion of this chapter: not only does it explore embodiment and time in a thoroughly modern way, but it also shows that the focus of critics on introspection when discussing Cavafy and memory offers an incomplete picture, which leaves out the inherent elements of theatricality so vital to understanding his work.

‘Ο ήλιος του απογεύματος’ is related both to the notion of erotohistoriography and to the above examples of characters trying to impact the world in the same way as the world impacts them. Its setting is, once again, highly dramatic: one can picture the narrator pacing about his old room, piecing together the memories of his past lover. By doing so, he is trying to erase the room’s current incarnation as a mundane office and superimpose the past, and the way the room used to be when the two lovers were together. He is, in other words, trying to act both as a stage director and set designer, trying to redesign the set to suit the parameters of his imagination and memory. The throw-away manner in which he describes the current state of the building contrasts with the meticulous care he takes in listing the objects that he associates with his past love. On their own, these items are nothing special – they are just furniture. The way they are

³⁰⁵ ‘Ο Πάτροκλος (ολίγο θα τον ξαναγγίζω)’ in Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 46.

³⁰⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 73.

³⁰⁷ Beaton: 1987, p. 140.

listed together in lines six to thirteen, however, sensualises them as a collective, as the list climaxes with:

Πλάι στο παράθυρο ήταν το κρεββάτι
που αγαπηθήκαμε τόσες φορές.³⁰⁸

The verb ‘αγαπηθήκαμε’ colours our view of the objects previously listed by the aforementioned sensualisation, and also paves the way for what surely is the most poignant line of the poem: ‘θα βρίσκονται ακόμη τα καυμένα πουθενά’.³⁰⁹ There is a link here to Sarah Ahmed’s queer phenomenology, and the way she defines orientation ‘geographically’, so to speak: the concept of orientation is defined ‘through different sites, spaces, and temporalities’.³¹⁰ According to Ahmed, ‘spaces are sexualised’,³¹¹ and thus the line about the ‘poor objects’ elevates what was previously listed in the poem into a certain tragic grandeur: these items were not only sensualised by their association with the lovers, but they were also loved. The fact that they must still be around somewhere – probably languishing, one is led to infer – is a further indication of the sense of ‘hybrid present’ in Cavafy. One could easily encounter these things from the past in the present – by now, they would almost seem like ghosts, bringing back incomplete resonances of past loves and sensual pleasures; ghosts not too unlike the ghost of Caesarion, for example.

The dramaturgical affinities of the poem have not gone unnoticed. Chioles writes ‘Here, Cavafy intuits the truth of modern dramatists, who describe the stage sets where their human collisions occur ... It is a humble vision of persons through things, as Ibsen or O’Neill might graft word-pictures for their scenes; and, just as with Ibsen drama would never be the same again, so with Cavafy reality takes poetry to another plane’.³¹² The narrator’s movement around the room, and the way the memories come back to him gradually (‘Δεξιά. Όχι, αντίκρυ, ένα ντολάπι με καθρέπτη’) contrasts with another Cavafian character’s movement: the sculptor from Tyana in the eponymous poem does have a say in impacting the world as he takes us for a tour around his studio, but the narrator of ‘Ο ήλιος του απογεύματος’ is unable to encounter his lover in the present. The final musing about the week that was to last forever bears a resemblance to the concept of time in ‘Καισαρίων’ – as Caesarion brings with him from the past a unique sense of time, with his enemies’ whisperings forever recurring. Along the same lines, that fateful week from the past keeps recurring for this poem’s narrator in a part-nightmarish, part-rueful manner. We can trace parallels of this recurrence to the repetition and circularity previously described in the discussion of ‘Θυμήσου, Σώμα...’. This recurrence is also quite theatrical, reminiscent of a run of performances for example.

³⁰⁸ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 13.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ Sarah Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Duke University Press, 2006), p. 2.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

³¹² Chioles:2010, p. 182.

‘Μύρης· Αλεξάνδρεια του 340 μ.Χ.’ is in many ways a summation of Cavafy’s preoccupation with dramatic representations of memory. The setting is described again with precision, with the main character standing at the end of a hallway of Myres’s Christian home in order to avoid his friend’s relatives. This immediately establishes him as a character in a liminal situation, standing betwixt and between both literally and figuratively: too out of place to take part in the Christian memorial of his friend, too close to Myres to ignore the occasion altogether. The poem abounds with theatrical touches. Robinson even detects a ‘cinematic panning in’ in the first four stanzas, which form their own distinct section’.³¹³ What follows is a heart-rending deconstruction of the identities of both Myres and the narrator, a deconstruction that is prompted by the Christian rituals the speaker was unfamiliar with. The flashbacks triggered by the rituals lead the speaker to experience an increasingly desperate sense of alienation. The poem also offers the greatest amount of character development in Cavafy’s work – both as Myres’s identity is deconstructed and then reconstructed, and as the speaker begins to doubt his own identity with increasing intensity. This development is the result of the masterful exposition of the plot, as well as the careful staging, with the speaker’s reminiscences being the direct consequence of him standing in the corner, able to snatch only fragmented bits of conversation from the memorial.

Loss is of course a central theme in the poem – the narrator lost his present and future when his lover died, but the alienation and lack of belonging that he begins to feel threaten to deprive him of his past as well. As he realises that his memories of Myres are practically rewritten in the present – and perhaps partly erased by the fragmentation of his identity – the only thing left to do is to flee the scene by the physical act of running. This parallels Tom’s ‘escape’ in *The Glass Menagerie*, who is also fleeing because of an increasing sense of alienation and desperation. The reasons and motives behind the two characters’ decisions to leave might be different, but the end result is the same: the way and method that the two writers use to characterise their protagonists is remarkably similar. A natural conclusion of the comparison is that ‘Myres’ can also be described as a ‘memory play’, and a multi-layered one at that. Michalis Pieris observes three distinct temporal settings: the occasion when the speaker is in Myres’s house, the flashbacks, as well as the ‘time of writing’ when the speaker is telling the story. One cannot be certain about the latter, but the possibility that the speaker is telling the story from outside the ‘framework imposed by the main directorial line of the poem’ opens up a wider array of interpretive views.³¹⁴ For Pieris, ‘bigger memory rifts are created, from which new little details emerge, which retrospectively shed light – a different sort of light – to the older episodes’.³¹⁵ It is by no means a straightforward interpretation, but, regardless of any objections to Pieris’s theory, the very ambiguity about the temporal setting of the speaker’s recounting of

³¹³ Robinson: 1988, p. 104.

³¹⁴ Michalis Pieris, *Χώρος, Φως και Λόγος: Η διαλεκτική του «μέσα»-«έξω» στην ποίηση του Καβάφη* (Athens: Kastaniotis Editions, 1992), p. 175.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*

the story aptly depicts the vital importance of the dramatic in Cavafy's representations of memory, and the way the two are often inextricably interconnected.

Conclusions

Therefore, although the interpretations of a topic as elusive as memory can never be unequivocal, the comparison between Cavafy and Williams demonstrates how attentive to the idea of the dramatic Cavafy was. Where Williams internalises his dramatic depictions of memory by using poetic devices, Cavafy fleshes out the introspective nature of memory with an array of dramatic techniques. The examples illustrated above provide telling evidence to support the theory that Cavafy goes from the internal to the external as far as memory is concerned. Memory is an internalised concept to begin with – often starting with a reverie, as in 'Καισαρίων' – and develops into the ideas of embodied memory. This is shown by the almost literal appearance of the ghost of Caesarion, or the narrator's movements across the 'stage' of 'Ο 'ηλιος του απογεύματος' – the way he is piecing together the memories and reflecting on the current status of the items from the old room poignantly suggest the futility of his attempts to have a say in the process. The physical objects of the poem are nearly forgotten props from past performances; performances that he is not able to recreate or repeat properly. In Cavafy's case, of course, the physical space is almost always enclosed, indoor 'sets' or 'stages' that give life to musings on memory.

The concept of the theatrical in Cavafy thus ranges more widely than his ostensibly straightforward dramatisations of history, or any examples of obviously dialogic poems. Pieris may have explored the dramatic in Cavafy's work, but, his analysis of 'Μύρης...' notwithstanding, he does not pursue the line of thought that Cavafy's view of memory is inherently theatrical. The dramaturgical affinities of his poems are undeniable, and a number of them can be better understood if they are viewed as memory plays. It is not enough to make that step, however – interpreting Cavafy's poems as memory plays provides the ideal framework for taking the next step and explain Cavafy's unique sense of time and the way his characters physically interact with their surroundings (whether past or present). The parallel with the sub-genre of the memory play is not just an interesting observation but allows them to be interpreted from the point of view of 'hybrid time' more readily, for example. Furthermore, it emphasises an altogether different view of Cavafy when he writes about memory: not the old poet sinking into a deep Proustian reverie as he delves into the past, but a dynamic director who is just as concerned with embodiment in the present. Thus, this approach opens doors towards new interpretative paths that would otherwise be obscured by the prevailing ways of interpreting Cavafy.

Chapter four: History on the stage: Theatricality, performativity, and performance of self in Cavafy's historical poems

The fifth chapter will focus on history and the way Cavafy dramatises historical events in his poems. The theatrical use of history is arguably the most widely discussed aspect of performance in his poetry. I will extend the scope of existing studies by examining the way Cavafy uses fictional *dramatis personae* in real historical situations (and vice-versa), and the importance of performativity in history and politics. The performative aspects of history include public rituals and the way power and knowledge operate in relation to the public. In addition, a wide variety of Cavafy's characters in the historical poems function as actors in performances – Cavafy keeps coming back to the notion of performance of self, which thus links a wide variety of poems. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that, as in the case of his treatment of memory, Cavafy operates as a stage director and redefines the notion of the storyteller in his historical poems. This comes through in the way they are framed and contextualised – at once putting us right in the centre of the action, through the eyes of characters experiencing it with their own subjectivity, and using hindsight, either explicitly or implicitly in the poems.

So far, I have looked at the ways in which theatre and performance inform Cavafy's treatment of memory in his poetry, as well as the importance of performativity in our interpretation. History is among the most discussed elements in Cavafy's poetry, and there is no shortage of studies of Cavafy's inspiration from historical sources. However, the place of history in the context of my thesis on Cavafy and performance goes beyond the examination of his sources and the way he used them. The previous two chapters have focused primarily on performativity and memory respectively, and they are very closely related to history. Historians and other writers recently have increasingly taken into account the role of memory, to the extent that the two appear to be different sides of the same coin. History can be defined as memory seen through the aid of documents of various kinds, while memory on the other hand is history seen through affect, and therefore subjective. The overlap between history and memory is greater than what purists might have us believe, and given that a great number of the studies of Cavafy and history were written when the purist view was the more prevalent one, I am going to examine the role of performativity in Cavafy's use of history. Performativity is, in many ways, the missing link between history and memory – as Jay Winter, in his introduction to *Performing the Past*, has written: 'The performative enhances the overlap between history and memory because it borrows from both'.³¹⁶ This is because the idea of citationality and repetition relates both to the 'archival' or 'official' objective memory of history and to the subjective and the individual of memory.

³¹⁶ Jay Winter, 'The Performance of the Past: Memory, History, Identity' in Katrin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay Winter (eds.), *Performing the Past: Memory, History, Identity in Modern Europe*, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press: 2010, p. 13.

‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’ is a quintessential example of the theatricality of public life. It is important at this stage to note that Cavafy did not arbitrarily invoke theatricality in his depictions of Alexandrian life. The theatrical facets of Hellenistic rulers have already been discussed at length by Angelos Chaniotis for instance. In the paper *Theatricality Beyond the Theater. Staging Public Life in the Hellenistic World*, Chaniotis outlines that the concept of ‘life as a stage’ was very commonplace in Hellenistic thought: ‘Hellenistic theatricality is not a literary invention of contemporary authors, but a distinctive feature of life in the Hellenistic urban centers, closely connected with the popularity of theatrical performances in the Hellenistic world.’³¹⁷ This is because ‘public life took place, to a great extent, in the theater’.³¹⁸ Since general assemblies were held in theatres, ‘politics were increasingly dramatized by being held in a venue which was associated primarily with entertainment.’³¹⁹

‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’ is thus set against this backdrop of theatricality. In the poem, Cavafy deliberately invokes the notion of theatre to describe the ceremony of Antony and Cleopatra’s heirs in order to reveal that the celebrations are just as hollow or ‘non-serious’ (to borrow Austin’s term about theatre) as an actor’s performatives. In other words, the performatives in the ‘real life’ of the poem – Caesarion being named ‘king of kings’ and so on – are no more serious than theatrical performatives, the very type that Austin dismissed. The serious performative – in the Austinian sense – of the poem can be found in the act of crowning itself. In other words, Cleopatra declares Ptolemy as the king of Cilicia, Syria, and Phoenicia, and that very act of calling him king is also the action of making him king, since she is the person in authority to bestow such titles, in the same way as Queen Elizabeth would be the one to name a ship. At the time they are uttered, the performatives are still valid, since all their criteria have been fulfilled: they have been carried out correctly and Cleopatra is still – barely – in a position of power. It is the fact that she is *barely* in a position of power that turns the performance on its head, however, and the performative is thus used to underline fragility and the sense of impending tragedy.

The poem, therefore, not only has a straightforward – if somewhat foreboding – performative outlined above, but also depicts the very act of hollowing in the making. The famous last two lines depict the Alexandrians in full awareness that all these ceremonies and fanfares are not worth anything:

μ’όλο που βέβαια ήξευραν τι άξιζαν αυτά,
τι κούφια λόγια ήσανε αυτές οι βασιλείες.³²⁰

³¹⁷ Angelos Chaniotis, ‘Theatricality Beyond the Theater. Staging Public Life in the Hellenistic World’ from *Pallas*, no. 47, 1997, p. 224.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

³¹⁹ Eric Csapo and William J. Slater, *The Context of Ancient Drama*, University of Michigan Press, 1995, p. 145.

³²⁰ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 42.

Cavafy, in this case, unwittingly and tellingly shares Austin's exact terminology with his use of the word 'κούφια' – 'hollow'. Even though Cavafy would naturally not have been familiar with Austin's analysis – or indeed with the word 'performativity' and any of its incarnations – he uses the word 'hollow' to describe the very same function of speech. Ironically, it is also used in a poem, which is a form of language Austin – erroneously, according to Derrida – chose to ignore or put in a parenthesis. Austin considered speech acts in literature or theatre as non-serious by definition and 'parasitic' to his main discussion.

In more detail, Austin writes 'A performative utterance will ... be in a *peculiar way* hollow or void if said by an actor on the stage, or if introduced in a poem, or spoken in soliloquy'.³²¹ Derrida sees all sorts of problems with this, and the biggest one is that Austin labels this kind of use of language 'parasitic upon its normal use' and excludes it by saying 'our performative utterances, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances'.³²² It is worth quoting the passage from Derrida in full:

Austin's procedure is rather remarkable and typical of that philosophical tradition with which he would like to have so few ties. It consists in recognizing that the possibility of the negative (in this case, of infelicities) is in fact a structural possibility, that failure is an essential risk of the operations under consideration; then, in a move, which is almost *immediately simultaneous*, in the name of a kind of ideal regulation, it excludes that risk as accidental, exterior, one which teaches us nothing about the linguistic phenomenon being considered.³²³

Austin's concept of 'ordinary' language which excludes the 'abnormal', the 'non-serious' and the 'parasitic' is indeed problematic. One implication is that 'It may seem that Austin has shattered the concept of communication as a purely semiotic, linguistic or symbolic concept'.³²⁴ Another is whether this parasitism is an external trap that language may fall in, or something internal. Whatever the answer is, it will not free Austin's theory from Derrida's objection. If it is something internal, it is particularly problematic, since, as we saw earlier, Derrida defined the performative as having no existence outside of language. It would then appear that it comes with its own self-contained paradox accompanying it at close quarters.

