Int class trad (2014) 21:121–158
DOI 10.1007/s12138-014-0341-3

ARTICLE

# Orestes and Nothingness: Yiannis Ritsos' "Orestes", Greek Tragedy, and Existentialism

**Vayos Liapis**

Published online: 3 May 2014


## Introduction: Ritsos' Orestes Between Greek Tragedy and Existentialism

This paper offers a close reading of 'Orestes', the earliest (1962–1966) of the monologues eventually included (after being published as separate volumes) in Yiannis Ritsos' *Fourth Dimension*. Its principal aim is to explore Ritsos' extensive reworking of the myth of the Atreids, especially as retold by the three great tragedians, in the light of existentialist philosophy and drama.

Of the seventeen monologues included in *The Fourth Dimension*, ten are expressly mythological: they are narrated by a character from Greek (tragic) myth, such as Orestes, Agamemnon, Ajax, Helen, Phaedra, etc. One of the most salient features of these monologues is their blend of mythic past and present reality. In the case of 'Orestes', this symbiotic amalgam is enhanced by an implicit (and often allusive) dialogue with major existentialist texts, notably Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* and *The Flies*, and Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. Starting from a pre-moral attitude of egocentric hedonism, Ritsos' Orestes initially rejects matricide simply because, in an instance of Sartrian 'bad faith',[1] he is unable to extricate himself from his facticity. Progressively, however, Orestes graduates into an increasingly committed stance, as part of which he consciously espouses matricide, not as a duty decreed for him by an alien will but as a freely chosen life-project. In this respect, Ritsos' Orestes follows in the steps of his Sartrean predecessor in *The Flies*, and like him he is ultimately led to an acceptance and even glorification of the ultimate meaninglessness of the world.[2]

Ritsos' involvement with the theatre, and with ancient Greek drama in particular, goes back to his early youth. In 1931, at age 22, he worked as an amateur actor and director, and performed as a dancer at variety shows; in 1938, he took part in the chorus of Aeschylus' *Persae* at a performance by the National Theatre of Greece; and in 1951

[1]For the term see p. 6 and p. 11 of this paper.

[2]For a summary of *The Flies* see pp. 6–7 of this paper.

V. Liapis (✉)
Graduate Programme in Theatre Studies, Open University of Cyprus, P.O. Box 12794, CY-2252 Nicosia, Cyprus
e-mail: vayos.liapis@ouc.ac.cy

he choreographed a performance of the same play, which was put up by his fellow exiles on the island of Makronissos.[3] As for Ritsos' familiarity with existentialism, it cannot be positively ascertained (among other things, for the reason pointed out in n. 4 below). However, it seems certain that he was conversant with at least the French varieties of existentialism (mainly Sartre and Camus), which were extremely influential in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s, as the brief overview in the "Existentialism in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s: A Brief Survey" section will show.

The existentialist underpinnings of Ritsos' *Fourth Dimension* have never been properly examined. Only the vaguest inklings are offered in Calotychos [7] 190, in Green [31] 104, and especially in Sokoljuk [93] 15–16. Even Hatzidimitriou [33], who offers, in an MA dissertation, a comparative reading of Sartre's *The Flies* and Ritsos' 'Orestes', fails to point out adequately the latter's existentialist subtext. It is this desideratum that the present study intends to fulfill.

## Existentialism in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s: A Brief Survey

As mentioned at the start of the "Introduction: Ritsos' Orestes Between Greek Tragedy and Existentialism" section, Ritsos' 'Orestes' was written in the early-to-mid sixties, at a time when existentialism was perhaps past its prime but still influential in Europe; more importantly, after a somewhat slow start, it was enjoying a rapid spread in Greece, where it may even be said to have been a sort of intellectual fashion. Thanks to his excellent knowledge of French, Ritsos, a voracious reader, was familiar especially with the French brand of existentialism even before it became widely available in Greece through translated editions.[4]

By and large, it is the literary and dramatic rather than the philosophical work of the French existentialists that first reached Greek audiences, mainly from the mid-1950s onwards. These included translations of novels or plays by Camus and Sartre,[5] although plays by these authors were being staged in Athens as early as 1948.[6] Translations of the essays and philosophical treatises followed several years later, starting in the late 1960s.[7] The first Greek book-length study on Camus and the absurd came out in 1972,[8] and at about the same time Christos Malevitsis started publishing his translations of Jaspers, Wahl, and Tillich, which further contributed to the serious study of existentialism in Greece.[9]

[3] See Veloudis [104] 22–3; Dialismas [23] 19, 25; Van Steen [102] 367 and [103] 132. Further on Ritsos' involvement with the theatre, and especially on the theatrical dimension of his work, see Myrsiades [56] xv–ixx.

[4] I owe this piece of information to Ms Eri Ritsou, the poet's daughter. Unfortunately, Ritsos' library, which would have provided clues to the extent of his readings in existentialism, lies dispersed in several places in Greece and remains inaccessible.

[5] Camus: *The Outsider, Caligula*, *Exile and Kingdom* (Camus [9, 12, 13] respectively). Sartre: *The Wall, No Exit, The Devil and the Good Lord* (Sartre [82, 84, 85] respectively).

[6] Sartre: *The Respectful Whore* (dir. Karolos Koun in 1948); *Dirty Hands* (dir. Takis Mouzenidis in 1949); *No Exit* (dir. Karolos Koun in 1955); *The Flies* (a production of the Institut Français d'Athènes in 1962), etc. Camus: *The Just Assassins* (dir. Takis Mouzenidis in 1960). For further documentation see Petrakou [61] 225–7; especially on the performance reception of Sartre on the Greek stage see Petrakou [62].

[7] Camus' *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* came first (see Camus [11, 14] respectively); Sartre's fundamental *Being and Nothingness* was first translated in 1977 (Sartre [87])

[8] Kelesidou-Galanou [44].

[9] See Jaspers [37] and [38]; Wahl [107]; Tillich [95].

Still, as early as 1946 Greek literary magazines such as the venerable *Nea Hestia* were publishing articles by and especially on Sartre and the French existentialists (as well as on Kierkegaard and Heidegger).[10] The first reports on the new philosophical trend—by poets Takis Papatzonis, a liberal Christian, and Kostas Varnalis, a communist—were largely negative, condemning the movement as a manifestation of decadence (Papatzonis) or of a reactionary individualist nihilism (Varnalis).[11] Moreover, as early as 1948 Sartre's popularizing lecture *L'Existentialisme est un humanisme* (1947; cf. Sartre [88]) became available in a Greek translation (by an unidentified 'S.P.') under the idiosyncratic title *Ἐγκζιστανσιαλισμός*.[12] Existentialism even invaded, briefly, popular Greek culture in the early 1950s, in the form of a bohemian youth group, which was formally constituted as the 'Diogenes National Society of Greek Existentialists' in 1953. Headed by a certain Simos Tsapnidis (1919–1999), aka 'Simos the Existentialist', a down-at-the-heel shoemaker and repairer of car upholstery, the group turned out to be short-lived and marginal but managed to attract attention thanks to the public antics of its members, which scandalized bourgeois mores and resulted in the group being eventually dissolved by court order in July 1955. However, Simos' 'Greek Existentialists' acquired legendary status and left a long-lasting mark on popular culture.[13]

## Ritsos' 'Orestes': Autobiographic, Existentialist, Marxist?

At first sight, it may appear paradoxical that a lifelong and prominent communist like Ritsos, who was on more than one occasion imprisoned, displaced or put under house arrest for his political views, should focus on Orestes' individual development from detached sensualist to committed existentialist rather than bring out the political aspects of Orestes' violent act. After all, in Greek tragedy Orestes is a tyrannicide, as well as a matricide,[14] and the political repercussions of his act are also prominent in Voltaire's (1750) and especially Alfieri's (1783) Orestes tragedies, which also influenced the earliest modern Greek tragic treatment of the Orestes myth, namely Alexandros Soutsos' *Orestes* (1835).[15] Moreover, Ritsos must have been aware of a contemporary Orestes play—*When the Atreids…* (*Ὅταν οἱ Ἀτρεῖδες…*, Anglicized as *The*

[10] For a list of such articles between 1946 and 1960 see Petrakou [61] 219 n. 2; to these add the brief account of Camus' existentialism by Apostolopoulos [2] 151–8.

[11] See further Petrakou [61] 220–3.

[12] See Sartre [79]; cf. Petrakou [61] 225. Sartre's popularizing lecture was published again in Greece 20 years later in a new translation by Maria Politi (cf. Sartre [86]).

[13] For the information on 'Simos the Existentialist' I rely on a story by journalist Manolis Daloukas on the 'MediaSoup' website (URL: http://www.mediasoup.gr/node/16236); on a sound recording of an interview by Simos Tsapnidis to the same Manolis Daloukas (URL: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l3WXyI-1kDE); and on a story by G. Vidalis in the daily *Eleftherotypia* (17.02.2006), reproduced in Dr V. Agtzidis' blog 'Und ich dachte immer' (URL: http://kars1918.wordpress.com/2011/12/05/greeks_existenzphilosophie/).

[14] Cf. esp. Aeschylus, *Choephori* 973 (spoken by Orestes after the double murder of Clytemnestra and Aegisthus) ἴδεσθε χώρας τὴν διπλῆν τυραννίδα, 'behold the twin tyrants of this land' (transl. Sommerstein [94] 337).

[15] Chassapi-Christodoulou [17] i. 373, 376, 378–80. For a critical edition of Soutsos' play see Catica-Vassi [15]. On Alfieri's Orestes as a tyrannicide motivated by political (as well as personal) considerations see Merola [54], esp. 79; on Alfieri's radical politics see Highet [35] 426–7.

*Successors*)—by another leftist, the debutant Greek playwright Vanghelis Katsanis, which caused quite a stir in 1964 and was banned from its scheduled Athens Festival performance at the prestigious Odeum of Herod Atticus, as a result of its openly anti-monarchic stance (Greece was a constitutional monarchy at the time).[16] Katsanis' play, which exposed murder as the principal means for both the self-perpetuation and the eventual implosion of monarchy, was published in full in the left-leaning periodical *Theatro*, edited by Kostas Nitsos, while select passages appeared in various Greek newspapers even before the play's performance, thus keeping the public in a state of excited anticipation.[17]

Thus, both Ritsos' own communist credentials and the modern reception of the Orestes theme as a springboard for liberal, anti-monarchic treatments should lead one to expect that the poet would have opted for a militantly political reading of the Orestes story rather than for what I argue is an essentially existentialist parable. After all, as we saw above ("Existentialism in Greece in the 1950s and 1960s: A Brief Survey"), militant communists such as the poet Kostas Varnalis were highly critical of existentialism, which they excoriated as a bourgeois manifestation of individualist nihilism and of reactionary politics. Can Ritsos' 'Orestes' really be shown to rely on existentialist underpinnings, as I suggest, or is this notion an illusion?

It is on the latter assumption, it would seem, that several interpreters have taken 'Orestes' to be largely an autobiographical monologue, in which Ritsos grapples with his own secretly ambivalent attitude towards his communist ideology. Thus, for instance, Prevelakis argues that Orestes' turmoil is a projection of Ritsos' own dilemmas between, on the one hand, a life of poetic creation free of ideological constraints and, on the other, political commitment and the contradictions and disappointments resulting from his deep but uneasy faith in communism.[18] However, the autobiographical interpretation suffers from the inherent fault of any attempt to establish, at all costs, exact but ultimately reductive equivalences between the real-life commitments or vacillations of the *poète engagé* on the one hand and the polysemy, fluidity and even contradictoriness of his art on the other.[19] More sensibly, Tziovas argues that myth in 'Orestes' is used 'not so much to convey a political message as to foreground the complexities of existence and poetry'.[20] And Van Steen states that 'Ritsos' Orestes functions as a "poetic mask": his role is the poet's pretense

[16] For the details concerning Katsanis' *The Successors* see Pefanis [60] 166–7 and Van Steen [100] 54–9 and esp. 62–82; the latter offers a full discussion of this undeservedly forgotten play. The only translation of Katsanis' play is by Valamvanos and MacKinnon [98], whence the title *The Successors*. For weaknesses in the play's eventual staging (by director Dimitris Myrat at the Kotopouli Theatre in Athens, October 1964) see Papandreou [58].

[17] See Katsanis [42]. For the publication details and the play's reception see Valamvanos and MacKinnon [98] 31–2; Van Steen [100] 56, 82.

[18] See Prevelakis [66] 358–66. Cf. Tziovas [97] 70: 'Ritsos uses the myth of Orestes to highlight the dilemma of a committed writer, who in the end has to choose whether to demonstrate his independence or to succumb to pressure from the past, his milieu or his ideology.' Along similar lines cf. also Chambers [16] 42, who argues that 'Orestes' 'expresses Rítsos' exasperation with the intrusive, proprietary attitude that the Communist Party adopted towards him'; in favour of her interpretation, Chambers invokes the testimony of 'certain persons who knew Ritsos well'.

[19] Against such reductive readings see Prokopaki [67] 55; cf. Colakis [18] 126: 'a strict Marxist interpretation of ['Orestes'] would be an oversimplification.' More sensitively, Savidis [89] 16 speaks of the Ritsos' 'twin engagement' as both a communist and an artist.

[20] See Tziovas [97] 77.

and vehicle to posit deeper existential questions that probe the subject's identity and the limits of personal freedom".[21] The concept of the mythological persona as a 'poetic mask' is one that Ritsos himself seems to have encouraged,[22] and a number of critics see it as a key to unlocking the meanings generated by the interaction between ancient myths and their contemporary references both in 'Orestes' and in *The Fourth Dimension* in general.[23] As one critic has put it, the 'poetic mask' relocates the present into the past and alienates events by projecting them onto a persona from classical myth.[24]

The autobiographical element implied by the 'poetic mask' conceit may well be there. However, it neither excludes nor contradicts an existentialist reading of 'Orestes'. Whatever the autobiographical stimulus behind 'Orestes'—whether Ritsos' private disenchantment with the corruption of communism or his dilemma between poetic autonomy and ideological commitment—[25] the monologue has a wide-ranging applicability, which (as will be argued *in extenso* in the rest of this paper) results both from its pervading use of Greek tragic myth as a universalizing device and from its grappling with the fundamental existentialist questions of freedom and personal choice.

As for the apparent incompatibility between Ritsos' existentialist individualism in 'Orestes' and his Marxist ideology, this is a topic to which I shall return at the final section of this paper ("Epilogue: Between Individualism and Engagement").

## Ritsos' 'Orestes' and Jean–Paul Sartre's *The Flies*

Shortly before Ritsos started work on his 'Orestes', his personal friend[26] Zoë Karelli (pen name of Chryssoula Argyriadou, *née* Pentziki) wrote a play entitled *Orestes* (1959), which was published only in 1971 and performed in 1976.[27] In the spirit of a rather diluted existentialism, Karelli's play included, *inter alia*, a Pylades who attempted to goad Orestes into action by encouraging him to choose freely his own life-project rather than to let himself be carried away by circumstances.[28] Until the end, however, Orestes remained suspended in a state of perpetual indecision, uncertain whether free choice is indeed possible, whether one can truly resist the overwhelming power of

[21] Van Steen [100] 83 with n. 52.
[22] In a letter to Chryssa Prokopaki (dated 'Athens 15.V.72'), Ritsos speaks of 'the easiness of disguise and extreme confession under the mask of the other' (Ritsos [73] 95); cf. Hatzidimitriou [33] 60–2.
[23] See in particular Jeffreys [40] 64.
[24] Myrsiades [55] 456–7. Cf. Prokopaki [67] 33: 'Le mythe antique est le canevas sur lequel [Ritsos] tisse la tragédie ou plutôt le drame contemporain. En créant une distance factice entre nous et les faits, il laisse l'élément dramatique tout nu, il se permet de l'analyser en dehors de la précarité.' So also Prokopaki [68] 5.
[25] See further Green [31] 105–7.
[26] See Kotti [47] 141.
[27] See Pefanis [60] 168–9; Chassapi-Christodoulou [17] ii. 891–2.
[28] Cf. Chassapi-Christodoulou [17] ii. 894. On existentialist influences in Karelli's *Orestes* see Petrakou [61] 244–5.

external forces, or indeed whether sin, punishment and forgiveness have any meaning.[29]

It seems likely, especially in view of their personal acquaintance, that Ritsos was aware of Karelli's play and its (weak) existentialist resonances. However, Ritsos' main theatrical inspiration for his 'Orestes', apart of course from the ancient Greek tragedies on the same theme, was undoubtedly Jean-Paul Sartre's *The Flies* (*Les Mouches*, 1943).[30] Sartre's play, which dramatizes the Orestes story from a manifestly existentialist angle, is based primarily on Sophocles' *Electra* and Aeschylus' *Choephori* and *Eumenides*, and secondarily on Euripides' *Electra* and *Orestes*.[31] A brief summary of *The Flies*—a seminal exposition of Sartre's existentialist thinking—[32] will serve as a starting point helping us identify, with due supplements in the course of this article, Ritsos' debts to Sartre, both in *The Flies* and in his philosophical work.

