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Andreas Staikos' *Alcestis and Sweet Dreams*: The Dramatic Transformation of Euripides' *Alcestis*[*]

This paper examines the play *Alcestis and Sweet Dreams*,[1] in which Andreas Staikos attempts an intertextual dialogue with Euripides' *Alcestis*. The play was written in 2012 in the context of a collaboration of the playwright with the Department of Theatre Studies of the University of Patras. It was staged at the "Apollo Theatre" of Patras in May of the same year, under the direction of the playwright, with a cast of students from the Department of Theatre Studies.[2]

The central topics explored in this paper are (*i*) the basic thematic motifs that the playwright draws, primarily, from the dramatic myth of Euripides' *Alcestis* and, secondarily, other thematic motifs drawn from the fairy tale tradition, as well as from the European theatre tradition; (*ii*) the ways through

* I would like to express my warmest thanks to Professor Stavros Tsitsiridis (University of Patras) for his encouragement to engage on this topic and for the fruitful discussions we had, especially at the initial stages of this research. I am mostly grateful to Associate Professor Vayos Liapis (Open University of Cyprus) and my colleague at the University of Patras, Dr Agis Marinis, for their valuable comments and their overall support. My sincere thanks to the anonymous referees for their contribution.

1. The play was published by Kichli Publishing, Athens 2012.
2. Initially, the play was staged on May 10, 2012 in Ancient Olympia as part of the ceremony of the Lighting of the Olympic Flame that signaled the beginning of the Olympic Games in London. It was also staged on May 12, 13 and 14 at the "Apollo Theatre" in Patras. The following persons participated in the production of this play: Andreas Staikos (director), Antonis Volanakis (stage and costume design), Katia Savrami (movement and production management), Petros Chatzigeorgiou (music), Efterpi Ioannidou (Assistant Director). Cast: Giota Bimbli (Alcestis), Marios Kritikopoulos (Admetus), Chara Koutroumanou (Smaro) and Iliana Nantsiou (Iopi).

which these motifs are transformed in the dramatic myth of the new play and the dramatic goals that these transformations cater to; (*iii*) the repertoire of the play's dramatic techniques. The ultimate objective of this study is an in-depth understanding of this important work in the context of contemporary Greek drama.

THE KEY ELEMENTS IN STAIKOS' DRAMATIC WORK

Initially, I would like to touch upon basic elements of Staikos' dramaturgy, before proceeding with a further elaboration on the dramatic use of the myth of Euripides' *Alcestis* in Staikos' work.

Andreas Staikos (b. 1944) has written until now thirteen plays, staged by the National Theatre, the State Theatre of Northern Greece, Municipal Theatres and private groups all over Greece. His dramaturgy is based on an interplay of the various individual elements of the drama, both at the level of theme and at the level of dramatic technique. The major aim of this interplay is to explore the theatrical enigma. In contrast to a large number of contemporary Greek playwrights, who prefer to draw their themes from socio-political realities and subscribe to realism and psychological theatre, Staikos' plays explicitly avoid realism or any connection with contemporary reality, and his dramatis personae do not abide by the norms of psychological character drawing.

At the level of theme, the relationship of his dramaturgy with the game is achieved, in principle, in the following ways. Firstly, the playwright is extensively using Myth. His aim is not to attempt revisions of an ideological nature, such as those encountered in 20th century dramaturgy (e.g. in Brecht's, Sartre's, Anouilh's or even Heiner Müller's plays). Instead, by elaborating on recurring themes (motifs), he attempts to explore the relationship between reality and illusion (see, for example, his play *Daedalus*) as well as to play with variations on language, dramatic forms, dramatic genres (characteristically in his play *Clytemnestre peut-être*), and finally to build on the erotic game and its rules, which is a central topic in all his plays.

