

**Paris Tacopoulos speaks to, (or with) Boston College Students
about his play
“The Pre-Last of the Monikins”
Oct. 28, 2010**

To save time and face, I decided to change the order of the agenda not strictly set by **Dia’s** questionnaire, so that I can clarify matters vice versa, and start from the end, although I call *The Prelast of the Monikins* a play without a beginning and without an end.

So I start with **Jack Xia’s** question, i.e., what inspired me to write this play. Well the answer is simple. The reason lies in a very unhappy incident, and nearly fatal self accident, in my life (*How do you like all these euphemisms and evasions?*) After this, not top secret, confession **Jack** has the right to say that Monikin was I, although he became “not I”, as he gradually developed into a play. And now for my second open confession: writing the play saved my life from a new desperate attempt. It made me see the funny side of my dilemma. Monikin made me realize that a “second coming” is better than any “second going”. Yes I owe a lot to Monikin; writing about him, while – I must also confess – drinking with him. *Have you heard what I said?* To quote or misquote my hero. Let’s say “a la maniere” of Monikin. Drinking –is that my third confession? – together with my first answer to **Jack**, covers and honours also the question of some other responders, in this friendly and not holy inquisition about Monikin’s not so immaculate conception and “parthenogenesis”.

How did you conceive the idea for a play as cerebral as the “Prelast of the Monikins? Where from did you draw inspiration? Asks **Honor Flannery** who has watched the play before reading it.

How and why did you pick the title “The Prelast of the Monikins” asks **Jeff Zanghi**, who unlike **Honor**, read the play, as it is his practice for similar occasions, before watching the video. While **Taylor Stiegler**, who prefers reading Monikin to watching him, asks where did I draw my biggest influence from? Playwriting unwise, **Samuel Beckett** perhaps; although my first naughty mentor was **Willie**, Hamlet’s father. I used to read and play for years together with an English friend of mine, almost all **Shakespeare’s** major roles; as well as Vladimir and Estragon. “Asides”, end here.

Best Supanusonti, who also thinks best to read the text and then to view it on DVD, wonders how I managed to keep the audience engaged

throughout such a long monologue. What else can I say to **Best**, than “thank you”; this was the best compliment I had up to now. I always thought better to be engaged, until I eventually got happily married to my cousin **Marina**.

Andrew Pike who first came to know the play by reading it, and pick apart many of the literary references, and thus enjoyed more the DVD later, especially the second time he saw it, asks how closely Monikin’s thoughts resemble mine as a writer? I will come to that, in a few minutes, and also revert to **Honor Flannery’s** belief that Monikin is a cerebral play.

But first to **Juan Rodriguez** categorical, more answering than questioning statement: “This is an extremely personal play”, a statement which covers the whole “primordial” question of Monikin’s creation. “*Primordial?*”! I start talking again like Monikin. “How much – if at all – asks **Juan** after his statement, “is Monikin’s train of thought influenced by your own views on spirituality, life, society and popular Culture?” There is the rub, as Monikin says together with Hamlet. I have to bring **Samuel Beckett** back into our conversation, who after a special revealing moment in his life, wrote *Krapp’s Last Tape*. A tragicomedy full of sad reminiscences, irreligiously kept by Krapp on a tape recorder. Past mishaps as present ones, – slipping because of a banana skin for instance–, make us laugh reminding us of **Charly Tsaplin’s** and **Baster Keaton’s** similar tragicomic scenes. Laughter is the real catharsis in our lives, unlike Gods in ancient Greek tragedies, which had perhaps their real catharsis in **Aristophanes**, or even in **Euripides**, who notwithstanding his many *Dei ex machina*– just a gimmick of his – knew how to make fun of both gods and men sometimes, although he was always, much more sympathetic to the latter.

Before my lines become “more continuous”, as **Peter Foradas** views my lines in the play, I come back to the raised theme of Monikin’s conception. Did I write this play on one sitting? Or, as **Scott Mulloy** asks: How much the play was planned or thought out carefully, and how much was actually my own stream of consciousness? And to this, **Grace Luetmer** adds her own doubt about how I wrote this play. And wonders whether I had in mind all the literary references while I was making up my Monikin’s “dialogue”. Stop. **Grace** says dialogue and not monologue, which answers a lot of three students questioning about the theatricality of a monologue; or why I haven’t used more persons “live” in my play, since there are, anyhow, two more Monikins, communicating by phone, with the “one and only” protagonist, in this play.

I am referring to **Caroline Quincy's** and to **Marlo Studley**, and to **Caitlin Kim's** remarks on the form of the play I chose. All of them, as far as I remember, enjoyed reading the play before or after, watching the DVD, and that should be sufficient to me.

But I would like to take this opportunity to make a remark which I consider crucial. It is the content of each play which determines the number of the actors. And a monologue is a continuous dialogue, not only with one person, or idea, or two or three which makes the monologue a triologue, or trianglogue, but even with a cast of thousands persons or ideas. Have you ever thought how many persons, pictures, or ideas pass through our minds every minute, awake or asleep? If not, ask your Wikipedia.

And now after this deviation a few words about the content of this play: the name of Monikin, his age, and some other interesting issues as raised by **Jennifer Truong, Cara D'Arcy, Andrea Alonso, David Keane, Samantha Galvin, Jon Hunter** and **Magdalena Lachowicz**.

First the name. "What does it mean?" No I am not unbalanced as one Lady, suggests in "Sweeney Agonistes", an unfinished aristo-funny poetic tragicomedy by **T.S. Eliot**, this time. "*But after all what did he mean? He might be unbalanced...*" or something like that.

