

## READING IN THE *FOURTH DIMENSION*\*

The story of the writing and publication of the poems of Yannis Ritsos mirrors the disturbed history of Greece.<sup>1</sup> At the start of the Metaxas dictatorship (1936) Ritsos, after a long poetic apprenticeship disrupted by tuberculosis, had just begun serious publication. Later, his situation was always irregular. At worst, in concentration camps, writing was almost impossible and the preservation of his papers a nightmare (Makrynikola, 1993: 13–15). Sometimes he could publish nothing in Greece, at other times only lyrical and personal work: several “political” poems first appeared abroad in translation. But he remained amazingly productive and so, when the dam of censorship burst, he could often bring out several collections at once. Reception of his work was also chaotic. Besides publishing delays, at different times his poems were burned and their reading and performance as songs were banned. The literary and academic establishment and the media largely ignored him for political reasons. Of the comments that were published, for or against, many may be deconstructed as mere ideological approval or disapproval (Veloudis, 1983: 120–8).

Thus when by 1964 a proportion of his work had become accessible in three large volumes (*Ποιήματα Α', Β', Γ'*), no critical framework existed for study of the varied poems they contained. No consistent criteria were used even in the planning of those volumes (Veloudis, 1984: 49–52). With the 1967 coup, publication of Ritsos' poetry and serious criticism again stopped in Greece. When censorship was lifted, Ritsos had a vast mass of recent work to put out and gave only limited help in the reception of what had already appeared. In a much-quoted sentence, he says that it is not a poet's job to speak *about* his poetry but *with* it, while admitting that the poet could provide the

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<sup>1</sup>Biographical charts in Veloudis, 1977: 35–48; Petropoulos, 1988.

best initiation into it (*Μελετήματα*: 97).

After 1974 persecution of Ritsos soon changed almost to adulation. He continued to write nearly up to his death (1990), and more past work was printed. The quantity and quality of criticism published on his poetry rose, but rather slowly, perhaps because critics were discouraged by its bulk, disparity and partial publication, which placed heavy demands on the critic whilst leaving judgements annoyingly provisional. Attention climaxed in a fat dedicated volume (Aferoma, 1981) and a series of seven studies published by Kedros.<sup>2</sup> Since then the volume of serious analysis has been disappointing.

I shall outline the three chief critical contributions, to show their major directions and to make grateful acknowledgment of my own obvious dependence on them. Ekaterini Makrynika (1981, 1993) has plotted Ritsos' publishing history (including pseudonyms and ephemeral magazines), adding lists of translations and studies of his work. Chrysa Prokopaki (1964, 1968, 1981), the first to write serious criticism on Ritsos, has charted a coherent authorial personality through hundreds of poems of many kinds. Giorgos Veloudis (1984, 1985) has stressed philological study of Ritsos, showing links with previous poetry and analysing autobiographical material used in composition.

But even these major studies are affected by the unusual publication and reception of Ritsos' work and its vast size. They primarily analyse the poetry to search for the poet, attempting to organise thousands of varied poems, most annotated with date and place of writing, to form a diary, a political biography and a poetic journal. This tendency is confirmed by the admiration felt by most students of Ritsos for his political persona, and by the presence of the poet in Athens till 1990. Inevitably concentration is on writing processes, historical circumstances, sources of influence, derivation of recurrent motifs and classification of techniques used in different collections. There is less emphasis on reading and reception, on application of the results of diachronic research to individual poems and collections so as to explore their literary possibilities, or on examination of the reader's reaction to

<sup>2</sup>Pierrat, 1978; Sangiglio, 1978; Topouzis, 1979; Bien, 1980; Veloudis, 1983; Aragon, 1983; Veloudis, 1984.

Ritsos' language and modernist strategies.<sup>3</sup>

The subject of this paper is Ritsos' collection *Τέταρτη διάσταση* [Fourth Dimension], often called his best. Most readers will find common features in twelve of its seventeen poems — dramatic monologues offering interesting demythologisation of classical stories, turning mythical heroes into human beings one might expect to meet. This reading is confirmed by critical articles, some of high quality, examining poems as versions of the myths of ancient tragedy, often (but not always) mentioning that Ritsos' writing had other purposes too.<sup>4</sup> But readers will notice elements which destabilise the mythical framework: the most obvious are anachronistic objects and actions, but many of the poems also contain comments and whole passages more appropriate to this century than to archaic Greece.

Puzzled readers may consult Prokopaki or Veloudis for assistance in the construction of meaning from these undermined myths. But the classical surface of the poems, which will be prominent in the reactions of most readers, has only a subordinate place in the work of these critics. It is called the least important layer of the poems, or a poetic mask.<sup>5</sup> The use of myth is examined with care, but even at the most sensitive moments of analysis it is treated almost completely in relation to the poet, with hardly a reference to the reader. Interpretation is largely biographical, at two main levels: Ritsos' youth in mansions in Monemvasia, and the post-war crises of Greece, the Left and the poet himself. Let me avoid misunderstanding: I agree with this analysis in its own terms, and admire the precision of its arguments. But such research concentrates all attention on Ritsos — a stage which might not have been so dominant if he had written less, or if he were a less ideologically charged figure, or if the writing, publication and reception of his work had been more normal.

I feel a need for another, supplementary approach centred on the

<sup>3</sup>Basic theoretical assumptions of this paper are uncontroversial — that the tasks of literary criticism have two focuses: (1) production and writing and (2) reception and reading, neither having automatic precedence.

<sup>4</sup>Martini, 1974; Skiadas, 1981; Polenakis, 1988; Zoras, 1988; Lanzara, 1989; Thomadaki, 1990; Trombino, 1990.

<sup>5</sup>Prokopaki, 1964: 169, 1972: 71–2, 1981: 313–23; Veloudis, 1983: 33–4.

collection and its relationship with its readers.<sup>6</sup> Such work must be based on the results of biographical and bibliographic research, and cannot hope to escape far from the persona of a poet who uses so much autobiographical material and rarely writes without reference to his current situation. But the old critical subjects need a new point of view. Just as classical archaeologists have learned to take account of higher strata in their excavations than those which chiefly interest them, so critics of *Τέταρτη διάσταση*, working in the reverse direction, should not rush to peel off the poems' mythical layers to get to the poet. We must accept the metaphor of the poetic mask;<sup>7</sup> but its literary function and effect on the reader deserve as much attention as any statement the poet may make from behind it. Other features of the poems too need more literary examination than they have so far received. Such analysis, without losing touch with broader research, should also be aimed at readers meeting Ritsos for the first time (perhaps in translation)<sup>8</sup> and needing a literary introduction to some of his best poems. These are the purposes of the present paper.

*Τέταρτη διάσταση* is not just a convenient book-title but a collection forming a distinct part of Ritsos' output from 1956 to 1975, not all of which appears in the eventual volume. For clarity and brevity in this paper, the wider collection will be called "*Τέταρτη διάσταση*" in full, while the volume's name will be abbreviated as "Τδ". Beginning from a full list of relevant poems, to set philological parameters, we will sketch the poet's biography for the period when they were written. Developing authorial intention over *Τέταρτη διάσταση* will be explored through the words of Ritsos and those close to him and strategies visible in the publication of his work, showing indecision over the content of Τδ and signs of a program in the order of its poems. The focus will gradually shift to reading and reception: we will examine myth, demythologisation and anachronism, together with

<sup>6</sup>Such studies do exist: Peter Bien, for example, has written three studies on *Φιλοκτήτης* (collected in Bien, 1980), giving an active role to ancient myth in the production of twentieth-century meaning. Most work of this scope, however, is less well-founded than this.

<sup>7</sup>It certainly has the sanction of the poet: see Prokopaki, 1990: 52 and passages collected by Prokopaki, 1981: 306–8.

<sup>8</sup>There is a complete new English translation by Green and Bardsley, 1992, and many partial translations, including Dalven, 1977.

autobiographical and historical reference. We must include the title *Τέταρτη διάσταση* itself, discussing the role of time and dialectic, and ending with a brief analysis of language and style.

From the interplay of the poet's changing intentions with critical reaction to his poems there will emerge an idea of the nature and characteristics of the cycle. The focus will remain general, avoiding full interpretation of individual poems, which would overbalance this paper. I hope, however, that understanding of single poems will benefit from study of the wider context of the development of the collection.

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Between 1956 and 1975 Ritsos wrote at least 27 poems attributed to the series.<sup>9</sup> The following list is in the order in which Ritsos dates the beginning of their composition — the first item in the second bracket.<sup>10</sup> The second item is the date of first Greek publication, usually in pamphlet form (poems only available in collected volumes are asterisked).<sup>11</sup> Citation and reference are from the collected volumes (the third item in the bracket; ΠΓ' = *Ποιήματα Γ'*, ΠΔ' = *Ποιήματα Δ'*, Τδ = *Τέταρτη διάσταση*, ΠΘ' = *Ποιήματα Θ'*).

*Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος* [Moonlight sonata] (June 1956: 1956: Τδ, 45–53).

*Χρονικό* [Chronicle] (January 1957: 1957: Τδ, 33–41).

*Χειμερινή διαύγεια* [Winter clarity] (January 1957: 1957: Τδ, 23–9).

<sup>9</sup>The words "at least" include similar unpublished poems, e.g. *Έκτη αίσθηση*, *Απολογία*, *Βραδινός μονόλογος* (1956–7; Veloudis, 1983: 178–9), and published works with some similar characteristics.

<sup>10</sup>The make-up of this list will be discussed below. It includes: (a) poems in Τδ; (b) poems attributed to *Τέταρτη διάσταση* in a note to *Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος* (1960; Makrynikola, 1993: 50, A 36); (c) poems said to belong to the collection by Veloudis (1977: 32, n. 11 and 1983: 145, n. 117), using primarily formal criteria; (d) a poem appearing both in Beraha and Kataza, 1958 and Cassian, 1964; (e) a poem listed by Prokopaki, 1968: 185. Ritsos was almost certainly the source of (a) and (b) and very probably of (d) and (e). His help is acknowledged in (c), and he would presumably have protested if he had disagreed, since the subject is his own authorial categorisation.

<sup>11</sup>*Η επιστροφή της Ιφιγένειας*, *Χρυσόθεμις* and *Ισμήνη* appeared as pamphlets just after publication in Τδ, as did *Φαίδρα* just before appearing in *Τέταρτη διάσταση* (1978). All four pamphlets are called second editions.