In *The Flies*, Orestes arrives in Argos accompanied by his Tutor, who (unlike his Sophoclean predecessor) does not approve of his charge's decision to return to his native city. For Argos is a backwater infested by a perverse cult of the dead, as part of which the living accuse themselves hysterically of their sins against the departed, and profusely express their guilt at the simple fact of being alive.[33] The Argives repeatedly beg the dead for mercy,[34] and try to shake off the burden of guilt by claiming that 'we have done nothing, it isn't our fault' and by scapegoating an anonymous woman who has shown sympathy for Electra.[35] This refusal to assume responsibility, and thus to embrace freedom of choice, echoes a fundamental claim of Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, where the assumption that one cannot escape one's facticity—the set of particular conditions in which we are all situated by necessity—is famously termed 'bad faith'.[36]

Even before he is recognized by Electra, Sartre's Orestes asks her to abandon Argos and follow him to Corinth.[37] Soon enough, however, his instinctual urge to flee is eclipsed by a growing awareness that he does not *belong*. His sheltered childhood and privileged upbringing have divested him of the ability to claim his share in the anguish of existence and prevented him from fighting for the painful choice of a deeply personal life-project away

[29] Cf. Chassapi-Christodoulou [17] ii. 896, 898; Raizis [70].

[30] For an extended essay on *The Flies* and for a collection of relevant texts (by Sartre and others) see Noudelmann [57]. On the play's existentialist import see Jeanson [39] 12–28. For a comparative reading of Sartre's and Ritsos' Orestes plays see Hatzidimitriou [33], esp. 93–104. On the influence of Sartre's *The Flies* on modern Greek theatre see also Van Steen [101] 222; on Ritsos' 'Orestes' in particular see Vamvouri Ruffy [99]. With regard to Sartre's theatre production, the fundamental study remains that of McCall [52]. It is to be noted, however, that the only Greek performances of *The Flies* were an amateur production by the youth group Experimental Theatre Stage (Θεατρική Πειραματική Σκηνή) at the Institut Français d'Athènes in 1962 and a short-lived production in 1965, probably by Marieta Rialdi's Experimental Theatre (Πειραματικό Θέατρο): see Petrakou [62] 144–5.

[31] Cf. Burian [6] 258; Gasti [30]. Especially for Sartre's debt to Euripides' *Orestes* (which Burian and Gasti disregard) note *The Flies* Act 3, sc. 6 (Sartre [78] 245), where the Argives threaten to stone the matricidal siblings, and cf. E. *Or.* 46–50, 440–6, 866–956.

[32] Cf. Jeanson [39] 28: 'the work of Sartre in its entirety could be considered, without too much exaggeration, as a commenting on, criticizing and going beyond the conception of freedom proposed in [*The Flies*]'; cf. McCall [52] 24.

[33] Sartre [78] 159, 160: 'Pardonnez-nous de vivre alors que vous êtes morts.'

[34] The cry 'Pitié!' is uttered no less than five times in Act 2, sc. 2 (Sartre [78] 158–60).

[35] Sartre [78] 166–7.

[36] Sartre [81] 47–70; cf. Webber [108] 74–87; see further p. 11 of this paper.

[37] Act 2, sc. 4: Sartre [78] 169.

from the shackles of biology, education, or social norms. Rootless and deprived of a personal past,[38] he realizes that the murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra would at least enable him to appropriate a personhood, an identity similar to the fiction of a righteous, vengeful Orestes that had been haunting Electra for years. 'I hardly exist', he claims; 'of all the ghosts that roam about the city today, none is ghostlier than I am'.[39] The murderous act over, Orestes finally proclaims himself free: 'Freedom has crashed down on me like a thunderbolt'.[40] Resisting Jupiter's intimidating behaviour as well as the Argive's pervasive guilt culture, Orestes realizes that he must 'bear the anguish of full responsibility for inventing values by his acts'.[41] Having overcome the puerile ethics of repentance and forgiveness (an ethics even the relentless Electra eventually succumbs to), Orestes is now able, even as he is pursued by the Erinyes, to construct his own identity on the foundations of a criminal act freely chosen.[42]

## Orestes, Stage One: Sensualism and Unconnectedness

Like all the mythological monologues included in *The Fourth Dimension*, Yannis Ritsos' 'Orestes'[43] is delivered by an unnamed character, whose identity may be surmised from the title and, subsequently, from internal indications, especially stage directions.[44] The speaker is accompanied by a friend '*who always remains affectionately silent and devoted, like Pylades*'.[45] The Greek here is ambiguous: 'σὰν Πυλάδης' may mean both 'like the Pylades he actually is' but also 'like *a* Pylades'—i.e. like someone who without actually being Pylades acts in a manner reminiscent of him. This ambiguity is characteristic of the fusion of past and present that permeates both 'Orestes' and the rest of the mythological monologues of *The Fourth Dimension*. These pieces are populated by characters that embody some of the basic features of the respective Greek tragic personages but at the same time display wholly modern, mid-to-late-20th-century sensibilities.[46] The setting is equally ambiguous: the Propylaea of Mycenae with its landmark Cyclopean Walls and Lion Gate figure prominently, and seem '*unimaginably familiar and*

[38] Sartre [78] 106: 'Je suis né ici et je dois demander mon chemin comme un passant'; *ibid*. 122: 'un chien a plus de mémoire que moi : c'est *son* maître qu'il reconnaît'; *ibid*. 176–7: 'Je veux mes souvenirs, mon sol, ma place au milieu des hommes d'Argos.'

[39] Sartre [78] 176: 'J'existe à peine : de tous les fantômes qui rôdent aujourd'hui par la ville, aucun n'est plus fantôme que moi.'

[40] Sartre [78] 210: 'Je suis libre, Électre; la liberté a fondu sur moi comme la foudre.' Cf. Sartre [78] 236; McCall [52] 14; Leonard [48] 218–19.

[41] Quotation from McCall [52] 12.

[42] On Sartre's engagement with Greek tragic myth as a means of affirming existential freedom as opposed to the sense of fatality dominating Cocteau's, Giraudoux's and Anouilh's retellings of Greek myths see Dennis [21]; further on responsibility as a route to existential freedom in *The Flies* see Blasi [5]. On Nietzschean influences in *The Flies* see Kaufmann [43] 65–73.

[43] Dated 'BUCHAREST, ATHENS, SAMOS, MYCENAE, June 1962–July 1966': see Ritsos [72] 71–89; Ritsos [74] 63–81.

[44] See further Tziovas [97] 68.

[45] Quotation from Ritsos [74] 65; cf. Ritsos [72] 73. I have substituted 'devoted' (ἀφοσιωμένος) for Green and Bardsley's 'attentive', which is weaker.

[46] On the monologues of *The Fourth Dimension* as interweaving past and present, 'the Bronze Age and Ritsos's own world into a timeless continuum', see Green [31] 100–101. Cf. also Veloudis [104] 27–8; Prokopaki [68] 3–4; Colakis [18] 118, 129; Chambers [16] 37; and esp. Tziovas [97] 68: 'By maintaining the anonymity of his protagonists, Ritsos casts them in a twilight zone between past and present, subjectivity and objectivity, light and darkness.'

*affecting*'[47] to the two unnamed youths who are seen approaching them. At the same time, this Mycenae is also the modern tourist site, frequented by visitors in private cars and tourist buses, and guarded by state employees.[48]

This dual sense of familiarity and unfamiliarity has a destabilizing effect: it elicits feelings both of involvement and of distancing, thereby encouraging us both to identify the poem's characters with their tragic counterparts and to invest them with the qualities of a contemporary person. After all, the entire collection's title, *The Fourth Dimension*, hints precisely at the crucial role of *time* in binding together epochs far removed from each other.[49] In this connection, Dallas [19] 56 usefully introduces the concept of '*amphichrony*' to describe this symbiotic relation of past and present, in which the ancient and the modern world come to coexist 'in a third, intermediate reality'. As critics have pointed out, this coexistence may encourage readers to view the ten-year-long Trojan War that looms at the background of 'Orestes' (and of most of the mythological monologues in *The Fourth Dimension*, for that matter) as providing a parallel with and a framework for the two decade-long wars that dominated 20th-century Greek history (from 1912 to 1922, and from 1940 to 1949) and that have indelibly scarred the collective conscience of the Greek people.[50]

In the nocturnal calm, the site of Mycenae seems to come alive: '*The place breathes in the silence—a deep breath from the mouths of ancient tombs and memories*'.[51] The coming-alive of 'ancient tombs and memories' is, of course, an image of the mythic past being resurrected and morphing into a present that (as noted above) is simultaneously time-specific and achronous. As a bleak link between past and present, Electra's cries are heard from time to time, '*sharp, harsh, jarring*'[52]—a reminder of and an implicit appeal for the brutal task that Orestes is faced with but is unwilling to perform:

> Let's move a little away from here, so the woman's voice won't reach us;
> let's stand further down; no, not at the ancestral tombs;
> no libations tonight. I don't want
> to cut my hair—this hair
> where your hand has so often wandered.[53]

[47] Quotation from Ritsos [74] 65; cf. Ritsos [72] 73.

[48] '*The private cars and large tourist buses have gone*' […] '*There comes the sound of the nightwatchman's steps, and the great key that locks the inner door of the tower*' (Ritsos [74] 65; cf. Ritsos [72] 73). On the deft use of time-markers, which strip 'the classical myths of their antiquity', in *The Fourth Dimension* see further Myrsiades [55] 451–5, who appositely remarks (p. 451): 'Time and space are here dissolved so that the poet may extend through time the psychology and suffering' of his characters. Cf. also Prokopaki [67] 33 and [69] 24–5; Veloudis [106] 114–15.

[49] Further on the function of time in *The Fourth Dimension*, especially as an agent of corruption and decay, see Meraklis [53] 522–7; cf. Myrsiades [55] 450.

[50] See Bien [3] 17: 'one decade of war from 1912 to 1922 ending in disastrous defeat by the Turks [during the ill-fated and divisive Asia Minor Expedition], and a second decade from 1940 to 1950 ending in brutal hatred of Greek for Greek [in the Greek Civil War]. No wonder, then, that Ritsos became obsessed by that other decade-long conflict involving internal dissension, the Trojan War.' Cf. also Myrsiades [55] 456; Tziovas [97] 68.

[51] Cf. Ritsos [72] 73: '*Ὁ χῶρος ἀνασαίνει μὲς στὴν ἡσυχία, — μιὰ βαθειὰ ἀναπνοὴ ἀπ' τὰ στόματα τῶν ἀρχαίων τάφων καί τῶν ἀναμνήσεων*'. The translation of Green and Bardsley (Ritsos [74] 65) goes oddly astray here: '*The place relaxes in the silence—the mouths of ancient tombs and monuments breathe deeply.*'

[52] Cf. n. 47 above.

[53] Ritsos [74] 66; cf. Ritsos [72] 74.

The ritual gestures of offering a shorn lock and pouring libations at Agamemnon's tomb belong, of course, to the tragic treatments of the myth: cf. Aeschylus' *Choephori* 6–7 (only the offering of the lock is mentioned in the preserved portion of the prologue), Sophocles' *Electra* (82–5; only the libations are mentioned), and Euripides' *Electra* 513–17 (the shorn hair and a sacrificed lamb are mentioned).[54] Orestes rejects downright these reminders of his traditional role in ancient myth: to him, they represent a duty imposed on him by others rather than chosen by himself. 'For an entire lifetime', he complains, 'they have been preparing me and I have been preparing myself for this'.[55] However, rather than proceeding to make an existentially authentic decision, one that will set him on the path towards fulfilling his own life project, Orestes falls back to hedonistic resignation. What he longs for is

> the delightful
> pleasure of indifference, of tolerance, beyond everything,
> in the midst of everything, in the midst of ourselves—alone, together,
> under no obligation,
> without competition, rivalry, censure, without
> any expectations or demands placed on us by others.[56]

His resentment for 'any expectations or demands placed on us by others' is not a form of existential self-assertion: it does not prepare him for existential authenticity—for the moment when he will have the power to construct his identity by choosing freely and committing himself to his own 'fundamental project'.[57] All he cares for is a desire to break free of any form of commitment and to embrace 'the delightful | pleasure of indifference'.

Thus far, Orestes' ethical development seems to correspond to the first and most elementary stage of existence in Kierkegaard's philosophy. This is the so-called 'aesthetic' stage, dominated by a desire for instant gratification and a pre-moral valorization of pleasure as opposed to ethical categories. Aesthetic pleasure is not only carnal or material but involves also the subject's exuberant imagination and dialectal intellectuality, which ends up serving as a substitute for authentic existence. This is a 'fantasy-existence in aesthetic passion', in which the subject, much like Orestes, has not

[54] For the intertextual nod to Sophocles' *Electra* in particular see Jeffreys [40] 84; for a general examination of ancient Greek Orestes-tragedies as the background to Ritsos' treatment see Sangiglio [77] 51–6. For modern Greek survivals of the ancient funerary rituals (hair-cutting, libations etc.) see Pilitsis and Pastras [64] 152–3 n. 6.

[55] Ritsos [72] 74: *μιὰ ὁλόκληρη ζωὴ μὲ ἑτοίμαζαν κ' ἑτοιμαζόμουνα γι' αὐτό*; Green and Bardsley mistranslate 'they prepared a complete life for me and for this I prepared myself' (Ritsos [74] 66).

[56] Ritsos [74] 65; cf. Ritsos [72] 73. Green and Bardsley's 'tolerance' is a reasonable rendering of Ritsos' *ἀνεξιθρησκία*, which however carries the more specific meaning of 'religious tolerance' or 'religious freedom'.

[57] On the existentialist notion of the 'fundamental project'—of the ability to choose oneself as a totality in a set of given circumstances—see Sartre [81] 557–75, esp. 564.

yet developed an ethical individuality allowing them to choose and reveal their own self.[58] Consequently, an essential characteristic of the aesthetic stage is loneliness and absence of genuine communication: 'The aesthetic individual, even when with others, remains alone.'[59]

It is precisely this sense of loneliness, of non-belonging, that Orestes is painfully aware of:

> I lack that essential
>
> relationship to the place, the time, the situation,
> the facts. […] I'm unprepared
> before the threshold of the deed, a total stranger
> before the destiny that others have decreed for me. How is it
> that others establish our fate, little by little, prescribe it for us
> and we accept it?[60]

In his distressing unconnectedness, Ritsos' Orestes recalls his Sartrean predecessor, who (cf. p. 6–7 of this paper) yearns above all for an essential link with his natal city and the firmness of identity he has been deprived of. Both Ritsos' and Sartre's personages are rootless rather than free, extraneous rather than self-sufficient, unattached rather than autonomous. But in contradistinction to his Sartrean counterpart, Ritsos' Orestes feels that the destiny that seems to lie ahead for him, that of an avenger and matricide, is not the result of his own choice and does not represent his own will; it has been imposed on him by an alien agent.[61] Far from being eager to exact punishment for the crime perpetrated against Agamemnon, Orestes feels that the responsibility associated with his prescribed destiny has enveloped him in its coils like the fateful net that once immobilized Agamemnon just before his murder (cf. Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* 1115, 1382; *Choephori* 492–3):[62]

> How is it that with the smallest threads
> of a few of our moments they weave for us
> our whole time, harsh and dark, thrown
> like a veil from our head to our feet, covering
> our faces and hands completely, where they've secreted
> an unknown knife—quite unknown—and it lights up,
> with its harsh glint, a landscape, not our own—
> *that* I know; it is not our own.[63]

[58] Kierkegaard [45] 212; cf. Evans [25] 68–89; Furtak [27] 39.
[59] Quotation from Harries [32] 79.
[60] Ritsos [74] 67; cf. Ritsos [72] 74–5.
[61] Cf. also Tziovas [97] 70 with n. 7.
[62] More accurately, in Aeschylus, Agamemnon is trapped in a garment with no holes for the head or the arms—a garment *visualized figuratively as* a net; cf. Garvie [29] *ad* A. *Ch.* 491–2; Sommerstein [94] 168–9 n. 294.
[63] Ritsos [74] 67; cf. Ritsos [72] 75. Green and Bardsley's 'secreted' is perhaps too fanciful a rendering of ἀποθέσανε, which means simply 'put', 'placed'.

