



Ancient Telling, Contemporary Showing: A Reading of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017) As Film Adaptation

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Abstract

This article aims to investigate the contemporary aspects of adaptation from ancient plays, presenting a reading of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017). A comparative view towards Iphigenia at Aulis by Euripides (405 BC) raises the question of how story elements of that play are recreated within the film adaptation. Also, it seeks to explore the relationship between the type of engagement, from hypotext (play) “telling” to hypertext (film) “showing”. The theoretical framework of the article utilized theories of Gerard Genette’s “hypertextuality” and Linda Hutcheon’s “adaptation”. The results indicate subtle thematic connections, as well as a significant interplay between hypotext and hypertext. *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* represents an adaptation with a creative interpretation, one which reimagines the forms and themes of ancient tragedy in a modern-life context. Various influences, imitations and transformations of Euripides’ story elements are interwoven in the adaptation process and discussed in the article.

Keywords: Film Adaptation; Hypertextuality; *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*; Linda Hutcheon; Iphigenia at Aulis; Gerard Genette



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Poya Raissi and Morteza Ghaffari

Introduction

The advent of the dramatic arts can be found in adaptation. Western drama took its nascent shape in the adaptation of mythological tales and epic poems, notably Homer's works. Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were among the first dramatists who adapted these narratives for the stage in ancient Greece. The surviving plays of that period have inspired many film adaptations. Throughout the relatively brief history of cinema, adapting and repurposing older stories in order to create new ones can repeatedly be observed within numerous cinematic works, as well as the influence of mixed-source texts. The structuralist and post-structuralist view which frames the influence of earlier texts on new texts has been termed "intertextuality", with some theorists positing that no text can be independent of other texts; any intertextual text is thus necessarily derived from the presence of (or influence of) previous texts in the present text.

The term "intertextuality" was first coined by the philosopher, novelist and literary critic Julia Kristeva in the 1960s, then developed and modified by later critics such as Roland Barthes and Gerard Genette. Intertextuality can generally be considered as a theory that investigates the presence of a text or a work of art in relation to other texts, and in this way, considers the effect that previous texts have had on the creation of new works (Allen, 2000, p. 111). Walter Benjamin (2006, p. 149) maintains that "storytelling is always the art of repeating stories, and this art is lost when the stories are no longer retained". In cinematic storytelling, intertextuality can be observed when 'a film includes other films or texts explicitly through references and quotes, mainly in its diegesis' (Haastrup, 2014, p. 85). The analysis and application of intertextuality as a theoretical

tool may help to understand the ways in which authors include other characters into their story, as well as how these characters situate themselves in a new world of different texts (Bazerman, 2003, p. 84).

Many films adapted from ancient plays, or mythological epics, such as *Troy* (2004), have tried to preserve the historical style or world of the earlier text. Today, however, many modern films are more freely adapted and narrated in different styles. One of the most acclaimed contemporary films of this, which won Best Screenplay at the Cannes Film Festival, is *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017), directed by Yorgos Lanthimos. The present paper aims to investigate the contemporary aspects of film adaptations of ancient plays, and to address the question of how story elements of *Iphigenia at Aulis* (405 BC) were specifically recreated in the adaptation of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*. Additionally, it seeks to explore the relationship between the type of engagement, which can vary from hypotext “telling” to hypertext “showing”. It should be noted, the elements of any story can include a wide range of definitions. The present article discusses a selection of the most prominent elements in the process of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* adaptation, including: characterization, structure, inciting incident, dramatic situation, suspense, and certain narrative possibilities.

This study was conducted through a qualitative research method with a comparative analysis approach. The theoretical framework of the research also includes Genette’s theories of “hypertextuality” and Hutcheon’s “adaptation”. In this regard, from a comparative point of view, the hypertextual effect of *Iphigenia at Aulis* on the story elements of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* is studied. Using Hutcheon’s theory, the paper analyzes how Lanthimos’ film was recreated and modernized from an ancient play.