- Αποχαιρετισμός* [Farewell] (March 1957: 1957: ΠΓ', 253–72).  
*Η εορτή των ανθέων* [The festival of flowers] (May 1957: 1964\*: ΠΓ', 158–69).  
*Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος* [When the Stranger comes] (February 1958: 1958: Τδ, 319–34).  
*Ο οδηγός του ασανσέρ* [The lift attendant] (March 1958: 1975\*: ΠΔ', 251–64).  
*Οι γερόντισσες κ' η θάλασσα* [The old women and the sea] (September 1958: 1959: ΠΘ', 9–52).  
*Ο φαροφύλακας* [The lighthouse-keeper] (December 1958: 1975\*: ΠΔ', 267–80).  
*Το παράθυρο* [The window] (April 1959: 1960: Τδ, 9–19).  
*Η γέφυρα* [The bridge] (June 1959: 1960: ΠΓ', 297–309).  
*Το νεκρό σπίτι* [The dead house] (September 1959: 1962: Τδ, 93–111).  
*Ο τελευταίος και ο πρώτος του Λίντιτσε* [The last and the first of Lidice] (January–March 1960: 1964\*: ΠΓ', 275–94).  
*Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού* [Under the shadow of the mountain] (May 1960: 1962: Τδ, 137–57).  
*Δελφοί* [Delphi] (May 1961–April 1962: 1975\*: ΠΔ', 299–307).  
*Η ώρα των ποιμένων* [The hour of the shepherds] (1962–71: 1975\*: ΠΔ', 283–96).  
*Ορέστis* [Orestis] (June 1962–July 1966: 1966: Τδ, 73–89).  
*Το δέντρο της φυλακής και οι γυναίκες* [The prison tree and the women] (September, 1962: 1963: ΠΘ' 169–76).  
*Φιλοκτήτης* [Philoktitis] (May 1963–October 1965: 1965: Τδ, 247–65).  
*Περσεφόνη* [Persephoni] (December 1965–December 1970: 1972\*: Τδ, 191–203).  
*Ισμήνη* [Ismini] (September–December 1966–December 1971: 1972: Τδ, 207–28).  
*Αγαμέμνων* [Agamemnon], (December 1966–October 1970: 1972\*: Τδ, 57–69).  
*Χρυσόθεμις* [Chrysothemis] (May 1967–July 1970: 1972: Τδ, 161–88).  
*Αίας* [Ajax] (August 1967–January 1969: 1972\*: Τδ, 231–43).  
*Η Ελένη* [Eleni] (May–August 1970: 1970: Τδ, 269–89).  
*Η επιστροφή της Ιφιγένειας* [The return of Iphigenia] (November 1971–

August 1972: 1972: Τδ, 115–33).

*Φαίδρα* [Phaidra] (April 1974–July 1975: 1978: Τδ, 295–315).

Critics connect this new poetical direction with events affecting the poet at the time of writing.<sup>12</sup> In 1956 the Soviet Communist Party condemned Stalin and the cult of personality, and the Greek Communists purged their leader, Zachariadis. These events are reflected in a theoretical text of 1963 on Mayakovsky, where Ritsos links the loss of past certainties with the adoption of a less direct approach in poetry. I quote one sentence, applicable to *Τέταρτη διάσταση*:

Κι όταν ακόμη ο σημερινός ποιητής αισθάνεται την ανάγκη κάποτε να χρησιμοποιήσει το πρώτο πρόσωπο και τον ενεστώτα, τότε εξαφανίζεται σ' έναν τρίτο, ή “ντύνεται” έναν τρίτο [...]<sup>13</sup>

Elections in February 1956 brought hope for the Greek Left, as a Centre-Left alliance won a majority of votes, but not of seats. In 1956 Ritsos also made his first journey abroad, to the Soviet Union. He was to visit Romania and Bulgaria in 1958, Romania again in 1959–60, and then to spend most of 1962 in various countries of Eastern Europe. In 1954 he had married, in his mid-forties (after confinement from 1948–52); in 1955 his only child was born. I will tentatively add two more biographical items of possible significance, for study by those with access to relevant data. I assume that early in the 1950s Ritsos' attitudes will have been substantially changed by the marginalisation of tuberculosis by drug therapy.<sup>14</sup> Then his sister mentions a significant financial change in 1960, with an inheritance from their uncle Leonidas Vouzounaras.<sup>15</sup> Ritsos bought two flats to put his finances on a firmer

<sup>12</sup>E.g. Veloudis, 1977: 17–18; Papageorgiou, 1981: 562–63; Prokopaki 1981: 308–9.

<sup>13</sup>[And even when today's poet feels the need sometimes to use the first person and the present tense, then he disappears into a third person or 'dresses himself' in a third person ...] *Μελετήματα*, 29. All translations are my own.

The indirect approach of Cavafy, sanctified for the Greek Left by Tsirkas, 1958, was also important: see p. 99 below.

<sup>14</sup>Could his decision to marry have been partly due to the fact that his dormant illness would not now threaten the lives of those close to him?

<sup>15</sup>He had already intervened from London to help Yannis and his sister Loula in 1925 with a small income on their move to Athens (Ritsou-Glezou,

basis, as publication disruptions made his income unreliable.

The remaining biography up to 1975 may be briefly sketched. The early sixties increased hope for the Greek Left, with a break in the dominance of the Right. Ritsos became more involved in formal politics, standing unsuccessfully at parliamentary elections in 1964. But then hopes were dashed. There is no need here to tell of the tragic events leading to the fascist coup of April 1967, which destroyed Ritsos' fragile personal and professional prosperity. It led to more concentration camps on Yiaros and Leros, the stifling loneliness of house-arrest, sickness and despondency. Ritsos now had wider fame in Greece and abroad to invest in resistance, and he used it. Yet he could publish nothing in Greece till late in 1970. Τδ appeared at the end of 1972, when life was more normal, but the political framework was no more acceptable. *Φαίδρα*, the latest poem of Τδ, was begun in April 1974, just before the Junta's collapse, and completed in July 1975. To sum up: there are similarities between Ritsos' life and poetry, even suggesting bluntly deterministic connections. Some parallels are already clear, others will be explored later. Certainly both poet and poetry underwent significant changes around 1956.

The new form of the poetry was to be called *Τέταρτη διάσταση*. Evidence for the use of this label available to me from before the publication of Τδ comes in translations of Ritsos' work and other publications likely to have been influenced by him, directly or indirectly. I shall present them as a numbered list, with details later in a table.

#1 A book of French translations entitled *Quatrième Dimension*.<sup>16</sup>

#2 A note in the third edition (1960) of *Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος*:

*Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος, καθώς και τα ποιήματα Χρονικό, Χειμερινή διαύγεια, Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος, Οι γερόντισσες κ' η θάλασσα, Η γέφυρα, Το παράθυρο, που εκδόθηκαν ως τώρα σε ξεχωριστές πλακέτες, μαζί με μια μεγάλη σειρά ανέκδοτων ποιημάτων, ανήκει στην ποιητική συλλογή Τέταρτη διάσταση, που θα εκδοθεί αργότερα.*<sup>17</sup>

1981: 71–2).

<sup>16</sup>The first appearance of the phrase (Beraha and Kataza, 1958; Makrynika, 1993: 343–4, Γ 4).

<sup>17</sup>[*Moonlight sonata*, like the poems *Chronicle, Winter clarity, When*

#3 The Romanian title of a book of translations (Cassian, 1964; Makrynika, 1993: 343–4, Γ 15). Two items were probably included because of Romanian connections: *Γράμμα στο Ζολιό Κιουρί* [Letter to Joliot-Curie]<sup>18</sup> and *Ένας πίνακας με μικρές πινελιές* [A picture with small brush-strokes].<sup>19</sup> These have been ignored here. The contents predate Ritsos' return from Romania in early 1960.

#4 An article of Prokopaki (1964: 160). She, though close to Ritsos, is also an important critical interpreter of his work.<sup>20</sup> Thus dependence on the poet for categorisation of his poems cannot be assumed. The credibility of her list with reference to the poet's thoughts is increased by its similarity to others.

#5 A negative item: late in 1964 Ritsos included four poems on our list in *Ποιήματα Γ'*, thus excluding them from *Τέταρτη διάσταση*. *Η εορτή των ανθέων* even moved to a separate collection, *Γενική δοκιμή*.

#6 A list of poems Ritsos planned to publish in a *Τέταρτη διάσταση* volume at the time of his arrest in 1967 (Prokopaki, 1968: 185).

#7 The poems of Τδ itself (1972), implying further exclusions.

*the Stranger comes, The old women and the sea, The bridge and The window*, which so far are published as separate pamphlets, together with a long series of unpublished poems, belong to the collection of poems *Fourth Dimension*, which will be published later.] Makrynika, 1993: 50, A 36.

<sup>18</sup>Translated into French and published in Bucharest in its first, incomplete, edition in 1951 (Makrynika, 1993: 337, Γ 1).

<sup>19</sup>A collection written in Romania in 1959 with some Romanian content (published in Greek in *Ποιήματα Θ'* [1989]: 55–75).

<sup>20</sup>Judgements of this kind in this paper should be read in the light of comments on it by Prokopaki in a letter to its author dated 18.3.94: “Θα ήθελα να διευκρινήσω ότι για τις ερμηνείες στίχων που απ' ό,τι φαίνεται [...] θεωρείτε να προέρχονται από συγκεκριμένες συζητήσεις μου με τον ποιητή, φέρω αποκλειστικά την ευθύνη τους: για λόγους συνθηκών αλλά και αρχής ουδέποτε συζήτησα με τον ίδιο επί της ουσίας πριν δημοσιεύσω κάτι. Το μόνο που μπορώ να σας βεβαιώσω είναι ότι, εκ των υστέρων, με διάφορους τρόπους είχε εκφράσει την ευαρέσκειά του για τα κείμενα στα οποία αναφέραθε”. [I should like to explain that for the interpretations of lines which, as it seems, [...] you regard as arising from particular discussions with the poet, I am exclusively responsible: as a result of circumstances, but also for reasons of principle, I never had discussions of substance with him before publishing something. The only assurance I can give you is that, after the event, he had expressed his satisfaction in various ways with the texts to which you refer.]

#8 A list of *Τέταρτη διάσταση* poems not in Tδ (Veloudis, 1977: 32, n. 11).

	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
	'58	'60	'60	'64	'64	'67	'72	'77
Η σονάτα του σεληνόφατος	√	√		√		√	√	
Χρονικό	√	√	√	√		√	√	
Χειμερινή διαύγεια	√	√		√		√	√	
Αποχαιρετισμός			√	√	x			√
Η εορτή των ανθέων	√*		√*	√*	x			
Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος		√	√	√		√	√	
Ο οδηγός του ασανσέρ			√*				x	√
Οι γερόντισσες κ' η θάλασσα		√	√	√		√	x	
Ο φαροφύλακας							x	√
Το παράθυρο		√		√		√	√	
Η γέφυρα		√		√	x			√
Το νεκρό σπίτι			√	√		√	√	
Ο τελευταίος ... Λίντιτσε				√*	x			√
Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού				√		√	√	
Δελφοί							x	√
Η ώρα των ποιμένων							x	√
Ορέστης						√	√	
Το δέντρο της φυλακής ...						√	x	
Φιλοκτήτης						√	√	

The date in the second row is that to which I believe the item refers (see above), not the date of publication. A tick indicates that the poem was included in a volume or on a list; a cross means an exclusion, that the poem was included in a different collected volume or omitted from Tδ; a tick with an asterisk, that the poem was unpublished in Greek at the relevant time. The last 8 poems written for Tδ are uncontroversial and have been omitted.

