

OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

The Ancient Myths
as Medicine for the Hardships
of Life in Children's
and Young Adults' Culture

Edited by
Katarzyna Marciniak



OUR MYTHICAL
HOPE

“OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD” Series

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Our Mythical Hope: The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults' Culture, edited by Katarzyna Marciniak (University of Warsaw, Poland)
in the series "Our Mythical Childhood", edited by Katarzyna Marciniak (University of Warsaw, Poland)

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Katarzyna Marciniak

What Is Mythical Hope in Children's and Young Adults' Culture? – or: Sharing the Light



WHAT IS MYTHICAL HOPE IN CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULTS' CULTURE? – OR: SHARING THE LIGHT

To Professor Jerzy Axer
with gratitude for His faith in Childhood

L'enfance croit ce qu'on lui raconte et ne le met pas en doute.
[...] C'est un peu de cette naïveté que je vous demande et,
pour nous porter chance à tous,
laissez-moi vous dire quatre mots magiques,
véritable "Sésame ouvre-toi" de l'enfance:
Il était une fois...

Jean Cocteau, *La Belle et la Bête*, 1946

"Long, long ago, when this old world was in its tender infancy, there was a child..." – this is how Nathaniel Hawthorne's tale "The Paradise of Children" begins. It belongs to the collection *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851).¹ Its narrator, a young man bearing the telling name of Eustace Bright – with the Greek prefix εὖ, 'well' / 'good', and an allusion to light included – is staying with his little cousins at Tanglewood, a beautiful manor in Lenox, Massachusetts. They are cut off from the world by a strong winter snowstorm over which the children "rejoiced greatly", though Eustace not so much. Thus, cousin Primrose, both to make Eustace feel better and provide their group with some indoor entertainment, asks him for a story. The therapeutic function of storytelling in plain sight. The thoughts of Eustace go to warm weather, and he tells the children

¹ In the present chapter the following edition is used: Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*, Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, [1879], 89 (in the further quotations the page numbers from this edition will be given in parentheses). On Hawthorne and children's literature, see in the first place Sheila Murnaghan with Deborah H. Roberts, "A Kind of Minotaur: Literal and Spiritual Monstrosity in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne", 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, 55–74; and Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

about the times when there was "but one season in the year, and that was the delightful summer; and but one age for mortals, and that was childhood" (88).

As this story of the Golden Age develops – with Eustace's charming descriptions of meals growing on trees, carefree fun, and the bright aura – it in fact reveals the sinister myth of Pandora, here a "playfellow" sent by the gods to the boy Epimetheus, in whose household "a great box" menacingly awaits. Even though in Hawthorne's version the girl is not responsible for bringing the box to Earth (it had been deposited by Mercury in person much earlier²), it is still hers to release the evils and, as a result, to put an end to this Paradise of Children, "who before had seemed immortal in their childhood, now grew older, day by day, and came soon to be youths and maidens, and men and women by and by, and then aged people, before they dreamed of such a thing" (104–105).

The horror that follows the opening of the box by Pandora is foreshadowed in the moment she lifts the lid – by a change in the weather: there was a heavy thunderclap, "the black cloud had now swept quite over the sun, and seemed to have buried it alive" (102); it was so dark that Pandora could hardly see a thing. But she heard. Hawthorne's emphasis on the sense of hearing enhances the dreadful atmosphere of the scene: the ears of Pandora were hit by "a disagreeable buzzing, as if a great many huge flies or gigantic mosquitoes [...] were darting about" (103). As her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, she saw "a crowd of ugly little shapes, with bats' wings, looking abominably spiteful, and armed with terribly long stings in their tails" (103). They were "the whole family of earthly Troubles", including evil Passions, Cares, Sorrows, and Diseases. And they attacked and strung first Epimetheus and next Pandora. The girl, distressed, opened the windows and the doors to drive them out of their household, and thus they scattered and began tormenting people all over the world.

"L'enfance croit ce qu'on lui raconte et ne le met pas en doute" – childhood or, in fact, children believe in what they are told and do not question it. This is how Jean Cocteau, in 1946, begins his fairy-tale movie *La Belle et la Bête*. But do young people really accept everything uncritically? Well, in Hawthorne's myth of Pandora, in the section "Tanglewood Play-Room: After the Story", one of the cousins asks Eustace how big the box was and whether it truly contained all the troubles. The storyteller confirms it did, adding that the box included even the snowstorm and was "perhaps three feet long, [...] two feet wide, and two feet and a half high" (110). Such a precise answer, however, does not satisfy the boy:

² For Hawthorne, children embody innocence; Pandora's curiosity is "provoked" by the mysterious presence of the box (90).

"Ah," said the child, "you are making fun of me, Cousin Eustace! I know there is not trouble enough in the world to fill such a great box as that. As for the snowstorm, it is no trouble at all, but a pleasure; so it could not have been in the box." (110–111)

Pandora did her homework, too. She developed critical thinking (a side effect of her knowledge of good and evil), and when she heard a little tap from inside the box and a gentle voice asking her to open it again, she replied: "I have had enough of lifting the lid! [...] You need never think that I shall be so foolish as to let you out!" (106). This is not the end of her story, of course, but we need to learn more before returning to it.

In fact, Cocteau's Belle is not naive, either. She gains the ability to see beyond appearances and in the moment of ultimate trial she displays her own agency and manifests a sharp assessment of the situation and her feelings, thereby leading to the triumph of Good, which also entails her personal victory.

It is remarkable that Cocteau, who enjoyed the reputation of an avant-garde artist *par excellence*, in his movie *La Belle et la Bête* elaborates upon one of the oldest classical tales, and, as observed by critics, he makes his work a "rather faithful adaptation" of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's version of the story (1756).³ The opening of the movie, with the director's request to watch it with a certain naivety, is accompanied by his evocation of childhood (*l'enfance*) and the fairy-tale tradition both of the Orient (*véritable "Sésame ouvre-toi"*) and European folklore (*Il était une fois...*): together they define the sources of Cocteau's "personal mythology".⁴ But mythology in the classical understanding of the term is present in the movie, too – not only via numerous details, like, for instance, the sculpture of Diana coming alive in the garden of the Beast,⁵ but above all in the whole narrative framework based on the Greek myth of Eros and Psyche, with the final scene of Belle and her Prince-not-Bête-anymore flying into the sky like Cupid and his beloved on the famous painting by the French academic William-Adolphe Bouguereau (see Fig. 1).

That Cocteau demands "un peu de cette naïveté" – a bit of this naivety – from his viewers when evoking the mythical and fairy-tale context is not a coincidence. Indeed, this naivety is the condition *sine qua non* for viewing such

³ See William Verrone, *Adaptation and the Avant-Garde: Alternative Perspectives on Adaptation*, London: Continuum, 2011, s.v. "Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*".

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Diana plays the key role in the finale, when she shoots the antagonist and transforms him into a beast.



Figure 1: William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *The Abduction of Psyche* (ca. 1895), Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

paintings and movies and for reading and listening to such tales and myths, insofar as we wish to grasp their essence. We need to believe, at least for a moment, that a rose can cause a family drama or that all the world's evils originate from the intriguing box deposited by Mercury in Epimetheus' house. Only then can we enter the realm of primordial stories and learn our lessons. And owing to the particular reaction triggered by childlike innocence, these lessons take an unexpected turn, as we can see in the sceptical remark of Eustace's little cousin. In fact, it turns out that this kind of naivety is not at all contradictory vis-à-vis the protagonists' agency or the young audience's inquisitiveness. On the contrary, it inspires these features as if they were its precious side effects, while the lack of experience along with the feeling of joy at discovering the world with humility when facing its wonders arouses curiosity and leads to wisdom, even though there are some complications along the way.

Indeed, Psyche ruined her happiness while discovering her husband's identity; Belle boldly entered the forbidden room where the Beast kept the magic rose and nearly crushed the delicate flower; Pandora satisfied her curiosity, but in consequence she released a host of evils to torment humankind. With such protagonists, ones we typically do indeed meet in childhood, we learn to doubt – not the fantastic elements of the given story (these we believe, as per Cocteau's request), but our judgements of events, of the motivations of the heroes and heroines, and of our imaginary choices, had we been in their shoes. Thus, the myths and fairy tales help us achieve ever more agency in the coming-of-age process, and this is essential for us both to become able to make our own decisions in our own stories and to strive with hope for the (im)possible happy ending.

Sometimes these lessons need to be repeated, especially when disaster strikes, shattering our childhood ideals. This may explain why the visionary French director chose such an unexpected source – “the tale as old as time” of Beauty and the Beast – as the theme for his movie shortly after World War Two had utterly destroyed the dream of creating the Century of the Child and bringing the Golden Age back to Earth.⁶ Cocteau understood the artist's mission – the effort to rekindle this dream for the future of humankind.

⁶ In fact, the idealized concept of the Century of the Child by Ellen Key (ed. pr. in Swedish 1900) was shattered already by World War One; see Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Klassiker der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Ein internationales Lexikon*, vol. A-K, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1999, ix; Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012; Katarzyna Marciniak, “What Is a Classic... for Children and Young Adults?”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature*

After all, the myths and fairy tales we come to know with a sort of naive open-mindedness teach us to channel curiosity into the trust we consciously bestow upon someone. Psyche's terrible deed triggered her maturation and brought her to wise interactions with other creatures and, in the (happy) ending, to a full reunion with Eros on Mount Olympus. Belle violated the Beast's ban on moving around the castle, but this was how she learnt to notice what was invisible to the eye (quite literally, too, the enchanted servants included) and how she came to know the curse, which she later lifted owing to her courageous and independent actions. Pandora... well, she sentenced humankind to eternal suffering, but she also brought Hope into the world.

Pandora, indeed, transformed her original, vain, and empty naivety into the naivety as meant by Cocteau – wise, humble, and leading to trust. In spite of her very worst experiences and after many doubts, she took the decision to place confidence in the voice that promised not to be “those naughty creatures that have stings in their tails”. However, as if by an ironic twist of Fate, this time it was extremely difficult to lift the lid – it suddenly became very heavy and the girl needed Epimetheus' help. Only together, jointly did they succeed, whereupon they saw a “beautiful creature” (108), as Pandora exclaimed in awe. She was a sunny and smiling little fairy-like personage with “rainbow wings, throwing a light wherever she went” (107). Her gentle touch healed the inflamed wounds left by the evils on the children's bodies and “immediately the anguish of it was gone” (107). Hope – having presented herself with this name – explained that she had been “packed into the box to make amends to the human race for that swarm of ugly Troubles”, and then she made the following promise to Pandora and Epimetheus: “Never fear! We shall do pretty well in spite of them all” (108).

This promise is also conveyed both to Eustace's audience and to the little readers of Hawthorne's story, thereby further strengthening the agency of the children, who are encouraged to change the world for the better with Hope's help. And she is a very special helper, for she gives her cures and blessings to all in need (*pour nous porter chance à tous*), as if the Golden Age were still

for Children and Young Adults, “Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity” 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 6. However, the dream to revive it is still strong, with many great initiatives, like the establishment of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) in 1953 that within its first efforts promoted the pacifistic *Ferdinand the Bull* (1938) by Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson; see Katarzyna Marciniak, “*Et in Arcadia Ferdinand*: The Mythical Victory of an Extraordinary Bull”, in Jan Stanisław Ciechanowski and Cristina González Caizán, eds., *Spain-India-Russia: Centres, Borderlands, and Peripheries of Civilisations. Anniversary Book Dedicated to Professor Jan Kieniewicz on His 80th Birthday*, Warsaw: Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw and Wydawnictwo Naukowe Sub Lupa, 2018, 247–262.

on Earth. That is why, in case the evils manage to make Hope disappear from our horizon in certain circumstances, it is so crucial to travel back to the realm of childhood, via fairy tales and myths, to lift the lid and find her again.

A Sacred Word

In his version of the myth of Hope as a healer, Hawthorne overcomes the famous Hesiodic *crux*. In *Erga* the “beautiful creature” we know from “The Paradise of Children” is kept in the box (jar) by the will of Zeus, whose epithet νεφεληγερέτα (*nephelēgeréta*; cloud gatherer) brings to mind the storm and the dark cloud that seemed to have buried the sun alive, as described by the American writer. However, then the similarities are no more:

μόνη δ' αὐτόθι Ἑλπίς ἐν ἀρρήκτοισι δόμοισιν
ἔνδον ἔμιμνε πίθου ὑπὸ χεῖλεσιν, οὐδὲ θύραζε
ἔξέπτη: πρόσθεν γὰρ ἐπέλλαβε πῶμα πίθιοιο
αἰγιόχου βουλῆσι Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο.

(Hes., *Op.* 96–99)

Only Hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door; for ere that, the lid of the jar stopped her, by the will of Aegis-holding Zeus who gathers the clouds.⁷

The decision of Zeus and the function of Hope in this famous didactic epic leave room for discussions: did the king of the gods wish to preserve Hope for people and place her under their control?⁸ Or, on the contrary – was his intention

⁷ Trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White in Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric Epics*, Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, 1914, via Perseus Project. For a discussion on this issue, see Willem Jacob Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod: Works and Days*, vv. 1–382, Leiden: Brill, 1985, 66–71.

⁸ Verdenius calls Hope “the natural companion of man” (66). See also *ibidem*, 67: Verdenius refers to Babrius 58, where the jar contains only the good things: Ζεὺς ἐν πίθῳ τὰ χρηστὰ πάντα συλλέξας / ἔθηκεν αὐτὸν πωμάσας παρ' ἀνθρώπων. / ὁ δ' ἀκρατὴς ἄνθρωπος εἰδέναι σπεύδων / τί ποτ' ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ τὸ πῶμα κινήσας, / διηκ' ἀπελθεῖν αὐτὰ πρὸς θεῶν οἴκους, / κάκει πέτεσθαι τῆς τε γῆς ἄνω φεύγειν. / μόνη δ' ἔμεινεν ἑλπίς, ἣν κατειλήφει / τεθὲν τὸ πῶμα, τοιγὰρ ἑλπίς ἀνθρώποις / μόνη σύνεστι, τῶν πεφευγόντων ἡμᾶς / ἀγαθῶν ἕκαστον ἐγγυωμένη δώσειν (Zeus gathered all the useful things together in a jar and put a lid on it. He then left the jar in human hands. But man had no self-control and he wanted to know what was in that jar, so he pushed the lid aside, letting those things go back to the abode of the gods. So all the good things flew away, soaring high above the earth, and Hope was the only thing left. When the lid was put back on the jar, Hope was kept

to hide her from humans? If to hide, then why? To punish them more harshly or to protect them from the worst?⁹ And if the latter cause, then what was that “worst” scenario?

Hope in Greek culture has an ambiguous meaning. That is why scholars usually leave it (her) untranslated in their analyses, as Ἐλπίς / Elpis. The most neutral versions, ‘expectation’ or ‘anticipation’, cover both denotations: “anticipation of bad as well as of good things”, to quote Glenn W. Most.¹⁰ The first denotation makes us realize why Zeus’s decision to keep Hope imprisoned in the jar might be interpreted as, in fact, an act of mercy: a life spent awaiting only terrible events would be torture. The second denotation is the one that corresponds best to our contemporary understanding of Hope in English as – let us quote Wikipedia for the most popular definition – “an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one’s life or the world at large”.¹¹ What is interesting, this positive definition, attested by English etymological dictionaries as the principal meaning of “hope” (‘expectation of good’),¹² is found also in the Slavic languages (for example, *nadzieja* in Polish), despite the different roots of this noun. For instance, Wiesław Boryś’s *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* [Etymological Dictionary of Polish]¹³ defines Hope as “oczekiwanie spełnienia czegoś pożądanego” (anticipating the fulfilment of something desirable). However, even such a positive meaning can lead to negative consequences: Hesiod warns his public against *κενεὴν ἐπὶ ἐλπίδα μίμνων* (*Op.* 498) – “the vain (empty) hope” that makes people lazy.¹⁴

inside. That is why Hope alone is still found among the people, promising that she will bestow on each of us the good things that have gone away; trans. Laura Gibbs, in *Aesop’s Fables*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Of course in this version there is no blame of Pandora-the-woman. For the most recent retelling of the Pandora motif, see Natalie Haynes (who rejects the Erasmian “box” already in the title), *Pandora’s Jar: Women in the Greek Myths*, London: Picador, 2020.

⁹ Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod*, 66–71.

¹⁰ Glenn W. Most’s commentary in Hesiod, *Theogony; Works and Days; Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most, Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2006, 95, n. 7. See also the entry “Pandora’s Box” on Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandora%27s_box-#cite_note-23 (accessed 20 December 2020); Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod*, 69–70. See also Martin L. West’s commentary in his edition of Hesiod, *Theogony*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, 169; Noriko Yasumura, *Challenges to the Power of Zeus in Early Greek Poetry*, London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2011, 186.

¹¹ The entry “Pandora’s Box” (accessed 20 December 2020).

¹² See, e.g., William W. Smith, *A Condensed Etymology of the English Language for Common Schools*, New York, NY, and Chicago, IL: A.S. Barnes & Company, [1870], 69.

¹³ Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005, 347.

¹⁴ See Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod*, 66.