Secondly, Staikos makes extensive use of history by incorporating well-known and significant historical events into the dramatic myth, as part of the individual stories of his dramatis personae. His aim, though, is not to comment on historical reality; rather, by situating the dramatic events in a historical dramatic chronotope, he aims to produce a sort of 'mock' historical

plays.[3] Going one step further, Staikos also engages with history in order to play language games. In an environment that enables him to situate dramatic action in a specific historical context, he manages to develop an absolutely personal and distinct dramatic idiom. This idiom is an invented language that is also smart, spiritual, figurative and sophisticated, incorporating the "wordless", the "conditional" and the "implied".[4] It initiates a dialogue with itself, often leading to a comic result. This continuous linguistic interplay effectively entitles the playwright to be considered as the 'designer' of a language with distinctive features, whose roots hark back to "marivaudage" and classical French drama. It is not coincidental that Andreas Staikos has contributed significantly to the translation of works of that period, having rendered into Modern Greek plays of Molière, Marivaux, Lesage, de Musset, Laclos, Labiche etc. Staikos' dramaturgy is generally centered on language:[5] this peculiar attribute is strongly related to history, while simultaneously functioning as a main parameter of the theatricality of his plays.[6]

Moreover, with regard to the dramatic exploration of myth, history and language, I wish to briefly delineate some of the standard dramatic techniques that illuminate this playful dimension of Staikos' work, as outlined above. First of all, he uses the 'play-within-the play' technique,[7] which actually embodies theatre within the framework of the dramatic myth, resulting in an exciting theatrical game: a process that continuously blurs the boundaries between illusion and reality. Secondly, the playwright makes use of a toolkit borrowed from comedy,[8] such as impersonation, exchange of roles,[9] misunderstandings, disguises and farce motifs. Thirdly, he adopts various

3. See, for example, the following plays: *Φτερά στρουθοκαμήλου* [*Ostrich Feathers*] takes place in Alexandria of the 1920s, where a thriving Greek community was living at the time. His play *Ναπολεοντία* [*Napoleontia*] takes place in Nafplion in 1833, a landmark year in Greek history, when the reign of King Otto was established in Greece. His play *1843* takes place in that very year when the first constitution of Greece was adopted.
4. Tsatsoulis (2001) 21.
5. For an analysis of the language in Staikos' plays, see Sivetidou (2000) 49-53.
6. It is important to make clear that, although this language-centricity appears to conform to the precepts of post-dramatic theory, Staikos, instead, adopts a rather personal and insular approach in his dramaturgy that is only loosely related to that theory. In the majority of his plays the playwright mostly follows the structure of conventional dramaturgy, while language games do not aim at dissecting linguistic meaning but rather at creating a distinctive flavor, rooted in Marivaux and in 18th-century French theatre.
7. For the notion of 'play-within-the play', see Fischer & Greiner (2007).
8. On some basic elements of comedy as a dramatic genre and on its techniques, see Pavis (1998) 283-288.
9. For a discussion of the exchange of roles in Staikos' work, see Baconicola-Georgopoulou (2001) 11-19.

styles of writing that resemble older dramatic forms encountered in theatre history: this technique leads to intertextual games, through which the playful impression created by his work is reinforced. At the same time, those games dictate different ways of acting and transform the task of staging into a challenging process.

In other words, in Staikos' approach to drama, the Aristotelian '*mimesis* of an action' is once more subject to *mimesis*,[10] and this playful use of the elements of the drama is instrumental in producing a unique sort of theatricality. This deserves to be considered as the single most important attribute of his dramaturgy. Staikos' use of the 'play' is a process of rapid reproduction, since theatre, the 'mimesis' of an action, is after all a game.

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ALCESTIS MYTH

Having outlined the principal parameters that define the differentiated dramatic approach of Andreas Staikos, and before discussing *Alcestis and Sweet Dreams*, it is necessary to make some brief remarks on Euripides' *Alcestis*, which is the main source of inspiration for Staikos' play.

