

“KENI DIATHIKI” (“THE HOLLOW BIBLE”)
BY PARIS TACOPOULOS,
AND FINNEGANS WAKE BY JAMES JOYCE
Two parallel unique books not on the same myth
A biopsy by E.C. Duckworth

Paris Tacopoulos’s “Keni Diathiki” (literal translation: “Empty Testament”) and its second volume, ‘Aporia pros ta Ethni’ (Wondering towards the Nations), which has just been published, have as titles and content more than one connotation, as is exactly the case with James Joyce’s *Finnegans Wake*, or *Finnegan’s Wake*, as the title is sometimes wrongly rendered by some of his would-be decoders. With an apostrophe, the title loses its double meaning (fin=’end’, and ‘again⁷), and stresses only the story of the death of Tim Finnegan, immortalised in an Irish ballad. The ballad describes humorously the ‘fall and rise of a ‘usually’ drunk builder, who, from the heights of his ladder, falls and dies, full of liquor, only to be revived during his Wake by the same cause as. that of his death.

After much drinking and gnashing of teeth, a wild row ensues, with much whisky spilling over Tim’s dead body. And then suddenly Tim leaps from his coffin, Lazarus-like, but singing to his people, “whirl your liquor around like blazes – souls to the devil! D’ you think I am dead?”

Monikin, the hero in ‘Keni Diathiki’, himself faces death after life, not as a life sentence but unlike Joyce’s hero, as a final death. At least, so it seems to me, as far as I can judge from volume number one, especially as the author threatens us that after the first death and the second volume, there will be many other volumes, while he gives us no

indication, or promise, of another death. (There's a word-play on 'Keni Diathiki' with the word 'Keni', in Greek. Spelt with an 'e', it means 'empty', while with an 'ai', it means 'new'. Instead of 'empty', I decided to render it as 'hollow' so that there is also an equivalent word-play in English: 'Hollow Bible', versus 'Holy Bible').

In *Finnegans Wake*, the hero, Mr. Porter, alias, Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, for short H.C.E., an impersonation of Finnegan, and of many other Irish heroes and non-heroes, after a hard working and drinking day and night, eventually falls asleep, dreaming of both his own guilt and that of all humankind.

H.C.E., in a '-Here Comes Everybody' new identity, relives the history of human life, as compared with real life, in one night. Such is—in "Vico" veritas—the sequence of the historical repetitions of salutes. First: Life of the people, by the Gods, through the Prophets (Theocracy). Second: Life of the people, by the Aristocrats through: themselves, as the new Prophets. And third: Life of the people, by the people, and for the people, which, from Democracy, deteriorates to Chaocracy', and then back to the Gods and the Prophets again. And so on, and so forth, ad infinitum, until the final «turn». All this, in a Humpty Dumpty, rise and fall, and re-rise and re-fall, fin-again, world without end, till 'life' us do part.

Well, there ends, plot-wise, but not humour and play-word wise, the similarity between Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*, and the "Hollow Bible" by Paris Tacopoulos. While James Joyce predicts not only a second coming, but a thousand repetitions of salutes for such a coming, not because he wishes it, but because 'it is written so', the author and not the hero of 'Keni Diathiki', refuses to accept this, even as a joke, as a historical law. The period in which his hero, Monikin, lives, is also one of chaos. That of the Greek civil war, which started not only during the German occupation of the Second world War, but long before, since the first days of Greece's struggle for independence, and has a lot of parallel blood-shedding as has that of the Irish people*. Monikin tries, unlike H.C.E., to spare his own people, to save his people, not through God-knows-whose wisdom, but through no man's land wisdom, trying

to break all historical, divine or human – ‘Off with their heads’ – rules.

But before I deal further with the second volume of the ‘Hollow Bible’, I should like to refer to some more, not missing links, between Joyce’s and Tacopoulos’ style and content of their writing, besides the “mis-treatment” of their own language, (a) However strong is the universality of their theme, it always goes through the spirit (in the dual meaning of the word) of their countries, (b) They prefer to deal even with the most serious human problems in the most carefree and hilarious manner, stressing in almost every point of their views, as counterpoint, laughter, a ‘catharsis’ which changes life from unacceptable Tragedy to acceptable Comedy, (c) They both believe that a word needs analysis as much as the person who utters it. By cloning old words, or “clowning” new ones, not only do they give birth to new words, but they also bury the old ones, (d) Their text is musical, and thus is better understood, if read aloud or heard inwardly. There is no doubt as to Joyce’s influence on “Keni Diathiki” and “Aporia pros ta Ethni”, two volumes which took Tacopoulos fourteen years to write – almost as long as it took Joyce to finish “Finnegans Wake”.

