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## When Monasticism Invades Poetry

### Abstract

In this paper, we are going to see how Fr Moyses (1952-2014), the Athonite monk, uses Constantine Cavafy's (1863-1933), the widely known Modern Greek poet's, techniques in his poetry. While we could speak about influences from Cavafy to Fr Moyses, it is also important to notice the way Fr Moyses extends these influences, going beyond Cavafy's poetic territory. Fr Moyses achieves that, as he explores and includes in his poems the experience of Orthodox Monasticism, which gives his poetry a strong spiritual character.



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## Keywords

Fr Moyses, Cavafy, Simeon the Stylites, Theatricality, Monasticism, Modern Greek Poetry

## 1 Introduction

Initially, the first poems that will be discussed are Fr Moyses' 'Μπρος στην εικόνα της' ('In Front of Her Icon')<sup>1</sup> and Cavafy's 'Συμεών' ('Simeon').<sup>2</sup> As we can see, Simeon constitutes the title of Cavafy's poem, while the same name appears in the second line of Fr Moyses' poem. Both, Cavafy and Fr Moyses refer to Simeon the Stylites (389-459), who was a Christian hermit.<sup>3</sup> However, while Cavafy expresses his admiration for Simeon, Fr Moyses expands on the importance of *ascesis*, prayer, and spirituality.

Besides, we will look at the way Fr Moyses uses Cavafy's theatricality in the poem 'Ο Ηθοποιός' ('The Actor'),<sup>4</sup> which is reminiscent of Cavafy's 'Απολείπειν ο Θεός Αντώνιον' ('The God Forsakes Antony')<sup>5</sup> and 'Ο Βασιλεύς Δημήτριος' ('King Demetrius').<sup>6</sup> However, again, Fr Moyses reverses Cavafy's

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<sup>1</sup> Μοναχού Μωυσέως του Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα* (Athens: Armos, 1996), p. 96 (my translation).

<sup>2</sup> Κ. Π. Καβάφης, *Άπαντα τα Ποιήματα*, edited by Σόνια Ιλίνσκαγια (Athens: Narkissos, 2003) p. 383.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 476.

<sup>4</sup> Μοναχού Μωυσέως του Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40.

<sup>5</sup> C. P. Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, translated by Evangelos Sachperoglou, edited by Anthony Hirst, introduction by Peter Mackridge (Oxford, 2008), pp. 34-35.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

atmosphere, through the representation of *theosis* and *charmolypi*, which constitute important values of Orthodoxy.

## 2 Simeon the Stylites

According to Cavafy, Simeon was possibly the only person who attempted to live the hermitic life. Cavafy read Tennyson's poem 'St. Simeon Stylites',<sup>7</sup> about Simeon, but he characterized the poem as non-representative of Simeon's true significance.<sup>8</sup> Cavafy considered that Tennyson's poem does not mean justice to its subject and Tennyson did not confront Simeon, according to his value. A poem for Simeon is a difficult effort, which could be fulfilled only by a splendid poet.<sup>9</sup>

Also, Cavafy decided not to publish his poem on Simeon, because he did not consider it good enough.<sup>10</sup> Cavafy's poem constitutes an expression of admiration for Simeon and his decision to live the ascetic life. According to Cavafy, Simeon's ascetic life constitutes an example of real faith.<sup>11</sup> It is also interesting to note that in his poem, Cavafy characterizes the discussion on poets as trivial, as opposed to the obvious admiration for Simeon. Cavafy asserts that he was among Christians, although not a Christian, only to see the pillar of Simeon. He watched those who were praying below Simeon's pillar.

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<sup>7</sup> Alfred Tennyson, *The Poetical Works of Alfred Tennyson* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1874), pp. 52-54, <http://archive.org/details/poeticalworksofa00tenniala>, 04<sup>th</sup> February 2013.

<sup>8</sup> Φιλίππου Σέρραρντ, *Η Μαρτυρία του Ποιητή: Προοπτικές και Παραλληλισμοί* (Athens: Indiktos, 1998), p. 41.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> Αλέκου Καραπαναγοπούλου, *Ο Κ. Π. Καβάφης ήταν Χριστιανός;* (Athens: Dodone, 1993), p. 43-44.

Cavafy's poem opens with an important piece of information; this is the appearance of a new poetic collection:

I know them, yes, those new poems of his.  
All Beirut is passionate about them.<sup>12</sup>

Here, Cavafy speaks about a poetic collection which although a new one, would become very famous in Beirut. After that, Cavafy compares the new poems with those of Libanius and Meleager;<sup>13</sup> his conclusion is that the new poems are better than Libanius', but not better than Meleager's:

Certainly he's better versed in Greek than Libanius.  
But even better than Meleager? I don't believe so.<sup>14</sup>

The comparison between the new poet and well-established poets implies Cavafy's anxiety about poetry. Here, Cavafy uses the persona of a new poet as an alter ego, in order to express his worry about his fame as a poet. It could be said that the new poet, who is compared here with older ones, is Cavafy. By saying that the new poet is not better than Meleager, Cavafy admits that his lyrics are not better than those of Meleager. When Cavafy realizes that he is not the best poet, he turns to his fictional friend, Mebes, and talks about the value of Simeon:

Ah Mebes, so what of Libanius who! and which books!  
and all such trivialities! (...) Mebes, yesterday I was-

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<sup>12</sup> C. P. Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, translation by Daniel Mendelsohn (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, 2012), pp. 331-332.

