

Reconsidering Modernism: the exile poems of Giannis Ritsos

Maria Athanassopoulou
University of Cyprus

The aim of the present paper is to explore the exile poems of Ritsos, from the perspective of style and intertextual dialogue with Modern Greek poems hitherto unrelated to them, drawn from the ranks of literary modernism. Ritsos's ordeals with post-war rehabilitation camps for Left-wing ideologues came as a result of his life-long commitment to the Greek Communist Party. He was initiated into the communist ideology in 1927, when he was an inmate of the sanatorium "Sotiria", where he met a plethora of the bohemian intellectuals of his time. He became a *de facto* spokesman for the Communist Party in 1945 with the publication of his long epic encomium of the Party's head, "Ο Σύντροφός μας Νίκος Ζαχαριάδης", upon the latter's release from Dachau.¹ By the time the Greek Civil War erupted in 1945-46, Ritsos was a reasonably well-known poet,² having already published eight collections, namely *Τρακτέρ* (1934), *Πυραμίδες* (1935), *Επιτάφιος* (1936), *Το τραγούδι της αδελφής μου* (1937), *Εαρινή συμφωνία* (1938), *Το*

¹ See Angeliki Kotti, *Γιάννης Ρίτσος: Ένα σχεδιάσμα βιογραφίας* (Athens: Ellinika Grammata 2009), p. 54 ff. on Ritsos's initiation to the communist ideology and trade unionism; p. 105 ff. on his involvement in the formation and voicing of the party line through his poetry.

² On Ritsos's reception by Modern Greek criticism, which shaped the public response, see Christina Dounia, "Ο Ρίτσος και η κριτική", in Aikaterini Makrynika and Stratis Bournazos (eds.), *Διεθνές Συνέδριο: Ο Ποιητής και ο Πολίτης Γιάννης Ρίτσος* (Athens: Benaki Museum-Kedros 2008), pp. 220-41. Alafouzou and Karvounis, official Party critics of the time, were reserved about *Τρακτέρ* and *Πυραμίδες*. Ritsos's most positive early critic was Chourmouziou.

εμβατήριο του ωκεανού (1940), *Παλιά μαζούρκα σε ρυθμό βροχής* (1943), and *Δοκιμασία* (1943).³

It is worth recalling the chronicle of Ritsos's years of exile, which runs as follows: in July 1948, when the third and by far the bloodiest round of the Civil War began, Ritsos was arrested and displaced to Limnos, where he was kept for nine months, an inmate of the camp of the town of "Kontopouli"; in May 1949 he was transferred to the harsher camp of Makronissos⁴ from which

³ Chryssa Prokopaki, in her "Εισαγωγή", *Ανθολογία Γιάννη Ρίτσου* (Athens: Kedros 2000), offers a reliable periodization of Ritsos's work, according to the dominant stylistic traits of each phase: (i) 1930-36: apprenticeship phase. During this phase Ritsos oscillates between socialist realism and modernism, between the decapentasyllabic couplet and free verse; (ii) 1937-43: phase of "lyric explosion". Surrealist elements are fruitfully integrated in his poetry, now mainly written in free verse; (iii) 1944-55: phase of political commitment and bifurcation of lyric production. Two types of poems will from now on be discerned in his output: short, lapidary poems on imagist or mythological themes, and long, frequently confessional, *poèmes-fleuves*; (iv) 1956-66: phase of "sophisticated meditations" and "inventive lyric tropes", i.e. the dramatic monologue; (v) 1967-71, while stylistically repeating traits of phase (iv), this phase witnesses a higher degree of irony, sarcasm and the use of the absurd in his poems, by way of response to the Colonels' dictatorship; (vi) 1972-83: phase of recollection and self-reflection. His love poems become more "open" now. He also tries his hand at prose: nine novels are left behind when he dies on 11 November 1990. His heirs also found fifty unpublished collections in his Nachlass (some of which were recently published in *Ποιήματα ΙΔ'* [Kedros: Athens 2007]). According to this literary-historical map of his work, by the beginning of the Civil War Ritsos had completed the second phase of his stylistic development, and was heading for the third.

⁴ Concerning "Makronissos", the first post-war concentration camp in Western Europe, see: Stratis Bournazos and Tassos Sakellaropoulos (eds.), *Ιστορικό Τοπίο και Μνήμη: Το παράδειγμα της Μακρονήσου* (Athens: Philistor 2000). According to Bournazos, "Το 'Μέγα Εθνικόν Σχολείον Μακρονήσου' (1947-1950)", in *Ιστορικό Τοπίο και Μνήμη*, pp. 115-45: 117, the uniqueness of the Makronissos experiment consists in three factors: (a) the scale of the operation, which, by most accounts, dealt with some 50,000 detainees, over a period of three years; (b) the intensity of the physical and emotional tortures employed there; and (c) the organized nature of state propaganda implemented on the island, with the aim of securing the detainees' renunciation of communism. Also of interest is the article by G. Papatheodorou, "Η Ίπυκνοκατοικημένη

he was released in July 1950 on account of health problems, only to be rearrested and deported back there a few months later. By 1950 the Makronissos rehabilitation camp was falling into disuse, so the poet was, soon after he was rearrested, transferred to Agios Efstratios, from where he was released in August 1952. At this point his suffering for being a vocal supporter of the Greek Left during the Civil War came to an end. The next round of imprisonments for Left-wing dissenters began in 1967, a result of the Colonels' *coup* of 21 April 1967. A few days after the *coup*, Ritsos was deported to the island of Giaros, and on 30 June to Leros. But by this stage, Ritsos was far too famous to be treated as an ordinary political prisoner. The French Marxist/surrealist poet Louis Aragon headed an international campaign for his release, while Ritsos's own failing health provided ample excuse for special conditions of confinement in the comfort of his wife's home in Samos, to which he was moved in October 1968 (after a few months' hospitalization in Athens). There he remained virtually until the fall of the dictatorship on 24 July 1974.

Ritsos was continuously writing during these seven years, and some of his most brilliant short poems, namely the collection *Πέτρες, Επαναλήψεις, Κιγκλίδωμα*, were produced during this second phase of confinement for political reasons. But since, by this stage, Ritsos had reached the status of a poet-laureate, who, while being a *persona non grata* for the establishment, could still afford to produce poetry in the comfort of his own home, his production in this period falls outside the scope of my examination here. This is because I consider as core examples of "exile

Ερημιά' των ποιητών της Μακρονήσου: Γραφές της Εξορίας", in: Bournazos and Sakellaropoulos, op. cit., pp. 227-44, which reads the poetry of Ritsos, Patrikios, Alexandrou as informed by a poetics of resistance from within the censored discursive domain. See also: Yannis Hamilakis, "The Other Parthenon: Antiquity and national memory at the concentration camp", *The nation and its ruins: antiquity, archaeology, and national imagination in Greece* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2007), pp. 205-41, with special reference to the Janus-faced discourse of classical inheritance, used both by the detainees and the oppressors on Makronissos.

