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CAVAFY: TOWARD THE PRINCIPLES OF
A TRANSCULTURAL SOCIOLOGY
OF MINOR LITERATURE

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari isolate three hallmarks of the disestablishmentarian, potentially revolutionary literature that they refer to as “minor literature”: the deterritorialisation of language; the politicisation of the individual, the particular, the personal; and the activation of a collective apparatus of enunciation (1975: 33).¹ They treat Franz Kafka as the exemplary man of minor letters. Kafka is born in Prague in 1883. The year before, while taking refuge in Constantinople from the British siege of Alexandria, a nineteen-year-old Cavafy will have begun to think of himself as a poet and to write his first verses (Anton 1995: 29). Between the emotionally frail Czechoslovakian Jew who writes in German and the ephebophilic Hellenic Egyptian who writes in a mélange of ancient, Koine and Demotic Greek there is nothing that literary historians would be tempted to describe as “influence.” The imagistic repertoires of the two have barely any overlap. Kafka, the “existentialist,” has a taste for the absurd, for the grotesque, for bestial metamorphosis. Cavafy, the “hedonist,” has a taste for irony, for the formulae of the erotic sublime, for corporal perfection. All of this is true enough. Yet it is also of a piece with that sort of historical particularism which too often serves to conceal structural homologues, and too often does so in the name of preserving a conception of the solitary and unaccountable genius that is as spiritually appealing as it is sociologically and anthropologically blind. Structurally, Kafka and Cavafy in fact have much in common. They come to write with similar assets and similar liabilities. They strive to enter and claim a place within a literary arena that has only just begun to reveal the consequences of its increasing detachment from the arenas of value – religious and moral – to which it had formerly been subordinate. They approach that arena not in the open air but instead one step removed from the ghetto and still barely peeking from out of the closet. They approach it not in the position of the aspirant who has had the advantage of having been raised at its center, but instead in the position of the aspirant looking in from its semi-

peripheries, its structural provinces – if for precisely that reason with a structurally more sensitive eye than many at the center could themselves manage to exercise.

A literary arena relieved of its obligations to other arenas of value is one whose procedures of consecration are predominantly self-referential and one in which originality can take precedence even over the allure of good form. It imposes on any would-be man or woman of letters the task of carving out a place of his or her own in a language that – as *langue* and as *langage* – always belongs first to others. The provincial is in this respect more burdened than his metropolitan counterparts only in degree, however, not in kind (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 35). Kafka nevertheless shares with Cavafy two further burdens that appear to define the lot of the person of minor letters as such. He faces the initial burden of entering the literary field not as one subject but as two. He faces the subsequent burden of coping with a split literary personality that cannot really be resolved but must instead be put to literary use. In his struggles as in the prefixed or hyphenated realism that becomes his stylistic signature, Kafka is indeed exemplary, but his sensibility and his strategies of collectivisation so close to what Deleuze and Guattari – who are themselves persons of minor letters, if in a slightly different discipline – are ready to embrace that his broader league remains unnecessarily vague. Cavafy, another frequently prefixed or hyphenated realist, is the exemplary supplement who discloses the proper scope – a transcultural and translinguistic scope – of the principles of that sociology of minor literature which Deleuze and Guattari summon (1975: 43) but do not pursue.

In what follows, I shall not pursue the Herculean task of establishing Kafka and Cavafy as perfect counterparts. The task would not merely demand a book of its own; it would also very likely be misguided. That Cavafy writes in what remains now as in his day a geopolitically minor language does not guarantee that all of his oeuvre, not even all of his literary oeuvre, belongs to “minor literature” as Deleuze and Guattari intend that term to be understood. That he comes to write in an increasingly distinctive idiolect of the Greek of one diasporic outpost of Hellenism (when he is not writing cryptic shorthand in English) is no guarantee of his minority, either. Deleuze and Guattari think roughly of a minor literature as the literature “that a minority makes in a major language” (29). Their more considered definition of it nevertheless focuses on the specific principles or strategies of its construction and in fact implies that a minority is less its inevitable creator than its inevitable audience. A minor literature is always an “affair of the people” (32). It always addresses a people of disestablishmentarian and potentially revolutionary concerns – an inevitable minority, however few or great its actual numbers might be and whether or not it recognises itself as such. Kafka as man of minor letters addresses the borderline schizophrenic, possibly German-speaking and Czechoslovakian lost Jew that Deleuze and Guattari imagine we have all – a universal minority – already become. I

confine myself to arguing that Cavafy's oeuvre is at its most minor when addressing the purists of courage that very few of us yet are. What will, I hope, become clear is that I am thus stating neither the obvious nor the absurd.

DETERRITORIALISATION 1: SPLICE, PARALLEL, SERIES

Semiotic and corporeal at once, deterritorialisation is a process of the undoing or dissolving of the coded. It is a process of the breakage or rupture of something previously whole and intact. It is a "schiz" that blocks but also initiates a "flow," a stream or "line of flight" (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 25; cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1983: 2–8). It runs counter to signification. Deterritorialised, signs are unmoored from the binary matrices that render them amenable to referential or tropological service. The relations in which they stand to one another are relations of seriality, of contiguity and remoteness, of association and disassociation. Thus, the Kafkaesque sign: it is a gesture of ambiguous import, a cry – "pure intense sonorous material" (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 12) – or a cough "that seems worrisome, but which has no significance," the whistle of a mouse becoming human and trying to sing, the cheeping of the man becoming insect who "has the voice of an animal" (1975: 24–25).

Cavafy does not report history, he picks it, one fruit at a time from a neglected orchard. Interior to the canon and the unpublished poems, the past is delivered in linguistic and imagistic snippets. Diskin Clay reviews the various devices to which the poet resorts in incorporating the past into the present of his texts (1987). Cavafy borrows a phrase from Plutarch's *Life of Antony* to serve as a title: "The God Abandons Antony." He leaves the phrase in the ancient language but writes the body of the poem in demotic Greek with occasional irruptions of katharevousa. He severs a remark on the barbarisation of music from Athenaeus' *Learned Banquet* and imports it into his "Poseidonians" as an epigraph (Clay 1987: 69–70). Cut and splice. He blends the fourteen lines of Baudelaire's "*Corrélations*," translated into katharevousa Greek, into his own reflections on synaesthesia (Cavafy 1989: 10–11; cf. Anton 1995: 85–87). Baudelaire receives oblique acknowledgement in the poem's title. Dissolve in, dissolve out: the poet whom Kostis Palamas blamed for "legislating the amorphous in versification" (in Anton 1995: 62) as cinematic editor *avant l'heure*, but leaving his interventions, his seams, always partially visible. Over more than twenty-five years, perhaps beginning in 1903 with the first draft of "Craftsman of Wine Bowls," Cavafy writes a series of poems whose lines are broken in the middle, seventeen in all. Many of the poems are unrhymed. Others suggest rhyme schemes so idiosyncratic that it is difficult to say whether or not they are intended. Some reveal systematic syllabic parallelisms; others do not. Within the series, the early "He Swears" is

