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CONTENTS

SECTION ONE: PAGES ON CAVAFY

C.P. Cavafy	Cavafy's Commentary on his Poems	7
	Poems, Prose Poems and Reflections	18
James D. Faubion	Cavafy: Toward the Principles of a Transcultural Sociology of Minor Literature	40
Vassilis Lambropoulos	The Greeks of Art and the Greeks of History	66
Peter Murphy	The City of Ideas: Cavafy as a Philosopher of History	75
Μιχάλης Τσιανίκας / Michael Tsianikas	Πρισματικές φωτοθυμίες στον Καβάφη: Με αφορμή το ρήμα “γυαλίζω”	103
Vassilis Adrahtas	Cavafy's Poetica Gnostica: in Quest of a Christian Consciousness	122
Anthony Dracopoulos	Reality Otherness Perception: Reading Cavafy's <i>Myris</i> : <i>Alexandria, A.D. 340</i>	134
Tim Buckley	Echoes and Reflections in Cavafy and Callimachus	146
Vrasidas Karalis	C.P. Cavafy and the Poetics of the Innocent Form	152

SECTION TWO: GRAECO-AUSTRALIANA

Toula Nicolacopoulos–George Vassilacopoulos	The Making of Greek-Australian Citizenship: from Heteronomous to Autonomous Political Communities	165
Leonard Janiszewski–Effy Alexakis	California Dreaming: The ‘Greek Cafe’ and Its Role in the Americanisation of Australian Eating and Social Habits	177
George Kanarakis	The Theatre as an Aspect of Artistic Expression by the Greeks in Australia	198
Patricia Riak	The Performative Context: Song–Dance on Rhodes Island	212
David H. Close	The Trend Towards a Pluralistic Political System under Kostas Simitis, 1996–2002	228
Eugenia Arvanitis	Greek Ethnic Schools in a Globalising Context	241

Dimitris Vardoulakis	Fait, Accompli – The Doppelgänger in George Alexander's <i>Mortal Divide</i>	258
Steve Georgakis	Sporting Links: The Greek Diaspora and the Modern Olympic Games	270

SECTION THREE: SPECIAL FEATURE

Katherine Cassis	Getting Acquainted with Giorgos Sarantaris (1908–1941)	279
George Sarantaris	Poems 1933 (selection) – Translated by Katherine Cassis	289

SECTION FOUR: COSMOS

Ihab Hassan	Beyond Postmodernism: Toward an Aesthetic of Trust	303
Paolo Bartoloni	The Problem of Time in the Critical Writings of Jorge-Luis Borges	317
Rick Benitez	Parrhesia, Ekphrastic and the Cassandra Dialogue in Aeschylus' <i>Agamemnon</i>	334
Thea Bellou	Derrida on Condillac: Language, Writing, Imagination, Need and Desire	347
Andrew Mellas	<i>Monstrum/Mysterium Tremendum</i> in <i>Buffy the Vampire Slayer</i> : Re-mythologising the Divine	358

SECTION FIVE: BOOK PRESENTATION

	LIST OF CONTRIBUTORS	375
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CAVAFY'S POETICA GNOSTICA
IN QUEST OF A CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS

This article is not interested in whether C.P. Cavafy was a faithful or a nominal Christian. It is not even interested in the religious references, Christian or not, within his work. Some have already approached the personal religious convictions of the poet¹ – only to cause confusion over the issue – while others have traced and analysed the theological viewpoints embedded in his poetry and prose² – only to end up with a well-informed but rather inconsistent set of conclusions. It is not that Cavafy's religious alliances or sources are not significant fields of research in themselves, but that their proper assessment requires a certain hermeneutic contextualisation pertaining to the distinctiveness of Cavafy's literary contribution. Thus before sorting out Cavafy's religiosity or theological learnedness one has to address the question of his position in the hierophany³ history and typology of Western culture. In other words *the priority lies in the centre of Cavafy's religious experience and theology.*

