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# The Reception of Cavafy in Russia and Ukraine\*

*Anastassiya Andrianova*

In *Translation, Rewriting, and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, André Lefevere identified several factors that determine which literary works get accepted or rejected, canonized or not canonized, including power, ideology, and the patronage of persons and institutions; added to these, the translation of Greek texts in particular is influenced by the presence of a classical tradition, Philhellenism, and Greek diaspora.<sup>1</sup> As Joanna Kruczkowska points out in her discussion of modern Greek poetry translations into Polish, what is missing from Lefevere's theory is, however, the important factor of the translator's enthusiasm for individual authors.<sup>2</sup> Along with a Philhellenic tradition that brought Constantine Cavafy (1863-1933) to Russia and Ukraine, it is the enthusiasm of individual translators working in receptive literary and critical circles that evidently fueled the translation, publication, and dissemination of Cavafy's work in Russian and Ukrainian. Specifically, that of the Russian philologist Sof'ia Il'inskaia, who "discovered" Cavafy and produced the first translations of his poems into Russian; and other translators and critics, including Mikhail Gasparov, Irina Kovalëva, Vladimir

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<sup>1</sup> Lefevere 1992.

<sup>2</sup> Kruczkowska 2015, 106.

Toporov, and Tat'iana Tsiv'ian, as well as the émigré poet and essayist Joseph Brodsky; and Cavafy's Ukrainian translators and enthusiasts, Andrii Bilets'kyi (and the broader efforts of the Andrii Bilets'kyi Historico-Philological Society), Hryhorii Kochur, Iryna Betko, and Andrii Savenko. Most of Cavafy's works have now been translated into Russian and are readily accessible in the Cavafy Internet archive hosted by *Biblioteka Ferghana*, as well as in print in *Ruskaia Kavafiana* (*Russian Kavafiana*), along with translations by Il'inskaia, Gennadii Shmakov (under Brodsky's editorial supervision), and others.<sup>3</sup> Although his entire corpus has yet to be translated into Ukrainian, the largest collection of selected poems, edited by Savenko, is available in print in *Konstantinos Kavafis. Vybrane* (*Constantine Cavafy. Selections*), along with some works available online.<sup>4</sup>

While much has been written about Cavafy in Russian and Ukrainian by Russian and Ukrainian scholars, little is known to anglophone readers about how Russian and Ukrainian critics received, translated, and disseminated Cavafy's work. To date, the reception of Cavafy in Russia and Ukraine has not been exhaustively documented in English. This history of translation and criticism would be of interest to Cavafy scholars outside of those linguistic contexts because some of the earliest public lectures on Cavafy were given to Russo-Ukrainian audiences, a little-known fact that puts in perspective the history of Cavafy's reception more readily identified with the anglophone and francophone West: crediting E.M. Forster and T.S. Eliot with promoting Cavafy in the English-speaking world and Marguerite Yourcenar, with introducing Cavafy to the French. Such a discussion would, moreover, widen and confirm the poet's cosmopolitan scope and global appeal, the two qualities highlighted by his Russian and Ukrainian translators alike. Kovalëva, the late Russian translator, philologist, and poet, alleged that "Cavafy is, perhaps, the only Greek poet since Homer and the tragic poets to have a truly worldwide significance".<sup>5</sup> Stressing Cavafy's trans-

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<sup>3</sup> Konstantinos@Kavafis.ru 2009; Tsiv'an (ed.) 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Savenko 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Kovalëva 2004. All translations from the Russian and Ukrainian are my own—A.A. Transliteration follows the Library of Congress (ALA-LC) Romanization Tables, with ligatures omitted.

latability, Kovalëva also considered him the singular representative of twentieth-century Greek poetry for the foreign reader.<sup>6</sup> Savenko finds him the “most notorious” (on account of his politics and sexuality) persona in “the history of Greek letters, the cradle of the entire European literary tradition, which gave the world many famous names”.<sup>7</sup>

Generally speaking, Russian and Ukrainian Cavafy enthusiasts appear less interested in the history of Cavafy’s reception in their respective national languages than they are in his reception by Modern Greek scholars and poets, particularly George Seferis, and in analyses of poetics and form. Il’inskaia’s monograph *K.P. Kavafis. Na puti k realizmu v poëzii XX veka* (*C.P. Cavafy. The Path to Realism in Twentieth-Century Poetry*, 1984), a telling example, analyzes Cavafy’s poetic development from his artistic failures and uncertainty to the discovery of his path and the refinement of his philosophical and aesthetic positions, and concludes with a chapter on “Kavafis i potomki” (“Cavafy and His Descendants”), discussing the posthumous history of his reception in Greece. Il’inskaia did, however, give a talk on the interesting history of bringing Cavafy to Russian-speaking audiences –with his first introduction given to the Greek diaspora in what was then the Russian Empire but is now Ukraine.<sup>8</sup> Savenko provides a brief entry in the *Biblioteka Ferghana* archive detailing Cavafy’s translation and dissemination in Ukraine, though similarly without reflecting on why Cavafy might generate interest among Ukrainian readers in particular, other than the select few members of Modern Greek- or Cavafy-oriented societies.<sup>9</sup> Such reluctance may be due to the belief, voiced by the translator in partial criticism of Il’inskaia’s attempt to read contemporary historical events into Cavafy’s poetry, that his style is too “protean” for narrowly focused, and especially political, interpretations; while bringing to light the critique of imperialism implicit in poems like “Waiting for the Barbarians”, tendentious readings limit the texts’ “broad perspective”.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kovalëva 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Savenko 2017, 6.

