

OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

Susan Deacy

# WHAT WOULD HERCULES DO?



Lessons for Autistic Children  
Using Classical Myth

WHAT WOULD  
HERCULES DO?

“OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD” Series

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Susan Deacy

# WHAT WOULD HERCULES DO?

Lessons for Autistic Children  
Using Classical Myth



Susan Deacy (University of Roehampton, London, UK), *What Would Hercules Do? Lessons for Autistic Children Using Classical Myth*, in the series "Our Mythical Childhood", edited by Katarzyna Marciniak (University of Warsaw, Poland)

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Detail from the *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, photograph by Marina Arcady. Used with kind permission.

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Pour tracer un chemin  
Et forcer le destin  
À chaque carrefour  
To trace a path  
And force destiny  
At every crossroads

Jacques Brel, "Quand on n'a que l'amour"  
[When You Only Have Love], 1957  
(English translation by Susan Deacy)





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## THE POSSIBLE DREAM – OR, A FOREWORD BY THE SERIES EDITOR

This is my quest,  
To follow that star...

Mitch Leigh and Joe Darion,  
"The Impossible Dream (The Quest)"  
from the Broadway musical  
*Man of La Mancha*, 1965

In his dialogue *De officiis* [On Duties], Cicero reveals a paradox that is still part and parcel of the life experience of each and every one of us – despite the passage of over 2,000 years, the uncounted reforms of education, and the ever new concepts of child rearing:

Ineunte enim adulescentia, cum est maxima imbecillitas consilii, tum id sibi quisque genus aetatis degendae constituit, quod maxime adamavit; itaque ante implicatur aliquo certo genere cursuque vivendi, quam potuit, quod optimum esset, iudicare. (1.117)

For it is in the years of early youth, when our judgment is most immature, that each of us decides that his calling in life shall be that to which he has taken a special liking. And thus he becomes engaged in some particular calling and career in life, before he is fit to decide intelligently what is best for him.<sup>1</sup>

What is more, this very experience was also shared by the greatest hero of classical mythology – Hercules. Cicero recalls – after Xenophon of Athens, who in turn was recalling Prodicus of Ceos – that Hercules, when he "was just coming into youth's estate [...], went out into a desert place". The Latin term for "coming into youth's estate" – "pubesceret" ("cum primum pubesceret [...],

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<sup>1</sup> All the quotations from this dialogue in the present text have been taken from M. Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller, "Loeb Classical Library Foundation", Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1913, ad loc. via Perseus Project.



exisse in solitudinem”) – suggests a boy who is fourteen to sixteen years old.<sup>2</sup> At this point another paradox should be revealed – one resulting from Cicero’s observation in the same part of the dialogue. For even though he admits that the human mind is indeed immature at such an age, he also notes that Nature has appointed this precise age “for choosing the path of life on which [we] would enter” (“quod tempus a natura ad deligendum, quam quisque viam vivendi sit ingressurus, datum est”; Cic., *Off.* 1.118).

The emphasis on the power of Nature is of great importance here. Today, rich in the experience of many epochs of human culture, we may be inclined to think we can moderate the maturation process of children. But if so, then only to a limited degree, and our interventions are not guaranteed to bear good fruit, as that same rich experience has amply shown. Nonetheless, it still happens that, guided by the idealistic belief in a carefree childhood, we hope to protect the young by trying to postpone their entrance into the adult world. Yet childhood has never been fully carefree and the world is calling, just as it always has. At this point in his dialogue, Cicero makes us aware of transformations beyond our control. That is why, even after the passage of so many centuries, it is good to come back to the Classics in order to recall our limits and in consequence to limit our *hubris*. Young people will choose their own way of life, no matter how premature their decision might seem to older generations. They will make their choice because they want to and because they have to, just as each of us also once did.

The Cicero/Prodicus/Xenophon myth of the Choice of Hercules tells about the two life paths we can take – that of Pleasure and that of Virtue. We know the story, as it has accompanied us as a frequent allegorical motif in nearly all periods of art (see, for example, Fig. 1). These two paths are represented in mythology by two women who reveal before Hercules alternate visions of the journey ahead. Pleasure, of course, is sensual and showers the young man with her promises of luxurious joys, while Virtue is austere and offers him a life full of hardships, but crowned with immortality among the stars (on Mount Olympus) as a reward for all his sacrifices in making the world a better place.

So goes the full version of this myth we know from its countless textual and iconographic elaborations, yet not from the quoted fragment of Cicero’s dialogue *De officiis*. Here you would search in vain for the two women’s famous bids for Hercules’ fate (or maybe even for his soul). Cicero dedicates to them but bare

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<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Mark Eric Vesley, *Youthful Misbehavior in the Early Roman Empire*, PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1996, 35. For Susan Deacy’s approach to chronology within the Choice myth in relation to the artefact she (*nomen omen*) chose for the base of her volume (a chimneypiece panel from the University of Roehampton), see her comment on p. 105.

mention (“the path of Pleasure and the path of Virtue” – “unam Voluptatis, alteram Virtutis”), unexpectedly deciding to tell this myth from a different angle. He does so for several important reasons, I believe. His desire not to tire readers with a repetition of the well-known motif might be one of them, but surely that was not the chief reason. For the very idea of a duel of words and promises waged between Pleasure and Virtue and the potential of such a scene must have been appealing to Cicero as the master of rhetoric. That he resigned from this scene is meaningful and makes the alternative he, *nomen omen*, chose all the more prominent. This alternative consisted in his placing all the focus on Hercules’ role in making a choice: “[H]e debated long and earnestly which one it were better for him to take” – “[D]iu secum multumque dubitasse [...] utram ingredi melius esset”. In this way Cicero emphasized the young hero’s deep inner reflection that was to result in the final triumph Hercules achieved at the end of his life.

We are again confronted with a paradox here. As if undercutting Cicero’s comment on the “most immature” judgement of young people who are not “fit to decide intelligently”, what we observe is the decision process of a boy who turns out to be perfectly capable of making the right choice. Of course, Cicero may have relied on the image of Hercules as a philosopher. However, given the young age of the hero and the link created between him and the dialogue’s readers, we can assume that Cicero indeed expressed here his faith in the young and their ability to choose wisely.

Furthermore, an unexpected turn of events should be emphasized. Having built a solemn tension around the hero’s choice, Cicero suddenly dismisses the



**Figure 1:** Annibale Carracci, *The Choice of Hercules* (*Eroale al bivio – Hercules at the Crossroads*, 1596), Museo e Real Bosco di Capodimonte, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

mythical component of the scene. He jokingly states that a meeting with Pleasure and Virtue “might, perhaps, happen to a Hercules, ‘scion of the seed of Jove’; but it cannot well happen to us” (“hoc Herculi, ‘Iovis satu edito’ potuit fortasse contingere, nobis non item”). And here a paradox again manifests itself. For we all do in fact experience such confrontations – confrontations between the easy and difficult paths in life. This occurs in a metaphorical sense, of course – but we keep on repeating Hercules’ choice over and over, and not only in adolescence (though that is when we set our headings), and Cicero clearly points this out in each of the three books of *De officiis*. It seems to me that his dismissal of the divine personifications of Pleasure and Virtue here, in favour of his emphasis on the long, painful, and rather mundane decision process of the young not-yet-hero (“diu secum multumque dubitasse”), serves precisely this aim – to make us aware of our choices, our “Herculean” moments. Cicero’s joking tone, in turn, dispels the scene’s divine and unrealistic layer along with its pathos, too “stiff” as much for his ancient audience as for readers in our own times.

Indeed, the whole dialogue *De officiis* is built at a crossroad – a fork with two signs: *honestum* and *utile*. Cicero offers guidance on what to choose in face of the apparent conflict between what is honest and what is useful, and he tries to prove that in essence (another apparent paradox) there is no conflict between them, for only honest things can be beneficial to us.

The powerful sincerity of this message strikes us even more strongly when we remember that Cicero wrote *De officiis* as an elderly man who had made many choices, many wrong ones included. He wrote the dialogue in extremely difficult political circumstances, for in the middle of the civil war to which he had lost some of his closest friends, and when the Roman Republic was falling apart. He worked on it throughout the last period before his death (he was murdered on the order of his adversaries, as in the end he made the choice not to leave his beloved motherland). He meant *De officiis* to become, in personal terms, a guide for his son, and, in a broader context, a kind of last will for all of his wider audience – and so, also for us. Cicero meant to bequeath a message on how to prepare youth for their life choices – a quest underway for centuries in ever new settings and aspects.

Prof. Susan Deacy in her book *What Would Hercules Do? Lessons for Autistic Children Using Classical Myth* continues this quest in many ways.<sup>3</sup> First, even

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<sup>3</sup> It is worth emphasizing that Prof. Deacy referenced Cicero’s *De officiis* during the Ciceronian Congress *Cicero, Society, and the Idea of Artes Liberales* that took place at the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw (organized jointly with the Société Internationale des Amis de Cicéron), in December 2019 (<http://www.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/en/cicero-congress>; all sites mentioned in this text were accessed on 15 July 2022, unless stated otherwise).

if her book is not a dialogue as such, it originates from several years of “dialogic experiences”, as we may call her involvement in building an inclusive milieu where the standpoints of all its members are heard and addressed in a positive way. A Professor of Classics and Disability Coordinator, linked to the University of Roehampton for nearly twenty years, she has created a hub of educational initiatives for undergraduate and PhD students with a particular emphasis on neurodivergence, which she embraced not as an obstacle to learning, but, on the contrary, as a power enabling neurodivergent students to look at the ancient heritage from a new angle, and she encouraged them to share this fresh insight with all.<sup>4</sup> The resulting reciprocal inspirations within her courses, groups, and among her trainees are another manifestation of her dialogic method at work. Prof. Deacy has also been appointed National Teaching Fellow and Advance Higher Education Principal Fellow and she has conducted numerous workshops for children at schools with autism bases. Her contacts with pupils, their teachers, parents, and tutors contributed further to enhancing the dialogic background of this book. If you lend an ear, you will hear the polyphony and discover an aural memory of their voices. Prof. Deacy follows them with utmost respect in developing a unique research approach that could be called the Humanities of Empathy – the future of our discipline.

Second, the main idea behind this book also brings us back to Cicero, for he understood that it is impossible to protect young people from the world by isolating them from challenges. Instead, he desired to offer them training – among other tools, through *De officiis* – so that, when called up by Nature, they could make their choices wisely, with a free mind, and with sensitivity to the world. Prof. Deacy focuses on autistic children,<sup>5</sup> but I have no doubt that all her readers, irrespective of their age and life situation, can profit from her reflections (inclusivity in practice!) and learn with Hercules how to cope with the path “per aspera ad astra” – “through hardships to the stars”.

Third, this hard path does not exclude pleasures along the way. For just as Cicero rejected the contradiction between *honestum* and *utile*, so Prof. Deacy observes that joys may, and even *must*, accompany hardships. The exercises

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<sup>4</sup> See Prof. Susan Deacy’s blog post “Roehampton Students on Classics and Neurodiversity: Poppy and Lucy!”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 11 July 2022, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2022/07/roehampton-students-on-classics-and.html>.

<sup>5</sup> This term is used in line with the autistic people’s self-definition; see, e.g., Amy Marschall, “Should You Say ‘Person with Autism’ or ‘Autistic Person?’”, *verywellmind*, 28 April 2022, <https://www.verywellmind.com/should-you-say-person-with-autism-or-autistic-person-5235429>, and CaptainQuirk, “The Autistic Not Weird Autism Survey”, *Autistic Not Weird*, 23 March 2022, <https://autisticnotweird.com/autismsurvey/>. I am grateful to Milena Pszczolińska for consultation.



contained in this book have been created by her upon this very premise: “docere, movere, delectare” – “to teach, to move, to delight”. We need quite a number of pleasures to continue recovering our strength and to cope with adversities in order to complete the quest and to make the impossible dream, so beautifully presented in Don Quixote’s song in the Broadway musical *Man of La Mancha* by Mitch Leigh and Joe Darion, indeed *possible* – despite all the odds (and despite some twists of Don Quixote’s story).

And we have hard evidence that dreams do come true: for instance, the mythical journey we started in 2013, after I had shared, via a mailing list managed by N.J. Lowe, a portion of the results of my cooperation with my colleagues and students within the Loeb Classical Library Foundation Grant for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Children’s Literature between East and West* (2012–2013). This was a catalogue of Polish literature for children and young adults inspired by Classical Antiquity.<sup>6</sup> It is meaningful that Prof. Deacy was attracted to that work – where the entries had been prepared by students performing their first research tasks in a scholarly community. We exchanged emails, and, with her typical empathy, Prof. Deacy also made me aware of the groundbreaking animations based on Greek vases by her University of Roehampton colleague Dr Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons, who together form the Panoply Vase Animation Project. Shortly after our first contact, all three joined our mythical team, and thus it is no coincidence that the present book contains a set of illustrations created by Steve K. Simons.

We accomplished an important stretch of our journey owing to the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives for the project *Chasing Mythical Beasts... The Reception of Creatures from Graeco-Roman Mythology in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture as a Transformation Marker* (2014–2017),<sup>7</sup> and immediately thereafter we took yet another, particularly challenging, path with the support from a European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception*

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<sup>6</sup> See Katarzyna Marciniak, Elżbieta Olechowska, Joanna Kłos, and Michał Kucharski, eds., *Polish Literature for Children & Young Adults Inspired by Classical Antiquity: A Catalogue*, Warsaw: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2013, available online: [https://obta.al.uw.edu.pl/omc\\_catalogue](https://obta.al.uw.edu.pl/omc_catalogue).

<sup>7</sup> See the project’s website: <http://mythicalbeasts.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/>, and the page of the joint (ERC and Humboldt projects) publication in Open Access: Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture*, “Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children’s and Young Adult Literature” 8, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020, [https://www.winter-verlag.de/en/detail/978-3-8253-7874-5/Marciniak\\_Ed\\_Chasing\\_Mythical\\_Beasts\\_PDF/](https://www.winter-verlag.de/en/detail/978-3-8253-7874-5/Marciniak_Ed_Chasing_Mythical_Beasts_PDF/).

of *Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* (2016–2022), which enabled us to develop our cooperation.<sup>8</sup> Prof. Deacy contributed with her years-long dream she indeed made possible, as her results within the project attest – namely, her research on classical mythology in the context of autism. She noticed an interesting paradox: mainly, that ancient myths have a seemingly fixed and, hence, reassuring nature and are at the same time endlessly flexible. Thus she decided to exploit their potential in the process of helping autistic children develop social understanding, social cognition, and affective engagement – all necessary to make life choices.<sup>9</sup>

Over the last couple of years, Prof. Deacy explored this field in depth, and elaborated several sets of materials (some of which were also presented “in real time” on her blog to enable their immediate use).<sup>10</sup> She also led workshops in the aforementioned schools in the United Kingdom and in the Polish café *Życie jest fajne* (Life Is Cool) – the only place in Warsaw where the staff is autistic. Last but not least, within the Cluster “The Past for the Present – International Research and Educational Programme”, she founded, together with our team member Prof. Lisa Maurice from Bar-Ilan University, the network ACCLAIM: Autism Connecting with CLAssically-Inspired Myth – a vibrant milieu of scholars and students ready for the quest to promote inclusive education. The polyphony and the dialogical method I have already indicated as typical of Prof. Deacy's book, contain also their voices, as well as the voices of all our friends and colleagues in *Our Mythical Community* from Universities all over the world. I wish to thank them for their kind engagement.

The ERC Consolidator Grant project has resulted in some specific tasks complementing each other, like the “Animating the Ancient World” contribution by Dr Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons;<sup>11</sup> Prof. Lisa Maurice's pioneering volume on the use of classical mythology in education,<sup>12</sup> as well as her and her

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<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., the project's website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/>.

<sup>9</sup> For all the stages of Prof. Deacy's research, see her blog, *Autism and Classical Myth*, established as early as 2009: <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>10</sup> For details, see, e.g., the “Autism and Mythology” section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-autism>.

<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., the “Animating the Ancient World” section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/animating-the-ancient-world>, and the Panoply Vase Animation Project website: <https://www.panoply.org.uk/>.

<sup>12</sup> For details, see, e.g., the “Our Mythical Education” section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-education>, and the volume in Open Access: Lisa Maurice, ed., *Our Mythical Education: The Reception of Classical Myth Worldwide in Formal Education, 1900–2020*, “Our Mythical Childhood”, Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2021, <https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.9788323546245>.

Bar-Ilan University colleague Dr Ayelet Peer's course for autistic children in Israel;<sup>13</sup> a guide through children's literature with classical references prepared by Prof. Elizabeth Hale and Dr Miriam Riverlea from the University of New England in Australia;<sup>14</sup> and the studies on African and Ancient Greek myths in a comparative approach by Prof. Daniel A. Nkemele, Prof. Divine Che Neba, and Prof. Eleanor Anneh Dasi from the University of Yaoundé 1 in Cameroon.<sup>15</sup> I am deeply grateful to all of them that we can make this mythical journey together. My gratitude also goes to the ERC Executive Agency staff and in particular to our project officers: Ms Sandrine Barreaux, who took amazing care of the grant at its first stage, and Ms Katia Menegon, who guided us with great dedication through the next stages, including the challenging period of the pandemic.

It is my honour and pleasure to also thank the reviewers – the theoretical experts and at the same time accomplished practitioners in the field of inclusive education: Dr Nicola Grove from the University of Kent and Prof. Nicola Martin from London South Bank University – for all their inspirational remarks.

I am full of gratitude, as always, to Prof. Jerzy Axer and Prof. Jan Kieniewicz from the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, for their faith in the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme ever since its very beginning.

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<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Lisa Maurice's lecture *Mythology in the Israeli Autistic Classroom* at the Israel Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies 2021: IsraelClassicStudies, "ISPCS 2021 Session 2 Lisa Maurice", YouTube, 7 June 2021, <https://youtu.be/w98T4ifofTA>.

<sup>14</sup> Elizabeth Hale and Miriam Riverlea, illustrations by Steve K. Simons, *Classical Mythology and Children's Literature... An Alphabetical Odyssey*, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.9788323557296>.

<sup>15</sup> For details, see, e.g., the "Myths from Cameroon" section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myths-from-cameroon>.

Andersen. Last but not least, a particular expression of gratitude goes to Ms Marta Pszczolińska, who attentively read the first proofs and checked the classical references, and to Ms Olga Strycharczyk, who helped edit the bibliography and the list of figures – *gratias ago!*

Despite the most intensive research from the very beginning of the project, Prof. Deacy's book is its unexpected result, in that we had not planned it in the grant's "Description of Action". This book was one of those seemingly impossible (and even unspoken) dreams we all have as researchers and as people, working on which we have taken "a special liking" ("quod maxime adamavimus"). And yet it came into being, and in a natural way, to evoke Cicero's vision of Nature calling in the context of Hercules' Choice.

One of the impulses that made us aware of the necessity to publish Prof. Deacy's exercises in book form, was of course the Covid-19 pandemic, which – especially in its first year – made the development of inclusive education particularly difficult. There is also the issue of "the Humanities at the Crossroads" – a global discussion around why we need or (a sadly more frequent formula<sup>16</sup>) why we do not need "those branches of knowledge" that educate young people "for maintaining a healthy democracy, for fostering a deeper understanding of human concerns and values, and for enabling students to rise above parochial perspectives and 'the bondage of habit and custom' to become genuine citizens of the world".<sup>17</sup> As this would be a theme for a much too long chapter – so, if the above definition (based on Martha Nussbaum's oeuvre) from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* is not enough as the answer in itself, I will put it briefly for the time being. We need the Humanities to have such results as Prof. Susan Deacy's *What Would Hercules Do? Lessons for Autistic Children Using Classical Myth*. The results that support the quests of many parents and tutors who try to reach with their children for the unreachable star – no matter how far their aim is and no matter how weary their arms are. And this is not a Quixotism detached from reality. Quite the reverse, "the world will be better for this", as the lyrics of "The Impossible Dream (The Quest)" go and as so many people affected by various kinds of rejection along with their near and dear could tell you.

To make the world a better place is also something "in accord with Nature", to quote Cicero again – "est secundum naturam". For even if he was sceptical

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<sup>16</sup> Prof. Deacy experienced it personally in the last stage of her work on this book; see her article "Roehampton Staff Are Fighting for the Future of Education", *Tribune*, 16 July 2022, <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2022/06/fighting-for-higher-education-university-cuts>.

<sup>17</sup> See the entry "humanities/scholarship" at *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/humanities>.

about the chances of us mortals, not demigods, meeting Pleasure and Virtue in their divine persons, he was certain that our natural choice is "to emulate the great Hercules and undergo the greatest toil and trouble for the sake of aiding or saving the world, if possible" ("pro omnibus gentibus, si fieri possit, conservandis aut iuvandis, maximos labores molestiasque suscipere imitantem Herculem"; Cic., *Off.* 3.25).

So what at first appeared to be a pile of paradoxes, we can now see as a deeply wise order of Nature – "rerum Naturae": "it is in the years of early youth, when our judgment is most immature, that each of us decides that his calling in life shall be that to which he has taken a special liking". Nature makes us choose in the period when indeed our *logos* is not the sharpest (for the obvious reason: it is not fully developed for the lack of experience), but when our heart is strong (maybe even the strongest with the child-like naivety in the best meaning of the term) – "quod maxime adamavit". This is not a coincidence that Cicero uses the verb "adamare" here, with the root in the word "love" – "amor". Indeed, one needs a lot of passion to "undergo the greatest toil and trouble for the sake of aiding or saving the world".

Cicero mentions also the reward – once again with a certain distance by hiding himself behind the common version of Hercules' myth: "out of gratitude for his services, popular belief has given him a place in the council of the gods" ("hominum fama beneficiorum memor in concilio caelestium collocavit"; Cic., *Off.* 3.25), among the stars, as expressed symbolically also on the book cover of the present publication. Let us notice that this time, despite his slight scepticism, Cicero does not joke that such an award is the lot only of demigods. It may also be human – in terms of grateful memory that builds a whole constellation, where each star is a reminiscence of the people who have inspired us: parents, teachers, friends, well-known (or known only to us) authorities, etc. We need the stars to brighten the way. For not only the aim, but also the path we choose matters. And in the end the initially impossible dream can prove to be quite possible after all, as this very book testifies. May it be one of the guiding stars for you, Our Mythical Reader, on your quest.

Warsaw, July 2022

## NOTE ON THE AUTHOR

Susan Deacy is a classicist who specializes in Ancient Greek religion, mythology, history, gender and sexuality, and in the experiential applications of classical mythology. Her books include *Athena* (Routledge, 2008) and the co-edited volumes *Rape in Antiquity* (with Karen F. Pierce; Duckworth/Classical Press of Wales, 1997, 2002) and *Athena in the Classical World* (with Alexandra Villing; Brill, 2001), and she is the Series Editor of "Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World" (Routledge, 2005–present). She has developed distinctive research relating Classics to diversity, learning differences, and inclusivity, including authoring an equality and diversity toolkit for the Higher Education Academy in the UK and co-founding the network ACCLAIM: Autism Connecting with CLAssically-Inspired Myth.

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## NOTE ON THE ILLUSTRATOR

Steve K. Simons is an animator and graphic artist. He specializes in creating animations from ancient artefacts and is the co-creator of the Panoply Vase Animation Project ([www.panoply.org.uk](http://www.panoply.org.uk)), with Dr Sonya Nevin. He has worked with collections including the University of Oxford's Ashmolean Museum, the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology at the University of Reading, and the Classical Museum at University College Dublin. For "Animating the Ancient World" within *Our Mythical Childhood*, Steve has created five vase animations from the collection at the National Museum in Warsaw, a series of short documentaries, and activity sheets featuring illustrations of artefacts. His other materials created for *Our Mythical Childhood* have included illustrations and the animation for the autism and mythology part of the project and the illustrations for Elizabeth Hale and Miriam Riverlea's *Classical Mythology and Children's Literature... An Alphabetical Odyssey*. He is also a contributor to Prof. Véronique Dasen's ERC project *Locus Ludi*, creating animations of frescos, vases, and relief sculptures. He illustrated *The Idea of Marathon: Battle and Culture* by Dr Sonya Nevin (Bloomsbury, 2022), creating maps and drawings of Greek and Persian artefacts. Steve is a member of the Cluster "The Past for the Present – International Research and Educational Programme" and is in partnership with the University of Cambridge's Cambridge School Classics Project. He lives in Cambridge in the UK.





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## FOREWORD AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – OR, ON REACHING A FORK AND TAKING IT

The late baseball player and coach Yogi Berra is known for his wisdom. His was a sideways wisdom, one worthy of the Ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, where impossibilities exist in one another. As Berra once said, “when you come to a fork in the road, take it”.<sup>1</sup>

This book is concerned with a scenario that might seem to involve a different kind of perspective about what to do on reaching a fork in the road, namely to choose just one path and then stick to it – consistently and for always. But, in fact, the path taken in the scenario in question is not clear. The pathfinder, the Ancient Greek hero – and/or god – Hercules, took one path. He took the other path too. In short, as though a pre-echo of Yogi Berra, he came to a fork, and took it.

On one way of reading what happened at the fork, Hercules’s choice was made without much deliberation. Alternatively, the process of choosing leaves him caught in indecision and even in impending meltdown. For this reason, and more, Hercules and his choice are the focus of this book presenting lessons for autistic young people.

When I was running a session for autistic children and their families – held online in 2020 while the world was in the midst of the Covid pandemic – I asked the participants to consider what Hercules might be experiencing at his crossroads. “He is thinking of something”, one participant suggested. Another suggested, meanwhile: “He doesn’t know what is going on”. It is just such a confused Hercules, and just such a bewildered Hercules, that this book presents. It is a Hercules that – I propose – can serve as a prism through which to explore being autistic and in particular being an autistic young person – who might have intense interests, who might experience strong emotions, or who might find routines comforting and change unpleasant.

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<sup>1</sup> Yogi Berra, *The Yogi Book: I Really Didn't Say Everything I Said*, New York, NY: Workman Books, 2010, 48.

It is a book that has come out of several paths including my own childhood as someone who, around the age of ten, developed an intense interest in classical myth the moment I opened Roger Lancelyn Green's *Tales of the Greek Heroes*.<sup>2</sup> It had taken me a while to open the book. Curious though I was about its cover, depicting a young man preparing to club a leaping lion, I had no clue who or what "the Greek Heroes" might be and was nervous about what might be inside. But once I had finished the remaining school stories (Enid Blyton, Angela Brazil...) on my shelf, I started reading it and was immediately engrossed in the strange world I discovered there.

When this new interest matched up with my existing interest in astronomy, my quest to delve into the world of Greek myth deepened still. This was thanks to a book my Grandfather bought for me at a library sale: *Legends of the Stars* by the astronomer and television presenter and, it turned out, mythographer, Patrick Moore.<sup>3</sup>

Nearly thirty years on, still wandering the paths of classical mythology, I heard something from a special needs teacher that led me to begin the project – tentatively at first, and from 2016 onwards in earnest – that has generated the present book. On hearing that I was a classicist who works especially on classical mythology, the teacher mentioned something that she and her colleagues had been struck by, namely that autistic children often love myth. I began to wonder why, and also to wonder whether I could turn my own love of myth towards an experiential application of classical myth for autistic children. I began the blog *Autism and Classical Myth* (<https://myth-autism.blogspot.com>) to share my initial tentative ideas and, encouraged by feedback, including from practitioners, such as dramatherapists and teachers, I spent several years building up my knowledge about autism while contemplating which aspects of classical mythology to focus on.<sup>4</sup> During this time I even, as a disability coordinator

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<sup>2</sup> Roger Lancelyn Green, *Tales of the Greek Heroes: Retold from the Ancient Authors*, ill. Betty Middleton-Sandford, Harmondsworth: Puffin Books, 1958.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Moore, *Legends of the Stars*, ill. Mike Codd and Richard Hook, London, New York, NY, Sydney, and Toronto: Hamlyn, 1973 (ed. pr. 1966).

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Susan Deacy, "Classical Myth and World Autism Awareness Day", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 2 April 2015, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2015/04/classical-myth-and-world-autism.html> (accessed 14 July 2022), with further reflections on the potential for a focus on Perseus, Medusa, and Athena; and Susan Deacy, "Autism, Asperger Syndrome, Perseus and Athena", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 23 March 2011, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2011/03/autism-asperger-syndrome-perseus-and.html> (accessed 14 July 2022), on the potential for a focus on Perseus, Medusa, Athena, and Jason.

at my university, led workshops, and organized training on supporting autistic students.<sup>5</sup>

Then, one day while I was checking emails in 2013, I saw a notice on an email list for classicists about a project looking at twentieth- and twenty-first-century Polish literature through the prism of children's engagement with Classical Antiquity. The project looked so intriguing and innovative that I wrote to its director, Katarzyna Marciniak of the University of Warsaw, whom I did not then know, to express my enthusiasm. I shall say something later about how much a presence – an inspirational and hope-inspiring presence – Katarzyna has been ever since that initial contact. For now, I shall highlight the thing that grew out of that first contact that has led to this specific book, though really everything about that first contact and subsequent collaboration has inspired and enabled the book.

As we began discussing our mutual interest in Classics and children's culture, we started contemplating a possible collaboration and one that could reach across disciplines, involving academics and practitioners, and children. Together, we became involved in a funding bid for the most ambitious project I had been involved in, along with academics in Australia, Cameroon, and Israel. We developed an application to the European Research Council, to fund the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*. This project would encompass such areas as myth in school curricula, Classics in works of children's culture, myths from Cameroon, vase animations – and, this being where the growing, but still tentative project I was planning came in – classical myth in autistic children's culture. As we were developing the bid, we were advised that the project was so ambitious that it might be a long shot, but – perhaps precisely because it was so ambitious – we won the funding. I remember the feeling of excitement combined with a bit of dread at the moment of finding out that the dream of making an experiential application of classical research for autistic children had become very real, with set deadlines stretching over a period of five (and as it turned out six; see below) years.

My plan had initially been to develop three sets of activities, and to make these available via my blog as part of ongoing blogging about my progress. I embraced this opportunity to provide immediate dissemination of my progress

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<sup>5</sup> E.g., Susan Deacy, "Making Learning Happen for a Student with Asperger Syndrome", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 17 April 2019, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2009/04/making-learning-happen-for-student-with.html> (accessed 14 July 2022).

rather than, as is the norm in academia, to build to a final product of an article, book chapter, or monograph. Initially I had planned to develop sets of lessons based on three particular mythological characters, starting with Hercules, then moving potentially to Medusa and then to another choice-maker: Pandora. But the more I investigated the potential of Hercules as a focus for the lessons, the more I zoned in on this figure, eventually deciding to concentrate on a particular artwork, one that had been close to me – including literally close – since, soon after joining the University of Roehampton in 2004, I was in a health and safety training session for new staff in the Adam Room in Grove House, an eighteenth-century villa on the Froebel campus.

At that time, I was completing a book chapter on this figure, looking especially at how far opposites cohere and collide but perhaps are dissolved around his persona and his interactions with others.<sup>6</sup> During the session, I realized, to my surprise, that I was sitting in front of a chimneypiece panel depicting just such a contradictory Hercules, one caught between two extremes of, on the one hand, Virtue and, on the other, Vice – or, as I came to discover, Pleasure. In the years that followed, I began finding out about the panel, and it provided a route for me into classical reception and into how, specifically, the eighteenth century repurposed the contradictions that cohere and collide around Hercules to resonate with what it was to negotiate a changing, industrializing society and to seek a suitable balance between the “virtues” of hard work and the “pleasures” or “vices” of leisure. I presented my research on the panel at several seminars and conferences while using the panel, its surrounding chimneypiece, and the Adam Room and Grove House – and Georgian Roehampton more broadly – as a means for students not just to study on a historical campus but to use the campus’s artefacts as a learning opportunity.<sup>7</sup>

During this time, I embraced any opportunity to incorporate the panel into the various aspects of my practice. For example, Hercules’ interaction with two people, each of whom are seeking to persuade him to follow a particular course of action, was used as a discussion point at a workshop in the Adam Room on combatting bullying and harassment which I co-organized with my Roehampton

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Deacy, “Herakles and His ‘Girl’: Athena, Heroism and Beyond”, in Louis Rawlings and Hugh Bowden, eds., *Herakles and Hercules: Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity*, Swansea and London: Classical Press of Wales, 2005, 37–50.

<sup>7</sup> Classics Confidential, “Hercules Transplanted to a Georgian House, with Susan Deacy”, YouTube, 22 July 2014, <https://youtu.be/4TZemDOjbu4> (accessed 30 June 2022).

