

Monikin "Hollow testament's" hero with his author on the air in Boston

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ΑΦΙΕΡΩΜΑ ΣΤΗΝ ΚΕΝΗ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ

του Πάρι Τακόπουλου

και “Τις ο Λαλών” της Κ.Δ. του Κώστα Σοφιανού

Αλεξάκης Βασίλης

Ανευλαβής Ελευθέριος

Αποστολίδης Ρένος

Αποστολίδης Ρ. Στάντης

Γελόεβα Φατίμα

Γκίκας Γιώργος

Γκίνης Άλκης

Δεληγιώργης Σταύρος

Δημηρούλης Δημήτρης

Duckworth Eddie

Καραβία Μαρία

Λυμπεροπούλου Μάγια

Μαρή Μαρία

Μάστρακας Κώστας

Mims Amy

Μπακονικόλα Χαρά

Μπαμπινιώτης Γεώργιος

Μπούρας Κωνσταντίνος

Πολίτη Τζίνα

Σαχπέρογλου Ευάγγελος

Φασόης Αλέξανδρος

Philippides Dia



ΑΦΙΕΡΩΜΑ ΣΤΗΝ ΚΕΝΗ ΔΙΑΘΗΚΗ

του ΠΑΡΙ ΤΑΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ από 22 συγγραφείς
μαζί με τα επτά πρώτα κεφάλαια από
το βιβλίο εν προόδω του ΚΩΣΤΑ ΣΟΦΙΑΝΟΥ
«Τις ο λαλών» της Κ.Δ.

ΣΧΕΔΙΑ
ΝΕΡΙΝΑΣ ΛΥΜΠΕΡΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ



ΑΘΗΝΑ 2014

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Γενική επιμέλεια: Κώστας Σοφινός

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Δεν απαγορεύεται η αναδημοσίευση και η αποσιτισματική ή συνολική αναπαραγωγή του κειμένου με οποιοδήποτε μέσο ή τρόπο (μηχανικό, ηλεκτρονικό, φωτοτυπικό), ασύμφωνα με τον Νόμο και τις διεθνείς συμβάσεις.

MONIKIN "HOLLOW TESTAMENT'S" HERO
with his author on the air in Boston
by Dia Philippides

Our shared Monikin connection began in 2006 or so, with an early meeting between Paris Tacopoulos (playwright) and myself on the mutually beloved island of Aegina. At an extended lunch table at the seaside we met as a group (Paris Tacopoulos, Marina Proussianou, Nikos Kalamo, Philip and Sarah Ramp, Marina's son Jan, Wim Bakker and me), some of whom are shown in the photo:



The restaurant was called the "dichty" (net), and there, the first strands of what would become a transatlantic network, were interlaced. The mutual appreciation and friendship kindled on that day have lasted, and indeed continued to grow (at least from the part of those of us in the West) steadily since then.

As instigator of the lunch invitation, not only was the playwright of *Monikin** (and many other works) present, but he had included in the group Nikos Kalamo, the actor with training from Stella Adler's studio

* standing for *The Pre-Last of the Monikins*

in New York City, who delivered the entire monologue of *Monikin* in English, first at St. Paul's church in Athens and then in Edinburgh, at the 2005 Fringe Festival.

We began timidly to explore possibilities expanding upon the initial cordial acquaintance. It turns out that the *Monikin* performance had been recorded on video at the time of the Edinburgh Festival (Aug. 2005) and the playwright presented ~~the~~ with a copy of the – well-edited – DVD, which I bore triumphantly back to our university. It would be the only contemporary Greek play in my course on modern Greek theater for which ~~as~~ would be able to offer the students not only the full text of the play in a polished English translation but also the option to view (indeed to *review* as often they wished) the entire production of the play on film, delivered in English.

