

## TEXTUAL REPLICATIONS OF MYTH VIA PHILOSOPHY AS A PEDAGOGICAL TOOL OF LEARNING AND SELF-KNOWLEDGE

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### ABSTRACT

The role of “thought stories” as a pedagogical tool in the teaching of Ancient Greek is one of the key factors in fostering the critical thinking of the teenage student. Philosophical discourse based upon the “myth of thought” is the main source of myth in the development of students not only in its encouragement of thought and emotion (academic knowledge and emotional intelligence) but also in fostering group research. Using the Platonic myth “The Ring of Gyges” in a secondary-school setting provided students with an opportunity to learn about philosophical dialogues through the myth. The teaching of Ancient Greek was transformed from a dull exam-oriented teaching approach into a creative thinking approach that brought the language to life in the classroom. The pedagogical doctrine “learn how to learn” developed into a learning process that can be described as “learning to think for oneself and with others” through the dialectical method. This philosophical myth and the discussions that ensued not only created a positive language learning experience for the students but also contributed to the development of their cognitive abilities.

### KEYWORDS

myth and philosophy; self- reflection; dialectical thought; emotional intelligence.

### INTRODUCTION

Myth and discourse: This is how we characterize the two poles, between which the human spiritual life oscillates. Mythical depicting power and logical thinking are the two contrasts which constitute the unconsciously figurative and the consciously conceptual one. Initially, the mythical formation of representations is the only form in which man tries to understand his outer and inner world. The myth, however, is not only to be interpreted through social and psychological phenomena. It holds itself a self-worth, both historical and philosophical. Some of the mythical heroes are, of course, historical figures, while others are not. However, almost all of them represent something that describes some activity of the prehistoric man in relation to his geo-environment or the natural-geological evolution in his birthplace.

The philosophical tale, in turn, relies on two fundamentals, the ancient Greek myth and the discourse, bearing the archetypal symbols, with the symbolisms closely related to the philosophical approach of nature, environment, animals and plants’ behaviour, and the ancient Greek discourse, a forceful timeless source to ‘teach’ the student the continuity of man and anthropocentric culture in the history. Language is the means of transferring the imaginative ancient Greek thought from past to present, as it reflects reality and translates it into a modern acquisition of children. The aim of approaching ancient Greek philosophy with the use of fairy tales is to use myth as a pedagogical tool and at the same time to deepen the concern that it signals. The ‘philosophical’ tale as a pedagogical tool is the potential for the student to be the main source of myth and interpret its symbolism on the one hand, while on the other hand through its vulgarization, it is ‘kept’ in man’s

soul and mind in a way more experiential and less didactic.

## 1. MYTH AND DISCOURSE: A CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS

Once upon a time ... a mother, who wished to see her son as a scientist, met Einstein and asked him what to do to strengthen his spirit and he responded to **'feed' him fairy tales**.

- 'And then?' Asked the mother.
- **'More fairy tales'**, answered Einstein.

The word 'fairy tale' is as distant as our history. We find it in the Homeric verb «*παραμυθεόμαι-οὔμα*» in the meaning of I advise, I induce, I encourage. In Herodotus and Plato's texts it appears in the sense of comfort, closer to the notion of myth, but different from that of courage. In Thucydides, it takes the meaning, I soothe and I mitigate, while in Eressio Theophrastus with the importance of relieving, decreasing, I cease. (Liddell & Scott, t. III, p. 455).

In Greece, the interest in the fairy tale belongs to the general interest in the products of popular literature, which contributed mainly to the formation of national identity. As a kind of art it is equivalent to folk poetry, it has developed equally to all people and cultures and it represents folk prose in the world of the utopian and timeless.

The history of the Aegean man who turns into God and his gods who humanize is reflected in three-way intersection, called Aegean, in the goddess, the cosmogony, the long Dionysian worship, the Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries, in the need for contact with the unknown divine, in its humanization. Tradition is transformed into narration with the sequence History-Myth-Archetype-Symbol, repetition, imagination, art. All of these, along with the irony of everyday life and the tragic irony as a technique of narrative speech, will be the basic elements for the creation of the fairy tale<sup>1</sup>.

