

Paris Tacopoulos

Audio Cyber-Interview via Conference Call

Oct. 28, 2010

Clip 2:

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 Gertrude Stein’s line: a rose is a rose, is a rose is a rose. But I am not talking to just any audience or to a reviewer or 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 Pre-Last 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’s, 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 Bernhardt played Hamlet at a very mature age. I wouldn’t have liked her to play my Monikin.

Nikos 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. Concerning the name of Monikin, Monos –meaning ‘alone’ in Greek – it’s not something strange to American ears. Just open any Webster dictionary and you will find hundreds of words starting with “mono-”. You also use words such as manikin, minikin, (not to mention “Manneken Pis”), 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 **Andrea Alonso's** specific request that I clarify issues such 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 to his four thousand years, it's a self leg pulling of the Greeks, who are so proud of their past, -- whether justifiably or not, is of no concern. Every nation is proud of its past. Look how proud each country is of 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-volume novel, for the time being, called *Hollow Bible* (*Keni Diathiki* in Greek, the first word of which means "Empty" if is written with an "e", while if written with the diphthong "ai" [having the same sound] means "New"). The hero of *Keni Diathiki* is, again, and will always remain Monikin, until death do the two Monikins part. *Monikin* the play, as well as the novel, are works in progress as was Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*. As to puns: a 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, at Karolos Koun's Art Theater, in 1977, my *Hollow Bible* had already been published four years earlier. So one can understand the biblical references, as the two works are communicating vessels.

As to 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, poems or quotations equivalent to the Greek ones, that would 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 on 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 which 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 on my Greekness. I leave that to Monikin.

I conclude with **Marcus Chan's** 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", in combination with the 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.