By letting an alien fate impose itself on him, Orestes has suffered a kind of moral death to match his father's literal death. Unable or unwilling to hold his own, he has resigned himself to what seems like a perpetual oscillation between the fate he once considered his own and the extraneous fate that has been decreed for him:

> And how does it happen
> that our own fate accepts it, stands back
> and watches, like a stranger, ourselves and our alien fate;
> she watches, dumb, austere, resigned, aloof,
> not even with the air of magnanimity or stoicism,
> without at least disappearing, without dying,
> so that we may remain, at least, prey to a foreign fate,
> but to one only—not in two minds and divided. Look at her, still there,
> as though drowsy—one eye closed, the other dilated,[64]
> letting us see her as she watches us and discerns
> our endless oscillation, with neither approval nor disapproval.[65]

One may usefully evoke here the Sartrean notion of 'facticity', the assertion that we are all by necessity situated in a set of particular conditions, 'interpersonal, social, cultural, institutional, political' or otherwise.[66] A cardinal form of 'bad faith', according to Sartre, is to 'affirm that there is no more to one's ability to go beyond one's situation than is provided by one's facticity;[67] the freedom to transcend one's facticity is thus an essential presupposition of existential authenticity.

Sartre's Orestes would welcome being constrained by a commitment giving him the opportunity 'to go somewhere', to perform an act that would be entirely his own: 'There are people who are born committed: they have no choice, they've been thrown on a path, and at the end of that path there is an act that awaits them, *their own act*'.[68] In Sartre, Orestes resents his freedom, 'the freedom of those threads that the wind blows off from cobwebs and that float at ten feet from the ground; I weigh no more than a thread and I live in the air'.[69] Indeed, he later declares that he would need 'the ballast of a heavy crime' to make him 'go straight down, to the bottom of Argos.'[70] By contrast, Ritsos' Orestes complains of 'the smallest threads | of a few of our moments' being

[64] The image of the dilated eye may echo Sartre's *The Flies* (Act 3, sc. 2), where Orestes' eyes are dilated by the anxiety of having just made a free, deliberate, and fully conscious existential choice: 'Tu es pâle, et l'angoisse dilate tes yeux' (Sartre [78] 237).

[65] Ritsos [74] 67; cf. Ritsos [72] 75. I modify the Green/Bardsley translation on a number of points: among other things, I substitute 'alien fate' (ξένη μοίρα) for 'strange fate'; 'the air of magnanimity' (τὸ ὕφος ... μιᾶς μεγαλοψυχίας) for 'the dignity of magnanimity'; 'so that we may remain, at least, pray to a foreign fate' (νὰ μείνουμε ἔρμαιο ἔστω μιᾶς ἀλλότριας μοίρας) for 'and that we remain, prey, it may be, to a different fate'. I have also assigned 'fate' a feminine gender to reflect Greek usage.

[66] Quotation from Gardner [28] 99. Further on 'facticity' see Sartre [81] 79–84, 481–553; cf. Webber [108] 19.

[67] Quotation from Webber [108] 22. Cf. Leonard [48] 217.

[68] Quotation from *Les Mouches*, Act 1, sc. 2: 'Il y a des hommes qui naissent engagés : ils n'ont pas le choix, on les a jetés sur un chemin, au bout du chemin il y a un acte qui les attend, *leur acte*' (Sartre [78] 123).

[69] Act 1, sc. 2: '… la liberté de ces fils que le vent arrache aux toiles d'araignée et qui flottent à dix pieds du sol; je ne pèse pas plus qu'un fil et je vis en l'air' (Sartre [78] 123).

[70] Cf. *Les Mouches*, Act 2, sc. 4: 'Il faut que je me leste d'un forfait bien lourd qui me fasse couler à pic, jusqu'au fond d'Argos.' Cf. Leonard [48] 218: '[Orestes] experiences his freedom not so much as a liberation but rather as a crushing necessity.' See also Slochower [92] 45.

used to weave a confining destiny. Evidently, Ritsos is deliberately distancing himself from Sartre here: for his Orestes, threads stand for constraint; for Sartre's character, they stand for flimsy insubstantiality. In the final analysis, however, both characters long for essentially the same thing: a sense of purpose, a deeply personal life-project, which would free them either from the fetters of an alien imperative (in the case of Ritsos' Orestes) or from the pointlessness of vagabond detachment (in the case of Sartre's Orestes).

Orestes' anxiety at being unable to relate to his native landscape is brought out by his description of an anonymous Mycenaean farmer being simply, and wondrously, at one with his natural surroundings. A cloud-shadow was seen, at noon, passing over the plain, says Orestes,

> and the peasant who was trudging along at the far end of the field
> seemed to be holding, thrust under his left armpit,
> the whole shadow of the cloud, like a huge cloak—
> majestic, yet simple as his sheep.[71]

The image may be an implicit echo from Euripides' *Electra*, where an anonymous farmer is introduced as Electra's husband, or from Sartre's *The Flies*, where Electra confronts the Argives' remorseful self-pitying with 'that humble contentment of the farmer who walks on his field and says "A fine day"'.[72] It is in this essential one-ness with the universe, Orestes suspects, that the ultimate justice is to be found—not in the desire for a vengeance that has long become pointless, nor in the burden of a past now seen as inapposite and fundamentally alien.

## Contrapunctus: Electra's Self-Contained Irrelevance

In contrapuntal antithesis to Orestes' dreamlike longings of assimilation into the surrounding landscape, Electra's cries come across as so self-contained and detached as to become irrelevant, as well as ritually inappropriate:

> Listen to her—her voice covers her like a resonating vault
> and she herself is suspended inside her voice
> like the clapper of a bell, and is struck by and strikes the bell,
> though there is neither feast nor funeral, only the immaculate solitude of the rocks
> and, below, the humble quiet of the fields—underlining
> this unvindicated frenzy…[73]
>
> […]
> Meanwhile this woman shows no sign of being quiet. Listen to her.
> How can she herself not hear that voice of hers? How can she stay
> shut suffocatingly in one instant of past time,

[71] Ritsos [74] 68; cf. Ritsos [72] 76.

[72] See *Les Mouches*, Act 2, sc. 3: '…cet humble contentement du paysan qui marche sur sa terre et qui dit « Il fait beau »' (Sartre [78] 164).

[73] Ritsos [74] 66; cf. Ritsos [72] 73–4. I adapt Green and Bardsley's translation by substituting 'resonating vault' (βαθύβουος θόλος) for their 'deep-arched vault', and 'unvindicated frenzy' (ἀδικαίωτη παραφορά) for their 'unjustifiable passion'.

past feelings? How can she, and with what,
renew this passion for retribution and the voice of passion
when all the echoes belie her, mock her even…[74]

The anomaly represented by Electra's cries is twofold: her lament is solitary rather than communal, and is not prompted by any ritual occasion—hence the comparison to a lone church bell that tolls for no apparent reason.[75] Moreover, it is exasperatingly untimely: her mourning is a relic of a bygone age, an outdated remnant of 'past feelings' (or 'feelings fallen into desuetude', παρωχημένων αἰσθημάτων), which she strives, stubbornly, to refresh against all odds.

In her anomalously prolonged mourning, Ritsos' Electra is reminiscent of her Sophoclean counterpart, who repeatedly proclaims that she will never stop lamenting for her dead father (*Electra* 103–9, 145–52), an attitude acknowledged also by the play's chorus (*El*. 123). In Sophocles' text, Electra's dirges are repeatedly referred to in the language of ritual lament (*El*. 88 θρήνων ᾠδάς, 94 θρηνῶ, 92 παννυχίδων, 139 γόοισιν … λιταῖς, 283 κἀπικωκύω).[76] However, at the same time, they run counter to a fundamental requirement of ritual: rather than being temporally circumscribed, they are abnormally prolonged into 'a lifetime of tears' (1085 πάγκλαυτον αἰῶνα). Moreover, as Electra herself avows (*El*. 355–6), her continued lamentation, as well as being a means of honouring the dead, is also 'an instrument in the apparently endless conflict with her mother and stepfather' and thus an agent of disruption in the family—contrary, again, to the normal function of ritual, which is to restore social cohesion after the disruption caused by death.[77] The ritual abnormality of Electra's lament in Sophocles is further increased by the fact that—like her counterpart in Ritsos—she performs it 'by herself and to herself' (αὐτὴ πρὸς αὐτήν, *El*. 285), although θρῆνος is markedly a formal 'expression of communal or familial grief'.[78]

In Ritsos, Electra's words are dismissed by her brother as 'pompous', 'old-fashioned, as if unearthed | in a linen chest "from the good old days" (as the old folks say)'.[79] She herself is 'an old woman of a girl' (γριὰ

[74] Ritsos [74] 68; cf. Ritsos [72] 76.
[75] Cf. Pilitsis and Pastras [64] 152 n. 5: 'In the Greek Orthodox tradition, the death of a person is announced to the rest of the community by the tolling of the church bell in a slow mournful rhythm.'
[76] On θρῆνος as ritual dirge see Alexiou [1] 11–14, 102–8. For the transmitted παννυχίδων Blaydes offered παννυχίων to avoid 'the joyous sense of παννυχίδων' (Dawe [20] 230). However, as Lloyd-Jones and Wilson [50] 45 and Segal [91] 272 suggest, mention of joyous festivals in a context of incessant lamentation may increase the irony and poignancy of the situation. For the ritual nuances of κωκύειν cf. e.g. *Il*. 22. 407 (cf. 409); *Od*. 24. 295 (where ὡς ἐπεώκει indicates the formal, ritual aspect of the dirge); A. *Ag*. 1313; S. *Ant*. 28, 204, 1302; Di Benedetto [22] 170 n. 21.
[77] See Seaford [90], esp. 320–1; the quotation is from p. 320. Note in particular Seaford's remark (again from p. 320): 'So far from being a response by the kinship group to the disruption caused by a death, a response which though relatively unrestrained is nevertheless contained within an articulated framework of separation and reintegration, the ritual of mourning has been perverted by both sides [i.e. Electra's and Clytemnestra's] into a weapon in a conflict within the kinship group, a conflict which is uncontained by any temporal, moral, or ritual limit, and which is intensified by the perversion of the natural relationship between mother and daughter.'
[78] Quotation from Segal [91] 273.
[79] Ritsos [74] 69; cf. Ritsos [72] 77.

παιδίσκη), 'given to denial | of beauty and delight—ascetic, odious in her moderation, | solitary and detached.'[80] One detects here verbal echoes from Aeschylus' *Eumenides* (68–9), where the Erinyes are sharply termed κόραι | γραῖαι, παλαιαὶ παῖδες, 'aged maidens, old virgins', and their solitary detachment attributed to their repulsive nature (*Eum*. 69–73). The points of contact between Ritsos' Electra and Aeschylus' Erinyes are significant: both combine, in a fashion deemed as repellent, elderliness and maidenhood; and both are agents of vengeance for intrafamilial crimes.[81]

Having lost their point of reference, and thus their relevance, Electra's self-perpetuating cries for revenge are not only futile but also a manifestation of her fundamental failure to make her own personal choices and decisions and to assume responsibility for them:

> And she persists in preparing hydromel and food for the dead
> who no longer thirst or drink, no longer have mouths
> or dream of restoration or revenge. She keeps invoking
> their infallible nature (—what way infallible?) perhaps to escape
> the responsibility of her own choice and decision—
> when the teeth of the dead, bare, scattered on the ground,
> are white seeds in an endless black valley
> sprouting the only thing infallible—invisible, pure white trees—
> that glow in the moonlight, till the end of time.[82]

By attributing to the dead an 'infallibility' they are not really possessed of, Electra can enclose herself in a moral and emotional time capsule. She thereby surrenders the responsibility for all meaningful decisions to the 'infallible' dead, and releases herself of the existential burden of having to make and abide by her own choices.

## Orestes, Stage Two: Choosing Existential Authenticity

In spite of Orestes' thinly veiled contempt for her, Electra is essentially her brother's mirror-image: she is unable to 'spell out her freedom',[83] to construct her own authentic identity by choosing and consistently pursuing a life-project of her own. Instead, she occupies a place assigned to her by a negative attitude, namely by her opposition and hatred for her mother.[84] Like her counterpart in Sartre's *The Flies*, she 'needs the

[80] Ritsos [74] 71; cf. Ritsos [72] 79. On Electra's out-of-date attitude see also Tziovas [97] 69.
[81] On this central function of avenging demons such as the Erinyes see e.g. Rohde [75] 179; Parker [59] 107; Lloyd-Jones [49] 204, 207. Humans (especially females) are often embodiments of the Erinyes in Greek tragedy: in S. *Tr*. 1051–2, Deianeira acts as an instrument of the Erinyes; in A. *Ag*. 1580 (also 1382–3), Clytemnestra acts as an Erinys (she embodies the δριμὺς ἀλάστωρ of the house: *Ag*. 149–1503); and in E. *Med*. 1260 Medea is an Ἐρινὺν †ὑπ' ἀλαστόρων† (the corrupt part of the text may conceal an otherwise unattested ὑπαλάστορον, according to Page). See further Dodds [24] 40; Kitto [46] 176; March [51] 70.
[82] Ritsos [74] 69; cf. Ritsos [72] 77. I have corrected a couple of mistranslations by Green and Bardsley: 'She keeps invoking' (ὅλο ἐπικαλεῖται) rather than 'All this invokes'; and 'sprouting the only thing infallible—invisible, pure white trees—' (βλασταίνοντας τὰ μόνα ἀλάθητα, ἀόρατα, πάλλευκα δέντρα) rather than 'sprouting all by themselves, infallible, invisible, pure white trees'.
[83] Ritsos [74] 72; cf. Ritsos [72] 80.
[84] See Ritsos [74] 72; cf. Ritsos [72] 80.

enemies she claims to hate; it is their tyranny that makes her ceremony of rebellion possible.'[85] She thereby restricts herself to a life that is fundamentally derivative, insofar as it depends on the preservation of her odium for another person:

> She sustains her anger with the pitch of her own voice—
> (if she were ever to lose it, what would be left her?)—I think she fears the accomplishment
> of her revenge, lest nothing else be left for her.[86]
>
> […]
> But how can it be
> that she lives a life entirely based on opposition to another,
> entirely out of hatred for another, and not out of love
> of her own life, without any place of her own?[87]

It is at this point that Orestes seems to attain the first glimpses of what will become later a consciously chosen, robustly defended choice of a personal way of existence. He proposes to Pylades that they should leave Mycenae for Athens, whence presumably they have come: 'Attica's lighter. Isn't it?'[88] This is one of the most telling signs of Ritsos' indebtedness to Sartre for his treatment of Orestes. Whereas in the extant Greek tragedies Orestes comes to Argos from Phocis, where he had been staying in the house of Strophios, Pylades' father (cf. Euripides' *Orestes* 765), in *The Flies* Orestes comes to Argos from Athens,[89] though pretending to be from Corinth.[90] What is more, in Sartre's play Orestes owes to missing 'the sweet land of Attica', and his Tutor grows nostalgic of the 'untainted lightness' of evenings at Corinth and at Athens[91]—note the telling correspondence with Ritsos' 'Attica's lighter'.

