Moulded by Eros with skill and experience: sculpture of the male body in the poetry of Cavafy[1]

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If one leafs through Cavafy's collected poems, one will soon realize that sculpture is not on the face of it a thematically dominant subject. Out of 154 poems, just two involve sculpture explicitly in their title: 'Τυανεὺς γλύπτης' ('Sculptor from Tyana') (1911) and ''Ενώπιον τοῦ ἀγάλματος τοῦ 'Ενδυμίωνος' ('On Looking at the Statue of Endymion') (1916). A few others are more or less directly related to sculpture either because of their genre (epitaph) or because it is clearly stated in the poem that a statue or some other sculptural work is involved. Take, for example, ' Ἡ κηδεία τοῦ Σαρπηδόνος' ('The Funeral of Sarpedon') (1898/1908), ' Ἡ συνοδεία τοῦ Διονύσου' ('The Procession of Dionysus') (1907) or ''Ιωνικόν' ('Ionic') (1911). Yet, in the twenty or so poems that may be said to constitute the sculpture-related corpus of Cavafy's work, there is enough material to give the reader the image of a modern Greek poet to whom the notion of the *sculptural* was more important than it was to any other poet. For it is not the choice of the subject as such or the Parnassian element that make Cavafy a sculptural poet.[2] His appropriation of sculpture is much more subtle and does much to define the poet's attitude towards his own art – an attitude that may be compared to that of the sculptor.

The way Cavafy worked, in the first place, was reminiscent of the work of the sculptor. It is well known, for example, that he would often leave long intervals between the first version of a poem and the second, or between writing in general and publication. He would let the idea rest and mature, then work on it again, set it aside, and rework it once more until finally the poem was ready for publication. This recalls what Adrian Stokes calls 'weathering' of stone in the preliminary stages of sculpture. The stone has to be exposed to the atmosphere in order either to show up any fundamental weakness or in order to allow it to become more solid.[3] In the same way, Cavafy would leave

his poems to 'weather' so to speak, so that the next reworking would be stronger and firmer.[4]

Again, we have Cavafy's habit of 'thinning'. This is what essentially happens to a stone when carved, and Cavafy followed the same procedure of thinning his compositions when reworking them. Sareyannis reports characteristically that Cavafy revealed to him 'in conversation that 'τοῦ Μαγαζιοῦ' ('For the Shop') had originally been written in twenty-four verses, later in sixteen, still later in twelve, and finally in its present form in ten verses. This must have been the way in which he usually worked.'[5]

Though carving is the normal sculptural term that covers the process of thinning when reworking, it is not in fact carving but *modelling* that best shows how Cavafy conceived of poetic creation in the poems I discuss. In all of them the dominant verbs are πλάθω (mould) and σχηματίζω (form, shape, arrange), which are related to modelling. Modelling, as Adrian Stokes describes it, has much in common with Cavafy's technique. According to Stokes, it is more purely a plastic creation than carving: it *makes* things, gives them shape. The sculptor who chooses modelling 'may very well seize upon light effects and other transitory phenomena to make a forcible pattern. He rejoices in the image of his immediate mood. . . . The modeller . . . imbues spatial objects with the animus and calculation of inner life.'[6] In these terms, the best sculptor of all in Cavafy's poetry is probably the poet's imagination. It is as a modeller that the imagination typically appears, moulding forms and giving shape to feelings and memories. The poem 'Καισαρίων' ('Caesarion') (1918) is a good example:

> κ' ἔτσι πιὸ ἐλεύθερο σ' ἔπλασα μὲς στὸν νοῦ μου.
> Σ' ἔπλασα ὡραῖο κ' αἰσθηματικό.
>
> and so I moulded you the more freely in my mind.
> I moulded you handsome and sensitive.[7]

Such verbs – πλάθω (mould), and elsewhere σχηματίζω (form, shape, arrange), and, more suggestively ξαναγγίζω (touch up) – are also related to a typical feature of the art of sculpture: the feeling of touch. The importance of touch in the appreciation of a sculpted work of art, together with the pleasure of contemplation which, as Nietzsche insists,[9] sculpture offers perhaps more than any other art, are both prime characteristics of Cavafy's poetry. Poetry for Cavafy is not only formed through visual and tactile experience and memory, as we shall see of ''Ετσι πολὺ ἀτένισα' ('I've Gazed So Much') (1917) for

example, where the vision dominating the beginning of the poem is replaced by poetry in the last lines: it becomes visual and tactile itself. In the poem 'Γιὰ τὸν 'Αμμόνη, ποὺ πέθανε 29 ἐτῶν, στὰ 610' ('For Ammones, Who Died at 29 in 610') (1917) the link between sculpture and poetry is explicit, first of all in line 12:

Τὸ αἰγυπτιακό σου αἴσθημα χύσε στὴν ξένη γλῶσσα.

Pour your Egyptian feeling into the foreign tongue.

Poetic creation, it seems, is the result of the triple action of inspiration, love and handicraft. Through the verb χύνω (pour) language is compared to three distinct things: it is the frame which will give shape and substance to inspiration, the womb which will shape the offspring of a fertile love, and the cast which will give form and substance to the molten metal, all these in one of Cavafy's most sensual lines.[11] At the same time the friends of Ammones ask Raphael for something 'πολὺ καλαίσθητον καὶ λεῖον' ('in the best taste and polished'). The adjective λεῖος (polished) here is highly suggestive, since only a work of sculpture is literally open to tactile appreciation.

But the sculpture analogy is not only a useful reference-point for Cavafy's technique of writing. It also defines the ambience of his poetic world and indeed his attitude towards the art of poetry itself. As many scholars have pointed out, Cavafy's poetry is one of closed spaces, and among the most cherished of these – if we judge from the poet's own comments on his poems – are the Museum and the sculptor's workshop. In his poetry they both become sacred places of inspiration where Art is worshipped in a way especially reminiscent of Hellenistic Alexandria. They become the exclusive domain of the eye, promoting as they do visual experience and aesthetic appreciation.[12] But the Museum and the workshop also favour an intimate, almost erotic, relationship between the viewer and the work of art – especially the statue – or the sculptor and his model, and this interests Cavafy particularly. The body of poetry is often reflected in the boyish male figure, the ephebe, described by the poet in sculptural terms. The eroticism with which the statue is invested echoes attitudes typical of Hellenistic age but also of the Victorian period.[13] And Cavafy was familiar with both.