Maria Boletsi also challenges Austin's exclusion of literary performatives from his theory by saying that, in Cavafy's poetry, there is a blurring of the boundaries between 'serious' and 'non-serious' discourse. For example, we have Cavafy's use of history, where there is a mix of historical and fictional characters; and the theatricality of public life, where the notion of theatre

³²¹ Austin: 1975, p. 22.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ Jacques Derrida, 'Signature Event Context' in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass. University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 15

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

ironically reveals the celebrations in ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’ to be hollow and just as ‘non-serious’ as literary performatives. Boletsi’s point is that there’s a fictional element in history, and also reality in literature. This is indeed corroborated by Cavafy’s use of history – even in a poem that features real historical characters such as ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’, Caesarion emerges more as a literary figure than a historical one given the extended description. Furthermore, given that the crowds appear to be aware of the hollowness of the whole performance, they too can also be described as part-historical and part-fictional. The boundaries, therefore, are not as clear-cut as Austin would suggest.

Furthermore, the poem also relates to the ritualistic side of governmentality – the power the government has over the people relies to a large extent on the performative power of its ceremonies.³²⁵ In this case, the ritual of bringing out Cleopatra’s children to be proclaimed kings and the parade of the army reinforces the notion that the government is all-powerful.³²⁶ As we saw earlier, the public can sense the hollow nature of the ceremony, but are happy to suspend their disbelief at the performance, much as one would in the theatre – for a morale boost, if nothing else.

Staying in the same time period, the ritual of power is also evident in the highly ironic ‘Το 31 π.Χ. στην Αλεξάνδρεια’. As mentioned in the chapter on the dramatic monologue, this poem, along with ‘Δημάρατος’, is the only occasion in Cavafy’s canon that Greece ‘proper’ is mentioned; typically for Cavafy, it is mentioned from the point of view of the Alexandrians as a distant place.³²⁷ The plot of the poem concerns a peddler arriving in Alexandria who is completely ignored by the crowds, who in turn are distracted and excited by parades and ceremonies about Antony’s war in Greece. In the final two lines, he finds out the reason behind the commotion:

ένας του ρίχνει κι αυτουνού την γιγαντιαία ψευτιά
του παλατιού – που στην Ελλάδα ο Αντώνιος νικά.³²⁸

All the hustle and festivities in the streets are revealed to be a ploy by the palace to convince the people that Antony is winning. Whether the people are fooled or not is left up in the air: there is no explicit reference to them being aware of the real events – the poem is too concise and subtle for that. One would suspect, however, that there is some form of awareness of the hollowness of these performatives, in the same way as in ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’. The performative itself is

³²⁵ The word ‘governmentality’ was coined by Michel Foucault in order to explain the organised practices by which governments try to control their subjects. See ‘Governmentality’, trans. Rosi Braidotti and revised by Colin Gordon, in Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (eds.) *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 1991, pp. 87-104.

³²⁶ See Chaniotis: 1997, pp. 238-242 for a discussion on the tradition of the staging of royal appearances as a show of power.

³²⁷ See Clay: 1977, p. 97.

³²⁸ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 47.

not as explicit or as Austinian in this poem: it lies instead in the statement by the palace that Antony is winning. In a way, it could be described as wishful thinking, as if the mere act of saying it at the same time has the power to bring it into reality.³²⁹ No matter how much power the palace wields over the people, it would be impossible for such a performative to be anything other than hollow or incomplete. In addition, the poem is indicative of Cavafy's attitude to Greece in his poetry. It is viewed from the margins, from the distant Alexandria. Diskin Clay writes: 'the *Ellada* of 'In Alexandria, 31 B.C.' is a place of illusion and defeat. But *Ellada* does not occupy a privileged place in Cavafy's poetry as a place of defeat. In Cavafy's history of Greece there are no victories and no triumphs. The Greek victory at Salamis was a defeat for Dimaratos, Octavaian's victory at Actium a defeat for Antony.'³³⁰ Cavafy's capricious and highly parodic use of rhyme lends the poem a characteristically bustling and faux-ceremonial quality which is broken up and fragmented by the enjambement between the very small stanzas. The text thus mirrors the bustle and confusion it describes, and lends a tragicomic quality to this 'illusion and defeat'. This tragicomic quality, together with the intense irony, is an example of Cavafy's system of subversion that will be discussed more in the next chapter.

Related to the ritual of power is the way performative statements create situations from a position of power. 'Καισαρίων', for example, is a work with a very complex relationship with time and history, and there are a number of instances – both in the past and the present – that relate to the power that performative statements can have. The inscriptions that the speaker is examining in the first part of the poem feature a great number of praises for the Ptolemies, but only a tiny mention in passing of Caesarion. That in itself shows explicitly how history operates: by selectively remembering some people and forgetting others, or by selectively giving voice to a group of people while another group remains silent. The writers of the inscriptions – or, perhaps more importantly, the people who commissioned them – were able to create a situation from a position of power, whereby the Ptolemies concerned were remembered as illustrious and others, like Caesarion, mostly forgotten.³³¹ Similarly, at the end of the poem, the 'Too many Caesars' can also be said to operate performatively. To say that phrase from a position of power is effectively equal to doing it, since the statement had the power of wiping out the other Caesars, both literally (by killing Caesarion) and figuratively (by ensuring that Caesarion is

³²⁹ The ritual of power is also a central theme in 'Περιμένοντας τους Βαρβάρους', where we see the emperor sitting on his throne wearing his crown, ready to bestow the barbarian leader with various titles, and the consuls dressing themselves up in a series of objects symbolic of their power – embroidered togas, precious stones, and gold and silver staves, which all serve as props to reinforce the performative nature of their power. This is directly comparable to the riches in show in 'Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς' or the shows of power of the parades in 'Το 31 π.Χ. στην Αλεξάνδρεια'.

³³⁰ Clay: 1977, p. 106.

³³¹ The way the speaker sets history right by reimagining and fantasising about Caesarion also has a certain performative air about it – it is as if he conducts a very specific ceremony, governed by performative rules, in order to bring Caesarion back to life. The séance mentioned in the previous chapter serves the function of a performative, in other words – to say that Caesarion has appeared under the right set of circumstances is to make him actually appear.

almost forgotten by history). The very utterance of the phrase creates a situation, and by extension performativity is a power that again is shown to shape the course of history.

Actors and performances

‘Ο Βασιλεύς Δημήτριος’ is among the poems that most explicitly makes the connection between history and theatre, along with ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’. In this case, Cavafy makes his sources clear, with the quotation from Plutarch at the beginning of the poem. The quotation is then paraphrased by Cavafy in the poem itself. It is clear which point fascinates him: that King Demetrios behaved like an actor changing costumes at the end of a performance.³³² Plutarch says as much in the quotation provided by Cavafy, and so do the final three lines of the poem:

Κάμνοντας όμοια σαν ηθοποιός
Που όταν η παράστασις τελειώσει,
Αλλάζει φορεσιά κι απέρχεται.³³³

The reader is left with no doubts as to the main issues of the poem: Demetrios’s is explicitly described as an actor in a performance, rather than a king. The poem may amount to little more than an elaboration or reimagining of Plutarch’s three quoted lines, but the way Cavafy frames the action clarifies and underlines the link between history and performance. The subject matter is not a king losing the support of his people, but rather a character and the public performance of his identity.

Willis Barnstone references ‘Ο Βασιλεύς Δημήτριος’ in his 1977 article ‘Real and Imaginary History in Borges and Cavafy’.³³⁴ The idea he derives from Cavafy’s use of history, in this case, is that Cavafy does not ‘use the past to remove us from the present but rather to remove us from illusory perspectives which cause us to distinguish past and present.’³³⁵ In other words, Cavafy’s use of history does not take us on a straightforward journey to the past – instead, he stages the past in such a way as to dynamically bring it to life, not exactly in the present, but in a world where the boundaries between past and present and fact and fiction become blurred.³³⁶ Barnstone uses the point in a different way, however: he states that Cavafy’s practice of recreating ancient history and making it indistinguishable from the present is typical of many

³³² For the importance of costume as an element of the theatricality of politics in Hellenistic times, see Chaniotis: 1997, pp. 232-234.

³³³ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 33.

³³⁴ See, for example: ‘They deal with deposed heroes and flawed royalty, with King Demetrios of Macedonia (not Alexander the Great but his stepbrother), or with Ibn Hakkan al-Bokhari – former mighty king whose armies have been routed and who seeks protection in a labyrinth over the sea’ in Willis Barnstone, ‘Real and Imaginary History in Borges and Cavafy’, *Comparative Literature*, vol. 29, no. 1 (winter 1977), p. 55.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

³³⁶ This is not unlike the ‘hybrid time’ we encounter in his treatment of memory and ‘Καισαρίων’ in particular.

Greek writers, and cites the examples of Seferis's use of Odysseus in his work, Ritsos's 'Ρωμιοσύνη' or a number of Sikelianos poems. They are then juxtaposed with Joyce and his Ulysses, where the elements of the myth are 'a few stage props for moving characters around Irish streets and giving linguistic fun and puns to their lips'.³³⁷ It may be that Joyce does occupy a different place regarding the use of history and myth. However, Barnstone's alignment of Cavafy with Ritsos, Seferis et al might be too simplistic. There is a difference between Cavafy's historical settings and Seferis's everyman Odysseus. Seferis's transposition of Odysseus to the present does not have Cavafy's specificity of detail and is rather abstract.³³⁸ He does not come across as a stage director the way Cavafy does with his settings of history – there is little or none of Cavafy's theatricality or use of performance and performativity. Whereas Seferis's method is a more straightforward transposition of a historical or mythical character in the present, Cavafy uses history not only to comment on the present, but often to also examine the very process of recording history. This is at its most explicit in 'Καισαρίων', with 'Πολυκαισαρή' drawing our attention to how history is produced and recorded.

The elements of costume and acting are again present in 'Η Δυσαρέσκεια του Σελευκίδου'. The poem juxtaposes Demetrios of the Seleucids – who later went on to become king of Syria – and Ptolemy VI Philometor.³³⁹ The dissatisfaction of the poem's title refers to Demetrios's disapproval of Ptolemy's presentation in his trip to Rome. Ptolemy, recently deposed by his brother, travelled to Italy in order to ask for the Romans' help to reinstate himself to the throne of Egypt. His appearance is not what Demetrios would have expected:

Έφθασεν ένας Πτολεμαίος σε τέτοιο χάλι.
Με τρεις ή τέσσαρες δούλους μονάχα·
πτωχοντυμένος και πεζός.³⁴⁰

Ptolemy then declines Demetrios's offer of expensive clothes, jewellery, horses and an entourage. Instead:

Παληοντυμένος, ταπεινός μπήκε στη Ρώμη,
Και κόντεψε σ'ενός μικρού τεχνίτου σπίτι.
Κ'έπειτα παρουσιάσθηκε σαν κακομοίρης
Και σαν πτωχάνθρωπος στην Σύγκλητο,
Έτσι με πιο αποτέλεσμα να ζητιανέψει.³⁴¹

³³⁷ Barnstone: 1977, p. 60.

³³⁸ Indeed, Beaton also distinguishes between Seferis's use of the 'mythical method' and Cavafy's treatment of history in 'The History Man' – see especially pp. 25-27.

³³⁹ See Savvidis's notes in Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 137.

³⁴⁰ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 37.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

Again, therefore, the poem is all about the performance of self. Exactly like King Demetrios of the eponymous poem behaved as an actor in a performance, Ptolemy in this case also treats his trip to Italy as a performance – one where he is supposed to play the part of the beggar in order to win over the Roman council. Indeed, as we know from historical hindsight, his performance proved to be a successful one, and the Romans helped him ascend to the throne of Egypt again.³⁴² The performance is therefore a point of new beginning for him as king, as opposed to King Demetrios's exit, which was to be his last performance on the historical stage: as an actor, he makes his final exit at the end of the poem and withdraws from his part as king.

In 'Αιμιλιανός Μονάη, Αλεξανδρεύς, 628-655 μ.Χ.' we see a character fail in his attempt to create a different public persona for his advantage. The protagonist is a fictional character who is placed in a concrete historical setting. As Savvidis notes, 'the dates of his life indicate that, as a teenager, he found himself a refugee in Byzantine Sicily, since, in 642, Alexandria had been conquered definitively by the Muslims'.³⁴³ The speaker's intention is to create a facade in order to protect himself in public:

Με λόγια, με φυσιογνωμία, και με τρόπους
Μια εξαίρετη θα κάμω πανοπλία.³⁴⁴

The predominant theatrical element here is that of costume, given that his performance of self in public is described as a piece of armour that he intends to wear. The final stanza, however, takes a step back and reframes the action from the point of view of a more omniscient speaker, who laconically says that the boasts by Aimilianos did not work:

Ρήματα της καυχίσεως του Αιμιλιανού Μονάη.
Άραγε νά'καμε ποτέ την πανοπλία αυτή;
Εν πάση περιπτώσει, δεν την φόρεσε πολύ.
Είκοσι επτά χρονώ, στην Σικελία πέθανε.³⁴⁵

There is a certain poignant irony in the harshness of the penultimate line, as the figurative armour by Aimilianos did not succeed in altering his fortunes, if he indeed got around to wearing it – or, in other words, if he played his part in public the way he intended to. This is in sharp contrast to King Demetrios and Ptolemy the 6th, both of whom perform their public roles to perfection in their respective poems.

We also have a mention of theatre in 'Η Διωρία του Νέρωνος', which is less about the performance of self – though that too is a factor in the poem – and more about performativity in

³⁴² Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 137.

³⁴³ From notes in Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 38.

³⁴⁴ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 84.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

the shape of unheeded warnings. It was first written in 1915, with the rather foreboding title ‘Προς την πτώση’. Its definitive shape and title were decided when it was published in 1918. Cavafy’s main source, in this case, was the Life of Nero by Suetonius.³⁴⁶ The setting is A.D 67, one year before Nero’s death. The final title of the poem makes a more subtle reference to Nero’s impending doom than the working one, requiring the reader to piece the puzzle together with a degree of knowledge of the historical context. The poem thus uses a combination of a recreation of the action by Cavafy as a stage director, and a more detached comment by history and context. The speaker is not a part of the action, but a more omniscient poetic voice. We do, however, get immersed in it with the immediacy of it happening in real time.

The three parts of the poem are very distinct from one another. The opening describes the oracle at Delphi, and the prophecy and warning they gave Nero. The mention of theatre comes in the second stanza, which describes Nero’s leisurely tour of Greece on his way back to Rome. Theatre, in this case, is firmly identified with sensual pleasure:

Τώρα στη Ρώμη θα επιστρέψει κουρασμένος λίγο,
αλλά εξάισια κουρασμένος από το ταξίδι αυτό,
που ήταν όλο μέρες απολαύσεως –
στα θέατρα, στους κήπους, στα γυμνάσια...
Των πόλεων της Αχαΐας εσπέρες...
Α των γυμνών σωμάτων η ηδονή προ πάντων...³⁴⁷

These lines feature all the hallmarks of Cavafy’s treatment of sensuality and pleasure – the use of the hyphen is a tell-tale sign, as we have already seen in the memory chapter. The same applies to the ellipses of lines 11-14 – there is an intense feeling of sensual reverie about Nero’s evenings of pleasure in Greece. Theatre is at the very centre of this notion of sensuality, as it is elsewhere in Cavafy’s poetry, starting with the hidden ‘Στο Θέατρο’.³⁴⁸ Theatre again is less about the performances on stage and more about the connotations of sensuality through sexual encounters with young people for instance.