Having reached the point where he can at last begin to articulate a personal mode of existence—one free of the control imposed by the moral authority of others—Orestes can be said, in the terminology of Kierkegaard's philosophy, to have advanced to the

[85] Quotation from McCall [52] 18.
[86] Ritsos [74] 71; cf. Ritsos [72] 79. I have modified the Green/Bardsley translation on a number of points: 'her own voice' (τῆς ἴδιας τῆς φωνῆς της) rather than 'that voice of hers'; 'if she were ever … left her?' (ἂν θὰ τὴν ἔχανε κι αὐτὴν τί θὰ τῆς ἔμενε;) rather than 'if she ever lost it, what would become of her?'; and 'lest nothing else be left for her' (μὴ καὶ δὲν τῆς μείνει τίποτα) rather than 'lest nothing be left of her at all'.
[87] Ritsos [74] 72; cf. Ritsos [72] 80.
[88] Ritsos [74] 72; cf. Ritsos [72] 81.
[89] Cf. Act 2, sc. 4: 'ELECTRA: … C'est vrai que tu as vécu à Corinthe ? ORESTES: Non. Ce sont des bourgeois d'Athènes qui m'ont élevé' (Sartre [78] 173). It is doubtful whether Sartre (or Ritsos for that matter) was aware of the textual variant in *Odyssey* 3. 307, which has Orestes come back to his native land ἀπ' Ἀθηνάων or ἀπ' Ἀθηναίων, 'from Athens' (the reading was corrected into ἀπὸ Φωκήων, 'from Phocis', by Zenodotus). It is unlikely, *pace* Pontani [65] 228, that Orestes' stay in Athens *prior* to the matricide was an innovation introduced by the poet of the *Odyssey* rather than by later copyists or adapters. As S. West (in Heubeck et al. [34] 180) points out, if ἀπ' Ἀθηνάων was the standard version in 5th-century Athens, it would be amazing that the Athenian tragic poets did not pick up on it. Curiously, Pontani uses Euripides' *Iphigenia in Tauris* 947–8, 955 in favour of his thesis, but that passage refers to Orestes' stay in Athens *after* the matricide, in preparation for the trial on Areopagus.
[90] Sartre [78] 118, 128: 'Je me nomme Philèbe et je suis de Corinthe.'
[91] Cf. Sartre [78] 243 'le doux pays d'Attique' (Act 3, sc. 5); also Sartre [78] 181 'cette légèreté sans tache' (Act 2, sc. 4). On the imagery of weight and lightness in *The Flies* see McCall [52] 14, who points out that for Sartre's freedom-seeking Orestes weight (the burden of the responsibility of freedom) is a quality to be sought after (cf. also p. 11–12 of this paper).

'ethical' state of existence, in which he engages with an either/or dilemma and is consequently forced to make a choice:

> An ethical action is decided on in full awareness of the alternative, of the possibility to do otherwise. […] Choice consolidates the person. Someone who acts without really facing the renunciation involved in every real choice […] is not really choosing. Such a person cannot be ethical.[92]

If an 'aesthetic' life in Kierkegaardian terms (cf. p. 9–10 of this paper) is a play with possibilities, an unwillingness to choose one among several alternatives, an 'ethical' choice weighs and then excludes other possibilities, and so valorises the one finally chosen.[93] In the context of this new existential awareness, Orestes even comes to view his father's murder as part of the larger natural scheme of things, of death's ultimate and inflexible sway over all of humanity:

> I too have a life of my own and I must live it. Not vengeance—
> what could it take away from death, one death more,
> and that a violent one?—what could it add to life?
>
> […]
> Indeed, I feel a certain sympathy for the murderess—she took the measure of great chasms,
> great understanding has widened her eyes in the darkness
> and she sees—she sees the inexhaustible, the unattainable, and the unalterable.
> She sees me.
> I too want to see Father's murder in death's placatory generality,
> to forget it in that totality of death
> which awaits us too.[94]

## Orestes, Stage Two: Intersubjectivity

Orestes is gradually coming to embrace what will eventually be his freely and earnestly chosen identity—that of a matricide. His two key decisions at this stage are to forego vengeance as a moral imperative decreed for him by others, and to accept his father's death as an instance of the ineluctable totality of death.[95] Indeed, he goes so far as to identify Clytemnestra's

[92] Quotation from Harries [32] 138. This notion ultimately goes back to Aristotelian προαίρεσις, 'choice' or 'preference'; cf. *Eth. Eud.* 1226b7-8 'moral choice (προαίρεσις) is a selection, though not just simply so; rather, it is to choose one thing over another (ἑτέρου πρὸ ἑτέρου)'.

[93] See further Harries [32] 137–48.

[94] Ritsos [74] 73; cf. Ritsos [72] 81. I have emended Green and Bardsley's 'what could it bring back from the dead' into 'what could it take away from death' (τί θὰ μποροῦσε ν' ἀφαιρέσει ἀπ' τὸ θάνατο); also, I have substituted 'placatory generality' (κατευναστικὴ … γενικότητα) for their 'palliative generality'. On Agamemnon's murder 'as part of the wholeness of death of which he too is part' see also Myrsiades [56] xxv.

[95] On the importance of individual freedom and personal choice in 'Orestes' see also Tziovas [97] 70, who associates, however, these qualities with Ritsos' commitment to action-oriented communism rather than with existentialism.

murderous act as an instance of an all-encompassing nexus of interconnected *usurpations*—a nexus that Orestes himself is not exempt from:

> This night has taught me
> the innocence of all usurpers. And we are all
> usurpers of something—some of the people, some of the throne,
> others of love or even of death; my sister
> usurps my sole life, and I yours.
> O my dear, how patiently you share in all
> these alien, foolish affairs. And yet, my hand
> is yours; you too must take it, usurp it—your own,
> and because of this also my own; take it, clasp it; you expect it to be
> free from retributions, reprisals, recollections,
> free—I too want that,
> so that it belongs wholly to me, and only thus
> can I give it wholly to you.[96]

The above lines may seem at first to place Orestes on the same moral plane as Electra: they are both usurpers of other people's lives, and they both seek to impose their own moral choices on others. However, as will be seen in the following paragraph, the above passage, with its pronounced sense of shared humanity ('so that [my hand] belongs wholly to me, and only thus | can I give it wholly to you'), contains in fact a poetic restatement of a basic tenet of Sartrean existentialism.

According to Sartre, existence precedes essence, which is to say that humans do not come to this world equipped with a pre-existing set of qualities, such as they would possess if their essence were predetermined by a divine intelligence.[97] Found on earth by pure accident, rather than by divine providence, humans have no choice but to fashion themselves, to define their essence, in complete and absolute freedom. 'Man is condemned to be free;[98] he is responsible for the choices that make up his existential identity—that make him into what he is. 'And when we say that man is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible only for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men.'[99] The very fact of making existential choices for which they are solely responsible means that human beings assign moral value to certain or to all components of their existential makeup. The freedom to choose means the freedom to affirm the value of what we choose, since one does not consciously choose evil. And since nothing can be good for the individual unless it is good for everyone, it follows that individual choice does not commit the individual alone but all humankind.[100]

[96] Ritsos [74] 73; cf. Ritsos [72] 81. I have introduced a number of changes into Green and Bardsley's translation: 'my sole life' (τῆς μόνης μου ζωῆς) for 'my own life'; 'how patiently' (μὲ πόση ὑπομονή) for 'how particularly'; and 'alien, foolish affairs' (ξένες, ἀνόητες ὑποθέσεις) for 'strange, foolish undertakings'.
[97] See Sartre [81] 25, 567–8.
[98] Quotation from Sartre [88] 29. Cf. also Orestes' words in *Les Mouches*, Act 3, sc. 2: 'je suis condamné à n'avoir d'autre loi que la mienne' (Sartre [78] 237). Cf. Leonard [48] 217–18.
[99] Quotation from Sartre [88] 23. Similar ideas are also to be found in the work of Ritsos' elder contemporary, Nikos Kazantzakis, who was heavily influenced by precursors of existentialism such as Nietzsche. Cf. esp. his *Askētikē*, section 'The March'/'First Step: The Ego' (no. 15): 'Love responsibility. Say: It is my duty, and mine alone, to save the earth. If it is not saved, then I alone am to blame' (transl. K. Friar). On existentialist themes (even before Sartre) in Kazantzakis see Petrakou [61] 228–32.
[100] See Sartre [88] 24, whom I paraphrase.

By discovering themselves in that first moment of self-awareness, which corresponds to the Cartesian *cogito*, humans also realize the existence of others. Subjectivity is attained only when we project ourselves outside of ourselves, by adopting truths which we hold to be valid for all humans. The shaping of one's existence into essence cannot be made by strictly individual standards of truth; the very fact of choosing certain standards implies and presupposes a belief in their universal validity. Thus, to realize oneself means necessarily to realize all others. To quote Sartre,

> When we say 'I think', we each attain ourselves in the presence of the other, and we are just as certain of the other as we are of ourselves. Therefore, the man who becomes aware of himself directly in the *cogito* also perceives all others, and he does so as the condition of his own existence. He realizes that he cannot be anything (in the sense in which we say someone is spiritual, or cruel, or jealous) unless others acknowledge him as such. I cannot discover any truth whatsoever about myself except through the mediation of another. The other is essential to my existence, as well as to the knowledge I have of myself. Under these conditions, my intimate discovery of myself is at the same time a revelation of the other as a freedom that confronts my own and that cannot think or will without doing so for or against me. We are thus immediately thrust into a world that we may call 'intersubjectivity'. It is in this world that man decides what he is and what others are.[101]

When Orestes claims to 'usurp' Pylades' life, this should not be taken as a gesture of aggressive appropriation. It is, on the contrary, an expression of what Sartre calls 'intersubjectivity'[102] in the quotation above: Orestes' realization of his freedom to choose authentically his own life is made possible only through the realization of a similar freedom on Pylades' side—a freedom that may be compatible with his own or militate his own. To become aware of oneself as a fully realized, deliberate and responsible agent—in other words, as an existentially authentic human being—is an act of 'usurpation' insofar as it presupposes and is effected through the construction of potentially innumerable existential identities, based again on freely and deliberately chosen standards, for all humanity.

Remarkably, Ritsos presents this act of 'usurpation' as essentially an act of *love*. Orestes wishes himself free from alien impositions ('from retributions, reprisals, recollections') for the sake of Pylades, who also (so Orestes affirms) wills his companion free of such existential constraints. If Orestes seeks to realize a fully volitional and self-aware existence, it is in order to make sure that he belongs totally to himself, so that he may totally give himself over to Pylades. Whereas Sartre dwells on an analysis of how subjectivity is constructed by means of existential choices, Ritsos celebrates the centrality of the *affective* bond in establishing an existential interconnectedness of personhoods. Orestes' formerly feeble, resigned, somewhat dreamy attachment to Pylades now becomes a purposeful and firm decision to achieve, by sheer willpower,

[101] Quotation from Sartre [88] 41.

[102] The term itself derives, of course, from Husserl, although Sartre places decidedly less emphasis on the empathetic aspect of intersubjectivity, which is so central in Husserl. See Husserl [36] 89–150 (Fifth Meditation). On Sartrean intersubjectivity cf. also Slochower [92] 51.

'a displacement away | from the plain of death, in hope of a dubious freedom of choice'.[103]

Significantly, Electra's cries are now felt to 'batter' Orestes' 'nerves and dreams, just as those oars | battered the floating slaughtered corpses […] and they were all agleam, young and erotic, unbelievably immortal'.[104] Rather than merely deploring the self-contained irrelevance of his sister's anomalously prolonged mourning, Orestes now ponders its effect on and significance for himself. Her mourning is a reminder of his own hitherto death-like status, full of potentialities cancelled, denying him his own erotic aura and youthful vigour—which is to say, denying him a notional immortality. He is now able to detect 'small revelations of the great wonder' in the most mundane things, such as the stirring of a tortoise, which he embraces as 'a calm unpredictability, a hidden complicity, happiness', so much so that the living world becomes for him 'all one passion (ἔρωτας)—enchantment and amazement'.[105] Orestes is finally at one with the mystic rhythm of the universe, with its hidden internal geometry, with its secret semantics, at once definite and indecipherable:

> the falling fruit
> is a message, fixed and incommunicable,
> like the circle, the triangle, or the rhombus. I muse over
> a saw rusting in an abandoned woodshop,
> and the house numbers changing position out there on the horizon—
> 3, 7, 9—the innumerable number.[106]

## Orestes, Stage Two: Futility, or the Unity of Opposites

Eventually, Electra's cries stop, as if Orestes' newly found determination has willed her into silence: 'She's stopped at last—peace—deliverance. It's beautiful.'[107] In the precious silence that ensues, an almost spectral vision of nature is revealed, one dominated by the ultimate lack of meaning and purpose that French existentialism (especially Camus) predicated of the world:

> … this approval—glorification almost—
> of not waiting, not hoping, of an accepted futility,
> moving out to intrepid isolation, to the end of the road
> with the ghostly, violet passage of a cat.[108]

[103] Ritsos [74] 74; cf. Ritsos [72] 82. I substitute 'freedom of choice' (αὐτεξούσιο) for Green and Bardsley's 'independence', to render more specifically the philosophical connotations of the Greek term.
[104] Ritsos [74] 74; cf. Ritsos [72] 82.
[105] Quotations from Ritsos [74] 74; cf. Ritsos [72] 82, 83. I have substituted 'a calm unpredictability' (ἥσυχο ἀπρόοπτο) for Green and Bardsley's 'unforeseen calm'.
[106] Ritsos [74] 74–5; cf. Ritsos [72] 83. The numbers 3, 7, 9 are presumably chosen for their mystic significance: Orestes attains insights that are both esoteric and the result of a revelation. On the use of oxymoron (cf. 'innumerable number') in 'Orestes' see further Tziovas [97] 71–2.
[107] Ritsos [74] 75; cf. Ritsos [72] 83.
[108] Ritsos [74] 75; cf. Ritsos [72] 83. I have substituted 'accepted futility' (τῆς ἀποδεγμένης ματαιότητας) for Green and Bardsley's 'manifest vanity', which mistakes ἀποδεγμένης ('accepted', 'assented-to') for ἀπο(δε)δειγμένης ('proven', 'manifest').

The acceptance and even glorification of futility—of the lack of meaning and purpose immanent in the world—is unmistakably reminiscent of Albert Camus' injunction to embrace the world's absurdity, which consists in the fundamental and unsurpassable conflict between human desire for reason and meaning on the one hand and the indifferent, unreasonable silence of the universe on the other.[109] The 'absurd man', to quote Camus, 'recognizes the struggle, does not absolutely scorn reason, and admits the irrational. Thus he again embraces in a single glance all the data of experience and he is little inclined to leap before knowing. He knows simply that in that alert awareness there is no further place for hope.'[110]

In what follows, Orestes alternates between a growing awareness of the grim responsibility bearing on him and an acute sense of intimacy with the minutest details of the landscape. There are on the one hand birds sleeping perched on branches, 'light, light, as if the sky had penetrated their wings',[111] and on the other the leaden immobility of the dead, whose sandals, 'warped from the damp' seem to move 'all by themselves, as though walking without feet—but they don't walk'.[112] There are naked women enjoying the feeling of water and soap in bath rooms, pleasurably abandoning themselves to a slipperiness that seems to embody 'the returning rhythm of life'.[113] But their bath-time light-heartedness is contrasted starkly to Agamemnon's fateful last bath and to 'that great net in the bath—who wove it?—knot upon knot—unloosable—black…'.[114] The cheerful image of small frogs leaping, 'soft and silent, in the damp grass',[115] is opposed to that of bottomless wells containing the detritus of bygone merry feasts: 'pitchers, cups, mirrors, and chairs, | animal bones, lyres, and clever exchanges'.[116] Even Electra, now finally fallen silent, but still 'walled up in her narrow righteousness',[117] is imagined as dreaming perhaps of the most mundane and the most genuine pleasures of life—'an innocent place with kindly animals, | whitewashed houses, the smell of warm bread, and roses'.[118]

At the same time, Orestes' sensuality, which has so far been at the forefront of his worldview, and a recurring motif of his discourse, seems to recede to the background. It is now no more than

> … a pebble in our sandals or even a nail; you don't feel like
> stopping, removing it, loosening your straps,
> being delayed—the secret rhythm of your walking has possessed you

[109] See Camus [8] 28.
[110] Camus [8] 37.
[111] Ritsos [74] 75; cf. Ritsos [72] 84.
[112] Ritsos [74] 76; cf. Ritsos [72] 84.
[113] See further Tziovas [97] 72–3 on Ritsos' focus on palpable, sensuous details emphasizing 'life and vitality by drawing attention to the role of the senses'.
[114] Ritsos [74] 76; cf. Ritsos [72] 84. I have substituted 'knot upon knot' (κόμπο τὸν κόμπο) for Green and Bardsley's 'the knot, the knot'.
[115] Ritsos [74] 76; cf. Ritsos [72] 85.
[116] Ritsos [74] 76; cf. Ritsos [72] 85. Further on these lines see Green [31] 101–3. On Ritsos' predilection for everyday objects and actions cf. Meraklis [53] 540–3; Savidis [89] 14; Jeffreys [40] 88, who sees such objects as 'a link from the mythical period to the present day'. Especially on the recurrence of mirrors in Ritsos' poetry see Sangiglio [77] 121–4; Veloudis [105] 90–2; Myrsiades [56] xxv.
[117] Ritsos [74] 77; cf. Ritsos [72] 86.
[118] Ritsos [74] 77; cf. Ritsos [72] 86. I have replaced Green and Bardsley's 'good animals' by 'kindly animals' (ἀγαθὰ ζῶα).

more than the annoyance of the pebble, more
than the stubborn reminder of your weariness,
your procrastination; and there is still
a small thorny exultation and recollection
in the fact you've brought that pebble back from a beloved shore,
from a pleasant walk with beautiful thoughts…[119]

Eroticism is not entirely obliterated, of course: it still forms an essential part of Orestes' life-choice, but—tellingly—it is one capable now of producing no more than 'a small thorny exultation'. As we shall see immediately below, it is wholly different considerations that now prevail in Orestes' mind.

