Nysret KRASNIQI
Department of Literature
Faculty of Philology
University of Pristina
31 George Bush St.
10 000 Pristina, Kosovo
nysretkrasniqi@uni-pr.edu

UDK 821.14.09 Kavafis.K.=111

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SEMA AND *SOMA* IN THE POEMS ABOUT DEATH BY CONSTANTINE P. CAVAFY

Abstract

The aim of this article is to analyse Constantine P. Cavafy's poems on death with the help of theoretical and hermeneutical literary principles and the interplay of the Greek words *sema* ("a grave") and *soma* ("the body"). The aim is to study their forms and symbolisms as one of the fundamental motifs of Cavafy's oeuvre. Simultaneously, the article will compare the poetic symbols with ancient philosophy on death (exemplified by Plato), as well as with the later authors' (for instance, Stéphane Mallarmé's) symbolistic considerations of death, which inspired Cavafy's, modern, poetry. Through a textual analysis of his poetry on death, the poet's influence and the sense of destruction he arouses in the reader will be explored. Furthermore, the article will focus on the thymotic power of his poetry, arguing that this author of historical heritage—that is, of the inheritance of Eros inheritance—is also an author of the inheritance of Thanatos.

Keywords: hermeneutics, reader response criticism, literary tradition, modernist poetry, death in poetry, *thymos*, Constantine P. Cavafy

Introduction

Constantine P. Cavafy (1868–1933), a poet of ancient Greek heritage (Κωνσταντίνος Πέτρου Καβάφης) and expression, is an icon of poetry or, in other words, is characterized as a strong poet. Having been resident in Constantinople, Liverpool, and Alexandria, Cavafy was a metrical master of the liberal iambic foot, with a thematic reliance on historicism (e.g., "The Glory of the Ptolemies," "Tomb of Eurion," or "Tomb of Ignatius"), homoeroticism (e.g., in his poems on the Alexandrian youths), and philosophy (e.g., "The Walls," "Thermopylae," or "The God Abandons Antony"). But "[s]trong poets are infrequent" (Bloom, *Map* 8, 9), since the aesthetic greatness of certain poets depends on their power to cope with the complex relationship between "influence and catastrophe" (Bloom, *Map* 10; Bloom, *Anxiety*; Bloom, *Western Canon*). What is more, influence is an inevitable phenomenon in a historical sense, because "no poet, no artist of any art has his full meaning alone," as "[h]is significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his reaction to the dead poets" (Eliot 15)—that is, in the sense of gnoseology of the poetic canon and the recognition of poets who have been able to culturally form us through the centuries. Above and beyond, it is a desire or an ideal to be distinguished as an authentic voice, with a goal to achieve "the literary sign through the philosophical game" (Derrida 351–70) in the mysterious space of poetry, with a precise intent of being incorporated into this canon's icon.

Taking into consideration previous scholarship on Cavafy's poetic opus, notably the works by Theoharis C. Theoharis (i.e., his novel translation of Cavafy's poetry in the collection *Before Time Could Change Them: The Complete Poems of Constantine P. Cavafy*, 2001) and Maria Margaronis ("Mixing History"), our hypotheses prognosticate a scientific contribution pertaining to an in-depth analysis of nine poems, predominantly dealing with the topic of catastrophe.

While catastrophe is a phenomenon of rebirth pursuant to this gnoseology or philosophy of knowledge, which can be attained if a lyrical subject, metaphorically speaking, rises, or comes from the dead to witness his idiosyncratic voice—that is, even his catastrophic emotion—in verse, in a particular poetic form. This phenomenon was similarly noted by the leading figure of symbolism, Stéphane Mallarmé, when he emphasized that "it is in front of the paper that the artist creates himself" (Lloyd 48), thus implying the creation as a form of personal death in the verses of poetry.

Cavafy has experienced and realized this phenomenon in his poems as a strong poet, who, metaphorically speaking, was associated with the phenomenon of death throughout his poetic life and was marked as a poet of death, or of the creation of poetic images of a lost emotion in the tradition similar to death. The French philosopher Maurice Blanchot describes Cavafy's emphasis of the essential loneliness of death with the following words: "The work is solitary: this does not mean that it remains uncommunicable, that it has no reader. But whoever reads it enters into the affirmation of the work's solitude, just as he who writes it belongs to the risk of this solitude" (*Space* 21).