<sup>13</sup> Libanius (314-393 A.D) was a Greek-Syrian teacher of rhetoric and Meleager (130-70 B.C) was a well-known poet of epigrams; see: Κ. Π. Καβάφης, *Άπαντα τα Ποιήματα*, pp. 454, 476.

<sup>14</sup> C. P. Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, p. 331.

quite by chance it happened- at the foot of Simeon's pillar.<sup>15</sup>

Cavafy is disappointed after he realized that there are better poets than him. Simeon constitutes a kind of consolation for him. Cavafy maintains that poetry is such an unimportant thing to him, compared with his visit to Simeon's hermitage. Poetry is characterized as a trifle, as opposed to Simeon who is the personification of real value.

In the next lines of the poem, Cavafy praises Simeon:

Ah, don't smile; thirty-five years, just think-  
winter, summer, night and day, thirty-five  
years he's been living atop a pillar, martyring himself.  
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and ever since he's stayed there before his God.<sup>16</sup>

Cavafy states that Simeon lived a notable life. He tells Mebes to stop laughing and think about the life of Simeon that was difficult, but respectful. Simeon lived for thirty-five years a purely ascetic life on a pillar. This is how he came close to God and lives in front of Him forever.

Fr Moyses' poem recalls Cavafy's, from the very beginning. In the first two lines, Fr Moyses writes:

I know my lyrics are poor  
they are not like these of Gregory and Simeon.<sup>17</sup>

Similarly to Cavafy, Fr Moyses starts his poem writing about poetry. Nonetheless, Fr Moyses speaks directly about his

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 331.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*.

<sup>17</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 96 (my translation).

poems, as opposed to Cavafy who uses the alter ego of another poet. Also, Fr Moyses compares his poems with these of Gregory of Nazianzus<sup>18</sup> and Simeon the Stylites, saying that his are not as good as theirs.

The comparison of poets in Fr Moyses, which also occurs (as we have seen) in Cavafy, again implies his anxiety for recognition of his poems. It denotes clearly his worry about how readers will see his poems. This is evident in the following lines:

I have not been hurt enough yet  
or actually I have not loved enough  
I have been misled so early in writing, brothers  
forgive my persistence of my awkwardness.<sup>19</sup>

Similar to Cavafy who undervalues poetry, in general, and praises the hermitic life of Simeon, Fr Moyses proceeds in an identical acclamation for Simeon and Gregory, underestimating his poems. Fr Moyses asks forgiveness from readers for his writings. Although he was not ready to publish poems, he has been misled by his passion for writing poetry.

By saying that his works are not like these of Gregorios and Simeon, because he has not been hurt and did not love enough,<sup>20</sup> Fr Moyses seems to know why his works are not so good. As opposed to Cavafy who included details of Simeon's hermitic life, to express his admiration for him, Fr Moyses expresses his admiration, by implying that the greatness of Gregory's and Simeon's work is connected with the fact that

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<sup>18</sup> Gregory of Nazianzus (329-390 A.D) was a rhetor, theologian, poet and church father; see: Danya S. Kalleres, 'Demon and Divine Illumination: a Consideration of Eight Prayers by Gregory of Nazianzus', *Vigiliae Christianae*, Vol. 61, No. 2 (May 2007), p. 157.

<sup>19</sup> Μωυσεώς Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 96, (my translation).

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

both of them had been hurt and they loved enough. In that way, Fr Moyses alludes to their spiritual *ascesis* which is reflected in Simeon's and Gregory's work. Spiritual *ascesis* is not an easy process. In contrast, this is a difficult process, which on the one hand it hurts and on the other hand, it makes people love each other. So, here Fr Moyses refers to the spiritual *ascesis* of Gregory and Simeon which helped them to write poetry.

Moreover, the use of the verb *γνωρίζω* (I know)<sup>21</sup> in the first line of Fr Moyses' poem, brings his work even closer to that of Cavafy, since, in the latter's, we have the verb *ξέρω* (I know),<sup>22</sup> again in the first line. Both Greek verbs mean 'know' and are used in the two poems, in the first person. In Cavafy, 'know' is used to show that he knows the new poems of the writer, while in Fr Moyses, 'know' is used to display that he knows the value of his poems. Here, Fr Moyses uses a synonym verb to that of Cavafy, in the same person. As we can see, in both poets the verbs refer to the poems: in Cavafy, the verb refers to the new poems of his writer, while in Fr Moyses it refers to his poems. Finally, the end of Fr Moyses' poem is again reminiscent of Cavafy:

Simeon went up onto the pillar  
and ever since he's stayed there before his God  
(Cavafy).<sup>23</sup>

and I remain costly in a dead end  
in front of the icon with the great eyes  
(Fr Moyses).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 96 (my translation).

