

# Phaedra and Hippolytus: The intertextual journey of the mytheme in 21st century's drama plays

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The article proposes an intertextual approach to the timeless myth of Phaedra and Hippolytus<sup>1</sup> by looking at its various adaptations, particularly in the Greek dramaturgy of the 21st century. In particular, the paper focuses on the remodelling of dramatic characters and their reconsidered 'dramatic behaviour' in selected Greek plays of this century. These plays are: (a) Vassilis Papageorgiou, *Hippolytus Kalyptomenos* (2005), (b) Elena Pegka: *Phaedra or Alcestis - Love stories* (2007) and (c) Vassilis Alexakis: *Don't call me Fofo* (2008).<sup>2</sup>

In the late 20<sup>th</sup> c. Sarah Kane was the first to present a deconstructed form of the mytheme, applying changes or additions to the episode by way of 'aggressive' transformation and textual 'modernization'.<sup>3</sup> The heroine's attitude and actions are such as to draw her markedly away from her earlier namesakes, as the episode becomes assimilated into what for the playwright is the disturbing and disgusting

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<sup>1</sup> For the mythic episode of Phaedra and Hippolytus, which is a dramatic adaptation of the archetypal motif of Potiphar's wife (Old Testament, Genesis 39), see esp. Thompson 1977:415; Zoras 1992; López Salva 1994:77–112; West 1997:365; Hansen, 2002:332–352; Mills 2002:26–27; El-Shamy, 2004:146–147; Hans-Jörg Uther, 2004 passim.

<sup>2</sup> For Papageorgiou's text [Greek title: *Ιππόλυτος Καλυπτόμενος*] I used the University Studio Press edition, Thessaloniki 2005. For Alexakis' text [Greek title: *Μη με λες Φωφώ*] I used Exantas edition, Athens 2008. Pegka's text [Greek title: *Φαίδρα ή Άλκηστη - Love stories*] remains unpublished. It was forwarded to me by the playwright herself. I kindly thank her for responding to my request.

<sup>3</sup> The play has been studied in the Greek translation by Athena Paraponiari, Introduction by Patsalides and Sakellaridou, University Studio Press: Thessaloniki, 2002.

daily life of her time, in the England of globalization, insecurity and confusion. Hippolytus and Phaedra accept their destiny without the slightest hint of objection, beyond any rule of moral and religious prohibition, in a closed and dark world, albeit open to potentiality as they waver between tenderness and violence, erotic love and revenge, the pleasure of sexual contact and the pleasure of death.<sup>4</sup> As far as the two central characters are concerned, Kane had wanted to imbue the pious exemplar of the pure young man with cynicism, apathy, depression and saturation thus turning him into a contemporary, shallow and unholy creature, remote from his nominalist burden. Phaedra is still the archetypal persona of the incurably romantic woman who immerses herself in an ambiguous seductive depression after her passion is rejected.

Kane's play suggests that the idiosyncrasy of the central characters changes according to the moral parameters of the time within which the play is composed, therefore we find ourselves markedly transposed from their mythical portrayal. Nevertheless, as we shall see further down, each version builds on a particularity, either obvious or suggested, delicate or repulsive. The person that is most visibly remote from his Euripidean, Senecan and Racinean depiction is Hippolytus: the pure young man in *Stephanêphoros* and the man in love in Racine's *Phèdre* is reduced to Kane's cynical and apathetic hero. Both Phaedra and Theseus remain loyal, *mutatis mutandis*, to the mythological components, with the stepmother confessing her love to Hippolytus and, enraged by his rebuke, falsely accusing him to her lawful husband. At the same time, Theseus, ignorant due to his absence, is called upon to assume the role of the tragic father by punishing his son. The addition of 'Tutors' and 'Nurses' to the main characters is either intended to represent the popular

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<sup>4</sup> See specifically Diamantakou-Agathou 2007:235–290; Critchley 2008:190–191.

opinion or to aid (and abet) the characters' action. They eventually vanish in the contemporary variations where the now liberated heroes act of their own accord and accept the consequences of their actions. Each version contains something unique and at the same time something vague, something ambivalent and closely bound to human idiosyncrasy which runs an off-center course around catastrophe or survival. This is precisely the element which provides the mythic episode with adjustability and may be discerned in 21st c. plays.