Released, apparently for the first time, from his self-absorption, Orestes suspects that both Agamemnon's murder and his own (as yet rather vague) mission to kill Clytemnestra form part of a broader nexus, in which perpetrators and victims are inextricably enmeshed, as if by force of a natural law connecting and balancing seemingly disparate elements:

This night of waiting[120] has left me an opening to the outside
and to within. I can't describe it exactly. Perhaps it is
huge masks thrust into a precipice,[121] metal buckles;
and the sandals of the dead, warped from the damp,
move all by themselves, as though walking without feet—but they don't walk;
and that great net in the bath—who wove it?—
knot upon knot[122]—unloosable—black—it was not Mother who wove it.[123]

[…]
Something like fingers of fire and freshness pass in succession over our chests,
drawing exploratory circles around the nipples,[124]
and we too are winnowed by the air, circle upon circle, around a center
unknown, vague, and yet fixed—endless circles
around a mute cry, around a knife thrust; and the knife
is driven into our hearts, I think, making our hearts into a center
like the stake in the middle of the threshing floor up there, on the hill…[125]

[119] Ritsos [74] 77; cf. Ritsos [72] 85–6. I have substituted 'you don't feel like | stopping' (βαρυέσαι | νὰ σταθεῖς) for Green and Bardsley's 'you get tired | of stopping'; and 'beautiful thoughts' (ὡραίους διαλογισμούς) for their 'good conversation'.

[120] It is difficult to render adequately the original here: ἡ νύχτα τούτη τῆς παραμονῆς could mean both 'This night of our sojourn/wait [here]' and 'tonight's eve'—i.e. this night as the period preceding the event of Clytemnestra's murder. Green and Bardsley's translation is perhaps the best way of maintaining the ambiguity.

[121] This rendering of Ritsos' μεγάλα προσωπεῖα βαραθρωμένα is preferable to Green and Bardsley's colourless 'huge masks destroyed'.

[122] See n. 114 above.

[123] Ritsos [74] 76; cf. Ritsos [72] 84.

[124] 'Exploratory circles' is a more accurate rendering of κύκλους ἀνιχνευτικούς than Green and Bardsley's 'circle-traces'.

[125] Ritsos [74] 76–7; cf. Ritsos [72] 85. I have replaced Green and Bardsley's 'ambiguous' by 'vague' (ἀόριστο); also, I have substituted 'making our hearts into a center' (κάνοντας κέντρο τὴν καρδιά μας) for their 'forming the center of our hearts', which reverses the meaning of the original.

Astonishingly, Clytemnestra is here all but absolved of the responsibility for Agamemnon's murder. It was not she, we are told, who wove the 'unloosable' net that enveloped the King as a prelude to his death[126]—and we recall how a few lines ago Clytemnestra was still unambiguously 'the murderess' (see p. 16 of this paper), a matter-of-fact statement that is carefully avoided here.

The realization that Clytemnestra is not directly responsible for the weaving of the net—a realization that is presumably the result of the 'opening to the outside | and to within' that Orestes experiences this night—naturally leads to the question of who the guilty party is. Though no definite answer is provided, we are encouraged to think that the murder of Agamemnon was part of a supra-human collusion, of a concerted action by agents beyond human control—perhaps the dead themselves, or rather their inanimate appurtenances such as masks, buckles, and sandals. These objects, worn and battered as they may be, seem eerily to acquire a life of their own and to bring about, as if automatically, events that might appear at first sight to issue from human agents. The emphasis on sandals in particular, moving 'all by themselves, as though walking without feet', no doubt harks back to the famous scene from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (944–9), where the King, just come back victorious from Troy, has his sandals taken off, so that he may tread on the purple fabrics spread out before him by Clytemnestra. In Aeschylus, Agamemnon's sandals are termed, in a typically bold usage, 'slaves for my feet to tread on' (πρόδουλον ἔμβασιν ποδός)[127]—a striking expression, which may lie behind Ritsos' even bolder reversal of the image. Moreover, the prominence of sandals in the Ritsos passage is meant to evoke the sense of impending doom that dominates the Aeschylean scene, where Agamemnon is apprehensive about attracting envy, and eventual catastrophe, through the gratuitous destruction of wealth that his treading on the purple fabrics would be bound to cause.[128] This engagement with forces beyond human control—perhaps with the unfathomable power of the dead to influence human affairs—has a universal applicability insofar as it 'explores the shift in consciousness which accompanies our confrontation with the fact of our own mortality.' At the same time, Ritsos 'also deals in something very much his own, a kind of eschatological retrieval process, in which the dead seem to have as much vividness, presence, "being," as the living.'[129]

A comparable sense of imminent bloodshed, arranged by unfathomable forces that seem to surpass human nature and jurisdiction, is evoked in the second excerpt from Ritsos' monologue quoted above (p. 21 of this paper). The image of human beings forced to move in endless circles[130] 'around a knife thrust' applies not only to Clytemnestra's forthcoming murder but, remarkably, also to Orestes himself, who seems to be propelled into a circle of events controlled by powers beyond him, by something resembling a universal conjunction or balance of opposites, 'something like

[126] On the (figurative) net that trapped Agamemnon see p. 10 with n. 62 of this paper.
[127] Translation by Sommerstein [94] 111.
[128] See *Ag*. 948–9: πολλὴ γὰρ αἰδὼς δωματοφθορεῖν ποσὶν | φθείροντα πλοῦτον ἀργυρωνήτους θ' ὑφάς, 'For I feel a great sense of impropriety about despoiling this house under my feet, ruining its wealth and the woven work bought with its silver' (transl. Sommerstein [94] 111).
[129] Both quotations are from Green [31] 104. Cf. Calotychos [7] 190: 'In scenes of decay and dilapidation, Ritsos reminds us of our relation to the forever "being" of the dead and to our own mortality.'
[130] Tziovas [97] 76 and Philokyprou [63] 159–60 aptly compare this with Seferis' *Mythistorema* XVI, where the unnamed narrator (presumably Orestes) muses on the 'rounds', the 'bloodied circles' he is forced to make, as a charioteer, around the racetrack.

fingers of fire and freshness'. It seems as if Orestes is coming to terms, perhaps fumblingly, with a new conception of the world, one that involves, centrally, a universal circuit of multiple interrelations, not only among humans but also between humans and the rest of the animal and even inanimate world. In such an interconnected universe, the notion of individual responsibility must be radically revised.

## Orestes and Nothingness: The Intransigence of Assent

'Orestes' culminates in an extended image that takes up almost two printed pages. Somewhat abruptly, Orestes starts reminiscing about a cow he and Pylades saw one evening in Attica. Just unyoked from the plough, she stood gazing at the sunset,

> scarred
> on her sides and her back, beaten about the forehead,
> familiar perhaps with denial and submissiveness,
> with the intransigence and hostility of assent.[131]

This vignette is a key point in the monologue. It is pregnant with a newly found meaning, one that inhabits the existential choice Orestes is about to make as his only available, yet freely chosen life-project. Finding himself constrained by the given condition of an absurd world, in which no order, meaning or moral equilibrium is discernible, Orestes chooses to revolt against it by resolutely complying with it. The conjunction of opposites implicit in this attitude—hostility-in-assent, denial-in-submissiveness—has already been foreshadowed in Orestes' vision of 'fingers of fire and freshness' cajoling him into a paradoxically free acceptance of a murder preordained (see pp. 21, 22–23 of this paper).

In point of fact, this seeming paradox is a fundamental tenet of existentialism: to become aware of the absurdity of the human condition is to realize that one cannot reconcile one's desire for absolute meaning on the one hand and the fundamental impossibility of imposing rational order upon the world on the other. Confronted with this realization, one can (as Camus puts it) either escape from this absurd world by committing suicide or rebel against it by accepting 'the desperate encounter between human inquiry and the silence of the universe'.[132]

The cow, Orestes reminisces, lapped up water from a nearby river with her bloodied tongue, as if she were licking 'her own inner wound, as if she were licking | the silent, vast round wound of the world'.[133] Raising her head from the water, she appeared wondrously 'untouched and calm, like a saint'[134]

[131] Ritsos [74] 78; cf. Ritsos [72] 86. I have emended Green and Bardsley's translation on a number of points: I have supplied 'denial and submissiveness' (τὴν ἄρνηση καὶ τὴν ὑποταγή) for their 'resignation and obedience'; and 'the intransigence and hostility of assent' (τὴν ἀδιαλλαξία καὶ τὴν ἐχθρότητα μέσα στὴ συμφωνία) for their 'implacability and hatred in her acquiescence'.
[132] Quotation from Camus [10] 6.
[133] Ritsos [74] 78; cf. Ritsos [72] 86.
[134] Ritsos [74] 78; cf. Ritsos [72] 86.

and only between her feet, both rooted in the river,
there remained a small changing pool of blood from her lips,
a red pool, in the shape of a map,
which little by little widened and dispersed; it disappeared
as if her blood were flowing far away, freed, without pain,
into an invisible vein of the world; and she was calm
precisely for this reason; as if she had learned
that our own blood is not lost, that nothing is lost,
nothing, nothing is lost in this vast nothing,
disconsolate and pitiless, incomparable,
so sweet, so consoling, so nothing.
This nothing is our familiar infinite. Useless, then,
this gasping for breath, the anxiety, the glory. Just such a cow
I drag along with me, in my shadow—not tied:
she follows me of her own accord[135]

The argument that 'we are encompassed with nothingness',[136] that 'Nothingness is part of the ontological structure of the human-world relation',[137] is one of the most fundamental tenets of Sartrean existentialism as set out in the early parts of *Being and Nothingness*. For negation to occur, Sartre argues, there must be an irreducible component of Nothingness that is inherent in the ontological makeup of reality; it is this component that forces us to perceive Being antithetically, as that which is not Nothing. 'The necessary condition for our saying *not* is that non-being be a perpetual presence in us and outside of us, that nothingness haunts being.'[138] Moreover, for Nothingness to exist it must be apprehended and experienced as such by humans, who are able—even at a pre-judicative level—to situate themselves in relation to a being and identify it not only as something that is not non-being but also as something destructible, something that has the potential for non-being—a process described by Sartre as 'nihilation'. This ability to be immersed in Being and at the same time to detach ourselves from it by a nihilating disengagement—by withdrawing from what is before us (e.g. the rubble of a destroyed building) to posit that which is not (e.g. the building intact as it once was)—[139] is in and of itself an indication of freedom. It is this Sartrean insight, I argue, that partly informs Ritsos' image of the cow's blood being liberatingly lost, and yet not lost, into Nothingness.[140]

However, Ritsos' image of the cow is not merely an affirmation of an all-encompassing Nothingness. It is also intensely evocative of 'the agonized serenity', which according to Camus[141] is a precondition for the rebellion against the irreducible absurdity of the world. To exist truly is to experience the irresolvable tension between

[135] Ritsos [74] 78; cf. Ritsos [72] 86–7. I have substituted 'the glory' (ἡ δόξα) for Green and Bardsley's 'faith' (who were evidently misled by the ancient Greek meaning of δόξα, 'opinion').
[136] Quotation from Sartre [81] 5.
[137] Quotation from Reynolds [71] 62.
[138] Quotation from Sartre [81] 11; see further Sartre [81] 3–45 ('The Origin of Negation').
[139] The example and much of the phrasing come from Reynolds [71] 64.
[140] The 'rhetoric of exaggeration' identified by Tziovas [97] 74 in these lines may thus appear less exaggerated if seen in conjunction, as I suggest, with Sartrean existentialism.
[141] See Camus [10] 302.

the world's lack of meaning and the decision to rebel, nobly and desperately, against it. 'Life', Camus writes, 'is this dichotomy itself, the mind soaring over volcanoes of light, the madness of justice, the extenuating intransigence of moderation'[142]—and note how Ritsos' 'intransigence … of assent' (p. 22–23 with n. 131 of this paper) appears to echo Camus' phraseology here. It is this ineluctable dichotomy that Ritsos' Orestes hints at when evoking the paradox of a nothingness that is both 'consoling' and 'pitiless'. The void is there, and it is irreducible; the challenge is to affirm the essence of existence within the ineluctable confines of nothingness. Existentialism offers no formulas for optimism, 'for which we have no possible use in the extremities of our unhappiness';[143] what it offers is 'words of courage and intelligence which, on the shores of the eternal seas, even have the qualities of virtue.'[144]

This irreducible paradox of existence, in which opposites are conjoined without ever being reconciled, continues to inform the image of the cow, whose central importance in the monologue becomes more and more evident. The cow, Orestes vaguely recalls, 'was a symbol in some ancient religion';[145] indeed, the animal's eyes 'faintly reflected a church tower, and the jackdaws perching upon the cross'[146]—though as soon as someone calls out, the birds disappear from the cow's eyes,[147] thus breaking the momentary metaphysical illusion. A little later, Orestes remembers, the cow let out 'a heartrending bellow, toward the horizon', causing everyone and everything around her—branches, swallows, sparrows, horses, goats, and farmers—to scatter, leaving her alone

> in a naked circle,
> out of which rose, much higher, in the distance,
> the spiral of constellations, until the cow ascended.[148]

This moment of 'magical realism', if the term may properly be applied to this scene, had been carefully prepared a little earlier by a striking image: 'the shadows of her horns | may just be two pointed wings and maybe you can fly'.[149] Again, however, Orestes recoils from fully accepting the implications of this momentary transcendence of palpable reality; he refuses to yield to the easy consolation of metaphysics:

> no, no,
> I think my eye picked her out from among the herd
> climbing the overgrown path, quiet, docile,
> toward the village[150]

[142] Quotation from Camus [10] 302–3.
[143] Quotation from Camus [10] 303.
[144] Quotation from Camus [10] 303.
[145] Ritsos [74] 79; cf. Ritsos [72] 87.
[146] Ritsos [74] 79; cf. Ritsos [72] 87.
[147] Ritsos [74] 79; cf. Ritsos [72] 87.
[148] Ritsos [74] 79; cf. Ritsos [72] 87–8.
[149] Ritsos [74] 78; cf. Ritsos [72] 87.
[150] Ritsos [74] 79; cf. Ritsos [72] 88. On the image of the cow as a symbol of Orestes' newly found power to embrace a profound unity with the infinite and with the creative forces hidden therein see Bien [4] 149–56; Chambers [16] 41. Cf. also Prevelakis [66] 363.

Tempted as he is to formulate the rudiments of a new religion—perhaps a kind of absurdist zoomorphism with the cow as its principal symbol—, Orestes steps back at the last moment, as if on the brink of a metaphysical chasm that he himself has conjured up. Comparably, Camus' metaphysical rebel 'blasphemes' in rising up against established religion but at the same time is in search of a new god:

> The rebel obstinately confronts a world condemned to death and the impenetrable obscurity of the human condition with his demand for life and absolute clarity. He is seeking, without knowing it, a moral philosophy or a religion. […] Therefore, if the rebel blasphemes, it is in the hope of finding a new god.[151]

Tellingly, the transitory vision of the cow ascending to heaven, and the immediate forestalment of the implications of this image, are succeeded by a soothing, even sobering image of the approaching dawn. The first rooster is heard crowing—an archetypal symbol of the denial of God;[152] Orestes completely and irreversibly denies the personal gods he was briefly tempted to worship. This is, however, a denial that stems not out of cowardice but out of a fundamental unwillingness to take refuge in vague longings for a meaning that is transcendental rather than immanent: 'Not for me | such ideas and such abstractions.'[153] One may compare here the following passage from Camus [8] 51:

> I don't know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms. What I touch, what resists me—that is what I understand.

