Debating with the Eumenides

Aspects of the Reception of Greek Tragedy in Modern Greece

Edited by Vayos Liapis, Maria Pavlou and Antonis K. Petrides

dicite, Pierides: non omnia possumus omnes

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contributors vii

Acknowledgements xii

Introduction 1
Antonis K. Petrides

Chapter One 9
Can Transmission and Transformation be Reconciled?
Lorna Hardwick

Chapter Two 26
George Seferis and Euripides' *Bacchae*
Michael Paschalis

Chapter Three 39
Myth, the Mask and the "Masquerade" of Femininity:
Performing Gender in Yannis Ritsos' "Ismene"
Demetra Demetriou

Chapter Four 63
The Brightness of Philoctetes' Weapons in Yannis Ritsos' "Philoctetes"
Maria Pavlou

Chapter Five 102
Dialogising Aeschylus in the Poetry of Kyriakos Charalambides
Antonis K. Petrides

Chapter Six 122
Memories of Heroines in Memories of Spectators: Mythic, Dramatic
and Theatrical Time from the Ancient Drama to the Modern Greek
Theatre
Theodore Grammatas and Maria Dimaki-Zora

Chapter Seven 132
How to Do (in) Kings with Words: Radically Rewritting the Myth
of the Atreids in Athens, 1964
Gonda Van Steen

Chapter Eight 169
Very Tragical Mirth: Myth and the Tragic in Pavlos Matessis'
Towards Eleusis
Ioannis Konstantakos

Chapter Nine 202
Cassandra and the Centaur: Greek (Tragic) Myth in Marios Pontikas'
Play *Neighing*
Vayos Liapis

Bibliography 218

General Index 244

CHAPTER THREE

MYTH, THE MASK, AND THE "MASQUERADE" OF FEMININITY: PERFORMING GENDER IN YANNIS RITSOS' "ISMENE"

DEMETRA DEMETRIOU

All the world's stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
William Shakespeare

Antigone, *through clenched teeth*. A girl, yes. Haven't I cried enough for being a girl?
Jean Anouilh

Half victims, half accomplices, like everyone else.[1]
Jean-Paul Sartre

In 1972, shortly after preventive censorship was lifted by the Colonels' ruling junta in Greece, Yannis Ritsos' "Ismene" was published in a collection under the title *The Fourth Dimension*, which included sixteen dramatic monologues at the time, though it took its final form in 1978 with the addition of "Phaedra". Ritsos' recourse to myth in twelve of these poems shows how "literature in the second degree"[2] may become, under

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* My warmest thanks go to Maria Margaroni for inspiring discussions that improved the argument. I am also grateful to the editors of this volume, Vayos Liapis, Maria Pavlou, and Antonis K. Petrides for insightful comments and valuable bibliographic suggestions. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

[1] This is one of the two epigraphs that Simone de Beauvoir adds characteristically to the second volume of *The Second Sex*, first published in 1949, a line from Sartre's 1948 play *Dirty Hands*.

[2] Cf. Genette (1997).

conditions of totalitarianism, the medium of a "second route", which enables communist writers like him to invite allegorical interpretations of their poetry, especially within the rigid framework of the Colonels' rule. However, the writing of "Ismene", completed in two distinct phases, the first between September-December 1966 (that is prior to the Colonels' coup), and the second in December 1971, following the poet's release after three years of detention and house confinement, invites a holistic appreciation of the context which informs *The Fourth Dimension.* The collection, which comprises poems written from the mid-1950s to the late 1970s, epitomises the evolution of Ritsos' poetic and political vision in the years that follow Stalin's death, especially after the violent reaffirmation of Soviet authority in Eastern Europe in the 1950s and late 1960s.[3] The fact that Andreas Karantonis, one of Ritsos' more severe bourgeois critics, welcomes "The Moonlight Sonata"—chronologically the first of the poems eventually included in *The Fourth Dimension*—"in a spirit of triumph"[4] also points in this direction, which makes myth—or the "utmost avowal under the mask of the other"[5]—both a coded protest and a highly self-critical gesture.

Although the character of Ismene appears in a number of extant Greek tragedies related to the Theban Cycle, the "emergence"[6] of mythical

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[3] Ritsos' own 1963 essay "On Mayakovsky" ("Περί Μαγιακόβσκη") [Ritsos (1974) 9-33] might be seen as direct proof of this significant turn; in it, he reflects upon and re-evaluates his earlier aesthetic and ideological engagements. In this respect, see also the poet's reflections in Ritsos (1981 and 1991b). Furthermore, the crisis caused in the international communist movement by the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia, as well as its significant repercussions over the Greek Communist Party, are crystallised in a number of poems of the collection *Πέτρες. Επαναλήψεις. Κιγκλίδωμα* [*Stones. Repetitions. Railing*] (1972), where the poet's allusive—yet poignant—criticism is directed at the party's mechanisms and ideological sterility. A number of critics have pointed out that changes in style and inspiration during that period emerge out of the turbulence within the international communist movement; see, for example, Prokopaki (1981) 37-44; Veloudis (1984) 26-30; Prevelakis (1992[3]) 268-269; Demetriou (2013).

[4] Vitti (2006) 170.

[5] Ritsos (1991b) 95. See also Ritsos (1989) in one of his latest interviews: "I do not work with mythological themes anymore. I used to have recourse to them while in exile, as a disguise—someone else poses as yourself—to make some things heard, but without provoking the persecution of the editor, the poet, or even the reader".

[6] With regard to myth criticism, Brunel [(1992) 72-86] formulates the three following principles: "emergence" (which refers to the examination of mythical occurrences in a text), "flexibility" (which enables the adaptability of a given myth), and "irradiation" (which refers to the power of myth to "radiate" and signify).

occurrences in Ritsos directly points to Sophocles' *Antigone* as his main intertext. Interestingly, the play figures among Ritsos' early translations of ancient drama,[7] and a stage production of this translation was presented in July 1965 at the Lycabettus Theatre, featuring renowned Greek actress Anna Synodinou in the role of Antigone—a performance which met, however, with sharp criticism by theatre critic Alkis Thrylos.[8] Apparently informed by this translating experience, Ritsos embraces, in "Ismene", many aspects of Sophocles' play as regards the story, but brings entirely new elements into the plot, a transformation which defines the identity of his text and deploys its potential meanings. This modernisation consists first and foremost in the transposition of the play into a different genre, a fusion of prose, free verse, and drama, peculiar to *The Fourth Dimension*, as well as in its significant contraction in one act, framed by a prologue and an epilogue by way of stage directions. The story is entirely related from the point of view of an aged Ismene, who addresses her monologue to the mute character of a young officer. The monologue is taken up mainly by Ismene's recollection of a distant, undefinable past, which, along with a vague setting, enables the myth to move freely between past and present, fiction and reality, individual experience and universality. However, when it comes to "literary myth",[9] this transhistorical dimension is resolutely permeated by historicity, which in Ritsos reclaims its rights through various anachronisms, thereby grounding the story in the *hic et nunc*.

One might have thought that Ritsos, following the logic of his militant Marxist politics, would have opted for the figure of Antigone, who has been forged, especially by twentieth-century dramatists, as an iconic figure of resistance.[10] Like Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht,[11] he could have

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[7] Veloudis (1984) 51.

[8] See Thrylos (1981). I am grateful to Maria Pavlou for drawing this critique to my attention.

[9] With regard to "literary myth", I draw particularly on the theoretical and methodological concerns brought to light by Albouy (1969); Brunel (2003); and Chauvin, Siganos, and Walter (2005).