unique in abandoning the division in its final two lines; the rest preserve the division from the first line to the last. “He Swears” is a poem of ambivalence. It is a poem of multiple divisions: of the narrative consciousness from the narrated body; of day from night; of a “better life” from “fatal [or fateful: *mirea*] pleasure” (Cavafy 1975: 105).² By no means all the poems in the series treat ambivalence. Arguably at least, they all treat divisions of one or another kind – the incompleteness of experience vs. its completion in art (1975: 219), for example, or the culpability of prostitution vs. the innocence of sensuality and “pure flesh” (279), or the virtues of civilisational achievement vs. those of civilisational heritage (283) – but they are neither thematically homogeneous nor thematically distinct from poems canonical and unpublished whose lines lack interruption. The majority of the poems focus on eros, or, if not that, at least on the desired and the desirable. Once again, however, they lack homogeneity: the object of desire may be the body of a beloved lost (225, 233, 243, 313) but it might also be a Macedonian victory (229) or the privilege of Greek descent (283) or the inviolability of Greek soil (257). The latter two poems, “Greek from Ancient Times” and “On an Italian Shore” are, moreover, notable for lacking even an implicit erotic motif. Interior to the poetry, there are no grounds for regarding the series as a unity nor for placing it apart other than visually or typographically from the rest of Cavafy’s oeuvre. Its seventeen members instead inscribe and repeat a duality that is not figural but literal. They echo and recall many other dualities in Cavafy’s oeuvre. To the imagistic duality of the masculinity and femininity that Despina Charalambidou-Solomi discerns in the beloved Cavafian body (2003) one might add the characterological dualities of the sculptor Damon (Cavafy 1975: 43) and the Tyanaean sculptor (59), or of the queens Anna Komnina (205) and Anna Dalassini (277). One might add Edmund Keeley’s mythographer of Alexandria, the Cavafy who arranges scenarios and personalities of Alexandria past in contrastive or converging parallel with scenarios and personalities of the Alexandria of his day (Keeley 1996). Mythic Alexandria, dualistic Alexandria is itself a series still “in progress” at Cavafy’s death and it holds scenic and personal series within it: of Marc Antony’s brief reign with Cleopatra; of the “illicit” erotic encounters and fantasies of the “Days” poems; of Julian the Apostate’s wavering paganism (Bowersock 1983; Haas 1984).

ART AND LIFE: THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL QUESTION

Constantinople, 1883. For several months, Cavafy has devised to steal away from his family at night in order to loiter in the dark alleys of the city. “Some unacknowledged passion simultaneously governs his being and robs him of his will. Unthinkingly, he finds himself entangled in suspicious relations. Persons of a stigmatised underworld involve themselves secretly in his life and take control of it” (Malanos 1957: 17). His mornings

are filled with regret, but he continues to return to Constantinople's "dilapidated neighbourhoods" when darkness falls (17–18). In the course of the day, he writes. His verses are sometimes in English, sometimes in French, sometimes in Greek. They are so many exercises in imitation that he will later denounce them as "trash" (Savidis 1966: 197; cited in Anton 1995: 30). But he writes. He is taking himself seriously as a poet. In 1883, Constantine also has the first of those explicitly homoerotic passions of which those who knew him were aware – for his cousin, George Psilliary (Liddell 1976: 45).

Alexandria, 1924. Cavafy already has more than one hundred and ten poems in circulation. His reputation has grown – and grown more controversial – in his native city, in Greece and elsewhere in Europe. A year before, E.M. Forster had published an encomium to his elder contemporary among the essays in *Pharos and Pharillon* (1923). Forster was also already urging a curiously reluctant Cavafy to have a hand in translating his poems for an English-language anthology (Pinchin 1977: 108; cf. Liddell 1976: 184–185; Savidis 1985: 169–178; Jeffreys 2001: 75–78). In 1924, the year of Kafka's death, Marcel Proust had already been dead for two years. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, whose *Psychopathia Sexualis* appeared in English translation in 1892, died in 1902. Oscar Wilde had died, broken, at the turn of the century. Havelock Ellis was brought to trial in 1898 under the charge that his *Sexual Inversion*, published two years previously, was obscene. In 1924, Cavafy circulated a poem entitled "Before Time Altered Them," which opened:

They were full of sadness at their parting.
 They hadn't wanted it: circumstances made it necessary.
 The need to earn a living forced one of them
 To go far away – New York or Canada. (Cavafy 1975: 243)

In Cavafy's original Greek, the initial upsilon of *Iorki* is marked with a smooth breathing, as it should be. A journalist subsequently noted that Cavafy's orthography differed from that of fellow-journalist and physician Socrates Lagoudakis, who seems to have spelled *Iorki* with a rough breathing. Or perhaps the journalist reported Cavafy's mockery of Lagoudakis's substandard English – accounts vary (cf. Anton 1995: 68; Ekdawi 1993: 300; Liddell 1976: 188–189; and Malanos 1957: 268–69). All parties agree that Lagoudakis took offense and began to devote several of the signature character profiles that he regularly disseminated in the press to Cavafy, whom he apparently denounced as "another Wilde" (Malanos 1957: 269). Though there were rumors of an impending lawsuit, the poet did not respond. A great many of his supporters, however, soon came to his defense, by no means the least of them Timos Malanos, who suffered physical assault but still managed to circulate a vigorous apology of the united front to which he belonged in the

weekly *Sinema* (Malanos 1957: 270–71). Cavafy seems subsequently to have greeted Malanos with a coldness of bearing that communicated his displeasure with the apology. Malanos's interpretation: that the poet had wanted his supporters' gesture to be "absolutely his own" (1976: 271).

Between 1882 and 1924 unfold the decades of what virtually all of Cavafy's readers regard as his maturation as a poet (cf. Jusdanis 1987: xvi–xvii). If Cavafy remains a master of irony and something of an aesthete throughout, he leaves behind the poetical principles of the romanticism and the symbolism he absorbs from his readings of Baudelaire and the Parnassians and their decadent successors in France and in England in favor of the increasingly inimitable "visionary" or "dramatic" realism appropriate to an investigation of the scope of human feeling always "in progress." If with less consensus, a majority of his readers note a parallel maturation of the thematic of homosexuality or the homosexual voice. Masked, occluded, imprisoned in the early poetry, homosexuality and the formulae of homoerotic desire begin to emerge in Cavafy's works as early as 1904, though, as Edmund Keeley notes, in none of his published works until a decade thence (1996: 45; cf. Alexiou 1983). Rendered in the passive or middle voice at first, more often than not as autoerotic fantasy, homosexuality becomes, as Alexander Nehamas has shown, an increasingly "active" motivation in the later poetry, the motivation of an active subject, and its scenes less nocturnal, less ephemeral and anonymous, more greatly enriched with a complexity of sentiment (Nehamas 1983). For many readers, from Malanos (1957) and Stratis Tsirkas (1958, 1971) to John Anton (1995), the homoerotic poetry is further testament to the poet's coming to terms, literally and figuratively, with his own sexual "instinct" or "proclivities," even if its testament is "implicit" (Malanos 1957: 60). Cavafy does not indeed write anything that could be construed as overtly confessional poetry. As Keeley further notes, the poet stops short of making public "poems in which a first-person speaker [is] an active participant in a context that establishe[s] the sex of the loved one unambiguously" (1996: 45) – a considerably easier feat in Greek than in English. But then, the majority reader might add, as goes the man so go his poems. Biographers agree that in multiple arenas of his life, Cavafy was a virtuoso of both impression management and the fine arts of discretion, of which his gestural pouting at the valiant Malanos in 1924 may have been so well-crafted an instance that even Malanos did not recognise it to be so.

In any event, the thesis that much of Cavafy's oeuvre is autobiographical rests with many others on the presumption that between an author and his oeuvre a unilinear relation of cause and effect must hold, and a relation that in its "optimal" – or least hermeneutically vexing and most ethically sincere – modality is equivalent to that between a particular sensibility or point of view and its written avenue of representation.