Adhering to a hermeneutical cognitive principle, which protects the stance that the works of classical authors possess "the meaning of the author" but at different times also get "the meaning that the reader gives them" (Hirsch 1, 19), we will investigate influence and catastrophe, followed by the sense of loss in the tradition of some Cavafy's proems, recognizing their power to provide multiple significations and constant emotions, being a previously configured integral part of the Western canon (Bowra, *Stvaralački eksperiment*), which has the figurations of the forms of death in the poetic verses as the main thesis. Thus, multiple significations of Cavafy's verses stem from the author's consciousness, as this poet recalibrates the poetic expression on the principle that "poetry should change its character in order to retain its youth, even by entering into a creative experiment" (Bowra, *Nasleđe* 243).

The voices of the dead

In the philosophical tradition regarding the birth of script or writing, as well as the debates about literary creation, the philosophies are generally professed by Plato, who said for the writing that they are "a means of the remembering" (*Phaedrus* 68) and that poiesis is the only imitation of the metaphysical will or eidos. From this point of view, it emerges that poetry, however powerful it might be in its autonomous ideal, can be considered as a recreation that has an ideality of an artistic creation. Concerning such conscience, Cavafy did not promulgate creation but recreation, or a "literary writing of the second degree" (Genette 7), based on the philosophy of transtextuality. The philosophy of writing in the second degree certainly implies an awareness of the existence of paratexts, and Cavafy's paratext, essentially and symbolically speaking, is a historical awareness, from which the power of influence emerges as a source of death.

The voices of the dead, in the sense of an imaginary reflection, were so powerful in Cavafy's psyche that his poems cannot be interpreted without a high awareness of the history of antiquity, be it the story of the book or of mythology, which the author does not discriminate against. Moreover, he considers them as the versed idealized experiences—that is, as the important facts of the Western culture. This dreamlike ideal of poetic writing that was also investigated in the following verses of a poem entitled "Voices":

> Ideal voices and beloved
> of these who have died, or of those
> who are lost to us like the dead.
> Sometimes, within our dreams, they speak;
> sometimes, the mind can hear them in our thoughts.
> (*Collected Poems* 5, 3)

According to Cavafy, the ideal voices that originate from the dead are the reminiscences of dreams, which change into a pressure of thought, even according to the principle of historical recognition, which then becomes a part of life with the images and historical topoi, being realized in the author's "topophilia" poetry (Bachelard 9, 12). Topophilia marks the author's power to create the images that recognize and distinguish the poetic expression from memory to the benefit of poetry, which builds the poetry of image topoi that are not directly related to the past but are created by the current creative crisis, "forgetting" what could have happened—that is, being a forgetfulness that enables the credo in poietic images and spiritualities which should be presently studied on the basis of a topoanalysis, with the power of imagination.

This means that the author lives with the voices or images that originate from the dead. Consequently, it implies the author who remembers, not the author who creates. In the sense of influence, the author who remembers the events from the past recollects the topoi images, or topophilia. He recalls the influence of the dead voices, and the poetic creation crisis is investigated in the poem "The First Step," where we find the following verses:

> In order to set foot upon this step,
> you must be in your own right
> a citizen in the city of ideas.
> It is both difficult and rare
> to be made a citizen of that city.
> (*Collected Poems* 20, 8)

The awareness about the mystery of poetry, about its tradition, appears to be the first, upright step in a philosophical doubt, as well as a crisis experienced by a new author in relation to the old ones, for it is difficult to become a citizen among other preexistent citizens, the poets. In literature, we are used to know the symbolism of the City of God, the Holy City, the City of Sun, the City of Happiness, and the like, as metaphysical-religious concepts, even as the utopian premises of literature. Nevertheless, Cavafy targets the City of Poetry, which also possesses its sacredness, even as a view and inheritance of symbolism with regard to the art as a form of faith.

