

The Pre-last of the Monikins  
the play that gave birth to “Keni Diathiki”  
A view, and a review by Evangelos Sachperoglou\*

Although three weeks have elapsed since I saw the *Pre-Last of the Monikins*, the memory of both its text and its performance continue to haunt me. My thoughts are still lingering on the many levels of this one-man play, whose multi-sided character, Monikin, is perhaps one of the most moving in modern drama. Having been under the spell of Cavafis’ 154 poems, which I have been, for some years now, translating into English, I could very well empathise with Monikin’s loneliness, isolation, and quiet desperation. What I admired in Paris Tacopoulos’ play is the superb structure of the text, as well as the author’s inner courage, his penchant for self-dissection, his serene pride in the face of the inevitable, his humane vision of the world, his humility and, last but not least, his humour, which is the amalgama and reflection of the above qualities.

If I were asked to characterise this play, I’d call it a “propitiatory prayer”, an attempt to ward off life’s unending tragedy, by the potent filter of spiritual honesty, by drinking several cups of high quality “artistic veritas”, or, as the playwright would probably have called them, “in vino veritas”!

This polyphonic self-debunking monologue is a jewel of its kind that has already survived the rigours of time. If I refer to the past, I do so because the play was written in 1966 and presented by the Karolos

---

\* This is the main part of a review written in Kathimerini-Herald Tribune on June 9, 2004, for last year’s performance in Greek.

Koun Art Theatre in 1977 and still is, at least in its new adaptation, one of the best “post-modern” plays, world theatre-wise, or unwise.

As I sat riveted, ruminating on *Monikin*, I realised how little we get to know people, unless fortuitously, they are remorselessly revived by courageous playwrights, who happen to possess particular qualities of innocence and truthfulness. If only our theatre companies had the same courage to present such plays more often!

Now that I have been acquainted with the more than three *Monikins* existing in the play, (if one does not take into consideration the very first one, the playwright himself) and the numerous ones existing in the one-and-only main character of the play, I hope I won't be subjected, some day, to the predicament of having to make a choice, for I have come to love them all! But enough about the play; the actor also is the thing, and especially in such a play as the *Pre-Last of the Monikins*. Nikos Kalamo, founder of the Phyto-rio of Aegina, and an experienced actor and director, who completed his studies at Stella Adler's Conservatory of Acting in New York, has managed to be a mature and introverted *Monikin*, without exaggerated gestures or other easy mannerisms. He showed respect for the text with all its linguistic acrobatics, and its climaxes and anti-climaxes, in all its actions or inactions, and he managed eventually to give us a lovable, convincing and memorable *Monikin*.

The music by Kostas Mantzoros was very moving, and provided the right counterpoint to the point of the play. The setting by Margarita Samara was also quite appropriate for the solitary room of a *Monikin*, and displays equal measures of skill and sensitivity. So was the lighting by Nikos Pexomatis, which helped considerably in enlivening the setting, as well as the play. Finally I should like to refer to the good taste and text selection in the programme, and especially the exciting cover, designed by Alkis Ghinis.

All in all, a memorable *Monikin*, this year. I only hope that after this *Monikin*, and the second English one in the Edinburgh Festival, there will be - to paraphrase Dylan Thomas - many others. And I make the same wish for his other plays, which if they are not so numerous as

the 154 poems of Cavafis, they exceed the 54. (A number I have lately discovered in the recent publication of his plays by Ellinika Grammata, two volumes indispensable for the bookshelves of all greek theater lovers).

Last and not pre-last conclusion: C. P. Cavafis, a theatre lover, would have also been touched by Monikin and perhaps would have commented on him: "To have come so far is no small matter; / to have done so much, is great glory".

*Evangelos Sachperoglou*



**Evangelos Sachperoglou** was born in the winter of 1941.

He attended Athens College displaying an early interest in History and English. Upon graduation he went to the USA on a Fulbright Grant. He was educated in *Economics and in History* at Michigan State University receiving his MA diploma in 1964.

Following his sojourn in the U.S. he attended the University of Vienna, Austria taking courses in the History of Economics. On his return to Greece he taught for a number of years at Athens College and Deree College and studied Italian before taking over the family business which he successfully directed till 1998 when he retired to follow his academic interests.

Since the early 70's he has been associated in the capacity of friend and supporter with the British School of Archaeology at Athens, having served as Vice-Chairman of the Friends for almost twenty years.

Upon his retirement he decided to pursue his long standing dream of translating Cavafy's canon in English. His translation is considered one of the best existing in English ; and five years after his first bilingual edition in Greece it was chosen and published by the Oxford World's Classics. Since then he has gone through several printings which have been well received by both critics and the public.

Evangelos Sachperoglou is married, has two children, three grandchildren, and lives in Athens.