The truth of myth is nothing but the measure of the intensity of temporary escape from reality. The conflicts of imaginary cosmogony end up becoming a personal case, turning the myth into an experiential condition. As an expression of collective consciousness, it is interpreted and called upon to express the concerns and values of the time. The theme of the myth differs as it is modernized. His update marks the evolution of human civilization as a kind of possible knowledge –glory as Plato uttered it- capable of conceptualizing reality from another perspective.

The narrative myth attempts to interpret present by rethinking past. It encompasses the prestige of authenticity by enlivening the hypothesis and its heroes' power. It is based on the Manicheistic scheme of the good versus evil struggle, the composition of the world in a harmony - as Heraclitus expresses it- where the two opposing forces in a perpetual motion fight against in order to end up in balance. Hans Christian Andersen writes in his book 'A Poet's Bazaar' about his travels to Greece in 1841: 'As the fairy tales seem to be, even if they have a happily ever after they seem to never end ...'.

Cassirer in his three-volume work of *Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen* considers the myth as a symbolic, figurative language, completely opposed to the analytical language of science. Bruno Snell in 'Discovery of the Mind' agrees with Cassirer and considers the genesis of thought in the Greek world as a revolution in the field of philosophy and science with the myth deprived of its scientific value. On the contrary, C. Levy-Strauss in the 1960s

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<sup>1</sup> [www.marinapetri.gr](http://www.marinapetri.gr).

tried to restore continuity between myth and scientific thought, proving that mythological thought is not completely different from modern science as to the logical tools it uses, because it is also trying to reveal a class in the world by identifying radical contradictions such as those of nature and culture which it is trying to overcome. From the beginning of the 20th century Cornford tried to restore the kinship of myth and discourse, that is to say, the continuity between the mythical cosmogony and the natural philosophy of the Pro-Socratic philosophers. The mythical narrative is no more a secondary partial reference in the face of its collective importance (Burkert, 1993: 50), while it is still a traditional genre with folk influences and collective memory that seeks its roots in the past.

Rationalizing it, is also an attempt to answer the existential questions of man through the identification, aversion and the general emotional involvement, which in turn leads him to the current social-political matters. The conflicts of imaginary cosmogony become a personal case by turning the myth into an experiential condition.

The English philologist and critic R.H. Dawkins, who dealt remarkably with folklore, notes: ‘The Greeks put so much of their character and their thoughts in their fairy tales that what for the other people was an entertainment for the children, in Greece was a pastime of the ‘old’ ones. But is it just a pastime for both young and old? Or does philosophical discourse, its production and its transmission beyond writing culture, which contains the depth of thought and discourse, is a potentially organized mythological narrative and an attempt to interpret the current situation? The answer to the question lies partly beyond the inseparable relation of myth with art, truth with science.

Thucydides is driven by laws that compel him to write the history of the Peloponnesian War (431-411 BC) according to human nature. To be more precise, he includes the Trojan War in Archaeology<sup>2</sup> and characterizes it as an imperialist war. From the beginning he defines the economic interests as the driving force of History. That’s why he demystifies the Trojan War by talking about human passions. As long as the pure knowledge of the historical course - which only history as a science can offer - becomes necessary for the proper judgment of the events, the myth is so enlightening, as it transforms events into art by penetrating the human soul and transforming it into an object of interpretation. The historic re-establishment of the Trojan War by Thucydides does not negate the fictional rendering of Homer, while both are tied in the same contradiction; they are at the same time unified in the composition of myth and discourse.

In addition, myth as an expression of collective consciousness has also been used in tragedy to express the concerns and values of a new form of collectivity of Athenian democracy with the thematic of engaging to mythical narrative based on the three mythical circles, the Argonaut, the Trojan and the Theban.

At the same time, the presence of myth is also notable in philosophy. Protagoras’ myth about the evolution of human civilization, which Plato mentions in his homonymous dialogue, but also the use of myth (using poetic means) and speech (lecture) as alternative methods of development of the same subject, was a starting point for the transmission of Platonic knowledge and the rethinking on myth as a subject of a scientific study (Burkert, 1993: 50). The myth comes to offer its services where philosophical or scientific research has made good use of its potential and cannot progress. With the unlimited possibilities of imagination, myth is called to fill the cognitive gaps of thought through the confrontation of the concepts of truth and its imagery, ‘myth-image’ (Krantz, 1953: 243-5)<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Thucydides, History, Book I, par.8-9.

