



**‘The Funeral of Sarpedon’ by Constantine P. Cavafy
and Kyriakos Charalambidis: convergences - divergences / similarities –
differences**

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*Τη μέρα που οι ανέξοδοι νεκροί
σηκώθηκαν ψηλά να τους ιδούμε
φανήκανε τα ζώντα ποιήματα
κρυμμένα πίσω από τον θάνατό τους.*

K. Charalambidis, Θόλος [Dome], 1982

ABSTRACT: Our presentation will be structured, mainly, around three axes. At a first level, our interest is focused on the artistic representations of the archaic angiographies that were the reason for the composition of the two poems, the targeting, the connotations and their consequent role. At a second level we will highlight the poetic function of the "Funeral of Sarpedon" by Konstantinos Cavafy and Kyriakos Charalambidis, as well as the convergences-discrepancies between them. At a third level, we will detect the contexts, since the conceptual bridges that direct us in an intertextual walk towards the corresponding contexts of the Iliad are scattered, but also in any differences or upheavals that highlight the ideological meanings of each poem.

KEY WORDS: Sarpedon, Iliad, Cavafy, Intertextuality, Poetry, Charalambidis

When Charalambidis was a student at the Faculty of History and Archaeology of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, Professor Kontoleon, in his Archeology class, showed the students a slide of Eufronios' pottery design which represented the transport of Sarpedon's dead body by Hypnos and Thanatos, the twin voyagers, children of Nyx and Erebus, who

appear either together or apart in Homer's epic poems¹ and in Hesiod's *Theogony* (*Θεογονία*, 759). This scene, inspired by Book 16 of the *Iliad*, made a deep impression on the poet, thanks both to its artistic technique and symbolic associations. Thus, in 1978, the memory of the visual representation on the red-figured krater, from the 6th century BC, around 515 BC, exhibited in the Villa of Rome, became the starting point for the composition of the poem 'The Funeral of Sarpedon'.

It should be noted that the title of the poetry collection *Θόλος [Dome]* (1989), in which the poem under discussion is included and whose central theme is the issue of the missing persons of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, those who were lost 'in the sea of the many dead' ['στη θάλασσα των πολυνέκρων'], is inspired, according to the poet, by 'an idea of the multifaceted American mechanic, mathematician and architect Buckminster Fuller for a geodesic dome² that will cover the earth and regulate the weather and the atmosphere' ['μια ιδέα του πολυσχιδούς μηχανικού, μαθηματικού και αρχιτέκτονα Μπάκμινστερ Φούλερ, για έναν θόλο γεωδαιτικό, που να καλύπτει τη γη και να ρυθμίζει τον καιρό και την ατμόσφαιρα']. Charalambidis was thinking that

'if it is in man's hands to achieve it, let alone God himself and his son in the dome of Heaven! And in front of me appeared the shape of the Church which symbolises Heaven with its horrible altar, where we taste the body and blood of Christ. I felt that the missing persons were inviting us to the Banquet of the Kingdom of Heaven, reminding that the human body is "a temple of the Holy Spirit within us" (Paul the Apostle). The missing persons [...] are connected to the "life of things", meaning the *living* society. [...] And become carriers of the Lord Almighty – or rather He becomes their carrier'³

[‘αν είναι στο χέρι του ανθρώπου να το κατορθώσει, πόσο μάλλον ο ίδιος ο Θεός και ο Παντοκράτωρ Υιός του στον θόλο του Ουρανού! Και ήρθε μπροστά μου το σχήμα της Εκκλησίας, που συμβολίζει τον Ουρανό με το φρικτό θυσιαστήριό του, όπου γευόμαστε το σώμα και το αίμα του Κυρίου. Αυτήν την πρόσκληση στο Δείπνο της Βασιλείας των Ουρανών ένιωσα να μας κάνουν οι Αγνοούμενοι, υπενθυμίζοντάς ότι το σώμα του ανθρώπου είναι “ναός του εν ημίν αγίου Πνεύματος” (Απ. Παύλος). Οι αγνοούμενοι [...] αφορούν στη “ζωή του πράγματος”, δηλαδή τη ζώσα κοινωνία. [...] Και γίνονται φορείς του Παντοκράτορος – μάλλον Εκείνος γίνεται φορέας τους’],

as the poet notes.⁴

¹In the *Iliad*, Hypnos/Thanatos appear as a pair only when they transport the corpse of Sarpedon, following Zeus' instructions to Apollo, so that the dismemberment/abuse of the Lycian hero's dead body from Patroclus and the Myrmidons would be avoided and the honour of the body would be preserved.

