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JOURNAL OF THE HELLENIC DIASPORA

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SPRING-SUMMER 1983

SPECIAL DOUBLE ISSUE

C. P. Cavafy

Guest Edited and with an Introduction by MARGARET ALEXIOU

THE ALEXANDRIA WE HAVE LOST

by ALEXANDER KITROEFF

THE HISTORY MAN

by RODERICK BEATON

EROTICISM AND POETRY

by MARGARET ALEXIOU

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THE VIOLENT POWER OF KNOWLEDGE:

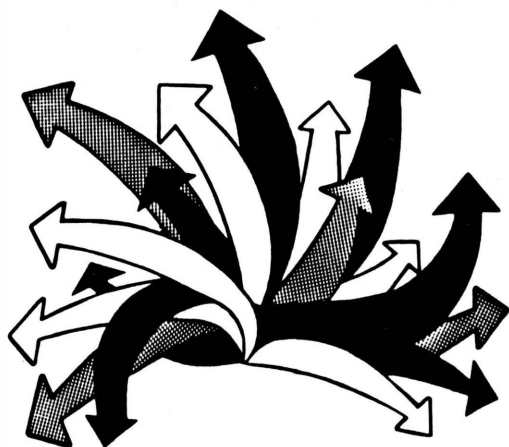
THE STRUGGLE OF CRITICAL DISCOURSES FOR DOMINATION

OVER CAVAFY'S "YOUNG MEN OF SIDON, A.D. 400"

by VASSILIS LAMBROPOULOS

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in writing; along with others, it arises in opposition to previous critical texts, but in relation to institutions such as the university, the publishing house, and, most importantly, that of criticism, with its standards and criteria, which designate whose readings can be considered true and whose false. A text, then, does not simply exist in an innocent and internally oriented signifying chain, since it is simultaneously tied down in history, occupying a place in an extra-textual reality and system of discursive power. It is this system that should become an object of study—the process through which various discourses struggle to appropriate a particular text or *oeuvre* and invest it with meaning.

9.

Yet does it all end here? Should a critic preoccupy him/herself only with texts, even in the broader context? How does the struggle over “literature” relate to the struggles over other institutions and notions taking place in the world today? Is it sufficient to fight over the meaning of “Cavafy”? In other words, what is the critic’s role outside the security of her/his field. (On the personal level, is this article nothing other than an appendage to my *curriculum vitae* or an attempt simply to add my name to those who have written on the subject?) Indeed, how can one be involved in reading/writing and simultaneously commit him/herself to the non-literary conflicts in our society, here and now?

Are there any real, purely literary issues? Or is the domain of criticism another institutional site where power and violence are exercised and therefore authority (including one’s own) should be unremittingly resisted? And you, “*lecteur*,” how does this concern you, how about your responsibilities, and what is your position now that you have done with this?

“All his experiments failed. Each time he was greatly amazed . . .
They consulted each other, opened one book,
passed over to another, then they did not know
what to decide faced with the divergence of opinions.”

The Violent Power of Knowledge: The Struggle of Critical Discourses for Domination Over Cavafy’s “Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400”

by VASSILIS LAMBROPOULOS

Introduction

Fifty years after Cavafy’s death, the popularity of his work and the amount of exegetical labor devoted to its faithful annotation continue to increase steadily. Commentators, essayists, critics, philologists, and artists return with self-defeating reverence to that small body of texts, and attempt to elucidate its complex messages. But the most surprising aspect of this growing industry is not exactly its large scope but rather its wide variety. There are as many interpretations of the literary sign “Cavafy” as critical approaches to it, each one striving for inclusiveness of coverage and exclusiveness of appropriation. The “erotic,” the “political,” the “didactic,” the “historical,” the “symbolist,” the “mythopoetic,” and other Cavafys compete for our attention, and for absolute interpretive authority.

Unfortunately, the scholarly interest in the disciplines of criticism—their emergence, individuation, development, and transformation—remains completely nonexistent in Greek studies. Thus, we lack not only a history of modern Greek criticism but also any major study on the reception and transmission of individual literary works. With a noble idealism and naive innocence typical of its romantic conception and orientation, modern Greek scholarship keeps returning dutifully to the original works and investigating the authenticity of their origins and meanings in order to recover the author’s (conscious or unconscious) intentions. The tradition of the works’ transmission, their (mal)functions, (mis)readings, and (ab)uses, incite no interest whatsoever, since the established mythical image of the text is still one of purity and full presence.

The case of Cavafy, however, remains a strong challenge to the humanistic presuppositions underlying Greek philology. The number of existing approaches, and the embarrassing variety of their results, cries for a history of his work’s reception, especially an epistemological inquiry into Cavafian criticism that would describe the ideological investments in it. The

purpose of the paper in hand is to break some ground toward this direction, namely, to propose a systematic (but nonscientific) approach, and apply it to a concrete example, the history of one particular text. Its first part consists in a reading of Foucault's reading of Nietzsche's reading of Schopenhauer's reading of . . . while the second is a reading of Cavafy's reading of Athenaeus' reading of ancient Greek poets' reading of. . . .

All that goes to show the inherently intertextual (and consequently anti-metaphysical) nature of the whole enterprise: this paper is *just* another text on texts, *just* another reading that interpolates texts between other texts (i.e., readings between readings), makes certain diacritical comments, and draws certain differential conclusions, while simultaneously trying (in vain) to cover itself and preempt future (intertextual) counter-arguments that may attack it. To rephrase the preceding statement in conventional and more practical terms, the first part of the paper outlines the project of a genealogical investigation (by opposing it to the historical one), and poses power and the struggle of discourses for domination as its concrete object; while the second part offers as an example (and not a model) of such an investigation a genealogy of the reception of the poem, "Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400" (1920)*—a microscopic

*YOUNG MEN OF SIDON (A.D. 400)

The actor they'd brought in to entertain them
also recited a few choice epigrams.