poems”: (a) texts that have been produced in the harsh physical, mentally taxing, conditions experienced by an ordinary camp prisoner, and (b) texts that deal explicitly with the theme of exile and related themes (such as the reasons that brought the inmate to his/her fate, and the expected outcome of his/her resistance), and hence reflecting/refracting the conditions of their production in their choice of subject-matter. It should be finally noted that I am aware of the theories that posit that the trauma of deportation and torture may be *denied* by its victim, and therefore “represented” in his/her creative output only by virtue of its meaningful absence, which has then to be read as a vestige of the trauma’s ghostly presence. Yet the motive for writing in these dreadful conditions is precisely to keep suffering at arm’s length, to reorganize trauma as rational explanation. So, while from the point of view of Ritsos’s readership trauma may here be redeployed as redemptive suffering, as far as authorial intention goes, I would be wary of a “hermeneutics of suspicion” that would treat thematically unrelated poems from that period as pertinent to his “exile poetry” (e.g. the 21 short, impressionist poems of *Παρενθέσεις* [1946-47]), as codified chronicles of this experience. The fact that the communists offer pride of place to *socialist realism* as regards writing and reading literature,⁵ and given that Ritsos is explicitly committed to Communist ideals at this stage (he is in exile for not renouncing them!),⁶ makes more obvious my view that any

⁵ Christina Dounia, “Το Συνέδριο των Σοβιετικών Συγγραφέων”, *Λογοτεχνία και πολιτική: Τα περιοδικά της Αριστεράς στο μεσοπόλεμο* (Athens: Kastaniotis 1996), pp. 311-64, offers a detailed account of the formation of the dogma of *socialist realism* at the 1st Congress of Soviet Writers, which took place in Moscow, in September 1934. She also comments on the way the Greek Communist Party castigated Ritsos for not following it closely enough (pp. 442-50).

⁶ On Ritsos’s adventure with the compulsion to make a “repentance statement”, see Kotti, *Γιάννης Ρίτσος*, pp. 111 ff. For a theoretical reading of its instrumentality in destroying solidarity among Greek communists, and its negative impact on the prisoners’ subjectivity, see P. Voglis, “Ανάμεσα στην Άρνηση και την αυτοάρνηση: Πολιτικοί κρατούμενοι στην Ελλάδα, 1945-50”, in: Mark Mazower (ed.), *Μετά τον Πόλεμο: Η ανασυγκρότηση της οικογένειας, του έθνους και του κράτους*

cryptic reading of his Civil War poetry should be put aside. Having defined the material that falls within the scope of my paper, it is now time to look at the texts as such.

The data Ritsos's biographers offer us,⁷ in conjunction with the reading premises I posited above as regards the production of his "exile poetry", are as follows:

1) November 1948: *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας I (27 Οκτωβρίου-23 Νοεμβρίου)*. The collection comprises thirty diary entries irregularly scattered over a period of four weeks; it consists of poems of different length; the opening poem of the collection, which is its shortest, has fourteen lines ("27 Οκτωβρίου 1948"), the longest has fifty-two lines ("14 Νοεμβρίου 1948").

2) January 1949: *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας II (24 Νοεμβρίου 1948-31 Ιανουαρίου 1949)*. It comprises forty-nine diary entries distributed across sixty-eight days; the poems are much shorter than those of *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας I*, more elliptical in nature, and made up of very short lines (e.g. six to seven syllables is the rule).

3) February 1949: *Καπνισμένο τσουνκάλι*, later placed as postscript to *Μετακινήσεις*, a collection originally conceived in 1942.

4) September 1949: *Πέτρινος χρόνος* (begun August) and early parts of *Οι γειτονιές του κόσμου* (completed in 1951).

5) June 1950: *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας III (18 Ιανουαρίου-1 Ιουνίου 1950)*. The collection comprises thirty-eight diary entries, consisting of poems that thematically adhere to the minimalist poetics of *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας II*, yet tend to run to some length. (They are composed of more parts than the poems in either of the two previous diary collections, even though the parts are brief and they consist of short lines.)

6) November 1950 (the poet is now in Agios Efstratios): *Γράμμα στο Ζολιό Κιουρί*.

στην Ελλάδα, 1943-60, trans. Eirini Theofylactopoulou (Athens: Alexandraia²2004), pp. 87-104.

⁷ More scholarly in outlook, though less pleasant to read than Kotti's biography, is: Aikaterini Makrynika and G. P. Savvidis, *Εργογραφία Γιάννη Ρίτσου - Χρονολόγιο Εργογραφίας Γιάννη Ρίτσου* (Athens: Kedros 1981).

7) July 1951: *Οι γειτονιές του κόσμου*, a composition of epic aspirations, which takes the reader on a tour of 20th-century European history, from the battle of Stalingrad (1943) to the establishment of NATO, assessing the role of proletarians worldwide, but primarily of the Greek people in materializing the ideals of justice and peace.

It is time for some preliminary observations. First, let us note that, in the more humane conditions of Agios Efstratios, the poet is able to take his mind off the emergency situation that dictated *Ημερολόγια*, and produce works of wider scope, even if still fixated on the topic of war. A further proof of this opening-up of the poet's thematics in the improved living conditions of Agios Efstratios, as Civil War reprisals are drawing to a close, comes in "Το ποτάμι κι εμείς", composed in late 1951. The composition, later incorporated in *Αγρόπνια* (1954) along with "Ρωμιοσύνη" (1945-47), deals with the Heraclitus-like topic of the passing of time, through the fragmentary recording of the experiences of a young couple; it is hence totally unrelated to the exilic situation from which it springs. Secondly, let us notice that Ritsos's exilic output comprises both short and longer collections. More importantly, Ritsos's exilic output comprises both collections that adhere to the pattern of engaged poetry that the Communist Party would have wished for, and collections that strike more subversive tones. On closer observation, one realizes that the "engaged" texts tend to be longer, and more narrative in scope, the "disengaged" texts (if I may call them so) tend to be shorter, fragmentary and cryptic. The shortest of all positively "engaged" texts related to the Civil War ordeal is *Καπνισμένο τσουκάλι* (written in 1949 on Limnos; published in *Μετακινήσεις* [1961]), in which the poet presents scenes of the daily life in the prison and the camp, along with his feelings of solidarity for his comrades, boosted through the reminiscence of common resistance acts against the Germans during the Occupation. Certain extracts of *Καπνισμένο τσουκάλι* have acquired proverbial status, thanks to their literary merits. Such is the following:

Και να, αδελφέ μου, που μάθαμε να κουβεντιάζουμε
ήσυχα-ήσυχα κι απλά.
Καταλαβαινόμεστε τώρα – δε χρειάζονται περισσότερα.
Κι αύριο λέω θα γίνουμε ακόμα πιο απλοί
θα βρούμε αυτά τα λόγια που παίρνουν το ίδιο βάρος σ’ όλες
τις καρδιές, σ’ όλα τα χείλη
έτσι να λέμε πια τα σύκα: σύκα, και τη σκάφη: σκάφη,
κ’ έτσι που να χαμογελάνε οι άλλοι και να λένε: “τέτοια
ποιήματα
σου φτιάχνουμε εκατό την ώρα”. Αυτό θέλουμε και μεις.

