

From the Work of Art to the Title

Angelos Drakogiorgos

A variety of questions arise when one realises that the wrong name has been assigned to a work of art held within a museum's permanent collection. Such occurrences are not unusual within the field of art history and can have various ramifications. In this paper I discuss an example involving an artifact held in the collection of the National Gallery of Athens. The work at issue is a painting in watercolour by Demetrios Galanis which has been included in some important exhibitions at the museum. The work has been known by the title *Portrait of Jean Moréas* [Fig. 1]. But is the person depicted really Jean Moréas? In order to answer this question we must follow the 'journey' of this work of art; from the artist, to the collector, into the museum's collection. As I shall explain, the title *Portrait of Jean Moréas* was given to the painting during the second phase of its journey — therefore the title did not come from the artist himself, but was apparently assigned without his knowledge.

Barthes and 'The Photographic Message'

I have based my study of this painting upon archival research, through which I have reconstructed the original context of its creation. Methodologically, I have based my analysis on the structuralist approach as promoted by Roland Barthes in his article 'The Photographic Message' (1961).¹ The reason for this choice lies in the concept of the visual message of an image. The message transmitted by an image is never autonomous, but is dependent upon its context. In the case of Barthes' article, the image is considered alongside a textual message (the title and/or the text) which relates to the image, and also to the space in which the visual and textual messages are displayed — in Barthes' article, the image is a photographic one placed in the context of a newspaper. The newspaper — which Barthes identifies as providing a specific ideological context for the image's display — is the vehicle for the promotion of the visual message. According to Barthes' article, the visual message is encapsulated in the subject (the man who is portrayed in the painting); the textual message is the title *Portrait of Jean Moréas*; and the space is the artistic institution — the National Gallery of Athens — the personnel of which assumed responsibility for the documentation of the painting and its subsequent reception. The manner in which museums exhibit their works of art are also a part of their ideological context. For this reason, I consider the three exhibitions in which the painting has been included, which reproduced the disputed textual message of the painting's title.

However, there is an important difference between my analysis and that of Barthes: I have centred my work around a painting, while Barthes' article focuses upon the reproduction of photographs in the mass media. While they have many



Fig. 1. Demetrios Galanis, *Portrait of Jean Moréas*, 1900, watercolour. National Art Gallery and Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Collection of the Foundation E. Koutlidis, Athens.

differences, both photographic images published in the mass media and paintings are categorised as images and are fundamentally concerned with the communication of a visual message. Barthes' article is primarily used as a means of structuring my analysis, through the use of his triple distinction (source of emission → channel of transmission → point of reception). This distinction helps us to understand the *process* of the image's visual message in relation with the textual message; the transference from the 'transmitter' to the 'receiver'. Using the first two parts of this distinction, I examine the way that these messages were created, as well as the actual messages themselves. By identifying the existence of a problem in the relation between these two types of message, originating with the textual message — in this case the painting's title — this approach helps us to detect this relationship and to restore it through archival research.

In 'The Photographic Message', Barthes introduces a triple distinction in relation to the way that the photographic message is transmitted by images which appear in newspapers. The first point of this distinction is the 'source of emission'. In his analysis Barthes explains that in the case of a newspaper's image, the 'source of emission' includes "the staff of the newspaper, the group of technicians certain of whom take the photo, some of whom choose, compose and treat it ... [and others who] give it a title, a caption and a commentary".² Barthes' second point is the 'channel of transmission', which equates to the newspaper. More specifically, this term refers to 'concurrent messages' — messages that all have the photograph as their common reference point. In the context of 'The Photographic Message' this includes all aspects which surround an image, such as text, title, caption, layout, and the name of the newspaper, because, according to Barthes, "a photograph can change its meaning as it passes from the very conservative *L'Aurore* to the communist *L'Humanite*".³