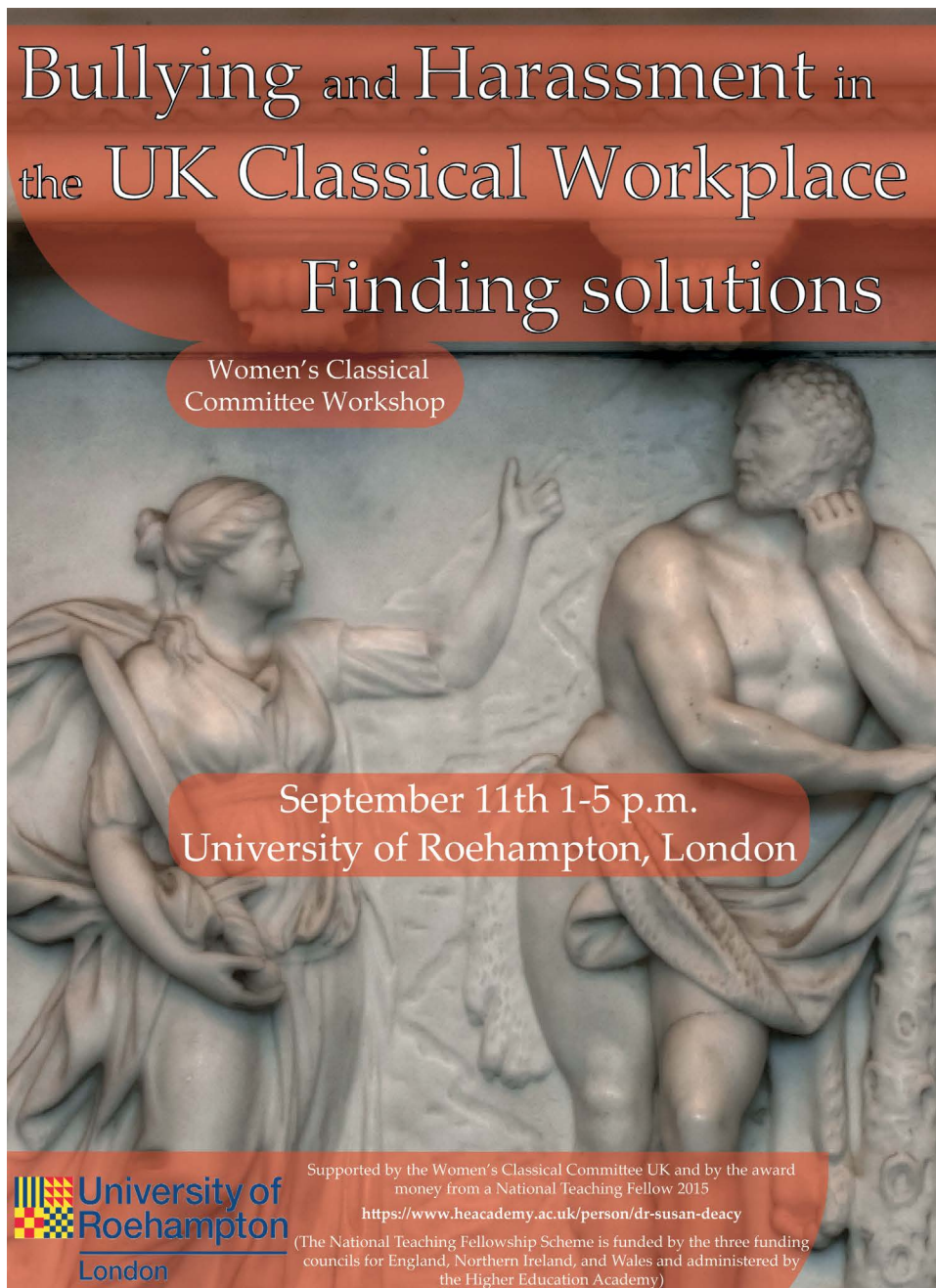


**Figure 2:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, photograph by Marina Arcady. Used with kind permission.

colleague Fiona McHardy.<sup>8</sup> Another session in the Adam Room, this time with young women from London schools who were on campus to take part in activities put on by the Humanities Department at Roehampton in 2016, showed just how far the panel could resonate with younger viewers too. As a classicist, and one interested in Hercules at that, my eye had always been drawn to the man in the middle, to Hercules. But the gaze of the girls, none of whom had any background in studying Classics, was drawn instead to the two women, especially to how each was making a play for the man between them. When I gave some of the mythological background, the girls became especially interested in the topic of choice-making, with one going so far as to comment in her

<sup>8</sup> See Susan Deacy, "Event Report: Bullying and Harassment in UK Classics Departments. Finding Solutions", *Women's Classical Committee United Kingdom*, 16 October 2017, <https://wcc-uk.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2017/10/16/event-report-bullying-and-harassment-in-uk-classics-departments-finding-solutions/> (accessed 13 July 2022).





**Figure 3:** Poster from the 2017 event *Bullying and Harassment in the UK Classical Workplace: Finding Solutions*, created by José Magalhães using a photograph of the *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, by Susan Deacy. Used with kind permission.

evaluation form that the Adam Room Hercules had stimulated her to think about choices she would go on to make in life.<sup>9</sup>

Fuelled by these experiences, above all those with the girls in 2016, the idea – tentative at first – to centre a series of lessons around the panel began to take root. I drafted an initial set of lessons as summarized in Chapter 6 of this book in 2018. I also ran a consultation session with autism researchers and practitioners that year, including Nick Hodge, Professor of Inclusive Practice and a Co-Director of the Sheffield Hallam Autism Research Partnership (SHARP), the autistic author and academic Damian Milton, who has been instrumental in the development of the “double empathy” theory of autism discussed in this book, and Nicola Grove and Rita Jordan, two of the authors whose work had been informing and inspiring my own practice.<sup>10</sup>

It was at this event that I became further confirmed in my thinking that Hercules could resonate with being autistic. This was when the participants quizzed me on why I was developing lessons based on classical myth, and Hercules in particular, beyond the fact that I myself am enthusiastic about these topics. Would other sets of stories do just as well, they asked, for example those



**Figure 4:** The author in the Adam Room in Grove House at the University of Roehampton in 2016 discussing the *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel with Year 10 (aged fourteen to fifteen) students from schools in London, photograph by Rhianwen Deacy. Used with kind permission.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Deacy, “How Children Teach Us about Classics”, *Antipodean Odyssey*, 26 December 2017, <https://antipodeanodyssey.wordpress.com/2017/12/26/how-children-teach-us-about-classics/> (accessed 13 July 2022).

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., (on Nicola Grove) Susan Deacy, “*Odyssey NOW* – and *The Greatest Hero of Them All* in Autistic Perspective”, *Autism ad Classical Myth*, 6 February 2017, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2017/02/odyssey-now-and-greatest-hero-of-them.html> (accessed 13 July 2022); and (on Rita Jordan) Susan Deacy, “Autism & Mythology: Learning Good Practice”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 1 November 2016, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2016/11/autism-mythology-and-learning-good.html> (accessed 13 July 2022).

about Winnie the Pooh? My answer was along the following lines. I described Hercules as one who is at home in the wilds – his own space – where he is capable of things that others cannot manage. I summarized how he needs to learn the rules of each new scenario he experiences. I explained how while when he is in the wilds, he invariably manages to overcome obstacles, when he gets to civilization, something goes wrong, often terribly wrong. The response of one of the participants, the autistic academic Damian Milton, was: “That sounds like being autistic”.<sup>11</sup>

After that, I began honing the lessons, while trialling them, and reporting my progress at various events, including online events during the Covid pandemic. These are reported in my blog and on the website for an initiative that has grown out of the *Our Mythical Childhood* project, namely, ACCLAIM (Autism Connecting with CLAssically-Inspired Myth), a network launched by Lisa Maurice and myself in 2019, within the Cluster “The Past for the Present”, for anyone interested in where classical mythology meets autism, and vice versa.<sup>12</sup> Connecting as it does mythologically leaning autistic people and allies, the ACCLAIM network exemplifies a feature of my progress towards the present book that I would now like to run with: namely that it has taken place in the company of others.

Working among colleagues in the *Our Mythical Childhood* project has been thrilling as we have strived together to expand the frontiers of research across several disciplines and across the world while also managing to expand our own horizons including in ways we did not imagine when we embarked on our shared journey. Of these colleagues, Katarzyna Marciniak’s blend of vision, positivity – sometimes in the face of what has felt like Herculean odds – rigour, humour, and efficiency has supported and inspired my progress at each turn. It was Katarzyna, indeed, who saw the potential for this present book, to augment the planned dissemination of my research on my blog.

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted with the kind permission of Damian Milton. On the event, see, further, Susan Deacy, “Autism and Classical Myth: Prof. Susan Deacy (Roehampton) Reports on a Public Engagement Project Supported by the ICS”, *Institute of Classical Studies*, 9 May 2019, <https://ics.blogs.sas.ac.uk/2019/05/09/autism-and-classical-myth/> (accessed 2 August 2022).

<sup>12</sup> See Susan Deacy, “ACCLAIM: Autism Connecting with CLAssically Inspired Myth – Revealing a Mythical Surprise”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 25 May 2019, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2019/05/acclaim-autism-connecting-with.html> (accessed 15 July 2022). The ACCLAIM site also includes Adam Soylar’s interview with me about my practice: Adam Soylar, “ACCLAIM Interviews: Prof. Susan Deacy”, *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* [Project’s website], <http://www.omic.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/interview-susan-deacy> (accessed 20 July 2022).

Other *Our Mythical Childhood* colleagues have been constant sources of support, including in ways that have directly impacted on the current book, among them Robin Diver, Anwen Hayward, Lisa Maurice, Dorota Mackenzie, Anna Mik, Ayelet Peer, Elżbieta Olechowska, Edoardo Pecchini, Daniel A. Nkemele, Sonya Nevin, Danielle Shalet, Steve K. Simons, Hanna Paulouskaya and Elizabeth Hale. For example, the skills of the artist and animator Steve K. Simons have been turned to the creation of the high-quality vector drawings in this book as well as the animations of the *Choice of Hercules* panel which are used in two of the lessons (8 and 9). Also, the initial prompt for the lesson involving paper fortune tellers was inspired by a workshop led by Elizabeth Hale at one of the project gatherings in Warsaw. Meanwhile, Edoardo Pecchini's use of Hercules in his psychiatry practice has let me recognize further the potential for Hercules to resonate with contemporary people's experiences.<sup>13</sup> And, in an example of the cooperation fostered by the project, after reading the initial set of lessons I created in 2018, Lisa Maurice and Ayelet Peer teamed up with an autism specialist in Israel to create a series of myth-based games for autistic children. The leading themes of these games, centred around specific facets of autism, inspired me, in turn, to sharpen the focus of the lessons for the present book around particular dimensions of autism.<sup>14</sup>

In addition, I would like to offer my very warm thanks to the students at Roehampton University who took part in autism and myth workshops over several years, and to those who did work experience with the ACCLAIM network and the *Our Mythical Childhood* project: Amber Cann, Lucy Head, Harry Rao, Poppy Robbins, Erika Ruminaitė, and Adam Soyler. I would also like to thank the many current and past colleagues at Roehampton who encouraged the work that has led to this book, among them: Anna Seymour (Professor of Dramatherapy), Adam Ockelford (Professor of Music and Director of the Applied Music Research Centre), and the archivist and heritage officer Gilly King, whose knowledge about the history and heritage of the University and its college is unrivalled. My thanks, too, to the classicist and former Research Facilitator for Humanities at Roehampton, Helen Slaney, including for the camaraderie she provided

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<sup>13</sup> Edoardo Pecchini, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Hope: The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults Culture*, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, 2021, 275–325.

<sup>14</sup> See Manchester Classical Association, "S Deacy & L Maurice Hercules & Classical Myths for Autistic Children ACCLAIM Autism and Myth", YouTube, 11 August 2021, <https://youtu.be/RIuLX-q3M6Jk> (accessed 27 July 2022).



**Figure 5:** The *Our Mythical Childhood* community gathered under Hercules on the stairwell of Tyszkiewicz-Potocki Palace, University of Warsaw, May 2017, photograph by Mirosław Kaźmierczak. Used with kind permission.

during the event for practitioners and experts mentioned earlier in this Foreword as I presented my still-nascent experiential applications. In turn, I would like to thank those who took part in that event: Chris Goodey, Nicola Grove, Nick Hodge, Rita Jordan, Nicola Martin, Damian Milton, and Marion Leeper. The project has never been the same since. I am deeply grateful, too, to Effrosyni Kostara for her work as Research Assistant for two periods, in 2018 and then 2022. Effrosyni's insights as a classical philologist and inclusive education practitioner have been invaluable, and continue to be at the time of writing, as we plan a range of activities for museums, gardens, and heritage sites which are growing out of the present book.

My very warm thanks, too, to the funding bodies who have made this book possible and/or enriched its contents. It is due to the European Research Council's funding for *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* (originally for 2016–2021, then extended for a further year in response to the challenges posed by the Covid pandemic) that I have been able to develop the real-world applications of classical myth presented in this book. The Institute of Classical Studies at the University of London funded the event for external partners mentioned above with a public engagement grant. The University of Roehampton funded the 2018 Research Assistantship of Effrosyni Kostara. Steve K. Simons's animation of Hercules choosing was enabled by funds from the award accompanying my 2015 National Teaching Fellowship from the Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE).

The final version of the book has been informed by the incisive encouragement in the reports of the two peer reviewers of the penultimate version: the Professor of Social Justice and Inclusive Education Nicola Martin and the learning disabilities specialist and author Nicola Grove. I have prepared the book with wonderful support at Warsaw: from Katarzyna and her colleagues at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales" and at the University of Warsaw Press, including Maria Makarewicz, Ewa Balcerzyk-Atys, Marta Pszczolińska, and Olga Strycharczyk.

Finally, I extend my deep thanks to everyone who has been involved in sessions trialling lessons in this book: to the teachers and classroom assistants and to the students – each "star".

And so – to the book: to stars, to constellations, and, first, to a quiet place and what happened there...

London, July 2022 – with some amendments,  
Guildford, June 2023

## **Update to the Acknowledgements**

As I was working through the proofs of this book, I sent them to two colleagues in the *Our Mythical Childhood* community and ACCLAIM network: Robin Diver and Anwen Hayward. The feedback from Robin and Anwen, as neurodivergent classicists specializing in classical myth in children's culture, has been deeply valuable including as they look back to their own childhoods prompted by some of the things in the manuscript.

Anwen comments, for example, on the usefulness of turning “the focus on approaching autism away from ‘deficit models’” and of the focus in the book on the choice between Hard Work and Pleasure “which doesn’t have an obviously ‘right’ answer, which is the sort of decision-making that a lot of autistic people find most difficult”.

Robin comments meanwhile:

A lot of these lessons would have been really helpful to me as a neurodivergent child, even as one with a different diagnosis.

In particular, when I was in school, neurodivergent behaviours were never discussed or explored like in your lesson plans, you were just told they’re bad with no explanation. I’ve discussed this with neurodivergent friends in adulthood, that it was upsetting and confusing being told off for being enthusiastic in class with no explanation when we thought we were contributing or being helpful. We now realise in some cases we were probably making it hard for other kids to get a word in edgeways or contribute or concentrate, but that was never explained so we were just always confused.

I love phrases like: “Just as he could perform tasks better than anyone else, he could sing louder than anyone else and eat and drink more than anyone else” [p. 119, in the current book]. To me, one of the dominant feelings of being a neurodivergent child was that everything I did, whether happy or sad, learning or having fun, was seen as just too much, too loud, too intense for my school, so I think I would have identified with this, and the advantages but also issues of being like this would have been a really good discussion.

[Responding to Lesson 2] I didn’t even know I had issues with arriving at new places and adjusting to the new sensory environment until I was an adult, it was never presented to me as something people \*could\* have issues with, so discussing that in classrooms would have been a huge step forward!

As noted in the relevant places below, I have also made some final adjustments to the manuscript based on the feedback from Anwen and Robin.

Bristol and Leicester, August 2023



# CHAPTER 1

## Introduction







## INTRODUCTION

One day, according to the *Memorabilia of Socrates* by the Ancient Greek author Xenophon, the hero Hercules “went out to a quiet place and sat, pondering” (2.1.21).<sup>1</sup> This book is concerned with what happened there and how and why it can “speak” to autistic children. The book presents a set of ten lessons (plus a preliminary one), each dealing with:

- ★ an aspect of what happened when Hercules entered the quiet place, met two women (or goddesses..., or personifications...) and was tasked to make a choice between two paths, literal and metaphorical;
- ★ particular dimensions of autism, including communicating, emotions, decision-making, sensory experiences, planning, and interests.

### Who the Book Is For

The book is primarily for two sets of readers:

- ★ professionals and practitioners looking to utilize the appeal of mythology in their work with autistic children;
- ★ academics in areas such as education, Classics, and literature interested in the experiential application of their subject.

The lessons are designed primarily with autistic children in mind:

- ★ The main piloting has been done with children aged between seven and eleven (at Key Stage 2 in England in the UK) in the Autism Base of a London primary school.
- ★ The activities have been piloted, too – with success! – with older children. They have been workshopped with autistic adults where they have resonated with participants’ experiences, for example around decision-making and sensory experiences. Furthermore, the degree of engagement of a child aged

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<sup>1</sup> Translation by Susan Deacy.

six at a session adapting the Lesson 3 in this book at an eighteenth-century garden temple suggests potential for younger children too.<sup>2</sup>

The reasons for the focus on children stems from:

- ★ what first stimulated me to contemplate myth-based activities for autistic children as explained in this book's Foreword (in short: hearing from a special needs teacher that autistic children often enjoy learning about myth);
- ★ my role in the European Research Council-funded project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* (2016–2022) investigating Classics in autistic children's culture.

## Goals

The book provides:

- ★ fresh ways for teachers and other practitioners to engage autistic children;
- ★ a demonstration of the appeal of mythological figures for autistic children;
- ★ explorations of the role classical myth can play in facilitating communication and engagement for autistic children, by utilizing the characters of myth as "gateways" to understanding, identifying, contextualizing, and conceptualizing oneself and others.

The lessons explore particular themes, each of which resonates with autistic experiences, such as:

- ★ emotions;
- ★ arriving in new places;
- ★ routine changes;
- ★ decision-making;
- ★ sensory experiences;
- ★ communicating with others, including starting and maintaining conversations;
- ★ planning;

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<sup>2</sup> See Susan Deacy, "Finding a Hidden Temple and a God of Fast Speed with the Youth Education Programme Proud Places", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 4 July 2022, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2022/07/finding-hidden-temple-and-god-of-fast.html> (accessed 4 July 2022).

- ★ causality;
- ★ fantasy worlds;
- ★ problem-solving.

They provide opportunities for children to explore topics including:

- ★ encountering new things;
- ★ feelings generated by particular experiences;
- ★ feelings aroused when meeting a new person;
- ★ what it can be like to talk with other people;
- ★ sources of hardship and enjoyment;
- ★ experiences of making choices;
- ★ actions and how they impact on the future;
- ★ interests;
- ★ what can be learnt from stories, including self-authored ones.

## **Distinctiveness of the Book**

The book offers a programme of lessons grounded in:

- ★ current thinking about autism and neurodiversity, including “double empathy” theory,<sup>3</sup> the reimagining of autism as a “constellation” rather than a “spectrum”,<sup>4</sup> and the departure from deficit models for autism;<sup>5</sup>
- ★ research by the author into:
  - 📖 classical mythology, including into Hercules<sup>6</sup> and figures linked with Hercules, such as Athena,<sup>7</sup> and the Hydra;<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., Damian Milton, *A Mismatch of Salience: Explorations of the Nature of Autism from Theory to Practice*, Hove: Pavilion, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> E.g., Sue Fletcher-Watson and Francesca Happé, *Autism: A New Introduction to Psychological Theory and Current Debate*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019, 40.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Nick Chown, and Anna Stenning, eds., *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Susan Deacy, “Herakles and His ‘Girl’”; Susan Deacy, “Heracles between Hera and Athena”, in Daniel Ogden, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Heracles*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 387–394.

<sup>7</sup> Susan Deacy, *Athena*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.

<sup>8</sup> Susan Deacy, “Down the Sink Hole: The Lernean Hydra”, in Debbie Felton, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Monsters in Classical Myth*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

- ▣ classical myth and children's culture;<sup>9</sup>
- ▣ autism and classical myth;<sup>10</sup>
- ▣ the potential for a "monstrous" pedagogy.<sup>11</sup>

## Evidence Base

- ★ The programme of lessons is anchored in current research into autism, neurodiversity, and classical mythology, as detailed above.
- ★ The development of the lessons has been informed by piloting and workshoping sessions described in Chapter 6 and on the ACCLAIM pages of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website at <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim>.

## Format

Each of the lessons seeks to open the world of Hercules and the adventures he experiences and also the landscape where, on resting, he meets the two women and is tasked to choose between two possible routes in life. The exploits of Hercules are played out in relation to particular dimensions of autism. Conversely, particular dimensions of autism are explored through the lens of Hercules and those with whom he interacts:

- ★ Each lesson balances opportunities for engaging with the imaginative potential of myth with a clear structure based around five lesson steps building from an introduction, likely to be teacher-led, to creative activities, and, from there, to opportunities for the students to reflect on particular topics.

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<sup>9</sup> E.g., Susan Deacy, "'From the Shadows': Goddess, Monster, and Girl Power in Richard Woff's *Bright-Eyed Athena in the Stories of Ancient Greece*", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 8, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020, 177–195.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Susan Deacy, "Autism and Classical Myth: Choosing with the Froebel College Hercules", *Primary Schools Partnership* June (2020), 14–16; Susan Deacy, "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Hope: The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults Culture*, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, 2021, 251–274.

<sup>11</sup> Susan Deacy, "It's All Greek to Me... Why Every Jack Needs a Giant", poster for *Heroes and Monsters: Extraordinary Tales of Learning and Teaching in the Arts and Humanities*, Manchester, 2–4 June 2014, <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/knowledge-hub/its-all-greek-me-why-every-jack-needs-giant> (accessed 25 November 2022).

- ★ Each lesson comes with guidance notes providing information about the particular aspect of Hercules and classical myth with which the lesson is concerned and an explanation of the goals of each session.

The lessons can be done individually, or as a set:

- ★ If done as a set, they are designed to offer an immersive approach into classical myth which builds from introducing Hercules to entering the new place to the meeting with two strangers, to being tasked with making a choice, then making that choice and dealing with the implications of that choice. They can be carried out weekly, although they could take place daily, for instance during a summer-school programme, or even over a single “myth study day”, with each lesson designed to last between 45 and 90 minutes.
- ★ If time, or space, in the curriculum is restricted, or if teachers would like to focus on specific issues relevant to autistic experiences, the lessons can be done as stand-alone sessions or in an order that would meet the specific interests or needs of the students.

## **The Name of the Hero: Hercules**

The lessons use the Roman name Hercules rather than the Ancient Greek name of Herakles or Heracles (Ἡρακλῆς). “Hercules” is the name by which the figure tends to be known in works for children and in other postclassical receptions, including those from the eighteenth century, when the artwork on which the activities are based was created.

## **Setting**

The lessons are designed to be carried out in the familiar space of the classroom.

## **Adaptations**

With their focus on mythological artefacts and on experiencing aspects of nature, the lessons can be adapted for sites such as museums, gardens, and heritage sites:

- ★ At the time of writing, groundwork has been done into the potential for extending the lessons to museums (in the UK and Greece), gardens, villas, country houses, and an eighteenth-century garden temple.
- ★ Ongoing and future adaptations will be reported via the ACCLAIM pages of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website at <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim>.

## Materials

The materials for the lessons comprise:

- ★ a selection of drawings of Hercules based on ancient and modern artworks which can be printed or copied on A4 or US Letter-size sheets of paper (although the drawings can also be used via electronic devices, such as tablets);
- ★ where hard-copy versions of the drawings are used: writing/colouring implements, such as pencils, crayons, or felt-tips;
- ★ for some lessons: scissors and glue sticks;
- ★ for some lessons: emojis (see below);
- ★ for two of the lessons: an animation of Hercules choosing, created by Steve K. Simons, with music for the lyre composed and performed by Alikí Markantonatou;
- ★ an “amphora” or “urn” as explained in Chapter 5.

## The Drawings

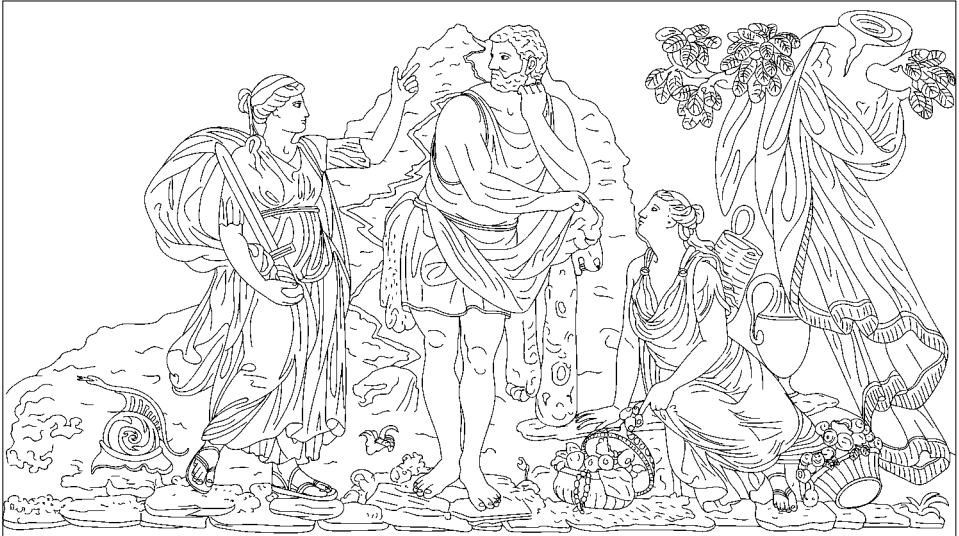
The lessons make use of a series of drawings by Steve K. Simons:

- ★ of the *Choice of Hercules* panel as a whole, and of its various details;
- ★ of other depictions of Hercules drawn from Ancient Greek vase paintings and from a neoclassical statue.

Steve has created two versions of certain of the drawings: namely, the scene as a whole (Figs. 6 and 7), of the figure of Hercules (Figs. 8 and 9), and of the figure of Pleasure (Figs. 10 and 11). This has been done to add clothing to Hercules and to Pleasure in case the more unclothed versions are unsuitable for children. It is the clothed versions (Figs. 7, 9, and 11) that are to be used in the lessons.



**Figure 6:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.



**Figure 7:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added to the figures of Hercules and Pleasure.





**Figure 8:** Detail of Hercules from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.



**Figure 9:** Detail of Hercules from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added.



**Figure 10:** Detail of Pleasure from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.



**Figure 11:** Detail of Pleasure from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added.

## Colouring Activities

There are plenty of opportunities for colouring in the drawings, never as time-fillers,<sup>12</sup> but to encourage students to look at, discuss, and hopefully emote with the scenarios. There is never any correct or incorrect colour to pick, just as – as set out later in this book – there is never any correct or incorrect answer to the question of what Hercules chose. Students will be encouraged to reflect on the complexities of the feelings and gestures of each of the three people via colouring activities.

To illustrate just how far the choice of colour can shape how the scene is viewed, here are two drawings created by Steve K. Simons where he has added colour to his drawing of the panel in the Adam Room. Spot the difference! In the first (Fig. 12), Hard Work is wearing white – a colour that might look suitable

<sup>12</sup> See Susan Deacy, “How Classics Might Reshape the – Autistic – World: Notes from a Conference at Reading University in October 2018”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 11 October 2018, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2018/10/how-classics-might-reshape-autistic.html> (accessed 15 July 2022).



**Figure 12:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn and coloured by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added to the figures of Hercules and Pleasure. The colour of the clothing of Hard Work and Pleasure is the reverse of that in Figure 13.



**Figure 13:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn and coloured by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added to the figures of Hercules and Pleasure. The colour of the clothing of Hard Work and Pleasure is the reverse of that in Figure 12.

for the personified Virtue – while Pleasure wears red. But in the second (Fig. 13), it is Pleasure who wears white, while Hard Work has a red dress.

## The Animation

As well as creating the drawings for the lessons, Steve K. Simons has created an animation of the chimneypiece panel to convey the complexities of how Hercules is engaging with his surroundings and its inhabitants, as well as how the two women, Pleasure and Hard Work, are, in turn, engaging with Hercules. The animation is accompanied by a haunting piece of music on the lyre. The piece is performed by its composer, Aliko Markantonatou, who has written the piece specially for the animation. This animation is among the resources for Lessons 8 and 9. The animation brings out the complexities of the interpersonal communication between the three figures while opening up perspectives on the range of emotions experienced by Hercules, and the difficulties of the choice he is tasked to make as he deliberates first one, then another possible decision. The link to the animation is provided at the end of this chapter.

## Emojis

Throughout the lessons, the students are invited to reflect on the range of emotions experienced by Hercules and to relate these to their own experiences arriving at new places, meeting new people, and making decisions. These responses can be communicated verbally or in writing or via a printed-out set of emojis, whether “basic” or more “complex” ones – although the very distinction between “simple” and “complex” might not necessarily match what it is like, as a neuro-diverse person, to process or communicate emotions.



**Figure 14:** Selection from Spiral Ogert, *The Adoring Emojis* (2021), Wikimedia Commons.

## Using the Book

The other chapters comprising this book build on the current introduction as follows:

- ★ The models of autism which inform the lessons are set out (Chapter 2), after which an explanation is provided of the rationale for the focus on (a) myth, (b) classical myth specifically, and more specifically, still, (c) the myths of Hercules (Chapter 3). Readers already familiar with theories of autism and/or with classical mythology might want to skim over these chapters, although such readers might find the explanation of where I position myself in terms of “autism” and “myth” a helpful backdrop for the lessons.
- ★ Next comes a chapter giving the rationale for the use of the Choice of Hercules as the focus for the lessons (Chapter 4). This is a chapter that readers will hopefully find useful, not least because the episode is no longer among the well-known stories from classical myth.
- ★ The chapter on the Choice episode is followed by the lessons themselves (Chapter 5).
- ★ Then follows an account of the piloting and workshopping of the lessons (Chapter 6). This is another chapter which busy readers might prefer to skip, though it does explain how the final version of the lessons has been shaped in light of trials in various settings.
- ★ The book concludes with a resource pack of pictures to be used in the lessons, and, then, a bibliography and indexes.

## Note on the Use of Footnotes

Throughout the book, details of books, articles, and other sources relevant to topics discussed in the main text, are included in footnotes:

- ★ These footnotes include references to postings from my blog which concern topics discussed in the main text.
- ★ Where a particular work is mentioned more than once, full details are given the first time: for example, Sue Fletcher-Watson and Francesca Happé, *Autism: A New Introduction to Psychological Theory and Current Debate*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019; or Susan Deacy, “Fun, Toil, Party... How Fortune Tellers Can Help Us Play Herculean Games – World Autism Awareness Week Day 2”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 2 April 2019,

<https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2019/04/fun-toil-party-how-fortune-tellers-can.html> (accessed 20 July 2022).

- ★ Subsequent citations use a summarized version: for example, Fletcher-Watson and Happé, *Autism*; or Deacy, "Fun, Toil, Party...".
- ★ The URLs for online resources were correct as at the latest date of access mentioned in the relevant footnotes.

## Accompanying Materials Online

This book is accompanied by online materials, including:

- ★ the *Choice of Hercules* animation by Steve K. Simons, with music composed and performed by Aliko Markantonatou;
- ★ links to videos of the author talking about autism and classical myth, including the *Choice of Hercules* lessons;
- ★ materials from the 2018 version of the lessons, including the lesson plans and a teachers' guide by Effrosyni Kostara;
- ★ a teacher's guide by Effrosyni Kostara based on the lessons in this book;
- ★ a lesson plan by a teacher at a school in Bedfordshire in the UK, which adapts a draft of lessons in this book to teach neurotypical students about autism;
- ★ a set of lesson plans for classes for autistic children based on Ancient Greek religion created by Caroline Cutrona, an Education Major specializing in Special Needs Education at a university in the USA while on a Study Abroad programme at Roehampton University;
- ★ reports on sessions extending the lessons in this book at cultural settings, including the neoclassical garden temple at Mount Clare, Roehampton, and Keats House in Hampstead in London.

Website address: <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim>.

Website's section with the aforementioned companion materials: <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.





## CHAPTER 2

# Stones to Stars: Autism and This Book







## STONES TO STARS: AUTISM AND THIS BOOK

If you know that your students are not neurotypical and you learn how to work with them then it could open up a world of opportunities.