An early poem originally inspired by a Victorian picture[14] which involves in seminal form the issues of the involvement with one's own work, the sense of touch, and the preoccupation with form, is "Η κηδεία τοῦ Σαρπηδόνος' ('The Funeral of Sarpedon'). The poem was published in two different

versions in 1898 and in 1908,[15] and the changes Cavafy made in the second enhance its sculptural dimension, particularly in the sections that refer to Sarpedon's memorials. What Cavafy is mainly interested in is the elevation of the hero's form. A careful comparison of the two versions shows that this is indicated first of all by a subtle transition from the vocabulary of death to the vocabulary of sleep: emphasis is thus given to the promotion of Sarpedon's *body* rather than his *corpse* in the second version. What is more, Cavafy emphasizes the statue Phoebus makes of Sarpedon's body in the 1908 version rather than the man-made monuments that figure in both versions.

In the 1898 version there is a single monument which is being built as part of the human funeral. In the 1908 version, by contrast, two are involved: the 'human' once again but also the divine, the one Phoebus makes while tenderly arranging the hero's body. We can best compare them, starting from the human memorials with which both poems end:

> Μνημεῖον τῷ ἀνήγειρον μαρμάρινον,
> κ' ἐπὶ τῆς βάσεώς του μὲ ἀναγλυφὰς
> ἔμπειροι γλύπται ἐξιστόρησαν τὰς νίκας
> τοῦ ἥρωος καὶ τὰς πολλάς του ἐκστρατείας.
>
> They set up to him a marble monument,
> and on its base in relief
> experienced craftsmen carved the hero's
> victories and his many campaigns.
>
> κ' ἔπειτα ἔμπειροι ἀπ' τὴν πολιτείαν ἐργάται,
> καὶ φημισμένοι δουλευταὶ τῆς πέτρας
> ἤλθανε κ' ἔκαμαν τὸ μνῆμα καὶ τὴν στήλη.
>
> and later experienced craftsmen from the city
> and reputed workers in stone
> came and made the tomb and monument.[16]

David Ricks has pointed out that 'in the 1898 version the restriction to the monument alone at once admitted irrelevant detail and omitted important components of a human funeral which would balance the divine funeral already witnessed.'[17] I agree that Cavafy's attempt, in this earlier version, to balance the divine funeral with a human monument was not a success, although one can trace in its description certain elements Cavafy will exploit

in his later work. But it is not the human monument of the 1908 version either which fulfils this goal. Cavafy's aim will be realized in the later poem through the statue Phoebus makes, and not as a god – as Ricks notes, the word 'god' disappears in the new version – but as an independent artist, indeed a sculptor.

For the human monument of the 1898 version, the verb chosen for its construction is ἀνήγειρον (they set up). On the other hand, in the 1908 version the verb used is ἔκαμαν (they made), a choice which excludes the grandeur of raising or even resurrecting the hero. The hasty reference to the human monument of the later version also replaces with the colourless ἔκαμαν ('they made') the verb ἐξιστόρησαν (they narrated, recounted on the stone). Indeed, the victories and expeditions 'narrated' on the foundation of the monument bring Sarpedon very close to the image of Alexander the Great, who, of course, was deified after his death. The monument itself, on the other hand, reminds the reader of the Mausoleum at Halicarnassus, fragments of which Cavafy must have seen in the British Museum. The reliefs in the 1898 version which, as far as sculpture is concerned, could be related to a frieze, give to the earlier monument a more dynamic feeling which corresponds better to the character of the hero, particularly when compared to the 1908 version, in which μνῆμα (memorial, tomb) and στήλη (stele) are more static and from that point of view more related to the inertia of death. Most importantly, with the verb ἐξιστόρησαν Cavafy has the opportunity to bring the sculpted monument very close to a text such as the *Iliad*, almost implying that the monument is made of verse rather than marble after all. The transition, finally, from something glorious to something prosaic is also implicit in the words which indicate the material of the monument: in the 1898 version it is made of marble; in the later, of stone. Although marble is of course a kind of stone, the terms are not used indiscriminately by Cavafy: marble is quite precious in his poetry and clearly surpasses stone, which sometimes has negative associations.[18]

Nevertheless, the 1898 monument is ultimately rejected by Cavafy in the second version in favour of the statue erected by Phoebus. Despite its splendour, this monument is so heavy in decoration and wealth as to obscure the person it is supposed to commemorate.[19] Its rich reliefs hide the body, or else the form of Sarpedon, although their ultimate aim is to honour it: in that sense, the word μνημεῖον has an ironic tone. Faced with such monuments, Cavafy did not feel particularly moved: what was important for the poet was the promotion of human form. As Ricks points out, 'he develops Pope's references to form in order to make Sarpedon's an ideal body.'[20] This does indeed happen in the 1908 version; but in the 1898 one, Cavafy's

preoccupation with the preservation of form is already apparent: 'τοῦ δικαίου καὶ ἀνδρείου ἥρωος | ἡ φυσιογνωμία ἀναφαίνεται' ('and the just, brave hero's | physiognomy appears to view') (lines 18–19), 'τὴν μορφὴν λαμπρόν' ('glorious in form') (line 49). But it is in the 1908 version that the hero will become in some sense an ἀπολλώνια ὀπτασία (a vision of Apollo): a man of exquisite beauty but also the creation of Apollo, which is so ideal that it loses its material substance. I quote here the relevant lines (13–25):

Τὸν πλένει ἀπὸ τὲς σκόνες κι ἀπ' τὰ αἵματα·
κλείει τὲς φοβερὲς πληγὲς, μὴ ἀφίνοντας
κανένα ἴχνος νὰ φανεῖ: τῆς ἀμβροσίας
τ' ἀρώματα χύνει ἐπάνω του· καὶ μὲ λαμπρὰ
'Ολύμπια φορέματα τὸν ντύνει.
Τὸ δέρμα του ἀσπρίζει· καὶ μὲ μαργαριταρένιο
χτένι κτενίζει τὰ κατάμαυρα μαλλιά.
Τὰ ὡραῖα μέλη σχηματίζει καὶ πλαγιάζει.

Τώρα σὰν νέος μοιάζει βασιλεὺς ἁρματηλάτης –
στὰ εἰκοσιπέντε χρόνια του, στὰ εἰκοσιέξι –
ἀναπαυόμενος μετὰ ποὺ ἐκέρδισε,
μ' ἅρμα ὁλόχρυσο καὶ ταχυτάτους ἵππους,
σὲ ξακουστὸν ἀγῶνα τὸ βραβεῖον.

He washes it of the dust and the blood;
he closes the terrible wounds, not allowing
any trace to be visible; he pours
scents of ambrosia over him; and clothes him
with shining Olympian garments.
He whitens his skin; and with a pearl
comb combs the dark black hair.
He arranges and lays out the beautiful limbs.