We could conclude that Hesiod is a rather pessimistic expert on Hope, if not for a single detail that changes everything. Despite all his dark thoughts, he wrote *The Works and Days* as a poignant appeal to his brother, with whom he wished to be reconciled. The choice of this kind of narrative framework for his message is the best testimony to the "hopeful side" of Hesiod's personality and his faith that positive change is possible – you only need to channel your agency in the right way, with humility and trust. Interestingly, the concept of agency is also a crucial component of Hope's etymology both in Greek and Latin: the origin of *elpis* is associated with the root meaning 'to want', 'to choose',¹⁵ while the Latin noun *spes* has among its cognates such verbs as 'to be capable', 'to succeed', and 'to prosper'.¹⁶

Great expectations, to evoke the title of Charles Dickens's famous novel (1860–1861) having Hope and Love as the engines of the young protagonist's life,¹⁷ require great efforts – a true quest *per aspera* (nota bene, an idiom linked by some scholars with the Hope semantic field: *ab-spe*¹⁸). Thus, Hope grows to the rank of an ally in our struggles with the evils set free by Pandora¹⁹ and is added by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to the four sacred words (ἱεροὶ λόγοι; *hieroi logoi*) symbolizing the divinities who are supposed to accompany us from childhood: Daimon, Tyche, Eros, and Ananke.²⁰ The importance of Hope is also acknowledged in the Christian religion – it is one of the three theological virtues, next to Faith and Love. What is interesting, the connection between Hope and Faith is traceable already in Archaic Greek poetry. Douglas Cairns, in his fundamental study of Greek metaphors, shows this in a fragment by Semonides

¹⁵ M. Gnanavaram, "Preaching as a Language of Hope: An Indian Perspective", in Cas J.A. Vos, L. Lind Hogan, and Johan H. Cilliers, eds., *Preaching as a Language of Hope*, Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2007, 225.

¹⁶ Michiel Arnaud Cor de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages*, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2008, 580.

¹⁷ See Monika Peplińska, "Sposoby konceptualizacji nadziei w wypowiedziach młodzieży licealnej" [Methods of Conceptualizing the Term Hope in High School Students' Utterances], *Studia Językoznawcze* [Linguistic Studies] 4 (2005): *Synchroniczne i diachroniczne aspekty badań polszczyzny* [Synchronic and Diachronic Aspects of Research into the Polish Language], 258. The scholar observes that young people are more creative in their use of the term of "hope", far beyond its dictionary definitions.

¹⁸ See de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary*, 58, 580; Sophia Papaioannou, "'A Historian Utterly Without Hope': Literary Artistry and Narratives of Decline in Tacitus' *Historiae* I", in George Kazantzidis and Dimos Spatharas, eds., *Hope in Ancient Literature, History and Art: Ancient Emotions I*, "Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes" 63, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018, 214.

¹⁹ Papaioannou, *ibidem*, notices that *spes*-related words were used by Tacitus in Book 1 of his *Histories* twenty-six times.

²⁰ Davide Stimilli, *The Face of Immortality: Physiognomy and Criticism*, New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005, 105.

of Amorgos: ἔλπις δὲ πάντας κάπιπειθείη τρέφει / ἄπρηκτον ὀρμαίνοντας (1.6–7 West) – “Elpis and credulity nourish all as they strive for the impossible”.²¹ Hawthorne’s title of his tale, “The Paradise of Children”, may create a link between Christian tradition and the Graeco-Roman mythology with the aim of strengthening the positive interpretation of Hope (not so obvious for the Greeks) as a vital source of power for humans during the hardships of life. The full understanding of this message comes in adulthood, when we all become aware that striving for the impossible is an intrinsic part of human fate and that happy endings are an exception rather than something guaranteed.

In fact, childhood, even when not idealized to such a degree as in Hawthorne’s writing, is probably the period of our highest hopes, even in grim circumstances. And if one emotion should be indicated as characteristic of this time, hope would be the obvious choice (nota bene, in Polish “być przy nadziei”, literally ‘to be with hope’, means ‘to expect a child’).

Hope together with curiosity opens us up to the world. This process does bear some risks, as we have seen in the examples of Pandora, Psyche, and Belle, thus all the more so is Hope needed to make us ready to trust over and over again – to allow ourselves to be persuaded to lift the lid once more and set free the beautiful creature who can heal wounds and who dispels the darkness with her shining wings. No further explanation is necessary as to why we dared turn exactly to Hope as our patron for the opening phase of an enormous new endeavour within the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme.

Our Mythical Hope

The programme *Our Mythical Childhood* was born in 2011, indeed from a childhood dream I shared one day with Jerzy Axer and Elżbieta Olechowska at our Alma Mater – the University of Warsaw. We were at that moment in the middle of intense transformations: the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies “Artes Liberales”, that arose from the Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA), was evolving into the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, with OBTA becoming one of its main units.²²

²¹ Douglas Cairns, “Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry”, in Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds., *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 32.

²² On these processes, see Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Antiquity and We*, Warsaw: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2013, also available online (http://al.uw.edu.pl/pliki/akt/Antiquity_and_We_eBook.pdf).

Constant transformation in response to ever new societal needs is also a characteristic feature of the reception of Classical Antiquity. The Classics, usually perceived as a petrified legacy of the past, indeed do build a steady foundation with their repository of cultural heritage, but at the same time the (re)interpretations of this heritage reveal ever novel meanings and offer an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the next generations all over the globe. As a result, for ages we have been communicating by using references to the ancient code – in art, science, politics, and at home, even if today we are often unaware of this phenomenon.

Thus, with our anchors forged in ancient times, we set off on a new journey, with a fantastic team of scholars from around the world, ones who answered our call for adventure: all of them filled with a childlike joy over research discoveries; all full of Hope and believing in the community spirit, citizen science, and the importance of the Classics for the present times.

In our first steps as toddlers on board, we focused on preliminary research into the reception of Classical Antiquity in children's literature in a comparative approach – namely, by taking into consideration the diverging experiences of Europe's Western countries and those once behind the Iron Curtain. It quickly turned out that we were sailing strange new seas, where no Google search had gone before. Indeed, already then the perspectives of other continents – Africa, Australia, and Asia – manifested themselves very clearly, showing the potential for the next stages of our research. In this "infancy" period, we were honoured to enjoy support from the Loeb Classical Library Foundation for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Children's Literature between East and West* (2012–2013) and from the "Artes Liberales Institute" Foundation that has never ceased to assist us, especially in the organization of the societal ventures linked to the programme.²³

We made our next steps with help from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives. At that stage we took into consideration not only literature, but also culture for young people writ large, with its audiovisual genres, and we expanded the regional approach, owing to the amazing scholars joining our crew from the farthest-flung parts of the globe. We were also inspired by the evolving human–animal studies. Summing up all this, the choice of a theme came to us in a natural way: *Chasing Mythical Beasts... The Reception of Creatures from Graeco-Roman Mythology in Children's*

²³ For the results of this stage, see Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016.

and Young Adults' Culture as a Transformation Marker (2014–2017).²⁴ This was also when we together discovered Jim Henson's favourite song, "If Just One Person Believes in You",²⁵ that has become a kind of anthem for us, with the component of Hope strongly present in its lyrics, as there is no Hope without Faith in each other (Pandora, too, had to trust the creature hidden in the box). This is the idea we all share in our collaboration.

As joyful five-year-olds, in 2016 we embarked on a wonderful research journey with the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, supported by the European Research Council (ERC) within the framework of an ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2022), implemented at the University of Warsaw (Host Institution) and at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, the University of New England in Australia, the University of Roehampton in the United Kingdom, and the University of Yaoundé 1 in Cameroon, together with experts from all around the world.

In this project, we address a choice of demanding challenges, such as: the question of the role of the Classics in education – a task that resulted in a comparative study conceptualized and led by Lisa Maurice;²⁶ the multifarious aspects of the relationship between classical mythology and children's literature in regard to the coming-of-age process – an examination carried out by Elizabeth Hale in collaboration with Miriam Riverlea;²⁷ the intercultural dialogue with Greek and Roman mythology in the context of the preservation of native myths from Africa – a mission undertaken by Daniel A. Nkemele, Divine Che Neba, and Eleanor Anneh Dasi; the potential of mythotherapy in work with autistic children – pioneering research by Susan Deacy;²⁸ the innovative approach to artefacts

²⁴ See the project's website: <http://mythicalbeasts.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/> (accessed 15 July 2021). For the results of this stage, see 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.

²⁵ See Laser Time, "Jim Henson Memorial Service – One Person" (May 1990), YouTube, 22 September 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeEzQ4qwkgo> (accessed 15 July 2021).

²⁶ See 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, also available online (<https://www.wuw.pl/product-eng-14887-Our-Mythical-Education-The-Reception-of-Classical-Myth-Worldwide-in-Formal-Education-1900-2020-PDF.html>).

²⁷ Elizabeth Hale and Miriam Riverlea, *Classical Mythology and Children's Literature... An Alphabetical Odyssey*, ill. Steve K. Simons, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, forthcoming.

²⁸ Susan Deacy, *What Would Hercules Do? Lessons for Autistic Children Using Classical Myth*, ill. Steve K. Simons, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, forthcoming.

via the animations of Greek vases by Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons, etc.²⁹ Moreover, together with eminent experts – their affiliations ranging from the United States, through many parts of Europe, to New Zealand³⁰ – we explore the reception of the Classics in children's and young adults' culture as a space where the development of human identity takes place, and as a marker of the social, political, and cultural transformations underway in global and regional settings. In the course of this, we also try to make use of the global appeal of the ancient tradition along with the natural connection that the educated public feels towards the theme of childhood, to encourage novel formats for citizen science. With *Our Mythical Hope* on the banner we truly hope to contribute to establishing a new holistic model for work in the humanities on the frontiers of research, education, and culture, beyond the borders of generations and countries – thus consolidating Our Mythical Community.

At the same time, our choice revealed the necessity to face certain research dilemmas that are an intrinsic part of the theme, even if the contemporary denotations of the "hopeful vocabulary" do not contain much of the ambiguity typical of the Greek Elpis. Today, the main questions regard the reliability of the sources of Hope. The first sources available to most of us from the earliest stage of life are the relationships with our near and dear that contribute to the memories of wonderful moments in the past. When the relationships are no more, these memories become the next source of Hope we can draw from in the hour of need, in the future, while we strive for the impossible. However, even if we leave aside the utopian view of childhood according to (*inter alia*) Hawthorne as a period uncontaminated by evil, we have to admit that it is often a time of both the most beautiful and the most terrible experiences – ones that are formative and provide or in fact deprive us of a supply of Hope for the years to come. Among such experiences we might indicate developing relationships with peers; learning to respect others and to love within and outside the family; dealing with loss and violence, bullying, and rejection; fighting against addiction; achieving agency and resilience; undergoing crisis in regard to identity-building, religious and other values; having to make crucial choices; discovering

²⁹ See "Animating the Ancient World", *Our Mythical Childhood...* [Project's website], <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/animating-the-ancient-world> (accessed 15 July 2021).

³⁰ In these sections I also make use of my reflections published in the *Our Mythical Hope* conference booklet; see Katarzyna Marciniak et al., *Our Mythical Hope in Children's and Young Adults' Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life: Conference Booklet*, Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, 2017, http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/files/OMH_Conference_Booklet_9.5.2017.pdf (accessed 15 July 2021).

the limits of freedom under external forces and from one's own volition, etc. Positive feedback does not always flow from these experiences, especially if the burden is too heavy to bear at the given stage of our life or in the given circumstances, or if there is no wise and caring tutor nearby. Worse even: Hope can be crushed then and the young person left devastated...

But speaking of the ancient foundations: what about a source of Hope (nearly) as old as humankind and also available from the earliest childhood – that is: the contact with art through the works of culture?³¹ This source is as boundless as the artists' imagination, but we can try to examine at least part of it – via the methods of reception studies enriched with tools borrowed from other disciplines, and with maintaining due humility and focusing on the stream rooted in the Graeco-Roman heritage. Classical Antiquity is a particularly important field in terms of "Hope studies" not only because of the myth of Pandora and the birth of "the beautiful creature" who promised to help us in spite of all. For centuries, the ancient tradition, and classical mythology in particular, has been a common reference point for whole hosts of creators of culture, across many parts of the world, and with the new media and globalization only increasing its impact. Thus, in our research at this stage, we have decided to study how the authors of literary and audiovisual texts for youth make use of the ancient myths to support their young protagonists (and readers or viewers) in crucial moments of their existence, on their road into adulthood, and in those dark hours when it seems that life is about to shatter and fade away. However, if Hope is summoned in time, the crisis can be overcome and the protagonist grows stronger, with a powerful uplifting message for the public.

But again, is this really so? Are the Classics, or even more broadly – is human culture of any help in the hour of need? Our doubts were reflected in the title of the conference, at which we presented the first results of our research: *Our Mythical Hope in Children's and Young Adults' Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life*; the parentheses as a signal that we wished to refrain ourselves from easy judgements. And yet the answer came unexpectedly, in February 2020, with the coronavirus pandemic that disrupted our mundane rhythm in nearly all parts of the world and made people, both younger and older, face dilemmas and challenges they would have probably never expected to experience.

³¹ The role of nature is also crucial in this context. We study it in the third phase of the ERC project; see "Our Mythical Nature: The Classics and Environmental Issues in Children's and Young Adults' Culture", *Our Mythical Childhood...*, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-nature> (accessed 15 October 2021).

This situation raised up everyday heroes and heroines for all to see: medical personnel on the frontline, persons working in commerce, staffing courier companies, maintaining cities' infrastructure, etc.

When there are lives to save, everything else recedes into the background. The professional competences of certain groups of society are crucial to help its most fragile members. In the culminating moments of the pandemic's waves, this absolute focus on saving lives seems widely perceptible. The coronavirus, which is assumed to be the most dangerous to older people and those with coexisting diseases, exposes our hierarchy of values like no other experience known in recent times. The solidarity felt with those who are the weakest is poignant testimony to what is best in humans.

Hope is a common theme in such circumstances. The pandemic increased fears shared by children and young adults, like uncertainty as to what will happen tomorrow, in terms of both health and economy, and the feeling of helplessness enhanced by social distancing – a necessary condition, yet one so contradictory to our need for interactions. And here another important testimony to the best in humans manifested itself: special interactions did take place – of course in a form adjusted to the situation. Thus, many communities grew stronger owing to the hosts of volunteers going *per aspera* to assist those in need. This amazing solidarity (may it last also in the aftermath of the lockdowns!) was both an expression of Hope in the present and a source of Hope for the future.

Having set these priorities, we can focus on the "second row". In these grim times, the salvific power of culture is felt intensely, even though many artists experience great financial difficulties and their ability to act is limited. However, the cultural depository has much to offer and people all over the world look for entertainment and solace in works of literature, film, music, etc. Such immersion ensures temporary escape from problems and permits the reservoir of Hope to be restored through the cathartic emotions triggered by art. The Classics and the works inspired by Classical Antiquity as a result of the reception process are in this corpus, too.³²

³² In these circumstances, more educational materials would be useful. To this challenge we are trying to respond through the initiative *Find the Force!* (<http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/find-the-force>; see Fig. 2) – activities we prepare for use both at school and home, for regular lessons and as a family pastime. For now we have English, Italian, Belarusian, and Polish language versions, expanded on a voluntary basis and linked to our collaboration with students. I wish to invite all to contribute.



Figure 2: The poster of the *Find the Force!* initiative (2020). Artwork by Zbigniew Karaszewski.

The immersion in culture may also lead to artistic practices – they come the easiest to children who have not yet lost faith in the power of their creations. Nowadays, the young all around the globe have felt the need to express their fears and hopes by choosing the rainbow as the symbol of their message. Greek mythology features, of course, the rainbow goddess Iris (quite menacing sometimes³³), however, here the choice seems to have been influenced by the experience of children’s literature that has preserved the image of Hope as depicted with words by Hawthorne: the beautiful creature with “rainbow wings, throwing a light wherever she went” (107).

³³ See “Iris – the Rainbow Goddess”, *Our Mythical Childhood...*, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/iris> (accessed 15 July 2021), where Iris is the protagonist of Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons’s animation, which they present also accompanied by educational materials within the *Find the Force!* initiative. The users, young and old, share with us their artworks based on these materials (see Figs. 3 and 4), and we publish them on the webpage “Our Mythical Creations”, *Our Mythical Childhood...*, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-creations> (accessed 15 July 2021).

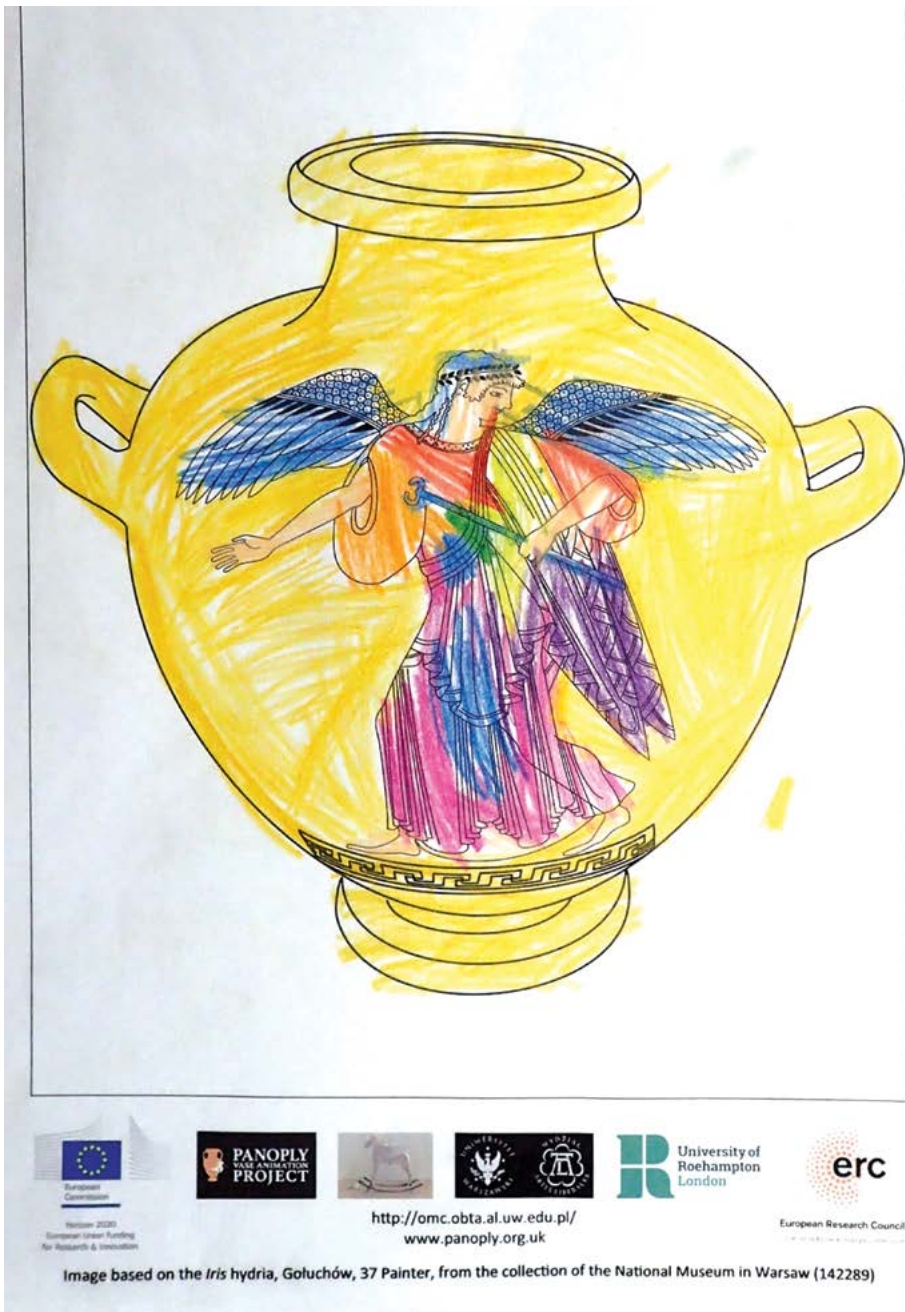


Figure 3: Example of artworks created by users of the educational materials prepared within the *Our Mythical Childhood* project: *Iris the Rainbow Goddess* by Oktawia, age 5, from Poland (2020). For more, see “Our Mythical Creations”, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-creations> (accessed 15 July 2021).