Monikin is just a name but what does it mean, what does it symbolize as a lot of the women and men ask you about the content of your play. A play **is**, as well as a name **is**. And then what's in a name or in a play? The easiest answer would have been Getrude Stein's line: a rose is a rose, is a rose is a rose. But I am not talking to any audience and to a reviewer or to a journalist; I am talking to young people who were always my best audience or readers. And what's more to young students as you, with such a teacher as Dia, not ex machina but ex anima. As concerns the title one must not forget "The last of the Mohicans" "an epic well known to Greeks as well.

A few weeks ago a book of mine was published with my collected poems. The first poem written recently had the title "Growing Young". I was very young when I wrote the prelast of the Monikins. The first actor who played the role was much younger than me. Actually he was about 23, and it was the first role in his career which proved to be as successful as Monikin, up to his last day. Since then a lot of actors have undertaken this role regardless of their age. It is not the choice of the author, who is going to play whom. Actors of different age can play any role. Sarah Bernard

played Hamlet at a very mature age. I wouldn't have liked her to play my Monikin.

Nicos Kalamo whom you have lately seen in the DVD of the Edinburgh Fringe Festival production, was acclaimed in Greece as the best Monikin, even by his younger predecessors including the first Monikin **Dimitris Oikonomou** who died a few months ago. As concerns the name of Monikin, Monos –meaning alone in Greek – it's not something strange for American ears. Just open any Webster dictionary and you will find hundred of words starting with the word “mono”. You also use words as Manikin., Minikin, (not to mention “Meneken Piss) but truth was and is, as usual, more simple. I used to call my friend Monikin and she used to call me Monikin. So what's more natural than to call the heroes of my play Monikins? Is that my fourth confession?

To answer as briefly as possible **Andreas Alonso** specific questions to clarify matters as the “who is who” of the Monikins. When Monikin asks who is Monikin and answers “Monikin is me” etc etc... he is already in a state of childish feverish delirium; probably because he is also drunk. One even may wonder whether it is the first time he tries to commit suicide, since he says somewhere, that this time he will not postpone it. As concerns his four thousand of years, it's a self leg pulling of the Greeks who are so proud of their past, justifiably or not, is of no concern. Every nation is proud of its past. Look how proud each country is about its football team. All Monikin's reactions and all his self-funereal speeches come from the fact that he still yearns for his “female” Monikin, who deserted him. That's why the music which occasionally accompanies the play, according to my instructions, was Charlie Chaplin's song “Je cherche ma Titine et je ne la trouve pas”.

And now I come to the content of the play and the style and the literary references. **Andre Gayraud** pays attention to the use of wordplay and **Amy Feinberg** to the existence of many biblical references while **Jeff Trivella** mentions the different allusions to Hamlet, **Bob Dylan**, **Cavafy**, **W.B. Yeats**, **Lord Byron** and the Bible.

Alejandra Rodriguez is surprised to find such names as **Yeats**, **Dylan** and **E.E. Cummings** in the Text. **Adam Wladis** is rather surprised to find so many puns and literary allusions all in a Joycean style. **Bart Celie** refers to Monikin's pseudo-aphorism, that “*if it is not Greek it is not logos*”, and is slightly surprised that Monikin finds delight in Greek naughtiness.

Before I forget it, I will give an answer which you can take as another confession of mine.

Monikin the one act play, is a prologue of my, two volumes, novel, for the time being, called Hollow Bible (Keni Diathiki in Greek, which means “Empty” if is written with “e”, while with the diphthong “ai”, with the same sound means “New”). The hero of Keni Diathiki is, again, and will always remain Monikin, until death the two Monikins’ part. Monikin the play, as well as the novel, are works in progress as was **Joyce Finnegans Wake**. As concerns puns: pun is fun, although it is the most dangerous form when ill-used.

In my previous satirical novels and short stories I attack the use of clichés, even in my poems by distorting them. They are my enemy number 1, as they falsify both life and human beings.

When my play first appeared on stage, by Karolos Koun’s Art Theater, in 1977, my Hollow Bible had already been published four years since. So one can understand the biblical references since the two works are communicating vessels.

As the inclusion of many foreign literary names in this play, that was completely necessary when I was asked to write the play in English for the Edinburgh Festival production. I have tried to find, in English, equivalent poems or quotations, to the Greek ones, that could make sense to the English public.

Kieran Mara, to end my answering soliloquy, asks whether I chose **Socrates** statuette as a symbol of greekness. And **Brian Klaus** wonders whether the emphasis of the greekness in this play limits the potential audience. Well I don’t know; when I write a play I simultaneously play the roles and think also of a proper, or improper, setting; and of course I write in Greek, because I am a Greek, and I am addressing myself first to me, and then, to my audience who is also Greek. If this interests other people, as Monikin has managed to do, I consider it a plus. One must not forget that European Culture (which is also an “American activity”) is a combination of Greek and Christian thought. So there is not such a great difference between a cultured European audience and a Greek one. No more emphasis for my greekness. I leave that to Monikin.

I finish with **Marcus Chan** observation about the frequent use of three dots. Dots usually represent pauses. But anyhow regardless of the longer or shorter pinterian pauses in modern playwriting, which I usually try to

avoid, what I say to an actor as playwright, and occasionally as director, punctuation is for making reading easier. Actors should forget full stops, dots, commas or semi “colonians” when they act. They have to find “punctuality”, combined with their rhythm of their bodies and their logos. The rest is silence or logos, (if I left any unspoken), and it is not mine but yours.

The Greeks have not the last word, but a Greek word for it. Poetry, ποίησις i.e. action – (πράξις) a unique word for art, real art, which must be concrete, and which gives a real meaning to poetry. Does it sound like another logos by Monikin? If it does, I don't mind. I am ready for another questionnaire.