Theoretical Foundations: Transtextuality

In the first pages of his book, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, the French theorist and semiotician Gerard Genette (1930-2018) defines transtextuality as ‘all that sets the text in a relationship, whether obvious or concealed, with other texts’ (Genette, 1997, p. 1). Genette divides transtextuality into five broad categories, of which intertextuality is a part. These five species are: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hypertextuality (Namvar Motlagh, 2016, p. 25). Graham Allen refers to Genette's endeavor as a new, structuralist poetics, one which has developed into the field of intertextual studies (Allen, 2000, pp. 97-98).

Hypertextuality

Genette's hypertextuality is based on a relationship of “derivation”, while his intertextuality is based on a relationship of “co-presence”. In Genette’s intertextuality, if the first text did not exist, the second text may still form a functional whole, merely without the parts borrowed from the first text. On the other hand, the hypertextual relationship is an ontological relationship; thus, if the first text were not to exist, the second text would not be able to exist at all (Namvar Motlagh, 2016, p. 29).

With this in mind, adaptation-type relationships can generally be categorized as hypertextuality. Hypertextuality is any type of relationship that ontologically connects a text B (the hypertext) to a pre-existing text A (the hypotext); transformation or imitation of the original source material thus takes place (Kotecki, 2010, p. 242). In imitation, the goal is to preserve the original version of the text, and thus the changes involved are often minor. However, in transformation, the main emphasis is on the hypertext and it thus involves deeper changes to various elements.

In *Palimpsests*, Genette describes six genres of hypertextuality, including pastiche, charge, parody, forgery, travesty and transposition. In his categories, transposition is the most common form and the most diverse type of hypertext, since it includes all types of transtextuality that are based on inter-semiotic and inter-media features (Namvar Motlagh, 2012, p. 150). Genette divides transposition into two types: formal and thematic. Formal transposition includes a change of mode or form (Genette, 1997, p. 277). Also, in thematic transposition, complex changes happened in terms of concept and meaning (Genette, 1997, p. 294).

Adaptation

In her book entitled *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon, a Canadian theorist in the field of adaptation, maintains a strong interest in the discursive relationships between texts or intertextuality, stating that ‘from the perspective of its process of reception, adaptation is a form of intertextuality’ (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 8). Viewing a new work as an independent work, not a second-hand one, and paying attention to the place of recreation, in Hutcheon’s view, is of prime importance. In the artist’s recreation, which is inspired by the ancient work, s/he both recreates and creates the original work in a different way. Hutcheon believes that adapted texts should not be the basis of priority and latency strategies, but should be seen as texts that relate to each other (Doughty & Etherington-Wright, 2018, p. 82).

Hutcheon chooses two basic approaches towards dealing with adaptation: ‘as a product (as extensive, particular transcoding) and as a process (as creative reinterpretation and Palimpsestic intertextuality)’ (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 22). She also focuses three modes of engagement, which include: ‘telling, showing, and interacting with stories’ (Hutcheon 2006, p. 27).

According to Hutcheon, when examining an adapted work, it is necessary to pay attention to how the type of engagement in the adaptation work has changed. Another interesting question raised is: what is conveyed during the adaptation, or in other words, what is the most important element? Hutcheon believes that the story is the most adaptable element (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 10), but what is essential in adaptation is not just the story or the theme; rather ‘there is, in short, a wider communicative context that any theory of adaptation would do well to consider. That context will change with the mode of presentation or engagement’ (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 26).

Elaborating on the context, she adds: ‘an adaptation like the work it adapts, is always framed in a context — a time and a place, a society and a culture; it does not exist in a vacuum’ (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 142). Therefore, the process of re-creation stresses the spatial and temporal context. The author or the creator must possess the quality of ‘creative interpretation/interpretive creation’ (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 18) to produce the desired effect. This important effect is seen to be a kind of conscious process by which the author is allowed to make the work his/her own, a work which is formed from and in relation to the philosophy and thought of the time of its creator. In this regard, Linda Cahir – author of *From Literature to Cinema* (2006) - believes the act of recreating ultimately leads to a better possibility for the survival and durability of the adapted work (Cahir, 2006, p. 14).