²That has the ability to measure angles and distances.

³Already in the poet's last phrase we understand that the missing persons are His images and their sanctity is precisely a result of History's millstones on which they crush' ['Ήδη από την τελευταία αυτή φράση του ποιητή καταλαβαίνουμε [ότι] οι αγνοούμενοι αποτελούν εικονισμούς Εκείνου και η ιερότητά τους προκύπτει ακριβώς από τις μυλόπετρες της Ιστορίας στις οποίες συνθλίβονται'] (Μ.-Κ. Moros, 'Ιεροφάνεια και Ιστορία στην ποίηση του Κυριάκου Χαραλαμπίδη', Conference Paper presented at *Η Θεολογία σε διάλογο* [School of Social Theology and Christian Culture AUTH] 16 June 2016 [publication forthcoming]).

⁴K. Charalambides, 'Στα στέφανα της κόρης του (Ιεροφάνεια)', in *Ζεϊδωρος Υετός, Τιμητικός τόμος στον καθηγητή Δημήτριο Δ. Τριανταφυλλόπουλο επί τη εβδομηκονταπενταετηρίδι του, Κυπριακά Σπουδαί* 78-79 (2016-2017), Nicosia 2019, p. 862.

As is well known, in Book 16, Sarpedon is mortally wounded by Patroclus' spear. The Achaeans and the Myrmidons strip his corpse and steal his armour. But before they have time to complete the body's abuse and subsequent defamation, Apollo, following Zeus' orders, collects the corpse. The Lycian god heals the body, taking it to the river to wash off the blood and dirt, anoints it with ambrosia [αμβροσίη] and dresses it with deathless clothes,⁵ which indicate he is descended from Zeus. Afterwards, Hypnos and Thanatos receive the body to transfer it to Lycia, so that a burial appropriate for someone descended from Zeus can take place. It is for this reason that Sarpedon's funeral 'necessitates a high theological and ritualistic status' [‘επιβάλλει υψηλό θεολογικό και τελετουργικό κύρος’].⁶ The hero's funerary homecoming (nostos) will eventually be materialised, unlike that of the numerous missing persons of the Cypriot tragedy.

Charalambidis' dual parallel attributes as reader-poet and poet-reader lead to a second writing, which recharges the ideological connections of the lines referring to Sarpedon's transport in the *Iliad*. In that way, the poet successfully offers his version of the details surrounding the primary source, mediated by Cavafy's poem of the same title. It is Cavafy's poem that he feels he is competing with, while, however, clearly departing from it. Charalambidis' poem breaks away from both Homer's and Cavafy's sources, but certain elements are imaginatively and succinctly incorporated, so that they are integrated in the modern historical context.

Cavafy's 'funeral of Sarpedon' was initially composed in the *katharevousa*, most likely in 1892, as Savvides notes, and was published in Skokos' *Εθνικόν Ημερολόγιον* (1898); later on, in 1908, it was composed in the *koine* and was published 'edited in the 1910 volume' [‘διορθωμένη στο τεύχος του 1910’].⁷ This funeral, too, is inspired by the image of a male Ascension-PIETA, included in the journal *Αττικόν Μουσείον* (1892),⁸ captioned: 'The death of Sarpedon' (from Homer's *Iliad* - Copy of Levy's image) [‘Ο θάνατος του Σαρπηδόνοσ’ (εκ της *Ιλιάδοσ* του Ομήρου - Αντίγραφον της εικόνοσ του Λεβύ)]. 'This image, with the evocatively homoerotic sensualism of the complex Zeus - Sarpedon - Υπνοσ - Thanatoσ, can plausibly be considered as the visual stimulus which led Cavafy to *Iliad*'s Book 16' [‘Η εικόνα αυτή, με τον υποβλητικά ομοφυλόφιλο ερωτισμό του συμπλέγματοσ Δίοσ - Σαρπηδόνοσ - Υπνοσ - Θανάτοσ, εύλογοσ μπορεί να θεωρηθεί ωσ το εικαστικό ερέθισμα που οδήγησε τον Καβάφη στο *Π* της *Ιλιάδοσ*»],⁹ as Savvides writes on the topic. The 'aesthetic and sensual attraction' [‘αισθητική και αισθησιακή έλξη’]¹⁰ of bodies, mostly young ones, is a recurring theme in Cavafy's poetry.