[10] For the phenomenal reception of *Antigone* in Western European thought and literature, see Fraisse (1974); Steiner (1984); Duroux and Urdician (2010); Chanter and Kirkland (2014). On the dynamics of the Antigone story in the world theatre, see Mee and Foley (2011). For feminist appropriations of *Antigone*, see Söderbäck (2010). For a critical re-reading of the reception history of *Antigone*—in philosophy, political theory, gender/queer theory, and cultural politics, see Honig (2013).

[11] Although Brecht's Antigone, as portrayed in *Antigone Modell 1948*, fails to act on time to prevent the defeat of her people, she remains undeniably, as Bernard

transformed Antigone into a revolutionary myth, or depict her as one of socialism's "positive hero(-in)es", as he did in earlier collections with numerous female figures, such as the heroic mother of the *Epitaphios*, who is modelled on Maxim Gorky's *The Mother*,[12] or even his emblematic *Lady of the Vineyards*, at times identified with Virgin Mary, at others with Dionysios Solomos' "Glory" or with Laskarina Bouboulina, a major female protagonist of the Greek War of Independence in the early 19th century. However, Ritsos opts for Ismene—or the anti-hero—, whose perspective has been silenced both by the tragic tradition and by its later reception. This is a significant choice, for Ritsos further shifts his chief thematic focus on the sisters' rivalry rather than on the confrontation between Antigone and Creon that lies at the heart of the tragic action and has been placed at the centre of both scholarly interpretations and rewritings of *Antigone*. Hence, it is gender which provides the source of dramatic conflict in Ritsos. Gender, however, is no longer inscribed in some kind of Hegelian masculinity/ femininity dialectic,[13] but is rather articulated around two different ethical stances, which correspond to two radically opposed variations of "womanliness". Significantly, it is on another Sophoclean play, namely *Electra*, that Ritsos grounds his own Electra-Chrysothemis confrontation in his monologue "Chrysothemis" (1972), where the conflict between the sisters appears to revolve around similar—yet not identical—concerns.

Engaging postmodern[14] feminist thought enables us to explore how Ritsos exposes the circumstances of the production of (female) subjectivity

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Knox observes, "the image of what Brecht longed to see—the rising of the German people against Hitler, a resistance that in fact never came to birth" [(1984) 36].

[12] Gorky's *Mother* has served as a model for a number of communist writers in general and for Ritsos in particular. For a discussion of Ritsos' indebtedness to Gorky, see Veloudis (1977) 4; and Demetriou (2013) 406-413.

[13] In his reading of *Antigone* as a conflict between the spheres of divine and human law, Hegel (1977) comes to naturalise this opposition as a dialectic between the feminine and the masculine element: whereas the former is associated with nature, the *oikos*, contingency, and individual self-consciousness, the latter is aligned with culture, the *polis*, freedom, and universal self-consciousness. Hegel's interpretation of the play has been highly influential among scholarship, but is vividly contested by contemporary feminist thought. A number of essays on this topic appear in Söderbäck (2010), including Luce Irigaray's foremost "The Eternal Irony of the Community" (ch. 5), first published in Irigaray (1985a).

[14] Although postmodern thought as an all-encompassing theoretical approach (quite often conflated with poststructuralism) is increasingly being contested, we may identify some points of resonance between a number of diverse thinkers who articulated, along with Jacques Derrida, Jacques Lacan, and Michel Foucault, a

within the political rationalities of both the Greek military junta and Soviet totalitarianism. In this paper, I will seek to build on insights by Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and their respective intellectual backgrounds, especially since both thinkers attribute a certain theatricality to (gender) identity construction by raising significant issues that relate to personal agency. In doing so, they both explore, albeit from different theoretical standpoints, the possibilities of social and subjective transformation. I intend to show that their theories can illuminate my discussion of "Ismene", for Ritsos' very recourse both to the mythical persona and the genre of dramatic monologue invites some kind of enactment, which foregrounds performative strategies, along with Brechtian techniques, as an essential component of the text.

The way the status of the *dramatis personae* is transformed on the level of signification is thus placed at the centre of the argument: rather than rehearse the celebrated Antigone – Creon debate, at the heart of Sophocles' *Antigone*, Ritsos chooses to focus on a confrontation that is rather peripheral to Sophocles' play, namely the encounter between Ismene and Antigone. Both in Ritsos and Sophocles the sisters' rivalry foregrounds not a familial, but rather a political issue, which exposes an enduring tension between the domestic and the public spheres with regard to a woman's position in a male-dominated world. In fact, Antigone, in wishing to give burial rites to her brother Polynices against Creon's edict, is not just a transgressor of civil law, but also of the behavioural patterns of her sex. Sophocles' Creon stresses, throughout the play, the importance of maintaining his sexual status rather than his identity as a ruler (*Ant.* 679-680):

> κρεῖσσον γάρ, εἴπερ δεῖ, πρὸς ἀνδρὸς ἐκπεσεῖν,
> κοὐκ ἂν γυναικῶν ἥσσονες καλοίμεθ' ἄν.[15]
>
> Better to fall from power, if need be, at the hands of a man,
> and thus nobody would call us inferior to women.

At the same time, Sophocles' Ismene, already at the opening scene of the play, reasserts the civic (*qua* male) structures of authority. In attempting to

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vivid critique of modernity and Enlightenment's ideals. Among a number of feminist thinkers, Judith Butler (1992) recognises (albeit mistrustfully) a certain usefulness of both "postmodernism" and "poststructuralism" for feminist political agendas, as long as these terms serve to contest normative frameworks and problematise the grounds of foundationalist positions.

[15] I quote *Antigone* from Lloyd-Jones (1994), whose line-numbering I adopt.

dissuade her sister from committing the deed, she comes to rationalise (and naturalise) her own submissive behaviour and consequent exclusion from political and community life (*Ant.* 61-64):

> ἀλλ' ἐννοεῖν χρὴ τοῦτο μὲν γυναῖχ' ὅτι
> ἔφυμεν, ὡς πρὸς ἄνδρας οὐ μαχουμένα·
> ἔπειτα δ' οὕνεκ' ἀρχόμεσθ' ἐκ κρεισσόνων,
> καὶ ταῦτ' ἀκούειν κἄτι τῶνδ' ἀλγίονα.
>
> But you must understand, first, that we were born women,
> not made, by nature, to contend with men;
> then too, that we are ruled by those who are stronger,
> so we must obey in this, and things still worse.

Borrowing on this role-bound Sophoclean type, Ritsos presents an equally passive and obeying Ismene, caught up in a feminine ideal of beauty, as opposed to her sister, who refuses to fall mimetically into the same pattern. This portrayal of the two sisters' attitudes to femininity is highly reminiscent of Jean Anouilh's version of *Antigone*, which premiered in Nazi-occupied Paris in 1944 and was first brought to the Greek stage by the Theatro Technēs of Karolos Koun in 1947. Ritsos, who was most probably familiar with the original French version of the play, seems to enter, to a certain extent, into a dialogue with Anouilh, but further develops an approach which is hardly flattering with respect to pre-given ideals of femininity. In fact, his Ismene only affirms her ostensible "essential" self through a process of abjection[16] and exclusion of all that Antigone's (male) values represent. The abject figuring of Antigone marks out, precisely, Ismene's attempt to carve the divide out of which her feminine ego will be able to emerge:

> Ὢ, ἡ ἀδελφή μου ρύθμιζε τὰ πάντα μ' ἕνα πρέπει ἢ δὲν πρέπει,
> […]
> Πολὺ τὴ λυπόμουν. Παρὰ λίγο νὰ βλάψει καὶ μένα.