The Euripidean Alcestis is, first and foremost, a model of female marital dedication. She sacrifices her life for the sake of her husband, Admetus, King of Pherae, while, notably, his parents were unwilling to offer their lives in order to rescue their son. Heracles, following a duel with Death, resurrects the heroine. The play was first produced at the City Dionysia Festival in 438 B.C. in lieu of a satyr play, following a set of three tragedies with no thematic connection (*Cretan Women, Alcmeon in Psophis* and *Telephus*). However, such is the peculiar character of *Alcestis* that it initiated a prolonged discussion among scholars as to whether it is the tragic or the satyric element that predominates or even whether the play ought to be regarded as a tragicomedy.[11]

The myth of Alcestis was popular in antiquity and was presented in many variations, in both prose and poetic forms.[12] Interestingly, the same myth is

10. See also Patsalidis (2001) 353.
11. See discussion in Parker (2007) xxxvi-lvi.
12. E.g. Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca,* Plutarch's *Eroticus.* Also, Phrynichus wrote a tragedy with the same subject and title, from which Euripides actually adopted the personification of Death. Further, Alcestis as a devoted spouse is mentioned in Plato's *Symposium* (179b-d). The myth is referred to as a theme for pantomime by Lucian (*On Dance* 52) and was parodied by many ancient comic poets (Eubulus, Phormis, Aristomenes, Theopompus, Antiphanes). The myth is also popular in Roman literature (for instance in Vergil or Propertius), and Alcestis is evoked as a model of wifely devotion in Ovid, Juvenal and Dracontius. See Parker (2007) xv-xix.

encountered in many folk traditions in Europe (Germany, Russia, Finland, Switzerland) and the Balkans, as well as in Turkey, Iran, India, Sudan etc. Several versions of the myth are also found in Modern Greek folk poetry.[13] Additionally, the same myth has been a source of inspiration, through the centuries, for a large number of writers.[14]

The evolution of the dramatic myth in Staikos' play is defined by a number of principal motifs, which amplify specific aspects of the myth. In *Alcestis and Sweet Dreams* Staikos maintains some of the parameters of the Euripidean plot, notably by adopting the central motif of the devoted wife, who is willing to sacrifice her life for the sake of saving her husband's life. Admetus must die, and the only hope for his salvation would be to exchange his wife's death for his own. Staikos builds upon this foundation, which he rewrites in a rather ironic manner, shifting the interest of the audience from the central motif of the faithful and devoted wife to the erotic game and its rules. Euripides' Alcestis possesses an admirable character (cf. esp. E. *Alc.* 152-4: 'isn't she quite extraordinary? Who will object to this? What should one call this outstanding woman?').[15] In a comparable way, Staikos' Alcestis earns the admiration of Admetus with her noble behavior and her morality: Alcestis is initially eager to die with Admetus, being convinced that in this way they would save their love.[16]

The plot of Staikos' play is briefly as follows. Admetus, the king of Pherae, single and well known for his love affairs, receives a written message from the heavens warning him that after fifteen days he will die. The

13. In some variants from Thrace, the wife offers her life on behalf of her husband, whilst in variants from Aegina, Rhodes and Pontus the wife offers half of her life; finally, there are versions of the myth, especially from Northern Europe, in which it is the husband who sacrifices his life for the sake of saving his wife. See Iakov (2012) 25-43. Regarding the presence of the Alcestis motif in various mythological traditions, see also Lesky (1925).
14. In European literature we first encounter it in Chaucer's *The Legend of Good Women* (1385). Among the playwrights who have made dramatic use of the Alcestis myth, one could mention, for instance, Alexandre Hardy (*Alceste ou la fidélité,* 1602), Emanuele Tesauro (*Alcesti o sia l'amor sincero,* 1600), Vittorio Alfieri (*Alceste,* 1798), Herder (*Admetus Haus: Der Tausch des Schicksals,* 1808), Hugo von Hoffmannsthal (*Alkestis: Ein Trauerspiel nach Euripides*, 1911), T.S. Eliot *(The Cocktail Party*, 1949), Thornton Wilder (*The Alcestiad,* 1955*),* Efua Sutherland (*Edufa,* 1967) etc. It is worth noting that Bob Wilson has also worked on the myth of Alcestis (*Alcestis*, American Repertory Theatre, Cambridge, Mass. 1986 and Staatstheater, Stuttgart, 1987). For a more detailed discussion see Parker (2003) 1-30.
15. Hourmouziades (2008) 38.
16. This concept directly reflects the romantic playwrights and the French literature of the 18th century that has influenced Staikos.

