

**THE RECEPTION OF THE MYTH OF ALCESTIS
IN *ALCESTIS* OF EURIPIDES
AND IN *ALCESTIS AND SWEET DREAMS*
OF ANDREAS STAIKOS**

DESPINA KOSMOPOULOU

National Kapodistrian University of Athens &
University of the Peloponnese, Greece
dkosmopoulou@gmail.com

Abstract: This article attempts, through the theory of comparative literature and intertextuality, the interpretation of the reception of the myth of Alcestis by the ancient poet Euripides¹, but also by the contemporary Andreas Staikos. The reconstruction and transcription of the material by each author, focuses mainly on the archetypal heroes, re-signifying and re-sketching the features of the heroes through their writing, and composing new themes and codes of theatrical writing. The structural and thematic elements of the two works are put under the microscope in order to clarify the differences and relevance at the writing level, based on the socio-political context of each author.

Keywords: Alcestis, intertextuality, comparative literature, reception, transcription.

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1. Introduction

From 438 BC, when the satirical drama *Alcestis* was taught by Euripides (Easterling, 2018, p. 59), until 2012, when the theatrical work of Andreas Staikos²

¹ Το 2002 στην Ελλάδα είναι έτος Ευριπίδη υπό την αιγίδα του Ελληνικού οργανισμού Τουρισμού με πλούσιες δράσεις κυρίως στη Σαλαμίνα που ήταν η γενετειρά του. Θα διεξαχθεί μάλιστα Διεθνές Συνέδριο Αρχαίου Δράματος με τίτλο: "Το Θείο και η Πόλις στον Ευριπίδη" όπου η γραφούσα συμμετέχει στην οργανωτική και επιστημονική επιτροπή.

² Ο Ανδρέας Στάικος είναι σημαντικός Έλληνας θεατρικός συγγραφέας, σκηνοθέτης, πεζογράφος και μεταφραστής. Γεννήθηκε στην Αθήνα. Πήρε πτυχίο Φιλολογίας από το Πανεπιστήμιο Θεσσαλονίκης και το 1967 έφυγε για το Παρίσι όπου ξεκίνησε θεατρικές σπουδές. Εκεί σπούδασε στο Conservatoire National d' Art Dramatique και παρέμεινε μέχρι το 1981 γράφοντας και δουλεύοντας ως βοηθός σκηνοθέτη στο πλάι του μεγάλου σκηνοθέτη Αντουάν Βιτέζ. Από το Παρίσι εξάλλου έγινε γνωστό το πρώτο θεατρικό του έργο με τίτλο "Κλυταμνήστρα".

Η ιδιότυπη θεατρική γραφή του είναι αποτέλεσμα της δυναμικής των προβών με τους ηθοποιούς. Ο ίδιος έχει αναφέρει χαρακτηριστικά: "Η γραφή γεννούσε αυτομάτως τη σκηνοθεσία τους και η σκηνοθεσία γεννούσε αυτομάτως τη γραφή τους. Σύγχυση ή ταύτιση της γραφής και της σκηνοθεσίας." Έτσι τα έργα του ανεβαίνουν σχεδόν πάντα για πρώτη φορά στη σκηνή κάτω από τη δική του σκηνοθεσία.

Παράλληλα έχει μεταφράσει στα ελληνικά πληθώρα θεατρικών έργων Γάλλων κλασικών συγγραφέων όπως ο Λακλό, ο Μολιέρος, ο Μαριβώ, ο Λεσάζ, ο Λαμπίς, κ.α. και έχει εκδώσει δύο δημοφιλή μυθιστορήματα (Αισχροτάτη Εριέττα και Επικίνδυνες μαγειρικές).

Ασχολείται ενεργά με τη διδασκαλία τόσο σε ελληνικά πανεπιστήμια Υπήρξε επί μία δεκαετία διευθυντής του Εργαστηρίου Θεατρικής Μετάφρασης στο Κέντρο Λογοτεχνικής Μετάφρασης του Γαλλικού Ινστιτούτου Αθηνών και αργότερα συνεργάτης του Ευρωπαϊκού Κέντρου Λογοτεχνικής Μετάφρασης. Ενδεικτικά έργα του που έχουν μεταφραστεί σε πολλές γλώσσες: Κλυταμνήστρα, 1843, Δαίδαλος, Το μικρό δαχτυλάκι της Ολυμπιάδος, Η Αυλαία πέφτει, Το μήλον της Μήλου κ.α

Alcestis and sweet dreams was published, the themes that occupied the theatrical creators were varied, with each era reflecting on the transcription of the myth. Euripides' works were largely characterized as prototypical at thematic level, as he dealt with issues such as war, social status, religion, women, with a radical mood for his time. In the homonymous satirical drama, *Alcestis* converses with the era of poetic writing and especially with Athens of the 5th century, with a dialectical relationship of the poet with his audience. After all, the works of ancient tragedians were intended to be taught in the society of the time, usually with a critical tone. The reception of the myth of *Alcestis* from modern and contemporary drama is spotted in the work of Andreas Staikos *Alcestis and sweet dreams*. Andreas Staikos converses and rewrites the myth, using the game of transformations and focusing on the hero of the play with a comic mood in a grid of luck and upheavals. His ancient-themed work, with post-theatrical manifestations that constantly penetrate the dipole of "appearing" and "being", is included in postmodern writing. The need for storytelling of events constitutes an element of human existence, with the study of ancient myths being sealed by mythology and the semiotic approach studying the methods by which myth narratives validate the human entity (Danesi, 2017, p. 159). The concept of myth in ancient Greece had the meaning of "the word, the speech or even the history of the gods", with the myth finally taking on the meaning of telling stories with protagonists being gods, heroes or even extraterrestrial creatures and taking place in a metaphysical world in opposition to the notion of the real (Danesi, 2017, p. 163). In *Poetry*, Aristotle explains the reason why ancient tragedians used myths; because they were believable and plausible to the audience of the time (Ross, 1993, p. 401). Myth, according to Rolan Barthes, is a kind of discourse, which for mythology is a fragment of semiotics, the science of signs, based on the theory formulated by Saussure (Barthes, 2013, p. 101).

