



# Grieving Alone? Representation of Women in Grief in Euripides' Alcestis

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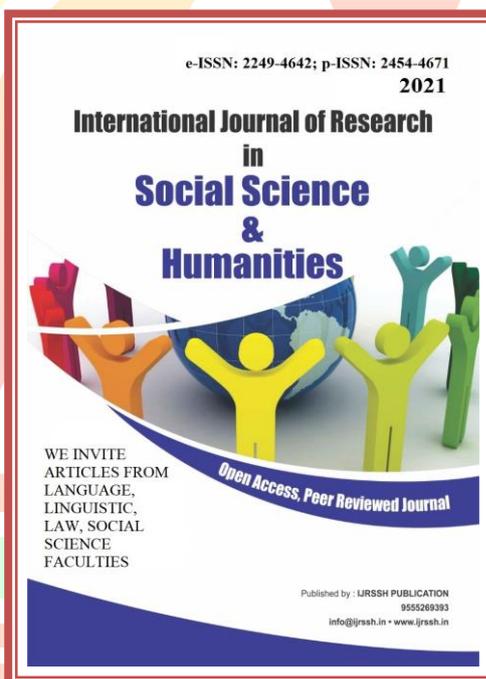
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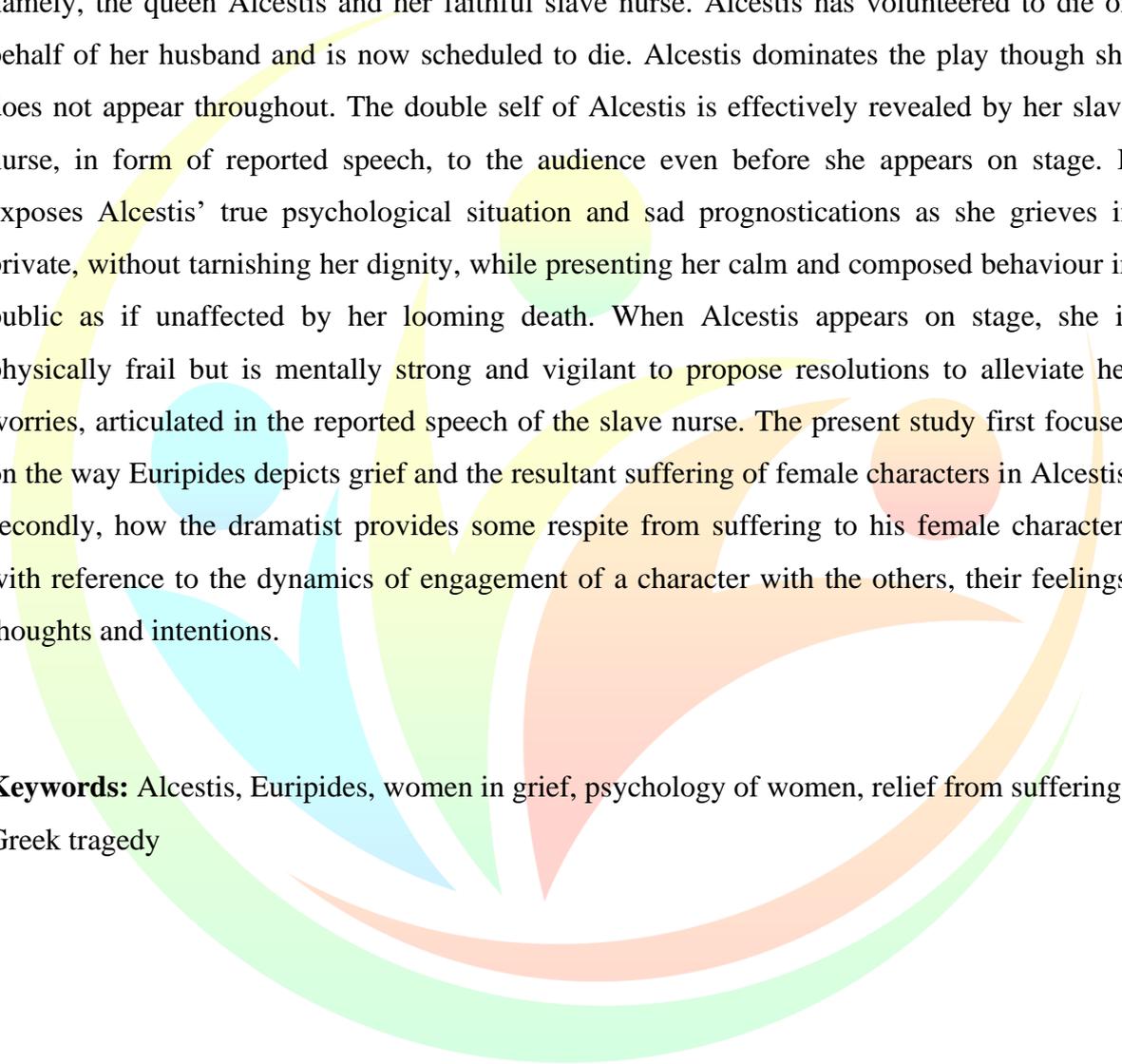