The study of the following versions opens a fascinating path that demonstrates how their respective writers have subversively intervened with the stereotypical structure of the mytheme, proposing seemingly new treatments; however, every single one of them contains a thread that links back to the earlier tradition. Also demonstrated here is how the literary material that the Greek writers have borrowed becomes remodeled in order to propose an alternative reception of the mytheme.

In 2005 Vassilis Papageorgiou writes *Hippolytus Kalyptomenos*.<sup>5</sup> The play re-inscribes the mythic episode drawing on the scarce fragments from the Euripidean *Hippolytus Kalyptomenos*.<sup>6</sup> These fragments, due to their short length, only partially point to the style and structure of the lost tragedy. Based on the *Hypothesis*<sup>7</sup> of the *Stephanêphoros* as well as on the view of Aristophanes,<sup>8</sup> Euripides appears to have

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<sup>5</sup> The play, directed by Nikos Sakalides, was put on stage on 12 July 2007 by Teatro Technis "Aktis Aeliou" in the framework of the Delphi Festival.

<sup>6</sup> For the fragments of the Euripidean *Hippolytus Kalyptomenos* see Barrett 1964:18–22; Halleran 1995:25–37, Mills 2002:27–35.

<sup>7</sup> Aristophanes Byzantius' hypothesis to *Hippolytus Stephanêphoros* says that the play "was written later; for this play has amended what was unseemly and blameworthy" (i.e. in the earlier *Hippolytus*).

<sup>8</sup> See Aristoph. *Frogs* 1043.

written a 'second' Hippolytus in the aftermath of the public reaction against the depiction of a shameless Phaedra.

Papageorgiou's play opens on the premise that the relationship between Phaedra and Hippolytus is consummate and what remains is to explore how the rest of the *dramatis personae* deal with this fact. The playwright endeavours to illustrate the emotions that have prompted this relationship as well as the thoughts that followed the consent of the two protagonists. At the same time, light is shed on the transgression of institutions, on pain, death, uncertainty, dread – precisely because the consummation of this passion leads to knowledge of life's deeper meanings. Readers are invited to think and judge on the basis of a social and contemporary philosophy, whilst the continuous and unchallenged contact of the two stands out, stirring up speculation about the correlations between all *dramatis personae* in the play.

The very list of characters attests to the playwright's adherence to the *Stephanêphoros* version: apart from the central figures of Hippolytus, Phaedra, Theseus, Nurse, roles are also assigned to the two rival deities, Aphrodite and Artemis. As early as the first scene of the play, Phaedra without hesitation declares her passion for Hippolytus. She is aware that her love is unholy and agonizing but at no point in the play does she seem to regret it [pp. 13–14].<sup>9</sup> Papageorgiou borrows the Euripidean image of the frail and love-stricken Phaedra, though altering her final wish and motive in the new light of the consummate relationship. As the play progresses, the Chorus wonders, within a setting of textual irony, about the next steps of the queen who is given to enigmatic silence.<sup>10</sup> Still, the goddess Artemis

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<sup>9</sup> Citations refer to pages of the play as published by University Studio Press: Thessaloniki, 2005.

<sup>10</sup> See Eur. *Hipp.* 38–40, 273, 279, 297.

soon appears on stage, her presence readily exposing the links to *Stephanêphoros*. Artemis stresses her special relation with Hippolytus but only through *faits accomplis*, acknowledging the limits of her choices [pp. 18–22]. The presence of a weakened goddess suggests the transformation of the borrowed material by Papageorgiou, with the addition of human will and assumption of responsibility for the choices and actions of the characters. In the fourth scene, his head covered, Hippolytus confesses his passion for Phaedra to the Chorus [pp. 22–24], wary about whether it might impact on his relationship with Artemis. At the ensuing meeting with the goddess, he declares his pure love whilst describing romantic moments of the two at the centre of Thessaloniki [p. 30].