2. The myth of Alcestis

The pre-dramatic myth of *Alcestis*, before being transformed either into a tragedy (or rather a satirical drama)(Easterling, 2018, p. 59) or a work with postmodern writing, is drawn as a story from the popular tradition, well known to both the Athenian public of the time and earlier. The persons who constitute the myth are Admetus, king of Pherae in Thessaly, son of Feritas and Klymeni, *Alcestis*, daughter of Pelias and Anaxivia, the sons of the couple Evmilos, Ippasos and Perimilis, the god Apollo, the goddess Artemis and Death. The earlier reference to

Admetus, Alcestis's husband, is made by Homer, in a brief reference to him as the "son of Feritas" (Admetus, in Iliad B 763) and there may have been more information in the lost *Catalogue of Women* of Hesiod (Slater, 2013, p. 8).

Wilamowitz, in his work *Isyllos von Epidauros*, has shown that the myth of Alcestis is a continuation of the myth of Asclepius and Koronida located in the 3rd Pythionikos of Pindar (Ebeling, 1898, p. 66). The most popular version of the myth begins with Asclepius, son of the god Apollo, who was punished by Zeus, because he committed an insult when he brought to life one or more mortals. Apollo then killed the Cyclops, who were the ones who produced the lightnings. Apollo in turn was punished for the murder of the Cyclops and was forced to serve someone for a whole year. So Apollo chose the king of Pherae, Admetus, in Thessaly, a rich bachelor with the obligation to protect the land grazed by the oxen that the king had in his possession. A year later, Admetus enjoyed the favor of Apollo, as the god made each cow give birth to twins in each litter. Admetus, when it was time for him to get married, fell in love with the daughter of Pelias, Alcestis. As Alcestis was claimed by several suitors, Pelias planned a seemingly impossible task to choose a groom for his daughter. He tied a wild boar and a lion to a chariot, which whoever managed to stand up and drive around, would win his daughter. The god Apollo contributed to the victory of Admetus, but on the day of the wedding snakes filled the room, because Admetus had not made sacrifices and libations in honor of the goddess Artemis. The sign of the snakes was a prophetic message that the king of Pherae had to die at a young age. Apollo, however, did not want Admetus to die and visited the gods, begging them to save his life and finally managing to reach an agreement. This agreement ruled that if a friend or family member voluntarily took the place of Admetus among the dead, he could continue to live (Kravaritou and Stamatopoulou, 2018, p. 129). In another version of the myth, the death of Admetus or of a close person of him was not a demand of Artemis, but was related to the revenge of Akastos, Alcestis's brother, for the slaughter of his father by his daughters, that is, the sisters of Akastos (Segal, 1992, p. 148). Following the myth from a universal point of view, when the news spread to Admetus, he himself was convinced that one of his elderly parents would replace him, while they themselves denied his expectations. At that point, Alcestis offered to take his place and was transported to the Underworld, surrounded by her friends and family. Admetus, during this period, realized his mistake and desired to reverse this decision. Hercules, being a regular visitor to the kingdom of Admetus, agreed to bring Alcestis back from the Underworld. When Hercules faced Death, he managed

to win and led Alcestis's soul back to Admetus. The couple lived together for years, until they both went down to the Underworld (Dowden, 2016).

The above version is written in the *Library* of Pseudo-Apollodorus (1st – 2nd century AD)(Slater, 2013, p. 8), but it also refers to another version of the myth. In the second version, Hercules does not play any role in the ascension of Alcestis from the Underworld to earth, but it is noteworthy that the *Library* was written later than Euripides and the stories it contains are considered much older. The ascension of Alcestis to earth, in fact, is reported to occur by Persephone, an earlier popular form of the myth than the version with Hercules, but in the work of Euripides the version with Hercules is preferred instead of that with Persephone. In the version with Persephone, the spirit of Alcestis appears in front of Persephone in the Underworld, where the latter wonders which person is the one who wants to take the place of Admetus in death. Persephone is then moved by Alcestis's faith and devotion to Admetus, so she orders Death to bring the queen back to life. Nevertheless, the version with the use of Hercules as a companion of Alcestis from the Underworld is considered to be predominant (Joshua, 2014). Euripides, after all, chooses Hercules and introduces him as a comic character, presenting his work in The Great Dionysia as a satirical drama and not as a tragedy (Easterling, 2018, p. 59). However, the version with Hercules as the person who brings Alcestis back to earth, includes the strict rule that only Alcestis can take the place of her husband in death. Admetus is informed about this, accepts the term, while his wife becomes more and more weak. The city then falls into deep mourning and Alcestis demands, in exchange for her sacrifice, that Admetus will not marry again, but he will keep her memory alive. The king then agrees and swears at the same time that he will never organize a celebration in the palace again, so Alcestis dies (Joshua, 2014). The sequel in both versions, with Hercules and Persephone, finds the same end with the prevailing version of the myth mentioned above.