The last stanza abruptly takes a step back from the reverie and offers a curt dismissal of Nero. The focus changes completely, and centres on Galba, who proves to be the real object of the oracle’s warning when his armies defeat Nero the year after. The decree by the oracle: ‘τα εβδομήντα τρία χρόνια να φοβάται’ was misinterpreted and dismissed by Nero, and this is framed not unlike an infelicitous performative. After all, in order for a performative to be successful it needs the participation not only of the speaker, but also the interlocutor or witness, and in this case Nero fails in his role as interlocutor by not heeding its warning properly. The

³⁴⁶ Kostara: 2014, p. 357.

³⁴⁷ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 75.

³⁴⁸ See chapter five for an extended discussion on this topic.

reader again is asked by Cavafy to complete the poem retrospectively with knowledge of historical events, since Nero's loss is only hinted at in the poem instead of explicitly stated.³⁴⁹

There is also a further aspect of theatre and performativity, apart from the two already mentioned. During his tour of Greece, Nero organized a great number of festivals and showings of ancient Greek tragedies, in which he often participated in himself as an actor. As a result, the mention of theatre is not only as an abstract reference to sensual pleasure, but also points to a concrete historical fact. King Demetrios and Ptolemy the 6th were actors on the public stage with their performances of their identity, while Nero in this case is an actor in the completely literal sense. What is particularly significant about Nero's participation as an actor is that the spectators were required to declare him as the victor in these poetic contests.³⁵⁰ Performativity thus appears in a different guise in this poem – effectively, Nero is the winner because he decrees himself to be the winner, for all intents and purposes.

Cavafy revisits this theme in the later 'Εύνοια του Αλεξάνδρου Βάλα'. This is a dramatic monologue by a fictional character who participates in chariot races in Antioch. He does not succeed on this occasion because of a broken wheel in his chariot. However, he reveals himself to be the favourite of Alexander Balas, the ruler at the time, and predicts that the race will be reported in the news as an unfair one: 'Αύριο, να δεις, θα πουν πως ο αγών δεν έγινε σωστός'.³⁵¹ The way he says that it will be decreed that the race was not done properly is very reminiscent of the use of the word 'hollow' in 'Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς' – in other words, it again references performativity, and the way power operates in a performative way. The final two lines hark back to 'Η Διωρία του Νέρωνος':

(Μα αν ήμουν ακαλαίσθητος, κι αν μυστικά το είχα προστάξει –
θά'βγαζαν πρώτο, οι κόλακες, και το κουτσό μου αμάξι).³⁵²

The fictional protagonist thus reveals himself perfectly capable – if unwilling, on the surface at least – of using his influence in order to effectively declare himself the winner, in exactly the same way Nero made the spectators declare him the winner of his drama competitions. The refusal to use that influence seems to be more an element of arrogance and appearances than genuine fair play. The idea of performance of self surfaces again, as a result – this is about the way he wants to present himself to the public: he is concerned that it would be in bad taste to use that influence, therefore he refrains from doing so. This is all part of how he wants to be seen and interpreted by the people.

³⁴⁹ There is a link here to the way Cavafy recreates things in the present as far as memory is concerned. In this case, the readers are asked to play the role of director by completing the story of the poem themselves.

³⁵⁰ See Kostara: 2014, pp. 358-359.

³⁵¹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 29.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

Cavafy's 'Julian cycle'

Julian the Apostate's relationship with the public and the way he was perceived is central to the way he was treated by Cavafy. The canon includes six poems that focus on Julian, by far the most Cavafy has devoted to a single historical character (perhaps Antony and the events in Acteon come close as a collective but a large portion of these poems focus on other characters and have brief mentions of Antony or the other central figures). These are 'Ο Ιουλιανός, ορών ολιγορίαν' (1923), 'Ο Ιουλιανός εν Νικομηδεία' (1924), 'Μεγάλη συνοδεία εξ ιερέων και λαϊκών' (1926), 'Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς' (1926), 'Ουκ έγνωνς' (1928) and 'Εις τα περίχωρα της Αντιοχείας' (1933). In addition to the six official poems in the canon, there are also five unpublished or incomplete ones. As such, we have to see each poem in context rather than in isolation, as G.W. Bowersock has done in his 1981 article 'The Julian poems of C.P. Cavafy'.

I will argue that this has also been the pitfall of many interpretations of these poems: while it is not a mistake to examine them in context, too often the next step of doing so is to try and find a unifying attitude by Cavafy that is consistent across all six poems. As a result, a number of writers attempt to find a definitive answer to the question of Cavafy's stance towards Julian, for instance. My position is that the primary focus should not be on whether Cavafy was sympathetic towards Julian or not – this issue can lead us astray, as it can short-change the many layers found in these poems and the various nuances of Cavafy's irony, as well as the dramatisation of real and fictional historical events (and the way the two intertwine). For example, a cursory reading of the poems can reveal a number of negative epithets to describe Julian, such as 'άνόητος', 'ανόσιος', and 'αποτρόπαιος' among others. It would be misleading, however, to take these adjectives in isolation as evidence. A large number of them, for instance, are uttered by characters in the poems – normally the Christians – and serve more as ironic descriptors of the characters themselves than of Julian in general, or as an accurate indication of Cavafy's attitude towards him. Regardless of any damning depictions of Julian, the Christians in these poems more often than not come across as conniving, insincere, and downright arrogant – it would be an understatement to say that they are not portrayed in a particularly favourable light.

In the Julian poems, Cavafy depicts different manifestations of theatre and performance from a variety of angles. There are at least three major strands being explored in the poems: theatricality, performance of the self, and performativity, which in turn contains more sub-categories, such as ritual and ceremonies. The idea of power, and its connection to performativity, also keeps emerging at various points in the poems, especially in 'Μεγάλη συνοδεία εξ ιερέων και λαϊκών'. The cycle of poems largely hinges on the conflicts between Julian and the Christians and Julian and the 'εθνικοί'. Cavafy examines all possible permutations: Julian and the Christians are the topic of 'Ουκ έγνωνς', 'Εις τα περίχωρα της Αντιοχείας' and 'Μεγάλη συνοδεία εξ ιερέων και λαϊκών', Julian and the 'εθνικοί' in 'Ο

Ιουλιανός, ορών ολιγοφρίαν’, while ‘Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς’ is about both. Significantly, five of the six are dramatic monologues (either in the ‘strict’ sense or featuring a number of dramatic monologue attributes), while ‘Ο Ιουλιανός εν Νικομηδεία’, though narrated by a more omniscient voice compared to the others, still features a narrative voice that appears to take sides.

It follows that the poems are not objective narratives by a disinterested voice, but instead put us right in the middle of the action from the point of view of various observers with vested interests. This is in line with Mackridge’s view that history in Cavafy is experienced by an individual subjectivity, instead of with hindsight (though hindsight does of course play a large role from the point of view of the reader).³⁵³ Even from the very fact that they are all dramatic monologues, it is clear, as a result, that Cavafy is not interested in offering us a definitive picture of what he thought of Julian. Rather, we get a kaleidoscopic portrayal of life at the time of Julian’s reign, with all its uncertainty, plotting, and struggle for power. Three of the six poems are set in Antioch – apart from the two where it features in the title, it is also the setting of ‘Μεγάλη συνοδεία...’. Perhaps not coincidentally, these three are particularly important in the context of Cavafy’s performative take on history; Antioch held particular fascination for Cavafy, who viewed it as a kind of second Alexandria given what he has written about its hedonistic lifestyle, and theatre was of particular importance in that lifestyle.³⁵⁴

Theatre features explicitly in ‘Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς’. Julian was an unusually complex character in the context of Byzantine rulers. One has to imagine the main draw for Cavafy was his move away from Christianity and towards neo-paganism. In his own way, like a myriad of other Cavafy characters, Julian embodied the ‘εν μέρει – εν μέρει’ principle by not only living at a time of turmoil between Christianity and paganism, but also instigating most of the turmoil himself by his proposed changes away from Christianity and the restoration of paganism as the official state religion. In addition to that, he led an ascetic lifestyle unusual for emperors of that time, a fact that alienated the people of Antioch. Antioch, as Cavafy pictured it and conceived it for the purposes of his poetry, was the Antioch that was described in the pages of Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*:

The warmth of the climate disposed the natives to the most intemperate enjoyment of tranquility and opulence, and the lively licentiousness of the Greeks was blended with the hereditary softness of the Syrians. Fashion was the only law, pleasure the only pursuit, and the splendour of dress and furniture was the only distinction of the citizens of Antioch. The arts of luxury were honoured, the serious and manly virtues were the subject of ridicule,

³⁵³ See Mackridge’s introduction to Cavafy/Sachperoglou: 2007, pp. xxv – xxviii.

³⁵⁴ The source for this can be found in a more extended discussion on Antioch in the next page.

and the contempt for female modesty and reverent age announced the universal corruption of the capital of the East.³⁵⁵

It is not surprising that Cavafy himself wrote, as a result: ‘Μετά την μεγάλην, την θαυμάσιαν Αλεξάνδρειαν, αυτό το κέντρο του Ελληνισμού ελκύει την φαντασία μου’, and quoted an excerpt from the above passage from Gibbon for good measure.³⁵⁶ Cavafy latches on to the conflict between the – perhaps unexpectedly – ascetic emperor and the hedonistic Antiochians in ‘Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς’. The asceticism and prudishness of the emperor, as described in the poem, are normally characteristics one would associate with Christian piety and might at first glance appear at odds with Julian’s neo-paganism, but make more sense if we consider his Christian upbringing. The poem is a dramatic monologue from the point of view of a Christian, who passes judgement on both Julian and the non-Christians of Antioch, for different reasons. Theatre is not only mentioned explicitly in the poem, but is also one of the main themes – it sits at the juncture between high Art and hedonism/pleasure that is at the forefront of life in Antioch:

Ήτανε δυνατόν ποτέ ν’απαρνηθούν
την έμορφή τους διαβίωσι· την ποικιλία
των καθημερινών τους διασκεδάσεων· το λαμπρό τους
θέατρον όπου μια ένωσις εγένονταν της Τέχνης
με τες ερωτικές της σάρκας τάσεις!³⁵⁷

Later, the speaker comments on Julian’s prudishness and ‘childish phobia of theatre’:

Τες περί των ψευδών θεών αερολογίες του,
τες ανιαρές περιαντολογίες·
την παιδαριώδη του θεατροφοβία·
την άχαρι σεμνοτυφία του· τα γελοία του γένεια.³⁵⁸

The criticisms here are multi-faceted, and paint both the emperor and the speaker himself in ironic light. The order in which Cavafy arranges the criticisms delivers a potent punchline at the end: the speaker’s concerns with the emperor move from the serious to the trivial – he disapproves of Julian’s religious beliefs and changes he imposed, his tedious speeches, the aforementioned phobia of theatre, his prudishness, and, finally, his beard. It is fair enough for a citizen to disapprove of a ruler’s impositions regarding religious beliefs, or to have an issue with his speeches, but it is quite another to have an issue with his physical appearance. Yet this certainly appears to have been a common complaint among Julian’s detractors: Glanville Downey for

³⁵⁵ Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, New York, Modern Library: 1932, pp. 799-800.

³⁵⁶ C.P. Cavafy, *Τα Πεζά*, ed. by Michalis Pieris. Ikaros, Athens: 2003, p. 138.

³⁵⁷ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 61.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

instance references this when he writes ‘Julian vented his spleen in the famous satire, the *Misopogon* or Beard-Hater, in which, by pretending to satirize himself and the philosopher’s beard which he wore in a clean-shaven age, he was able to pour forth his bitter anger against, and disappointment with, the people of Antioch.’³⁵⁹ G.W. Bowersock also writes of *Misopogon* and the way ‘the people of Antioch taunted the emperor toward the end of his life with attacks on his beard’.³⁶⁰ In this instance, Cavafy certainly seems in tune with the layperson’s view of Julian, and this is in line with Mackridge’s assertion that Cavafy mainly focused on subjectivity instead of historical hindsight when setting the scene in a historical poem. By framing the poem as a dramatic monologue, Cavafy thus brings us to the core of everyday life at the time of Julian’s stay in Antioch. This is similar to his take in ‘Συμείων’, where the focus is on imaginary ordinary people in Syria, as opposed to Simeon himself.

Julian’s apparent phobia of theatre is a major part of the poem, but so are the subtle layers of characterisation of the Christians and ‘εθνικοί’, as well as of the unidentified observer and speaker. He clearly disapproves of the immoral lifestyle of the Antiochians, but identifies with them as far as their disapproval of Julian goes. It should be noted that Antioch was a cosmopolitan city with a mixed population, with both Christians and non-Christians partaking in this hedonistic life as Cavafy portrays it. The phobia of theatre does not mean that Julian was merely not a fan of theatre. In Cavafy, both contextually and in the poem itself, theatre comes to symbolise the very essence of hedonism. The mention of theatre in this case is therefore different from that in ‘Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς’, where it is more abstract in the sense that it mostly refers to the grandiose ‘production’ put on by the royalty. As we have seen in the hidden ‘Στο Θέατρο’, however, theatre for Cavafy came to denote much more than just ‘the building that houses theatrical performances’. In the first place, it is also a space to see and be seen, to facilitate or reminisce about sexual encounters, and in general to partake in the city’s vibrant social life. This could not be more at odds with Julian’s ‘ostentatious simplicity’.³⁶¹ Edmund Keeley uses the word ‘excess’ to describe this Antiochian way of life that Julian disapproved of, but I would argue it is misleading to attribute negative connotations to something that Cavafy largely celebrates in his poetry, namely the pursuit of pleasure above all else.³⁶² Therefore, Antioch – in the case of the Julian poems – almost serves as an extra character in its own right, in a similar way to Alexandria in a number of Cavafy poems. As Zisimos Lorentzatos has written, ‘Cavafy’s interest is attracted by the limits that separate or unite religions, languages, races, ideologies, areas or territories’.³⁶³ Antioch is one such limit and more – it is the meeting point between the three contrasting ideologies and beliefs of Julian, the Christians, and the ‘εθνικοί’, with its own personality and temptations. It plays an active role in the people’s opinion and reaction towards Julian, and helps us see that the issue is not the Christians versus the ‘εθνικοί’ at all: it is about

³⁵⁹ Glanville Downey, ‘Julian the Apostate at Antioch’ in *Church History*, Vol. 8, No. 4 (Dec., 1939), p.305.

³⁶⁰ G.W. Bowersock, *Julian the Apostate*. Harvard University Press, 1978, p. 13.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² Edmund Keeley, ‘Cavafy’s Voice and Context’ from *Grand Street*, vol. 2 no. 3 (Spring, 1983), p. 161.