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**ABSTRACT**

The plots of Greek tragedies are all about human suffering and their characters are affected by or are victims of a grieving situation central to the play, and they communicate grief in different proportions. *Alcestis* is a tragi-comedy, which contains two female characters, namely, the queen *Alcestis* and her faithful slave nurse. *Alcestis* has volunteered to die on behalf of her husband and is now scheduled to die. *Alcestis* dominates the play though she does not appear throughout. The double self of *Alcestis* is effectively revealed by her slave nurse, in form of reported speech, to the audience even before she appears on stage. It exposes *Alcestis*' true psychological situation and sad prognostications as she grieves in private, without tarnishing her dignity, while presenting her calm and composed behaviour in public as if unaffected by her looming death. When *Alcestis* appears on stage, she is physically frail but is mentally strong and vigilant to propose resolutions to alleviate her worries, articulated in the reported speech of the slave nurse. The present study first focuses on the way Euripides depicts grief and the resultant suffering of female characters in *Alcestis*, secondly, how the dramatist provides some respite from suffering to his female characters with reference to the dynamics of engagement of a character with the others, their feelings, thoughts and intentions.

**Keywords:** *Alcestis*, Euripides, women in grief, psychology of women, relief from suffering, Greek tragedy

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## INTRODUCTION

Suffering and grieving at loss are inevitable human conditions and emotional experiences an individual may encounter in the course of living. Prior to probe further into this aspect it is vital to focus on a useful and a perceptive definition on suffering:

the experience of distress or disharmony caused by the loss, or threatened loss, of what we most cherish. Suffering involves dissolution, alienation, loss of personal identity and/or a sense of meaninglessness. It results from the stripping away of beliefs and symbols by which we construct a meaningful narrative of human life in general and our own lives in particular. Suffering is often compounded by a sense of threatened or lost dignity. Hopelessness is an extreme manifestation of suffering. However, hope is a natural human resource that can palliate and contribute to healing (Coulehan, 2012: p, 728 also see p. 718 Wilkinson 2005, Cassell 2004. Also, Frankl 2006, Frank 2001,

George 2009 and Malpas & Lickiss, 2012, pp. 1-2).

Universality of suffering compels us to wonder whether grief and suffering as presented in Greek tragedy (Hall 2010; Also see Rabinowitz's review 2011, pp. 30-33) can be understood with the help of this definition. Secondly, whether the fictitious representations on stage reflect, to any degree, real life experiences. Greek tragedy, being representations of human suffering, emerged when dramatic plots developed from mythological accounts known to the Greek audience. Such plots may not have been far different from real life experiences of the audience. It was by rendering the well-known myths as theatrical productions Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides earned their particular character and style much like today's film makers (Walcot 1976, pp. 76-93 & pp. 94-103). Andreas Markantonatos studying the link between theatrical action in Greek tragedies and real-life incidents has recognized the dependency of theatrical action on real world incidents and states that "the fire of the theatre needs oxygen from the air of the real world in order to burn" (2013, pp. 8-10). When such is the connection between theatrical and real action of humans, it also needs to

be noted that, since human action is linked with human sentiments and suffering, human suffering shown on stage could also be understood with reference to real life experiences.

Of the three playwrights, who dominated the Greek tragic theatre in the fifth century BC, Euripides has presented his characters and plots with a realistic approach, suggesting that the emotions and dispositions of the characters were true to life best eliciting pity and fear in the audience. This could have been what Aristotle meant when he conceded that Euripides was 'the most tragic of the poets' (*Poetics*, xviii, 1456a 25-7; xv, 1454 b1; xxv, 1461 b21; xiii, 1453 a30). A close examination of Euripidean plays informs us that in thirteen out of the nineteen surviving tragedies, the suffering of the female characters form a vital part of the plot. The present study first focuses on the way Euripides depicts grief and the resultant suffering of female characters in *Alcestis*, secondly, how the dramatist provides some respite or relief from suffering to his female characters with reference to how the dynamics of engagement of a character with the other characters, their feelings, thoughts and intentions.

## DISCUSSION

The name play *Alcestis* contains only two female characters, namely,

Alcestis the queen and the nurse, who could certainly be a slave (Wiedemann 1981, Fisher 1993).<sup>1</sup> The core of the myth from which Euripides has developed its plot is as follows,

Admetus was fated to die on his wedding day and Apollo helps him to evade death by providing a substitute. Yet, no one agreed to die on his behalf except Alcestis, his new bride. She dies and goes to Hades and Persephone, the queen of the underworld, sends her back in recognition of Alcestis' devotion to her husband.

Euripides begins his play on the day Alcestis, the protagonist, is to die. Yet, he has delayed the quest for a substitute and Alcestis' decision to volunteer to die in few years, at least, until after two children were born (*Alcestis*, lines 284-289). Euripides also delays the appointed day of death of the queen Alcestis, at least, until the two young children are old enough to trail behind their dying mother and until the boy could utter sensible words of mourning.<sup>2</sup> Euripides makes Alcestis face a situation engulfed in grief, that could be

<sup>1</sup> It was customary in ancient Athens to have faithful domestic slaves as nurses of the well-to-do individuals as is depicted in literary sources such as Homeric poems.