<sup>8</sup> Il’inskaia 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Savenko 2020a.

<sup>10</sup> Savenko 2017, 24-25.

Similarly, Savenko suggests that the “universal elements characteristic of [Cavafy’s] poetics allowed [Cavafy] to find ‘key themes’ the interpretation of which is panchronic in nature”.<sup>11</sup>

An overview of Cavafy reception in the Russian and Ukrainian contexts suggests the influence of Il’inskaia’s, Savenko’s, and other individual translators’ enthusiasm on the appreciation and dissemination of Cavafy’s work in translation among Russian- and Ukrainian-speaking audiences, efforts aided by institutional support from Philhellenic societies and cultural centers; it also reveals the more subtle ways in which social and political forces have facilitated or thwarted such dissemination—a history that is curiously missing from Russian and Ukrainian accounts. This essay provides one such overview of Cavafy’s reception history previously inaccessible to anglophone readers while filling in some of these critical gaps.

## **Philhellenism and Early Reception**

The long tradition of Russian and Ukrainian Philhellenism set the ground for the reception of Cavafy in the Russian Empire.<sup>12</sup> Greco-Russian relations date back to the Glagolitic alphabet, devised by the Thessaloniki-born Byzantine theologians (and later canonized saints) Cyril and Methodius in the ninth century and used to transcribe Old Church Slavonic. This intercultural connection was solidified through Christian Orthodoxy shared by Kievan Rus’ and Byzantium. Concern for Greek language and culture is evident in the efforts of Tsar Peter the Great and Tsarina Catherine the Great, who promoted literary Philhellenism.<sup>13</sup> The latter patronized the Greek scholar Eugenios Voulgaris, founded a Greek *gymnasion* for Greek children in Saint Petersburg in 1775, and encouraged Greek settlements in Mariupolis (currently, Mariupol, Ukraine) and Odessa, both of which became important centers of Greek culture and

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<sup>11</sup> Savenko 2020, 73.

<sup>12</sup> For more on Philhellenism, see Arsh 2007; for cultural, political, and economic connections between Greeks and Russians, see Sokolovskaia 2018; for Greek diaspora in the Crimea, see Nikiforov 2013.

<sup>13</sup> Arsh 2007.

trade. Φιλική Εταιρεία (Society of Friends), for example, was founded in Odessa in 1814 by young Phanariot Greeks from Constantinople and the Russian Empire with the goal of overthrowing the Ottomans and establishing an independent Greek state. Interest in Greece remains strong to this day in the south of Ukraine, where Greek minorities tended to settle.

Philhellenism undoubtedly explains why some of the earliest public lectures on Cavafy's poetry in the history of his reception were well received by Russian and Ukrainian audiences. The most comprehensive overview of Cavafy reception in the Russian context (first in the Russian Empire and later in the Soviet Union) is provided by Il'inskaia, his Russian "discoverer", in a talk she delivered at the Fifth International Symposium on Cavafy in November 1995, titled "K.P. Kavafis v Rossii" ("C.P. Cavafy in Russia"), which was first published in the Athenian journal *Θέματα λογοτεχνίας*. According to Il'inskaia, the first oral introductions to Cavafy's work in Russian took place in 1911 and 1912 "in two southern cities", Ekaterinoslavl' and Rostov, "with flourishing Greek populations, following an initiative by the Greeks".<sup>14</sup> The first bit of evidence comes from a library catalogue of the English club in Ekaterinoslavl', then part of the Russian Empire and presently the city of Dnipro in Ukraine. The lecture was given on May 20, 1911 by K. Vallianos and dedicated to the Greeks of Egypt and, specifically, "to the young poet Cavafy" (who was 48 at the time). The second lecture, mentioned in G. Skaramangas' unpublished journal, took place in December 1912 in Rostov, a city in southern Russia; Skaramangas notes that "in the hall of the public library the honorable audience listened to a lecture by Ambrosius Rallis on the Greek poet from Alexandria C.P. Cavafy".<sup>15</sup> Rallis, doctor and son of the painter F. Rallis, is listed among the people to whom Cavafy gifted his collections (a book from 1910). In the public appreciation of Cavafy those two Russian lectures were preceded only by Petros Petridis' 1909 lecture in Alexandria, which had mixed success, "clearly indicating that the public was not yet ready to

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<sup>14</sup> Il'inskaia 2000, 563.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. 563.

appreciate Cavafy”.<sup>16</sup> Forster, of course, would not introduce the poet to the English-speaking world until 1919, with the first English translations appearing four years later.<sup>17</sup>