<sup>22</sup> Καβάφης, *Άπαντα τα Ποιήματα*, p. 383.

<sup>23</sup> Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, p. 332.

<sup>24</sup> Μωσσεώς Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 96, (my translation).

Although the lyrics in Cavafy refer to Simeon and Fr Moyses speaks in the first person about himself, the similarities between the two poets, particularly in the vocabulary they use, are evident. Initially, both poets use, again, very similar verbs: Cavafy uses the verb *μένει* ('he stays'), and Fr Moyses uses the verb *παραμένω* ('I remain'). In Greek, the verb *παραμένω* is a composite verbal form, which consists of *παρά* and the verb *μένω*, which is used in Cavafy in the third person.

By the use of these verbs, both poets intend to show permanence in one specific situation. Cavafy identifies the permanent situation of Simeon on a pillar, while Fr Moyses says that he watches an icon, remaining in a dead end. Moreover, Fr Moyses' title of the poem which is repeated in the last line of his poem, 'in front of her icon,' alludes to Cavafy's words 'in front of God'.<sup>25</sup> Here, in the original Greek, both poets use the word *μπροστά* ('in front of'), accompanied by an invocation to God. Cavafy describes Simeon staying on the pillar and praying to God since he turned to Him wholly. Fr Moyses presents himself praying in front of an icon, to be helped to exit from the dead end in which he finds himself.

Nonetheless, Fr Moyses adapts his poem to his poetic style. He gives his poem stronger Christian character than Cavafy, by introducing himself as petitioner 'in front of the icon with the great eyes.' This is the greatest prayer, according to his words:

Then, the greatest prayer is born.<sup>26</sup>

Presenting himself praying, Fr Moyses replaces Cavafy's distance from Orthodoxy with a faithful Christian's close relation with Orthodoxy.

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<sup>25</sup> Mendelsohn translates 'before his God'.

<sup>26</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 96, (my translation).



Cavafy declares that he is not a Christian. He asserts that he just found some Christians and admired Simeon. Even when Christians were praying below the pillar of Simeon, Cavafy was upset and suffered:

I slipped in among the Christians  
 who were praying silently and worshipping,  
 and kneeling down; but since I'm not a Christian  
 I didn't have their serenity of mind-  
 and I was trembling all over, and suffering;  
 and I was horrified, upset, deeply distressed.<sup>27</sup>

As opposed to Cavafy, who feels uncomfortable among the Christians and who presents Simeon and Christians praying, Fr Moyses presents himself praying, showing his closeness to Christianity. Prayer is the way for Fr Moyses to express his duty to God in his life as a monk. Cavafy becomes sick, among the Christians. In contrast, Fr Moyses asserts that his prayer in front of the icon is the greatest one. As opposed to Cavafy's sickness, Fr Moyses feels happy while praying. The difference in the two poems is reflected through the opposing views held by the poets regarding Orthodoxy. Cavafy declares that he is not a Christian, whereas Fr Moyses is a Christian who prays. Thus, Fr Moyses reverses Cavafy's unfaithfulness to the true faith.

Fr Moyses' poem acquires strong Orthodox character through the petitionary mood and the poet's prayer. The poem revolves around the greatness of prayer. If we want to see, how the prayer in Fr Moyses' poem reveals Orthodox character, we should focus on the role of prayer in Orthodoxy.

Prayer constitutes a good work which is made in the name of Christ; it is a means to acquire the Holy Spirit.<sup>28</sup> A sinful man

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<sup>27</sup> Cavafy, *Complete Poems*, p. 331.

can be cured of sin, only when he turns towards God and cries to Him in prayer and with complete faith.<sup>29</sup> The prayer of words is called active prayer and leads to calmness, which is the frontier of wordless contemplative prayer. This is the prayer in which the heart lays itself open in silence before God.<sup>30</sup> Prayer is the motive power behind all human efforts and the whole spiritual life.<sup>31</sup> According to St. Isaac the Syrian (7<sup>th</sup> century), prayer is a conversation with God which takes place in secret and is also every thought of God.<sup>32</sup>

Prayer directs to union with God since it is a personal relationship with Him. It is the union which must be fulfilled in human persons, and it must be conscious and voluntary.<sup>33</sup> According to Gregory Palamas (1296-1359 A.D.), the power of prayer fulfills the sacrament of our union with God. It is a bond which connects rational creatures with their Creator.<sup>34</sup> In prayer, a person encounters with God. Personally, he knows Him, and he loves Him.<sup>35</sup>

The beginning of prayer is a petition and this is nothing more than a preparation for a true spiritual prayer.<sup>36</sup> Little by little the soul regains its unity, and then God answers prayer by manifesting His providence. When the soul entrusts itself wholly to the will of God, this is the end of the petition; and then we have 'pure prayer.'<sup>37</sup> The mystical experience which is