<sup>2</sup> Heracles, who is still a human not a god, is made responsible for Alcestis' resurrection, which appears to be an innovation of Euripides.

far stressful for any individual to experience in life.

Though grief and suffering of Alcestis is made the focal point and attention of the play as all the other characters contribute by manifesting or sharing the grief and suffering of Alcestis, Euripides begins his play by depicting grief at divine level. Accordingly, in the prologue, Apollo was articulating, in form of analepsis, his grief at the death or rather the murder of his son Asclepius by Zeus with his thunderbolt for resurrecting humans. Then he continues to say how Apollo retaliated by killing the maker of Zeus' thunderbolt, for which, Zeus subjected Apollo to further peril by making him a slave, though a god he was, to Admetus, a mortal. This speech of Apollo ends by referring to the cause of human grief and suffering in the play, the death of Alcestis, which is to follow soon (*Alcestis*, lines 1- 21). As the opening scene progresses this report of grief at divine level continues to a ferocious on-stage clash of conflicting authorities of death and of light / healing represented by Thanatos and Apollo respectively. This amplifies the horror and intensity of human grief and suffering in spite of the prolepsis (where Apollo forecasts of someone rescuing Alcestis from death: *Alcestis*, lines 64-71), which ends the opening scene (also see Markantonatos,

2013, pp. 22-28). Thanatos makes it very clear that the human characters caught in the snares of death will soon be immersed in grief and resultant suffering.

The cause of grief and suffering of the two female figures of the play, Alcestis and her nurse, is the impending death of Alcestis, though their perspectives, approaches and association with the grief differ. Alcestis is grieving over the impending loss of her own life while her nurse is grieving over the death of her beloved mistress. Yet, even by the words of the nurse, it is to the grief, suffering and endurance of Alcestis, the dramatist draws attention. The grief of the nurse is theatrically presented by bringing her on stage weeping over the looming death of her queen, Alcestis, in compliance with the character of slaves whom the Athenians thought were reckless and unable to control emotions.

The nurse's speech which reports Alcestis' disposition at the verge of death draws uninterrupted attention to grief-stricken queen. It also provides the first glimpse of the imminent domestic misery in full scale, in a human point of view, while providing a significant detail of the protagonist's contrasting dispositions, which otherwise would have been concealed from public knowledge. The first part of the speech reports incidents

that occurred within the inner quarters of Alcestis, and the queen displays a high level of self-control. The queen willingly prepares for her last hour of life purifying and decking herself elegantly with the finery, presumably set aside for her burial (*Alcestis*, line 149, 158-160). When she prayed to Hestia and made offerings at all altars in Admetus' palace she reportedly comes to the view of the palace community. Alcestis' prayers to Hestia were given a special focus by reporting it in direct speech (Also see Markantonatos, 2013, pp. 46-48). Alcestis appears to stand very firm in her terrible moments coping admirably with the horrendous prospect of premature death.

When she learned that her fated day had come, she bathed her fair flesh with spring water and taking clothes and adornments from their homes of cedar wood, she dressed herself in befitting fashion. Then, standing before the altar of Hestia, she made this prayer: 'Divine mistress, falling before you this last time (for now I am to descend beneath the earth), I will ask you to look after my orphaned children. To the boy, join a loving wife; to the girl, a noble husband. And I pray that my children may not perish, as I, their mother, perish, before their time, but rather that

they may be happy and fulfill a pleasant life in their native land.' Then she went to all the altars throughout the house of Admetus and garlanded them and made her prayers, stripping foliage, as she did so, from the branches of a myrtle tree, without tears or lamentation, nor did the coming evil change the natural loveliness of her complexion (*Alcestis*, lines 158- 174; tr. From Conacher, 1988).

The last two lines in the above quotation sums up the amazingly calm and composed behaviour of Alcestis at a moment someone would generally be affected by immense emotional disturbance reflecting such mental disposition through one's facial expressions.

Nonetheless, her collected demenour changes as she enters her private sphere, the marriage-chamber, in the second portion of the nurse's speech (Markantonatos 2013, p. 49). Her cool-headed and self-assured manner collapses as she sets eyes on the nuptial bed. Here, she weeps uncontrollably as a pitiable heart-broken wife being surmounted by an array of doleful sentiments and. The marriage-bed had created in Alcestis strong crisis feelings activating flash-backs

and sad prognosis (Markantonatos 2013, p. 49).

Then falling upon her marriage-bed she wept as she cried out 'dear bed, where I first lost my maidenhood to this husband for whom I die, farewell! I hate you not but you alone have destroyed me: for it is in dread of betraying you and my husband that I die. Some other woman will possess you, more fortunate perhaps but not more chaste true'. Then falling on the bed, she kissed it and all the bedding grew wet from the tear-floods streaming from her eyes. When at length she'd had her fill of many tears, she went stumbling headlong from the bed, leaving the room many times only to return and cast herself upon the bed again (*Alcestis*, lines 175-188).