In the next scene, the Chorus warns the young man that he is accountable to the *polis* and that he has to meet with Phaedra and his father [pp. 32–35]. The active involvement of the *polis* as judge of actions is also found in Kane's version, whilst the potential punishment suffered by an entire city because of the actions of an illustrious man conjures up the Euripidean *Bacchae*. In the seventh scene, a naked Phaedra confesses her passion for Hippolytus to the Nurse, foregrounding the irresistible power of love.

Now, the point that differentiates Papageorgiou's heroine from her predecessors is the certainty that Theseus will forgive both her and Hippolytus. Theseus is shown to be a metatextually improved character, bound to show sympathy. The role of the stern judge is assigned to the *polis* [p. 41]. This is a unique point in the studied version which merits our attention as Phaedra is under the impression that the entire city participates and empathizes in support of her passion for Hippolytus, in spite of the fact that she has committed adultery [p. 41], as though in an effort to instruct the *polis* on the universality and permeability of erotic love. At the same time, she declares that Theseus will show magnanimity, her words indicating she is

here as an metatextual judge to cast a critical eye on the stereotypical stages of the episode's unfolding. It is as though she seeks to have the denouement of her own drama, her own reinscription of the episode, withdrawn from the traditional denouement, declaring that from now on the characters may act of their own volition and face the consequences of their actions.

In the tenth scene [p. 51] Phaedra meets with Aphrodite. Now the second divine pole appears in the text as actual and compelling as in the Euripidean *Stephanêphoros*. Talking to Aphrodite, Phaedra is adamant that what she has chosen and what she feels is not some godsent manipulated desire, but love. What she implicitly does is to inform the goddess that 'her play' will not be a contemporary dramatization of the rivalry between the two goddesses that foregrounds human weakness and lack of will power. She clarifies that the *dramatis personae* in the *Kalyptomenos*, herself included, have evolved to become improved metatextual characters who make choices and assume responsibility for their actions. This particular point differentiates Papageorgiou's version on a significant plane which might not be readily obvious. Papageorgiou chooses to reconstruct Euripides' lost play about which all scholars agree that it proposed a shameless Phaedra whose behaviour had compelled Hippolytus to cover himself. Nevertheless, he opts to 'correct' the play ascribing well-balanced features to the two protagonists, clearly indicative of moral improvement as they have detached themselves from dependency and face their fate or at least what their mythological role has intertextually allotted them.

In the eleventh scene [p. 56], Papageorgiou builds an unprecedented meeting of the two divinities. Even though the goddesses initially disagree on the attitude of the protagonists, they eventually come to an agreement and jointly understand that their faithful dramatic heroes, Hippolytus and Phaedra, are no longer the

mouthpieces of their volitions, as in *Stephanêphoros*, but in fact act and choose voluntarily. Therefore, after the scenic landscape has been alleviated by the divine element, the twelfth scene is marked by the meeting of Hippolytus and Phaedra. Both are ready to accept the consequences of their mutual passion [pp. 62–65].

In the play's fifteenth scene, the Nurse attempts to deter Theseus from punishing the lovers, with the spouses coming together in the next scene. With enigmatic and vague talk, Phaedra bids Theseus farewell without the least conflict erupting between them. She then leaves, receding into the darkness in order to end her own life. Theseus' ensuing soliloquy is compelling in spite of its vagueness. His words transpose him to a place extra human, where he retreats into a delusion of drowning into the depths of the sea as scenes from the episode's denouement flash before his eyes. The delusion is interrupted by Hippolytus' presence. The latter has decided to die while Theseus implores him not to. Papageorgiou sketches out a tragically weak Theseus who readily forgives Hippolytus and begs him to refrain from further action. He would rather that time stopped and the dramatic heroes lingered in intertextuality within a neutrally charged zone. The dramatic stagnancy is palpable. The play closes with the Chorus' extensive monologue in the form of a messenger's report, where the death of Hippolytus is relayed and the pale, moribund form of Theseus described.<sup>11</sup>

In 2007 Elena Pegka puts on stage the play *Phaedra or Alcestis – Love Stories* where she introduces new characters, diverging from the episode's typical structure.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Papageorgiou's Theseus opts for isolation in the example of Racine's Theseus. Theseus, as a dramatic character in all three versions explored here, is, we shall see, utterly waned by the playwrights, so much so that his action and presence appears to be unnecessary. In Papageorgiou's play, Theseus is shown to move along a different dimension, seeking givens that cannot be.