The Alexandrian poet quite possibly had in mind the translation of the *Iliad* (1715) by Alexander Pope¹¹ (1688-1744), as Savvides, Ricks¹² and Petropoulos have already pointed

⁵I note parenthetically that Cavafy, in his poem of the same title –both in the first version in the *katharevousa* and in the definitive version in the *koine*, respectively– calls them 'Olympian deathless robes' [‘ολύμπια αθάνατα φορέματα’] and 'glorious Olympian robes' [‘λαμπρά Ολύμπια φορέματα’].

⁶D. N. Maronitis, 'Νεκρώσιμοσ νόστοσ “Η κηδεία του Σαρπηδόνοσ”' in *Κ. Π. Καβάφησ. Μελετήματα*, Athens, Patakis, 2007, p. 115.

⁷G. P. Savvides, 'Έπτά στάδια ενόσ ποιήματοσ του Καβάφη. “Η κηδεία του Σαρπηδόνοσ”, 1892-1924' in *Μικρά Καβαφικά*, Volume 1, Athens, Ermis, 1985, p. 259.

⁸*Αττικόν Μουσείον* 4, 17 (15 March 1892) 145 [See *Λεύκωμα*, 200] Cavafy had published poemσ during that time, specifically the poemσ 'Κτίσται', 'Λόγοσ και σιγή' and 'Σαμ ελ Νεσίμ', *ibid* (footnote 7) p. 264.

⁹*Ibid*, p. 264.

¹⁰D. N. Maronitis, 'Η τιμή του σώματοσ', *Το Βήμα*, 28.8.2011.

¹¹Poet, critic and translator.

out, an assumption supported by the use of words from Pope's translation. For example, perfume but also retaining¹³ the 'paradox of the winged wayfarers' ['παράδοξο των πτερωτών πεζοπόρων'],¹⁴ etc. It should be noted that Pope's influence has been questioned by certain scholars.¹⁵

Cavafy's poem, according to Maronitis' insightful commentary, 'appropriates [...] with, in fact, unusual conformity the original excerpt from the *Iliad*' ['παρακολουθεί [...] με ασυνήθιστη μάλιστα συμμόρφωση το ιλιαδικό του πρότυπο'].¹⁶ Charalambidis' poem occupies a rather opposite space, since the poet undertakes a different poetic approach as he borrows from the original material only those pieces which are absolutely necessary for his own palimpsest. The traces from the *Iliad* in Charalambidis' reading have their own signifiers, in the sense that they assist the contemporary poet in highlighting contemporary historical issues while, simultaneously, aligning them with issues of theological interest. Charalambidis' poem is, as a result, imbued with its secret, historical and theological truth.

Charalambidis likely chooses Sarpedon deliberately, instead of a first-class hero from the *Iliad*, like Achilles, Patroclus or Hector. The Lycian hero, who belongs to the auxiliary forces, is indeed a warrior, but a little-known one. I believe he chooses a less featured hero precisely to identify him with the unsung dead and missing-dead heroes.¹⁷ This would also justify the choice of the name 'Yorgos', which follows, within the text, Sarpedon's name that already appears in the title. Charalambidis contends that 'Sarpedon [however] was [also] Zeus' son, therefore of noble godly descent, as, similarly godly, the descent of each one of our missing people and valuable arisen from the dead should be considered'¹⁸ and adds 'arisen from the dead, not dead'.¹⁹ Consequently, this attribute, which leads to theological connotations, strengthens the choice of this particular hero. Indirectly and cryptically, Yorgos is assigned the attributes of a saint,²⁰ given that his name includes all the missing persons and deceased of the invasion (Charalambides, 20 March 2019), who, in this way, become sanctified heroes. The poet emphatically notes:

Επάνω μας φέρνουμε όλοι το δυσβάσταχτο βάρος των 1619²¹ αγνοουμένων μας (αριθμός που τείνει να γίνει ιερός, εξαιτίας του μεγάλου πόνου που περιέχει) και ξέρω πως αυτό θεμελιώνεται καλύτερα στον χώρο της Εκκλησίας. Η ουσία του

¹²D. Ricks, 'Αρχαία μέρα', *Η σκιά του Ομήρου*, Athens, Kardamitsas, 1993, p. 146 onwards.

¹³Και κατά εκεί τον πλούσιο τόπο, την Λυκία/τούτοι οδοιπόρησαν οι δύο αδελφοί/Υπνος και Θάνατος' (Cavafy).