## Orestes and Nothingness: Fulfilment and Action in an Absurd World

At the end of the monologue, we are brought back to Orestes' initial dilemma: how to strike a balance between the life-project assigned him by others and his own individual choice of existence? Orestes' final decision recalls that of his counterpart in Sartre's *The Flies*: he freely and knowingly chooses for himself the role that the others expect of him—or, in Prokopaki's apt phrase, 'Orestes appropriates his own fate'.[154] In so doing, however, he sacrifices his personhood—he graphically speaks of his 'flayed face', as we shall see shortly.[155] Indeed, he realizes that this choice amounts to a kind of spiritual death: the true Orestes dies and is replaced by a persona that willingly accepts the identity attributed to him by others.

[151] Quotation from Camus [10] 101. Further on Camus' critique of religion and religiosity see Sagi [76] 145–58.
[152] Cf. Matt. 26:34: 'Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice' (King James Version).
[153] Ritsos [74] 79; cf. Ritsos [72] 87. On the undermining of the metaphysical symbol here cf. Tziovas [97] 73.
[154] See Prokopaki [68] 8 and [69] 29.
[155] Ritsos [74] 80; cf. Ritsos [72] 88.

In a striking passage, Orestes declares that the ashes contained in the funeral urn he carries are not a sham to deceive his opponents into thinking of him as dead, as happens in Sophocles' *Electra* (54–8, 757–60, 1113–25, 1142);[156] on the contrary, it contains his own real ashes:

> Let us now lift up this funeral urn with my purported ashes—
> the recognition scene will begin in a moment.
> They will each of them find in me that person they expected,
> they'll find the just man, in line with their legislation,
> and only you and I, only the two of us, will know that in this urn
> I am holding my own real ashes.
> And while the others are triumphing through my deed, the two of us
> will weep over the gleaming, bloody sword, worthy of glory,
> will weep for these ashes, this corpse, whose place
> has been taken by another, completely covering his flayed features
> with a golden, respectable, venerable mask.[157]

Whereas in the prologue of Sophocles' *Electra* Orestes has superstitious qualms about allowing fake news of his death to be spread, his counterpart in Ritsos is firmly and calmly aware of his death as something accomplished, something that has already happened. The reference to 'the recognition scene', which 'will begin in a moment', is of course an allusion to Aeschylus' *Choephori* 168–232, where Electra recognizes her brother on the basis of several tokens (a lock of hair, footprints, a piece of cloth), and especially to Sophocles' *Electra* 1097–1235, where Electra's mournful reaction to the fake news of Orestes' death and to the sight of the urn supposedly containing her brother's ashes leads to the recognition between brother and sister on the basis of a tell-tale heirloom (Agamemnon's signet-ring now borne by Orestes, who is present onstage as the bearer of the false report, 1222–3).

At the same time, however, the theatrical allusion serves to underline the feigned, make-believe element in Orestes' imminent act—except that Orestes consciously chooses to perform this act in this specific manner rather than allowing himself to be dragged to it as a result of succumbing to an alien imperative.[158] To assume willingly another person's identity, a persona, Orestes feels, is not entirely devoid of practical usefulness: it could serve to sustain the multitude's faith in the inexorable advance of history—the debased conception of history which, in Camus's words, reeks of Christian decadence insofar as it exhausts itself in a dangerously puerile logic of punishment and reward.[159] Genuine, 'terrible knowledge', says Orestes, is 'impossible for the multitude'; what they need is

[156] Cf. Jeffreys [40] 84. An urn supposedly containing Orestes' ashes is already mentioned in Aeschylus' *Choephori* (686–7) as part of Orestes' mendacious report of his own death. But the urn there is not brought on stage: it is purportedly in Phocis, and it is up to Orestes' family to decide whether they will repatriate his ashes or allow them to be buried in a foreign land. Cf. Pontani [65] 205 with n. 6.

[157] Ritsos [74] 79–80; cf. Ritsos [72] 88.

[158] Cf. Dialismas [23] 48. I take exception here with Van Steen's [100] 85 view that the metatheatricality of this passage allows Orestes 'to blame the theatrical qualities attached to his own stereotype, whose force drives him to play his part unwillingly.'

[159] Cf. Camus [10] 69–70: 'For Christianity, reward and punishment implied the existence of history. But, by inescapable logic, all history ends by implying punishment and reward; and, from this day on, collectivist Messianism is born.'

easy faith,
inflexible, necessary, unfortunate faith,
disproved a thousand times and held fast a thousand more
tooth and nail by the soul of man—ignorant faith
that does great deeds secretly, antlike, in the dark.[160]

The point, of course, is that this kind of faith is chosen by Orestes in freedom and full personal knowledge; it is not chosen for him by others:

And I, the faithless one, choose this faith (it is not the others who choose me),
yet in full personal knowledge. I choose
the knowledge and the action of death that uplifts life.[161]

Crucially, at this point Orestes' choice and the fortunes of the people of Mycenae appear, at first sight, to converge: what was up till now Orestes' personal life-project seems to ramify into and imbue the multitude. Is this a case of Existentialism meeting Marxism, or is it merely an instance of the existentialist tenet that an individual decision is bound to affect the whole of humanity?[162] The question will be further explored in the final section of this paper ("Epilogue: Between Individualism and Engagement").

There are three points that need to be taken into account with regard to Orestes' decision to undertake the murderous act. Firstly, his decision is motivated neither by hatred ('absolutely not out of hatred') nor by a desire for vengeance or for punishment ('who'd punish, and punish whom?').[163] Rather, it arises out of a will to release history of the constraints of 'appointed time', so that time may 'remain free'.[164] This 'appointed time', rather than representing a teleological thrust towards a preordained future, is probably to be understood as the period during which, according to Camus, murder may temporarily prevail so that it may be subsequently extinguished forever. For by removing even a single human being from the community of men, one *ipso facto* annuls the identity of that community: 'if one single human being is missing in the irreplaceable world of fraternity, then this world is immediately depopulated',[165] and the rebel's self-justification in the name of that universal fraternity collapses.[166] The only way for the rebel to reconcile himself with murder (as a one-off exception by definition) is, Camus argues, 'to accept his own death and sacrifice. He kills and dies so that it shall be clear that murder is impossible.'[167] If collective existence is to be safeguarded, murder, which represents a temporary replacement of existence-in-the-present with the hope of a future existence, can only be a desperate exception that must last its 'appointed time', so that the rule may once more become possible.[168] In line with these

[160] Ritsos [74] 80; cf. Ritsos [72] 88.
[161] Ritsos [74] 80; cf. Ritsos [72] 89. See also Meraklis [53] 528–9. I have emended Green and Bardsley's translation on a couple of points: 'it is not the others who choose me' (δὲ μὲ διαλέγουν οἱ ἄλλοι) rather than 'the others do not choose me'; and 'uplifts' (ἀνεβάζει) rather than 'enhances'.
[162] See p. 17 with n. 99 of this paper.
[163] Ritsos [74] 80; cf. Ritsos [72] 89.
[164] Ritsos [74] 80; cf. Ritsos [72] 89. Cf. Sokoljuk [93] 17.
[165] Quotation from Camus [10] 281–2.
[166] Cf. Camus [10] 281: 'if a single master should, in fact, be killed, the rebel, in a certain way, is no longer justified in using the term *community of men* from which he derived his justification' (italics in the original).
[167] Quotation from Camus [10] 282.
[168] Cf. Camus [10] 282.

principles, Orestes has already performed the murderous rebel's act of redeeming self-sacrifice: he has already died and held his funeral ashes in his own hands (p. 27 of this paper), in preparation for the unique and exceptional murderous act he is about to commit.

Secondly, Orestes' decision also arises out of a wish for 'some sort of useless victory over our first and ultimate fear',[169] which must be the primal fear of death. It is against death that Camus' rebel rises up:

> 'The rebel does not ask for life, but for reasons for living. He rejects the consequences implied by death. If nothing lasts, then nothing is justified; everything that dies is deprived of meaning. To fight against death amounts to claiming that life has a meaning, to fighting for order and for unity.'[170]

Such a victory is indeed 'useless', as Orestes says—but essential as a cardinal act of existential revolt.

Thirdly, and finally, Orestes' murderous act is motivated by a desire 'for some sort of "yes" that shines, ambiguous and irreproachable, beyond you and me'.[171] A rebellion, says Camus, is not only a refusal or a renunciation. The rebel also 'says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion', since rebellion 'cannot exist without the feeling that, somewhere and somehow, one is right. It is in this way that the rebel slave says yes and no simultaneously.'[172] The rebel's 'yes' is an affirmation of the logic of creation, truth, and justice that must inform a genuine rebellious act; to isolate the rebel's 'no' is to give way to nihilism and thus to annul the basic premise of rebellion, which is to protest against death.[173] Moreover, the rebel can neither claim to annul violence absolutely (since violence and injustice are precisely what justifies his rebellion in the first place) nor to accept it (since this would be tantamount to legitimating violence and therefore to annulling the reasons for his rebellion). 'Thus the rebel can never find peace. He knows what is good and, despite himself, does evil.'[174] This tension is fundamentally irresolvable, and all the rebel can do, according to Camus, is to fight in order to diminish the chances of murder and evil around him.

Orestes envisages his imminent murder of Aegisthus and Clytemnestra as 'the right ending […] after the most righteous of fights'. The voluntary inevitability of his act appears to be confirmed by Pylades' enigmatic smile—seemingly one of consent—as well as by the palace guards standing aside, in the monologue's concluding 'stage directions', '*as if they were expecting them*', with the palace porter opening obligingly the great door as the two men enter the palace.[175] However, once the murders are over, '*right under the lion gate, a large cow stops and stares at the morning sky with her huge, black, unwavering eyes*.'[176] The cow's fixed gaze may suggest serenity, but as we saw above (p. 24–25 of this paper), this is surely the 'agonized serenity' of the

[169] Quotation from Ritsos [74] 80; cf. Ritsos [72] 89.
[170] Quotation from Camus [10] 101.
[171] Ritsos [74] 80; cf. Ritsos [72] 89.
[172] Quotation from Camus [10] 13.
[173] Cf. Camus [10] 285.
[174] Quotation from Camus [10] 285.
[175] Ritsos [74] 80–1; cf. Ritsos [72] 89. On the epilogues of Ritsos' mythological monologues as providing a retrospective illumination of the entire poem see Prokopaki [67] 31–2.
[176] Ritsos [74] 81; cf. Ritsos [72] 89.

perpetual and irresolvable dichotomy between despair and consolation, destruction and pity, nothingness and its negation. Oscillating between such extremes till the end, Orestes comes to be a true existential hero.

## Epilogue: Between Individualism and Engagement

Ritsos' 'Orestes' interweaves themes and images from ancient tragic treatments of the Atreid myth with considerations that, as shown above, are heavily influenced by existentialist philosophy and drama. Apart from the Greek tragedies (in particular, Aeschylus' *Choephori* and Sophocles' *Electra*) that inform Ritsos' treatment of the Orestes figure, an important model is Sartre's *The Flies*, which depicts an Orestes who eventually chooses and consistently abides by the identity of a matricide. That this is the identity he has already in traditional myth is incidental: what is important is that Sartre's Orestes—like his spiritual descendant in Ritsos—freely chooses matricide as his own fundamentally personal life-project rather than as the outcome of his submission to a foreordained course of events. Equally importantly, and in sharp contrast especially with the Euripidean version of the myth, Sartre's and Ritsos' Orestes never repent, since repentance would *ipso facto* annul the validity of their existential choice. In Ritsos, Orestes starts off as a sensualist—in what seems to correspond to Kierkegaard's 'aesthetic' stage (cf. p. 9–10 of this paper)—but gradually proceeds to an 'ethical' stage of existence (cf. p. 15–16 of this paper), in which he is finally ready to make an existential choice by rejecting all available alternatives, a choice that consolidates his identity as a matricide.[177]

We have also seen that the existentialist background of Ritsos' monologue lends it a universal applicability that both contains and surpasses individual considerations. (Sartre himself had prioritized the use, in the theatre, of 'situations so general that they are common to all' as a means of achieving 'the unity of all spectators'.[178]) This seems consistent with the use of a mythical character as the narrator. By virtue of its widespread familiarity and its perceived relevance across different periods, Greek tragic myth is an apposite device through which to focus on and promote an archetypal reading of the human condition and the concomitant questions of freedom and personal choice.[179] At the same time, as Tziovas perceptively points out, myth serves as a regulating device, framing and containing with its authority 'the oppositions, contradictions and paradoxes' of the monologue's rhetoric.[180] According to Tziovas, the transparency of myth helps elucidate and counterbalance the poem's drive towards obscurity and mysticism—and, I should add, provides a familiar background against

[177] This runs counter, at least partially, to what is otherwise a notable characteristic of the *Fourth Dimension* monologues, as described by Colakis [18] 118: 'By concentrating on failure or non-achievement, or by focusing on characters in their less glorious moments, Ritsos jolts us out of sentimentalized acceptance of the ancient myths.' There is of course no question of 'sentimentalized acceptance' of the matricide in Ritsos' 'Orestes', but neither does the monologue focus on Orestes' 'failure or non-achievement'.

[178] Sartre as quoted in Jeanson [39] 12.

[179] *Contra* Tziovas [97] 77, who agues against universalizing interpretations of Ritsos' use of myth, prioritizing rather the use of myth as a modernizing device, depriving the ancients of 'the aura of mystery and greatness' and 'presenting them instead as ordinary human beings'.

[180] See Tziovas [97] 74–5. Cf. also the remarks of Prokopaki [69] 26.

which to project the poem's experimental preoccupation with central issues of humanity through the lens of existentialism.

As we saw in the "Ritsos' 'Orestes': Autobiographic, Existentialist, Marxist?" section above, the existentialist viewpoint of 'Orestes' and its focus on the individual's progress towards freedom may appear to conflict with Ritsos' lifelong adherence to communism. It is now time to explore the question whether this perceived incompatibility is a real one.

We shall first review the evidence suggesting that Ritsos, in re-casting the Atreid myth in an existentialist mould, was implicitly distancing himself from basic communist tenets. As we saw above (p. 27–28 of this paper), Ritsos' Orestes seems mistrustful of the ability of the multitude to share in the 'terrible knowledge' that the existentially accomplished individual is able to acquire: the crowd would opt rather for an 'easy faith', an 'ignorant faith'. This has a disturbing implication: the individual may risk forfeiting his or her genuine identity in deference to the multitude's simplistically 'teleological conception of the development of human history as a unified and convergent force'[181]—a conception that is unmistakably reminiscent of orthodox Marxism as well as of the Christian teleological ethics of punishment and reward excoriated by Camus (see p. 27 of this paper). The only suggestion, in the monologue, that Orestes' individual existentialism may have broader political repercussions looks distressingly like an afterthought:

> ……..
> perhaps for some sort of "yes", that shines, ambiguous and
> irreproachable, beyond you and me,
> so that this land may breathe, if possible.[182]

This seemingly extraneous justification of Orestes' action provoked a jeering commentary from a hostile bourgeois critic at the time of the monologue's publication: 'the conclusion of Orestes' discourse (what a pity) is the conclusion of an indirect revolutionary political speech at a villagers' gathering outside of Argos…'.[183]

On the other hand, it must surely be significant that Ritsos' Orestes, unlike his Sartrean predecessor, does not seem to envisage the possibility of self-exile after the murderous act. The palace guards let Orestes and Pylades enter the palace complex '*as if they were expecting them*' (p. 29 of this paper): does this also imply an expectation on their part that Orestes is the rightful occupant of the throne of Argos? Are we further to envisage Orestes as an enlightened ruler who would make sure that 'this land may breathe'? Will he perhaps continue to encourage the people's 'ignorant faith' as part of an anticipated linear progression of history towards freedom? Or will he withdraw once he has perpetrated the act that seals his newly found existential autonomy? The question is never explicitly answered, and the monologue ends on a note of undecidedness as to the political ramifications of Orestes' action.[184] The text, it seems, has weighed all available options and felt itself unable to decide amongst them, thus

[181] Quotation from Leonard [48] 62.
[182] Ritsos [74] 80; cf. Ritsos [72] 89. I have substituted 'so that this land may breathe, if possible' (γιὰ ν' ἀνασάνει (ἂν γίνεται) τοῦτος ὁ τόπος) for Green and Bardsley's 'to give this place, if possible, a breathing space'.
[183] Quotation from Karantonis [41] 50.
[184] On the poetics of ambiguity in Ritsos see further Hatzidimitriou [33] 76–80.

allowing room for an interpretation in which Orestes' act is deprived of its potential for actual political engagement—an interpretation that might have been described as 'defeatist' in the language of communist political invective.