The distinctiveness of Cavafy's contribution to modern Greek literature is evidenced both negatively and positively. Negatively, because throughout his lifetime Cavafy's poetry was not just rejected as bad poetry but was questioned for even being poetry in the first place⁴. Positively, because posthumously Cavafy has been acknowledged as one of the most original modern Greek poets⁵, a precursor of Greek literary modernism⁶, and a direct link to the work of the Greek surrealists⁷. However, *this ambivalent recognition of Cavafy's distinctiveness must be related to and indicative of his peculiar poetics, which in turn was articulated by him as an open and questing Weltanschauung.* In this respect, the present article is a quest for Cavafy's own quest for meaning in life. This of course does not imply that Cavafy's poetic distinctiveness cannot or should not be approached from a literary perspective. By all means, such an approach is justified, but a different one seems to be justified as well. Whereas a literary approach would limit itself to Cavafy's poetic practice, a hierophany-based hermeneutic approach would focus on Cavafy's poetic theory, i.e., on his poetic experience⁸.

CONTEXT: THE HIEROPHANY HISTORY AND
TYPOLOGY OF WESTERN CULTURE⁹

Presumably Western culture can be understood in a variety of ways, depending on the point of reference one chooses. Whatever the choice, however, it has to pertain to something that encompasses as comprehensibly as possible the historical development of those elements that form the set of types peculiar to the identity of Western culture. To my understanding, this "something" is Christianity, since whatever Greco-Roman, Jewish, or even Islamic strands, are found in Western culture, all of them have been accommodated within a dominant Christian frame. In this sense, they have contributed to the syncreti(sti)c potential and thus to the historically conditioned distinctiveness of Christianity. Termed differently, Christianity is a system of transactions taking place between a great variety of constituent hierophanies on the basis of a few fundamental ones. The former type of hierophanies belong primarily to non-Christian experiences, whereas the latter pertain to diverse, though equally genuine, Christian experiences. Moreover, *what renders Christian experiences distinctive in religionswissenschaftliche terms is their preoccupation with history: an experience emerges as Christian when history becomes an unresolved problem. Thus the hierophany history of Western culture is the ongoing experience of history as a hierophany, that is, as a persisting tension between the sacredness and profanity of culture.*

Understood in this way, the hierophany history of Western culture can be systematically codified through a certain typology in regard to its fundamental Christian hierophanies. According to such a typology, it would seem that *Western culture is all about four types of Christian consciousness: i) the gnostic, ii) the apocalyptic, iii) the mundane, and iv) the eschatological.* All of them are based on a distinctive experience of the historical Jesus as the ultimate hierophany and thus render his history the sole access to salvation. However, on the other hand, Jesus' history had an end, which means that the field of history is indeed affirmed as the only access to the Divine but at the same time it has to be negated as such. As a consequence, Jesus' history, that is, his parousia, either stands tragically alone or becomes the first parousia that requires the counter-balance of a second one. So *in Christianity everything is played within this tension between the first and the second parousia of Jesus, between his Incarnation and his Kingdom.*

More specifically, the gnostic type of Christian consciousness stresses the first parousia as a salvific experience *hic et nunc*. In other words, in the light of the historical past, as it makes an absolute out of the historical present; both the past and the future exist insofar they are recapitulated in the present¹⁰. Exactly the same is the case with the apocalyptic type of Christian consciousness, but in the reverse way: the apocalyptic Christian

mentality stresses the second parousia in the sense that the present is experienced as salvific because it inaugurates the end to come. So again, an absolute is made out of the historical present, this time in the light of the envisaged historical future. The mundane type of Christian consciousness in turn considers equally both the first and the second parousia, for the sake of stressing the intermediary time, that is, the history of the Church. Thus salvific importance is ascribed to this protracted kind of historical present and a new, true history is substituted for the old, false history of the world. The Church becomes the world. Last but not least, the eschatological type of Christian consciousness stresses equally the Incarnation and the Kingdom, and thus absolutises both of them. In this way the salvific experience lies in a historical present that transcends the historical past in view of a historically unattainable future – consequently, the tension remains and history is affirmed and denied at the same time¹¹.