Figure 4: Example of artworks created by users of the educational materials prepared within the *Our Mythical Childhood* project: *Iris the Rainbow Goddess* by Temperance, age 7, from Ireland (2020). For more, see “Our Mythical Creations”, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-creations> (accessed 15 July 2021).

When the pandemic broke out, our chapters had already been completed; nonetheless, the aggravating situation impacted the tone of the volume, our new view on the reception of the Classics, and our awareness of the importance to continue our studies on Hope and the healing function of culture in the future. At the same time, our reservations in regard to the efficacy of such a cure, as we expressed them via the parentheses in the title of the conference of May 2017, were replaced by the strong conviction, tested “in the field” by various experts,³⁴ that the realm of the Classics³⁵ indeed can serve as a healing place

³⁴ For example, on Natalie Haynes’s video series *Ovid Not Covid* see Rachel Cunliffe, “Natalie Haynes on How Classics Can Help Us Survive Lockdown”, *New Statesman*, 21 January 2021, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2021/01/natalie-haynes-how-classics-can-help-us-survive-lockdown> (accessed 28 June 2021).

³⁵ This therapeutic potential is present in the heritage of many cultures – we keep to the Classics as our research field, however, we are always open to multifarious experiences, as some of the chapters in this volume will also demonstrate.

for the soul – ψυχῆς ἰατρεῖον (*psychēs iatreion*) – as the inscription in ancient libraries read.³⁶ Hence the final title of the volume, to reflect this change: *Our Mythical Hope: The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*. As will be shown in the subsequent chapters, this medicine is sometimes sweet and sometimes bitter, and its healing power is limited, but if we take it regularly, we will feel its effects.

The Daughter of the Night

While Hope, according to children (and Hawthorne), is a fairy-like personage on rainbow wings, adults may also meet her much different incarnation, as captured – for instance – by George Frederic Watts, who created his famous painting (1886; see Fig. 5) during a time when he was affected by both a global crisis – the Long Depression of the 1870s – and a personal tragedy – his granddaughter Isabel died from an illness.³⁷

In this symbolist painting, Hope (in classical robes that are supposed to imitate the Elgin Marbles³⁸) sits on a globe – possibly Earth – and she has bandages on her eyes and head. Obviously, she must have been wounded. She seems gravely afflicted, as she is bent in a strange, semi-fetal position that art critics link to Michelangelo's *Night* (1526–1531; see Fig. 6).³⁹

And indeed, there is darkness in the background of the painting. We also see heaven in suffocated colours and a cloud that is about to engulf the figure of Hope, yet it cannot. For even if a grim and threatening gloom spills over the painting, there is no doubt that its centre is dominated by Hope, with her shining face, despite the hidden injuries, and there is a bright star over her head. She cannot see it, of course, but she appears to feel the light coming and she does not surrender to despair. Instead, she plays a damaged lyre.

³⁶ See, e.g., Robert Glatter, "Theater of War: Using Greek Tragedy to Help Frontline Medical Workers Cope during Covid-19", *Forbes*, 4 August 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertglatter/2020/08/04/theater-of-war-using-greek-tragedy-to-help-frontline-medical-workers-cope-during-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR27vf9znsWBZ8aY_oGM_v-_iHV6RJGaiA8AQIC__R-vYLWDTjGR0tltSmo (accessed 15 July 2021).

³⁷ Isabel's mother, Blanche, was Watts's adopted daughter; see Mark Bills and Barbara Bryant, *G.F. Watts: Victorian Visionary. Highlights from the Watts Gallery Collection*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008, 220. For an original approach to the theme of hope, see also the painting *Hope in the Prison of Despair* (1887) by Evelyn de Morgan.

³⁸ See Nicholas Tromans, *Hope: The Life and Times of a Victorian Icon*, Compton: Watts Gallery, 2011.

³⁹ See Malcolm Warner, Anne Helmreich, and Charles Brock, *The Victorians: British Painting 1837–1901*, Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1996, 194.



Figure 5: George Frederic Watts, *Hope* (1886), Tate, London, photograph © by Tate, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/watts-hope-n01640> (accessed 1 July 2021), Creative Commons Licence Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported.



Figure 6: Michelangelo, *Night* (1526–1531), sculpture from the New Sacristy, Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence. Fragment of a photograph by Rabe! (2014), Wikimedia Commons.

Hope has only one string at her disposal, but she listens intently to the sound produced. Art therapy also in her case? Or maybe in this way she is recreating the music of the spheres and thereby is bringing the universe back to its hopeful order, in Greek – κόσμος (*kósmos*), so that we can repeat after Plato (and Louis Armstrong), “what a beautiful [καλός; *kalós*] world” (see *Timaeus* 29a).⁴⁰

Watts had either an overall very good knowledge of the reception of classical mythology or true artistic intuition – or both. For there is a link between the Greek Elpis (Roman Spes) and the darkness: Hope, a goddess of unknown parentage, sometimes is considered to be none other than a daughter of Nyx (Nox), as if to challenge the darkness and despair associated with the night.

⁴⁰ On the musical motifs in painting, see the interesting study by Charlotte Purkis, “Listening for the Sublime: Aural-Visual Improvisations in Nineteenth-Century Musical Art”, *Tate Papers* 14 (Autumn 2010), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/listening-for-the-sublime-aural-visual-improvisations-in-nineteenth-century-musical-art> (accessed 15 July 2021).

Interestingly enough, this relationship is also on display in the fairy-tale opera *Turandot* by Giacomo Puccini. Hope is the protagonist of the first enigma posed by the Princess to the candidates for her hand:

Nella cupa notte
vola un fantasma iridescente.
Sale e spiega l'ale
sulla nera infinita umanità.
Tutto il mondo l'invoca
e tutto il mondo l'implora.
Ma il fantasma sparisce con l'aurora
per rinascere nel cuore!
Ed ogni notte nasce
ed ogni giorno muore!

In the gloomy night
an iridescent phantom flies.
It spreads its wings and rises
over infinite, black humanity!
Everyone invokes it,
everyone implores it!
But the phantom disappears at dawn
to be reborn in the heart!
And every night it's born
and every day it dies!⁴¹

This portrayal of Hope is similar to Hawthorne's: a winged creature who dispels the darkness with her iridescent wings – a dear companion of the people. Indeed, brought to Earth by Pandora, Hope is the only deity that remained among us, while all the others, too terrified or disappointed with humans, had long left us for the secure asylum of Olympus, as Theognis writes in his elegy, pointing to the sunny brightness conveyed by this goddess to our lives:

Ἐλπίς ἐν ἀνθρώποισι μόνη θεὸς ἐσθλή ἔνεστιν,
ἄλλοι δ' Οὐλύμπων ἐκπρολιπόντες ἔβαν·
[...]

⁴¹ Trans. from The Metropolitan Opera, "Turandot's Riddles", in *The Met: HD Live in Schools 2015–16 Educator Guide*. Puccini, *Turandot*, 13, <https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/discover/education/educator-guides/turandot/turandot.15-16.guide.pdf> (accessed 15 July 2021). There also the Italian quote (39).

ἀλλ' ὄφρα τις ζῶει καὶ ὄρα φῶς ἡλείοιο,
εὐσεβέων περὶ θεοῦς Ἐλπίδα προσμενέτω
(1135–1144)

Elpis is the only good deity among human beings: the others have abandoned us and gone to Olympus. [...] But as long as a man lives and sees the light of the sun, let him be pious with regard to the gods and await Elpis.⁴²

Thus, it is not surprising that we have been clinging to “Sweet Hope”, as she is called by Pindar (Fr. 233, quoted in Pl., *Resp.* 330e), “while there is life”, to quote Cicero (*dum anima est, spes esse dicitur*, *Att.* 9.10.3). And not only in Antiquity, as references to those authors might suggest, but in all of human-kind’s epochs the world over, and even in galaxies far, far away – in all the acts of the Human Comedy across the ages. For life without Hope is impossible. Dante knew this. You abandon Hope and enter hell.

But what if Hope is not able to regenerate overnight, for the burdens of everyday tragedies are too heavy? What when we lose hope in Hope? Turandot, after Prince Calaf – against her expectations – solves her enigma correctly, cries in desperation: “La speranza che delude sempre!” (Hope which always deludes!) – thus we are back with Hesiod here. Indeed, even if much is in our hands, like in the case of Pandora, who gave Hope a chance and opened the lid for the second time, there are things beyond our power. And that is when the most crucial question arises.

Between July 1962 and March 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., worked on his poignant sermon he entitled “Shattered Dreams”.⁴³ He dedicated it to “one of the most agonizing problems of human experience” – the fact that “[v]ery few, if any, of us are able to see all of our hopes fulfilled”. King’s approach stands out from that by other theoreticians focused on Hope due to his extraordinary broadness of thinking. Namely, he juxtaposes the greatest people – the

⁴² Trans. from Cairns, “Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry”, 27. There you will find also an in-depth interpretation of the passage. Moreover, see Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod*, 67.

⁴³ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Draft of Chapter X, ‘Shattered Dreams’” (1 July 1962–31 March 1963?), in Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Susan Englander, Troy Jackson, and Gerald L. Smith, eds., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 6: *Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948–March 1963*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007, available online via The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/draft-chapter-x-shattered-dreams> (all quotations are from this website, accessed 15 July 2021). It is worth adding that this sermon was vital also for Barack Obama.

founders of the world's culture – with each and every one of us in a way that takes us by surprise and thus necessitates a deeper reflection. "Each of us, like Schubert, begins composing a symphony that is never finished", states King, going on to evoke the Apostle Paul and his never completed journey to Spain, and Mahatma Gandhi and his then unfulfilled dream of peace in India. King also refers to Watts's portrayal of Hope, with her head "sadly bowed and her fingers [...] plucking one unbroken harp string". Then he asks: "Who has not had to face the agony of blasted hopes and shattered dreams?", and although this seems to be a rhetorical question, he does give an answer – one that sounds like the most depressing statement on the human condition ever: "Shattered dreams! Blasted hopes! This is life".

Or is it really? At this moment King voices the problem that probably takes shape in the minds of most of those listening to his sermon: "What does one do under such circumstances? This is a central question, for we must determine how to live in a world where our highest hopes are not fulfilled".

King ponders three main scenarios, all three sadly real – we may well have already encountered or even experienced them. First, the frustration arising from blasted hopes transforms into "bitterness and resentment of spirit. The persons who follow this path develop a hardness of attitude and a coldness of heart. They develop a bitter hatred for life itself. In fact, hate becomes the dominant force in their lives". This scenario, according to King, is the most terrible one, as it "poisons the soul and scars the personality" and above all harms "the person who harbours it". Second, disappointment over the failure of dreams leads people to introversion – they withdraw themselves from relationships with their near and dear and suffer in silence. Also here the pain affects all – the persons in crisis and their families and friends. Third and final, there is fatalism, in suffocated colours and with no star dispelling the darkness – only a sombre resignation, against which Hesiod had warned his brother, and whose traces may be found in the aforementioned elegy by Semonides:

ὦ παῖ, τέλος μὲν Ζεὺς ἔχει βαρύκτυπος
πάντων ὅσ' ἐστὶ καὶ τίθησ' ὄκη θέλει,
νοῦς δ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀνθρώποισιν, ἀλλ' ἐπήμεροι
ἄδη βοτὰ ζοοῦσιν, οὐδὲν εἰδότες
ὄκως ἕκαστον ἐκτελευτήσει θεός.

(1.1–5 West)

My boy, Zeus the loud-thunderer holds the outcome of all that there is and arranges it as he wishes. There is no sense in human beings; rather they live from day to day like grazing beasts, knowing nothing of how the god will bring each thing to pass.⁴⁴

But this is the very same elegy that contains the message on "Elpis and credulity" that "nourish all as they strive for the impossible". It is amazing how close they were in their conclusions: the today little-known Greek poet from the seventh century BC and the African American non-violent Christian activist, murdered in 1968, whose legacy still inspires people in various parts of the world in the third millennium. King knew what "striving for the impossible" meant and, despite all the sufferings, he gave to his audience this simple counsel – a difficult one, yet the only valid one:

We must accept our unwanted and unfortunate circumstance and yet cling to a radiant hope. The answer lies in developing the capacity to accept the finite disappointment and yet cling to the infinite hope.

The Paradise of Children, even if not immune to evil, as already Pandora had found out, is a period when Hope is the strongest. With the coming-of-age and ever more frequent disillusionments, when childhood dreams are confronted and often crushed by adulthood's reality, there is a risk of losing Hope permanently, with all the terrible consequences enumerated by King. Of course, it must be extremely difficult to follow his counsel and cling to Hope in the midst of the most dire disappointments, but there is something that can help us in this respect.

Franz Schubert was not the only composer who did not finish his work. Neither did Puccini bring his *Turandot* to an end – he died from cancer, and the opera was completed by his disciple Franco Alfano. We do not know whether Puccini would be pleased with the happy ending, not quite typical for this genre. But maybe he would. After all, in his beautiful aria "Nessun dorma", written for Prince Calaf and taking place at night, under a starry sky, we can hear a string of Hope plucked that preannounces the ultimate triumph of Good: "le stelle che tremano / d'amore e di speranza!" – "the stars, that tremble / with love and with hope!" Needless to add that this aria, through a number of societal artistic initiatives, has offered an uplifting message to the people exhausted by the

⁴⁴ Trans. from Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 31–32. There you will find also an in-depth interpretation of the passage.

coronavirus pandemic.⁴⁵ “All’alba vincerò” – “I will win at dawn!”, Prince Calaf concludes. May these words prove prophetic also for our times.

But what does all this tell us about the help we can get to keep Hope intact, or to make her regenerate each night? Puccini never saw his work on stage and he never knew the incredible impact it had and still has on people all over the world. However, it is precisely this impact and Alfano’s continuation that testify to the existence of a Community – the same as the one evoked in King’s sermon through his references to Schubert, the Apostle Paul, Gandhi, Watts, and to each and every single person from his projected audience. The members of this Community – the greatest artists and their public – indeed do experience shattered dreams and blasted hopes, but where somebody’s mission ends, there another person can take it up and go on. Hope can be shared, and when shared, paradoxically, she grows stronger and she strengthens both the Community and its single members.

Puccini based his opera on a Persian fairy tale moved to a Chinese setting and this – along with King’s sermon, probably delivered in Atlanta, Georgia, and Semonides’ Ancient Greek elegy – is yet another testimony to the essential role of the cultural repository in building ties between people all around the globe, beyond time and space. Let the one among us who was never moved by a book or a movie scene, who never laughed with their friends during a comedy show, who never shed a tear at the sound of music, be the first to place Hope back into the jar.

The Classics are not the only stream of nourishing emotions, of course – each culture has its precious contribution here – but in fact they are of special importance in this context, as for millennia ancient culture has been offering a Community-building code of communication for a great part of the world. In particular, this is one of the functions of the ancient myths that since childhood have been guiding us like starry signposts (often quite literally, if we remember the names of the constellations) through the stormy night.

If Classical Antiquity can help us regain Hope through the tales we often remember from our reading, movies, or storytelling family “sessions” when we were small, and from the plethora of works nutritious to us in adulthood, let us use this medicine. For Hope is like a Classic *par excellence*, to recall the “classical”

⁴⁵ See, e.g., NowThis News, “Italian Opera Singer Serenades Quarantined Florence amidst Coronavirus Outbreak”, YouTube, 16 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhTjGS3QkYE>; see also Victor Mair, “Turandot and the Deep Indo-European Roots of ‘Daughter’”, *Language Log*, 16 March 2020, <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=46417>; also the Polish tenor Piotr Beczala registered this aria during the pandemic; see [Piotr Beczala] and Pentatone, “Vincerò! – Piotr Beczala”, YouTube, 7 May 2020, music video by Julia Wesely, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQ-e4bAtsz0> (all websites accessed 20 December 2020).

definition by T.S. Eliot.⁴⁶ Rooted in the past, sometimes even stuck in the darkest parts of the jar⁴⁷ or box in Pandora and Epimetheus' household, Hope comes to our aid in the hour of need and encourages us to make a step into the future, with a child's audacity, which is far beyond an adult's *hubris*. Owing to this, we get a chance to remain true to our ideas, to keep faith in our dreams, and, when the decisive moment comes, to choose not hatred but love, not darkness but light.