The ambiguous ending of Ritsos' 'Orestes' may be profitably compared with that of *The Flies*. Having accepted the crushing burden of free choice, Sartre's Orestes leaves Argos to go into exile. On the one hand, as Orestes himself makes clear, his self-exile signifies his refusal to perpetuate the old order by accepting the throne of the tyrant he has slain, the throne offered him by the odious Jupiter.[185] On the other hand, as Leonard [48] 219 remarks, Sartre's Orestes has delivered 'the Argives to a freedom which they do not want', and his self-imposed 'exile is the expression of the bad faith of a democracy which cannot take responsibility for its own freedom.'[186] Indeed, by leaving the city he has liberated, Orestes may be thought to renege on his responsibilities to his fellow-citizens and to reaffirm, ultimately, his own individualism, thus creating a gap between the moral justification of his act and the political contingencies he fails to engage himself in.[187] At best, the logic underlying the Sartrean Orestes' self-exile may be described, in Jeanson's [39] 25 phraseology, as the magic logic of 'contagion by example': Orestes trusts that his own newly acquired freedom will spread like an epidemic to the rest of the Argives. Still, as Jeanson shows (*l.c.*), this logic is specious: the existentialist *prise de conscience*, the sole origin of genuine moral action, can only be the result of laborious '*work* which must be accomplished patiently in history' ('un *travail* qui doit s'accomplir patiemment dans l'histoire') rather than being automatically transmitted like a disease or like hysterical laughter.

A more promising approach with regard to Orestes' relinquishment of Argos at the end of *The Flies* seems to be offered by McCall's political reading of the play as an indictment of Nazism, the Vichy régime, and French collaborationism. Such a reading had been encouraged by Sartre himself, who stated, on the occasion of a revival of *The Flies* in 1951, that his play 'tried to contribute […] to the extirpation of this sickness of repentance, this abandonment to shame that Vichy was soliciting' from the French people.[188] As Sartre had explained in his essay 'Paris under the Occupation', Vichy politics involved not only collaborating with the Nazi forces (even more so after the collapse of the hitherto unoccupied southern 'free zone' of France in November 1942), but also launching a demoralizing campaign among the French populace, one that promoted a sweeping ethics of shame and remorse, as well as a denigratory image of the French national character.[189] The underlying message was that the French people

[185] Sartre [78] 246: 'je ne m'assiérai pas, tout sanglant, sur le trône de ma victime : un Dieu me l'a offert et j'ai dit non.' Cf. McCall [52] 13.

[186] Cf. also McCall [52] 13: 'Orestes has freed the people from Aegistheus (sic), but nothing indicates that he has freed them from the slave mentality which made Aegistheus' (sic) tyranny possible'; similarly Jeanson [39] 22–3.

[187] Cf. Leonard [48] 222, whose phraseology I have occasionally borrowed. Indeed, in his 1965 adaptation of Euripides' *Trojan Women*, Sartre seems to move away from the triumphant existentialism of *The Flies*, where man is unshackled from the constraints of bad faith, towards a total nihilism, in which 'the very concept of freedom seems absurd in the context of the relentless force of the tragedy of irrational destruction' (quotation from Leonard [48] 225).

[188] Sartre, 'Ce que fut la création des *Mouches*', *La Croix*, 20 January 1951 (as cited by McCall [52] 167 n. 18, whose translation I quote). *Contra*, however, Slochower [92] 46: 'The play was purportedly written as an attack on the Nazi system and Vichy collaboration. Yet, it is more an indictment of the people than of the system which forged their chains.'

[189] Sartre [80] 35; cf. McCall [52] 21–2.

themselves—always 'fickle, foolish, boastful, egotistical'—were responsible for their defeat by the German forces. The cult of collective guilt and the annual ceremony of national repentance supervised by Aegisthus in *The Flies* have, as McCall [52] 22 observes, a number of analogues in the Vichy policies. The majority of the Argives—as well as, eventually, Electra herself—are not literally accomplices in the royal couple's crimes or even fellow-travellers of its policies; however, they fall for 'the official dogma of an original sinlike guilt that all share equally'.[190] This ethics of collective guilt allows the Argives to avoid coming to grips with their individual responsibility, and at the same time blurs the distinction between the true culprits (Aegisthus and Clytemnestra) and the artfully inculpated populace.[191] In contrast to the dominant culture of crimes disowned, Orestes' 'act of revolt must be a crime for which he assumes total responsibility.'[192]

In so doing, however, Orestes does not attempt to go beyond the negation of the current order to create something new—say, to rule Argos in a more just or humane fashion. His role is 'to express the anarchist's "no" to an order judged unacceptable'.[193] In the words of Harry Slochower, 'The myth of Existentialism lives exclusively in the […] negation of the old collective ("essences", "metaphysics", "the system", etc.), and accepts the resulting homelessness, estrangement, fear, and anguish as a final "resting" point.'[194] Thus, Sartre's Orestes is more a nihilist than a genuine rebel, for he annuls without affirming (see Camus' observations as cited on p. 29 of this paper).[195] Though freed from the constraints of facticity and bad faith, Sartre's Orestes does not take the qualitative leap towards social engagement; in this respect he is, as Harry Slochower has called him, an 'un-Marxian hero'.[196]

It is crucial to point out that Sartre soon became aware of the limitations of his emphasis on individual choice as a basis for the person's project of self-making (he had already come under attack from Goldmann, Merleau–Ponty, and Aron for precluding, in his focus on the individual, the collective subject required by Marxism).[197] As a result, in his 1957 essay *Questions de méthode*, he sought to situate existentialism within the broader perspective of Marxist dialectics.[198] This he tried to do by connecting existentialism with the *praxis*-oriented analysis of social, economic, and historical facticities, which impose limitations on human *praxis*, and also (crucially) by weaving it into the Marxist politics of engagement, which seeks to transcend those limitations. The existentialist project is now redefined in Marxist terms: its aim is to

[190] Quotation from McCall [52] 23.
[191] See again McCall [52] 23.
[192] Quotation from McCall [52] 23.
[193] Quotation from McCall [52] 23.
[194] Quotation from Slochower [92] 43.
[195] In her search for one-to-one equivalences between *The Flies*' dramatic fiction (which she considers a *pièce à clef*) and contemporary historical reality in France, McCall [52] 23 equates Orestes' refusal to assume power in Argos with the aims of the French Resistance, whose members (with the exception of the communists) 'had no intention of taking power after the war; [their] single goal was to liberate France from the occupying Nazi forces.' Apart from the fact that the one-to-one equivalences she seeks to establish belong to a now-discredited paradigm of literary analysis, the specific point made by McCall seems off the mark, in view of the fact that French Resistance was controlled largely by Charles De Gaulle, the future President of the French Republic.
[196] Slochower [92] 46.
[197] See Flynn [26] 174–7.
[198] For Sartre's earlier engagement with the collective subject—a group brought together by the situation, structured by common action, and organized by leaders—in *Les Communistes et la paix* see Flynn [26] 178.

establish '*for everyone* a margin of *real* freedom beyond the production of life'.[199] In this perspective, the existentialist striving after freedom and self-making cannot be divorced from the antinomy between history-as-is (Sartre's *pratico-inerte*)[200] and the possibility to *make* history by causing ruptures that transcend facticity as manifested in the form of prevailing socio-economic structures.[201]

It seems doubtful, or even unlikely, that Ritsos' 'Orestes' represents an attempt to reconcile existentialism with Marxism, either along Sartre's lines or otherwise. In Ritsos, as in the early Sartre, it is the *individual's* liberation from facticity that claims pride of place—although in his case the ambiguity surrounding Orestes' future after the matricide represents a less finite interpretive possibility than his Sartrean counterpart's definite departure from Argos. Still, Orestes' personal triumph over the contingencies of existence overshadows, in Ritsos, his responsibility for the community, which thus recedes into the background and is even tainted with contemptuous references to the ignorance of the crowd.[202]

It is in the context of this ambiguous stance towards political engagement, I suggest, that Ritsos' appropriation of Greek tragic myth should be read. In Aeschylus, Orestes' acquittal at the Areopagus is presented under a dual light. On the one hand, it spells Orestes' restitution to the royal house whose rightful heir he is (*Eumenides* 754–61); on the other, it provides, anachronistically, mythic authority for a historical (462/1 BC) alliance between Athens, where the trial took place, and Argos, Orestes' homeland (*Eum*. 762–77)—an alliance that is envisaged as lasting 'for the fullness of all time to come' (*Eum*. 763).[203] Moreover, at the end of *Eumenides*, the Erinyes are persuaded to forego punitive vengeance for their defeat at Areopagus and to pledge their eternal blessing and protection of Athens; in affirmation of which they are finally escorted in procession to their sanctuary under the Areopagus (*Eum*. 902–1047). Thus, the Aeschylean version of Orestes' myth is concluded *sub specie aeternitatis*: the vision of the future it constructs is one in which an individual's (Orestes') restitution is intertwined with communal benefit, including the liberation of the community from the fear of recurring disruption through the perpetuation of retributive justice (represented by the Erinyes). In Ritsos, by contrast, the tragic myth is to a large extent divested of its political import: Argos is never liberated from bad faith. On the contrary, 'easy faith, | inflexible, necessary, unfortunate faith […] ignorant faith' is pronounced a force 'that does great deeds secretly, antlike, in the dark'[204]—though crucially such 'great deeds' are performed only by a benighted multitude. The anonymous peasant envied by Orestes (p. 12 of this paper) is singled out for his natural and unproblematic integration

[199] Sartre [83] 34.

[200] As noted by Hazel Barnes, the translator and annotator of Sartre's *Search for a Method*, the term *pratico-inerte* (Sartre's coinage) refers 'to the external world, including both the material environment and human structures—the formal rules of a language, public opinion as expressed and molded by news media, any "worked-over matter" which modifies my conduct by the mere fact of its being there' (Sartre [83] 173 n. 6)

[201] Further on Sartre's attempts to situate existentialism within the Marxist paradigm, and on his crucial divergences from it (especially in his negation of historical determinism, the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the inevitability of a future classless society) see Flynn [26], esp. 173–204.

[202] For Slochower [92] 47, Sartre's Orestes, too, 'has only contempt' for the people, and *The Flies* 'depicts the people in a manner which does not make them worthy of being saved'; so also Jeanson [39] 24: 'Au fond, [Oreste] les méprise un peu, ces gens d'Argos.'

[203] Translation by Sommerstein [94] 451. See further Tzanetou [96] 31–3.

[204] See above p. 28 with n. 160 of this paper.

in the locale—not as an ideological symbol of, say, a politically aware and active proletariat.

Thus, as well as being re-cast in the mould of (mainly Sartrean) existentialism, the Orestes myth in Ritsos is also stripped, to a very large extent, of its communal function as a conveyor of meaning that can serve to shape or validate communal identity, to inaugurate or sanction a tradition, and to institute or promote a shared language and feeling. Ritsos plays on the traditionary, authoritative status of myth in order to construct a subversive, ironical, and even pessimistic reading of it. From a manifestation of communal engagement in Aeschylus, the Orestes myth becomes, in Ritsos' retelling, not only a tale of individual choice triumphing over situational inertia but also a celebration of the ultimate futility of all human struggle. This affirmation 'of an accepted futility', in which we have detected echoes of Camus' existentialist absurdism (see p. 20 of this paper), militates against the fundamental function of classical myth as an agent of a meaning that is primarily relevant to the collectivity. 'Where the classic myth', writes Slochower, 'relates the ego's rebellion to the common ground of things, Existentialism would relate it to the groundlessness of things, to "Nothing"'.[205] Thus, tragic myth becomes not so much a foil for Ritsos' revisionist reading as a template on which to graft an ironical refashioning of the traditional tale by revisiting its constituents (especially in their Aeschylean manifestation) to promote a bleak vision of an ultimately meaningless universe.

**Acknowledgments** This paper is part of the research project *"Our Heroic Debate with the Eumenides": Greek Tragedy and the Poetics and Politics of Identity in Modern Greek Poetry and Theatre*, which is generously funded by the Research Promotion Foundation of Cyprus. My warmest thanks go to Antonis Petrides (Open University of Cyprus), to Dimitris Tziovas (University of Birmingham), to Gonda Van Steen (University of Florida), and to two anonymous *IJCT* readers for constructive criticisms; also, to Kyriaki Petrakou (University of Athens) and to Yiorgos Zografidis (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) for valuable assistance. I am also indebted to Ms Eleftheria (Eri) Ritsou for information on her father's readings on existentialism and other matters. None of the above is responsible for the use I have made of their advice or for the views expressed in this paper. All errors are mine.

## References

1. Alexiou, M. 2002. *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition* (2nd ed., rev. by D. Yatromanolakis & P. Roilos). Lanham.
2. Apostolopoulos, D. 1960. *Δοκίμια τοῦ εἰκοστοῦ πρώτου ἔτους* [*Essays of the Twenty-First Year*]. Athens.
3. Bien, P. 1974. 'Myth in Modern Greek Letters, with Special Attention to Yannis Ritsos' *Philoctetes', Books Abroad* 48: 15-20.
4. Bien, P. 1980. *Αντίθεση καί σύνθεση στήν ποίηση τοῦ Γιάννη Ρίτσου*, transl. Y. Kritikos. Athens.
5. Blasi, A. 1974. 'On Becoming Responsible: Orestes in Aeschylus and in Sartre', *Review of Existential Psychology and Psychiatry* 13: 70-87.
6. Burian, P. 1997. 'Tragedy Adapted for Stages and Screens: The Renaissance to the Present', in P. E. 1201 Easterling (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy* (Cambridge), 228-83.
7. Calotychos V. 1994. Review of '[i] *The New Oresteia of Yannis Ritsos* translated with notes & commentary by George Pilitsis & Philip Pastras. Introduction by Kostas Myrsiades. Pella Publishing Co., 1991. [ii] *The Fourth Dimension* by Yannis Ritsos, translated by Peter Green & Beverly Bardsley. Princeton University Press, 1993', *Harvard Review* 7: 189-90.

[205] Slochower [92] 44.