¹⁴M. Paschalis, 'Cavafy's "Iliadic poems"', in P. Roilos (ed.), *Imagination and logos, Essays on C. P. Cavafy*, Cambridge, MA & London, 2010, p. 169. See also I. Petropoulos, 'Διαβάζοντας τον Όμηρο με τον Κ. Π. Καβάφη: Η κηδεία του Σαρπηδόνας', in the volume E. Arseniou (ed.), *Επτά μελετήματα για τον Καβάφη*, Athens, Mandragoras, 2018, p. 47.

¹⁵M. Paschalis, *ibid* (footnote 14) pp. 160-161 and I. Petropoulos, *ibid* (note 14), p. 39.

¹⁶D. N. Maronitis, *ibid* (note 6), p. 107.

¹⁷In this poem, Charalambides implies, in a masterful way, the drama of the missing persons in whom, of course, he includes those killed or murdered during the Turkish invasion and whose bodies were not returned to their families so they would get a fair and honourable burial.

¹⁸K. Charalambides, private communication, 15.2.2019.

¹⁹K. Charalambides, *ibid* (note 4), p. 869.

²⁰The fact that Christ divides history and introduces *meta-history* as an eschatological landmark, that repositions humans in their primary holiness' ['Το γεγονός ότι ο Χριστός τέμνει την ιστορία και εισάγει τη μεθιστορία ως ορόσημο εσχατολογικό, αυτό επανατοποθετεί τον άνθρωπο στην πρωταρχική του ιερότητα'] (K. Charalambides, *ibid*, note 4, p. 863).

²¹Until 2014 331 missing persons had been identified.

Χριστιανισμού είναι η θλίψη, που εγκυμονεί τη χαρά και τη λύτρωση.²²

[We all carry the overwhelming weight of our 1619 missing persons (a number that tends to become holy, because of the great pain it contains) and I know that this fact is better founded within the Church. The essence of Christianity is sadness, which encapsulates joy and redemption].

I would add that, also through the participle ‘μωλωπισμένοι’ [bruised], Charalambidis’ missing and deceased are assigned christological-sanctifying characteristics.

Prompted by the participle ‘μωλωπισμένοι’ [bruised], which, admittedly, puzzled me, as did the son’s smile at Hypnos –both lexical choices being crucial and ambiguous–, I believe that Charalambidis, in the context of this dense meta-narrative of the dramatic events from 1974, implies, potentially, on a first level, that he creates bruised bodies/poems, given that they contain the trauma of Cypriot Hellenism, as Seferis had previously done, and carry the yearning of *romiosini*. It is, thus, very likely that the poem under discussion contains elements of self-referentiality.

On a second level, given that ‘is used to characterise the parents (‘ο πατέρας του κι η μάνα / μωλωπισμένοι κι έφεραν νερό’ [‘his father and mother, bruised and carrying water’])²³ who, devastated by pain, search for their missing son, looking for his body, in this case in a plain which likely alludes to Homer’s asphodel meadows,²⁴ in order to mourn and ensure his return to the ancestral home. On the one hand, this accentuates their devastation, because of the sadness and their subsequent unhappiness. Besides, the Eucharist also includes the wish/statement by John Damascene which is also an element of mourning:

‘και τους μώλωπας οράς μου’ [‘and you can see my wounds/bruises’]

On the other hand, one could assert that they do not have a ‘face’, but appear to be lost due to their human fragility [‘με χαμένο πρόσωπο’]. Here Charalambidis refers to vulnerability, common to all humans. ‘This could mean that they *lost* their face, which now explains why they did not see, with their soul’s eyes of course’ [‘Ένδεχομένως τούτο να σημαίνει πως

²²http://k-Charalambides.com.cy/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/parastasi_ammoxostos_vasileuoussa.pdf. K. Charalambides: interview with A. Hadjithomas, in *Πίστη και ποίηση*, Nicosia 1989.