This gives insights into Ritsos' developing thoughts on the collection. Before publishing *Ποιήματα Α' and Β'* in 1961, he planned a book called *Τέταρτη διάσταση*, to include long poems written after the watershed of 1956. Item #1 shows that the idea probably existed by 1958 (or earlier), when he gave the title to the French translators. It remained current as he returned to Greece from Romania in early 1960,

the probable effective date of #3. In November 1960 he published #2, an explicit program of five Tδ poems, with two published poems which would not appear in Tδ. He includes unnamed poems unpublished in 1960: these were presumably *Η εορτή των ανθέων* and *Ο οδηγός του ασανσέρ*, probably *Ο τελευταίος και ο πρώτος του Λίντιτσε* and *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού*, and perhaps *Ο φαροφύλακας* and the still unpublished poems of note 9 above. Prokopaki retains a similar frame of reference in February, 1964 (#4). Ritsos' plans changed by the second half of 1964, when *Ποιήματα Γ'* appeared (#5), excluding from *Τέταρτη διάσταση* four poems found on previous lists. By #6 (1967), the list expanded to include *Το δέντρο της φυλακής και οι γυναίκες* (a second "choral" poem). At the publication of Tδ in 1972 (#7), seven more monologues were added but both "choral" poems fell out. Finally *Φαίδρα* was brought in (1978).

The table is interesting from the point of view of form and content. All Tδ poems written after 1960 are monologues with little or no direct political reference, but including introductions and epilogues like theatrical stage directions, marked off from the main text by brackets and italics.<sup>21</sup> *Η εορτή των ανθέων*, like the Tδ poems *Χειμερινή διαύγεια* and *Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος*, has no stage directions. *Οι γερόντισσες κ' η θάλασσα* is a long choral poem, not a monologue. *Χρονικό* is a third-person narrative, *Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος* begins in the first person plural. Thus six of the nine poems confidently assigned to the 1960 plan (#2) do not have the regular Tδ form, proving that this was not originally characteristic of the collection.<sup>22</sup> At another level, *Αποχαιρετισμός* and *Ο τελευταίος και ο πρώτος του Λίντιτσε* are classed by Ritsos as political poems (in spite of their philosophical tendencies) (Prokopaki, 1990: 51, 53). This did not bar them from the first form of *Τέταρτη διάσταση*.

We may conclude that *Τέταρτη διάσταση* began as a fairly open category. Unlike Tδ, it did not exclude direct political reference nor

<sup>21</sup>These passages will be referred to here as "stage directions", with no implications for their status. They are an integral part of the text and use poetic discourse.

<sup>22</sup>Veloudis (#8, with Ritsos' likely support) uses stage directions and monologue form as criteria to assign to *Τέταρτη διάσταση* poems not in Tδ, written before 1962. This could be a later rationalisation.

demand a particular form. Tδ follows the former rule strictly, while exceptions to the latter are only found in poems surviving from this early plan. Prokopaki in 1964 defines the early stage of the collection thus:

Κοινά στοιχεία της Τέταρτης Διάστασης είναι ο συνθετικός χαρακτήρας των ποιημάτων, η εσωτερική τους κίνηση, η προβληματική τους, που εισδύει όλο και βαθύτερα στα πιο ουσιαστικά προβλήματα, η απογύμνωση, τέλος, της έκφρασης από κάθε διακοσμητικό στοιχείο και η συσπείρωση της ποίησης στον εσώτερο πυρήνα της.<sup>23</sup>

The criteria are based on poetics and philosophy, not form. Before the exclusions of #5 (late 1964) *Το νεκρό σπίτι* and *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού* were complete and work had begun on *Ορέστης* and *Φιλοκτήτης*. It was probably the increasing numbers of such poems with mythical subjects and stage directions which led to a change of plan.

The next way to view Ritsos' plans is in the arrangement of poems in Tδ itself (1972).<sup>24</sup> The first poem written, *Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος*, is printed fourth. The first in Tδ, *Το παράθυρο*, was written fifth. But the most significant break in chronological order is at the end. The latest poem written, *Φαίδρα*, is placed sixteenth, while the seventeenth and last poem of Tδ, *Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος*, was written fourth. This foregrounds *Το παράθυρο*, the first poem in Tδ, and *Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος*, the last, since they were written fifth and fourth respectively in the series and about a year apart. I shall look at each in turn to examine why they were chosen for these positions.

*Το παράθυρο* was written in Pireas, and its narrator sits at his window observing a busy port city, perhaps reflecting the poet's perceptions and thoughts as he wrote.<sup>25</sup> The narrator's persistent observation, described to an interlocutor in the room, brings a pressure

<sup>23</sup>[Common elements of *Τέταρτη διάσταση* are the complex character of the poems, their inner movement, their problematics, which go deeper and deeper into the most serious issues, finally the stripping from the expression of every element of decoration, and the coiling of the poetry around its inner core.] Prokopaki, 1964: 160.

<sup>24</sup>Here I begin from the approach of Kassos: 1991, 19–22.

<sup>25</sup>Prevelakis (1981: 256) gives great importance to this picture of Peiraias. For the window-motif in Ritsos' work see Kaklamanaki, 1988.

or threat: he is said to be “πιεσμένος ανάμεσα στον τοίχο και το τζάμι” [compressed between the wall and the window], a phrase underlined by its later retraction (Tδ 9, 17). He shows a desire to escape. The square of the window dominates the poem and is compared to the frame of a photograph, linked to other photographs, which provide some temporal depth. The window allows a view from the outside in as well as from the inside out, and the photograph in the frame is that of the observer. Eventually (in the final stage direction) protagonist and interlocutor leave the room, and go out to join in the life which had been observed. In a newspaper interview on the poem, Ritsos said:

Μα όποια και όσο σημαντική απαραίτητα γνώση, ανακάλυψη ή αποκάλυψη δεν αρκεί να συντηρήσει την ίδια τη ζωή, όσο μένει στην αυτάρκεια και στην αυταρέσκεια μιας παθητικής αόριστης ενατένισης. Χρειάζεται πάντα η συμμετοχή κι η πράξη.<sup>26</sup>

Whatever other interpretations the poem may inspire, one important subject is the ivory tower and the social responsibility of art.<sup>27</sup>

*Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος* is the last poem in Tδ. At the start, mourning narrators mention in the first person the arrival of a Stranger in their midst. He is uninvited and unwanted, shabbily but interestingly dressed. His presence is suspicious — is he a beggar? He emphasises his poverty, yet has the power to show others' wealth: his voice has many resonances for his hearers. Most of the poem is spoken by the Stranger, as shown by insertions like “He said” and “The Stranger continued”. It includes a rich and idealised picture of rural life, probably based on Monemvasia,<sup>28</sup> stressing the role of women. The Stranger

<sup>26</sup>[But of whatever kind and however vitally important knowledge, discovery or revelation may be, they are not enough to support life itself, so long as they remain at the self-sufficient and complacent level of passive and indefinite observation. Participation and action are always essential.] Ritsos, 1960; quoted in Thasitis, 1981: 236. Similar thoughts are found in Sangiglio, 1978: 38–9; Meraklis, 1981: 531.

<sup>27</sup>Compression between wall and window may be interpreted as the pressure of responsibility on the artist-observer — but Ritsos' imprisonment and torture also intrude into my reading of the poem.

<sup>28</sup>The poet Nikiforos Vrettakos, a younger contemporary of Ritsos at Gytheio high-school, finds in this poem many examples of Ritsos' poetic

becomes an integral part of the society: Κι αυτός ο Ξένος, είταν ο πιο δικός μας (Τδ, 334). There is no more mourning. Women boil him water, and the last image is of his half-shaven face, reflected in a mirror among soap-suds.<sup>29</sup>

Interpretation is plainly dependent on the reader's reactions to the Stranger. There are pointers to him as a Christ-figure, like the capitalisation of Ξένος. Other indications are his role in making articulate the life of the community he is joining, his socialist resonances and the idealisation of rural life (not, it seems, the depressed Lakonia Ritsos had left in the twenties). The fact that the poem was written in Athens underlines its rural references: *Το παράθυρο* describes the Pireas where it was written, *Χρονικό* is written and set in Samos, in spite of a statement to the contrary.<sup>30</sup> It is interesting, therefore, that *Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος* shows a sense of place, but not the place of writing.

From their positioning, we should probably look at these first and last poems together. It is tempting to see a programmatic relationship based on a simple structural schema.<sup>31</sup> In *Το παράθυρο*, an observer is enclosed and then leaves his enclosure. In *Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος* a community absorbs a single Stranger. Both individuals have artistic connotations involving ideas of participation: one may see this parallel as the link which makes the program. At one of the many layers of this complex poetry, the observer who leaves the window in its first poem seems to become the Stranger who joins a new community in its last

memories of Monemvasia (Vrettakos, 1981). Thasitis (1981: 233–5) also finds here glorification of workers' tools and produce. Further idealisation of non-urban life is found in *Οι γερόντισσες κ' η θάλασσα*, written some months later (Douka, 1981).

<sup>29</sup>On this poem, see also Banuş, 1975: 49–50; Topouzis, 1979: 81–106; Meraklis, 1981: 538.

<sup>30</sup>Yatromanolakis, 1981, 201–2; Prevelakis, 1981: 212. Even *Η συνάτα του σεληνόφωτος* has an Athenian reference (Veloudis, 1983: 44).

<sup>31</sup>Other poems of 1957–9 have a tendency to geometrical shapes, reminiscent of Cavafy's symbolist poems of the 1890s. *Η εορτή των ανθέων* reduces the efforts of the Left in the forties to a flower-festival stuck in the yard where the floats were made through failure to measure the width of the gate, *Ο οδηγός του ασανσέρ* becomes a vertical lift-shaft reaching up into space, and *Ο φαροφύλακας* has the vertical line of the lighthouse together with horizontal beams of light.

(cf. Green and Bardsley, 1993: x–xii). I conclude that the placing of these two poems first and last in Τδ (the reverse order of writing) marks a recommendation that the artist should not be an uninvolved spectator, but an organic member of the community, perhaps through the medium of the rural references of *Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος*. By this logic, Τδ would announce the mission of a somehow marginalised art which wishes to become a central discourse of the community, partly by reference to the latter's healthy pre-industrial traditions. Τδ thus foregrounds regular concerns of its poet.

It is interesting to compare the relevance of these poems to 1958–9, when they were written, with 1972, when they were prominently placed in Τδ. At the earlier date, as we have seen, Ritsos was exploring new horizons in poetry, family life and travel, and enjoying international recognition. A sense of moving from a persecuted and introverted periphery closer to the centre seems appropriate. In 1972 he was reliving some of the same experience, as he resumed publication after years of Junta censorship. But, as we shall see, the positive frame provided for Τδ in these poems does not match the mood of the seven poems of the collection finished in 1970–2. It is more in tune with the more militant *Γκραγκάντα* (Γίγνεσθαι, 45–74), the significant new poem he wrote in 1972 (and published in 1973).