The myth of Alcestis, however, had been taught to the Athenian public at least once before the widely known version of Euripides. Around one generation earlier, the tragedian Phrynichus presented Alcestis in Dionysia (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 90). Euripides borrowed elements from Phrynichus, such as the presence of Death on stage with a sword in his hand and the rescue of Alcestis by Hercules, but Phrynichus did not focus on Alcestis' desire to die for her husband (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 91). Evidence for the myth of Alcestis is also inherent in other tragedies, such as the *Iketides* and the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus. In *Iketides*,

there is a hint about the period of slavery of Apollo and, in *Eumenides*, the chorus accuses Apollo of deceiving the Fates with fraud. Aeschylus emphasizes on the aspect of the story of the poisoning of the Fates, while Euripides in *Alcestis* avoids revealing Apollo's deception on them, but implies it in verses 12 and 33-34 (Ευριπίδης [μτφρ. Τσοκόπουλος], 2010, pp. 5-6). In Phrynichus' work, the treatment of Apollo by the Fates was probably designed in such a way as to bring greater relief to the opposition of the deities of time and the generosity of the gods of Olympus. In other words, by putting a Bacchic touch, the codes that regulate the relations between gods and humans are stopped. In fact, it is mentioned that in order to highlight the passion of the situation, Phrynichus gives an exaggeration to Apollo's offer to Admetus, who promises him immortality, not just a temporary cessation of his death. The choice of eternal life soothes the moral significance of Admetus' choice to sacrifice his wife, while at the same time Apollo's conflict with the older system of gods emerges. Even the deception of the Fates with the collaboration of Apollo, indicates the satirical character of Phrynichus's play. Isichius of Alexandria mentions 5 words from the play that not only introduce Hercules in the play, but indicate his fierce fight with Death with a victorious result. Euripides, therefore, probably borrowed from Phrynichus the battle of Hercules with Death and it is immediately understood that Phrynichus related in an inventive way two seemingly unrelated mythical stories (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 93).

3. The reception of the same myth in different plays

The transcription of the texts, either of the ancient Greek literature or of others, starts from the need of the creators to converse with their time on the basis of a primary material that acquires new breath, through the new theatrical writing that is transformed. It is a fact, as Blessios records in his work *Ancient Myths in Modern Greek Drama*, that writers in the post-war period appear particularly sensitive to the exploitation of earlier myths by providing their own approach (Μπλέσιος, 2001, p. 437). The conversion of a myth into a dramatic genre is a dynamic process, concerning the knowledge and influence of secondary entity sources, with Athenian tragedians transforming mainly fragments and composing elements of myths, while contemporary writers established aesthetics theories that contributed to the understanding of the interrelated relationship between tragedy and mythology (Μαρκαντωνάτος, 2008, p. 183). Based on Robert Jauss, the theory of reception has a dual role regarding the meaning of each work,

which primarily concerns the text itself and then the horizon of expectations related to the space and time that each text is perceived by its audience.³ Therefore, with an introductory element being something specific, every writer hopes for the subjective approach of each reader to ensure the timelessness of his creation.

3.1 The work of Euripides

The manipulation of the myth of Alcestis by Euripides, based on other authors also, is a point that needs special attention and analysis, as it is the cornerstone for understanding how the same point of origin (the myth) can lead in different destinations (authors' works). Euripides' writing and narrative skills are evident not only in the handling of the myth, but also in the way he connects different narrative elements, timeless conventions and situations, giving the public the opportunity to re-examine the myths of Alcestis and Hercules in terms of their interpretive content (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 94). Euripides chooses the transcription of the myth concerning the rescue of Alcestis, daughter of Pelias (verse 37)(Ευριπίδης [μτφρ. Τσοκόπουλος], 2010, p. 7), by Hercules and elaborately boxes the 12 labours of Hercules in a seemingly unrelated story focusing on Alcestis. Alcestis, as in the myth, has chosen to die in the place of her husband Admetus, as Admetus's parents, Ferris and Klymeni, refuse to die for him. Euripides in his work places Admetus arguing with his father, because the latter refuses to take his place in death and by this choice forces Alcestis to become the scapegoat herself and her children to mourn on stage, with Evmilos being the only speaker and the other two sons being dumb faces (verses 393-403)(Ευριπίδης [μτφρ. Τσοκόπουλος], 2010, p. 25). Euripides follows the myth of Alcestis with formal reverence and with a narrative respect quotes the elements of the myth, either from the point of view of the genealogical origin of the heroes or according to the chronological sequence of events, choosing though to focus on the version of the myth that Hercules is the one that saves Alcestis and not Persephone. In essence, the reference to the story of Hercules connects two legendary stories, the 12 labours of Hercules and the story of Alcestis, creating an explosive combination, posing a common denominator that their common component cannot be identified at first. However, the receiver's anxiety is alleviated, via the

³ Τσατσούλης, «Αρχαϊόμυθη Ελληνική Δραματουργία – Ανασημασιοδοτώντας την εθνική κληρονομιά».

unique connection that the creator achieves. Then, Hercules' visit to the kingdom of Admetus may result in two interpretive extensions, which are worth separating. More specifically, the poet uses it to show the size of Admetus who, despite his fragmentation, accepts people to visit him. On the other hand, however, it functions as a distinctive precursor element for the salvation of Alcestis by Hercules.