The Source of Emission

In the case of Galanis' watercolour portrait held at the National Gallery of Athens, the 'source of emission' is the artist who created the work; the collector who bought it; those who authenticated it and assigned the title; and the curators who included it in the museum's permanent collection, and in exhibitions. Galanis was a Greek caricaturist, painter and engraver. A descendant of a well-educated, urban family, Galanis was born in Athens on 16 May 1879 and died in the city in 1966. From a young age, Galanis' caricatures were published in Athenian newspapers and magazines.⁴ He was accepted into the Technical University's School of Civil Engineering in 1896 or 1897: however his studies were suspended in 1897 due to the Greco-Turkish war. During the war Galanis went to the front at Thessaly as a correspondent for the newspaper *Acropolis*. In 1899 he completely abandoned his Civil Engineering studies to join the School of Fine Arts, where he attended painting lessons given by Nikiphoros Lytras. In 1900, Galanis won first prize in a caricature competition on the theme of 'Noah's Ark' organised by the French newspaper *Le Journal*. That same year Galanis left for Paris.⁵ But where did Galanis create the misidentified watercolour with which we are concerned — in Athens or in Paris?

In order to answer this question, we must examine the painting's 'journey'. Unfortunately, I do not possess any details concerning the early life of the painting known as *Portrait of Jean Moréas*, and it does not feature in any bibliography of which I am aware. The earliest piece of verifiable information that we have is that the painting was part of Evripidis Koutlidis' (1890-1974) collection, which was bequeathed to the National Gallery of Athens in 1977. According to the collection's catalogue, the list of works was compiled by the collector in collaboration with the art historian Elpiniki Misirli.⁶ Galanis' watercolour is included in the catalogue under the title *Portrait of Jean Moréas*. Therefore, we can deduce that the title was assigned to the work before Koutlidis' death in 1974. Unfortunately, his archive is not yet available for study, which prevents the establishing of when the painting was purchased, as well as whether it was already in possession of its erroneous title when it entered the collection.

Galanis' watercolour has been publicly exhibited on three occasions. It was first shown by the National Gallery of Athens in 1991, as part of an exhibition entitled *Greek Watercolour Painting of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, which was re-staged at the Koumantarios Gallery in Sparta in 1996-1997. Galanis' painting appeared in a third show at the National Gallery of Athens in 2006-2007 called *Paris-Athens: 1893-1940*. In the first exhibition, in both venues in Athens and Sparta, the painting was presented as part of a chronological arrangement of works, as the curator Nelly Misirli aimed to "demonstrate the beginnings and, symbolically, the course [of watercolour painting] by using material available in the National Gallery".⁷ Lina Tsikouta, curator of the Spartan exhibition,⁸ pointed out that "watercolour follows in

general the evolution as well as the changes in painting and the art of watercolour on the international level”⁹ The exhibition *Paris-Athens: 1893-1940* presented work by the first Greek artists to arrive in Paris and demonstrated how the artistic metropolis’ modernistic tendencies influenced Greek art. Galanis’ watercolour was included as part of the Greek engraving section of the exhibition. According to the art historian Marilena Z. Cassimatis, Greek engraving was reborn in the French capital as part of a more general rebirth of engraving as a genre, via the experiences of Greek artists living in Paris at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹⁰ Finally, Galanis’ painting was mentioned in an article by Aphroditi Kouria in the catalogue for the exhibition *Metamorphosis of the Modern. The Greek experience*, in which Kouria commented on the relationship between Greek artists and the French group, Les Nabis. Kouria claimed that the watercolour painting with which we are concerned demonstrates that Galanis was influenced by Japonisme, an assertion which I shall return to later in this article.¹¹

The Channel of Transmission

In the case of Galanis’ watercolour, the ‘channel of transmission’ includes everything that surrounds this particular work of art; for instance, the museum that included it in its collection and that exhibits it, as well as its title, other works of art on the same theme and texts that serve to introduce or illustrate this theme. In this section I examine the structural self-sufficiency of the piece of art, which consists of what the painting represents and how this subject is depicted. This area demands careful examination as we cannot speak of complete structural self-sufficiency, since all works of art are created under particular social, historical and artistic circumstances — as part of a wider context.