<sup>3</sup> Krantz, W.(1953), *Ιστορία της Αρχαίας Ελληνικής Λογοτεχνίας*. Μτφρ. Θ. Σταύρου. Αθήνα. Στο: Πλάτων, (2013), *Μύθοι*, Εκδ. Ζήτρος.

Myth is defined by W. Burkert as ‘a traditional fairy tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance’. According to the above definition, myth is a traditional species, so its transmission is always oral and fluid, and requires a community with developed collective memory that perceives itself as a whole.

Philosophical discourse, on the contrary, is the creation of specific individuals or groups, so its production and transmission requires a writing culture and presupposes the existence of a civilized society. As it expresses collective memory, myth is organized as a narrative attempting to interpret a current situation by redefining it in the past, at its beginnings, and encompassing the prestige of authority, and therefore it is expressed as a monologue. Philosophical discourse, on the contrary, develops in a competitive dialogue situation, so it takes the form of argumentation, that is, of trying to support a perspective. This implies the intensely interactive and warlike character of the philosophical discourse, since in every phrase of a philosopher the latent echo of the opposing speech is distinguished, as well as its increased methodological accuracy and self-referentiality.

However, in spite of their distinctive typological characteristics, we should not forget that myth and discourse have the same function: they make up interpretations of the world, images of cosmos<sup>4</sup>, and for this purpose they use to a great extent the same tools, most importantly the distinction of two levels of reality: the divine-human world, the essence-phenomenon, the done thing-beingness, a distinction upon which they base their ontology and ethics<sup>5</sup>.

## 2.1. THE PEDAGOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF ‘PHILOSOPHIC’ MYTH

The educational value of ancient Greek myths should be sought not only in the importance they have or they can get, but also mainly in the emotional state they carry and in the cultivation of the imagination they offer. Their study can reveal to us timeless archetypes, which still have the power to illuminate the deepest mysteries of man’s existence and the prehistory of his birthplace.

Undoubtedly, the benefits of fairy tales as a pedagogic tool for the transmission of knowledge and metacognitive ability of the child, concerning the cultivation of his imagination, his socialization, the encouragement of his self-confidence are unquestionable. At the same time, it motivates the teacher to become more energetic in spreading knowledge in a playful way through an interactive relationship between the imaginary and the real, myth and discourse, in a virtual world that is more interactively perceived within the class than a lecture teaching method. Reader response theories interpret the text’s meaning perception as a two way relationship between reader and myth, not only as a person but also as a ‘interpretive community’, within a role playing game, which potentially transforms the symbols of the myth into meaning through the interaction of the students with the teacher as a mediator (giving feedback).

The question raised has two basic sub-questions:

1. How relevant similar is the power of the ‘philosophical’ myth in shaping the child’s soul?
2. How can a ‘philosophical’ fairy tale touch older people?

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<sup>4</sup> Κονδύλης, Π., (1991), *Ισχύς και Απόφαση. Η διαμόρφωση των κοσμοεικόνων και το πρόβλημα των αξιών*, Στιγμή, Αθήνα.

<sup>5</sup> «Η ερμηνεία των μύθων από την αρχαιότητα ως σήμερα», στο Ι.Θ. Κακρυδής (επιμ.), *Ελληνική Μυθολογία*, Εκδοτική Αθηνών, Αθήνα 1986, τ.1, σ. 241-303.

The philosophical myth is still a fantastic narrative that is often accompanied by a conclusion, a moral lesson, knowledge and awareness of what is right and wrong in the thoughts and actions of his heroes and anti-heroes. It embraces the discourse, the fairy tale element, the exaggerated reality, and continues to provide the listener-reader the *methexis* (group sharing) and *catharsis* (cleansing/ purging) of the ancient tragedy. It was the curriculum of the basic education of ancient Greek language and the treasure of epic, choral and tragic poetry. But what is its position today at Secondary School Education?