Il’inskaia suggests that Cavafy could have been introduced to Russian audiences as early as 1903 or 1904 by Mikhail Likiardopoulos, who published on Russian literature in two Greek journals (*Παναθήναια* and *Νοτιάς*) and on Greek literature and culture in the leading modernist journal *Vesy* (*Libra*), and whose “Letters from Moscow” appear in the same issue as Xenopoulos’ essay on Cavafy and Cavafy’s own poems, “Unfaithfulness” and “Voices”.<sup>18</sup> However, Likiardopoulos’ interests shifted to Oscar Wilde and away from Russian-Greek connections before he did any work on Cavafy.<sup>19</sup> Il’inskaia is confident that Likiardopoulos must have read Cavafy, and that if anyone could have introduced him to Russian readers, it was he, especially since he collaborated with the Russian decadent Mikhail Kuzmin, who also, theoretically, could have introduced the poet to Russian readers, but did not: the two –Kuzmin and Cavafy– had a famous “nevstrecha” (non-meeting) in Alexandria, where Kuzmin had traveled in 1895.<sup>20</sup> To Kuzmin, who produced a collection titled *Aleksandriiskie pesni* (*Alexandrian Songs*), Alexandria was also very meaningful; his homosexual thematics, erudition, and Gnosticism all seem to have originated there.<sup>21</sup> Il’inskaia concludes that the first time Kuzmin and Cavafy actually “met” was on the pages of her essay collection, *K.P. Kavafis i russkaia poëziia “serebrianogo veka”* (*C.P. Cavafy and the Poetry of the Russian “Silver Age”*), first published in Greek in 1995 and reprinted in *Russkaia Kavafiana* in 2000.<sup>22</sup>

The next chapter in Cavafy’s reception in the 1930s tells the story of individual enthusiasm inauspiciously unreciprocated by Cavafy himself. Two letters from Moscow were written and sent to Cavafy in 1931 by a

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid. 564.

<sup>17</sup> Longenbach 2009; Kovalëva 2001.

<sup>18</sup> Il’inskaia 2000, 562.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 543.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 473, 542.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 551; Tsiv’ian 2000, 577-578.

<sup>22</sup> Il’inskaia 2000, 543.

certain Timofei Glikman, a self-professed philologist-Hellenist. With a record of translation from Spanish and Italian, Glikman appears to have been the first Russian to want to translate Cavafy; he had a serious interest in Greek culture and wrote under the pseudonym “Timofei Grek” (Timofei the Greek). But Cavafy never responded to his requests.<sup>23</sup>

## Reception in the Soviet Union

One would expect the political and cultural contexts that shaped Soviet letters in the 20<sup>th</sup> century –Socialist Realism, censorship, and dissident art; Marxist purging of bourgeois texts; homophobia; and Joseph Stalin’s attempt to create a monolingual supranational identity– to have shaped the reception of Cavafy. These factors must have contributed to some degree: whereas the first public lectures on Cavafy date to when the Greek diaspora prospered in the Russian Empire, Stalin’s policy of aggressive Russification and the closure of Greek language schools, banning of Greek publications, and terrorizing of Greek minorities must have precluded any work on Modern Greek literature.

Indeed, Cavafy’s work in translation was not formally introduced to Russian and Ukrainian readers until 1967 and 1969, respectively, that is, following the Khrushchev Thaw, the period from Stalin’s death to the mid-1960s, which witnessed the relaxation of repression and censorship and would have made it (more) possible to publish the works of a poet who was not overtly communist or pro-Soviet. Cavafy’s homoerotic poems, however, would not be printed until the fall of the Soviet Union. In other words, it was over fifty years after the two early public lectures in Ekaterinoslav’ and Rostov that Cavafy was published in Russian and Ukrainian translation. In 1965 Il’inskaia’s translation of Cavafy’s “The Satrapy” was featured in a story by Mitsos Aleksandropoulos. Two years later, in August 1967, 11 of his poems were published also in Il’inskaia’s Russian translation in *Inostrannaia literatura* (*Foreign Literature*). Founded in 1891 as *Vestnik inostrannoi literatury* (*The Herald of Foreign Literature*), this journal underwent various changes, both in

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 564-565.

name and orientation, throughout the Soviet period. Under Stalin, it was under three levels of censorship: like other journals, it was policed by the censorship agency Glavlit,<sup>24</sup> which had to approve any publication, however trivial; like other serious literary journals, moreover, it was also subject to the party's ideological control, and added to this was the censorship of the Comintern,<sup>25</sup> which determined the lists of writers who could and could not be translated, with preference given to those openly professing socialist or communist ideals or, at the very least, showing some "tendency in that direction", including pro-Soviet writers like Romain Rolland, Louis Aragon, Bertolt Brecht, and Pablo Neruda.<sup>26</sup> Despite such strict censorship, not all works published in the journal supported the ideological interests of the working class: Ernest Hemingway, John Steinbeck, John Dos Passos, and Thomas Mann appeared on its pages, and even James Joyce's *Ulysses* (though its publication was truncated). *Foreign Literature* also featured the translations of W.H. Auden, Federico García Lorca, Ted Hughes, and other avant-garde poets who did not subscribe to Socialist Realism.<sup>27</sup> Blium alleges that "all this was done for show, to keep up appearances, in the old Russian tradition of creating 'Potemkin villages', but it nevertheless made a strong impression on Western intellectuals".<sup>28</sup> That nearly a dozen Cavafy poems was included in *Foreign Literature* seems appropriate not only as a façade for the West, but also as a legacy of Khrushchev's policy of de-Stalinization and, perhaps in a different way, the general corruption and inefficiency characteristic of Leonid Brezhnev's time as General Secretary (1964-1982).

These first translated poems reached the Russian diaspora abroad, including Igor Efremov, the head of the New York-based Russian publishing house "Hermitage", who recalled reading Cavafy in Il'inskaia's

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<sup>24</sup> The abbreviated title of the General Directorate for the Protection of State Secrets in the Press under the Council of Ministers of the USSR.