These students, who ~~are~~ studying at an American university in Boston, are undergraduates (hence of ages roughly 18-22), and for them to enter the course, no prior knowledge of Greek theater or of Greece is presupposed, or even possible, in almost all cases. This generation of young people has been brought up in the West, ca. 5,000 miles from the Greek mainland, and they rely firmly on laptops, videos, the Internet, iTunes and social media such as Facebook, for their reception of the world's culture. The university is a Catholic institution, administered by the Jesuit order. Students attending the university may be of any race, color, or religion. The setting of the course is such that it is taught by a professor centered in the Department of Classical Studies, but is cross-listed in the English Dept. (as "Core literature" or "Literatures of the World") and also in the Theater Dept. (where it satisfies the requirement in "dramatic literature"). This is usually the sole time that the particular group of students will work with a professor during their whole set of years at the University – a 15-week stint of collaboration, and a short window for students who know nothing about the subject at the start ~~to~~ learn something about Greek theater of the 20th and 21st century and the modern realities of Greece.

The full set of ways in which this play was accessible to the students, and the fact that its playwright had rewritten it himself in the mid 2000s for an English-speaking audience, combined with the availability

me/

I/

J/

—/

of the DVD, urged me –in the first go-around of teaching the play in the course– to leave *Monikin* for the final week of the semester, treating the play as a reward for which the students would have to wait and prepare themselves over time. We may note, that in past years, before this play was added to the repertory, the students usually read texts of several modern Greek plays in translation, viewed a few short video-clips from some of these plays (thanks to a gift from the Theatre Museum in Athens), and then viewed longer excerpts of non-Greek plays on video (Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, and others), for purposes of comparison according to theme and genre.

Strangely enough, *Monikin*, as the course's most recent play in one sense, also brought us "full" circle to the earliest play read at the start of the course: Nikos Kazantzakis' "Comedy: a Tragedy in One Act" (1909-1910) –with the plot evolving in the context of approaching death– an indeed rather difficult subject for young students to approach. *Monikin* also linked in somewhat, from the point of view of genre, with "Moonlight Sonata", Yannis Ritsos' dramatic monologue in the face of growing old and approaching death.

an/ *Monikin*, however, presents a unique kaleidoscope, a tour-de-force of ideas and phrases, an unstoppable current, that must be near impossible for an actor to memorize. Nikos Kalamo did wonderfully, and the students commented on his excellent acting.

As has been stated, the first time that the course was given, I placed *Monikin* at the end of the semester (not *Pre-Last*), so that the students would be better prepared by that time (through their increasing familiarity with Greece and Greek theater) to appreciate the play – though, of course the play outwits any fixed chronological placement because of its having an original date in Greek of 1966 or so, and then having been rewritten by its playwright (who appears extraordinarily conversant with international Western literature and culture) in English, for a non-Greek audience in or ca. 2005. The students reacted favourably to the play, but the pressures of time did not yield much continuation or dialogue.

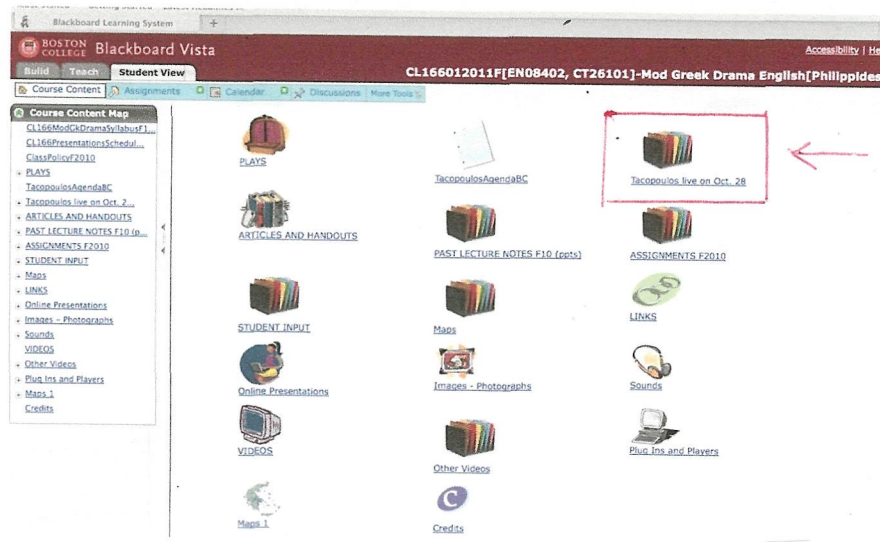
In the second go-around of the course, I moved *Monikin* slightly