The question remains unanswered as the teaching of the ancient Greek myth is limited to the last class of the Lyceum in ancient Greek courses, and mostly in a fragmented form. The myth ‘Gyges ring’ in Plato’s Republic is part of the curriculum of the ancient Greek language course, sacrificed at the targeted for the Panhellenic exams, degraded knowledge.

## **2.2. A PEDAGOGICAL ACTION**

In the context of this concern, the pedagogical action of capturing Plato’s myth ‘Gyges ring’ in modern Greek language through the vulgarization of its meanings and with final recipients the students of Humanities field of the 3<sup>rd</sup> class of Experimental Lyceum, GEL of Mytilene of the University of the Aegean, took place.

**School year:** 2017-18

**Duration:** First semester

**Class C (Humanities):** 22 students

**Title of Pedagogical Action:** A Philosophical Myth: ‘Gyges Ring’.

### **2.2.1. PURPOSE:**

The study of a closed learning environment of the ancient Greek language and its transformation into an open cognitive environment.

### **2.2.2. GOALS:**

- a. To realize myth’s timeless power from the distant past till present as a means of values and ideas. (cognitive field)
- b. To live the hero’s experience, empathize with it and rationalize it. (emotional field)
- c. To develop the ability to present the myth in a comic book or to dramatize it. (psychomotor field)

### **2.2.3. EXPECTED RESULTS:**

The experiential perception of this ancient text through the development of a personal dialogue of the student with the values, attitudes and notions of the myth in combination with the strengthening of his comparative ability to form a personal opinion and attitude from the

distant past till present through the paths of philosophical discourse. (theories of aesthetic response and perception)<sup>6</sup>.

#### 2.2.4. METHODS:

According to the rhombus model, students were asked to find information about Plato and his myths (Literacy).

The method used by the class to study the subject is the content analysis of the philosophical myth. It was based on ‘hamming up’ narrative techniques, studying deeply the ancient text and rendering it in an adapted format, with students ‘role playing’ in groups, his heroes in a dialectical game (Θεοδωροπούλου (επιμ.): 83-118). The quality and quantity data process followed (Μπονίδης, 2004: 120).

The students were separated into four research groups in order to construct the image of the philosopher and present his myth, ‘Gyges Ring’. The teams did not work impersonally. They were asked to create the fairy tale from the beginning through its rebirth to the present. They gave ‘breath’ to the myth by using dramatizing techniques in the classroom (non-verbal and paralanguage elements such as handshake, vocalization, voices, gestures, grimaces, etc.). The groups were decomposed and reshaped to bring the fairy tale to paper with beginning, middle and end, as they experienced it and perceived it, first personalized and then cooperatively. The philosophical dialogue was more than just a conversation. It constituted an activity, a cooperative research, a new way of common criticism and self-reflection (Camthy, 2013: 178-180)<sup>7</sup>. The idea of transforming the class into a ‘research community’ was not based on the perception of metacognition of established knowledge, but on the research and questioning of the cause-effect relation of mythological hero’s actions as a form of concern and problem solving of the groups in the events of fairy tale philosophy. The students were gradually led by the rote memory of knowledge in the production of this (Knowledge making).

The co-operation and interaction played a decisive role in the participation of everyone in the course, pupils and professors. The class had been transformed into a writing workshop of the myth. The teaching thinking was followed by listening and reasonableness with the final product to be the creation of a student community of enquiry with communal responsibility and solidarity (Haynes, 2009). Such an approach has revived Socratic Dialectics on the occasion of a ‘myth of thought’ (Fisher, 1998: 196). The conclusions of each lesson’s discussion were written on the board and were uploaded to the classroom blog as a pretext for the next lesson. According to Piaget’s constructivism, the children have been at the center of the educational process gradually building the myth’s knowledge of the world by locating it - from the dramatic reality - into the real form of life.

#### 2.2.5. THE FINAL PRODUCT:

The final product of their work is the specific myth-philosophy that follows, Plato’s philosophical myth, adapted by students ‘Gyges Ring’ in Plato’s Republic (Book B) 359d-360d:

<sup>6</sup> Επιμορφωτικό υλικό για την επιμόρφωση των εκπαιδευτικών – Τεύχος 3 (Κλάδος ΠΕ02) γ’ έκδοση 118.