In a second pass, approaching the play more structurally, the first point that is worth mentioning is, as it is understood, the title. The classic motif of Euripides is observed once again, by giving female names in his titles, thus highlighting the value of gender and giving a leading role to them. Impressive is his subsequent recognition as one of the anti-feminist poets. In any case, Euripides in this particular myth gives his own point of view, ignoring its previous versions (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 94). The poet does not focus on the 12 labours of Hercules, but gives the audience the authority to recall and connect the case of the labours of Hercules, which were known to the public of the 5th century BC. A particularly difficult task, addressed to a demanding audience, which Euripides already introduces in this process from the prologue through Apollo (verse 60)(Ευριπίδης [μτφρ. Τσοκόπουλος], 2010, p. 9). In more detail, at the point of the prologue, with Apollo's narration, it seems that Euripides has used the myth, according to which Zeus punished his son Asclepius with death by lightning, since due to his science he stopped the process of human death.

The reception of the myth continues with his narration and his obligation to live next to Admetus, watching over his oxen (Κρεββατάς, 1998, p. 19). The labours of Hercules did not remain in the public consciousness only as punishments imposed by Hera, but also as labours that brought order and culture. The abduction of Alcestis by Hercules from the hands of Death affirms the new morality and is a political act. This is in contrast to the act of Asclepius to bring the men from the Underworld regardless of their moral status, while Zeus establishes a new moral system with the release of his son Hercules from punishment, thus giving the possibility of a second chance to the virtuous (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 94). When Apollo, in the prologue, prophesies the rescue of Alcestis by Hercules, he indicates one of the most important pieces of the narrative puzzle, that is, that the story of Alcestis is inextricably linked to the 12 labours of Hercules. In particular, he speaks of the 8th labour of Hercules, the abduction of the wild horses of Diomedes (verse 67 and verses 476-506)(Ευριπίδης [μτφρ. Τσοκόπουλος], 2010, p. 9 και 27-29), and in fact, the rise of Alcestis from the

Underworld as an event is almost in the middle of the labours of Hercules, between the 7th and the 8th. In addition, it is important to mention the battle of Hercules with Death at the tomb of Alcestis which is associated with the 12th and last labour of Hercules, his descent to Hades and the fight with the three-headed dog Cerberus, which he had to raise to earth. On his journey to the Underworld, he released Theseus and also tried to free Peirithos, the king of the Lapiths, but he did not succeed. It is understood, therefore, that the rescue of Theseus from the Underworld constitutes a mirror story in the rescue of Alcestis (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 86). After all, all the stories of Hercules are about the fight to the death, with exological elements from human civilization. The way Hercules deals with death in his labours is reminiscent of the way Alcestis stands in the face of the possibility of her death and sacrifice. The injection of the myth of Hercules into Alcestis, turns a typical story about the avoidance of destruction and death into a story where death is defeated, through the morality and the integrity of the character of Alcestis and the honesty of Hercules (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 89). Of course, the character of Admetus does not converge on the above, as he gives his place to his wife in death with relative ease.

From what is understood, the reception of the myth of Alcestis is proposed with the myth of Hercules going through the whole text and being used implicitly and in chronological order. Euripides takes into account the version of the myth that Hercules rescues Alcestis and exploits complex points of his character and conflicting aspects of him, giving a comic tone to the play, making it a satirical drama and not a pure tragedy. Hercules, through the eyes of Euripides, is presented on the one hand as a brave warrior and on the other as noisy and lover of entertainment, attributing the worshipping traditions of ancient Greece and highlighting the relationship of human destiny with the divine power and the variability of human existence (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 95). Although Hercules affirms the characteristics of his mythical identity, Euripides, as usual, deprives him, deconstructs him with an anti-heroic spirit, without implying that he will not be the person who will bring Alcestis from the Underworld. The poet, in fact, places Hercules in the center, by putting him to present his achievements to Admetus, and through this narrative technique indirectly exposes the mythological tradition of Hercules, which is far greater than the history and the myth of Alcestis (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 124).

Apart from the connection of Hercules with the myth of Alcestis, there is also an underlying relationship between him and Apollo and Admetus. Euripides

brings out in his work this connection with tensions, in order to introduce both the heroic achievements of Hercules and his dark aspects. In short, the demigod Hercules mirrors Admetus and Apollo with the trials that are enforced to each of them, that is, Admetus to sacrifice someone close to him and Apollo to suffer punishment by his father, Zeus (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 101). In addition, Hercules and Apollo are connected through an incident of violence that occurred in Delphi, which involved the altar of Apollo and finally had the intervention of Zeus, with the two brothers abandoning the battle between them. This story is the reversal of the story of Asclepius, which is referred to in the work of Euripides in verses 121-129 (Ευριπίδης [μτφρ. Τσοκόπουλος], 2010, p. 12). Zeus avoids blaming one of the two brothers and destroying the culprit with lightning, as he did to Asclepius. Hercules, therefore, enjoyed the favor of Zeus, and in Euripides' *Alcestis* was chosen to serve as a moral figure of Asclepius.