<sup>12</sup> For an analysis of the postmodern play of Pegka, see Karampatsa 2017:34–51.

Pegka had wanted to interweave two stories, similar at points, but at the same time different in order to cast a different point of view on Phaedra's line of action. The new characters of the play are Thanatos, Alcestis, her Maid and Admetus. As will be shown further down, Pegka chooses to gradually follow part of the mythic episode, removing however the end and the tragic ending, adding instead her own hybrid of two similar stories. Right from the start, the scene is split in two, with Phaedra's space in bright red and Alcestis' space in black. At the middle, a video is projected while the radio plays romantic songs and commentary.

The first scene of the play shows Hippolytus and Phaedra dining amidst sexual innuendos and expressions. On the footsteps of Kane and, partially, Papageorgiou, Pegka matter-of-factly sets forth the erotic passion of the two protagonists. Hippolytus' provocative and sexually enticing behaviour causes the withdrawal of Phaedra, who is struggling to resist. Between this scene and the next one, Pegka adds her own peculiar choral song where two maidservants dance.

In the second scene, Hippolytus, in the likeness of Kane's hero, is playing with a remote-controlled gadget, onto which he has affixed a camera and films Phaedra, inviting her to strike erotically provocative poses. But at some point, this game<sup>13</sup> takes on a different form, as Phaedra becomes more excited sexually and ends up masturbating on stage.<sup>14</sup> One step before consummation, aware of the impending act of adultery, an embarrassed Hippolytus pulls back and, in a daze, calls for his horse in order to go far away. At this point, Thanatos makes his appearance to

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<sup>13</sup> The narration and fantasization of hunting images as described in the Euripidean *Stephanêphoros* but also in the Ovidian letter of Phaedra to Hippolytus, are remoulded into an on-stage erotic "hunting" game, exactly like the Euripidean Phaedra would have had it. Cf. Eur. *Hipp.* 215–222, 228–231 and Ovid *Her.* 4.38.

<sup>14</sup> Kane's Hippolytus also masturbates on stage, which intertextually overturns the archetypal image of a sexually abstinent Hippolytus.



advise him to keep away from the sea because he is in danger. When the young man refuses to believe him, Thanatos, like an oracle, relates the tragic end that awaits him. We can see that Pegka sets out to intratextually alter the standard ending of her version, effectively proposing an additional option of denouement.

In the third scene, in the context of role-play, the Maidservant plays Phaedra while Phaedra plays Theseus after having put on his clothes. Therefore, the characters change parts in order to set up a remodeled scene where the two spouses meet. Pegka deliberately chooses to remove Theseus from the *dramatis personae* and puts him on stage only through the use of his clothes in a bid to erase his intertextual role and utility. Consequently, the on-stage confession of Phaedra's passion to Theseus only takes place within the controlled distorted scene that Pegka had chosen. Phaedra enacts Theseus who, of course, 'expresses himself' through her views, based on which Theseus is bound to ask forgiveness for his absence. Pegka's Phaedra has directed a scene of her own, with circumstances and dialogues to her liking in order to justify her passion.<sup>15</sup> In the context of this fictitious meeting she can now express herself, rid of any demureness or regret over everything she has contemplated and did.