³⁶³ Zisimos Lorentzatos, *Μικρά Αναλυτικά στον Καβάφη*. Ikaros, Athens: 1977, p. 26.

the Antiochians united against Julian and his personality and beliefs that were incompatible with the Antiochians'. Karatasou notes as much when she writes:

Aside from their religious differences, Christians and pagans are Antiochians and take part together in a unified vision of grandeur, glory and aesthetic splendour. What is different, and foreign to these values, is Julian, whose existence threatens the prestige and allure of their world.³⁶⁴

It would, as a result, be misguided to examine the poem from the perspective of Cavafy's views of Christianity versus paganism. For the purposes of 'Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς', the two are one and the same, united by the seductive nature of the Antiochian lifestyle – symbolised largely by the notion of their splendid theatre – and against the prudishness and austerity of Julian. Indeed, the hidden 'Ο Ιουλιανός εν τοις μυστηρίοις' is a less subtle attempt to portray that contradiction in Julian's personality, where his Christian upbringing instinctively rears its head in a moment of uncertainty and fear for the young man. The main idea in this case is repression, and 'repressed' is certainly among the chief adjectives one would use to describe Julian – both in terms of the repressed Christianity of his childhood as depicted in these poems, and in terms of his deliberately cultivated austerity repressing the sense of hedonism or pleasure.

The earlier 'Ο Ιουλιανός εν Νικομηδεία' also features a reasonably explicit nod to theatre, although the word 'θέατρο' is absent, unlike in 'Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς'. The events described take place earlier in Julian's life, before he became emperor – Savvidis locates the setting to A.D. 351 or 352, during Julian's second visit to Nicomedia, when 'he was taking his first decisive steps towards mystical paganism'.³⁶⁵ It depicts a 'retreat into the religious closet', according to George Syrimis.³⁶⁶ This description is loaded with meaning: on the one hand, it is a succinct summary of the poem's plot, where Julian's pagan leanings become troublesome to the powers that be, such as his older half-brother Gallus. As a result, Julian is prompted by his mentor and advisor Mardonios to display his Christian piety in public. On the other hand, this Christian piety can also be identified, according to Syrimis, with the sexual closet that plays such a major role in Cavafy's poems about homosexuality.

At the moment in time that 'Ο Ιουλιανός εν Νικομηδεία' is set, Julian clearly did not have the power or leverage to fully step out of the closet as a neo-pagan, and is thus forced to lead a double life. It is possible to make a case – though it is quite unconvincing and one-dimensional, as I explained earlier – that Cavafy mocks Julian's principles and disposition with his irony, but

³⁶⁴ Katerina Karatasou, 'Ο Ιουλιανός των Αντιοχείων: Μίμηση και επιθυμία στην ποίηση του Καβάφη' in *Μαντατοφόρος* (1993-94), p. 105. My translation.

³⁶⁵ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 124. My translation.

³⁶⁶ George Syrimis, 'Empire, Religious Fanaticism, and Everyman's Dilemma: Julian the Apostate in Kazantzakis and Cavafy', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies*, Supplement to Volume 28, no. 1. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010, p. 87.

in this context Julian's public performance of his Christian piety can be compared to the young man's outwardly respectable life in the roughly contemporary 'Θέατρον της Σιδώνος (400 μ.Χ.)'. The latter comments more on 'τα φαιά φορούντες' than on any hypocrisy on the part of the young man in what was, after all, a necessary step to ensure his well-being.³⁶⁷ Similarly, while it is possible to view Julian as a hypocrite for not staying true to his beliefs, given the context it makes more sense to interpret Julian in Nicomedia in a similar vein to King Demetrios: they are both actors putting on performances for their respective audiences. Just as King Demetrios changes costume at the end of the eponymous poem, Julian plays his part with commitment. There are at least two layers of irony in this case: firstly, when we see this in context of the other poems – and 'Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς' in particular – we have the self-confessed theatrophobe Julian having no problem at all being an actor of sorts himself, and performing his part with aplomb. Secondly, there is considerable irony in the lines

Ο Ιουλιανός πηαίνει πάλιν αναγνώστης
στην εκκλησία της Νικομηδείας,
όπου μεγαλοφώνως και μετ' ευλαβείας

πολλής τες ιερές Γραφές διαβάζει,
και την χριστιανική του ευσέβεια ο λαός θαυμάζει.³⁶⁸

In this case, the irony does not necessarily come across as particularly mocking; it is an irony that makes us aware that Julian is back in the 'religious closet' as per Syrimis's terminology. The irony is also reinforced by the relentless rhyming Cavafy uses. The poem is written exclusively in strict rhyming couplets, and the effect is ostensibly one of parody – indeed, it is often the case that Cavafy uses strict rhyming couplets to parody a character or situation. It is possible, however, to read the poem in a less ironic manner, and interpret Julian's change as a sincere one. The key, in this case, is in the lines quoted above – the 'εulάβεια' or piety of Julian is a descriptor that rings true, regardless of which religion he follows. It was this very piety that was the root of his fallout with the Antiochians: despite their Christianity, their lifestyle was always the top priority over any religious belief or piety, and this was at odds with Julian's character. This poem, then, also references this fact, which is at the very centre of 'Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς' and 'Εις τα περίχωρα της Αντιοχείας', as the Julian poems again prove to be elaborately intertwined, whether deliberately or not.

In 'Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς', Julian is finally out of the closet, but it is a Julian full of contradictions. Syrimis uses the metaphor of the closet to explain: 'The singularity and contradiction of Julian lies in the fact that even though he nominally exited the prison of silence

³⁶⁷ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 43.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 44.

when he became emperor, his closet did not collapse behind him.³⁶⁹ Julian had no need to pretend to be a Christian any more, but his Christian upbringing followed him doggedly in the shape of his ‘abstinence, his disregard for the arts, his zealous imitation of Christian organizational tactics, and his adoption of Christian virtues’.³⁷⁰ Julian of the ostentatious beard and pretentious asceticism may be laughable in the way these qualities clash with the Antiochians, but the metaphor of the closet helps us see him as a human instead of a caricature. Stepping out of the closet for good is one thing, dismantling or forgetting about the closet quite another.

Fast forward a few years, both in Cavafy’s canon and Julian’s timeline, and we arrive at a further point of contention and strife between the emperor and the people of Antioch, namely his decision to resurrect the oracle of the temple of Apollo, and the order to remove the remains of the 3rd Century bishop Vavylas that were supposedly inhibiting the god. These events form the context of the last poem in Cavafy’s canon, ‘Εἰς τὰ περίχωρα τῆς Αντιοχείας’. The focus is therefore different and more specific than in ‘Ο Ιουλιανός και οἱ Αντιοχείς’, which painted a picture out of the general points of conflict between the emperor and the Antiochians. ‘Εἰς τὰ περίχωρα τῆς Αντιοχείας’, however, is anything but objective, in spite of the fact that it revolves around a particular widely reported historical event. Instead, it features the most partisan narrator of all the Julian poems: a Christian who, along with his circle, regards Julian as an enemy and despises his actions regarding the oracle of Apollo.

This is evident right from the opening two lines: the word ‘καμώματα’, used to describe Julian’s actions, has a judgemental undertone and we are accustomed to seeing it normally associated with thoughtless, impetuous or otherwise foolish behaviour.³⁷¹ After that, the speaker wastes no opportunity to disparage or mock Julian and his beliefs. The result is that he comes across as obnoxious and petty, certainly not attributes befitting a Christian. As Edmund Keeley notes:

The speaker in ‘On the Outskirts of Antioch’ is depicted as being not so much hypocritical as arrogant in his defense of his martyr Babylas (or Vavylas). His attitude toward Julian is too close to what he portrays Julian’s to be in dismissing the martyr.³⁷²

Indeed, the speaker’s arrogance borders on fanaticism, which is evident not only in his derogatory throwaway comments on Apollo as a ‘false god’ that ‘trembled at the sight of our martyrs’, but also by his apparent delight at the fire that eventually destroys the oracle.³⁷³ Through the medium of the dramatic monologue, Cavafy is thus able to depict both Julian and

³⁶⁹ Syrimis: 2010, p. 87.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 99.

³⁷² Keeley: 1983, p. 161.

³⁷³ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 99.

the Christians in a similarly critical light – Julian comes across as petty and childish, not to mention obsessive in his fanaticism, but the final lines are quite damning on the speaker too:

Έσκασε ο Ιουλιανός και διέδωσε –
 Τι άλλο θα έκαμνε – πως η φωτιά ήταν βαλτή
 Από τους Χριστιανούς εμάς. Ας πάει να λέει.
 Δεν αποδείχθηκε· ας πάει να λέει.
 Το ουσιώδες είναι που έσκασε.³⁷⁴

As well as displaying the same traits as Julian – perhaps even to a greater extent – he also offers what practically amounts to an admission of guilt regarding the fire, when he says that it was never proven that it was started by the Christians. For Keeley, it is the idea of excess that provides the key to understanding the tone of ‘Εις τα περίχωρα της Αντιοχείας’. Both the speaker and Julian are prone to excess and fanaticism in terms of their attitude and actions towards the opposing religion. Keeley asserts that Cavafy does not so much take sides between Christianity and paganism, but instead sits in the middle, with the poetic voice swinging back and forth. Irony is reserved particularly for moments of hubris or excessive fanaticism from either side, as shown earlier. This view goes against Keeley’s own position in *Cavafy’s Alexandria*, where he claims that the poet sides with the Christian speakers, and indeed he acknowledges so in this paper.³⁷⁵

These factors from the Julian poems already discussed inform, in turn, ‘Μεγάλη συνοδεία εξ ιερέων και λαϊκών’, which comes last in terms of the chronology of Julian’s reign. We have already seen him performing his public role with an actor’s skill before he became emperor in ‘Ο Ιουλιανός εν Νικομηδεία’; and clashing with the Antiochians during his reign as emperor, when he was out of the ‘religious closet’ in ‘Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς’ and ‘Εις τα περίχωρα της Αντιοχείας’. ‘Μεγάλη συνοδεία ιερέων και λαϊκών’ takes place shortly after Julian’s death, when the empire was briefly under Jovian’s reign. The setting is again Antioch, but this time it is an Antioch with a different atmosphere to the earlier poems. While ‘Ο Ιουλιανός και οι Αντιοχείς’ pitted Julian against the Antiochians as a whole (regardless of their religion), ‘Μεγάλη συνοδεία...’ features a much greater degree of segregation between the two religions now that they do not have a common enemy any more. The action takes place during the procession of the title, with a cross paraded around the city, accompanied by the eponymous priests and laymen. The ceremony takes place annually, but on this occasion there is a palpable difference:

Είναι μια ετήσια εορτή Χριστιανική.
 Μα σήμερα τελείται, ιδού, πιο επιφανώς.
 Λυτρώθηκε το κράτος επί τέλους.
 Ο μαρότατος, ο αποτρόπαιος

³⁷⁴ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 100.

³⁷⁵ Keeley: 1983, p. 164.

Ιουλιανός δεν βασιλεύει πιά.³⁷⁶

Once again, we have a case of Cavafy elaborating on performativity in his work. The ceremony is repeated every year, but it gradually acquires a new meaning. With Julian out of the way and the ‘pious’ Jovian restoring Christianity to what its followers perceived to be its rightful place, the ceremony described in the poem is not only a performance of a religious ritual, but also one of power. The Christians are all out en masse in a show of strength: ‘αντιπροσωπευμένα πάντα τα επαγγέλματα’, while the pagans are forced to confront their uncertainty:

Οι εθνικοί, οι πριν τοσούτον υπερφίαλοι,
 συνεσταλμένοι τώρα και δειλοί με βίαν
 απομακρύνονται από την συνοδείαν.³⁷⁷

The way performativity and power are connected is made explicit in the last three lines of the opening stanza:

βγαίνουν, οι ευλαβείς, στες πόρτες των σπιτιών τους
 και πλήρεις αγαλλιάσεως τον προσκυνούν –
 την δύναμιν, την σωτηρίαν της οικουμένης, τον Σταυρόν –³⁷⁸

It is clear that the cross equals power, and the procession of the Christians with the cross is about reappropriating the annual ceremony in order to display and advertise that power. The main reason why it stands for power is performativity: it has acquired meaning (power in this case) through repetition over the years and through the recognition that it has come to stand for something. In this case, the balance of power has changed, and so has the performative meaning of the procession and the cross: they have acquired more power and control over people’s lives. One has to wonder whether the people coming out of their houses to greet the cross with apparent jubilation are all as pious as the speaker wants to portray them, or whether they had no choice. When there is a major political shift, it is important for people to nail their colours to the mast: if you are not with them, you are against them, and hence it is very important for people to publicly display their faith like that in order to maintain their status (or acquire new status) in society.

In addition, this public display of faith demonstrates a further point of interconnection between Cavafy’s Julian poems. The poem is not only about performativity and ritual as far as the link to performance goes – it is also about the performance of self in a public setting. In this case, what matters most is that people publicly show their Christian faith by the demonstration of

³⁷⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 59.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

piety in front of the parading cross. This is far more important than whether they were, in fact, Christians, or whether they were observant Christians or not. The latter is merely a matter of private convictions, whereas it is the public performance of self that will play the bigger role in ensuring they are well-regarded in society. This links the poem quite closely with ‘Ο Ιουλιανός εν Νικομηδεία’ – just as Julian is told to show his Christianity in public and does so ‘on stage’ as an actor, so do the people of Antioch in ‘Μεγάλη συνοδεία...’ by coming out of their homes and performing their Christianity. The connection between the poems, therefore, proves to be deeper than the figure of Julian or Cavafy’s attitude towards Christianity and paganism. The same facets of performance keep occurring across six poems – in this case while ‘Μεγάλη συνοδεία...’ is mainly about performativity and ritual, it is also about performance of self, which in turn is the main component of ‘Ο Ιουλιανός εν Νικομηδεία’.

The concept of reclaiming space goes hand in hand with that of the repeated ritual that acquires a new meaning. The Christians are now able to use this new power to reclaim the physical space they occupy in their procession. It is clear from the third and fourth lines of the poem that it is a lengthy procession that progresses through a number of significant places in Antioch. With their show of power, the Christians are not only reaffirming the dominance of their religious beliefs, but also reclaiming the space: Antioch has become a metaphorical battlefield, and the Christians are gaining the upper hand in terms of territory. Indeed, the lines that follow the earlier excerpt about the pagans staying away from the procession are:

Μακράν ημών, μακράν ημών να μένουν πάντα
(όσο την πλάνη τους δεν απαρνούνται).³⁷⁹

In other words, ‘may they always stay away as long as they remain deluded’. The performative power of the procession thus has a double effect: it both ensures the Christians reclaim the space as their own, and at the same time sends a message to the pagans that they have lost their status and are not regarded as a serious threat any more. As long as the pagans stay away, it does not matter to the Christians what they do, since they do not have leverage any more, given Jovian’s ascend to the throne. Given all this, it is also particularly ironic that the speaker describes the pagans as ‘υπερφίαλοι’. If anything, the Christians’ ceremony, which essentially amounts to a show of strength and power, is the very definition of arrogance. This is similar to ‘Εις τα περίχωρα της Αντιοχείας’, where a great number of the speaker’s criticisms towards Julian apply equally to the speaker himself and, by extension, the Christians.