Now he looks like a young king charioteer –
at twenty-five years of age, at twenty six –
resting after he has won
with his golden chariot and swiftest horses
the prize in a famous contest.

Whereas in the 1898 poem Sarpedon is compared to a young athlete, a

young lover and a young, happy spouse, in the final version he is described as a charioteer resting after a race. Cavafy could have the charioteer of Delphi in mind because it was excavated in 1895 or 1896 together with many other statues by the French Archaeological School who undertook the task.[21] The charioteer is said to represent the athlete in repose just after his triumph in the race, and this brings to mind the way Cavafy describes Sarpedon in the lines discussed here. In any event the motif of the worshipped youth in the form of a statue looks forward to the poem ''Ενώπιον τοῦ ἀγάλματος τοῦ 'Ενδυμίωνος' ('On Looking at the Statue of Endymion') (1916).

The deification of Sarpedon through the sublimation of his body is implied in the 1908 version in several ways. First of all Phoebus is said to whiten his body (18). Cavafy makes a general contrast between the 'coloured' context of his death (alluded to by the presence of dust, blood and wounds) and the white and gold of which his transformation consists. So, apart from his body, the pearl comb stresses the whiteness of that section (lines 11–20) – despite his black hair[22] – and the hero's chariot is gold. It is as if Sarpedon is transformed into a chryselephantine statue, by which only a few gods were honoured, Athena and Zeus being the most famous. Another element that contributes to the elevation of Sarpedon to a godlike status is the additional gleam of his garments, represented in the 1908 version by the adjective λαμπρά (shining). Andrew Stewart explains that:

> Ivory, the whitest and most precious living substance, was the nearest to the ethereal complexions of the gods [. . .] Gold, incorruptible and 'the child of Zeus', radiated celestial brightness and lasting glory.[23]

In other words, in the later version Cavafy does not explicitly mention the immortality of Sarpedon, as he did in the 1898 version. In the 1908 version the adjective ἀθάνατα (immortal) is replaced by λαμπρά (shining) and the hero's immortality is implied through the allusion to the precious materials of his statue.

Indeed, the statue created by Phoebus is original and superior to the other monuments, for the reasons mentioned above, but also because of the special character of the artist who built it. The Phoebus of the 1908 version differs from the one of 1898, as indeed from the human artists who made the monuments discussed above. They all made commissioned work, whereas Phoebus becomes independent from Zeus' orders: as Ricks points out, he is the active subject of all the verbs of lines 11–20.[24] What is more, he cares for his work and is emotionally involved in what proves to be a very intimate relationship. Indeed, the verbs σχηματίζει (shapes, arranges) and πλαγιάζει

(lays out) convey the tenderness and care of the god as well as describing the modeller's movements. These verbs as often in Cavafy, add an erotic sense of touch. What is more, by making a statue rather than a monument, Phoebus is in fact raising the body itself into a monument and consequently preserving the beloved form.

We have seen that a sculptural preoccupation does much to shape this relatively early, and seemingly not especially self-referential poem. I shall now proceed to the discussion of certain other poems of Cavafy that involve sculpture more explicitly, and I shall examine in greater detail the meaning and significance of perceiving the male body in sculptural terms. My aim is to show how, in fact, all these poems go far beyond the label of 'erotic' which has been attached to them: they are in fact an important category of Cavafy's self-referential poems and reveal to the reader the particular nature of the poet's relation to his art. This relation is characterized by the privacy, the sensitivity and the sensuality to be found only in an erotic relationship and which, in sculpture, develops between the sculptor and his model or the statue (compare the myth of Pygmalion). The poem ''Ετσι πολὺ ἀτένισα' ('I've Gazed so Much') (1917) establishes most openly the connection between body and statue, and locates Cavafy's sculptural allusions in the Hellenistic period specifically:

Τὴν ἐμορφιὰ ἔτσι πολὺ ἀτένισα,
ποὺ πλήρης εἶναι αὐτῆς ἡ ὅρασίς μου.

Γραμμὲς τοῦ σώματος. Κόκκινα χείλη. Μέλη ἡδονικά.
Μαλλιὰ σὰν ἀπὸ ἀγάλματα ἑλληνικὰ παρμένα·
πάντα ἔμορφα, κι ἀχτένιστα σὰν εἶναι,
καὶ πέφτουν, λίγο, ἐπάνω στ' ἄσπρα μέτωπα.
Πρόσωπα τῆς ἀγάπης, ὅπως τἄθελεν
ἡ ποίησίς μου . . . . μὲς στὲς νύχτες τῆς νεότητός μου,
μέσα στὲς νύχτες μου, κρυφά, συναντημένα . . . .

I've gazed on beauty so much
that my vision overflows with it.

The body's lines. Red lips. Sensual limbs.
Hair as though taken from Greek statues,
always lovely, even uncombed,
and falling slightly over white foreheads.

> Faces of love, just as my poetry
> wanted them to be . . . . in the nights of my youth,
> in my nights secretly encountered. . . .[25]

From the first we can see how Cavafy emphasizes the dominance of sight in poetic creation. The intense contemplation of statuesque bodies in lines 1–6 is replaced by poetry in lines 7–8, in a way reminiscent of the work of the sculptor. Rodin, for example, had models walking and taking natural poses in his workshop, so that he could study every possible movement spontaneously made by the human body; then he would translate into marble or clay the movement not as he saw it but as his art dictated it. For similar reasons ancient sculptors would pay frequent visits to the gymnasium. There they could freely observe the naked athletes from different angles before reproducing them in their art. According to Richard Jenkyns:

> Winckelmann had suggested that the Greeks owed the whole nature of their aesthetics to their nakedness: 'The . . . places where completely naked youths . . . played . . . were schools of beauty. It was there that artists contemplated the perfect development of physique; the daily sight of the nude warmed their imagination and taught them . . . the beauty of forms.'[26]

The description of what the poet calls ἐμορφιά (beauty) – the body and particularly the head of one or more young men – deserves a closer look. Its features crystallize around three key words, ἑλληνικά (Greek), πάντα ἔμορφα (always lovely) and ἄσπρα (white) in lines 4–6, used by the poet in his relatively detailed account of the hair.