Reading of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* As Film Adaptation: The sudden arrival of the sacred deer into the modern world

The first sparks of meaning created by a cinematic work may precede the viewing itself; meaning is already hinted at, or claimed, when a prospective viewer encounters the title of the film itself. The film’s title is regarded as part of the paratext, and forms a threshold that must be crossed to enter the world of the film. Paratextuality, as Genette believes, is: ‘those elements which lie on the

threshold of the text and which help to direct and control the reception of a text by its readers' (Allen, 2000, p. 103).

The Killing the Sacred Deer, as the title of the film in question, is a clear paratextual reference to the tragedy *Iphigenia at Aulis*, in which the goddess Artemis replaces a deer with an alternative victim for Iphigenia. Even from this first moment, then, it can be argued that the film confirms, even highlights, its derivation from Euripides' play and an ancient tragedy. The relationship on paratextual display has a historical/ancient context, yet one which is put on display in the context of today's world. In his discussions of tragedy, Roland Barthes states:

'We never manage to free ourselves from a dilemma: are the Greek plays to be performed as of their own time or as of ours? should we reconstruct or transpose? emphasize resemblances or differences?' (Barthes, in Campbell, 2010, p. 58).

In encountering this dilemma, *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* has made many modern changes to the hypertext, shifting to both a modern approach and context. In the play of *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the Greeks are prevented from moving to Troy because the wind stops blowing; they cannot leave the port of Aulis, unless, according to the prophecy of Kalkhas, the daughter of Agamemnon (the king), Iphigenia, is sacrificed for the goddess Artemis.

'Agamemnon: [...] and Kalkhas the seer, making use of the standstill, said to sacrifice my daughter Iphigenia to Artemis, the local goddess, and the launch would happen, and the Trojans' destruction — if we sacrificed her' (Euripides, 1999, p. 330).

This ancient mythological situation is recreated in *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* through intermedia transposition. Dr. Steven Murphy is a skilled, prosperous cardiologist and heart surgeon, with a wife named Anna and two children, Bob and Kim. Now, due to a past mistake, he is in a similar

situation to that of Euripides' play, in which he has to sacrifice a family member. The adaptation of this situation is based on hypertextuality, which connects the first text (play) to the second text (film). Its modality is also based on the imitational mythical act (sacrifice), although the situation of the film has undergone narrative transformations, which will be discussed below.

Character, hamartia and the issue of standing still

Steven, as the protagonist of the film, holds the place of king Agamemnon in the play. He plays the role of the heart surgeon, one who is king of the modern world, who controls life and death with his expertise and surgical instruments. The opening scene of the film shows him performing surgery, then in slow-motion, he starts removing his gloves, clothes and then a surgical cap; these gestures suggest the removal of a crown. His hands are also covered with blood, forming an image related to Steven's hamartia.



Figure 1. The hands in the first scene, (Lanthimos, 2017). *Fig. 2.* Removing the surgical cap, (Lanthimos, 2017).

In *Poetics*, Aristotle writes about a character's hamartia in order to explain the optimal kind of tragic plot: 'a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error [hamartia] or frailty' (Aristotle, 1997, p. 23). Hamartia is an integral part of the protagonist, and among the various meanings of hamartia, "the hero's share in his downfall" seems to provide a clearer and more comprehensive definition. In the hypotext,

hamartia is based on Agamemnon's ambition. Ambition drives Agamemnon to sacrifice his daughter Iphigenia in order to stay in power.

‘Menelaus: [...] when you were hoping to lead the Greeks against Troy, you avoided any appearance of wanting the command, but in your heart, you longed for it. [...] then when Kalkhas told you to sacrifice your daughter as an offering to Artemis, so the Greeks would be able to sail, you were delighted. You gladly promised to sacrifice your child. You sent for her willingly’ (Euripides, 1999, pp. 339-340).