In the analogy of the legend of Hercules and the story of Admetus there is a reversal of patterns of violent behavior that end in destruction. The only difference lies in the fact that Hercules is the protagonist in stories of in-family violence, while in the story of *Alcestis* he is the savior of the family. The hospitality he accepts from Admetus and his stay in the city of Pherae resembles a similar incident related to the 4th labour of Hercules, in his hunt for the Erymanthios boar, where he himself did not comply with the etiquette of the good visitor. He forced his friend Centaur Folos to open a pot of wine that Dionysus had given him to keep and had given him the order to open it only when Hercules appeared. Finally, Folos opened the pot and the favor of Hercules' hospitality ended up in the unknowing self-destruction of Folos with the poisoned arrows from the death of Lernaean Hydra. Of course, one hospitality ends up in good, while the other in mortal (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 102).

Euripides brings the dark pessimism of Admetus on stage in conflict with the comic figure of Hercules, adding cynicism. Both attitudes of the two men are opposing in front of the calm attitude of *Alcestis* and her self-sacrifice (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 119). Of course, *Alcestis* mentions that some god has defined the future (Lesky, 2010, p. 47), so it is a duty to follow it, since in ancient Greece the meaning of insult was of paramount importance. The profile of Admetus through the work of Euripides appears as of a man who is timid in the face of death, but it is a trick to validate the myth and to intensify the attitude of *Alcestis* towards death. Admetus with the word "treason" ("προδῶς") (verse 250) (Ευριπίδης [μτφρ. Τσοκόπουλος], 2010, p. 21) reveals that he betrays his wife, or

in another interpretation that he abandons her (Lesky, 2010, pp. 38-39), while Alcestis asks him to take an oath not to marry another woman and get their children obtain a stepmother. The trick of covering the face, used by Euripides, serves dramatic purposes of intensity for when Alcestis reappears. When her silence is mentioned and that it will take three days for her to speak again, the purification that needs to take place is implied, as she came from the world of the dead (Lesky, 2010, p. 45).

Alcestis has been put in a space by Euripides who gives her her status. This space is Hades, where, despite her undoubted fear, she chooses to go in order to free her beloved. The space automatically takes on a dimension of heroism and courage that is inconsistent with the darkness and cowardice of Hades. This contrast intensifies the integrity of the love she feels and the pure element of her character (Κοσμοπούλου, 2018, pp. 182-183). She faithfully serves the exemplar of the ideal wife, acting educationally to the theatrical audience, as it is also one of the goals of this art. Of course, it must be taken into account in the reading of each work that the author goes through a dynamic process of shaping the original myth, based on his own character. One would say that he must be "on the cutting edge", in order to maintain a balance between the mythological axes that he must serve and his own personal attitude, both in an aesthetic and in an ideological level. And all these being integrated in a perpetual under the light of the historical facts of the time of writing (Βασιλείου, 2012, pp. 19-22).

3.2 The ancient themed play of Andreas Staikos

The reception of the myth of Alcestis by Andreas Staikos in his work *Alcestis and Sweet Dreams* concerns the use of intra-textual metatheatrical elements (Lehmann, 2006, p. 95) with the aim being more the parody and not the capturing of the tragedy of the heroes. Possibly, Euripides has laid the foundations, presenting his own work as a satirical drama and not as a pure tragedy of the time, and Staikos has only to use the reception of the myth of Alcestis by Euripides to communicate his themes to the contemporary audience. As Savvas Patsalidis puts it, can tragedy answer questions of a society which has the feeling that it has dealt extensively with any human subject? (Πατσαλίδης, 1997, p. 429) This is the basis of the transcription of myths, and especially of the ancient themed ones, by contemporary writers, who become co-creators of the ancient poets.

Initially, it would be useful to refer to the general theatrical writing of Andreas Staikos. His dramaturgy does not use realistic terms, but aims to explore theatricality and dramatic techniques, with his characters not being examined with psychological superpositions (Ziropoulou, 2013, p. 179). His theatrical writing contains repetitive thematic motifs that move between reality and illusion, usually building love stories with games of chance and misunderstandings, inspired by the technique of *marivaudage*. He uses, through the theater in the theater, the imitation of an act that ultimately concerns a game (Ziropoulou, 2013, p. 180).

The parody of Andreas Staikos on the myth of Alcestis lies in his theatrical writing with the verbal play he performs with the stereotypes, the ethography of the Greek culture, the proverbs, the lyrics from songs, but also the isolation of his heroes and their introversion, as a result of which the communication and the action are stopped in order to capture more actively the irrational element that runs through his work. The title already prepares the reader for the verbal play, but perhaps it is a reference to the myth of Alcestis with her eventual rescue from the Underworld, as if she just closed her eyes for a while. The writer in the stage instructions often indicates a long pause, to express the lack of communication between the persons; an element that creates comedy through embarrassment. Its purpose is not to answer questions of the time, nor to promote the motif of the devoted wife who sacrifices, but to show the irony inherent in life, through love. When Admetus finally falls in love with Alcestis, it is already too late.

