8. In Ritsos’ Moonlight Sonata what sentiments does the woman’s confession provoke/inspire to you and how these compare to the ones felt by the young man who remains silent throughout her long monologue.

Yannis Ritsos' "Moonlight Sonata" is a poignant and emotionally charged poem that presents a deeply intimate monologue of a woman speaking to a silent young man. The setting is night, with the moonlight casting a dreamlike atmosphere over the scene. The woman's confession, filled with personal revelations, memories, and emotions, evokes a variety of sentiments in the reader and provokes a complex response.

“Moonlight Sonata” in form, is like a choral poem but it is not divided into voices, rather a single voice is introduced through the prologue, which then the monologue that follows, speaks uninterruptedly to a stranger who had inquired after the speaker.[[1]](#footnote-1) Ritsos uses painterly technique, his poems being rich in imagery, allowing the reader to visualize the scene and emotions he is describing. The poem's ostensible theme is deception, more precisely, self-deception. The technique here becomes deceptive in its own right as we as the reader are confused, unsure of which narrator to trust.[[2]](#footnote-2) Should we seek the author’s genuine voice, this is done in vain, although his voice is present and can be discerned in the poem's painterly form. The poem utilizes a prologue and an epilogue to frame a dramatic monologue, thus capturing the essence of the speaker’s voice, allowing for it to resonate more deeply with the reader.[[3]](#footnote-3) Upon registering this form, we are able to realize that the poem's underlying message is not about deceit, but rather the human desire to be liberated from decay and partake in a cosmic realm defined by incorruptibility. Here, decay is symbolized by the self-deception of a romantic woman who seeks solace in illusions; time and its decay not existing beneath the redemptive moonlight.[[4]](#footnote-4) In her monologue, she remarks, “the moon is kind – no one will sense that my hair’s turned grey. The moon will make it blonde again,” illustrating her perception of time and decay as nonexistent beneath the moonlight. This suggests her search for solace in a realm where decay is absent, in an idealized past or a dream-like present.[[5]](#footnote-5) The moon serves as a central element in shaping the mood and thematic resonance of the piece, it evokes a sense of timelessness and continuity, contrasting to the nature of human life in which decay and the passing of time is inevitable. As such the moon may act as a juxtaposition in relation to the ephemeral nature of human life, and the decay the woman wishes to avoid. Despite the prominent symbolism that the moon holds there is also a deviation from this symbolic stance. In the opening stanza of the poem, the moon is portrayed as being gentle and benign, but as we move into the second stanza, a more complex image of the moon emerges. The moonlight, which at first seemed soothing, now casts elongated shadows and unseen hands seem to draw aside the drapes. These aspects of the monologue reveal the woman's perception of the moon: while she acknowledges its initial kindness, it also brings to light haunting and unwanted visions. This duality reflects the broader, ostensible theme of deception in the poem. Just as the woman initially seeks comfort in the moon's gentle illusion, she is confronted with its true nature – a reality that includes aspects she would prefer to remain hidden. This juxtaposition illustrates the complex relationship between beauty, comfort, and the often-harsh truths of reality. Although this imagery occurs at the beginning of the monologue, the notion of the woman wishing to regain her youthful appearance brings about a sense of nostalgia and melancholy. Her monologue evokes in the reader a sense of empathy as we witness her life now being tinged with the sorrows of what have been lost to time and decay.

The woman's monologue, which delves into her past experiences, regrets, and longings, often evokes a deep sense of empathy. Her reflections on lost youth, unfulfilled desires, and the passage of time can create a feeling of melancholy. The reader might feel sadness for her unrequited love and her life that seems to be filled with more regrets than fulfillment. The woman's monologue, although directed towards the young man, carries a sense of solitude. This can evoke feelings of isolation and loneliness, as if she is speaking more to herself or to the universe rather than to the man in front of her. As the woman recalls her past, it can evoke a sense of nostalgia in the reader. Her memories, while personal, touch on universal themes of aging, evolving relationships, and the bittersweet nature of memory. The phrase "let me come with you" is expressed by the woman multiple times throughout her monologue.[[6]](#footnote-6) This can be perceived as being a sorrowful reflection on aging, longing, and the desire for connection. There are multiple layers in relation to this line and its repetition, relating to the themes of old age and the passage of time. The content of each stanza before she mentions the phrase is varied, from these we can infer how each of these lines may be read differently. In some, the phrase may signify her seeking companionship, brought about by the loneliness of aging. Comparatively, since we are aware that she is addressing a younger man, there may be an underlying sense of envy and nostalgia for the vitality that accompanies youth, which is a stark contrast to her current stage of life. Another interpretation of this phrase may be the woman coming to a sense of acceptance, no longer being self-deceptive and acknowledging the inevitability of aging. The repetition of this phrase is also something which is reflective of how those older tend to act, repeating phrases and in many instances forgetting that they had already said the phrase.