Each type of Christian consciousness is articulated as a distinctive dialectics of history that aspires to resolve the problem of history, that is, the paradox of the historical Jesus as the ultimate hierophany. However, this aspiration is either unsuccessful – the case of the three first types – since it ends in equating the Christian experience with the world, from which it is supposed to differ, or successful – the last type – since it makes the unresolved problem of history the resolution of Christian experience. In other words, *the first three types of Christian consciousness could be characterised as the primary phenomenology of secularisation, whereas the last one would have to be perceived as the alternative to such a development.* More specifically, and in relation to the topic of this article, the most plausible way to place the work of Cavafy in the hierophany history and typology of Western culture would be to consider him as a heir of the gnostic Christian consciousness and to try to substantiate such a consideration.

HYPOTHESIS: CAVAFY AS AN HEIR OF THE GNOSTIC CHRISTIAN CONSCIOUSNESS

Literary criticism has already demonstrated the multiple ways in which Cavafy's work is embedded within the literary and broader intellectual tradition of Western culture¹². This embeddedness, however, has been treated exclusively in terms of description or explanation: the objective has been to trace the "sources", affinities, or effects of Cavafy's poetry, and thereof to achieve a better understanding of it. This of course is a way of doing things, but the hermeneutic process must look into the historicity of a literary product not as chain reaction but as chain creation. It is the literary product itself that creates a "chain" and conceives it as a reaction within which it holds a distinctive position of its own. Thus what comes first, for both literature and literary criticism, is

understanding and not description or explanation. This way of doing things, however, is quite risky, since it presupposes an intuitive focus on what makes a literary product stand out from its equals; a focus that might well be a *petitio principii*. So in order not to become a vicious circle, understanding should be tested through description and explanation, on the one hand, and through competition with other hermeneutic discourses, on the other. And only then can it be regarded as valid, when it has been critically shown to have the potential to function as a basis for a more comprehensive account of the complexity of a literary product. As a consequence, *every understanding is a hypothesis, a promising and at the same time precarious hypothesis*¹³.

The hypothesis of this article is that in order to understand Cavafy's poetry on the basis of his religious experience and theology, one has to shift from the incidental affinities between his poetry and various (inter)texts of Western culture to the intrinsic relation of his poetry with the context of Western culture. Now, if this context is the hierophany history and typology mentioned above, one would have then to show that the issue of history as a problem and one of the hierophany ways of dealing with it do inform the poetry of Cavafy. This, to be sure, would seem to put the poetics of Cavafy under the philosophy of history. But since the poet himself "spoke of his poems as falling into three categories: the historical, the erotic, and the philosophical" (Harvey, 1983: 7), *it would only be reasonable to assume that through his work Cavafy articulated the philosophy of history as poetics*.

Cavafy's poetry is not just about history; most importantly, it is *of* history. His writing seems again and again to be provoked by and responsive to the haunting question of history. It is the presence and absence of a splendid historical past – the past of Greek universality – that permeates the historical present – the present of Greek provinciality – and inspires Cavafy's experience of the latter. In his poetry, history is indeed *the* problem, the problem of a "paradise lost" and a "paradise regained". The very experience of this problem, however, is invested with a solution. It is poetry, and in particular its vision of events, that can confer a certain meaning on the otherwise frustrating discrepancies between the past and the present. The poetic creation of the historical past – the past of Hellenism culminating in the triumph of Christianity – becomes an Exodus-like experience for Cavafy, since it reveals to him his destiny and enables him to know what he must do. This is the gnosis of Cavafy's poetics, the gnosis of a self-aware dignity. For him there is no apocalyptic fever, no mundane deception, no eschatological anticipation; there is only the pleasure of gnosis. In this respect, *the poetics of Cavafy constitute a genuine and distinctive version of the gnostic type of Christian consciousness within the heart of modern times*.

ARGUMENT: FROM ALIENATION THROUGH
PLEASURE TO DIGNITY

The hypothesis that Cavafy's poetry is embedded within the hierophany history and typology of Western culture as a genuine and distinctive gnostic Christian contribution is something that has to be tested in a variety of ways. Only then will the evidence be not just plausible but quite conclusive, since the convergence of different methodic approaches will produce a comprehensive, coherent, and compelling argumentation. And first of all, why should Cavafy's literary work be considered as Christian in the first place? Not of course because he was a faithful Christian. This, whether true or not, is irrelevant or at least not the most significant aspect of the whole issue. Besides, the irony¹⁴ that is so dominant in Cavafy's poems makes it virtually impossible to draw any secure conclusions about his faith in terms of the psychology of religion¹⁵. However, *Cavafy's poetry can be characterized as intrinsically Christian to the degree that it articulates an experience that draws heavily on a number of Christian hierophanies as historical phenomena*¹⁶.