²³The water which parents bring, aside from symbolising the living water and, by extension, Christ, since he is the living water himself, also alludes to burial rituals such as, for instance, the urn which is occasionally broken on the grave, as an act of burial, according to Christian practices. And as N. Pendaras notes, ‘Charalambides’ poetry [...] is “living water” which becomes “a water spring bubbling everlasting life”. The poetry in the collection *Θόλος* is life-giving. Life-giving for those who have disappeared, but also for us who are searching for them. And its entire strength is concentrated here. [...] Certainly the poetry of Kyriakos Charalambides manages to resurrect the dead without perishing. It is now our turn to be transformed...Can’t you hear? THE DOME is echoing the last trumpet’. [‘Η ποίηση του Χαραλαμπίδη [...] αποτελεί “ύδωρ ζων” που γίνεται “πηγή ύδατος αναβλύζοντος εις ζωήν αιώνιον”. Είναι ζωοδότρα η ποίηση της συλλογής *Θόλος*. Ζωοδότρα γι’ αυτούς που χάθηκαν, μα και για μας που τους ψάχνουμε. Και όλη της η δύναμη εδώ συγκεντρώνεται. [...] Σίγουρα η ποίηση του Κυριάκου Χαραλαμπίδη καταφέρνει ν’ αναστήσει άφθαρτους τους νεκρούς. Η σειρά μας τώρα να μεταμορφωθούμε... Δεν ακούτε; Ο ΘΕΟΣ ηχεί την έσχατη σάλπιγγα» (N. Pendaras, ‘Κυριάκου Χαραλαμπίδη: *Θόλος*, *Αλήθεια*, 22.1.1990, and in the volume, Th. Pylarinos (editor.), *Για τον Χαραλαμπίδη. Κριτικά κείμενα*, Nicosia, Aegaeon, 2009, p. 226.

²⁴Charalambides is openly conversing with his poem, ‘*Τα κύματα*’ [*The Waves*]: ‘...Ο κόσμος δεν καταλαβαίνει, Κύριέ μου, / τα λόγια σου, μήτε κι εγώ. (Χαμογελά.) / ‘Σ’ ανέσπερο λειμώνα...’ (Παύση.) ...’] [‘*People do not understand, my Lord, your words, neither do I. (He smiles. / ‘In an eternal meadow...’ (Pause)...’*]. (*Αμμόχωστος Βασιλεύουσα [Famagusta Regal Capital]*, 1982).

έχασαν το πρόσωπό τους, πράγμα που τώρα εξηγεί γιατί δεν είδαν, με τον ψυχικό φυσικά οφθαλμό’], the poet notes in a self-referential comment about the poem ‘Στέφανα της κόρης του (Ιεροφάνεια)’.²⁵ Even though this comment is made in a different context and poetic environment, both poems are aligned regarding their historical and theological backgrounds.

There are, however, additional theological allusions. We are indirectly led to Christ’s tortures on the way to Golgotha. Ode 4 of the Holy Saturday Liturgy includes the phrase ‘κατάστικτον τοις μώλωπι’ [‘covered with bruises’], which refers to the crucified.

But the participle ‘μωλωπισμένοι’ also indirectly reaches out to the body of the deceased Yorgos and, consequently, to the mistreatment he has suffered. The meaning conveyed is further strengthened by the initial Homeric source. The body, following Sarpedon’s death, is in terrible condition, deformed and ‘unrecognisable’ [‘ανεγνώριστο’], as the poet refers to it in the context of a different poem.

Yorgos’ smile, on the other hand, in the line ‘και χάρισε στον Ύπνο ένα χαμόγελο’ [‘and he gave Hypnos a smile’], is the other keyword which, I would suggest, acts as a counterpoint to ‘μωλωπισμένοι’. It is the messianic element, since it captures the meaning of understanding the world and, in essence, signifies the meaning of life.

Charalambidis often represents Rimakos, one of his personae, with a smile, denoting, thus, the affirmation of life. One should also not forget the motto of his poetry collection *Πρώτη Πηγή [First Source]*: ‘Εν αρχή ο Θεός / εποίησεν ένα / χαμόγελο’ [‘In the beginning God / made a / smile’] or forget the ‘smile-loving’ [‘φιλομειδή’] Aphrodite whom Charalambidis recalls by association when he translates Solomos’ Italian poem ‘Donna Velata’; he explains what it was that led him to translate the word ‘ridente’ as smile: ‘Solomos’ poem ends with the expression “l’amica glorificata e ridente” [“the glorified and laughing friend”, translated as “η ποθητή γελούμενη και πολυδοξασμένη” by G. Kalosgouros, “η Καλή φωτοστεφανωμένη και γελούμενη” by L. Politis, and “η φίλη, δοξασμένη και γελαστή” by S. Alexiou. From my end, I considered how Solomos would say it in Greek. I, therefore, thought that *smile* is more fitting for Greek beauty – let’s remember ‘smile-loving’ Aphrodite. And, moreover, I felt that the image should be framed by glory and close with it: “It was my Love’s smile and glory” [“Ήτανε της Αγάπης μου χαμόγελο και δόξα”].²⁶

But could this possibly also be poetic self-referential commentary? Is it therefore performing a ‘meta-literary, poetical function’? [‘μεταλογοτεχνική, ποιητολογική λειτουργία’]; Maybe Yorgos’ smile is in reality the poet’s own smile for his creation, as, besides, is the case in the *Iliad* according to A. Rengakos’ observation?²⁷ Because the funeral games, in the corresponding section of the *Iliad* (Book 23, Ψ 55-557), is one of the scenes where Homer comments on himself, through Achilles (“Έτσι μιλούσε, κι αχνογέλασε’ [‘Thus he spoke, and slightly smiled’]). If that is true, then this is another point of convergence with the homeric epic.