That the statues are characterized as ἑλληνικά (Greek) is interesting, particularly when one attempts to explain why Cavafy felt the need to specify their provenance. One can consider as a possible answer his wish to differentiate them from Roman copies, stating, in other words the antithesis between the original and the copy in the artistic sense of the word. This is not to deny the Romans original artistic creation, but rather to emphasize that the majority of classical statuary has come to us through Roman copies. And as R. R. R. Smith reminds us, copying, particularly in the case of a Hellenistic statue, was no easy task.[27] Yet, this distinction is surely not so important here. It becomes more suggestive when the term ἑλληνικά is understood as *Hellenistic* on the one hand, and as *pagan* on the other. In this light Cavafy's

erotic poems are seen to evoke the specific tradition of Hellenistic sculpture and at the same time to project an alternative to the Victorian criticism with which Cavafy was familiar.

As Keeley has shown, Cavafy knew the work of Browning.[28] He had also made a careful study of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*.[29] According to Peridis, Pater's works too were in Cavafy's personal library.[30] Pater is important for my discussion here and particularly his essay on Winckelmann, in which he elaborates on statues of Greek youths and the sensual and sexual connotations of sculpture.[31] A contrastive reading of this essay and Cavafy's erotic poems can shed new light on the interpretation of the latter. In this comparison the notions of whiteness and eternal beauty which appear in '"Έτσι πολὺ ἀτένισα' become central.

From the first pages of Pater's essay we become aware that he adopts A. W. Schlegel's understanding of 'classical' antiquity in contradistinction to the modern world. The former is sculptural, that is white, bright, with clear outlines, pure and hard; the latter is painterly, coloured, blurred, dark, soft. This opposition takes on subtle religious and sexual undertones. The religious nuance is given by the association of the white colour of Greek statues with moral and aesthetic purity, a certain holiness which, as Ruskin put it, 'is awakening no ideas of the base kind'. The sexual tint is soon added: not only when 'in the happy light of the antique, Winckelmann had a sense of exhilaration almost physical', but also when Winckelmann, and Pater who quotes him, believe that only male beauty can give an 'impartial, vital, inborn instinct for beauty in art'. And the greater part of Pater's discussion on Winckelmann's appreciation of classical statues goes hand in hand with his account of Winckelmann's relations with young men.

A new nexus – ancient statuary, young men, and the sense of touch – seems to have been crucial for the German scholar, according to Pater: 'Here, then, in vivid realization, we see the native tendency of Winckelmann to escape from abstract theory to intuition, to the exercise of sight and touch'. And a few pages later he adds: 'by [. . .] his piercing eyes, his rapid movements, [he] apprehended the subtlest principles of the Hellenic manner, not through the understanding, but by instinct or touch'.[32] Here we are treading on familiar ground. For in Cavafy too we can detect a feeling of touch in poems such as '"Έτσι πολὺ ἀτένισα' and 'Στοῦ καφενείου τὴν εἴσοδο' ('At the Café Entrance) (1915).[33] In the first of these poems, the reference to the hair as ἀχτένιστα (uncombed) has erotic undertones. In the second poem, sensuality and eroticism are enhanced by the dominance of the feeling of touch not only in the shaping of the body itself – the name of Eros is spelled out here – but

also when, in the last two lines, hands and touch are explicitly mentioned:

> Τὴν προσοχή μου κάτι ποὺ εἶπαν πλάγι μου
> διεύθυνε στοῦ καφενείου τὴν εἴσοδο.
> Κ' εἶδα τ' ὡραῖο σῶμα ποὺ ἔμοιαζε
> σὰν ἀπ' τὴν ἄκρα πεῖρα του νὰ τῶκαμεν ὁ 'Ερως –
> πλάττοντας τὰ συμμετρικά του μέλη μὲ χαρά·
> ὑψώνοντας γλυπτὸ τὸ ἀνάστημα·
> πλάττοντας μὲ συγκίνησι τὸ πρόσωπο
> κι ἀφίνοντας ἀπ' τῶν χεριῶν του τὸ ἄγγιγμα
> ἕνα αἴσθημα στὸ μέτωπο, στὰ μάτια, καὶ στὰ χείλη.
>
> My attention something they said beside me
> Turned towards the entrance of the café.
> And I saw the beautiful body which looked
> As if Eros himself had made it with his extreme skill –
> Modelling with delight the symmetry of his limbs;
> Raising his stature as though sculpted
> Modelling the face with emotion
> And leaving from the touch of his own fingers
> A feeling on the forehead, on the eyes and on the lips.[34]

What is important in this poem is that the body of the ephebe and that of a statue have a particular affinity revealed through the use of the words γλυπτό (sculpted or sculpture) and ἀνάστημα (stature).[35] The second noun, especially, and the etymologically related verb ἀνασταίνω (resurrect) can be used to refer to the sublimation of the body in sculpture.[36] This sculptural perception of the body becomes more suggestive, almost fetishistic, through Cavafy's insistence on keeping it fragmented. It is not the whole but its parts which acquire importance for the poet, and in the erotic encounters it is not the bodies but rather their parts which meet.

But the feeling of touch as combined with sculpture in 'Στοῦ καφενείου τὴν εἴσοδο' and associated with the limbs of a young man has a particular affinity with Pater's account of Winckelmann. What the latter does, according to Pater, is to use the young male body as a starting point for aesthetic appreciation. His enthusiasm for the Hellenic world is 'dependent to a great degree on bodily temperament'. What is more, 'his affinity with Hellenism was not merely intellectual' but 'is proved by his romantic, fervent friendships with young men'.

Nevertheless, what constitutes an important difference between Pater's and

Cavafy's appreciation of youth – men or statues, it does not matter – is their own feelings towards male nudity. As indicated, Pater associates the statues and their whiteness, with moral and aesthetic purity: Winckelmann's affinity with them is said to be wholly Greek, 'alien from the Christian world', and 'still uninfected by any spiritual sickness'. Pater's argument reaches its conclusions: 'The beauty of the Greek statues was a sexless beauty'; and a few lines below he points out that: 'With the sensuous element in Greek art he [Winckelmann] deals in the pagan manner'. What does this mean? Simply that the pagan manner does not 'fever the conscience: it is shameless and childlike.' In other words, Pater attempts to purge the sense of touch of the sinful, sick, impure connotations which the modern soul has invested it with. As Jenkyns puts it, Pater, 'with his shifting, slippery metaphors, clustering around the idea of whiteness, blurs the distinction between different kinds of purity and . . . implies that emotions which his contemporaries reprehend could seem innocent in a Greek context. . . . Throughout his essay, the reader is being coaxed into believing that the Greek worship of beautiful youths is acceptable, since it is enveloped in a halo of quasi-religious association.'[37]