The room opened out on the garden
and a delicate odor of flowers
mingled with the scent
of the five perfumed young Sidonians.

There were readings from Meleager, Krinagoras, Rhianos.
But when the actor recited
"Here lies Aeschylus, the Athenian, son of Euphorion"
(stressing maybe more than he should have
"his renowned valor" and "sacred Marathonian grove"),
a vivacious young man, mad about literature,
suddenly jumped up and said:

"I don't like that quatrain at all.
Sentiments of that kind seem somehow weak.
Give, I say, all your strength to your work,
make it your total concern. And don't forget your work
even in times of stress or when you begin to decline.
This is what I expect, what I demand of you—
and not that you completely dismiss from your mind
the magnificent art of your tragedies—
your *Agamemnon*, your marvelous *Prometheus*,
your representations of Orestes and Cassandra,
your *Seven Against Thebes*—merely to set down for your memorial
that as an ordinary soldier, one of the herd,
you too fought against Datis and Artaphernis."

genealogy of the struggle over Cavafy's work in general. One might choose wishfully to call these two parts "theoretical" and "practical," respectively; but, evidently, there is no way that this paper could effectively object to such (or any other) treatment and appropriation, no matter how much it would disagree with its principles.

On Genealogy

1.1 In his book, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Michel Foucault proposed, through a comprehensive methodological review of his past work, a new historical discipline called "archaeology," and clarified its orientation and goals by opposing it to the traditional "history of ideas" (see, especially, Part IV, Chapter 1). Three years later, in his seminal essay, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" (1977), Foucault abandoned the old term and revised the elaborate methodology accompanying it, under the commanding influence of Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals* (1887). Instead, he adopted the very term "genealogy," and outlined his new project by opposing it to humanist "history," while avoiding, at this time, the development of a detailed plan of investigation.

The defining characteristics of genealogy, according to the essay, are the following three:

a) ". . . It opposes itself to the search for 'origins'" (1977: 140); it does not try to recover the true identity of things and phenomena, the unity of their original creation, by searching for the intentions and motives of the creator, the moment of their immaculate conception, the "spirit of the age," or their inviolable autonomy and perfection. Genealogy is the "history of an error we call truth" (144).

b) It "does not pretend to go back in time to restore an unbroken continuity" (146) between the present and its foundations; on the contrary, it traces the "complex course of descent" (146) and shows the disparity and dispersal, the heterogeneity and heterogeny, of things by studying them in their concrete manifestations and culturally conditioned uses—i.e., their material existence and the historical factors that allow for it. "Genealogy, as an analysis of descent, is thus situated within the articulation of the body and history" (148).

c) It does not follow the naturalistic model of evolution that describes historical developments according to their organic necessity; it deals with the emergence of things and the play of forces involved in it. Things are not created; they appear as a result of a struggle for domination over a set of rules. The emergence of a thing ensues after the successful appropriation of those rules by one particular interpretation in a specific game situation; ". . . the development of humanity is a series of interpretations. The role of genealogy is to record its history" (152).

In summary, it can be said that genealogy rejects the metaphysical postulates of the humanistic/romantic discipline of history and its objectivist/scientific pretensions, and posits, as its own subject, the cultural/

historical emergence of things (or ideas or phenomena) and their descent from the interaction of intersubjective forces in games where these forces develop competitive relationships and struggle for the appropriation of rules, that is, domination.

During its transformation from "archaeology" to "genealogy," Foucault's idea of an anti-humanistic discipline gained in philosophical strength what it lost in methodological rigor; it also improved its strategic focus and political awareness, while losing its scholarly prestige and appeal. The primary purpose became less descriptive and more polemical; knowledge itself receded into the background, while power, as the "will to knowledge," (again, after Nietzsche) became the central notion.

As this paper has been intimating so far, yet another approach to "Cavafy" and the genuine meaning of his poetry would be an idealistic and futile attempt to return to the original sources and reconstruct the act of creation. Even a dexterous presentation of data—be it of a biographical, historical, or esthetic nature—cannot illuminate the tradition surrounding and delivering the work to us, unless, of course, one still happens to subscribe to the ontological theory of art, and prefers to ignore its historical materiality and dispense with cultural transmission. What is needed for its understanding is, in our case, a genealogy of the sign "Cavafy," namely, an investigation of its descent—the points, moments, and conditions of its emergence: how it has been read/received and constituted, used/appropriated and transformed; which games have centered around it, which forces have contested for it, which powers have been exercised over/through it. The supreme point of reference for any genealogical study becomes, obviously, power in its specific, local, and temporal manifestations.

On Power

1.2 The forms and relations of power as manifested and invested in various institutions of social control and discipline have been repeatedly examined by Foucault in his mature work. But the most succinct and illuminating discussion, with far-reaching implications for the study of all cultural formations and systems, is contained in his book on sexuality (1976), where power is conceived as the "will to knowledge," and is thus linked to truth. In this part of the essay, power and its operations will be examined, and four tentative "rules" for their systematic description will be advanced, according to the philosophical principles and the methodological objectives provided by Foucault in the chapters entitled "Objective" and "Method" in his book.