Overview of the Volume's Content

In children's and young adults' culture, Hope is a tiny but powerful creature on iridescent wings. Once we had set her free by together lifting the lid for our research, we were unable to control her flight. And this is good, because in this way we can better explore her nature. For Hope, *nota bene* like the ancient tradition as such, is on the move between mythical times and our age. She travels through various periods of human life, and thus unites generations. She is present in innumerable works of art (not only there, of course, but only in this field are we able to catch up with her for the sake of studies). We have chosen some examples – cultural texts from different genres and for various target audiences among youth, but we should remember that today, as in Ancient Greece and Rome, the younger and older publics often enjoy the same stories and some age divisions make no sense anymore. Our portrayal of Hope most certainly will not be completed, but at least we can try to capture and share her multicoloured brightness, with the hope that our endeavour shall be continued.

Again, we start "classically". In Part I of the volume, "Playing with the Past", we focus on one of the first childhood activities, still practised in our times: games and their unlimited supply of Hope, relaxation, and entertainment, but also precious lessons on the hardships of life. Véronique Dasen analyses a selection of scenes on Attic and southern Italian vases with images of maidens playing. Their seemingly innocent games, with references to Eros and Aphrodite, become a tool through which they learn, test, and push the limits of their agency in the prospect of marriage with all its hopes and challenges for a woman in Antiquity. Next, we get a chance to compare the ancient approach to games with the one developing in modern times: Rachel Bryant Davies takes us from

⁴⁶ See T.S. Eliot, *What Is a Classic? An Address Delivered before the Virgil Society on the 16th of October, 1944*, London: Faber & Faber, 1945. See also my introductory chapter "What Is a Classic... for Children and Young Adults?", 1–26.

⁴⁷ See Haynes, *Pandora's Jar*.

Homeric Troy, the cradle of the classical mythology, to nineteenth-century Britain, where modern children's culture was taking its first shapes. She traces the reception of the Trojan Horse as a vehicle for young people's amusement and education, in the context of the emerging consumerism that sometimes led even to a happy ending of the Troy story.

In Part II, "The Roots of Hope", we enter the twentieth century – the period for which many people had high hopes. As already mentioned, it was expected to be "the Century of the Child" – a kind of Golden Age restored after so many bloody conflicts.⁴⁸ The chapters in this section move between this dream and the hopes blasted by the failure of its implementation, with some glances also to our times. Katarzyna Jerzak explores the mythical chronotope of Oscar Wilde (*The House of Pomegranates*) and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (*The Little Prince*) to see it at work in the debut album of the contemporary audiovisual artist Woodkid, *The Golden Age* (2013). She demonstrates how mythical thinking encourages both the young and old to cope with suffering, loss, and death sometimes marking the passage from childhood into adulthood. Marguerite Johnson analyses the retellings of Greek myths in children's columns of the Australian newspapers during the Great War: the ancient tales, embedded in the modern context of global events, served as tools for moral and intellectual pedagogy, bordering on indoctrination, and were to provide young readers with hope in the moments difficult for the Australian Commonwealth. Jan Kieniewicz takes us to Central and Eastern Europe at the threshold of the twentieth century and offers a broader understanding of the notion of myth, namely, in reference to the Kresy – Poland's onetime eastern borderlands, incorporated into the USSR after World War Two. In this chapter, we gain the chance to expand our horizons in regard to the potential of mythology in studies which are not linked directly to the Classics and classical reception. The Kresy were treated as an Eden and mythologized in the metaphorical sense. The chapter touches the difficult problem of maintaining emotional balance by the youngest generation of this region in the circumstances of the traumatic loss of childhood as coupled with the destruction of the world they knew and hoped to enter as adults. Unexpectedly, a classic of children's literature came to the aid here, in the form of the concept of "Bandar-log", drawn from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. The families of the landed gentry and intelligentsia described in this way unruly children. Paradoxically, the right to vent their emotions taught the children to mature and face hardships with more hope than sometimes their parents were able

⁴⁸ See above, n. 6.

to muster. In the finale of this part, Simon J.G. Burton and Marilyn E. Burton analyse C.S. Lewis's use of myth to engage young and adult readers in the fundamental questions of life via the example of the novel he considered his most mature work – *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, based on the tale of Cupid and Psyche and published in the same year (1956) as *The Last Battle* from the *Chronicles of Narnia*. This chapter also offers a broader approach to mythology, according to Lewis's understanding of Christianity as the "New Myth". The authors discuss the disastrous consequences of renouncing the childlike capacity for delight and adopting a cynical attitude to the world, yet they also show a chance for redemption owing to Faith, Love, and Hope.

Part III of the volume, "Holding Out for a Hero... and a Heroine", contains chapters that deal with two creative approaches towards heroism. The first one consists in such a reception of the ancient heroes and heroines as to present them as paraenetic – and attractive – examples for the young people today. First, N.J. Lowe discusses the motif of becoming a hero as the master plot of modern popular culture, with the contemporary authors adjusting the concept of heroic growth to the challenges of our times. Next, Robert A. Sucharski explores the motif of the hero's journey; however, here the hero is not taken from the classical mythology, but he is created from scratch by Maciej Słomczyński (*nom de plume* Joe Alex) – an eccentric Polish writer of crime fiction, poet, and translator (*inter alia*, of the entirety of Shakespeare's corpus). He sends his protagonist – a Trojan boy – on a quest to the far North in search of amber. This narrative framework builds a subtle link between what was later Polish territory (on the Amber Route) and the Mediterranean, while the quest as such is an element of the coming-of-age process, with no happy ending for the boy, yet with all the more important message of hope. Subsequently, Michael Stierstorfer also focuses on works whose authors (Rick Riordan and Anna Banks) produce their own heroes and heroines after the ancient pattern. He analyses the cases where the classical mythological features are adjusted to the figure of the holy Redeemer known from the Christian tradition, with a hope for victory in the battle between Good and Evil. Then, Markus Janka studies the reception of the mythical hero *par excellence*, Hercules, by offering a comparative analysis of the ancient sources and contemporary popular culture (both literary and audiovisual). His chapter, highlighting the ambivalence of this hero, conveys us to the second kind of approach to heroism – from the therapeutic perspective. This section is opened by Susan Deacy, who for several years has been striving courageously for wide access to inclusive education for autistic children, with the ancient myths as a vital tool in this process. In the present volume she discusses the results of her research

into the concept of Hercules as the Bearer of Hope in the autistic context, and she offers a set of practical exercises that have the potential to be adapted to the needs of many other groups and in fact could be used widely in work with young people to stimulate their creative thinking and empathy. The therapeutic function of the figure of Hercules is explored further by Edoardo Pecchini, who approaches his myth from the perspective of paediatric neuropsychiatry. By choosing this “imperfect” hero, he proposes a preventative mental health programme for young people, both in clinical and educational terms, with a particular focus on disruptive behaviours and conduct problems. Last but not least, Krishni Burns takes us on a fascinating quest with the ancient heroines: Persephone, Ariadne, Andromache, and Cassandra, by means of the contemporary novelizations of their myths used as tools in modelling psychological resilience – a set of behavioural patterns a young person needs to develop to be able to face adverse events and overcome traumas. By relating to the mythical characters – affected by the most terrible experiences and limited in their freedom as women – young people can reflect on their own agency and coping strategies, at minimal risk of feeling retraumatized, owing to the paradoxical nature of the phenomenon of reception, within which the myths are perceived as at the same time both close to and removed from our reality.

This phenomenon carries us directly to the ancient tragedies. Created from the crumbs from Homer’s table (to quote Aeschylus), the masterpieces by the Athenian tragedians have been nourishing one generation after another, for over two and a half millennia. Their ancient cure for the souls was enhanced by numerous authors in the subsequent epochs who – inspired by Aeschylus’, Sophocles’, and Euripides’ oeuvres – sometimes wrote precisely with children and young adults in mind (by changing also the genre, for example into a novelization – more appealing to youth than the ancient drama). The reception of Greek tragedy in youth culture constitutes a fascinating theme for a separate project we intend to undertake in the future. In Part IV of the present volume, “Hope after Tragedy”, we wish to share but our first research results in this field. In each chapter two works are discussed in a comparative approach. Interestingly, such a rigorous structure had not been planned, but its “natural” application seems to be more than a coincidence – rather, this is testimony to the complex character of the issue and to its need for contextual analysis. Thus, first, Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts examine two books from the “Save the Story” series – the twenty-first-century retelling of crucial works from the library of human civilization. The two scholars focus on Yiyun Li’s *The Story of Gilgamesh*, which recasts an ancient epic with tragic themes as an account

of maturation from childhood to adulthood, and a version of *Antigone* by Ali Smith, who presents Sophocles' drama from a surprising animal perspective. Both works contain troubling subjects, such as conflict, death, divided loyalties, and the demarcation of friends and enemies, yet they are also full of hope – not only for, but also in the youngest as the ones who will keep these indispensable stories alive. Next, Edith Hall discusses two contemporary novels for older youth (and for adults of course, too) that were – and justly – cultural events in the United Kingdom and in other English-speaking countries: Natalie Haynes's *The Children of Jocasta* and Colm Tóibín's *House of Names*, both inspired by the ancient tragedians: respectively, Sophocles (again) and Aeschylus. The novels are focused on the theme of family violence, with a special look at the situation of girls on the threshold of adulthood – victims of social rules and eternal conflicts over power, who, nonetheless, hope for a happier future and get up the courage to shape it. Then, Hanna Paulouskaya studies two movies from the Soviet 1980s: *Chuchelo* [Scarecrow] by Rolan Bykov and *Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna* [Dear Miss Elena] by Eldar Riazanov. They were broadcast in the countries behind the Iron Curtain during the periods when censorship was relaxed, and if you watched them, especially in childhood, you would not be able to forget them, such powerful messages did they convey. Despite there being no direct connections to Antiquity, both movies echo Greek tragedies and they use elements of this genre to help children voice and resolve their problems. The last chapter in this part again expands our mythological horizons – this time we move to Africa with Daniel A. Nkemleke and Divine Che Neba's analysis of two seminal novels by the Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah: *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* deemed Pan-African epics. The archetypal motif of a journey and references to Egyptian mythology serve here as tools for settling accounts with slavery and colonialism, and responding to the needs of the youngest African generations in the process of building their own identity.

Part V, "Brand New Hope", comprises chapters that explore the theme of Hope in works that fuse the ancient tradition with fantasy, sci-fi, magical realism, and other similar tropes so willingly followed by young readers and viewers. Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer examines the reception of the myth of Atlantis in James Gurney's *Dinotopia* novels, with the author's enchanting illustrations that complement his literary vision of an ideal community where humans and dinosaurs coexist in peace. Elizabeth Hale discusses Ursula Dubosarsky's novel *The Golden Day*, blending the everyday Australian reality of the 1960s with the supernatural. The vivid narration with evocations of Aboriginal beliefs and the famous *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay build an amazing setting for a group of girls

to complete their rite of passage from childhood to maturity – between hope and pain, as they experience (or believe they experience) the impossible. Babette Puetz investigates the theme of Hope in the confrontation between humans and creatures of Artificial Intelligence, as presented against a mythical and biblical background in the New Zealand bestseller for youth – *Genesis* by Bernard Beckett. This novel poses a number of surprisingly timely questions. Set after a pandemic – with a border closure of New Zealand that is never lifted – *Genesis* shows the consequences of how a country tries to protect itself from a widespread plague and never goes back to normal. Helen Lovatt analyses the novel *The Girl with All the Gifts* by Mike Carey and his related short stories. Unexpectedly, also this choice has gained resonance with the current circumstances, as the setting of Carey’s dystopia is a world affected by a terrible pandemic that puts the limits of humanity to the test, with a protagonist who has to decide whether she will be a new Iphigenia or a new Pandora – whether she will sacrifice herself or push humankind on a completely different track. Lisa Maurice searches for Hope among the Israeli youth who write fan fiction embedded in Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* universe. This amateur yet inspirational recasting of the series enables the young author-readers to engage better with their contemporary Israeli society. Katerina Volioti takes us to the cradle of classical mythology – Greece – and she presents a choice of Modern Greek books for small children who are offered a message of Hope from the Olympian Gods, well aware of the crisis in their homeland. Ayelet Peer changes the perspective, by moving to Japan and studying the motif of Hope in the context of a dysfunctional (Olympic) family in a type of manga aimed at young boys (*shōnen* manga); again, a hero’s journey, this time – from a corrupt Olympus in search of salvation. Next, Anna Mik investigates traces of racism and social tensions in the 1940 *Fantasia* by Walt Disney Productions, and how they were dealt with in the subsequent re-editions of the movie to restore Hope and promote a vision of a world free from discrimination. In conclusion of this part, Elżbieta Olechowska focuses on the uplifting sense of Hope in relation to Fatum and a plethora of mythological references in one of the most popular young-adult television series of the twenty-first century – *Once Upon a Time*. This chapter, with a section on Hades as the main villain of the fifth season and the protagonists’ adventurous katabasis to his realm, introduces us into the final set of reflections.

Part VI of the volume, “Behold Hope All Ye Who Enter Here...”, contains chapters dedicated to the ultimate mystery – an inseparable part of human life, yet one of the most difficult to handle, not only for children, but for adults too: death. Like a shadow, it has been following the protagonists of nearly all the works hitherto analysed, and, finally, here it comes to the fore. How to present

this theme to a young audience without truisms and false solace, but with true Hope? The authors of the texts of culture chosen for this part treat their public with respect, even blunt honesty. The katabasis of their protagonists, even if successful, comes at great cost. Hope must be learnt and earned. Nonetheless, it is worth all the efforts, as the alternative known from Dante's *Inferno* is simply not an option. Thus, first, Jerzy Axer takes us on an exceptional hero's journey with Rudyard Kipling's Kotick the White Seal from *The Jungle Book*. This journey leads to the discovery of a place where Kotick and his near and dear can live safe and in peace – truly a Paradise of Seals, in essence not much different from Hawthorne's Paradise of Children. Next, Krzysztof Rybak discusses the contemporary Polish novel *Bezsenność Jutki* [Jutka's Insomnia] by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala. Its protagonist lives in the Łódź Ghetto during World War Two with her aunt and grandfather who tells her Greek myths – not only to distract the girl, but also to strengthen her in the face of the horrors of the Holocaust. Then, Owen Hodgkinson focuses on the critically acclaimed novel for young readers *A Song for Ella Grey* (Guardian Children's Fiction Prize and the Hans Christian Andersen Award) by the bestselling British author David Almond. The writer explores the themes of love and loss within a group of teenagers by setting their problems, including their first experience of death and its irreversibility, on the background of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Finally, I have the pleasure of returning to my own precious childhood memory – the CBS series *Beauty and the Beast* (1987–1990) by Ron Koslow. This urban fantasy production, rooted in the ancient myth of Eros and Psyche and in the folklore fairy tale, acquaints the audience with classical culture – in the broadest meaning of the term – through numerous references to the masterpieces of literature and music. Above all, however, it uplifts contemporary dramas that can happen to anybody into the realm of myth. In my chapter, using an example from this series (namely, an episode based on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice), I attempt to show how a seemingly ruinous descent into the Underworld can turn into a quest for Hope.

Acknowledgements

I do not believe it a coincidence that Pandora easily managed to set the evils free by herself, but she needed Epimetheus' help to let Hope come to the world. By means of these scenes, Hawthorne may have hinted at the fact that sometimes the lid is simply too heavy for one person and that Hope is a joint effort – you need a community of your near and dear to evoke her.

For the friendship and steady help in keeping the lid lifted from the very beginning of the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme – I wish to deeply thank the scholars from Our Mythical Community from all over the world: Australia, Austria, Belarus, Cameroon, Germany, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Russia, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Poland, too. I also wish to thank the European Research Council Executive Agency (ERCEA) team. I am especially grateful to Ms Sandrine Barreux, who took great care of the project at its preliminary phase, and to Ms Katia Menegon – our fantastic Project Officer. I express my gratitude also to the reviewers of the volume, Prof. Mark O'Connor from Boston College and Prof. David Movrin from the University of Ljubljana. I thank our expert in legal procedures – the attorney-at-law Ms Małgorzata Sudoł – for her reliable support. I wish to recall also the milieu of my Alma Mater. As always, and within the theme of Hope in particular, my deepest feelings of gratitude go to Prof. Jerzy Axer and Prof. Jan Kieniewicz from the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw. I highly appreciate the professional and pleasant collaboration with the University of Warsaw Press team: its Director, Ms Beata Jankowiak-Konik; the book's commissioning editors, Mr Szymon Morawski and Mr Jakub Ozimek, and its copy editor, Ms Ewa Balcerzyk-Atys; Mr Zbigniew Karaszewski – a graphic artist and the designer of the programme's visual materials, including the layout of the present series and this volume's cover with the ancient Spring-Flora as a contemporary mother with a bright message of Hope from nature resurgent after the Winter darkness; and Mr Janusz Olech who carried out the typesetting. Last but not least, I wish to thank deeply my colleagues from the Faculty of "Artes Liberales": Dr Elżbieta Olechowska, on whose wise expertise in many subjects I can always count, Ms Magdalena Andersen, Ms Maria Makarewicz, Dr Hanna Paulouskaya (who gathered the terms for the main concepts index), Ms Marta Pszczolińska, and Ms Olga Strycharczyk.

It is an exceptional privilege and a source of great joy to see Hope roaming among us on her iridescent wings. That she is always near, this we owe to each and every member of Our Mythical Community – *gratias Vobis ago maximas!*

* * *

The aftermath of the myth of Pandora according to Hawthorne takes us back to the Paradise of Children – this time, however, they are the children from his favourite manor. The author aptly observes that "[h]ad there been only one child at the window of Tanglewood, gazing at this wintry prospect, it would perhaps have made him sad" (111). Yet there are half a dozen of them, and they have

also a wise young adult in charge – Eustace Bright who invents several games to keep their spirits up (as you see, not without reason will this volume also start with playing). The children and Eustace's joy offer further testimony to the power of Community based on the Classics.