Cavafy may himself have understood the relation between author and oeuvre just so. One of the notes recovered from his archive reveals him worrying over the triangle composed of truth, falsehood, and sincerity (or honesty: *ilikrinia* [Cavafy1983a: 21]). Another of them has him bemoaning his own lack of courage for hesitating to write more candidly about his erotic passion:

It passed through my mind tonight to write about my love [or, my eros: *ton erota mou*]. And yet I will not do it. What power prejudice has. I have freed myself from it; but I think of those who are enslaved, under whose eyes this paper might fall. And I stop. What pusillanimity. But let me inscribe a letter – T – as a symbol ... of this moment. (Cavafy 1983a: 27; my translation)

Hence, the Cavafy of the capital T (cf. Gialourakis 1959), whose symbol is widely thought to be the first initial of an unidentified man's name but could just as readily (also) stand for the Orthodox cross in any of its darker connotations. With so many of his readers, what Cavafy may not consider – or not yet in 1902, when both notes were written – that writing is not representational, more or less sincerely, more or less courageously from one instance to the next, but is instead productive (cf. Dallas 1986: 18–19), and perhaps even productive of the very author who in turn produces it. Indeed, Cavafy arrives at something like this alternative with the central conclusions of the “Ars Poetica,” written in 1903: that poetry and theory are enterprises of the same genre; and that they generate the schemas or guidelines in reference to which those who ply the *praktikos bios* act (in Anton 1995: 339–46). Even there, he does not explicitly entertain the possibility that the poet might himself be the result of his poetry, and his rigid distinction between the theoretical and the practical life seems incompatible with it. He does, however, insist that the poet is not limited to his own experience in instilling his poetry with substance. Cavafy here is not an impersonalist in the manner of T.S. Eliot, but perhaps he only means to suggest – as would be expected from someone with his taste for history – that the poet is free to draw on other people's experiences, other people's intentions and actions. That he understands himself to be able to write about someone other than himself is, however, compatible with two other possibilities. One is that he may sometimes write not about himself but apologetically for himself. The other is that he may sometimes write deterritorialistically against himself, against one or another or all of the subject-positions that he is urged or compelled to occupy, perhaps even against his “famous” homosexuality – and perhaps even without knowing it. Cavafy the apologist is in fact already a familiar Cavafy. Cavafy the counter-homosexual should not be declared dead in advance of considering whether or not he might exist.

That writing is productive is in any event Deleuze and Guattari's position, but far from theirs alone. It is central to Michel Foucault's analysis of discourse, power relations, and their "truth effects" (1972) and one of the central dimensions of his analyses of "technologies of the self" (e.g., Foucault 1997: 87–106 and 223–51; 2000: 326–48). It could hardly be more central to his analysis of the sexological and psychoanalytic forging – in writing and in other media – of the homosexual subject-position in the later nineteenth century (Foucault 1978). If only in so many words, truth effects and subject-positions emerge as a late theme in Pierre Bourdieu's sociology of class (Bourdieu 1990: 177–198) but already linger in the background of his earlier studies of art, literature and what, after Peter Bürger and Max Weber, he designates the "historical genesis of a pure aesthetic" (Bourdieu 1993; cf. Bürger 1984; Weber 1946: 323–59). The high abstractions of a philosophical programmatisation of minor literature are in need of Foucauldian and Bourdieusian ballast in order to yield a sociologically and historically more precise account of the conditions in which Cavafy came to write and to write what, and as, he did. In his admirable analysis of Cavafy's poetics, Gregory Jusdanis (1987) illuminates the first principle from which any such analysis must proceed: that the poet's preoccupations, his enduring preoccupation with poetics and aesthetics included, are intelligible only against the backdrop of the preoccupations of French and British men and women of letters from the early nineteenth century forward to his own day. The analytical scale on which the principle operates is not that of the intimate and idiosyncratic details of the individual life in all its existential particularity. It is rather that of the sociological profile. Precisely so, it allows the question of the relation between author and oeuvre to remain open.

DETERRITORIALISATION 2: IMPASSES AND LINES OF FLIGHT

The Kafkaesque body: pierced, battered, tattooed, on four legs or on six, it is if human always in the process of becoming animal and if animal always in the process of becoming human. It is a perpetually liminal body, a threshold-body and a body in excess of the forms of the human and the animal alike (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 25). Deterritorialised bodies are nomads. Deterritorialised signs are nomadic. The deterritorialised language is a language abandoned and a language in which enunciation is not full of meaning but instead full of intensity; it is a language of intensities. At the territorial forefront of Kafka's world is the oppressive Oedipal triangle that binds father to mother, mother to child, child to father. Behind it and always knocking at its doors are those "diabolical powers that would be terribly happy to introduce themselves one day": technocracy, bureaucracy, fascism (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 22). Undone, deterritorialised, it becomes a world of nebulae. It is neither liberated nor empty but its interstices permit of navigation. It has its

impasses but also its ways out. In Kafka's own words: its "attraction ... is strong; those who love me love me because I am 'forsaken' – not, I feel sure, on the principle of a Weisian vacuum, but because they sense that in my good moments a freedom of movement completely lacking to me here is accorded to me in other spheres" (Kafka 1949: 215).³

An oppressive geometry takes shape early in Cavafy's oeuvre. Its claustrophobic foundations are laid in the first of the published poems, "Walls," and fortified in four others: "The Windows," "The Footsteps," "The City" and "The Satrapy." It is a polygon of guilt trodden by the Furies (1975: 47). It is a space of origin and of destination from which escape is seemingly futile (51). Its pace is that of stasis. It holds possessions, wanted and unwanted; it inspires ambition, sometimes requited, sometimes unrequited (53). Its signature regime is monarchic; it is a place of rulers and subjects, or perhaps of inhabitants all of whom are subjects. It is the polygon of things established, the high and imposing walls of the establishment. Place of stasis: its architecture is everywhere in "Waiting for the Barbarians" and its anthropological paralysis embodied in the suspended animation of those poised for a refreshing invasion never to come. It encloses the suspended animation of the voice of the early "Candles" and of "Longings," which speaks of a life passing without event or satisfaction; it encloses the suspended animation of the idling emperor in "Nero's Deadline" and the anti-reformist skeptic of "In a Large Greek Colony, 200 BC." It is home to false – if not always convincing – fronts. Feigning the mourning of a widow but pained only that "she never managed to gain the throne" (205), Anna Komnina lives here. Mourning not the loss of her son as much as the loss of the power he might have acquired, Princess Alexandra lives here (167). They are the negative counterparts of the embodiments of what Michael Pieris (1992) calls "interlove": the Christian son who mourns authentically for his pagan father (267) or – chiasmatically – the pagan who mourns the passing of his Christian lover (307–09). This is a territory whose royals are actors in a theater of status. The parts they play might be played as convincingly by one leading man or woman as by another (41; 265). They sponsor pageants that the proper Alexandrian at once sees through and enjoys (77; cf. Malkoff 1987: 194). Space of substitutability: "Someone else indispensable and unique and great / can always be found at a moment's notice" (345). The self-confident young man "From the School of the Renowned Philosopher" agrees: "His looks would last / at least another ten years. And after that? / Maybe he'll go back to Sakkas. / Or if the old man has died meanwhile, / he'll find another philosopher or sophist: / there's always someone suitable around" (221). In the later poetry, the walled city of established ways and means, of hollow forms and lukewarm passions, almost acquires the name "Antioch" – "fatal [*mireia*] city" (323) with its emperor Julian, "vacuous" (287, 337), intemperate (385) and the very picture of spiritual expediency (241). Space of impasse. Impassable space, from which, "engulfed by

fear and suspicion, / mind agitated, eyes alarmed, / we try desperately to invent ways out..." (57).