The main characteristics of power consist in the following four distinctive features:

a) *Immanence*: "[P]ower must be understood in the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitutes their own organization" (92). Power is

not abstract and general but concrete and specific; however, it is not a force in itself, not even the result of one force's action, but the outcome of every force relation. "Relations of power are not in a position of exteriority with respect to other types of relationships . . . but are immanent in the latter" (94). All relationships, all relations of forces, are, *in one respect*, relations of and about power. "One needs to be nominalistic, no doubt: power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society" (93). It is the name of the game; power is immanent in the game; and there is nothing outside the game.

b) *Continual Variations*: "The omnipresence of power . . . because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere, not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (93). Its "juridical representation" (89), the traditional legal model of its description, conceals its strategic character and its rhetorical situatedness: power does not belong to the sovereign or the ruling hegemony (or anybody else). "Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; power is exercised from innumerable points" (94) by all the forces participating in the game, since it is immanent in the relations they develop.

c) *Double Conditioning*: "Power relations are both intentional and nonsubjective" (94). The exercise of power always follows certain objectives and serves certain interests. But there is no center or permanent structure in the game; local centers emerge due to overall strategies which depend on specific force relations; and these relations, in their turn, are affected and transformed by the particular overall strategy. Thus, there is an organic mutual interdependence between forces and their tactics on the one hand, and the overall strategy on the other. The double conditioning and the "strictly relational character of power relationships" becomes clear when their oppositional nature is taken under consideration. "Their existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network" (95). Mutual interdependence, therefore, conditions not only strategies and tactics but also power and its opposites. "Where there is power, there is resistance" (95).

d) *The Tactical Polyvalence of Discourses*: "We must make allowance for the complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy" (101). Discourses are not uniform bodies of knowledge or stable embodiments of truth; they vary in function and their functions vary: their constitutions change, their potential uses are innumerable, their operations are complex, their elements are distributed in irregular fashion. Discourses both enunciate and compete for power; essentially, they are dis-

cursive formations whereby power turns into knowledge and strives to appropriate the rules of the game and solidify them as truth.

These are the four main characteristics of power in its material manifestations. Clearly, no method could ever provide valid guidelines for an objective description of the field or a scientific taxonomy of the games played, the rules followed, and the strategies adopted in force relations. For this reason, Foucault has suggested that we "must construct an analytics of power" (90) and try to analyze its mechanisms. This has to be necessarily a historical/cultural investigation of concrete cases, of specific situations "in the field of multiple and mobile power relations" (98). To that effect, he has additionally proposed four "cautionary prescriptions" (98), corresponding to the distinctive characteristics of power described above, that *might* protect the investigation from absolutist epistemological fallacies. After outlining these (far from normative) rules, I will set out the goals of my own excursion into the field of Cavafian criticism.

a) *Rule of Immanence*: "Between techniques of knowledge and strategies of power, there is no exteriority. . . . We still start, therefore, from what might be called 'local centers' of power-knowledge" (98). We will examine the concrete manifestations of power in force relations developing in a historically specific game situation, and the ensuing possibilities of knowledge.

b) *Rule of Continual Variations*: "We must seek . . . the pattern of the modifications which the relationships of force imply by the very nature of their process" (99). We will examine how force relations are constantly transformed, how their distribution changes, how power is exercised through them, and how that affects the constitution of knowledge.

c) *Rule of Double Conditioning*: "[O]ne must conceive of the double conditioning of a strategy by the specificity of possible tactics, and of tactics by the strategic envelope that makes them work" (100). We will examine this asymmetrical dialectic in order to find the aims informing the tactics applied, the interdependence between these tactics and the overall strategy of the game, and the nuclei of resistance that develop at various points and cause their revision and readjustment.

d) *Rule of the Tactical Polyvalence of Discourses*: "[I]t is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together" (100). We will examine the variety of their functions and effects, that is, the specific ways in which power is exercised strategically and produces knowledge effectively. "[W]e must question them on the two levels of their tactical productivity (what reciprocal effects of power and knowledge they ensure) and their strategical integration (what conjunction and what force relationship make their utilization necessary in a given episode of the various confrontations that occur)" (102).

In short, the crucial points of our interest and reference will be local centers of force relations historically situated where strategies of power, through their mutual interaction with specific tactics, are constantly trans-

formed and produce polyvalent discourses, that is, multiple constitutions of knowledge that aspire to absolute authority, truth.

In order to make the preceding discussion of power explicitly relevant and connect the first with the second part of this paper, I will paraphrase freely a long passage from "The Will to Knowledge" (97), adapting its suggestions to the purposes of our own genealogical investigation. The important question we must address ourselves to is not, given the presence of Cavafy's work in the corpus of modern Greek literature, how and why is it that power needs to establish a knowledge of it; it is rather, in a specific type of discourse on literature, in a specific type of critical discourse and its relations with other critical discourses similarly oriented to a concrete form of extortion of truth, that of Cavafy's poetry, what were the most immediate, the most local power relations at work, how did they make possible these kinds of critical discourses, and, conversely, how were these discourses used to support power relations?

What follows is a genealogy of the descent of a literary text—an investigation into the conditions of its possibility as circumscribed by force relations that developed between discourses competing for its explication (i.e., domination over it); it is a genealogy of the power-knowledge relationships that have produced the text through various constitutions of its truth. Still, at this last point of our first part, a note of warning seems appropriate: "power is tolerable only on condition that it masks a substantial part of itself. Its success is proportional to its ability to hide its own mechanisms" (86). Nietzsche's conception of power as read/revised by Foucault remains one of struggle, fierce fighting, violence, prohibition, suppression, and appropriation. It is based on the Heraclitean model, and bereaves all human communication and creativity of idealism, innocence, and purity. Therefore, any critique of power relations has inherently the character of resistance against particular impositions of authority; in order to refute them effectively, in order to achieve our strategic/political goal of undermining prevailing forms of domination, "we must immerse the expanding production of discourses" on Cavafy's work "in the field of multiple and mobile power relations" (98) and expose their hidden metaphysical assumptions that disguise those relations into true knowledge.