Γιατί εμείς τραγουδάμε για να ξεχωρίσουμε, αδελφέ
μου, απ’ τον κόσμο
εμείς τραγουδάμε για να σμίξουμε τον κόσμο.⁸

The longest of all the exilic collections, positively “engaged” with the ideals of the Greek left, is, as we saw, *Οι γειτονιές του κόσμου*. It is an epic synthesis on the prehistory of the Greek Left, which runs to 4,000 lines and occupies fourteen cantos of uneven length and uneven numbers of stanzas. *Οι γειτονιές του κόσμου* offers a panorama of modern European history, from the battle of Stalingrad (3 February 1943) to the Greeks’ unanimous Resistance to the Germans in Athens (terminating the Occupation on 12 October 1944), and from there on to the Truman Doctrine (1947) and the days of the Marshall plan (1948), concluding with the 1949 establishment of NATO. It is clearly an “exilic” composition, even if it does not thematize Ritsos’s camp surroundings, since it is rooted in the communicative situation from which it springs: *Οι γειτονιές του κόσμου* aimed at providing Ritsos’s fellow prisoners on Makronissos and Agios Efstratios with a comprehensive narrative of their battles and their goals, which would make their suffering meaningful. Some sections of *Οι γειτονιές του κόσμου* strike one as too programmatic and lacking in inspiration. Yet the collection as a whole boasts several merits, not least among them the successful, deliberate depiction of the anonymous, everyday, Elpenor-like individual, as main agent of

⁸ Now in: *Καπνισμένο τσουκάλι* (Athens: Kedros ¹⁰1976), p.12.

historical change. This strategy consciously undermines the significance so far attributed to the eponymous, Odysseus-like hero of the more orthodox, liberal strand of Greek modernism, and the repressive ideological repercussions harboured by his use, i.e. the view that only socially, or biologically, privileged individuals can make history.⁹ To illustrate this point, let us look at two indicative extracts from *Οι γειτονιές του κόσμου*. The first comes from section *Γ* of the composition, and refers to the time of the German Occupation of Athens, when a son's loss to the Germans turns the mother into an active member of the Resistance. A resurrection of the lost youth thus occurs, figuratively, in the ideological domain:

Η θεια-Καλή ντυμένη στα κατάμαυρα –
 φούσκωνε η φούστα της μπροστά γιομάτη παράνομο τύπο.
 Ο εργάτης με το ζεμπίλι της δουλειάς την καλημέρισε.
 Είταν βρεγμένα τα μαλλιά του εργάτη.
 Κάτι σταγόνες πέσαν καθώς έσκυψε το κεφάλι του να
 χαιρετίσει.
 Κι έσφιξε δυνατά το ζεμπίλι του.
 Η κυρά-Λένη μισόκλεισε τόνα της μάτι και την πείραξε:
 “Πότε με το καλό, ο καινούργιος γιος,”
 “Αμ όπου νάναι” λέει η θεια-Καλή.
 “Όπου νάναι” και τράβηξε το δρόμο της.¹⁰

⁹ The point was first raised by G. P. Savvidis, *Μεταμορφώσεις του Ελπήνορα: Από τον Πάουντ στον Σινόπουλο* (Athens: Nefeli 1990). Savvidis suggestively notes that the anti-hero's revalorization began in 1917 (the year of the October revolution in Russia), with Pound's revival of Elpenor in the *Cantos*. He argues that Ritsos's re-valorized Elpenor dates from 1964-65 and is related to his mythological collection, *Μαρτυρίες (Δεύτερη σειρά)*. Projecting this argument backward in time, I would suggest that Ritsos's view that the populace is the real agent of historical change (a view later on nicely expressed through the Homeric frame), was formed earlier on, during his first engagement with communism.

¹⁰ Now in: Giannis Ritsos, *Τα Επικαιρικά* (Athens: Kedros ¹²1987), p. 50.

The second comes from section *E* of the composition and refers to the suffering on Makronissos, strategically coupled with the visualization of a better future, so as to make the prisoners' sacrifice meaningful.¹¹ The importance of the anonymous hero in procuring sociohistorical change is foregrounded in this stanza through the skilful, mixed reference to both fictional members of the proletariat worldwide, and to the real, historical personages, Ritsos met on the island:

Έτσι έφυγε κι ο Πέτρος σε μια δύση ολόχρυση.
 Έτσι έφυγε κι ο Φούτσικ κι ο Περί κι η Ζόγια
 βγάζοντας απ' τις τσέπες τους χιλιάδες προκηρύξεις
 και τούτος ο άνεμος στριφογυρίζοντας τις προκηρύξεις
 πάνω απ' τις στέγες της πολιτείας
 πάνου απ' τα καράβια
 πάνου απ' τα κράνη των Ναζήδων
 μπροστά στα καμένα παράθυρα
 μες στις πλατείες των μαχαλάδων
 μες στα στρατόπεδα συγκέντρωσης
 καρφώνοντας ο άνεμος τις προκηρύξεις στα συρματοπλέγματα
 ανεβάζοντας ο άνεμος τις προκηρύξεις
 ως το κελί του Λαμπρινού και του Θέμου Κορνάρου...¹²

Οι γειτονίες του κόσμου adheres nicely to the definition of “Resistance poetry” given by the relevant specialist critics: the collection exudes a high degree of comradeship, a solidified feeling of the collective; this is achieved by recourse to the ritualistic invocation of shared ideological battles.¹³ But this is only one side of the coin, as we shall soon come to realize.

¹¹ Voglis, “Ανάμεσα στην Άρνηση και την αυτοάρνηση”, argues that the aim of the farewell letters left behind by those about to be executed was to vindicate their imminent executions, to make them meaningful. (That this process should take place through writing is related by Voglis to the fact that the humiliating renunciation of communism was also a textual act: the signing of the *repentance statement*.)

¹² *Τα Επικαιρικά*, p. 60.

¹³ For a comprehensive account of post-war poetry in Greece with special emphasis on the political strand, see Dora Menti, *Μεταπολεμική*

Ritsos's exilic output also comprises, at the other end of the spectrum, collections of shorter poems in which fragmentariness, at times bordering on speechlessness, becomes a compositional rule, mirroring the poet's loss of faith in the power of *grand narratives*. Such is the case of his diary-like *Ημερολόγια Εξορίας* I-III (Limnos–Makronissos, 1948-49), consisting of at times extremely short, minimalist poems that can be fruitfully read as “τετράδια γυμνασμάτων” towards the creation of his more accomplished (though only one year “younger”), yet no less disillusioned *Πέτρινος χρόνος* (written 1949, published 1957). In order to illustrate the extremes to which such poetic brevity can go, let us look at the first part of the tripartite, eleven-line poem: “4 Δεκεμβρίου”, from *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας* II:

Πρόβατο, πρόβατο της αγωνιάς
 μικρό ποίημα
 πιάσε με απ' το χέρι.
 Η αυγή έχει τ' αγκάθι της
 και το σκαμνί της.
 Ως το βράδυ ας πιστέψουμε.¹⁴

We may compare the bipartite poem “2 Δεκεμβρίου”, from *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας* II, which consists of just five lines:

Ο ουρανός είναι μια τρύπα.
 Δεν χωράμε.