As is clear from the quoted section above, this part of the reported speech too quotes Alcestis' own words loaded with agony. The flames of pain Alcestis has so far concealed from the others have crept out of concealment and have grown to a full blaze by the sight of the marriage-bed, the symbol of her marriage and the birth of her children. Alcestis grieves alone to her satisfaction and finally vents all her grief and suffering that she had so far kept to

herself. Alcestis' grief is well articulated by the device of expressing it through a speech reported by a slave nurse who, has access to the private quarters of Alcestis and, is reckless enough to divulge everything she witnessed without restraint being true to the nature of a slave. Markantonatos has further pointed out that the nurse's speech, in the play of our concern, contains two parts. He recognizes Alcestis' visit to altars and prayers to Hestia as the first, while considering the scene where Alcestis is in her nuptial bed-chamber and the following where Alcestis consoles the saddened children and staff as the second (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 44-45). However, it appears to me that the nurse's speech can be classified as containing three, not two parts based on the psychological conditions of Alcestis displayed in these scenes and her disposition in public. I perceive that though the moment when Alcestis consoles the grieving staff and her children can also be classified as Alcestis' appearance in public, the mental vigor she showcases in this scene is much more formidable and astounding than that in the former when she prays to Hestia. In this light it stands as a separate part of nurse's speech. Moreover, as Alcestis leaves the bed-chamber her emotional disposition appears to have improved with strong self-assured and self-confident character traits.

Here, Alcestis is shown reportedly consoling her desolate young children and the palace staff who grieve over her impending death instead of Alcestis herself incessantly mourning (as she did in the bed-chamber) over her looming misfortune. Accordingly, when Alcestis is once again with the palace residents, she resumes her self-restraint and firm behavior, now in a more advanced scale, no matter how ostensible it could be. Her role has changed to a resolute consoling agent trying to relieve others from grief and distress while it was, she herself who required much solace being the victim and supposedly subject to a far greater agony within.

The children kept clinging to their mother's clothes and wailing, and the queen then took them in her arms and gave them each her last kiss. Thereupon, all the servants throughout the house were weeping and bewailing their mistress. The mistress herself stretched out her right hand to each of them in succession and there was none too base not to be addressed by her and to address her in return (*Alcestis*, lines 189-195).

The nurse's speech, therefore, is a fine display of alternately contrasting behavior of Alcestis. When in a public or

semi-public setting Alcestis is depicted as a restraint woman of strong and enduring disposition, who controls the situation, yet, within her private sphere Alcestis is presented as a woman conquered by her own emotions and succumbs to uncontrollable agony. Such contrasting dispositions not only highlight Alcestis' double character and personality but also make a deep and lasting effect on the audience of Alcestis' suffering. The female nurse exits the stage having mentioned about the physical frailty of the dying queen and how she still yearns to set eyes upon the light of the day before leaving to the realms of darkness.

Alcestis is, finally, brought on stage supported by her husband Admetus, children and attendants. Despite her physical frailty, Alcestis appears to be firm and indomitable on stage. Yet, Alcestis is having nightmarish visions of her new abode, the netherworld, and of its non-human dwellers such as Charon and Hades, the boatman and the king of the netherworld (*Alcestis*, lines 245-270).

Though Admetus and Alcestis appear to be conversing, Alcestis in her hallucinations ignore Admetus' babbling requests prior to making her lengthy monologue. Alcestis begins her monologue highlighting the prospects she would have enjoyed (*Alcestis*, lines 280-286) but dismissed when volunteered to die for her husband,

thus, pointing at the magnitude of her sacrifice (*Alcestis*, lines 286-289). She reminds Admetus of the rarity of her commitment as his aged parents too rejected to die on behalf of their only son (*Alcestis*, lines 290-294).

Admetus, before I die – for you see how things are with me now – I want to tell you my wishes. Reverencing you before my own life, I die, since I have arranged thereby that you should continue to see this light of day. I did not have to die for you; instead, I could have married any Thessalian lord whom I wished and have lived in a house rich with a ruler's wealth. But I did not wish to live, deprived of you, with my orphaned children and I spared not my youthful beauty, though in both of these possessions I took much joy. And yet, your father and your mother, the one who begat and the one who bore you, both abandoned you, when they had reached an age when they might quite properly have died, quite properly have saved their son and so have died with fair renown. For you were their only son and there was no hope, when you had died, of producing other children. And then both I would have continued to live, and you, for the

rest of our time, and you would not now be lamenting the loss of your wife, nor bringing your children up as orphans. But still some god contrived that these matters should turn out so (*Alcestis*, lines 280-298).

Though *Alcestis*, here, appears to be strong and makes a bold, sensible and a cleverly crafted speech unaffected by emotions, her hidden agony sparkles through her words on the pretext of securing the future prospects of her children. Half of the speech focuses on her children as she anticipates the risks to which her children shall be exposed at the presence of a vicious step-mother (*Alcestis*, lines 289-322). This is directly connected with what she was helplessly grieving for and mourning incessantly in her marriage-chamber, a while ago, haunted with prognostications of Admetus' remarriage and of another woman taking her place. Yet, at this point, *Alcestis* is ostensibly devoid of such mental disturbances and having highlighted the importance of securing the future prospects of her children, requests or even lures Admetus to show reciprocal gratitude to her noble sacrifice by making him concede to remain celibate after her death. This may make one wonder whether *Alcestis* finds solace to her grief by

subjecting Admetus to psychological blackmailing.

