C. P. Cavafy, *Supplication* — A First Approach of the Poetry and Poetics of the Alexandrine Poet

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Abstract: The object of this teaching scenario is the poem *Supplication* by Cavafy, which belongs to the early period of the poet's writing (written in 1896; published in 1898). The four-part structure of the scenario is comprised of units on its identity, its development, the assessment by the pupils via the worksheets, and bibliographical references. The pupils are called upon to approach the poem through different parameters, such as Cavafy's versification, the linguistic peculiarity of Cavafic poetry, tragic irony, the inevitability of fate, and religious faith. At the same time, they are encouraged to co-operate with each other and to create multimedia texts (presentations, texts with images) at the stage of worksheet elaboration in the computer lab, which they then present and discuss in class. The formation of groups by the students, the assignment of specific small tasks, the presentation of the results in class, as well as the utilisation of IT contribute to the substantial approach of the subject.

Key words: holistic knowledge, co-operative learning, interdisciplinary learning, IT utilisation

1. Teaching Scenario

1.1 Cognitive Areas Involved

Subject of the scenario: Modern Greek Literature, Junior High School, Grade A

Scope of the subject: Unit: Religious life. C. P. Cavafy, *Supplication*, from the school textbook *Modern Greek Literature Texts Junior High School Grade A*

Compatibility with the Syllabus and the Cross Curricular/Thematic Framework (CCTF):

The choice of texts and the method of approach are completely compatible with the Syllabus and the CCTF of the course, because:

a) they allow the teaching to work as an act of communication, in the form of an exchange of ideas of how reality is perceived, understood and interpreted in different texts

b) they meet the Syllabus goals regarding the substantial, as possible, contact of the pupils with representative texts of our cultural heritage; the stimulation of the pupils' interest in literature, so that they are led to a creative reading, interpretation, and criticism of the texts and to the broadening of their personal experiences; the cultivation of the pupils' various reading skills; their emotional and experiential participation and response

c) they are appropriate for an interdisciplinary approach, since their interpretation is linked to various means

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of expression of faith (prayer, oblations, votive offerings) or to the term "tragic irony," known from Ancient Greek literature

d) they offer the opportunity to utilize alternative supportive materials for literature, such as IT and the internet

e) they are considered appropriate for the application of modern teaching and learning techniques, such as a co-operative approach to the text, enriched teaching, the hermeneutic approach.

1.2 Aim and Objectives of the Teaching Scenario

1.2.1 General Aim

The substantial and effective communication of the pupils both with the texts as well as with each other, during the suggested elaboration process of the material, the development of their critical thinking as regards both to the collection, recording, and creative processing of specific material as well as the writing of group papers, the awareness of the important role religious faith plays in people's everyday life, and the cultivation of the pupils' aesthetic experience.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives Regarding the Subject and the Learning Process

On the level of knowledge, the pupils will:

a) be introduced to the poet C. P. Cavafy by means of reading his poems and by the utilization of information given by the teacher and found on the internet

b) locate the poem's thematic centers

c) come into contact with the linguistic peculiarity of Cavafic poetry

d) understand the role of linguistic register, so that they can be able to compose their own oral or written text

On the level of skills, the pupils will:

a) experience the process of a creative approach to a poem

b) practice co-operative learning

c) cultivate skills regarding the use of IT, such as the utilization of the internet as a pool of information or the presentation software for the creation of multimedia texts.

d) develop skills for the holistic consideration of knowledge by studying each subject through different perspectives; for example, to compare the difficulties of sailors and the attitude of their relatives in a Cavafic poem and a folk song.

On the level of attitudes, the pupils will:

a) discern between the various ways (personal prayer, oblations) in which religious faith is expressed, and be able to interpret the characters' actions and to compare them with similar attitudes and behaviors in our times.

b) be motivated to personally engage further with the poet C. P. Cavafy and his work.

Educational software and Information Technology (IT) services are utilized as follows: pupils are directed to browse the website of the Center for Neo-Hellenic Studies[1], where they can find biographical, artistic and photographic materials from the C. P. Cavafy archives, and are also asked to listen to a reading of the poem by Mimis Souliotis; on the website http://cavafis.compupress.gr they can browse for rich materials regarding Cavafy and his poems, as well as critical texts on the entirety of the works of the Alexandrine poet. Additionally, trustworthy search engines on the internet are also indicated. IT can be used both as audiovisual media, in order to heighten the pupils' interest, but mostly as new work and digital literacy environments.