Since Galanis’ watercolour is a portrait, the analysis will begin with the person that the painting portrays. The work features a standing male figure. His body is held in a diagonal position, with the face in profile. The man’s hair and mustache are blond and he wears a naval uniform, consisting of a white naval hat, a blue coat, a white buttoned shirt and trousers, and brown shoes. His right hand is in the coat’s pocket, and in his left hand he holds a cane. To the left of the sitter we see a three-legged table on which are placed three wine or champagne bottles and a glass. Because we can see trees and grass, as well as a fence on the right side of the painting, the viewer might conclude that the man is portrayed in the countryside, or in the courtyard of a cottage. The artist’s use of alternating colours to suggest light and shadow suggest that the season is spring or early summer.

In the bottom left-hand corner the painting is signed and dated by the artist [Fig. 2], although this was not a common practice in Galanis’ mature work. This example of Galanis’ signature is unusual because he used the Latin version of the Greek letter λ (‘l’) in his last name (‘Ταλάνης’ in Modern Greek), so that the ‘l’ also

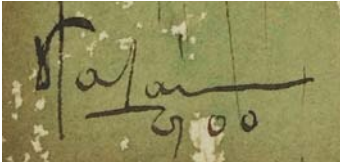


Fig. 2. Detail of Galanis' signature from *Portrait of Jean Moréas*.



Fig. 3. Demetrius Galanis, *Pregnant-pottery*, 1900, caricature published in *Estia* on 11 June 1900.



Fig. 4. Demetrius Galanis, *The guitarist*, 1900, oil on canvas. National Art Gallery and Alexandros Soutzos Museum, Collection of the Foundation E. Koutlidis, Athens.

serves as the first digit of '1900', the year in which the work was painted. By comparing this signature with some of Galanis' caricatures published in the Greek press, we can see that they are signed in the same way [Fig. 3]. However, if we compare the signature on the watercolour to that on an oil painting of 1900 [Fig. 4], we can see that from this point onwards Galanis signed his name in Latin characters only. We also observe a significant change in the style of his work, in comparison with the watercolour painting. According to this evidence, we can conclude that the watercolour was probably created while Galanis was still in Greece, whereas the oil painting was created during his time in Paris.

Galanis executed the painting using vivid colours, often layered on top of one another to render detail; for example, the man's coat, shoes, and the shades used to paint the tree trunks. The painting also demonstrates the artist's keen interest in rendering areas of light and shade, and particularly in capturing the reflection of light on the objects included in the composition. As a result, the light in the painting seems to be somewhat other-worldly and unrealistic. The tree's foliage, which can be seen behind the figure, is painted mainly in dark green, but in some parts the artist has used a lighter tone. The same dark green colour can also be seen being used to delineate areas of grass, although it mainly consists of light green and ochre tones. Strong colours have been used for the details; dark blue with black areas of shading for the coat; yellow for the hair, moustache, cane and the table; dark yellow for the shoes; and black for the bottles, the ribbon on the man's hat and the fence. Galanis also utilises gradations of grey. Light grey is used to create the shadows on the tree trunks, as well as on the man's trousers, whereas darker grey tones have been used to depict the mountains in the background, where we can also observe a light blue sky. We can see that a sketch

provided a guide for the application of colour onto the surface of the painting, as we can make out the sketched outlines of the man's body, the trees and the table. The composition of the painting features a vertical axis, defined by the figure and the tree trunks. The axis, in combination with the flattening effect of Galanis' use of intense colours, the graduations of shading, the unrealistic rendering of the landscape and the painter's decorative tendency in his depictions of the natural world, reinforce Kouria's contention that Galanis was influenced by Japonisme as well as by Les Nabis.