Very well. Remember now the favour you owe me for all this. I will never, of course, ask back an equal favour (for nothing is more valuable than life) but I will ask for what is just as you yourself will agree; for, as a right-minded man, you love our children as much as I do. Allow them to be the future master and mistress of my house and don't marry a step-mother over our children: - some woman who, unable to rival me in excellence, will spitefully raise her hand against these children, yours and mine. Of all things, don't do this, I beg you. For a step mother coming after is harsh to the children of a former marriage, no gentler than viper.

Now a male child has a great tower of strength in his father [whom he can talk to and in turn be answered]. But you, O little daughter of mine, how will you grow up properly to maidenhood? What sort of wife to your father will you find? I fear lest she destroy your marriage prospects by afflicting you with some scandalous report when you are in

your bloom of youth. For your mother will not be there to betroth you nor, by her presence, to give you heart in your labours of child-birth, when there is nothing more helpful than a mother. For I must die, and this evil comes on me not tomorrow nor the third of the month but immediately am I to be spoken of as among those who are no longer alive. Farewell and may you be of good cheer. For, you, my husband, may boast that you married a most excellent wife and you, my children, that you were born of the best of mothers (*Alcestis*, lines 299-325).

The root of Alcestis' distress, as can be discerned from a close study of the reported speech of the female nurse and Alcestis' monody in par with Coulehan's view on suffering (stated above), was the threatened loss of what she most cherished: her children and the married life. Alcestis' words to Admetus infer that, as any other Athenian woman of her time, she was full of aspirations and expectations typically ascribed to women within the bounds of Athenian social norms. A comparative study of other self-sacrificing women in the tragedies of Euripides (Dyson, 1988, p. 15) helps us to infer that the very thing Alcestis was about to lose through her imminent death was

what any young Athenian woman of her time was waiting to possess. Macaria in *Heraclidae* (*Alcestis*, lines 591-592; 523-524) and Iphigenia in *Iphigenia in Aulis*, (*Alcestis*, lines 1398-1399), for instance, weep for being deprived of marriage or married life and her chance to bear legitimate children, which rendered social recognition and reception to an Athenian woman, owing to their death. Polyxena, in *Hecuba* (*Alcestis*, line 416), too weeps for being deprived of marriage due to her death. All these girls, who were ready to sacrifice their lives, were in agony of losing the prospect of marriage and motherhood, the two things Alcestis already possesses and cherish, and is now in the verge of losing due to her premature death caused by her marriage to Admetus (Dyson, 1988, p. 15). The sense of emptiness created through the sentiments of the prospects of being detached from the family affairs she yearned to get involved appear to have tormented her profoundly.

Alcestis abandoned the things that mattered to her and the things she treasured very much when she volunteered to die in place of Admetus because she did not wish to live without him as it risked her children becoming orphans. Alcestis' children, especially the girl child, increase the magnitude of her sacrifice since it renders much value to Alcestis' existence

as the person of paramount importance, especially to the daughter during her formative years through to the times of bearing her own children. Thus, Alcestis' suffering comes in form of distress directly associated with her individuality as a wife and as a mother. Not only the speech of the nurse, but also the monologue of Alcestis herself indicate that Alcestis' grief and suffering are connected with her memory, time and history, as Alcestis contemplates beyond her time with regard to place and to person, through a sense of history, both personal and communal (cf. definition of suffering by Malpas, 2012, pp. 9 & 11).

In the nuptial bed chamber, for instance, as per the report of the nurse, it was the memories of her wedding night and, possibly, the happy times she spent with her husband, Admetus, that caused her feelings of dissolution due to her soon-to-follow death bringing acute mental torment. Eric Cassell's view on the temporal element of suffering which explains that a situation becomes a source of suffering when it influences a person's 'perception of future events' is very clear with regard to Alcestis' agony (Cassell, 2004, p. 35; Also cf. Malpas, 2012, p. 11). In the nurse's (reported) speech, the suffering connected with analepsis becomes worse as Alcestis is influenced by her perceptions of Admetus' prospect of remarrying and leading a happy married

life having prolonged his existence at the expense of her death. If expressed by Alcestis herself, such prognostication may have harmed and threatened her dignity, and along with that, the prospect of being immemorial as the noblest wife to her husband and the mother to her children despite the enormity and rarity of her sacrifice. She would be just another jealous wife like Medea longing for her husband's attention. But here, Euripides does justice to Alcestis by preserving her status, while articulating these emotions of Alcestis through a reported speech of a slave nurse. Thus, the fear of losing her position in Admetus' *oikos* as a noble wife and a mother and then the fear of fading into oblivion after her death have intensely affected her emotions and also those of the audience. Moreover, such looming termination of bonds and affection may have led to nostalgic sentiments of isolation causing one to feel the loss of personal identity making her terribly depressed at the prospect of becoming worthless. Such perceptions may have generated a sense of hopelessness in Alcestis causing her to weep incessantly. Such effusion of grief and suffering has soaked her bed-linens in tears. The same sad effect caused by this hopelessness may have attracted her to the marriage-bed (*Alcestis*, lines 187-188), the symbol of her marriage that invoked her death. Clearly,

this grasp of future events is well connected both with her past memories as well as with the present activity and affectivity i.e. her impending death and its impact on herself and her children. Continuation of such past memories have received a heightened effect in her monologue as she points to the risks her children will be exposed to at the hand of a prospective step-mother.