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[16] In *Powers of Horror*, psychoanalytic feminist Julia Kristeva theorises "abjection" as the "dark revol[t] of being" [(1982) 1], directed against everything that appears to threaten the subject's individuation and necessary separation from the (m)Other. Rather than drawing a definite borderline or mark out a cut, the abject shows how identity remains constantly threatened by a breakdown of meaning, order, and cohesion. Although a precondition to subjectification, abjection also points to its limits, exposing the porous boundaries of the self, as well as the violent exclusionary processes of ego-formation within specific socio-historical locations.

[…]
Ἡ ἀδελφή μου θαρρεῖς καὶ ντρεπόταν ποὺ εἶταν γυναίκα. Ἴσως αὐτὸ
νἆταν ἡ δυστυχία της. Κ' ἴσως γι' αὐτὸ νὰ πέθανε.[17]

Oh, my sister settled all questions with *It's either right or it isn't*
[…]
I felt so sorry for her. She almost hurt me too.
[...]
My sister, you see, was also ashamed of being a woman. Maybe that
was her real misfortune. And perhaps that was why she died.[18]

As her monologue unfolds, Ismene finds her sister guilty of *hubris* for having renounced her desire and sacrificed her wedding with Haemon in the name of "her own longing for heroism" and "a cheap immortality".[19] In invoking Antigone's lament on her way to her final habitat, where she was to be buried alive, Ismene recalls emphatically the sole Sophoclean passage where her sister's moral integrity appears to collapse before mortality:

Κ' ἐκεῖνο της τὸ "ἄκλαυτος, ἄφιλος",
ἰδίως ἐκεῖνο τὸ "ἀνυμέναιος" εἶταν ἡ μόνη της ὁμολογία,
ἡ πρώτη ὡραία ταπεινοσύνη της, ἡ μόνη θηλυκή της γενναιότητα,
[…] ποὺ ἔτσι σὰ νὰ δικαίωσε κάπως
τὴν πικραμένη ὑπεροψία της. Αὐτὸ τὴ συγχώρεσε στὰ μάτια μου.[20]

And those words of hers, "unwept,
unbefriended",
above all, that "unwedded", were her only admission,
her first fine humble gesture, her sole act of feminine daring,
[…] some sort of vindication
for her embittered arrogance. In my eyes, that excused her.[21]

The otherwise allusive intertextual relation between Ritsos and Sophocles becomes here effective, for Ismene quotes precisely those words which in Sophocles' version shake Antigone's pride as she is being

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[17] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 210-212. English translations of "Ismene" are those of Peter Green and Beverly Bardsley [Ritsos (1993)]. For short quotations, I cite only the English translation. I have modified Green and Bardsley's translation whenever I thought it was necessary.
[18] Ritsos (1993) 196-198; translation modified.
[19] Ritsos (1993) 196.
[20] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 213.
[21] Ritsos (1993) 198-199.

led off to her tomb (cf. *Ant*. 876-878: ἄκλαυτος, ἄφιλος, ἀνυμέναι- | ος <ἁ> ταλαίφρων ἄγομαι | τὰν ἑτοίμαν ὁδόν).[22] However, while Antigone's significant change of tone in Sophocles seems to highlight her profound humanity, Ritsos' Ismene places greater emphasis on her sister's anguish, which betrays, to her eyes, a "feminine" (*qua* resigned) bravery.[23]

In light of Irigaray's feminist perspective, the complex unconscious processes, as well as power and symbolic workings, through which Ismene—be it in Sophocles, Ritsos, or Anouilh—comes to adopt a phallic position become plainly evident. Indebted to Derrida's deconstructive project, Foucault's discursively constructed subjectivity, and Lacan's psychoanalytic perspective, Irigaray (1985a, 1985b) denounces the patriarchal structures which sustain *Logos*, having excluded women from language and imported them into a monosexual economy of desire and representation. Interestingly, Irigaray exploits the theatre metaphor in order to interrogate the ways in which the "scenography" of philosophical discourse renders this "systematicity" possible.[24] She thus sets out to query *logos* and its scenic apparatus, that is,

> the architectonics of its theatre, its framing in space-time, its geometric organization, its props, its actors, their respective positions, their dialogues, indeed their tragic relations, without overlooking the *mirror*, most often hidden, that allows the logos, the subject, to reduplicate itself.[25]

Entrapped within this set of discursive arrangements, a woman has no choice, Irigaray argues, but to "enter into the masquerade of femininity",[26] that is in a value system where she remains the object rather than the subject of language and desire. The concept of "masquerade", first introduced in psychoanalytic discourse by Joan Rivière's influential essay

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[22] "Unwept, unbefriended, unwedded, I hapless one am led, along the road prepared for me".

[23] It should be noted, however, that unlike his character (Ismene), Ritsos seems to fully concur with Sophocles—as well as with Anouilh—in presenting a humanised Antigone who, despite her bold statements and "heroic temper" [cf. Knox (1964)], proves to succumb—even for a moment—to her passion for life: "But one noontime in summer, when the whole house was asleep | [...] I saw her | by the dining room pantry, a bowl of syrup in her apron, | wolfing down huge spoonfuls of bread pudding. I turned and fled. | [...] | She too could be hungry (and knew it). Perhaps she even felt love. What | she couldn't bear | was to yield to her own desires" [Ritsos (1993) 198].

[24] Irigaray (1985b) 74-75.

[25] Irigaray (1985b) 75.

[26] Irigaray (1985b) 34.

"Womanliness as a Masquerade" (1929), then taken up by Lacan in his seminal "The Signification of the Phallus" (1977), foregrounds the constructed nature of femininity which comes to be worn as a mask or "essence". Both Rivière and—most notably—Lacan appear to inform Irigaray's conflation of "masquerade" and "femininity", although her concept of the mask implies that there lies an other, genuine feminine self behind the artifice that has to renounce an essential part of her *jouissance* in her attempt to "be the phallus"[27] or "the living mirror"[28] of the male subject. Nonetheless, Irigaray recognises a revolutionary potential in the masquerade, inasmuch as "a playful repetition"[29] may disrupt the staging conventions and recuperate "the feminine"[30] in language. She writes:

> One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. [...] To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself [...] to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible", by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible.[31]

However ludic such a (re)enactment might seem, to take on the masquerade is not necessarily a joyful "play", for much pain may be concealed, as Ismene's words suggest, insofar as femininity becomes a woman's burial mask:

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[27] Cf. Lacan's distinction between "having" and "being" the phallus, which designate two modes of identification that correspond to male and female psychosexual development respectively [Lacan (1977) 281-291]. In her attempt to "be the phallus", Lacan contends, "a woman will reject an essential part of femininity, namely, all her attributes in the masquerade" (*ibid.* 290).

[28] Irigaray (1985b) 207.

[29] Irigaray (1985b) 76.

[30] As indicated by the title of her book *Speculum of the Other Woman*, Irigaray (1985a) intends to bring back to language a pregiven femininity which has been repressed within the structures of patriarchal thought. However, this woman will no longer be Beauvoir's inferior "other" (as merely the "other of the same") but rather, as Margaret Whitford puts it in her introduction to *The Irigaray Reader*, "a self-defined woman [...], whose otherness and difference would be given social and symbolic representation" [(1991) 24-25].

[31] Irigaray (1985b) 76.