An attentive reading of Cavafy's poems will show that the terms the poet uses to describe the young lovers are similar to the vocabulary of Winckelmann and Pater. For example whiteness is not something we encounter only in the poem '"Ετσι πολὺ ἀτένισα', where the hair falls on the white foreheads: it occurs in many others, even more laden with implications. I have already noted in 'Ἡ κηδεία τοῦ Σαρπηδόνος' how the body of Sarpedon acquires sculptural qualities by becoming white after Phoebus has cleaned away its blood: there, we saw that whiteness implied divinity and sublimation. But Cavafy's divergence from Pater and the tradition he represents involves dispensing with its equivocal attitude towards Greek statues and, by extension, towards young men, by leaving no doubts as to the nature of this attitude. It is not only erotic but also divine and pure. In the poem 'Μακρυά' ('Long Ago') (1914), for example, the whiteness of the flesh is suggested by its being compared to jasmine and thus associated with scent: 'Δέρμα σὰν καμωμένο ἀπὸ ἰασεμί' ('A skin as though of jasmine'): a first 'oriental' element invades the 'clear outlines' of Hellenism. In 'Πολὺ σπανίως' ('Very Seldom) (1913), as well as being white, the flesh becomes firm and acquires beautiful lines:[38]

> Τὸ ὑγιές, ἡδονικὸ μυαλό των,
> ἡ εὔγραμμη, σφιχτοδεμένη σάρκα των,
> μὲ τὴν δική του ἔκφανσι τοῦ ὡραίου συγκινοῦνται.

Their healthy sensual minds,
their shapely taught bodies
stir to his perception of the beautiful.

Such a view is both developed and, in a typically Cavafian way, challenged, in the poem 'Τῶν 'Εβραίων (50 μ.κ.)' ('Of the Jews (A.D. 50)') (1919). Beauty is combined in this poem with hardness, and in line 5 we find again the association of perfection and whiteness. The speaker makes the distinction between Hellenism and Hebraism explicit in these terms:

'Η τιμιότερές μου μέρες εἶν' ἐκεῖνες
ποὺ τὴν αἰσθητική ἀναζήτησιν ἀφίνω,
ποὺ ἐγκαταλείπω τὸν ὡραῖο καὶ σκληρὸν ἑλληνισμό,
μὲ τὴν κυρίαρχη προσήλωσι
σὲ τέλεια καμωμένα καὶ φθαρτὰ ἄσπρα μέλη.
Καὶ γένομαι αὐτὸς ποὺ θὰ ἤθελα
πάντα νὰ μένω· τῶν 'Εβραίων, τῶν ἱερῶν 'Εβραίων, ὁ υἱός.

'My most precious days are those
when I give up the pursuit of sensuous beauty,
when I desert that beautiful, hard-edged Hellenism,
with its over-riding devotion
to perfectly shaped, corruptible white limbs,
and become the man I would want
to remain forever: son of the Jews, the holy Jews.'[39]

The sculptural qualities of Hellenism will have to be abandoned by Ianthes if he wants to be faithful to the traditions of his family. But Cavafy's choice of words carefully undermines the young man's resolutions. Despite his good intentions, he cannot escape his own nature, that of a Hellenizing Jew, recorded already in his very name, physique and occupations:

Ζωγράφος καὶ ποιητής, δρομεὺς καὶ δισκοβόλος,
σὰν 'Ενδυμίων ἔμορφος, ὁ 'Ιάνθης 'Αντωνίου.

Painter and poet, runner and discus-thrower,
beautiful as Endymion: Ianthes, son of Antony.

His name is related to the sweet-smelling violet flower, and its bluish-purple colour is to be contrasted with the whiteness of marble. Yet his athletic

preferences relate him to what came to be one of the most representative instances of ancient statuary, namely the statues of athletes and the Discobolus. This correlation is important, because Ianthes has a beautiful body and above all a firm one, the result of athletic training but not irrelevant to the statues he somehow represents. The artistic perfection of these statues suggests the perfection of his own body and justifies the simile 'σὰν 'Ενδυμίων ἔμορφος' ('beautiful as Endymion'). At the same time Ianthes is a painter and a poet, occupations identified by German Idealism with modernity; this means that the young man is a mingling of ancient and modern elements.[40] What Ianthes wants is to abandon one aspect of his own nature (he embodies, in fact, the beauty and hardness of Hellenism), at the expense of the other. In Cavafy's poetry one must be faithful to one's nature, and there is always a pervasive irony in the cases of young lovers who want to reject it. The irony in the case of Ianthes in 'Τῶν 'Εβραίων' is emphasized by the use of the adjective τιμιότερες (most precious). Τίμιος is an adjective Cavafy tends to associate with the Hellenic.[41] That Ianthes considers 'non-Hellenic' days in such terms increases the irony of the lines and emphasizes the implication that the young man will not, in the end, keep his word.

Living on the fringes of the Greek world, Cavafy experiences the 'blurring of the outlines' of Hellenism by Oriental influences and is in a position to appreciate its positive aspects. The mingling of classicism and modernity, Hellenism and Judaism, purity and passion, is ultimately sanctified beyond religion, in the realm of a religion of Beauty. At the same time, by investing sculptural antiquity with sensuality and colour, he is in fact restoring what Pater and the Germans took away: 'the bloodlike stains of action and passion'. And particularly he gives back the self-conscious feeling of eroticism which was expressed so characteristically in Hellenistic sculpture.

Cavafy's insistence on the the outlines, the lips, the hair, the prominence of touch and the sensuality with which the statue is approached in poems such as ''Έτσι πολὺ ἀτένισα' or 'Στοῦ καφενείου τὴν εἴσοδο', points directly to developments in sculpture after Alexander and his personal sculptor, Lysippus. In the Hellenistic period the representation of the hair became almost an obsession, since it was a constitutive feature of the royal portrait. It had to be thick; at first shorter, later it could be longer and had to look dishevelled, but at the same time in the most perfect face-framing fashion.[42] And in ''Έτσι πολὺ ἀτένισα', the fact that the poet says ἀχτένιστα (uncombed) contributes to the erotic tone of the lines.

Other characteristics of the royal portrait were full lips and a gaze at the same time far-off and penetrating. 'Directed heavenwards, his [Alexander's]

eyes brimmed with "diffuseness" and moisture; they generated ecstasy because they contained so much of what Greeks called *enthousiasmos* – divine inspiration.'[43] Again, the eyes are important for Cavafy too. On the other hand, the sensuality of the limbs and a certain fluidity and height perceived in the description of the body, conveyed especially from Cavafy's insistence on the outlines (compare γραμμὲς τοῦ σώματος (the body's lines)) rather than on minute description, recalls the innovations of Lysippus.

