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“Made just like me”: The homosexual Cavafy and the poetics of sexuality
by Dimitris Papanikolaou (review)

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perceptions of Constantinople (Tsarigrad, as it was known in Russia) and its crucial position within the nineteenth-century Russian political agenda (Tina Georgieva).

Although the chapters are varied in both approach and theme, certain emphases recur. For example, most chapters destabilize or challenge entrenched clichés and nationalist stereotypes in both Bulgarian and Greek historiographies. To some extent, the volume's content mirrors Nadia Danova's own contributions to the fields of intellectual and political history, even though recently she expanded her research to include socioeconomic themes (which issues some of the chapters do likewise explore). And yet within this versatility and high productivity, Danova is one of the scholars who have researched Greek-Bulgarian relations beyond antagonisms, exploring cultural transfers and daily social practices. She also heralded studies on the image/perception of the Other, or so-called *imagology*, in Bulgarian historiography, another topic that figures prominently in this collection. Many chapters in this volume likewise escape the narrow nationalist framework and interpret historical past within broader Ottoman and European contexts.

This collection is an informative and valuable contribution to the study of cultural and national identities, modernization, and sociopolitical and economic transformations of the Ottoman Balkans, the post-Ottoman nation-states, and the post-Cold War conditions. By promoting academic dialogue, many authors not only address issues considered until recently inconvenient by their respective national historiographies but also offer critical interpretations to some sanitized renditions of the recent past. The book has a wider significance for the entangled history of Southeast Europe, Ottoman studies, and nationalism and thus would be of interest to students and researchers in those interdisciplinary fields.

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Dimitris Papanikolaou (Δημήτρης Παπανικολάου), «*Σαν κ' εμένα καμωμένοι*». *Ο ομοφιλόφιλος Καβάφης και η ποιητική της σεξουαλικότητας* ["Made just like me": The homosexual Cavafy and the poetics of sexuality]. Athens: Patakis. 2014. Pp. 358. Paper €17.

E.M. Forster famously described Cavafy as "standing absolutely motionless at a slight angle to the universe" (1923, 91). This book unpacks the historical coordinates that

shaped this “angle” and proposes sexuality as a central force in Cavafy’s poetics. Sexuality, the book argues, is indispensable for understanding Cavafy’s modern sensibility, his historical consciousness, the subject’s place in history, the production of bodies, memory, and the dynamics of self and other. Foregrounding Cavafy’s erotic poems, the book explores how they relate to a modern discourse on sexuality. In Cavafy’s time, homosexual lives become a popular topic in European literature, in autobiographical accounts, and in medical-juridical discourses on sexuality (what Michel Foucault in *The History of Sexuality* calls “sexology”; 2012, 5). Cavafy’s “angle to the universe” is formed by renegotiating these discourses, thereby yielding a collective “homo-biography” (215), to use Papanikolaou’s own term, and addressing a future community of people “made just like me.” The latter phrase, which forms the book’s title and was used by Cavafy both in a personal note and in his poem “Hidden Things,” underlines Cavafy’s poetic attempt to draw the contours of a collective experience of homosexuality. But the emphasis could equally be on “made” (*καμωμένοι*), since the book takes up a Foucauldian notion of the subject as historically constructed through discursive practices of power/knowledge, yet not deprived of agency.

The book’s title demonstratively projects Cavafy as homosexual. The significance of this qualification lies less in indicating the book’s thematic focus and more in marking its analytical lens—its “analytical challenge,” in the author’s words (13). Papanikolaou’s work is equally indebted to Foucault’s poststructuralist thought and to queer theory as it has taken shape since the early 1990s in the works of leading figures like Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. The book elaborately presents the latter theoretical framework, which has been amply employed by literary studies in the Anglo-American context for more than two decades, but which has been rather underrepresented in literary criticism in Greece or often received with suspicion as nonserious, minor, or ideologically tainted. Papanikolaou’s application of the categories “gay” and “queer” to Cavafy may strike some as anachronistic. The term “gay” was after all not in circulation as a signifier for homosexuality in Cavafy’s time (14); nor was, of course, the term “queer”—an offensive term for homosexuals that was affirmatively reappropriated by queer theory to theorize deviant subjectivities and positionalities of resistance vis-a-vis the normative. But the book endorses this “productive anachronism” (14) as essential in unraveling both Cavafy’s relationality to an emerging discourse on homosexual subjectivity in his time and his work’s importance in the articulation of homosexual identities throughout the twentieth century. As a strategy, this anachronism is also guided and justified by the nonlinear temporality of Cavafy’s own work, in which past, present, and future constantly (re)shape each other. In line with Cavafy’s self-description as a “poet of the future generations” (Cavafy 2010, vii), his work *invites* its reading through “preposterous” theoretical vocabularies—a term I use here, following Mieke Bal, for an act of reversal that “puts the chronologically first (pre-) as an aftereffect behind (post-) its later recycling” (Bal 1999, 6–7).