<sup>7</sup> Camthy, D. (2013). Στο: Θεοδωροπούλου, Ε. (2002). Διδάσκοντας φιλοσοφία στα παιδιά. 3<sup>ο</sup> Πανελλήνιο Συνέδριο της Παιδαγωγικής Εταιρείας Ελλάδος. Αθήνα: Παιδαγωγική Εταιρεία Ελλάδος.

### 3. PEDAGOGICAL ACTION’S EVALUATION:

#### 3.1. INITIAL EVALUATION

During the traditional teaching of this module from the authentic ancient Greek text, there was a lack of the students’ interest their only aim, the acquisition of knowledge for the final examinations. The lesson seemed to be carried through without any interest.

After the myth’s study was completed in a conventional way, students were asked to express their personal opinion, if they liked the platonic myth or not, and why. The majority of the class, although they knew the translation, hence the meaning of its content, was indifferent towards its deeper meaning.

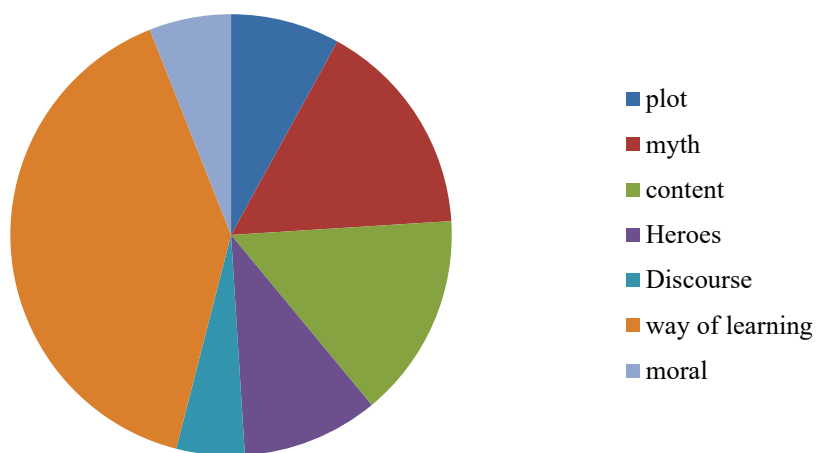
#### 3.2. FINAL EVALUATION

Following this myth-editing action, questionnaires were distributed on students on the understanding of ancient Greek philosophy and on the positive or negative effect of myth and philosophy as an action and attitude of life. Questions and answers are reflected in the following pies:

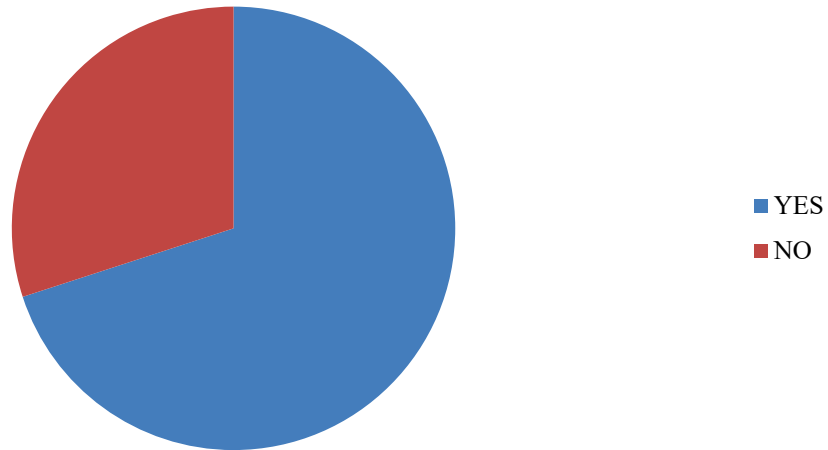
**1st Question:** What did you enjoy in this fairy tale?