Poppy Robbins, undergraduate student speaking on neurodiversity in Classics in March 2022<sup>1</sup>

The present chapter is the first in a pair of chapters that build from the Introduction's broad outline of the scope and purpose of the book. It examines further the model of autism that the book follows. Its paired chapter (Chapter 3) then turns to how and why autistic children can relate to characters and episodes from classical myth, including – or especially – Hercules and his experiences. Teachers, or other professionals, who do not have time for a deeper dive, or who are already knowledgeable about autism, might skip to the next chapter. However, I would recommend at least a quick read of what follows, if only to enable readers to gain a sense of the concepts and perspectives that are shaping the lessons.

### Introduction

Autism has been envisaged recently as “like a stone in the woods” which “few people bother to look under”.<sup>2</sup> For others, meanwhile, the analogy is not

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Deacy, “Roehampton Students on Classics and Neurodiversity”, featuring Poppy Robbins and Lucy Head, *Asterion: Celebrating Neurodiversity in Classics*, April 2022, <https://asterion.uk/index.php/home/neurodiverse-classics-constructive-connections> (accessed 4 July 2022).

<sup>2</sup> Debbie Riall, *The Autism Resource Manual: Practical Strategies for Teachers and Other Education Professionals*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2022, xv, quoting Jamie, an autistic student aged fourteen.



**Figure 15:** Jacopo Tintoretto, *The Origin of the Milky Way* (ca. 1575), The National Gallery, inv. no. NG1313, photograph from The Yorck Project (2002), Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

of a world beneath, but above, to the stars – where each autistic person is a star in a multidimensional constellation.<sup>3</sup>

This book is concerned with how classical myth can resonate with the “stars” in this “constellation”, though it will return to the “stone” image as well. It presents lessons addressing particular dimensions of the autism constellation by focusing on Hercules. This character is one of the many “stars” in the “universe” of classical myth. He stands as an excellent image for the constellations

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<sup>3</sup> E.g., Caroline Hearst, “Does Language Affect Our Attitudes to Autism?”, *Autism Matters*, 8 January 2015, <https://www.autismmatters.org.uk/blog/does-language-affect-our-attitudes-to-autism> (accessed 27 April 2022); Fletcher-Watson and Happé, *Autism*, 40; Patrick Dwyer, “The Autism Constellation”, *Autistic Scholar*, 2 October 2020, <http://www.autisticscholar.com/the-autism-constellation> (accessed 28 April 2022).

metaphor for autism in view of his many astral connections, including his accidental creation – as a baby – of the Milky Way (from the Ancient Greek γαλαξίας [*galaxías*; galaxy], derived from γάλα [*gála*; milk]). According to a story told about the baby Hercules by the first-century BCE Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (*Historical Library* 4.9.6), the infant bit so hard on the nipple of the goddess Hera as she was nursing him that she pulled away in pain. As re-envisioned in Tintoretto's *The Origin of the Milky Way* of around 1575, the spurts of milk that Hercules did not manage to drink became the Milky Way (see Fig. 15). How Hera – who, as we shall see, is a dedicated enemy of Hercules – came to be nourishing him with her divine milk I shall come to later but suffice it to say that the story illustrates just one of the ways that this figure can appeal to what it can be like to experience life as a neurodivergent person.

The current chapter sets out the autistic dimensions I shall be covering. It explains the approach I shall be taking, and makes clear, too, what approaches I shall be steering away from.

## **Autism as Problem: Deficit Models**

In short, I shall be steering away from approaches which see autism as posing a problem:

- ★ Sometimes, the problem is presented as lying with autistic people (“medical model”).
- ★ Sometimes the problem is said to be with society (“social model”).

Either way, there is thought to be something that needs to be made better, or even cured, autistic people<sup>4</sup> or society, to make it more accepting of autism.<sup>5</sup>

When I began contemplating making contributions to autistic children's education in 2008 (please see the Foreword above for an account of why and how I started on this path), these two models above were prevalent. It was hard to think beyond them when the literature on autism tended to be framed

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<sup>4</sup> E.g., Steven K. Kapp, “How Social Deficit Models Exacerbate the Medical Model: Autism as a Case in Point”, *Autism Policy & Practice* 2.1 (2019), 3; Alan Jurgens, “Neurodiversity in a Neurotypical World: An Enactive Framework for Investigating Autism and Social Institutions”, in Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Nick Chown, and Anna Stenning, eds., *Neurodiversity Studies: A New Critical Paradigm*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2020, 73.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Kapp, “How Social Deficit Models Exacerbate the Medical Model”, 4; Jurgens, “Neurodiversity in a Neurotypical World”, 73–74.

in terms of how hard life is for autistic people, and those around them. At this time, the emphasis tended to be on helping to reduce, or cure, certain behaviours and on where autistic people were supposedly deficient – for example, through being apparently unimaginative, lacking empathy, or incapable of feeling emotions.<sup>6</sup> At this time, there was a sense as well of autism as:

- ★ **a disorder** from which someone suffers, as in Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD);
- ★ **something a person has – and from which they might be divested:** as in “person with autism” or “child with autism”;
- ★ **a spectrum** into which all can be fitted – whether they are labelled “low functioning”, “middle functioning”, or “high functioning”, or whether they are considered to display traits commensurate with “classical autism” or with “Asperger’s Syndrome”;<sup>7</sup> from such a perspective, to help an autistic person, a key step would be to work out how “autistic” they appear to be.<sup>8</sup>

One effect of the deficit models was that those autistic people, often girls and women, who were adept at putting on what the autistic author, musician, and entrepreneur Alis Rowe terms the “normal mask”<sup>9</sup> – for example by masking autistic behaviours, or copying neurotypical behaviours – went undiagnosed.<sup>10</sup>

Such views are still present, as may be demonstrated by programmes geared towards improving autistic people’s behaviour. One such programme has been developed, using improvised theatre, by the director, producer, and actor Gary Kramer and the special education practitioner Richie Ploesch. Their book instructs practitioners and parents how to run the programme. It is full of imaginative games, including one where students create superheroes and others where they are encouraged to express their emotions. But it is still grounded

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<sup>6</sup> See Kapp, “How Social Deficit Models Exacerbate the Medical Model”.

<sup>7</sup> Hearst, “Does Language Affect Our Attitudes to Autism?”; Lorcan Kenny, Caroline Hattersley, Bonnie Molins, Carole Buckley, Carol Povey, and Elizabeth Pellicano, “Which Terms Should Be Used to Describe Autism? Perspectives from the UK Autism Community”, *Autism* 20.4 (2016), 442–462.

<sup>8</sup> Fletcher-Watson and Happé, *Autism*, 40.

<sup>9</sup> Alis Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: Asperger’s and Me*, London: Lonely Mind Books, 2013, 37–41.

<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Cora Beth Fraser, “Introducing *Asterion*: A New Initiative Celebrating Neurodiversity in Classics”, *CUCD Bulletin* 50 (2021), <https://cucd.blogs.sas.ac.uk/files/2021/09/CUCD-Introducing-Asterion.pdf> (accessed 2 September 2021). Roehampton student Lucy Head discusses her diagnosis as an adult in Deacy, “Roehampton Students on Classics and Neurodiversity”. On girls and autism, see also Susan Deacy, “Best... Panel... Ever: Gendering Classical Myth for Children, Including Using Hercules – at FIEC 2019”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 9 July 2019, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2019/07/best-panel-ever-gendering-classical.html> (accessed 30 June 2022).

in a deficit model of autism designed, in the authors' words, to "help individuals with social skills *deficits*".<sup>11</sup>

Being diagnosed as autistic continues, too, to be regarded as something unfortunate – as a tragedy no less – for an autistic person and for their family.<sup>12</sup> As Danielle Shalet – an Education lecturer, Disability Coordinator and ACCLAIM network member – has commented:

[M]y partner was just diagnosed with ASD and his parents were no help at all during his assessment because they refused to accept that the child THEY raised could be autistic. [...] [T]o a parent having an autistic child can be seen as either their fault or a tragedy.

We suspect that our three year old may also be slightly autistic but whenever you tell a neurotypical person this may be the case all you get it "I'm so sorry." To us, it's not a tragedy.<sup>13</sup>

But – as the final words of Dani's comment illustrate – there are other potential responses too.

## **“Not a Tragedy”: The Neurodiversity Movement and the Autism “Constellation”**

As long ago as the 1990s, the autistic self-advocate and academic Jim Sinclair was defining autism as a particular kind of world, one alien to non-autistic people but capable of being discovered if neurotypical people approach "without preconceptions" and "with openness":

Autism is a way of being. It is pervasive; it colors every experience, every sensation, perception, thought, emotion, and encounter, every aspect of existence. It is not possible to separate the autism from the person – and if it were possible, the person you'd have left would not be the same person you started with. [...] Push for the things your expectations tell you are normal, and you'll find frustration, disappointment, resentment, maybe

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<sup>11</sup> Gary Kramer and Richie Ploesch, *Improvised Theatre and the Autism Spectrum: A Practical Guide to Teaching Social Connection and Communication Skills*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2022, 1, emphasis added.

<sup>12</sup> See here Deacy, "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", 254–258.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted in Susan Deacy, "Autism: It's NOT a Tragedy", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 30 March 2020, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2020/03/autism-its-not-tragedy.html> (accessed 18 July 2022).

even rage and hatred. Approach respectfully, without preconceptions, and with openness to learning new things, and you'll find a world you could never have imagined.<sup>14</sup>

Understandings of autism and what it is to experience the world as an autistic person are changing, helped by the inclusion of voices of autistic people,<sup>15</sup> including where autistic people reflect on their own autistic childhoods.<sup>16</sup>

In the past, those who wrote about autism tended to be neurotypical people. Increasingly, however, autistic self-advocates are setting out what it is like to be autistic, and what it is like does not always match what previously was thought to be the case. To quote further the analogy of the stone in the woods by the teenaged autistic student Jamie:

On one side it is very worn where people have walked on it. Everyone sees that side [...]. But underneath... very few people bother to look under the stone and see that life is there.<sup>17</sup>

The perspectives of autistic people are increasingly being shared and heard.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the world of autism, its richness once typically missed by neurotypical people, is being articulated,<sup>19</sup> and it is increasingly being recognized that, far from being unimaginative, lacking empathy, or not feeling emotions, autistic people can have deep imaginative lives, feel empathy, and experience emotions.

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<sup>14</sup> Jim Sinclair, "Don't Mourn for Us", Autism Network International, [http://www.autreat.com/dont\\_mourn.html](http://www.autreat.com/dont_mourn.html) (accessed 21 July 2019); originally published in the Autism Network International newsletter, *Our Voice* 1.3 (1993).

<sup>15</sup> E.g., Hearst, "Does Language Affect Our Attitudes to Autism?"; Milton, *A Mismatch of Salience*; Nick Walker, *Neuroqueer Heresies: Notes on the Neurodiversity Paradigm, Autistic Empowerment, and Postnormal Possibilities*, Fort Worth, TX: Autonomous Press, 2019.

<sup>16</sup> E.g., Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: Asperger's and Me*; Alis Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: What I Have Learned about Life*, London: Lonely Mind Books, 2019.

<sup>17</sup> Riall, *The Autism Resource Manual*, xv.

<sup>18</sup> E.g., Hanna Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Marianthi Kourti, David Jackson-Perry, Charlotte Brownlow, Kirsty Fletcher, Daniel Bendelman, and Lindsay O'Dell, "Doing It Differently: Emancipatory Autism Studies within a Neurodiverse Academic Space", *Disability & Society* 34.7–8 (2019), 1082–1101; Bertilsdotter Rosqvist, Chown, and Stenning, eds., *Neurodiversity Studies*; Nick Walker and Dora M. Raymaker, "Toward a Neuroqueer Future: An Interview with Nick Walker", *Autism in Adulthood* 3.1 (2021), 5–10, <https://doi.org/10.1089/aut.2020.29014.njw>.

<sup>19</sup> E.g., Ralph James Savarese, *See It Feelingly: Classic Novels, Autistic Readers, and the Schooling of a No-Good English Professor*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018; Walker, *Neuroqueer Heresies*.

Also, the helpfulness of attempts to distinguish between “high-functioning” and “low-functioning” autism has been questioned. Someone who appears high-functioning in some respects can be low-functioning in other ways or when levels of social energy are higher.<sup>20</sup> According to the autistic author and educator Caroline Hearst, indeed, autism:

does not move along one line going from low to high, it circles in many spheres, and one of its many facets is a tendency to extremes, leading to the same individual being “high functioning” in some areas and “low functioning” in others.<sup>21</sup>

It is not that the problems have gone away, however. Not yet. For example, Harry Rao, an undergraduate Classical Civilisation student at Roehampton University, wrote in 2022 about:

the struggle many autistic people (myself included) face with great regularity on a daily basis, whether it’s something as small getting up in morning and engaging in basic communication with others, or something much larger such as wanting to be accepted by peers in a new and unpredictable environment.<sup>22</sup>

However, the whole concept of what makes being autistic hard is being approached in new ways. What is more, a new problem has been presented, notably by the autistic author and academic Damian Milton – of “double empathy”.<sup>23</sup> On the one hand, neurotypical people can find it hard to comprehend autistic experiences. As a result they might unwittingly harm an autistic person, for example by trying to reduce autistic behaviours which the person themselves finds reassuring.<sup>24</sup> But, the converse is true as well: autistic people can find neurotypical people hard to make sense of.

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<sup>20</sup> Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: What I Have Learned about Life*, 81–86.

<sup>21</sup> Hearst, “Does Language Affect Our Attitudes to Autism?”

<sup>22</sup> Harry Rao, “Autism and Hercules”, *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* [Project’s website], July 2022, <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/autism-and-hercules> (accessed 19 July 2022).

<sup>23</sup> Damian Milton, “On the Ontological Status of Autism: The ‘Double Empathy Problem’”, *Disability & Society* 27.6 (2012), 883–887; Milton, *A Mismatch of Salience*.

<sup>24</sup> See, e.g., Steve Silberman, *Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter about People Who Think Differently*, London: Allen & Unwin, 2015, 308–309.



## Autism and This Book: At the Crossroads

It is against such a background – where there is a great deal not understood and where so much progress is being made, and remains to be made – that the lessons in this book are presented. The lessons respond to:

- ★ the sources of hardship experienced by autistic people;
- ★ dimensions of autism as they are currently understood;
- ★ the aim of neurodiversity scholarship which, as phrased by the autistic writer and academic Nick Walker, is moving “toward a future in which we engage with neurodivergence in ways that unleash previously untapped creative potentials of individuals, communities, and humanity as a whole”.<sup>25</sup>

I have used several metaphors during this chapter: stone, spectrum, constellation and here, now, is one more: that of a “crossroads”. This is an image that the autistic artist Maria Montaldi even uses to illustrate one of the models of autism (the developmental trajectory model) in Sue Fletcher-Watson and Francesca Happé’s *Autism: A New Introduction to Psychological Theory and Current Debate*.<sup>26</sup> It is an image very relevant to the current book in light of the location where the key episode occurs: a place where roads converge and from which new paths can be travelled. Autism, like the place reached by Hercules, is at a crossroads – where different ways of being are meeting, and talking to one another. This book seeks to contribute to the conversation via lessons involving classical myth that resonate with dimensions of autism, including the following ones, which Prof. Nicola Martin suggested that I address in her peer review of the penultimate version of this book:

### *Executive function*

- ★ **Facets of autism:** Autistic people can have a particular way of planning, organizing, and decision-making.<sup>27</sup>
- ★ **Use of Hercules myth:** The lessons focus on a task faced by Hercules, which can relate to what it can be like as an autistic person to make choices and contemplate the possible consequences of those choices.

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<sup>25</sup> Walker and Raymaker, “Toward a Neuroqueer Future”, 8.

<sup>26</sup> Fletcher-Watson and Happé, *Autism*, 100–101.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: What I Have Learned about Life*, 165–180.

### *Central coherence*

- ★ **Facets of autism:** As an autistic person, it is possible to be detail-oriented, that is, to focus on specifics rather than the “big picture”.<sup>28</sup>
- ★ **Use of Hercules myth:** The lessons centre around a depiction of Hercules which is packed with details. Looking at this artwork can relate to what it can be like to zoom in on the details of any particular scenario or to take a more holistic approach.

### *Sensory experiences*

- ★ **Facets of autism:** One dimension of being autistic can be to have different sensory experiences from neurotypical people. Neurodivergent people can be less sensitive than other people, or more so. They can find loud noises distressing. They can find certain colours or combinations of colours difficult to deal with – or they might find these thrilling.<sup>29</sup>
- ★ **Use of Hercules myth:** The lessons will be concerned with the possible range of multi-sensual experiences of autistic people.

### *Communication*

- ★ **Facets of autism:** Working out how to communicate with other people is a common feature of being autistic.<sup>30</sup>
- ★ **Use of Hercules myth:** The experiences of Hercules and the two women he meets can relate to such issues as starting conversations, keeping conversations going, making sense of body language, and conveying feelings to other people.

### *Problem-solving*

- ★ **Facets of autism:** Due to how so many aspects of society continue to be designed with neurotypical people in mind, when you are autistic, life can present a whole series of problems. Deal with one, and another comes up soon afterwards.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> E.g., Fletcher-Watson and Happé, *Autism*, 175–179.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., Susan Deacy, “Looking Back on What Hercules Did in Nebraska – Including Multi-Sensory Possibilities”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 12 April 2019, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2019/04/looking-back-on-what-hercules-did-in.html> (accessed 15 July 2022).

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: What I Have Learned about Life*, 77–122, 181–192.

<sup>31</sup> E.g., Rao, “Autism and Hercules”.

- ★ **Use of Hercules myth:** The lessons deal with a mythological character whose experiences at facing, and solving, problems can resonate with this dimension of autism. Indeed, the key episode, at the crossroads, sees the hero, Hercules, facing one such problem: of what to do in life.

### *Anxiety*

- ★ **Facets of autism:** Feeling anxious is key to many autistic people's experiences, often because of the effort that comes with trying to fit in or to cope with social situations. Being autistic can, indeed, feel like experiencing an ongoing panic attack – and the built-up emotions can lead to violent behaviour, either self-directed or directed at others.<sup>32</sup>
- ★ **Use of Hercules myth:** The lessons deal with responses to situations which might relate to autistic experiences of anxiety. The responses of Hercules might, moreover, be recognized as comparable with autistic overload.

### *Imagination*

- ★ **Facets of autism:** Autistic people can have rich inner worlds, stimulated by, for example, fantasy fiction, video games, and science fiction – and by myth.<sup>33</sup>
- ★ **Use of Hercules myth:** The lessons seek to present a world where people can “see” or “find” themselves, or where they can play a part in creating this world.

## **Conclusion: Respect the Beast**

I started this chapter's discussion of autism with metaphors. I am going to draw it to a close with a further metaphor: of “an uncontrollable, wild and savage beast”. This is the image used by M, the teenaged autistic heroine of the novel *M Is for Autism* by Vicky Martin and students of Limpsfield Grange, a school for autistic children in Surrey in the UK.<sup>34</sup>

Hercules, as the great slayer of beasts, might look like a suitable metaphor for dealing with the struggles associated with being autistic. It is an image indeed that fits the deficit and medical models I looked at above of autism as a disorder

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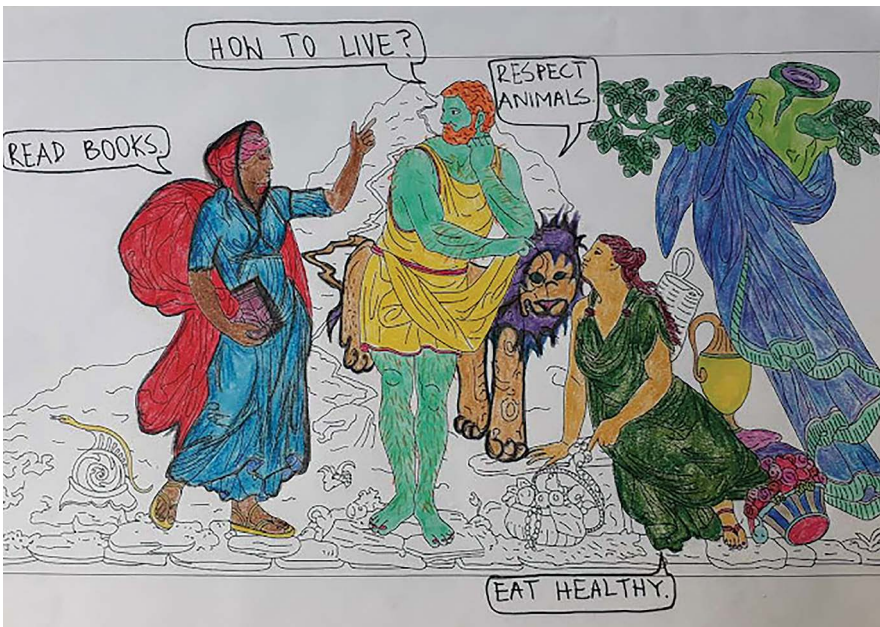
<sup>32</sup> E.g., Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: What I Have Learned About Life*, 47–75.

<sup>33</sup> E.g., Savarese, *See It Feelingly*.

<sup>34</sup> Students of Limpsfield Grange School and Vicky Martin, *M Is for Autism*, London: Jessica Kingsley, 2015, 15.

or a condition to be treated, even cured. I would like to propose a different use of the metaphor of the autism beast – where the beast, like autism, cannot be slain. Indeed, as Jim Sinclair says, even if there were to be a cure for autism – a cure longed for by parents of autistic children – “the person you’d have left would not be the same person you started with”.<sup>35</sup> Instead of proposing Hercules as the slayer of the hardships of autism, or indeed as the slayer of autism *per se*, I am going to propose a different image of a beast-linked Hercules. It is one where he is like the monsters he encounters: he inhabits their world; he is monstrous himself. He comes in from the beyond; he disrupts, he subverts. He does not fit in; he operates outside ordinary categories and systems of classification.

This is a Hercules who can provide an image for being autistic. It is a Hercules who, as imagined by the cultural and animal studies scholar Anna Mik, at a workshop based on an earlier version of the lessons, is partnered with his lion – a lion given a voice by Anna (see Fig. 16).



**Figure 16:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added to the figures of Hercules and Pleasure, with colour and additions by Anna Mik at a workshop at the Polish Theatre in Warsaw in May 2019, photograph by Susan Deacy. Used with kind permission.

<sup>35</sup> Sinclair, “Don’t Mourn for Us”.

Anna was working with one of the drawings by Steve K. Simons from the *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel on which the lessons are based. On the drawing, the lion-skin and head are on top of Hercules's club. In Anna's version, the lion, revived, stands alongside Hercules, the club of the hero transformed into one of his paws, while some of the zigzags of the path behind Hercules have become the lion's tail. The lion's words, "Respect animals", can serve as useful advice to non-autistic people for approaching autistic people. Respond "respectfully", as Jim Sinclair said, and a world will become manifest.

The next chapter explores the potential for just such a world to come into focus via Hercules.



## CHAPTER 3

# Classical Myth, Hercules, and How “That Sounds Like Being Autistic”





## *CLASSICAL MYTH, HERCULES, AND HOW “THAT SOUNDS LIKE BEING AUTISTIC”*

Utilize neurodiversity. [...] [Y]ou can find something you love and really focus on it.

Lucy Head, UK university undergraduate student, speaking on neurodiversity in Classics in March 2022<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter explained the model of autism that this book is following. Autism, as I set out there, is not something that goes “with” a person; rather, it is intrinsic to who that person is. That chapter also set out how such a way of being can be expressed as being like a star in a multidimensional constellation, and it sketched out the dimensions of autism with which the lessons are concerned. The present chapter forms a pair with the previous one. It considers what it is about myth, and specifically classical myth, and more specifically still myths of a particular character, that can relate to the dimensions of autism and to autism as a way of being. Echoing the message for readers in the previous chapter, anyone who does not have time for a deeper dive into myth and into this character, Hercules, might skip ahead to the next chapter, especially if they are already familiar with classical myth. But, as with the previous chapter, I would recommend at least a quick read of what I present. That way, readers can gain an impression of the approach I take to myth, and the approach I take to how Hercules can resonate with neurodivergent experiences and feelings.

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<sup>1</sup> Deacy, “Roehampton Students on Classics and Neurodiversity”.



## Myth and Autistic Imaginations

Many autistic people enjoy envisaging other worlds, and seeing themselves, or finding themselves, in these worlds: worlds which can mirror the “real” world but which differ from, or which subvert, the dimensions of that world. One appeal of such worlds is the various characters who are outsiders. The characters in question might be robots, or they might be magical creatures. They might be non-human, or, like Mr Spock, they might be part human, part non-human.<sup>2</sup>

Myths too, with their hybrid characters, monsters, and with their incoherent coherence can offer another such world. The myths in question could be those, say, from the Pacific Islands,<sup>3</sup> or from Japan,<sup>4</sup> or they could be those of Ancient Greece or Rome. For example, according to Nicola Grove and Keith Park in their *Odyssey Now*, the story of Odysseus – another great mythological adventurer – is “a brilliant story which everyone can enjoy” and which can “nourish the imagination and emotions of students, as well as providing them with practical skills”.<sup>5</sup>

Delve just a little into the world of classical myth, and what will emerge could be an array of characters of different types, such as gods, beasts, and heroes. Delve deeper and a world emerges all the more vividly – a world like, but different from, the “real world”. Here there are rules – though not those of the “real world” – and yet there is never an authentic, official version of any story; nor is there ever any official biography of any character.<sup>6</sup> To look for an authoritative definition of myth, or an authoritative version of any character or story is not helpful. Making any such attempt pins down what is transient; it puts boundaries where these are not needed; it limits what can be imaginative, potentially contradictory and potentially subversive. Indeed, as far back as it is possible to go, myth-makers – from Homer (possibly eighth century BCE)

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<sup>2</sup> Savarese, *See It Feelingly*; Walker, *Neuroqueer Heresies*; Anna Kurowicka, “Aliens’ Speaking Out: Science Fiction by Autistic Authors”, *Przegląd Kulturoznawczy* 3 (2020), 261–277.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Deacy, “What I’ve Found Out Today about the Gender in the Middle with Implications for Autism and Myth”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 15 October 2021, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2021/10/what-ive-found-out-today-about-gender.html> (accessed 27 July 2022).

<sup>4</sup> Nicola Grove, Miyuki Takano, Mariko Udo, and Yumiko Mitsudo, “Heroes with a Difference: Legends and Personal Stories with Japanese School Children”, *The SLD Experience* Spring (2016), 3–5.

<sup>5</sup> Nicola Grove and Keith Park, *Odyssey Now*, London and Philadelphia, PA: Jessica Kingsley, 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Helen Morales, *Classical Mythology: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007; Roger D. Woodard, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

and Hesiod (likely seventh century BCE) onwards – were already remodelling earlier versions from elsewhere in the ancient Near East. When any modern author, like Rick Riordan, say, or any video-game developers, like the creators of *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey*,<sup>7</sup> draw from myth, or create fresh mythological scenarios, they are continuing to do what ancient myth-makers would do, namely, to draw from particular story types and characters and scenarios to innovate, defamiliarize, modernize, subvert, repeat... Such is the incoherent coherence of myth:

- ★ There are patterns; there are clearly delineated characters.
- ★ There is scope for innovation, subversion, and transformation.

The most popular characters tend to be those who blend: the ordinary with the extraordinary, and memorable traits with variations on these traits.

It is these characters – at once coherent and incoherent – that can especially resonate with being autistic. Such is the case, for instance, with Medusa: the monster, the female, the powerful, the feared, the victim.<sup>8</sup> The world of Percy Jackson, meanwhile, blends the everyday world with fantasy and with classical myth. As Kiera Young, an autistic A Level (ages sixteen to eighteen) student from the UK, writes:

I first read it at the age of 8 and it quickly became one of my autistic special interests. [...] [A]nd I know plenty of neurodivergent people have been drawn towards Riordan’s books as they could see themselves in the characters.<sup>9</sup>

Such is the case, too, with Hercules.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Ubisoft Quebec developers, *Assassin’s Creed Odyssey*, Paris: Ubisoft Entertainment, 2018.

<sup>8</sup> E.g., Susan Deacy, Pauline Hanesworth, Greta Hawes, and Daniel Ogden, “Beheading the Gorgon: Myth, Symbolism and Appropriation”, in Stefano Goffredo and Zvy Dubinsky, eds., *The Cnidaria, Past, Present and Future: The World of Medusa and Her Sisters*, New York, NY: Springer, 2016, 823–834.

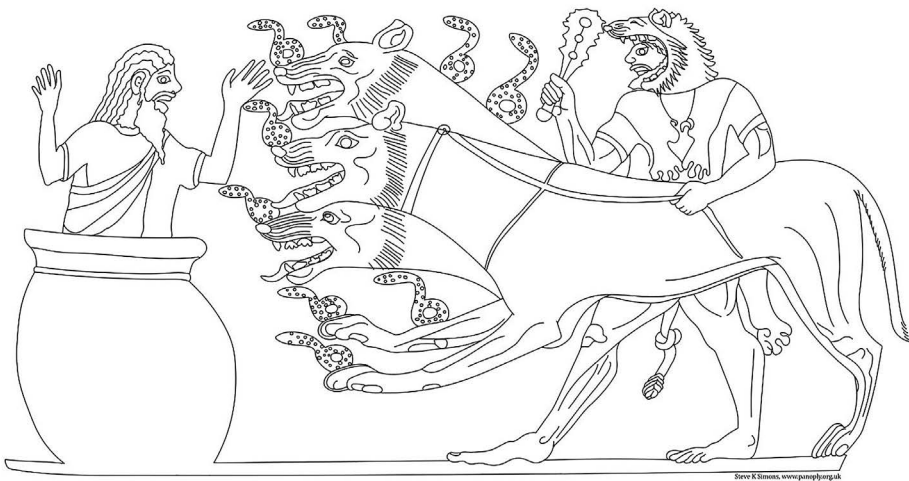
<sup>9</sup> Kiera Young, “Percy Jackson and the Future of Neurodiversity in Classics”, *Asterion: Celebrating Neurodiversity in Classics*, 7 November 2021, <https://asterion.uk/index.php/2021/11/07/percy-jackson-and-the-future-of-neurodiversity-in-classics> (accessed 30 June 2022). Cf. Poppy Robbins’s reflections in Deacy, “Roehampton Students on Classics and Neurodiversity”.

<sup>10</sup> The popularity – in antiquity and subsequently – of Hercules is charted in Alastair Blanshard, *Hercules: A Heroic Life*, London: Granta, 2005, and in Emma Stafford, *Herakles*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2012, 201–244.

## Hercules: A Hero in the Autistic Headcanon?

There are more representations of Hercules than of any other figure from classical mythology. More stories concern this character, and more works of art depict him as well. In this huge body of material, Hercules is a clearly delineated character, with a distinctive iconography. For example, he tends to be easily recognized – as in the selection of illustrations below (all drawn by Steve K. Simons) – due to specific attributes, such as his lion-skin and his club:

- ★ The first image, from a sixth-century BCE vase painting (Fig. 17), depicts a club-wielding Hercules clad in a lion's skin. Hercules had been tasked by his cousin Eurystheus to bring up Cerberus, the multi-headed dog of Hades. At the spectacle of the multi-headed – and serpent-fringed – dog, Eurystheus cowers in a large jar. More soon on who Eurystheus was and how he came to set this difficult task, and others, for Hercules.

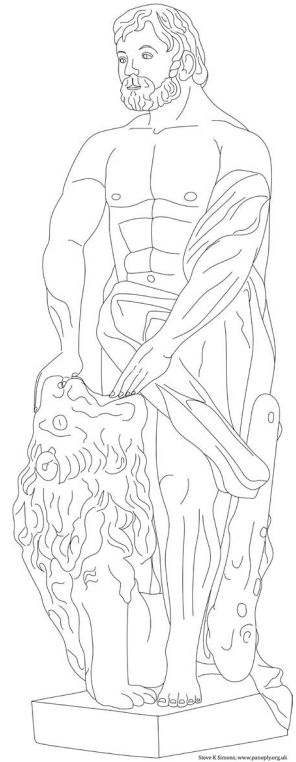


**Figure 17:** *Hercules, Eurystheus and Cerberus*, detail of Attic black-figure hydria by the Eagle Painter, ca. 525 BCE, Louvre, Paris, inv. no. E701, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

- ★ The second, much later, image (Fig. 18) portrays a statue of Hercules in Łazienki Park in Warsaw. The statue is likely to be from the eighteenth century, apart from the head, which is a recent addition by the sculptor Wiesław Winkler, modelled on the features of a Park employee, Stanisław Kalinowski. Hercules' club leans beside him. He is not wearing a lion-skin but standing over a defeated lion.