For a new author, the one who wants to become a part of the City of Poetry, the concept of art as a faith necessarily requires the recognition of previous standards, as well as a conquest of these standards. Situated in a historical time subsequent to the end of the poetry of Romanticism, Cavafy's first step in poetry was the integration of opposing elements into the romantic poetry. He removed the praise from a poetic expression, as was the case with the poem "Thermopylae," and added experimentation as the legacy of symbolism, exemplified in the poem "Ithaca."

The poem "Thermopylae" explores the elements of a romantic description, historical narrativity, and heroic tribute based on historical evidence, as well as a poetic discourse that slides toward the direction of metonymy. As such, we will emphasize that the author poetizes historical evidence in the following verses and is less immersed in a dreamlike memory:

> Honor to those who in their life
> set out and guard Thermopylae.
> Never wavering from duty;
> just and forthright in all their actions,
> though yet with mercy and compassion;
> generous when rich, and when
> poor, still in small measure generous,
> helping again, as they can;
> always speaking forth the truth,
> yet without malice for the deceitful.
> (*Collected Poems* 5–10, 11)

The architext of this poem is the historical narrative of Herodotus of Halicarnassus; moreover, we can interpret that such glory is devoted to three hundred Spartans, who by their loss, created the historical image of the tribute for resistance, social and individual cause, as a permanent requirement of human stoicism (*Histories* 6–225). Death is not the end or loss, and, furthermore, the cause of freedom is projected as a permanent revival. However, this mimetic philosophy of poetic creativity "is forgotten" in "Ithaca," in which we read the following verses:

> Always keep Ithaca in your mind.
>
> To arrive there is your final destination.
> But do not rush the voyage in the least.
> Better it last for many years;
> and once you're old, cast anchor on the isle,
> rich with all you've gained along the way,
> expecting not that Ithaca will give you wealth.
> (Cavafy, *Collected Poems* 25–30, 37)

From the point of view of a historical metonymy of "Thermopylae," poetry is passed to the philosophical and symbolic meditation of human immanence regarding the journey. The journey—that is, Ulysses' return to Ithaca observed as the homecoming of a Homeric figure of *Odyssey*—is now a semantic encoding being implied as the essence of every man, at any time and space, concerning the phenomenon of journey itself. The journey is life, but, as a figure, it can be perceived as a path toward death, toward tranquility. There are innumerable paths, but the journey is one and only and as such implies the immanence of human empirics. Consequently, Cavafy's philosophical query turns out to be the irony of life, as the *igitur* obeying.

Cavafy is not a poet of the *igitur*, but he writes poetry for the *igitur* state of death; he does not want to die in his youth because he wants to carry in his psyche a permanent phenomenon of death, a phenomenon that becomes an extraordinary motivation for his extraordinary poetic creativity (Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*). Thus, the phenomenon of death in this author's poetry is a powerful impulse and stimulus to poetize the life, because this author comprehends that only man possesses a "historical consciousness" (Heidegger, *Basic Writings* 126) and that death speaks to life, while the tombs are the human *sema* and *soma* and are thus the parts of our being in this world.

It seems that Cavafy speaks to the tombs figuratively, recalling his former life in its symbolism of eternity, experiencing a phenomenon which Harold Bloom calls the "anxiety of influence" (*Anxiety* xlvii). The tombs are the signs of an existence on the Earth that remain here for a long time, even as a testament of such an existence. The testaments of an existence transform into the extraordinary creative and reflective motifs, similar to those of Cavafy's. It seems that this phenomenon provokes an auctorial intent to hear the voices from the past and see the old images that become a part of poet's intentional imagination. This phenomenon, hypothetically philosophical, has also been noted by Susan Sontag, who says the following regarding a report about death in life in the context of literary creativity: "It is by means of images and sounds, not words that have to be translated by the imagination, that one can participate in the fantasy of living through one's own death and more, the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself" (*Against Interpretation* 149). Death is considered a tradition that the future poet fills with the motifs, but it does not guarantee an aesthetic success. An aesthetic success, however, is achieved when a young poet manages to challenge the aesthetic heritage, even if it pertains to the legacy of his ancestors. Cavafy recognizes this phenomenon; thus, he acknowledges that we must respect our ancestry by being true to it, but we must also simultaneously challenge it to secure our place within a poetry iconography, similar to the poem "The First Step." Likewise, the aesthetic power proving that "the poet will acquire his own identity and gain a place in tradition only if he successfully deviates from the past and forges a distinctive mode of expression" (Jusdanis 150) will result from this awareness.