The irony in the poem does not stop there, and is not only a matter of tone and attitude towards the characters. The final line is extremely ironic, both in terms of dramatic irony and given the performative elements in the poem. In terms of the latter, the ceremony is annual, but now it has acquired a different meaning. The last line, in this respect, becomes almost a decree

³⁷⁹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 59.

instead of a show of piety and respect. The dramatic irony, on the other hand, is framed by Cavafy in such a way as for history to contribute the last and decisive comment on the action of the poem: Jovian's reign after Julian lasts a mere seven months before he too dies.³⁸⁰ As Keeley points out:

As in several of Cavafy's subtlest late poems ... it is events that follow on the speaker's heels which provide the poem's final comment, outside the range of the speaker's voice and perception, the kind of silent comment which raises the poet's perspective above the speaker's particular bias to the level of the poet-historian who sees a more universal – and generally tragic – pattern behind even those moments of history with which he has shown some degree of sympathetic identification.³⁸¹

The poem, therefore, operates on two distinct but at the same time interconnected levels: Cavafy places us in the middle of the action, through the eyes of an anonymous fictional speaker. This is an inherently theatrical device, similar to the way Cavafy operates as a stage director in his poems that deal mostly with memory. At the same time, with the last line, he invites us to take a step back from the action, and consider the context with a historian's perspective. Cavafy, in a way, reinvents the role of the storyteller for his age. Walter Benjamin, Cavafy's later contemporary, wrote of the modern phenomenon of being less engaged and more remote from stories due to the increase of the amount of information available to people (in his time, he was talking principally of newspapers and photographs).³⁸² As Benjamin thus wrote about the function of the storyteller coming to an end, Cavafy at the same time, and within the same historical – if not necessarily cultural – context, reframes the role of the storyteller through his use of performance in his historical poems.

‘Μεγάλη συνοδεία...’ also offers a demonstration of how performativity can link memory and history. It is not exactly the same as Jay Winter says, as Cavafy is not relaying personal memories, however the same principle applies: performativity is the force that shapes history, in the guise of the ritual of the cross and the grand procession that demonstrates the Christians' power. At the same time, this relies heavily on memory: performativity in this case is all about citationality – the procession of the cross only has power in the first place because people remember the previous processions that shaped its meaning. Citationality relies on memory – it may be a collective memory in this case, but it is a subjective memory, not a documented historical one – and performativity thus brings memory and history closer together in Cavafy's work.

³⁸⁰ Gibbon: 1932, chapter 25.

³⁸¹ Keeley: 1983, p. 166.

³⁸² See Walter Benjamin's 'The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov' in Dorothy J. Hale (ed.), *The Novel: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory 1900-2000*, Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. In the introduction of his article, Benjamin writes: '[The storyteller] has already become something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant ... This distance ... teaches us that the art of storytelling is coming to an end.'

Conclusions

Cavafy's Julian poems are therefore a microcosm of Cavafy's treatment of history in general. They are distinct in the way they focus on different aspects of drama in Julian's life, as well as in their presentation of Julian's character and exploration of different elements of performance. At the same time, they are intertwined by an intricate web of references to performance and performativity, which in turn, mirrors the way performance and performativity operate in Cavafy's use of history in general. The focus on performative aspects in Cavafy's work allows us to interpret the historical poems in a more complete way: by seeing them both as subjective experiences of historical action as if it is happening in the present, and by allowing historical context to add its own commentary on the works. Cavafy either explicitly provides an epilogue that contextualises the action, as in 'Η Διωρία του Νέρωνος', or leaves it up to the reader to use historical hindsight in order to add more layers, such as in 'Μεγάλη συνοδεία...'. The intense dramatic irony in a number of poems often subverts expectations, and thus provides a link between theatre/performance and subversion. Performativity, finally, proves to be the link the chain that connects history and memory in Cavafy's work, through the way it borrows from both as a concept. In general, performance in Cavafy's use of history is rarely a stable phenomenon; at one point it is the theatricality of public life, at another it is performativity, and at another an invitation to the reader to act as director.

Chapter five: Cavafy, performance and subversion

In my thesis so far, I have shown that we can gain new insights into Cavafy's poetry by focusing first and foremost on the theatrical and the performance aspects. In addition, these aspects do not occur randomly, but are intrinsically woven into the poems in a manner that goes beyond the straightforward matter of Cavafy gaining inspiration from past playwrights. They permeate his work in a variety of guises, and are central to the way he develops his ideas. In this chapter I will delve deeper into Cavafy's use of theatre and performance to examine the reasons why he used them so extensively and deliberately in his work. Just as he used history to comment on a range of contemporary issues, the use of theatre and performance was also very much a conscious decision – it is not merely something that can be detected if we know where to look, or a theoretical mode applied to Cavafy from the outside. It is an intrinsic part of his poetry. The issue that follows is to examine what it was about theatre and performance that fascinated Cavafy to such an extent, and whether there is a system or over-arching reason behind their use in his poetry.

One suggestion would be that Cavafy was influenced by his contemporary writers and critics, as the world of literature and art in general was shifting from Romanticism and its derived styles towards modernism. Even though more than half of Cavafy's life was in the 19th century, he wrote most of his poems – in fact almost all of his published poems, with few exceptions – in the 20th century, in the height of early modernism. As a result, he is often described as a modernist by critics. King's College London, for instance, offers a module called 'C.P. Cavafy: the making of a modernist'. In the description it claims he is 'a poet seen worldwide as a modernist'.³⁸³ It would be possible, in this context, to trace Cavafy's fascination with theatre and performance as a modernist trait. As a whole, modernism is a movement that has been shaped by 'theatromania'.³⁸⁴ That is, theatre was often used as a trope or metaphor by modernist writers, and it is tempting to place Cavafy against this background.

The issue of Cavafy's relationship to modernism is a complex one, and addressing it at length would be a digression from the main point of my thesis. I will briefly list some examples of that 'theatromania' for context before proceeding to discuss Cavafy's system. Firstly, theatre was by no means universally liked among Cavafy's contemporaries. Ezra Pound, for example, detested it, calling it an 'asinine ... gross, coarse form of art'.³⁸⁵ Toril Moi, in her discussion of Ibsen and modernism, commented that 'modernism is profoundly antitheatrical'.³⁸⁶ In spite of

³⁸³ Taken from <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/artshums/depts/classics/modules/level7/7AACM214.aspx>. Accessed 15/08/17.

³⁸⁴ Phrase borrowed from Vassiliki Kolokotroni and Olga Taxidou's 'Modernism and Hellenism: Aspects of a Melancholy Sensitivity in Dimitris Tziouvas (ed.), *Greek Modernism and Beyond*, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997, p. 16.

³⁸⁵ Forrest Read (ed.), *Pound/Joyce*, New York: New Directions, 1967, p. 46.

³⁸⁶ Toril Moi, 'Ibsen, Theatre, and Ideology of Modernism', *Theatre Survey* 45.2 (November 2004), p. 247.

that, theatre was a prominent trope among writers of that time. Nietzsche, who was a major influence among modernist thinkers such as Sartre, kept returning to it as a metaphor or allegory. In *Human, All Too Human* he asserted that human culture at the time was the first to have access to all eras and cultures from the past, whereas earlier ones ‘were capable of enjoying only themselves, with no view of what lay outside – it was as though they lay beneath a vaulted dome ... which, though light streamed down upon them from it, was itself impenetrable to their gaze’.³⁸⁷ In essence, this is a view of the past as a theatrical stage. This is a different use of theatre in history to Cavafy’s, but the fact remains that Nietzsche sought recourse to theatre as an analogy. This function of theatre as a metaphorical tool can also be found in *The Birth of Tragedy*, and was also used by other writers in that time, such as Matthew Arnold.³⁸⁸ In ‘Modernism and Hellenism: Aspects of a Melancholy Sensitivity’, Vassiliki Kolokotroni and Olga Taxidou summarise ‘theatromania’ as follows: ‘From the phantasmagoric stagings of Wagner to the radical writings of Brecht, theater occupies a privileged position in these debates.’³⁸⁹

The picture that is emerging is that a considerable number of late 19th and early 20th century writers used theatre as a metaphorical or allegorical tool. It would be tempting to suggest Cavafy was part of the same movement – or, if not movement, at least part of the same prevailing culture at the time of describing things in theatrical or performative terms. At this stage, it should be pointed out that Greek modernism was somewhat different to the modernism of the English speaking writers mentioned above. Dimitris Tziouvas outlines the key differences in his introduction to *Greek Modernism and Beyond*: ‘Modernism in Europe has been associated with universal capitalism and cultural imperialism. In contrast, Greek modernism, experienced as an identity problem, can be seen as introverted, ethnocentric and anti-colonial.’³⁹⁰ Greek modernism is epitomised by George Seferis and other members of the generation of the 30s. Ancient Greek myths were of particular importance to them, and were intertwined with contemporary reality in what has been termed the ‘mythical method’.³⁹¹ Tziouvas also identifies an emphasis on landscape and light,³⁹² which is readily evident in arguably the two most prominent modernist Greek works of poetry, Seferis’s ‘Μυθιστόρημα’ and Elytis’s ‘Το Άξιον Εστί’. It is not difficult to see that these works inhabit a completely different world to the cosmopolitan Cavafy, with his array of ‘theatrical sets’ of enclosed spaces.

³⁸⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. by R.J. Hollingdale. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 257.

³⁸⁸ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. by Francis Golffing. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books. For Arnold’s use of theatre as a metaphor, see Matthew Arnold, *Selected Prose*, ed. by P.J. Keating. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1987.

³⁸⁹ Kolokotroni/Taxidou: 1997, p. 16.

³⁹⁰ Dimitris Tziouvas, Introduction to *Greek Modernism and Beyond*. Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997, p. 2.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 4. The phrase ‘mythical method’ was coined by T.S. Eliot in his review of James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, “Ulysses, Order, and Myth”. See *Selected Prose of T.S. Eliot*, ed. by Frank Kermode. New York: Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1975.

³⁹² *Ibid.*

Tziouvas proposes a different categorisation, based on these diametrically opposite characteristics exhibited by Cavafy compared to the ‘traditional’ figures of Greek modernism. Charles Russell offers a firm distinction between modernist and avant-garde writers, with the former category including writers such as Pound, Proust, Joyce, Eliot and Hemingway, and the latter exemplified by Rimbaud, Apollinaire and Brecht.³⁹³ The avant-garde, in this case, is not a chronological category – it is applied to artists with particularly radical aesthetic outlooks and techniques. From this division alone it is easy to discern which category Cavafy belongs to – he is firmly in the avant-garde, with his cosmopolitanism and ‘challenging aesthetic and social stance’.³⁹⁴ This is in contrast to Seferis and Elytis (as well as Palamas, Tziouvas argues), who are modernists whose ‘attachment to Greek tradition shaped and restrained to some extent their experimental impulses’.³⁹⁵ There is also a difference in terms of reception in Greece, with the modernists enjoying great popularity – Seferis and Elytis are still the only Greek recipients of the Nobel Prize for Literature – and the avant-gardists being the ‘underdogs’. Posthumous critical reception, however, has been reversed – Cavafy is now the most established modern Greek poet by some distance, both at home and abroad (perhaps at home partly because of the great popularity abroad, in fact).³⁹⁶

Such distinctions can only go so far, however. Cavafy undoubtedly shares characteristics with modernist writers and precursors of modernism in his constant recourse to theatre and performance in his poetry, and also stands in stark contrast with the traditional figures of Greek modernism. It is a fact that a great number of writers from that period – regardless of which tradition they belonged to – used theatre in their writings.³⁹⁷ The use of theatre and performance is a common feature between Cavafy and other writers of that period, but I argue that the *raison d'être* of performance and theatre goes deeper than affinities and influences. My goal therefore is not to frame Cavafy in the discourse on modernism and the avant-garde, but to uncover something more fundamental in his treatment of performance and theatre.

The solution I am proposing is that, in most cases, Cavafy used theatre and performance as part of a complex system of subversion throughout his poetry; a system related to hedonism/sensuality (of which theatre is a major signpost in Cavafy) and, by extension,

³⁹³ See Charles Russell, *Poets, Prophets, and Revolutionaries: The Literary Avant-garde from Rimbaud through Postmodernism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.

³⁹⁴ Tziouvas: 1997, p. 5.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁶ Parenthetically, it should be noted that Seferis himself saw fertile ground in comparing Cavafy to modernism in his famous ‘Κ.Π. Καβάφης, Θ.Σ. Έλιοτ: Παράλληλοι’ from *Δοκιμές Α’*. He describes Cavafy as isolated from influences: ‘Δεν ξέρω ποιητική δημιουργία περισσότερο απομονωμένη από τη δική του’. (Seferis, *Δοκιμές Α’*, Athens: Ikaros 1974, first edition 1936-1947, p. 325) In the same essay, Seferis also pointed out Cavafy’s connection to theatre: ‘είναι δραματικός ο Καβάφης’. (p. 347)

³⁹⁷ Cf. Kolokotroni/Taxidou, 1997: ‘Writers of that era – regardless of their leanings, and whether they would be classified as modernists or avant-garde – often used theatre as a prism from which to see the world’. (p. 16)

homosexuality.³⁹⁸ I will begin by examining the implications of the fact that theatre signified sensual pleasure in Cavafy by using the suspended hyphen as an example, and continue with a discussion on the wider issue of performance and subversion in general. For the purposes of this chapter, the terms ‘hedonism’, ‘sensuality’, and ‘sensual pleasure’ are all used as equivalent to Cavafy’s ubiquitous ‘ηδονή’.

In the discussion of ‘Η Διωρία του Νέρωνος’ and performativity, I have already commented on the connection between theatre and sensual pleasure. In that poem, the mention of theatre is right in the centre of a stanza describing Nero’s evenings of sensual pleasure in his travels back from Greece,³⁹⁹ framed by Cavafy’s use of the suspended hyphen and the word ‘ηδονή’ at the end.⁴⁰⁰ I have already mentioned the fact that the use of the suspended hyphen was a highly personal and individual one by Cavafy, and signified the homosexual subtext of a poem when part of the poem’s title.⁴⁰¹ Its use within poems as a syntactical feature is of course wider, and can sometimes be more mundane and commonplace – signifying a break in dialogue, as in ‘Ηρώδης Αττικός’, or a change of focus or tone, as in ‘Στα 200 π.Χ.’. In the sensual poems, however, the use is consistently in terms of heightened emotion, and, as an extension, homosexual subtext. To ascertain that, we only need a cursory look at, for example, ‘Το Διπλανό Τραπέζι’, ‘Θυμήσου, Σώμα...’, ‘Μέσα στα καπηλειά –’ (where it mirrors the use in the poem’s title) or ‘Πέρασμα’. The case of ‘Πέρασμα’ warrants a closer look in terms of the connection between the hanging hyphen and sensuality/homosexuality in the context of this discussion:

Εκείνα που δειλά φαντάσθη μαθητής, είν’ ανοιχτά,
 φανερωμένα εμπρός του. Και γυρνά, και ξενυχτά,
 και παρασύρεται. Κι ως είναι (για την τέχνη μας) σωστό,
 το αίμα του, καινούριο και ζεστό,
 η ηδονή το χαίρεται. Το σώμα του νικά
 έκνομη ερωτική μέθη· και τα νεανικά
 μέλη ενδίδουνε σ’ αυτήν.

Κ’ έτσι ένα παιδί απλό
 γένεται άξιο να το δούμε, κι απ’ τον Υψηλό
 της Ποίησης Κόσμο μια στιγμή περνά κι αυτό –
 το αισθητικό παιδί με το αίμα του καινούριο και ζεστό.⁴⁰²

The hanging hyphen appears in the penultimate line, significantly before the word ‘αισθητικό’. The word strictly translates as ‘sensuous’ – Sachperoglou translates the line as ‘the

³⁹⁸ The link between theatre and subversion is strengthened by Cavafy’s frequent use of dramatic irony – a traditionally theatrical device that subverts expectations.