**Figure 18:** *Hercules with Nemean Lion and the Club of Hercules*, eighteenth-century statue with head added by Wiesław Winkler, modelled on the features of Stanisław Kalinowski, Łazienki Park, Warsaw, drawing by Steve K. Simons.

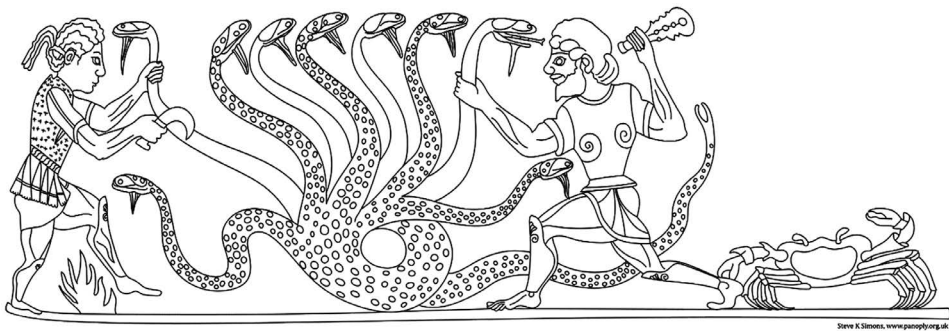
- ★ The third image, a vase painting from a sixth-century BCE amphora (Fig. 19), shows Hercules in action performing the deed that enables him to acquire his lion’s skin. There are two versions of how he came to acquire this skin. In one, it was from the skin of a lion he killed on the orders of Thespius, the founder and ruler of Thespieae in the region of Boeotia in central Greece. In the other, better-known – and probably earlier (though not definitely earlier: little is definite where Hercules is concerned) – it was Eurystheus who had tasked him with the seemingly impossible labour of killing a ferocious lion from the region of Nemea in the Peloponnese. The lion’s body was impervious to weapons, so Hercules



**Figure 19:** *Hercules Wrestles the Nemean Lion*, detail of black-figure amphora, sixth century BCE, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. no. 84001769980, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

wrestled him instead and it was from the skin of this defeated lion that Hercules created his lion's skin.<sup>11</sup>

- ★ The final example (Fig. 20), again from the sixth century BCE, and attributed to an artist known today as the Eagle Painter, depicts Hercules as he attempts to carry out another seemingly impossible task set by Eurystheus, namely, killing the Hydra, a many-headed serpent from the marshlands of Lerna. He is assisted this time by his nephew Iolaus. Far from killing the Hydra, cutting off her heads would only make her more vigorous, and each time Hercules cut off a head, new ones would grow from the severed neck. Once Hercules worked out that strength alone was insufficient to defeat her, he prevented new heads from growing by getting a helper, his cousin Iolaus, to cauterize each of the Hydra's necks. The flame that Iolaus will use is already burning on the ground beneath him. Just as Hercules has a helper, so does the Hydra in the form of the crab, who is biting the ankle of Hercules.



**Figure 20:** *Hercules, Iolaus, the Hydra and the Crab*, detail of hydria from Caere in Etruria, attributed to the Eagle Painter, 520–510 BCE, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, inv. no. 83.AE.346, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

As well as looking a certain way, Hercules is known for specific deeds, especially his Twelve Labours, three of which are depicted in the illustrations above. In the go-to ancient work for these labours, the first- or second-century CE compendium of Greek myth attributed, probably falsely, to the Athenian author Apollodorus, the labours are:

1. Killing the Nemean Lion;
2. Killing the multi-headed Lernaean Hydra;

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<sup>11</sup> On the two versions, and why the version set in Nemea might be earlier, I recommend Stafford, *Herakles*, 54.

3. Capturing the Ceryneian Deer;
4. Capturing the Erymanthian Boar;
5. Cleaning the Augean Stables;
6. Killing the Stymphalian Birds;
7. Capturing the Cretan Bull;
8. Stealing the Horses of Diomedes;
9. Taking the Girdle of the Amazon Hippolyta;
10. Capturing the Cattle of Geryon;
11. Stealing the Apples of the Hesperides;
12. Capturing Cerberus.<sup>12</sup>

Yet the figure of Hercules also offered – and still offers – scope for innovation. For instance, in antiquity, the ordering of many of the labours was done in different ways. For example, in Euripides’ tragedy *Heracles* (vv. 360–430), from the fifth century BCE, the first and final labours are the same, but otherwise the order differs – and some tasks appear that do not come to be included in the list of Apollodorus:

1. Killing the Nemean Lion;
2. Killing the Centaurs;
3. Capturing the Deer;
4. Stealing the Horses of Diomedes;
5. Killing Cycnus;
6. Stealing the Apples;
7. Killing the serpent guarding the Apples;
8. Holding the sky for Atlas;
9. Taking the Girdle of Hippolyta;
10. Killing the Hydra;
11. Killing the three-bodied shepherd of Erytheia;
12. Going to Hades.

What is more, just as Hercules was relevant at various moments and periods in the ancient world, since antiquity, his image has continued to be updated to suit new scenarios.<sup>13</sup> For example, in March 2019, participants in a public engagement event in Leeds for Emma Stafford’s *Hercules Project* were invited to create postcards depicting contemporary labours of Hercules. The resulting postcards showed the hero taking on such challenges as world peace, animal

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<sup>12</sup> Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Library* 2.14.12–2.25.12.

<sup>13</sup> Moments in the rich and varied postclassical “afterlife” of Hercules are charted in Blanshard, *Hercules: A Heroic Life*, and in Stafford, *Herakles*, 201–244.

rights, ending poverty, battling the Hydra of Brexit (the event took place during the process of the UK's withdrawal from the European Union), and cleansing the Augean Stables of British politics.<sup>14</sup>

The two aspects of myths of Hercules I have noted – a fixed structure along with the potential to be adapted to meet the needs of specific people or places – can resonate in broad terms with being autistic:

- ★ Autistic people often experience uncertainty, including because the real world often does not make sense. Myths of Hercules offer a measure of certainty.
- ★ Just as autistic people often love imaginary worlds, myths of Hercules open up such a world involving, as they do, a great traveller who keeps reaching new places, some pleasant, some strange, some full of dangers to negotiate, and whose adventures are full of potential for stimulating the imagination, for engaging emotions, and for moving beyond the norms of neurocognition.

Furthermore, several facets of Hercules are comparable with dimensions of autism.<sup>15</sup> Identifying actual people – contemporary people especially, but historical subjects too – as autistic brings with it a range of issues.<sup>16</sup> But, where fictional characters are concerned, it is a different matter. There is a game, headcanon, where autistic people set out points of contact with characters from, for example, books, TV shows, films, and video games.<sup>17</sup> Why not, too, characters from myth, Hercules included?

As the most varied, the most popular, and the most elusive of classical mythological figures, Hercules can speak to what it is to experience the world as an autistic person. For example, Hercules is a great achiever and problem-solver. He is capable of things that are impossible for other people. The location where he performs these activities is usually in the spaces away from human society – in the wilds. Here, he carries out his various tasks, each time succeeding against the odds. Usually his success is achieved alone, and when he

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<sup>14</sup> Emma Stafford, "Hercules' Labours Today", *Hercules Project*, <https://herculesproject.leeds.ac.uk/629-2> (accessed 9 June 2022).

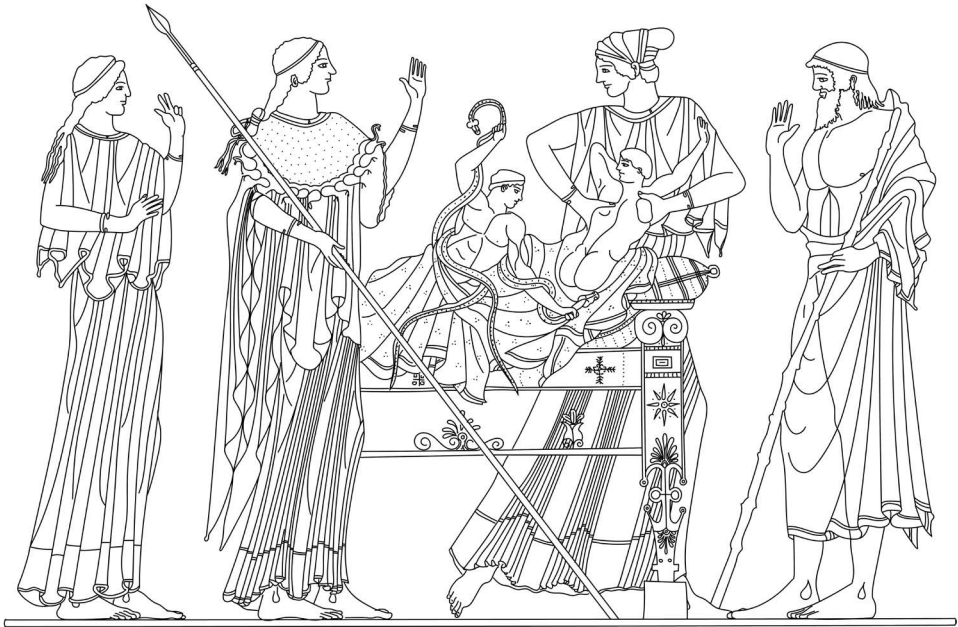
<sup>15</sup> On Hercules and autism, see Deacy, "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", 261–265.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Fitzgerald and Brendan O'Brien, *Genius Genes: How Asperger Talents Changed the World*, Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC Publishing, 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Erin Ekins, "My Autistic Headcanons (and Why I Prefer Them to Most 'Actually Autistic' Characters)", *Queerly Autistic*, 20 November 2017, <https://queerlyautistic.com/my-autistic-headcanons-and-why-i-prefer-them-to-most-actually-autistic-characters> (accessed 3 May 2022).

has helpers – like Iolaos, as in Figure 20 – it is on his own terms and temporary. But, each time he succeeds in working out how to solve some particular problem – of how to defeat a particular foe, for instance – he then needs to move to a fresh scenario for which he has to learn a completely different set of rules. As the Classics undergraduate student Harry Rao puts it, in a discussion of how Hercules connects with autism, including for Harry personally:

I believe the idea of Hercules being a man who has to face one insuperable challenge after the other, with the odds being continuously tacked against him, and Hercules’s ability to overcome these challenges links directly into the struggle of those on the Autistic Spectrum. I know for myself the idea of Hercules overcoming different kinds of adversity which people with Autism might potentially face with great regularity on a daily basis.<sup>18</sup>



**Figure 21:** *Baby Hercules Wrestles Snakes*, detail of Attic red-figure stamnos by the Berlin Painter, early fifth century BCE, Louvre, Paris, inv. no. G192, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

Indeed, for Hercules nothing is ever easy. Even as a baby, he wrestled snakes sent, by Hera, to the cot he shared with his twin brother, Iphicles. Figure 21, Steve K. Simons’s drawing of a painting on a fifth-century BCE vase by

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<sup>18</sup> Rao, “Autism and Hercules”.



the Berlin Painter, shows a woman, likely Hercules' mother, Alcmene, rescuing Iphicles, while Hercules wrestles the snakes. Three others (from our left to our right: a woman, the goddess Athena, and Hercules' mortal father, Amphitryon) look on with their hands raised, possibly in alarm.

And then, once the adult Hercules succeeds at a particular task, he typically goes on to experience a completely new situation whose rules need to be learned from scratch. To quote Harry Rao further:

Hercules's slaying of Hydra or the Stymphalian birds represents an equally problematic but different kind of challenge to cleaning the Augean stables. However at their core they are all fundamental example of facing fears and trepidations and finding ways to circumvent and overcome these problems.<sup>19</sup>

What is more, when Hercules is in the space where he can succeed – alone or on his terms – he is successful. But then, when he reaches civilized society, things tend to go wrong, often terribly so. This tendency to fits of rage is something to which autistic people might relate: when anxiety escalates into an eruption of violence, directed against themselves or against others including those closest to them. According to Harry indeed:

This is the aspect of Hercules's character that made him so palpable and identifiable to me growing up. Because Hercules was a victim of his own failure, Hercules's own volatile emotions were his worst enemy.<sup>20</sup>

There is still more; there is generally more with Hercules. Earlier in this book I quoted the autistic author and educator Caroline Hearst's explanation of autism as including "a tendency to extremes".<sup>21</sup> No classical mythological figure displays a "tendency to extremes" as thoroughly as Hercules.<sup>22</sup> There is no one else, likewise, whose troubling of neurocognitive norms and – as we shall see – gender norms points to a neuroqueer selfhood as envisaged by Nick Walker and others.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> Hearst, "Does Language Affect Our Attitudes to Autism?"

<sup>22</sup> Deacy, "Herakles and His 'Girl'"; Deacy, "Heracles between Hera and Athena".

<sup>23</sup> Walker, *Neuroqueer Heresies*; Walker and Raymaker, "Toward a Neuroqueer Future"; Savarese, *See It Feelingly*.



**Figure 22:** Peter Paul Rubens, *The Apotheosis of Hercules* (ca. 1637), Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium, Brussels, photograph from The Yorck Project (2002), Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

For example, he has a divine father, Zeus, the king of the gods no less, but he has a mortal father too, a man named Amphitryon, whom he repeatedly describes as his father in the play recently mentioned: Euripides' *Heracles*. He lives his life as a hero, and comes to be deified, as in Rubens's *Apotheosis of Hercules* of around 1637, which depicts Hercules in the process of travelling to Olympus, his new home as a god (see Fig. 22). Yet it is not just that he lives his life as a hero and then, later, is deified; rather, he is always somewhere in both categories. There was, even, a special term for him in antiquity, that of the ἥρωας-θεός (*hērōs-theós*) or "hero-god".

As a hero-god, Hercules is above ordinary mortals in terms of his extraordinary strength. Yet he is also, from birth, the servant of another, his cousin Eurystheus, the favourite of one who keeps trying to kill him: Hera. It was Hera's

promotion of Eurystheus that led to Hercules' life of toil. Eurystheus would set him seemingly impossible tasks, sometimes even involving facing a foe that Hera had nurtured. I have already mentioned that Hera breastfed him. She did the same for the Nemean Lion and for the Lernaean Hydra.<sup>24</sup> And with the Hydra comes a particularly acute example of Hercules as both victimizer and victim:

- ★ Against the odds, he works out how to deal with the Hydra. When he realizes that new heads invariably sprout from the severed neck of each head he cuts off, like a cut-back plant that benefits from hard-pruning, he sears each neck before burying the Hydra's one remaining head under a huge boulder.
- ★ Then, years later, it is the Hydra's blood that causes his own death. After killing the Hydra, he dipped his arrows in her blood. Then, one day, he used the now-poisoned arrows to kill a Centaur called Nessus, who was trying to rape his wife, Deianira. As Nessus was dying, he told Deianira to use the blood seeping from his wounds as a love potion should she ever need to win back her husband's affections. One day she did – so she smeared a robe with the blood and gave it to Hercules. He put it on and died in agony fatally poisoned. He even describes his suffering in terms of being attacked by a creature (Sophocles, *Women of Trachis* 1028–1030).
- ★ He also, in another instance of his tendency to extremes, defines his suffering in the play as making him "discovered a woman" (v. 1075) as though in his agony he has crossed a gender boundary.

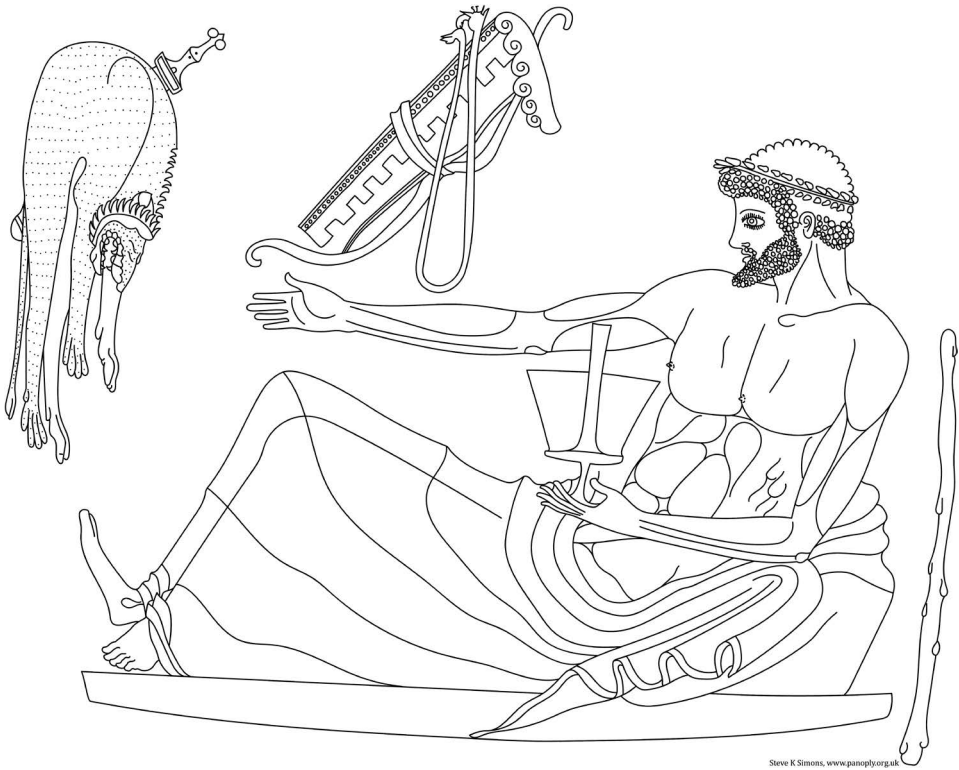
Heracles, then, is god yet mortal; he is a god's son yet a human man's son. Also, he suffers at the hands of Hera, yet – as we have seen – he is deified due to this same deity. The constant relationship between Hercules and Hera is even captured in his name, which means 'glory of Hera' from the word κλέος (*kléos*; 'glory', 'renown') and the name of the goddess.

He is, also, a saviour yet a destroyer. For example, returning in Euripides' *Heracles* just in time to save his family from death at the hands of a tyrant, he is driven mad on the orders of Hera, and kills his first wife, Megara, and his children. As a result of this act, according to some ancient sources, he is tasked to carry out the Twelve Labours. Alternatively, it is at the point of his return from his final labour to his home and family that he kills his family.

As may be illustrated by this terrible experience, his life involves persistent suffering, through his own actions and due to the interventions of others. Yet this same sufferer is also a great lover of the pleasures of life, including at the

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<sup>24</sup> Deacy, "The Lernaean Hydra".



**Figure 23:** *Hercules Reclining on a Couch*, detail of Attic red-figure bell-krater by the Berlin Painter, ca. 500–490 BCE, inv. no. G172, Louvre, Paris, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

most seemingly inopportune of moments, as when in another Ancient Greek play, the *Alcestis* by Euripides, he eats, drinks, and sings drunken songs, despite being a guest in a house he knows to be mourning (vv. 755–776).<sup>25</sup>

A resting and feasting Hercules is depicted, too, on Figure 23, Steve K. Simons’s drawing of another work by the Berlin Painter. Hercules is lying on a couch. His lion-skin is hung up, as are his bows and arrows. The club he typically wields when performing his tasks is set aside next to him. In one hand, he holds a drinking cup, while his other hand is outstretched, perhaps because he is beckoning over an attendant.

Hercules is, also, depicted as someone capable of resting, and being reflective. We shall meet such a Hercules when we reach the key episode for this book, the one where he encounters Hard Work and Pleasure. But he is also

<sup>25</sup> See Deacy, “Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?”, 272–273.

someone who is typically on the move. This connection with both movement and stillness can resonate with the experiences of neurodivergent young people. As the neurodivergent classicist Robin Diver puts it in a personal comment, quoted here with her kind permission:

I think stimming was my biggest issue in school. I was told off for rocking and moving my hands around with the idea “you can’t concentrate if you’re doing that”, and even though I knew stimming was essential for me to concentrate, I assumed the teachers must know better, and spent most of school with listening and concentration issues as a result. Hercules lends himself a lot to the idea movement is learning and stillness is difficult, and to some extent so does history more broadly since the idea utter stillness signifies respect and concentration is partially an invention of the last few centuries.

## **Hercules in Children’s Culture**

As Harry Rao explains, the tendency of Hercules to face extremities resonated with him as a young person:

The whole reason for Labours was to atone for his past digressions and murder of his wife Megara and children. While this is an example of extremity, conceptually I believe this analogy of having difficulties to emote and respond well to change does have some merit when comparing struggles of Hercules to struggles of children and even adults with Autism, something which I can verify through first-hand experience.<sup>26</sup>

I am now going to consider where Hercules currently sits in children’s culture, starting with Harry’s own gateway to classical mythology: the Disney film *Hercules* of 1997.<sup>27</sup>

Before that film came out, the focus tended be on Hercules as one who endures, who suffers, and who is ultimately rewarded with immortality. Hercules was viewed as a “worthy” hero, whose stories were told to children as part of a classical education, and who could stand, in Lisa Maurice’s words, “as a mark

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<sup>26</sup> Rao, “Autism and Hercules”.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*.

of intellect and good education”.<sup>28</sup> But Hercules is – now – like Classics more broadly – in a different, more democratic place, just as autism is in another place. The old place lingers still: there is still the Hercules whose stories might be told to convey worthy knowledge, but there is a new, subversive, disruptive, and immersive set of images of Hercules where myth connects with fantasy fiction. This is when Hercules intrudes into the modern world, or where contemporary people find themselves transported into the world of Ancient Greek myth.

For example, in Francesca Simon’s time-travel fantasy novel *Helping Hercules* (1999, for ages seven to nine), a magic coin transplants a girl called Susan into the world of Ancient Greek myth, where she helps various heroes, notably Hercules, and is in turn helped by her experiences to deal with various aspects of life in the real world.<sup>29</sup> And in *Zeus Sorts It Out*, a comic-intrusion fantasy novel by John Dougherty (2011, for ages eight to twelve), leaving Mount Olympus to become god of the school toilet, Zeus sets Twelve Labours for the school bully, Eric Lees – his name a pun on Herakles (say it out loud) – including wrestling the caretaker’s cat and stealing leftover cakes from the dinner ladies.<sup>30</sup>

Meanwhile, in Gerald Vinestock’s *Crib and the Labours of Hercules* (2017, for ages nine to fourteen), monsters and other foes from the Twelve Labours return, to modern Greece, and cause havoc until they are faced down by a ten-year-old girl, Crib, and her uncle.<sup>31</sup> Rather than being killed, the monsters are persuaded to live alongside humans in a specially constructed Herculean theme park, replacing, according to Ayelet Peer, “the monster-slaying repeated motif” with “a message of mutual understanding and acceptance”.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Lisa Maurice, “From Elitism to Democratisation: A Half-Century of Hercules in Children’s Literature”, *Journal of Historical Fictions* 2.2 (2019), 81. Lisa’s article provides an excellent exploration of the place of Hercules in children’s culture, pre-Disney and since. See also the following posting from my blog, itself building from Lisa’s study: Susan Deacy, “What Hercules Has Been Doing in Children’s Literature since the 1970s”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 25 August 2020, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2020/08/how-childrens-literature-depicts.html> (accessed 20 July 2022).

<sup>29</sup> Francesca Simon, *Helping Hercules*, ill. Tony Ross, London: Orion Children’s Books, 1999.

<sup>30</sup> John Dougherty, *Zeus Sorts It Out*, ill. Georgien Overwater, London: Young Corgi Books, 2011.

<sup>31</sup> Gerald Vinestock, *Crib and the Labours of Hercules*, ill. G. William, Caterham: Bobaloo Books, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Ayelet Peer, “Entry on: *Crib and the Labours of Hercules* by Gerald Vinestock and G. William”, peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Daniel A. Nkemeleke, *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*, Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/827> (accessed 30 June 2022).

Classical mythology is present in the modern world, too, in P.J. Hoover's "Camp Hercules" series (2018, for ages eight to twelve).<sup>33</sup> Here, Hercules has been cursed by Hera to do his labours over and over again, on a loop, at a Hercules-themed summer camp, until Logan, one of the boys at the camp, defeats the assorted foes after teaming up with two peers. According to Ayelet Peer:

Logan not only discovers his interest in Greek mythology, but also finds out more about himself. He discovers his inner strength, resourcefulness and his ability to lead others. [...] The mythological world with its plethora of various characters, of adventures and perils is an optimized setting in which the hero can develop and grow.<sup>34</sup>

These are just a few of the wealth of Hercules-related works of children's culture. To find others, I would suggest searching "Hercules" in the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* of works of children's and young adult culture shaped in some way by classical topics or themes:<sup>35</sup>

- ★ Searching "Hercules" generates hundreds of hits, from instances where Hercules is key, to retellings of myth where stories about him are told among many others.
- ★ Readers might try other keywords relevant to the current book, such as "adventure", "coming of age", "conflict", "friendship", "identity", and "autism".

## Conclusion

In conclusion, there is much potential for a Hercules that resonates with being a child, and with being autistic. What is more, depictions of Hercules allow children to become immersed in classical myth and to have fun while exploring such issues as fitting in and dealing with friends and family.

In the next chapter, I shall turn specifically to Hercules' choice and to how this episode can relate with being autistic.

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<sup>33</sup> P.J. Hoover, *The Curse of Hera*, "Camp Hercules" 1, Austin, TX: Roots in Myth, 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: *The Curse of Hera* (Camp Hercules, 1) by P.J. (Tricia) Hoover", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Daniel A. Nkemeleke, *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*, Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/956> (accessed 30 June 2022).

<sup>35</sup> *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*, <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey> (accessed 6 June 2022).



CHAPTER 4  
The Choice of Hercules







## THE CHOICE OF HERCULES

We're forging new connections for mythology.

Poppy Robbins, UK undergraduate student  
speaking on neurodiversity in Classics in March 2022<sup>1</sup>

### Introduction



**Figure 24:** Gerd Altmann, *Choice* (2017), Pixabay.

The previous chapters in this book have looked at what it is – and what it can be – about Hercules that can be so relevant to autistic children that they can engage with this figure and his experiences, including in dealing with hardships, solving problems, and inhabiting extremes. With these facets of Hercules in mind, I am going to turn the focus to the key episode on which the lessons are based: the crossroads where Hercules meets two strangers who task him to do something very difficult. This task is perhaps more difficult than the creature-slaying and problem-solving tasks that usually are set for him.

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<sup>1</sup> Deacy, "Roehampton Students on Classics and Neurodiversity".

## **A Story for All**

The concept of a “classical education” carries connotations of elitism. Indeed, as we have seen, retellings of Hercules for children once epitomized such a view of the place Classics could inhabit in children’s culture. However, the story of the Choice of Hercules does not have this baggage, and this is one reason for its appeal for a programme of research into the experiential applications of classical myth. This is because few people today know about this episode. Therefore, no one needs to be advantaged nor disadvantaged, whether or not they start with much – or any – knowledge about classical myth. Instead, all can explore the myth together:

- ★ Anyone already knowledgeable about Hercules, or indeed who already loves classical myth, can extend that knowledge, and so they can go deeper into the world.
- ★ Anyone with limited knowledge – or none at all – does not need to feel excluded, as autistic people often do from any given subject or activity.

And there is more...

## **Zooming In – to a World!**

As this book has been unfolding, I have been increasingly narrowing in: from myth, to classical myth, to one particular character from classical myth. Now I am going to narrow further, to a particular episode involving that character. Soon, I shall be narrowing still further – to one particular artefact: a representation of Hercules on a chimneypiece panel from the eighteenth century. Zooming in in this way can resonate with one of the dimensions of autism, namely, focusing on details rather than the “big picture”. As Rhiannon, a Year 9 (aged thirteen to fourteen) student in the UK, puts it, being autistic means that “all of your senses are heightened. You can hear the quietest sound, you can spot the smallest details and some subtle tastes are really strong”.<sup>2</sup>

Zooming in can offer opportunities for becoming immersed in a particular experience – through touch for instance, or smell. Such a zooming in can be

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<sup>2</sup> Girls of Limpsfield Grange School and Sarah Wild, Head Teacher, “Introducing ‘What We Want the World to Know’ from the Girls of Limpsfield Grange School”, in Barry Carpenter, Francesca Happé, and Jo Egerton, eds., *Girls and Autism: Educational, Family and Personal Perspectives*, Abingdon and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019, 35.

a source of intense, even thrilling, pleasure, including as part of the particular – often called “special” – interests held by many autistic people. For example, the autistic author, musician, and entrepreneur Alis Rowe describes such interests as “obsessive ones”, which “show dedication and focus” and which take her to a world where “it is just me and nothing else matters”.<sup>3</sup>

A facet of autism, then, can be to focus in on very specific details. Yet autism is also about inhabiting a world: it can be a world beneath, as we have seen; it can be a world above as well. I shall be opening up a world the more I narrow in: a world conveyed at a place where roads converge. At this place, Hercules encounters two women – or goddesses – named Pleasure (or Vice) and Hard Work (or Virtue), each of whom set him a task: of choosing between two contrasting ways of life. Choose one and a life of continual hard work will be his but with ultimate rewards of eternal fame. Choose the other, and his will be a life of continual pleasure.

In the earliest, and most influential, version, in Xenophon’s fourth-century BCE *Memorabilia of Socrates*, Hercules was a young man on the cusp of adulthood, the time when “the young, now becoming their own masters, show whether they will take the path of virtue [ἀρετή; *areté*] or vice [κακία; *kakía*]”. The young man found himself at a quiet place, a crossroads, and, not knowing which path to take, “sat, pondering” when two stately women appeared. One of them, Arete, was “attractive to look at and of free-born bearing [...], her body [...] adorned with purity”. The other woman, Kakia, meanwhile, was “grown into plumpness and softness, with her face embellished so that it looked whiter and rosier than it actually was”.<sup>4</sup>

Each of the women offered Hercules a particular path in life:

- ★ Kakia told him that, should he choose her path, his would be a life of pleasures, such as “what delicious food or drink you can find, what sight or sound might appeal to you”, and “what smell or touch you might experience”.
- ★ Arete told him that, should he choose her path, his would be a life of perpetual hard work, with the eventual reward of enduring fame.

As the autistic classicist and novelist Anwen Hayward puts it in a personal comment, “leaving things open-ended can be distracting for autistic people”. What, then, did Hercules choose? What people often assume is that he chooses the way of hard work. In the 1950s retelling of the story by Roger Lancelyn Green,

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<sup>3</sup> Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: Asperger’s and Me*, 93.

<sup>4</sup> Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.1.21–34. Translations by Susan Deacy, emphasis added.

for example, Hercules picks the way of Virtue, and the choice does not cause him much effort.<sup>5</sup> This is a reasonable thing to assume. Hercules is, after all, as we have seen, the doer of labours – someone whose life is full of dangers and hard work. But ancient authors who narrate the story do not actually say what it is that Hercules chooses. And while the enduring, hardworking Hercules of the labours and other deeds fits an outcome where he chooses hard work, there is also another side to Hercules, namely, the great lover of life who matches exactly what the other woman, Pleasure, set out for him. Thus, to the question “What did Hercules choose?” there is no right or wrong answer:

- ★ Opt for hard work and there is plenty of evidence to support this option.
- ★ Opt for pleasure and this decision can be supported with evidence for the feasting or music-loving Hercules – the lover of the pleasures of life.

What is more, the ambiguity in the ancient authors’ accounts is likely to be deliberate. Each author discusses the episode in the context of philosophical discourse around different ways of living and behaving:

- ★ In Xenophon, the story is narrated by the philosopher Socrates, who in turn says that he learnt of it from another philosopher, the sophist Prodicus of Ceos.
- ★ The Roman politician, philosopher, and academic Cicero introduces the choice as part of a concern with how young men should decide how to live and how to behave, including where conflict comes up between competing obligations in a work called *On Duty* (*De officiis* 1.117–118) written in 44 BCE and addressed to his son Cicero the Younger.<sup>6</sup>
- ★ In the first-century CE treatise *On Kingship* by the orator and philosopher Dio Chrysostom, the story of the choice forms part of a discussion of the duties and responsibilities of different kinds of leaders (1.52–84).

And when, starting in the Renaissance, artists came to portray Hercules choosing, he is shown doing just that: choosing. The point is not so much what he chooses but the process of being tasked with choosing. For example, in a painting by Thomas Sully from 1819, the young Hercules is facing a choice between pleasure, conveyed by dancing figures, and learning, conveyed by books and scrolls (see Fig. 25).

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<sup>5</sup> Lancelyn Green, *Tales of the Greek Heroes*, 90–91.