πολιτική ποίηση: Ιδεολογία και ποιητική (Athens: Kedros 1995). Menti defines “Ποίηση της Αντίστασης” (op. cit., pp. 121-61) – as opposed to “Ποίηση της Δοκιμασίας” and “Ποίηση της Ήττας” – by making reference to its proponents' (a) ideological commitment to the Left; (b) sense of collectivity, and nearly simultaneous first appearance in letters; (c) thematics, related to their contemporaneous historical background; (d) moderate stylistic modernism; (e) variegated class provenance; (f) differentiation vis-à-vis the Thirties poets as regards the programmatic value they attached to their poetry. Menti argues that, contrary to what one would have anticipated, post-war poets are *less* committed than the Thirties poets to maintaining their ideology intact in their poetry, when reality fails them.

¹⁴ *Τα Επικαιρικά*, p. 228.

Ξαγρόπνια. Το τσιγάρο. Ο αγέρας.
 Δε θέλω να μιλήσω.
 Ποιος ακούει έτσι;¹⁵

Combining the two aforementioned tendencies of Ritsos's earlier exilic poetry, i.e. his tendency towards compression, and his tendency to expand to epic dimensions, *Πέτρινος χρόνος* comprises twenty-four poems of some length, ostensibly on a variety of themes ("Γνωριμία", "Πάντα", "Έτοιμοι", "Ο Ντικ", "Οι ρίζες του κόσμου", "Βράδυ", "Μεσημέρια", "Σήμερα", "Ο Αλέξης", "Συμβάντα", "Οι γερόντοι μας", "Αλλαγή", "Χρέος", "Φεγγάρι", "Ο μπαρμπα-Μήτσος", "Τα παιδιά μας", "Ξημέρωμα", "Χρόνος", "Ο μπαρμπα-Καράς κι ο γιός του", "Κάθε βράδι", "Λίγο-λίγο", "Ωστόσο", "Τα χέρια των συντρόφων", "Α.Β.Γ."), which share the common underlying feeling that memory and comradeship are annihilated when confronted with the sight of torture. This is a collection produced in Makronissos, and most definitely about Makronissos. It comes as close as one can get in Ritsos to the definition of the sub-genre of "exilic literature".¹⁶ In *Πέτρινος χρόνος* the poet removes all traces of verbosity and old-style lyricism, in an attempt to dramatize, at the level of form, diction and choice of futile subject-matter, the devastation caused by separation and death, immanent in the camp experience. He also – on occasion – points to the new configurations of the self that can potentially arise from the exilic experience. Let us look at two characteristic poems from this collection, beginning with "Ο Ντικ":

Η πέτρα σταυρωμένη απ' τον άνεμο –
 ο άνεμος, η σιγαλιά –

¹⁵ *Τα Επικαιρικά*, p. 226.

¹⁶ For an historical overview of the notion of exile both as enforced banishment and as voluntary withdrawal, and some penetrating remarks on the changes the exilic situation brings to the exile's self-perception and to his/her texts (also in terms of devising a literary mode that would procure a sense of continuity to the alienated self), see R. Edwards, "Exile, self and society", in: Maria-Ines Lagos-Pope (ed.), *Exile in literature* (London: Associated University Presses 1988), pp. 15-31.

δεν ακούγεται τίποτα
μόνο το καρδιοχτύπι της πέτρας
κι η πέτρα της καρδιάς που δουλεύεται
με το θυμό και με τον πόνο
βαριά, σιγά και σταθερά.

Μπόλικη πέτρα
μπόλικη καρδιά
να χτίσουμε τις αυριανές μας φάμπρικες
τα λαϊκά μέγαρα
τα κόκκινα στάδια
και το μεγάλο μνημείο των ηρώων της Επανάστασης.

Να μην ξεχάσουμε και το μνημείο του Ντικ –
ναι, ναι, του σκύλου μας του Ντικ,
της ομάδας του Μούδρου,
που τον σκοτώσαν οι χωροφυλάκοι
γιατί αγάπαγε πολύ τους εξόριστους.

Ένα μνημείο για τον Ντικ –
ένας πέτρινος σκύλος
με φαρδιά καπούλια,
με δύο σταγόνες αφοσίωση στα μάτια
μ' ανασηκωμένο το πάνω του χέιλι
δείχνοντας το ζερβί του δόντι
έτοιμος να δαγκάσει
τον αστράγαλο της νύχτας
ή τη σκιά του χωροφύλακα
ή τη στενόμακρη παύση του κλεφτοφάναρου
πούβαζε μια πλάκα σιωπή
ανάμεσα στα λόγια και στα χέρια μας.

Να μην ξεχάσουμε, σύντροφοι, τον Ντικ,
το φίλο μας τον Ντικ
που γαύγιζε τις νύχτες στην αυλόπορτα άντικρυ στη θάλασσα
κι αποκοιμιόταν τα χαράματα
στα γυμνά πόδια της Λευτεριάς
με τη χρυσόμυγα του αυγερινού
πάνω στο στυλωμένο αυτί του.

Τώρα ο Ντικ κοιμάται στη Λήμνο
δείχοντας πάντα το ζερβί του δόντι.

Μπορεί μεθαύριο να τον ακούσουμε πάλι
να γανγίζει χαρούμενος σε μια διαδήλωση
περνοδιαβαίνοντας κάτω απ' τις σημαίες μας
έχοντας κρεμασμένη στο ζερβί του δόντι
μια μικρή πινακίδα “κάτω οι τύραννοι”.