<sup>25</sup> Communist International, whose leadership consisted of general secretaries of national communist parties.

<sup>26</sup> Blium 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

translation.<sup>29</sup> It was abroad, as well, that Brodsky published his famous 1977 essay “On Cavafy’s Side”, a review of Edmund Keeley’s *Cavafy’s Alexandria*. Originally written and published in English, Brodsky’s review was then circulated in various Russian translations under different titles, including in *Russkaia Kavafiana*, thus adding to Cavafy criticism in Russian in and outside of Russia: for example, Lev Losev’s 1978 Russian translation (titled “Na storone Kavafisa”) first appeared in the French *L’Echo*. In 1988, 19 poems were published in the literary supplement to the newspaper *Russkaia mysl’* (*Russian Thought*), in Shmakov’s translation with Brodsky’s editorial assistance. A collection of Cavafy’s poems in Russian came out in the journal *Khudozhestvennaia literatura* (*Literary Fiction*) in 1984, as well as in *Nauka* (*Science*), along with Il’inskaia’s aforementioned monograph, *C.P. Cavafy. The Path to Realism in Twentieth-Century Poetry*.<sup>30</sup>

Ukrainian critical interest in Cavafy dates to the same decade as his Russian reception, and was largely due to the individual efforts of Bilets’kyi and his spouse Tat’iana Chernyshova, later carried on by their disciples, who translated several poems into Ukrainian. Kochur, first a neophyte and later a Cavafy expert, produced some of the earliest translations of “Waiting for the Barbarians”, “Thermopylae”, and “Candles”, among others.<sup>31</sup> These were published in the journal *Vitryla* (*Sails*) in Kyïv in 1969 and then in *Druhe vidlunnia* (*The Second Echo*). The next to come out was a selection of translations along with a brief introduction written by Chernyshova, for a journal on foreign literature in translation titled *Vsesvit* (*Universe*).<sup>32</sup>

## Reception in Post-Soviet Russia

In both the Russian and Ukrainian contexts longer selections started appearing in the 1990s after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. In 1995 the Soviet and Russian philologist and translator Boris Dubin pre-

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<sup>29</sup> Il’inskaia 2000, 566.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. 566-567.

<sup>31</sup> Savenko 2020a.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

pared a special edition of *Foreign Literature* titled *Portret v zerkalakh: Kavafis (A Portrait in Mirrors: Cavafy)* consisting of essays by Auden, Brodsky, and Yourcenar.<sup>33</sup> The journal *Literaturnoe obozrenie (Literary Review)* dedicated a special issue to 20<sup>th</sup>-century Greek literature in 1997, in which Cavafy was prominently featured, and then in 1998, the journal *Kommentarii (Commentaries)* published a translation of Seferis' seminal essay "C.P. Cavafy and T.S. Eliot: Parallels". The publication of *Russkaia Kavafiana* in 2000 marks the final phase of Cavafy's reception in post-Soviet Russia, as it includes translations into Russian of practically the entire poetic corpus (including 69 poems previously unavailable in Russian translation), two monographs, and a series of articles by Cavafy experts. In 2003, a tome of his prose was also published.<sup>34</sup> That the majority of critical output in Russia came out around or after 1984 may be attributed to the further relaxation of censorship under Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of Glasnost (openness, transparency), with its objective to promote open discourse between the citizenry and the mass media, followed by the liberal policies of post-Soviet Russia's first president Boris Yeltsin (1991-1999).

This rather late publication of Cavafy's oeuvre perhaps explains why the leading Russian philologist Toporov would claim, in 2000, that Russian readers "have only very recently begun to familiarize themselves with the Cavafy phenomenon: with some rare exceptions, he is not yet their own".<sup>35</sup> Toporov laments this in "Iavlenie Kavafisa" ("The Cavafy Phenomenon"), while also asserting that Cavafy is not only prominent in 20<sup>th</sup>-century world literature, but also the culmination of three millennia of Greek literature and culture—a gesture toward Cavafy's transhistorical legacy reiterated by Russian and Ukrainian critics alike.

One notable essay from this period is Il'inskaia's previously mentioned *C.P. Cavafy and the Poetry of the Russian "Silver Age"*, originally published in 1995. By drawing parallels to three early 20<sup>th</sup>-century

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<sup>33</sup> Kovalëva 2004.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Toporov 2000, 491. This is an expanded version of his 1994 article "Dve zametki o poëzii Kavafisa" ("Two Notes on Cavafy's Poetry"), published in *Znaki Balkan (Balkan Signs)*.

Russian modernist poets who participated, Il'inskaia argues, in a unified European process, she set the stage for the reception of Cavafy in the Russian literary sphere. This is the kind of sponsorship that Lefevere describes in his discussion of translation.<sup>36</sup> Specifically, Il'inskaia traces independent parallels between Cavafy and the leading Russian Symbolist Valerii Briusov, the aforementioned Kuzmin, and Nikolai Gumilev, the cofounder of the modernist Acmeist movement. She draws attention to a shared symbolism and, at the same time, a tendency, especially for Briusov and Cavafy, toward concrete meaning, clarity and precision in expression, which made them break out of the Symbolist aesthetic.<sup>37</sup> All three took similar approaches to solving problems in their creative processes and also similarly faced the fin-de-siècle dilemma between revolution and evolution, choosing bold evolutionary moves. Additionally, they shared Cavafy's unrestrained dedication to art, turned to high culture as a fund for creativity, and tended toward universality while also understanding that they were living in an age of major cataclysms.<sup>38</sup> With Kuzmin in particular, Il'inskaia insists, Cavafy shared an interest in Alexandria as a locus of content, figure, and lexicon, so much that their works could be read as "Greek and Russian variants of the same texts".<sup>39</sup>