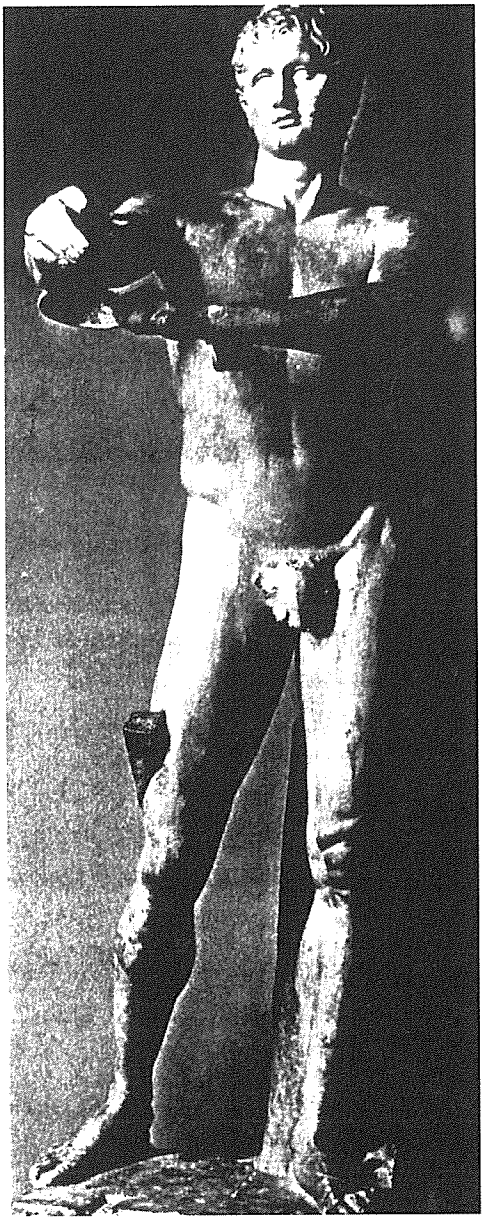
Lysippus' work was to some extent a response to the 'canon' of Polyclitus, 'a heavily muscled, sharply articulated, four-square scheme of the naked male body'.[44] The revisionist sculptor opted for another kind of *symmetria* based on how the eyes perceived the body in its context or environment, rather than on pre-defined mathematical analogies. Pliny informs us that Lysippus used to say that in the work of earlier sculptors men were represented as they really were, but in his as they appeared. He adds that a special characteristic of Lysippus' art is the subtle fluctuations of surface which were apparent even in the smallest details.[45]

Pliny's comments are extremely interesting because in many respects they are reminiscent of how Cavafy himself treats the young men he describes. The poem 'Στοῦ καφενείου τὴν εἴσοδο' quoted above, reflects some of Pliny's comments: the symmetry of the limbs, the sculptural figure, the feeling of touch, all bring to mind the symmetry, height and sensuality of the statues of Lysippus. A statue, in certain conditions of light, can be mistaken for a person and the reverse is also possible. And the need to appreciate a sculpted work by caressing it does something to explain why, in museums, we are warned not to touch the exhibits. According to Adrian Stokes:

> Hand-finish is the most vivid testimony of sculpture. People touch things according to their shape. A single shape is made magnificent by perennial touching. For the hand explores, all unconsciously to reveal, to magnify an existent form. Perfect sculpture needs our hand to communicate some pulse and warmth, to reveal subtleties unnoticed by the eye, needs your hand to enhance them.[46]

The contact with a statue, especially a marble one, gives the feeling of flesh, for marble has its glow but also its humidity. In Hellenistic times, sculptors were eager to communicate the feeling of the flesh. This feeling is something Cavafy retains with great fidelity.

The poem with which my discussion will end, 'Τυανεὺς γλύπτης' ('Sculptor from Tyana') (1911), confirms Cavafy's religious attitude towards Art as projected in the worship of the 'statuesque' male body in an explicitly sculptural context, a sculptor's workshop:



Apoxyomenos by Lysippus

You'll have heard I'm no tyro.
I see my share of stone.
Back home, in Tyana, I'm quite well known.
And here too I've had a good many statues
commissioned by senators.

And let me show you
a few without further ado. Notice that Rhea:
august, primordial, austere.
Notice that Pompey. Marius,
Aemilius Paulus, Scipio Africanus.
To the best of my abilities, true copies.
Patroclus (I shall be touching him up a little later on).
There, by those bits of yellow
marble, is Caesarion.

And lately I've been taken up for quite some time
with the making of a Neptune. My concern
is above all his horses, how to shape them.
They must be light as if
their bodies and their feet are visibly
not treading earth but racing over the sea.

But here's the piece dearest of all to me,
on which I worked with feeling and with the greatest care;
this one here, on a hot summer's day,
my mind ascending to the realm of the ideal,
this one here in my dreams, young Mercury.[47]

In a manner which brings to mind Browning's dramatic monologues, the sculptor from Tyana presents his workshop, full of statues commissioned by senators. Cavafy uses the same technique of introducing a viewer or a visitor to a place which resembles a room in a museum or private collection and providing a guide for it. In Browning the guide is usually the artist himself or the owner of the work of art, as in the case of 'My Last Duchess' (1842) where the Duke who owns the painting also wishes to dominate the picture with his words and to control the conditions under which it may be seen.[48] In 'Τυανεὺς γλύπτης' the sculptor himself is the guide. And though the works presented are commissions, they follow a hierarchical pattern from the more concrete

and external aspect of sculpture to the more abstract and internalized. This makes some of the statues described (particularly Patroclus, Caesarion and Hermes) sound more like personal creations of the sculptor than commissions.

With Patroclus and Caesarion the deeper personal involvement of the sculptor (and of the poet too) in his work becomes evident: it is through them that the sculptor becomes more confessional. The phrase 'ὀλίγο θὰ τὸν ξαναγγίξω' ('I shall be touching him up a little later on') carries an erotic tone that brings to mind how Apollo looks after the body of the dead Sarpedon in ''Η κηδεία τοῦ Σαρπηδόνος', which Cavafy was still working on. What is more, at this point in the dramatic monologue one can hear the voices of the speaker and the poet become one. For both Patroclus and Caesarion are characters in Cavafy's poetry, and it is as if the poet is using sculpture to show us how he is giving the dead men new life though his own work. The imagery of the line 'Πλησίον στοῦ μαρμάρου τοῦ κιτρινωποῦ | ἐκεῖνα τὰ κομάτια, εἶν' ὁ Καισαρίων' ('by those bits of yellow | marble, is Caesarion') is especially vivid. In the poem 'Καισαρίων' (1918) Cavafy uses sculptural vocabulary in order to give us a metaphorical account of how artistic imagination works. The fragmented image of the young Caesarion: 'Στὴν ἱστορία λίγες | γραμμὲς μονάχα βρίσκονται γιὰ σένα' ('In history but few lines are to be found about you') is remoulded into a new existence by the poet: 'κ' ἔτσι πιὸ ἐλεύθερα σ' ἔπλασα μὲς στὸν νοῦ μου. | Σ' ἔπλασα ὡραῖο κ' αἰσθηματικό' ('and so I moulded you the more freely in my mind | I moulded you handsome and sensitive'). Here, on the other hand, sculpture is literally involved: Caesarion's statue emerges as a new, integral creation among the bits of yellow marble.