The book converses with different interlocutors: Cavafy and his writings, Cavafy’s critics, and homosexual readers who found in his poetry ways to tell their own story. The book also scrutinizes the “angles” from which traditional criticism in Greece framed Cavafy’s homosexuality, trying to pathologize or desexualize it. Papanikolaou differentiates his approach from this tradition and places his book in a line of studies on Cavafy’s homosexuality circulating in the English-speaking world since roughly

the 1980s, such as those by Margaret Alexiou (1983, 1985), Vrasidas Karalis (2003), Christopher Robinson (1988, 2005), George Syrimis (2003), and James Faubion (2003) (73–74). Thus, although neither the book's theoretical framework nor the topic is new, the book has undeniable significance as a systematic introduction of this approach in literary criticism in Greece, where theoretical discourses tend to arrive with a time-lapse. The author lays out his approach in an accessible way, allowing nonspecialist readers who like a challenge to engage with it, too.

The first chapter probes the ways in which traditional Greek criticism—from Timos Malanos (1957) to Giorgis Giatromanolakis (2003)—“de-homosexualized” (53) Cavafy: casting his homosexuality as a problem or an obstacle to his canonization as a national poet, toning it down, or denying its centrality in Cavafy's poetics. The book's polemical tone against dominant Cavafian criticism in Greece and against the model of the “national philologist” (35) may risk dividing readers into two, opposed camps. To those who subscribe to the book's theoretical premises, Papanikolaou would be preaching to the choir, while those more attached to national philological traditions would be alienated by the book's critical tone. This risk, however, is less present today than in previous decades, as current Greek literary criticism is probably more receptive to Papanikolaou's approach.

Papanikolaou performs a kind of scholarship that makes no secret of the critic's investment in the argument. He projects scholarly discourse, however, not as purely subjective, but as *intersubjective*—a term that I use to underline the social and historical dimension of every personal act of writing. Employing a writing style in which the critic's “I” is emphatically present, the book casts the critic as a historically and ideologically situated subject. If Cavafy, according to the book, is the poet of “the vulnerable self” (68) the critic also emerges as a vulnerable subject. By debunking the fiction of an objective scholarly discourse and the non-sense in its purported common sense, Papanikolaou also invites an exploration of the ideological underpinnings of Cavafy's dominant reception as a national poet. Consequently, the opposition between a neutral critic (the “national” critic) and a biased critic with an agenda (the “gay” critic) is deflated. Does the book have an agenda? Yes. Does the author have personal stakes in the argument? Absolutely. But the book shows that any act of criticism involves ideological, personal, even libidinal investment. Acknowledging this does not impair the scientificity of an argument but promotes critical dialogue.

The second chapter delves into Western European discourses on sexuality popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Cavafy, Papanikolaou convincingly shows, is influenced both by British Aestheticism and the French Decadent movement, but also by medical and juridical discourses that studied confessional accounts of homosexual lives, pathologizing them, yet simultaneously shaping the homosexual as a new type of subject. Cavafy's poetry, especially after 1910, absorbs and recasts all these tendencies. He writes about homosexuality in open, realistic terms, but without eliminating aestheticism and a classicist admiration for male beauty, and he speaks back to the oppressive discourse of sexology by using this discourse to understand the homosexual self as produced through practices of power and control.

Chapter 3 scrutinizes strategies of concealment and disclosure of homosexuality as an organizing principle in Cavafy's poetry. Reversing a traditional valuation of concealment as disempowering and disclosure as emancipatory, the book reads them

as complementary forces, simultaneously at work in Cavafy's poetry. Strategies of control and restriction, according to Foucault, tend to (re)produce that which they try to confine. Similarly, the concealment of homosexuality in Cavafy *produces* eroticism, decenters fixed identities, and empowers the subject that it hides.

Acknowledging the inextricability of Cavafy's writings and life, Chapter 4 takes on the issue of biography in a way that differs from traditional biographist approaches. Cavafy's life is seen as a text, multiply constructed and narrated by both the poet and literary critics. The poet's life and writings are parts of a discursive nexus that connects them with other lives, past and future. Specifically, the chapter shows how the negative inscription of the homosexual body at the time of biological racism, eugenics, theories of ethnic purity, and taxonomies turns into a collective "homo-graphy" (266) in Cavafy, one which is based on recognition, community, and desire. Cavafy, Papanikolaou aptly argues, narrativizes this collective experience without emptying out or universalizing the personal and the historically conditioned character of that experience.