The forms of death

Cavafy is a "poet of the old age" who writes motivated by a psychological phenomenon of the death drive, even in the form of the immanence of a lyric subject with regard to the repetition (Smith 51). Repetition is a psychological phenomenon conceived by Sigmund Freud, which is interconnected with Eros; nonetheless, Cavafy intentionally uses the repetition phenomenon as a topos that incorporates the death drive, or Thanatos, as its source.

As a lucid connoisseur of ancient philosophy, Cavafy necessarily possesses the topoi of Plato's philosophies (*Republic*) for the body and soul, especially for the tomb as a sign, which is a concept elaborated in Plato's *Phaedo* and *Cratylus* dialogues. It seems that Plato's concept asserting that "the body is the prison of the soul and that the true philosophers practice dying, and death is less terri-

ble to them than to any other man" (*Phaedo* 29) has continually preoccupied Cavafy, urging him to integrate the problems of *soma* and *sema* in his poietic images, which emerge in this form throughout the dialogue of Hermogenes and Socrates on the motivation or arbitrariness of names in the *Cratylus* dialogue:

> **Hermogenes:** But what shall we say of the next word?
>
> **Socrates:** You mean *soma* (the body).
>
> **Hermogenes:** Yes.
>
> **Socrates:** That may be variously interpreted; and yet more variously if a little permutation is allowed. For some say that the body is the grave (*sema*) of the soul which may be thought to be buried in our present life; or again the index of the soul, because the soul gives indications to (*semainei*) the body; probably the Orphic poets were the inventors of' the name, and they were under the impression that the soul is suffering the punishment of sin, and that the body is an enclosure or prison in which the soul is incarcerated, kept safe (*soma*, *sozetai*), as the name *soma* implies, until the penalty is paid; according to this view, not even a letter or the word need be changed.
>
> (Plato, *Cratylus* 2014b)

A philosophical duality of *sema* versus *soma* in the form of Plato's philosophy, which has traveled in time while maintaining the sense of tradition, is also validated by the insistence or by Cavafy's creative consent to coin the epigram's antique form, the one that originated from epitaphs. Within this creative philosophy, there are epitaphic-epigrammatic poems that relate to the graves, losses, and the mysteries of death, which assume a new form when entering the modern creative poet's laboratory—that is, a metonymic narrative linearity, at sight simple and explanatory, but one that takes a sudden turn in the end to suggest a philosophical question.

But is poetry indeed the aesthetics of a philosophical question? The poems of this nature are "Supplication," "The City," "Tomb of the Grammarian Lysias," "Tomb of Eurion," "Tomb of Ignatius," and the like. The portage of the tomb (*sema*) as a sign captures various philosophical reflections, generating the ongoing hermeneutics of what we call the "reader response criticism" (Iser 188; cf. Barthes *S/Z*), which, *inter alia*, implies a polyvalent reading of a literary text. This reading, when performed by a literary critic, is more of a "meaning-giver of literary text than finding the meaning of the literary text," and "hence to in-

terpret a text is not to give it a (more or less justified, more or less free) meaning, but on the contrary to appreciate what plural constitutes it" (Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* 5).

Implying the symbolism of the *sema* (grave) or the phenomenon of death in connection with this philosophy, it turns out that the grave in the poem "Supplication" is indeed the sea. Nevertheless, the sea, even as a contrast to the loss of an earthly sign (tomb), is replaced by the voice of Saint Mary—that is, it is manifested in the icon as a statement of the loss of a sign (tomb). It signifies the absence of the process of release with regard to the absolution of the spirit from the prison of the body. Besides, many spiritual icons experience a sense of loss just like this one or a paradox of Saint Mary's sorrow concerning the spiritual loss of a mother, which is in fact Cavafy's metaphysical expression that appears in the following form:

> The sea took a sailor into its depths.—
> His mother, unaware, goes to light
> a tall candle before the Virgin Mary,
> that he return soon and meet with fine weather—
> all the while turnings windward her ear.
> But as she prays and supplicates,
> the icon listens, solemn and sad, well aware
> that he'll never come back, the son she awaits.
> (*Collected Poems* 5, 7)