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[1] http://www.snhell.gr.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This is an interdisciplinary teaching proposal, based on teaching in groups. Learning, of course, concerns each individual separately and his/her acquisition of knowledge and cognitive skills, but it is at the same time considered a social co-operative process. In this sense, it is more a social rather than an individual phenomenon, according to the theory of social learning by Bandura, and therefore special emphasis is given on co-operative learning (Bandura, 1963, 1986). We talk about active learning, where pupils answer questions, ask questions, argue during class, but also co-operative learning, where pupils work in groups under conditions which ensure positive interaction and personal responsibility for each group member. The role of the teacher is to help and encourage. The pupils work in groups, they take on different roles, they investigate and discover knowledge, while they shape a final product which constitutes a new digital resource in the form of an MS PowerPoint presentation, which can be published on the internet, e.g. on the class blog, the school paper, or the school website (the group projects by the pupils of class A1, on the poem *Supplication* by Cavafy, when taught during the school year 2013–2014, are posted on an old school website, which no longer exists).

1.4 Proposed Teaching Methodology

The approach to the poem is basically interpretative and text-centric, leaving, however, enough space for the pupils to find personal meanings, which then lead the way for them to find meaning in their own world. The exchange of knowledge between teacher and pupils is a combination of separate methods and techniques, such as enriched teaching, the use of appropriate and targeted questions, combined reading, co-operative and interdisciplinary approach to knowledge, and the use of IT.

1.5 Estimated Duration

Start time: The start of the first hour of lessons. In order for this teaching proposal to bear fruit, it is considered useful that pupils have practiced, at least rudimentarily, how to divide into groups in class, to avoid losing time.

Duration: The teaching proposal can be completed in three teaching hours (total duration 130–135 minutes).

2. Development of the Teaching Scenario

2.1 General Description

a) Teaching Phases

1st stage of teaching in the classroom (1st hour of teaching): Cue

The teaching starts with listening to the poem. George Chronas is reading. It is the reading that is included, with 40 other poems by C. P. Cavafy, in the CD "Poems by C. P. Cavafy," which was distributed with the journal "Odos Panos" ["Pan Street"], issue 147, January–March 2010, a tribute to C. P Cavafy. The teacher then asks simple targeted questions, as an incentive for the pupils to briefly present their opinions on the poem's content and to comment on the difference between the written and auditory perception of a literary text. Then, with the help of a projector, the teacher shows the pupils the painting by Théodore Ralli (1852–1909), *Praying in a Greek church, Mount Parnassus* (1876), oil on canvas, 60 x 93 cm, private collection (Peridis, 1948, p. 270; Tsirkas, 1983, p. 235; Savidis, 1991, pp. 135–136). The steps to present the painting are very simple: Google Greece > Google images > we type: Théodore Ralli and choose this particular painting. Finally, the teacher asks the pupils to point out thematic analogies between the poem and the painting (Rigopoulos, 1991, pp. 44, 82–83). Estimated time

approximately 15 minutes.

2nd stage of teaching in the classroom (1st hour of teaching): introductory information

The teacher briefly informs the pupils regarding the life and work of C. P. Cavafy insisting on two main axes: a) the division of his poems in three different categories or "areas" (Peridis, 1948, pp. 167–170): the philosophical, the historical, and the hedonistic (or sensual) and b) the poet's language and style. He/She also asks his/her pupils to comment, on the one hand, on the one-word title regarding the content of the poem, emphasizing that it is a foreshadowing of what is to come: *Supplication* is the entreaty of a mother to Our Lady the Mother of God to keep her child safe, and on the other hand to comment on the term "tragic irony" (Vogiannou, 2008, p. 186) and why it is there in the poem. Estimated time approximately 20 minutes.

3rd stage of teaching in the classroom (1st hour of teaching): group formation

First, the philologist succinctly and clearly explains the basic prerequisites, so that the pupils form six groups of four. The number 24 represents an approximate average number of pupils in a class, while groups with four members are considered the most efficient as regards cognition and learning, because the number of four pupils: "a) creates a simpler communication grid than larger groups, b) allows the formation of two subgroups within the group, which makes the process simpler and faster, c) the process of the co-operative elaboration can be completed and d) it does not require special desks or other furniture." (Matsaggouras, 2007, pp. 517–518). Specifically, the teacher: a) determines the subject of inquiry and explains in detail what he/she requires of his/her pupils; b) emphasizes certain expected forms of social behavior in his pupils, which should be in effect, in order for the group work to go smoothly. Indicatively, we mention the following: the pupils should not stray from their seats, they should talk in low voices, they should not interrupt their interlocutor, they should work earnestly, they should express their positions clearly and without hesitation; c) determines the duration of group work, in this case approximately 20 minutes; d) mentions the necessity of arranging the working space on the basis of the groups of four, which entails pushing desks and chairs facing each other, so that the group members can directly communicate with each other and the groups can work in some isolation. During this stage, the teacher keeps encouraging the pupils to co-operate and answers any questions that may arise. Estimated time approximately 10 minutes.