Ποτέ της
δὲν εἶταν ἡ ἀδελφή μου τόσο ὡραία, ὅσο νεκρή· ἐγὼ μόνη μου
τῆς ἔβαψα ἔντονα τὰ μάγουλα [...]
τῆς ἔβαψα τὰ χείλη βυσσινιά, καὶ τὰ μάτια κατάμαυρα, τεράστια
μὲ καμένο φελλὸ (ποτέ της δὲ βαφόταν). Τῆς φόρεσα
πενταπλᾶ περιδέραια νὰ κρύψω τὸ σημάδι τοῦ λαιμοῦ της,
τα σκουλαρίκια ἐκεῖνα μὲ τοὺς δυὸ γυμνοὺς ἐρωτιδεῖς, δαχτυλίδια,
βραχιόλια,
καὶ μιὰ φαρδειά, χρυσή πόρπη στὴ ζώνη της. Ἔτσι, βαμμένη, στολισμένη,
εἶχε ἀποχτήσει μιὰ παράξενη ὁμοιότητα μ' ἐμένα.
"Πῶς μοιάζει τῆς Ἰσμήνης", εἶπε σιγὰ ἕνα κορίτσι. Τώρα
εἶχε παραιτηθεῖ ἀπ' τὶς τρομερές της ἀποφάσεις, ἀπ' τοὺς ἠθικοὺς κανόνες,
ἀπ' ὅλες τὶς ἀνόητες ἀντρικὲς φιλοδοξίες καὶ ἰδεοληψίες. Πεθαμένη,
εἶχε γίνει ἐπιτέλους γυναίκα.[32]

Never, never
had my sister looked so lovely as when she was dead. All by myself
I made up her cheeks, heavily [...]
painted her lips bright crimson, made her eyes look deep black, huge,
with black burnt cork (she never made up herself). I hung
five rows of necklaces on her to hide the scars round her throat,
plus those earrings with two naked lovers, rings and bracelets,
and a broad gold buckle for her belt. Made up and adorned this way
she'd acquired a curious resemblance to me.
"How like Ismene she is", a girl whispered. Now
she'd renounced her frightful decisions, her moral principles,
all those stupid male goals and obsessions. By dying
she'd at last become a woman.[33]

By representing gender as a social practice rather than the causal effect of anatomical sex, Ritsos would appear to echo Simone de Beauvoir's famous assertion "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, woman",[34] which laid the groundwork for constructionist perspectives of gender identity. Across the Atlantic, Judith Butler departs precisely from Beauvoir's phenomenological account to ground her own understanding of the natural body as a product of acculturation. Moving beyond the sex/gender distinction, Butler's reading of Beauvoir comes to support her major thesis that sex has been "gender all along".[35] Like Irigaray, albeit from an anti-

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[32] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 213.
[33] Ritsos (1993) 199.
[34] Beauvoir (2011) 293.
[35] Butler (1999[2]) 12; (1986) 46. It should be noted, however, that by identifying "woman" with "gender", as feminist critic Toril Moi [(1999) 59-79] rightly points

essentialist perspective, Butler explores the relation between power, language, and the body, and presents gender as a theatrical event, as constituted through a series of performative acts. In her view, the body literally dramatises its available historical conventions through a process of "stylized repetition",[36] which produces the illusionary effect of an internal gender core. She primarily relies on John Austin and John Searle's speech-act theory to foreground the social, intersubjective, and ultimately *dramatic* dimension of language and its role in the constitution of identity.[37] In light of this approach, Ismene's last utterance in the quotation above is not merely a statement, but a founding act, whose symbolic power initiates a (rather violent) process of "womanisation" that takes place before (and is to be approved by) the social audience attending the ritual. Furthermore, femininity in "Ismene" appears to be some kind of vestimentary code under the guise of a naturalised law, or as Roland Barthes puts it with regard to fashion, "a supercode which words impose on the real garment".[38] However, Ismene's sign system produces neither garments, nor fashion trends, but "women"; a set of identical "Others", whose inglorious "Mythologies"[39]—as Barthes would have it—are made to serve the interests of domination.

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out, Butler ultimately disregards Beauvoir's understanding of the *sexed* body as a situation. As Beauvoir suggests, and Moi further elucidates, whilst biological facts cannot ground any values or hierarchies, they still form part of a woman's situation, and thus remain fundamental to the "lived experience" of the female human being.

[36] Butler (1988) 519.

[37] In *How to Do Things with Words*, philosopher of language J. L. Austin (1962) distinguishes between "constative" and "performative" utterances: whilst the first are merely descriptive, the second have a performative function in communication, by literally bringing about the reality that they name. For a fuller discussion of Butler's reliance on Austin's lectures in linguistics, see Salih (2002) 88-92, 100-103. John Searle's (1969) approach in *Speech Acts* further develops the performative function of language communication and remains a reference point in Butler's (1988) essay "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution".

[38] Barthes (1990) 9.

[39] Cf. Barthes's ideological analysis of myth in his *Mythologies*, where he exposes the way in which the petit-bourgeois popular myths "suggest and mimic a universal order which has fixated once and for all the hierarchy of possessions" [Barthes (1972) 156)]. In the same vein, his cultural analysis of fashion as a system of signs [Barthes (1990)] resembles very much the way in which these modern mythologies come to institute culture as nature, and has much in common with the Beauvoirian "myths of Woman", referring to stereotypical images of femininity, as manufactured by various collective representations within patriarchy [Beauvoir (2011) 161-284].

Nevertheless, Butler keeps emphasising that the body is not a mere object or medium upon which such a semiology operates; rather, the social agent participates in this en-gendering process as someone who is simultaneously acting and being acted upon. In exploring, then, the limits of personal agency, Butler contests Beauvoir's "voluntaristic account of gender",[40] which seems to postulate that identities can be chosen by some kind of transcendental *cogito* that remains ontologically distant from language and culture. In the context of the problematic of essence and performativity, Butler[41] revisits a wide range of psychoanalytic and feminist literature related to the notion of "masquerade" (including Rivière, Lacan, and Irigaray) to raise a crucial question: Who is the "one" that lies beneath the mask? Who is truly the "doer" behind the deed? In rejecting an "expressive model"[42] of gender, Butler contests Irigaray's sexual ontology and insists on an understanding of the masquerade as the very *means* by which genuine femininity is constituted, "an appearing", says Butler, "that makes itself convincing as a 'being'".[43]

However, in her reading of Beauvoir's concept of "becoming"—through the lens of Sartre's pre-reflective doctrine—Butler recognises eventual spaces of agency and innovation.[44] Indeed, to "become" a woman, both for Butler and Beauvoir, is based on an understanding of the body as both "construct" and "freedom", "facticity" and "project", a "scene of culturally sedimented meanings"[45] and a field of possibilities. This kind of choice, taken up in its spontaneity, opens up the subject to multiple resignifications and enables one to see the self—to mix Foucaultian and Kristevan phraseology—as an *artwork-in-process*.[46] For Butler then, the

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[40] Butler (1986) 36.
[41] See Butler (1999^2) 55-73.
[42] The term refers to an ostensible gendered essence and interiority as "expressed", shown, and produced through the body, which implies that the gendered self precedes the very acts "by which [gender] is dramatised and known" [Butler (1988) 528].
[43] Butler (1999^2) 60.
[44] See Butler (1986) 40, 45-48.
[45] Butler (1986) 48.
[46] The making of the self as a work of art remains a focal point in Foucault's ethical-aesthetic approach of subjectivity. In his late work on sexuality he refers in particular to an "aesthetics of existence", which implies a number of strategies/practices (or "techniques of the self"), by which individuals "not only set themselves rules of conduct, but also seek to transform themselves, to change themselves in their singular being, and to make their life into an *oeuvre* that carries certain aesthetic values and meets certain stylistic criteria" [Foucault (1987) 10-11]. In a similar vein, Kristeva's (1998) psychoanalytic/semiotic approach of a