Είταν καλός ο Ντικ –
να μην ξεχάσουμε, σύντροφοι, τον Ντικ
το φίλο μας τον Ντικ που σκοτώθηκε στις γραμμές μας
το φίλο μας τον Ντικ που τον σκότωσαν
γιατί αγάπαγε πολύ τους συντρόφους μας.¹⁷

The poem's specificity in time-and-place depictions makes it characteristic of Ritsos's exilic poetry of the Civil War (Moudros, in line 16, is a sizeable town on the island of Limnos, referred to in line 38, which also hosted a post-war rehabilitation camp). It is this particular aspect of Ritsos's poetry that I consider fully intentional and radically anti-modernist, when read against the monumentalization of place and time, primordial but by definition Greek, that one gets in Seferis's *Μυθιστόρημα* (1935) or Elytis's *Προσανατολισμοί* (1940). In “Ο Ντικ” the lyric subject addresses his fellow exiles (line 31: “σύντροφοι”) enmeshed in the problematic present they are all facing; for this reason he has no need to masquerade, hide, or bowdlerize any of the painful aspects of their common experience. Exposing is a way of castigating and exorcizing their shared, troublesome present. The collective subject of the comrades has nothing to hide; a subject that, incidentally, has little in common with Seferis's trans-historical “σύντροφοι”, vested in Homeric overtones (cf. “Η μορφή της Μοίρας”, “Ο Στράτης Θαλασσινός ανάμεσα στους αγάπανθους”, *Logbook* II). The immediacy of the poem's language likewise reflects the urgency of the situation from which it springs. On the other hand, the choice of the lowly, kitschified subject-matter of the dead dog

¹⁷ *Τα Επικαιρικά*, pp. 264-5.

and its monument hints at the debunking of the communist ideology some of his fellow inmates may have privately undergone in the face of extremities such as a body in pain. What is more, this poem, through the use of the trope of self-referencing, narrativizes an accentuation of earlier perceptions of exile by Ritsos himself, such as we get in *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας* I, where this very same dog, “Dick”, is depicted alive, and friendly with the inmates (the poem “23 Νοεμβρίου”).¹⁸ I should finally like to note that two echoes of earlier poems in “Ο Ντυκ” validate its reading as a critique of Ritsos’s own earlier, at times too programmatic, exile poetry of the type of *Οι γειτονιές του κόσμου* (1957), and of his poetry of projected national univocality of the time of the Occupation. The first echo is of Karyotakis’s¹⁹ anti-war satire “Ο Μιχαλιός”, from *Ελεγεία και Σάτιρες* (1927).²⁰ In this poem on the futility of the Great War, the unwilling victim of the battlefield, Michalios, is given the honour of a soldier’s funeral, but as he is too tall (a total misfit) everything goes wrong:

Απάνω του σκεπάστηκεν ο λάκκος,
μα του αφήσαν απέξω το ποδάρι:
Ήταν λίγο μακρύς ο φουκαράκος.

Are we allowed to read dead Dick’s ever-protruding “ζερβί δόντι” (lines 24, 39, 43) as a jocose, if party-tainted, allusion to Michalios’s protruding leg? How are we to interpret the parallel? The next echo comes from Ritsos’s own *Επιτάφιος* (1936), a funeral poem on the death of a tobacco-worker during the 1 May 1936 strike in Thessaloniki. The poem ends with the mother’s vision of a triumphal march in which the resurrected young worker, her son, also takes part:

¹⁸ *Τα Επικαιρικά*, p. 221.

¹⁹ On the early influence of Karyotakis on Ritsos, see Prokopaki, “Εισαγωγή”, *Ανθολογία Γιάννη Ρίτσου*, p. 12.

²⁰ Now in: G. P. Savvidis (ed.), *Κ. Γ. Καρυωτάκης, Ποιήματα και Πεζά* (Athens: Ermis 1984), p. 105.

Ανάμεσά τους, γίόκα μου, θωρώ σε αναστημένο, –
το θώρι σου στο θώρι τους μυριοζωγραφισμένο

reads one of the last decapentasyllabic couplets of the poem.²¹ It is clearly the same motif: both mother and comrade experience an allegorical moment of resurrection of their beloved, dead fighter (the son, the dog), who is then visualized in full splendour amidst the crowds of a triumphal march (line 40: “να γανγίζει χαρούμενος σε μια διαδήλωση”). One may find the parallel risky or disrespectful; yet it illustrates the point that in certain instances of the exilic poetry of Makronissos, Ritsos appears disillusioned, hence parodic, as regards his earlier attempts at monumentalizing the struggles of the Greek Left through the lyrical diction, lofty themes and mythical landscapes of poems such as “Ρωμιοσύνη” (1945-47). It is a point I shall return to after the discussion of my second example, the poem “Α.Β.Γ.”. The view that I am trying to put forward is that the reference point of the poems in *Πέτρινος χρόνος*, the “state of exception” in relation to the torture and execution that comrades are faced with, separates meaning from language and ideological belief. Poetry proves unable to compete with the extreme situations it is called to represent. “Α.Β.Γ.”, the final poem of *Πέτρινος χρόνος*, amply illustrates this:

Τρία μεγάλα γράμματα
γραμμένα μ’ ασβέστη στη ραχοκοκκαλιά της Μακρόνησος.

(Όταν ερχόμαστε με το καράβι
στριμωγμένοι ανάμεσα στους μπόγους και στις υποψίες μας
τα διαβάσαμε πάνου απ’ το κατάστρωμα
κάτου απ’ τις βρισιές του χωροφύλακα, τα διαβάσαμε
εκείνο το ήσυχο πρωινό του Ιουλίου,
κι η αρμύρα κι η μυρουδιά της ρίγανης και το θυμάρι
δεν καταλάβαιναν καθόλου τι θα πουν αυτά τα τρία
ασβεστωμένα
γράμματα).

²¹ Anthologized in: Prokopaki, *Ανθολογία Γιάννη Ρίτσου*, pp. 42-8, the specific quote on p. 47.

Α' Τάγμα.

Β' Τάγμα.

Γ' Τάγμα.

ΜΑΚΡΟΝΗΣΟΣ

Κι η θάλασσα του Αιγαίου ήταν γαλάζια όπως πάντοτε
πολύ γαλάζια, μόνο γαλάζια.

Α'—

Α, ναι, μιλούσαμε κάποτε για μια ποίηση αιγαιοπελαγίτικη,

Β'—

για το γυμνό στήθος της υγείας κεντημένο με μian άγκυρα και
μια γοργόνα

Γ'—

για το γαλάζιο φως που πλέκει τα κουρτινάκια των γλάρων.

Α.Β.Γ.

300 σκοτωμένοι.

Μιλούσαμε, ναι, για μια ποίηση αιγαιοπελαγίτικη—
ο κάβουρας που ρεμβάζει στο νοτισμένο βράχο,
αντίκρυ στη μαλαματένια δύση,
καθώς ένα μικρό μπρούτζινο άγαλμα του Ωκεανού.

Α.Β.Γ.

600 τρελλοί.

(Οι γυάλινες γαρίδες κυνηγώντας στα ρηχά τον ίσκιο του
πρωινού άστρου,

το χρυσό και γαλανό καλοκαίρι πετροβολώντας με
κουκουνάρια το μεσημεριάτικο ύπνο των κοριτσιών,
τα παλιά πεύκα ξύνοντας τη ράχη τους στην ασβεστωμένη
μάντρα.)

Α.Β.Γ.

900 κουτσοί.

Ζήτω

ο βασιλεύς Παύλος.

(Κι η Παναγιά του πόντου φλωροκαπνισμένη απ' το σούρουπο
να σεργιανάει ξυπόλητη στην αμμουδιά
συγκυρίζοντας τα σπίτια των μικρών ψαριών

καρφώνοντας μ' ένα θαλασσινό σταυρό τη φεγγαρίσια της
πλεξούδα).

A.B.Γ.

A.B.Γ.

(Μιλούσαμε για μια ποίηση αιγαιοπελαγίτικη, ναι, ναι).