4th stage of teaching in the computer lab (2nd hour of teaching): handing out and working on worksheets

Group A. This groups listen to the reading of the poem *Supplication* by Mimis Souliotis. The pupils access the website of the Center for Neo-Hellenic Studies[2] and successively choose the links: C. P. Cavafy Archive > Recognized Poems *Supplication* > *Supplication* (reading). After listening to the poem, they write answers to the following two questions on their worksheet:

a) Do you believe that listening to the poem contributes to its understanding? Why?

b) Compare the two readings of the poem you have heard and write down mainly their differences.

Group B. This group search the internet for epithets of the Mother of God given to her by the inhabitants of various areas in Greece, whether because of the "miracles" she has performed or in the hope that she will lend them her support in difficult times. They use the Google search engine and type "Mother of God epithets" and choose, for the sake of time economy, 1–2 websites from the first results page. Here are some of them:

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[2] http://www.snhell.gr.

α) PENTAPOSTAGMA: Five hundred names for the Mother of God's grace[3]

β) THE TITLES OF THE THEOTOKOS[4]

γ) Tributes—Names for the Mother of God—On this day[5]

Group C. The teacher gives the group the book by N. G. Polites, Eklogai apo ta tragoudia tou hellēnikou laou, Athens 1991 and from the unit Fables, 131–167, asks them to locate the folk songs which treat the difficulties of sailors or the pain of their relatives for losing them in shipwrecks, and therefore are related in meaning with the poem Supplication. The pupils must focus their attention on the song Of the North Wind, pp. 153–154, and to briefly mention the thematic similarities between the two texts.

A short recording of the corrected and completed answers by the pupils

It is the projection of a very common incident from the life of sailors, the sinking of a ship with concomitant loss of life, and the loss of a sailor and a sailor boy. The presence and action of the mother in the two poems has also been pointed out: in *Supplication*, she prays to the Mother of God that her child returns safely, while in the folk song she throws stones at the sea.

Group D. The group read the poem Infidelity by C. P. Cavafy (written: 1903, first published: 1904), which has been given to them in a photocopy, and they compare it with the poem Supplication on the basis of two criteria: a) tragic irony and b) the motif of the futility of human endeavors.

A short recording of the corrected and completed answers by the pupils:

As regards the first criterion, in the poem Supplication the tragic irony is mirrored in the icon of the Mother of God, who listens "solemn and sad" to the mother's supplication, without being able to do anything. It emphasizes the contrast between reality and the ignorance of it. In the poem Infidelity, the theme is destiny, which even the gods cannot prevent. The poet derides the fact that humans resort to the gods and their faith in them hoping that they will prevent their sad Fate (Vogiannou, 2008, p. 219). As regards the second criterion, complementary to the pupils' comments, the teacher notes the loaded atmosphere in the poems by Cavafy, the bitter pessimism and morose mood of the Alexandrine poet.

Group E. This group's object of inquiry is the stanza organization of the poem (Agras, 1980, p. 109) and its verse form.

A short recording of the corrected and completed answers by the pupils:

In the first case, the pupils note that the poem consists of 4 stanzas of two verses each, while in the second, they study the Cavafic verse on the basis a) of rhythm, b) the number of syllables, and c) rhyming. In Cavafic verses, the iambic rhythm is predominant. The uneven number of syllables within the same poem means that the verse is free, close to prose, and allows enjambment (Papazoglou, 2012, pp. 270–271). The rhyme is paired and homophone, it lends musicality to the poem and auditorily signifies the end of each verse (Karvelis, 1984, pp. 215–219; Papazoglou, 2012, pp. 487–488). The teacher points out that Cavafy's preference, in general, for complete and perfect rhymes denotes that the poet follows the example of previous poets (old Athenian School).

Group F. This group comment on the peculiar language of Cavafy's poetry.

A short recording of the corrected and completed answers by the pupils:

The poem Supplication is written in the spoken demotic language, there are, however, some aberrations into the katharevousa (e.g., δέησις, υψηλό, δέεται, εικών, υιός) but also idiomatic forms (πηαίνει, ανάφτει, ξεύροντας),

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[3] http://www.pentapostagma.gr/2010/08/blog-post_3094.html.

[4] http://users.sch.gr/aiasgr/Theotokos_Maria/Proswnumies/Oi_proswnumies_ths_Theotokou.htm.