The influence is equal, at least, to that of T.S. Eliot, on the work of Seferis, with the only difference, perhaps, that although Joyce’s and Tacopoulos’, as well as T.S. Eliot’s, strongest weapon is their sense of humour, the same cannot be said about Seferis, especially if one remembers his very poor attempts to write limericks. And now back to ‘Aporia pros ta Ethni’, a wondering or wandering around the nations, similar to that of St. Paul’s, or to that of Leopold Bloom around Dublin. The second volume is not exactly, in relation to the first, what *Finnegans Wake* was to *Ulysses*. But all works, even of the most inconsistent creators, are some form of development, if not on a similar theme, on their own idiosyncratic style. The “ricorso” theory itself, by Giovanni Battista Vico (Joyce’s favourite poet-philosopher), a variation on many Ancient Greek philosophers’ theories, on the laws of Political History, from the Pre-Socratics to Aristotle, Hegel, Spengler and all those chaps, is also a historical repetition, which Monikin tries to stop, as Marx tried to do with the “Struggle of the Classes”, but not so successfully.

History does not repeat itself, he believes, even if we appear to be making the same mistakes. Monikin, the hero of 'Keni Diathiki', (another H.C.E., not a wandering Jew like Bloom in *Ulysses*, but more like Joyce's Daedalus, who himself is more like his son Icarus, or more like the son of God, or the Holy Ghost, than the father himself) through his solitary way and faith (monos=alone, Monikin=Manikin) wants to change the course of the future of his country, which is founded on the same eternal civil war as that of Ireland's. A war between right and left, or right and wrong, or wrong and left, or Catholic and Protestant, and Protestant and Orthodox, or Catholic and Orthodox, in the literary Greek and Latin meaning of these religious and political words., ... Monikin wants to become the saviour of his country. Will he succeed? Doubtful, since we have met him at the start of his first volume of life, before the Gates of Hell. He, unlike Dante in his *Divine Comedy*, is alone without any of his Beatrices (who either have deserted him, or been deserted by him). His one and only constant company is the unholy spirit of his friend, mentor, and baptist.

To save his country, he goes West, hoping to rediscover there, all the wisdom that his conquered ancestors transmitted to their conquerors. And he starts from Italy, which, a long time ago, was the step-mother of Magna Grecia, and where all the greatest/minds of the Renaissance owed most of its enlightenment to his ancestors; Greek scholars and iconographers, who migrated to Italy after the second sacking of Constantinople by the 'infidels', which followed that of the 'Fidels'.

The road to Paradise is paved with bad intentions, and Monikin perambulates in Hell in the second volume, discovering, step by sizzling step, the iniquities of both his own contemporaries and those of Dante, and his successors, led in Hell, not by Virgil but by Hugo Foscolo, the half-Italian, half-Greek poet, who spent most of his life and death changing tombs. He was buried and unburied several times, while his own 'Tombs' are considered his best poems.

Joyce and Paris Tacopoulos share an equal love for Shakespeare, Dante and Lewis Carroll. The latter, who helped Joyce more than anyone else to develop his style, through his 'portmanteau' words, as well

as with his parodies on some well-known poets of his time, is the main reason of both writers' optimistic attitude towards life. Joyce's optimism is less negative than Tacopoulos'. Perhaps because in his novel, its "outcoming" depends on a heroine, Anna Livia Plurabella, while in "Keni Diathiki" its "outgoing" is that of a Man (Monikin). Women are demonstrably more durable than men.

Joyce and Tacopoulos have also another common denominator. They do not only like playing on words, but plays, as well, being playwrights themselves. Tacopoulos wrote about fifty, mostly-successful plays, in a Beckettian style –there's another explanation of his much-hidden optimism– while Joyce wrote one and only, the "Exiles", and that was not very successful. "Exiles" was influenced by Ibsen –whom Joyce, in common with George Bernard Shaw, greatly admired– and its greatest drawback is not that it is dated, as are nowadays considered rightly or wrongly, most of Ibsen's plays, but it is rather "longeth" and if it does not "stinketh" like "The Iceman Cometh" by O'Neil (to quote Dorothy Parker), it is monumentally boring. Something which, admittedly, is supremely insulting in reference to Joyce, who both as a writer and as a person, even drunk –and this he was very often– was the 'spirit' of his readers and his audience. Ibsen dunnit!

Both Joyce's and Tacopoulos' works' have a consistent unity in the development of their themes. Joyce, from his "Pomes Penny Each", his fifteen short stories, "The Dubliners", his first novel, 'A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man' (a prologue to "Ulysses"), as well as from "Ulysses" and "Finnegans Wake", constantly pursues the discovery of Life through Art, not for Art's, but for Life's sake.