**Question 2:** Did your writing work help you become more familiar with ancient Greek philosophy?

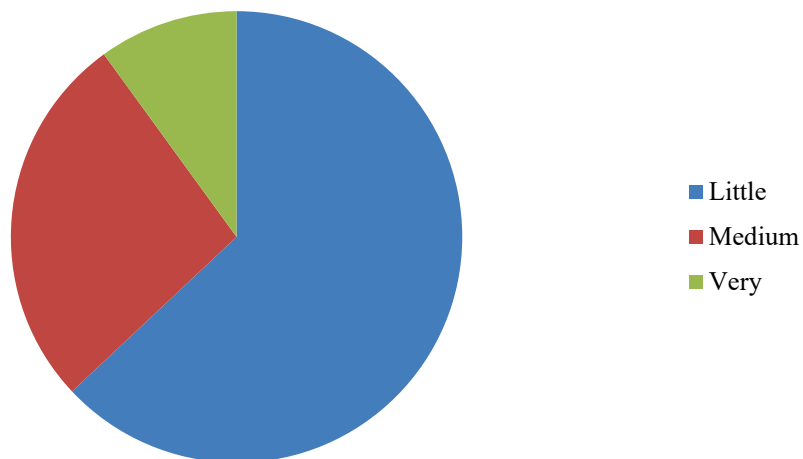
**Question 3:** How difficult was it for you to engage in ancient Greek text through this pedagogical action?



**Graph 1.** What did you enjoy in this myth?



**Graph 2.** Did your writing work help you become more familiar with ancient Greek philosophy?



**Graph 3.** How difficult was it for you to engage in ancient Greek text through this pedagogical action?

#### 4. CONCLUSION:

A good fairy tale is not age-related because it has many interpretations, that is, many levels and approaches that broaden or re-establish the perception of reality beyond the microcosm of a student. A good myth deals with the most important issues that concern man, regardless of age, such as existential-type quests of life and death, justice and injustice, with the imminent difficulties and challenges that man is going to encounter in the course of his life. In addition, a good philosophical myth can give in a natural and effortless way the



possibility not only of bringing the students into communication with the ancient philosophical thought, but also of acquiring its deep meaning, primarily through its deeper understanding (internalization) and secondly through the proper controlling of their emotions, in a dialectical, dramatic and at the same time authorial way, without reducing the cognitive value of the exam-oriented lesson.

## THE FINAL PRODUCT

### **Plato's philosophical myth/ legend, adapted by students** **Ring of Gyges** **Plato's Republic (Book B) 359d-360d**

Once upon a time, in an eastern country, Lydia, a virtuous man lived, called Gyges. He was the fairest person among men. He was a shepherd in the service of the ruler of Lydia, Croesus, on the vast lands of the Asian land. He was not ashamed of his job, nor was his job ashamed of him. He lived his life in dignity without any particular aspirations and deceitful dreams.

At last, the spring had come! The shepherd whistled thunderously, non-stop, to his herd by putting his two fingers skilfully in his mouth, guiding them daily for grazing. In his legs it was as if he had wings, scudding as he was a young man full of power for life. He was not discouraged by distance. Early this morning, he had begun to guide his sheep to the mountain to seek for food. It was already getting late, almost dusk; he had to take the road back.

What was it that shook his herd so suddenly? He could not even imagine what was coming to him...

In the road back he had already begun to mumble a rhythm that was often interrupted to shed his herd and over again. His long crook was helpful in organizing them in a herd and bearing them in the right direction. He was constantly worrying about losing one of them. He was obliged to compensate his master for what was lost. The fear of loss was real and in sight – how could it not? – he was identified by name and surname, in duty of his king's work, as well as his cattle, such as the slaves – animals and humans - to their master.

The sky began to darken and the shower was about to break out. The heavy rain pounded man and cattle. His only concern was to rescue his sheep and lock them up in the sheep shed. As soon as he could, he gathered the herd from the top of the mountain to the lawn, where he had his house and his shed. The sheep bells ringing, hanging on the throat of his sheep, was their sound 'traces' as the twilight made the task of gathering them even harder. The animals forming a cone-shaped order followed the sheep-leader in a strange layout, which looked like a military one, since one closely followed the other and all together their shepherd.