* * *

2.1 The poem, "Youth of Sidon, A.D. 400" (hereinafter referred to as YMS) was published in 1920, appeared as an object of analysis (and knowledge) in the late 1920s, and was first appropriated by the prevailing critical discourse of the time, that of *patriotic moralism*. The principles governing the constitution of knowledge (and the appreciation of literary values) in the framework of this discourse were already quite clearly articulated during the debate between Apostolakis (1923) and Varnalis (1925) about the significance of Solomos's poetry—a debate that essentially centered around the moral/political responsibilities of the

artist. The question was not abstract and general but practical and urgent: which were the possible roles and tasks for the poet after the Asia Minor Disaster?¹ For more than a century, from Rhigas Pheraios to Palamas, the Greek poet had advocated and praised territorial expansionism, eagerly trumpeting the coming of a third empire and the resurrection of the eternal Hellenic spirit. The national humiliation in 1922 shattered the dream and left him desolate in search of a new vision.

Both Apostolakis and Varnalis tried to provide a meaningful solution by going back to Solomos, who first conceived of the poetic vocation as a mission. Their suggestions, advocating Victorian Idealism—the Poet as Hero—and Romantic Marxism—the Poet as Revolutionary—respectively, met on a crucial point of convergence, the dogma of patriotic moralism. It is in this context that YMS first appeared in the domain of literary criticism and was subsequently judged according to the validity of its moral message.

Two different positions were expressed: the first, supported by Vrisimitzakis and Xenopoulos, saw the poem as a negative depiction of cultural decay; the other, defended by Sareyannis and Spieros, understood it as a positive advocacy for the powers of great art. According to the negative interpretation, the poem portrays the “youth of that age” (Vrisimitzakis, 1975: 57), whose corrupted moral standards lead to arrogant irreverence. Xenopoulos went even further and polarized the discussion: his was the only correct explanation—those who might disagree were wrong; if Cavafy disagreed with it, then the treatment itself of his subject was wrong. Obviously, what remained untouched by doubt was the moral standard that was used to measure the poem’s value.

According to the positive interpretation, on the other hand, the poem is a bold defense of art and its contributing role to society. Sareyannis thought that it contained the poet’s admonition to his nation, that it dealt with a “national problem,” which Spieros described as the close connection and eventual identification of art with life. For the first, the “artist is a hero,” for the second, a “soldier in the battlefield.” They both took up the youth’s challenge to Aeschylus and tried to clarify and emphasize its moral implications: the artist has his own fights to give as a defender of national values—and it is this mission that was underplayed in the tragedian’s epitaph.

Even though the two interpretations differ in their appreciation of the poem’s provocative message, they belong essentially to the same critical discourse, that of patriotic moralism, since they examine the “content” of the text as a moral message and judge its acceptability on explicitly ideological grounds. The unstated principles behind the two different

¹During the years of the 1967 dictatorship, Maronitis discussed Cavafy and posed the same Hölderlian question, borrowed this time from Seferis, with belated sentimentalism: “In times like ours, when history is produced and written by machines with human appendages, of what use can the poet’s voice be?” (1972: 117). His answer, as ahistorical as his method, defends the supreme value of symbolist formalism, a discourse we will encounter later: “telling the truth” (134).

positions that take sides either with the old man of Athens or with the young man of Sidon are the same: they stem from nationalism and moralism, and serve an attempt to preserve their complementary values. To label the negative interpretation “conservative” and the positive one “progressive” would be entirely misleading: the second one is not defending the independence of art, but only tries to secure a place for the displaced artist in the realm of public service and to accommodate art as an ideological commodity valuable to the nation. The two interpretations represent different reading practices but share the same ultimate concern about the moral responsibilities of the artist toward society—and agree that the obsequious response should be the highest criterion for the evaluation of his work. Thus, art becomes subservient to morality.

2.2 While this critical discourse was trying to define a reputable social space for art (by proving its usefulness at any cost) and simultaneously control its circulation, and while certain overtones were detected in Cavafian criticism, indicating a wishful attempt to praise Cavafy’s poetry using standards similar to those that promoted Palamas to the status of national poet, the literary “school” of decadence and cosmopolitanism which emerged at the same time (i.e., during the 1920s) succeeded in turning attention to the private drama of the “poète maudit,” and gradually established (and was itself produced by) its own critical discourse, that of *biographical intentionalism*, which would honor that drama appropriately.

As its name suggests, this discourse shifted the critical focus from the message of the poem to the intentions—or should we say: passage?—of the poet, from the public functions of the artwork to the private world of the artist. According to its tenets, what bestows significance on the work and makes it important is not its uses in society but its meaningful construction by its creator. The previous discourse made value a public/moral issue, the new one a private/personal matter beyond the reach of social strictures. It was at this point that literary criticism dispensed with the principle of the morally “good”/socially “useful” as an evaluative criterion.

We can distinguish two main approaches inside the critical discourse of biographical intentionalism: the psychological, advocated by Malanos, Papatsonis, Dimaras, and Piniatoglou, among others, which produced the so-called “erotic” Cavafy; and the ideological, advocated by Tsirkas, that produced the “political” Cavafy. This second major discourse made its triumphant official appearance (and overwhelming impression) immediately after the poet’s death in 1933, with the publication of Malanos’s first book. “Cavafy’s” intentions became the exclusive center of attention and were examined mainly from the viewpoint of his experiences, and, above all, his sexuality. The interpretations offered by the previous discourse were undone with excruciating patience and in great detail, while alternative ones were suggested which made the texts fit into the new overall scheme.