It is important to note that the phenomenon of death in this author's opus is investigated in its varying forms. While we may observe a description of the sea as a tomb in the poem "Supplication," in the poem "The City" a configuration of the tomb is the city, a topos which is not pictured as sociality and an image of life but as a destiny of permanent death and an attraction to it. The city, however, often permits the escape of a lyrical subject, an adventure, or the image of finding comfort somewhere else. Yet, it is projected as an attractive magma, which calls to retain its (metropolitan) part, or to merge into it. The following verses are therefore substantial:

> Just as you've wasted your life here,
> In this tiny niche, in the entire world you've ruined it.
> (Cavafy, *Collected Poems* 15, 29)

As for the epitaphs, which denote the tomb even in the title, we begin the poetry hermeneutics with the poem "Tomb of the Grammarian Lysias," in which the poet narratively describes the existence of Lysias' tomb in vicinity of the Beirut Library to consecrate at least three forms of death. The first is death as the loss of life of the linguist, Lysias, in letters and syllables (i.e., study as a permanent form of death); the second is death as a sign (tomb) of reality, which reflects the former physical existence of the body; and the third is a fundamental associative sign related to his presence close to the Library, which may figuratively be implied as a "tomb" in the form of an archive of bookish inheritance—that is, as a sign of the preservation of life after the deaths of the authors in their books, expressed by modern terminology as the "author's death," or as "The Death of the Author" ("La mort de l'auteur") in Barthes' 1967 essay (*Image-Music-Text* 148), as follows:

> Thus, his tomb will be seen and honoured by us,
> each time we make our way towards the books.
> (Cavafy, *Collected Poems* 5, 61)

In essence, the reverence paid to the tomb turns out to be the way of finding the book, or the homonymy of two cultural signs, the tomb and the book, which talk to us from the afterlife. In this author's philosophical concept, it is death that speaks more than life. The forms of death in Cavafy's poetry are realized by having a deep cultural awareness and knowledge, even as a legacy of rhetoric, which would later be seen as a structure for poetic composition. In the interior of these topic's forms, we notice a phenomenon of the "old young man or the young old man" (Curtius 80–101), as a permanent confrontation of the oldest juvenile. Nonetheless, in the poem "Tomb of Eurion," Cavafy applies the rhetorical topoi of the old young man, whereby we have the following substantially philosophical verses:

> In this most artfully ornate memorial—
> entirely built of syenite stone,
> covered with so many violets, so many lilies—
> the handsome Eurion is laid to rest.
> An Alexandrian youth tilted twenty-five.
> On his further' s side, of old Macedonian stock;
> from Jewish magistrates, his mother's lineage.

> He was a student of Aristocletius in philosophy,
> of Paros in rhetoric. The sacred scriptures
> he studied at Thebes. He wrote a history
> of the Arsinoite nome. That will, at least, survive.
> But we have lost the most precious of all—his living image,
> which had the semblance of an Apollonian vision.
> (*Collected Poems* 5–10, 61)

At the commencement of Cavafy's poetry, we find the topos of the grave, which is motivated by the descriptions of the syenite stone, violets, and lilies, as the signs of a memory of the life of the deceased Eurion. The topos of the age (i.e., twenty-five years), however, implies the power of his personality: in Cavafy's poetry, it influences a poetic narrative that has the sign of literary meme in its structure. A literary meme emphasizes the lineage of blood as a symbolic and human universality but, most importantly, appears actually to be the poetry of glory, of the topoi of the old young man, for the young Eurion mastered philosophy and rhetoric, studied sacred scriptures, and wrote the stories that would survive time itself. The point of poetry as a legacy of antiquity and medieval culture is precisely related to the paradox of the young age and wisdom (philosophy), which is the stage of the old age, to motivate the unusual, the sublime, and the eternal.