In hypertext, Steven’s hamartia plays a key role in the story. Steven consumes alcohol before Martin's father's surgery, leading to errors which cause the patient’s death. Hamartia's function goes from hypotext to hypertext and produces the same result; the protagonist's mistake endangers his social and familial position. In this way, the protagonists of both the film and the play contribute to their own downfall. Lanthimos’ use of Steven’s hamartia can be considered as a thematic transposition in Genette's point of view; he has reproduced the tragic mistake in the new cultural context. This shift leads to a ‘cultural representation of a basic ideology’ (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 176) which, according to Hutcheon, makes it possible to define narrative in adaptation.

From hamartia to the inciting incident

Steven’s hamartia gives rise to an inciting incident in the story structure of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*; by making a mistake in Martin's father's surgery, he ruins his future life. Martin claims that because of his father's death, there must be a reciprocity, or revenge, for the Steven family to restore justice. In the world of story elements, this element is referred to as an inciting incident. According to Robert McKee (1997, p. 189): ‘the inciting incident radically upsets the balance of forces in the protagonist's life’. Steven’s hamartia does not pose a threat to his health, but rather affects his family. The question is: why not take revenge directly on the protagonist himself? This is precisely the question that Anna asks Martin in the film. The same asymmetric

punishment/justice logic can be seen at play in *Iphigenia at Aulis*, too: in order to bring Helen back, Iphigenia must die, while the death of those directly involved in the case is not demanded. This situation can thus be read as a hypertextual relation.

‘Iphigenia: I beg you, in the name of Pelops, and your father Atreus, and Mother here, who endured pain when giving birth to me and is now undergoing this second labor pain. What do I have to do with the marriage of Helen and Paris?’ (Euripides, 1999, p. 373).

In Euripides' play, the static position of ships and their (non-)progression towards the open sea is an important conceptual symbol. In the hypertext, the same concept is recreated in a modern and mysterious way. In *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, the “static of the ships” transforms into a “physical stagnation/paralysis”. With Martin's prophecy and power, Kim and Bob both lose the ability to move their legs. From this point, they will not even be able to take a step forward, mirroring the stranded ships at Aulis. The diagnostic and therapeutic measures of the doctors and the hospital also fail from the treatment, which brings Martin's prediction closer to reality moment by moment.

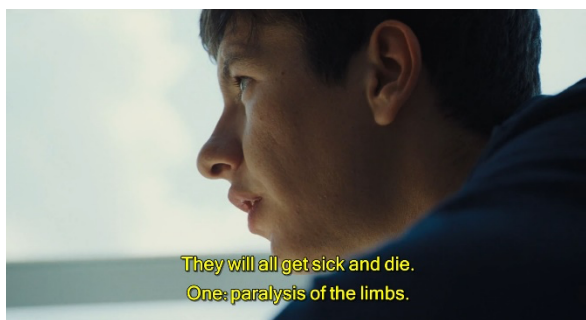


Fig. 3. The scene predicting paralysis, (Lanthimos, 2017). Fig. 4. Paralysis of the boy, (Lanthimos, 2017).

This is the situation in which Agamemnon is forced to sacrifice Iphigenia to relieve the Greeks from the static situation and move towards Troy. From a comparative point of view, a similar dramatic situation evolves into another familiar form in the hypertext, providing a resemblance

that implies both a formal and thematic type of transposition; stagnation/not moving *vis-a-vis* stagnation/not moving. Hence, one can see how a similar mythical-ancient state emerges via adaptation in a new interpretation.

Matching the characters of the play and the film

The network of characters adapted from the play does not merely include Steven, but includes almost all the characters of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*. The following table shows the correspondences between the hypotext and hypertext characters.

Table 1. A comparative view of the characters.