Christianity is part of the history experienced by Cavafy; or better Christianity is the recapitulation of the meaningful events experienced as history by Cavafy. In fact, these events inform the idea of a continuity between Hellenism and Christianity, an idea which is conceived as a chain of revelatory instances of Greek-ness¹⁷. These instances are in tension and discontinuity to one another, and thus form a dialectical relation that stands as a unified whole insofar that they are projected on an envisioned historical development that concludes with Christianity. In this respect, Christianity is for Cavafy the paradox of history par excellence: the paradox of Hellenism being Greek by transcending or "abandoning" its Greek-ness. In other words, *Cavafy's Greek poetry is Christian, because only as Christian can it reaffirm its Greek-ness*¹⁸.

A second point that must be considered is the extent to which the poetics of Cavafy can be seen as having a religious character. Literary criticism has made some suggestions that are worth mentioning. For instance, "The notion of art as *redemption* is very prominent in Cavafy's work. Art *saves* the poet by providing him with a formalist *sanctuary*, where he can escape from the sorrow, vulgarity, and ugliness of the world" (Jusdanis, 1987: 82; my emphasis). And "Although religion, morality [...] and so on are treated ironically and are often repudiated in Cavafy's poetry, aesthetics is never questioned and is venerated with *religious conviction*" (Jusdanis, 1987: 85–6; my emphasis). So, if the structure and function of Cavafy's poetics constitute a hierophany of and on their own, then the Christian hierophanies that permeate his work would have to be approached as hierophany transformations. Termed differently, *the hierophany poetics of Cavafy do not cease being Christian, but are re-articulated and invested with a new morphology*,

the morphology of Beauty – and it is the latter that now becomes the possibility of transcending the world.

Apart from Christian historicity and transcendental Beauty, there is another aspect of the hierophany character of Cavafy's poetics that has to be dealt with. Once again, it is literary criticism that has brought to the fore the affinities that Cavafy's work has with the movement of Western esotericism¹⁹. This special connection is evident in the traces of romanticism and symbolism throughout Cavafy's poetry²⁰, especially during the earlier periods of his literary production. Diana Haas notes: "On sait que pendant la période qui commence vers 1882 et se termine vers 1903 Cavafy cherche sa propre voie poétique dans plusieurs directions – romantisme, Parnasse, symbolisme. Ce que l'on sait moins, c'est que cette recherche esthétique coïncide avec une recherche spirituelle" (1996: 241). And during this spiritual quest "Cavafy s'est familiarisé avec les idées, les thèmes, ou tout simplement le climat, des divers courants du mouvement [of modern esotericism]" (ibid., 242). For our thesis, in particular, it is very important that Haas does allude to a certain gnostic interest on the part of Cavafy, when she refers to the esoteric currents with which he familiarised himself²¹.

At this point, however, the hypothesis of the present article has to be substantiated in a more concrete way, that is, through reference to the material of Cavafy's poetry itself. As a starting point, one could address the issue of alienation, which seems to be a permanent and dominant feature in Cavafy's poetry. Alienation from one's self, from life, from truth, from the world, in all its interrelated forms alienation was the basis of Cavafy's experience. In the poems titled "Walls" and "An Old Man", for example, alienation is the awareness²² one has in regard to fate or time as the agents responsible for the loss of one's self²³. A loss that is experienced as feelings of enclosure, isolation, coldness, loneliness, helplessness, rejection, despair, misery, suffering, frustration and deception. In "The Horses of Achilles", "The Funeral of Sarpedon", and "Candles", alienation widens and becomes the problem of death²⁴, which again is the problem of fate and time in disguise²⁵. Moreover, it seems that for Cavafy alienation is not just a psychologically conditioned experience, but a genuinely metaphysical one, since due to death one is "turned back from life to the great Nothingness" ("The Horses of Achilles"; Savidis, 1975: 5). This metaphysical orientation of Cavafy is but the problem of truth so forcefully put in the poem "Prayer": "the ikon listens, solemn, sad" (ibid., 6) knowing that death has conquered. Thus the only thing left to be done is to stand in irony, in a suffering or defiant irony. Either way, one has to live in the world with a certain aloofness: "Even if you can't shape your life the way you want, / at least try as much as you can / not to degrade it / by too much contact with the world, / by too much activity and talk" ("As Much As You Can"; ibid., 35).