"Other woman"[47] is not one to be unveiled as Irigaray suggests, but rather, one to be *invented*. In the very character of gender as performative, and thus contingent, resides the possibility of enacting the self differently.[48]

In exploring precisely the potential of subversive performatives, Butler offers a discussion of drag and cross-dressing as ultimately theatrical, mimetic, and parodic, in that they expose the imitative structure of gender as a prototype that lacks originality.[49] Hence, potentiality is to be traced in "failure",[50] for the signs of gender may be re-cited, re-iterated, or brought into different contexts, in ways that can be, as Butler playfully puts it, "radically incredible".[51] Her fine remarks constitute an ideal locus for the exploration of Ritsos' staging of cross-dressing, which significantly "troubles" gender and plays around the boundaries of sexual difference:

> Μιὰ νύχτα, παίζοντας, ἀγόρια καὶ κορίτσια, πάνω στὸ χορό, κάποιος
> εἶχε τὴν ἔμπνευση ν' ἀλλάξουμε ρούχα—νὰ φορέσουν τ' ἀγόρια γυναικεῖα
> κ' ἐμεῖς ἀντρικά. Κ' εἴτανε μιὰ παράξενη πληρότητα, μιὰ ἀδέξια ἐλευθερία
> μέσα σ' αὐτὴ τὴν ἀλλαγή,—σὰν ξένοι στὸν ἑαυτό μας καὶ ταυτόχρονα
> σωστοὶ καὶ εἰλικρινεῖς. Μονάχα ἡ ἀδελφή μου
> ἔμεινε μὲ τὰ μαῦρα ροῦχα της, στὴ γωνιά, πετρωμένη,
> ἐπιτιμητική κι ἀντιπαθητική. [...]
> Τὰ κορίτσια,
> ντυμένα ἀντρικά, εἶταν πιὸ θαρρετὰ ἀπ' τὰ ἀγόρια.[52]

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motile *sujet-en-procès* (a subject "in process", but also "on trial") foregrounds the dynamism which is inherent in both the signifying process and the creation of the self.

[47] See above, n. 30.

[48] See Butler (1988) 520.

[49] See Butler (1999^2) 174-177.

[50] Butler (1999^2) 179. Butler draws heavily on Derrida's engagement with Austin with regard to the "failure" of an utterance to perform a given speech act within particular conditions/context. According to Derrida, the risk of "failure"—in conveying "one" single meaning, truth, or authorial intention—is intrinsic/essential to the linguistic sign, every sign being structurally "iterable" and "citational", that is likely to be reduplicated with an alteration of the same: "Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written [...] can be *cited*; put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable. [...] This [...] iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called 'normal'" [Derrida (1982) 320-321].

[51] Butler (1999^2) 180.

[52] Ritsos (1991^{17}a) 211.

> One night, while boys and girls were playing and dancing together, someone
> had an inspiration: let's change clothes, make the boys wear the girls' dresses
> and let us have their male attire. There was a strange fulfillment, an awkward freedom
> in this exchange—we were like strangers to ourselves, yet
> at the same time real and honest. Only my sister
> stayed in her own black dress, in the corner, turned to stone,
> reproving and repugnant. [...]
> The girls
> in their male clothes were bolder than the boys.[53]

While Antigone does not have to "perform", for she really *is* her own "masculine" values, Ismene dares to display her "masculinity" only when masked. At the same time, the crucial detail that the girls in this game "were bolder than the boys" suggests that women, born as such, are not able to contemplate themselves on equal terms with men except *in disguise*. Through this playful mimesis, Ismene seeks to integrate all the parts of who she is, experiencing an authentic sense of herself which is clearly at odds with the social role she performs:

> Ὁ Αἵμων
> φοροῦσε τὸ δικό μου φόρεμα κ' εἶταν τόσο δικός μου
> ποὺ χόρεψα μέσα στὸ σιντριβάνι καὶ τὰ νερὰ κρουνελίζαν
> στὰ μαλλιά μου, στοὺς ὤμους μου, στὰ μάγουλά μου,
> σὰ νἄκλαιγα—λέει· ὥσπου πάγωσα ὁλόκληρη κ' ἔνιωσα νἄχω γίνει
> ἕνα ἄγαλμα ἐπίχρυσο τοῦ ἴδιου τοῦ ἑαυτοῦ μου, φωτισμένο ἀπ' τὸ φεγγάρι,
> ἀντίκρυ στὰ τυφλὰ μάτια τοῦ πατέρα.[54]

> Haemon
> was wearing my dress, and was so much mine
> that I danced under the fountain, let the water pour down
> on my hair, my shoulders, my cheeks—
> as if I were crying, he said—till I got chilled through and felt
> I'd become a gilded statue of my own self, lit by the moon,
> facing my father's blind eyes.[55]

As "natural" identities become increasingly suspect, Ismene's reference to her blind father is significant, for Oedipus stands for the hero who finds

[53] Ritsos (1993) 197; translation modified.
[54] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 211-212.
[55] Ritsos (1993) 197-198; translation modified.

his way to real identity at a terrible price: blindness. In this way, links between vision and truth, sight and knowledge, appearance and substance, clearly break down. What is more, transvestism leads here to a reverse—and quite unpredictable—metamorphosis: in fact, Ismene's metaphoric transformation into a "statue" does not respond to a desire to become some kind of unusual or supernatural other; on the contrary, it enables a return to a "primary" (or rather repressed) state of being. Esther Newton's fine theorisation of drag as a "double inversion" is here quite instructive:

> At its most complex, [drag] is a double inversion that says, "appearance is an illusion". Drag says [...] "my 'outside' appearance is feminine, but my essence 'inside' [the body] is masculine." At the same time it symbolises the opposite inversion; "my appearance 'outside' [my body, my gender] is masculine but my essence 'inside' [myself] is feminine".[56]

To further trouble vision and metaphysical claims to truth, Ritsos follows Sophocles in introducing the figure of "the blind old prophet"[57]—presumably Teiresias—who is charged, however, with a totally different role. Instead of making known the verdict of the gods to Creon, the seer of Thebes is here revived to tell Ismene a truth about herself:

> μούπιασε τὸ πηγούνι, μοῦ σήκωσε τὸ πρόσωπο. "Θἄσουνα πιὸ ὄμορφη—
> μοῦ εἶπε—
> ἂν εἴσουν ἀγόρι". "Εἶμαι", τοῦ εἶπα. Γελάσαμε
> κ' οἱ δυὸ σὰν συνένοχοι.[58]

> he took me by the chin and lifted my face. "You'd be better looking", he
> told me,
> "if you were a boy". "I am", I said. We both
> laughed like conspirators.[59]

As laughter arises in parodic forms,[60] the lack of identification between the actor and the character may further cling to the distortion of the

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[56] Newton (1972) quoted in Butler (1999^2) 174.
[57] Ritsos (1993) 209.
[58] Ritsos (1991^{17}a) 224.
[59] Ritsos (1993) 209.
[60] Cf. Butler's [(1999^2) 175-177] discussion of drag in terms of "gender parody". Specifically, Butler turns to Fredric Jameson's concept of pastiche as parody without laughter, for it has lost the sense of an original compared to which what is being imitated appears to be comic. She goes on to argue that gender impersonation is closer to pastiche rather than to parody, in the sense that it

writer's own gendered reality in his stage role, played by a woman.[61] If this is the case, then the anatomy of the performer proves to be literally *male*, which reverses the terms, multiplies significations, and suggests a larger fluidity of identities. Furthermore, it is significant that it is Teiresias who reveals Ismene's true identity, for he appears in a number of narratives as the androgynous myth *par excellence*.[62] If his androgynous status remains allusive in "Ismene", it becomes the very theme of a choral song of the same period, which Ritsos titles precisely "Teiresias",[63] where the staging of both the female and male selves of the seer open up the self to the Other(s) *within*.