Those who enter the realm of myths not only behold Hope – they gain direct access to its source, at least in the stream that can be drawn from the masterpieces of ancient art and from the works inspired by Classical Antiquity in the reception process. If we look at all this closely, Pandora's curse can be also a gift – she is all-giving, indeed. The Golden Age is gone and we have to face Winter, but it brings its joys too, as the children from Tanglewood show, but on one condition – that we are not alone. The gift of Pandora is the understanding of the importance of a hopeful awaiting for Flora the Spring with our near and dear. And not passively, but like the protagonists of Hawthorne's tales – in the community that takes the best possible in the given situation, even from a snow-storm, and supports each other. We remember little cousin Primrose (also with a telling name, one indeed evoking Spring) who noticed Eustace's depression and immediately took action to cheer him up, at the same time bringing the primordial joy of storytelling to their whole group.

Eustace Bright decided to make his cousins acquainted with Greek myths as constitutive elements – together with other stories they will eventually come to know from all over the world – of the communication code that gives access to the global community of people joined by cultural experiences and the system of values developed in this process. Owing to this, we know what to expect when we hear the words "Once upon a time...", or "Long, long ago...", or "Open Sesame!" (in fact: to expect the unexpected), and we feel that we are not alone when we strive for the impossible. However, to make full use of this source, we need to maintain in ourselves a bit of "this naivety" that Cocteau sought from the viewers of his *Beauty and the Beast* – a small (sometimes a big) concession in terms of displaying childlike curiosity, trust, and faith, all necessary to enter the realm of myths and fairy tales, whether through novels, movies, television series, video games, or an old wardrobe. And through this volume, too, I do hope. There is some of the ancient wisdom in the saying repeated by the protagonists and fans of the CBS series *Beauty and the Beast* (1987–1990), founded on the story of Eros and Psyche and with many mythological references, during a Community celebration called Winterfest: "Even the greatest darkness is nothing, so long as we share the light".

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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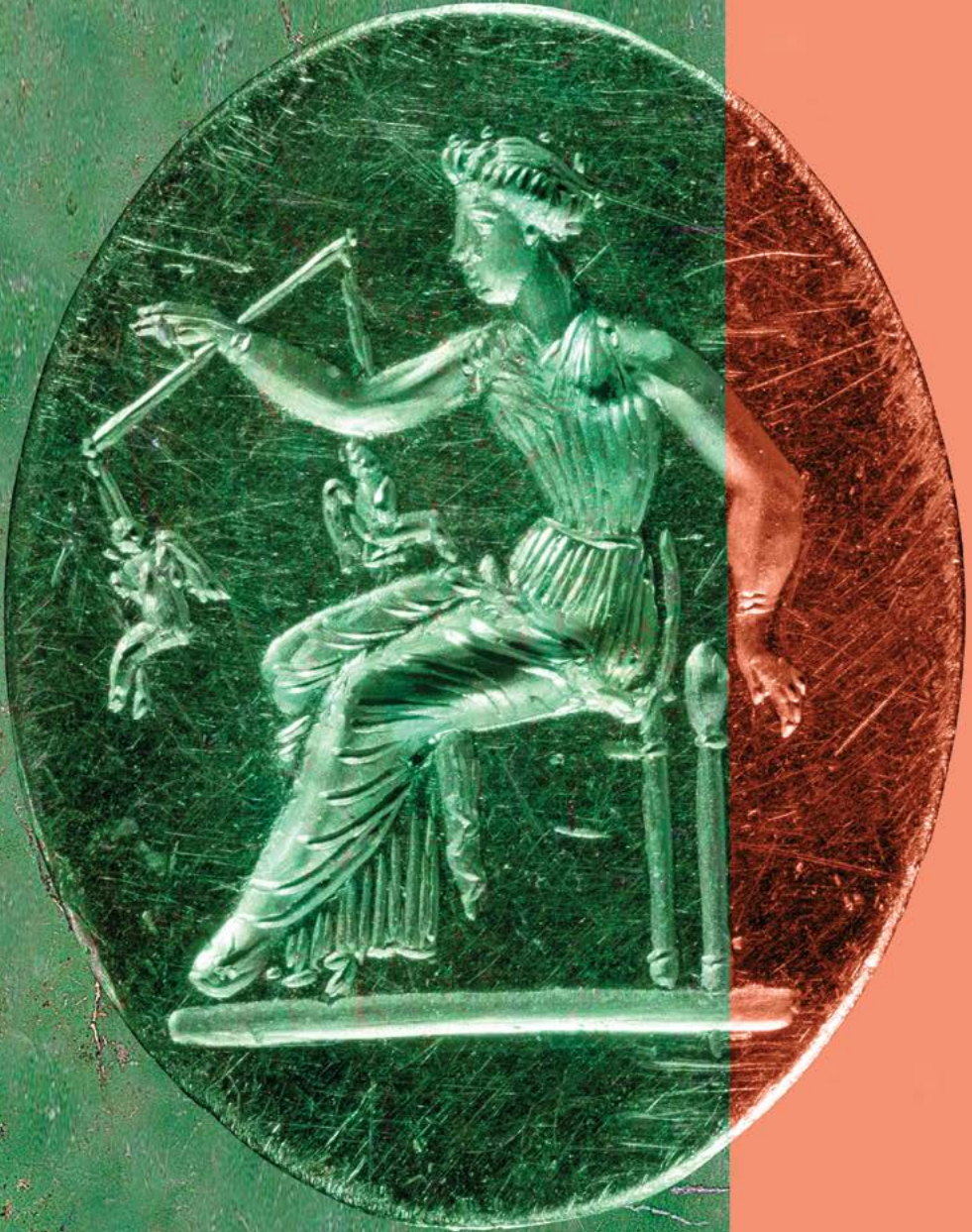
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PART I

Playing with the Past



PLAYING WITH LIFE UNCERTAINTIES IN ANTIQUITY*

In Ancient Greek, παιδιά (*paidiá*; play) and παιδεία (*paideía*; education) derive from the same root of παῖς (*país*; child), which is why scholars used to associate ludic culture mainly with childhood and education.¹ The cultural importance of games, however, goes far beyond the physical and mental development of children. Games were ubiquitous in Ancient Greece, among children and adults, women and men, free individuals and slaves. They shaped the players themselves because their rules reflected social and religious norms and expectations. Their study can thus provide a privileged access to a past social imaginary. This chapter examines how Greek vase depictions of skill and chance games, mainly played by young individuals, especially maidens, must be read on a metaphorical level. The aim of the painters was not to portray a realistic game, allowing us to reconstruct ancient rules, but to express visually how life's uncertainties were managed by girls of prenuptial age. They also translate visually a verbal pun which is based on the double meaning of παίζω (*paízō*), 'play' and 'play amorously', or 'toy with love emotion'. In these metaphoric scenes, girls lead the game in an agonistic way.

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¹ See, e.g., Stefano de' Siena, *Il gioco e i giocattoli nel mondo classico. Aspetti ludici della sfera privata*, Modena: Mucchi, 2009.

Love Divination

The first example is a game in which one uses one's fingers, called κλήρος δία δακτύλων (*klēros díá daktýlōn*), 'casting of lots with fingers'.² The game is found in Greek iconography since the mid-fifth century BC.³ The participants are usually women, playing together or with a young man of the same age category, or, more rarely, with Aphrodite.⁴ The only men playing against each other are Erotes and satyrs.⁵ Gods sometimes play together, like Eros with Nike or Aphrodite. The game always takes place outdoors, whether it is in the city or in the countryside. The players hold a stick with one hand and throw out the fingers of the other hand. As it is played today, the winner is the person who guesses the total number of extended fingers, shouting the result. But other rules are possible, as in Kabylia (Algeria) where the raised fingers are counted.⁶ Although the stick does not resemble exactly a shepherd's crook, which usually had a hook at one end, it could still allude to this rural context.

On a hydria by the Washing Painter in Warsaw (see Fig. 1; ca. 440–420 BC), the context is prenuptial. The scene takes place at a fountain house. Instead of fetching water, two handsome maidens, wearing thin clothes and adorned with jewellery, are sitting on hydriai; they are engaged in a playful activity, drawing lots with their fingers. Several elements in the scene point to the meaning of the game. The context is festive, most likely a marriage. The fountain could be that of the Kallirhōē spring, 'lovely flowing', where water was fetched for the bride's (νύμφη; *nýmphē*) bath,⁷ but it could be another Athenian fountain also associated with the organization of the feast. In other scenes depicting this game,

² Phot., *Bibl.* 149a.17. It is also called in Greek δακτύλων ἐπάλλαξις (*daktýlōn epállaxis*), or λαχμός (*lachmós*), in Latin *micare digitis*. See Cic., *Div.* 2.41.85. Most sources date to the Roman period, but the nature of the game is different; it involves men only and is played for money; see Véronique Dasen, "Jeux de l'amour et du hasard en Grèce ancienne", *Kernos* 29 (2016), 85–91.

³ For a catalogue, see Herbert A. Cahn, "Morra. Drei Silene beim Knobeln", in Heide Froning, Tonio Hölscher, and Harald F. Mielsch, eds., *Kotinos. Festschrift für Erika Simon*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1992, 214–217.

⁴ Dasen, "Jeux de l'amour", Fig. 12 (girl and youth) and Fig. 14 (girls and Aphrodite).

⁵ *Ibidem*, Fig. 10 (Erotes) and Fig. 11 (satyrs).

⁶ Said Boulifa, "Jeux en Kabylie au début du XX^e siècle", *Encyclopédie berbère* 25 (2003), <https://doi.org/10.4000/encyclopedieberbere.1503>, cols. 92–94, § 23 "Tirage au sort".

⁷ On fountain scenes, see Victoria Sabetai, "The Poetics of Maidenhood: Visual Constructs of Womanhood in Vase-Painting", in Stefan Schmidt and John H. Oakley, eds., *Hermeneutik der Bilder. Ikonographie und Interpretation griechischer Vasenmalerei*, "Beihefte zum Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum" 4, München: C.H. Beck, 2009, 103–114. On the prenuptial bath and Kallirhōē, see John H. Oakley and Rebecca H. Sinos, *The Wedding in Ancient Athens*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993, 15–16; Victoria Sabetai, "Women and the Cycle of Life", in Nikolaos Kaltsas

the girl plays with a handsome young man; she is sitting on a chest which looks like a dowry chest containing female belongings, clothes, and jewellery, part of marriage preparations.⁸ On the hydria attributed to the Washing Painter, the maidens cast lots with their fingers instead of working, as though too impatient to know who will marry first. A woman brings a wreath, possibly myrtle, like the one used in weddings, to crown the winner, and a winged Eros flies towards the left player, bringing a sash or belt, the token of a bride's success and beauty.

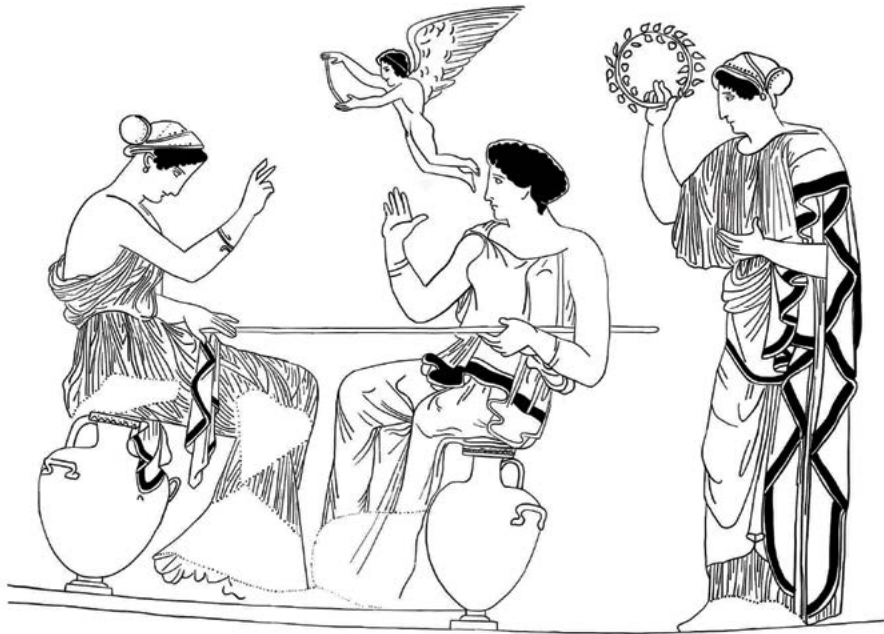


Figure 1: Washing Painter, Attic red-figure hydria, ca. 440–420 BC. Gołuchów, National Museum of Archaeology in Warsaw, inv. no. 14299.3. Line drawing by Véronique Dasen.

The nuptial dimension of this game is used in a comical way on a skyphos (a deep wine cup) from the Theban Kabirion (see Fig. 2; ca. 420–410 BC); the scene is a parody of the judgement of Paris, who had to choose the most beautiful

and Alan Shapiro, eds., *Worshipping Women: Ritual and Reality in Classical Athens*, New York, NY: Alexander S. Onassis Public Benefit Foundation, 2008, 293.

⁸ Dasen, "Jeux de l'amour", Fig. 12, Fig. 14. On chests and boxes, see François Lissarrague, "Women, Boxes and Containers: Some Metaphors", in Ellen D. Reeder, ed., *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*, Baltimore, MD: Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery, 1995, 91–101. The chest can also contain scrolls with musical or poetic texts, alluding to the literacy of the women.

goddess amongst Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite.⁹ On one side, Hera is sitting on a rock, holding a sceptre; her head is veiled, indicating that she is already married, as opposed to the other two goddesses. Beside her, a young woman with a naked breast, most likely Helen, is waiting for the outcome of the contest, holding a wreath in anticipation of her victory, that is to say her marriage to Paris. Hermes, holding a κηρύκειον (*kērykeion*), walks towards them, letting Paris make up his mind alone. On the other side, Paris, sitting on a rock, identified by his Phrygian hat and oriental boots, plays the lyre. Before him, two goddesses, Aphrodite and Athena, are sitting with the shepherd knotted staff between them, drawing lots with their fingers. By depicting the contest as a playful divinatory process, the painter suggests that neither the sex appeal nor the promise of the goddesses determined Paris' choice. The decision was in the hands of the gods, as were its tragic consequences – Helen's abduction and the Trojan War. The presence of Helen may not be as passive as it appears. Some ancient authors use her addiction to games to illustrate her deviant behaviour, first as an adulterous wife abducted by Paris, abandoning husband and children, second as an expert in powerful φάρμακα (*phármaka*), remedies and poisons. In the Roman period, Ptolemy Chennus (second century AD), the author of the parodic *New History* summed up by Photius, adds to her lustful nature and its dire consequences her addiction to games with Paris, a blame that may be a transposition from gossip about Cleopatra with Mark Antony.¹⁰ Ptolemy Chennus thus credits her with the invention of the game *klēros díā daktýlōn* and winning against Paris:

Ἑλένη πρώτη ἐπενόησε τὸν διὰ δακτύλων κληρον, καὶ Ἀλεξάνδρῳ λαχοῦσα ἐνίκησε· καὶ ὡς Ἀφροδίτης εἶη θυγάτηρ. (Phot., *Bibl.* 149a.16–18)

Helen was the first to imagine drawing lots with the fingers and [...] she won playing with Alexander; she was the daughter of Aphrodite.¹¹

⁹ On the iconography of the judgement of Paris (with earlier bibliography), see Florence Gherchanoc, *Concours de beauté et beautés du corps en Grèce ancienne. Discours et pratiques*, Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2016, 19–47, esp. 40–41, Fig. 11 (interpreted as Nike). See also Alexandre G. Mitchell, *Greek Vase-Painting and the Origins of Visual Humour*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 270, Fig. 140 (as Aphrodite).

¹⁰ Plut., *Vit., Ant.* 29. For the sources on Roman women at play, see Véronique Dasen and Nicolas Mathieu, "Margaris ou l'amour en jeu", in Véronique Dasen, ed., *Dossier: Eros en jeu*, "Métis. Anthropologie des mondes grecs anciens" N.S. 19, Athens and Paris: Daedalus and EHESS, 2021, 123–146.

¹¹ Trans. from Photius, *Bibliotheca*, trans. John Henry Freese (here and thereafter revised by the author – V.D.), London and New York, NY: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Macmillan Company, 1920, ad loc.

She even won the right to choose the name of her daughter in a game of knucklebones with Paris:

Ὡς γένοιτο παῖς θήλεια ἐξ Ἀλεξάνδρου Ἑλένη, διαφιλονεικησάντων δὲ περὶ τῆς κλήσεως (ὁ μὲν γὰρ Ἀλεξάνδραν, ἡ δ' Ἑλένην ὀνομάζειν ἠξίου) νικᾷ Ἑλένη, ἀστραγάλοις λαβοῦσα τὸ κῦρος, καὶ ἡ παῖς τῇ μητρὶ ὀμώνυμος ἐγεγόνει. Ταύτην ἀναιρεθῆναί φασιν ὑπὸ Ἑκάβης ἐν τῇ Ἰλίου ἀλώσει. (Phot., *Bibl.* 149b.8–12)

Helen had a daughter by Alexander; they disagreed about the name to give her; he wanted to call her Alexandra, she wanted to call her Helen; Helen won, in a game of knucklebones, the right to choose and named her daughter after her own name; this daughter was killed, it is said, by Hecuba when Troy was taken.



Figure 2: Two scenes from a Boeotian skyphos, ca. 420–410 BC, Boston, Museum of Fine Arts, inv. no. 99.533. Vectorized drawing © by Alexandre G. Mitchell. Used with his kind permission.