We may examine Ritsos' thoughts seven months before the appearance of Τδ. In a letter to Chrysa Prokopaki dated 15.V.72 (Prokopaki, 1990), Ritsos analyses his notorious duality as a poet — his need to write both timely (“political”) and timeless poetry — and expresses a preference for the latter, listing its advantages by referring to poems on ancient themes, chiefly the mythical poems of Τδ:

[...] η διάσταση του μύθου, η προϋπάρχουσα μαγεία της απόστασης, η άξιαφη μουσική των αναχρονισμών, η ελευθερία κίνησης της φαντασίας, η ευκολία της αμφίσεσης και της ακραίας ομολογίας κάτω απ' την προσωπίδα του άλλου, η στοχαστική κίνηση του λόγου απ' το φιλτραρισμένο μέσω των εποχών αίσθημα και νόημα που δεν υπόκειται στην αναγκαιότητα της λαχανιασμένης στιγμής.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup>[... the mythic dimension, the pre-extant magic of distance, the sudden music of anachronisms, the freedom for imaginative movement, the ease with which one assumes a costume and makes profound confession



This is poetic rather than critical discourse, but Ritsos' descriptive agenda is close to that of his critics.

Another approach to the canon of Τδ is via the exclusion of poems once part of *Τέταρτη διάσταση*. The first omissions were those of #5 (1964). *Η εορτή των ανθέων* is a simple political parable (Prevelakis, 1981: 238), relocated to a more "political" collection. *Αποχαιρετισμός* and *Ο τελευταίος και ο πρώτος του Λίντιτσε* are both listed by Ritsos in 1972 as "political" poems (Prokopaki, 1990: 51, 53). *Η γέφυρα*, particularly at its end, is a direct statement of belief which would be unique in Τδ.<sup>33</sup> We may conclude that *Τέταρτη διάσταση* was redefined by 1964 to exclude the political and the direct.

The next exclusions occur with the publication of Τδ (1972). *Οι γερόντισσες κ' η θάλασσα* and *Το δέντρο της φυλακής και οι γυναίκες* are "choral" poems, and the former would be far the longest in Τδ. Others may have dropped out earlier. *Ο οδηγός του ασανσέρ* and *Ο φαροφύλακας*, written between *Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος* and *Το παράθυρο*, were not originally published as pamphlets, unlike those early poems in the series which did become part of Τδ. We may assume that Ritsos always ranked them lower. *Δελφοί* and the opaque *Η ώρα των ποιμένων* were written in 1961–2, after the first mythological poems: their link with *Τέταρτη διάσταση* relies only on a suggestion of Veloudis, left uncorrected by the poet.

Six years on, at the sixth edition of Τδ (1978), *Φαίδρα* was added (Τδ, 336; Makrynika, 1993: 149, A 283):

Το ποίημα *Φαίδρα*, που γράφτηκε [...] από τον Απρίλη 1974 έως τον Ιούλη 1975, ανήκει στη συλλογή *Τέταρτη διάσταση* και περιλαμβάνεται για πρώτη φορά σ' αυτή την έκδοση (έκτη).<sup>34</sup>

Ritsos, in planting out poetic seed-trays, has found a stray plant to be

under the mask of the other, the thoughtful movement of language caused by emotion and meaning filtered by the centuries, which is not subject to the compulsion of the breathless moment.] Prokopaki, 1990: 52.

<sup>33</sup>As suggested by its sub-title: "Μια απολογία που δε ζητήθηκε" [A defence which was not requested].

<sup>34</sup>[The poem *Phaidra*, written ... from April, 1974 to July, 1975, belongs to the collection *Fourth Dimension* and is included in it for the first time in this (sixth) edition.] Makrynika, 1993: 149, A 283.

added to a garden bed already full of the same species. *Τέταρτη διάσταση* is clearly now a defined category to which a new example demands assignment. *Φαίδρα* has all the regular formal characteristics of Τδ and a typical mythical subject. But the simplicity of the above note leaves unanswered questions. A glance at Makrynika (1993) shows that this is the only substantial change made to one of Ritsos' main collected volumes after its first publication.<sup>35</sup> Equally, it seems that *Φαίδρα* was begun after the first edition of Τδ.<sup>36</sup> One thinks of a need to "complete" Τδ by answering a neglected question or meeting a challenge from a new historical or poetic situation. Why did the poet take this unique step?

I have no easy answer. *Φαίδρα* is harder to analyse than the poems of 1957–9 with their underlying geometric shapes. We may, for example, place it in a sequence beginning with *Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος* and including *Το νεκρό σπίτι* and *Ισμήνη*, where an older woman speaks the monologue to a younger man. Phaidra is totally determined to dominate Hippolytos, and confident of success.<sup>37</sup> When it is clear that she has failed sexually, it seems an obvious next step to continue the power game by suicide and a posthumous letter to her husband.

Phaidra is quite different from the Woman in Black of *Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος*, whose repeated pleas for acceptance by her young visitor are made from a situation of powerlessness and uncertainty over her real wishes, as the end of the poem shows. The contrast is so great as to suggest an interpretation. Linkage of these two poems would be symmetrical, as they were the first and last to be written, and would also lead to greater integration of *Η σονάτα* within Τδ: it is central to

<sup>35</sup>It was however only later at the seventh edition (1978) that Τδ was labelled the sixth volume of the collected works (Makrynika, 1993: 151, A 290).

<sup>36</sup>Ritsos' note "Απρίλης 1974–Ιούλης 1975" at the foot of this poem (confirmed by the comment quoted above) seems to conflict with a statement of Prokopaki, 1990: 55, that Ritsos had begun work on it long before 1972.

<sup>37</sup>Ritsos' text ignores the moral conflict which consumes Euripides' Phaidra. An audience of the ancient play may be surprised by the letter to her husband, which shows unexpected vindictiveness: this aggression has been made the basis for her portrayal by Ritsos.

the book in form, subject and poetics, but it seems out of place in the early texts, which tend to make their point without much interest in character. The pitiless self-examination of the Woman in Black and the importance of her character to the poem as a whole point forward to the mythical poems. One interpretation of *Φαίδρα* might imagine the thoughts of Hippolytos as he leaves for exile and compare them with the final words of the visitor of *Η συνάτα*: “Η παρακμή μιας εποχής” [The decadence of an era]. Hippolytos faced unpredictable aggression, not pathetic decadence. *Φαίδρα* might thus be seen as a revisiting of the earlier poem using Ritsos’ mythology and poetics of the Junta period and including reaction to that historical situation, especially its arbitrary authoritarianism. But this reading, of course, has no pretensions to exclusiveness.<sup>38</sup>

\* \* \*

Ritsos came slowly and painfully to the full use of mythical subjects in the poems of Τδ. The evidence is available in the poems published after 1957, culminating in the first explicitly structured as a myth, *Ορέστης*, begun in 1962. He had, of course, used myth much earlier. Veloudis (1984: 51–8) has charted the development of this side of his work. At one level it may reflect the construction of a specifically Greek symbolism for the Left after the Second World War, in response to the nationalism of the Right.<sup>39</sup> At a personal level, it shows the reaction of a Peloponnesian poet from a declining aristocratic family cursed by tuberculosis and mental instability. It was natural to see his family through the prism of another cursed Peloponnesian house, the Atreidai. Geography fostered the influence of myth: in high-school years, he lived on the islet of Kranaz (Marathonisi) off Yithio, where Paris and

<sup>38</sup>*Φαίδρα* is the least studied of these poems. The only general interpretation is that of Kassos (1991: 41–5), who also notes parallels to *Η συνάτα*, but makes the power of poetry the subject of both poems. In my view he relies too much on the report of Dimitris Doukaris (1979: 3–6) that Ritsos based *Η συνάτα* on a visit Doukaris paid to the poetess Melissanthi. Whatever its source, *Η συνάτα* seems to put poetry among the bourgeois elements spurned by the young visitor, to whom it gives no poetic dimension. Equally no poetry is imputed to either protagonist of *Φαίδρα*.

<sup>39</sup>Achieved with great success, of course, in poems like *Ρωμιοσύνη* [Romiosyni] and *Η Κυρά των Αμπελιών* [Our Lady of the Vineyards].

Helen took refuge on leaving Sparta.<sup>40</sup> Mythic self-identification may be seen in embryo as early as the poem *Εξήγηση* in the collection *Πυραμίδες* (1930–5; *Ποιήματα Α’*, 102–5).

But the first use of the ancient world in Τδ is quite different. *Χρονικό* introduces us to the unlikely treasurer of the failed local society “Pythagoras”, who carries responsibility to absurd lengths. When the society folds, he disappears — not with the (non-existent) funds, but with signed receipts for unpaid subscriptions not really owed. Later he pays the debts, but nobody notices. Topological and philosophical hints are dropped to link the treasurer to Pythagoras himself. At the end, we find him happily reminding people of the debts, and paying them in the currency of the stars. Thus the theme of responsibility is developed in a way suggesting identification of the treasurer with the poet.<sup>41</sup>

The island where the poem is set is Samos, as already stated. The connections of the conscientious treasurer with Pythagoras also seem carefully made, for an educated reader. But in the stage directions, which have a marked ironic flavour, both identifications are denied. This playful technique, I suspect, conceals unease about the role of the ancient element in the poem. It certainly leaves the reader puzzled, and uncertain whether or not to follow Pythagorean lines of interpretation.

*Το νεκρό σπίτι* and *Κάτω απ’ τον ίσκιο του βουνού* may for many purposes be taken together.<sup>42</sup> Both continue the theme and the approach of *Η συνάτα*. Both refer to the House of Atreus, and the woman speaking both monologues can only be Elektra; but in neither case is the identification explicit. In the former poem, the reader is faced with more playful mystification in the stage directions. After a subtitle “Φανταστική κι αυθεντική ιστορία μιας πανάρχαιης ελληνικής οικογένειας” [Imaginary but authentic history of a most ancient Greek family], the stage directions begin thus:

<sup>40</sup>Ritsou-Glezou, 1981: 56, 60–61; see also the autobiographical *Το τερατώδες αριστούργημα* [The monstrous masterpiece] (*Γίνεσθαι*, 390).

<sup>41</sup>On *Χρονικό* I have used the excellent study of Yatromanolakis, 1981.

<sup>42</sup>Ritsos made them a trilogy with *Η συνάτα*, “αποτελούν κατά κάποιον τρόπο ένα είδος τριλογίας” [they form, in some sense, a kind of trilogy]; see Makrynika, 1993: 57–8, A 43 and A 44, followed by Leivaditis (Makrynika, 1993: 497, Δ 300) and Prokopaki, 1964.

Απ' όλη τη φαμίλια απόμειναν μονάχα δυο αδελφές. Κ' η μια τρελλάθηκε. Φαντάστηκε πως το σπίτι τους είχε μεταφερθεί κάπου στην αρχαία Θήβα, ή, μάλλον, στο Άργος — σύγχυζε τη μυθολογία, την ιστορία και την ιδιαίτερη ζωή της, το παρελθόν και το παρόν, όχι το μέλλον. Αυτό μόνον. Αργότερα συνήλθε [...] <sup>43</sup>

A reference to the mental illness and recovery of Ritsos' sister Loula is here neatly combined with a caricature of the poet's purpose and method in writing, which is made part of his sister's delusion. Later mythical poems do not use such apologies or explanations.