only hope for his salvation, as the message specifies, would be for a woman to take his place. Admetus invites young women to an 'audition' in order to select among them the 'Queen of Pherae'. Obviously, he does not reveal his true intention, which is is to pick a woman who would die in his place. The candidates include Alcestis, Smaro and Iopi. Admetus chooses Alcestis as a wife and decides to keep Smaro as his favorite lover, while rejecting Iopi. After marrying Alcestis, Admetus convinces her to die with him — although he has no intention to die himself —, his pretext being that in this way they will protect their love from the wear and tear of time. However, Iopi discovers the written message by chance and reveals its content to Alcestis, who goes on to employ a number of excuses in order to avoid her supposedly 'joint death' with her husband. Alcestis' resistance causes Admetus to fall in love with her, so much so that, in the end, he commits suicide in the mistaken belief that his wife is dead; indeed, he uses the poison that had been intended for Alcestis. When Alcestis realizes that Admetus is dead, she confesses to Iopi her eternal love for him.

In Staikos' play, the dramatic setting is the same as in the ancient play: the palace of King Admetus at Pherae, a town of Thessaly. The dramatic time, however, remains unspecified. True, Staikos uses a specific date (May 29)[17] for the upcoming death of Admetus, but this only serves to underline the playfulness of his work, as he purposely refrains from specifying the year to which that date refers. Generally speaking, the chronotopes in the work of Staikos range from the ancient times up to the present day.[18] As to the duration of the dramatic events, Staikos uses the minimum required period of fifteen days that would allow for the deployment of the intrigue (i.e. the revelation of Admetus' real intentions to Alcestis). This time period also allows for a shift in the amorous feelings between the couple, something that would be impossible to happen in the period of one day, which is typically the duration of an ancient Greek tragedy. As regards the dramatis personae, Staikos keeps the two leading characters, namely Admetus and Alcestis, and preserves many of their key character traits. Throughout the play, those two characters are the main forces that drive the dramatic action. Besides, Staikos' invention of the dramatic role of Iope is of particular interest. Iope is a prostitute, a favorite dramatic role in Staikos' dramatic work. Contradicting their reputation, prostitutes in Staikos' work always appear to have good in-

17. It is worth noting that Staikos uses this fatal date for his hero due to its symbolism: May 29, 1453 is a grievous date in Greek history, since Constantinople fell to the Ottomans.
18. Sivetidou (2000) 34.

tentions.[19] Accordingly, in *Alcestis and Sweet Dreams* a prostitute is the person who reveals Admetus' plans and saves Alcestis from death. In fact, Iope would appear to be as important a role as Heracles in Euripides' *Alcestis*, the latter being the one to bring Alcestis back to life. Both roles are crucial for the development of the plot and the final outcome.

In both Euripides and Staikos, Admetus wants someone else to die in his place, although the homonymous characters' approach to life and death are markedly different. In Euripides, Admetus openly expresses his intentions, whereas in Staikos he seeks to deceive, and he appears to be sincere only when he realizes that he has fallen in love with Alcestis and eventually drinks the poison. Likewise, both Admetus-characters initially plan the death of Alcestis, whilst at the end they realize that they cannot live without her. A major difference is that Alcestis in Staikos, unlike her counterpart in Euripides, is unwilling to die — a feature she rather shares with the Euripidean Admetus.