The Cavafian way out has its earliest if vague and discarded invention in the recollection of the voices of the beloved dead, who bring with them "sounds from our life's first poetry – / like distant music fading away at night" (35). Though still early, it has a more confident invention in the pleasure that the courageous can find in hearing the very proclamation of their abandonment, that an Antony can find in attending "to the voices, / to the exquisite music" of the orchestral procession bearing away "the Alexandria that [he] is losing" (61). Plutarch's Antony suffers Dionysus' abandonment, not that of Alexandria. Cavafy's Antony may retain the god at his side, or at least the Cavafian cosmos retains him, perhaps as that "ephebic ethereal figure / indistinct, in rapid flight," who "wings across" the hills of Ionia (63). Perhaps the sighting is triple. A nebulous, metamorphic meteor, this god-in-motion might also be "the young Hermes" (59), god of crossings, of speech, of communication and transport. It might also be Eros, that master-sculptor (103). It might be all three who tutor the body-in-longing for its distant home – the body of Antony-Odysseus of "Ithaka" – that longing is itself the essence of the moved and moving body, of the sailing body (189, 369; cf. Pieris 1989: 280–82), of the man in motion. It is certainly not Athena who tutors the lonely man in motion that the home he seeks is merely an incitement to travel, that home will disappoint him, that his real satisfactions will come along the way to it, a way of "adventure" and "discovery," of "sensuous perfumes" and enlightenment (67). The final cause, the purpose designed for the body-in-longing is not return, not repetition but its negation. It is not being at home but the being of the artist, for whom Dionysus and Eros will prescribe more immediate incitements, a whole intoxicating pharmacology of liquors (106) and lusts (103; cf. Alexiou 1985). Home: polygon of establishment. The Erotic-Dionysiac pharmacology: way out, which is and can only be the way of the "illicit" and the "anomalous," the way of transgression (129, 139, 153, 161, 279, 285, 289, 305, 321, 333, 375; cf. Jusdanis 1987: 100–101; *pace* Anton 1995: 324). Among the unpublished poems, one likely written already in 1903 pronounces the Cavafian line of flight with particular precision:

GROWING IN SPIRIT (*Dhinamosis*)

He who hopes to grow in spirit
will have to transcend obedience and respect.
He'll hold to some laws
but he'll mostly violate
both law and custom, and go beyond
the established, inadequate norm.

Sensual pleasures will have much to teach him.
 He won't be afraid of the destructive act:
 half the house will have to come down.
 This way he'll grow virtuously into wisdom. (347)

Sensual pleasures are drugs that teach; they are exercises, *askêseis* (cf. Anton 1995: 263, n. 3). They bring not release from the self, not the self-dissolution of Nietzsche's bacchantes or George Bataille's erotists. They bring on the imagination, the body-in-the-flight-of-imagination, the body in flames (95), surrendering (131, 177) and penetrating (178). They are the stimulants of the imagination and even in small and partial doses, as the fragmentary capsules and nebulous powders of "things half-glimpsed" and the "indistinct memories / of unfulfilled love affairs," they deliver the imagination to an art that "knows how to shape forms of Beauty, / almost imperceptibly completing life, / blending [or coupling: *sindhiazousa*] impressions, blending day with day" (219). The way of the unresolved body-in-longing, of the lonely man in motion, is the way of the sculptor and the painter and the writer whose secret, unutterable name is Pygmalion. Cavafrican Galateas: Lanis, who is painted to life (131); Kaisarion, who is resurrected in writing (155); the "handsome boy" who is pictured to life (111); all the boys of secret and unutterable names who are versified to life.

The narrator of Ithaka is optimistic; the only dangers – "Lastrygonians, Cyclops, / angry Poseidon" – that lie in wait for the man in motion are those he harbors in his own soul. The body-in-longing is, however, in danger of excess (131), of an over-indulgence that descends irreversibly into addiction (70, 105), of an "Alexandrian" devotion to pleasure, fevered and absolute and deadly (143). Occupational hazard. A Pygmalion dare not restrain himself. He must "give in completely," he must "drink strong wine / the way the champions of pleasure drink" (89). He must transgress – or "be an ascetic. / That would be much more in keeping" with his poetry than "finding pleasure in the commonplace rooms" (375; cf. Pinchin 1977: 63). Commonplace rooms: polygons of repetition, polygons of compromise. Transgress, or be an ascetic. The virtue that the Champion of Pleasure shares with his self-denying opposite inheres in his title – Champion, *andhrîos*, "brave one." Bravery is a soldier's virtue, and most praiseworthy when it is uncompromised, unadulterated, free of the constrictions of self-interest or pragmatic consequentialism. The soldiers who fought for the Achaian League were *andhrîi* worthy of just such praise, and they recall the soldiers keeping guard at Thermopylae, "never betraying what is right, / consistent and just in all they do / but showing pity also, and compassion," soldiers to whom all the more honor is due because they maintain their watch knowing they will meet defeat (27). Sisyphian intensity; pure intensity (cf. Keeley 1996: 82–83). King

Dimitrios Sotir estimates himself well for having shown “the same, indomitable *andhria*” even in his failure to sustain his crown (193). He recalls the dowager Spartan queen Kratisiklia, boarding the ship that will take her son Kleomenis and her to disgrace and death in Egypt (315). They all recall Saint Simeon Stylites, who climbed a pillar and remained there until his death, “facing his god” (379). Unadulterated *andhrii*; purists of *andhria*: these are the *dramatis personae* of Cavafy’s oeuvre who meet the finitude of the lines of flight they are called to pursue full-face, without the promise of anything but the poet’s memory to save them. *Andhria*, “courage” – the Greek term derives from the ancient anêr/andros, “man.” *Andhria* might also be translated as “manliness.” Were there no women of courage in Cavafy’s oeuvre, were male figures less androgynous and men never cowards, never compromising, never crudely ambitious or foolish, then – just then – *andhria* would have to be interpreted as a term of territorialisation.

LIFE AND ART: SOCIOLOGICAL PROFILE OF THE ARTIST AS AN ENDURINGLY YOUNG MAN

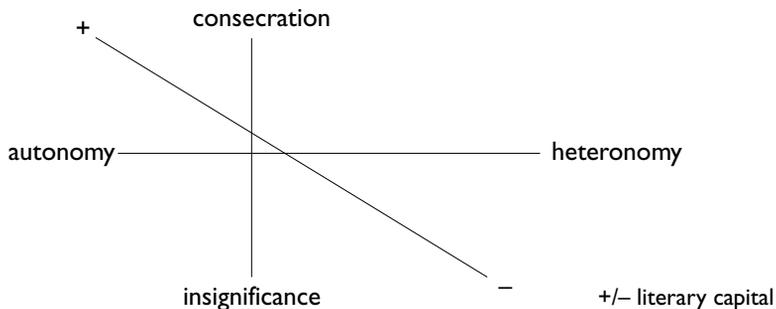
“Cavafy,” with a capital “C,” not “K,” and ending in “y” – the poet’s own way of transliterating his surname into English, and so English a way too. He is born the last child of Fanariote and Anglophilic parents. He acquires their high-bourgeois, perhaps somewhat proprietary, familiarity with the European fine arts. He is tutored from childhood in both French and English, which all the other members of his family speak. He travels widely in Europe and, after his father’s death, lives for an extended period in England – in Liverpool and in London. He is reported to have spoken Greek with an English accent (cf. Liddell 1976: 104). The discreet Cavafy’s estimation of British colonisation is a matter of dispute (Savidis 1985: 101–124 and 313–34; Tsirkas 1971; Liddell 1976: 78–94). At the very least, it was not entirely sanguine. Yet, his life as one of the colonised did not commence with his return to occupied Alexandria in the autumn of 1885. It had evidently begun long before.