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<sup>28</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Cambridge: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005) pp. 196-197.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 206-207.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

inseparable from the way towards union, between man and God, is possible only through prayer.<sup>38</sup> Every presence of man before the face of God is prayer. Nonetheless, this presence should be a constant attitude and prayer should be perpetual.<sup>39</sup> The practice of spiritual prayer in the tradition of the Christian East consists of preparing the heart for the indwelling of grace by guarding its purity.<sup>40</sup> The fruit of prayer is divine love, which is simply grace appropriated in the depths of human creatures' being.<sup>41</sup> According to St Gregory of Nyssa (335-395 A.D), love is the very life of the divine nature.<sup>42</sup>

Orthodoxy retains a vital tradition, in which the method of prayer is necessary. All prayer is good, but luminous prayer is something that has to be performed properly.<sup>43</sup> The proper posture of prayer is to stand and pray with upraised hands, but a person who prays for repentance and sorrow should kneel.<sup>44</sup> Certainly, the rules about the posture of prayer are not strict, since one who feels tired and cannot stand long should start prayer standing up and then to sit down.<sup>45</sup> The Orthodox use icons in their prayer in order to be helped in keeping the mind focused on the presence of God.<sup>46</sup> This is what Fr Moyses does in 'In Front of Her Icon,' in which he asserts that he prays 'in front of the icon with the great eyes.'<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 212.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 213.

<sup>43</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church: an Introduction to its History, Doctrine, and Spiritual Culture* (West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), p. 347.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 96. My translation.

Orthodox spiritual tradition is geared to the following threefold understanding of prayer: the harmonizing into a single sounded note of the body, the mind, and the heart.<sup>48</sup> The heart is the seat of the understanding, the source of human reflection and contemplation. Also, it is the holy place in which man relates to God in the deepest seat of religious awareness.<sup>49</sup>

St Macarios the Great (295-392 A.D.) described the importance of the heart in prayer, by asserting that God, the angels, life, light, the apostles and holy cities dwell there.<sup>50</sup> From here the 'prayer of the heart' becomes a practice which is common in Orthodoxy: the Jesus Prayer. The Jesus Prayer is widely known in Orthodox countries and is practiced by the monks and the laity.<sup>51</sup> The Jesus Prayer holds the whole gospel truth, and it could be seen as a summary of the Gospels.<sup>52</sup> The special value of the Jesus Prayer lies in the fact that it makes all truths come alive so that they are perceived with all the fullness of our being.<sup>53</sup>

Christ is the link between the Father and humankind and source from whom the image of God in humans is derived. For humans, the prayer is the way to find Christ in their hearts and through him to find God.<sup>54</sup> In Orthodox thought, the salvation of humanity can be fulfilled by prayer.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> John Anthony McGuckin, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 349.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 349.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 351.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 351-352.

<sup>52</sup> Kallistos Ware Bishop of Diokleia, *The Power of the Name* (Oxford: SLG Press, 1987), p. 8.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>54</sup> Nonna Verna Harrison, 'The Human Person as image and likeness of God', in: M. B. Cunningham, E. Theokritoff (eds.), *Orthodox Christian Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 80.

<sup>55</sup> Hilarion Alfeyev, 'Eschatology', in: M. B. Cunningham, E. Theokritoff (eds.), *Orthodox Christian Theology*, (Cambridge, 2008), p. 118.

Consequently, by presenting himself praying, Fr Moyses alludes to this significant role of prayer in Orthodoxy. Thus, although influenced by Cavafy, Fr Moyses' poem reveals Orthodoxy. Bearing in mind, the pieces of information given above and the prominent role of prayer in Orthodoxy, Fr Moyses' poem obtains sound Orthodox character, because of the petitionary mood and all the substance of prayer that includes.

### 3 Theatricality in poetry

Fr Moyses' poem 'Ο Ηθοποιός' ('The Actor')<sup>56</sup> alludes to Cavafy. Fr Moyses describes the story of an actor who did not succeed in Athens and left for another place. After three performances in the new location, the theater closed permanently, and he finally became a drifter, wearing the costume of his last performance. There are two poems in Cavafy's corpus which describe a similar situation presenting actors and performances. These are 'Απολείπειν ο Θεός Αντώνιον' ('The God Forsakes Antony')<sup>57</sup> and 'Ο Βασιλεύς Δημήτριος' ('King Demetrius').<sup>58</sup>

Firstly, we should look at the poem 'The God Forsakes Antony.' The background of the poem is the story of the Roman general and politician Mark Antony, at the time of the fall of Alexandria and his death (31 B.C.). Antony heard the sound of instruments and voices singing, and people's cries and shouts while dancing.<sup>59</sup> This procession crossed the city towards the gate, where the enemy was located. People assumed this to signify

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<sup>56</sup> Μουσσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40.

<sup>57</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 215 (Hirst).

that the god Dionysus had now forsaken him.<sup>60</sup> According to the tradition traced to Plutarch (45-120 A.D.), Dionysus was considered the patron of Mark Antony.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, Cavafy refers indirectly to Dionysus (since he does not mention his name clearly), to show that Mark Antony's patron was Dionysus.