³⁹⁹ See Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 95 for full quotation.

⁴⁰⁰ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 75.

⁴⁰¹ C.f. Papanikolaou: 2005, p. 258.

⁴⁰² Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 90.

sensuous boy’, while Keeley and Sherrard use the slightly more adventurous and charged, if somewhat awkward, ‘the young sensualist’.⁴⁰³ In this context, the word ‘αισθητικός’, just like ‘αισθητής’ (aesthete) in other examples, is a thinly-veiled disguise of ‘homosexual’.⁴⁰⁴ When we also take into account the mention of ‘ηδονή’ earlier in the poem, together with other highly-charged phrases such as ‘έκνομη ερωτική μέθη’ and ‘το αίμα του καινούριο και ζεστό’, there could be no doubt that the hanging hyphen of line 9 is also an example of homosexual subtext. The phrase ‘έκνομη ερωτική μέθη’ is very closely linked to ‘έκνομη ηδονή’ in ‘Η αρχή των’.⁴⁰⁵ ‘Έκνομη’, meaning ‘unlawful’, leaves us in no doubt regarding the explicit nature of homosexuality in both poems.⁴⁰⁶ The suspended hyphen of ‘Η Διωρία του Νέρωνος’ is similarly framed in the context of ‘ηδονή’, ‘γυμνά σώματα’ and other similarly charged phrases.⁴⁰⁷ Given all this evidence, there can be no doubt that the mention of theatre – the way it occurs both in ‘Η Διωρία του Νέρωνος’ and elsewhere – is directly connected to sensual pleasure and homosexuality.

‘Πέρασμα’ is a compelling example in other ways as well – the phrase ‘το αίμα του καινούριο και ζεστό’ is not only highly charged, it can be interpreted as very explicitly sexual in a Cavafian context. This is because of its connection to the hidden ‘Ο Δεμένος Όμοσ’, which is probably the most strikingly explicit of Cavafy’s erotic poems:

Είπε που χτύπησε σε τοίχον ή που έπεσε.
Μα πιθανόν η αιτία νά’ ταν άλλη
του πληγωμένου και δεμένου ώμου.

Με μιά κομμάτι βίαη κίνησην,
απ’ ένα ράφι για να κατεβάσει κάτι
φωτογραφίες που ήθελε να δει από κοντά,
λύθηκεν ο επίδεσμος κ’ έτρεξε λίγο αίμα.

Ξανάδεσα τον ώμο, και στο δέσιμο
αργούσα κάπως· γιατί δεν πονούσε,

⁴⁰³ C.P. Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, trans. by Evangelos Sachperoglou (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, reissued 2008), p. 100.

⁴⁰⁴ See Papanikolaou: 2014, p. 116. Papanikolaou suggests that, by the time we get to later examples in ‘Σ’ ένα βιβλίο παληό –’ and ‘Κατά τες συνταγές αρχαίων Ελληνοσύρων μάγων’, the word ‘αισθητής’ is not a mere hint, but fully equivalent to ‘homosexual’.

⁴⁰⁵ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 28.

⁴⁰⁶ Not that there could be doubt about whether the word ‘ηδονή’ can be synonymous with anything other than homosexual pleasure given the general context of Cavafy’s writings, but it could have been possible for writers arguing from a position of heteronormativity to say that there is no definitive indication of homosexual love, if it were not for word ‘έκνομη’. While they could not plausibly argue that the poem does not depict homosexuality, it could have been part of the argument that Cavafy was always hiding it behind hints and suggestions without ever being direct about it.

⁴⁰⁷ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 75.

και μ'άρεζε να βλέπω το αίμα. Πράγμα
του έρωτός μου το αίμα εκείνο ήταν.

Σαν έφυγε ηύρα στην καρέγλα εμπρός,
ένα κουρέλι ματωμένο, απ' τα πανιά,
κουρέλι που έμοιαζε για τα σκουπίδια κατ' ευθείαν
και που στα χείλη μου το πήρα εγώ,
και που το φύλαξα ώρα πολλή –
το αίμα του έρωτος στα χείλη μου επάνω.⁴⁰⁸

Keeley has described it as 'one of the most startling erotic poems that Cavafy wrote, certainly the most avant garde for his time.'⁴⁰⁹ Gone are the secret signals, codes or words-signposts to indicate homosexuality. In this case, we have the persistent mentions of the lover's blood, which by the end of the poem become not only very highly sexualized, but also fetishistic.⁴¹⁰ The final three lines obsessively fixate on the bloodied cloth with what can only be described as lust, and the repetition (και που ... και που), together with the trademark suspended hyphen at the end of the penultimate line again, only heightens this feeling. The link between 'Ο Δεμένος Ώμος' and 'Πέρασμα' is undeniable: they were almost contemporary – 'Πέρασμα' was written in 1914 and published in 1917, two years before 'Ο Δεμένος Ώμος' was written, and the mention of blood is very similar. The image is central to both poems and is consolidated by the repetition – 'το αίμα του έρωτος' in 'Ο Δεμένος Ώμος' is repeated in the last line, slightly altered after its first appearance in line 11. In 'Πέρασμα', 'το αίμα του καινούριου και ζεστό' is again repeated in the final line, this time verbatim after its first appearance. In addition, in both poems the repetition of the image of blood in the final line occurs after the suspended hyphen of the penultimate line, so we can be left in no doubt as to the way the image of blood should be read.

Because of the interplay between 'Πέρασμα' and 'Ο Δεμένος Ώμος', we can view the mention of blood in the former as completely and unashamedly sexualised. Given the similarities with 'Ο Δεμένος Ώμος' we can again infer a certain fetishistic sexualised mention of blood in 'Πέρασμα'. An 'innocent' reading along the lines of 'fresh blood' indicating youth with no added subtext is completely nullified by the fetishistic context inferred from the way the poem interacts with 'Ο Δεμένος Ώμος'. The image of blood can also have a different association: the late 19th and early 20th centuries were the high point of the Gothic horror genre, and one of its most famous examples was Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. *Dracula* was published in 1897 – during Cavafy's early period and twenty years before 'Πέρασμα' – and was an instant hit, sparking numerous theatre and film adaptations from as early as the 1920s, such as F.W. Murnau's

⁴⁰⁸ Cavafy: 1993, p. 106.

⁴⁰⁹ Keeley: 1976, p. 69.

⁴¹⁰ Note, again, the suspended hyphen right before the last mention of the word 'blood'. Significantly, it is also at the end of the penultimate line, exactly the same place as in 'Πέρασμα'.

unauthorised *Nosferatu*.⁴¹¹ The concept of vampirism, therefore, was a popular cultural trope, and has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Christopher Craft, for instance, views Dracula as exemplifying latent homosexuality.⁴¹² Given this context, it is possible to describe the mention of blood in ‘Πέρασμα’ in the context of vampirism, with ‘ηδονή’ in this case playing the role of the vampire, and the young man surrendering himself to it fully. Papanikolaou indeed pursues this line of thought, and adds that there is a connection between homoeroticism in Victorian times and the ideas of vampirism and the exploitation of young men.⁴¹³ The poem then takes these ideas and subverts them into something positive and worthy of art.⁴¹⁴

This subversion is again related to performance, even though it is a subtler and different kind of performance than in other poems with more overtly theatrical elements. ‘Πέρασμα’ is not concerned as much with a specificity of setting. The title ‘Πέρασμα’ can allude to the young man passing through the stage, as the speaker is observing this passage, but this is a rather general point. The function of performance can be clarified if we examine narrative perspective: ostensibly, it is an older poet that is making this observation, addressing us as a group: ‘Κ’ έτσι ένα παιδί απλό / γένεται άξιο να το δούμε’.⁴¹⁵ The world of poetry is operating as a stage and is observed by a group of people, led by the speaker who is introducing and describing the situation in a manner reminiscent of speaker in a lecture theatre. As a result, the performance in the poem is not so much theatrical as scientific – the young man as an ‘exhibit’ passing through the stage, with the speaker lecturing and presenting his findings to a group. From this point of view, the setting – though, significantly, not the tone – recalls a turn of the 20th century scientist recording

⁴¹¹ The film came out in 1922, during Cavafy’s lifetime.

⁴¹² Christopher Craft, “Kiss Me with those Red Lips”: Gender and Inversion in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* in *Representations*, vol. 8, Autumn 1984. California: University of California Press, pp. 107-133.

⁴¹³ Papanikolaou: 2014, p. 248. The implication is that the idea of homosexuality, somewhat personified, is preying on unsuspecting young men, which was – and arguably still is, to an extent – something society at large feared.

⁴¹⁴ Even though there is no mention of blood, the idea of vampirism could also be said to lurk beneath the surface of ‘Ηλθε για να διαβάσει –’. In this case, the young man who wanted to read is half-asleep when Eros visits, and there is a feeling of subverting the trope of a youth with good intentions being taken advantage of by something malign. The idea of homosexual desire as a malign influence is subverted in Cavafy – in ‘Πέρασμα’ it is described as worthy of being elevated into art, and in ‘Ηλθε για να διαβάσει –’ lust is not concerned with ‘αστείαν αιδώ’ (See Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 46). This poem, then, belongs in the same category of performance and subversion, especially considering the decoding of signs that relate to homosexuality, such as the suspended hyphen of the title and the word ‘ιδεώδη’. In turn, the element of performance in ‘Ηλθε για να διαβάσει –’ informs the less performance-related ‘Σ’ ένα βιβλίο παλιό –’. The two poems are linked by the starting point of books, and by the significance of the suspended hyphen in their titles. The latter describes a watercolour sketch of a young man bearing the title ‘Παρουσίασις του Έρωτος’, on which the speaker muses that the addition of ‘του έρωτος των άκρως αισθητών’ would be more appropriate. (See Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 39). The speaker, in this case, remarks that it is obvious, if you know where to look, that the artist who drew the young man did not depict him as someone intended for ‘those who love in a healthy way’. The hallmarks are all there – the suspended hyphen in the title, the use of the words ‘ηδονή’, ‘ιδεώδη’ and ‘αισθητής’ to denote homosexuality, and we are again presented with a set of people who can decipher signs and codes related to homosexuality. As readers, we participate in this same kind of decoding and recognising signs in Cavafy’s erotic poems. In this case, homosexuality is more overt than normal, given the mentions of ‘ανωμάτων έλξεων’ and ‘κρεββάτια / που αναίσχυντα τ’ αποκαλεί η τρεχάμενη ηθική’.

⁴¹⁵ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 90. Emphasis mine.

observations on homosexuals, and relaying them in a presentation.⁴¹⁶ It can be argued that this is not coincidental: Papanikolaou observes a correspondence between the poem and the way homosexuality was recorded in the turn of the 20th century.⁴¹⁷ The template that Cavafy follows is the confession of the subject's homosexuality, followed by a description of the acts, and finally a judgement. This judgement would have been in the context of a medical analysis of the phenomenon in the case of a scientific study,⁴¹⁸ or a negative moral judgement in the case of other publications ('η κοινωνία που ήταν / σεμνότυφη πολύ συσχέτιζε κουτά').⁴¹⁹ This pattern is subverted by Cavafy in 'Πέρασμα'. The element of judgement in the template is instead replaced by the elevation into art as the young man discovers homosexuality – at first bashfully, then fully giving himself to the 'vampire-like' sensual pleasure. This is not so much about 'art completing life', which has been the topic of discussion in a number of poems by Cavafy – it is more a case of Cavafy subverting a familiar formula and thus redressing the balance of the way homosexuality was viewed and recorded, especially if we take into account the correspondence between this poem and the more risqué 'Ο Δεμένος Ωμος'.⁴²⁰

In 'Στο Θέατρο', the connection between theatre and sensual pleasure/homosexuality is even more evident, as the theatre itself is the setting for the speaker's fantasies about the man he notices in the boxes. Keeley is among the critics to note the explicit connection between theatre and sensuality: 'The setting here, though neither a brothel nor a secret retreat ... serves as a kind of metaphor for the theatre of the mind, where one half of his sensuality found its home during these years.'⁴²¹ The subversion of expectations is there right from the start of the poem, with the very first lines of the monologue stating that the speaker was bored of looking at the performance on stage, and turned his gaze to the boxes, staging his own performance with the man in the boxes in the starring role.⁴²² The poem, on the whole, is like a map of the connection between theatre/performance, sensuality, and subversion in Cavafy, since all three are very tightly intertwined. It is impossible to separate the performance that is taking place in the speaker's

⁴¹⁶ See, for instance, Pierre Aristide André Brouillet's painting *A Clinical Lesson at the Salpêtrière*, which shows a scientist – the neurologist Jean-Martin Charcot – giving a demonstration for his students. The painting can be found at Paris Descartes University, and was retrieved from

https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=A+Clinical+Lesson+at+the+Salp%C3%AAtri%C3%A8re&client=firefox-b-ab&dcr=0&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwjJ2-7M-b7YAhUpDsAKHfXyAhwQ_AUICigB&biw=1525&bih=733#imgrc=9Dd40Ic3hNCO6M.

⁴¹⁷ See Papanikolaou: 2014, pp. 250-251.

⁴¹⁸ See Ellis and Symonds' 1897 work *Sexual Inversion* for the archetypal example of this pattern. Havelock Ellis was a physician who studied human sexuality in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and influenced psychoanalysis in many ways. Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition*, ed. by Ivan Crozier. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 (First edition 1897).

⁴¹⁹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 63.

⁴²⁰ According to Papanikolaou, the poem concerns itself with portraying the homosexual as 'ένα υποκείμενο που μιλά, επιθυμεί, και εμπλέκεται ηθικά'. (Papanikolaou: 2014, p. 251)

⁴²¹ Keeley: 1976, p. 54.

⁴²² For a closer discussion of the poem, see the chapter on performativity in Cavafy, where it has also been quoted in full.

imagination from the subversion in the fact that the ‘real’ performance is taking place in the boxes as opposed to the stage, and from the feeling of intense homosexual desire.

There are different levels of subversion in the poem – it is not confined to the subversion of the theatrical performance by the speaker. It is also to do with sexuality, as the speaker subverts what he heard about the man in the boxes. He takes what he heard from social circles: ‘όσα με είπανε το απόγευμα για σένα’;⁴²³ and transforms it into something that fuels his passion and intensifies his fantasy. It is safe to assume that what he heard about the young man came with negative connotations – it would have been from the same society that ‘made stupid correlations’ or ‘συσχέτιζε κουτά’.⁴²⁴⁴²⁵ The ‘public denunciation’, therefore, is very powerfully turned into an ‘intensifier of desire’, as I have discussed before.⁴²⁶

The steps, so far, in this relationship between performance, sensuality/homosexuality and subversion are quite clear. First, in the cases where Cavafy used the word ‘theatre’, it was as a major associative ‘buzzword’ for sensuality, which of course means homosexuality in this case. Further, the poems that address these issues frequently use performative techniques.⁴²⁷ The frequent presence of dramatic irony – itself a fundamentally theatrical device – is another telling sign for the link between performance and subversion in Cavafy. Gonda van Steen, who read Cavafy as a ‘dramatist’, makes the same link when she writes of ‘Cavafy’s penchant for subversive irony’.⁴²⁸ In addition, those poems are not just about the situations they are describing, but also about the process: the process of recording homosexuality, the process of censoring it, the process of defining and producing an identity. More often than not, therefore, the subversive element is present in at least two levels – the more literal (character subverting a situation and using it in an unexpected way), and a more general, often meta-literary level. The erotic poems in particular do not address desire in general, but are about one particular kind of desire, and about the methods of performing it and subverting social expectations. We can test this relationship by presenting a counter-example, and in the case of ‘Στο Θέατρο’ we are fortunate enough to have one in the form of a reimagining of the poem by Stavros Melissinos in his *Ποιήματα Παρ’ Άλληλα*.⁴²⁹ The poem is ‘Έφηβεία’, and it essentially reads like an example of what would happen if Cavafy’s poetry was not centred on homosexuality. The first two stanzas of the poem read as follows:

Δεν με τραβούσε, κάτι, στη σκηνή

⁴²³ Cavafy: 1993, p. 88.