Following the example from the *Iliad*, the presence of Hypnos, Thanatos’ twin brother, is recorded, as well as the attempt to heroise Sarpedon which is implied in Charalambidis’ line: ‘Take off your armour and helmet’ [‘Βγάλε τον θώρακά σου και το κράνος’], a line which

²⁵ K. Charalambides, *ibid* (note 4), p. 870.

²⁶ K. Charalambides, ‘Ιταλικό βομβύκιο και ελληνική χρυσαλλίδα’ in *Ολισθηρός Ιστός*, Volume 1, Athens, Agra, 2009, p. 232.

²⁷ A. Rengakos, *Το χαμόγελο του Αχιλλέα. Θέματα αφήγησης και ποιητικής στα ομηρικά έπη*, Athens, Patakis, 2006, p. 17.

simultaneously denotes the hero's baring of his panoply, that is 'from strife, attack and defense' ['από την αμάχη, την άμυνα και την επίθεση']. But it might also constitute 'a stripping of the jewels of the bodily (not intellectualist) embrace of the elements of life. There's an additional reason' ['απογύμνωση από τα μαλάματα του σωματικού (όχι νοσηριαρχικού) εναγκαλισμού των στοιχείων της ζωής. Ιδού ένας πρόσθετος λόγος'], Charalambidis writes, 'which makes me study death a lot as well. Death gives us a measure of life' ['που με κάνει να μελετώ πολύ και τον θάνατο. Ο θάνατος μας δίνει ένα μέτρο ζωής']. By cultivating 'nuggets of wisdom and death' ['ψήγματα σοφίας και θανάτου'] the soul is adjusted, so as to convey the appropriate meanings, as Papatsonis mentions:

Μονάχα της ψυχής, καθώς οδεύει στου θανάτου
τους λειμώνες, αυτής έχει ταχθεί το δώρο
να συντάσσει πλάκα ονειρού, πλάκα ευπαθή
που τέτοια αισθήματα ν' αποδίδει.²⁸
[Only of the soul, heading to death's
meadows, it has been assigned the gift
of composing a dreamy plaque, a fragile plaque
that attributes such feelings.]

In Charalambidis' poem, the love scene between Zeus and Hera is also recalled, implied in the lines:

Ο γιος απλώθηκε στου κάμπου τη φρεσκάδα
πάνω από το γρασίδι μισό πόντο.
[The son spread himself in the meadow's freshness
over the grass, half a centimeter tall]

We should also remember the lines from Book 14:

‘Αυτά είπε ο Δίας, και τη γυναίκα του στην αγκαλιά του παίρνει, / κι η γης η θεία
χορτάρι νιόβλαστο φυτρώνει κάτωθι τους, / σαφράνια και τριφύλλια ολόδροσα και
κρίνους και ζουμπούλια, / πυκνά, απαλά, που ανακρατούσαν τους, το χώμα μην
αγγίξουν’.

Iliad Book 14 (Ξ 346-349), transl. Kazantzakis - Kakridis

“There with the son of Cronos clasped his wife in his arms, and beneath them the divine earth made fresh-sprung grass to grow, and dewy lotus, and crocus, and hyacinth, thick and soft, that upbare them from the ground.”

Homer, The Iliad Book 14 (transl. A. T. Murray), Harvard University Press, 1993.

Of course, 'the image of the son hovering over the grass, thus defeating gravity' ['η εικόνα του γιου που αιωρείται πάνω από το γρασίδι, νικώντας έτσι τη βαρύτητα'], is only 'subconsciously connected with the relevant scene from the *Iliad*' ['υποσυνείδητα συνδέεται

²⁸K. Charalambides, "Ένα πρώιμο κείμενο του 1973 που δόθηκε στον Θεοκλή Κουγιάλη" in *Ολισθηρός Ιστός*, Volume 1, Athens, Agra, 2009, pp. 305-306.