In his poem, Cavafy describes the situation in theatrical terms. The very first lines of the poem are indicative of Cavafy's intention to liken the story of Antony with a theatre company:<sup>62</sup>

When suddenly, at the midnight hour  
an invisible company is heard going the past,  
with exquisite music, with voices-  
your fate that's giving in now, your deeds  
that failed, your life's plans that proved to be  
all illusions, do not needlessly lament.<sup>63</sup>

In the above lines, Cavafy advises Antony not to cry for the failure of his plans, when the procession passes through the city. Cavafy describes the whole scene in the poem, like an episode from a theater performance. In the center of this scene, we have Antony to whom Cavafy speaks and encourages to be strong. Although there is no direct reference to Antony as an actor, the fact that Cavafy writes about the coming of a theater company and refers to Antony in the second person, inspires

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ιλίνσκαγια in Καβάφης, *Άπαντα τα Ποιήματα*, p. 445

<sup>62</sup> Sachperoglou's translation for 'θίασος' is 'company', in: Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, pp. 34-35. This is the one which is used here. 'θίασος' constitutes the group of actors in a theatrical performance. Another translation could be theatrical troupe.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

readers to imagine a theatrical performance with the latter at the center of the scene.

Fr Moyses' opening is reminiscent of Cavafy's:

There was an unfortunate actor  
the director judged him undeserving  
to play the role of Emperor  
he succeeded better in being a slave.<sup>64</sup>

The first common element between the two poems is the fact that both allude to the theatre. On the first hand, by using 'θίασος' ('theater company') in the opening of his poem, Cavafy introduces readers in an atmosphere of theater. Moreover, this word is accompanied by another theatrical reference, which is 'μουσικές εξαίσιες' ('exquisite music').

Although Cavafy does not present Mark Antony, clearly, as an actor of this theater company, Cavafy's advisory words reminds the reader of a director who gives instructions to the protagonist of the performance. Cavafy, as director, says to Mark Antony, the protagonist: 'as one long since prepared,' 'as courageous,' 'don't be misled,' 'don't say it was a dream' and 'listen with the deepest feeling.' It seems that Cavafy exhorts Mark Antony to follow his instructions, like a director who attempts to give his protagonist guidelines, to make his performance better.

On the other hand, Fr Moyses speaks clearly about an actor, who has not been considered sufficient by the director to hold the role of emperor. Secondly, Fr Moyses' actor is characterized by similar terms to Cavafy's Antony. Cavafy advises Antony not to blame his 'τύχη' ('fate') on the fourth line, while Fr Moyses denotes that the actor of his poem is 'δυστυχής' ('unfortunate')

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<sup>64</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40, (my translation).

in the first line. As we can see, Fr Moyses used a word which appears in Cavafy and reformed it to adapt it to the needs of his narration. 'Δυστυχής' consists of the prefix 'δυσ' and the adjective 'τύχη'.

The two poets present a similar opening in their poems. Cavafy describes a theater company, with Antony in the role of the actor in the center. Fr Moyses speaks directly about an actor who is trying to secure the role of emperor. In both cases, the actors are unfortunate and unsuccessful and certainly not happy with their status. Antony is unhappy because his plans seem to be unsuccessful and Fr Moyses' actor is unhappy, because he cannot have the role of the emperor of the theater's performance.

The next common element between Cavafy's "The God Forsakes Anthony"<sup>65</sup> and Fr Moyses' "The Actor"<sup>66</sup> is the fact that both poems describe flight. Cavafy states that Antony will leave Alexandria, while Fr Moyses maintains that the actor of his poem left Athens:

As one long since prepared, as one courageous,  
bid farewell to the Alexandria that's leaving.

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with a coward's entreaties and complaints,  
listen as an ultimate delight to the sounds,  
to the exquisite instruments of the mystical company,  
and bid farewell to the Alexandria you are losing.  
("The God Forsakes Anthony").<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, pp. 34-35.

<sup>66</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40.

<sup>67</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, p. 35.



Here Cavafy presents Antony as ready to depart from Alexandria. Antony seems reluctant to leave Alexandria, but Cavafy advises him to be strong and courageous. He should retain only the last memory of his beloved city, with the instruments and music, and say goodbye. Antony loves Alexandria, but he is forced to leave by circumstances. Cavafy uses the future tense to show that Antony has some hesitations, because Alexandria is the place he loves and he is unwilling to leave.

On the other hand, Fr Moyses presents the actor of his poem as very decisive. He had already made the decision and had gone from Athens to fulfill his goals:

Mocking the emperor  
he left the performance in the middle  
we learnt that he himself became protagonist  
far from Athens  
(‘The Actor’).<sup>68</sup>

As opposed to Cavafy who uses the future tense, Fr Moyses uses the past tense to illustrate the fact that the actor is already away from his first place. He is not reluctant as Antony is, but ready to follow his dreams and become a protagonist in another place. Because of his passion for finding his real route, he left the performance before its end. In that way, Fr Moyses substitutes Antony’s hesitation to leave in Cavafy’s poem with decisiveness for flight.