Nevertheless, Cavafy's style always targets an unexpected shift. When the poetic narrative accustoms us with the course of loss, Cavafy marks a greater loss, emphasized by the following verses: "But we have lost the most precious of all—his living image, / which had the semblance of an Apollonian vision" ("Tomb of Eurion," *Collected Poems* 5–10, 61). These verses are related to the elaborate Platonic philosophies in the *Dialogue of Charmides.* In this anti-philosophical work-dialogue, Plato debates the concept of sophrosyne, or temperance (Jowett 159), through Socrates' alter ego, as an equipoise of ethics with beauty, since "in this dialogue may be noted the Greek ideal of beauty and goodness, the vision of the fair soul in the fair body, realised in the beautiful Charmides" (Jowett 2). Such a topos of death of the old young man is certainly related to the concept of an early liberation of the soul from the body, even as a sign of transition from the human to the divine, of a religious escape from the possible sins of this world.

At the same time, a permanent philosophy of the poet of death, between humanity and the divine, can also be studied in the poem "Tomb of Ignatius," which is structured in the form of a sound that originates from the dead. Ignatius speaks of an eternal world by influencing the verses to reflect the sense of loss of human and vital actions in order to find comfort and peace under the protection of Jesus Christ:

> Here, I'm not that Cleon who was famous
> in Alexandria (where it's hard to boast)
> for my splendid houses, for my gardens,
> for my horses and my chariots,
> for the diamonds and the silken robes I wore.
> Be it far from me! Here, I' m not that Cleon;
> let his twenty-eight years be erased.
> I am Ignatius, lay-reader, who very late
> came to the senses; yet even so, I lived ten happy months
> in the serenity and the security of Christ.
> (Cavafy, *Collected Poems* 5–10, 93)

As a projection of the past life, talking from the tomb, from eternity, is a well-known topos in poetry. It suffices if we recall Virgil's *Aeneid,* Dante's *Inferno,* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where the world of the dead speaks to the living ones in different variations, where death becomes a fundamental motive for life and an extraordinarily creative literary intertextuality of the worlds. This being said, the fundamental theme in "The Tomb of Ignatius" turns to the repentance, which occurs after death. Speaking from eternity, Ignatius recalls the strength, riches, and glories of a terrestrial life to ascertain the suspicion of denying their values, whereby poetry assumes the moralizing tones.

A basic philosophical query of this poem turns out to be whether the life, which seems real to us, is essentially unrealistic and whether we as human beings just live our lives as dreams and experience our dreams as lives. In the practical and philosophical discourses, life often appears to be a dream or a legend which must be fulfilled without knowing if life is more valuable than death. Correspondingly, through this poem, Cavafy raises a philosophical and moralizing question if life's commendations are just a trick to understand the essence of the soul's passage from the body to its unstoppable course of move-

ment—that is, the Heraclitus of Ephesus' "infinite flux" (Goldschmidt 169–88). It suffices, namely, to reemphasize Socrates' statement about Plato's *Phaedrus* dialogue, in which he writes the following: "Every soul is immortal, because anything that is ever-moving is immortal, whereas anything which causes motion elsewhere and is moved from elsewhere stops living when it stops moving. It is only something which moves itself that never stops moving because it never abandons itself' (*Phaedrus* 27). In the poem "Tomb of Ignatius," the spirit of Ignatius speaks about the "divine truth," the continuation of the life of the soul, and its purification "in the serenity and security of Christ," even as a symbol (Cavafy, *Collected Poems* 5–10, 93).

Besides, hereby death, or a talk about death, strengthens a permanent philosophy of meditation and poetic dreaming, a known phenomenon of symbolism and its inheritance, perceiving art as a religion in itself, even as a co-creation that is conceived in the primordial beginnings of human life. Regarding this phenomenon, Martin Heidegger emphasized that it is a matter in suspense of whether "art created man or man created art" (*Kant* 17–79), thus imagining the issue of the origin of art in general and of poetry in particular and reactualizing the myth of creation explored hitherto. This philosophy also fits to the concept founded by Friedrich Nietzsche, pertaining to the dominance of the myth of metaphor as an illusion of mimetics of reality. What is more, if poetry is a human metaphor, then his observance that "we believe that we know something about ourselves when we talk about trees, colors, snow, and flowers; but we possess nothing other than metaphors for things—metaphors that do not correspond to the original entities" (Breazeale 81–83) is accurate.