On the other hand, the visions of Charon and Hades that Alcestis envisages in her despair could be an attempt of Euripides to symbolically materialize the fear that drenched Alcestis in her acute grief which is incomparable to that of others in the palace, and especially to that of Admetus (Also cf. Markantonatos, 2013, pp. 61-64).

Having, thus, examined how Euripides has depicted grief and suffering of the female characters in *Alcestis*, our next endeavour is to examine whether and how Euripides provided a theatrical dose of morphine to these female characters. If we could extend M. Jarret-Kerr's idea, 'Man is a behavior pattern at a given moment' to include grief and suffering, which are negative effects of human behaviour, finding relief from such sentiments must also be considered as a positive effect of such behavior-pattern (Jarret-Kerr, 1965, pp. 363-374). The most

obvious and the simplest method adopted by Euripides (and also by the other Greek tragedians) to provide relief from grief and suffering to a character was to make it a collective experience by making other characters share such agonizing sentiments. As for the female nurse in the play, Euripides conveniently allows her to enter the stage weeping (a disposition quite apt for a slave) not only as a theatrical demonstration of her grief and resultant suffering but also to allow her to drain her torment. This was followed by the readiness of the chorus to share her grief by conversing with her about the doomed queen and her invaluable sacrifice on behalf of her husband (*Alcestis*, lines 141-151). The lengthy report of the nurse referring to how the queen coped with her own doleful misery could be another device used by Euripides to relieve the nurse from her suffering and Frank Brennan's view, 'suffering seeks a voice' (2012, p. 265) explains it further, as it suggests that suffering can be relieved through articulation. Also, the strong personality of Alcestis in the presence of the palace community may also have rendered some solace to the nurse to some extent.

On the other hand, the anguish of Alcestis is also obviously shared by the other characters in the play and most of all by the nurse, who is inextricably involved

in her mistress' grievous trouble. Moreover, sharing of grief appears to be another device to gain relief from grief. Alcestis' entrance on stage being supported by her family and staff is a theatrical display of the willingness of these characters to share Alcestis' grief and suffering.

However, the intensity of the agony shared by each character in the play is relative to the prospective loss they may experience following the impending demise of the queen. In this light, the grief and suffering borne by Alcestis, who is immensely affected by her own death, is incomparable and may leave the impression that this suffering is solely of Alcestis (Malpas, 2012, p. 11). Nonetheless, sharing of grief and suffering of a character occurs as a result of drawing sympathy of the others to the grieving individual (character) and by considering the grief and suffering as common sentiments and conditions in order to lessen its acuteness and resultant misery (Blyth, 2012, p. 134). Almost until the end of the reported speech of the female nurse no mention was made of Admetus, but, when she does so at its end, it is limited to a very cold remark about him. Thus, the grief and suffering of the nurse due to the befalling bereavement of the queen has congealed her to dislike

Admetus, the creator of the present calamity.

And if he [the king] had died, so what? let him perish. But in escaping death he has acquired such a sorrow as he never will forget. (*Alcestis*, lines 197-198).

Other notable devices used by Euripides in providing relief to his female characters in this play, just as in most of his other tragedies, appear to be to inject resistance and hope into the character traits of the grieving figures. Alcestis' self-assured and calculated behavior can be understood as a mark of endurance that gradually gained strength to form a resistance to the impending disaster. It reaches a climax when Alcestis' facial expressions are described as to have not been affected by the calamity, with no visible sign of grief. Yet again, Alcestis' impassioned plea to Hestia, on behalf of the welfare of her children, indicates her concealed agony silently pointing to what she is about to lose, as a result of her premature death, while reducing her to hopelessness. Her prayers to Hestia to enable her son and daughter to enjoy what she failed to achieve, i.e. long life and happy married life, has empowered her with hope (Markantonatos, 2013, p. 48). This hope for a better life, at least, for her children seems to be instrumental in

relieving Alcestis' grief, at least in certain intervals, as a personal appeal for the fulfillment of struggle for her children's survival and welfare. Yet, as noted above, this resistance wanes as Alcestis enters her marriage chamber and sets eyes on her marriage bed, the crisis-trigger. Euripides allows the queen to weep in private draining her agony. Nonetheless, the stream of tears appears to have hardened Alcestis once again to appear strong and firm consoling the weeping children and slaves being a role model who bravely faces death.