<sup>6</sup> See Susan Deacy, “What Cicero Might Have to Say to Autistic Children – With an Animated Surprise”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 9 January 2020, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2020/01/what-cicero-might-have-to-say-to.html> (accessed 29 July 2022).



**Figure 25:** Thomas Sully, *Choice of Hercules* (1819), Princeton University Art Museum, inv. no. PP304, photograph from Princeton University Art Museum, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

The point is not that Hercules makes one final choice, but that either choice opens up a Herculean path. It is precisely because the choice is still in process that the story was a popular one in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, that is, at the time of Sully's painting, and the date of the chimneypiece panel featured in the lessons. At this time, in Britain, the myth became reimagined as a national myth expressing the difficulties of finding a balance between the "virtues" and industriousness and the temptations of pleasure.<sup>7</sup>

Due to the ambiguity over what Hercules chooses, there is space for anyone to relate to the story and to think about choices without their answer being judged as right or wrong. There is potential appeal for autistic children, who so often feel as though they get things wrong. What is more, it is an episode that opens up various scenarios that are relatable to autistic people, including:

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<sup>7</sup> Classics Confidential, "Hercules Transplanted to a Georgian House"; Deacy, "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", 270–271.

- ★ experiencing intense, potentially contradictory, emotions leading, in some cases, to sensory overload;
- ★ feeling anxious;
- ★ assessing the potential consequences of making decisions.



**Figure 26:** A modern mythological meeting of the roads. Street signs bearing the names of Aphrodite and Prometheus in the neighbourhood of the Zeus Housing Estate in Warsaw, photograph by Maria Makarewicz. Used with kind permission.

## The Adam Room Choice of Hercules

I shall turn, now, to the particular artefact on which the lessons are based and to how it can relate to these various dimensions of autism. It is a late eighteenth-century chimneypiece panel created in the workshop of the Carters, a prominent eighteenth-century family of sculptors.<sup>8</sup>

The panel was intended as a conversation piece, where Hercules stands between the two women, or goddesses – or personified abstractions – resting on his club, over which his lion’s head hangs:<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> On the sculptors and on the popularity of the Choice of Hercules in the eighteenth century, see Deacy, “Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?”, 270–271.

<sup>9</sup> Classics Confidential, “Hercules Transplanted to a Georgian House”.





**Figure 27:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, photograph by Marina Arcady. Used with kind permission.

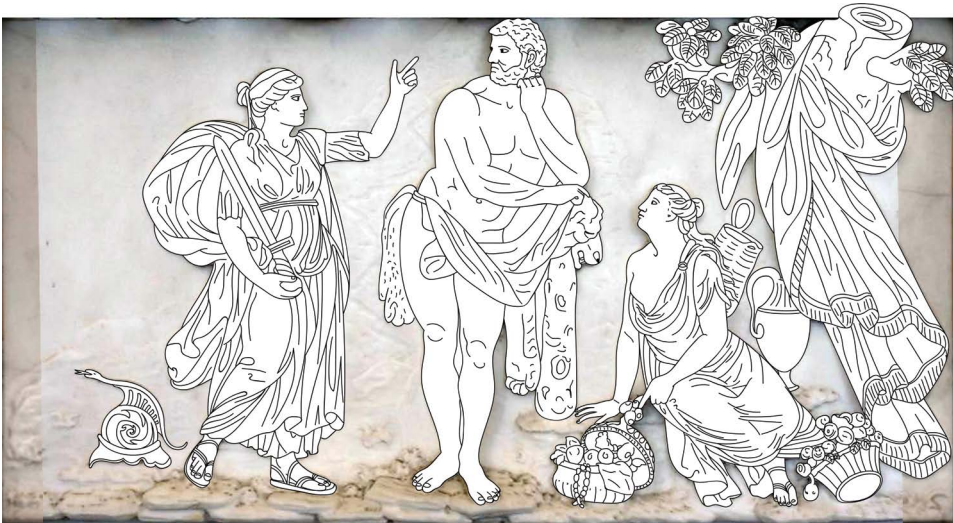


**Figure 28:** Mirror over *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, room decoration by William Wyatt in the style of Robert Adam, eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, photograph by Marina Arcady. Used with kind permission.



- ★ His head is turned towards the woman on the viewer's left, who is fully clothed: Hard Work or Virtue.
- ★ His body is turned to towards the woman on the viewer's right, who is less modestly dressed: Pleasure or Vice.

This, then, is Hercules caught in the midst of deciding between the temptations of pleasure and the drive towards hard work. To the viewer's left, on the side of Hard Work, the landscape is rocky and barren. To the right, meanwhile, on the side of Pleasure, the landscape is a pleasant one, containing fruit and vines, a drinking vessel and a shady covering. The things on the side of the woman on the left, Virtue or Hard Work, are beyond reach, as is indicated by one of her hands, which is pointing up a steep and craggy path. In the other hand she holds a sword – either her own, or the gift she will give Hercules to arm himself for a journey up the mountain. At her feet, there is a helmet, again, either her own, or her gift to Hercules should he choose her path. The helmet is either fringed with a serpent or there is a serpent crawling over it, suggesting the dangers and hardships that will accompany Hercules should he choose the way of Hard Work, though also, potentially, the immortality that will be his ultimate reward should he take this path. The things associated with the other woman, meanwhile, are attainable, plentiful, and abundant. For example, there are two baskets of fruit, one of which is so full that it is overflowing.



**Figure 29:** High-quality vector drawings by Steve K. Simons laid on photograph by Marina Arcady of *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel from the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London. Used with kind permission.

The lessons seek, via stories about Hercules, especially his Choice as depicted on the panel, to provide an opportunity for autistic children to reflect on their experiences as they seek to engage with the world around them, and explore what it is like to experience the world as an autistic child. While the focus is on the episode with the two women and the choice they offer Hercules, as depicted on the panel in the Adam Room, the lessons also draw on other stories about Hercules. Each of these stories – wrestling the Nemean Lion, killing the Hydra, and bringing up Cerberus from the Underworld – has already been outlined in this book. The lessons invite the students to imagine what Hercules might have been doing before reaching the landscape. Were I to have picked many other depictions of the episode, we might have a problem here for the following reason. Full of variation though stories of Hercules are, the Choice takes place, according to ancient authors as summarized earlier in this book (see p. 99) and as depicted in postclassical art (see Figs. 1 and 25), when he is a young man and so before his labours can have begun, apart potentially for the first labour: wrestling the Nemean Lion. Yet “our” Hercules is an adult, bearded man whose depiction might be modelled on the Farnese Hercules, a Roman statue highly popular in the nineteenth century (see Fig. 33).

After introducing Hercules, the lessons move through the story, from his arrival at the strange place, to the meeting with the two women, to the choice and its consequences.

One way for autistic people to cope with the potential anxieties of dealing with daily life can be by coming up with fixed routines: walking the same route, for instance, to a particular destination. When the routine needs to change for a reason beyond their control, like the routine of Hercules does on reaching the strange place and its inhabitants, the change can be anxiety-inducing.<sup>10</sup> The lessons include an opportunity to explore what it can be like to come to a new place that involves a routine change.

Furthermore, just how detailed the place is can provide an opportunity for exploring what it is to experience the world as an autistic person, for whom arriving at any new place can be a source of anxiety. It is not only that there are so many individual features: there are also two distinct sides of the scene, one containing abundant vegetation and fruit, the other rocky and sparse. Each detail, from the sword in the hand of the woman on our left, for example, to the baskets of fruit, to the covering over the foliage behind the woman on our right and the helmet with a serpent on top might contribute to a sense of feeling

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<sup>10</sup> See, e.g., Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: What I Have Learned about Life*, 29–46.

overloaded when there is a great deal of information to process. The lessons invite the students to ask questions such as:

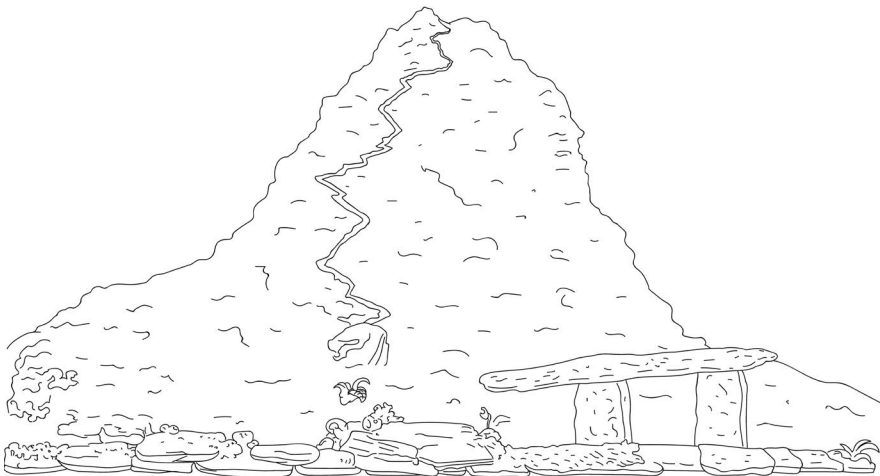
- ★ What can Hercules see?
- ★ What might he be able to hear?
- ★ What does he think about the landscape on one side which includes vegetation and bowls of fruit, baskets, and a water container?
- ★ What does he think about the rocky terrain on the other side?

What is more, the range of possible ways to read what is being experienced by Hercules can resonate with how emotions can be experienced by autistic people. Participants are invited to ask, for example:

- ★ Is Hercules happy to be in the place?
- ★ Is he anxious?
- ★ What does he think about the landscape?

His expression is hard to read. Is he, for instance, happy, or nervous, or relaxed, or worried, or lonely? Or is he feeling several things at once, perhaps leading to emotional overload or even meltdown? Faced with the choice he is charged to make, is he experiencing decision paralysis?

I like to imagine the mountain behind Hercules not only as something he might climb but also as a metaphor for the “volcano effect”, with the lines running down the mountainside being streaks of lava rather than a path zigzagging upwards to the summit.



**Figure 30:** Landscape with seat (figures and objects removed), detail of *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel from the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.



**Figure 31:** Selection of materials from *Choice of Hercules* workshop at the *Życie jest fajne* (Life Is Cool) café, May 2018, prepared by Susan Deacy and Effrosyni Kostara, including *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons, photograph by Susan Deacy. Used with kind permission. The term “cold sweat” on one of the pieces of paper and the word “confused” on another signal two of the many possible emotions connected with the episode. The emojis on two of the other sheets, along with the page of stickers, suggest other possible emotions.

As well as exploring what it can be like to enter a new place and process the numerous things in that place, the lessons include opportunities to explore what it is like to meet new people and interact – or not interact – with them. For example, there are activities focusing on the gestures of the two women, each of whom is approaching Hercules and seeking his attention, and seeking to appeal to him. In line with how challenging it can be to interact with others, the activities can be carried out via lone working, though there are opportunities for group work.

The lessons also include a focus on the complexities of the social situation depicted on the panel via an examination, for example, of each woman’s facial expression and hand gestures. There is an opportunity to discuss how easy – or otherwise – it is to read the gestures and body language of Hard Work and of Pleasure, including in relation to another of the autistic traits that can be read as a deficiency but also as a strength, namely, being direct and straightforward. For example, as is explored in the lessons, the body language of Hercules could suggest that he is responding favourably to either or both women: his gaze is directed to one of them, while his body is turned to the other woman.

Another aspect of what it can be like to be in a strange, new place and to try to make sense of what is going on there is explored in activities that look at the

scene from more than one perspective. As I have said, there is an opportunity to consider how each of the three figures – Hercules, Hard Work, and Pleasure – are using particular ways of communicating. There is a focus, too, on what each of them might be thinking and feeling: that is, not just on Hercules, but also the two women and what each of them might be thinking about Hercules, who, from a different perspective, is not so much a visitor who needs to make sense of his surroundings but an intruder into the space of other people. The lessons include opportunities to think about what others are thinking or feeling by imagining a particular circumstance from someone else's perspective.

After the lessons that centre around how the three figures interact with one another, the focus moves to the event that gives the episode its name: the choice Hercules is tasked to make. As we have seen, his gaze is directed at Hard Work but his body is turned the other way, towards Pleasure. There are two possibilities: that Hercules is in the act of choosing, or that Hercules is unable to choose. Hercules, then, could potentially choose either outcome, so there is no right or wrong answer – and this ambiguity can help facilitate an examination of the complexities of choice-making and their consequences.

## **The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book**

Now that I have given a flavour of how the lessons connect with aspects of being autistic, I shall round off this chapter by outlining how each lesson explores particular dimensions of autism.

### *Lesson 1: Hardship and Having Fun – Meeting Hercules*

When you are autistic, life can be, at turns, intensely pleasurable and full of hardships. This lesson:

- ★ provides an opportunity to reflect on and discuss sources of hardship as well as sources of enjoyment and fun;
- ★ introduces Hercules as a doer of deeds who experiences many hardships but who also likes resting and enjoying himself.

### *Lesson 2: Experiencing New Things – Hercules Arrives Somewhere New*

Autistic people often dislike unfamiliar situations, especially where there is a lot of sensory data to process. This lesson:

- ★ explores what it is like to arrive somewhere new; there is also an opportunity to think about understanding the “big picture” in any scenario as against zoning in on details;
- ★ shows Hercules arriving at a new place, unlike any he has experienced previously, and one that is full of things to see, touch, and smell.

### *Lesson 3: Dealing with Emotions – Hercules Meets Two Strangers*

Some autistic people experience intense emotions, while other people do not feel emotions deeply. Some people, meanwhile, might not be able to recognize or process what they are feeling. Alternatively, someone’s words or body language might communicate a different emotion from the one they are actually feeling. This lesson:

- ★ provides an opportunity to explore the emotional profile of oneself and others;
- ★ explores how Hercules – so often a doer of deeds – is shown to be responding to the place he is in, the people he meets there, and the information he is given by the people there.

### *Lesson 4: Working Out What Others Are Thinking and Feeling – Two Women Meet Hercules*

For a long time I assumed that, as I experience empathy, sometimes intensely, I could not be autistic. Yet autistic people can show a range of levels of empathy. This lesson:

- ★ explores how other people might have different knowledge, experiences, and emotional profiles from one’s own;
- ★ shifts the focus to the two women on the panel by looking at how they are responding to Hercules and by considering what emotions they might be experiencing.

### *Lesson 5: Starting a Conversation – Hercules, Hard Work, and Pleasure Communicate*

Many autistic people enjoy the company of other people, yet social situations can be overwhelming and anxiety-creating. Other people prefer to be by themselves. This lesson:

- ★ explores what to do or say in social situations, including responding to cues, and initiating and maintaining conversations;
- ★ considers how the three mythological characters might be communicating with one another, both verbally and non-verbally.

### *Lesson 6: Enjoying Things – What Pleasure Said*

Autistic people can find many kinds of things pleasurable and often have intense interests. These can offer a sense of structure and security and help someone feel relaxed and happy. This lesson:

- ★ considers sources of enjoyment for autistic young people;
- ★ considers the life of continual pleasure offered by one of the two women who meet with Hercules.

### *Lesson 7: Finding Things Hard – What Hard Work Said*

Autistic people may experience many hardships, such as social interaction, communicating with others, and processing emotions. Conversely, hard work can be a source of pleasure for some autistic people. This lesson:

- ★ provides an opportunity to think about what might, or might not, count as hard work;
- ★ considers the life of continual toil offered by one of the two women Hercules encounters.

### *Lesson 8: Making Decisions – Hercules Chooses*

Autistic people often find changes, big or small, hard to deal with and some might seek to avoid making decisions. This lesson:

- ★ offers an opportunity for thinking about choice-making;
- ★ focuses on the choice Hercules is tasked to make between two different paths in life.

### *Lesson 9: Choices and Consequences – Hercules Fortune Teller*

Some autistic people may find it difficult to understand causality, that is, how one event or process can contribute to another. This lesson:

- ★ provides an opportunity to consider the consequences of actions and events;
- ★ looks at the consequences for Hercules should he choose either of the options offered by the two women.

### *Lesson 10: Present and Future – What Hercules Does Next*

Many autistic people have rich imaginations and rich inner fantasy worlds. This, final, lesson:

- ★ provides an opportunity to create a fantasy world;
- ★ looks ahead to what Hercules might do next after having made his decision at the crossroads.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has moved from the conceptual to the very practical by marking out how the Choice of Hercules can resonate with being autistic and by setting out how each of the lessons engages with dimensions of autism. The next chapter presents the lessons.





CHAPTER 5  
The Lessons





## THE LESSONS

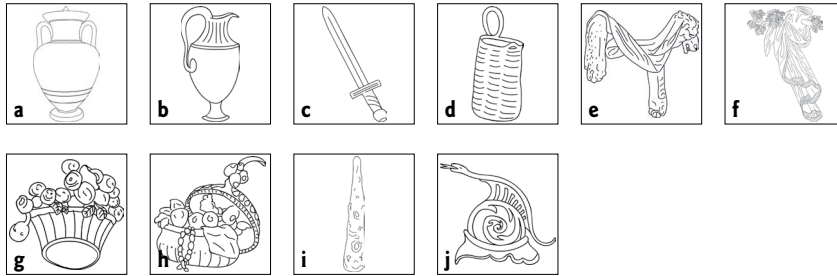
### Introduction

Chapter 1 of this book gave a broad overview of the scope and purpose of the lessons, including their goals, the setting, and the materials required. The chapters that followed looked at how stories about Hercules, including the episode at the crossroads, can relate to the experiences and feelings of autistic children. The previous chapter then concluded with an explanation of the dimensions that are explored in each lesson. The current chapter presents these lessons.



**Figure 32 (left):** The author leading the workshop *Draw Your Hercules' Choice* at the Polish Theatre in Warsaw, during the conference *Our Mythical History* in May 2019, photograph by Katarzyna Marciniak. Used with kind permission. **Figure 33 (right):** Copy of Farnese Hercules, Tyszkiewicz-Potocki Palace, University of Warsaw, photograph by Marta Pszczolińska. Used with kind permission.

## Preliminary Lesson: Decorating the Amphora



**Figure 34:** Set of images for Preliminary Lesson: a-j. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

Each of the lessons starts with the teacher taking out materials relevant to the session (for example, handouts and colouring implements) from some kind of container. This container is called an “Amphora” to give a classical twist and because the key artefact used in the lessons contains an amphora (see Figs. 34b, 35). An alternative name could be the equally classical and perhaps better-known “Urn” or “Grecian Urn”. This Amphora (or Urn) needs only be as basic as a cardboard folder or large envelope. When I have workshopped the lessons I have used a linen basket.



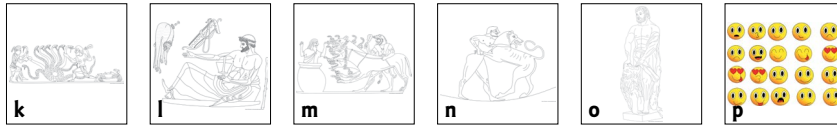
**Figure 35:** “Amphora” containing materials for *Choice of Hercules* lessons, photograph by Susan Deacy.

Whatever is used, the Amphora could be illustrated with a picture of an amphora. To give the students a flavour of what is to come in the lesson or lessons they take part in, as well as to generate some expectation for what is to come, teachers might:

- ★ Invite the students to select one of the two drawings that follow. One is a template created by Steve K. Simons for the Panoply Vase Animation Project. The other is Steve's drawing of the amphora on the *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel that is key to the lessons.
- ★ Invite the students to customize the chosen amphora. This could be done by colouring it in or by cutting out and sticking in some of the images that will be used in the lessons.



## Lesson 1: Hardship and Having Fun – Meeting Hercules



**Figure 36:** Set of images for Lesson 1: k–p. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

This first lesson introduces Hercules, and also some of the dimensions of autism that recur throughout the lessons. The lesson can serve as an introduction to the set as a whole, although it can also be done as a stand-alone session.

Life can be full of pleasures for an autistic young person. Yet life can also present many challenges and hardships. This lesson offers an opportunity to explore sources of hardship and pleasure by introducing Hercules: a hero who, at turns, leads a life of constant hardship and of intense pleasure.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** Hercules as a figure who leads a life of hard work and enjoyment;
- ★ **explore** aspects of “hard work” and “fun”;
- ★ **reflect on** sources of hardship and enjoyment in their lives.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: Hercules wrestling the Nemean Lion; Hercules feasting; Hercules alone; also, potentially: Hercules and the Hydra; Hercules and Cerberus.
- ★ Emojis.
- ★ Colouring pencils, crayons, etc.

### Lesson Steps

#### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Suggested pictures: Hercules alone; Hercules wrestling the Nemean Lion; Hercules feasting; emojis.

**Step 2: Talk about... Hercules Working and Resting**

- ★ A starting point for this part of the lesson could be to tell the students about how, a long time ago – in Ancient Greece – people liked telling stories about heroines and heroes, gods and goddesses, fantastic creatures and monsters. Most of all, it could be explained, the Ancient Greeks liked telling stories about a hero called Hercules, who was the most adventurous of all the figures from myth. At this point, the depiction of Hercules on the statue could be discussed.
- ★ One point to emphasize could be that Hercules was regarded as very strong and that he was known for carrying a club made of wood. Points to stress could be that his many adventures included fighting ferocious beasts that no one else could defeat, usually all by himself, and that his life very often involved difficulties and hardship.
- ★ As an example, perhaps pick the encounter with the Nemean Lion as an illustration of Hercules' strength and the effort he has to put in. Alternatively, pick the drawing of the statue, and point out how Hercules' lion-skin rests on his club. Ask whether he looks weary here, perhaps because of how tiring his labours are.
- ★ Stress that as soon as he had defeated some creature or other he would sometimes rest and then move on to a whole new adventure. The examples of his encounters with the Hydra and with Cerberus could be brought in here: the Hydra example because of the hard work, both physical and intellectual, that Hercules uses to overcome this creature, and the example of Cerberus because, even by the standards of Hercules as the great traveller, this adventure is exceptional, involving as it does a visit beyond this world, to the realm of Hades.
- ★ Then introduce the other side of Hercules, namely that, as well as carrying out tasks, he loved having fun, as is conveyed in the picture which shows him lying on a couch. Explain that he loved eating and drinking and partying and making music. Just as he could perform tasks better than anyone else, he could sing louder than anyone else and eat and drink more than anyone else.

*Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ Encourage students to say, or write down, words to describe Hercules (for example, "strong", "brave", "happy"). Alternatively, the children could point to or draw an emoji that best fits how they would describe the hero.



### **Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn**

- ★ Hand out to the students one of the pictures of Hercules from the Amphora, or let the students choose one of the drawings and colour it in.
- ★ Ask whether the picture is depicting “hardship” or “fun”.

### **Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex**

- ★ Ask the students to discuss something they have found enjoyable, and something they find hard.
- ★ Or: stick with Hercules. Invite the students to compare two depictions: one where he is having fun, the other where he is in action.

### **Step 5: Plenary**

- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

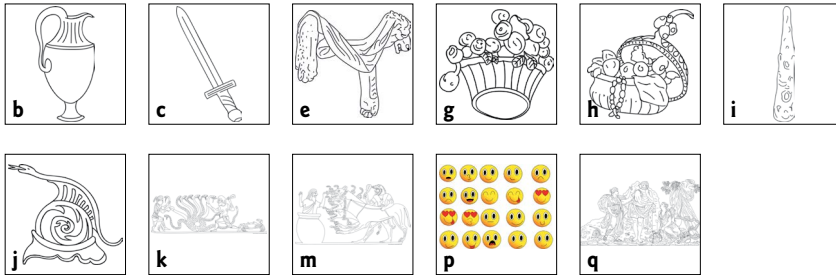
### **Follow-Up Materials**

- ★ The *Teachers’ Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See “What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials”, *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* [Project’s website], <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials> (accessed 20 July 2023).

## Lesson 2: Experiencing New Things – Hercules Arrives Somewhere New



**Figure 37:** Set of images for Lesson 2: b, c, e, g, h, i, j, k, m, p, q. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

This lesson – the first to consider Hercules in the place where he meets two women and their assorted attributes – deals with the moment when Hercules arrives at a new place, one unlike any other he has experienced previously.

Many autistic people dislike being in unfamiliar environments. This lesson offers an opportunity to explore what it can feel like to arrive somewhere new. It does this by inviting discussion of what Hercules might be experiencing when he enters an unfamiliar place full of things to see, smell, and taste.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** Hercules as an adventurous hero dealing with new challenges on arriving somewhere new;
- ★ **explore** what it can be like encountering new things and processing sensory data;
- ★ **discuss** experiencing new things.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: the whole panel scene; possibly details from the panel; Hercules wrestling the Nemean Lion; Hercules alone; the Lernaean Hydra or Cerberus (or all of these).
- ★ Colouring pencils, crayons, etc.

## Lesson Steps

### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Suggested pictures: Hercules with the Nemean Lion or the Lernaean Hydra or Cerberus (or all!); the panel scene.

### Step 2: Talk about... Hercules Arriving Somewhere Strange

- ★ Start by introducing Hercules as a hero who likes having adventures. If this lesson follows the previous one then a quick recap could be provided. If this lesson is being done as a discrete one then give a quick overview of Hercules, perhaps by focusing briefly on the example of one of the labours. Possible ones to focus on are the encounters with the Nemean Lion or the Lernaean Hydra or Cerberus.
- ★ Next, explain how the lesson will concern an encounter Hercules had, but not his usual kind of adventure. Outline how he was walking through the countryside – alone like he usually was – when he found himself in a strange place that looked like nowhere else he had ever been to, even though he had been to all sorts of wondrous places. For example, the story of the visit to the lair of the Hydra could be mentioned, or Hercules' visit to the Underworld to bring up the monstrous multi-headed dog Cerberus.
- ★ Explain, showing the depiction of the scene as a whole, that there were so many things in the place that he did not know where to look first. For example, point out how, on one side, there were rocks and the start of a path up a steep and craggy mountain and bowls of fruit and drinking vessels on the other side.

### *Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ What do you think Hercules notices first?
- ★ What else is there to see?

### Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn

- ★ Either: let the students pick one of the aspects of the scene and copy it or colour it in, using any colours they would like.
- ★ Or: put the students into groups where everyone is assigned one aspect to colour in.

**Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex**

- ★ Ask the students to compare and contrast the things on the one side of the scene (rocks, mountain, etc.) with those on the other (fruit, drink, etc.). Perhaps discuss the colours students chose for each part of the scene.
- ★ Ask the students to think of a time when they arrived somewhere new. What was the journey like? What was the first thing they noticed when they entered the new place?

**Step 5: Plenary**

- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

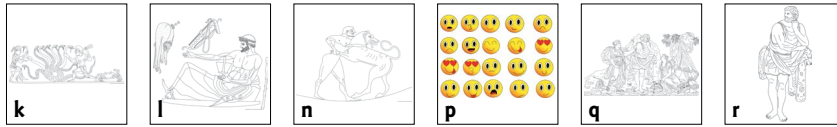
**Follow-Up Materials**

- ★ The *Teachers' Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See "What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials", <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.

## Lesson 3: Dealing with Emotions – Hercules Meets Two Strangers



**Figure 38:** Set of images for Lesson 3: k, l, n, p, q, r. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

This lesson explores emotions, including recognizing and regulating them and communicating them to other people.

By discussing what Hercules might be feeling when he reaches an unfamiliar landscape, the students are offered an opportunity to discuss the emotions generated by new experiences.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** Hercules as an adventurous hero who reaches a landscape unlike any other;
- ★ **explore** different kinds of emotions and ways to recognize, understand, and communicate them;
- ★ **discuss** emotions generated by particular experiences.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: the whole panel scene; Hercules from the panel; Hercules wrestling the Nemean Lion; and potentially Hercules with the Hydra and Hercules feasting.
- ★ Emojis.
- ★ Colouring pencils, crayons, etc.
- ★ Possibly, word list: “happy”, “worried”, “excited”, “nervous”, “delighted”, “scared”, “confused”.

## Lesson Steps

### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Suggested pictures: Hercules from the panel; an active Hercules, for example, fighting the Nemean Lion; emojis.

### Step 2: Talk about... Hercules and His Feelings

- ★ Describe how Hercules is known as a great doer of deeds. If the students are meeting Hercules for the first time, focus on one or two of his adventures, such as with the Nemean Lion or the Lernaean Hydra.
- ★ If they have already done one of the other lessons, give a quick recap or ask the students which stories they remember – or tell the students about an episode that has not yet been covered.
- ★ Stress that when he is not carrying out tasks, Hercules likes eating tasty food and drinking pleasant drinks. Perhaps show the picture of Hercules feasting. Then show the picture of the whole scene.
- ★ Emphasize that there is a lot that he could do in the current place where he has found himself – there is fruit and drink and a helmet to put on with a serpent on top of it. There is a mountain path he could climb. One of the fruit bowls has turned over. He could put that right. Or he could investigate the cloth hanging over a tree.
- ★ Point out that there are two other people to talk to. But stress that Hercules is standing still, not doing anything.

### *Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ What is Hercules looking at?
- ★ What is he standing like?
- ★ What could he be feeling?

### Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn

- ★ Colour in Hercules: either the picture of Hercules by himself or Hercules as depicted in the landscape.
- ★ Another activity could be to have a go at impersonating his pose.

### Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex

- ★ Ask the students what words they would use to describe how Hercules is feeling. Invite them to pick one or two or as many as they would like from

an existing list, for example: “happy”, “worried”, “excited”, “nervous”, “delighted”, “scared”, “confused” – or they might add their own. Or they might use emojis – such as “happy”, “confused”, “sad”, or more complex ones...

- ★ Ask whether it looks as though Hercules is glad to be there or if it could be that he is wishing he was somewhere else.
- ★ Ask whether anything like this has ever happened to the students: when they reached a new place which puzzled them, for example. What was the place? What things did they notice? What did they feel like? Did they want to stay, or leave?

### **Step 5: Plenary**

- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

### **Follow-Up Materials**

- ★ The *Teachers’ Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See “What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials”, <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.

## Lesson 4: Working Out What Others Are Thinking and Feeling – Two Women Meet Hercules



**Figure 39:** Set of images for Lesson 4: c, k, r, s, t. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

For this lesson, the focus moves away from Hercules to the two other figures in the landscape. Students are invited to explore ways to assign knowledge and emotions both to themselves and to others and to consider how far other people will have different perspectives and knowledge from their own.

For students who have done others of the lessons, this shift away from a focus on Hercules offers an opportunity to consider situations as they are experienced by those who encounter Hercules rather than by Hercules himself. The lesson can also serve as a stand-alone opportunity for exploring relating to other people, imagining what other people are thinking and feeling, and attributing emotions to other people.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** two mythological personifications whose environment the hero Hercules enters;
- ★ **explore** how to gauge what others are thinking and feeling;
- ★ **discuss** feelings aroused when encountering someone new.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: Hard Work; Pleasure; Hercules and the Nemean Lion, the Hydra, or Cerberus.
- ★ Emojis.
- ★ Colouring pencils, crayons, etc.



## Lesson Steps

### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Suggested pictures: the two women from the panel; Hercules with one of the monsters he encounters – Cerberus, the Hydra, or the Lion.

### Step 2: Talk about... Hard Work and Pleasure Meet Hercules

- ★ How the discussion proceeds will depend on whether the students have already done any of the previous activities or are doing this lesson as a discrete one. If they have done other lessons already, it should be worth saying that while Hercules will be relevant again, the focus is going to shift from him to the other two people in the scene. As a route in, it might be worth giving a recap of some of Hercules' encounters with others, such as those with the Lion or the Hydra, in contrast to his meeting with two strangers who are different from those he usually encounters.
- ★ Alternatively, if this is the first lesson the students have done, one starting point could be an overview of who Hercules is, and the kind of figures he tends to meet, such as the Nemean Lion and the Hydra and the monstrous dog Cerberus. However, it is not vital to start with any back story. Indeed, the lesson could even be done without any reference at all to who Hercules is.
- ★ One thing to do is look at the two women and identify what is distinctive about them. Explain how one is called Pleasure. Invite the students to consider how Pleasure is sitting down in the part of the place where there is a tree for shade, so she will not get too hot, and a sheet over the tree to make it even more shaded. Point out how she is sitting down, not standing. Her seat is a bench from where she can reach baskets full of fruit. There is also a big vase full of something to drink for whenever she is thirsty.
- ★ Next introduce the other woman, who could be called Hard Work. It could be that Hard Work liked to spend her time in the other part of the place. Here there is no shade and there are bare rocks leading up to a tall mountain with a steep path going up it.
- ★ Describe how, one day, a visitor, a man, entered into the place and stood in the middle of it between Pleasure and Hard Work.

### *Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ What might Hard Work be thinking? And what about Pleasure? What might she be thinking? Which of the two women looks like she is going to speak first?