The poem has mentioned Elektra's sister and brother; the latter as a sailor — presumably Chrysothemis and Orestis. But there also appears a younger brother with artistic tendencies. The problem arises in the closing stage directions:

Και το σπίτι — όχι του Αγαμέμνονα. Κι ο μικρός αδελφός με τις καλλιτεχνικές τάσεις; Ποιος; Μα δεν υπήρχε δεύτερος αδελφός. <sup>44</sup>

Attention is called to the second brother by denying his existence in the myth. In fact, this clearly diverts reference from the house of Atreus to that of Ritsos. The sailor reflects Ritsos' brother Mimis, one of the family's tuberculosis victims, and the problematic little brother points to Yannis himself. Once more the reader is denied an interpretation to which the poem had pointed.

In *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού* we have the closest approach in Tδ to undisguised history — for example, to destalinification:

Έναν άλλον  
τον κηδέψαν μ' αφάνταστες τιμές — ολόκληρο δάσος μεσίστειες  
σημαίες,  
δεν έμεινε πλατεία ή πάρκο χωρίς το άγαλμά του. Σε λίγο  
κάποια μανία τους κυρίευσε όλους — μήτε καλοθυμάμαι —

<sup>43</sup>[Out of the whole family, there remained just two sisters. And one of them went crazy. She imagined that their house had been transported somewhere in ancient Thebes, or rather in Argos: she confused mythology, history and her personal life, the past and the present, not the future. At least not that. Later she recovered ...] Tδ, 93.

<sup>44</sup>[And the house — not Agamemnon's. And the younger brother with artistic tendencies? Who? But there was no younger brother.] Tδ, 111.

χειρονομούσαν, τρέχαν, φώναζαν, σπάζαν τους ανδριόντες  
του  
κ' είταν παράξενο να βλέπεις τους ανθρώπους να πολεμούν με  
τ' αγάλματα. <sup>45</sup>

Just before there is a long reference to the macabre exhumation and rehabilitation in 1956 of the Hungarian leader Ladislav Rajk (Prokopaki, 1981: 370, n. 22). Later mythical poems do not admit such undigested history. In the context of the whole collection, all this gives readers a sense of a method still developing towards maturity.

Both these early mythical poems examine the myth from long after its normal point of reference, inaugurating one of the two patterns of Tδ, as we shall see. Both protagonist Elektra figures, like the Woman in Black in *H συνάτα*, are elderly, self-critical virgins enclosed in decaying mansions, with a strong sense of barrenness and imminent death — as occurs at the end of *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού* — pointing to a Marxist critique of Western civilisation. Both poems, especially the first, also show a startling concentration on objects, especially everyday household items: this is so strong as to persuade one commentator to call Ritsos' work of 1956–60 a period of dialogue with objects (Kouloufakos, 1975: 27).

The next two poems written, *Φιλοκτήτης* and *Ορέστης*, were composed together (1962–6): the latter was started first but the former was first to be published. These are the first Tδ poems dated by Ritsos over a span of years, suggesting a struggle with his material. Both have heroes with a real degree of choice about the future, unlike most Tδ protagonists, who are shown as powerless, often just before death. Both poems stress a major theme of Tδ (and all Ritsos' work): the need for the individual to play an active role against personal inclination, because of a wider duty or pressure. This one theme dominates both poems to an unusual extent for this collection, suggesting immediate

<sup>45</sup>[Another man they buried with unimaginable honours — a whole forest of flags at half mast, there was no square or park without a statue of him. But soon some frenzy overtook them all — I don't really remember — they made gestures, ran, shouted and smashed his statues, and it was strange to see people fighting with statues.] Tδ, 146; for similar examples in this poem see Veloudis, 1984: 68.

contemporary relevance.<sup>46</sup> One senses that the theme dictated the choice of myths.

The myth of Philoktitis is best known from Sophoklis. The hero, owner of Heraklis' unerring bow, left for Troy with the other Greeks. But on the way a snake-bite gave him an ugly wound, causing noisy spasms of pain. His shipmates found him intolerable and marooned him on Limnos, where he suffered alone for the ten years of the war, surviving by hunting with Heraklis' bow. Then a prophecy said that the bow was needed to capture Troy, and Neoptolemos and Odysseas were sent to Limnos to fetch it. After much negotiation, Philoktitis' reluctance was overcome by Heraklis himself as *deus ex machina*, and he took the conquering bow to Troy.

In my reading of *Φιλοκτήτης* an absent poem plays a large role. Since Metaxas, communists had been imprisoned on small Greek islands — rarely alone, but frequently suffering. Ritsos' own first concentration camp was actually on Limnos at Kondopouli (1948–9), before Makronisos. A poem almost writes itself. Philoktitis speaks the monologue as a patron saint of exiled communists. There is scope for ironic equation of the snake-bite with commitment to communism, and identification of Heraklis' bow with Ritsos' poetry.

The actual poem is quite different. The stage directions again playfully set the scene on an island, “perhaps Limnos”. The monologue is spoken by a youth with “something of the features of Achilles, but rather more spiritualised, as if he were his son, Neoptolemos” — the only case where the title of a Tδ poem is the name of a hero who is not also the speaker. Philoktitis has not suffered on the island; in fact he welcomed the snake-bite as a chance to withdraw from the fight for philosophical reasons. Neoptolemos almost ignores Philoktitis, filling his monologue with comments on his own past which the reader may relate to Ritsos' youth and twentieth-century Greek history. This is a fascinating poem, on which I recommend the analyses of Bien (1980). But I feel that, in the context of *Τέταρτη διάσταση*, it marks a false

<sup>46</sup>Ilinskaya, 1975: 37–8; Bien, 1980: 100–5; Prevelakis, 1981: 352–66. I do not know whether there are grounds for suggesting a link here with Ritsos' involvement in the elections of 1964.

step. The myth is almost unrecognisable, but for the title and stage directions.

The myth was probably too close to the poet's reality. If Philoktitis spoke the monologue, there would be little scope for Ritsos to “dress himself” in a third person, as recommended above in the introduction to Mayakovsky (1963), written during the composition of *Φιλοκτήτης*.<sup>47</sup> A conclusion was reached above that before the publication of *Ποήματα Γ'* in 1964, Ritsos redefined *Τέταρτη διάσταση* to exclude the political and the direct. I sense in *Φιλοκτήτης* a desire to avoid an absent text which would have deserved both epithets. Remember that the direct parable *Η εορτή των ανθέων* was transplanted in the same year out of *Τέταρτη διάσταση* into another collection.

In this context we may return to Ritsos' letter to Prokopaki on the mythical poems of Tδ. He is answering a lost letter in which Prokopaki seems to have asked for a closer link in his poems between myth and contemporaneity, as in *Επιτάφιος* — a poem based on an event of 1936, but with resonances reaching far back in Greek popular culture. Ritsos puts words into her mouth to sum up the attraction of *Επιτάφιος* and demand a repetition:

[...] έτσι που το άμεσο γεγονός να επεκτείνεται συνειρμικά κ' αισθητικά σ' έναν άπειρο χρόνο ιστορικό, μυθικό, εσωτερικό προς τα πριν και τα μετά. Θα μου πεις, όπως το λες περίπου: κάνα κάτι τέτοιο και τώρα: πάρε ένα άμεσο γεγονός ή πρόσωπο κι άπλωσέ το προς το μύθο της αρχαιότητας, αντί ν' απλώνεις τον αρχαίο μύθο προς το παρόν [...] Ο Αυξεντίου δεν κατάφερε να εκταθεί πολύ πριν απ' το χρόνο του, ούτε να ταυτιστεί εσωτερικά (ή στην αίσθηση του ακροατή) μ' έναν Προμηθέα ή μ' έναν Χριστό, παρ' ότι και τους δυο “στοιχειωδώς” τους αναφέρει.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup>Extensive parallels between this text and *Φιλοκτήτης* are listed by Bien, 1980: 107–8, n. 12.

<sup>48</sup>[... so that the immediate event should be extended by association and aesthetically to an infinite time — historical, mythical, internal to what precedes and what follows. You will say, as you have said, more or less: “Do something like this now; take an immediate event or person and extend it towards the ancient myth, instead of extending the ancient myth towards the present ...” Afxendiou did not succeed in extending himself far

The direction of movement of the myth is crucial. So far as we may judge, Ritsos believed that Prokopaki had asked him to choose an Afxendiou and give him a mythical dimension. He makes her complain that his present poems operate in the reverse direction, from antiquity towards the present. This comment, by implication, Ritsos accepts. One assumes that the primary text for the organisation of his poems is the myth, while more contemporary discourses are secondary, at least in structural terms. A reader looking for a clear modern message will thus be condemned, almost inevitably, to receive a fractured and incoherent impression. In this sense, the myth becomes a barrier to interpretation. This is the developed pattern of Ritsos' use of myth, which in 1964 he was still to achieve.

*Ορέστης* is closer to this pattern than *Φιλοκτήτης*. The scene is firmly set outside Mykinai. Orestis has returned home with Pyladis to kill his father's murderers. He is only named in the title, but the identification is unmistakable. The single playful element is that Pyladis is not named directly, but called "affectionately silent and devoted, like Pyladis". Before entering Mykinai, Orestis listens to the wails of his sister, Elektra, who is consumed with hatred for her mother. He resents the domination of others, especially Elektra, over his actions, and compares her unfavourably to his mother. He seems to decide against the murder. There are intertextual references to ancient tragedy: he refuses to cut his hair for the libation which in Sophoklis' *Elektra* (901) leads to recognition between brother and sister, and is carrying the urn, said to be of Orestis' ashes, used in the tragedy (758–760) to trick his mother. Here it is no trick: the urn, Orestis says, really does contain his own ashes. The demythologisation of the poem thus proceeds in terms of the tragic myth, and so does the conclusion: for all his doubts, he proceeds to kill Klytaimnistra and Aigisthos, for reasons of higher necessity which are left rather problematic.

The full development of the mythical pattern may be seen in *Αγαμέμνων* (1966–70), started a few months after *Ορέστης* was completed. The protagonist is Agamemnon returning from Troy, but

back before his time, or identifying internally (or in the consciousness of the reader) with a Prometheus or a Christ, although he refers at a rudimentary level to both.] Prokopaki, 1991: 53. Afxendiou is the Cypriot hero of the poem *Αποχαιρετισμός*, killed by British forces in 1956.

demythologised. He feels weariness and distaste for his victory and tries to stop the people's cheers — a hero far from the Agamemnon of Aischylos' *Oresteia*. But Ritsos' poem has intertextual links to that play, involving the purple cloth on to which his wife entices him, the incomprehensible Cassandra, and the bath in which he will die.<sup>49</sup> There is imaginative reconstruction of life in the camp outside Troy. In this case, it seems to me that the poet's first inspiration was the myth, a reading of Aischylos. The mythical hero was then reduced to human terms: Ritsos tries to get inside the skin of a man who has won a victory in a long war at great cost. The framework remains that of Aischylos, though the demythologisation, as always, has a tendency towards timelessness. Only when it is complete, I think, are specifically modern and personal thoughts allowed into the poem. The result is like a film which gives a satisfactory account of an ancient subject, but with characters whose philosophical comments, acting style, and even some props, are distinctly modern.