To sum up, in the two poems we have a similar opening with theatrical vocabulary and one protagonist commonly. Next, we have the psychology’s description of the protagonist, which is the same in the two poems. Cavafy’s Antony and Fr Moyses’

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<sup>68</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40, (my translation).

actor are unhappy with their situation. Also, the two poems speak about the flight, but Fr Moyses reverses Antony's reluctance to leave Alexandria, expressed as it is in the future tense, by using the past tense to show the willingness of his actor to leave Athens. This last point should be seen as Fr Moyses' way of changing the climate of Cavafy's poem. This conversion of the tense from future to past signifies the change of the hero's character. On the first hand, Cavafy's Antony is timid, and on the contrary, Fr Moyses' actor is bold.

The next poem of Cavafy which alludes to theatrical performance and has probably influenced Fr Moyses' 'The Actor,'<sup>69</sup> is 'King Demetrius.'<sup>70</sup> As opposed to Fr Moyses' poem, where someone wants to become emperor in a theater performance, in 'King Demetrius,' we have a king who abandons his throne.

Initially, 'King Demetrius'<sup>71</sup> describes a king who does not behave regally:

When the Macedonians abandoned him,  
and displayed their preference for Pyrrhus,  
King Demetrius (a great soul he had)  
did not -so they said-  
behave like a king at all.<sup>72</sup>

In the above lines, Cavafy informs us that Demetrius lost the throne because people want Pyrrhus now. According to Cavafy, Demetrius' reaction was not that of a king. Without any hesitation he left and got undressed:

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>70</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

He went ahead  
and took off his golden garments  
and threw away his royal-purple  
shoes. He quickly dressed  
in simple garb and fled.<sup>73</sup>

As we can see, Cavafy says that Demetrius put away his fitting garments and got dressed like any other man. He abandons his former life as emperor and becomes like any other man. Also, Cavafy states that his attitude is reminiscent of an actor who finishes his performance and leaves:

emulating an actor who,  
when the performance comes to an end,  
changes costume and departs.<sup>74</sup>

Here, Cavafy draws a parallel, by saying that Demetrius behaves like an actor who after he finishes his performance leaves to obscurity. Like an actor who is famous only during his performance, Demetrius was known only during his reign. After the end of a theatrical performance and reign, he becomes one among many.

In contrast, Fr Moyses presents an actor who has the aspiration to gain the role of the emperor in his performance and not that of a slave which he currently holds:

They applaud him like slave  
but he was wearing the crown  
until one night  
mocking the emperor

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 43.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

he left the performance in the middle  
we learnt that he himself became protagonist  
far from Athens  
emperor with crown and scepter.<sup>75</sup>

As we can see in the above lines, Fr Moyses follows the opposite route to that of Cavafy. While Cavafy mentions that Demetrius leaves the palace and his imperial power to become a normal citizen, Fr Moyses states that the actor of his poem abandons the kind of life he does not want, that of a slave, to become emperor. Moreover, although the actor holds just the role of the slave, he is not prevented from behaving like an emperor (wearing crown), as opposed to Demetrius who is king and behaves like any man.

Also, the two heroes in the poems share a very basic characteristic: boldness. As previously mentioned, Fr Moyses' actor is characterized as a bold person. He has no hesitation in leaving and fulfilling his aspirations. Cavafy's Demetrius (as opposed to Cavafy's Antony)<sup>76</sup> is also described as a bold person but on the other way round. He is presented as being ready to abandon his kingdom for a new life, without the power of his former life.

Finally, the last lines of Fr Moyses' poem, again, recall Cavafy's poem:

The theater was not doing well  
the third night it closed forever  
now he goes round  
wearing the costume of his last performance  
the whole city is applauding him

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<sup>75</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40, (my translation).

<sup>76</sup> On previous pages.

and he bows, laughing  
I applaud and cry.<sup>77</sup>

Demetrius, in Cavafy, behaves like an actor who finishes his performance and abandons the theater. This piece of information implies that after the performance, he is not known to people. Once the performance ends, he is just an individual in the mass. Fr Moyses' actor, though, is an actor who gains recognition, even after the end of the performance. He is recognized by several people in the city when he plays the role of emperor. People's cheers constitute the reward of this recognition.

In Cavafy's 'King Demetrius'<sup>78</sup> and Fr Moyses' 'The Actor'<sup>79</sup> we have someone who changes position. In the former, we have an emperor who becomes an unknown citizen, while in the latter we have a slave who becomes an emperor (even if this happens in the manner of a theatrical performance). It could be said that Fr Moyses changes Cavafy's scheme from the emperor to the citizen, by reversing it: from a citizen (or slave) to emperor. Similar to Cavafy who gives details regarding Demetrius' imperial garments, Fr Moyses gives similar details, as well. Firstly, Cavafy says that Demetrius put away his 'χρυσά φορέματα' ('golden garments')<sup>80</sup> and 'ολοπόρφυρα υποδήματα' ('royal-purple shoes').<sup>81</sup> Fr Moyses says that the actor wore 'στέμμα' ('throne')<sup>82</sup> and took 'σκήπτρο' ('scepter').<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40, (my translation).