It thus becomes obvious that Ritsos' characters in "Ismene" performatively re-inscribe gender in ways that accentuate its constructedness and display the grotesque of the whole venture. Unlike her tragic model, Ismene offers a different kind of "repetition" which brings together both Butler and Irigaray's politics of mimesis, for both thinkers have emphasised in highly Derridean fashion—and despite their differences—the possibility of shaking *logos* from the inside. Is this implosive strategy, however, capable of a radical displacement? Butler is pretty much aware that the performance may challenge but will never change the "script" of gender. Derrida himself addresses the problem of the "place" of power, which "regularly transforms transgressions into 'false sorties'",[64] as he terms it. In fact, Ritsos' female figures seem to fall back into a "place" or the claustrophobic climate of the collapsing house that foregrounds their monologues: cf., for instance, the indoors death of the old maid in

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disputes the notion of an "original" and further reveals that the "original" is deprived of ontological locus. However, for Butler (*ibid.* 176), "[t]he loss of the sense of 'the normal' can be in its own occasion for laughter, especially when 'the normal', 'the original', is revealed to be a copy, [...] an ideal that no one *can* embody". Laughter interpolates, thus, Butler's argument, implying, unlike Jameson, that postmodern parody interrogates extant normative assumptions, and thus, may be ironic, subversive, and highly politicised.

[61] The lens that the mythical persona brings to *The Fourth Dimension* has been put forward by Ritsos himself on several occasions (see above, n. 5). On the enriching interaction between Ritsos and his fictional characters, see, in particular, Prokopaki (1981) 38. On this topic, see also Veloudis (1984) 43-74.

[62] For a comprehensive account of the narratives related with Teiresias' experience as both man and woman, see Brisson (1976).

[63] It should be noted that "Teiresias", completed between 1964 and 1971, was written in about the same time as "Ismene" (1966-1971), and that the two texts explore similar concerns, as well as performative techniques. "Teiresias" was first published in the fourth volume of Ritsos' complete poems (*Ποιήματα*), in 1975.

[64] Derrida (1969) 56.

"Chrysothemis"; "the mountain's sovereignty" over Electra's fate, "especially on the side of the women's quarters";[65] the drowning of the Woman in Black in the kitchen of "The Moonlight Sonata"; or the "drowning woman"[66] that Ajax hides beneath his own masquerade of masculinity. Unlike male heroes of the collection, such as Orestes or Philoctetes, Ismene proves incapable of finding her way towards an opening and only addresses her potential of liberation as a conditional:

> Ἂν βγάλω τοῦτα τὰ βραχιόλια, ἂν λύσω τὴ νύχτα τὰ μαλλιά μου,
> ἂν λύσω τὰ κορδόνια ἀπ' τὰ σαντάλια μου, προπάντων ἂν βγάλω
> ἐτούτα τὰ βαριὰ περιδέραια, ποὺ μοῦ κρατοῦν τὸ λαιμὸ σὰ χαλκάδες,
> θαρρῶ πὼς θὰ φύγω πρὸς τὰ πάνω, θὰ ἐξαερωθῶ. Δὲ θὰ τὄθελα.
> Ἴσως γι' αὐτὸ τὰ φορῶ. Μὲ στερεώνουν κατὰ κάποιο τρόπο,
> παρ' ὅτι μ' ἐνοχλοῦν συχνά·—τὰ φορῶ καὶ στὸν ὕπνο μου, σὰ νἆμαι
> ἕνα σκυλὶ ποὺ ἐγὼ ἡ ἴδια τὄχω δέσει μπρὸς σὲ μιὰ πεσμένη πόρτα.[67]

> If I take off these bracelets, if at night I lay down my hair,
> if I untie my sandal laces, above all if I remove
> these heavy necklaces, which clasp my throat like chains,
> I feel I'll float up, become airborne. I wouldn't want that.
> Perhaps that's why I wear them. They anchor me in some way,
> though they're often a burden—I even wear them when sleeping, as though
> I were a dog that I myself had tied to a fallen door.[68]

By omitting any reference to Creon's crude threats and brutal attempts to exercise authority, and by silencing Ismene's will to share her sister's fate as is the case in Sophocles, Ritsos focuses on the ways in which Ismene participates in the very terms of her oppression. The move from the tragic to the modern myth is thus marked by the transition from the authoritative figure of the ancient regime to modernised disciplinary practices that render the subject "docile"[69] and self-regulating, in ways that recall Foucault's lucid analysis in *Discipline and Punish*, and resemble the self-censorship imposed by the junta on authors and publishers following

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[65] Ritsos (1993) 125.
[66] Ritsos (1993) 228.
[67] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 208.
[68] Ritsos (1993) 194.
[69] Foucault's [(1979) 135-169] analysis of the historical development of the penal system shows how power in modern societies continues to work through the use of new techniques that produce obedient and subjected individuals. Hence the chapter entitled "Docile Bodies", where he exposes the way in which modern disciplinary power aims no longer to inflict physical penalties on the body, but rather to "correct" and manipulate it.

George Seferis' 1969 statement.[70] In a sense, Butler concurs with Foucault in arguing that this kind of power is not truly external, but literally acts *on* and *through* the body in ways that remain concealed.[71] Given this framework, Ismene does not merely internalise, but literally *incorporates* the law imposed on her, for her body becomes fashioned, shaped, and normalised in accord with dominant representations of femininity.

Furthermore, the fact that Ritsos refers to Creon only as a grieving figure, upon discovering the death of both his wife and son, highlights the tyrant's *hamartia* and subsequent *pathos*, and leaves no doubt about his guilt, a question that has provoked vivid debates in the philosophical, philological, and literary reception of *Antigone*.[72] Thrylos' depreciative views of Ritsos' translation of *Antigone* are of particular interest in this respect, focusing precisely on the translator's linguistic choices with regard to the figure of Creon. Specifically, Thrylos contends that by choosing a vocabulary drawn from *triodia*[73] and *katharevousa*,[74] Ritsos' major concern was "to humiliate Creon" and "show that Creon is nothing more than a vile demagogue".[75] Apparently informed by Hegel's interpretation of the play as a conflict between two equal rights, Thrylos further argues that "[b]y humiliating Creon, [Ritsos] humiliated the whole tragedy; by removing one of its parts, he came to abolish the conflict between two equal opponents and efface catharsis altogether".[76] However

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[70] On the impact of Seferis' statement against the junta and the subsequent lifting of preventive censorship, see "Athenian" (1972) 136; Van Dyck (1998) 26-27; Van Steen (2015) 133-135. On the establishment of the New Press Law (in January 1970), which allowed authors, journalists, and publishers to publish their books or articles—yet at their own risk, see Richard Clogg's introduction in "Athenian" (1972) 2; Van Steen (2015) 118-119.

[71] See Butler (1999^2) 171-180.

[72] Dominant interpretations of the play are divided between the so called "orthodox view", according to which Antigone is justified in her opposition against Creon, and the "Hegelian view", the proponents of which follow Hegel's reading of the play as a conflict between two equally valid spheres. For a detailed doxography concerning both interpretative traditions see Lardinois (2012) 58-64.