ΜΑΚΡΟΝΗΣΟΣ –

ΜΑΚΡΟΝΗΣΟΣ – ΜΑΚΡΟΝΗΣΟΣ

Κι η θάλασσα είναι ακόμη γαλάζια όπως πάντοτε
κι ο αμερικάνικος στόλος ταξιδεύει στο Αιγαίο
ήσυχος, ήσυχος, ωραίος,
και τ' άστρα ανάβουν κάθε βράδυ μικρές φωτιές
να ψήσουν οι Άγγελοι την ψαρόσουπα της Παναγίας.

A.B.Γ.

A.B.Γ.

Κι από κάτω απ' τ' αστέρια περνάνε
καραβιές-καραβιές οι εκτοπισμένοι
και τσουβάλια με κομμένα ποδάρια
και τσουβάλια με κομμένα χέρια
και τσουβάλια με νεκρούς
ξεβράζουν οι φουρτούνες στις αχτές του Λαυρίου.

(Αιγαιοπελαγίτικο τοπίο
χρυσό και γαλάζιο).

A.B.Γ.

Σε τούτα τα βράχια τουφεκίστηκαν οι 300 του Α' Τάγματος,
τούτα τα φύκια είναι μια τούφα μαλλιά ξεκολλημένα μαζί με το
δέρμα
απ' το καύκαλο ενός συντρόφου που αρνήθηκε να υπογράψει
δήλωση.

A.B.Γ.

Τα συρματοπλέγματα.

Οι νεκροί.

Οι τρελλοί.

A.B.Γ.

(Γαλάζια, η θάλασσα - πολύ γαλάζια.
Χρυσό αιγαιοπελαγίτικο τοπίο.
Οι γλάροι).

A.B.Γ.

Μαύρη, κατάμαυρη θάλασσα
Μαύρο, κατάμαυρο τοπίο.
Τα συρματοπλέγματα.

A.B.Γ.

Μαύρο, κατάμαυρο τοπίο με σφιγμένα δόντια,
κόκκινο, κατακόκκινο τοπίο με σφιγμένη γροθιά,
μαύρη και κόκκινη καρδιά πηγμένη στο αίμα της
κι ένας κόκκινος ήλιος πηγμένος μες το αίμα του.²²

It is a remarkable poem as regards the degree of formalist “abstraction”, stylistic “nakedness”, verbal minimalism Ritsos has achieved in it. Despite the fact that “A.B.Γ.” presents itself, in terms of typesetting, as a long poem, much of its length derives from the partial or total repetition of its lines. Repetition is here a stylistic device employed to connote the impoverishment of a poet’s language when faced with the inconceivability of the camp experience (it can be read as a depiction of stuttering, of compulsive repetition as sign of trauma). Let us also note the poem’s “letteristic” element:²³ capital letters that do not mean much (unless they are rehearsed in the context of the poem), are thrown in the raw on the page, in order to suggest the impossibility for language

²² *Τα Επικαιρικά*, pp. 299-304. The poem runs to 134 lines, of which I have quoted 81, adhering to the choice of Prokopaki, who in *Ανθολογία Γιάννη Ρίτσου*, pp. 104-11, suppresses the second, and even more laconic part of “A.B.Γ.”.

²³ *Lettrisme* is a French avant-garde movement, established in Paris in the mid-1940s by Romanian immigrant Isidore Isou. It is called *Lettrisme* from the fact that its proponents’ early works centred on letters and other visual or spoken signs.

to signify, in the face of terror. At the same time, to the historically aware reader, the three capital letters in the text form an exemplum of the poetics of specificity of landscape informing Ritsos's Civil War poems.²⁴ Each of the three letters refers to one of the three battalions in operation on Makronissos, and to their respective wards; this division would be one of the first things one would become aware of upon arrival on the island. The same aesthetic principle applies to the use of Arabic numbers in the text, as opposed to writing them in full Greek script, when counting the poet's lost comrades to torture (cf. the dismembered limbs, lines 55-6) and executions. The quantification of casualties offers a commentary on the absurdity of loss and the impossibility for language to account for them. At the same time, it operates in very pragmatic ways; it may represent an instance of historical realism, almost testimony. I should finally like to note the conscious redeployment of an Aegean Sea "counter-discourse" in "Α.Β.Γ.", a counter-narrative that targets Seferis's and Elytis's depictions of the "quintessentially Greek" landscape of the Archipelago, and Ritsos's own earlier non-specific (in terms of time and place) landscape depictions of *Ρωμιοσόνη*. This stance becomes clear in the self-commentary of line 17: "Α, ναι, μιλούσαμε κάποτε για μια ποίηση αιγαίπελαγίτικη" (repeated with small alterations in lines 24 and 43), which refers to Ritsos's past concessions to liberal-style modernism, forging links with Right-wing poets that proved treacherous. It is by no means the only instance of a renunciation of the poetics of the Archipelago in Ritsos's exile poems, but it is by far the most prominent and most often quoted.²⁵ Other such instances include the hints in the poem "Αλλαγή" (lines 3-4):

²⁴ Christopher Robinson, "The presentation of place and space in the poetry of Yiannis Ritsos, 1934-1947", *Κάμπος: Cambridge Papers in Modern Greek* 2 (1994) 73-94, discusses the various poetic languages Ritsos uses to articulate his personal perception of space. Robinson is one of a handful of critics to note Ritsos's temporality, i.e. his historical consciousness, in representing landscape.

²⁵ See E. Garandoudis, "Τα νησιά του Αιγαίου ως τόπος μιας αντίθεσης: Από την ποιητική γενιά του 1930 στη μεταπολεμική ποίηση", *Από τον*

Αλλιώς κοιτιέται η θάλασσα απόνα παράθυρο
αλλιώς πίσω απ' το συρματοπλέγμα.²⁶

or the depiction of the arid landscape of the camp island through the lenses of a Sinopoulos-like nightmare (as in “Φεγγάρι”, lines 3-4):

ένα τοπίο μισό μαύρο, μισό κίτρινο
ένα κομμένο πόδι ψάχνοντας για το σώμα του.²⁷

Let us, finally, note the haunting repetition of the place-name “Makronissos”, in lines 2, 13, 44 and 45 of “Α.Β.Γ.” (miming and subverting, in its striking use of capital letters, the feeling that a traveller gets from an approaching signboard at the entrance of a port to be visited on holiday). The haunting repetition of the place-name “Makronissos” stands as a signpost to an alternative Aegean islands geography, a dystopic topography, where civic consensus is replaced by conflict, travelling is overrun by torture.

Ritsos’s aesthetic positioning against his ideological opponents, the literary modernists, appears decided and consistent in his exile poems.²⁸ For some critics, the defining feature of the modernist text is the rhetoric of the visionary employed by the poet. For others, modernism in Greek letters can be best understood through an enquiry into the poet’s particular employment of myth, landscape-depictions, and the trope of orality. For a third group of critics, it is modernism’s relation to tradition that should

Μοντερνισμό στη σύγχρονη ποίηση (1930-2006) (Athens: Kastaniotis 2007), pp. 227-46, specifically p. 236. Though in scope very similar to Papatheodorou’s earlier article on the matter referred to above (n. 4), this study offers the benefit of a more detailed account of the presence of the Aegean sea counter-discourse in a variety of post-war poems.