In the fourth scene, Thanatos comes to take Phaedra with him. Within a delusional setting, the leading lady fantasizes she is asking Hippolytus to copulate with her. The tragic element consists in the fact that Hippolytus' penetration of her equals her death. The scene closes with Phaedra dying in the hands of Thanatos while accusing Hippolytus of rape. In this last scene, Pegka skillfully transforms yet

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<sup>15</sup> In *Stephanêphoros* husband and wife never meet. Only in Seneca's *Phaedra* [1156] do they meet after the death of Hippolytus, in a scene where Phaedra accuses Theseus for being absent and for the death of Hippolytus. A meeting between the two spouses is also proposed in the fourth Act of Bernardakis' *Fausta*.

another typical stage in the development of the episode by choosing a peculiar death for Phaedra and a peculiar incrimination of the young man.

In the fifth scene, Thanatos appears with Alcestis in his arms, both philosophizing about human nature: passions, habits, persons. Her travel luggage by her side, Alcestis declares readiness to set out on the journey ascribed by her intertextual role: that of the faithful wife who chooses to die for her husband's sake.

The sixth scene parallels the third one: it is a role-play where Alcestis is disguised as Admetus and the Maidservant as Alcestis. The dialogue exposes the decision of a passive and tolerant Alcestis to sacrifice herself in order for Admetus to live. In the seventh scene, Admetus and Alcestis come face to face in identical clothes. Pegka chooses to show husband and wife in likeness in an indirect bid to put men into two categories: either conventional or unconventional; those who choose moderation and those who behave in excess, hinting at Theseus. Alcestis changes attitude and points out to Admetus that his demand for her to descend into Hades, supposedly in demonstration of her devotion and love for him, is nothing but a cowardly and selfish motion. Nevertheless, she does not retract her resolution and, like her Euripidean predecessor, she only asks that he doesn't marry another woman<sup>16</sup>. The scene closes with Alcestis in the arms of Admetus. The lights are

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<sup>16</sup> See Eur. *Hipp.* 860–861: θάρσει, τάλαινα· λέκτρα γὰρ τὰ Θησέως | οὐκ ἔστι δῶμά θ' ἥτις εἴσεισιν γυνή [Fear not, poor woman: there is no woman who shall take possession of the bed and house of Theseus]. The thematic motif of the saeva noverca can be traced back to the Euripidean *Alcestis* [300–310], where the homonymous heroine asks Admetus not to remarry so that she may safeguard the fortune of her children after her death: μὴ δῆτα δράσης ταῦτα γ' αἰτοῦμαι σ' ἐγώ | ἐχθρά γὰρ ἢ 'ποιοῦσα μητρὶά τεκνοῖς | τοῖς πρόσθ', ἐχίδνης οὐδὲν ἠπιωτέρα [No, do not do it, I beg you. For a step-mother comes in as a foe to the former children, no kinder than a viper]; also, to the fragmentary *Diktys* [TrGF fr. 338], where the homonymous hero warns and advises his brother, Polydectes not to marry Danae, fearing her future behaviour towards his children; to the fragmentary *Frixos* [TrGF fr. 824], where Ino attempts to murder her step children: ὡς οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς φασὶ μητρὶάς φρονεῖν νόθοισι παισίν, and to Ion 1025: ὀρθῶς φθονεῖν γὰρ φασὶ μητρὶάς τεκνοῖς [Rightly; a stepmother is said to hate her stepchildren], where Creusa plans the murder of the

lowered even as scenes are projected from Hippolytus' remote-controlled camera.<sup>17</sup> The first scene shows Thanatos carrying the dead Hippolytus on his shoulder and laying him down next to Phaedra. When Hippolytus opens his eyes and realizes that he is next to her, he appears happy. The second scene shows Alcestis and Admetus copulating when Thanatos appears and asks her to follow him. This short video is interrupted as the camera runs out of battery. Now only Thanatos remains on stage, waiting for Alcestis with a smirk as Admetus refuses to let her go.