***Ephedrismós* and the Taming of the Filly**

The lexicographer Julius Pollux (second century AD) describes the rules of the ἐφεδρισμός (*ephedrismós*) game as follows:

Λίθον καταστησάμενοι πόρρωθεν αὐτοῦ στοχάζονται σφαίραις ἢ λίθοις· ὁ δ' οὐκ ἀνατρέψας τὸν ἀνατρέψαντα φέρει, τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς ἐπειλημμένος ὑπ' αὐτοῦ, ἕως ἂν ἀπλανῶς ἔλθῃ ἐπὶ τὸν λίθον. (Poll., *Onom.* 9.119)

They place a stone upright on the ground and throw balls or stones at it from a distance. The one who fails to overturn the stone carries the other, having his eyes blindfolded by the rider's hands, until – if he does not go astray – he touches the stone.¹²

¹² Trans. from Jenifer Neils and John H. Oakley, eds., *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press and Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth, 2003, 275. The term *ephedrismós* derives from the Greek verb ἐφεδρίζω (*ephedrízō*;

Because of the close physical contact, the partners are usually of the same sex.¹³

The *ephedrismós* game is used explicitly with a metaphorical meaning on an Apulian skyphos from the workshop of the Ilioupersis Painter (see Fig. 3; ca. 375–350 BC). On one side, Eros sits upon the back of a maiden, covering her eyes with his hands. The girl is dressed as an attractive παρθένος (*parthénos*), wearing a thin belted chiton, a necklace, and bracelets. She steps forward, stooping because of the god's weight on her back, attempting to target a pile of rocks painted in white. The group can be interpreted as a visual pun: riding the girl refers to marriage conceived as the taming of a filly. This metaphor is very frequent in Ancient Greek literature. Euripides thus qualifies the unmarried Iole, the daughter of Eurytus, King of Oechalia, as πῶλος (*phōlos*) – 'filly', ἄζυξ (*ázyx*) – 'un-yoked' (ὁ ζυγός; *ho zygos* – 'yoke'), who is unmarried.¹⁴ Similarly, the poet Anacreon (sixth century BC) describes an erotic pursuit with the image of bridling and riding a filly:

Πῶλε Θρηκική, τί δὴ με λοξὸν ὄμμασι βλέπουσα
νηλέως φεύγεις, δοκεῖς δέ μ' οὐδὲν εἰδέναι σοφόν;
ἴσθι τοι, καλῶς μὲν ἄν τοι τὸν χαλινὸν ἐμβάλοιμι,
ἠνίας δ' ἔχων στρέφοιμί σ' ἀμφὶ τέρματα δρόμου·
νῦν δὲ λειμῶνάς τε βόσκειαι κοῦφά τε σκιρτώσα παίζεις,
δεξιὸν γὰρ ἵπποπείρην οὐκ ἔχεις ἐπεμβάτην.

(Anac., fr. 417 Page)

Thracian filly, why do you look at me from the corner of your eye and flee stubbornly from me, supposing that I have no skill? Let me tell you, I could

to sit upon). See Ursula Mandel, "Die ungleichen Spielerinnen. Zur Bedeutung weiblicher Ephedrismosgruppen", in Peter C. Bol, ed., *Hellenistische Gruppen. Gedenkschrift für Andreas Linfert*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1999, 213–266; Daniela Ventrelli, "Le jeu de l'ephedrismos", in Véronique Dasen, ed., *Ludique. Jouer dans l'Antiquité, Lugdunum, Musée et Théâtres romains, 20 juin–1er décembre 2019*, Gent: Snoeck, 2019, 68–69; Salvatore Costanza, *Giulio Polluce, Onomasticon: excerpta de ludis. Materiali per la storia del gioco nel mondo greco-romano*, "Hellenica" 81, Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2019, 152–153.

¹³ See, e.g., Neils and Oakley, eds., *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece*, Cat. No. 83 (two girls), No. 84 (girl and satyr).

¹⁴ Eur., *Hipp.* 546; Arist., *Hist. an.* 572a.30, describes rutting mares with the verb *paizō*. On girls as fillies, see Claude Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece: Their Morphology, Religious Role, and Social Function*, trans. Derek Collins and Janice Orion, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, 238–239 (ed. pr. in French as *Les chœurs de jeunes filles en Grèce archaïque*, Roma: Edizioni dell'Ateneo & Bizzarri, 1977); Claude Calame, *The Poetics of Eros in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999, 70–71 and 324–325 (ed. pr. in French as *L'Éros dans la Grèce antique*, Paris: Belin, 1996 [with earlier bibliography]).

neatly put the bridle on you and with the reins in my hand wheel you round the turn post of the racecourse; instead, you graze in the meadows and frisk and frolic lightly, since you have no skilled horseman to ride you.¹⁵



Figure 3: Ilioupersis Painter, Apulian red-figure skyphos, ca. 375–350 BC, Providence, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, inv. no. 25.089, photographs by Erik Gould. Images courtesy of the Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence.

On the Apulian skyphos, the group symbolizes both the constraint of love imposed by Eros, who “blinds” his victim, as well as the uncertainties of fate, which may be compared to the girl’s hesitant steps. Her cautious progression represents the disquieting transition from *parthénos* to *nýmphē*, bride. Yet, she is not passive; she is willing and taking part in the game. Above the pile of rocks, a fringed sash is suspended, alluding to marriage, the victorious result of the erotic *ἀγών* (*agón*).

On the other side of the skyphos, we find depicted the ideal couple. A young man is standing, naked, a *ἡμάτιον* (*himátion*) on his shoulders, holding a strigil, the attribute of the athlete and *καλοκάγαθία* (*kalokagathía*; ‘beautiful goodness’), and achieved citizenship.¹⁶ The woman facing him is sitting on a rock, adorned with earrings, a necklace, and bracelets, holding a dove in her hand, the emblem of her *χάρις* (*cháris*) as well as a reminder of Aphrodite’s presence. Behind her, a circular device may allude to an erotic ball game.

¹⁵ Trans. from *Greek Lyric, Volume II: Anacreon, Anacreontea, Choral Lyric from Olympus to Alcman*, ed. and trans. David A. Campbell, “Loeb Classical Library” 143, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988.

¹⁶ Heather L. Reid, “The Philosophy of the Strigil: Gymnasium Culture in Magna Graecia”, forthcoming.

The See-Saw Maidens and Winged Horses

In other pictures, maidens play a more active part, as in the see-saw game, recently studied by John Richard Green.¹⁷ Only girls of prenuptial age participated in this game. No boy is ever depicted on a see-saw. The rule was simple: the players did not sit, as they do today, pushing their feet into the ground, but stood on the plank; they jumped in turn on the board in order to go up and down. The game was thus very acrobatic, training physical fitness and concentration. No ancient source describes it, but it may be noted that Modern Greek names include the root ζυγός (*zygós*; 'yoke'), referring to 'the beam of a weighing scale' – τὸν ζυγὸν ταλάντου (*tòn zygòn talántou*).¹⁸

The erotic connotations of the play, possibly contained in the name, referring again to the yoke of marriage, underpins the imagery of a fragmentary Attic column-krater attributed to the Leningrad Painter (see Fig. 4; ca. 470–460 BC).¹⁹ The plank rests on a tree log placed in front of an apple tree, showing that the scene takes place outside. Both girls wear a belted χιτῶν (*chitón*). The one on the left has a thicker garment, more elaborate, with different patterns embroidered or woven. She wears earrings, a necklace, and a fillet, and the lower part of her hair is neatly tied in a cloth bag. The head of the girl on the right is missing, but the end of a headdress called σάκκος (*sákkos*) is identifiable near her breast.

Ergonomically, the scene is very realistic. The players' posture is focused, with closed fists. One maiden is jumping, the other falls back. Both wear a girded chiton that characterizes active girls. The erotic dimension of the scene is present at several levels. As Green noted, the game allows the painter to display the physical beauty of the maidens in an agonistic context similar to that of young men training in the palaestra, with the difference that girls are always clothed.²⁰ This acrobatic game also demonstrates their self-control, a quintessential part of the expected σωφροσύνη (*sōphrosýnē*), or wisdom, of the marriageable

¹⁷ John Richard Green, "Zeus on a See-Saw: A Comic Scene from Paestum", *Logeion: A Journal of Ancient Theatre* 4 (2014), 1–27, with a list of ten Attic and south Italian vases.

¹⁸ John Davidson Beazley, in Lacey Davis Caskey and John Davidson Beazley, *Attic Vase Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, vol. 3, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, No. 149, reports several Modern Greek names, such as δραμπάλα (*drampála*), τραμπάλα (*trampála*), κούνια (*kóunia*) in many districts, ζαγκουβάνα (*zagkouvána* – in Chaldia Pontou), τσουντσουβάνα (*tsoun-tsouvána* – in Kotyora Pontou), γκούλιαρος (*gkóuliaros*), and ζύγκαρος (*zýgkaros*; = ζύγαρος; *zýgaros*? – in Epirus), ζυοτήρι (*zyotíri*; = ζυγοτήρι; *zygotíri* – on Cyprus), ζυγόγυρος (*zygógyros* – on Rhodes).

¹⁹ See Neils and Oakley, eds., *Coming of Age*, No. 82; Green, "Zeus on a See-Saw", No. 2, Fig. 6.

²⁰ Green, "Zeus on a See-Saw", No. 6, Fig. 10.



Figure 4: Leningrad Painter, Attic red-figure column-krater fragments, ca. 470–460 BC. Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 10.191, photograph from the Beazley Archive (after Lacey Davis Caskey and John Davidson Beazley, *Attic Vase Paintings in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, vol. 3, London: Oxford University Press, 1963, 48–49, No. 149, plate 85). Image courtesy of the Classical Art Research Centre, University of Oxford. Detail of the “left-side” girl’s dress – line drawing by Véronique Dasen.

girl. The Boston krater delivers also a more complex erotic discourse, referring to Aphrodite’s orchard, to the taming of maidens, and to ἐρωτοστασία (*erōtostasía*), or the “weighing of love” as described by modern scholars.

Aphrodite’s Orchard

The presence of apples on the tree is significant. For many authors, the semantic field of μήλον (*mēlon*) or μάλον (*mālon*) designates in a generic way a round and fleshy fruit: apple, quince, or pomegranate. It is also used to describe an erotized feminine body, the cheeks, the bosom, and the sex. The image of the mature apple on the tree behind the players thus refers to the maturity of maidens ready for marriage.²¹ *Mēlon* or *mālon* is also the fruit *par excellence*

²¹ On the eroticism of women plucking fruits, see Susanne Pfisterer-Haas, “Mädchen und Frauen im Obstgarten und beim Ballspiel. Untersuchungen zu zwei vorhochzeitlichen Motiven und zur Liebessymbolik des Apfels auf Vasen archaischer und klassischer Zeit”, in *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung*, vol. 118, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2003, 139–195.

of two famous orchards, the κῆπος (*kēpos*) of Aphrodite in Paphos and that of the Hesperides, which carry golden fruits for the marriage of Zeus and Hera. The gift offered by Paris to the most beautiful goddess is an apple. In wedding rites, a pomegranate was given to the bride, possibly as a reminder of the six pomegranate seeds Kore ('young girl' in Greek) ate in the Underworld as a sign of consent to marry Hades, and then changing her name to Persephone.²²

"Throwing the apple", μηλοβολεῖν (*mēloboleîn*), is a proverbial expression for an invitation to reciprocal love.²³ For instance, Theocritus (third century BC) describes how Clearista throws apples to a goatherd who pleases her:

βάλλει καὶ μάλοισι τὸν αἰπόλον ἅ Κλεαρίστα
τὰς αἴγας παρελᾶντα καὶ ἀδύ τι ποπυλιάσδει.
(Theoc., *Id.* 5.88)

And Clearista pelts the goatherd with apples as he drives his flock by her, and she whistles to him sweetly.²⁴

In the *Greek Anthology*, Meleager of Gadara (first century BC) transforms a ball into a heart with which Eros plays:

Σφαιριστὰν τὸν Ἔρωτα τρέφω σοὶ δ', Ἡλιοδώρα,
βάλλει τὰν ἐν ἐμοὶ παλλομένην κραδίαν.
ἄλλ' ἄγε συμπαίκτην δέξαι Πόθον· εἰ δ' ἀπὸ σεῦ με
ρίψαις, οὐκ οἴσω τὰν ἀπάλαιστρον ὕβριν.
(5.214)

I am training Love to play with a ball: he throws to you, Heliodora, the heart that bounces within me. Come now, take Desire as your playmate; if you cast me from you, I will not bear this unsportsmanlike offense.²⁵

²² Oakley and Sinos, *The Wedding*, 35.

²³ Schol. vet. in Ar. *Nub.* 997c: μηλοβολεῖν ἔλεγον τὸ εἰς ἀφροδίσια δελεάζειν, ἐπεὶ τὸ μῆλον Ἀφροδίτης ἐστὶν ἱερόν ("they said 'to throw apples' to attract someone to Aphrodite's pleasures because the apple is sacred to Aphrodite"). Personal trans. from Kyriaki Katsarelia (unpublished).

²⁴ Trans. from *Theocritus, Moschus, Bion*, ed. and trans. Neil Hopkinson, "Loeb Classical Library" 28, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015.

²⁵ Trans. from *The Greek Anthology, Volume I: Books 1–5*, trans. W.R. Paton, rev. Michael A. Tueller, "Loeb Classical Library" 67, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. Cf. *ibidem*, 5.80: Μῆλον ἐγὼ· βάλλει με φιλῶν σέ τις. ἄλλ' ἐπίνευσον, Ξανθίππη· κἀγὼ καὶ σὺ μαραινόμεθα ("I am an apple. The one who sends me is in love with you. Nod your consent, Xanthippe; both I and you are wasting away").

The golden apples of Aphrodite's *kēpos* can become instruments of love magic. In the story of Atalanta, Hippomenes uses the attraction of these apples to win the race against the indomitable *parthénos*, and wins her heart. Theocritus explains how Atalanta loses her mind as a result of discovering the precious fruits, and is bewitched by love:

Ἴππομένης, ὄκα δὴ τὰν παρθένον ἤθελε γᾶμαι,
μᾶλ' ἐν χερσὶν ἐλῶν δρόμον ἄνυεν· ἅ δ' Ἀταλάντα
ὡς ἴδεν, ὡς ἐμάνη, ὡς ἐς βαθὺν ἄλατ' ἔρωτα.

(Theoc., *Id.* 3.40–42)

Hippomenes, when he wished to marry the girl, ran the race with apples in his hands, and as soon as Atalanta saw them she leaped deep in love.²⁶

Apples are also included in the preparation of aphrodisiac philtres, like that described on a Greek magical papyrus which prescribes using *mēloboleîn* to possess the desired woman, body and soul, ψυχή (*psyché*), by arousing the loving madness – μανία (*manía*), desire – ἔρωσ (*érōs*), love – φιλία (*philia*), and affection – στοργή (*storgé*).²⁷

On a kylix attributed to the Penthesilea Painter (see Fig. 5; ca. 450–440 BC), a young man stands before a seated maiden. Behind the youth, a κάλαθος (*kálathos*), or wool basket, and a spindle allude to the girl's φιλεργία (*philergía*). The young man's pose, leaning on his walking stick, suggests they are conversing. The girl manipulates two fruits, yarn balls, or real balls that she seems to present to him, as though ready to start juggling with them. The suspended sash between them reinforces the allusion to courtship. These juggling scenes with balls or apples should not be interpreted at face value: they are not just balls of wool used as toys in an innocent game played by maidens promised in marriage in their leisure time. The painters represent a visual invitation to a two-way love relationship. There is a caveat: in iconography, women, not men, practise juggling, while in literary sources it is mostly men who try to entice women with apples. The vases show girls actively attempting to arouse men's desire in agonistic terms.

²⁶ Trans. from *Theocritus, Moschus, Bion*, ed. Hopkinson; Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 69–75.

²⁷ PGM CXXII.5–25 (in English as *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, ed. and trans. Hans Dieter Betz, Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic*, 75–78.



Figure 5: Pentesilea Painter, Attic red-figure kylix, ca. 450–440 BC, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, inv. no. 13.84. Line drawing by Véronique Dasen.

The Taming of Maidens

On the krater attributed to the Leningrad Painter (see above, Fig. 4), the girl on the left side of the see-saw wears a dress decorated with an intriguing pattern: a frieze of winged horses. Various interpretations could explain this detail. The winged horse Pegasus' name is connected semantically to fountain and spring, πηγή (*pēgḗ*), and wherever the horse's hooves struck land, a spring was said to form, as on Mount Helicon.²⁸ The motif could also hint at the generic scenes

²⁸ On the Hippocrene spring (ἵππος; *híppos* – 'the horse'; κρήνη; *krēnḗ* – 'the spring') produced by the stroke of the hoof of Pegasus on Mount Helicon, see Hes., *Theog.* 6.

of maidens fetching water at the fountain house, which were very popular in archaic vase-painting,²⁹ which could suggest that the two girls on the see-saw were of the same age category.

It is, however, more likely that Pegasus referred to the fate of Hippe, Chiron's daughter, described by Euripides in his *Melanippe Wise*. The *parthénos* was hunting in the forest when she was raped by Aeolus, son of Hellen. She became pregnant and fled to the mountains to give birth:

[...] κάκεϊ ὠδινούσης αὐτῆς τὸν πατέρα ἐλθεῖν κατὰ ζήτησιν, τὴν δὲ εὔξασθαι καταλαμβανομένην πρὸς τὸ μὴ γνωσθῆναι μεταμορφωθῆναι· καὶ οὕτως γενέσθαι ἵππον τεκοῦσαν τὸ παιδίον· διὰ δὲ τὴν εὐσέβειαν αὐτῆς καὶ τοῦ πατρὸς εἰς τὰ ἄστρα ὑπὸ τῆς Ἄρτεμιδος τεθῆναι.