Play (Hypotext)	Film (Hypertext)	The role or function of the characters in hypotext	The role or function of the characters in hypertext	From hypotext to hypertext
Agamemnon	Steven	The main character (King) / Hamartia / Hesitant to sacrifice his child / Doing sacrifice	The main character (the surgeon) ^(T) / Hamartia ^(T + D) / Hesitant to sacrifice his child ^(D) / Doing sacrifice ^(D)	T= Transformation
Artemis	Martin	Myth / Command and request for a sacrifice / Off-stage presence (Telling)	Implicit claim of being myth(-ical) ^(T) / Command and request for a sacrifice ^(D) / On-	

			stage presence (Showing)	I= Imitation T+I= Transformation + Imitation
Kalkhas	Martin	Fulfillment of the story according to his prediction / Off-stage presence (Telling)	Fulfillment of the story according to his prediction ^(I) / On-stage presence (Showing)	
Iphigenia	Kim	The daughter of the main character / Virgin / The only option for sacrifice / Refusing to be sacrificed / Volunteering to be sacrificed / Surviving	The daughter of the main character ^(I) / Virgin ^(I) / One of the options for sacrifice ^(T+I) / Refusing to be sacrificed ^(I) / Volunteering to be sacrificed ^(I) / Surviving ^(I)	
Orestes	Bob	The younger son of the main character / Not an option for sacrifice	The younger son of the main character ^(I) / One of the main options for sacrifice ^(T)	
Klyemnestra	Anna	The wife of the main character/ Against the sacrifice	The wife of the main character ^(I) / Agrees with the sacrifice ^(T)	

Sacred deer	Bob	An alternative to human sacrifice / Off-stage presence (Telling)	Human sacrifice ^(T) / On-stage presence (Showing) ^(T)
Odysseus	Matthew	Aware of the secret of the main character / Off-stage presence (Telling)	Aware of the secret of the main character ^(I) / On-stage presence (Showing)

The table above shows how the characters (even Odysseus, who has no physical presence on the stage/play) are recreated as new characters within the film. Perhaps, the sacrifice transformation role, as well as the transformation of myth to man, reveals itself more than any other transformations or imitations seen in the table. In Euripides' play, Agamemnon is asked: who is making you sacrifice your child? In response, he speaks of a third person named Odysseus, who knows the whole story and is aware of the mystery and necessity of the sacrifice. In the film, Matthew (Steven's colleague) is aware of the doctor's mistake (drinking before surgery) and reveals this secret to Anna. This type of thematic adaptation indicates the subtlety of adaptation, even in the side-characters.

‘Agamemnon: Something else just happened to me. Aren’t you afraid?’

Menelaus: Unless you tell me, how can I figure it out?

Agamemnon: The spawn of Sisyphos (Odysseus) —he knows the whole story!’ (Euripides, 1999, p. 330).

Completely terrestrial, completely mythical

‘The myth as a structural grid acquires a different content according to time, space, and the dominant ideology’ (Kyriakos, 2013, p. 195). The hypertextual relation between the mythical transformation into a man must be sought in the new time and space of film with focus on Martin's characterization. In the dinner scene at Martin's house, the television is on, and during an over-shoulder shot, a voice can be heard on TV, asking the question “how do you know I am not a god?” After watching this moment, he seems satisfied, and then leaves the room. In one of the hospital scenes, Kim stands up when Martin calls, and walks to the window, despite his paralyzed legs. In doing so, Martin demonstrates his power in the form of a mythical character; a myth that is no longer in the sky or Olympus, but has become completely terrestrial.



Figure 5. Hearing the question on TV, (Lanthimos, 2017). Figure 6. Walking with paralyzed legs, (Lanthimos, 2017).