²⁶ *Τα Επικαιρικά*, p. 277.

²⁷ *Τα Επικαιρικά*, p. 281-2.

²⁸ This stylistic division of labour between liberal modernists and anti-modernist radicals, was first suggested by Mario Vitti, in his historic article “Οι δύο πρωτοπορίες στην ελληνική ποίηση”, *Ο Πολίτης* 1 (1976).

lie at the centre of critical attention.²⁹ On all three fronts, Ritsos's exile poems present the reader with a counter-statement on the stylistic choices made by his liberal, bourgeois contemporaries, mainly Seferis and Elytis. Beaton has convincingly shown that in composing his tableau of the Greek landscape, in 1945-47, Ritsos pays tribute to the landscape of Seferis's *Μυθιστόρημα* (1935) (with special reference to sections 2, 15 and 17), Elytis's *Προσανατολισμοί* (1940) and *Άσμα ηρωικό και πένθιμο για το χαμένο ανθοπολοχαγό της Αλβανίας* (1946), and further back in tradition to the landscape of Palamas's sonnet on Athens from his "Πατρίδες" (1895) and Solomos's *Ύμνος εις την Ελευθερίαν* (1823). Beaton considers "the depth of intertextual allusion in *Romiosini* [...] an integral part of the poem's treatment of its subject-matter, because all those poetic precedents, as they accumulate through the length of the text, come to be included in the overarching concept of 'Hellenism' as conceived within the poem".³⁰ Beaton attributes, correctly, the poet's all-inclusiveness in his choice of literary (and hence political) allusions in *Ρωμιοσύνη* to the fact that its writing coincided with a period of truce in the Civil War, a truce that began with the Varkiza agreement in February 1945 and ended with the outbreak of the third round of hostilities of 1947-49. He also notes that, as in the parallel case of Seferis's almost contemporary "*Κίχλη*" (1947), in *Ρωμιοσύνη* Ritsos makes abundant, yet carefully imprecise, reference to the recent experience of the Second World War. It is also left purposefully ambiguous throughout the poem whether the concluding demand for justice should be understood in political or in national terms; i.e. whether the essential trait of *Greekness*, which is understood in this poem to be resistance, should be read as resistance against the outsider (national consciousness) or

²⁹ For a general overview of Greek criticism's theses on literary modernism, see D. Tziolas (ed.), *Greek Modernism and beyond: Essays in honor of Peter Bien* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield 1997).

³⁰ See Roderick Beaton, "Modernism and the quest for national identity: The case of Ritsos's *Romiosini*", in: Makryníkola and Bournazos (eds.), *Ο Ποιητής και ο Πολίτης Γιάννης Ρίτσος* (see note 2), pp. 109-24, at p. 116.

against the oppressor (political or ideological consciousness). To make his point, Beaton characteristically explains that, in the line “Όταν σφίγγουν το χέρι, ο ήλιος είναι βέβαιος για τον κόσμο”, “the words themselves are ambiguous: the Greek could equally refer to the warmth of a friendly greeting, or to the iconic clenched fist of communist posters and slogans”.³¹ Well, if the Axis Occupation presented Left-wing poets with the opportunity of a fantasized coalition across the political spectrum, the Civil War severed any bridges.

It is my contention in this paper that, in the fragmentary narratives of his poems of (on) exile, Ritsos reconsidered the tropes of modernism, “setting the record straight” both vis-à-vis the depictions of the national psyche proposed by his political opponents, the Greek bourgeoisie, and vis-à-vis his own earlier concessions to the tropes, language and rhetoric of modernism. Moreover, while adhering to Beaton’s argument, I should like to argue that this dialogue is deeper and more extended than has been suggested. For example, three of Ritsos’s exile collections identify already by their title the project of rewriting Seferis’s stylistic premises and related ideological bias. *Ημερολόγια Εξορίας* I, II, III make conscious allusion to Seferis’s collections: (a) *Ημερολόγιο Καταστροφώματος Α΄*, a collection that contains poems written between 1928 and 1940, the best known among them being “Ο Βασιλιάς της Ασίνης”. In this poem, the persona of the poet, strolling through the ruins of the Homeric king’s castle, contemplates the eventual disappearance of a work’s creator (published Athens 1940); (b) *Ημερολόγιο Καταστροφώματος Β΄*, a collection that covers, in the covert style of Seferis, major World War II events, such as the German invasion and occupation of Greece, the flight of the Greek government to South Africa and to Egypt, the horrors of war, the April 1944 uprising in the Greek army stationed in the Middle East, etc. (published Alexandria 1944); (c) *Ημερολόγιο Καταστροφώματος Γ΄*, Seferis’s “Cypriot” collection, which negotiates his views on colonialism and

³¹ Ibid, p. 121.

nationalism (published Athens, 1955). It has been noted that the repeated title word of Seferis's three most political collections, *logbook*, hints at the notion of a captain leading his ship through turbulent times to a worthy, hopefully safe, destination port. So, clearly, a shred of the Ulysses myth still accompanies Seferis as late in his poetic career as 1955. By contrast to this visionary conception of history and of the poet's almost messianic role in it, Ritsos's textualized poet in *Ημερολόγια Εξορίας* has nowhere to go. He finds himself stranded on a wasteland, a desert land where:

Εδώ τ' αγκάθια είναι πολλά –
αγκάθια καστανά, κίτρινα αγκάθια
σ' όλο το μάκρος της μέρας, ως μέσα στον ύπνο.

and where:

Τα λόγια που μας φάνηκαν όμορφα κάποτε
χάσαν το χρώμα τους σαν το γιλέκο του γέρου στο σεντούκι
σαν ένα λιόγερμα σβησμένο στα τζάμια.

This kind of desolate landscape, as Savidis has observed, bears a lot similarities to Sinopoulos's landscapes:³²

Οι άνθρωποι περπατάνε με τα χέρια στις τσέπες
ή κάποτε χειρονομούν σα να διώχνουν μια μύγα
που ξανακάθεται στο ίδιο μέρος πάλι και πάλι
στα χείλη του άδειου ποτηριού ή πιο μέσα
σ' ένα σημείο απροσδιόριστο κι επίμονο
όσο κι η άρνησή τους να το αναγνωρίσουν.³³

The parallel is overwhelming. In his three *Ημερολόγια Καταστώματος*, Seferis, the diplomat, travels the world over and con-

³² Savidis, op. cit., p. 29.