- ★ If appropriate, show pictures of Hercules' other adventures – and turn the focus on what others might be experiencing – the Hydra, for example, when Hercules comes to her home.

### **Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn**

- ★ Invite the students to colour in one of the women – either assign them the figure to draw or let them choose. Or: half the class could pick one, half the class the other.
- ★ Another activity could be to encourage the students to impersonate the poses of one or both women.

### **Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex**

- ★ The woman the students have coloured in: ask what might she be thinking or feeling? Surprised? Pleased? Annoyed? Anxious? Relaxed? Do the same for the other woman. Invite the students to compare and contrast the two. Students' answers can be written, given via emojis or given verbally as required or preferred.
- ★ Ask the students if they have ever been somewhere they are used to when someone new turned up. It could be a visitor, or a relative. How did they feel? Responses can be oral or written – via a short reflective piece, for instance – or via emojis.

### **Step 5: Plenary**

- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

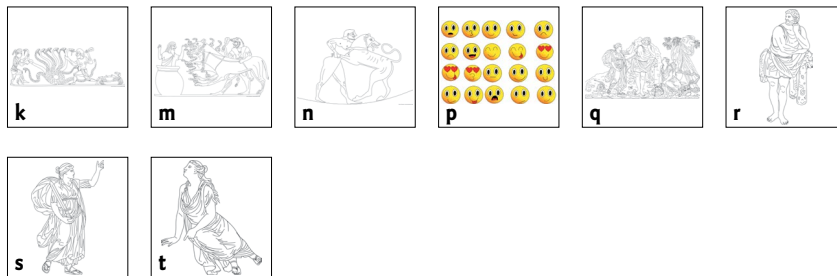
### **Follow-Up Materials**

- ★ The *Teachers' Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See "What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials", <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.

## Lesson 5: Starting a Conversation – Hercules, Hard Work, and Pleasure Communicate



**Figure 40:** Set of images for Lesson 5: k, m, n, p, q, r, s, t. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

This lesson is concerned with what to do or say in social situations.

By considering the range of non-verbal communications and gestures made by the three figures on the Choice of Hercules panel scene, students are invited to explore possible ways of responding to the cues of others, and ways to initiate, and maintain, conversations.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** how the hero Hercules interacts with people he is meeting for the first time;
- ★ **explore** how to communicate with others, including starting and maintaining conversations;
- ★ **discuss** what it can be like to talk with others, including when meeting them for the first time.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: Hard Work alone; Pleasure alone; Hercules alone; the whole panel; also, potentially: Hercules and the Hydra, Lion, or Cerberus.
- ★ Emojis.
- ★ Pens, colouring pencils, crayons, etc.
- ★ Potentially pre-prepared words for speech bubbles, for example: “Hello”, “How are you?”, “Where do you come from?”, “Do you like it here?”

## Lesson Steps

### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Suggested pictures: the three figures from the panel; a picture of Hercules with others, for example, feasting; emojis.

### Step 2: Talk about... Hard Work, Pleasure, and Hercules in Conversation

- ★ How the session starts will depend on how many – if any – of the lessons the students have already done. If they have done one or more of the others, a good starting place could be a reminder of how Hercules had reached a curious place where two women were present along with numerous objects and features.
- ★ If this is the first or a stand-alone lesson, a place to start would be an introduction to Hercules as an action hero. This could be done via an example of a labour such as the encounter with the Nemean Lion – a good choice because of the lion-skin resting on his club, or the encounter with the Lernaean Hydra – a good choice because the serpent on the helmet might be compared to the Hydra's many snake heads. The picture of Cerberus would be another possible image to show to the students in light of the serpentine appearance of Cerberus in this image.
- ★ Describe how the place Hercules has reached is a curious one. Show the picture of the scene and emphasize that it is a place which involves three people who might each have their own relationships with the space. Explain that it is a space linked with the women, for instance, while Hercules is a newcomer who has arrived in their space.
- ★ Suggest what might have happened when the three people started to interact with one another. Who made the first step? Did they do it by talking or by a gesture? Or both? Who started speaking first?

#### *Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ Who speaks first?
- ★ Who goes next?
- ★ What do they say?

### Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn

- ★ Invite the students, individually or in groups, to spend a little time colouring in one or more of the three figures in the scene, focusing perhaps on their faces and arms.

- ★ Next invite the students to add speech bubbles next to each person, such as: “Hello?”, “Who are you?”, “What’s your name?”, “Where are you from?”, “Do you live here?”, “Do you like being here?” These could be from a pre-prepared list, or the students could create them themselves.
- ★ If appropriate, and to let the students go deeper into the story, invite the students to write a dialogue between the characters.

#### **Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex**

- ★ Ask the students whether they have ever been somewhere where they started a conversation with people they had never spoken with before. Did they start the conversation, or did the other person or people? What did the students say? What did the other person or people say?
- ★ If such a topic is suitable for the current class, ask when it is okay to speak to a person they have not met before (for example, a new teacher or classmate)?

#### **Step 5: Plenary**

- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

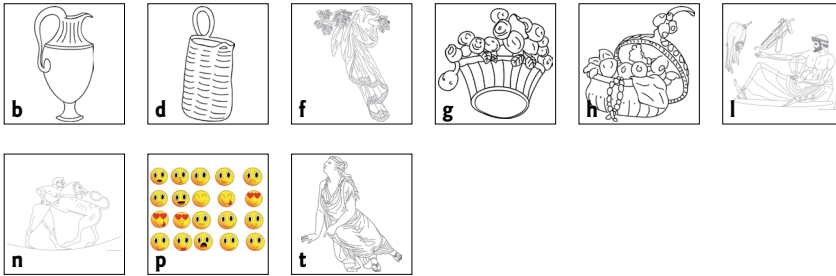
#### **Follow-Up Materials**

- ★ The *Teachers’ Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See “What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials”, <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.

## Lesson 6: Enjoying Things – What Pleasure Said



**Figure 41:** Set of images for Lesson 6: b, d, f, g, h, l, n, p, t. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

The focus of this lesson is what is represented by, and offered by, one of the two women whom Hercules encounters: Pleasure.

The lesson invites students to discuss what they enjoy doing, including by sharing any intense interests they may have.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** Hercules and his encounter with two curious women, one of whom offers him a life full of pleasurable things;
- ★ **explore** various sources of enjoyment;
- ★ **discuss** pleasurable things, such as hobbies, favourite activities, and intense interests.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: Pleasure, along with Pleasure-linked aspects from the panel – basket, fruit basket, overturned fruit basket, sheet-covered tree, drinking vessel; also: Hercules feasting and with the Nemean Lion.
- ★ Emojis.
- ★ Colouring pencils, crayons, etc.
- ★ Where suitable: a list of words linked with the figure of Pleasure, for example – “happy”, “nature”, “basket”, “food”, “fruit”, “drink”, “party”, “shade”, “rest”.

## Lesson Steps

### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Suggested pictures: Pleasure and the things linked with her on the panel; Hercules feasting.

### Step 2: Talk about... Hercules and Pleasure

- ★ Like the previous lesson, how this one starts will depend on how many – if any – of the lessons the students have already done. If they have done other lessons, a possible starting point could be a quick reminder of how Hercules came to be in a curious place – perhaps after having completed one of his labours, such as fighting the Nemean Lion or the Lernaean Hydra or bringing up Cerberus from the Underworld.<sup>6</sup>
- ★ If this is the first or a stand-alone lesson, a starting point could be an introduction to Hercules as a hero who has lots of adventures – perhaps by focusing on how he defeated the Nemean Lion as this will also explain the presence of the lion-skin resting on his club.<sup>7</sup> Another characteristic to highlight would be Hercules' tendency not just to do lots of tasks but to enjoy feasting as well, as illustrated by the picture of him feasting in the Amphora for the current lesson.
- ★ Then briefly say that Hercules had arrived at a curious place, barren on one side, abundant with fruit and drink on the other. Describe how, in the curious place, he met two women, each of whom was associated with a particular side of the landscape.
- ★ Invite the students to look at the side of the scene where there is food and a drink vessel and a shady covering offering protection from the heat of the sun.
- ★ Explain, next, that each of the women told Hercules what kind of life he should lead. Say that one of the women, Pleasure, told him about the things she liked – about the fun she liked having, always doing what she wanted to do. Perhaps explain that she said that he could have as much of the food that he would like to eat, and as much of the contents of the drinking vessel as he wanted.
- ★ Talk about how Hercules might have responded to what Pleasure said. Suggest that he might be tired from his adventures and would like to enjoy

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<sup>6</sup> For my approach to the chronology within the Choice episode, see my comment on p. 105.

<sup>7</sup> For an alternative version of the lion-skin provenance (the Lion of Cithaeron myth), see p. 83.

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resting, or that he might be remembering other times he enjoyed eating and drinking and not having to work hard.

### *Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ What might Hercules be thinking about what Pleasure tells him?
- ★ Does he seem interested?
- ★ What might be the significance of how he is looking at Hard Work while his body is turned towards Pleasure?

### **Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn**

- ★ Let the students pick one of the objects linked with Pleasure, or assign particular objects to each student or to small groups. Invite them to colour in their object and to say, write down, or point to words which describe it, where appropriate from a pre-prepared list.

### **Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex**

- ★ Ask the children about times they have had fun, for instance by listening to a song they like, or eating their favourite food, or doing an activity that they like to carry out. Were they alone or with friends or family? Answers can be given verbally or in writing. Alternatively, students can be invited to draw a picture showing themselves having fun.
- ★ Alternatively, keep the focus on Hercules by thinking about other times when he has had fun or relaxed by resting, eating, drinking, and not having to try hard.

### **Step 5: Plenary**

- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

### **Follow-Up Materials**

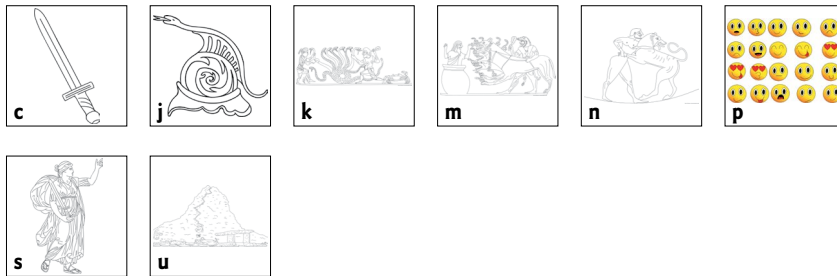
- ★ The *Teachers' Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See "What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials", <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.



## Lesson 7: Finding Things Hard – What Hard Work Said



**Figure 42:** Set of images for Lesson 7: c, j, k, m, n, p, s, u. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

The focus of this lesson is the life of continual toil offered by one of the two women that Hercules encounters. This lesson can complement the previous one, which focuses on sources of pleasure, although – like all the lessons in this book – it can also be done independently of any other lesson.

The lesson offers an opportunity for thinking about reasons for doing things that are difficult, including by inviting the students to think about how present actions can have longer-term consequences. The lesson also offers an opportunity for considering what might, or might not, count as hard work.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** the hero Hercules and the many difficulties he experiences;
- ★ **explore** what makes certain tasks difficult;
- ★ **discuss** experiencing difficult things that require hard work to accomplish.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: Hard Work, along with Hard Work-linked aspects from the panel – helmet, sword, mountain; also: Hercules with the Nemean Lion, the Hydra, or Cerberus.
- ★ Emojis.
- ★ Colouring pencils, crayons, etc.
- ★ If suitable, a list of words linked with the figure of Hard Work, for example: “difficult”, “mountain”, “helmet”, “sword”.

## Lesson Steps

### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Suggested pictures: Hard Work and the things linked with her on the panel; Hercules with the Nemean Lion, the Hydra, or Cerberus.

### Step 2: Talk about... Hercules and Hard Work

- ★ Like the previous lesson, how this one starts will depend on how many – if any – of the lessons the students have already done. If they have done any of the others, a possible starting point could be a quick reminder of how Hercules came to be in a curious place – perhaps after having completed one of his labours, such as fighting the Nemean Lion or the Lernaean Hydra or bringing up Cerberus from Hades.<sup>9</sup>
- ★ If students have done the previous lesson, “Enjoying Things – What Pleasure Said”, perhaps pick a different labour from the one dealt with there. A suitable choice could be the encounter with the Hydra or with Cerberus as the serpentine aspects of each match the serpent on the panel on top of the helmet.
- ★ If this is the first lesson the students will have done, a starting point could be an introduction to Hercules as a hero who has lots of adventures – perhaps by focusing on how he defeated the Nemean Lion as this will also explain the presence of the lion-skin resting on his club,<sup>10</sup> or by focusing on the Hydra or Cerberus in light of the serpentine aspects mentioned in the previous bullet point. Another characteristic to highlight could be Hercules’ tendency not just to do lots of tasks but to enjoy feasting as well.
- ★ Then briefly say that Hercules had arrived at a curious place, abundant with fruit and drink on one side, but barren on the other, with rocks and a helmet with a serpent on top.
- ★ Describe how, in the curious place, he met two women, each of whom was associated with a particular side of the landscape. Consider whether, on the rocky side of the place, Hercules was interested in looking at the helmet and the snake on top of it.
- ★ Explain that they each told him what kind of life he should lead. Say that one of the women, Hard Work, told Hercules about what he could do if he put on the helmet and took the sword she was holding. Describe how she pointed up the mountainside and told him about all the adventures he could

<sup>9</sup> For my approach to the chronology within the Choice episode, see my comment on p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> For an alternative version of the lion-skin provenance (the Lion of Cithaeron myth), see p. 83.

have if he started up the mountain path. It would be hard work but he would have many new experiences and meet lots of people and creatures. He would never be bored.

### *Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ What might Hercules be thinking about what Hard Work tells him?
- ★ Does he seem interested? He is looking at Hard Work after all, even though his body is turned towards Pleasure...

### **Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn**

- ★ Invite the students to select one of the objects linked with Hard Work. Alternatively, assign objects to the children.
- ★ Invite the students to colour in their objects and pick words which describe it.

### **Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex**

- ★ Ask the students to consider times when they have had to work hard for something, such as at school when they were taught something new. Questions to ask might include: did you work by yourself, or with others? Did you give up or did you keep going? Were you pleased with the results of your hard work?
- ★ Or, keep the focus on Hercules by thinking about other times when he did difficult things – like how he fought the Hydra or the Lion or went to the Underworld to bring up Cerberus.

### **Step 5: Plenary**

- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

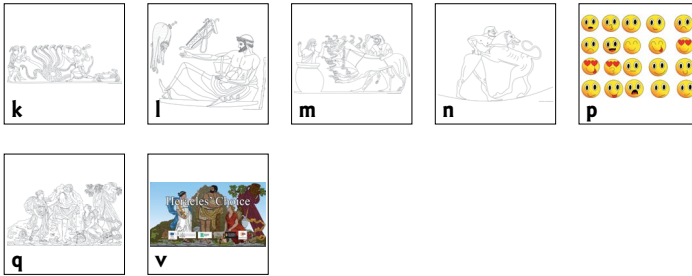
### **Follow-up Materials**

- ★ The *Teachers' Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See "What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials", <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.

## Lesson 8: Making Decisions – Hercules Chooses



**Figure 43:** Set of images for Lesson 8: k, l, m, n, p, q, v. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

By considering the difficult decision Hercules is asked to make between Pleasure and Hard Work, the students are offered an opportunity to discuss choice-making. This lesson focuses on the choice Hercules is tasked to make between two contrasting paths in life.

Autistic people may worry about getting things wrong. Yet there is no “right” or “wrong” answer to the question of which choice Hercules made. Like other lessons in this book, this one can be done alone or in connection with any of the others.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** the choice the hero Hercules faces between two very different paths in life;
- ★ **explore** having to make choices;
- ★ **discuss** experiences of making choices.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: the panel as a whole; Hercules with the Hydra, the Nemean Lion, or Cerberus; Hercules feasting.
- ★ Emojis.
- ★ Colouring pencils, crayons, etc.
- ★ *Choice of Hercules* animation.

## Lesson Steps

### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Picture of the panel as a whole along with at least one depiction of Hercules carrying out a labour and the picture of Hercules feasting.
- ★ Still of the *Choice of Hercules* animation together, perhaps, with a piece of paper/card either with the word "Animation" written on it or containing a drawing of a play button icon.

### Step 2: Talk about... How Hercules Makes a Choice

- ★ Like the previous lesson, how this one starts will depend on how many – if any – of the lessons the students have already done. If they have done any of the others, a possible starting point could be a quick reminder of how Hercules came to be in a curious place, perhaps after having completed one of his labours, such as fighting the Nemean Lion or the Lernaean Hydra or bringing up Cerberus from Hades.<sup>12</sup> Summarize how adventurous Hercules is, but also how fun-loving.
- ★ If this is the first lesson the students have done, or a stand-alone lesson, a starting point could be an introduction to Hercules as a hero who has lots of adventures, perhaps by focusing on how he defeats the Nemean Lion as this will also explain the presence of the lion-skin resting on his club,<sup>13</sup> or by focusing on the Hydra or Cerberus in light of the serpent on the helmet that he might choose to put on. Another characteristic to highlight would be Hercules' tendency not just to do lots of tasks but to enjoy feasting as well.
- ★ Describe how Hercules listened to what the two women in the curious place he had reached told him. State that he heard Hard Work tell him that he should choose a life of hard work. She told him to put on the helmet and take the sword she was holding and start walking up the mountainside ready for new adventures. Say how he also listened to Pleasure, who told him that, by choosing the path she offered him, he could opt for a life of constant fun and pleasure. There would always be nice food to eat and tasty things to drink. Explain that the women told him to choose between the two options.
- ★ Next, show the animation.

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<sup>12</sup> For my approach to the chronology within the Choice episode, see my comment on p. 105.

<sup>13</sup> For an alternative version of the lion-skin provenance (the Lion of Cithaeron myth), see p. 83.

### *Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ Which choice sounds better?
- ★ As Hercules is trying to make his choice, what is he looking like – does he seem to be feeling any one thing, or lots of things? Is he worried? Confused?

### **Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn**

- ★ Give each student – or the class as a whole – the picture of Hercules deliberating. Let the students add to the picture things to do with choosing Pleasure on one side, and things linked with choosing Hard Work on the other. The students can also be encouraged to colour in aspects of the scene, or to try impersonating the pose of Hercules or of the other two people.

### **Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex**

- ★ Possible questions for the students: have you ever had to make a choice that you found difficult to make, such as which game to play, what to read, what to have for breakfast, or which TV show or movie to watch? How did you make your mind up? What would *you* choose if faced with a choice like that of Hercules?
- ★ Alternatively, keep the focus on Hercules by asking what the options are for Hercules? Fun? Not having to try all the time? Hard work? Adventures? What does he choose?

### **Step 5: Plenary**

- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

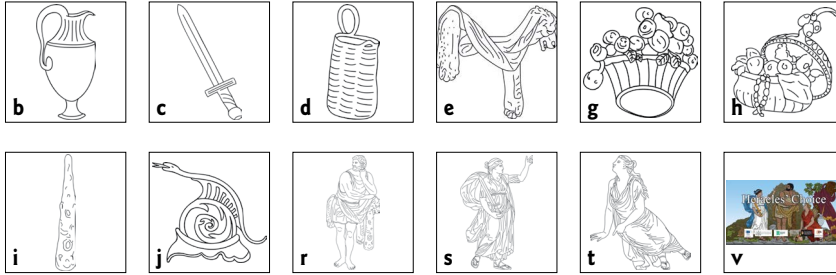
### **Follow-Up Materials**

- ★ The *Teachers' Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> See "What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials", <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.

## Lesson 9: Choices and Consequences – Hercules Fortune Teller



**Figure 44:** Set of images for Lesson 9: b, c, d, e, g, h, i, j, r, s, t, v. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

This lesson deals with an issue also explored in the previous lesson, namely, making choices, while also exploring causality. Recognizing that the present can impact upon the future can be an intriguing concept for an autistic person.

By examining the different choices that Hercules might make, the students are given an opportunity to think about how one event or process can contribute to another. The lesson could be done as a follow-up to the previous lesson, which also covered decision-making. Alternatively, like all the lessons in this book, it can be done as a stand-alone lesson.

Step 3 – making the fortune teller – will likely take longer than step 3 in the other lessons so more time might be needed for this lesson.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** Hercules and his distinctive mode of life;
- ★ **explore** choices and causality;
- ★ **discuss** actions and how they impact on the future.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: Hercules; Pleasure; Hard Work; lion-skin; vase; sword; helmet; basket; sheet; mountain; club; overturned basket.
- ★ Glue, scissors, colouring pencils, crayons, etc., writing pen or pencil.
- ★ *Choice of Hercules* animation.

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## Lesson Steps

### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Card containing the word “animation” or a “play” symbol, along with the details from the panel listed under “materials” above.

### Step 2: Talk about... Hercules and Where His Choices Lead

- ★ Like the previous lesson, how this one starts will depend on how many – if any – of the lessons the students have already done. If they have done any of the others, a possible starting point could be a recap of how Hercules came to be in a curious place, perhaps after having completed one of his labours, such as fighting the Nemean Lion or the Lernaean Hydra or bringing up Cerberus from Hades.<sup>15</sup> Summarize how adventurous Hercules is, and how much he enjoys having fun as well.
- ★ If this is the first lesson the students have done, a place to start could be an introduction to Hercules as a hero who was renowned for having adventures, perhaps by focusing on how he defeated the Nemean Lion as this will also explain the presence of the lion-skin resting on his club,<sup>16</sup> or by telling the students about the encounter with the Hydra in light of the serpent on the helmet that Hercules might choose to put on. Another characteristic to highlight would be Hercules’ tendency not just to do lots of tasks but to enjoy feasting as well.
- ★ Describe how the place Hercules had reached contained lots of pleasant things on one side, such as lots of food and drink, and things linked with hardship on the other side, like a path up a steep mountain and a helmet. Describe how the two women each told Hercules that he could live a life linked with a particular side of the landscape. Offer the suggestion that Hard Work told him that he should put on the helmet and take the sword she was holding and start walking up the mountainside ready for new adventures.
- ★ Tell the students about how Pleasure told Hercules that, by choosing the path she offered him, he could opt for a life of constant fun and pleasure where there would always be nice food to eat and tasty things to drink.
- ★ Explain that the women told him to choose between the two paths in life. Then show the animation of Hercules deliberating.

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<sup>15</sup> For my approach to the chronology within the Choice episode, see my comment on p. 105.

<sup>16</sup> For an alternative version of the lion-skin provenance (the Lion of Cithaeron myth), see p. 83.



### *Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ Which choice sounds more appealing?
- ★ Is it easy for Hercules to decide? Or is it hard for him to choose? Show depictions of him working hard, for example: fighting the lion. Also show the depiction of him feasting.

### **Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn**

- ★ This lesson's creative activity involves making paper fortune tellers, aka cootie catchers, whirlybirds, and chatterboxes. How much help the students need with creating their fortune tellers will depend on how experienced they already are at making them, as well as how much teachers might need to help them. I still remember how amused some of my classmates were at primary school at my own initial attempts at making fortune tellers. And as Robin Diver comments, thinking of "the number of autistic people who also have dyspraxia or who have coordination issues as part of autism, [...] I loved fortune tellers as a creative exercise as a child", but only "so long as someone else made them for me – I couldn't figure out the spatial components at all" (personal communication, quoted with permission). In light of the time that might need to be spent on this stage of the construction of the fortune teller, more time might need to be set aside for this step in comparison with the creative activities in previous lessons.
- ★ Instructions follow, though these can be supplemented with descriptions, and videos available online, especially for anyone who would welcome more explicit instructions.<sup>17</sup> Those made by the students need not be as elaborate as the one shown as Figure 45!<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See, e.g., "How to Make a Paper Fortune Teller", *Skip to My Lou*, 4 August 2020, <https://www.skiptomylou.org/paper-fortune-teller-from-isly-blog/> (accessed 29 July 2022), and PPO, "How to Make a Paper Fortune Teller – Easy Origami", YouTube, 23 August 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAhiITxUYA> (accessed 29 July 2022).

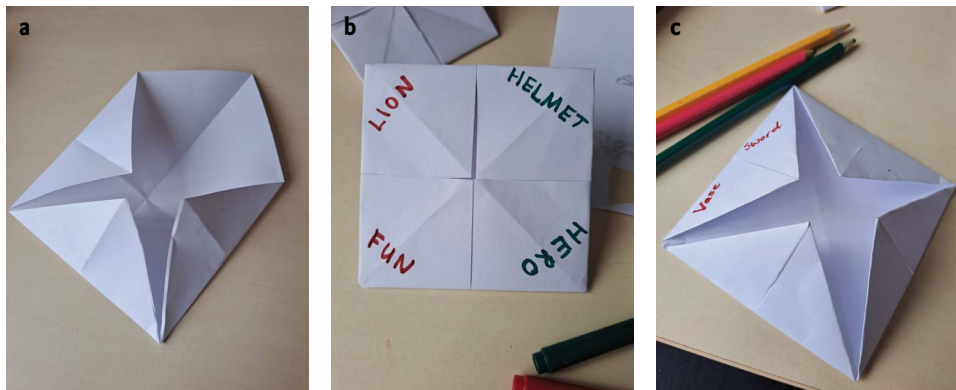
<sup>18</sup> See also the Choice of Hercules fortune teller created by a workshop participant illustrated at Susan Deacy, "Fun, Toil, Party... How Fortune Tellers Can Help Us Play Herculean Games – World Autism Awareness Week Day 2", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 2 April 2019, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2019/04/fun-toil-party-how-fortune-tellers-can.html> (accessed 20 July 2022).



**Figure 45:** Cootie catcher, photograph by Paul Blais (2006). Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cootie\\_catcher.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cootie_catcher.jpg) (accessed 26 July 2022); user: Paulblais86 (2006).

### *How to make a fortune teller?*

1. Take a square piece of paper and crease it diagonally from each corner to the centre.
2. Turn the paper over and fold the paper in half from each side (Fig. 46a).
3. Bring the corners to the centre of the paper.
4. Write words associated with Hercules' choice on the four outer squares (Fig. 46b) and then stick in the picture that best illustrates each word.
5. Turn the paper over and write further words linked with the choice on the triangles (Fig. 46c) and perhaps add relevant drawings or stick in pictures.



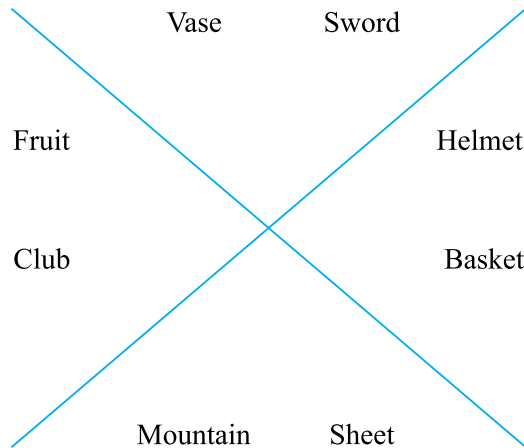
**Figure 46:** Choice of Hercules fortune teller, created and photographed by Susan Deacy: (a) getting started; (b) words linked with Hercules' choice for the outer squares; (c) words linked with Hercules' choice for the inner triangles.

6. Write fortunes underneath the flaps. One option could be for students to write their own, linking each fortune to the relevant picture. The fortunes could refer specifically to possible futures in store for Hercules or they could be suitable to individual students and their classmates. Alternatively, the fortunes could be sufficiently generalized to refer both to Hercules and to a contemporary young person. Or the students could choose from a list of things that count as "hard work" and as "fun", although some of the items here under "fun" could count as hard work and vice versa.

☑ Possibilities for "fun" might include: "You will go to an enjoyable party"; "You will find a nice spot where you can relax and read your favourite book"; "You will receive an exciting present"; "A feast will take place in your honour with all your favourite food and drink".

☑ Possibilities for "hard work" meanwhile might include: "You will meet a mysterious stranger"; "You will encounter a strange beast"; "You will go on a long trip to a new destination"; "You will be set a tricky problem that only you can solve".

7. Next students can try out the fortune teller by choosing one of the words in the squares and manipulating the fortune teller one time for each letter, for example four times for H-E-R-O. They should then pick one of the four triangles and spell out the word in question, again manipulating the fortune teller one time for each letter, for example C-L-U-B. Finally, the students should pick one of the triangles from those they are taken to, open the flap, and read the fortune.



**Figure 47:** Examples of words for Choice of Hercules fortune teller.

#### **Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex**

- ★ Ask the students to tell someone else's fortune using their fortune teller. Discuss what fortunes come up – are they pleasant or unpleasant ones? Possible questions to ask might be: how did you decide what to write down? Was it easy to decide which options to pick, or was it hard?
- ★ Alternatively, keep the focus on Hercules by thinking about the various options for his fortunes and future.

#### **Step 5: Plenary**

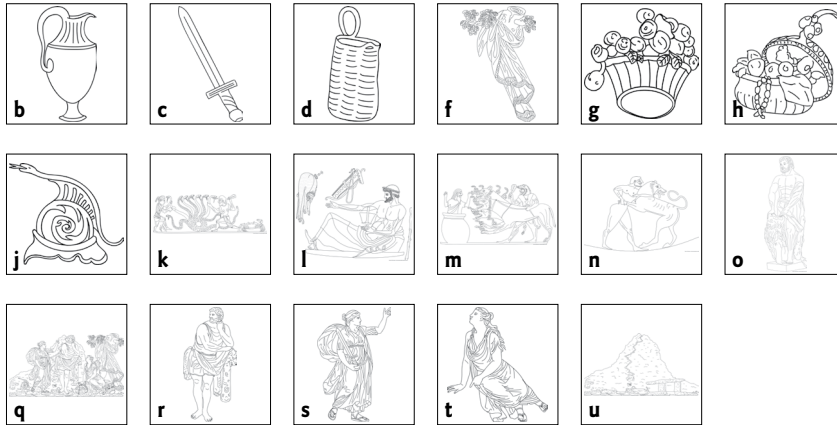
- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

#### **Follow-Up Materials**

- ★ The *Teachers' Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> See "What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials", <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.

## Lesson 10: Present and Future – What Hercules Does Next



**Figure 48:** Set of images for Lesson 10: b, c, d, f, g, h, j, k, l, m, n, o, q, r, s, t, u. See p. 169 for Resource Pack.

### Introduction

This lesson offers an opportunity to think about what took place after Hercules made his choice by imagining what happened next and writing a story about it.

Like the other lessons in this book, this one can be done as a stand-alone one. Alternatively, it can be done after one or more of the other lessons.

On how this lesson, and others in this book, connect with dimensions of autism, see also “The Adam Room, Being Autistic, and the Lessons in This Book”, pp. 108–111 above.

*Students will have an opportunity to:*

- ★ **know about** Hercules and his adventures, including self-created new versions;
- ★ **explore** fantastic worlds through an imaginative activity;
- ★ **talk about** what can be learnt from stories, including self-authored ones.

### Materials

- ★ Pictures: the whole set illustrated in the miniatures.
- ★ Blank or lined paper.
- ★ Pen or pencil; colouring pencils, crayons, etc.

## Lesson Steps

### Step 1: In the Amphora...

- ★ Suggested pictures: the whole panel; also, blank/lined paper for the story.

### Step 2: Talk about... Hercules and What He Did Next

- ★ If this lesson is the first the students have done, spend some time introducing Hercules as an adventurous hero known for his many difficult labours and also for enjoying things in life – like eating, drinking, and resting. Outline how, on getting to a curious place, he met two women who offered him two distinct paths: a life of hard work and a life of endless pleasure.
- ★ Tell the students about the various things relevant to the two ways of life on the panel – on the side of Pleasure (fruit, sheet, vase, etc.) and on the side of Hard Work (sword, helmet with snake, mountain to climb).
- ★ Complement the description of the two sides with the drawings of Hercules labouring (against the Nemean Lion, the Hydra, or Cerberus) as against Hercules feasting.

### *Possible prompts for discussion*

- ★ What are the benefits of choosing the life of hard work?
- ★ What are the benefits of choosing the life of pleasure?

### Step 3: Creative Activity: Do Something/Your Turn

- ★ Invite the students to write their own story about Hercules' choice. Explain that they should decide which choice Hercules makes and then write about what happens to him as a result of his choice.
- ★ If any of the students' choice is a life of adventure, invite them to write a story about how, perhaps starting by climbing the mountain, Hercules embarks on a labour – perhaps involving a fantastic creature.
- ★ If the choice is a life of pleasure, invite the student or students to write a story about an enjoyable thing or things that happen to Hercules. The story can be illustrated, if students would like, with their own artwork or with the drawings in the Amphora.