(Eur., *Melanippe Wise* F488)

[...] while she was in labour there her father came in search of her, and as she was caught she prayed to be transformed so as not to be recognized; thus she became a horse after giving birth to her child, and because of her and her father's piety she was placed by Artemis amongst the stars.³⁰

Hyginus adds in his *Astronomica* (2.18) that this female Pegasus was placed out of sight of the centaur, her father, Chiron, showing only half her body, to hide her sex.³¹

A horse jump was also part of *χελιχελώνη* (*chelichelónē*), a game of *parthénoi* which consisted in girls dancing in a circle around a young girl who would suddenly jump "like a horse" on one of the girls in the group who would then take her place. Julius Pollux preserved the rhyme that was sung in the game:

ἡ δὲ χελιχελώνη, παρθένων ἐστὶν ἡ παιδιά, παρόμοιόν τι ἔχουσα τῆ χύτρα· ἡ μὲν γὰρ κάθηται, καὶ καλεῖται χελώνη, αἱ δὲ περιτρέχουσιν ἀνερωτῶσα

²⁹ On water-fetching scenes as metaphors for maidenhood, see Sabetai, "The Poetics of Maidenhood", 103–114. She notes on p. 105 that the inscribed names of the girls at the fountain house refer to flowers, "poetically associating maidens with blossoming and beauty", also accentuated by the inscription *καλή* (*kalē*). See also Guy Hedreen, "So-and-So *kalē*": A Brief Reexamination of the 'Beautiful' Woman", in Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, ed., *Epigraphy of Art: Ancient Greek Vase-Inscriptions and Vase-Paintings*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2016, 53–72.

³⁰ Trans. from Euripides, *Volume VII: Fragments. Aegeus–Meleager*, eds. and trans. Christopher Collard and Martin Cropp, "Loeb Classical Library" 504, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008. On rape and marriage, see Andrew Stewart, "Rape?", in Ellen D. Reeder, ed., *Pandora: Women in Classical Greece*, Baltimore, MD: Trustees of the Walters Art Gallery, 1995, 74–90.

³¹ Also described in Eratsth., *Cat.* 18; Ov., *Met.* 2.665–675. See Arnaud Zucker, ed., *L'encyclopédie du ciel. Mythologie, astronomie, astrologie*, Paris: Robert Laffont, 2016, 135–140.

χελιχελώνη, τί ποιεῖς ἐν τῷ μέσῳ;
 ἢ δὲ ἀποκρίνεται
 ἔρια μαρύομαι καὶ κρόκην Μιλησίαν.
 εἴτ' ἐκεῖναι πάλιν ἐκβοῶσιν
 ὁ δ' ἔκγονός σου τί ποιῶν ἀπώλετο;
 ἢ δέ φησι
 λευκᾶν ἀφ' ἵππων εἰς θάλασσαν ἄλατο.
 (Poll., *Onom.* 9.125)

The "tortoise" is a girls' game, similar to the "pot". One girl sits and is called the "tortoise" whereas the others run around her asking her: "Tortoise, what are you doing in the middle? I'm weaving wool and Milesian thread". Then they shout back: "What was your son doing when he died? From white horses into the sea he was – jumping".³²

As Andromache Karanika demonstrated,³³ the tortoise game is a form of choral training teaching a girl social expectations and norms with dynamic role-play. The girl first sits at the centre, motionless, like a tortoise, personifying the αἰδώς (*aidōs*), modesty, of the ideal γυνή (*gynē*), the married, wool-working woman, φιλεργός (*philergós*).³⁴ She is expected to have born a son, and may be weaving his shroud, as she is asked about the cause of his death. When the tortoise utters the word "to jump", she takes the role of the son and leaps onto the closest player who then takes her place.³⁵ The erotic symbolism of leaping is expressed in a male context by another fragment of Anacreon's poetry. The image of the leaping horse transmits the violence of the feelings of love: ἀρθεις δηῦτ' ἀπὸ Λευκάδος πέτρης ἐς πολιὸν κῦμα κολυμβῶ μεθύων ἔρωτι ("See, once again I climb up and dive from the Leucadian cliff into the grey waves, drunk

³² Trans. from Mark Golden, *Children and Childhood in Classical Athens*, Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990, 74; see also Andromache Karanika, "Playing the Tortoise: Reading Symbols of an Ancient Folk Game", *Helios* 39.2 (2012), 101–120; Salvatore Costanza, "Performance e giochi d'iniziazione in Grecia antica: la 'tarta-tartaruga' (*chelichelónē*) e il 'calderone' (*chytrinda*)", *Mantichora* 7 (2017), 72–91, and his *Giulio Polluce, Onomasticon excerpta de ludis. On similar games in Modern Greek culture*, see Salvatore Costanza, "Pollux témoin des jeux: continuité, survie et réception dans la culture ludique néogrecque", in Véronique Dasen and Marco Vespa, eds., *Ancient Play and Games: Definition, Transmission, Reception*, "Jeu/Play/Spiel" 2, Liège: Liège University Press, 2021, 329–342.

³³ Karanika, "Playing the Tortoise", and her *Voices at Work: Women, Performance, and Labor in Ancient Greece*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014, 164–177.

³⁴ See Gloria Ferrari, *Figures of Speech: Men and Maidens in Ancient Greece*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2002, 60.

³⁵ See similar rhymes in Erinna's *Distaff* 15–17; Karanika, "Playing the Tortoise", 7–9.

with love").³⁶ In the *chelichlónē* rhyme, the girl's leap may allude to the danger of sexual intercourse as well as of the madness caused by love. The krater attributed to the Leningrad Painter captures two young girls balancing very skilfully, and the idea of the girls being at risk is further enhanced by the flying horses on the girl's dress, a reminder of Hippé's terrible fate.



Figure 6: Boeotian skyphos, ca. 425–400 BC, private collection, photograph © by Nik Bürgin, Basel, 2014. Image courtesy of Jean-David Cahn, AG Gallery, Basel.

Vase-painters sometimes compare explicitly the training of girls with that of boys. On a Boeotian skyphos (see Fig. 6; ca. 425–400 BC), a maiden sits on a chest. She is ready to throw a ball to supernatural partners, a small Eros with stretched-out arms, carried on the shoulders of a companion. The scheme of the scene is borrowed from boys' games at the palaestra. On a black-figure lekythos attributed to the Edinburgh Painter (ca. 500 BC),³⁷ the trainer is an old, bearded man sitting before two teams of young people perched upon the shoulders

³⁶ Anac., fr. 376 Page (trans. from *Greek Lyric, Volume II*, ed. and trans. Campbell). See Karanika, "Playing the Tortoise", 3.

³⁷ Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1890.27; BA 380847 (Beazley Archive, Classical Art Research Centre, <http://www.beazley.ox.ac.uk>, accessed 14 February 2020). See also London, British Museum B 182; BA 301522.

of companions, like the Boeotian Eroles. On the Boeotian skyphos, the *agón* is feminized and takes place in an imaginary bridal space where the woman rules over the love game and calls the shots.³⁸

An *erōtostasia*?

On a red-figure Attic hydria from the National Archaeological Museum in Madrid, the erotic meaning of the game is revealed by the supernatural presence of Eros in the middle, ready to offer a sash to the winner (see Fig. 7; ca. 440–430 BC). The players are called Archedike and Hapalina, their names adding to the erotic connotations of the play, as Hapalina means ‘the sweet one’, and Archedike may refer to the name of a famous hetaira, thus mingling two levels of sexual attraction, for a bride or a lover.³⁹

A form of *erōtostasia* takes place on a red-figure krater from Metaponto (390–380 BC);⁴⁰ two Eroles substitute for the girls on the plank, holding the end of a sash, as in a *klēros díá daktýlōn* game. The divinatory dimension of the play is even more explicit on the bezel of a Hellenistic gold ring (see Fig. 8; ca. 350 BC).⁴¹ Aphrodite weighs two Eroles sitting in the trays of her scales. The outcome of the weighing contest is still suspended, but Aphrodite displays her power over the struggles of love.⁴² The image transfers the conventional

³⁸ See the ball-playing scene in a prenuptial scene on a Boeotian pyxis in Christina Avronidaki, “An Assortment of Bridal Images on a Boeotian Red-Figure Pyxis from the Workshop of the Painter of the Great Athenian Kantharos”, in Stine Schierup and Victoria Sabetai, eds., *The Regional Production of Red-Figure Pottery: Greece, Magna Graecia and Etruria*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2014, 81–101.

³⁹ See Ricardo Olmos, “Archedike und Hapalina. Hetären auf einer Wippe”, in Elke Böhr and Wolfram Martini, eds., *Studien zur Mythologie und Vasenmalerei. Festschrift für Konrad Schauenburg*, Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 1986, 107–113; Green, “Zeus on a See-Saw”, No. 3, Fig. 7a–b.

⁴⁰ Konrad Schauenburg, “Erotenspiele, 1. Teil”, *Antike Welt. Zeitschrift für Archäologie und Urgeschichte* 7.3 (1976), 43, Fig. 20; Véronique Dasen, ed., *Ludique. Jouer dans l’Antiquité, Lugdunum, musée et théâtres romains, 20 juin–1er décembre 2019*, Gent: Snoeck, 2019, 60, Fig. 1. For a parallel in a gymnasium context on a Gnathia vessel (with hoop, strigil, and aryballos), see Schauenburg, “Erotenspiele, 1. Teil”, 43, Fig. 22.

⁴¹ Jeffrey Spier, *Ancient Gems and Finger Rings: Catalogue of the Collections of the J. Paul Getty Museum*, Malibu, CA: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 1992, 34, No. 51. See also Angelos Delivorrias, s.v. “Aphrodite”, in Lilly Kahil et al., eds., *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*, vol. 2.1: *Aphrodisias–Athena*, Zürich and München: Artemis Verlag, 1984, esp. s.v. “Aphrodite bei der Erotostasia”, *ibidem*, 120, Nos. 1246–1249; and the gold ring, Boston Museum of Fine Arts 23.594 (late fifth century BC).

⁴² Cf. Anac., fr. 398 Page: ἀστραγάλοι δ’ Ἐρωτός εἰσιν μανία τε καὶ κυδοιμοί (“The knucklebones of Love are madness and uproar”; trans. from *Greek Lyric, Volume II*, ed. and trans. Campbell).

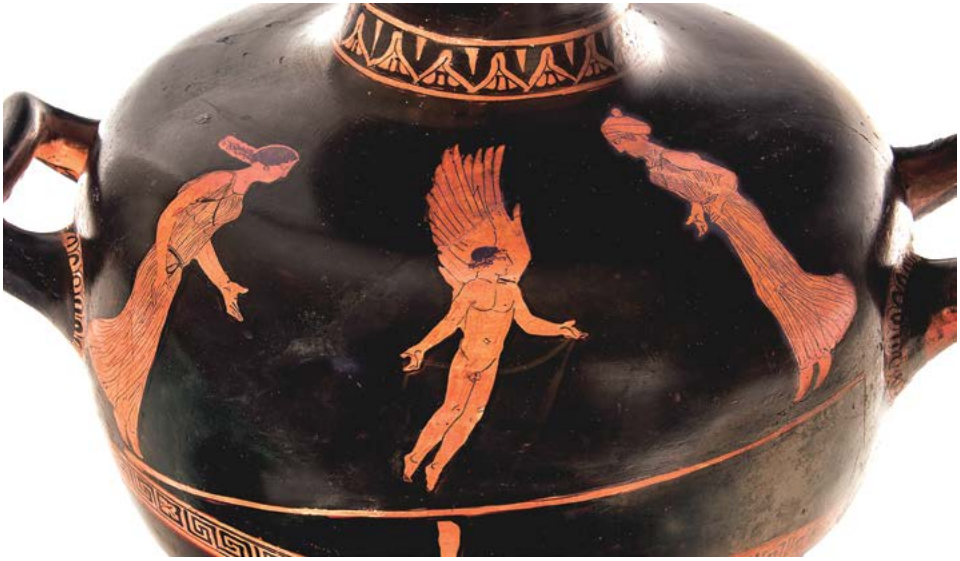


Figure 7: Attic red-figure hydria, ca. 440–430 BC, National Archaeological Museum, Madrid, inv. no. 11128, photograph by Ángel Martínez Levas. Image © by the National Archaeological Museum, Madrid. Used with permission.

psychostasía scenes, the weighing of warriors' fates (κηροστασία [*kērostatasía*] or ψυχοστασία [*psychostasía*]) on Zeus' scales (τάλαντα; *tálanta*),⁴³ to a courtship context.

Conclusion

Representations of ancient games shed light on the collective and social values that govern the emotional life of maidens under the patronage of Eros and Aphrodite. The games of skill and chance are all characterized by upward and downward movements, like the players on the see-saw or juggler's balls, visual cues that display the dynamics of love. They also express the perception of love as a risk-taking affair and a potential source of "agón-y". Depictions of the *ephedrismós* game can act as visual metaphors of maidens as untamed

⁴³ Hom., *Il.* 8.68–74. On Aphrodite as a figure of authority in these scenes, with a possible parodic dimension, see Hannah Lisbeth Jones, *Weighing Iconography of Love in Classical and Early Hellenistic Art: Considering Allusions and Metaphor in Images of Aphrodite Balancing Eros*, Senior Honors Thesis, University of Utah, 2012, <https://collections.lib.utah.edu/details?id=205788> (accessed 14 February 2020).



Figure 8: Ring with Aphrodite weighing two Eroses, gold (2.2 × 1.8 cm), ca. 350 BC, J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Villa in Malibu, California, inv. no. 85.AM.277, photograph © by the J. Paul Getty Museum. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

beings civilized by marriage. The agonistic dimension of play reveals, however, that maidens were not perceived only as objects of male desire. They were also actively engaged, riding successfully on the indefinite semantic field of the verb *παίζω* (*paízō*) – namely, seduction, love, prosperity, and happiness, without forgetting pleasure that ensured fertility.

“THIS IS THE MODERN HORSE OF TROY”:
THE TROJAN HORSE AS NINETEENTH-
CENTURY CHILDREN’S ENTERTAINMENT
AND EDUCATIONAL ANALOGY*

“[T]he horse is the king of nursery [...], the strongest and most used of all toys” – so began a beautifully illustrated article about toy horses in a Victorian children’s magazine, *Kind Words for Boys & Girls* (1866). More surprisingly, perhaps, this article presents the Trojan Horse as the quintessential toy horse. Its mythical tale forms a detailed digression from the supposed subject of toys, accompanied by a quarter-page woodcut of a surprisingly lifelike specimen trotting through Troy’s crumbled walls (see Fig. 1).

The anonymous author – most likely the magazine’s editor, Benjamin Clarke – even exhorted his youthful readers that “next time you play with your wooden *toy horse* [...] remember the wooden *Troy* one”.¹ This suggestion was explicitly aimed at “my young friends”, the middle-class children to whom this halfpenny weekly was marketed (and subsidized) by the Sunday School Union.² Clarke’s nine-part series on toys aimed to remind “bigger boys and girls [...] of the happy hours they spent with theirs”.³ Different family members, it seems,

* I would like to thank Katarzyna Marciniak for including me in the *Our Mythical Hope* conference and the other participants for stimulating debate: especially Marguerite Johnson, N.J. Lowe, Sheila Murnaghan, and Deborah H. Roberts for discussing periodicals.

¹ The Editor [Benjamin Clarke], “Toys”, *Kind Words for Boys & Girls*, 11 January 1866, 12 (emphasis in the original). *Kind Words* (1866–1879) later became *Young England* (1879–1937).

² Diana Dixon, “Children and the Press, 1866–1914”, in Michael Harris and Alan Lee, eds., *The Press in English Society from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Centuries*, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1986, 139. The Sunday School Union was a Protestant and later ecumenical educational organization in Great Britain, founded in 1803 and based on the earlier movement of Sunday Schools where underprivileged children were taught reading and writing; eventually, instruction focused on the Bible.

³ The Editor [Benjamin Clarke], “Toys”, *Kind Words for Boys & Girls*, 4 January 1866, 6.



TOYS.

BY THE EDITOR.

CHAPTER II.

"A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!"—*Shakespeare.*



UT it is quite time to be going into the nursery, for there are lots of toys on the floor waiting for our notice.

First of all the horse; for if the lion is the "king of the forest," the horse is, I am sure, the king of the nursery. There he stands—

if, indeed, his legs will enable him to—the strongest and most used of all toys.

There are many classes of horses, some of which have never yet been exhibited in any horse show; but the place of honour must be given to the rocking-horse, because he is the largest and the best made, and the most expensive. He supports his great load of juvenile humanity without complaining; for see, not only is there one young rider in the saddle, but there are two clinging on to the hind legs on the rocker, two in front in the same position, while one is sitting underneath on the stand. Now, as no horse was ever made to carry six outside, you must not be surprised if, some day, the overlaid animal breaks down under such treatment. You are as bad as a man I once heard of, who hired a horse for an afternoon's ride, and was very particular to have a long-backed one, "because," said he, "there are three more to take up at the turnpike."

This reminds me of that wonderful horse—the largest that was ever made; but it was not intended as a plaything, nor did the Trojans find it so.

The Greeks, who had been at war with them for many years, and were unable to take Troy, at last made this great horse, and under pretence of presenting an offering to the gods before retiring from the siege, they got the horse taken into the city.

The inhabitants worked away, of course, "*like Trojans*," but they had their work to do to drag it in. It was so heavy, that they thought it was an animal of some considerable mettle, and how many pounds *Troy weight* it was I cannot tell.

But this wooden horse *wouldn't* go in at the gates, so they had to pull down the walls. When they had done admiring this tremendous "gee-gee" they went to bed; when, lo! from the inside of the animal there sprang out hundreds of armed men, who gave the signal to their comrades outside the city, and in they came through the breach in the wall made to admit the horse, and the city of Troy was easily taken.

Now, next time you play with your wooden toy horse, remember the wooden *Troy* one,

But it is not every child that gets a chance of riding on a rocking-horse, though there are few who have not had a horse of some kind or other to draw about. Happy are they who have one large enough to ride on, whilst one or two of their companions draw it along. Such a horse is a capital toy indeed. It is strong, it will amuse several at once, and it is cheap. You must not expect him to look as well as his neighbour on the rockers; nevertheless he is well made.



THE TROJAN HORSE.