³³ This is the opening poem of *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας* I, "27 Οχτωβρίου 1948", minus the second, more lyrical stanza, which I have omitted in the above quotation: "Όταν περνούν το συρματόπλεγμα οι νύχτες / αφήνουν μικρά κουρέλια απ' τη φύστα τους." See *Τα Επικαιρικά*, p. 201.

templates on issues relating to poetry, memory, collective history vs. private passing of time, as well as on nationalism, colonialism and war justice. Chained to his desert land, the implied poet of “27 Οχτωβρίου 1948” has no other option but to turn inwards, and to his minute surroundings (lines 10-11: “μια μύγα / που ξανακάθεται στο ίδιο μέρος πάλι και πάλι”) for a source of comfort and, if possible, for inspiration. As suggested in the opening poem to the three collections, the subjects of these collective “*journaux intimes*” are faced already from the first day of their coercive displacement with the threat of meaninglessness that mindless violence, and implicitly the enforced signing of the *repentance statement*, thrusts upon them (lines 13-14: “[...] σημείο απροσδιόριστο κι επίμονο / όσο κι η άρνησή τους να το αναγνωρίσουν”).³⁴ It would be impossible for the poet to find refuge in the monumental, generalizing world of myth (even in the Brechtian use devised for it in Ritsos’s later work),³⁵ in the face of such symbolic deprivation. It would likewise be impossible for a poet to fantasize for himself the role of a visionary, leading a nation.³⁶ As the lyric “I” repeatedly notes in *Ημερολόγια Εξορίας*, reality around them hardly makes the stuff of poetry. The penultimate, self-referential stanza of “13 Νοεμβρίου”, *Ημερολόγιο Εξορίας I*, is revealing in this respect:

³⁴ Is it too fanciful to read Ritsos’s line 8 of “27 Οχτωβρίου 1948” as a semi-conscious echo, and hence inversion, of the epigrammatic lines 15-16 (“The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes / The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes”) of “The love song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1917), Eliot’s first major modernist poem? The poem became celebrated in Greek letters through Seferis’s 1936 translation.

³⁵ On Ritsos’s use of myth, see G. Veloudis, “Αυτοβιογραφία, μύθος και ιστορία στο έργο του Γιάννη Ρίτσου”, *Προσεγγίσεις στο έργο του Γιάννη Ρίτσου* (Athens: Kedros 1984), pp. 43-74, esp. p. 58.

³⁶ Despite the somewhat Quixotic quality of the representation, or even because of that (line 18: “Προχωρεί, παραπατώντας, δαχτυλοδειχτούμενος”), the image of the discredited yet proud walker of the end of “Μέρες τ’ Απρίλη ’43”, *Ημερολόγιο Καταστώματος Β’*, now in: *Ποήματα* (Athens: Ikaros 1994), p. 208, may be read as a version of the poet/visionary, a leader of his nation, that Seferis at times reserved for himself.

Αυτά βέβαια δε γίνονται ποίημα
 κι εδώ τα ρίχνω στο χαρτί σα μια άχρηστη πέτρα πάνω στις πέτρες
 που ίσως μια μέρα θα βοηθούσαν να χτιστεί ένα σπίτι.³⁷

The parallels with (and the inversions of) *topoi* of seferian modernism can be easily multiplied. But it is not my aim in this paper to be exhaustive. All I am trying to do in it is raise the point that any reading of Ritsos's exile poetry would be incapacitated, unless its interpretative frame of reference shifts from the socialist realist paradigm propagated by his political allies, to include also the modernist paradigm of his political opponents. The topicality of Ritsos's exile poems, the specificity of the place names used in them, the historical specificity of the very recent events recorded in them, all target the mythical freeze-frame of history, and the universality of Greek landscape depictions in Seferis's poetry,³⁸ read by the communist poet as a stratagem of liberal, potentially repressive, "humanism".³⁹ So as to extend the argument to hitherto uncovered territory, I should also like to note that the "futility" of many of the exile poems' topics, the "poverty" of their language, coupled with consistent attempts to subvert

³⁷ *Τα Επικαιρικά*, p. 214.

³⁸ The most self-reflexive, and in this sense less suspicious of ideological bias, landscape depiction of Seferis is *Μυθιστόρημα* IB' ("Μποτίλια στο πέλαγο"): "Τρεις βράχοι λίγα καμένα πεύκα κι ένα ρημοκλήσι / και παραπάνω / το ίδιο τοπίο αντιγραμμένο ξαναρχίζει. / τρεις βράχοι σε σχήμα πύλης, σκουριασμένοι / λίγα καμένα πεύκα, μαύρα και κίτρινα / κι ένα τετράγωνο σπιτάκι θαμμένο στον ασβέστη. / και παραπάνω ακόμη πολλές φορές / το ίδιο τοπίο ξαναρχίζει κλιμακωτά / ως τον ορίζοντα ως τον ουρανό που βασιλεύει. / Εδώ αράξαμε το καράβι να ματίσουμε τα σπασμένα κουπιά, / να πιούμε νερό και να κοιμηθούμε. / Η θάλασσα που μας πίκρανε είναι βαθιά κι ανεξερεύνητη / και ξεδιπλώνει μιαν απέραντη γαλήνη. / Εδώ μέσα στα βότσαλα βρήκαμε ένα νόμισμα / και το παίξαμε στα ζάρια. / Το κέρδισε ο μικρότερος και χάθηκε. / Ξαναμπαρκάραμε με τα σπασμένα μας κουπιά".

³⁹ "Humanism": a system of thought criticized as being centred on the notion of the rational, autonomous self and ignoring the un-integrated and conditioned nature of the individual. (Humanism's potentially repressive nature relates to its enforcement of universal principles, rationally deduced, to the neglect of particularity and locality.)

received ideas on what passes as poetic form (these poems' lines can be very short, or very long; embedded "metrical" verses are very rare and randomly thrown into them), offer a corrective to Ritsos's earlier concessions to Thirties modernism, in *Ρωμοσύνη*. Interestingly, Ritsos's neglected poems of the Civil War period provide the seed of most post-war political poetry, making a *de facto* case in favour of their oddly avant-garde nature. By way of conclusion, let us remind ourselves of Titos Patrikios's short poem "Π", from "Προσχέδια για τη Μακρόνησο", which indicates the extent to which the father-poet's anti-modernist Civil War poetry proved a viable path for poetry of years to come:

BETO, ΑΕΤΟ, ΓΕΤΟ, ΣΦΑ, το Γάμμα Κέντρο
 απ' την κορφή ως τα νύχια πέτρα
 τ' αντίσκηνα σα βόλοι λάσπη
 ένα κομμάτι λάσπη οι άνθρωποι
 τρεμόσβηνε η ψυχή γινόταν χώμα
 φασματικές λάμπες κόβανε τα πρόσωπα
 φωτίζοντας μάτια τρελλών
 στόματα που ξεχύναν έντομα
 κι ο άνεμος με τις χοντρές αρβύλες του βασανιστή
 μαστίγωνε το άγριο βουνό με τη ζωστήρα του.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Titos Patrikios, *Ποιήματα I (1948-1954)* (Athens: Themelio 1990), p. 175. The parallel is also noted in Papatheodorou, op. cit., p. 236.