Another comparison which may evoke a sense of sadness from the reader is made through use of a simile likening the woman to a bear. This comparison creates a vivid image that encapsulates the woman's state of being and her emotions. On one level, the bear symbolizes strength and resilience, qualities that the woman might possess or yearn for in her old age, contrasting to the obvious vulnerabilities old age comes with. Through subtle indications, we can interpret the woman as being from a bourgeois background. The fact that she is able to calmly reflect through monologue under the moonlight suggests a level of comfort, this paired with her referencing to Beethoven’s “Moonlight Sonata”, and the sense of alienation, and loneliness may be interpreted as being reflective of the bourgeois condition.[[7]](#footnote-7) Ritsos presents us with characters that are situated in a tragic moment of transition in history’s innate progression towards an uncertain future.[[8]](#footnote-8) The portrayal of the woman in "Moonlight Sonata" could be a subtle commentary on the decay and irrelevance of the bourgeois class in the modern world, which aligns with Ritsos' broader themes in his body of work.

Being aware of Ritsos, and the socio-political context in which he wrote is also crucial. The simile presents an air of awkwardness, perhaps reflecting how the woman may feel out of place or cumbersome in her current phase of life, much like a bear may seem to be out of its element in a more refined or delicate setting. The visualization of this image can imply a disconnect between her inner sense of self and the physical limitations or perceptions she faces as an older individual. Other portrayals stemming from this simile might also include how bears often are associated with hibernation, which could be symbolic of the woman’s desire to retreat, and seek respite from the external world and society.[[9]](#footnote-9)

The young man's silence may indicate a form of respect or reverence for the woman's experiences and emotions. It shows that he acknowledges the weight of her words by listening intently. However, just as respect is usually held for those older with more experience, this is also accompanied by a generational gap, and a disconnect; the young man being from the younger generation may be unable or unwilling to fully engage with the older generation's experiences and sentiments. For the reader this may potentially add a layer of melancholy, further highlighting the woman’s loneliness and isolation. Another interpretation may be the young man taking the role of the listener, similar to us, the silence could also be a result of awkwardness, not knowing how to respond, or a sense of indifference or inability to relate to her experiences. The young man's silence in the conversation holds multiple layers of meaning. On one hand, it can be seen as a display of respect and reverence for the woman's experiences and emotions. By remaining silent, he is demonstrating his acknowledgement of the weight and significance of her words, listening intently, and giving her the space to express herself fully. This silence can be interpreted as a form of active listening, showing that he values and honours her perspective. However, it is important to consider the context of their interaction. The generational gap between the young man and the woman introduces a potential barrier to fully engaging with each other's experiences and sentiments, he may struggle to fully understand or relate to the emotions and experiences of the older generation. This disconnect can contribute to a sense of melancholy, highlighting the woman's loneliness and isolation in expressing her thoughts and feelings. Furthermore, the young man's silence can also be interpreted in other ways. It may stem from a sense of awkwardness or uncertainty, not knowing how to respond to the woman's revelations or the depth of her emotions. He may feel overwhelmed or unsure of how to provide the support or comfort she needs. This silence could also signify a sense of indifference or an inability to fully comprehend the complexities of her experiences. From the reader's perspective, the young man's silence can evoke curiosity and intrigue. We are left wondering what his thoughts and feelings are, hoping to understand his perspective and the impact of the woman's monologue on him. This dynamic adds depth to the narrative and invites us to reflect on the complexities of human connection and communication. Overall, the young man's silence serves as a powerful tool in the storytelling, conveying a range of emotions and interpretations. It highlights the woman's loneliness while also inviting us to reflect on our own experiences of listening, understanding, and connecting with others.