The play begins with a letter from heaven – as a divine intervention – that poses the dilemma to King Admetus of Pherae as to whether he or his wife will die in fifteen days. In essence, the author draws from the myth the place, with an unknown time besides the May 29th, and at first sight the persons and the main theme of the play, the sacrifice of Alcestis thanks to the love she holds for her husband. But this is a quick conclusion and is overturned by the fact that the letter comes from heaven by an unknown messenger – the messenger in the myth is Apollo. The second point is the explicit condition to be Admetus himself or his wife who will die and not any relative or friend, as it is written in the myth; but as in the myth, only by own desire and choice. Therefore, his wife will choose death and it will not be imposed on her, regardless of whether Staikos' Admetus "imposes" her death with a vital lie.

Staikos' Admetus is unmarried and in order to escape death, which is set for midnight on the 29th to the 30th of May, he organizes in a comic way a bride

market-audition to choose his victim. At this point there is a reversal of the myth, since the myth projected the choice of Alcestis' husband organized by her father, with candidates who were expected to accomplish a mission. There exists no mission in this specific play and one would say that this is a modern perspective, yet the bride market-audition is also opposed to modern perceptions of marriage. The potential victims are Smaro, Iopi and Alcestis. Smaro is daughter of a miller or, as she introduces herself, daughter of a flour industry owner (Στάικος, 2012, p. 14). Iopi, from Kalliopi, is a prostitute, as she herself mentions. And Alcestis, who is presented in the way she is presented by Euripides, but also by the myth; pure, innocent and holding true love for Admetus to the point that she consciously chooses her sacrifice, until of course the plot twist comes. Staikos uses stereotypical features, such as the choice of a woman by a man based on her hair, with the redhead Smaro mentioning to Alcestis her fear that Admetus will choose Iopi, because she has two hair colors, one brown and one blonde, and thus Admetus will never get bored. Besides, the way the king is presented indicates a man who is a lover of the female sex, who has fun at nights and acts only for his own interest; while he chooses Alcestis as his wife, he has the other two as mistresses. The social climber Smaro is the woman who will replace Alcestis after her death, and Iopi is the mistress who offers her company to Admetus because she considers him to be a better customer than the rest ones. Possibly Staikos wants to exculpate the negative figure of Admetus that has been presented in the myth, as he plays with the negative characteristics of people that are perceived as positive, since these make Admetus choose Smaro in the beginning. The more Admetus sees that Smaro is arrogant, hypocritical, narcissistic and coquettish, the more his desire for her increases, stating that she reaches perfection (Στάικος, 2012, p. 29). In addition, Smaro's reference to Admetus as Takis after his own request, and in fact because that is how his mother calls him, is a comic element, where Staikos uses a common name to decapitate the hero – as Euripides does more with the figure of Hercules– as well as to present Admetus in a stereotypical way, implying that he is attached to his mother. This is the only reference to Admetus-Takis' mother; that is, Admetus' parents are not projected as individuals who promote the action and push Alcestis to her sacrifice. The sacrifice concerns her and only her, with Admetus deceiving her that they will be sacrificed together to be saved from decay, like another Romeo and Juliet. Though, Admetus' intention is for only Alcestis to die and for himself to continue living. The revelation of his intentions comes from Iopi, who discovers that letter from heaven and reveals it

with a gift to Alcestis. Alcestis then insists on hastening their sacrifice, a fact that is a strong element for Admetus to fall in love with her, due to her great devotion. Staikos' game of chance appears when Admetus takes the poison that was intended for Alcestis, confusing their glasses. Alcestis nevertheless insists on her eternal love for Admetus, as she reveals to Iopi, even though she knows that he deceived her.

3.3 Comparative approach of the two plays

In terms of intertextuality, the plays of Andreas Staikos and of Euripides have several similarities, but also differences that stem mainly from the audience addressed by each author and his view of the myth. The ancient poet borrowed from the myth the notion of the claim of a woman-trophy by the man, with starting point in the struggle for the claim being the father of Alcestis. Staikos deals with the conventional image of the man who has seemingly several qualities and has the ability to choose any woman he wishes. The game with the stereotypical expressions of female characters about beauty, wealth, and the hunt for marriage with a rich man, is reversed by Andreas Staikos; he brings to the fore an Alcestis who desires the salvation of Admetus, while gradually learning his truth. Euripides does not suggest any doubt by Alcestis about the sacrifice, especially since Admetus' parents are not sacrificed. Staikos, though, places the sacrifice from the beginning to be the central starting point of the marriage, shows the gradual turnaround of Admetus about Alcestis and Alcestis to remain faithful to her love for Admetus, even though she learns the truth about him. The rest of the characters are the supporting characters in promoting the action.

It is worth mentioning Tsatsoulis' comment regarding the appositional comparison of the two plays. He records that the love for the idols that characterizes Staikos' plays is in fact the love for lies. Regarding the play *Alcestis and sweet dreams*, Andreas Staikos intends to restore the text of Euripides that he inadvertently skews, creating a situation that is just as known and familiar but at the same time original and new (Tsatsoulis, 2019, p. 333).

Euripides' Hercules is somehow replaced by Iopi, who saves Alcestis from death; with Iopi averting her death, while Hercules bringing her from the Underworld. Smaro, on the other hand, has a parallelism with the therapist of Admetus, since she has been appointed by Admetus to serve Alcestis and thus has a mirror role with Iopi, like the therapist has with Hercules. Smaro pities Iopi for her dress and profession, like the therapist does with Hercules for the way he

appears in the palace during mourning. After all, both Iopi and Hercules point to the Dionysian side, besides the role of savior, with the pleasures and the fun side that they advocate for life.