με την αντίστοιχη ιλιαδική σκηνή’], in which, however, it is implied that ‘the force of life, which is, of course, love and its connection to death, might intervene. Besides, the two are intertwined’ [‘μπορεί να υπεισέρχεται η δύναμη της ζωής, που είναι βέβαια ο έρωσ και η σύνδεσή του με τον θάνατο. Άλλωστε αυτά τα δύο είναι δεμένα μεταξύ τους’].²⁹ It should be noted that the pair Eros/Thanatos³⁰ is a recurring motif in Charalambidis’ poetry.

Therefore, what is of interest concerning the excerpt from the *Iliad* which dramatises the encounter between the couple of Olympian gods is mainly the topic of hovering. Charalambidis, with poetic inventiveness, suggests the elevation/ascension of Yorgos to the sky, a fact also implied by the line: ‘Yorgos woke up the other morning’ [‘Ο Γιώργος ξύπνησε τ’ άλλο πρωί’], implying he was reborn, ‘having of course secured the desirable right for burial in God’s arms’ [‘έχοντας φυσικά εξασφαλίσει το ποθεινό δικαίωμα τάφου στην αγκαλιά του Θεού’],³¹ because his mortal body was transformed into a body heavenly and ethereal [ουράνιο και αιθέριο].

Thus, in the smile Yorgos directs to Hypnos, instead of a response/verbal comment, there is pensive silence³² which encapsulates his ascension in a unique way.

To sum up the obvious or latent convergences and divergences between the poems, without this being an exhaustive list since my research continues.

C. P. Cavafy adopts the transport of the body by Hypnos/Thanatos, whom he considers to be ‘winged wayfarers [‘πτερωτούς πεζοπόρους’]. Michael Paschalis suggests that ‘Cavafy’s choice of the verb “οδοιπόρησαν” was dictated by Hermes as a wayfarer [οδοιπόρον] (an hapax legomenon) in the *Iliad*, Book 24, where Hector’s body is transported to Troy.³³

In Charalambidis’ poem, there is no mention of the burning of the body (for reasons easy to understand), nor of the construction of a tomb/votive column, while the transport of the corpse by Hypnos/Thanatos is implied.

Charalambidis is deliberately omitting the word death (Thanatos) which is, of course, implied by the presence of his twin brother, Hypnos. In that way, the poet wishes to emphasise that death is considered a ‘dormition’, following the Christian tradition. Those who have fallen asleep are not dead. Besides, in a self-referential comment, as mentioned earlier,

²⁹ K. Charalambides, private communication, 15.2.2019.

³⁰ ‘At the same time, in this initial poem, Charalambides examines the idea of death as a “measure of life”. Indeed, if man conceptualizes what the depth of death is (what death is), then he will also understand the depth of life (what is life), because life is like a scale. On the one side, there is love (eros) and death and, on the other side, man and life. Love (eros) is an important factor of life; it is its source’. (L. Christodoulidou, ‘Η “τρομερή θεά” Αφροδίτη και η ποιητική του θανάτου’ in *Όψεις του αρχαιοελληνικού μύθου στην ποίηση του Κυριάκου Χαραλαμπίδη*, Athens/Nicosia, Elias Epiphaniou, 2019, p. 87.

³¹ K. Charalambides, «Δικαίωμα τάφου» in *Ολισθηρός Ιστός*, Volume 1, Athens, Agra, 2009, p. 121.

³² ‘And how can they perceive of the one who rises beyond the senses in his pure silence and the placement [απόθεση], that is, the distancing, of the “meaning” of worldly confusion? His silence consists of vigilance and ablution, as an ontological characteristic of divine Love”, according to a very poetic expression of archimandrite Sophrony (Sakharov). But, in order for one to realise this tranquility, one must first deaden oneself, “let go of the noises of life”, and with extreme humility be emptied into the deepest word of Silence, *which is the mystery of the ages to come* (archimandrite Basil).’ (K. Charalambides, *ibid*, note 4, p. 869). [Και πώς μπορούν ν’ αντιληφθούν αυτόν που ανυψώνεται πέρα από τις αισθήσεις στην καθαρή ησυχία του και την “απόθεση”, τουτέστιν απομάκρυνση, “των νοημάτων” της εγκόσμιας σύγχυσης; Η ησυχία του συνίσταται από την εγρήγορση και τη νήψη, ως “οντολογικό κατηγορήμα της θείας Αγάπης”, σύμφωνα με μια ποιητικότερη έκφραση του αρχιμανδρίτη Σωφρόνιου (Σαχάρωφ). Αλλά, για να πραγματώσει κανείς αυτόν τον ησυχασμό, θα πρέπει να νεκρώσει πρώτα τον εαυτό του, να “μετέλθει των του βίου θορύβων”, και με άκρα ταπείνωση να κενωθεί στον βαθύτερο λόγο της Σιωπής, που αποτελεί το μυστήριο του μέλλοντος αιώνας (αρχιμανδρίτης Βασίλειος).]’ (K. Charalambides, *ibid*, note 4, p. 869).