*Αγαμέμνων* is one of seven poems finished under the Junta and first published in Τδ (1972). It shares features which are more pronounced in others of the group — particularly *Ισμήνη* and *Χρυσόθεμις*, the longest poems in the book. In monologues often of heightened emotion because spoken just before death, some of the protagonists exaggerate the characteristic reflexiveness of *Τέταρτη διάσταση* to such an extent that introspection itself becomes both the means and the subject of communication with the reader. Prokopaki describes the difference from previous poems in Τδ:

Στα μεγάλα ποιήματα, που είναι γραμμένα ή ολοκληρωμένα μέσα στη δικτατορία [...] η δράση υποχωρεί, οι ήρωες βρίσκονται ή μιλούν μετά τη δράση, γέροι, αποστρατευμένοι, συνήθως τη στιγμή του επικείμενου θανάτου τους. Αν και στην εξωτερική τους αρχιτεκτονική αυτά τα ποιήματα μοιάζουν με τα προηγούμενα, ωστόσο θα μπορούσε να τα κατατάξει κανείς σε μια άλλη φάση, από την πλευρά της εσωτερικής τους κίνησης και της θεώρησης των πραγμάτων. Απολογισμός ζωής και πράξεως, αυτοσυγκέντρωση, αναμέτρηση με το θάνατο. Είναι

<sup>49</sup>For a sound philological analysis of the differences, see Skiadas, 1981.

ποιήματα μνήμης [...] με σαφέστερη όμως τη μετάθεση του κέντρου βάρους σ' ένα υπαρκξιακό επίπεδο.<sup>50</sup>

She continues with an interesting anthology of passages connected with memory.

These same poems also contain most of the dream-like effects with sexual overtones explored by Aranitsis.<sup>51</sup> Ismini's fury with Antigoni, for example, chiefly involves the latter's dedication to protest and her denial of life and her nature as a woman; but it also involves a scene of clothes-swapping with Aimon, and obvious signs of sexual competition with Antigoni, complicated when as an old woman she chooses (apparently) to die in Antigoni's clothes. Thus a tinge of Freudian encoding is added to other perplexing features of the myth. The reader is likely to form an impression of a poetry forced to ever more basic levels of existential speculation, involving the exploration of deep recesses of psychological memory, seen through the minds of mythical characters close to death. The potential contradiction, noted in the case of *Αγαμέμνων*, between demythologisation of an ancient story and the intrusion of twentieth-century thoughts is realised in many of these poems. It leads to a kind of blockage which adds to the sense of evasion, dissolution, and distress which is a major part of my reaction to the poems of this period.

These techniques are used for the most pessimistic poems of Τδ,

<sup>50</sup>[In the long poems which were written or completed during the dictatorship ... action is of less importance, the heroes live or speak after action, in old age and retirement, usually at the moment of their impending death. Even if in their external architecture these poems resemble their predecessors, even so it would be possible to place them at another stage, from the point of view of their internal dynamics and world-view. A review of life and activity, a self-obsession, a confrontation with death. They are poems of memory ... but with an obvious repositioning of the centre of gravity to an existential level.] Prokopaki, 1981, 323. Cf Sangiglio, 1978: 63–72; Meraklis, 1981: 534–6.

<sup>51</sup>1980: this study uses Ritsos' poems, especially Τδ, to speculate on the poet's sexual preference, providing a *reductio ad absurdum* of the obsession of criticism with the poet rather than the poetry (όλ' αυτά δεν θυμίζουν, μήπως, πράγματα που οι ομοφιλόφυλοι εξομολογούνται στον ψυχαναλυτή τους; [139] [Doesn't all this remind one, perhaps, of things that homosexuals confess to their analyst?]). Despite this, the passages it collects are interesting and would repay examination at other levels.

composed in the camps of Yiaros and Leros and during the awful years of house-arrest on Samos.<sup>52</sup> It is easy, as before, to link poetry with historical circumstances: before 1967, Ritsos had been using myth in *Φιλοκτήτης* and *Ορέστης* largely to explore existentially the choice between commitment and inaction. But in 1967 that choice became irrelevant as political repression and sickness enveloped him as totally and as painfully as twenty years before; the mythical method was now deployed to provide a poetic dimension for political failure,<sup>53</sup> grief and imminent death. I will not discuss the poems of the Junta period further here: their analysis is a project for the future.

Thus we may see stages in the development in Ritsos' use of myths in Τδ, mirrored by different demands made of its readers. After the experiment of *Χρονικό*, he wrote *Το νεκρό σπίτι* and *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού*, developing the theme of *Η συνάτα* in a way which obscures and undermines his chosen mythical subject. Identification with mythical characters is denied, autobiographical elements are inserted and underlined, and undigested fragments of post-war history are included. With *Φιλοκτήτης* and *Ορέστης* the myth gains in importance and expresses a particular moral and philosophical problem, though in *Φιλοκτήτης* the Linnian coincidence caused difficulty. *Ορέστης* is the first poem to respect the integrity of the myth and use it with some subtlety. By the time of *Αγαμέμνων* the myth is paramount, and demythologisation occurs almost completely by intertextual reference to it. Most of the poems started in 1965 or later are close to the *Αγαμέμνων* pattern, sometimes transposed to the old age of the protagonists. It seems to me in general that their narrative frameworks (convoluted, as always) are dictated by the relevant myths, while those frameworks are filled by thoughts based more on personal and historical factors. This is the situation implied by Ritsos' answer to Prokopaki in 1972 (Prokopaki, 1990). Such disorientation becomes extreme in

<sup>52</sup>It cannot be irrelevant to analysis of these poems that the poet believed in 1969 that he was dying of cancer, untreated because he could not visit Athens. He was so sure of death that he destroyed unpublished work which he did not wish to survive unimproved (Pierrat, 1978: 75–6; Makrynika, 1993: 15).

<sup>53</sup>The division of the Greek Communist Party (1968) will have increased Ritsos' despair.

particular poems of the Junta period, for reasons I have tried to suggest.

In turning to demythologisation and anachronism we come to issues of defamiliarisation leading back to the Russian formalists and especially Brecht, whose influence on a Marxist writer of dramatic poems is not unexpected. Brecht's Epic Theatre often worked with known stories or myths, because the existence of a familiar outline made it easier to turn the story against itself, by undermining heroic elements. In this way, the audience, who know the myth but are faced by its demythologisation in the play, are unable to accept either of these stages in their entirety as a transparent reflection of reality, and are involved in the active construction of meaning from the disparate elements available to them.<sup>54</sup>

Defamiliarisation is also relevant to Τδ in other ways: it provides a theoretical context for the appearance of huge numbers of objects in the poems, especially in the phase of *Το νεκρό σπίτι* and *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού*. Kitchen utensils and other everyday household items and commodities lose familiar anti-poetic associations and are given a powerful aesthetic charge. Among other functions, they provide a link from the mythical period to the present day, or at least to the mansions in Monemvasia where the poet grew up. Many of the contents of those houses may be verbally listed in Greek in a way which does not strike a reader as seriously anachronistic at any period of Greek history (Prokopaki, 1981: 316). The imagination — unless, perhaps, the reader is an archaeologist — is free to work at either chronological level or both. In another way, these objects enlist the sights, sounds, smells and even the feel of contemporary Greece as a vivid background for poems formally set deep in antiquity.

But this diachronic game is frequently interrupted by specific items which are unacceptable to the reader at the earlier end of the scale: the anachronisms, which also affect the reader by defamiliarisation. The pattern of their use is analogous to that of myth. In the early mythical poems they are very obtrusive. In *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού*, for example, it is a group of tourists on a coach who discover Elektra's decomposing body and bury it. At the beginning of *Ορέστης* also the

<sup>54</sup>On these elementary details of the history of Marxist literature and criticism, see e.g. Eagleton, 1976.

protagonists wait for the coaches to leave before approaching the Lion Gate. Later, anachronisms become more subtle and all-pervasive. There are frequent references to smoking. Ismini, attacking Antigoni's memory, says that she would have made a good Christian. By the time of the last poem, when Phaidra watches Hippolytos stealing chocolate from the refrigerator or walks down an *Οδός Ακαδημίας* in pre-classical Athens, the anachronisms are felt not as a disturbance but as "sudden music", to use Ritsos' own aesthetically charged description of their aesthetic function (Prokopaki, 1990: 52).

As an index of the lack of common ground for the analysis of Ritsos' work, more than one critic feels a need to defend the anachronisms as intentional — rather than, presumably, careless (Prevelakis, 1981: 418; Veloudis, 1984: 58). The best comment on them is probably that of Prokopaki (1981: 315):

[...] τείνει μέσα από το "παράξενο" και τις απότομες τομές να αποδραματοποιήσει το μύθο, να κεντρίσει τον αναγνώστη για να αντιμετωπίσει κριτικά την όλη "αφήγηση". Κάτι δηλαδή που βρίσκεται κοντά στη μπρεχτική τεχνική. Ο ποιητής φορά το προσωπείο και συγχρόνως μας το δείχνει.<sup>55</sup>

Even in this comment one may see another example of the poet-centred tendency of criticism on Ritsos. Most new readers will not immediately find the poet in the poem. They will see a demythologised hero who at times points to the fact that (s)he is wearing a mask. By this and other techniques of defamiliarisation readers will be led to look for contemporary reference in the poem and hence back to the poet.

\* \* \*

Autobiographical and historical material appears at every level of the poems. In many ways the distinction is artificial, as when the poet describes himself in tears as he incorporates his whole experience from Makronisos into the monologue of the Cypriot martyr Afxendiou in *Αποχαιρετισμός* (Prokopaki, 1990: 53). How are we to categorise the

<sup>55</sup>[... it tends through "strangeness" and sudden turns to remove the element of drama from the myth, to prod the reader to approach the whole "narrative" critically — that is, something like the technique of Brecht. The poet puts on the mask and at the same time points it out to us.]

details of primitive lighthouse technology given in the stage directions for *Ο φαροφύλακας*, in view of the fact that Ritsos lived in Yithio lighthouse in 1922–3 (Ritsou-Glezou, 1981: 60, cf. *Ποιήματα Δ΄*, 267)? But it is true that most of the twentieth-century references which critics have found in the poems cluster in two areas: those based on Ritsos' own youthful experience, which are rarely explicit, and may only be identified by searching his poetry for obsessions, and linking them to available information about his life in Monemvasia (Veloudis, 1983: 86–95); and those referring to the broader experience of Greece and the Left, which are little more explicit, but more generally accessible to those with a knowledge of post-war Greece. One might say that the former is part of the input of the poetry while the latter belongs more to the output.

The former category is dominated by the image of the house. From Ritsos' sister's narration of family history (Ritsou-Glezou, 1981), it is clear that there are two houses to which reference is made. The first was extremely large, the *Χάνι της Γραβιάς*. On the upper floor there were about fifteen rooms, and three balconies with magnificent views. On the lower there were extensive storerooms containing a vast range of objects and produce, perhaps the inspiration for the obsession with objects mentioned above. There were also small rooms for country people, mainly tenants of the Ritsos clan, when in town for festivals or business.