**Step 4: Discussion: Do Something More Complex**

- ★ Here the students can share their stories and compare them with others. A particular focus could be on what the stories show about how the present can turn into the future.

**Step 5: Plenary**

- ★ Draw the lesson to a close with a summary of what has been learnt, key messages, and important points that the students have made.

**Follow-Up Materials**

- ★ The *Teachers' Guide*, which is among the online materials accompanying this book, includes suggestions for how students can express any ongoing engagement with the goals of this lesson. This guide is authored by the classicist and inclusive education practitioner Effrosyni Kostara.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See "What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials", <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.









## WORKSHOPPING AND PILOTING

The development of the lessons in this book was facilitated by a series of workshops, and by pilot sessions. I have included this final chapter to give a flavour of these activities, present some resulting artwork, and explain how I reshaped the lessons in light of the sessions.

### **Workshopping Hercules' Choice**

When I ran an initial set of workshops, in 2018, Steve K. Simons's high-quality drawings did not yet exist. I was working with a provisional set that I had created myself at the time when I was preparing an initial version of the lessons for publication on my blog.<sup>1</sup> These lessons sought to immerse children in an autistic Herculean world, but they tried to do a great deal – too much! – sometimes at once. The final set, comprising the lessons presented in the current book, is more focused and streamlined, due in no small part to the experiences of trying out the initial activities.

Just how inferior the first set of illustrations was compared with the drawings specially created by Steve K. Simons can be illustrated by the “before” and “after” versions of the character I have come to call Hard Work, but initially called by the name of Virtue, from the Latin name for the figure and the quality she represents (see Figs. 49, 50). But even so, and despite some of the details of the panel not being clear, participants using the earlier set responded creatively to the opportunity to work with the drawings.

This first workshop took place in May 2018 in a café in Warsaw, *Życie jest fajne* (Life Is Cool), which is staffed by autistic people. Some of the staff from the café took part, along with participants from the *Our Mythical Childhood*

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<sup>1</sup> Please see the set of blog posts, each detailing a particular lesson, from February 2018, beginning with Susan Deacy, “Preliminary Activity: Choice of Hercules”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 22 February 2018, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2018/02/preliminary-activity-choice-of-hercules.html> (accessed 22 July 2022).



**Figure 49:** Detail of Hard Work from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Susan Deacy.



**Figure 50:** Detail of Hard Work from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

project, as part of a programme of workshops linked with the project. As I gave an introduction to the programme, I encouraged the participants to get started: colouring, sticking, cutting, for example. Among the resulting artwork was Anna Mik's, which transformed Hard Work, Hercules, and Pleasure into, respectively, a faun, a minotaur, and a mermaid. When I saw another of the participants cutting out the figure of Hercules, meanwhile, I thought that it was because he wanted to make a particular use of Hercules. In fact, he was cutting him out to get rid of him as an intruder. By cutting out Hercules, what could be left were the two women and the things that surround them. It is this cutting out of the "man in the middle" that was the initial impetus for the lessons which turn the focus from Hercules to the two women and their feelings and experiences.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> On this event (including for the use of the quotation in the frontispiece of the present book), see further Susan Deacy, "'When You Come to a Fork in the Road, Take It' – A Choice of Hercules Workshop at Life Is Cool, a Café Managed by Autistic People in Warsaw", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 17 May 2018, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2018/05/when-you-come-to-fork-in-road-take-it.html> (accessed 20 July 2022).

Next, in November 2018, I ran a workshop for Classics students at the University of Roehampton on taking myth beyond the higher education classroom. This workshop focused on several current initiatives, including my own on autism and classical myth. Using various stickers, colouring pencils, and printouts of the scene, along with things like Blu Tack, glue, and scissors, the students worked independently or in groups to produce some inventive creations, some with a festive twist as the session took place close to the winter break. The paper fortune teller that one group made is one of the inspirations for Lesson 9 in the current book.<sup>3</sup>

The workshops that came next were accompanied with Steve K. Simons's drawings. The artwork that came out of these sessions continued to be inventive, especially now that participants had an opportunity to look significantly more closely at the scene. For example – and independently of one another – two participants at a workshop for academics, school teachers, and school students at the Polish Theatre in Warsaw animalized the scene. One participant, the classicist and children's author Giacomo Savani, did this by adding leopards' spots or tigers' stripes to the arms and legs of Hercules, Pleasure, and Hard Work (Fig. 51). The ingenuity of another participant, Anna Mik, brought the Nemean Lion back to life. This work by Anna has already been illustrated in this book (Fig. 16).<sup>4</sup>

When I had presented my project in late 2018 to a group of autism specialists, at a session mentioned earlier in this book, they did not like the colouring in idea, saying that it is the kind of thing teachers set as time-fillers. However, I decided to keep this activity because it has consistently been the case that, through colouring, participants find new ways to look at the scene and to reflect on what Hercules is experiencing and what they themselves might do or feel in the circumstances. Indeed, when the lessons were presented at a panel on disability and Classics during the Classical Association of Mid-West States conference in Lincoln, Nebraska, participants especially liked the multi-sensory aspects of the programme.<sup>5</sup> Meanwhile, one of the participants at a session

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<sup>3</sup> On this workshop, including for samples of the artwork produced by the students, please see the following two blog postings: Susan Deacy, "Fun, Toil, Party...", and Susan Deacy, "Autism and Hercules: In the Classroom and 'for All People Everywhere' – World Autism Awareness Week Day 3", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 3 April 2019, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2019/04/autism-and-hercules-in-classroom-and.html> (accessed 20 July 2022).

<sup>4</sup> On this workshop, see further Susan Deacy, "Talking about Making Choices via Hercules at the Polish Theatre", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 27 May 2019, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2019/05/talking-about-making-choices-via.html> (accessed 20 July 2022).

<sup>5</sup> On this event, please see Deacy, "Looking Back on What Hercules Did in Nebraska".

at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David commented on how the activity had “managed the Herculean task of getting a room full of academics to practice their colouring in!”<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 51:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel drawn by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added to the figures of Hercules and Pleasure, with additions by Giacomo Savani at a workshop at the Polish Theatre in Warsaw in May 2019, photograph by Susan Deacy. Used with kind permission.

I accomplished a similar “Herculean task” at subsequent workshops, including those at the sessions “Diversifying Public Engagement”<sup>7</sup> and “Gendering Classical Antiquity for Children”<sup>8</sup> at the International Federation of Associations of Classical Studies/Classical Association Conference in London in July 2019, and at a conference on mythology and education at the University of Cambridge in February 2020.<sup>9</sup> The artwork of two of the participants at these events is included here: firstly, the colouring by the children’s author Caroline Lawrence at the event in London and, secondly, the artwork from the event in Cambridge by the Children’s Literature academic and ACCLAIM network member Sarah Layzell Hardstaff. Both examples use a similar colour for the clothing of Hard Work (see Figs. 52, 53).

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<sup>6</sup> Susan Deacy, “Managing the Herculean Task of Getting a Room Full of Academics to Practice Their Colouring In (Lampeter, February 21st 2019)”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 21 February 2019, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2019/02/managing-herculean-task-of-getting-room.html> (accessed 22 July 2022). As the neurodivergent classicist Robin Diver commented in response to this debate about colouring in, “being allowed to colour can help people with intense stimming needs listen” (personal communication, quoted with permission).

<sup>7</sup> Susan Deacy, “Getting Colourful and Creative at ‘Diversifying Public Engagement’ during FIEC/CA 2019”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 10 September 2019, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2019/09/getting-colourful-and-creative-at.html> (accessed 30 June 2022).

<sup>8</sup> Deacy, “Best... Panel... Ever: Gendering Classical Myth for Children”.

<sup>9</sup> See Susan Deacy, “From Mythology and Education to Special and Inclusive Teaching”, *Autism and Classical Myth*, 20 March 2020, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2020/03/from-mythology-and-education-to-special.html> (accessed 22 July 2022).



**Figure 52:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added to the figures of Hercules and Pleasure, with colour added by Caroline Lawrence at the “Gendering Classical Myth for Children” panel during the FIEC/CA Conference, London, July 2019, photograph by Susan Deacy. Used with kind permission.



**Figure 53:** “Making Choices”, *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel drawn by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added to the figures of Hercules and Pleasure, with colour added by Sarah Layzell Hardstaff at the *Mythology and Education* conference, Cambridge, February 2020, photograph by Susan Deacy. Used with kind permission.

As well as confirming me in my thinking that colouring activities should remain a central part of the lessons, these colouring activities produced outcomes that I had not expected. For example, I had previously only ever seen a steep mountain behind Hercules, but others have seen a river running down the mountain and a lightning flash. What is more, where I had seen a scene of two halves (the rocky terrain on our left with its steep and craggy path and the fruit, vegetation, and drinking vessels on the other side), others saw a unified whole. In the artwork created at another workshop at Roehampton in December 2019, for example, the terrain of Hard Work is no longer rocky but grassy. Indeed, Hard Work stands by a pool which the participant has added at the foot, perhaps, of the stream running down the slope. Hercules, too, stands on its bank while

Pleasure's fruit basket is beside the pool, as is Pleasure herself. To the far right, behind Pleasure, there is light-green foliage, suggesting perhaps new growth of spring. In contrast to the brightness of this picture, to which the participant has even added a bright sun, another participant's artwork made the scene dark – perhaps ominous. What was coloured in was the sky rather than the three figures and other details, with the use of dark-blue biro creating a sense of an intense darkness, matched by the only other feature that is coloured in, again in dark-blue biro: the river/path which looks to me like a lightning flash. There is something foreboding about the picture, which covers not just one half but everything. Again, this is a unified landscape. This scene here looks more like one where three people are sharing a common experience rather than taking part in a contest.<sup>10</sup>

Participants at the various workshops I have run have welcomed the opportunity to think about the potential for taking classical myth outside the university classroom and into schools. As one Roehampton student commented in my "Guest Book", they were struck by "the way that different people with different learning abilities will engage with resources" and by how far "classical mythology (and classics) can be for all people everywhere". Meanwhile, a Classics DPhil student interested in neurodiversity commented, during the Diversifying Outreach event in 2019:

This project is so special. It means a lot to me that there are people supporting (but maybe it's not the right word) – better: LETTING autistic children know the classical heritage on their terms – and find ways to express their inner worlds on their terms. This is making the world a more colourful and creative place.

## **Piloting: At a Primary-School Autism Base**

As part of my attempt to bring colour – literal and metaphorical – and creativity to autistic children, I have piloted sessions based on the lessons for autistic children, starting with the lesson "Meeting Hercules", which took place at a local

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<sup>10</sup> Please see – including for the artwork created at the workshop – Susan Deacy, "Finding 'One Happiness' between Virtue and Pleasure at Roehampton in November 2019: In Arcadia After All?", *Autism and Classical Myth*, 12 May 2020, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/2020/05/finding-one-happiness-between-virtue.html> (accessed 4 July 2022).

primary school's Autism Base in 2018, which I arranged along with Effrosyni Kostara.

Classes at the school are taught following a four-fold pattern which combines being given initial information, brainstorming opportunities, hands-on activities, and opportunities for in-depth engagement with a given topic. Classes are small in size, led by a class teacher, with teaching assistants to support the students further. The first lesson – for a class of five children, all boys – formed the history lesson of the day. The teacher began by showing the class a photo of the chimneypiece panel: the artwork on which the activities are based. Without saying anything about classical myth or about the kind of artwork the panel is, the teacher asked who the people in the scene might be.

Straightaway, the children became highly animated and came up with all sorts of possibilities as to who the figures were and how they were interacting with one another, including:

- ★ They are statues, or maybe they are symbols?
- ★ Are they carved in temples?
- ★ We can find statues in palaces, homes, offices.

They were especially interested in the woman on the right – asking, for example, whether she is a servant, and wondering if she is saying “Help!”

After that, the teacher introduced Hercules – as someone who is always taking part in adventures. She showed them a picture of Hercules wearing the lion-skin and wielding his club. The teacher asked the students what they thought now about Hercules on the picture of the panel. What especially interested them was how adventurous they thought Hercules was. They said that he looked like an adventurous person but that he was not being very active here. One student commented that he looks like he is thinking. Another commented that he looks like he is sleeping. Another said that he appears to be thinking about his next adventure. Other comments included:

- ★ Maybe he is bored.
- ★ He is looking up to the sky.
- ★ He is trying to see a planet.
- ★ He is flirting.
- ★ He is pointing like this [the student then imitated his pose].

When the teacher asked what Hercules was holding, the students became very interested in his club and how it could function as a weapon.



The teacher asked next what kind of adventure Hercules might be going to face. Among the responses was that he was going to rescue someone; meanwhile, another pupil said that Hercules was going to look for a lost temple. The teacher then told the students about one of the labours performed by Hercules – his encounter with the Lernaean Hydra. The children loved hearing about this encounter, and asked for more monster stories in the future.

Then the children were given a picture of Hercules: the very provisional one I had created before Steve K. Simons created the high-quality vector drawings of the panel. The students were set a task – of colouring in Hercules. A great deal of thought went into which colours to choose and which colours to use for different parts of the drawing. One of the students, who was upset because his best friend was not at school that day, picked up all the pencils in front of him and used them all at once, pressing hard all the time.

For the final part of the lesson, the students were asked to look again at the two pictures of Hercules and compare and contrast them. They were asked to write down the words they were thinking of to describe Hercules. As they did this, the students continued to talk about the hero and how adventurous he is. They wanted to learn more about his labours.

One thing that struck me about the lesson was that knowing who Hercules is need not be vital: the students made some thoughtful observations about the panel, and the communications between the three people, before they found out who Hercules is and who the women might be. But what the lesson also showed is just how much the students enjoyed finding out about Hercules, especially as someone who performed tasks, in particular tasks involving monsters. The word “adventurous” was one that kept coming up.

As a result, the lessons include more than I had initially intended around different aspects of Hercules, and how these form a backdrop to what is taking place on the panel. Indeed, what is taking place on the panel can itself count as an adventure. The session also showed that, as well as producing a series of lessons about Hercules, it was worth developing stand-alone sessions.

The second lesson, this time for a class of girls as well as boys between the ages of eight and eleven formed the “topic” lesson for the day. This second session followed the same broad structure but took some distinctive turns. The teacher started the lesson, like all her lessons, by picking up a bucket and taking out of it something relevant to the session. This time, she had a card with the word “video” on it. Showing this led into the second, “Talk about...”, part of the lesson, which began with an introduction to Hercules via the trailer for the Disney *Hercules* – which the children were entranced by.

The teacher then showed a picture of a statue of Hercules, and asked the students to discuss what they saw. They rose to this task, making lots of comments including about the lion on his head, and his eyes, which one student found "scary". Then the teacher introduced the chimneypiece panel which produced a response of "wow" from one of the children. It was the women that especially interested them. They were full of ideas as to how the women are reacting to Hercules, including:

- ★ They both want his attention.
- ★ She is a servant.
- ★ She may say "help".
- ★ She is passing something to him.

Another suggested that they both want to marry him. As for Hercules, one student thought that he might be bored, another that he looked like he is flirting. Others thought that he might not be paying any attention to the women, with one student wondering whether he was looking up at the sky, and another commenting that he could be looking at the sea. Other responses were:

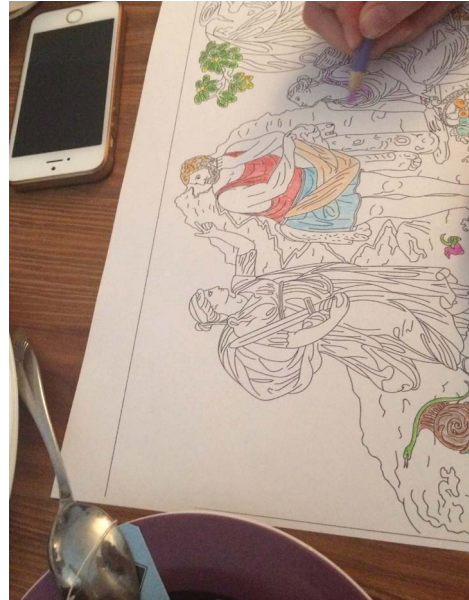
- ★ He is looking for a lost temple.
- ★ He is looking for evil gods.
- ★ He is going to rescue a girl.
- ★ He is going to the temples.
- ★ Is he in Greece? He is looking for artefacts, Greece has many artefacts and legends, I have a book with monster legends.

When it was time for the next stage of the class, called "Your Turn", the students coloured in a picture of Hercules: the same one that the previous class had coloured in. As they did the task, the students kept asking questions. There was a good deal of working together and sharing of ideas as well as sharing their colours and looking at what others were drawing.

For the final stage of the lesson, the teacher asked the children which picture of Hercules they liked better. They all said that they preferred the picture of Hercules alone to the one of him with the women. Then – because the teacher invited me to – I told them the story that is being depicted on the panel. The children listened carefully to the story about the choice that the women asked Hercules to make. They said that they thought that Hercules looked scared; one girl said that she felt "worried and scared". One of the children impersonated his pose.



**Figure 54:** The author leading a workshop at the *Życie jest fajne* (Life Is Cool) café during the workshops *The Present Meets the Past* in May 2018, photograph by Katarzyna Marciniak. Used with kind permission.



**Figure 55:** Materials from the workshop at the *Życie jest fajne* (Life Is Cool) café during the conference *Our Mythical History* in May 2019, photograph by Katarzyna Marciniak. Used with kind permission.

The students were asked to say what they would choose, the fruits or the rocks. All of them chose the fruits. I also asked them what they thought he should choose: the easy life or the life of adventures. They all said: “the easy life”.

As I only told the story close to the end of the class, there was not much time for thinking about choices, let alone causality. However, there was enough time for a brief chat about what the students thought about what Hercules might be feeling. The students were very willing to think about what they themselves would choose faced with comparable options. I therefore included among the lessons a discrete session (Lesson 9) where students have an opportunity to think about choices and about the implications of what they choose for the future.

I was struck by just how much the children liked hearing about Hercules, and how proactive they were in coming up with their responses to what he looked like, what he might be feeling, and how he was interacting with others. Likewise, I was struck by just how much the children engaged with what was going on in the scene – not only with Hercules but with how the women were responding to Hercules. The children’s responses showed just how many ways



**Figure 56:** The author leading a workshop at the *Życie jest fajne* (Life Is Cool) café during the conference *Our Mythical History* in May 2019, photograph by Katarzyna Marciniak. Used with kind permission.



**Figure 57:** A workshop at the *Życie jest fajne* (Life Is Cool) café during the workshops *The Present Meets the Past* in May 2018, photograph by Katarzyna Marciniak. Used with kind permission.

there can be of making sense of Hercules. Like the children suggested, he might be ignoring the women, for instance, or he might be flirting with them. Or his attention might be elsewhere – he might be looking at the sky, or at the sea. The activity also showed how colouring is something worth doing as an activity. The students turned with enthusiasm to the task, looking thoughtfully at the image, noticing new things and – all the time – reflecting on what their responses were to Hercules and to the scene on the panel.

The experiences of running the classes at the school helped shape the lessons in the current book. For example, I took from the experience a recognition of how much teachers welcome materials for one-off sessions. Therefore, each of the lessons came to be designed as a one-off, as well as to be part of a wider set. Also, I came to follow a four-part structure because this worked so well in the two lessons I have just described, not least because it enabled the students to move from not knowing much, or from knowing nothing, about the topic to being able to engage in depth with various issues.

## **Piloting at Hercules Café**

I began my review of activities involving the lessons with comments about what happened at a café staffed by autistic people. I shall end the survey, now, with a virtual café: a “Hercules café” created for the 2020 *Being Human Festival*. The festival – a UK-wide, international-looking event presenting humanities research within, and beyond, universities – usually comprises face-to-face events but was held remotely for 2020 during the Covid pandemic. The event, which formed part of the festival’s programme of “cafés”, offered an autistic perspective on the theme of that year’s festival, “New Worlds”, via a one-hour session, based on an earlier version of Lesson 2 in the current book.

The lesson was designed for autistic children aged around seven to eleven and their families, though I stressed that children of other ages, and adults without children, were welcome to join. Ahead of the session, I sent those who had booked some advance information, including details about the autism activities and a pack of drawings for colouring in, cutting out, etc.

Participants attended from round the UK and internationally, including from Israel, Belgium, Greece, and Poland. Those present included people from the *Our Mythical Childhood* project, some of whom had been in workshops with me previously. There were also teachers, students, people with autistic family members, and, best of all – children, of a range of ages, most of whom were

pre-teens. At the start, I stressed that dealing with specific situations can be a challenge for anyone, but especially for an autistic person, for whom “New Worlds” can seem “alien” places where one might feel like an outsider rather than a participant. The session considered what it can be like to enter a new world – somewhere that might provoke a range of responses as one approaches, then enters it, anxiety or excitement, for instance.

The focus was on one particular stage in the Choice of Hercules, namely, the moment when Hercules finds himself in a rich, packed, and multi-sensual space. I introduced Hercules as he discovers a new place, filled with many objects. The participants were invited to think about how Hercules takes in information about the place and about how he processes the emotions he experiences. I began by inviting people to share, via the chat facility, what they first noticed, or what Hercules might have noticed, in the curious place. The possibilities put forward included:

- ★ The tree curtain thing on the right; Hercules would wonder what it was.
- ★ A snake helmet.
- ★ Hercules first because he is in the middle and after that the two women next to him.
- ★ The things behind Hercules.
- ★ A long and winding road.
- ★ Hercules’ expression.
- ★ He looked uncertain.
- ★ Lightning.

We then discussed what Hercules might be feeling in this curious place. Comments included:

- ★ He looks bored. He’s not looking at the woman, but beyond her.
- ★ His mind knows he has to finish the labours but his body is tired and wants to relax.
- ★ He is magical, that’s what.
- ★ He’s distraught and finding it hard to decide.
- ★ He is thinking of something.
- ★ He doesn’t know what is going on.

After exploring what Hercules might be feeling, we moved on to a discussion of the times we have been somewhere new for the first time, and what it made us feel. These discussions were carried out over the chat facility – which was used very actively throughout the session. Comments included what it felt like

to start a new year at school as a student, or to start a new job at a school, or to give a talk on a specific virtual platform for the first time. Some participants shared experiences getting to new places, including:

- ★ Parthenon in Athens – magical.
- ★ Going to New York City. Everything so intense.

A pattern developed where people shared what it felt like when they first arrived at the Roehampton University campus. For example, as one participant commented:

- ★ The first thing I noticed was the nature around the University. Too much green. I remember crossing a path among trees! I was so excited!
- ★ I felt very calm when I first visited.

As well as the chat working well, there was a good deal of interactivity, with children holding up the colouring-in they were creating to their computer screens and – even – a pretend sword fight between myself holding a wooden sword I had taken out of my “Amphora” (see the Introduction to the Lessons in Chapter 5) and the sword of Hard Work picture which one of the children had coloured in and cut out.

The session demonstrated the readiness of people to participate actively, including by reflecting on what it can feel like to enter new spaces, via a focus on what Hercules might be going through. The sessions showed how it can work with a range of people, from different parts of the world, with different levels of knowledge, though with most encountering the Choice story for the first time, from family members working together to those who had not met previously.

## **Conclusion**

The pilot activities and workshops showed that the lessons can appeal to a range of people: for example, from different parts of the world and with varied degrees of prior knowledge about classical myth in general or Hercules in particular. While my original plan was for lessons aimed at those of age eight to eleven, I came to realize that they can be relevant to older children. I also found out that while colouring, or using stickers, or writing captions, or cutting out aspects of the scene, people would start discussing relevant issues, for example emotions and choice-making. Colouring, along with creative activities, such as making a paper fortune teller, are, consequently, a recurrent feature of the lessons. I was also





**Figure 58:** Students at a session at the eighteenth-century garden temple at Mount Clare, Roehampton, London, with Susan Deacy, during a session for the *Heritage of London Trust Proud Places* educational programme for young people, April 2022, photograph by Gilly King. Used with kind permission.

struck by how interested people were in finding out about Hercules. As a result, lessons front-load Hercules more than I had originally planned.

Further pilot sessions are detailed on the website pages accompanying this book, including:

- ★ with autistic students at a secondary school in London in June 2021;
- ★ with a mixed class of autistic and non-autistic students at a middle school in the USA in April 2022.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See “What Would Hercules Do? Companion Materials”, <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>.



## Accompanying Materials Online

As well as the pilot sessions just mentioned, the website also includes resources which others have developed, shaped by lessons in this book. These resources include:

- ★ a set of lesson plans for classes for autistic children based on Ancient Greek religion, created by Caroline Cutrona, an Education Major specializing in special needs education at a university in the USA while on a Study Abroad programme at the University of Roehampton;
- ★ reports on sessions extending the lessons in this book at cultural settings including a neoclassical garden temple at Mount Clare, Roehampton (Fig. 58), and Keats House in Hampstead in London.

The website also includes:

- ★ materials from the 2018 version of the lessons, including the lesson plans and a teachers' guide by Effrosyni Kostara;
- ★ a teacher's guide to accompany this book, including evaluation forms for teachers and students, by Effrosyni Kostara;
- ★ the animation of Hercules choosing, created by Steve K. Simons, with music for the lyre composed and performed by Aliko Markantonatou.

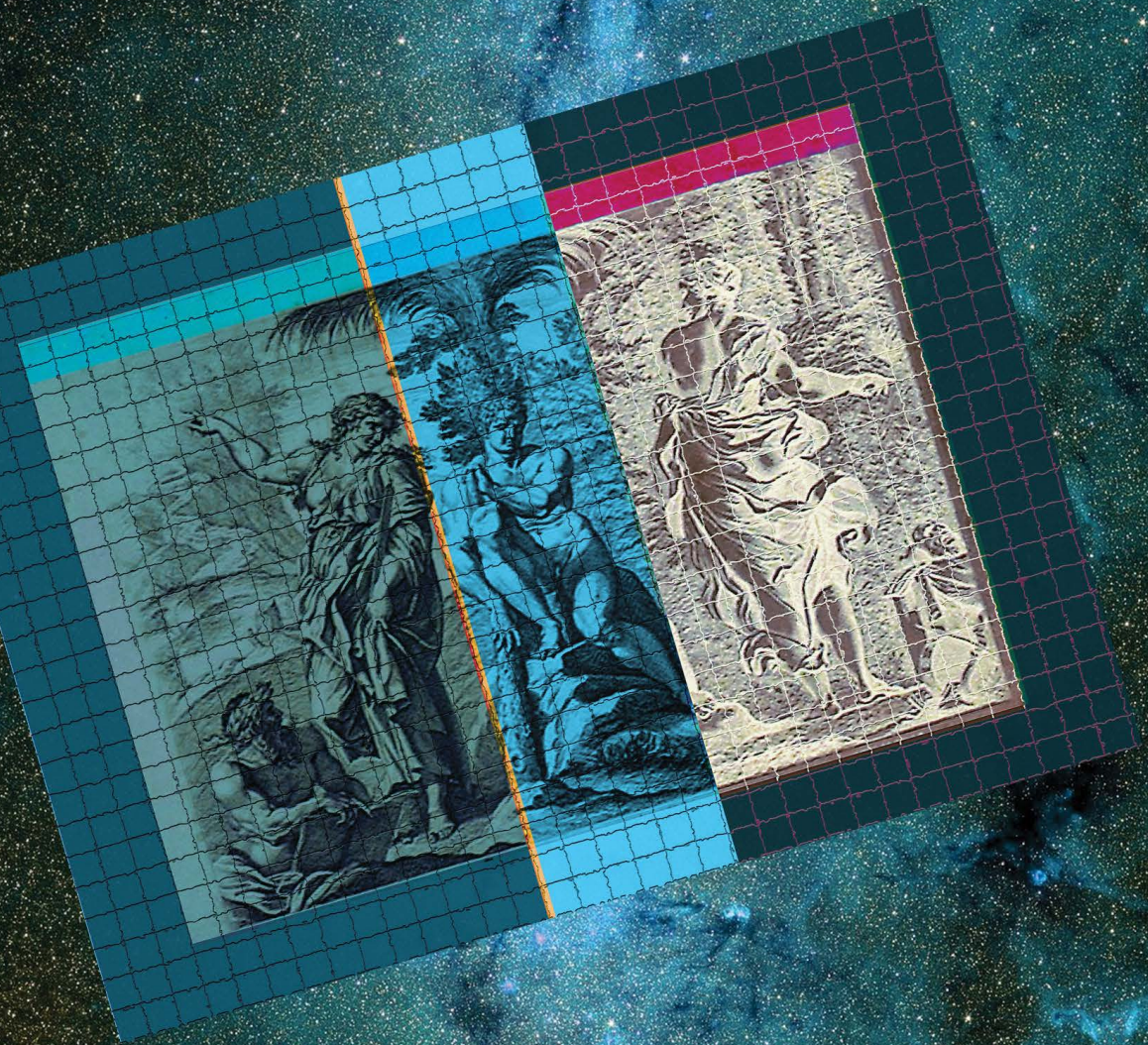
The site will not stand still! It will be updated with further materials, authored by myself and, I hope, others, among them perhaps readers of the present book. The site also includes details of how to get in touch with suggestions and comments.<sup>12</sup>

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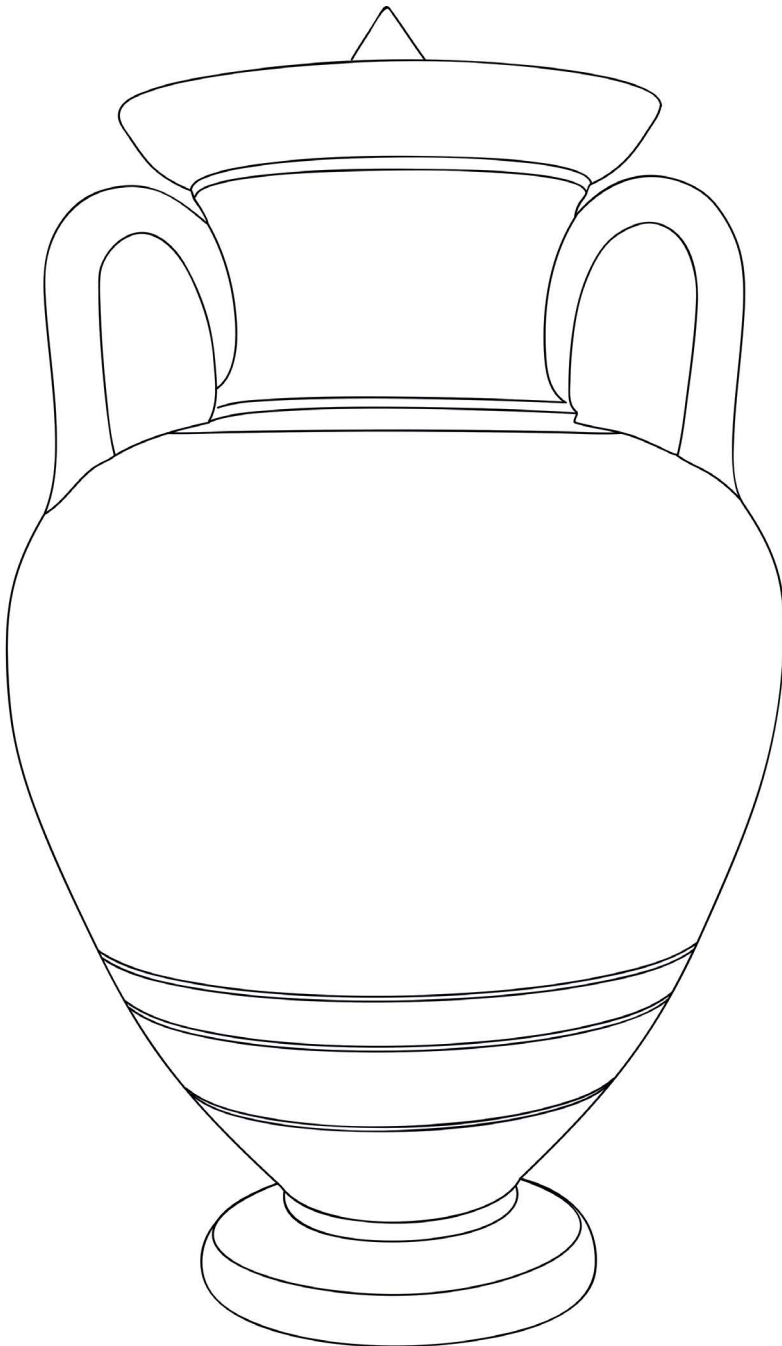
<sup>12</sup> Website address: <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/acclaim/hercules-materials>. See also p. 61.