The case of YMS was no exception. The original question: how good is the message of the poem (and the ensuing problem about the usefulness

of art in modern society) was rejected and another one was posed: what did the poet want to say (followed by an inquiry into the origins of his real intentions.) The answer was simple of course: the nameless youth from Sidon is just another poetic *persona*; "the words he said are Cavafy's words" (Malanos, 1957: 346). As for the nature of his motivation, biographical evidence pointed to the "excessive, almost pathological weakness of Cavafy for his work" (347).³

Thus, the message went from public (and therefore subject to social criticism) to personal, coming from artistic genius: one could not evaluate it without considering the artist's life and intentions. Naturally, the psychological reading practice of biographical intentionalism gave rise to a need for more information about the poet in order to explore his motives further. Publications like those by Lehonitis and Peridis amply served that need and obviously belong to the same discourse. They supported it by supplying additional evidence and more interpretations along the same lines. The quality of that evidence is exemplified in the following typical passage: "I have to say that in a related conversation with the poet I formed the impression that he shared the opinion of Mr. Sareyannis. Perhaps because that interpretation seemed to him broader and gave to his poem nationalistic, patriotic meaning and value. We should not forget that Cavafy was a fanatic nationalist. He did not consider any struggle futile for the service of Hellenism" (Lehonitis, 1977: 37).

This passage is also an apt reminder of the complexity of force relations that develop between discourses. Although our survey presents the critical discourses that have generated the knowledge of "Cavafy" in a seemingly linear fashion, this description does not correspond exactly to the ways in which their competition for authority was conducted. Lehonitis, for example, while trying to present the "real" Cavafy, is anxious to stress his patriotic motives. Thus, the values of patriotic moralism are not abolished here but rather transferred from the work to its creator. In fact, even after they lost their centrality and became marginal, they remained operational in approaches like Tsirkas's, which had them serve a "progressive" political cause. Clearly, no discourse ever has absolute power: authority is constantly contested.

The critical discourse of intentionality which invented "Cavafy" and gave us his first biography read YMS as a "passionate and forceful protest for the spirit and Art" (Peridis, 1948: 223). For it, the youth impersonates "Cavafy"—to like the poem is to agree with the poet. Reading follows the adventures of a soul in the realm of private experiences as reflected in personal ideas. Thus, the totalizing effect is complete; it also seems absolute, because it is supposedly based on objective evidence. While the discourse of patriotic moralism was more concerned with the

³Only as an extreme example of psychological intentionalism (and only in a footnote) can the insolent reading of the poem by Yakos be mentioned here—a repulsive display of critical voyeurism which satisfies itself by observing the poet's "affectation," "narcissism," and "effeminacy" (1963: 1632).

functions of art (which necessarily vary according to the historical context), biographical intentionalism became obsessed with the origins of art in the human psyche (which are fixed and ideally recoverable).

At a certain point, an attempt was made to combine the two discourses into a broad synthesis that would take under serious consideration all biographical evidence but would use it to ascertain the potential impact of the poetic message. This tendency proposed the "didactic" Cavafy by attributing the possible public functions of his poems to his meticulously executed intentions. The attempt at a friendly reconciliation of intentionalism with moralism was obvious: yes, good art is useful art; no, its usefulness cannot be decided by the public; yes, useful art is what the good artist creates; no, art is not useless—the good artist makes artworks for the public's beneficial use.

The application of this approach to YMS was particularly interesting. Of course, it is Cavafy who "becomes indignant" and "with the mouth of the youth from Sidon shouts angrily"; (Papanoutsos, 1971: 131) we know his motives, we know that throughout his life he identified with the youth's intellectual concerns: "In this poem Cavafy's *credo* is stated categorically" (132). Yet his real motives are praiseworthy because the poem does not limit itself to a personal expression of beliefs but is addressed to a specific audience—the artistic community. It is one in a series of "Admonitions to fellow-artists" (129) that instruct the craftsmen of the verbal art how to write strong poetry. Thus, the usefulness of the poem is proved *and* attributed to its creator's good intentions; although the origins of the message are private, its possible public uses are extensive and important, and therefore of high value.

This noble effort to establish a reading practice that would combine the means of biographical intentionalism with the ends of patriotic moralism soon failed because of its obvious naiveté. Discourses strive for absolute authority, not peaceful coexistence; they try to annihilate each other, not collaborate. What is more, in our case, at the time Papanoutsos was formulating that theory (1947), Seferis was launching his massive attack (1947) that would eventually change the course of Cavafian studies. But before moving to the next phase, we must examine the alternative version of biographical intentionalism proposed by Tsirkas under the rubric of the "political" Cavafy.

The common assumption that the psychological and the ideological approaches are antithetical completely misses the point of their epistemological orientation. Despite significant differences on the methodological surface (and much noisy slandering), they share the same critical presuppositions since they focus attention on the author's intentions, avoid esthetic considerations, refuse any rights to the audience, and return faithfully to the moment of the original creation. Their essential disagreement is about the poet's subjectivity and the supreme forces governing its constitution: are they psychical or mental; do they belong to the sphere of subconscious motives or to that of conscious ideological beliefs? What is

never questioned is the imposing presence of the talented artist who wills his poetry.