Pegka appears to connect the two stories, Phaedra and Hippolytus, Alcestis and Admetus, inasmuch as Phaedra too willingly chooses to die in order to join Hippolytus in the afterlife. An intertextual carrier of the mytheme's typical stages, Pegka's Phaedra knows that Hippolytus will die and opts to follow him. This does not distinguish her from Alcestis; in fact, they seem to have things in common. This particular similarity Pegka identifies and conveys to her readers. In the meantime, the dramatic fabric of the story of Alcestis and Admetus yields further points of discussion and convergence. The two protagonists choose death out of love for their spouse even though Theseus is intendedly removed from the play and replaced by Admetus who is given to similarly selfish decision-making and musing. At the meeting of the spouses, Admetus referred to the distinction between conventional and unconventional men, understanding and intransigent, intertextually hinting at Theseus' earlier adumbrations. It should be added that Papageorgiou's Theseus is also shown to be utterly weak, overwhelmed by fear of loss, incapable of accepting the death of Phaedra and Hippolytus. By analogy, Admetus refuses to release

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homonymous hero, believing he is illegitimate. See also Watson 1995: *passim*.

<sup>17</sup> According to Anagnostou 2016:133, the introduction of the video has the advantage that it splits the spectator's attention and creates more than one foci of attention.

Alcestis from his arms, albeit aware he cannot evade the lot of his nominalist burden. In terms of the two mirror scenes during which the heroines talk with their maidservants, it should be pointed out that their respective roles grant them the opportunity to view themselves from a different perspective, that of their husbands. These scenes also expose the impact of the male point of view on the heroines and its enactment by them. Also exposed is the mechanism that the heroines maintain and manage on their own regarding their self-identification and how they wish to be construed. As a result, we receive Phaedra and Alcestis with the same compassion, as they both die for love. Within the same play, Phaedra and Alcestis are successfully projected as the two faces of a disassembled subject which only within the shared setting of death will become reassembled.

We conclude this study of the mytheme's different versions in Greek dramaturgy with Vassilis Alexakis' *Don't call me Fofó*.<sup>18</sup> The set is a tiny island on which the entire drama unfolds. The dramatic characters are Phaedra, Oenone (Nurse), Rastapopoulos (a Greek American) and Agesilaus, who takes on the role of the narrator. The few, carefully selected props that Alexakis has chosen as symbols often serve to guide the attention of the reader/spectator, for instance Phaedra's rusted crown with the flickering red light. The rusted crown, vestige of forgotten royal attitude with pronounced signs of decay attests to perishability and oldness as well as to cheap love, also alluded to by the red light. It is further chosen as an object of theatrical mockery.

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<sup>18</sup> The play was presented on 29 and 30 June 2008 in the framework of Athens Festival, co-produced by DEPETHE Rhodes. The play's dedication to Samuel Beckett may initially leave room for vagueness, but a close reading of Alexakis' play brings out points in common with Beckett's work, especially in terms of the play's development and the slow denouement of the scenes. Also, before *Don't call me Fofó* Alexakis presented *Sam, Phaedra and I* on France Culture French radio station as a tribute to Samuel Beckett soon after his death.

The play opens and closes with long monologues by Agesilaus. His metaphorical opening monologue refers to the discovery of Alexakis' manuscript in a flooded setting where water, as a medium of purification, 'omitted' indecent scenes and expressions that had been brought into the play intertextually. His references focus more on Phaedra than Hippolytus, thus establishing from the start her leading role. Evidently, Alexakis has drawn thematically on Racine's version in the Greek translation of Ragkavis, hence his unaltered use of the introduction with the description of the sea monster. The role of Oenone as Nurse is another point of similarity with Racine's *Phèdre*.

Agesilaus goes on to refer to the mythological episode of Phaedra and Hippolytus: the stepmother's erotic passion, the youth's reaction, the false accusation, the father's curse and punishment, but also Phaedra's suicide. All this precedes Alexakis' play. Through Agesilaus' speech, the author makes it clear he has no intention of dramatizing a new version of the episode's scenes; rather, he will present the "afterwards", what follows in time within an imaginary setting.