While Ritsos was at primary school, the family moved to a smaller mansion, stone-built and two-storied, with five rooms on each floor, higher than the first on the rock of Monemvasia, with an even better view. This house was connected with many painful memories. To choose only two: when he was eleven, his mother and his elder brother Mimis were both dying there of tuberculosis, with his twelve-year-old sister Loula as housekeeper, disposing of the blood coughed up by each patient without worrying the other (Ritsou-Glezou, 1981: 47–9). Money was eventually found to send them to sanatoria, and the house was closed up. At the age of seventeen, when first attacked himself by tuberculosis, Ritsos returned to Monemvasia from Athens for a healthier environment. He camped in an outbuilding of the house, which was still closed. We see him through Loula's eyes, uncertain of his future but working with discipline to turn himself into a poet,

writing an unpublished collection called *Το παλιό μας σπίτι* [Our old house]. He would rarely enter the main house and then only in daylight (Ritsou-Glezou, 1981: 89).

Both houses were filled with heavy Victorian furniture, including many mirrors and a piano, of which the family was proud. His parents too are very prominent in these youthful memories. He was close to his mother, an educated woman of refined tastes, responsible for giving her children a love of books. He seems to have remembered her as a kind of angel. His father, on the other hand, was ruining the family by gambling and womanising. It was a difficult decade, since the wars of 1912–22 removed much of the male population on military service and made survival hard for landed proprietors like the Ritsos clan. The family estates were rapidly and cheaply sold to pay for gambling debts and treatment for Mimis in Switzerland.

In a sense, Ritsos continued to write *Το παλιό μας σπίτι* for the rest of his life. In most of his poems which involve memory or expression of feeling, the vocabulary of images with their attendant symbolism may be traced back to his youth. The poems of *Τέταρτη διάσταση* are particularly strongly influenced. The house itself, decaying and enclosing, dominates *Η συνάτα του σεληνόφωτος*, *Το νεκρό σπίτι* and *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού*. The piano, a source of pride and music, was neutralised into silence at the death of his mother, with whom he mainly connected it, like a black coffin. It plays a significant role in *Η συνάτα*, and is an attractive anachronism in *Η επιστροφή της Ιφιγένειας*. The mirrors of these poems seem to come from the complex of memories connected with the house, though they are used in ways common to most modernist poetry. Some pieces of furniture appear in more than one poem. Equally critics have suggested that the prominence given to Neoptolemos' mother in his monologue in *Φιλοκτήτης* involves reminiscence of Ritsos' own mother (Veloudis, 1984: 57), and this is not the only poem in Tδ where she plays a role. This paragraph includes only a fraction of the identifications which could be suggested.

We cannot restrict such autobiographical reference to the period of Monemvasia. A good example of the intervention of a later period in a Tδ poem is seen in a persuasive proposal of Veloudis (1984: 56–7), who identifies in the stage directions of *Η επιστροφή της Ιφιγένειας* a



reflection of the return of Loula Ritsou in 1931 from her unsuccessful marriage in the United States. The poet may have seen something sacrificial in events leading to the marriage. There is a chilling parallel between the barbarian idol which Iphigenia carried off from the land of the Tavri, and the baby which Loula brought back from New York.

The difficulty of identifying such references raises familiar theoretical problems. How can the reading of a poem be made dependent on the reader's knowledge of details outside it? Much of the force of the above items is accessible to a sensitive reader with no knowledge of the poet's biography — for example, many meanings of the house in *Η συνάτα*. More subtlety may be introduced to the interpretation of the Tδ poems by reading other poems of this and earlier collections, especially work from the thirties, where the relevant experience is fresher and its use more direct. For those who wish to go further, his sister's narrative may be recommended (Ritsou-Glezou, 1981). But in Ritsos' case, as always, readers are faced with a choice. Those who wish to negotiate a meaning based on as much as possible of the emotional and aesthetic charge of *Τέταρτη διάσταση* cannot avoid the family history of its poet. But readings of other kinds are equally possible.

There is less to be said over the role of history in the poems. It has been established above that Ritsos took a decision in 1964 to remove from the collection poems like *Αποχαιρετισμός*, with direct historical inspiration. We have already seen how open (but incidental) references to destalinification and its consequences appear in *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιου του βουνού*. Other poems of the period before 1967 show less obvious examples of the same tendency.<sup>56</sup> In general the ebb and flow of philosophical discussion which makes up much of the poems' surface often touches on issues of vital contemporary historical importance, but without markers to allow convincing identification of particular events causing concern in individual passages.

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<sup>56</sup>Readers may wish to follow up lists of page-numbers given by Veloudis for references to historical events (1984: 153, nn. 75–9). At another level there is an interesting but finally inconclusive attempt to link the ten years of the Trojan War with various decades in Greek history or Ritsos' life (Veloudis, 1984: 67; Bien, 1980: 91–100).

The phrase “τέταρτη διάσταση” appears in the final stage directions for *Η γέφυρα*, a poem discarded from the collection in 1964:

Μια αίσθηση σαν όταν ένας ανειδίκευτος διαβάζει για την ιδιοσυστασία της ύλης και αντιύλης, για την διάσπαση του ατόμου ή για την τέταρτη διάσταση [...] <sup>57</sup>

This passage is a warning that the meaning of the title for Ritsos is complex, not to be explained in a simple equation. Most proposed definitions include the idea of time,<sup>58</sup> so we will begin from there.

Many of the most memorable lines in the poems have to do with time and forgetfulness, implying almost that memory has primacy over that which is remembered, which is often utterly pointless:

... παλιές εικόνες, παλιούς καιρούς, που χάσανε τη δύναμή  
τους και το χρώμα τους  
και λίγο-λίγο χάσανε το νόημά τους  
κι αργότερα τον πόνο και το βάρος τους  
κι αργότερα τη νοσταλγία τους —

Υπήρξαν; Δεν υπήρξαν; Πότε; Πού; Γιατί;  
Και τι να τα κρατήσεις; Τι να τα κάνεις;  
Τι να τον κάνεις το χρόνο; Να διατηρήσεις τι;

(*Χεμερινή διαύγεια*, Tδ 23)

Κάποτε, θαρρώ  
πως τα πάντα δεν έγιναν παρά για να τα θυμηθώ μια μέρα  
ή πιότερο ίσως για ν' ανακαλύψω την αθάνατη ματαιότητά τους.  
(*Αγαμέμνων*, Tδ 62)

Λίγο-λίγο τα πράγματα χάσαν τη σημασία τους, αδειάσαν·  
άλλωστε  
μήπως είχαν ποτέ τους καμμιά σημασία; — χαλαρωμένα, κούφια·  
εμείς τα γεμίζαμε με άχυρο ή πίτουρο, να πάρουν σχήμα,

<sup>57</sup>[A sense just as when a non-expert is reading about the structure of matter and anti-matter, about the splitting of the atom or the fourth dimension ...] *Ποιήματα Γ'*, 309. A similar impression is made by the geometrical diagram printed on the cover, and Ritsos' own drawing (done on Leros) reducing human faces to cylindrical shapes, used as a frontispiece from the first edition (Makrynikiola, 1993: 86, A 98).

<sup>58</sup>E.g. Prokopaki, 1964: 160–1; Meraklis, 1981: 522.

να πυκνώσουν, να στεριώσουν, να σταθούν, — τα τραπέζια, οι  
καρέκλες,  
τα κρεβάτια που πάνω τους πλαγιάζαμε, τα λόγια ...  
(*Η Ελένη*, Τδ 271)<sup>59</sup>

In other cases the pointlessness is particularly connected with political events: changes of regime come and go without impacting on the memory or making significant differences (*Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού*, Τδ 146; *Χρυσόθεμις*, Τδ 165; *Η Ελένη*, Τδ 281).

The most obvious way in which these poems interact with time is prominent in *Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος* and common to all the other poems. Those who speak the monologues are all more or less dominated by memory, and the time-frames to which they refer are constantly varying between different periods of recollection and the present. Transitions between periods are often made via items remembered or observed in the speaker's immediate environment. Thus at a surface narratological level, the poems of Τδ show an unusual degree of temporal complexity, which works against the normal linearity of time.<sup>60</sup>

But the situation is made still more interesting through the use of myth. We have already examined the function of defamiliarised everyday objects and anachronisms. They collapse the three millennia from the Trojan War to the present day into a frame in which the reader is compelled to slide rapidly backward and forward, and is thus prevented from reading the poem either as a transparent myth or as a parable of only contemporary reference. But this is only one of Ritsos' experiments. Different temporal strategies are used to approach the

<sup>59</sup>[... old pictures, old times, which lost their power and their colour, and gradually lost their meaning, and later their pain and weight, and later their nostalgia — Did they or did they not exist? When? Where? Why? And why keep them? What are you to do with them? What are you to do with time? To preserve what?

Sometimes I think that everything only happened for me to remember it one day, or rather, perhaps, for me to discover its eternal pointlessness.

Gradually things lost their meaning, became empty; besides, did they really ever have any meaning? They were shapeless and hollow. We filled them with straw or chaff, for them to take shape, to become solid, steady, to stand up, — tables, chairs, the beds on which we used to sleep, words ...]

<sup>60</sup>See, e.g., Papageorgiou, 1981: 565–70.

myth itself. *Ορέστης*, *Φιλοκτήτης*, *Αγαμέμνων*, *Αίας* and *Φαίδρα* are set in the same time as the ancient tragedies with which they are connected. *Περσεφόνη* and *Η επιστροφή της Ιφιγένειας* hold an intermediate position, where events are seen from some time later. *Το νεκρό σπίτι*, *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού*, *Ισμήνη*, *Χρυσόθεμις* and *Η Ελένη* view the events of the myth from the old age of their protagonists, adding senility to the factors confusing temporal connection and recollection.

It is worth dwelling a little on the last group. The age of some of the characters is extreme. The nurse in *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού* is “more than 100 years old, perhaps 200”, and the visitor in *Η Ελένη* thinks of the protagonist as aged 100 or 200, comments which, as it were, remythologise them within the demythologised poems. Aranitsis (1980: 117) comments that several of the protagonists are speaking to stay alive, like Scheherazade in the *Arabian Nights*: Elektra in *Κάτω απ' τον ίσκιο του βουνού*, Chrysothemis and Eleni all die of old age during the stage directions at the end of their respective monologues (as do Ajax, Agamemnon and Phaidra by violence in the other group). One result is to increase the tension and emphasis on death, especially, as we have seen, in the poems of the Junta period. Another is to wrap up the myths in layers of temporal reference so complex that the reader is tempted to ignore time altogether and to approach the poems in a different frame which may have some connection with Ritsos' fourth dimension.

More complexity over time arises from the fact that the poems are dramatic monologues, and so the time-frame of performance is also relevant. Most of the monologues are produced by compulsive talkers. Most represent attempts by the speakers to escape from loneliness, and cover a speaking time of at least half an hour. The elements of the poetic discourse are simple, but they are made up into poems of some complexity. They are full of proposals which are thrown into doubt or negated, arguments which prove inadequate, challenging images and repetition of phrase and idea. If spoken or read quickly, they lose comprehension. Equally, in several cases, we may sense impatience, boredom, even contempt on the part of the silent listener in the poem, which may be confirmed in the closing stage directions. Thus to the temporal elements already listed we must add further tension between

the obsessive and contorted delivery of the speaker and the frequent annoyance of the reader's single fictional co-listener.