8. Camus, A. 1955a. *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (transl. J. O'Brien). New York (repr. 1991).
9. ————, 1955b. *Ὁ ξένος: μυθιστόρημα* (transl. Y. Kotsiras). Athens.
10. ————, 1956. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (transl. A. Bower). New York.
11. ————, 1969a. *Ὁ Μύθος τοῦ Σίσυφου: δοκίμιο πάνω στὸ παράλογο* (transl. V. Hatzidimitriou), Athens.
12. ————, 1969b. *Καλιγούλας: ἔργο σὲ τέσσερις πράξεις* (transl. M. Portolomaiou). Athens.
13. ————, 1969c. *Ἡ ἐξορία καὶ τὸ βασίλειο* (transl. X. I. Karakalos). Athens.
14. ————, 1971. *Ὁ ἐπαναστατημένος ἄνθρωπος* (transl. J. Tsiakiri). Athens.
15. Catica-Vassi, M. (ed.), 1994. *Alexandros Sutsos: Orestis. Einleitung, kritische Edition* (*Meletemata* 3). Hamburg.
16. Chambers, M. 1992. 'Yánnis Rítsos and Greek Mythology', *Hermathena* 153: 37-56.
17. Chassapi-Christodoulou, E. 2002. *Η Ελληνική μυθολογία στο νεοελληνικό δράμα: Από την εποχή του Κρητικού Θεάτρου έως το τέλος του 20ού αιώνα* [*Greek Mythology in Modern Greek Drama: From the Age of Cretan Theatre till the End of the 20th Century*], 2 vols. Thessaloniki.
18. Colakis, M. 1984. 'Classical Mythology in Yiannis Ritsos' Dramatic Monologues', *Classical and Modern Literature* 4: 117-30.
19. Dallas, Y. 2008. 'Οπτικές του θέματος και της ποιητικής στα αρχαιόθεμα ποιήματα του Ρίτσου' ['Aspects of Theme and Poetics in Ritsos' Poems on Ancient Myths'], in A. Makrynikola and S. Bournazos (eds.), *Διεθνές συνέδριο Ο Ποιητής και ο πολίτης Γιάννης Ρίτσος: Οι Εισηγήσεις* ['*Proceedings of the International Conference on Yiannis Ritsos as Poet and Citizen*'], Athens, 53-62.
20. Dawe, R. D. 1976. [Review of J. C. Kamerbeek (ed.), *The Plays of Sophocles. Part V: The Electra* (Leiden 1974)], *Gnomon* 48: 228-34.
21. Dennis, G. 2002. '«Enfin, Sartre vint»: D'un théâtre de la fatalité à un théâtre de la liberté', *Chimères* 26: 15-26.
22. Di Benedetto V., 1983. *Sofocle*. Florence.
23. Dialismas, S. 1999. *Εισαγωγή στην ποίηση του Γιάννη Ρίτσου* [*Introduction to the Poetry of Yiannis Ritsos*], 2nd ed. Athens.
24. Dodds E. R., 1951. *The Greeks and the Irrational*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.
25. Evans, C. S. 2009. *Kierkegaard: An Introduction*. Cambridge.
26. Flynn, T. R. 1984. *Sartre and Marxist Existentialism*. Chicago.
27. Furtak, R. A. 2010. *Kierkegaard's Concluding Unscientific Postscript: A Critical Guide*. Cambridge.
28. Gardner, S. 2009. Sartre's *Being and Nothingness: A Reader's Guide*. London/New York.
29. Garvie, A. F. (ed.), 1986. *Aeschylus Choephori: Edited with Introduction and Commentary*. Oxford.
30. Gasti, E. 2005. 'Οι *Μύγες* του Σαρτρ και τα τραγικά του [sic] πρότυπα: Συγκριτικές παρατηρήσεις' ['Sartre's *The Flies* and Its Tragic Models: Comparative Remarks'], *Dodone* 34: 1-11.
31. Green, P. 1996. 'Myth, Tradition, and Ideology in the Greek Literary Revival: The Paradoxical Case of Yannis Ritsos', *Arion*, 3rd ser., 4: 88-111.
32. Harries, K. 2010. *Between Nihilism and Faith: A Commentary on* Either/Or (Kierkegaard Studies Monograph Series 21). Berlin and New York.
33. Hatzidimitriou, D. 2011. *Υποκείμενο και ύπαρξη. J.-P. Sartre και Γ. Ρίτσος: Οι δύο εκδοχές του Ορέστη* [*Subject and existence. J.-P. Sartre and Y. Ritsos: Two Versions of Orestes*]. MA diss., Thessaloniki.
34. Heubeck, A. et al. 1988. *A Commentary on* Homer's *Odyssey, vol. I: Introduction and Books I–VIII*. Oxford.
35. Highet, G. 1949. *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*. Oxford.
36. Husserl, E. 1977. *Cartesian Meditations: An Introduction to Phenomenology* (transl. D. Cairns). The Hague.
37. Jaspers, K. 1969. *Εἰσαγωγὴ στὴ Φιλοσοφία* [*Introduction to Philosophy*, German original *Einführung in die Philosophie*], transl. Ch. Malevitsis. Athens.
38. ————, 1978. *Μαθήματα Φιλοσοφίας* [*Lessons in Philosophy*, German original *Kleine Schule des philosophischen Denkens*], transl. Ch. Malevitsis. Athens.
39. Jeanson, F. 1955. *Sartre par lui–même*. Paris.
40. Jeffreys, M. 1994. 'Reading in the *Fourth Dimension*', *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)* 2: 61-105.
41. Karantonis, A. 2009. '«Orestes»', in D. Kokoris (ed.), *Εισαγωγή στην ποίηση του Ρίτσου: Επιλογή κριτικών κειμένων* [*Introduction to the Poetry of Ritsos: A Selection of Critical Essays*], 47-50, Athens. (First published in newsp. *Kathimerini*, 13/11/1966.)
42. Katsanis, V. 1964. 'Βαγγέλη Κατσάνη, Ὅταν οἱ Ἀτρεῖδες…, τραγωδία σὲ τρεῖς πράξεις' ['Vanghelis Katsanis, *When the Atreids*…, Tragedy in Three Acts'], *Θέατρο* 3.15: 49-69.
43. Kaufmann, W. 1964. 'Nietzsche between Homer and Sartre: Five Treatments of the Orestes Story', *Revue Internationale de Philosophie* 18: 50-73.

44. Kelesidou – Galanou, A. 1972. *Ἀπὸ τὴν ἀναγκαιότητα στὴν ἐλευθερία: ὁ Albert Camus καὶ τὸ παράλογο* [*From Necessity to Freedom: Albert Camus and the Absurd*]. Athens.
45. Kierkegaard, S. 2009. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript to the Philosophical Crumbs* (ed. A. Hannay). Cambridge.
46. Kitto, H. D. F. 1966. *Poiesis: Structure and Thought*. Berkeley and Los Angeles.
47. Kotti, A. 2009. *Γιάννης Ρίτσος: Ένα σχεδίασμα βιογραφίας* [*Yannis Ritsos: A Biographical Sketch*], 2nd rev. ed. Athens.
48. Leonard, M. 2005. *Athens in Paris: Ancient Greece and the Political in Post-War French Thought*. Oxford.
49. Lloyd-Jones, H. 1990. 'Erinyes, Semnai Theai, Eumenides', in E. M. Craik (ed.), *'Owls to Athens': Essays on Classical Subjects Presented to Sir Kenneth Dover* (Oxford), 203-11.
50. Lloyd-Jones H. & Wilson N. G. 1990. *Sophoclea: Studies on the Text of Sophocles*. Oxford
51. March J. R., 1987. *The Creative Poet: Studies on the Treatment of Myths in Greek Poetry*. London.
52. McCall, D. 1969. *The Theatre of Jean–Paul Sartre*. New York and London.
53. Meraklis, M. G. 1981. 'Η «Τέταρτη Διάσταση» τοῦ Γιάννη Ρίτσου: Μιά πρώτη προσέγγιση', in: *Ἀφιέρωμα στὸν Γιάννη Ρίτσο* [*Homage to Yiannis Ritsos*] (Athens), 517-44.
54. Merola, N. 1981. 'Rileggere Alfieri: La tragedia della politica', *MLN* 96 (Italian Issue): 70-88.
55. Myrsiades, K. 1978. 'The Classical Past in Yannis Ritsos' Dramatic Monologues', *Papers on Language and Literature* 14: 450-8.
56. ————, 1991. 'Introduction. Yannis Ritsos' New Oresteia: Form and Content', in Pilitsis and Pastras (1991) xv–xxxi.
57. Noudelmann, F. 1993. Huis clos *et* Les mouches *de Jean–Paul Sartre*. Paris.
58. P[apandreou], N. 1964. 'Βαγγέλη Κατσάνη: «Όταν οἱ Ἀτρεῖδες», Δ. Κεχαΐδη, «Τὸ πανηγύρι»' ['Vanghelis Katsanis' "When the Atreids", D. Kechaidis' "The Fair"], *Ἐπιθεώρηση Τέχνης* 118: 349.
59. Parker R. 1983. *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*. Oxford.
60. Pefanis, G. 2000/1. 'Μακρινά ταξίδια μυθικών προσώπων: Η Κλυταιμνήστρα και ο Αγαμέμνων στο νεοελληνικό θέατρο (1720 – 1996)' ['Long Journeys of Mythic Characters: Clytemnestra and Agamemnon in Modern Greek Theatre (1720 – 1996)'], *Θέματα Λογοτεχνίας* 16: 150-89.
61. Petrakou, K. 2004. *Θεατρολογικά Miscellanea*. Athens.
62. ————, 2007. 'Η παραστασιακή πρόσληψη των θεατρικών έργων του Sartre στην Ελλάδα' ['The Performance Reception of Sartre's Plays in Greece'], *Θέματα Λογοτεχνίας* 32: 134-53.
63. Philokyprou, E. 2004. *Η αμείλικτη ευεργεσία: Όψεις της σιωπής στην ποίηση του Γιάννη Ρίτσου* [*The Implacable Benefaction: Aspects of Silence in the Poetry of Yiannis Ritsos*]. Athens.
64. Pilitsis, G. and P. Pastras (tr. and comm.), 1991. *The New Oresteia of Yannis Ritsos*. New York.
65. Pontani, F. 2007. 'Shocks, Lies, and Matricide: Thoughts on Aeschylus *Choephori* 653-718', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 103: 203-33.
66. Prevelakis, P. 1981. *Ὁ ποιητὴς Γιάννης Ρίτσος: συνολικὴ θεώρηση τοῦ ἔργου του* [*The Poet Yiannis Ritsos: A Comprehensive Survey of His Work*] (repr. 1992). Athens.
67. Prokopaki, C. 1973. *Yannis Ritsos* [Poètes d'aujourd'hui 178]. Paris.
68. ————, 1980. 'Ο κύκλος τῶν μυθολογικῶν ποιημάτων τοῦ Ρίτσου' *['Ritsos' Cycle of Mythological Poems'], Theatrika Tetradia 2: 3-11*.
69. ————, 1989. 'Ο μύθος των Ατρειδών στους ποιητικούς μονολόγους του Γιάννη Ρίτσου' [The Atreid Myth in Yiannis Ritsos' Poetic Monologues'], *Θεατρικά Τετράδια* 18: 24-32.
70. Raizis, B. 1975. Review of 'ΖΩΗΣ ΚΑΡΕΛΛΗ: «ΟΡΕΣΤΗΣ». Θέατρο, Θεσσαλονίκη 1971.' ['*Orestes: Theatre*' by Zoi Karelli, Thessaloniki 1971], newsp. *TA NEA*, 18 June.
71. Reynolds, J. 2006. *Understanding Existentialism*. Chesham.
72. Ritsos, Y. 1978. *Ποιήματα, τόμος ΣΤ' (1956 – 1972): Τέταρτη Διάσταση* [*Poems, Volume VI (1956 – 1972): The Fourth Dimension*]. 6th edn. Athens (19th repr., Athens 2001).
73. ————, 1991. 'Γιάννη Ρίτσου: ένα γράμμα του, γιὰ τὴν ποίησή του' ['Yiannis Ritsos: A Letter of His, on His Own Poetry'], *Nea Hestia* 65 (no. 1547): 94-7.
74. ————, 1993. *The Fourth Dimension* (transl. P. Green & B. Bardsley). Princeton.
75. Rohde E., 1925. *Psyche: The Cult of Souls and Belief in Immortality among the Greeks* (Engl. transl. W. B. Hillis). London.
76. Sagi, A. 2002. *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*. Amsterdam.
77. Sangiglio, C. 1978. *Μύθος καί ποίηση στόν Ρίτσο* [*Myth and Poetry in Ritsos*], transl. Th. Ioannidis. Athens.
78. Sartre, J.-P. 1972. *Huis clos: suivi de Les Mouches*. Paris (first publ. in 1947).
79. ————, 1948. *Ἐγκζιστανσιαλισμός* (transl. S. P.). Athens.
80. ————, 1949. *Situations, III: Lendemains de guerre*. Paris.

81. ————, 1956. *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (transl. H. E. Barnes). New York.
82. ————, 1961. *Ὁ τοῖχος* (transl. O. Argyropoulos). Athens.
83. ————, 1963. *Search for a Method* (transl. and introd. H. E. Barnes). New York.
84. ————, 1965a. *Κεκλεισμένων τῶν θυρῶν: σὲ μιὰ πράξη* (transl. E. Yeroyianni). Athens.
85. ————, 1965b. *Ὁ Διάβολος κι ὁ καλὸς Θεός* (transl. E. Yeroyianni). Athens.
86. ————, 1968. *Ὁ ὑπαρξισμὸς εἶναι ἀνθρωπισμός* (transl. M. N. Politi). Athens.
87. ————, 1977. *Τὸ Εἶναι καὶ τὸ Μηδέν: Δοκίμιο φαινομενολογικῆς ὀντολογίας* (transl. K. Papayiorgis). Athens.
88. ————, 2007. *Existentialism is a Humanism* (transl. C. Macomber). New Haven and London.
89. Savidis, G. P. 1991. 'Η Διπλή θητεία του Γιάννη Ρίτσου' ['The Twin Engagement of Yiannis Ritsos'], *Νέα Εστία* 103 (no. 1547): 13-16.
90. Seaford R., 1985. 'The Destruction of Limits in Sophokles' *Elektra*', *CQ* 35: 315-23.
91. Segal, C. 1981. *Tragedy and Civilization: An Interpretation of Sophocles*. Cambridge (MA) and London.
92. Slochower, H. 1948. 'The Function of Myth in Existentialism', *Yale French Studies* 1: 42-52.
93. Sokoljuk, V. 1976. '«Μυθολογικὰ» ποιήματα τῆς «Τέταρτης Διάστασης» τοῦ Γιάννη Ρίτσου' ['"Mythological" Poems in Yiannis Ritsos' "Fourth Dimension"'], *Τομές* 6:14-19.
94. Sommerstein, A. H. (ed.), 2008. *Aeschylus Oresteia: Agamemnon, Libation-Bearers, Eumenides* (Loeb Classical Library146). Cambridge, MA.
95. Tillich, P. 1976. *Τὸ θάρρος τῆς ὑπάρξεως* [*The Courage to Be*], transl. Ch. Malevitsis. Athens.
96. Tzanetou, A. 2012. *City of Suppliants: Tragedy and the Athenian Empire*. Austin.
97. Tziovas, D. 1996. 'Ritsos' Orestes: The Politics of Myth and the Anarchy of Rhetoric', in P. Mackridge (ed.), *Ancient Greek Myth in Modern Greek Poetry: Essays in Memory of C. A. Trypanis* (London), 67-80.
98. Valamvanos, G. and K. MacKinnon, 1979. '*The Successors* by Vangelis Katsanis', *Journal of the Hellenic Diaspora* 6.4: 31-83.
99. Vamvouri Ruffy, M. 2013. 'Sortir de l'ombre du mythe : Oreste chez Eschyle, Sartre et Ritsos', in U. Heidmann, M. Vamvouri Ruffy, N. Coutaz (eds.), *Mythes (re)configurés : création, dialogues, analyses* (Lausanne) 85-110.
100. Van Steen, G. 2002*a*. 'Rolling out the Red Carpet: Power "Play" in Modern Greek Versions of the Myth of Orestes from the 1960s and 1970s', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9: 51-95.
101. ————, 2002*b*. 'Rolling out the Red Carpet: Power "Play" in Modern Greek Versions of the Myth of Orestes from the 1960s and 1970s', *International Journal of the Classical Tradition* 9: 195-235.
102. ————, 2005. 'Forgotten Theater, Theater of the Forgotten: Classical Tragedy on Modern Greek Prison Islands', *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 23: 335-95.
103. ————, 2011. *Theatre of the Condemned: Classical Tragedy on Greek Prison Islands.* Oxford.
104. Veloudis, G. 1979. 'Αὐτοβιογραφία, μύθος καὶ ἱστορία στὸ ἔργο τοῦ Γ. Ρίτσου' ['Autobiography, Myth, and History in the Work of Y. Ritsos'], in: *Ἑταιρεία Ἑλλήνων Λογοτεχνῶν: 70 Χρόνια τοῦ Γιάννη Ρίτσου* [*Greek Literature Society: Yiannis Ritsos at 70*], Athens, 17-41.
105. ————, 1982. *Γιάννης Ρίτσος: Προβλήματα μελέτης τοῦ ἔργου του* [*Yiannis Ritsos: Problems in the Study of his Work*], Athens.
106. ————, 1991. 'Ο Μύθος στον Ρίτσο [Myth in Ritsos]' *Νέα Εστία* 103 (no. 1547): 113-16.
107. Wahl, J. 1970. Εἰσαγωγὴ στὶς φιλοσοφίες τοῦ ὑπαρξισμοῦ [*Introduction to the Philosophies of Existentialism*, French original *Les Philosophies de l'existence*], transl. Ch. Malevitsis. Athens.
108. Webber, J. 2009. *The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre*. London.