The poem unfolds entirely as a singular, cohesive narrative, primarily through the monologue of the female character, this being juxtaposed with brief encounters with the narrator at the beginning and end - in the prologue and epilogue. and our reencounter with the narrator in the epilogue prompts us to recall the narrator in the prologue. This cyclical structure not only bridges the opening and closing of the poem but also creates an impression of the poem being a static, singular composition, almost as if frozen in time and space. Ritsos' use of a painterly technique, acts similar to a filter, which reminds us that what we are experiencing is not a direct portrayal of raw life, despite the intense and pained nature of the woman’s lament.[[10]](#footnote-10) This technique serves to elevate the emotional and existential themes of the poem, allowing for more reflective engagements to occur between the poem and the reader. In the poem we witness Ristos’ use of dialectical framework, evident the dialogic connection between the past and the present, time being portrayed as a synchronic in comparison to being linear. The woman, who is central to the poem, is inhabiting a world in decay, emphasizes this dialectical schema through her monologue directed at a silent counterpart. The young man, maintaining his silence throughout her speech, stands in stark contrast to her, thereby creating a silent yet symbolically charged tension between these two opposing entities, depicting oppositional forces within the narrative.[[11]](#footnote-11) Additionally, it's important to observe the drastic age difference between the characters, being another critical element; the woman is older while the male character is a young man. This disparity in age further signifies the obvious juxtaposition of present and past, youth and old age, adding another layer of contrast to the narrative.[[12]](#footnote-12) There is also a significance here in relation to Marxist dialectics emerging, the Fourth Dimension presents us with “a decrepit class of former aristocrats , heroes who have grown tired of war and the status it has afforded them, or renowned families who have now reached the end of their tenure.”[[13]](#footnote-13) This is encapsulated in the sole line spoken by the young man in “The Moonlight Sonata,” where he observes that what we are witnessing is ‘the decline of an era’.[[14]](#footnote-14) Through the epilogue we are taken away from the woman’s monologue and transferred instead to an external setting.

The presence of the young man, though silent, is a constant undercurrent in the woman's extensive confessional monologue. The woman in the poem may symbolizes a segment of the old world that Ritsos views as doomed to extinction along with its aristocratic heritage, primarily due to its reluctance to evolve and engage in the dynamics of change. Ritsos depicts her with empathy, highlighting the associated challenges of aging, physical deterioration, solitude, and a sense of estrangement. In this poem, it appears that alienation and loneliness emerge from the woman’s reluctance to connect with others and to be involved in collective endeavors.[[15]](#footnote-15) It is dependent on the reader regarding how they interpret the young man’s silence, this ambiguity is one of the poem's strengths. It allows for the poem to resonate on different levels with different individuals. The silence, in its openness to interpretation, becomes a canvas onto which readers can project their thoughts, making the poem a deeply personal experience for each person who engages with it. The fundamental thematic structure of transitioning from darkness to light is evident in the poem, with the light symbolically represented by Beethoven's music. Additionally, it prompts the question of whether the poem manages to govern how the external world is perceived in relation to the self. The woman in the poem certainly strives to exert such control, but her efforts appear to be in vain.[[16]](#footnote-16) In addition to these thematic layers, Ritsos' skill in imagery and metaphor is evident throughout the poem, presented through his painterly technique.[[17]](#footnote-17) The imagery used is rich and evocative, painting vivid pictures that linger in the mind. The moonlight, plays a crucial role in setting the tone and atmosphere of the poem, adding to the sense of timelessness and universality.

Bibliography

Aragon, L. ed., (1957). *A Salute to Ritsos*. [online] www.poetryinternational.com. Available at: https://www.poetryinternational.com/nl/poets-poems/article/104-2424\_A-Salute-to-Ritsos/

Bien, P., A Ritualistic View of Ritsos’“The Moonlight Sonata”. *The Journal of Modern Hellenism*, pp.29-46.

Fifis, H., 2006. Yannis Ritsos' The Moonlight Sonata· the Cognition of the city and the Vision of Life from a Distance. *Modern Greek Studies (Australia and New Zealand)*.

Martelaere, A.D. (2012). *Moonlight Sonata (by Yannis Ritsos), III*. [online] Small Whales. Available at: https://smallwhales.wordpress.com/2012/12/06/moonlight-sonata-by-yannis-ritsos-iii/

Myrsiades, K. 1987, "Drama and Myth as Compositional Modes in the Poetry of Yannis Ritsos", *Studies in the Humanities,* vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 95.

Pourgouris, M. (2014). 282Yannis Ritsos, Marxist Dialectics, and the Reimagining of Ancient Greece. In: D.

Ritsos, Y. and Bien, P. (1979). The Moonlight Sonata. *New England Review (19781982)*, [online] 1(3), pp.301–309. Available at: http://www.jstor.org/stable/40355224

Tziovas, ed., *Reimagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture*. [online] Oxford University Press, p.0. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199672752.003.0016>.

1. Myrsiades, K. (1987, p. 98) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bien, P. (2001, p. 32-3) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bien, P. (2001, p. 33) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bien, P. (2001, p. 33) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Bien, P. (2001, p. 33), Ritsos and Bien (1979, p. 301) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ritsos and Bien (1979, p. 301-308) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Aragon (1957) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Pourgouris (2014, p. 296) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Martelaere (2012) [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Bien, P. (2001, p. 34) [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Pourgouris (2014, p. 289) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Pourgouris (2014, p. 289) [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Pourgouris (2014, p. 289-90) [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Pourgouris (2014, p. 290) [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Fifis, H., (2006, p. 309) [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Bien, P. (2001, p. 35) [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Bien, P. (2001, p. 32-3) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)