Archive → Documentation

'Jean Moréas' was the pseudonym of the Greek poet, critic and Symbolist theorist Ioannis Papadiamantopoulos, who was mainly active in Parisian literary circles.¹² He was born in Athens on 15 April 1856 and died in Paris on 2 April 1910.¹³ For the purposes of this analysis, I will examine three points concerning the relationship between Moréas and Galanis. First we must consider the date of Moréas' departure from Greece. Citing the evidence of a newspaper article in his monograph on the poet's youth, Robert Jouanny claims that Moréas left Greece on 7 July 1878 for Munich where he planned to study Law. Nevertheless, at the end of 1878 or early in 1879, Moréas left Munich for Paris.¹⁴ As I have mentioned, Galanis was born in 1879 and so he could not have had personal contact with Moréas before the poet left Greece. The second point concerns Moréas' brief return to Greece in 1897 — the only time when the two men could have met. During this year the poet returned to Greece to volunteer to take part in the Greco-Turkish war. However, since the order for his enlistment was delayed, he never saw action as the war ended in the meantime. Thus, Moréas left Greece, "both disappointed and enraged".¹⁵ As I have stated, during 1897

Galanis' studies at the Technical University were suspended, and he left for the front at Thessaly to act as a correspondent for the *Acropolis*.¹⁶ Once again, this means that there was no opportunity for Moréas and Galanis to have met. As a result, it seems increasingly unlikely that the title popularly applied to Galanis' watercolour portrait can be correct.

Finally I will examine the poet's physical characteristics. If we compare photographs, sketches and caricatures of Moréas [Fig. 5] alongside the painting which we have examined in this article, we can



Fig. 5. Paul Gauguin, *Be Symbolist (Portrait of Jean Moréas)*, 1897, drawing published in the French magazine *La Plume*, 1 January 1897.

observe the lack of similarities between the man in the watercolour and Moréas. First of all, Moréas appears to have been olive-skinned, unlike the fair-haired man in the painting. In addition, the peculiar shape of Moréas' moustache, as well as his monocle, occasioned comment. Indeed, in an interview with a Greek newspaper, Galanis remarked:

Once, a French painter, pretending to be puzzled about the quite obvious lack of hair on my top lip, said to me: "Monsieur Galanis, how come you have not been 'infected' by the disease of moustache-twisting?," implying like Moréas, who kept twisting his crooked moustache...¹⁷

Therefore we can arrive at two conclusions. Firstly, from a chronological point of view, there is no possibility that Galanis would have been able to meet Moréas while the former was resident in Greece. The artist and poet were only able to make one another's acquaintance after Galanis arrived in Paris, something which occurred after he had created the watercolour portrait. Secondly, Moréas' physical characteristics bear no resemblance to the appearance of the man in the painting. Moréas is evidently not the subject of the watercolour. But who is?

A multi-millionaire in Greece

On 28 June 1900, the Greek newspaper *Estia* published an article on its front page headlined "An American who spends money on the streets. 10,000 pounds spent like water. He plays with champagne".¹⁸ The article heralded the presence in Greece of an American multi-millionaire named Corwith, who had apparently arrived in the country in 1899. The article attempted to solve the mystery of the multi-millionaire's origins and included some details about Corwith's life. The piece illustrates Corwith's luxurious lifestyle and



Fig. 6. Front page of *Estia*, 28 June 1900.



Fig. 7. Demetrius Galanis, *The multi-millionaire Corwith*, published in *Estia*, 28 June 1900.

the ease with which he gave away large amounts of money. It also highlighted the American's caprices, which the journalist implied were a result of his wealth. The article was accompanied by a sketch of Corwith by Galanis [Figs 6 & 7].¹⁹ When Galanis' drawing and his watercolour painting are juxtaposed, it is impossible to ignore the similarity between the depictions of the two figures.