The poems featuring the word "Days . . ." in their titles are read as exemplifying Cavafy's "homographical" strategies (266). Through these readings, Papanikolaou also addresses the power relation between the poet and young, male characters in his poems, who appear objectified—dead, sick, silent, sacrificed, or on display. But he also reads the poet's relation to these characters differently, as signaling an ethics of responsibility and care for the other. These men's objectification is never fixed, complete, since the Cavafian text remains radically open, always contingent on past and future forces that change their claims on the poem's present. The reflection on the relation between poet and characters also raises the question of Papanikolaou's own relation to the poems that he reads. Throughout the book, Papanikolaou showcases his arguments through readings of lesser- and better-known erotic poems, which draw the reader in with their creativity and boldness. Nevertheless, the readings at times seem tailored to confirm the book's theoretical framework rather than being allowed to resist aspects of this framework or to guide the formation of arguments.

The last chapter turns to different generations of homosexual readers of Cavafy's poems, which found in them a source of consolation and self-expression. The book is, in that sense, also an account of Papanikolaou's own mode of relating to Cavafy. Constantine Giannaris's 1990 movie on Cavafy, *Trojans*, discussed in this chapter, functions as a filmic analogue to Papanikolaou's project. As a response to the life that the Cavafian text invites, Giannaris's film, Papanikolaou argues, projects the director's construction of the poet through Giannaris's own life experiences.

Following the implications of the book's argument, there is no real Cavafy behind the layers of his reception. To talk about the "national" Cavafy, the anticolonial or "political" Cavafy (as Stratis Tsirkas did [1971]), or the "homosexual Cavafy" are performative acts that produce Cavafy anew, constantly transfiguring the poet's "archive" (*passim*). Papanikolaou proposes a dynamic notion of the Cavafian archive that exceeds the collection of texts that Cavafy authored. This archive, which comprises the poet's life, writings, and shifting reception, never stays identical-to-itself: each reading and recasting of Cavafy's work discloses the difference of the original itself, which is always in the process of becoming. As part of this moving archive, Papanikolaou's "homosexual Cavafy" provides a dynamic angle for revisiting the poet's project and its shifting address.

The Cavafy of this book is not “absolutely motionless,” as Forster saw him. To the dominant image of a passive, almost paralyzed, old poet-observer, trapped in his homosexuality by social restrictions, Papanikolaou counterprojects another Cavafy: dynamic, radical, even revolutionary, poetically transfiguring oppressive discourses towards affirmative conceptions of the homosexual self.

Although the book indeed appears to propose sexuality as a key to Cavafy’s poetics, it does not intend to turn this key into a new, all-encompassing narrative in Cavafian criticism. Yet, if Cavafy’s poetics of sexuality permeates his whole poetic project, as the book claims, what is somewhat missing is a testing of this argument in readings of historical poems in which the erotic element is not manifestly present. Perhaps this is something a future study could address.

The book shifts Cavafy from a major to a minor key: from a (national) poet of the “greater Hellenism,” as George Savidis called him (1985), to a poet of what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari termed “minor literature” (1986). Their description of minor literature fully applies to Cavafy’s poetry as it emerges from Papanikolaou’s study: issued from the margins, this poetry makes “the individual concern . . . all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating in it”; it thus creates the possibility “to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (1986, 17).

In the multitude of studies on Cavafy, the real bet is to present new questions and frameworks that illuminate the poet’s work differently, making it part of our present. This book wins that bet. As the first book-length study of Cavafy through the lens of queer theory in Greece, it is bound to become a reference point for future research.

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Evthymios Papataxiarchis (Ευθύμιος Παπαταξιάρχης), editor, *Πολιτικές της καθημερινότητας. Σύνορο, σώμα και ιδιότητα του πολίτη στην Ελλάδα*. Athens: Alexandria. 2014. Pp. 544. €23.

Greece's debt crisis compounded by the refugee crisis brings to the fore matters of identity, belonging, deservingness, as well as inclusion and exclusion, which implicate both internal and external others. This condition of apparent dis-order (most often cast as a state of exception) and the multiple official and unofficial responses and novel forms of mobilization that it engenders highlight difference as a key political factor, which plays out in the realm of everyday, embodied, experience-near life. Viewed through traditional, state-centered perspectives on politics, these issues and forms of engagement may seem rootless, spontaneous, and unexpected, or perhaps as local manifestations of global forces and trends. If we apply a broader lens to the domain of the political, however, as an arena of tension, contestation, and negotiation around various forms of difference, implicating both formal and informal processes and producing specific political subjectivities that shape experience, we can arrive at a significantly more nuanced, dynamic, historically contextualized, and empirically grounded approach to current Greek realities.

Evthymios Papataxiarchis's edited volume offers just such a timely and valuable perspective. Seeking to re-envision the political, this volume approaches various dimensions of politicized and politicizing difference appearing at the margins of formal and mainstream discourses, especially since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. While it focuses on pre-crisis subjects, the book offers an informative, indeed necessary, window into the complexity and transformation of Greek political realities and provides an important context to the here and now. As Papataxiarchis convincingly argues, the crisis catalyzed developments in an already fragmented political system, whose unifying rhetoric failed to account for and address a multitude of tensions, discontents, conflicts, and contradictions that shape and are shaped by lived experience. Difference has been