There is no one who is at once a being of “competence” and not also colonised. Colonisation, moreover, has many modes, but it is always a process in which the colonising restrict and dominate the colonised, even if only for a brief time and (as one hopes with the colonising interventions of every liberal pedagogy) only to empower the colonised themselves (cf. Faubion 2001). The colonised Cavafy is hardly to be counted among the hordes of the excluded, among those permitted to carry on with their meager little traditions so long as they make no attempt to breach the walls separating them from their overlords. He is not – in the going idiom – a “subaltern.” He is the child of what might euphemistically be described as a “Western-looking” elite, and Western-looking in

two senses: looking to the leading societies of the West (and North) not merely as setters of trends but also of the standards of civilisation itself; and looking rather Western as a consequence. Each sense implies a distance: the first, from those inner sancta in which trends are forged and the pinnacles of civilisation legislated; the second, from the measure of that polished mimesis that would not come off as mere imitation. In conditions of colonisation, such distances are extraordinarily difficult to overcome. They tend with only rare exceptions to constitute the security zone between the center of an empire and its margins. They tend with equal constancy to reproduce between the cultural elite of a colonising society and the cultural elite of the society it colonises a rough terrain analogous to that which separates the cultural elite of any given society from the cultural middle-classes (or the high-brow from the middle-brow) beneath it. If anything, that terrain is all the more daunting for Cavafy because of the further disadvantages that accrue to him during his youth. After his father's death, his older brothers take control of the family's cotton and textile business and quickly squander virtually all of the fortune bequeathed them. Constantine subsequently passes his formative years in a genteel poverty that he is only slightly less concerned than his older kin to pretend away (Liddell 1976: 79; citing Gialourakis 1959: 83). Kafka attains advanced degrees in German literature and in law. Cavafy does not even have the opportunity to become the alumnus of a prestigious boys' school. He arrives at young adulthood with no prospect of an inheritance of his own. After several years of odd-jobbing, he is placed in a "temporary" post in the Alexandria Irrigation Office that he keeps, until his retirement, for thirty years (Liddell 1976: 53–54). The pension he receives afterward is sufficient to sustain him until he dies – a trilingual bourgeois *déclassé* erstwhile clerk and poet of a circle of admirers widening even as he takes his last breath – from cancer of the larynx in 1933. And then there is the "love," the "eros" of the man whose mother had (of course) dressed him in frocks and allowed his hair to grow long when he was a toddler. She had, it seems, been hoping during her pregnancy that (of course) he would be born a girl. No matter: he was (of course) her favorite anyway (cf. Liddell 1976: 23).

But to eros in due time. The observation that the structural distance separating a colonising from a colonised cultural elite is analogous to that separating the culturally high-brow from the culturally middle-brow is my own, but its metrics are a transnational adaptation of Bourdieu's diagrammatisation of the authorial positions in the very serious game of literary production in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of his native France. The diagram is that of a "field," Bourdieu's technical term for any arena of value whose internal dynamics are not directly determined by the prevailing forces of the political economy in which it is embedded (1993: 38–43). More specifically, it plots the distribution of the capital of literary recognition, which is one of many modalities of what

Bourdieu calls “symbolic capital” (1993: 75; Weber called much the same thing “status.”) The sum total of an individual’s symbolic and material capital is constitutive of his or her Bourdieusian “class.” Symbolic and material capital are potentially interconvertible, but neither one is reducible to the other. However reductive it might still be, Bourdieu’s sociology of literature thus frees the analyst from the duty that Tsirkas sought with prodigious twists and turns to fulfill in his treatment of Cavafy (1958) – that of demonstrating that a writer’s oeuvre is in fact the result or reflection of his relation to the material political economy of which he is part. Bourdieu’s diagram of the literary field itself has two axes. Its horizontal axis is a metric of the degree to which the writer is in practice free of the obligation to appeal to tastes – for entertainment, for example, or for information or edification – not intrinsic to the abiding formalism of the literary field itself. It measures aesthetic autonomy. It also measures the relative prominence of the rhetoric of aesthetic purity. The nearer to the autonomous pole a writer’s cultural capital compels him (and his economic capital allows him) to be, the louder and more unqualified his aestheticism is likely to be. Bourdieu’s vertical axis is a metric of the degree to which the writer secures his or her status as a writer – whether as a consummate artist (nearer the autonomous pole) eligible for canonisation or as “telling a good story” (nearer the heteronomous pole) and reaping the rewards of popular success. It measures what Bourdieu pointedly calls “consecration” (1993: 50–52). It tends to be inversely correlated with age, especially nearer the autonomous pole, at which the young writer’s recognition – as “promising” or “gifted” – depends primarily on the judgments of his or her established literary elders. It thus brings into relief the structural importance of aesthetic patronage and aesthetic clientelism. It also brings into relief the structural grounds of the tensions that motivate the sempiternal conflict between upstart “bohemians” and the aesthetic “old guard”. Because the possibilities of aesthetic autonomy are far fewer than the necessities of heteronomy, the diagram as a whole is asymmetrical in form.



The Bourdieusian actor is in the general (unwitting) habit of “making a virtue of necessity,” of coming to regard as worthwhile or valuable the very ends that he or she must

pursue (Bourdieu 1977; 1984). Not subaltern, Cavafy was not a mere instrument of necessity (however much certain of his poems, if read autobiographically, might portray him as being). He had his alternatives. It is nevertheless unlikely that any alternative other than the one he pursued could have made such reward of what fate had dealt him: a gentility without the material supports required to maintain and display it; and an “eros” whose only initial promise was the promise of abjection and exclusion. He could never have sustained his social distinction as effectively as he did had he sought a life in England instead of Alexandria. He could never have heard a more rewarding call than the call to poetry, which Everyone knew to be evidence of a distinction not merely social but natural and which cost the modestly-salaried Irrigation Office clerk barely more than a portion of his spare time. Without doubt, he found in poetry virtually the only calling of his day in which his eros could be construed not as a liability but instead as an asset – indeed, as the poet’s distinction *par excellence*. In this last respect, Cavafy is the beneficiary of those European legions of moral physiologists in whose fevered pronouncements, from the end of the eighteenth century well into the twentieth, Foucault has diagnosed the ascendance and entrenchment of a bourgeois ordering of political life “not through the enslavement of others, but through an affirmation of self” and of the vigilant and concerted cultivation of the self’s vital powers (Foucault 1978: 122–123). During the period between the First and the Second World Wars, bourgeois vitalism could even yield a Reich (Foucault 1978: 131). By the 1870s, it had begun to yield the “invert,” a figure of perversion but also a being who harbors those “contrary inclinations” and that particular “disequilibrium” of the soul that will make him specially and especially suited to the pursuit of the artistic life. The sexological authorisation of the rumor following every effeminate man comes first in Carl Westphal’s 1870 paper in the *Archiv für Neurologie*, the subject of a review in English the following year and gaining currency very rapidly thenceforth (Foucault 1978: 43). Aestheticist decadence does not come to Cavafy through Westphal but first through Baudelaire. From the 1870s forward, however, the decadent “movement,” such as it is, will have its most flamboyant champions in those inverts convinced that the path to the greatest and purest art has the beautiful boy beloved as its most enduring muse (cf. Jusdanis 1987: 36). Cavafy’s entry into the literary field, romantic and symbolist, corresponds to a point slightly below the midline at the far left of the diagram. It marks a young poet working with genres that are well established, even a touch old-fashioned, who enjoys the freedom of having no audience to demand anything of him other than his brother, who seems always to have been a sympathetic and supportive reader (Liddell 1976: 40). At least until the second decade of the twentieth century, Cavafy’s literary trajectory moves only slightly, and slightly upward and rightward, as his audience widens and his reputation modestly but steadily improves. Only with the publication of “Sculptor of Tyana” and the

even bolder “Dangerous Thoughts” in 1911 does the poet as poet, begin to drift toward the lower extreme of the left-hand quadrant of the diagram, considerably enhancing his literary youthfulness as he does so. As for the man, he had written a note to himself already in 1907 of the impression he drew from reading *Les Fleurs du mal*: “Baudelaire was enclosed within a very tight circle of pleasure” (Cavafy 1983a: 42). Baudelaire was too establishment. In the same year, he took up residence in a flat sitting securely above a brothel on Alexandria’s dubious Rue Lepsius, where he would remain until his death. Keeley speculates quite plausibly that he “found it his kind of territory” (1996: 53). But whether or not Cavafy becomes the bohemian aestheticist decadent, the aestheticist decadent thus publicly becomes him well after his early flirtation with Baudelaire and during a period in which the “young Hermes” of “Sculptor of Tyana” (Cavafy 1975: 59) and the “most audacious erotic desires” of the Hellenistic Myrtias of “Dangerous Thoughts” (Cavafy 1975: 71) would have been read by any up-to-date reader as telling allusions to what was then just coming to be known no longer as “inversion” but “homosexuality” (cf. Eribon 1999: 55–57).