In the first scene the two women gaze at the sea, waiting for the monster that had frightened Hippolytus' horses.<sup>19</sup> Phaedra relates a specific dream which Oenone exposes as a recurrent one. The dream's theme, Alexakis' textual device, conjures up the mythological episode within a setting of repetition and regression of the mind to memories that had had to be suppressed. The link to earlier tradition, especially in the first scene, is pronounced by way of wordplays and references on Phaedra's lineage to allow Alexakis to demonstrate how the borrowed literary material has been remoulded. But, to assess the overall adumbration of the leading

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<sup>19</sup> The two leading ladies are waiting for something, anything, which is strongly reminiscent of Vladimir and Estragon in Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*.

lady, Phaedra comes forth as a senile persona that dolls up so as to be attractive to the monster that she is certain will fall in love with her. What is more, the monster Phaedra eagerly awaits is intertextually linked to death, causing as it does the demise of Hippolytus. Likewise, Pegka's Phaedra too will come to contact with death, which she associates with Hippolytus. Last, Phaedra's mother, Pasifae, had also fallen in love with a monster: her unholy copulation with a bull had disgraced the bloodline of the Sun. But the Phaedra of Alexakis has a different ulterior aim: to rule over a sea kingdom in which, purified, she will freely enjoy her love.

Between first and second scene, Agesilaus' narration, reminiscent of a remodeled choral song, focuses on the water's purifying power in swaying objects, actions and behaviours. Among other things, she mentions a pair of red – probably royal – slippers that had been swayed by the waves.

In the second scene, Oenone relates to Phaedra a dream of her own, its description being an allegory for the scene of Hippolytus' death in the Euripidean *Stephanêphoros*: in the dream, both women were teachers, accompanying a group of children on a boat trip. An unexpected crash against a rock caused both to fall into the sea. If Phaedra hadn't rescued her, Oenone would have drowned. When Oenone asks how they both ended up on that arid rock, Phaedra reminds her that after the death of Hippolytus they both attempted to take their own lives with poison and were thrown to the sea. Eventually they were washed ashore and have since been on the island. Apparently, Alexakis achieves a connection with the earlier tradition by covering more than one version of the episode, where Phaedra commits suicide by taking poison with the Nurse, suggesting they were both responsible for the death of the youth.<sup>20</sup> According to Phaedra, she erotically approached Hippolytus

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<sup>20</sup> See the last scene of Racine's *Phèdre* [1625–1630] where Phaedra, over Hippolytus' dismembered body, confesses the truth and the real causes of the events, particularly focusing on Oenone's

when the unfaithful and ambitious Theseus was away. Phaedra admitted she had never copulated with the young man, even though she desperately wanted to. Hippolytus declined her solicitation and even went as far as to call her “a harlot”. When Theseus returned, Phaedra falsely accused Hippolytus of attempting to rape her and the young man was punished.

Perhaps the most potent connection that may be identified with the Euripidean *Stephanêphoros*, a connection containing various messages, is achieved by way of Oenone’s following words, as she wonders whether Phaedra and herself were eventually two teachers who were shipwrecked while trying to teach. But what was it they had wanted to teach? The answer seems to be provided intertextually by the Euripidean Phaedra in *Stephanêphoros*, where she maintains she accuses the young man in order to advise, instruct and admonish him.<sup>21</sup> The syllabus for the two women consists of respecting and giving in to erotic love; it is to force the sexually inert Hippolytus to accept that it is fatal and intertextually dictated that he should be with Phaedra. Perhaps this is why Alexakis opts to ‘situate’ the two women alone on an island as a kind of punishment for their actions. Part of their punishment is clearly this agonizing expectation and inertia. For Alexakis, the island is a space of

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destructive function. Without seeking forgiveness, she publicly restores Hippolytus’ reputation and commits suicide by a slow, agonizing death. On how Racine’s heroine chooses to sacrifice herself, see specifically Critchley (2008), 171, 191. Her choice also demonstrates the specific feature of isolation of Racinean heroes (Paschalis, 1990:94). Similarly, Phaedra’s reaction in *Hippolyte* by Guérin de la Pinelière (1634) and of Pradon in *Phèdre* (1677) demonstrate this issue of isolation, the particular scenic space that the heroines claim for their last scene. This ‘particular isolation’ seems to operate in the case of Racine’s heroine too inasmuch as she has decided to take the poison on her own, the Nurse having vanished from the play.