## **Homoerotic Poems**

Kuzmin and Cavafy shared not only aesthetic interests and thematics, as Il'inskaia notes; both poets' works were subject to the social repression and literary censorship of sexuality during the Soviet era. Kuzmin, Russia's first openly gay writer, was condemned to "official obscurity" for decades.<sup>40</sup> The criminalization and pathologizing of homosexuality in the Soviet Union prevented Cavafy's homoerotic poems from being

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<sup>36</sup> Lefevere 1992.

<sup>37</sup> Il'inskaia 2000, 531. Cf. Savenko 2017, 11, who describes such precision in terms of Eliot's "objective correlative".

<sup>38</sup> Il'inskaia 2000, 528-529.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 533.

<sup>40</sup> Malmstad & Bogomolov 1999.

published. Indeed, unique to the 2000 edition of *Ruskaia Kavafiana*, as compared to previous publications, including a small volume of 159 pages titled *Lirika* (*Lyrics*, 1984), was the addition of the erotic poems;<sup>41</sup> the latter, in Kovalëva's words, "we could not even dream of printing in 1984", pre-Glasnost<sup>42</sup>—that is, two years before a Russian respondent famously claimed, in one of the first Soviet-American tele-bridges, that "there [was] no sex in the USSR" ("U nas seksa net..."). That even as late as 2001 Kovalëva felt the need to refer to Cavafy's sexuality euphemistically in a popular literary newspaper ("Cavafy, as it is said nowadays, 'adhered to a nontraditional orientation'..."), suggests that at least some aspects of the poet's biography remain taboo.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, in *The New York Review of Books* in 1977, Brodsky wrote openly about Cavafy's visits to homosexual brothels.<sup>44</sup>

Homosexuality was criminalized during most of the Soviet era, though some discussion of decriminalization was initiated in the 1960-70s; the entry in the *Big Soviet Encyclopedia* on *gomoseksualizm* (homosexuality) claimed it to be a pathology, and some psychological research was published in the 1980s; at the end of that decade the Libertarian Party was the first to recognize the rights of "sexual minorities".<sup>45</sup> Male homosexual intercourse (*muzhelozhstvo*, or "man-lying-with-man") was decriminalized only in 1993. Even after its decriminalization, however, homosexuality continues to be pathologized in Russia in a general atmosphere of homophobia, with activist voices intervening in discursive practices around homosexuality but falling short of social recognition.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Savenko's *Vybrane* (2017) features such homoerotic poems as "Zmal'ovane" ("Pictured", 85), "Do dverei kav'iarni" ("At the Café Door", 88), "Na vulytsi" ("In the Street", 91), "Pered statuieiu Endymiona" ("Before the Statue of Endymion", 93), and "Iunyi literator na 24-mu rotsi svoho zhyttia" ("A Young Poet in His Twenty-Fourth Year", 175). These, along with several others, are also included in *Ruskaia Kavafiana* (2000), respectively: "Narisovannoe" (67), "U vkhoda v cafe" (70), "Na ulitse" (97), "Pered statuei Endimiona" (79), and "24-i god iz zhizni molodogo literatora" (159).

<sup>42</sup> Kovalëva 2001.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Brodsky 2000 (1977), 486-487.

<sup>45</sup> Kondakov 2013, 408.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. 409.

The history of sexuality in the Soviet Union and beyond further puts in perspective Il'inskaia's claim about the missed opportunities of introducing Cavafy to Russian readers early on, particularly given Likiardopoulos' literary proximity to the Modern Greek poet. The honest portrayal of same-sex love in Kuzmin's novel *Kryl'ia* (*Wings*, 1906) was well received by his Russian modernist peers, including Briusov; in an unprecedented move, Briusov chose to devote an entire issue of the journal *Libra* (the modernist journal where Likiardopoulos published some of his work) to this novel by the "Russian Oscar Wilde".<sup>47</sup> Theoretically speaking, building on such momentum Cavafy could have become "a phenomenon" in Russia prior to 1917. After 1917, "gay men were at times imprisoned for violations of 'public order' in Soviet Russia if they acted on their inclination, [and] campaigns were carried out for the eradication of the 'disease'"; in fact, "several of Kuzmin's gay friends and his lover were arrested, interrogated, and blackmailed by the secret police".<sup>48</sup>

### Reception in Post-Soviet Ukraine

Similar to the post-Soviet Russian context, Cavafy's work became more widely available to Ukrainian audiences after the fall of the Soviet Union. In 1991, the year of Ukraine's independence, the first edition with 10 poems came out, translated by Betko, Nadiia Hontar, Kochur, Oleksandr Ponamariv, and Sviatoslava Zubchenko. Since then more translations and editions have appeared, with the publication of *Vybrane* in 2017 containing the most comprehensive, though yet incomplete selection, edited and introduced by Savenko, the translator of the majority of the volume's poems, who has also translated into Ukrainian works by Seferis, Vizyinos, Papadiamantis, Lucian, and the ancient Greek lyricists. In the mid-1990s, moreover, the Fund for Greek Culture in Odessa started an initiative to publish a bilingual edition of the entire poetic oeuvre, which was, however, never completed. In 1999 most of the se-