His suffering, however, did not stop here! The outbreak of the shower was followed by a powerful earthquake, capable of cracking a piece of land and opening a gap there, just before he reached his shed. His sheep had sensed the natural disaster, because of their constant bleat -it was like they spelled the evil that was going to happen- they were trying to warn of the imminent danger. The enormous land gap yawned like a mouth, ready to swallow the entire herd and its shepherd together.

Without realizing it, he began to roll at breakneck speed in the midst of the earth. How dark was it inside there? With his legs he braked right on his huge belly leaving behind a big

and stuffing cloud of dust, while a hollow thud was heard by this odd clash. He stood up dizzy. He thought to leave but preferred to stay. His curiosity proved to be stronger than his cowardice.

Few rays of light from the open crack on the surface of the ground were enough for him to distinguish a huge bronze horse right in front of him, hollowed with loopholes. What was the horse looking for there? He wiped his eyes. They were dazzled by the view of this metallic monster. No, he would not lose his courage! He would have to face it. Was it an underground monster or not, ready to devour him without mercy?

-Well, I do not think so, he said. It'd have already done it.

He started climbing cautiously into its belly, he stretched his hands in order to be tugged from somewhere, and in a leap he managed to dive right inside it. It was so deep that no one would expect to see what the shepherd saw, a skeleton, which looked, in his eyes, larger than that of a man. In his skeletal finger, a remnant of the flesh, there was a golden ring with a precious stone, a red, fiery ruby. He pulled it hard, impatiently. Crack! And the ring had truly departed from the bone finger. He wore it with greed, while a thousand questions about how precious it was flooded his mind. What a pity that there was not a mirror to admire himself with this marvelous diamond ring that adorned his finger! Our shepherd suddenly began to turn from a simple man into a wicked honorary of its value. He wished he could escape his poverty!

He wished he would say to his king that he hates him for his conviction in a shepherd! He wished this ring had a magical genie ready to fulfill his every wish and claim! In a glimpse of an eye he forgot his sheep, the herd, the shepherd's habits, his poor house, and especially his happy, modest life. He started climbing, wearing the ring with his only concern not to lose it. He came out timidly into the mouth of the earth, which looked as though it had not been an earthquake, as if there had not been a storm. He found his sheep on the lawn, to warm up each other with such warmth that human society did not have alike. Was everything that he had lived an illusion or a dream? And the ring? He wore it tight on his finger. It was an irrefutable proof of the reality he had lived.

As usual, as every month, the shepherds were gathered to send heralds to the king to inform him of his herds. They gathered around the fire and warmed their hands in the big fire that was flickered in front of them. He arrives too, wearing the ring. It had become a part of his hand, a piece of himself. He was never separated. Among the other shepherds he did not dare to mention this experience. He had kept it hidden. He knew they would deride him and characterize him at least delusional. As he stood uneasily among the others, he turned the base of his ring stone to his side on the side of the palm. He had turned it to his side, upside down in his hand, not to be perceived by the other shepherds. In the moment he was lost from his fellows' eyes and they began talking about him without seeing him in front of them. He had become invisible! He was bemused as to the ring and groped it again, turning the base of the stone he brought it to the outside. In the moment he appeared in front of them. He had become visible. He did more ring tries to find out what he had wished in the belly of the horse was true, it had magic powers. The same thing happened again and again. He turned inward on the base of the stone, and he was invisible. Outwardly, everyone was watching him. After making sure, he immediately got himself, and managed to send him with the heralds to the king. His plan was in place. The ring was the mean for its realization. He entered the palace visible, kills the king invisible and marries the queen. Our shepherd was transformed into a cunning usurper of his king's throne, into unjust from just, into rich from poor, into a king from a shepherd.

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- [http://www.greeklanguage.gr/sites/default/files/digital\\_school/3.1.3ancient\\_greek\\_polkas\\_touloumis\\_0.pdf](http://www.greeklanguage.gr/sites/default/files/digital_school/3.1.3ancient_greek_polkas_touloumis_0.pdf)
- <http://digitalschool.minedu.gov.gr/>
- <http://www.greek-language.gr/greekLang/index.html>
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- <http://www.ime.gr/chronos/>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhIO27nQ96g>, <http://el.wikipedia.org/>
- <http://www.edutv.gr/>
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