[73] *Triodion* (plural *triodia*) is a canon of three odes intended for ecclesiastical use during Lent.

[74] *Katharevousa* is a variety of modern Greek which originated in the 19th century as an attempt to "purify" the language of foreign elements and provide a return to its ancient Greek roots. Much appealing to the regime's rhetoric during the Greek military junta, *katharevousa* remained the official language of the state and education until 1976, when it was replaced by Demotic Greek.

[75] Thrylos (1981) 243.

[76] Thrylos (1981) 243.

canonical in tone, Thrylos' review lays open to view Ritsos' highly modernising and rather parodic figuration of the tyrant. The use of *katharevousa* and ecclesiastical elements suggests precisely an intended mimicry of institutionalised and religious discourse on the part of Ritsos, recoding, thus, and interpolating the Antigone story into contemporary linguistic and political concerns. For Ritsos, then, Creon is not rehabilitated. However, his own story develops along a different path, for it is Ismene's *prohairesis*, that is the burden of her own choices, which invests the new myth with its intensity and passion. Ismene is not a drag, but a fallen queen. Having lapsed into "bad faith"[77] and unable to transcend her female condition, she becomes Ritsos' tragic hero *par excellence*:

Καθένας μας ἴσως
θἄθελε νἆναι κάτι ἄλλο ἀπ' ὅ,τι εἶναι. Ἄλλος τ' ἀντέχει περισσότερο ἢ
λιγότερο,
ἄλλος καθόλου. Ἡ μοίρα, καθὼς λένε, μᾶς δένει μὲς στὸν κύκλο τοῦ
ἀκατόρθωτου
νὰ τριγυρνάμε γύρω-γύρω στὸ πηγάδι, ὅπου μέσα του μένει
κλεισμένο, σκοτεινό, ἀξεδιάλυτο τὸ πρόσωπό μας. Ἡ ἀδελφή μου
ἀρνιόταν νὰ παραδεχτεῖ καὶ νὰ ὑπακούσει,—ἀλύγιστη ἡ ἀπελπισμένη.[78]

Perhaps
each one of us
would like to be something different. Some bear it, more or less,
others not at all. Fate binds us, they say, on the wheel of the
unachievable,
leaves us circling the well in the depths of which there awaits us,
closed in, dark, unresolved, our own face. My sister
refused to confess, to submit—unyielding, the desperate one.[79]

"Fate" here does not refer to some kind of transcendental ordering but rather to a determinism, which intersects with societal forces and sustains both the necessity of assumed roles in the functioning of society and a vicious historical circularity:

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[77] I use this term from a Beauvoirian rather than a Sartrian existentialist perspective, referring specifically to those *female* human beings who tend to act inauthentically under societal pressures, giving up themselves to passivity and immanence, and thus forfeiting any possibility of transcendence and personal fulfillment.

[78] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 212.

[79] Ritsos (1993) 198; translation modified.

Πόλεμοι, ἐπαναστάσεις, ἀντεπαναστάσεις (πόσες φορές ξανάγιναν τὰ ἴδια),—
σωρὸς οἱ στάχτες στὶς πλατεῖες [...]— ἴδια στάχτη·
[...]
Θηβαῖοι, Ἀργεῖοι, Κορίνθιοι, Σπαρτιάτες, Ἀθηναῖοι—ποιοί διοικοῦσαν στ' ἀλήθεια;—
μιὰ μυστικὴ ἐξουσία σὰ νὰ κινοῦσε ἀπὸ μακριὰ τὰ νήματα[80]

Wars, revolutions, counterrevolutions, the same again and again,
ashes heaped in the squares [...]—the ash is the same.
[...]
Thebans, Argives, Corinthians, Spartans, Athenians—which of them really ran things? A secret power seemed to be pulling strings from a distance[81]

Although the fratricidal conflict of Eteocles and Polynices is not here explicitly mentioned, the endless reiteration of civil conflict clearly informs Ismene's monologue and may allude, more specifically, both to the Greek Civil War (1946-1949) and to the major split within the Greek Communist Party that culminated following the 1968 Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.[82] While the Atreid myth had offered Ritsos an ideal platform for autobiographical parallelisms between his own family and the House of Atreus in earlier *Fourth Dimension* monologues such as "The Dead House" or "Under the Shadow of the Mountain", "Ismene" is mostly grounded in immediate political experience, thus enabling more direct allusions to collective and national "tragedies". In a secular era, which has evidently abandoned the theological debates enacted by Sophocles, the Antigone tale lends itself primarily to political reflection on the issues of repression and totalitarianism.

Thus immersed in the inescapability of history—or the "eternal recurrence" of her gender role—Ismene keeps foregrounding fatalism, in the face of which the subject remains powerless, and political will becomes futile. By contrast, Antigone's deed is given in Ritsos an existential edge: on the fragile boundary between the alterable and the inevitable—and despite her specific "situatedness"—Antigone, just like

[80] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 222.
[81] Ritsos (1993) 207.
[82] In this respect, see also the poem "Μετά το σπάσιμο της συνθήκης Λακεδαιμονίων και Αθηναίων" ["After the Breakup of the Treaty Between the Spartans and the Athenians"] [Ritsos (1972) 59], written in April 1968, that is two months after the split of the Greek Communist Party into the mainstream (pro-Soviet) Communist Party and the Communist Party of the Interior (with a reformist, Euro-Communist orientation).

her Sophoclean predecessor,[83] was empowered to impact on her own destiny by setting her own conditions of existence.[84]

> Μόνο τὸ θάνατό της,— ὄχι·
> μόνο τὴν ὥρα καὶ τὸν τρόπο τοῦ θανάτου της μποροῦσε νὰ διαλέξει.
> Κι ἀλήθεια, διάλεξε.[85]
>
> It was only her death—no, rather
> it was only the time and the mode of her death that she could choose.
> And indeed, she chose them.[86]

If death, then, proves to be the only power that is greater than humans (as Sophocles' Ode on Man in *Antigone* points out), and if there is no god left to pull the strings, then Ritsos' tragedy becomes profoundly *humanised*. Nevertheless, unlike Sartre or Brecht's political theatre, whose disdain for divine order has a clear revolutionary objective, Ritsos does not seem to put forward a philosophy of *praxis* in "Ismene". Instead, the very form of dramatic *monologue* evacuates action and accentuates passion. Locked up in individual suffering, Ismene is hardly capable of reaching out to her interlocutor. This further testifies to the committed writer's incapacity to reach out to his "virtual public",[87] as Sartre would have it, the world out of the windows and the City, which the young officer (a man of humble, rural origin) comes to symbolise. Not surprisingly, Ismene compares him on several occasions with Haemon, who appears, in

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[83] Cf. Antigone's words, addressing Ismene in Sophocles: σὺ μὲν γὰρ εἵλου ζῆν, ἐγὼ δὲ κατθανεῖν (555) ["because you chose to live, but I chose to die"].

[84] *Contra* Prokopaki [(1981) 55], according to whom "Antigone's sacrifice [in Ritsos] is stripped of her myth and its potential resistance overtones". In fact, Antigone's deed appears to be the sole purely heroic act of resistance in *The Fourth Dimension*, as it is free from the dilemmas faced by other "engaged" (*engagés*) figures of the collection, such as Orestes or Philoctetes.

[85] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 212-213.

[86] Ritsos (1993) 198; translation modified.