⁴²⁴ Cavafy/Sachperoglou: 2008, p. 167.

⁴²⁵ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 63.

⁴²⁶ Papanikolaou: 2005, p. 246.

⁴²⁷ I use the word ‘performative’ here to mean ‘related to performance’, as opposed to as a derivative of ‘performativity’.

⁴²⁸ Van Steen: 2015, p. 74.

⁴²⁹ Stavros Melissinos achieved fame as the ‘poet-sandalmaker’ of Athens in the 1960s, with a number of celebrities visiting his shop.

κι υψώθηκε η ματιά μου στα θεωρεία.
 Και μέσα σε ένα – ώ λάμπις φωτεινή –
 ξανάδα Εσένα, υπέροχη κυρία!

Κι αμέσως, μες στο νου μου, πήραν χρώμα
 Τα ερωτικά σου, τα όσα, μου είχαν πει
 και: σκέψις, συγκινήθηκαν, και σώμα
 που έννοιωσα πόθου, μείγμα, με ντροπή.⁴³⁰

I have no wish to discuss the seriousness of Melissinos's poetic aspirations or whether or not his work merits critical analysis, but this example illustrates the importance of homosexuality and its relationship to performance in Cavafy's poetry. By heterosexualising the plot of the poem and having the speaker gaze upon a 'lady', Melissinos removes the complex layers of the public performance of homosexual identity and makes it a very straightforward and banal example of a man praising a woman's beauty. The daring and (homo)sexualised 'παράξενη εμορφιά' and 'διεφθαρμένα νειάτα' are replaced by the loftier, more generalised, and far less sexual 'λάμπις φωτεινή' and 'υπέροχη κυρία'. The point of course is not to compare and contrast the two poems – it would be futile and unfair to both writers – but this example shows what can happen if one link of the chain is removed: the poem is about commonplace heterosexual desire and the element of performance and theatre becomes insignificant. If we substituted the setting with, for example, a busy street, or a market, the meaning would remain the same. In 'Στο Θέατρο', a performance of homosexual desire takes place in the theatre, subverting social moral codes in the way the speaker takes 'όσα με είπανε για σένα' and turns it into something positive, something that redefines the world around him. In 'Εφηβεία', nothing is subverted apart from the fact that the young narrator is, again, gazing at the boxes instead of the stage. This gaze, however, has nothing subversive about it, and is not related to anything else in the poem the way that theatre is linked to sensuality, subversion and homosexuality in Cavafy.

If Cavafy's poems were to operate in a heteronormative context, their character would change radically. As the example by Melissinos shows, the element of theatricality and subversion all but disappears. Cavafy has the evocative and very theatrical 'σε εικόνιζα', steeped in homosexual desire and in a sense of theatricality that echoes the characters' attempts to mould or effect the world around them in a manner akin to stage directors. Furthermore, subversion is a key element of theatre – without it, there is little depth or conflict. The staging of a publicly homosexual fantasy is a daring leap to take when the bare bones of the 'plot' is a character going to the theatre to watch a relatively uninteresting play. In Melissinos's reimagining, this staging of fantasy has completely disappeared, and indeed cannot be recaptured in a heteronormative resetting of the poem. Furthermore, the speaker even feels 'shame' about his fantasies of the woman. It is not a bold, subversive recreation – it is a momentary weakness, and an act that

⁴³⁰ Cavafy/Melissinos, *Ποιήματα Παρ'Αλληλα* (Athens: 1984), p. 71.

brings shame. The heteronormative resetting thus nullifies what makes ‘Στο Θέατρο’ so radical and subversive. Where ‘Στο Θέατρο’ is very much about physicality, about bodies and the way sexuality informs their public behaviour via performativity, ‘Εφηβεία’ deifies the object of affection and offers a more banal romanticism: this deification is obvious not only from the exclamation ‘ω λάμπις φωτεινή’, but also from the capitalisation of the letter E in the word ‘Εσένα’ when referring to the woman. Oddly, then – given that talking of heterosexual desire is in no way risqué – it is a sterile poem compared to the carnal desire of Cavafy’s ‘Στο Θέατρο’.

The word ‘theatre’ in the title, operating similarly as a signpost for the poem’s themes, occurs only in one other poem, ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)’:

Πολίτου εντίμου υιός – προ πάντων, ευειδής
 έφηβος του θεάτρου, ποικίλως αρεστός,
 ενίοτε συνθέτω εν γλώσση ελληνική
 λίαν ευτόλμους στίχους, που τους κυκλοφορώ
 πολύ κρυφά, εννοείται – θεοί! να μην τους δουν
 οι τα φαιά φορούντες, περί ηθικής λαλούντες –
 στίχους της ηδονής της εκλεκτής, που πηαίνει
 προς άγονην αγάπη κι αποδοκιμασμένη.⁴³¹

The poem was mentioned in passing in the chapter on performativity, in the context of the oft-quoted ‘τα φαιά φορούντες, περί ηθικής λαλούντες’ – the Christian religious authorities who performatively impose rules on what is a morally acceptable behaviour. The speaker describes himself as a ‘good-looking young man of the theatre’. In a Cavafian context, we can, by now, automatically take this mention of theatre to be associated with sensual pleasure and homosexuality. Unlike ‘Στο Θέατρο’, the theatre of Sidon is completely metaphorical – the action does not take place in a theatre building, and indeed it is not certain whether Sidon in A.D. 400 would have had a theatre the way we would recognise it. According to Sarah Ekdawi’s ‘Cavafy’s Mythical Ephebes’, theatre in this case stands for poetry recitations and competitions, much as the ones we witness in ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας (400 μ.Χ.)’, instead of the actual building.⁴³² Cavafy’s concern, however, is not to comment on the theatrical situation in Sidon in A.D. 400. Instead, it is about the mechanics of heteronormativity, and the result is the same kind of subversion we find in ‘Στο Θέατρο’, with homosexuality justified and elevated in poetry.

The speaker is a ‘young man of the theatre’ in more ways than one, since he operates as an actor in his everyday life. There is the façade he puts on for society, but at the same time circulates erotic homosexual poetry in secret, to a select few. He plays his role to perfection since

⁴³¹ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 43.

⁴³² Sarah Ekdawi, ‘Cavafy’s Mythical Ephebes’, in Peter Mackridge (ed.), *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek Poetry. Essays in memory of C.A. Trypanis*, London: Frank Cass, 1996, pp. 33-44.

he has not been exposed and remains well-liked and popular. At once, he has managed to circumvent the Christians (‘τα φαιά φορούντες’) and subvert their moral systems that look down upon homosexuality. The setting of A.D. 400 was a time of transition from paganism to Christianity, and for that reason was a favourite of Cavafy’s: it is a liminal setting, standing in between times, not quite belonging to either old or new. The surface of the poem, therefore, focuses on this contrast and tensions between the Christians and the ‘εθνικοί’ that we saw in Cavafy’s Julian poems. Indeed, Christos Papazoglou has read the gap in the middle of the poem as a reflection of this chasm between Christians and pagans, as well as between the public and furtive activities of the young man.⁴³³ In this sense, the poem is one of the archetypes of Cavafy’s ‘εν μέρει ... εν μέρει’ outlook, with the gap in the middle representing the liminal setting: between paganism and Christianity, public and private personas, censorship and banned or scandalous art, heteronormativity and its subversion. In addition, it is impossible to overlook the almost direct parallel between the way the speaker circulates his poetry and Cavafy’s method in his contemporary Alexandria. ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ is not about censorship and morality regarding homosexuality in A.D. 400 Sidon, nor is it an exact allegory for Cavafy’s contemporary situation. Rather, we can read it as a comment on the process by which heteronormativity imposes its values, and the way those can be subverted – with subversion signalled by and heavily linked with theatre and performance.

‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ is a key poem in Cavafian poetics because it is in dialogue with a number of other poems. First, it almost shares a title with ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας...’, as both poems are set in Sidon in A.D. 400. The latter is famous for being among the most widely debated poems in terms of attempting to pinpoint Cavafy’s attitude towards the main characters and themes. As I will show later, ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ has also been misinterpreted – not in the sense that critics have got it ‘wrong’ per se, but more in the sense that they have been somewhat blinkered in their approach. The topic of the debate in ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας...’ has been whether Cavafy identified with the opinions expressed by the young men, or whether he maintains an ironic distance. In more general terms, it is about art vs. action, as exemplified by the young man admonishing the actor for focusing on Aeschylus’s achievements as a soldier and not as a tragedian.⁴³⁴ It is only in more recent years that the discussion has moved on – Dimaras, who I have already quoted in the introductory chapter, was one of the early exceptions when he noted that ‘we cannot get anything out of the poem other than the exquisite portrayal of the young men’.⁴³⁵

⁴³³ Christos Papazoglou, *Μετρική και αφήγηση (Για μια συστηματική μετρική και ρυθμική ανάλυση των καβαφικών ποιημάτων)*, Athens: M.I.E.T., 2012, p. 652.

⁴³⁴ Sareyannis, for instance, interpreted Cavafy as siding with the young man who speaks up, while Seferis was firmly in the other camp. See I.A. Sareyannis, *Σχόλια στον Καβάφη*. Athens: Ikaros, 1964, pp. 104-110; and Giorgos Seferis, *Δοκιμές Α’*, Athens: Ikaros, 1974, pp. 441-447.

⁴³⁵ K. Th. Dimaras, ‘Η Ηθοποιία του Καβάφη’ (1933), retrieved from Michalis Pieris (ed.), *Νερά της Κύπρου, της Συρίας και της Αιγύπτου*, Θ.Ε.Π.Α.Κ., 2013, p. 75.

The point of interest here, however, is the way the poem converses with ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ In this context, it is important to consider the following comment by Kleon Paraschos:

‘Αλλού (Νέοι της Σιδώνας), η τέχνη του φαίνεται ανώτερη από την πράξη. Αλλού πάλιν δείχνει να πιστεύει πως όλα σα να οδηγούν τελικά στην πράξη. Η τέχνη για τον Καβάφη είναι απλό συμπλήρωμα της ζωής. Δεν είναι, όπως παρατηρήθηκε κιόλα, μέσο λυτρωμού, ή «αυτόσκοπος» παράλληλος και ισάξιος με τη ζωή.’⁴³⁶

Paraschos, then, sees Cavafy as a man of action first and foremost. He adds: ‘Δεν είναι απλός θεατής της ίδιας του τραγωδίας ο Καβάφης, είναι δρων πρόσωπο και το πρώτο μάλιστα. Αλλά τη δράση του τη σκεπάζει.’⁴³⁷ Parenthetically, this is a fascinating observation, especially in light of, for example, Papanikolaou’s understanding of Cavafy through a process of ‘telling and hiding’, a discourse of constantly producing sexuality and eroticism instead of gradually uncovering it: ‘Cavafy puts desire, “semi-hidden”, in the phrases of his poetry.’⁴³⁸ Paraschos – bearing in mind that he was writing a good few decades earlier – attributes a different reason to this ‘hiding’ or ‘covering’: his image of Cavafy is of one who ‘was hurt at some point, and now he is protecting himself’.⁴³⁹

This debate of art vs. action in ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας...’ can acquire a different meaning by its dialogue with ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’. In ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’, art *is* action. I do not mean in the sense of art completing life, as has been argued about other Cavafy poems, nor of art recreating life, nor of something acquiring value through its elevation into art.⁴⁴⁰ Furthermore, it is not an equivalence – I am not interpreting art as distinct from action and somehow equivalent in stature. Instead, it is a form of action. It is the way the young man of the poem subverts the system in place and circulates his verses clandestinely to gradually effect a different kind of balance. On one level, it is impossible not to see this as a metaphor for the way Cavafy himself circulated his poems in order both to circumvent social conventions and to gradually offer a powerful commentary on the way homosexuality was positioned in society, at the same time *creating* a new position. Art is action, then, in the sense that it can be a subversive political act against the powers that be; in that it can carve out a new identity for homosexuality; and in the way that it can comment on that very process, and on the new dynamic that is formed as a result.

⁴³⁶ Kleon Paraschos, ‘Απαντήσεις σε κριτικούς του Καβάφη’ in *Κ.Π. Καβάφης: Κριτικές Μελέτες*, ed. By Giorgis Pikros. Athens: Neos Stathmos, p. 119. Originally in *Καβάφης Απαντα: Άρθρα και Κριτικές I & II*, Athens: Fykiris, 1982.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁸ Papanikolaou: 2005, p. 235.

⁴³⁹ Kleon Paraschos, ‘Απαντήσεις σε κριτικούς του Καβάφη’ in *Κ.Π. Καβάφης: Κριτικές Μελέτες*, ed. by Giorgis Pikros. Athens: Neos Stathmos, p. 119.

⁴⁴⁰ The last two do happen in the poem, although it is not my main focus here. As the young man is a poet writing ‘daring’ verses about homosexual love, homosexuality is elevated through art in this sense above the moral recriminations of society.

Cavafy chose to use theatre and performance to signify this – on the surface, it is ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας...’ that seems the more appropriate one for the word ‘theatre’ in the title, but a closer analysis reveals just how interlinked performance, subversion and sensual pleasure are in ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’⁴⁴¹

‘Τέμεθος, Αντιοχεύς: 400 μ.Χ.’ is also closely related to ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’, both thematically and in terms of setting:

Στίχοι του νέου Τεμέθου του ερωτοπαθούς.
 Με τίτλον «Ο Εμονίδης» – του Αντιόχου Επιφανούς
 ο προσφιλής εταίρος· ένας περικαλλής
 νέος εκ Σαμοσάτων. Μα αν έγιναν οι στίχοι
 θερμοί, συγκινημένοι είναι που ο Εμονίδης
 (από την παλαιάν εκείνην εποχή·
 το εκατόν τριάντα επτά της βασιλείας Ελλήνων! –
 ίσως και λίγο πριν) στο ποίημα ετέθη
 ως όνομα ψιλόν· ευάρμοστον εν τούτοις.
 Μια αγάπη του Τεμέθου το ποίημα εκφράζει,
 ωραίαν κι αξίαν αυτού. Εμείς οι μνημένοι
 οι φίλοι του οι στενοί· εμείς οι μνημένοι
 γνωρίζουμε για ποιόνα εγράφησαν οι στίχοι.
 Οι ανίδεοι Αντιοχείς διαβάζουν, Εμονίδην.⁴⁴²

The eponymous Temethos is very similar to the speaker of ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ Both are poets writing homosexual erotic poetry, and both are concerned with strategies of how to best communicate that. Where ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ was about the circulation of the poetry in secret, ‘Τέμεθος, Αντιοχεύς...’ focuses on concealing the true subject matter within the poem. In other words, they are poems that are heavily linked with the processes and techniques of poetics and concentrate on different parts: ‘Τέμεθος, Αντιοχεύς...’ on the writing, and ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ on the publishing. Temethos’s poem uses the name of Emonides as a pretext: in reality, he is writing about his own lover, something that only a select few of his readers – his closest friends – can decipher.⁴⁴³ Cavafy’s choice of vocabulary is fascinating here: he uses the word ‘μνημένοι’ – the initiated – and repeats ‘εμείς οι μνημένοι’ to give it particular emphasis. The ‘initiated’, in this case, signifies more than just his close friends. It signifies the people who are trained enough in deciphering the codes and signs used to denote homosexuality; in other

⁴⁴¹ As far as ‘Νέοι της Σιδώνας...’ is concerned, if we read it in the context of its dialogue with ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’, it is less about whether action is more important than art or vice-versa; and more about art being action.