If “beware of the world” is Cavafy’s catchphrase, then it seems that he did find a way to create out of his alienation experience a hierophany experience; in other words he did posit the feeling of alienation as the necessary condition for its own transcendence. More specifically, alienation is the basement on which a ladder stands, “the ladder / of Poetry [...] tall, extremely tall” (“The First Step”; *ibid.*, 9). This “ladder” leads one “above the ordinary world” into “the city of ideas” (*ibid.*). On the other hand, the fact that poetry as a means of transcendence does constitute a hierophany becomes self-evident when Theocritus criticises the “young poet Evmenis”: “Words like that / are improper, blasphemous” (*ibid.*), that is, saying that “The First Step” in poetry is nothing important amounts to a sacrilege. In this respect, the primary sameness²⁶ of alienation is transformed into a dualism between the world and “ideal things” (“Sculptor of Tyana”; *ibid.*, 26). But how is this possible since the human predicament is nothingness? The answer is, through revelation, as one can see in such poems as “Windows” and “Voices”. In the former, an exit from the darkness of the world is affirmed, whereas in the latter Cavafy asserts that there can be a breaking of the silence in the middle of the worldly night. However, in both cases it is always about a reverent²⁷ and at the same time fading experience²⁸, which means that it is always about the special power of special moments given to special people, that is, the wise. “Sometimes during moments of intense study / their hearing’s troubled: the hidden sound / of things approaching reaches them, / and they listen reverently, while in the street outside / the people hear nothing whatsoever” (“But The Wise Perceive Things About To Happen”; *ibid.*, 39).

So the exit from the negative experience of alienation is achieved through the poetic transcendence of the world, a transcendence that realises even for a moment the possibility of having a hierophany experience. But this is only the formal pattern of Cavafy’s poetics. In terms of content his poetics become both a gnosiology and an ethos. The hierophany moment of transcendence transforms the wise into someone who really knows what this or that moment is all about, since it is only when his “mind” rises and a “vision” is given (see “Sculptor of Tyana”) that he discerns the truth and loses himself “according to his taste, his will, his vision of the beauty” (“For the Shop”; *ibid.*, 36). But this salvific gnosis is intertwined with pleasure. True gnosis comes along with true pleasure, as one can see in “The Glory of the Ptolemies” (*ibid.*, 28). Besides, this is the *raison d’être* of Cavafy’s erotic poems, this is the ethos with which they are so much preoccupied. The true poet is the one that abandons the world and seeks to dwell through his art in the gnosis of a fraction, an instant, a moment of time as the sensual and lovely body of memory (see “Come Back”; *ibid.*, 34). Finally, it is this experienced memory of the past that transforms him into a living and luminous spark of historical meaning. But in order to follow this way of life one has to be amongst “the champions of pleasure” (“I

Went"; *ibid.*, 36), since his fate is to fall again into the realm of the profane world only to endure and suffer a new kind of alienation, this time an alienation of dignity and yearning for the next moment that memory will pay a visit to him²⁹.