It is highly significant that in their attitudes to YMS, a text with no explicit reference to political ideas, the two practices of the same discourse produced the same result: Tsirkas (1973: 366) could not find any time to deal with that already controversial poem, but could easily afford to agree with the identification of Cavafy with the youth by only slightly historicizing the older explanation and turning the text into yet another symbolic gesture that justified the poet's determined devotion to art. Here, again, the main methodological trick of the ideological approach is exposed in all its crudity: although this theory was talking about politics, it concealed the transhistorical idealism of its own ideology by concentrating exclusively on the composition of a jigsaw puzzle out of Cavafy's *own* politics without ever discussing the political ideas expressed *in* his poetry. Small wonder that it produced the "political" Cavafy and not the politics of Cavafy's poetry (and poetics). Thus, the role of the author as the creative subject remained sovereign, and the metaphysics of his presence in the work stronger than ever.

This other practice of the second discourse to appropriate Cavafy's work had all the attractive elements of the romantic genre of literary biography, as well as the methodologies of critical positivism: it discovered suffering and nobility of intention behind concrete facts. Additionally, as an alternative to the decadent imagination of the homosexual, the enlightened class consciousness of the intellectual was vividly documented: the glamour of debauchery was replaced by the glory of the revolution.

The persistent attachment of the left to Cavafy thereafter (as evidenced in both criticism and poetry) is a safe measure of the popular success of this alternative: the poet came out clean and good, his work of some probable use for the education of the masses, and "progressive" causes gained another ally for their pantheon of geniuses. Still, that reevaluation was by no means a real revision; ironically, the two practices of the same discourse competed mostly over Cavafy's symbolist poems, and, of course, over the true meaning of private symbols. The political reevaluation drew most of its initial inspiration from the analysis of "Those who Fought for the Achaian League" (1922) in the seminal essay by Seferis (1981), but missed the ultimate aims of its strategy. It was with that lecture to the public, however, that the gradual emergence of a new discourse began, and, with it, Seferis's desperately relentless battle against Cavafy, which was going to mark the rest of his work with a hysterical "anxiety of influence" and "fear of belatedness."³

³At this point, it should be emphasized once more that, when we use names, we are referring to subjects that belong to a particular discourse as objects of knowledge and *not* to real persons. To give a concrete example, when we talk about "Seferis," we do not refer to George Seferiadis, or even the writer of certain texts, but to the "author" of "poems" and other "literary" works that belong to modern Greek literary tradition. In this sense, "Cavafy" was no more a product

2.3. *Symbolist formalism*, the discourse which revised the norms of intentionalist Cavafian criticism, was oriented toward the esthetic appreciation of artistic features residing in the text, and their interpretation as historical symbols of mythic proportions. Some attention had already been given to stylistic elements by Agras, who was himself a symbolist poet. The new discourse largely adopted his empirical method in dealing extensively with matters of form but drew its inspiration from the attitude of Palamas to Cavafy vociferously expressed in a series of interviews and articles in the late 1920s.

Palamas's remarks soon became (and still remain) notorious for their vehemence: "His texts look like *reportage*, as if he is trying to give us *reportage from the centuries*" (Christofidis, 1926: 180); "The works of Cavafy, versification, language, expression, form and essence, look to me like notes that cannot or do not deign to become poems" (Palamas, 1929: 217); "The poems of Cavafy are like drafts that tend to become poems but do not succeed" (Dimakos, 1929: 225). Palamas was clever (or careful) enough to accuse him of writing bad poetry but not of being a bad poet. So his reputation as the "national poet" of Greece remained intact for quite a long time. It was on that pedestal (which became vacant after his death in 1943) that Seferis had his eyes fixed since he appeared on the public scene of letters. In the 1940s, however, he came to realize that his success was not essentially a matter of succeeding Palamas but rather of displacing Cavafy. To this task he devoted all his energy and cunning, and fought persistently on the two fronts of art and criticism—on the first by embezzling and on the other by attacking Cavafian techniques of writing. Eventually, he did become the new national Greek poet simply by playing successfully the anti-Cavafian Cavafic.⁴

Not that he should be credited with this success. The Greek (pseudo-modernist) movement of modernist symbolism that is commonly known as the "Generation of the '30s" found in him the rational voice of formalist classicism, the impassionate defense of fascist nationalism, and the refined posture of esthetic outlook that the movement itself represented in literature. "Seferis" was actually invented by modernist symbolism in its efforts to suppress the cosmopolitan skepticism practised by decadent symbolism between the two wars, to marginalize the radical modernism of

of force relations related to critical discourses than was "Seferis" himself. Like "Cavafy," "Seferis" should be conceived both as an element and as a result in power relations that developed inside and between discourses.

⁴Zissimos Lorentzatos, the true heir of Apostolakis and the major contemporary advocate of patriotic moralism, has been the only critic to allude (unwillingly) to Seferis's systematic anti-Cavafianism: "Let us now go back to the question of the deterioration of metrics, as it became manifest when poetry—the way people wrote poems in Greece—broke up into two separate trends. On the one hand, there was the poetics in use from 1821, or even earlier, up to the appearance of [Karyotakis's] *Elegies and Satires* [1927]; and, on the other hand, we have the first emergence of the poetical crisis [in Cavafy's work] and the first post-Cavafian answer to it: Seferis's *Mythistorima* [1935]." (Lorentzatos, 1980: 94).

unorthodox writers like Papatsones, Dorros, Sarandaris, and Calas, and to revise the canon of tradition. None of these three goals could be reached without debilitating, debunking, and debasing Cavafy's manifestly disturbing, discomfiting, and discomposing influence. In this respect, Seferis played a role he did not choose in a power game he did not create, and achieved an authority that was not his: the old man who sat at the seashore of Asine—a literary place, a wasteland of interrupted continuity—and offered his vision of Greekness to the state, was only saving its nationalistic discourse from the abrogation and negation contained in Cavafy's idea of the ultimate, irredeemable exile—Greeklessness, i.e., extraterritorial Hellenism.⁵