Transposition helpful to suspension

The sacrifice is one of the major storytelling differences between the hypotext and the hypertext. Eli Solt in a website article claims that the concept of sacrifice in *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* has fallen into the realm of the imagination in the modern world, yet throughout the film, an ancient societal form has been placed in a modern context (Solt, n.d.). A deer replaces the sacrifice in the final scene of the play; in the film, this happens to Bob. Even in this new arrangement, the gender of the sacrifice changes from a girl to a boy. Of course, because of this shift, the initial prediction

of Kim's selection as the sacrifice disappears; by knowing and recalling the Iphigenia story in advance, a viewer may expect that the girl will finally be chosen for sacrifice and death. It seems that even the director intends to highlight the symbolic relationship between the girl and the deer. In the first scene, Kim is portrayed using a deer-like voice while rehearsing and listening. This is a hypertextual reference to Euripides' play, providing an emphasis that ultimately preserves the element of suspense in the hypertext story.

Pastiche in speech tone, discharge of feelings

Another noteworthy element in the characterization of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* is the expressive pastiche, involving the way in which the characters' emotions are discharged. Pastiche is a word borrowed from the field of visual arts, and is considered a genre of Genette's hypertextuality, along with Charge. In pastiche, style is imitated, but in most cases, the new work is used in line with another subject (Namvar Motlagh, 2012, p. 148). Charging is also defined as an exaggeration of the text, which is based on an imitative relationship (Namvar Motlagh, 2012, p. 149). In exploiting these genres, the adaptation of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* is accompanied by a different narration, and the emotions of the characters in the film are greatly suppressed. In *Iphigenia at Aulis*, the characters lead the narrative with restless cries and strong emotional outbursts, while in the film, these emotions are discharged and a certain coldness replaces that passionate emotional atmosphere of the hypotext.

'Agamemnon: [...] I'll say no more! Sudden tears come to my eyes when I touch you' (Euripides, 1999, p. 352).

‘Klytemnestra: Hearing your cry, I’ve come here, frightened, unhappy, driven mad with fear. Surely you haven’t come bringing some other disaster to add to the present one?’ (Euripides, 1999, p. 386).

The tone of speech as pastiche is another feature adapted from the characters in the hypotext. However, throughout the film, the style and tone of voice and the tone of the characters' dialogues are not utterly separated from the original play; some scenes are reminiscent of the classical style associated with ancient plays. Examples of this pastiche are presented in the figures 7 and 8.



Figure7. The tone of speech as pastiche, (Lanthimos, 2017). Fig. 8. The tone of speech as pastiche, (Lanthimos, 2017).

Two parallel structures meet!

There are elements in the structure and plot of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* that are taken directly from the hypotext. The main character/protagonist needs to make a destructive decision, while failure to make a decision will lead to even more severe damage. While Agamemnon is hesitant about the decision from the beginning, Steven is convinced of the need to decide in the third act. Therefore, in the hypertext, the vital importance of the decision has been preserved, but it has been delayed. Although the effects of this decision in the process of adaptation have been reduced to the scale of one family (compared to the entire Greek military), its horror is not diminished. It could, perhaps, even be claimed to have intensified. One of the reasons for this increase is based on changing the type of audience engagement from “telling” to “showing”. Although the initial

structure of the hypotext is different from the hypertext, placing the sacrifice scene at the end of the film (like Euripides' play) indicates a direct relationship between hypotext and hypertext. From Genette's point of view, the sacrifice scene (and its position in the hypertext structure) can be a transposition of the play's sacrifice scene, which now retains some aspects of the hypotext in the new story, but undergoes a thematic transposition.

In this scene, Steven replaces the executioner, and performs the sacrificial rite in deadly silence (in contrast with the mayhem of the play). Lanthimos also directs the audience's emotions scene-by-scene in order to build to the climax of the story. Here, the second text seems to implicitly perceive the terms of the earlier text, but then emerge from under its hypotextual dominance; as Hutcheon points out, 'adaptations disrupt elements like priority and authority' (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 174). Unlike the hypotext, there is no literal deer in the film, leaving the audience bearing witness to the enactment of a terrible crime, rather than a miraculous divine intervention.