<sup>21</sup> See Eur. *Hipp.* 667: σωφρονεῖν διδάξάτω [teach them to be chaste]; 730–731: τῆς νόσου δὲ τῆσδέ μοι | κοινῇ μετασχὼν σωφρονεῖν μαθήσεται [by sharing with me in this malady he will learn to keep within bounds].

isolation, monasticism, ascetic life, but also a place of punishment. By transposing the two to a remote island, away from the shore and the real world, he believes he has finally dislodged them from the intertext. At the same time, he cuts them off and removes them from the episode's typical development. Alexakis intervenes into the intertext and into the episode's revisitations, deeming that this imaginary island is the only safe area where the two women can be "held". So, what does it symbolize, this island? It seems to be a symbol of the mytheme itself which, so to speak, carries the play's characters on its back, intertextually, allegorically and metaphorically, and they are either remodeled, changed, improved, or more or less detached.

Everything is interrupted by a man's visit. His name is Rastapopoulos. It emerges, through his discussion with the two women and the skillfully chosen narratives, that he is an intertextual recasting of Theseus. Alexakis modernizes and contemporizes Theseus' mythological past, while having him married to another woman. The dialogue between Rastapopoulos and Phaedra is a play of words, coincidences and historical connections between text and reader; an ironic (inter)textual game. Eventually, the visitor withdraws, leaving the two women to rest from this improbable shift in their tedious life. But no sooner does Phaedra fall asleep than a deafening sound engulfs the whole island. Amid bad weather, the monster she had been waiting for since the beginning of the play finally makes its appearance. Its description is pasted from Ragkavis' Greek translation of *Phèdre*. Without wasting time, Phaedra makes a pass at the monster; but to no avail. Bereaved, she realizes she is no longer seductive as neither Rastapopoulos nor the monster had succumbed to her advances. Alexakis sketches out a Phaedra who is shorn of any gift or grace in an indirect bid to punish and satirize her intertextually. In the midst of disappointment, she realizes she has by now grown old and that the



repetition of the same story has taken its toll on her. In her own words: *Frankly, I am tired... This story has dragged on for too long, considering when it first began.*

Alexakis succeeds in creating a persona who is at the same time inside and outside his play and in a position to judge her own behaviour as Phaedra's intertextual carrier. She understands why she is on the island, why she is no longer attractive, why she is being punished, where she had been wrong. All in all, she is fully aware of the situation akin to a vision that travels through space and time.

In the last scene of the play, the two women realize that the red light on Phaedra's crown has by now gone out. The light flickers symbolically as though a distress signal through the intertext, like a heart beating to sustain Phaedra's dramatic role. Unfortunately, it has gone out. The two women gaze at the sea, contemplating. Suddenly, a pair of red slippers pass by them... they are carried away by the surge... two red slippers traveling... will they ever meet again? Could these two slippers be Phaedra and Hippolytus? Who knows...

\*

The three versions of the Hippolytus-Phaedra story bring out a number of particularities in terms of both structure and character selection. For instance, Theseus, incorporated in Papageorgiou's *Kalyptomenos*, albeit extensively altered, is omitted from the versions of Pegka and Alexakis. Further, these plays introduce a second dimension, where specific dramatic characters appear to act on the spatiotemporal plane at a distance from their intertextual role, by their own volition and, on occasion, ambiguously. It seems that as we draw away from the archetypal form of the mytheme in time, the play's central characters come face to face with their reflection, that dissected figure that has survived and has been intertextually recast. It is precisely with this reflection that they compete both dramatically and scenically in order to prevail and prove that the episode's central characters can function of their own free will, live their passion and assume

responsibility for their actions. The characters in the plays explored here act within a contemporary and modern setting where the present converses with the past to set up an alluring framework for the reception of the mytheme.

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