Moreover, Alcestis' monody is a clear demonstration of her resolute resistance to her impending disaster. The well-crafted speech embedded with wisdom is presented in a calculated manner. By the end of it, one would even suspect whether Alcestis successfully transferred all her grief and suffering to Admetus. Her monologue brings of resolutions to all the fears she had been experiencing through her prognostications in the bed-chamber and as a further back-up and assurance to her hope for the prospects of her children's well-fare. She begins by reminding Admetus of the magnitude and rarity of her sacrifice to save his life even when his aged parents refused to do so (*Alcestis*, lines 290-298) and by referring to what she chose to lose out of love for him and their children when

she had the option to continue her regal life as a wife of another king (*Alcestis*, lines 280-289). Having thus imprinted Admetus' mind with her noble commitment, as a preface to her attempt to palliate her fear of the possibility of Admetus forgetting her and enjoying his life after her death, Alcestis continues with the most sensitive subject at hand – the fate of children without the mother. She expects Admetus to reciprocate to her *charis* (favour), yet, at a proportionate level and concedes him to yield to her request to lead a celibate life after her death (*Alcestis*, lines 299-310). She presents her case resolutely and avoids all possible loopholes that may allow Admetus to reject her request. Euripides' inclusion of young children, especially the girl child, becomes very effective at this point since the potential risks to children at the hand of a step mother, that Alcestis foresees, attaches strong justification to her request. Admetus' sincere acquiescence to the appeal of Alcestis (*Alcestis*, lines 327-337) and his consent to play the roles of both parents (*Alcestis*, lines 374-378) for the children appears to be the culmination of Alcestis' fears and fruition of her hopes to remain immemorial in the minds of the beloveds. Thus, her personhood and identity will be preserved even after her death. The loss of Alcestis is well compensated and such projection of this

character has made scholars as J. J. Dellner to perceive Alcestis as a woman in the market, who "gives away what is precious to her while keeping things that are equally precious such as her position in the house as the wife, reputation, praise gained through the sacrifice, her children, Admetus" (2000, p. 17). Through the device of enabling Alcestis to articulate her thoughts and concerns cleverly, Euripides has demonstrated the power of wisdom as a bringer of relief for suffering, a philosophical view shared by Plato, Aristotle and sophists at a later time. Thus, Alcestis has cautiously eliminated the possibility of bringing anything new into existence subsequent to trading her life with Admetus' doom, thus alleviating hopelessness, fear, damage to personal identity and dignity.