Robert McKee's comprehensive definition of structure helps us to conclude the relationship between hypotext structure and hypertext. According to him 'structure is a selection of events from the characters' life stories that is composed into a strategic sequence to arouse specific emotions and to express a specific view to life' (McKee, 1997, p. 33). From this point of view, in the structure of Lanthimos' creative adaptation, the events of the characters' lives and their order are different from the hypotext, but in evoking similar emotions and attitudes to life, the hypertextual structure has retained its obvious connections with the hypotext.

From the readable hypotext to spectacular hypertext

According to Hutcheon, 'in a very real sense, every live staging of a printed play could theoretically be considered an adaptation in its performance' (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 39). The words

on the page must be visualized, interpreted and recreated by the director and the actor. This process is intensified in the adaptation of the play for film, because in cinema, the emphasis is on the visual aspects, while written words need to be perceived by the eye. Lanthimos focuses intensely on this process in his adaptation, even recreating aspects of image transmission in the form of staging and *mise-en-scène*. In order to clarify the subject, some scenes from the play and film are analyzed comparatively. 'Iphigenia: I lament for myself, Mother. The same melody of misfortune has fallen to both of us. No more for me the light, this brightness of the sun' (Euripides, 1999, p. 375).



Fig. 9. Low light of the house, (Lanthimos, 2017).

Iphigenia's metaphorical speech about the setting of the sun, which signifies the darkening of her life, manifests itself in the house lighting style of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*. The house scenes progress from bright scenes to darker, underground scenes throughout the film. The process of "telling" to "showing" is carried out through formal and thematic transpositions into the atmosphere of the film.

In another reading, Euripides' play repeatedly mentions the lack of wind and the immobility of ships on the sea. In *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, the ceiling fan seems to be a sign of the adapted, transformed, and implicit terms of that situation. A fan is normally used to generate wind and always rotates at a high speed, but the same fan gradually reaches a steady-state according to the development of the film story. The coincidence of the paralysis of the characters' legs and the immobility of the fan may seem like an overinterpretation, but it maintains a powerful presence in several scenes of *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*. It may be interesting to note that even the first

scene after the death/sacrifice scene of Bob presents a view of a ceiling fan in the restaurant. The fan is now spinning after the crisis.



Fig. 10. Rotating ceiling fan, (Lanthimos, 2017).

Fig. 11. Stationary ceiling fan, (Lanthimos, 2017).



Fig. 12. The first scene after Bob's death, (Lanthimos, 2017).

Mythical mise-en-scène

Mise-en-scène is how the scene is arranged and the way the actors move, as well as how these elements relate to the camera. By designing the mise-en-scène, the director, while realizing the script, also demonstrates his/her position and attitude towards the subject matter and content. In this regard, Lanthimos is building a world reflecting his own point of view with all the mise-en-scène throughout the film. Lanthimos seems to have adapted the “atmosphere and concepts of the

mythical world of the play”, and the result can be called a “mythical mise-en-scène”. This mythical mise-en-scène, coined by the authors of this article, can be referred to as the arrangements and movements and positions that reflect a mythical concept or form. From this perspective, in the process of adapting from “telling to showing”, the written mythological concepts of the hypotext are embodied and depicted in the form of the mythical mise-en-scène in the hypertext. The following are some examples to illustrate this claim.

After a scene in which doctors are unable to determine the cause of Bob's paralysis, despite numerous tests, Steven tries to force Bob to walk in the hospital corridor. In this mise-en-scène, Steven lifts Bob off the wheelchair to make him walk, but Bob immediately falls to the ground. Steven repeats this several times, and Bob falls each time. In this mythical mise-en-scène, a struggle with fate is hinted at, which Agamemnon also refers to; not unexpectedly, in this battle, Steven loses like Agamemnon (Figure 4 depicts this scene).

‘Agamemnon: What an unavoidable trap I’ve fallen into! Some god, much smarter than all my smart plans, has caught me!’ (Euripides, 1999, p. 344).