The gist of Seferis's argumentative strategies is paradigmatically encapsulated in his treatment of YMS. The initial premise/promise is deceptive: "I judge Cavafy as a poet" (1981: 442).⁶ Only much later will the credulous reader discover that, for the critic, the poem contains a "personal preaching" (446). In between, he will have been seduced by a typical masterstroke of Seferian ingenuity: the reply of Aeschylus himself that the anxious latecomer feels free (apparently as an equal) to improvise. Thus, Seferis resets the rules of the game: you play the youth, I play the tragedian; and he wins easily by proving that the artistic result is very poor indeed. In a more general remark of devious implications, we are even reminded that when Cavafy is using older poetic texts in his work, he "clearly fails" (443)—whereas, it is intimated, Seferis, who was himself already quoting Aeschylus in his *Mythistorima* (1936), succeeded. The conclusion of his reading has resounding Palamitic overtones: another potentially good poem that ended up a wasted effort.

In the context of the critical discourse of symbolist formalism, the above interpretation created something like a stir. Some later critics wholeheartedly agreed with it and pronounced the poem "unsatisfactory" (Liddell, 1974: 177); others tried to justify it by explaining that "Cavafy

⁵An inspired comment by Ms. Artemis Leontis reminded me that the poem "C.P. Cavafy" (1939) by Sarandaris remains probably the most succinct expression of the pervasive anti-Cavafianism which haunted modernist symbolism, in that it defends Constantinople, the imperial city of the Great Idea, against Alexandria, the dicercentered scene of writerly desire.

⁶The very same premise was first stated with equally deceptive innocence at the end of his essay on Cavafy and Eliot (1947). It should be noted emphatically that it opened up the necessary epistemological space which allowed Savidis to edit Cavafy's work and, simultaneously, make an industry and a career out of it. Savidis's doctoral thesis (1966) is the best product of symbolist formalism, in that a traditionalist bibliographical method serves to answer biographical questions—such as: "What happens in 1891 to the poet Cavafy?" (1966: 108); or "Why did Cavafy publish *these poems*?" (133)—after turning them into fake scholarly problems of esthetic significance. In the early 1960s, the combined efforts of Seferis (1962) and Savidis (1963, 1966) succeeded where other similar efforts had failed: Cavafy, by having his work edited and objectively elucidated, finally entered the canon of modern Greek literature—he was normalized.

views the occasion with a certain ironic detachment," an occasion "that reflects the divorce between literary society and the realities of history that Cavafy sees to be characteristic of a civilization during the final phase of its decline . . . (Keeley, 1976: 126); or by claiming that "the young men of that ancient city-state are also the youths of contemporary Alexandria" (Pinchin, 1977: 67). Since these ideas (as well as the books that host them) operate under Seferis's heavy shadow, the poem had to wait until its reevaluation by Yannis Dallas in order to gain again a convincingly positive value; and Dallas had to write a whole book, *Cavafy and History*, in order to counter effectively the Seferian study which focused on what could be called, Cavafy and Myth. Seferis examined Cavafy by employing, as a criterion, T.S. Eliot's technique of using myth as an "objective correlative"; Dallas, on the other hand, inserted into symbolist formalism the perspective of biographical intentionalism and thus grounded his artistic considerations on the supposedly firm basis of objective evidence. In addition, he refined Seferis's systematic investigations into form by reviving the stylistic approach of Agras and integrating it into an analysis of "esthetic structures."

While Papanoutsos's effort had a marked combinatory character, Dallas aims at inclusive integration. It takes the symbolic incarnation of history in esthetic structures as the main object of a scrutiny with pronounced scholarly aspirations. By attributing the presence of artistic elements invested with symbolic expressivity to the conscious intentions of the author, he presented the most satisfactory image of Cavafy ever proposed, without sacrificing any of the metaphysical assumptions of traditional criticism.

The criterion guiding Dallas's reading is explicitly stated in the very chapter of his book that deals with YMS: "His [Cavafy's] principle, to weave into the warp of history his personal problems and the problems of his age" (Dallas, 1974: 100). His approach brings into discussion all kinds of information which relates the poem to its personal, cultural, historical, or textual origins. The reading remains faithful to the dogmas of symbolist formalism: sources and parallel texts, intrinsic and extrinsic evidence, social context and private motives, are all used to discover how esthetic structures symbolically express the poet's ideas about his life, age, and art. Cavafy's poetics is seen as the Artist's symbolics, while "form" and "content," private and public experience, means and ends, life and art, are nicely balanced. The integrative approach produces an esthetic whole that saves the text from Seferis's rejection. Its main device is turning "form" into "style" and the author into an artist. Thus, the standards of the evaluation are revised: it is not "form" as the embodiment of truth that matters any longer but "style" as the actualization of beauty.

With performances of such caliber, the uses of symbolist formalism seem to have come to their logical end, since all their resources have been exhausted. Along with this development, there have been signs that another discourse, a new one, might start emerging, using the essay as a vehicle to propose Cavafy as a radical poet of Wildean eccentricity and

Gidean sensibility, dealing with the erotics of writing.⁷ In order to preempt the arguments of that discourse and secure permanent authority, Dallas has published recently the single most comprehensive analysis of a Cavafian text—and that necessarily had to be YMS. In returning to it again, he mounted an offensive arraying and dexterously combining all the discursive practices of reading available to a Greek literary scholar today.