Everything in "Ulysses" happens in one day and in "Finnegans Wake" in one night. But these daily and nightly perambulations equal, time-wise, the whole history of Humankind, from nowhere to everywhere and vice versa. While Dublin, where his own divine comedy takes place, represents, in terms of space, the whole world, if not the whole universe.

More unlike than likewise, Athens (Tacopoulos' 'Dublin'), disguises itself under the name of Pericles' 'Renowned City'. (Kleinon Asty), the

title of his first novel, and its inhabitant become the 'Apostates' (the title of his second novel), a false analogy to Julian's "Apostasy", as it was called by the Christians, for having committed the great crime of paganism against Christianity.

Tacopoulos, from his 7 + 7 parallel *Improper Lives*' (his second volume of short stories), his first, biblically-named ("Tis o Lalon"), follows the same steps which lead his one and manifold hero, to the same, yet not the same, No-Man's Land. Like Joyce, Paris Tacopoulos, in all his poems, short stories, novels and plays, even in his reviews, has a consistent and progressively developing way with words, and all this seems to me a preparation to a culminating point which is reached with his 'Hollow Bible'. There, words and life unite like silence and death, to give birth to new born, or stillborn beings, and non-beings ('Crop and corpse' united by Joyce, create a new, everlasting, word: "cropse").

In Art, unlike politics, consistency is not the 'hobgoblin of little minds'; it leads to an end, not necessarily to a happy one, but to a constant endeavour to re-discover life and death, pleasant or unpleasant.

Both writers, through Art, constantly and consistently endeavour to discover or rediscover "alitheia" (i.e. truth), which in Greek is the negation of falsehood – alitheia being the opposite of lathos (fault). And so on, and on-, 'a la recherche' of Truth'Lost, and Re-Lost, or Gained and Re-Gained, mostly re-gained in Joyce, and re-Lost in Tacopoulos.

While there is no end in 'Fin-again', and there is always a whimpering new beginning, I have a suspicion that Tacopoulos' "Keni Diathiki" will end, in his future volumes, with a bang, a second perhaps "big bang", but a final one, as final as the Second Coming, one hopes.

'Keni Diathiki' is the, marriage of Joyce's style in "Finnegans Wake" with T.S. Eliot's poetry in 'Waste Land'. It is a polyphonic, anti-epic, "Baroque and Roll" poetic modern work, whose unity owes a lot to our world's dis-unity –since the same causes, or what appear to be the same– have different effects upon some. Nature's fight, against Civilisation, or the opposite, Heavens and Gods struggle, against Hell and Lucifer, or Life Against Death, and Death against Life, are strange bed-fellows, producing the most passing strange results. And there's a

good, or equally bad, question or 'rub', in Tacopoulos' "Testament" or testimony of his time. Which came first, Life or Death? "To on" (being) – which becomes an egg, if spelt with an omega in Greek – or the 'hen'? ("To on" in Herasmic Greek, and "hen" in English, sound the same – to make an Anglo-Hellenic pun). The one (the 'hen') or the none, the non-"hen"? That is the Greek question in most of the Homeletic' soliloquies of his hero. Tacopoulos, unlike Joyce, hasn't done much to decipher his musical cross-words, which are full of unsolved enigmas and 'quotations' from various unknown sources. Mainly though of Greek origin, either from the Holy Bible (whose New Testament is easily understood by Greeks today, as many of its texts are often quoted, as are the St James's texts by English people) or, from ancient and post-ancient Hellenic texts from Heracletos to Lucian.

Ulysses, which was a catalyst to the development of the modern novel, more so than Marcel Proust's, "A la Recherche" of his "Temps Perdu", or Kafka's nightmarish, 'Castles' and 'Trials', has left enough evidence on the method of Joyce's "madness". Almost every friend of "Ulysses" knows that his hero is a modern reincarnation of Homer's Odysseus.

All his readers are familiar with Bloom/Odysseus, the wandering Jew/Greek, and with his 'son-image' Daedalus/Telemachos, and with the "wife/mother/lover" image, Molly Bloom, much-naughtier-than-Penelope's image, Eve/Demeter and Helen of "Dis-Troy", as Paris Tacopoulos would have described her.

Joyce's "Ulysses" is a Paradise of knowledge, full of bitten and unbitten forbidden fruits, collected with great care and love by him, and eventually by us. Throughout the history of his human comedy, which if it has a beginning, unlike Dante's "Trilogy", has no end. And this is why it is usually appreciated and enjoyed by the majority of his readers.