Surrender to Art

A lack of true art-to-reality interaction, even if the initial motif is reality, history, and politics, means that a genuine and intense poet's life always implies dreaming and permanent death in imagination and in the verse, which involves a permanent pain. Bearing in mind that Mallarmé said that "poetry is a language of a state of crisis,"[1] this philosophy strongly accords to the poet of unification of archihistoric and historic symbols in his poetic icon—namely, of

[1] "Le monde est fait pour abonnir à un beau livre," or "The world is made to lead to a beautiful book," was a reminder sent by Jules Huret which he subsequently published in the book *Enquête sur l'évolution littéraire* (1891), being ultimately translated by Frederic C. St. Aubyn in *Stéphane Mallarmé* (1989, p. 23).

Cavafy. Moreover, these elements are best described by Cavafy in his poem entitled "I Brought to Art," in which this author rebuilds a mosaic of his sensitivities turned into symbols and literary figures:

> I sit and muse in reverie. I brought to Art
> desires and sensations—some dimly envisaged
> faces and features; some vague memories
> of unfulfilled affairs. Let me surrender myself to Art;
> Art knows how to shape the Likeness of Beauty,
> barely perceptibly enhancing life,
> blending impressions, blending the days.
> (*Collected Poems* 1–5, 133)

"Let me surrender myself to Art" means to surrender to a permanent death in verse. This implies that death is a goal of artistic modernity in a poetic wording rather than in the external ideas, of a distribution of ideas in motifs and equal pieces of the same value that are to be reunited with the aim of creating a poetic system as an autonomous body, as an artistic peculiarity. Thus, this leads to the poetics of art creation without assistance, without textual policies, as a conscious and utilitarian escape from the ideology of aesthetics, always to remain with the author, whose basic creative philosophy is the "Likeness of Beauty."[2]

In tradition, a sense of loss is the most powerful "measure of a poet with dead poets" (Eliot 13–22) with regard to the principle of a triumph over the influence, as a special voice in the City of Poetry. Cavafy has the topoi of mortality as one of the fundamental motifs for the creation of his autotelic poetry, which arises from the dead voices and reaches us as the canonized symbols in the books with the full author's consciousness that humanity in this world is not juvenile. In this prism, Cavafy ostensibly justifies the notion of "heteroglossia" (Bakhtin 49) as the immanence of listening to the voice of the dead authors.

Nevertheless, the fundamental question in this case conforms to our topic of treatment and pertains to the postulate of how the poet Constantine P. Cavafy

[2] "L'acte poétique consiste à voir soudain qu'une idée se fractionne en un nombre de motifs égaux par valeur et à les grouper," or "The poetic act consists in seeing suddenly that an idea is divided into a number of equal motifs by value and grouping them together." The sentence appeared in the article "Crise de vers" from the literary magazine *La Revue blanche* (Sept. 1895) and was quoted by Lloyd (231).

managed to challenge the influence of the dead voices from the history—that is, the mixing of poetry and symbols of the legacy of ancient cultures—and to transform himself into a poet who constantly exerts an influence, even to an extent that he gains access to the most somber burial moments, in which his poetry about death is often read. It can be therefore said that Cavafy exalted the cult of awareness purporting that a literary work is an autonomous artistic form realized by the author who can be canonized in the gallery of literary opera by the phenomenon of recreation, which establish a dialogue with identity and a cultural, ideological, or religious phenomenon, always bearing in mind a complex structure and a specific nature of the literary phenomenon itself, with the author simultaneously being the creator and recreator. Additionally, literature stifles its author to merge into the literary text structure.

Cavafy did not avoid Cicero's philosophical principle claiming that the one "who knows only his generation remains always a child,"[3] even for a moment (*De Oratore*, ch. 34, sec. 120). Cavafy's reader notes that he has given priority to the second rule—that is, to the traditional one—over a philosophical concept of *thymos.*

When discussing the human being, Plato accentuates that the human soul (psyche) consists of a trinity: "the logos, the epithymia and thymos" (*Phaedrus* 52; *Republic*, bk. 4). The logos captures the reason, rationality, or even form, while the epithymia is related to a desire or pleasure of the psyche (soul), but the *thymos* is considered to be an eminent request of the human soul which consistently calls to be recognized, accepted, and respected in its existence as well as in its relation to the others. As a result, the intent of an acquaintance with death, whether as a division between the living and the eternal world or in the form of death in verses according to a symbolic concept, turns out to be this poet's sublime artistic demand.