<sup>78</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, pp. 42-43.

<sup>79</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40.

<sup>80</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, p. 43.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>82</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40, (my translation).

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40, (my translation).

Although Cavafy speaks about golden garments and royal-purple shoes, and Fr Moyses speaks about throne and scepter, it is worth noting that all this forms the trappings of an emperor. It could be said that Fr Moyses used scepter and throne to complete Cavafy's imperial description, who writes only about golden garments and royal-purple shoes, without making any reference to throne and scepter. Fr Moyses completes Cavafy's description of imperial garments by mentioning what Cavafy omitted in his narration.

This persistence of Cavafy in describing the garments, which is also adopted by Fr Moyses, also appears in the last line of the former's poem: 'αλλάζει φορεσιά κι απέρχεται' ('changes costume and departs').<sup>84</sup> Fr Moyses in the third line from the end of his poem writes: 'με τη στολή της τελευταίας παράστασης' ('wearing the costume of his last performance').<sup>85</sup> Cavafy uses 'φορεσιά', while Fr Moyses uses 'στολή'. In theatrical terms both words denote costume; this is another element which brings the two poets closer, since Fr Moyses follows Cavafy's end, mentioning the actor's clothes.

Concluding, Cavafy uses theatrical vocabulary in the two poems described above. Fr Moyses appears to have been influenced by Cavafy and also employed these theatrical allusions in his poem. Cavafy also wrote two other poems which present similar theatricality. These are: 'Αλεξανδρινοί Βασιλείς' ('Alexandrian Kings'),<sup>86</sup> and 'Νέοι της Σίδωνος (400 Μ.Χ.)' -

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<sup>84</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, p. 43.

<sup>85</sup> Μωυσέως Αγορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40, (my translation).

<sup>86</sup> Cavafy, *The Collected Poems*, pp. 52-53. Here Cavafy describes the appearance of Kleopatra's children to the Gymnasium to proclaim them kings. The whole atmosphere of the poem recalls theatrical performance, while Cavafy makes this theatricality more intense, by saying that Alexandrians saw the proclamation speech as a theatrical one.

(‘Young Men of Sidon, A.D. 400’).<sup>87</sup> Although these poems do not present many similarities with ‘The Actor’,<sup>88</sup> we should bear in mind that they reinforce Cavafy’s sympathy for poems with theatrical descriptions. This theatrical description from Cavafy is what Fr Moyses adopted and reformed in his poem.

One could say that from a first reading, ‘The Actor’ does not contain such strong Christian references as the poem discussed earlier. Nonetheless, ‘The Actor’ is a very optimistic poem, which gives a very hopeful message. The actor of the poem constitutes an example of someone who follows his dreams. Through this poem, Fr Moyses intends to make his readers follow and fulfill their dreams as well.

The actor of the poem became emperor only for three days since the theater was not doing well and it subsequently closed permanently. Nevertheless, the actor is considered by Fr Moyses successful, since he gained recognition. He walks on the road, wearing the clothes of his last performance and people applaud him; among these people is Fr Moyses. Through his applause, Fr Moyses shows his admiration for someone who followed and fulfilled his dream. Independently from the short period of his role as emperor, he still deserves applause. Fr Moyses’ actor is happy and laughs because he did what he always wanted to do.

It is worth noting, that at the opening of the poem, the actor is presented as being ‘*δυστυχής*’ (‘unhappy’), in contrast to his happiness at the end of the poem and after the fulfilment of his dreams, where he ‘*υποκλίνεται γελώντας*’ (‘he bows laughing’). Thus, the actor of the poem passes from unhappiness to happiness. Here, Fr Moyses preaches the ascension from

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., pp. 120-121. In this poem, Cavafy describes an actor who has been called to read poetry and has been interrupted by a young boy.

<sup>88</sup> Μωυσέως Αγιορείτου, *Αθωνικά Ποιήματα*, p. 40.

unhappiness to happiness, which is a very basic characteristic of Christianity. This transition or ascension from sadness to joy alludes to the ascension from passion to resurrection and constitutes the substance of Christianity.<sup>89</sup> According to Saint John of Climacus, this is the real meaning of Orthodoxy and is characterized as *charmolypi* (joy-sorrow).<sup>90</sup>

The significance of *charmolypi* derives from its relation with resurrection. Christ's crucifixion eliminates despair.<sup>91</sup> Orthodox Christians always hope and fight for resurrection.<sup>92</sup> The transition of the actor from unhappiness to happiness, in Fr Moyses' poem, alludes to *charmolypi*. In Orthodoxy, *charmolypi* represents the beauty and the brightness of resurrection.<sup>93</sup>

A Christian always hopes and seeks his resurrection,<sup>94</sup> like the actor of the poem, who constitutes an example of *charmolypi*. He is characterized by a fighter's spirituality. This is a prominent characteristic of Christianity, which directs believers to the proper route from devoutness to *theosis*.<sup>95</sup> So, this ascension makes Fr Moyses' 'The Actor' a Christian poem no less than any other Christian poem.