To sum up, Staikos parodies the Euripidean Alcestis' utter devotion to her husband, and her concomitant willingness to die in his stead, by having her change her mind as soon as she realizes the real intentions of Admetus, who (in contrast to his Euripidean namesake) is being deviously secretive. In Staikos, neither of the two main characters is capable of true love. His emphasis is rather on the playful perplexities of the game of love, in which resistance arouses erotic passion, while endless love remains an illusion.

There are further motifs borrowed from Euripides, which are again transformed in an (eventually) playful way. Staikos diverges from the Euripidean version, in which Alcestis is a prize to be won by Heracles in a wrestling match with Death, by opting rather for an 'audition' from which Admetus' bride will emerge. This is a process akin to that followed by directors in order to choose their actors: it seems that Staikos is indirectly commenting on the art of theatre.[20] The successful candidate will be, ostensibly, Admetus' wife and queen of Pherae; in reality, though, she will be Admetus' victim and the instrument of his own salvation.

Fate functions as a prime mover of dramatic action in both Euripides and in Staikos, although in the latter case it has no religious implications and is little more than a means of moving the action forward. In Euripides, Apollo

19. See, for example, his plays: *Καρακορούμ* [*Karakorum*] and *Το μήλον της Μήλου* [*The Apple of Melos*].

20. As we have mentioned before, Staikos invents various ways in order to comment on the art of theatre and explore the theatrical enigma. A typical example of this is seen in his plays *Κλυταιμνήστρα;* [*Clytemnestre peut-être*], *Η αυλαία πέφτει* [*The Curtain Falls*], and *1843*.

informs us already in the prologue that the gods have decreed that Admetus is destined to die unless he can find a suitable substitute. In Staikos, the audience are informed about Admetus' foreordained death by means of a written message in a balloon that drops from the sky. This light-hearted device gives the play an impressive start, while also introducing the spectator into the basic elements of the dramatic myth; it further parodies the ancient Greek belief in divine intervention in human affairs. While in Euripides the plot is consistent with Apollo's statements in the prologue, in Staikos it is deception that predominates and becomes a driving force: Admetus commits suicide under the impression that Alcestis is dead. Dramatic timing, too, is of the essence here: when Admetus becomes convinced that Alcestis is dead, it is already past midnight, which means that Admetus ought to be dead, since Alcestis is still alive and thus no one has actually died in his stead. The effect is clearly parodic: what may have appeared at first to be a supernatural decree is belied by the dramatic action itself. Finally, there is a constant deceleration in approaching destiny, and, at the end, Staikos' play culminates again in a diversion. Admetus is the one who finally dies on his own will.

Parody is also at work in the mode in which the message is delivered in Staikos' play. Whereas in Euripides it is the god Apollo himself who reports the decree of the gods, in Staikos a balloon falls from the sky, bursts, and reveals a letter contained within. The message-bearing letter, a recurrent device in Staikos, originates in French literature and especially in the French theatre of the Enlightenment period,[21] an era in which Staikos specializes as a translator, as already mentioned.

In both Euripides and Staikos, Admetus orders the entire citizenry to mourn for Alcestis' death, and the communal mourning is described in detail in both plays. I quote from Euripides (425-434):

> *πᾶσιν δὲ Θεσσαλοῖσιν ὧν ἐγὼ κρατῶ*
> *πένθους γυναικὸς τῆσδε κοινοῦσθαι λέγω*
> *κουρᾷ ξυρήκει καὶ μελαμπέπλῳ στολῇ·*
> *τέθριππά θ' οἳ ζεύγνυσθε καὶ μονάμπυκας*
> *πώλους, σιδήρῳ τέμνετ' αὐχένων φόβην.*
> *αὐλῶν δὲ μὴ κατ' ἄστυ, μὴ λύρας κτύπος*
> *ἔστω σελήνας δώδεκ' ἐκπληρουμένας.*
> *οὐ γάρ τιν' ἄλλον φίλτερον θάψω νεκρὸν*
> *τοῦδ' οὐδ' ἀμείνον', εἰς ἔμ'· ἀξία δέ μοι*
> *τιμῆς, ἐπεὶ τέθνηκεν ἀντ' ἐμοῦ μόνη.*
>
> "I command all the Thessalians in my realm to join in the mourning for my wife:

21. For a discussion about the use of letter-writing in literature, see Altman (1982).

> let them cut their hair and wear black apparel. All you who yoke teams and all single riders, cut your horses' manes with a blade. And let there be no sound of pipe of lyre in the city for twelve full months. For I shall never bury one I love more or who has been kinder to me. She deserves my honor since she died for me as would no one else."[22]

Likewise, in Staikos, Admetus reassures Alcestis that all of Thessaly will be in mourning – yet for the death of both of them rather than for Alcestis' alone. It is also interesting to see how Staikos modifies the wine-drinking motif found in Euripides: whereas in the ancient play Heracles becomes drunk while the mourners (unbeknownst to him) are lamenting for Alcestis, in Staikos' drama Admetus announces that after their death no citizen will be allowed to drink wine, since he is determined to uproot all vineyards of Thessaly!

In addition to his intertextual dialogue with Euripides' *Alcestis*, Staikos weaves into his play motifs originating in modern traditions. Thus, he uses the Don Juan motif, well known in the European theatre tradition from the 17th century onwards.[23] Just like Don Juan, the notorious womanizer who is eventually defeated by a woman, Staikos' Admetus arrogantly objectifies women (e.g. through philandering and concubinage) and exploits their love to his advantage, but in the end loses his life as a result of his love for a woman. Moreover, at the final scene of the play, Staikos inserts an intertextual reference to Shakespeare, again for parodic effect. Admetus' suicide comes as the result of a misunderstanding (he erroneously believes that Alcestis is dead), just as Juliet commits suicide in the mistaken belief that Romeo is dead (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act X, sc. Y). Lastly, Staikos employs a folktale motif, which has also been widely used since antiquity,[24] namely, the story of the woman of humble descent who marries a king and becomes queen. This is the case with Alcestis, but equally with all the women who participate in the audition.

DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

The main dramatic techniques employed by Staikos in *Alcestis and Sweet Dreams* are deception, misunderstanding and the reversal of mythic motifs.

22. Greek text and English translation are from Kovacs (1994) 202-203.
23. Don Juan, first presented on stage by Tirso de Molina (1549-1648) in his play *El Burlador de Sevilla y convidado de piedra* [The Trickster of Seville and the Stone Guest] has inspired numerous transformations to date. See, for example, plays written by Molière, Carlo Goldoni, José Zorrilla, George Bernard Shaw, Max Frisch, Patrick Marber, Paula Vogel etc. For the Don Juan theme, see Singer (2002).
24. See the classical index of folk-tale types by Aarne & Thompson (1961) nr. 875.

Moreover, the intrigue is central to the dramatic myth: an intrigue, which is all about Admetus deceiving everyone around him and which functions as the driving force for the dramatic action.

Deception and mystification are employed already in Euripides' *Alcestis*: Apollo deceives the Fates by making them promise that Admetus will be able to avoid death; Admetus deceives Heracles by concealing from him the fact that his wife has just died; and the in end of the play, Heracles conceals from Admetus the identity of the veiled Alcestis. In Staikos' play, the deception follows rather the model of classical French farce: the dual deception technique makes sure that Admetus deceives but is also deceived; he is a victimizer turned into a victim.[25] In point of fact, Admetus' deception is multiple: he hides his true purpose from the women of Pherae when he invites them to an audition; he hides the letter from Alcestis and inveigles her into voluntary death, pretending (to his wife but also to his people) that he, too, is willing to die. On the other hand, Admetus becomes himself the victim of multiple deceptions: Iopi reveals Admetus' plans to Alcestis, Smaro reports to him the false news of Alcestis' death; finally, Alcestis makes a pretence of drinking the poison when she is actually abandoning her husband. On the whole, the game of role-reversal and of fake identity is dominant in this play, as it is in Staikos' dramatic production in general.