A last point in the use of time is mentioned by Yatromanolakis (1981: 201) in relation to *Χρονικό*. He notes that the stage directions imply that the poem lasts from midday to late at night one day, and then the next day. This is not the time of performance, which would be much shorter, nor the episodic time of the narrative, which must be longer, since the Treasurer of the "Pythagoras" association leaves Samos and travels. It can only be the time in which Ritsos wrote the poem — adding to the temporal traps for the careful reader.

A major result of the fracturing of time is the setting up of oppositions: myth versus contemporaneity, idealised memory versus grim reality, heroic ideals versus their demythologised results, and many more. Through these oppositions, and in other ways, the reader is led to feel that Ritsos' poetry in the period of *Τέταρτη διάσταση* operates at more levels and incorporates more facets of the issues he discusses than had been the case in the past, making its points more acceptable by the use of dialectic (Bien, 1980: 113–45).

We have examined the change which came over the poet's work in the crucial year of 1956. Schematically speaking: before, all was certain and socialism led directly and automatically to a brighter future; after, there was a new situation which could allow for the errors of a Stalin or a Zachariadis and their official condemnation. Ritsos' post-war poetry, with its unshakeable political and social certainties and frequent direct appeals to history could be described as propaganda by a hostile critic. It would be easy to stigmatise it as two- or at best three-dimensional in ideological terms. The new poetics of *Τέταρτη διάσταση* obviously may claim at least one more dimension than this. Even political poems like *Αποχαιρετισμός* have philosophical qualities uncommon before. The revolutionary hero and his martyrdom are examined philosophically and demythologised, as it were, just before his death, to explore the pain and loss involved at every level in his glorious death. The poet's dialectic takes on the vital element of antithesis.

The narrative voice of the poems had often before been confident and direct, implying first person address by the poet, perhaps in the plural to represent the voice of the people. Now the second and third persons take over, or the use of the first person becomes indirect, as a

discrete speaker is introduced into the field of the narrative (Kaklamanaki, 1975). Later, with the introduction of myth, that speaker is formally removed to a distant past and raised to a different plane. The best commentary on this whole change, used more than once in this paper, is part of Ritsos' own analysis of the poetry of Mayakovsky (*Μελετήματα*, 9–33): he emphasises the directness of Mayakovsky's approach by comparing it to the indirect methods adopted by socialist poets after the denunciation of Stalin and all that implied. It is plain that the anonymous contemporary situation used as a term of comparison has much in common with Ritsos' own. In keeping with these comments, Ritsos named his new work after 1956 with a convenient metaphor, claiming that the dimensions of his writing had increased to four.

\* \* \*

At the most basic level of analysis we have a fairly uniform language and style throughout the collection, and typological conventions to convey its nuances to the reader. Ritsos is famous for his use of a simple, oral level of Greek syntax combined with many abstract nouns, forming a flexible style rising at times to an unexpectedly philosophical level of discourse. This tendency reaches a climax in *Τδ* (Prokopaki, 1981: 316). Words take on new meanings through a number of different tactics, including static association with others and dynamic changes of register within the same phrase.<sup>61</sup>

As we have seen above, the "narrative" is not linear, but moves around from period to period using connections often buried in the psyche and experience of the speaker. The groups of lines between these transitions make fairly short sections from a few lines up to about a page in length, marked off typographically by blank lines. There is variety at the beginning of these passages, some of which start with

<sup>61</sup>Alexandropoulos, 1975: 133–40 describes, from the reader's viewpoint, problems in understanding the extra charge which Ritsos gives to his lexicon. Similar issues motivated two attacks on Ritsos by Nikos Phokas (1982: 66–87), which for all their prejudice and violence identify (and satirise) interesting elements of his style, particularly combinations of the real and the surreal in the same phrase.

short lines printed in the right half of the page, which change the initial rhythm of the section and have influence too on the balance of the following lines. The sections are numerous, disparate, and often seem to concentrate more on the needs of the moment than the interests of coalescence into a unitary poem.

A few particular objects, animals, persons and events are described at unusual length or appear more than once in a poem.<sup>62</sup> Their importance can be marked in this way more economically in Tδ than in a more conventional narrative framework. In the poetics of Tδ they stand out prominently from the constant succession of vignettes not so marked: they should usually be allowed to play a significant role in interpretation.

Problems in the relation between one section and the next include uncertainty whether a section has a literal or a figurative connection with what precedes, whether a general comment is giving way to a more particular statement — or vice versa — or whether the new section is central to the development of the poem or a peripheral episode, perhaps an illustration attached to a previous passage before the main development continues. The status of such links is regularly left unexplained in Ritsos' text, in what is probably a deliberate characteristic of his poetics.<sup>63</sup>

A frequent feature of Tδ is repetition from one line to the next or over a group of lines, often leading to passages of two or more lines beginning with the same word or syntactical pattern. The impression given is of rhetorical structure designed to emphasise something in the lines concerned, though it is sometimes unclear where the emphasis lies. This practice also reinforces the metrical shape of the passage by

<sup>62</sup>E.g. the bear in Η σονάτα (Papageorgiou, 1981: 578–80) or the cow in Οπέστης (Bien, 1980: 147–56).

<sup>63</sup>The constant variation suggests Brechtian defamiliarisation, as mentioned more than once in this paper. "The play itself, far from forming an organic unity which carries an audience hypnotically through from beginning to end, is formally uneven, interrupted, discontinuous, juxtaposing its scenes in ways which disrupt conventional expectations and force the audience into critical speculation on the dialectical relations between the episodes" (Eagleton, 1989: 65–6, on the Epic Theatre). Such juxtaposing of opposites in Brechtian terms is often called *montage*.

stressing the position of the ends of the lines. The line-ends seem to be regulated with care: in some areas of the text the lines are systematically end-stopped, while in others an open pattern is left, with coincidence of sense-end and line-end avoided. The same may be said of line length. There are some passages of predominantly long lines (running over to a second typographical line), while elsewhere all lines are substantially shorter than the width of the page. I have come to no general conclusions about the effects of these variations, either at the level of authorial intention or of readerly response.

Finally it must be pointed out that the disjointed links between sections with different chronological status are mirrored on a smaller scale within many lines. Syntax is often very fragmented, with some lines containing more than one dash or question mark, showing a discourse based on rapid thought under some pressure. The many short questions, in particular, are usually rhetorical rather than specific to the interlocutor, and can sometimes stop the reader and cause a diversion from the main line of development of a scene. These tactics have reminded critics of Cavafy.<sup>64</sup> Another small-scale strategy is the listing in a line of several words of similar meaning sharing the same syntactical function, suggesting another rhetorical pattern. At first this seems merely repetitive and promises easier understanding. But in some cases, at least, interpretation is to be based on small gradations of meaning in the list of words, and so the apparent ease of understanding is illusory (Leivaditis, 1975: 245–6).

The effect of all this is a texture of narrative, style and language made up of apparently simple elements, but as a whole often complex and demanding on the reader. If one adds the existence of modernist images, not as all-pervasive as in some previous Ritsos collections but still fairly numerous, then it becomes difficult at a first reading to respond creatively and immediately to all the problems set and the stimuli given. Indeed the reader of Tδ becomes used to a level of

<sup>64</sup>Veloudis, 1984: 127–30. Cavafy too used myth, and later history, in ways which show both similarities and differences to Ritsos. Close study of Cavafy by Ritsos is proven by the writing and publication in 1963 of the collection *Twelve Poems for Cavafy* (Ποιήματα Θ', 179–86).

incomprehension, or comprehension of one layer only, of a text which is obviously multilayered, which is frustrating, granted the apparent simplicity of the means of expression, and adds some creative tension to the literary experience.

\* \* \*

Ritsos thus began publishing post-Stalinist literature in 1956, within months of the denunciation of Stalin. By 1958 this new production was named “Τέταρτη Διάσταση”. After beginning with several different literary frameworks, he soon came to rely on monologues addressed to an audience of one, with opening and closing stage directions, as in *Η σονάτα του σεληνόφωτος*, the first and most famous example. However, some early poems survive in Τδ from before the establishment of this regular form. We have seen how the collection *Τέταρτη Διάσταση* became a book — by excluding other categories and concentrating on the characteristic monologue. It uses an unusually challenging form of Ritsos’ poetic discourse.

Up to 1967 the poems of Τδ may be said to address specific subjects, like the social responsibility of art and the conflict between the need for isolation and contemplation and the duty of participation. Poems completed after 1967 are much harder to label in this way. Some tension arises between their classical frameworks and the more contemporary material which fills those frameworks, itself plumbing deeper psychological levels than before and less easy to interpret. The poems turn back on themselves.

A successful axis of research investigated the use of myth and associated techniques like anachronism. Ritsos starts with myth at a superficial level, playfully denying the fact in ways which seem to betray unease and disturb the reception of his work through those myths. Later, he uses myth more directly to work out the subjects of his poems, and finally gives structural primacy to the mythical story over his contemporary concerns, in ways which (together with other factors) lead to the impasse of the Junta poems. There introspection rules and communication of ideas to his readers seems blocked, so that the reader’s thoughts will probably turn towards the emotional pressures which led to the blockage — defensiveness, pain and despondency —

which seem to have obvious roots in the contemporary historical situation.

Finally, in 1970, Ritsos began to publish again and to emerge from the gloom of the past three years. In 1972, he decided at last to bring out Τδ. He had a variety of poems at his disposal, from the rather positive pre-mythical poems of the late ’50s through all the levels of his engagement with myth up to the pessimistic texts he had just completed. He chose *Το παράθυρο* and *Όταν έρχεται ο Ξένος* to be the first and the last in the book, presumably deciding to mark it with the expansive spirit of 1958–9, which must have had some similarity to the experience of 1972. Otherwise, he placed non-mythical before mythical poems. In the mythical category, he began with the six poems on the House of Atreus, thus disturbing the chronological order of writing, and hiding (or at least not foregrounding) the historical development of his poetics. The last act was the addition of *Φαίδρα*, placed second to last so as not to disturb the positive conclusion, and written, perhaps, to update the concerns of *Η σονάτα* to include the historical circumstances and mythical framework of the later poems of the collection.

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*Ritsos' name is not used in references to his poetry. Reference is to the collected volumes: in the list below, the first date in brackets is that of the volume's first edition, the second date and superscript number refer to the date and edition (reprint) number of the text used. For details of first publication in pamphlet form of individual works also found in these collected volumes, see the list on pp. 65–7 above.*

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## ERRATUM

*Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* 1, 1993

In the process of editing the text of D.H. Close, "Schism in Greek society under Axis occupation: an interpretation", the word "anti-Venizelist" was inadvertently extracted from several places; it needs to be re-inserted in:

p. 2, line 5; p. 3, para. 3, lines 9 and 18; p. 7, para. 3, lines 4 and 11; p. 19, para. 3, line 2.