In summary, it is worth noting that a comparison process does not imply the identification of similarities or differences between the presented facts, but is a dynamic process of identifying the facts that the author himself chose in order to render the myth, always in terms of his time, his thought and his own subjective perception of the multifaceted word "theater".

3.4 Semiotics and intertextuality in the work of Andreas Staikos

The term 'intertextuality' came from Julia Kristeva, who used this term in her works *Semiotics* (1969) and *Revolution of Poetic Speech* (1974), wishing to define the practice of transition from one system of signifiers to another, or, in a holistic writing level, the notion of the transformation of one text into another (Σιαφλέκης, 1989, p. 18). Ancient Greek tragedy is often found in contemporary works in a transformative form, either through direct reference or indirect, reconstructing the dramatic myth and creating the starting point for dialogue on a new form of text reception, highlighting its meanings that are unclear to the contemporary audience (Γκότσης et al, 2008, p. 7). The way a text is composed at the dialectical level, as well as the function of signs at the textual level, are studied in more depth by the science of Semiotics. Semiotics is based on some schematic diagrams, such as the *actantial model* (Figure 1) and the *semiotic square* (Figure 2) (Κοσμοπούλου, 2018, pp. 15-16), which are presented below:

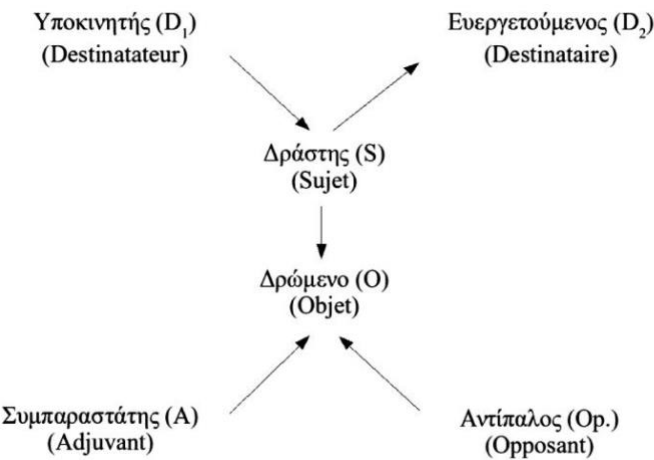


Figure 1: Actantial model.

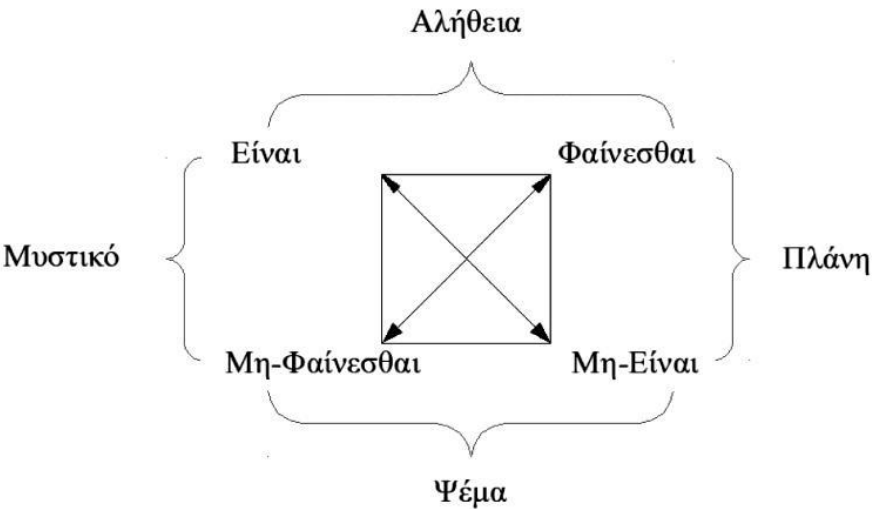


Figure 2: Semiotic square.

With the actantial model, the Actor-Subject is studied in relation to the Event-Object and the person who benefits from the action of the Actor. The Helper is the assistant of the Actor in making the Event happen, while the Opponent is the contradictory force in order not to happen (Κοσμοπούλου, 2018, p. 19). The semiotic square indicates the relationship between *being* and *appearing*, with the truth including both meanings, the lie including their opposite pair, the secret including the combination of being and not appearing, and the deception including

the combination of not being and appearing. In ancient tragedies, the way in which the heroes totter among deceptions, secrets and lies is often examined, based on the semiotic square (Κοσμοπούλου, 2020, p. 37), as observed in the work of Euripides, with Admetus being mistaken about the entity and the existence of his wife, a fact that is observed more actively in the modern version of the myth of Alcestis by Andreas Staikos. The research oriented view on the intertextual relationship of Euripides' Alcestis with the modern Alcestis of Andreas Staikos, is based on the idea that all works of any kind –poetry, theatrical writing or any other genre– converse and dialogue semantically, stylistically and at the level of motifs. The enlightenment of intertextuality in these two works will be attempted in relation to the above for the reception of the myth of Alcestis and the purpose that each author tried to serve.