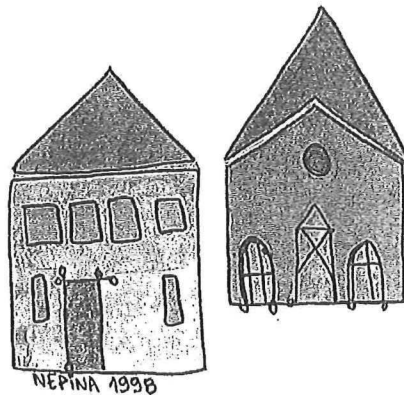
On the other hand, his "Finnegans Wake", as well as "The Hollow Bible" by Tacopoulos, offer a hellish job for their prospective readers, at least at first sight or hearing. Not that hell is less interesting than Paradise. But for me, it is a Hell worthwhile visiting and perhaps much more interesting than any "dejà vu" Paradise. Having read all Joyce's

works, and having read and re-read Tacopoulos' writings several times before they were printed, if not before they were written, although I sympathise with Ezra Pound's complaint to Joyce, about "Finnegans" obscurity, I cannot give Tacopoulos the same answer that Joyce gave to Pound. Joyce's reply was, "the action of my new work takes place at night. It's natural, things should not be so clear at night. Isn't it now?"

Paris Tacopoulos, apart from the second volume of "Keni Diathiki", "Aporia pros ta Ethni" –which is also a "Nachtmusik" in Genoa, full of tunes from Magna and Piccola Grecia– is a night and day Hell-enic and Divine Comedy, like Life and Death, or like "Ulysses" and "Finnegans Wake", combined.

So what can I say to Tacopoulos? Although I have already said it, if I remember well –which I don't. Shall I tell him that life is obscure enough, and why make it more obscure? I know his answer in advance; If in the beginning, was the Word –or "logos", which has more meaning in Greek as it also means the "cause"– Light and Darkness are a secondary matter, since, it is "all a matter of precedence". The only way to enlightenment is through Darkness. "Physsis krytpesthai philei" (Nature seeks concealment). For his own' protection, an artist, like Nature, likes, or even better, loves, to hide. As easy games are not meant for intelligent children, so easy books or crosswords, are not meant for intelligent readers. The rest is re-reading aloud his Unholy Bible –that's my advice– not as many times of course as the Holy Bible in a Christian church, or in a Hilton hotel.

Eddie Duckworth



ΟΤΑΝ Η ΕΛΕΝΗ ΒΛΑΧΟΥ μου πρότεινε να γράψω ένα τακτικό χρονογράφημα για την «Καθημερινή», νόμισα ότι αστειευόταν. «Επί πληρωμή, φυσικά», πρόσθεσε, «δηλαδή, πόσα θα πρέπει να σου δίνω;» ήταν η πρώτη μου ερώτησις, και «σε ποια γλώσσα;» η δεύτερη.

Το τι επηκολούθησε «is history», όπως λέμε Αγγλικά με μετριοφροσύνη. Παρ' όλην την μακράν μου παραμονή στην Ελλάδα και την αρίστη γνώσιν μου της Ελληνικής, δεν είχα ποτέ πάει σε Ελληνικό σχολείο, ούτε είχα γράψει Ελληνικά.

Με την θρασύτητα που με διακρίνει, όμως, δέχθηκα. Και το αποτέλεσμα εκτίθεται στην κρίσιν σας στο κομψό τούτο βιβλίο.

Αργότερα, συνέχισα να γράφω για τα «Πολιτικά Θέματα» τα οποία ευχαριστώ, αν και εκείνα δεν αστειευόντουσαν όταν ζήτησαν την συνεργασία μου.

Ευχαριστώ επίσης τον Πάρι Τακόπουλο, τον παλαιότερό μου φίλο. «Κανείς δεν έχει φίλους τόσο παλαιούς!», όπως είπε κάποτε ο Bob Hope μιλώντας για τον Bing Crosby.

Ευχαριστώ μετά τον Γιώργο Γκίκα που ανέλαβε με τόση φιλία την επιμέλεια και την διόρθωση αυτού του βιβλίου και τον Βαγγέλη Κουζούνη του οποίου διάλεξα μερικά σχέδια και βινιέτες που μου είχε χαρίσει. Για να χρυσώσω τον κρίνον μου (βρεταννικό γνωμικό).

Κι έτσι αυτά τα κείμενα γράφτηκαν απ' ευθείας Ελληνικά και στην αρχή με αρκετόν κόπο.

*«Ο δρόμος τον λόφου
Δεν είναι απότομος.
Ο λόφος είναι».*

Μια συλλαβή λιγότερη, και θα ήταν τέλειο ΗΑΙΚΥ.

Καμμιά φορά, η τελειότης μου ξεφεύγει.

Eddie Duckworth

17-11-94



Από το οπισθόφυλλο του βιβλίου του
«Δήγματα Γραφής» (εκδόσεις Γιαλλελή).