In the last part of 'Τυανεὺς γλύπτης' sculpture becomes ethereal, almost without substance. We think, surely, of Winckelmann, who claimed that ideal beauty, although incarnated in Greek statuary, was ethereal and pure like a dream apparition or the waters of a source – and we note that the word ἄγαλμα (statue) is no longer used here. What is more, sculpture in this section is not only totally personal and private but takes on a religious character: the interior of the workshop is transformed into a shrine, where the cult statue of the young or new Hermes becomes the god himself in a moment of revelation. Let us not forget that the summer – especially the hot hours of summer noon – are those when the pagan gods preferred to make their appearance; but such is also the moment Cavafy himself considered the most appropriate for the apparition of poetic inspiration in the form of a pale and ethereal young man.

It is in this last section too that we clearly see that the statue in Cavafy regains the religious aura it had in antiquity. The Greek word ἄγαλμα (statue)

is etymologically relatable to the verb ἀγάλλομαι (to exult in), that is, the beholder of an ἄγαλμα glories in the sight. The noun is distinguished from ἀνδριάς which emphasized the 'manliness' of the statue but excluded the divine aspect.[49] The joy of the beholder can be aesthetic of course – and, even if this way of looking at statuary is taken to be peculiarly modern, it is rooted in the Hellenistic period in which art criticism flourished.[50] But the joy is above all religious. The believer would no doubt feel a certain joy and elevation from the presence of the god in the statue standing in front of him. For, as Stokes remarks, stone, although solid, is the habitat of soft light like the glow of flesh; marble statues of the gods are the gods themselves.[51] And after the Peloponnesian War there is 'a shift in attention away from the group oriented state religion . . . toward cults which involved a personal and emotional relationship with the deity'.[52]

In Hellenistic times this way of considering the statue extended to the rulers, who assumed divine attributes. In 'Τυανεὺς γλύπτης', however, Cavafy adapts this tradition to his own ends, replacing divinity, heroism and political power with beauty as the reason for the existence and worship of the statue. Hermes may have been chosen because he 'was the god of young athletes and was depicted in sculpture as a young man';[52] but the attribute νέος means both young and new. Consequently, it does not only recall that the god was indeed one of the youngest, but reveals that the statue in the workshop was depicting a young man with such beauty as to make him divine and raise him to the status of the god, in other words replacing in Cavafy's world the 'old' god with a new one, a second Hermes. A young man's ethereal and divine body, reinvested with sanctified eroticism, is made correlative to the body of poetry itself.

NOTES

1 This article is based on the chapter 'C.P. Cavafy: the poet as sculptor' from my PhD thesis 'Ancient Greek Sculpture in Modern Greek Poetry, 1860–1960'. The thesis was completed at King's College London (2000) under the supervision of Dr David Ricks.

2 It is true that in many respects Cavafy's work might, at a first glance be related to the Parnassians. For example, the extreme care in the treatment of historical and other details; or again the 'culte de la Beauté' as the highest ideal in art; or, indeed, the Parnassians' assiduity in the perfection of form. But the difference lies in the degree to which Cavafy and the Parnassians respectively appropriate the metaphor of sculpture in their poetry, and which, in the case of the Parnassians remains perhaps superficial. For a detailed discussion see E. Politou-Marmarinou, 'Ο Καβάφης και ο Γαλλικός Παρνασσισμός in S. Skartsis (ed.), Πρακτικά Τρίτου Συμποσίου Ποίησης. Αφιέρωμα στον Κ. Π. Καβάφη (Athens 1984) 315–46.

3 See A. Stokes, *Stones of Rimini* (New York 1969) 28, n. 1.

4 Cavafy himself used to say, according to T. Malanos, 'Ο Καβάφης ἔλεγε (Athens 1986) 12: 'For me, the immediate impression is not my starting point. The impression must grow old, grow false on

its own, through the agency of time, without my falsifying it.' The fact that Cavafy needed time for his poetic idea to mature and in order to write his poem, is acknowledged by the poet himself in his Ἀνέκδοτα σημειώματα Ποιητικῆς καὶ Ἠθικῆς, ed. G.P. Savidis (Athens 1983) 39 and 51–2.

5 J. Sareyannis, 'What Was Most Precious – His Form' (tr. D. Haas) Grand Street 2.3 (1983) 108-126 (121).

6 A. Stokes, *The Image in Form. Selected Writings of Adrian Stokes*, ed. R. Wollheim (Harmondsworth 1972) 48.

7 Tr. D. Ricks, *The Shade of Homer* (Cambridge 1989) 114.

8 For πλάθω see 'Τυανεὺς γλύπτης' ('Sculptor from Tyana') line 16, and 'Στοῦ καφενείου τὴν εἴσοδο' ('At the Café Entrance') lines 5 and 7; for σχηματίζω see ''Η κηδεία τοῦ Σαρπηδόνος' ('The Funeral of Sarpedon') line 20, and ''Εκόμισα εἰς τὴν Τέχνη' (I've Brought to Art') line 5; for ξαναγγίζω, finally, see 'Τυανεὺς γλύπτης', line 11.

9 *Birth of Tragedy*, chapters 1 and 22.

10 Tr. D. Ricks, *Modern Poetry in Translation* 13 (1998) 11.

11 The sexual connotations of this line have also been commented on by E. Keeley in *Cavafy's Alexandria. Study of a Myth in Progress* (Princeton 1976) 84 and by M. Alexiou, 'Poetry, Eros and the dissemination of images' in M. Alexiou and V. Lambropoulos (eds.), *The Text and its Margins: Post-Structuralist Approaches to Twentieth-Century Greek Literature* (New York 1985) 157–96 (188).