Given this sketch of the pattern and content of Cavafy's poetics, one has no difficulty in recognising its affinity to the pattern and content of the gnostic type of Christian consciousness. The experience of alienation within the world, the fundamental dualism as a basis for transcendence, the redemptive gnosis, the antinomianism of extreme, powerful pleasures, and the focus on the mystical character of the moment ("kairos"), are all basic structure elements in gnostic Christianity³⁰. But it is not so much this analytic approach that renders Cavafy an heir of gnostic Christianity; beyond that, it is the proper understanding of his "body's memory" that reveals the genuine and distinctive gnostic Christian foundation of his poetics (cf. Leondaris, 1983). To be exact, Cavafy does not look towards the future but towards the past. However, he has no nostalgia for the past and he does not yearn for its restoration. His poetic moments of gnosis and pleasure are informed and realised through the memory of his personal history, his own body being part of Alexandria, Antioch, Beirut, Athens and Constantinople. His hierophany past lives *hic et nunc* insofar as he creates it as an absolute point of reference out of the fragmentary bits of his present experience. And because this past period of history is recapitulated in the image of Byzantium and Christianity, it can be said that he is not just a gnostic but a gnostic Christian. Christian historicity, aesthetic transcendentalism, and mystical esotericism become one within his poetic moments of disclosing the meaning of history.

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NOTES

- 1 For positions concerning whether or not C.P. Cavafy was a faithful Christian, see Malanos, 1957 and 1981; Sareyannis, 1963; Liddell, 1974; Papachristou-Panou, 1974; Moschos, 1978; Souliotis, 1983; Savidis, 1985; Karapanagopoulos, 1985 and 1993; Poulis, 1989.
- 2 See especially Andreadis, 1984; Dallas, 1986; Haas, 1996.
- 3 In general, this article uses the term "hierophany" according to the conceptualizations found in Eliade, 1958; Eliade and Sullivan, 1987. It modifies, however, Eliade's position in a way that allows "hierophany" to be more dialectical and historical; see Adrahtas, 1998; 1999; 2001b.
- 4 "As M. Georgiu observes in an article dealing with the hostile nature of early Cavafian criticism, 'Up to about 1930 it appears as if Greek criticism was answering the following question in a plebiscite: is Cavafy a poet or not?' (*Epitheorisi Technis* 1963: 654). Significantly, the debate was not on whether Cavafy's poetry was good or bad, but on whether it could be considered poetry at all" (Jusdanis, 1987: 178).
- 5 Cf. e.g., Savidis, 1975: 195–6; Jusdanis, 1987: 176.

- 6 See especially Jusdanis, 1987: 104–10.
- 7 See especially Andreadis, 1984: 85–90. “Greek surrealism will retain of course some basic features of the way Cavafy saw antiquity. High didactic style (Empirikos, Egonopoulos, Elytis), combination of the historical with the linguistic and poetic diachrony. Moreover, some orientations that are traced elementarily in the *Unpublished Poems*, the openness to an ecumenical myth, even the disguise of features of the Greek myth as something more barbaric, will all become guiding lines in Egonopoulos’ *Bolivar*, for instance...” (ibid., 100; my translation).
- 8 For this distinction between poetic practice, i.e., the technology of poetry, and poetics as a theory stemming from and informing aesthetic experience, cf. Jusdanis, 1987: xi–xiii (especially note 1).
- 9 The typology of Christianity and its intrinsic relation to secularisation, as expressed in this section of the article, draw heavily on ideas originally presented in Adrahtas, 1998; 2000a; 2000b; 2001a; 2003a; 2003b.
- 10 For this peculiar meaning of time and history in Gnosticism, generally, and gnostic Christianity, in particular, cf. Marrou, 1967; Puech, 1957; Quispel, 1968; Donovan, 1990: 35–9, 263–73.
- 11 For a quite similar presentation of the typology of Christianity, see Arkadas and Bekridakis, 2001.
- 12 For an introduction to Cavafy’s work in relation to the literary tradition of the West, see for example Jusdanis, 1987. For a very interesting reading of Cavafy’s work as a “correspondence” to various intellectual trends of western culture, see Andreadis, 1984. For more detailed references, see Pontani, 1940 and 1972; Keeley, 1952; Kephala, 1965; Harvey, 1983; Politou-Marmarinou, 1984.
- 13 For a general discussion of the priority of understanding in the hermeneutic process, see Adrahtas, 2003a.
- 14 For the operation and function of irony in the poetry of Cavafy, see for example Beaton, 1981.
- 15 Relevant here is the poem “Hidden Things” (written in 1908): “From all I did and all I said / let no one try to find out who I was. / An obstacle was there distorting / the actions and the manner of my life. / An obstacle was often there / to stop me when I’d begin to speak. / From my most unnoticed actions, / my most veiled writing – / from these alone will I be understood. / But maybe it isn’t worth much concern, / so much effort to discover who I really am. / Later, in a more perfect society, / someone else made just like me / is certain to appear and act freely” (Savidis, 1975: 142).
- 16 Some of the poems where this Christian conditioning is explicit are the following: “Prayer” (1898), “In Church” (1912), “Manuel Komninos” (1916), “Tomb of Ignatios” (1917), “If Actually Dead” (1920), “A Byzantine Nobleman in Exile Composing Verses” (1921), “Julian Seeing Contempt” (1923), “Julian in Nicomedia” (1924), “John Kantakuzinos Triumphs” (1924), “Priest at the Serapeion” (1926), “A Great Procession of Priests and Laymen” (1926), “Julian and the Antiochians” (1926), “You Didn’t Understand” (1928), “Myris: Alexandria, A. D. 340” (1929), “Julian at the Mysteries” (written in 1896), “Simeon” (written in 1917), “On the Outskirts of Antioch” (written in 1933).
- 17 Cf. for example the insightful remarks in Dallas, 1986 (especially pp. 71–94).
- 18 For the place of Christianity in Cavafy’s poetry, see Haas, 1983a and 1983b.