There is one more aspect which reinforces the idea that the portrait previously thought to be of Moréas in fact depicts Corwith — an exhibition organised by the Athenian Society of Art-Lovers. The society was founded on 28 September 1898 and had 288 elected members.²⁰ Its purpose, according to its president G. K. Romas, was “to support fine arts and develop an artistic taste in Greece”.²¹ For its third anniversary in 1900-1901 the Society organised an exhibition, with the participation of several artists. The exhibition was divided according to the techniques used in the creation of the works of art (for example oils, watercolour or engraving) and by medium (painting, sculpture etc). Galanis participated in the ‘painting — watercolour’ section, with a portrait entitled *Portrait of A. C.* We currently have no knowledge of a second watercolour painting created by Galanis during this period. If my hypothesis is correct and subject of the painting is Corwith, then in all likelihood, the initial ‘C’ in the painting’s title stands for ‘Corwith’. Thus, barring the emergence of evidence to the contrary, the painting examined in this article and the one that featured in the Society’s exhibition are one and the same.²² Galanis’ watercolour, previously known as *Portrait of Jean Moréas*, should in fact be titled *Portrait of A. C.*

- 1 R. Barthes, 'The Photographic Message' in R. Barthes, *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (London: Fontana Press, 1977) 15-31.
- 2 Barthes, 'The Photographic Message', 15.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Galanis was mentioned in the newspaper the *Scrip* as early as 1895, when he was 16 years old, after contributing an illustration to the satirical *Emerologion tou Podogyrou*. See *Scrip*, 19 November 1895, Athens, 3.
- 5 E. Mavrommatis, *E charaktike kai e zographike tou Dimitiri Galane, 1879-1966*, PhD thesis (University of Athens, 1983) 24.
- 6 D. Papastamos, *Katalogos ton zographikon ergon tes Sylloges Koutlide* (Athens: National Gallery and Alexandros Soutzos Museum, 1977) 9.
- 7 N. Misirli, ed., *E ellinike ydatographia tou dekatou enatou kai eikostou eona*, ex. cat. (Athens: National Gallery and Alexandros Soutzos Museum, 1991) 7.
- 8 This was a version of the 1991 exhibition originally held in Athens.
- 9 L. Tsikouta, ed., *E ellinike ydatographia tou dekatou enatou kai eikostou eona*, ex. cat. (Athens: National Gallery and Alexandros Soutzos Museum — Koumantarios Gallery of Sparta, 1996) 15.
- 10 M. Z. Cassimatis, 'La renaissance de la gravure grecque à travers l'expérience française' in M. Lambraki-Plaka and O. Mentzaphou-Polyzou, eds., *Paris-Athènes, 1863-1940*, (Athens: National Gallery and Alexandros Soutzos Museum, 2006) 415-417.
- 11 A. Kouria, 'Greek painters and the Nabis movement' in A. Kafetsi, *Metamorphoses of the Modern. The Greek Experience*, ex. cat. (Athens: National Gallery and Alexandros Soutzos Museum, 1992) 380.
- 12 Moréas published his Symbolist Manifesto in the literature section of the French newspaper *Le Figaro* in 1886.
- 13 G. Giannaris, *Jean Moréas, o ellenas* (Athens: Editions Kaktos, 1984) 13; M. Barrès, *Adieu à Moréas* (Paris:Emile Paul Editeur, 1910) 5.
- 14 R. A. Jouanny, *Jean Moréas: écrivain grec. La jeunesse de Ioannis Papadiamantopoulos en Grèce (1856-1878): édition, traduction et commentaire de son œuvre grecque* (Athens: Lettres Modernes Minard, 1975) 425-428.
- 15 Giannaris, *Jean Moréas*, 101-102.
- 16 Mavrommatis, *Dimitiris Galanis*, 24.
- 17 *I Vradyne*, Athens, 16 October 1952, 3.
- 18 *Estia*, Athens, 28 June 1900, 1.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Society of Art-Lovers, *Ta Pepegamena (28 Septemvriou 1898-6 Iouniou 1899). Praktika tes genikes Synelefseseos*, Athens, 1899, 12.
- 21 Ibid., 13.
- 22 Unfortunately, I have been unable to uncover further information regarding Corwith and so cannot yet provide decisive evidence which incontrovertibly proves my hypothesis.