Also, in the scene where Anna is treating Martin in the basement and the children are present, the mise-en-scène of Martin sitting and Anna kissing his feet evokes a mythical sacred prayer and ritual, in which Martin gains a divine status. This moment can be seen in Figure 13.



Fig. 13. Mythical Mise-en-scène, (Lanthimos, 2017).

‘Klytemnestra: [...] If you have the will, my child will be saved. Do you want her to embrace your knees as a suppliant?’ (Euripides, 1999, p. 365)

In this scene, Anna surrenders to fate sooner than Steven, and is placed in this mythical mise-en-scène. In the scene of the sacrifice, a circular mise-en-scène is formed. This represents an archetype with many functions in myth and mysticism. The whole family is gathered in this seemingly fateful circle. Steven walks around in the center of the circle, blindfolded, with family members around him with their hands and eyes closed. In this mythical mise-en-scène, the fate of family members is determined by blind arrows that are suddenly and carelessly fired by Steven. Steven himself, then, has become a fateful conduit for myths and their inevitable power over mortals; it is as if this mise-en-scène at the end of the film depicts the horror of the domination of mythical forces over a very modern life.

Euripides and Lanthimos, along the finish-line

The ending scene of *Iphigenia at Aulis* is shrouded in mystery. According to one account, Artemis appears to Klytemnestra and claims to have placed a deer on the altar before the eyes of the Greeks. Hence, when the Greeks sacrifice the girl, they think that the victim is Iphigenia. In another version, a messenger enters the scene and announces the appearance of a deer at the altar instead of Iphigenia. In the first version, the Greeks think that Iphigenia is dead, but in the second version, the Greeks see the rise of Iphigenia and the death of the deer. This ambiguity, defect or uncertainty at the end of the play can be studied in the typology of hypertext under the genre of forgery. In forgery, while imitating the hypotext style, an attempt is made to complete the incomplete part of the hypotext (Namvar Motlagh, 2012, p. 149). The new narrative that is formed at the end of the film can therefore be considered as a kind of forgery, in which Lanthimos recreates the tragedy of

Iphigenia in a modern adapted context with a new arrangement. In this regard, he also offers a creative interpreted answer with *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* to the question posed by Hutcheon: ‘how do we know the past? what do (what can) we know of it now?’ (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 115).

Conclusion

According to Genette, the relationship between texts in hypertextuality is of a derivation type, and the relationship between hypertext and hypotext seems unbreakable. This relationship has also been considered by Hutcheon, who points out the interaction between the first text and the second text. From this perspective, there are subtle thematic connections, as well as strong interplay between *Iphigenia at Aulis* (405 BC) and *The Killing of a Sacred Deer* (2017), as described in this article. In fact, each of the story elements discussed in the article, such as characterization, structure, inciting incident, dramatic situation, suspension, and some narrative possibilities, are influenced by the hypotext of the play, and have been recreated in the hypertext of the film within a simultaneously mythical/modern place. This eventually leads to distinctive adaptation features in the film. Reviewing Lanthimos' re-creation reveals important aspects of Genette's theories and opinions such as “hypertextuality, transformation and imitation, pastiche, forgery, transposition”, and provides a better understanding of Hutcheon’s theories about the importance of re-creation and the types of engagement involved. Horizons of overlap and dialogue between these theories also emerge. That is not all, however; in the process of this creative adaptation, which has led to the retelling of a Greek tragedy in the context of completely modern life, Lanthimos uses the formidable power of the mythical world to excavate hidden human apprehensions about modern life. In this way, a world is formed in the film that is related both to the mythical world and the modern world at the same time. This feature represents one of the most fundamental points of the process of adaptation, as George Kubler points out: ‘between the desire to return to the known

pattern, and the desire to escape it by a new variation' (Kubler, in Hutcheon 2006, p. 173). Lanthimos has taken an in-between approach in adapting *The Killing of a Sacred Deer*, in such a way that he situates the story elements between “imitation and transformation”. This approach makes the film concurrently “show” a contemporary world, while it “tells” of ancient myth.

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