Yet, the Cavafy thus located does not in every respect behave as he should. The “I” of “Understanding” is a decadent ego entirely worthy of Rimbaud (Cavafy 1975: 161). But as we have already seen, the voice in the poems is not as consistently aestheticist or decadent as it is purist. The purism of such encomia as “Of Colored Glass” (1975: 253) or “Anna Dalassini” (277) or “In Sparta” (291) is not aesthetic but moral. The purist moralisation of the “child of love” in “Days of 1896” ends with a judgment that is counter-decadent: “without hesitation putting/ the pure sensuality of his pure flesh / above his honor and reputation. / Above his reputation? But society, / totally narrow-minded, had its values all wrong” (1975: 279). All these are later additions to Cavafy’s oeuvre, but as Sara Ekdawi has argued convincingly, the latter poem, likely a gesture to Wilde, is a thematically precise echo of poems written before 1900, including the celebrated “Walls” (Ekdawi 1993: 299). It might be reconciled easily enough with the “hedonism” that permeates many of Cavafy’s sensual poems; but the celebration of the dignified sacrifice of the self in “In Sparta” (and not only there) remains recalcitrant. If not a transgressive decadent, then an ascetic: If Cavafian purism allows for the reconciliation of these alternatives, it allows for a reconciliation that is itself largely “aesthetic,” largely formal. It does nothing to diminish their substantive incompatibility. Formally, Cavafy’s oeuvre arguably speaks with one voice. Substantively, it does not.

Autobiographically, this rupture, this schiz is the correlate of anxieties and insecurities and doublings of vision that are no doubt psychologically very real. Structurally, it suggests positional bifurcations and paradoxes the nagging vexations of which Cavafy’s persistent ambivalence toward his publicity and his public particularly underscores. The bifurcations

and paradoxes at issue emerge spectrally and virtually at the very moment that Cavafy steps into the literary field. They loom all the larger as his tenure within it lengthens. They are particular manifestations of a far more general possibility: that the occupation of or assignment to a subject-position leaves its holder vulnerable to what Foucault calls “dividing practices” – techniques or procedures that either divide the subject within himself or divide him off from others and so “objectivise him” (2000: 326). The subject thus made object is not *ipso facto* robbed of agency. Yet objectivisation is the first step toward partial or complete subjection. In it inheres a virtual subjection thus made available for actualisation. If the young Cavafy resorts to poetry as a far more effective means of protecting himself from being divided from his social status than spending the money he does not have, the older Cavafy writes and circulates poetry whose content puts him at risk – not merely virtual in the end – of being objectified as “another Wilde.” Malanos, the most psychoanalytically inclined of Cavafy’s biographers, traces to the poet’s fear of being exposed as the invert or homosexual he never called himself the extremity of his self-consciousness, his “neurotic hypersensitivity,” his morbidity, his overarching concern “for at least thirty years” with how “to keep conspiracy, the enemy, at a distance” (1957: 52–53). But then why did he write and, from 1911 forward, make ever more public his “sensual” verses?

POLITICISATION

In minor literature, “everything is political” (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 30). This boldly categorical pronouncement does not entail that all of minor literature is politically “partisan” in the narrow sense of that term. It does not entail that the minor writer is incapable of “political neutrality,” as that term is usually understood; in the exemplary Kafka, “there is never *critique*” (1975: 84; emphasis in original). It instead entails that minor literature is not a literature of transcendence. It does not transcend the plane of the actual world in which individual, historically particular human beings live out their lives. (Minor literature is thus not “humanist,” in at least some of the senses given to that elusive term.) The plane of that world – which is this, our world – is for Deleuze and Guattari political ineluctably and patently. It is “political” in being a place of relations of force, of hierarchical and imperative systems, of the exercise of power and of resistance to its exercise, in and through language first of all (43). This is why a theory of minor literature demands a sociology. It is also the rationale for Deleuze and Guattari’s often misunderstood distinction between the major and the minor treatment of the “individual affair”.

In the “great” literatures ... *the individual affair* (familial, conjugal, etc.) tends to join with other affairs, the social milieu serving as environment and background; so well that none of these Oedipal affairs is indispensable in particular, none absolutely necessary, but

instead that all of them “unite” in a large space. Minor literature is entirely different: its cramped space makes every individual affair branch immediately onto the political. The individual affair thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, enlarged under the microscope because an altogether different history teems within it. It is in this sense that the familial triangle is connected to other triangles – commercial, economic, bureaucratic, juridical – that determine its values. (1975: 30)

What is at issue is not an aesthetic liability that would prevent a work of minor literature from becoming a classic. What is at issue are rather the features of the openings that minor literature has to pursue. They are “cramped.” They are narrow, or interstitial. They require maneuvering. They permit passage, but a passage that is never entirely free.

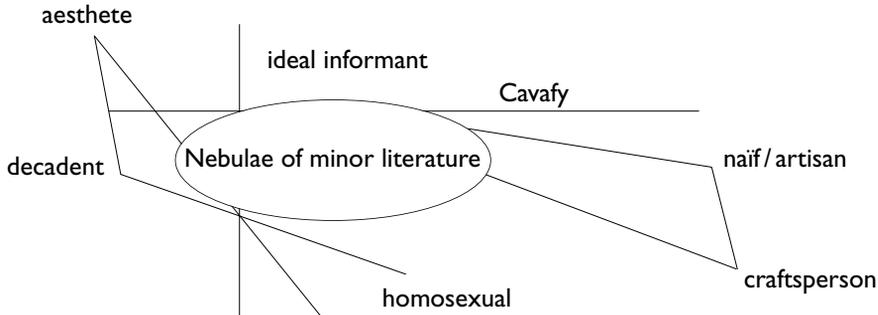
There is no need to decide whether or not Cavafy was a crypto-Marxist in order to find his oeuvre in accord with the principle that human beings make their own histories but in circumstances not of their own choosing. Cavafy is a poet of people – some of whom actually lived, others of his own devising – caught up in the circumstances in which they find themselves, sometimes awkwardly and unwisely, sometimes courageously and without illusion (cf. Sareyannis 1983 [1949]). Setting aside the paralysed narrator of the Cavafian geometry of oppression, the negative extreme of the poetic populace might be occupied by Hellenistic Orophernis, prince-in-exile, brief king, exile again, failed strategist on whom it dawned one day that “through his mother Antiochis / and that old grandmother Stratoniki/ he too was connected with the Syrian crown, / he too almost a Selefkid. / For awhile he gave up lechery and heavy drink, / and ineptly, half-dazed, / tried to start an intrigue, do something, come up with a plan; / but he failed pitifully and that was that” (115). Or it might be occupied by the anonymous “son of a misused, poverty-stricken sailor (from an island in the Aegean sea)” who worked for an ironmonger in the Alexandria of Cavafy’s own day. Wayward but beautiful son, who would “sell his body for a half-crown or two” in order to acquire “a tie for Sunday.” The “great Alexandria / of ancient times” might have erected a statue in his honor. Cavafy’s contemporary city did not, and the boy himself, “thrust into that poor ironmonger’s shop, / overworked, harassed, given to cheap debauchery, / he was soon used up” (305). The positive extreme might be occupied by the guards of Thermopylae or the soldiers of the Achaian League, by Kratisiklia sailing off to her death in Ptolemaic Egypt or Dimitrios Sotir, who could retain his courage though “everything he’d hoped for turned out wrong” (191). It might even be occupied by the poet, by Pygmalion himself – this Alexandrian, this odd element in a mixed and seamy cosmopolis in the backwaters of the “great” powers, this Marco Polo of the interstices separating one empire from another, past and present. Between Orophernis and Pygmalion, the Cavafian atlas of the living and the dead records the intersection between the members of the greater and lesser chain of human being and the circum-