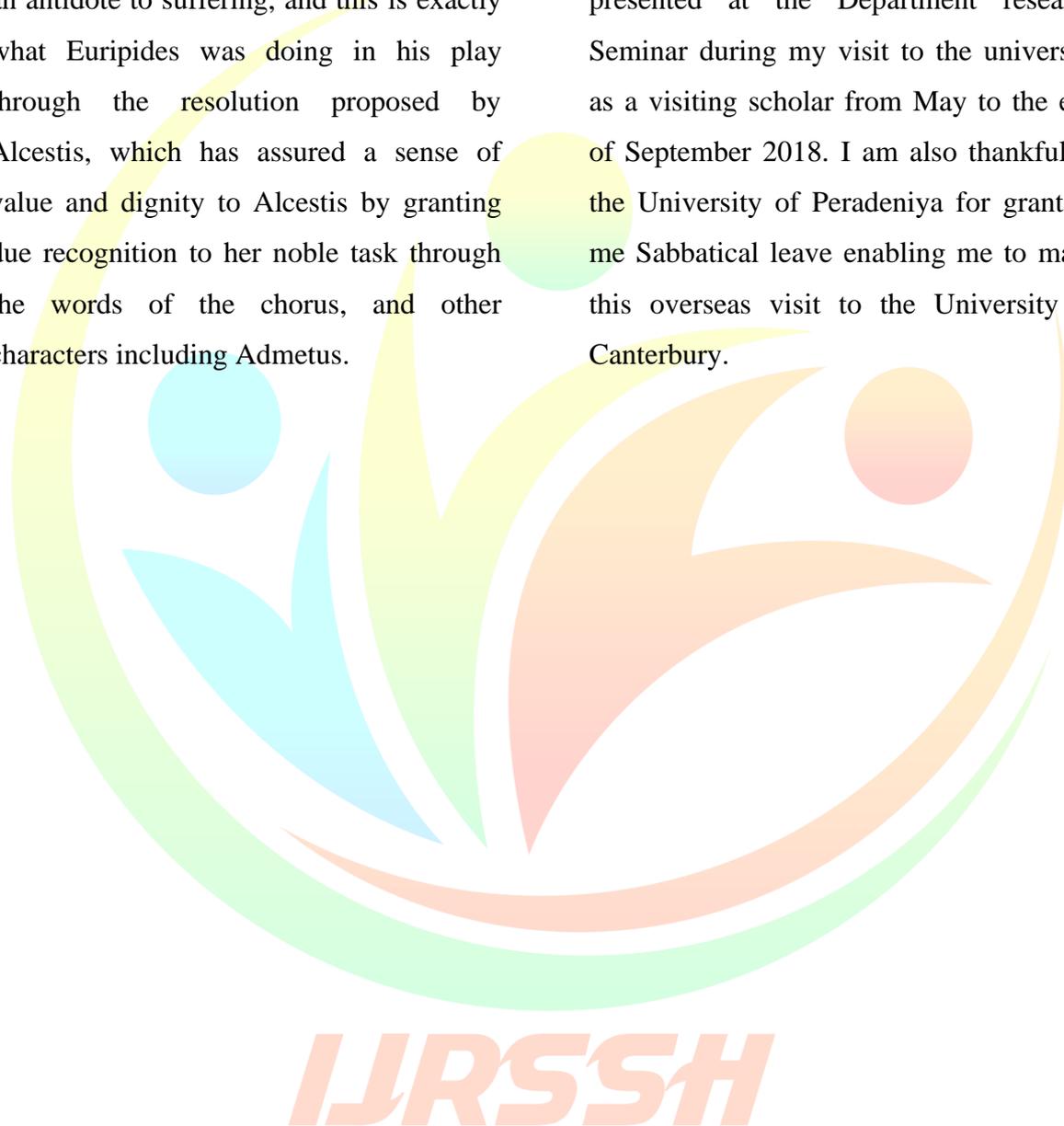
## CONCLUSION

Summing up, it is clear that the grief and suffering of Alcestis in her name play by Euripides has resulted from the threatened loss of what she most cherished. It has involved dissolution, alienation, loss of personal identity and worthlessness that has led to hopelessness. Euripides has employed a range of methods to palliate Alcestis' grief and suffering such as making other characters share her suffering and empowering the affected character with some resistance and hope with the use of wise calculated

speech and behavior. Thus, Euripides here has used wisdom as a key ingredient in generating hope and resistance through dynamics of engagement with others, their feelings, thoughts and intents. Thus, maintaining hope, especially deep hope, is an antidote to suffering, and this is exactly what Euripides was doing in his play through the resolution proposed by Alcestis, which has assured a sense of value and dignity to Alcestis by granting due recognition to her noble task through the words of the chorus, and other characters including Admetus.

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

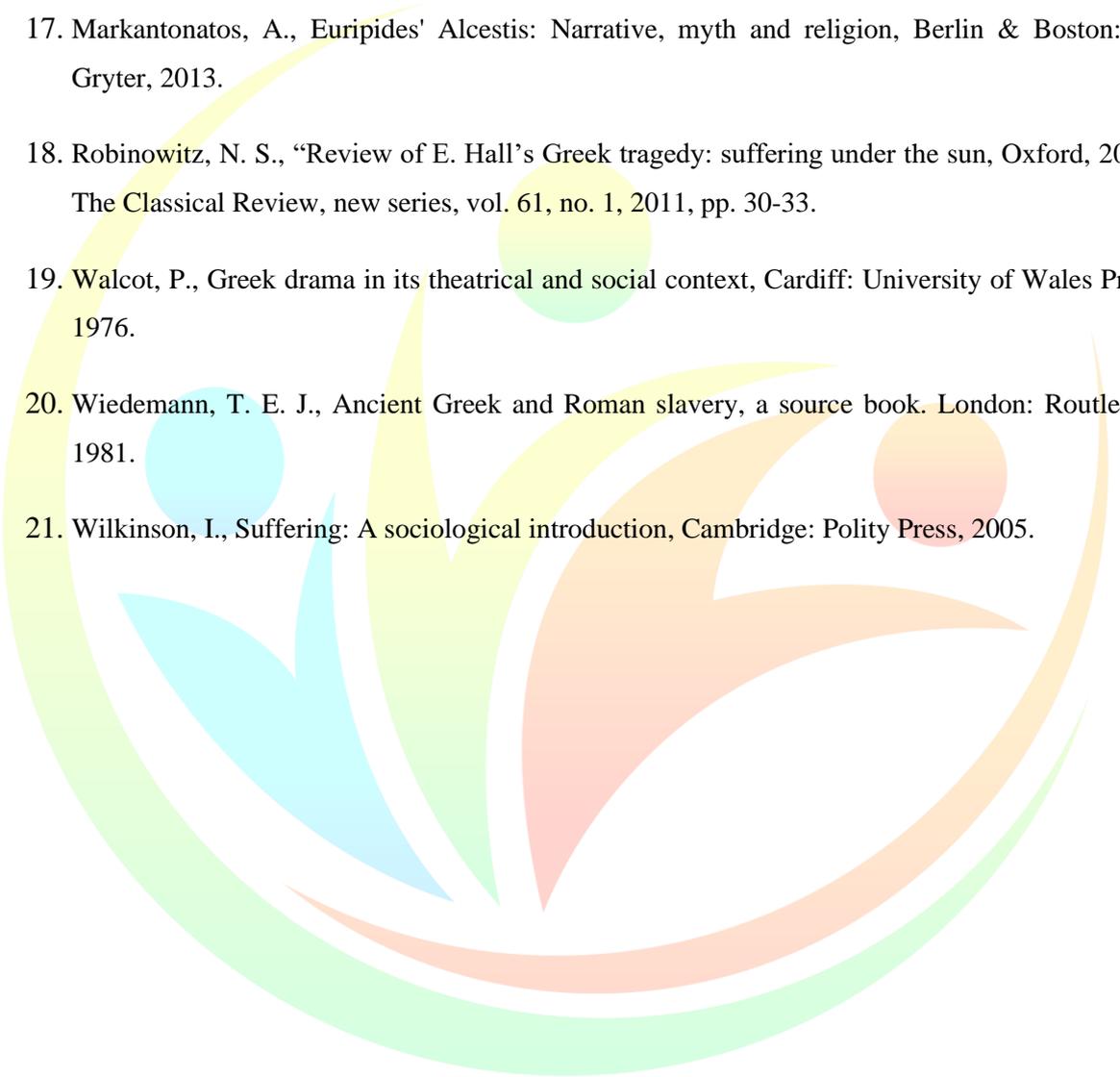
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