earlier in the term, to give the students more time to appreciate the play and discuss it before the term would end. The result? A coincidence that we were able to share was the fact that the play was being put on in the Art Theater in London in Nov. 2009, during our course. We found the theater online, thought of the playwright and the performance as it was taking place. All the students wrote essays, as personal responses to the play. Some of the students' essays were selected and sent to the playwright, for him to share also with the actor in the performance. Still, the most interesting interaction came from the one student from Greece who participated in the course and, after the conclusion of the course, began a written analysis of –or dialogue with– *Monikin*, written in English, that is expected soon to be revised and delivered to the playwright. This essay is especially important as it reviews the Greekness of the original text and its translatability into English for a non-Greek audience.

* “what comes third
is best”

In the third recurrence of the course, we reached a solution which may have been “~~the third and the better~~”^{*}, as a Greek saying goes. This past fall (Fall semester 2010) the play was placed just after the middle of the term. Before that time we began to consider and to plan: why not interview the playwright, relying on contemporary technology? We already use technology and media profusely for: projection of slides with text and images and music and video-clips during class-time and we post most of the course's materials on a secure password-protected website, from which the materials may be downloaded or reviewed outside class hours and 24/7. The texts of the play are there, the Powerpoint slide presentation from each in-class lecture, songs, readings, video-clips of theatrical productions, bibliographies, style-sheets, and a folder of links to Web locations such as the Theatre Museum in Athens, the society of Greek playwrights, etc. Also on the course website a link has been placed to the Edinburgh performance itself of *Monikin*, that is delivered to the students through streaming video.

a Greek/



Website for modern Greek theater course

Once the decision was made to interview the playwright remotely (as our budget did not provide for an air ticket, either for the playwright to be invited to Boston or for the members of the class to visit him in Greece), the planning proceeded. An agenda of questions was prepared and sent to the author—one question from each student—in advance. With the cooperation of technical staff from several offices on campus (Instructional Design Services, the Media Center in the Library, Media Technology, Communications) a conference phone with external speaker and a special recorder were brought in. Several provisional tests were carried out over the course of ten days. Then, unexpectedly, the possibility arose at Paris Tacopoulos' end that he would be able to use a Webcam built into a computer and that thus (with the collaboration of his stepson, Jan) we would be able to connect with the playwright also by Skype video from within our classroom in the University Library. New tests of that technological medium were conducted, in advance of the actual interview, which had been positively set for "OXI" Day*.

Finally the much anticipated day of the interview arrived. We had decided to conduct the majority of the interview relying on the conference phone – considered by the University's technical staff to be a more

* "No" day: the anniversary of 28 Oct. 1940, when Greece's (dictator) prime minister, Ioannis Metaxas, refused passage through Greece to Mussolini (which signified Greece's entry into World War II).

reliable medium. Thus, we would first listen and talk to the playwright for almost one hour. Thereafter we would switch over to Skype video, so that the interviewee could see his interviewers and vice versa. The playwright's voice came into the classroom through the conference phone speaker, loud and clear. Paris Tacopoulos had prepared more than one could have asked of anyone who is a creative writer and not a professor by trade: he took our prepared agenda of questions and, instead of addressing them by rote, one by one, he had reorganized them in his head and delivered to us an eloquent 20-minute address, that encompassed (by units of reason) all the major issues raised in the separate questions.