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<sup>47</sup> Malmstad 2000, 86.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid. 88n.

lected materials were published in the third volume of *The Notes of the Andrii Bilets'kyi Historico-Philological Society*, with an introductory chapter prepared by Betko and translations by the society's members, including Betko, Savenko, and Kochur.<sup>49</sup>

Evidence of Cavafy's relevance in contemporary Ukraine may be gleaned from a 2005 announcement of a local photography exhibit of Mount Athos landscapes in Kharkiv, held as part of the city's celebration of Greek culture. This announcement alleges that Greek antiquity and Hellenism are formative for all European (and world) cultures, but "Slavic culture in particular, because it spiritually grew out" of Greek culture.<sup>50</sup> Although the article makes no mention of Cavafy's poetry, the announcement is titled "Nam greki ne chuzhie skazal poet Kavafis" ("Greeks are not foreign to us said the poet Cavafy"), suggesting that Cavafy would be familiar to the popular newspaper's Philhellenic readers. In 2013, moreover, the project titled "2013—god K. Kavafisa v Ukraine" ("2013, the Year of C. Cavafy in Ukraine") was meant to commemorate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Cavafy's birth and the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death; sponsored by UNESCO and the Ministry of Education, Religion, Culture, and Sport of Greece and the Greek Cultural Fund in Odessa, the year saw a number of events dedicated to Cavafy's life and work.<sup>51</sup>

The flourishing of Cavafy initiatives and publications was contemporaneous with Ukraine's emergence as a new independent nation, along with which came efforts to critically reevaluate Ukraine's past history of Soviet, Moscow-centered neo-imperialism and to reorient itself vis-à-vis the European West, most starkly evident in the Orange Revolution (2004-2005) and Euromaidan, the second wave of protests and civil unrest (2013-2014).<sup>52</sup> This can hardly be seen as coincidental, even if Ukrainian Cavafy experts themselves are not invested in drawing such connections. In Savenko's criticism, preoccupied with Cavafy's

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<sup>49</sup> Savenko 2020a.

<sup>50</sup> Slavko 2005.

<sup>51</sup> "Proëkt" 2013.

<sup>52</sup> For more on modern and contemporary Ukrainian culture and post-colonialism, see e.g. Andrianova 2015; Chernetsky 2007; Grabowitz 1995; Pavlyshyn 1997.

place in the European literary canon, there are no parallels to Ukrainian literature's perhaps similarly fraught positionality, in light of Ukraine's colonial history as both "a semi-autonomous or vassal country" and "a somnolent province of Russia",<sup>53</sup> and its more recent efforts to align with the European Union and the West, which is culturally constructed as a "return" (*povernennia*) "to Ukraine's true identity, a return to enlightened Europe and Ukraine's European roots".<sup>54</sup>

In his introductory chapter to *Vybrane*, Savenko makes no mention of sociopolitical factors contributing either to Cavafy's obscurity during the Soviet era or to his emergence starting in the late 1960s and culminating in the post-Soviet period; rather than Cavafy's reception in Ukraine, Savenko comments on the poet's cosmopolitanism and connection to England and the English language, and his early realization of leading a "bifurcated life", partly due to homosexuality (one aspect of Cavafy's "social seclusion") but also due to the problem of pursuing humanist ideals and surviving in a society Savenko sees as plagued by a "dehumanizing crisis" (by which he means the broad disregard for or outright suppression of individuality and aesthetic sensibility).<sup>55</sup> Savenko describes Cavafy's choosing "the path of a small Chekhovian person" by becoming, in the words of J.A. Sareyannis, "the man of the crowd", assuming the position of civil servant, like his fellow modernists Stéphane Mallarmé and Eliot.<sup>56</sup> Notable in such contextualization are both the anglophone parallel and the Chekhovian allusion which, for the Ukrainian reader, would presumably highlight Cavafy's cosmopolitanism (and foreignness) while also making him more familiar through the Russian (though also worldly, because humanistic) tradition. Curiously missing from such grounding in the tradition of European letters and humanism is the more obvious parallel to Cavafy's modernist Ukrainian counterpart and near contemporary Lesia Ukraïнка (1871-1913), who was a Hellenophile and spent time in Egypt, and whose dramatic poems also foreground the tension between high ideals and crushing mundan-

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<sup>53</sup> Grabowicz 1995, 678.

<sup>54</sup> Naydan 2009, 187.