⁴⁴² Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 49.

⁴⁴³ Further on the name Emonides being used as a pretext: read backwards, ‘Εμονίδης’ becomes ‘Σοι Δίνομαι’ – ‘I give myself to you’. (Quoted from Margaret Alexiou, ‘Eroticism and Poetry’ in *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora*, vol. 10 Nos. 1 & 2, Spring-Summer 1983, p. 58)

words, to recognise other people based on how they perform their sexual identity. The poem, again, moves from the specifics of a poet subverting rules, laws or conventions to express his homosexual desire, to a more general analysis of the very process of expressing homosexual desire and recognising it as a performance.⁴⁴⁴ As we have already seen, Cavafy's poetry abounds with similar codes and key words – 'αισθητής', 'ηδονή' and often even 'θέατρο' are signals for homosexuality or homosexual desire.⁴⁴⁵

This view is shared by Kostas Ouranis, who wrote: 'Apart from a small number of poems ... in everything else there is the expression of his sexuality, whether direct or indirect, open or concealed'.⁴⁴⁶ Ouranis's stance is particularly radical for the time that he expressed it – 1927 – as is his use of the word 'σεξουαλισμός' in his essay's title. This, after all, is from a time when Cavafy's homosexuality was viewed as incidental to his poetry – as Papanikolaou notes, incidental enough to be considered equivalent to 'his passion for alcohol, tennis, smoking or chess'.⁴⁴⁷ For Ouranis, the majority of Cavafy's poems are not historical at all. They may have situations, settings, real or imaginary people from history, but everything is a 'form of Cavafy himself and his young friends'.⁴⁴⁸ Everything, then, in Cavafy's historical poems was an expression of his sexuality, according to Ouranis:

Η Αλεξαντρινή εποχή δεν υπήρξε, όπως νομίζουν, πηγή της ποιητικής του έμπνευσης. Είναι ο Καβάφης που την πλούτισε με την ποίησή του ... Η Αλεξάντρεια είναι απλώς ένα τεττωμένο πανί πάνω στο οποίο ο Καβάφης επρόβαλε τις κινούμενες σκιές των ερώτων του. Δεν εξέφρασε την εποχή της, αλλά, δια της εποχής αυτής, τον εαυτό του.⁴⁴⁹

As a result of these – quite striking for their time – comments, Ouranis reads 'Τέμεθος, Αντιοχεύς...' as a poem that sends up or satirises people who took Cavafy's poems as strictly historical. The element of subversion in this poem, then, is multi-layered – Temethos subverts his readers' expectations and moral codes in a performance that is interpreted only by those who know how to recognise it.⁴⁵⁰ Cavafy mirrors that behaviour, and furthermore offers the poem as a comment on the way heteronormativity can operate and be subverted. The link between performance – both in terms of the poem by itself and in terms of its dialogue with the theatre of 'Θέατρον της Σιδώνος...' – homosexuality and subversion is again very strong.

⁴⁴⁴ The element of ritual is already signified by the repeated use of the word 'μνημένοι', and therefore, from the link between 'μύησις' and 'ritual'.

⁴⁴⁵ See Papanikolaou: 2014, p. 116.

⁴⁴⁶ Kostas Ouranis, 'Ο σεξουαλισμός του Καβάφη' in *Κ.Π. Καβάφης: Κριτικές Μελέτες*, ed. by Giorgis Pikros. Athens: Neos Stathmos, p. 24. My translation. Ouranis's essay first appeared in 1927.

⁴⁴⁷ Papanikolaou: 2014, p. 55.

⁴⁴⁸ Ouranis: 1927, p. 24.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-25.

⁴⁵⁰ 'Σ' ένα βιβλίο παλιό –' addresses a similar issue to 'Τέμεθος, Αντιοχεύς...' The artist of the former intends his drawing of the young man to be interpreted as denoting homosexual desire by those in the know, much as the mention of Emonides in the latter poem is decoded by the 'initiated ones'.

The connection to ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ has also been addressed by Gregory Jusdanis, but from a different perspective. For Jusdanis, both poems comment on the issue of the position of the artist in society, and more specifically the artist’s autonomy in the face of society’s moral demands. Jusdanis, however, seems to read this only in terms of a rejection by Cavafy of the ‘democratisation of art’, with Cavafy preferring to remain an ‘aristocrat’ in this matter.⁴⁵¹ It is about ‘independence from popular aesthetic taste’.⁴⁵² Furthermore, Jusdanis notes: ‘Real art, it seems, is not exhibited in the marketplace lest it be corrupted by the crass expectation of the mass consumer’.⁴⁵³ This viewpoint, however, is far too general – it completely neglects the content of the poems, which is homosexual love. They are not just statements of the artist’s autonomy and assertions of his independence from public taste. The reason the poet of ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ circulated his poems privately and Temethos hid the true identity of the person he was talking about is the very reason Jusdanis completely overlooks: homosexuality, and the depiction of homosexual love. Jusdanis’s points address the poems in very general terms – for instance as if they could be swapped with any poem about an artist preferring to withhold his work from the public because he knows best. He essentially reduces ‘Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...’ to its plot points, keeping any specificity out of the equation: based on this reading, it is about a poet who circulates his work in secret without making it available to the wider public. The point these two poems make is quite different, however. They are about the politics of oppression and subversion and relate to homosexuality in particular. Margaret Alexiou has noted that Cavafy’s poetry ‘tends to invert and subvert inherited conventions of judging literature, morality and thought’.⁴⁵⁴ These two poems are not a general comment on the artist’s autonomy over the public (Jusdanis relates this to the emergence of the bourgeoisie as a result of the industrial revolution) by only granting access to a select few. This access to a select few is part of a process of subverting social conventions about homosexuality at the time, and is of course very closely related to the way Cavafy himself circulated his poems, picking and choosing both the poems and the intended audience.

The codes and conventions used in homosexual contexts – what Papanikolaou terms ‘the ritual of recognising and approaching’ among men – are among the main themes of ‘Η Προθήκη του Καπνοπωλείου’.⁴⁵⁵ In Cavafy, homosexuality is presented as a performance with its own

⁴⁵¹ Jusdanis:1987, p. 27.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁴⁵³ Jusdanis:1987, p. 31.

⁴⁵⁴ Margaret Alexiou: ‘Cavafy’s “Dangerous” Drugs’ from Margaret Alexiou and Vassilis Lambropoulos, eds. *The text and its Margins: Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature*. New York: Pella, 1985, p. 158

⁴⁵⁵ Papanikolaou: 2014, p. 57. The codes and ritual of recognizing homosexuality also occur in ‘Εν τη Οδῶ’ and ‘Η αρρώστια του Κλείτου’. In the former, there is a reference to the main character’s way of dressing: ‘με κάτι καλλιτεχνικό στο νύσιμό του / - τίποτε χρώμα της κραβάτας, σχήμα του κολλάρου –’ which signals his sexuality to those in the know as well as the reader (See Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 88). In the latter, Kleitos’s ex-lover is, significantly, an actor. Again, therefore, we have a link between theatre and and the codes and performing homosexuality.

codes and possibilities for being felicitous, and this type of performance is especially evident in this poem:

Κοντά σε μιά κατάφωτη προθήκη
 Καπνοπωλείου εστέκονταν, ανάμεσα σ' άλλους πολλούς.
 Τυχαίως τα βλέμματά των συναντήθηκαν,
 και την παράνομη επιθυμία της σαρκός των
 εξέφρασαν δειλά, διστακτικά.
 Έπειτα, ολίγα βήματα στο πεζοδρόμιο ανήσυχα –
 ως που εμειδίασαν, κ' ένευσαν ελαφρώς.

Και τότε πια το αμάξι το κλεισμένο...
 το αισθητικό πλησίασμα των σωμάτων
 τα ενωμένα χέρια, τα ενωμένα χείλη.⁴⁵⁶

It may be chance that initiates the encounter between the two men, as their gazes meet among a crowd in front of the shop window; but after that, they play their parts to perfection. Not only do they successfully express and recognise each other's 'desire of the flesh', they also act upon it, albeit hesitantly at first. This hesitation harks back to the unpublished 'Στες Σκάλες' of 1904. In that poem, two men similarly express and recognise their desires, but are too afraid to act, and it ends with the speaker ruefully commenting 'Αλλά κρυφθήκαμε κ' οι δύο μας ταραγμένοι'.⁴⁵⁷ The men of 'Η Προθήκη του Καπνοπωλείου' manage to overcome that fear, as we can see in the transition from hesitation to confidence between lines 5 and 7. Indeed, 'Η Προθήκη του Καπνοπωλείου', which we know from its final version of 1917, was first written in 1907 under a different title ('Το κλεισμένο αμάξι'), and as such we can see it as a response or corrective to the almost contemporary 'Στες Σκάλες'.

The final three lines of 'Η Προθήκη του Καπνοπωλείου' abound with the telltale signs for homosexual passion in Cavafy's poetry – by now, we know what to expect from the ellipses of line 9 and the mention of 'αισθητικό'. Our reading of these words and grammatical features and our recognising their contextual meaning mirrors the way the two men recognise each other's signals in the beginning of the poem. Their performance becomes complete at the end, unlike the one of 'Στες Σκάλες', which repeatedly stutters and then stops before it is properly begun. The final line 'Αλλά κρυφθήκαμε κ' οι δύο μας ταραγμένοι' is tinged with regret, especially given that the poem is written in the first person, from the point of view of one of the two men. By contrast, the ending of 'Η Προθήκη του Καπνοπωλείου' is an apotheosis of the successful performance of their homosexual desire, as they are now free to touch each other in the enclosed space of the car with all their worries gone.

⁴⁵⁶ Cavafy: 1999, vol. A, p. 89.

⁴⁵⁷ Cavafy: 1993, p. 87.

Conclusions

The way Cavafy used performance and theatre goes beyond issues of tradition or influences. It may be that he was, to an extent, following the example of contemporary writers who often used theatre as a metaphor in their works – especially the more theoretical/philosophical ones – but as I have shown, it is linked to Cavafy’s strategy of subverting heteronormative morality and norms. To that end, the major shift in Cavafian poetics that occurs in the important year of 1904 is signalled by the explicit theatrical and performative setting of the hidden ‘Στο Θέατρο’ and the way it interacts with and informs both its contemporary and later poems.

A summary of Cavafy’s techniques can be found in his shortest poem – and also one of his last, dating from 1929 – ‘Στον ίδιο χώρο’:

Οικίας περιβάλλον, κέντρων, συνοικίας
που βλέπω κι όπου περπατώ· χρόνια και χρόνια.

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

Κ’ αισθηματιποιήθηκες ολόκληρο, για μένα.⁴⁵⁸

The poem is unique – apart from its unusual, even for Cavafy, brevity – in that it is concerned exclusively with the general. It does not describe a specific setting: it is a general outline of this ‘περιβάλλον’ and the way it has been shaped and created by Cavafy, fleshed out with details and events. This is explicitly linked with the remark by Ouranis quoted earlier: Cavafy did not simply draw his inspiration from his surroundings of his contemporary Alexandria, or its history and the history of the other Hellenistic places we find in his poetry. Instead, he *created* his environment, and shaped it through the use of theatre and performance in order to become a reflection of feelings, as per the last line. As Keeley has commented, ‘the poet’s imagination is not only an agent transforming what he sees below his balcony window into a poetic image: it is also a principal actor in the series of dramas that make up the life of the city he projects.’⁴⁵⁹

By extension, this serves as a summary not only of the way Cavafy interacted with his surroundings in his poetry, but also of the way his poetry is informed by theatre and performance and their relation to subversion. The way he created his environment in other poems is, more often than not, through performative elements, which I have shown in this chapter. In addition, that environment was created in such a way as to provide a commentary of heteronormative

⁴⁵⁸ Cavafy: 1999, vol. B, p. 86.

⁴⁵⁹ Keeley: 1976, p. 54.

morality, as well as a corrective and subversion of it; and also ultimately as a comment on the very process of subverting and of creating a new identity.

General conclusions

When I started working on my thesis, my impression was that the analysis of performance in Cavafy's poetry was a straightforward task. That does not mean I expected a doctoral thesis to be simple, but it ostensibly appeared easy to compartmentalise. On the one hand, we had the instances where Cavafy used dramatic techniques in his poetry – lighting, sound, stage direction, set design and so forth – and on the other were the main themes and ideas that I wanted to show were explored through these techniques, such as memory, sexuality, history, or identity. Thus, the conclusion would be that performance is the primary mode for analysing Cavafy, and he would emerge first and foremost as a theatrical poet. Maybe he could not have written theatre, as per his assertion, but he often sought recourse to theatre and performance in order to depict his ideas in poetry.

As I progressed with my research, I discovered that theatre is never one fixed 'thing': in some cases it is a metaphor, in others a building, an event, a practice or a code. This, in turn, made me realise that performance and theatre in Cavafy are, above all, about the in-between. For example, as I wrote on performativity, I also found out it is about identity at the same time. Similarly, I wrote about memory and discovered it is about performativity as well. These instances where the use of performance and theatre is never about one fixed thing abound throughout Cavafy's poetry. The conclusion that follows from this is that performance and theatre in Cavafy are also about the margins, about the liminal space that is so prevalent in his work.

At the same time, one of the central points that emerged was that Cavafy used performance and theatre in order to subvert. This is a multi-layered issue, as subversion does not mean one thing only. Styles and poetic conversions are subverted, as are readers' expectations as a result. Within the poems, characters subvert social norms and shape and create new identities for themselves. Furthermore, the poems often look within themselves and towards that process of subverting. Theatre and performance are again used in this sense: not only to signify subversion, but also to signify an examination of the process of subverting. This pattern occurs in multiple examples in Cavafy, and is not necessarily always related to subversion. A great number of poems that deal with memory, for instance, also turn their attention to how memory operates. 'Γκρίζα' is not only about the memories recalled, but also about the very function of recalling. The same is true to a greater extent of 'Μακρού', and also of 'Μύρης...', to give but three examples. Similarly, 'Θέατρον της Σιδώνας...' offers a commentary on how heteronormativity imposes its values, and on the process of subverting those values. Finally, performance and theatre also relate to the codes and conventions of homosexuality: how these are recognised and acted upon, as well as how homosexuality is performed in order to be recognised.

Therefore, it would be restrictive to say that performance operates in one fixed way in Cavafy's poetry. The fact that it is very closely related to subversion and the idea of the 'in-between' emphasises the grey areas in Cavafy, of which there are many. It is also used to emphasise the present – the idea of characters interacting physically with their surroundings, and the attempt to have a physical say in the process of affecting their environment.

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