stances that define their liberties and their restrictions. Antony – the would-be hero, wrong in date and place and insight, man of too much passion – strides its Tropic of Cancer. Apollonius of Tyana – sage, magus, alleged worker of miracles, pagan double of the Nazarene (195) – strides its Tropic of Capricorn. Hot and cold; warm and cool: these are the thermal gradients of Cavafy's political cartography of the human. It includes the all too human colonies of the ignorant utopiasts of liberty and counter-colonies of the cynical dystopiasts of bondage. It is a cartography of established self-deception. It is also a cartography of the proleptic lines of flight that lead to the illuminations of a journey of principle into the face of death.

ART AND LIFE: CAVAFY AND HIS DOUBLES

The answer to the question of why Cavafy wanted to write – needed to write – and to publish his homoerotic poems surely does not lie in some half-secularised disposition to confess, which would be plausible only had Cavafy been raised in anything resembling an atmosphere of Catholic or Protestant piety. Nor does it lie merely in some disposition to contrariness – whether “Greek” or bohemian as the case may be. It lies more precisely, I think, in Cavafy's having been raised (if by no means intentionally) and having come to take on what I have proffered as the distinct burdens of every potential writer of minor literature and then – becoming an actual writer of minor literature in the process – to deterritorialise them. Cavafy was sociologically destined (which isn't quite the same thing as being theologically predestined) to occupy not one but two distinct and mutually dissonant positions within a literary field that was in his lifetime solidly under Western European control. The first of these is a triangulation of the aesthete, the decadent and the homosexual. The second is a triangulation of the spatial, temporal and geographical kilter (or Forsteresque “slant”; cf. Forster 1983 [1923]: 18) at which every colonised subject – thus provincialised and objectivised – stands from the colonising metropolis: out of place; out of date; out of sight. At its most extreme (and most heteronomous), at the far lower right of the Bourdieusian diagram, the latter triangle encloses the pure exotic, whose artistic representative is the “native craftsperson”. Somewhat less extreme, it encloses the native artisan or even the native artist, the interethnic analogue of the intraethnic “naïve,” the artist-object who is constituted as an artist by the aesthetic field itself (cf. Bourdieu 1993: 176). Least extreme, nearer the point on the diagram at which the vertical and horizontal axes intersect, the triangle is the habitation of what I am afraid must be characterised as the “ideal informant” – the repository of his or her people's lore, the source of mythology and history, the native who can (and who is thus asked to) tell the story of his people, tell their secrets, tell their triumphs and their humiliations, the sage,

the medicine woman, the elder chief, the educated genteel none too wealthy, none too rebellious member of an outlying elite whose proclivities may well fuel his paranoia and his paranoia his powers of social observation all in turn. His intraethnic analogues are the realists and naturalists of the literary field, from the intellectual novelist to the investigative and “literary” journalist. Cavafy does not become the journalist (though Liddell reports that he worked as one briefly before securing his post at the Irrigation Office). The literary field “asks” him to speak as it has asked so many other colonised applicants to the literary field to speak the truth and the whole truth about his people, to craft his voice as the voice of the truth of his people, to be their sage and their memorialist, their conjurer and their typical peasant. Cavafy does not become the ideal informant, but the ideal informant becomes Cavafy.



In his dual guise, his substantively dual triangulation, Cavafy appears to his early English-speaking literary advocates an integrated figure, of a piece. Thus conflated, he allows of appropriation as just the sort of “Greek revival” for whom such roving inquirers as Forster and W.H. Auden are looking. Cavafy’s generational juniors but his literary seniors, Forster and Auden write of their discovery in a timbre whose prevailing warmth cannot entirely drown out an unintended undercurrent of condescension. As Peter Bien has remarked, their regard of Cavafy is both interested and selective (Bien 1990: 74–75). They think they see a learned, cosmopolitan, poetical, pedigreed Hellenic homosexual. What they do not see is that Cavafy, the flâneur masquerading as ideal informant who loiters on Rue Lepsius and roams the backstreets and sails the waters of Alexandria’s mingled pasts, deploys the fragments of innocent and sublime passion across which he stumbles to disrupt the oppressive triangle that binds the aesthete and the decadent and the homosexual into a single hothouse species. Interior to the oeuvre, Cavafy’s “mythic method” does not effect a continuity between “homosexuality” in the Alexandrian present and “homosexuality” in one or another of its pasts. It effects a continuity instead between homoerotic desire in the present and homoerotic desire in the past. What thus steps into the foreground of the

“unlimited fields of immanence” (Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 93 and 154) of Cavafy’s poetic cosmos is not a subject but a force. It is a force that comes with all its aesthetic and moral potential and with all its aesthetic and moral danger intact.⁴ It does not, however, come with an attendant standard physiology. It does not come with a standard psychology, either. Nor does the poetry show any inclination to make up for the resulting lack – nor to register what is missing as a lack. Cavafy did not need to read Foucault to learn that homosexuality was a sexological construction of his own lifetime. Whether as provincial or as cosmopolitan skeptic, he seems never to have taken the homosexual for granted – naturally or sociologically. The homosexual is not “under erasure” in his poetry. He or she or it simply isn’t there. What charges the poetry instead are (homo)erotic intensities, pure and diluted, on which it might dwell at once as ethical and experiential *askêsis* and as ethical and experiential problem. Cavafy’s early advocates do not see that there is no homosexual in Cavafy’s oeuvre. Nor do they see that Cavafy, ontologist of purities and intensities masquerading as the decadent aestheticist homosexual, deploys the valorisation of the present to dissolve the mortar that holds together that triangle of provincialisation which simultaneously creates the colonised Other and places him or her or it behind and below. They do not see that the purism of Cavafy’s oeuvre is that of a tragicomic cosmopolis whose exemplary citizens – children of love and dowager queens – are indifferent to every barrier, every limitation, every excrescence of finitude, even the ineluctable finitude of death. They don’t see in the poet’s neurotic hypersensitivity a fine tuning of the refusal to participate in the practices that would divide him from himself and from others. They don’t see in his reluctance to cooperate in the translation of his poems into English even a trace of resistance to causes and categories and incarcerations that he did not want to be his own. They don’t see minor literature when it is there before their eyes.