<sup>55</sup> Savenko 2017, 7.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.* 7-8.

ity, while problematizing the dehumanization and commodification of art and artists.<sup>57</sup>

Besides broader transhistorical concerns, Savenko is largely interested in questions of form; he mentions the protean quality (“proteism”) of the poet’s process, his continuous revision and work with language, with the goal of eliminating anything superfluous to find the ideal form.<sup>58</sup> With respect to language in particular, Savenko comments on the juxtaposition of two communicative modes in Cavafy’s idiom: Δημοτική (vernacular formed in colloquial settings on the basis of dialect) and Καθαρεύουσα (an artificial dialect created at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by literary, high culture), the combination of which (often through irony, also analyzed in Cavafy criticism) is said to have contributed to the creation of a unified Greek cultural tradition.<sup>59</sup> “Mury”, Savenko’s translation of “Walls” and the first poem in *Vybrane*, features the translator’s approximation of this dialectical combination.<sup>60</sup> As other scholars, Savenko focuses on Cavafy’s Hellenism and his reception of antiquity and Byzantium.<sup>61</sup> His most recent work proposes a more “engagé” reading of Cavafy’s “Potentate from Western Libya” to explore what Savenko calls “the poetics of doubt” and the forging of a “queer discourse”, teasing out, among other meanings, the poet’s exclusion from the world of communication due to his queer identity.<sup>62</sup>

A similar preoccupation with form is evident in the critical reception of Cavafy in Russian. Any attempt to summarize this overwhelming archive would be impossible; notable for its lasting impact is, however,

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<sup>57</sup> See e.g. Luckyj 1969; Zabuzhko 2007. I am not aware of Ukraïnka’s familiarity with Cavafy, but one will likely discover independent parallels, akin to those Il’inskaia draws with Russian Silver Age poets.

<sup>58</sup> Savenko 2017, 10.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 11-12.

<sup>60</sup> Savenko 2017, 29. Note, for example, the past form of the masculine reflexive “not hearing” (*nezchuvsia*) in the closing line, for the Greek Katharevousa Ανεπαισθήτως, rather than the more common *ya ne chuv* (I did not hear): *Nezchuvsia, i mene vidrizano vid svitu* (I did not hear, and I am cut off from the world); similarly, *U bezrusi* (“motionless”, in line 3) rather than the more common *neruhomyi* (still, stationary) for the original κάθομαι.

<sup>61</sup> Kovalëva 2001; Chiglintsev 2009; Bekmetov & Perebaeva 2016.

<sup>62</sup> Savenko 2020, 73, 78.

Brodsky's essay "On Cavafy's Side", which homes in on Cavafy's language and poetics. Cavafy gains from translation, according to Brodsky, due to his use of "poor" ("bednye") poetic devices, without rich imagery or comparisons, and with reliance on the primary meaning of words, which further strengthens such "economy".<sup>63</sup> This technique comes from Cavafy's realization that language is no longer a means of knowledge, but of (material, bourgeois) possession, and by stripping it of accoutrements (poetic devices), poetry can win over language. The result is a kind of "mental tautology which frees up the reader's imagination". Cavafy does, however, continue to use metaphor, but in a peculiar way: he makes the "vehicle" of his poetry Alexandria, and the "tenor"—life (in I.A. Richards' terminology).<sup>64</sup> Composed in collaboration with Brodsky, Shmakov's translation of Cavafy's "Walls" into Russian ("Steny"), however, reveals that Brodsky perhaps overemphasized the original's linguistic paucity. Shmakov uses some of the same diction as does Il'inskaia in her translation of the poem, thus confirming the influence of Il'inskaia's translations on the way Cavafy was received, but he also employs imagery that could hardly be seen as "poor".<sup>65</sup> That Brodsky's evaluation (specifically of Cavafy's ostensibly "poor" devices) has been accepted as dogma can be inferred from its unattributed use in popular media. Brodsky's reading is offered as a general poetic strategy in the announcement of the lecture on "Pereklady K. Kavafisa" ("Translations of C. Cavafy"), held as part of the 2018 program by the Greek Fund of Odesa dedicated to the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the poet's birth, which featured Savenko and other Ukrainian Cavafy experts.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Brodsky 2000 (1977), 483.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 483-484.

<sup>65</sup> Il'inskaia 2000, 27; Shmakov, in *Biblioteka Ferghana* 2009. Shmakov's translation follows the original poem's rhyme scheme, as does Il'inskaia's, and opts for nearly identical diction: *vozdvigli* (erected) for the building of the walls; *peremeny* for changes in fate (cp. Il'inskaia's *peremenoi*); and the participial *rastushchego* (growing; cp. Il'inskaia's *rosla*), an organic term to qualify the (lifeless) bricks (lines 2, 4, 7). It also evokes both aural and visual imagery, e.g. the personified *glukhonemye steny* (literally: deafmute walls) in line 2; *promorgal* (I blinked through; I was blind to) and *zatmilo* (eclipsed; overshadowed) in line 6.

<sup>66</sup> "Ukrains'ki vymiry Kavafisa" 2018.

## Conclusion

More boldly than Auden who mentioned Cavafy's "seem[ing] always to 'survive translation'",<sup>67</sup> Brodsky alleged that, "Every poet loses in translation, and Cavafy is no exception. What is exceptional, however, is that he actually gains from it".<sup>68</sup> Toporov agrees with Brodsky's judgment on Cavafy's translatability: he gains because his language is stripped of all excess.<sup>69</sup> Whether Brodsky and Toporov were right about translation, scholarship on Cavafy reception would certainly gain from adding the Russian and Ukrainian contexts to the ever-expanding archive previously inaccessible to anglophone Cavafy scholars and students. An overview of Cavafy reception in Russia, the Soviet Union, and Ukraine reveals how a combination of the translators' enthusiasm for Cavafy, aided by institutional support and a history of Philhellenism, and broader historical forces has contributed to the dissemination of his work across linguistic and national borders. By reading Cavafy in Russian and Ukrainian translation, we find, in fact, a wealth of approaches, from Igor Zhdanov's romanticized adaptations<sup>70</sup> to Gasparov's "abbreviated" versions.<sup>71</sup> The wide gamut of interpretive transformations confirms Lawrence Venuti's claim about translation being "an interpretive act that inevitably varies source-text form, meaning, and effect according to intelligibilities and interests in the receiving culture".<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Longenbach 2009.