Another technique that features prominently in Staikos' plays is the abrupt revelation, leading eventually to closure. The technique is used already in Euripides' *Alcestis*, where the Servant's revelation of the truth to Heracles causes the latter to decide to save Alcestis from death. In Staikos' play, it is Iopi who reveals the truth to Alcestis, effectively encouraging her to take her destiny into her hands. Thus, the intrigue is enriched, and the spectator's interest moves from Admetus to Alcestis and her planned end, as well as to the possible ways in which she may act in the wake of the revelations. A number of devices, mainly associated with stage props, is used in order to increase suspense: for instance, glasses of wine one of which is poisonous; or the mysterious gift-box presented to Alcestis by Iopi, which contains the crucial letter.

Moreover, Staikos commonly resorts to the reversal of mythic motifs — a technique that occurs, again, in Euripides. However, in Staikos, this device serves different dramatic purposes. Namely, whereas in Euripides the eventual resurrection of the heroine grants to the play its tragicomic character, in Staikos the comic elements build up to a melodramatic end. Admetus chang-

25. For this technique, mainly used in French farce, see Davis (2005) 105-120.

es his mind and commits suicide out of love for Alcestis, while Alcestis falls in love with him only after his death.

Finally, Staikos' extensive use of dramatic irony[26] reprises a technique already encountered in Euripides. In the latter's *Alcestis* the audience knows the real reason of Admetus' mourning, in contrast to Heracles, who does not. They also know the identity of the veiled woman, of which Admetus is unaware. Likewise, in Staikos the audience is aware of Admetus' real plan, whereas Alcestis remains in the dark; they also know that Alcestis has discovered the truth, unbeknownst to Admetus; finally, they know that Alcestis is alive, all the while Admetus believes that she is dead.

In conclusion, Staikos transforms the central dramatic motif of the faithful and devoted wife, which is drawn from Euripides, and combines it with further motifs drawn from the fairy tale tradition and European theatre. At the core of his play we find a love game revolving around the time-old mismatch motif (deplored already at the beginning of Canto 2 of Ariosto's *Orlando Furioso*): when the one is in love, the other is not. Love is never mutual;[27] rather, it is ever sought but never fulfilled. Indeed, we are dealing with one of the commonest themes in Staikos' theatre. This is after all the reason why Staikos uses a slightly ironic version of the ancient tragedy's title; the crucial addition "and sweet dreams" is ambiguous: is love a wonderful dream, or do we simply choose to hide behind an illusion? Either way, the dream, or the illusion, is sweet.

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26. For some introductory elements on dramatic irony, see Sedgwick (1935); Pfister (1993) 55-57; Colebrook (2004) 13 ff.

27. Sivetidou (2000) 47.

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Abstract

This paper explores Andreas Staikos' *Alcestis and Sweet Dreams* (2012), a play inspired by Euripides' *Alcestis*. Initially, the paper highlights some key, recurrent elements of Staikos' dramaturgy. Further, it examines the main thematic motifs of the play, primarily drawn by the playwright from the dramatic myth of Euripides' *Alcestis*, as well as further thematic motifs drawn from the fairy tale tradition and the European theatre tradition. It also focuses on the transformations of these motifs and the concomitant dramatic goals. A main observation is that the interest of the audience is shifted in an ingenious way from the central motif of the devoted and faithful wife to that of the playful perplexities of the game of love, while true and endless love eventually turns out to be rather a sweet dream or an illusion. Finally, the paper discusses the repertoire of dramatic techniques that are traced in *Alcestis and Sweet Dreams.*