The playwright was reaching out across the Atlantic, across any barrier of language and culture and across the generations, to embrace these 31 American students and their preoccupations and queries about his work and the context and circumstances in which it was created. During his responses the playwright revealed even personal aspects, such as his depressed state of mind when he wrote the play, thus illustrating the relationship of an author to his own work.

Skype technology allowed us to see the playwright and his family. He was introduced to the students one by one, as they stepped up to the camera above the computer screen.

Later the students wrote individual responses to their experience of reading the text of the play and viewing the DVD (comparing their experiences according to which order they employed for the above), as well as their impressions from the in-class interview. These responses we shared with the playwright. As a subsequent gift the playwright sent to us a typed transcript of the recording of the entire conference phone interview – a task completed by Paris Tacopoulos' able and patient assistant Sophia Theophány. We hope that this transcript will soon be printed and circulated, as it is a reflection of the author's thoughts throughout the relatively long process of evolution of this theatrical piece. The transcript also gives a mirror glance into the reception of the play – an amalgam of its Greek depth and its international breadth.

Many people had worked hard to achieve the results attained: the playwright, all the people involved in the university course on modern

Greek drama, numerous technical staff members at Boston College.* This was a unique theatrical experience for all of us. We consider this first transatlantic interview a 'prova generale' for a number of subsequent occasions. Another time, we may think of using Skype video (and recording) for the entire class hour, or even setting up a proper 'video conference' in a specially equipped room, where numerous cameras would allow all the participants to be visible to the playwright.

The latest coda from the playwright arrived last week: Paris Tacopoulos put into writing and sent to us an alternate ending to the play, – actually as it was included in its first draft – that had apparently been used only in one production, but not hitherto written down, in English.

Before reaching our own coda, however, I would like to add that, besides the original written questions submitted in advance, the conversation and personal introductions via conference phone and Skype, and the subsequent individual written responses submitted, our class was also able to give Paris Tacopoulos two additional gifts in return:

One student prepared an 8-minute performance of scenes excerpted from *Monikin* that he delivered and we recorded on video in class. Juan Rodríguez, an undergraduate majoring in Theater, sent to Mr. Tacopoulos a video-file of his performance.

A second student, on the inspiration of *Monikin*, composed his own theatrical monologue, *The Last of the Snacirema*, a satire (more cannot be revealed in advance, as disclosure would risk spoiling the surprise effect of reading/viewing the piece) that could not have been written without *Monikin*. This piece Adam Wladis delivered in writing to Mr. Tacopoulos and he performed part of it in class, where we also recorded it and sent the video file to the author.

May our collaboration long continue, and let others at Athens College and elsewhere join the conversation. We are no longer a passive audience for the playwright (we're informing him what we like, what we don't understand, etc.) and he is letting us into his secrets too. The dramatic 'monologue' (which as Mr. Tacopoulos reiterated to us, was really a kind of 'dialogue' from the start, as it presumed a theatrical setting and audience) turned into an active dialogue, as the audience is actually vocalizing

* chief among them, Sarah Casticum and Scott Kinder (both of Instructional Design and eTeaching Services), and Genny M'Polo (of Media Services, O'Neill Library)

its questions and the play is growing interactively. May we forever be conducting our Pre-Last conversation and bringing about a broadening of the traditional stage/audience divide, a breaking of the fourth wall.

Our tele-dialogue between playwright, professor and students—with the actor in everyone's mind from the recent experience of viewing his performance on video—brings us in line with contemporary discussions on the evolving relationships in theatrical contexts. In a lecture, announced for Feb. 15, 2011 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and unfortunately not attended by me, the associate director of the National Theatre of Scotland, John Tiffany, was to present the “complexities involved in establishing a new national theater in a culture where artists and audiences are demanding innovative and interactive relationships with each other. How will theater keep up?” Well, we seem to have found a way to make our experience of theater ‘keep up’ with current developments. We participated in a step of re-examining and (re-developing?) the relationship between text and reader, or play and theatrical audience, seasoned creative writer and young students of another language and cultural background.