<sup>68</sup> Brodsky 2000 (1977), 483.

<sup>69</sup> Toporov 2000, 527.

<sup>70</sup> Zhdanov, in *Biblioteka Ferghana* 2009. E.g. Zhdanov's translation of "Walls" ("Steny") expands the original eight lines to 20 and accentuates the poet's torment with the image of a deep, oppressive well, evoking Charles Baudelaire's fallen poet as albatross; through its emphasis on stifling confinement, his translation of "Windows" ("Okno") calls to mind the poetry of imprisonment by the Russian Romantics, e.g. Aleksandr Pushkin's "Uzник" ("Prisoner", 1822) and Mikhail Lermontov's 1837 poem with the same title.

<sup>71</sup> Gasparov relied on English, French, Polish, and Russian translations (made available in the 1984 volume); finding Cavafy's language too wordy and prosaic, he produced "abbreviated" ("sokrashchionnye") versions which he thought might be "more to our taste". E.g. Gasparov's "Thermopylae" consists of seven very short lines, as compared to the 14-line original.

<sup>72</sup> Venuti 2019, 1.

Yet, what we do not find in contemporary Russian or Ukrainian scholarship on Cavafy is a serious consideration of the sociocultural and political factors that shaped this reception history, except for one mention of sexual repression and homophobia which delayed the publication of Cavafy's homoerotic poems. Rather, Russian and Ukrainian scholars attribute the poet's appeal to his cosmopolitanism, humanism, and aestheticism; even when suggesting more concrete literary parallels (Il'inskaia, to early 20<sup>th</sup>-century Russian "Silver Age" poetry; Savenko, to Chekhovian drama), these connections are largely philological and transhistorical. Savenko, for example, faults Marxist critics for not realizing that Cavafy's poetry transcends time because "[t]he poet does not point directly to any painful questions of today, though in many of his texts he reveals the broad functioning of social repression and the methods of its concealment", thus anticipating a Foucauldian critique of power.<sup>73</sup> This would be a perfect place to note the relevance of such politically charged ideas to Ukrainian readers familiar with their own nation's history of repression, first under the Russian Empire and then the Soviet Union. However, no such mention is made. Similarly, when discussing Cavafy's poem "Nero's Term", his Russian translator Kovalëva suggests that by dating "Those Who Fought for the Achaian League" (1922), Cavafy meant to evoke the Asia Minor Catastrophe—but again, she fails to note any relevance of this gloss on empire to Russia's history of imperialism.<sup>74</sup>

The previously mentioned historical factors might have made Cavafy, a member of the petty bourgeoisie, an ideologically dangerous poet during periods of severe censorship under Stalin (1924-1953), which coincided with the posthumous rise of Cavafy's global popularity.<sup>75</sup> By the present century, however, such concerns should no longer be guiding post-Soviet scholarship. Such omission is all the more surprising given the influence Cavafy has had on translators in other national literatures, allowing them to intervene in contemporary

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<sup>73</sup> Savenko 2017, 25.

<sup>74</sup> Kovalëva 2001.

<sup>75</sup> For more on Cavafy's popularity, see Jusdanis 2015.

debates about national identity in their respective historical contexts.<sup>76</sup> One counterexample is the so-called “Fergana” school of poetry which originated in the late 1980s-early 1990s in Uzbekistan, taking its name from Uzbekistan’s Fergana Valley and its capital city, with its roots in Russian language and culture yet intent on mapping out a new linguistic identity more cosmopolitan than that of Uzbek language and literature. “[C]ombining in its Russian imagery both western and eastern aesthetics” and positioning itself at “the crossroads of world cultures”, the “Fergana” school looked to Cavafy’s Mediterranean and modernist identities for inspiration, its members having been shaped by the translations of Cavafy published in the 1970s.<sup>77</sup>

It is difficult to gauge why Russian and Ukrainian scholars tend not to historicize their accounts of reception into their respective languages, choosing to provide factual literary history and publication information without recognizing the ways in which editorial and publication decisions, as well as the broader mechanisms of state censorship which control them, are shaped by and reflect specific historical contexts; they fail to do this even in prefatory materials that more readily lend themselves to such discussion than monographs or articles with more narrowly defined objectives. It may be partly due to disciplinary gate-keeping and institutional constraints that delimit the scope of these scholars’ projects to Modern Greek and Byzantine material. Savenko’s caution against bringing political realities (though not biography) into discussions of Cavafy’s poetry is symptomatic of a larger formalist philological trend. This paper has therefore attempted not only to introduce English-speaking audiences to the fascinating history of Cavafy’s reception, from the early public lectures in the Russian Empire to the present, but also to glean the behind-the-scenes forces that have in the past and continue to mold it.

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<sup>76</sup> See e.g. Goldwyn 2016: the discussion of Yoram Bronowski’s Hebrew translations of Cavafy in light of contemporary Israeli debates; and Goldwyn 2012: on Cavafy as a model for Albanian poets during and after the collapse of the Communist regimes in Albania and the former Yugoslavia.

<sup>77</sup> Bekmetov & Perebaeva 2016, 184.

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