In addition, this author's thymotic awareness of cultural integration, communications, and translation of symbols into various places and cultures and measurable and immeasurable historical spaces transforms it into a unique voice in what we know as the Western cultures, into an individual who achieves a universal poetic individuality. Thus, Cavafy's poetic *thymos* is a permanent spiritual demand that is realized and lives strongly in a literary theater either as

[3] This is, moreover, a translated quote by George Norlin (1871–1942), inscribed in the portico of the University of Colorado's namesake Norlin Library in Boulder, Colorado.

a requirement for an individual recognition, as a requirement for an auctorial separation, or as a sign in literary universality.

Ultimately, a literary identity always calls to recognition, self-recognition, and re-recognition, pursuant to T. S. Eliot's principle of a "dialogue with the dead authors" to study how the classics form us in the eternity and how a balance between the voices of tradition and the voices that emerged to be a universal literary practice have been hybridized, since "all strong literary originality becomes canonical" (Bloom, *Western Canon* 25). The treatment of the theme of death, as a continuous mystery, is the greatest scientific, philosophical, and literary challenge, and this subject is undoubtedly present in various forms in Cavafy's psyche and then in his auctorial poetry.

Conclusion

Within this study, we have analyzed the poetry by Constantine P. Cavafy concerning the concept of death. We have examined how a modern poet who develops his creative play by virtue of an integration of symbols from ancient mythology, archaeology, and history. Moreover, the concept of death has been one of the fundamental motives of Cavafy's poetic creativity. For this poet, death does not seem to be a controversial motive of life but is conceived to be its underlying source. As a "poet of the old age," Cavafy describes the forms of death in his verses, among which the following may be mentioned in a metaphorical sense: death as a triumph of the cause of life, death as a journey or a journey as death, death in verse, death as liberation of the soul from the body, death as a liberation from fraud of life, and the like.

Hence, this author's topoi of death appear to be his communication with tradition, to turn him into a poet stuck in the lost inheritance of the dead poets and societies. This perdition of his holds him in the theater of tradition, memory, symbolism, and inherited aesthetics, as a modern author is always kept in crisis and is constantly challenged by the concept of anxiety of influence.

Cavafy challenges this anxiety of influence by his scholarly and spiritual power of recognition and (self-)recognition—that is, by Plato's concept of *thymos*. His poems about death, tombs, and symbols of the past are a call to self-recognition and to a dialogue with the dead, with the awareness of the permanence of basic human categories.

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SEMA I *SOMA* U PJESMAMA KONSTANTINA P. KAVAFIJA O SMRTI

Sažetak

Nysret KRASNIQI
Department of Literature
Faculty of Philology
University of Pristina
31 George Bush St.
10 000 Pristina, Kosovo
nysretkrasniqi@uni-pr.edu

Cilj je rada analizirati pjesme Konstantina P. Kavafija koje tematiziraju smrt, a kroz vizuru teorijskih i hermeneutičkih književnih načela i igara riječi na temelju grčkih pojmova sema („grob") i soma („tijelo"). Cilj je proučiti njihove oblike i simbolizme, promišljajući o njima kao o temeljnim motivima Kavafijeva stvaralaštva. Pritom će se primijeniti komparativno načelo povezivanja pjesničkih simbola s antičkom filozofijom smrti (oprimjerenom Platonom) te s kasnijim, simbolističkim promišljanjem smrti autora (npr. kod Stéphanea Mallarméa), iz kojih se Kavafijevo moderno pjesništvo i izrodilo. Tekstualnom analizom njegove poezije usmjerene na smrt, istražit će se pjesnikov utjecaj i osjećaj razornosti koji pobuđuje u čitatelju. Nadalje, rad će se usmjeriti na timotičku snagu njegove poezije kroz tvrdnju da se pjesnik naslanja na povijesno naslijeđe ponajprije Erosa, ali i Tanatosa.

Ključne riječi: hermeneutika, teorija čitateljskog odgovora, književna tradicija, modernistička poezija, smrt u poeziji, *thymos*, Konstantin P. Kavafi