12 S. Goldhill, 'The naive and knowing eye: ecphrasis and the culture of viewing in the Hellenistic world' in S. Goldhill and R. Osborne (eds.), *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture* (Cambridge 1994).

13 For a discussion of the Victorian background of Cavafy's ephebes and the particular affinities with Oscar Wilde, see Sarah Ekdawi, 'Cavafy's mythical ephebes' in P. Mackridge (ed.), *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek Poetry* (London 1996) 33–44; 'The erotic poems of C. P. Cavafy, *Κάμπος* 1 (1993) 23–46; and 'Days of 1895, '96 and '97: the parallel prisons of C. P. Cavafy and Oscar Wilde', *Modern Greek Studies Yearbook* 9 (1993) 297–305.

14 Probably the picture by Levi Henry Leopold published in Ἀττικὸν Μουσεῖον on 15 March 1892, a journal to which Cavafy had contributed. See Λεύκωμα Καβάφη, ed. Lena Savidi (Athens 1983) 200. For an overview of mythological models and Victorian painting, see Rosemary Barrow, 'Mad about the boy', in the present volume.

15 But Cavafy was working on this poem from 1892 to 1924, as Savidis shows. See 'Επτά στάδια ενός ποιήματος του Καβάφη. "Η Κηδεία του Σαρπηδόνος", 1892–1924', in Μικρά Καβαφικά, Α' (Athens 1985) 259–80.

16 1898, lines 51–4 and 1908, lines 40–2. Tr. D. Ricks, *The Shade of Homer*, 100–1 and 102–4.

17 Ricks, *The Shade of Homer*, 110.

18 Compare, for example, the phrase 'κάμποση πέτρα' ('a good deal of stone') in 'Τυανεὺς γλύπτης' which reflects a certain vulgarity when talking in quantities.

19 This is explicitly stated in 'Εὐρίωνος Τάφος' ('Tomb of Eurion) (1914). Indeed, in this poem, the tomb of the young man is so heavily decorated that the ephebe's form is lost as the speaker acknowledges at the end: 'Χάσαμεν ὅμως τὸ πιὸ τίμιο – τὴν μορφή του, | ποὺ ἤτανε σὰν μιὰ ἀπολλώνια ὀπτασία' ('But we've lost what was most precious: his form – | like a vision of Apollo.').

20 Ricks, *The Shade of Homer*, 109.

21 See P. Hoyle, *Delphi* (London 1967) 158–9, and F. Poulsen, *Delphi* (tr. G.C. Richards) (London [n. d.]) 221.

22 Contrary to the whiteness of the body which implied youth, the whiteness of hair is a characteristic of old age, which Sarpedon, as indeed many of the youths of Cavafy's erotic poems, does not reach.

23 A. Stewart, *Greek Sculpture. An Exploration* (New Haven 1990) 36.

24 See Ricks, *The Shade of Homer*, 109.

25 After E. Keeley and P. Sherrard, *C. P. Cavafy. Collected Poems* (Princeton 1992).

26 R. Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece* (Oxford 1980) 133.
27 R.R.R. Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture* (London 1991) 14.
28 Edmund Keeley, Καβάφης και Browning (tr. A. Berlis) in Πρακτικά Τρίτου Συμποσίου Ποίησης (Patras 1986) 355–62.
29 Tsirkas, in his 'Ο πολιτικὸς Καβάφης (Athens 1971) publishes a manuscript of the poet with commentaries on certain passages of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and *The Stones of Venice*.
30 M. Peridis, 'Ο Βίος καὶ τὸ Ἔργο τοῦ Κωνσταντίνου Καβάφη (Athens 1948) 72.
31 W. Pater, 'Winckelmann' in D.L. Hill, ed., *The Renaissance. Studies in Art and Poetry* (Berkeley 1980) 141–85.
32 Pater, 'Winckelmann', 147, 154.
33 The sensuality of touch has also been pointed out by D. Nikolareizis, 'Ο ἡδονισμὸς στὴν ποίηση τοῦ Καβάφη, in A. Ziras (ed.), Δοκίμια Κριτικῆς (Athens 1983) 156–66 (164).
34 J. Mavrogordato, *The Poems of C. P. Cavafy* (London 1951) 66.
35 A similar affinity exists between the words 'stature' and 'statue' in English.
36 Compare the use of the verb in Sikelianos' 'Παντάρκης' (1914) to refer to the erection of Zeus's statue by Phidias.
37 Jenkyns, *The Victorians and Ancient Greece*, 149–50.
38 Both poems translated by Keeley and Sherrard.
39 After Keeley and Sherrard.
40 Pater for example, influenced by Schlegel and Winckelmann, says that 'painting, music and poetry, with their endless power of complexity, are the special arts of the romantic and modern ages'.
41 Compare ''Επιτύμβιον 'Αντιόχου, Βασιλέως Κομμαγηνῆς' ('Epitaph of Antiochos, King of Kommagene') (1923), lines 15–16: ''Υπῆρξεν ἔτι τὸ ἄριστον ἐκεῖνο, 'Ελληνικὸς – | ἰδιότητα δὲν ἔχ' ἡ ἀνθρωπότης τιμιοτέραν' ('In addition he was that best of things, Hellenic – | mankind has no quality more precious'). Tr. Keeley and Sherrard, 125.
42 Most of my information on Hellenistic sculpture is drawn from Smith's book Hellenistic Sculpture. I have also found extremely helpful the accounts given on Greek sculpture (Classical and Hellenistic) by Nigel Spivey, *Understanding Greek Sculpture. Ancient Meanings, Modern Readings* (London 1996).
43 Spivey, *Understanding Greek Sculpture*, 200.
44 See Smith, *Hellenistic Sculpture*, 51.
45 *Natural History* 34.65. Reported by J.J. Pollitt, *Art in the Hellenistic Age* (Cambridge 1986) 47.
46 Stokes, *Stones of Rimini*, 15.
47 Tr. D. Ricks, *Modern Poetry in Translation*, 9.
48 J. Heffernan, *Museum of Words. The Poetics of Ecphrasis from Homer to Ashbery* (Chicago 1993) 139–45 (141–2).
49 See also Spivey, *Understanding Greek Sculpture*, 45.
50 See, 'The Critic as Artist', in *Complete Works of Oscar Wilde* (London 1966) 1018–21.
51 Stokes, *Stones of Rimini*, 18.
52 J.J. Pollitt, *Art and Experience in Classical Greece* (Cambridge 1972) 125.
53 V.A. Caires, 'Originality and eroticism: Constantine Cavafy and the Alexandrian epigram, *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies* 6 (1980) 131–56.