CP Cavafy and the Poetics of the Innocent Form
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Abstract

In this short essay we are interested neither in genetic or constructivist theories about homosexual behaviour nor in their application to Cavafy’s poetry; we are simply interested in addressing the issue of how Cavafy constituted the homosexual within his subjectivity and how he represented it with his poetry. More specifically, we will discuss the formal representations he chose to employ in order to make each one of his poems chronicles of the creative need that generated them and, at the same time, we will attempt to problematise the homosexual as a literary dimension in his work. However, we don’t in any way wish to hypo statise and substantify the particularity of his behaviour or to transform it into a “core-quality” of being, as an essential element of his existence. The homosexual in Cavafy’s poems is the specific expression of the need for self-realisation, as every erotic behaviour indeed is; but the actualisation of this need takes place in given social formations and spatial frames which essentially make its representation a symbol of lived experience and temporal self-understanding – and in this Cavafy’s poems map the territory of the homosexual representation in its own terms, in opposition to the dominant forms of heterosexist or hetero-imitative modes of symbolic articulation.

Full Text:

Cavafy’s father was an importer-exporter whose business responsibilities frequently led him to the port city of Liverpool, England. Cavafy’s father died in 1870, and the business he left in Alexandria proved insufficiently profitable for Cavafy’s mother and eight siblings. The family consequently moved to Liverpool, where the eldest sons assumed control of the family’s business operations. Cavafy lived in England for much of his adolescence, and developed both a command of the English language and a preference for the writings of William Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde. Cavafy’s older brothers mis