In a first phase, the deconstruction of the work of Andreas Staikos will be attempted, based on the above diagrams. According to the actantial model, the Actor is Alcestis, the Event is her sacrifice, the Motivator is her love for Admetus and his salvation, the Benefactor is Admetus himself and Smaro, the Helper for her sacrifice to take place is again Admetus and Smaro, and the Opponent is Iopi who tries to stop the process of sacrifice. However, the semiotic square is complicated in the actantial model as follows: Admetus knows the whole truth in the beginning, that is, for what reason he will marry Alcestis, and deceives Alcestis, who thinks that he is marrying him because of love; Smaro keeps the secret, knowing that Admetus will marry her after the death of Alcestis; and Iopi discovers the truth and the real reason of the wedding ceremony. Though, afterwards, the truth belongs to Alcestis and Iopi, while now Admetus is the one in deception, who does not know that Alcestis has received the letter from Iopi and keeps this secret from Admetus, insisting and speeding up the process of sacrifice. And Admetus' deception continues until the end, when the couple's glasses are confused and Alcestis' sacrifice is stopped. After all, Andreas Staikos' theater is based on the reversal of the truth, with violation of the normative principles of the real dialogue, through false statements of the subject on stage, which, however, reveal the truth to the spectator (Τσατσούλης, 2007, p. 315).

Lina Rozi translates that if one observes the plot, he realizes that the Greek tragedy as a whole is an alloy of variations, additions and subtractions that interact on a mythological and morphological level. The interesting thing about this dynamic process is that a repetition of information can be observed, but they never reach their identification. Thus, an intertextual character could be

attributed to the tragedy, not just incidentally or occasionally (Burian, 2010, p. 269).

4. Conclusions – Discussion

The reception of the myth of Alcestis, both in contemporary dramaturgy and at the level of ancient Greek tragedy, fulfils specific purposes of the authors, which are examined mainly at the level of reception of the audience and society. Euripides transcribes the myth, presenting an Alcestis - woman role model, who is devoted to her husband, until the last moment. Staikos, on the other hand, engages the characters in a game of plot twists to highlight the way love functions and the tricks people use in the face of it. The common point, however, is that both authors project the figure of Alcestis that is inherent in the myth, a woman with a dominant element of purity and devotion to her desires, even when she is deceived by situations and persons. Essentially, these are two different but, at the same time, similar approaches to the same myth.

Staikos, as is perhaps logical, was not entirely unaffected by the work of Euripides. Admetus in the work of Staikos is heroized again, emphasizing the hope of timelessness of the myth that lives through the 25 centuries of waiting. It would not be an exaggeration to describe him as selfish, for leading the unfortunate Alcestis on a journey of no return. Staikos, by giving this extent to the above hero, chooses to be indifferent to the characters of Apollo or Hercules from the work of Euripides. It is understood, therefore, that his selective tendency from the past has a certain deeper aim. It gives dimension to characters that 2012 can absorb and identify. The seasons change, and with them the perceptions of individuals, and therefore the stimuli. The selective tendency of Staikos is also evident from the clear description of all the events on a completely classical structure, which Euripides' tragedy lacks; the latter is characterized as more tolerant when it refers to its audience. In other words, it provides the stimulus and allows the audience to guide it, giving an ancient freedom that has been admired and praised throughout the centuries in its whole extent.

Therefore, it is possible that this influence gave another element of similarity that allows the comparison in the two works, with the common denominator being the myth of Alcestis. Their comparison through this short article is not intended to put the signs of the two works in apposition, but to offer the reading public the opportunity to evaluate the two works by highlighting those

elements that reflect the topicality of the time they were written and the philosophy of their creator.

These differences and similarities are so interesting that they preserve the theater in life in the absolute sense. It may be about the same myth, but it's impressive how its different presentation places it in different eras and chronologies where the real common elements converse. It is "a myth, the people and the theater". One cannot know how the work of Staikos would be shaped, without the pre-existing work of Euripides. Nor, respectively, how the work of Euripides would be without its counterpart of Phrynichus. But it would not be very helpful, since the comparison, as mentioned above, is a dynamic process, even when it is not initially apparent that the specific works have a common basis. The only sure common denominator is the woman and the role she plays. She is the one who is responsible for the development and the plot is based on it. The role of woman in dramaturgy is deemed crucial for the specific approach of each work, giving the impression of a tragic person, whose feelings and life can interact with the experiences and thoughts of the author, in order to give a result that is both timely and timeless. The existence of woman within the ancient drama facilitates this coupling (Ρόζη, 2007, pp. 156-189).

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Dr. Despina Kosmopoulou was born in Athens and has graduated from the Faculty of Letters at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She is a post-doctoral researcher in the Department of Theatre Studies of the National Kapodistrian University of Athens and the Department of Philology of the University of the Peloponnese. She is also an adjunct lecturer in the Department of Theatrical Studies of the Arts and Crafts School of the University of the Peloponnese. Despina Kosmopoulou examines theatre further through the philosophy proposed by Semiology. She is a member and researcher of the Centre for Ancient Rhetoric and Drama of the University of Peloponnese, member of the Hellenic Semiotics Society and member of the creative team of the Analogio Festival under the auspices of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports. She has

written three books that are published by the *Dromon Publications*: *Pirandello and Genet, a 'Meeting' in the Tragic and the Absurd* (2017), *Space Dialectics and Enclosure to the Theater* (2018), *Theatrical Writing and Theory of Semiotics* (2020).