For me (and, reportedly, my students, as well), it was a pleasure and a satisfaction that the humanities had once again breached geographical national boundaries, brought about new cultural awareness (in both directions), that technology had served well (as is its function), and that intellect, hard individual work, and well-coordinated collaborative efforts had paid off, to create a first rapprochement, to which we hope that many will follow.

Spring-Summer 2011

Dia Philippides

*Prof. of Classical (and Modern Greek) Studies
Boston College (USA)*

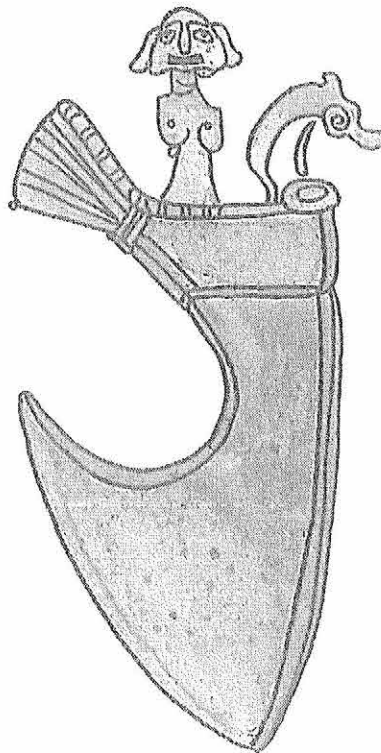
Postscript (2014): In recent years our research team at Boston College (comprised mainly of Scott Kinder, Vasilis Stotis, and David Smail, with a background of work done by previous undergraduate research fellows) has developed a public website that features (among other presentations for modern Greek drama and film) the 28 Oct. 2010 cyber-interview (audio and typed transcript) with Paris Tacopoulos, the dramatic text of *Monikin* in Greek and English, and the video-recording of the 2005 production with Nikos Kalamo's excellent acting at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival.

See <http://bcurfgreeks.weebly.com/>



Research Professor, B.A. in Applied Mathematics Radcliffe College, Ph.D. in Classical Philology, Princeton University, 1978. In her academic work (teaching and research) Prof. **Philippides** focuses on interdisciplinary approaches; harnessing technology to the service of the Humanities (Greek Studies); collaboration on research projects with student assistants and senior colleagues (at Boston College and elsewhere); reinforcing bridges between the USA and Greece. As of July 2013 Prof. Philippides is concentrating on research.

Prof. Philippides's teaching at Boston College has centered on ancient Greek language and literature (intermediate-level texts; lecture courses and advanced seminars on Greek drama) and on modern Greek literature and culture (courses and seminars in areas including fiction, drama, and films). In May 2011 she received a "Teaching with New Media" (TWIN) award.



Ο Προτελευταίος των Μόνικιν, ο ήρωας της Κενής Διαθήκης, ευρισκόμενος εις την αρχήν της, εις το προαιτοκτονικόν στάδιόν του, ενδυμείται και «εδνημείται» το «παρελθόν» του, το εξισούμενον με το παρόν του, προ των απειλών του μέλλοντός του, και όχι μόνον του ιδικού του, αλλά και ολοκληρου του γένους του, του αποτελούντος δια πάντα Έλληνα, Γραικό, ή Ρωμηό, το ένδοξον παρελθόν πασών των εξελληνισδεισών, μη «βαρβάρων» πλέον, εδνοτήτων.