³³ M. Paschalis, *ibid* (note 14), p. 169, and I. Petropoulos, *ibid* (note 14) p. 129.

he insists: 'Arise from the dead, not dead' ['Νεκρός όχι πεθαμένος'].

There is another presence in Charalambidis' poem, that of Hermes, because the sandals, as a symbol, allude to Hermes the Psychopomp, since the winged sandals are his trademark.

The Ascension is a shared motif both in the epic poem and in Cavafy and Charalambidis, as is the purification of the body which, in the latter's work, is denoted through the water the parents bring.

The issue of allusion to high art and, by extension, to poetics, is denoted in the *Iliad* with Achilles' smile, among other examples. In Cavafy there is a similar implication for the artist, through the reference to the construction of the tomb and of the votive column. In both Cavafy and Charalambidis it is apparent through the two artistic representations-Pieta. In the latter's work, this dimension also appears through the bruised bodies/poems, as I already mentioned.

Cavafy dramatises in detail the corresponding passage from the *Iliad* and in-between also encompasses homosexual connotations. As noted by D. N. Maronitis, 'the word *body* in Homer's epics means, as a general rule (even though there are exceptions) the corpse of the dead person, who is also called *νέκυσ* (the root of *Νέκυσια*). In Cavafy, however, the Homeric analogy between a living and dead body is reversed: rarely does the word denote the dead person; it usually alludes to the living young body' ['η λέξη *σώμα* στα ομηρικά έπη σημαίνει, κατά κανόνα (υπάρχουν όμως και εξαιρέσεις) το λείψανο του νεκρού, ο οποίος άλλως πως λέγεται και *νέκυσ* (εξ ου και η *Νέκυσια*). Στον Καβάφη ωστόσο, η ομηρική αναλογία νεκρού και ζωντανού σώματος αντιστρέφεται: σπανίως η λέξη δηλώνει τον νεκρό· συνήθως παραπέμπει στο ζωντανό νεανικό σώμα'].³⁴

Charalambidis does not follow the same tactic. He makes good use of the primary sources, leaving details out, so that he tells his own story. His greatest concern is to record and highlight a historical truth, the fact that the funereal nostos of the missing dead to their ancestral homes has not been achieved. Its dramatic dimension is evident.

Charalambidis' words are charged with various meanings, so that they fit harmoniously and functionally within the poetic framework in which they are integrated. For example, in the lines: 'ο αγέρας / το λιγυστό του πρόσωπο ξουράφισε / απ' τ' αδειανά που φύσαγε κουφάρια', the word 'κουφάρια' is an indirect allusion to the *Iliad*: We should remember that in Book 16, other dead bodies-corpses are piled on Sarpedon, those of his dead compatriots. Yorgos-Sarpedon is already perishing and the wind is brushing past what is left of his face. It is the air leaving the corpses of the other dead and missing-dead.³⁵

This is another version of the big issue of the missing persons of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Its essence is that the godly Sarpedon belongs to the 'εσμός', the crowd, of those missing, and answers to the common, everyday name Yorgos. He, too, however assumes godly qualities as far as the heart and pain of his parents are concerned. With this poem, Charalambidis attempts, as he often does in other poems, to portray the Cypriot tragedy while always remaining strictly within the realm of artistic creation, away from emotional outbursts. And that, I think, accentuates and multiplies the tragic quality of what is already tragic.

³⁴ D. N. Maronitis, *ibid* (note 10).

³⁵ Charalambides, private communication, 15.2.2019.



The death of Sarpedon from Homers' Iliad. Copy of Levy's image, journal of Attikon Museum [Αττικόν Μουσείον], 17 (15 Mars 1892)145.



The Euphronios' krater is created around the year 515 bc. It was probably looted from an Etruscan tomb, near Rome around 1971. After a lot of adventures, since 2009, is exhibited in Villa Julia in Rome.

<http://www.hellenicaworld.com/Greece/LX/en/EuphroniosKrater.html>

L.Ch.