His new study leaves almost no aspect of the poem untouched: first, it reviews the tradition of its reception and then subjects the text to three kinds of analysis—"morphological," "philological," and "critical" [sic]—that are deemed necessary to unlock its layers of meaning. Never have the crude, uninformed, and naive methods of modern Greek philology and criticism been employed to more spectacular effects, or so much literary metaphor paraded to testify to a text's ontological claims. Its conclusion is worth quoting in full: "This is truly a poetry that, though playing simultaneously on many thematic and psychological and ideological levels, is organically and absolutely concentric. Each one of his poems is a prism. How is it structured and how is it interpreted? It is interpreted each time by the reader's consciousness. And it is structured by the poet . . ." (Dallas, 1982: 81).

Dallas's holistic reading, by proposing the idea of the monocentric but multifaceted work and describing it as a prism, managed to secure a viewpoint (and self-assuring satisfaction) for every perspective, be it biographical, stylistic, moral, historical, political, or sociological. Thus opposing approaches are reconciled as the parts of the text are made to connect harmoniously; the author is credited with the quality of the work and the reader is granted a rich choice of possible explanations; the center does hold, while the particular discourse producing it is shown to give access to all the poem's aspects and secrets, at the same time acknowledging some help from the older discourses now reduced to an auxiliary status. Finally, a very important after-effect of this treatment should be mentioned: modern critical methods of structuralist orientation that have started tentatively to spread through Greek studies are rendered redundant by the systematic empiricism of this approach. "Common sense" and the values of good old humanistic education triumph over imported epistemological considerations, which had the potential to threaten long-cherished assumptions about the immediacy and transparency of literary writing, as well as the authority of the critic. The text is neutralized by being totalized.

⁷We are disregarding, of course, the continuous appearance of publications of simply symptomatic significance, like that recent piece of sheer necromancy (if not necrophilia) that aspires to illuminate "from a different critical viewpoint some aspects of the psychological and emotional undulations of Cavafy as a poet and as a man, always in direct connection with his work itself" (Μιχάλης Πατερής: Κ. Π. Καβάφης. "Εφοδος στο σκοτάδι [sic]. Αθήνα: Τό Μικρό Δέντρο, 1982).

Epilogue

Let us now try to summarize the main points of our survey. We have described the three discourses of literary criticism that have so far successfully appropriated Cavafy's poetry, and some of the discursive practices they engendered, by concentrating microscopically on the history of the reception of one particular text, YMS. As we have seen, each discourse has been a product of power relations (and has, in its turn, participated in the formulation of new ones) within the field of criticism that has centered around Cavafy's work, trying to dominate its explication, determine the conditions for its appropriate reception, and eventually gain absolute control over it. The ultimate aim of the three discourses, which have constituted through their power relations various forms of knowledge of "Cavafy," were the same—consolidation of exclusive authority—but their tactics of competition and means of appropriation were entirely different.

Patriotic moralism used the notion of the "good" and socially useful as its principal criterion, and judged the message of the poem according to moral values. Biographical intentionalism used the notion of the "true" and personally authentic as its principal criterion, and investigated the "content" according to psychological evidence. Symbolist formalism used the notion of the "beautiful" and artistically integrated as its principal criterion, and evaluated the "form" according to esthetic standards.

All three discourses gave strong but exclusive interpretations which were essentially different productions of different poems. There is no such a thing as *the* poem YMS but only an interminable series of reinterpretations, some of which acquire enough validity to form temporary constitutions of its knowledge. The "thing-in-itself," the "text on the page," is a meaningless esthetic illusion; it is only through its successful appropriation by a discourse that the text becomes a poem (or anything else)—and through each different appropriation a different one.

Every discourse offers an exclusive interpretation of the text as the only correct one. All interpretations of YMS have resulted from power relations, and the successful ones emerged as constitutions of knowledge and consolidations of authority. By placing the text in a particular discursive field and relating it to a concrete, stable point of reference, they effected a closure and mastered its reception. The individual readings of the poem described above were attempts at an exclusive, repressive, and prohibitive exercise of interpretive authority—not violations of an object but violent appropriations of a thing as an-object-of-knowledge. Each one identified it with a definitive meaning and imposed on it a specific structure and fixed center. There was no room left for doubt or dissent, no space opened for further exploration. Principles derived from notions like usefulness, truth, and beauty were employed to appraise the text according to an absolute measure, and to discover its permanent characteristics and value.

In this sense, one cannot speak of a better or worse, more or less correct, interpretation of YMS, since all of them were exercises of the interpretive will to truth which seeks to establish absolute power as real knowledge. Their different aims and tactics produced different constitutions of the text, but all these constitutions were guarded by the same strategies of exclusion and suppression that protect the authority of discourses. Inasmuch as these interpretations offered solutions, answered questions, explained meanings, recovered origins, guaranteed qualities, gratified expectations, and kept inventing Cavafys, they were all predatory, despotic, oppressive, totalitarian readings trapped in the endless and relentless struggle of explications for domination.

That is why this paper has dealt with the politics of Cavafian interpretation as exemplified in the ideological history of the consumption of YMS by criticism; that is why this paper has undertaken to expose the false and dangerous ideals supporting these critical enterprises; that is also why this paper has no position to take or suggestions to propose about YMS—because the poem does not exist but is rather produced by historically specific discursive practices that are intellectual exercises of explicatory power and juridical terror, that is, of “true,” “objective,” and “authentic” knowledge. Mine is only a hermeneutical interpretation, a political interpretation of interpretations, an interpretive resistance against the domineering interpretations, an interpolation of interpenetrations, an interrogation of interrelations, an interspersing of interpersonal intersections. That is why it is not mine; that is why I am not “I.”

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