Εις την πάλαι ποτέ νεότητά του, ή την πεπερασμένην ηλικία του –εάν προηγῆδη της πρώτης– ο Μόνικιν ξει, μωρογηραιόθεν σχεδόν, έναν συνεχή εμφύλιον, άλλοτε ένοπλον κι άλλοτε άοπλον «ίδε-αηδε-ολογικόν» πόλεμον, όστις, γιαβάς-γιαβάς, τον έκαμε ανορθόδοξα και αν-αρχικά, ν' ακολουθήσει την δια της Ρώμης, μίαν και καθολικήν ορθόδοξον οδόν, την «απορευομένην» προς τα έθνη της Δύσεως. Διότι κατ' εκείνον και τον «αιμ-βαπτιστήν» του, εκεί θα έπρεπε να ευρίσκεται, η σωτηρία, του πολλά αυτοπροδομένου λαού του, του μηδέποτε αγανακτισμένου με τον εαυτό του. Επιδιώκει δηλαδή, διωκόμενος, να μεταβεί εις «Εσπερίαν», δια να γυρίσει μιαν εσπέραν «οίκαδε», επιστρέφων εις τον λαόν του, ως μεταλαμπαδευτής σωτήρ, το κλαπέν σαν ελγίνειο μάρμαρο, φως, των προγόνων του, το νυν πλέον ηλεκτρονικόν.

Πώς όμως να σώσει τον λαόν του ο Μόνικιν, όστις ούτε τον εαυτόν του «δύνатаι σώσαι»; Ίσως η λύσις-δέσις, αυτής της απορίας, θρίσκεται στον τίτλο του Joyce: Finnegans Wake, (μια ολονυκτία), για το τέλος (fin) πάλι (again), που είναι και η νέα αρχή του Tim Finnegan, ενός ιρλανδέζου, συνήθως μεθυσμένου κτίστη, η πτώσις και η άνοδος (fall and rise) του οποίου, περιγράφεται με πολύ οίνον και χιούμορ σε μια ιρλανδέζικη μπαλλάντα. Το ερώτημα θα μείνει προς το παρόν αναπάντητο. Ο συγγραφέας της Κενής Διαθήκης δεν πιστεύει στην «ρικόρσο», εν τούτω Vico, θεωρία της επαναλήψεως της Ιστορίας. Αλλ' ούτε και στους σωτήρες. Γιατί ο Μανωληός είτε θάζει τα ρούχα του συνεχώς αλλιώς, ή του τα βγάζουνε, και φαίνεται διαφορετικός. «Κι απέ», όμως, τι απομένει, εκτός από πολλούς ζύδους, ουζάκια υπεροψίαν και μέθην, σαν μοναδική ιατροφαρμακευτική «αλεκ-σχινική» κάθαρσις; Μήπως μόνο το, αμετάφραστο ελληνικά, χιούμορ, το φέρον τον γέλωτα, παγκοσμίως και όχι πάντοτε «κοσμίως»; Ίδωμεν, ή οψόμεθα! Πιθανότατα εις τον επόμενον τόμον της Κενής Διαθήκης.

Λίαν συντόμως πάντως θα κυκλοφορήσει προς πλήρωσιν και πληροφόρησιν του αναγνωστικού κοινού, ένας τομίσκος με τίτλον «Η Κενή Διαθήκη δι' αναρχαρίους». Εν τω μεταξύ υπάρχει, ως βοήθημα, το βιβλίον του «Τα Ποιητικά 2000-1950». Ο Τζαίμς Τζόυς όταν τελείωσε το «Φίννεγκανς Γουαίηκ», μετά από πολυετή εργασία είχε δηλώσει ότι το μόνο που επιθυμούσε πια είναι να γράφει απλά, όσο το δυνατόν πιο απλά. Ο Πάρις Τακόπουλος σκοπεύων να συνεχίσει επ' αόριστον την ιδικήν του απόκρυφον Διαθήκην επί πολλάς ακόμη ολονυκτίας, προτείνει στους φίλους του να διαβάσουν αυτά «Τα Ποιητικά» του. Η «απλοποίησης» είναι η καλύτερη εξάσκηση για κάθε απρόσιτο κείμενο. Μέχρι τελικής πτώσεως.