*Theosis* is the original goal of human's creation. Although *theosis* had been interrupted by the fall of humanity, it has been made possible through the incarnation of the Son of God.<sup>96</sup> *Theosis*

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<sup>89</sup> Μιχ. Κ. Μακράκη, 'Ένας Ποιητής Επιστήμονας', *Νεοελληνική Λογοτεχνία και Ορθοδοξία* (Athens, 1996-1997), p. 236.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 237.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Νικηφόρος Καχριμάνης, 'Νοσταλγία και Επιστροφή στο Γενέθλιο Τόπο: Επισημάνσεις, Σχόλια και Αναφορές από την Περιδιάβαση στον Ποιητικό Λιμένα του Π. Β. Πάσχου', *Ibid.*, p. 165.

<sup>96</sup> Andualem Dagmawi, 'Theosis: Some Ideas of Deification as Reflected Throughout the Ethiopic Divine Liturgy', *Collectanea Christiana Orientalia*, 6 (2009), p. 49.



refers to the constant effort of Christians to imitate God to be transformed into the divine likeness of God.<sup>97</sup> The purpose of Christian life is to attain the God-given grace of His divine likeness.<sup>98</sup> The concept of *theosis* should be understood in a Christological context of redemption, and it defines the authentic human destiny and the purpose of man's creation by God.<sup>99</sup>

Also, salvation is understood as *theosis*, and it is achieved through Christ's Incarnation, his divine-humanity, teaching, and sacrifice on the cross.<sup>100</sup> The divine likeness is something towards which human beings strive.<sup>101</sup> *Theosis* can be understood as 'Christification' which means becoming Christ-like.<sup>102</sup> *Theosis* implies imitation of Christ and human beings' vocation is to become by grace everything that Christ is by nature.<sup>103</sup> Saint Irenaeus (2<sup>nd</sup> century) explained Incarnation theology as *theosis*: 'Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Word of God, out of his boundless love.

*Theosis* means a genuine union with God. God placed Adam on the path to such a union, but the latter chose a different path.<sup>104</sup> Although Adam's sin did not destroy the image of God in man, his sin effected a change in human nature.<sup>105</sup> Adam's descendants were incapable to be deified without a change.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>99</sup> John Meyendorff, 'New Life in Christ: Salvation in Orthodox Theology', *Theological Studies*, 50 (1989), p. 489.

<sup>100</sup> Peter Bouteneff, 'Christ and Salvation', *Orthodox Christian Theology*, p. 93.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., pp. 104-105.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>104</sup> Jonathan D. Jacobs, 'An Eastern Orthodox Conception of Theosis and Human Nature', *Faith and Philosophy*, 2009, 26 (5), p. 619.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 620.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

According to the Eastern tradition, a restoration or recreation of human nature is accomplished through Christ's Incarnation.<sup>107</sup> The means of achieving the union of mankind with God were changed on account of the fall. The change in human nature accomplished by Christ does not constitute mankind's destruction, but its transformation.<sup>108</sup>

Christ did not achieve the deification of each person separately, but he accomplished the transformation of human nature for those who acquire the new nature to be again capable of *theosis*.<sup>109</sup>

The deification of each person requires the grace of God and his cooperation.<sup>110</sup> Human existence in the fallen world is dominated by mortality and a struggle for survival.<sup>111</sup> If Christ had not been raised, then humankind's faith would be futile, and men would be in their sins.<sup>112</sup> Humanity's salvation should be understood regarding communion, sanctification and certainly, *theosis* which is based on a synergy of divine grace and human freedom.<sup>113</sup>

Concluding, the actor in Fr Moyses' poem ascended from unhappiness to happiness, because he showed fighter's spirituality. He resurrected, through the fulfillment of his goal which was to gain the emperor's role. Thus, he passed from his initial unhappiness to happiness and became an example of *charmolypi*. The actor of the poem fought and attained *theosis* because he struggled for his goal. He transformed his unhappy

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., p. 621.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> John Meyendorff, 'New Life in Christ', p. 498.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 498: John Meyendorff refers to Saint Paul' words (1 Corinthians 15:17).

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 498.

nature into a new happy nature. Through that allegory of the actor, Fr Moyses writes a Christian poem dealing with *theosis* and *charmolypi*.

#### 4 Conclusions

Is Fr Moyses a Modern Greek poet? Is he a religious poet? Does his poetry deserve a special place in Modern Greek literature? The answer to the above questions should be 'yes.' Although Cavafy is the obvious source and one could say the model as well for Fr Moyses, it is apparent that there are also very striking diversions, which are the result of his monastic experience. Fr Moyses does not only have a sound knowledge of the importance of prayer, *ascesis*, Orthodox spirituality, *charmolypi* and *theosis*, but he also reflects all these Christian values in his poetry. This is what makes him a religious Modern Greek poet. Fr Moyses does not only write Modern Greek poetry, but he also teaches basic ideas of Orthodox life.

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