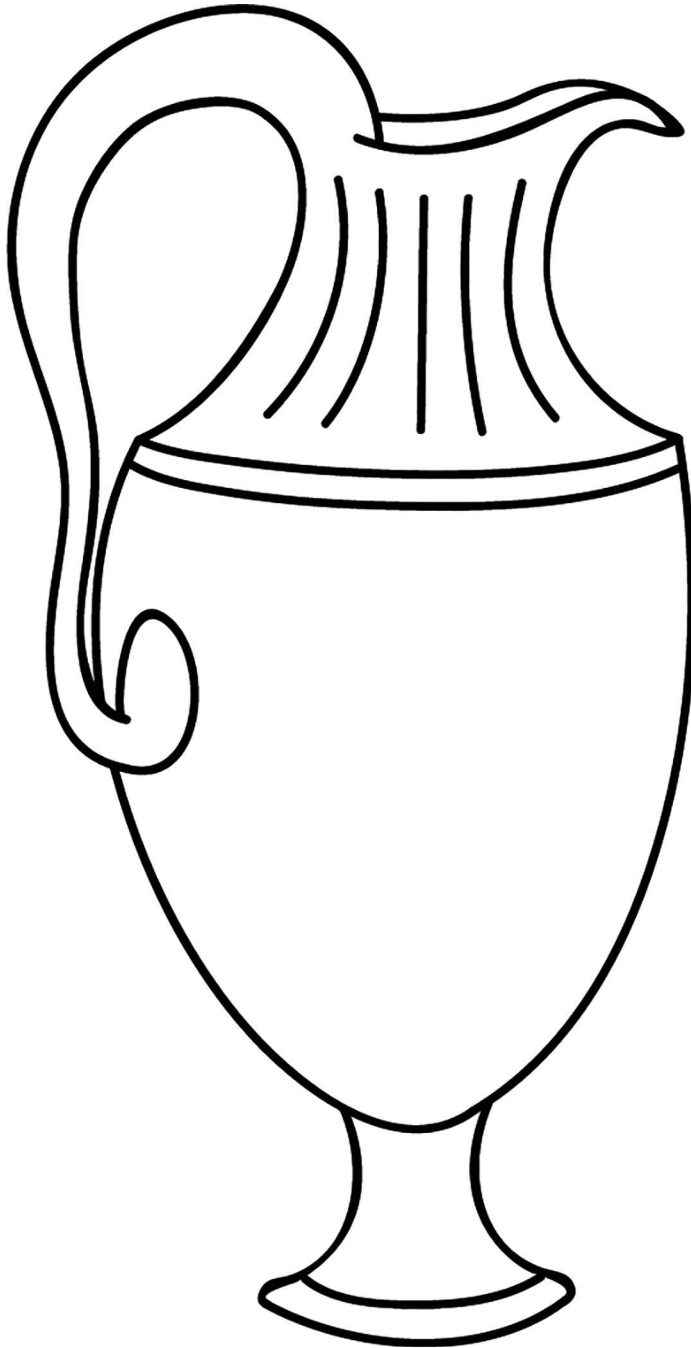
# Resource Pack



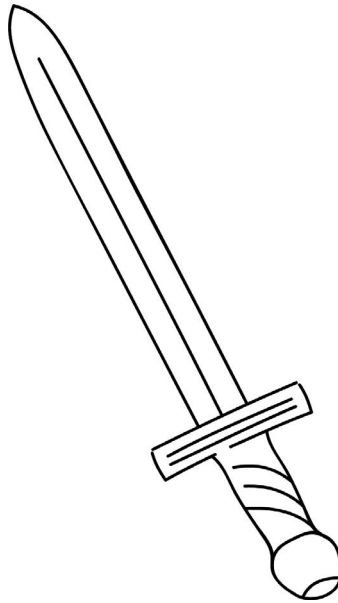




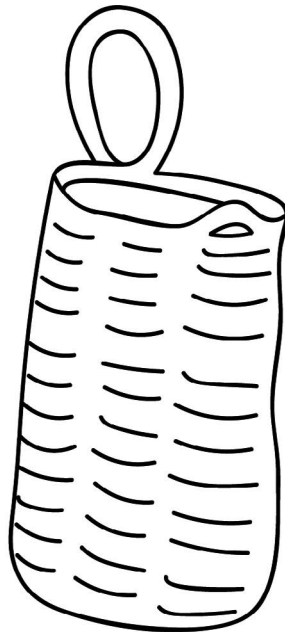
**Figure a:** Steve K. Simons, blank amphora outline, Panoply Vase Animation Project, <https://www.panoply.org.uk/sites/default/files/Panoply%20blank%20amphora.pdf> (accessed 26 July 2022).



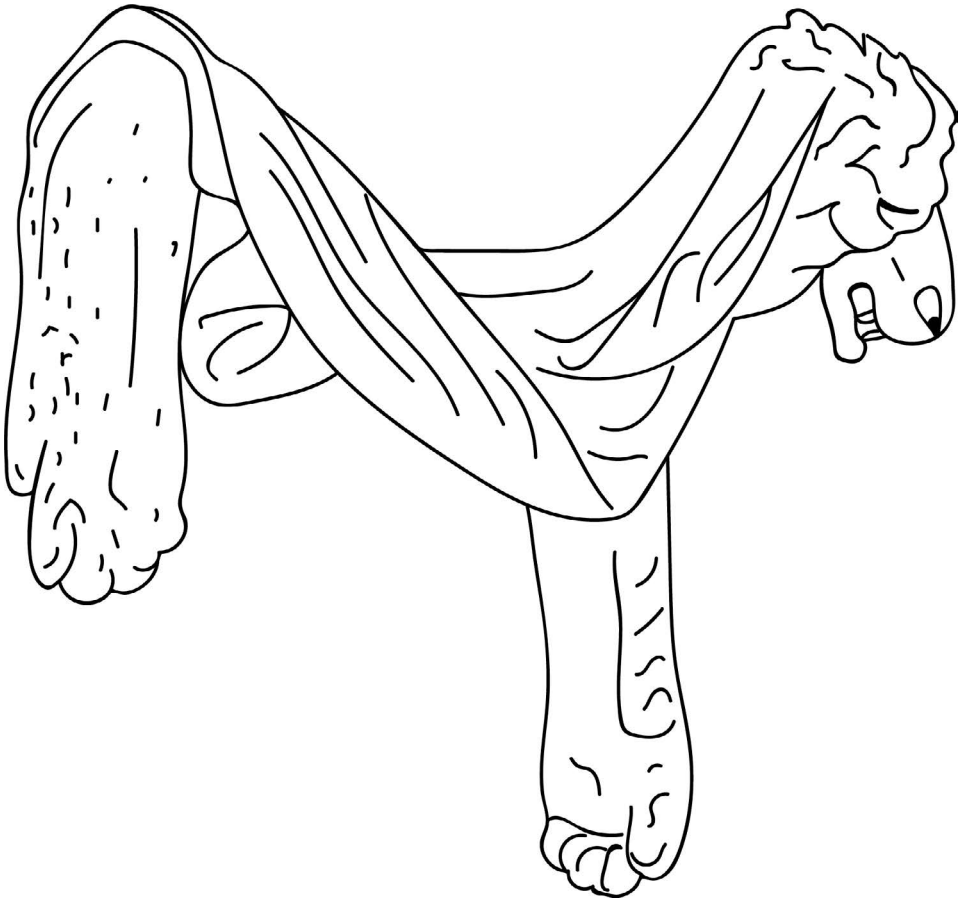
**Figure b:** Detail of amphora from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.



**Figure c:** Detail of sword from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.



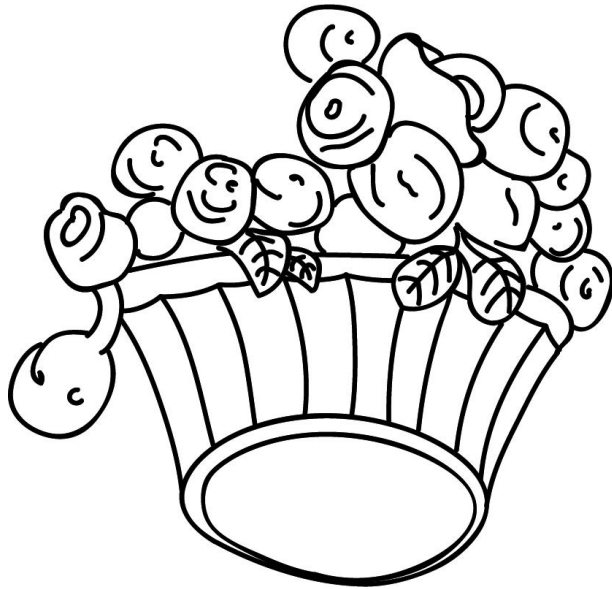
**Figure d:** Detail of basket from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.



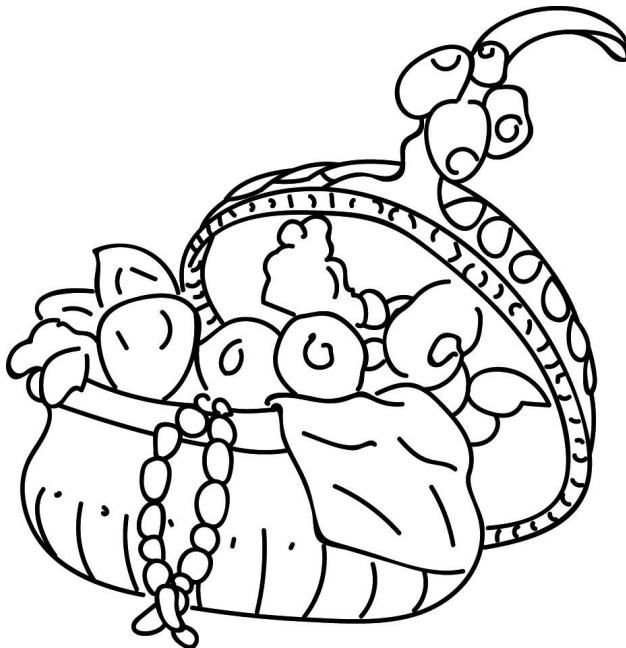
**Figure e:** Detail of lion's skin from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.



**Figure f:** Detail of drape and foliage from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.



**Figure g:** Detail of fruit basket from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

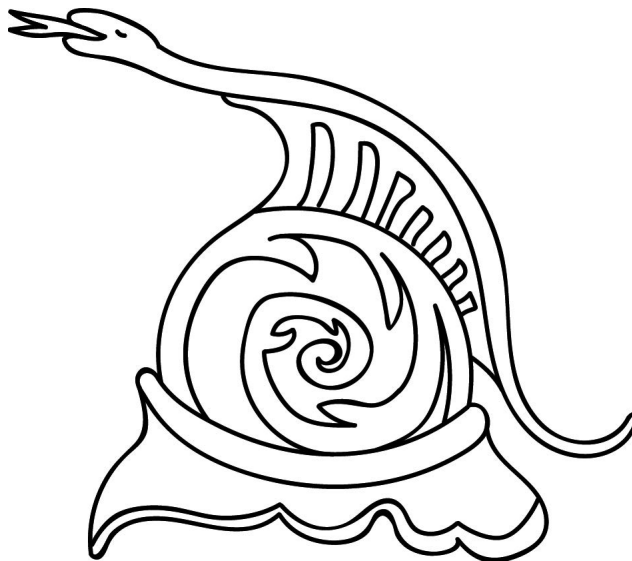


**Figure h:** Detail of lidded fruit basket from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

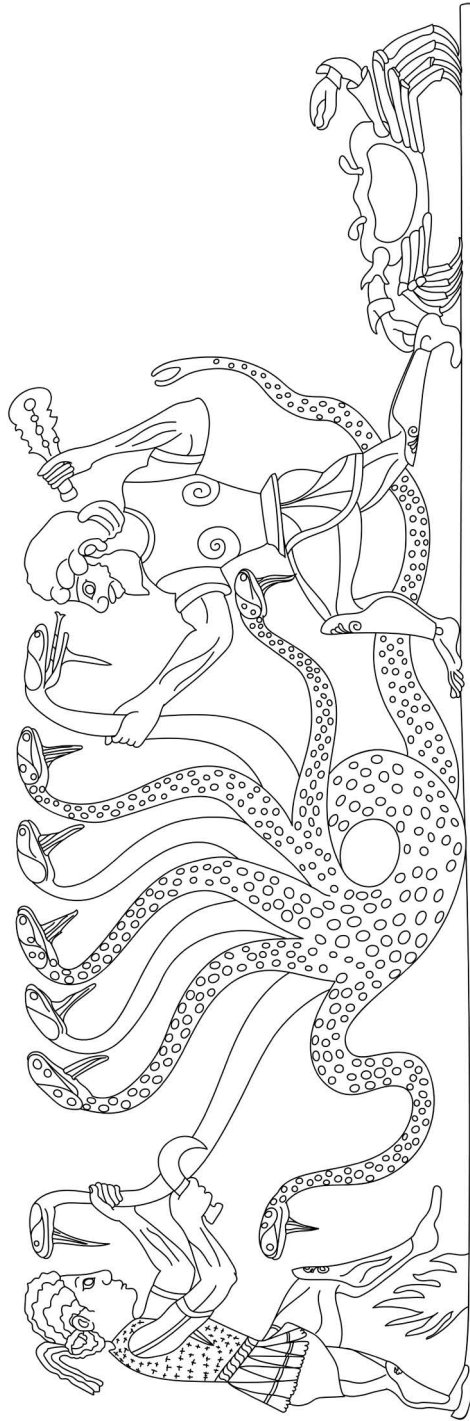




**Figure i:** Detail of club of Hercules from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

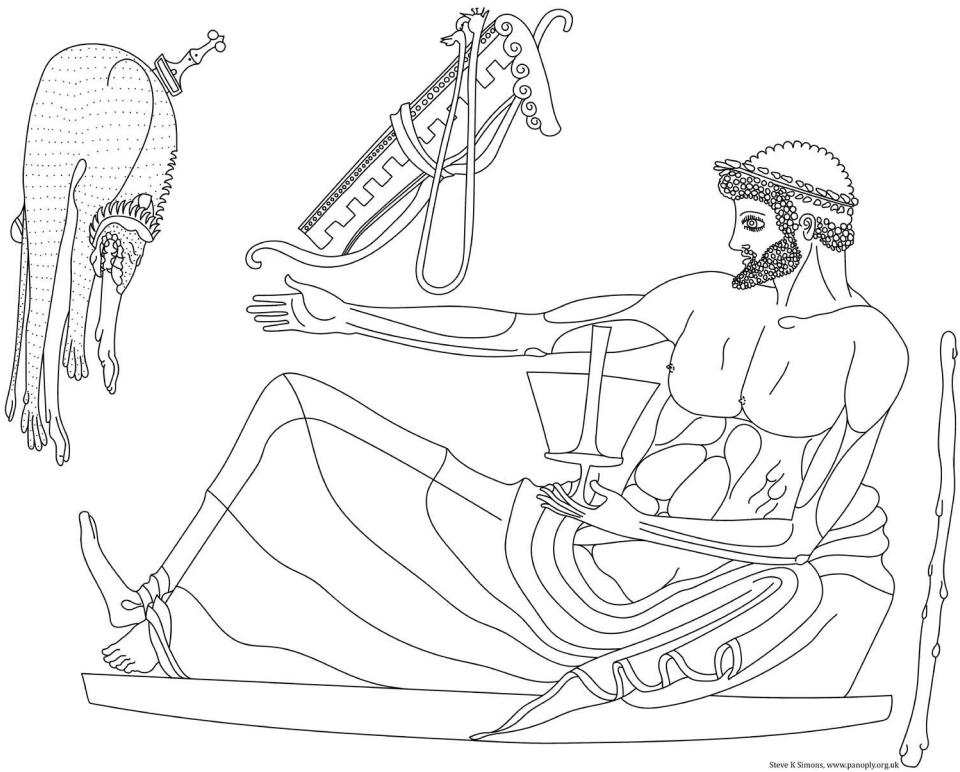


**Figure j:** Detail of helmet with serpent from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons.

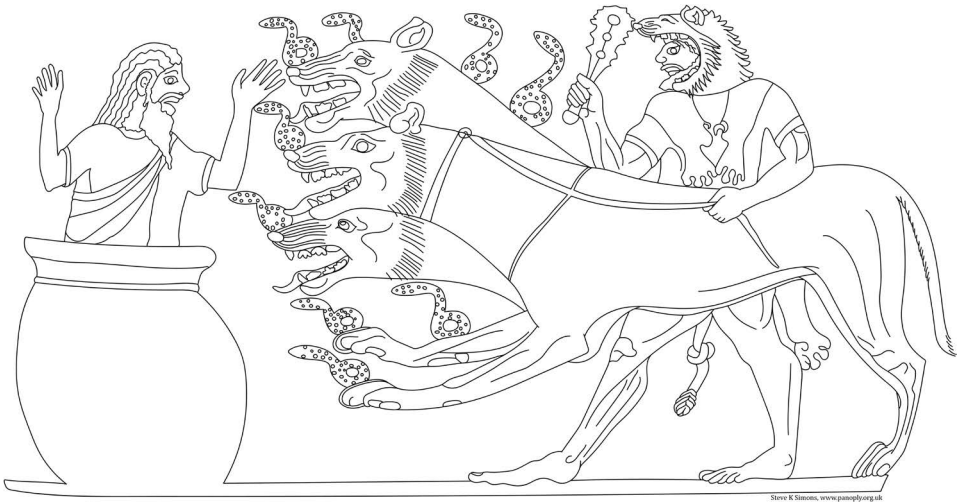


Steve K. Simons, www.painthorngate.com

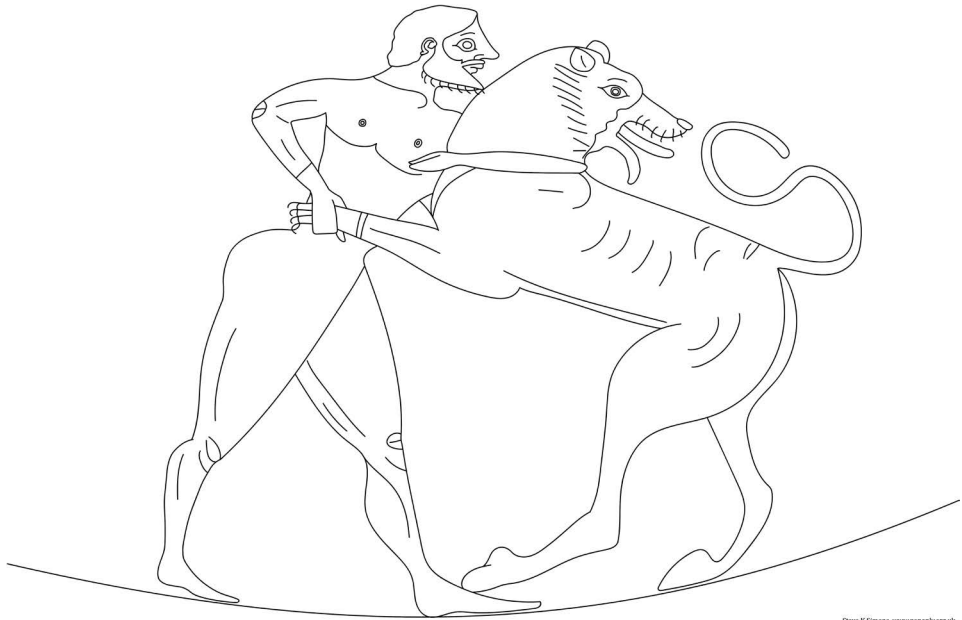
**Figure k:** *Hercules, Iolaus, the Hydra and the Crab*, detail of hydria from Caere in Etruria, attributed to the Eagle Painter, 520–510 BCE, J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, inv. no. 83.AE.346, drawn by Steve K. Simons (= Fig. 20).



**Figure 1:** *Hercules Reclining on a Couch*, detail of Attic red-figure bell-krater by the Berlin Painter, ca. 500–490 BCE, inv. no. G172, Louvre, Paris, drawn by Steve K. Simons (= Fig. 23).

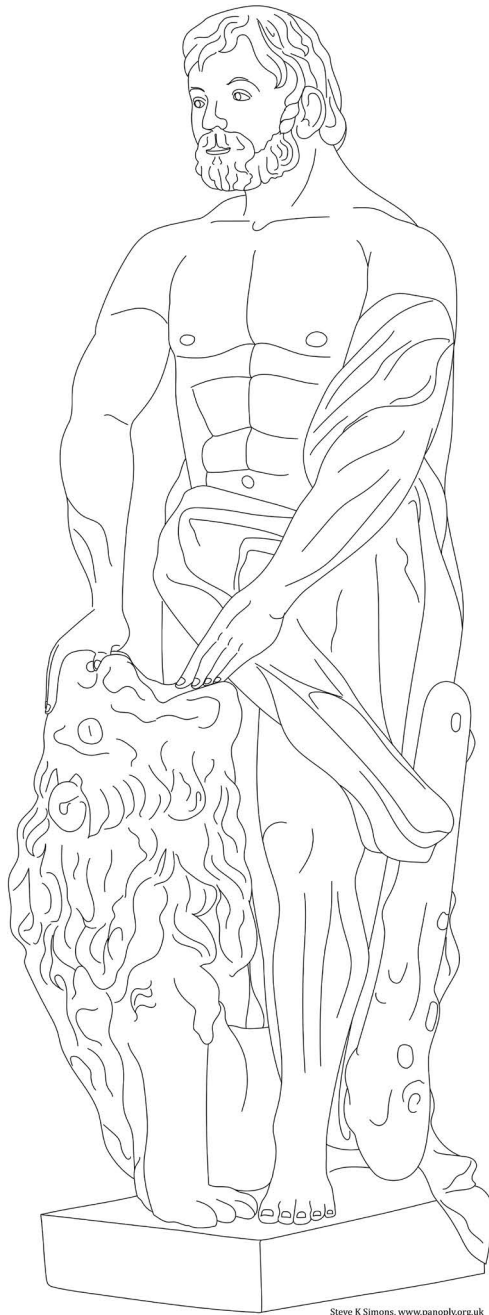


**Figure m:** *Hercules, Eurystheus and Cerberus*, detail of Attic black-figure hydria by the Eagle Painter, ca. 525 BCE, Louvre, Paris, inv. no. E701, drawn by Steve K. Simons (= Fig. 17).



Steve K Simons, [www.panoply.org.uk](http://www.panoply.org.uk)

**Figure n:** *Hercules Wrestles the Nemean Lion*, detail of black-figure amphora, sixth century BCE, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, inv. no. 84001769980, drawn by Steve K. Simons (= Fig. 19).



Steve K Simons, [www.panoply.org.uk](http://www.panoply.org.uk)

**Figure o:** *Hercules with Nemean Lion and the Club of Hercules*, eighteenth-century statue with head added by Wiesław Winkler, modelled on the features of Stanisław Kalinowski, Łazienki Park, Warsaw, drawing by Steve K. Simons (= Fig. 18).

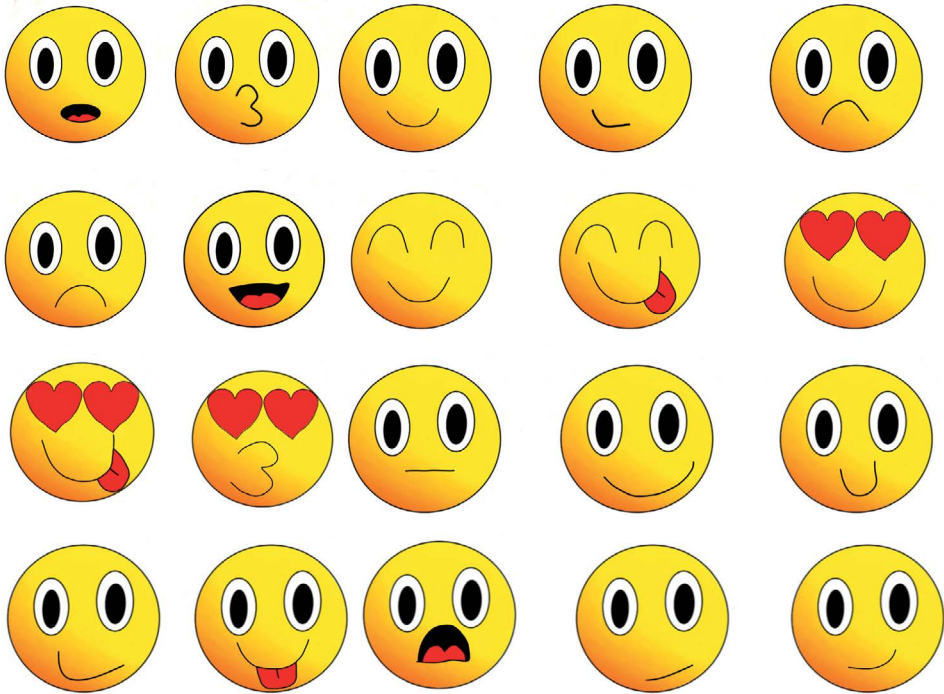
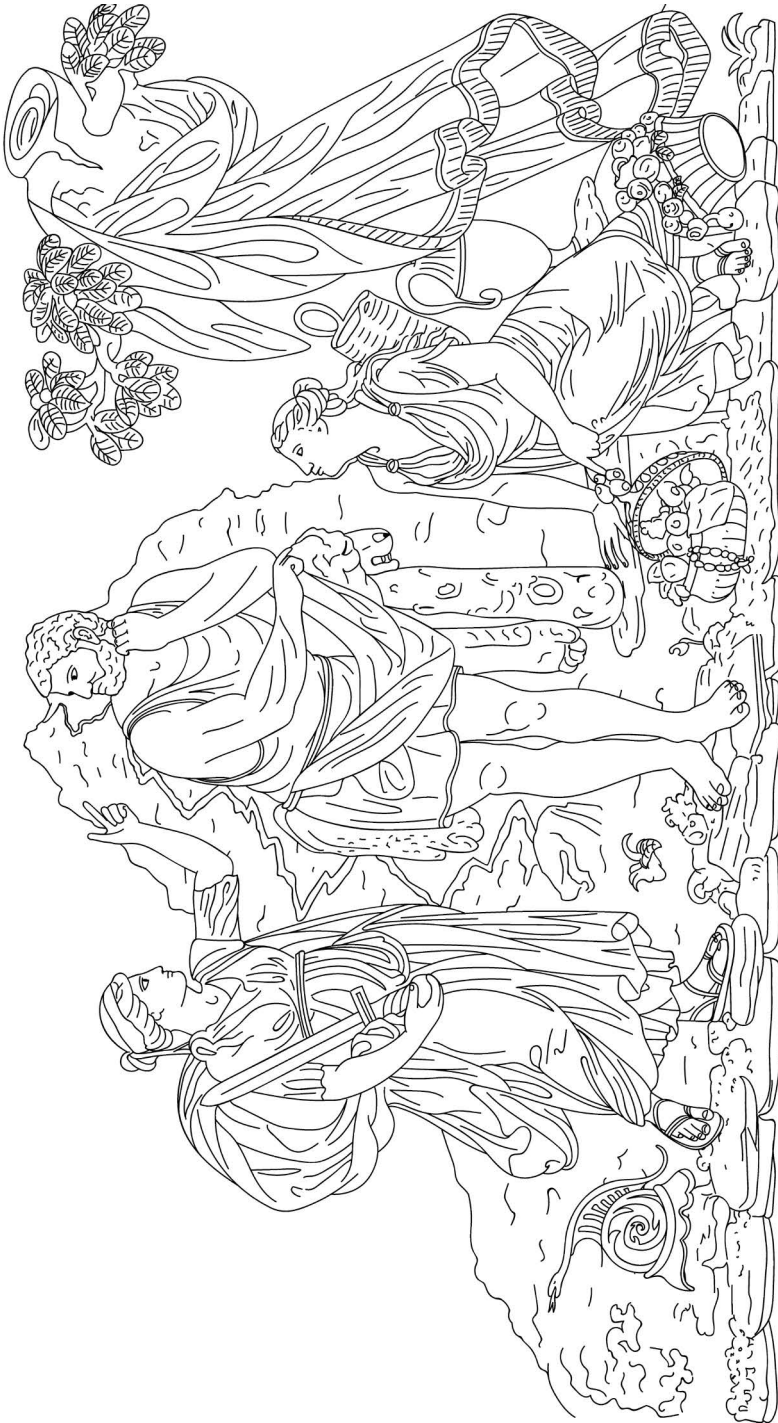


Figure p: Spiral Ogert, *The Adoring Emojis* (2021), Wikimedia Commons.



**Figure q:** *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, workshop of the Carter family of sculptors, late eighteenth century, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons with further clothing added to the figures of Hercules and Pleasure (= Fig. 7).





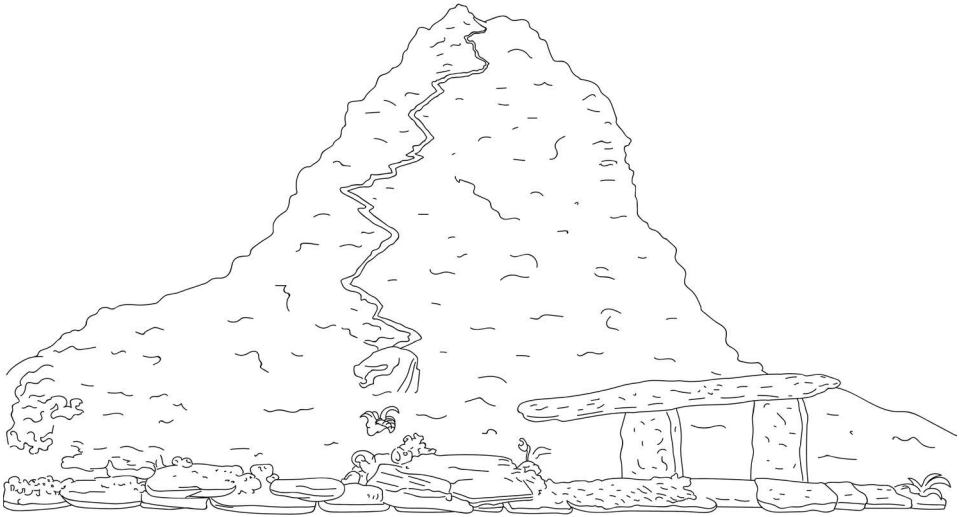
**Figure r:** Detail of Hercules from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons with further clothing added (= Fig. 9).



**Figure s:** Detail of Hard Work with sword from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons (= Fig. 50).



**Figure t:** Detail of Pleasure from *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons, with further clothing added (= Fig. 11).



**Figure u:** Landscape with seat, detail of *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London, drawn by Steve K. Simons (= Fig. 30).



**Figure v:** Still of opening frame of animation by Steve K. Simons of *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel in the Adam Room in Grove House, Roehampton, London.

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[Susan Deacy] is a leading expert in this field. [...] the book [...] offers an original and valuable contribution to the growing field of story work for students with special educational needs. [...] Professor Deacy is a classical expert, whose knowledge is lightly worn and beautifully conveyed in lucid prose.

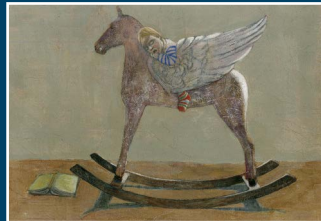
Nicola Grove, learning disabilities specialist and author,  
The Tizard Centre, University of Kent  
From the editorial review

[T]his work certainly fills a gap. It represents a really imaginative take on working creatively with autistic pupils and this is really refreshing. [...] it has practical application for imaginative teachers, parents and possibly therapists.

Nicola Martin, Professor of Social Justice and Inclusive Education,  
London South Bank University  
From the editorial review

This project is so special. It means a lot to me that there are people supporting (but maybe it's not the right word) – better: LETTING autistic children know the classical heritage on their terms and find ways to express their inner worlds on their terms. This is making the world a more colourful and creative place.

A backstage statement on Susan Deacy's work  
by a University of Oxford DPhil student interested in neurodiversity,  
Diversifying Outreach event, UK



Prof. Susan Deacy [...] has conducted numerous workshops for children at schools with autism bases. Her contacts with pupils, their teachers, parents, and tutors contributed further to enhancing the dialogic background of this book. If you lend an ear, you will hear the polyphony and discover an aural memory of their voices. Prof. Deacy follows them with utmost respect in developing a unique research approach that could be called the Humanities of Empathy – the future of our discipline. [...] Prof. Deacy focuses on autistic children, but I have no doubt that all her readers, irrespective of their age and life situation, can profit from her reflections (inclusivity in practice!) and learn with Hercules how to cope with the path “per aspera ad astra” – “through hardships to the stars”.

Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw  
From the foreword by the Editor of the Series