- 19 For an introduction to the origins and concept of western esotericism, see for example Faivre, 1998.
- 20 See for example Pieris, 1982; Ilyinskaya, 1983; Jusdanis, 1987. Romanticism and symbolism, however, should not be read as successive phases in Cavafy's personal evolution as a poet, but rather as a mark of his diverse and dialectical relation to nineteenth century European aesthetics (cf. Jusdanis, 1987: xvi–xviii).
- 21 See Haas, 1996: 241–85.
- 22 In “Walls” Cavafy confesses, “I can’t think of anything else” (Savidis, 1975: 3), and in “An Old Man” he emphasises, “he thinks [...] He knows [...] sees it, feels it [...] He remembers” (ibid., 4).
- 23 In “Walls”, “this fate gnaws my mind”; in “An Old Man”, “The time’s gone by so quickly, gone by so quickly” (ibid., 3 and 4 respectively).
- 24 In “The Horses of Achilles”, Cavafy focuses on “the eternal disaster of death” (ibid., 5), while in “Candles” he notes with sorrow, “how quickly that dark line gets longer, / how quickly one more dead candle joins another” (ibid., 8).
- 25 In “The Horses of Achilles” fate is mentioned explicitly (“the toys of fate”; ibid., 5), while in “The Funeral of Sarpedon” fate is alluded to by the remark “this the Law required” (ibid., 7). On the other hand, time in “Candles” is present thanks to the antithesis “Days to come stand in front of us [...] Days past fall behind us” (ibid., 8).
- 26 Representative of this sameness is the poem “Monotony”: “One monotonous day follows another / identically monotonous. The same things / will happen to us again, / the same moments come and go. / A month passes by, brings another month. / Easy to guess what lies ahead: all of yesterday’s boredom. / And tomorrow ends up no longer like tomorrow” (ibid., 20).
- 27 In “Windows” the reverent character of the hierophany experience becomes a nearly fearsome experience, a kind of tremendum: “And perhaps / it’s better if I don’t find them [the windows]. / Perhaps the light will prove another tyranny. / Who knows what new things it will expose?” (ibid., 11).
- 28 “like distant music fading away at night” (ibid., 15).
- 29 Examples of this suffering motif of dignity can be seen in the poems “Che Fece... Il Gran Rifiuto”, “Thermopylae”, “King Dimitrios”, “The Satrapy”, and “The God Abandons Antony”, to name only a few.
- 30 For all these, see Jonas, 1970; Kurt, 1983; Donovan, 1990. For the complicated problem of whether Gnosticism existed or not prior to Christianity, see Kurt, 1983: 275–94. An advocate of Gnosticism’s pre-Christian origins is Yamauchi, 1973. Regardless, however, of what the answer is to this historiographical problem, our understanding of gnostic Christianity is not affected since such a type of Christianity did exist. In other words, the basic structure elements we are dealing with are discernible in the ancient sources of Christianity.