[87] In his 1948 collection of essays *What is Literature*?, Jean-Paul Sartre refers to the committed writer's responsibility to place himself on the side of his "virtual public" (i.e. the oppressed masses, the progressive audiences) as part of the quest for a classless society, which would involve freedom for all: "he must write for a public which has the freedom of changing everything; which means, besides the suppression of classes, abolition of all dictatorship, constant renewal of frameworks, and the continuous overthrowing of order once it tends to congeal" [Sartre (1978b) 118].

Sophocles, to stand for the values of the democratic *polis*, as opposed to Creon's tyrannical, kinship-based rule:[88]

Ἔχετε κάτι ἀπ'
τὸν Αἵμονα—
αὐτὴ τὴ συστολὴ ποὺ φέρνει ἡ δύναμη κ' ἡ ἀκεραιότητα.[89]

You have something
of Haemon—
that modesty bred of strength and integrity.[90]

Κάτι κοστούμια τοῦ Αἵμονα—τἄχω κρατήσει στὴ ντουλάπα—
θὰ σᾶς πηγαίνουν μιὰ χαρὰ φαντάζομαι. Καὶ τὸ καινούργιο του ξίφος,
[...] δὲν πρόφτασε
νὰ τὸ ζώσει στὴ μέση του.[91]

One of those suits of Haemon's—I 've kept them in the closet—
should fit you beautifully, I think. And his new sword,
[...] he never got around to strapping it on.[92]

From the Young Man in "The Moonlight Sonata" to Neoptolemus in "Philoctetes", the power of youth, always at odds with the old, seems to return in borrowed clothes, throughout *The Fourth Dimension*, to bring about a change which is most often impossible.

In the final stage directions, Ismene takes off the mask, exposing the features of her ageing face, which point to the themes of time, decline, and death that pervade *The Fourth Dimension*, drawing thus significant parallels between the gendered and the political body. The highly expressionistic portrayal of the heroine goes hand in hand with an aborted attempt for dialogue and intercourse, for she resists the young officer's "siege", defends the portals of her chastity, and conceals her unaccomplished desire in the masquerade:

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[88] In the fifth-century *polis*, which had witnessed the transition to democracy, Creon's gradually emerging tyrannical behaviour can hardly have appealed to an audience of Athenian citizens. A number of scholars concur with this view; see, e.g., Bowra (1970) 72-76, 102-103; Winnington-Ingram (1980) 120; Lardinois (2012) 61-62; Carter (2012) 122-123. See also Froma Zeitlin's [(1990) 149] discussion of Thebes as an "anti-Athens" (the negative model of the democratic *polis*), where she refers in particular to Creon's tyrannical rule.

[89] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 214.

[90] Ritsos (1993) 200.

[91] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 228.

[92] Ritsos (1993) 213.

> Σηκώνεται. Πλησιάζει στὸν καθρέφτη. Βάφεται πάλι. Ἄσπρη σὰ γύψος. Τὰ μάτια πελώρια, κατάμαυρα. Ἕνα γύψινο προσωπεῖο. Ἀλλάζει. Φοράει ἕνα φόρεμα τῆς ἀδελφῆς της [...]. Βάζει μιὰ ζώνη μὲ φαρδειὰ πόρπη. [...] Ξαπλώνει στὸ κρεββάτι ντυμένη καὶ μὲ τὰ σαντάλια της. [...] Κλείνει τὰ μάτια. Χαμογελάει. Κοιμήθηκε; Ἀπ' τὴν πλαϊνὴ αἴθουσα ἀκούγεται τὸ ρολόϊ.[93]

> She rises, goes to the mirror, makes herself up again, plaster white, her eyes huge, black-circled. A plaster mask. She takes off her dress, puts on one of her sister's [...]. She adds a belt with a broad buckle. [...] She sinks back on the bed, fully dressed and still wearing her sandals. [...] She closes her eyes. She smiles. Has she fallen asleep? From the hall nearby the tick of the clock can still be heard.[94]

Fatality, thus, is reinvented in the face of self-denial. This open-ended scene clearly recalls "the fair dead" that Ismene herself makes up to bring about the *simulacrum* of womanliness, or bury, as deep as she can, her very "own dead opposite".[95] In her book *Antigone's Claim*, Butler tries to imagine an alternative Symbolic, a different social context in which Antigone—the unintelligible or the non-representable—would not have to choose death over life or "emerg[e] in language as a living body interred into a tomb".[96] Ritsos similarly opens up one such space for reflection, in which neither Antigone, nor Ismene will have to become a living corpse within the vault of their symbolic heteronomy.

While myth (or the mask) links life on and off the stage in a highly metaphorical way, the "masquerade" further unsettles the boundaries that demarcate performance from life and unravels new layers of meaning. This kind of distancing, which brings Ritsos close to Brecht's "alienation effect", solicits the entry of the reader/spectator into the story and enables a critical perspective. In eluding "presence", Ismene becomes both a

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[93] Ritsos (1991[17]a) 228.

[94] Ritsos (1993) 213.

[95] Ritsos (1993) 196.

[96] Butler (2000) 81. In *Antigone's Claim*, Butler sets out to unsettle the unquestionable laws both of kinship and language which provide, in her view, the heteronormative framework within which the subject is allowed "to be" and to speak. For Butler, Antigone becomes representative of the melancholic subject who suffocates within the reified structures (cf. the "tomb") of the Symbolic order, and yet claims the Word to disrupt its foundations from within. Therefore, the figure of Antigone provides Butler the opportunity to trace the livable space—if any—left open for marginal and un-intelligible lives towards different configurations of the human.

character and a "demonstrator",[97] who unmasks what is being performed behind the scenes. Between the world of appearances and the "real" one, Ritsos' use of the theatre metaphor problematises the truth-value of both gender categories and theatre itself. By presenting life as a form of performance and vice-versa, Ritsos moves towards a *new realism*, which dramatises the committed writer's inner crisis in his quest for alternative configurations of identity—be it sexual, social, national, ideological, or aesthetic.

As historian of religions Mircea Eliade suggests, myth is a "revelation", in that it reveals the mystery of the cosmos that would otherwise remain unknown: God or Being shows itself to us, in ways that make myth the ontological foundation of the world.[98] By raising the issue of identity—which haunts Theban narratives from Pentheus to Oedipus—the secular mythology of "Ismene" becomes precisely an *ontophany*, which reveals the complexity and plurality of human existence. Ritsos' significant digression from Sophocles clearly privileges *ēthos* (character) over *mythos* (plot),[99] and foregrounds the psychic drama of self-division and alienation. If myth offers the dissident writer a mask, the masquerade provides his characters with a language to reconfigure their placement, and open up themselves to new possibilities of existence. It gives way to expression to any "myth" of interiority (be it "masculine", "feminine", or "Other"), which is measured up daily against the human.

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[97] My use of the term "demonstrator" alludes to Brecht's [(2001) 125-126] approach to acting, which requires that actors do not identify with, but rather "demonstrate" their roles, by keeping the audience aware that they are watching a performance. In opposing "epic" to "dramatic" (Aristotelian) style, Brecht's theatre invites the critical involvement of the spectator, moving beyond emotional empathy.

[98] Eliade (1968, 1971) links religious thought to the manifestation of the Sacred in the world ("hierophany"), which literally founds the "reality" of *homo religiosus* and enables him to know himself in knowing the world. This quest of primordial truth is thus experienced as an "ontophany", a revelation of God or Being, which, as Brunel [(2003) 9] further suggests, is one of the major defining functions of (literary) myth.

[99] Cf. Aristotle's insistence on the preponderance of *mythos* (plot) over all the other elements of tragedy, including the characters themselves (*Poetics* 1450a 21-24, Halliwell).