A COLLECTIVE APPARATUS OF ENUNCIATION

The scribe of minor letters writes ineluctably and patently of individual matters grafted immediately onto immanent collective matters, which are always matters of power. The scribe of minor letters accordingly writes of matters that are neither those of a transcendent humanity, presiding over the entirety of the history that constitutes it, nor those of a select and privileged few, a pocket of humanity so privileged that it cannot recognise the restricted interstices, the dark tunnels and tight corridors of the ways out of the impasses that it has put into place as its own means of escape. The scribe of minor letters must devise, between the indiscriminate majority of the human and the discriminating but majoritarian exclusivity of the self-appointed aristocracy, a means of expressing the voice of the people, the audience real or potential, of which and perhaps for which it writes. He or she must

intervene into a major language in order to craft a “collective apparatus of enunciation” isomorphic with the voice of the real or potential audience of which or for which he or she writes. Plausibly enough, Deleuze and Guattari can see only two basic alternatives for the design of such a “machine of expression.” The minor writer can “artificially enrich” the language in which he writes, “pump it up with all the resources of a symbolism, an oneirism, of an esoteric meaning, of a hidden signifier” (1975: 34). James Joyce is credited as a particularly successful case in point (35). In the twentieth century – in Latin America, in the Soviet bloc and in Greece (Andriotis-Baitinger 1994/1995, 1999) – the surrealists and magical realists are more significant in number, but often show the strain of that “desperate effort at symbolic reterritorialisation” that Deleuze and Guattari themselves diagnose in some of the more Cabalistic and esoteric of the Czechoslovakian Jewish writers who were Kafka’s contemporaries (34). The other method is Kafka’s own invention as, in a different stylistic realisation, it will later be Samuel Beckett’s. Its trajectory leads ever further into deterritorialisation, but “in high sobriety (*à force de sobriété*).” It opposes “a purely intensive use of language to each and every symbolic, or significant, or even signifying usage.” It arrives “at a perfect and non-formed voice [*expression*], an intense material voice” (1975: 35).

Michael Pieris diagnoses Cavafy’s poetic trajectory as a “gradual romantic, Parnassian, symbolist evolution toward an absolutely personal kind of visionary realism” (1989: 274). Few of his other serious readers would be likely to object to such a formulation, though Jusdanis appropriately emphasises methodological alternatives to the sort of organicism that Pieris favors (Jusdanis 1987: xvi). In any case, the romantic and symbolist borrowings of Cavafy’s earlier poetry are plain. Diana Haas (1984) links them to the poet’s broader interest in the European esoteric movement, which was less a movement than a syncretic olio of predominantly Gentile Cabalism that came closely on the heels of the final phases of the epistemological marginalisation of Christianity. It could entertain magic, spiritism, the revival of Pythagorean and Egyptian mysticism, and an inspirationist conception of poetic genius all at once. Through Baudelaire and other French enthusiasts, it incorporated Edgar Allen Poe’s proto-surrealist methodology of the provocation of horror. Through Baudelaire’s translation of Poe, which made its way to Alexandria, it inspired Cavafy’s only attempt at a short story, “In Broad Daylight” [*Is to fos*] (Cavafy 1983b; Haas 1984: 217). With G. W. Bowersock (1983), Haas further stresses Cavafy’s enduring interest in and admiration of Apollonius of Tyana, the pagan Jesus whose fellow “sages” and “miracle workers” are common and frequent company in the poetry until about 1915 (Haas 1984: 219–22; cf. Cavafy 1963: 51–65). A wise if half-stifled “soothsayer” [*mandis*] appears in “On the March to Sinopi,” published in 1928 (Cavafy 1975: 303), but neither Apollonius nor other magicians make more than a single appearance from that point forward. Haas’ wry conclusion: that Cavafy has “come to the realisation that he has surpassed the magician in

power” and that his “loss of faith in magic only confirms his absolute faith in poetry” itself (1984: 223). As Anton has noted, Cavafy seems to have believed with unflagging conviction from about 1905 forward that he was blessed with poetic genius (Anton 1995: 43). Haas is very likely correct in suggesting that his vision of the poet is an esotericist and mantic vision throughout his career (cf. also Charalambidou-Solomi 1996/1997).

Cavafy’s broader vision, however, and his stylistics, and his voice – these are another matter. To my knowledge, none of his published readers have yet approached him with the question of Deleuze and Guattari’s two methods in mind. Unwittingly near to discerning in Cavafy an “intense material voice” is Joseph Epstein, who declares the poet a “freak of literature” (together with Borges, Lampedusa and Svevo [1994: 15]) and regards the poetry of his poetry as residing in “the absence of metaphor” (1994: 19). Yet, Epstein is quick to add that “Cavafy’s poems are free from metaphor for the very good reason that each of his poems is a metaphor unto itself” (19), thus preserving the corpus for a criticism that would presume any poetry worthy of the name to be a machine of figural expression, a tropological technology. A majority of readers in any event agree that from about the turn of the twentieth century forward, Cavafy’s poetic writing begins to take on more of the expressive economy of high tropological sobriety that will become tenets of the mission if not always the practices of literary modernism. It is hardly irrelevant that even at the beginning of his published career he has already abandoned much of the esoteric artifice of *katharevousa* in favor of a linguistic collage whose primary fabric is demotic. Perhaps it is not irrelevant – though certain to offend some of his admirers – that in a substantial portion of the poems in which one might expect the greatest tropological subtlety and complexity one encounters startlingly flat-footed formulicity instead. I rush to Keeley for support, and precisely to his well-illustrated opinion that Cavafy seems to have required “some years” in order to harvest for his erotic poetry the “proper objective correlatives for the emotion he felt and wished to convey” (1996: 67). He notes especially the abstraction and lack of specificity of many of Cavafy’s descriptions of the erotic encounter or fantasy; he notes the poet’s habit, persisting even in the later poems, of resorting to “general and hyperbolic” terms to define (male) physical beauty (68). Keeley’s gentle complaints are in fact consistent with any number of other readers who ascribe to the now near-truism that Cavafy was not a “born poet” but instead made himself one. Advocates of that position typically point, however, not to Cavafy’s increasing skill as a tropologist, but – with Keeley (68) – to his increasing skill at dramatic *mise-en-scène*. If Epstein’s Cavafy is still susceptible to being approached as an allegorist, Keeley’s Cavafy, more the modernist, is seeking not figural archetypology but concrete evocation and seeking above all the concrete evocation of “feeling.” Deleuze and Guattari: Kafka’s method, Beckett’s method “proceeds by dint of dryness [*sécheresse*]

and sobriety, of willed poverty, pressing deterritorialisation to the point that only intensities subsist" (1975: 35). Cavafy, in his "Ars Poetica," in 1903:

It may also very well happen that the guess work or rather the intellectual insight into the feelings of others may result in the delineating of more interesting intellectual facts or conditions, than the mere relation of the personal experience of one individual. Moreover – though this is a delicate matter – is not such study of others and penetration of others part of what I call "personal experience"? Does not this penetration – successful or not – influence the individual thought and create states of mind? (in Anton 1995: 341)

Cavafy as poet-machinist, maker of the psyche: whether or not the conjurer grows more confident of his powers as he ages, he seems ever more confident of his capacity successfully to deploy his technology of intensification upon himself. He will write of Alexandria, that unlimited field of immanence in which he has resided for so many decades: "The setting of houses, cafés, neighborhood / that I've seen and walked through years on end: / I created you while I was happy, while I was sad, / with so many incidents, so many details. / And, for me, the whole of you has been transformed into feeling" (317). Joycean Cavafy? Kafkan or Beckettian Cavafy? Better, in the end, not to force his methods to take sides. Better to cast him as a quantum, a particle-wave, filling within the perimeters of his orbit all possible positions at one and the same time.

NOTES

- 1 Here and throughout, translations of this text are my own.
- 2 Here and throughout, I follow Keeley and Sherrard's translation of all of the poems included in Cavafy 1975.
- 3 The translation is slightly modified. The German text is cited in Deleuze and Guattari 1975: 23-24.
- 4 This does not appear to be what the editors of the special commemorative edition of *The Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* have in mind when they insist that Cavafy is "gay" and attribute to him a "specifically homosexual strategy of liberation and historical consciousness" (Editors 1983: 6; cf. Malkoff 1987: 202)

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