[5] http://www.sansimera.gr/articles/657.

which result in a linguistic inhomogeneity and a constant switching between the demotic and the katharevousa. Another characteristic feature of Cavafy's language is the simple, almost dry, phrasing, which brings it closer to the rhythms of every day speech and prose. The teacher points out that the pursuit of precision with means as simple as possible is a complementary explanation for Cavafy's austerity of expression (Xenopoulos, 1963, pp. 1443–1449; Dalmati, 1964, p. 97; Agras, 1980, p. 114; Tsiatsikas, 1994, pp. 59–60).

Estimated time approximately 40–45 minutes.

5th stage of teaching in the classroom (3rd teaching hour): presentation in a plenary session in the classroom

The pupils orally present in front of their classmates the results of their group work on the basis of the materials they have come up with and the conclusion they have written down after working on their worksheets — a discussion follows. In this manner, the pupils practice communication, while the teacher, using targeted questions, can clarify some parts of the works, fills in the pupils' knowledge and briefly and succinctly summarizes the presentation of each work. Estimated time approximately 35 to 40 minutes.

6th stage of teaching in the classroom (3rd teaching hour): homework assignments

The pupils are allowed to choose one of the three homework assignments the teacher proposes (below), after they listen to instructions and clarifications. Estimated time approximately 5 to 10 minutes.

2.2 Logistics and Equipment

For the implementation of the scenario-teaching plan, the following equipment is required: a) an interactive whiteboard in the classroom connected to the internet or, alternatively, a projector that can be connected to a laptop, b) the use for one teaching hour of the computer lab with access to the internet or, alternatively, the use of at least 6 laptops with access to the internet in the classroom, and c) USB flash drives for saving and transferring data. Moreover, the teacher can support the pupils' projects with additional print materials that he/she will research and photocopy from relevant textbooks.

3. Conclusions

The general assessment of the implementation of this teaching proposal is considered positive. The pupils were initially intrigued by and then interested in the change in the manner of teaching by utilizing IT, group work, and the change of venue. The worksheets include clear questions of graduated difficulty depending on the cognitive level of the members of each group, and the pupils' response was very satisfactory. Undoubtedly, the teacher's attitude during the implementation of the teaching proposal has been very guiding, but this was considered necessary, given the small age of the pupils and the lack of relevant experience in the co-operative study of literary texts.

The limited teaching time of Modern Greek Literature Texts in Junior High School (2 hours per week) naturally influenced the implementation of the teaching proposal. We succeeded to a large degree to keep the stages of implementation within the specified time framework, with the most obvious repercussions on the 5th stage of teaching, since the time available for some groups to present their work to the plenary session proved to be little, which resulted in limited feedback and a very brief discussion of the work. However, it is a "flexible" teaching proposal, in the sense that the worksheets can be modified depending on the available equipment, the time limits, the pupils' level of knowledge, etc. — one can even have the pupils form fewer groups.

There were not really any problems with the formation and the function of the groups, because the pupils had had similar experiences during the school year; the very few interventions by the teacher were mostly to

encourage a more active participation on the part of some pupils when filling in the worksheets. The pupils did not have any problems accessing and browsing the internet, either, or when creating their presentation slides, since they already had the knowledge necessary for these tasks. Finally, it was found after the fact that it would be better if the second and third teaching hour were consecutive, so as to ensure the uninterrupted implementation of the teaching proposal and the unity of the teaching stages.

Three homework assignments on the poem *Supplication* by Cavafy are presented:

Worksheet 1

Based on the poem by Cavafy, *The Funeral of Sarpedon* (1898, repudiated), which you will find on the website of the Center for Neo-Hellenic Studies, please comment in no more than 15 lines on the poet's general view on human destiny.

[This assignment makes better understood a basic thematic motif of Cavafic poetry, the inescapability of destiny.]

Worksheet 2

Attempt to write down in no more than 15 lines the emotion that Cavafy feels, in your opinion, with the presence of the sea in his poems *Morning Sea* (1916) and *Voice from the Sea* (1898, repudiated). [The text of these two poems is given to the students in a photocopy.]

[With this assignment the pupils illustrate aspects of the poet's character by comparatively examining textual elements in his work.]

Worksheet 3

In the poem, the mother lights a "tall" candle to the Mother of God, so that she would protect her son. In your experience, and from narrations of people you know, gather evidence regarding various devotions, the "votives," that the faithful devote to churches and monasteries for the salvation of their souls, for the recuperation of the sick, etc. (This is the first interdisciplinary assignment in the textbooks, p. 56).

[This assignment connects the literary phenomenon with the pupils' lives and experiences.]

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