Figure 1: The Editor [Benjamin Clarke], "Toys", *Kind Words for Boys & Girls*, 11 January 1866, 12. Scan © by the British Library Board, General Reference Collection P.P.5992.h. Used with permission.

would have found suggestions for future amusement, or remembered their own bygone playtimes. The confident statement that “[t]he cheapest kind of horse, and one which no child need be without, is the hobby-horse” because “there are always sticks at hand that will answer the purpose”, emphasized the ubiquitous long-lived significance of the Trojan Horse for pedagogy and play that this chapter examines.⁴

Here, I ask how the Trojan Horse was widely transformed in nineteenth-century Britain into a more hopeful plaything for children’s consumption. It is usually seen as symbolic of mythical destruction. Secretly filled with soldiers and ostensibly left as a religious offering, the huge, hollow wooden structure enabled the apparently surrendered Greek army to take the city of Troy. Why was it necessary, and how was it even possible, in that time and place, to present disarmed or positive versions of the Trojan Horse? As I have argued elsewhere, the wider Trojan myths were often recast with happy endings in nineteenth-century British comic performances to avoid the logical conclusion of the British Empire’s destruction when Britain – especially the metropolis of London – was repeatedly paralleled with ancient ruined powers, such as Troy, Carthage, and Rome.⁵ This historical and political moment intersected with a significant milepost in the history of children’s literature and material culture: in London, children began to be targeted as consumers by specialist publishers from about 1750.

The flourishing of educational toys and games in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was followed by the increased accessibility of cheaper print for mass audiences and introduction of compulsory education in the late nineteenth century. In addition, there was a trend among Victorian children’s writers to sanitize stories to promote notions of childhood innocence.⁶ The myth of the Trojan Horse was continuously recreated for various didactic, pedagogical ends, in the guise of a playful amusement. Just as the mythical Horse smuggled Greek soldiers within Troy’s city walls, so entertaining accounts of the Horse secreted moral and ideological instruction, shaped by wider cultural discourses surrounding Classical Antiquity and the Trojan War myths of canonical epic literature.

The nineteenth century was also a crucial flashpoint when the historicity of the Trojan War and Troy’s location was passionately debated. The Trojan

⁴ The Editor, “Toys”, 11 January 1866, 12.

⁵ Rachel Bryant Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians: The Drama of Classical Ruins in the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

⁶ See, e.g., Gillian Avery, *Childhood’s Pattern: A Study of the Heroes and Heroines of Children’s Fiction, 1770–1950*, Leicester: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975, esp. 143–163.

Horse, the stratagem by which the Greek army smuggled soldiers into the besieged city of Troy, leading to its total destruction, annihilation of the Trojan soldiers, and enslavement of the Trojan women, offers an apparently insurmountable challenge to this volume's theme of "Mythical Hope".⁷ Yet, as the *Kind Words* article indicates, and this chapter examines, the Trojan Horse was firmly established as a child's toy by this period. Moreover, the Horse as nineteenth-century entertainment reached a far wider social range than only those families with access to traditional, formal, classical education: a hopeful symbol of the increased mobility promoted by the contemporary preoccupation with playful pedagogy – education in disguise, like Lucretius' sugared pill – for which the Horse was itself such a useful analogy. The cheap-print culture represented by the *Kind Words* article about toy horses unveils the sorts of everyday interactions that can be reconstructed or inferred (to varying degrees) through considering a range of the media and genres through which children experienced classical mythology. Charting the Trojan Horse's reincarnations across these sources demonstrates how deep-rooted the myth is, and how flexibly it was adapted into a narrative of hope.

The classical personification of Hope was familiar to nineteenth-century children as an embodied virtue. Books and cards which illustrated and explained morals using classical mythology flourished in the first half of the century. One example from 1830 (which posed exam questions at the end of each section) represented Hope as a woman wearing green, suckling a child, and holding an anchor.⁸ Hope was the virtue perceived as the foundation stone underpinning all others, as was literally depicted in the frontispiece of *Choice Emblems, Natural, Historical, Fabulous, Moral, and Divine, for the Improvement and Pastime of Youth* (see Fig. 2). In the image, Hope supports a monument to Filial Duty, Fortitude, Brotherly Love, Friendship, Perseverance, Temperance, Wisdom, and Virtue (to which the angelic mother-figure points the two cherubic children), topped by Charity. Originally written by John Huddleston Wynne in 1772, the text featured sections on fortitude, perseverance, and "change in human affairs".⁹ This last was a common moralistic element – closely related to more

⁷ Even in an "optimistic" reading of Virgil's *Aeneid*, in which the fall of Troy explicitly leads to the foundation of Rome, it would be hard to understand the account of the Wooden Horse as hopeful (since it forms the key part of Aeneas' narration to Dido of Troy's fall; *Aen.* 2.1–297).

⁸ William Pinnock, *Iconology, or, Emblematic Figures Explained; in Original Essays on Moral and Instructive Subjects, with Seventy-Two Engravings from Ancient Designs*, London: John Harris, 1830.

⁹ [John Huddleston Wynne], *Choice Emblems, Natural, Historical, Fabulous, Moral, and Divine, for the Improvement and Pastime of Youth*, 7th ed., London: E. Newbery, 1793.

frequent depictions of fortune and mortality – which drew parallels between ancient ruins and modern cities, or long-dead characters (often from the Trojan War myths) and young readers.¹⁰



Figure 2: Frontispiece to [John Huddleston Wynne]. *Choice Emblems, Natural, Historical, Fabulous, Moral, and Divine, for the Improvement and Pastime of Youth*, 7th ed., London: E. Newbery, 1793 (ed. pr. 1784). Image courtesy of Princeton University Library.

Underlying the Trojan Horse’s popularity as an object of imaginative play was the Homeric epics’ privileged position as backbone of both popular entertainment and school curricula in nineteenth-century Britain. Even as archaeological

¹⁰ Fortune is illustrated, e.g., in Samuel Boyse’s reference work, which went through at least ten editions in the eighteenth century; see Samuel Boyse, *A New Pantheon, or, Fabulous History of the Heathen Gods, Heroes, Goddesses, &c. Explain’d in a Manner Intirely [sic] New*, London: J. Newbery, 1753; and in card games such as Étienne de Jouy’s *Mythologie*, Paris, ca. 1805, and George Riley’s *Celestial Game, or, The History of the Heathen Gods and Goddesses* (in the latter, alongside the exalted company of Jupiter, Juno, Apollo, Minerva, and Balance): these items are all held at the Cotsen Children’s Collection, Princeton University Library.

discoveries and disappointments in the Troad brought into question the veracity of the Trojan War myths, the epic tales inspired countless stories, puzzles, and other pastimes. And as technological developments created a new market of child consumers and transformed Classical Antiquity into fodder for mass consumption, new relationships emerged between politics, pedagogy, and play. The Trojan Horse is a particularly visible marker of this sort of circulation and transformation of classical mythology. Marketed as a popular family amusement in nineteenth-century Britain, the Horse is an intriguing example of how a weapon of mass destruction – responsible for what is arguably the most notorious massacre from classical mythology – became symbolic of childhood entertainment.

This chapter tells the story of how and why the Trojan War myths were so often retold with “happy endings” that the Wooden Horse came to be seen as a quintessential toy – so ubiquitous that, as the *Kind Words* article recommended, it could be convincingly contrived by poorer children out of non-specific toys and everyday items. Here, I examine how the Trojan Horse was marketed as a vehicle for interactive, educational amusement, and evaluate the wider significance of disarming the Horse, which enabled the transformation of canonical ancient narratives of Troy’s destruction into adaptations featuring more hopeful outcomes. Children’s encounters with Classical Antiquity span material, visual, and performance media, as well as textual and literary genres. Many products were produced for immediate consumption in apparently transient, non-elite or non-traditional formats, such as the board game, theatrical souvenirs, and magazines analysed in this chapter. Much of this surviving evidence was preserved in private collections or recently rediscovered holdings. The different media encode different assumptions into the reworking of the myth: the Trojan Horse was not always entirely sanitized from bloodshed but, as we shall see, was usually presented as part of a wider, hopeful, and often moralizing story.

When these sorts of ephemeral evidence are juxtaposed, a lively tradition emerges of children’s imaginative re-animation of the Trojan Horse, and the enduring commercial and cultural power of a toy which enables children to change the outcome of this most recognizable of ancient myths. Hopeful innovations are informed by wider cultural narratives, for instance, political and educational debates. They also enable us to assess in which contexts children were expected to possess prior knowledge of the Trojan War myths or to be provided with necessary information: in turn, expectations of child consumer interaction afford insights into the levels of social mobility facilitated by such narratives. Of course, the Trojan Horse was, and is, perhaps the most recognizable episode of one

of the best-known ancient myths. But how did children acquire the knowledge that perpetuated this myth’s renown, and what was the significance of the myth’s revision – usually by adults – for children’s instruction and/or amusement?

“A Capital Toy”:¹¹ Interactive Play with Antiquity

The Trojan Horse presented in *Kind Words* is a key example of active interaction with and re-enactment of classical mythology, as well as the social accessibility of this mythical figure and some degree of sanitization in its adaptation. Building on the overwhelming popularity of the Trojan War myths as family entertainment earlier in the century (which had possibly influenced the author’s own childhood perceptions of mythology), *Kind Words*’ article presents the toy horses which had become family favourites earlier in the century, and epitomizes the surge of periodicals through the second half of the nineteenth century.¹² The new availability of affordable magazines brought classical mythology to ever-wider readerships, especially among children, who were increasingly targeted as consumers.¹³ Yet this account of “that wonderful horse – the largest that was ever made” – walks an awkward tightrope: while the image emphasizes its menacing size and “breach in the wall”, the synopsis of the myth is full of jokes and shies away from describing any actual combats (“the city of Troy was easily taken”).

Unless explicitly retelling ancient epic and tragic accounts of Troy’s fall, periodicals tended to follow earlier popular entertainment in avoiding or altering the myth to enable some degree of “happy ever after”. Modern Anglo-American popular culture has maintained this trend:¹⁴ the television show *Doctor Who* (“The Myth Makers”, dir. Michael Leeston-Smith, 1965), comic film *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (dirs. Terry Jones and Terry Gilliam, 1975), American fantasy television series *Xena the Warrior Princess* (“Beware Greeks Bearing Gifts”, dir. T.J. Scott, 1996), and, more recently, a comic adventure animation, *Mr. Peabody*

¹¹ The Editor, “Toys”, 11 January 1866, 12.

¹² See further: Dixon, “Children and the Press”, 133, and Kristine Moruzi, “Children’s Periodicals”, in Andrew King, Alexis Easley, and John Morton, eds., *The Routledge Handbook to Nineteenth-Century British Periodicals and Newspapers*, Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2016, 293–306.

¹³ See further: Julia Briggs, Dennis Butts, and Matthew Grenby, eds., *Popular Children’s Literature in Britain*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2008; Dennis Denisoff, ed., *The Nineteenth-Century Child and Consumer Culture*, Farnham: Ashgate, 2008.

¹⁴ Excepting the many computer and online strategy and war games, which in any case offer the possibility of altering the course of history.

and *Sherman* (dir. Rob Minkoff, 2014), all incorporate the Trojan Horse as the vehicle for their humorous (and mostly bloodless), rather than tragic, resolution of conflict. Similarly, in the early to mid-nineteenth century, London's circuses and theatres capitalized on the eager crowds drawn to watch comic re-enactments of the Siege of Troy in which the Wooden Horse played surprising roles to bring about happy endings. At the same time, Trojan War mythology was at the forefront of public awareness throughout the century, especially after Heinrich Schliemann's excavations at Hisarlik from the 1870s. Many images and accounts of the exposed ruins and archaeological proceedings, as well as episodes from Homer's and Virgil's epic poems, circulated in children's magazines.¹⁵

As we shall see, the Horse was employed to teach strategy or promote classical education. But other well-known epic episodes which could achieve those ends were not yet such popular toys: the *Odyssey's* monstrous Cyclops, for example, achieved notoriety, and fabrication as an action figure, through Ray Harryhausen's film *The 7th Voyage of Sinbad* (dir. Nathan Juran, 1958) and Walt Disney's *Hercules* (dirs. Ron Clements and John Musker, 1997). In contrast, it is easy to recreate the Trojan Horse, as *Kind Words* pointed out, using pre-existing, imaginatively transformed toys or household objects. Moreover, whereas the Cyclops is one of many challenges which mythical heroes must overcome, the Trojan Horse represents the defining moment in the ten-year-long Siege of Troy: the final opportunity to engineer an alternative to the death or slavery of the city's inhabitants. As the following case studies demonstrate, in nineteenth-century adaptations which disarm the Trojan Horse, it still breaks the Siege and ends the war. In such instances, adapting the myth of the Trojan Horse is highly effective in overcoming these mythical disasters.

Toys, games, and shows, alongside stories, facilitated playful encounters with the Horse. Children's periodicals provide the most plentiful accounts of creative reconstruction: the Horse often became the catalyst for reconciliation rather than destructive violence. Story papers were "one of the most widely consumed

¹⁵ See Susanne Duesterberg, *Popular Receptions of Archaeology: Fictional and Factual Texts in 19th and Early 20th Century Britain*, Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2015, 209–330; Rachel Bryant Davies, "An Imaginary Troy': Homeric Pilgrimage, Topography and Archaeology", in Rachel Bryant Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians: The Drama of Classical Ruins in the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 47–124; Rachel Bryant Davies, "A Subject Which Is Peculiarly Adapted to All Cyclists': Popular Understandings of Classical Archaeology in the Nineteenth-Century Press", in Bernard Lightman and Bennett Zon, eds., *Victorian Culture and the Origin of Disciplines*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2019, 161–187.

forms of entertainment in late Victorian Britain”, to quote Kelly Boyd,¹⁶ and so provide vital evidence for assessing the circulation and popular perception of knowledge. They also, as the subtitles to many such publications indicate, tried to balance pedagogical content with playful packaging: *Boys of England* (1874–1900) was subtitled, for example: “a magazine of sport, sensation, fun and instruction”, while *Our Young Folk’s Weekly Budget* (1871–1896) adopted the motto “To inform. To instruct. To amuse”.

Interactions between publication and reader, demonstrated in Marguerite Johnson’s chapter about Australian print media,¹⁷ were just as fast-paced in Britain, where child readers submitted essays and poems, entered competitions, and filled editors’ letter-bags with comments and questions.¹⁸ Such interactive, ephemeral evidence brings a new perspective onto the (in)efficacy of classical myth among producers and consumers of popular children’s culture. Since periodicals could adjust content rapidly to suit backers, purchasers, and readers, they capture cultural discourses in action. They often, as Geoffrey Cantor and Sally Shuttleworth have established regarding scientific articles, functioned as a “conduit” of specialist knowledge, as well as reinforcing cultural mores.¹⁹ Children’s periodicals are therefore full of what adults think children should know about and play with – although they could also, to some extent, reconstruct observed or experienced play. But, while we cannot be certain which pages were read, the periodicals discussed here enjoyed loyal readerships and long runs.

As Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts point out, it “has been a widely held tenet of children’s literature studies that the child addressed by children’s

¹⁶ Kelly Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys’ Story Paper in Britain: A Cultural History, 1855–1940*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, 49–50.

¹⁷ “For the Children’: Children’s Columns in Australian Newspapers during the Great War – Mythic Hope, or Mythic Indoctrination?”, in this volume, 145–157.

¹⁸ On the increasing trend to “court the reader’s approval”, particularly in correspondence, see Diana Dixon, “From Instruction to Amusement: Attitudes of Authority in Children’s Periodicals before 1914”, *Victorian Periodicals Review* 19.2 (1986), 63–66. For an analysis of classical puzzles, see Rachel Bryant Davies, “Fun from the Classics’: Puzzling Antiquity in *The Boy’s Own Paper*”, in Rachel Bryant Davies and Barbara Gribbling, eds., *Pasts at Play: Childhood Encounters with History in British Culture, 1750–1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, 96–112.

¹⁹ Geoffrey Cantor and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Science Serialized: Representation of the Sciences in Nineteenth-Century Periodicals*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2004, 4. See Duesterberg, *Popular Receptions of Archaeology*, 25, on the additional discourses created by popularization. For periodicals as an index of familiarity with archaeology, see Bryant Davies, “A Subject Which Is Peculiarly Adapted to All Cyclists’”: On the role of periodicals in constructing and perpetuating cultural ideologies, see Kristine Moruzi, *Constructing Girlhood through the Periodical Press, 1850–1915*, Aldershot and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012, and Boyd, *Manliness and the Boys’ Story Paper in Britain*.

literature is always to some extent an adult projection".²⁰ On the other hand, Kathryn Gleadle's use of diaries and autobiographies to examine juvenile recreation in late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century Britain exposed the "[c]omplex, symbiotic relationship between the worlds of child and adult".²¹ In her analysis of British children enacting soldiers during the Napoleonic era, she identifies "a general effect at work" in autobiographies "whereby this cohort of writers constructed and represented their memories through recourse to certain collective discourses and tropes".²² Likewise, children's periodical writers often explicitly recall their own childhood or, as in the *Kind Words* article, aim to arouse readers' reminiscences through classical mythology. While the injunction in *Kind Words* to imagine a hobby- or rocking-horse as the Trojan Horse may not have been taken up by contemporary children, it suggests the author's own childhood experience. Like Véronique Dasen's *Veni, vidi, ludique* exhibition,²³ this is an experiment in reconstructing historical games from texts and objects.

Gleadle finds that "volunteer play" (her term for children pretending to have enlisted to fight Napoleon in the early nineteenth century) "blurred the boundaries between juvenile play and adult cultures",²⁴ and posits that "acts of play might function as 'collective cultural production'".²⁵ Just as this military make-believe proved an effective "index of the effect of war on Georgian sensibilities",²⁶ I hope to show here that toys, games, and stories marketed for children's consumption – however ephemeral – are equally valid as an index of the perceived cultural function of classical mythology. Toy versions of the Trojan Horse establish the "cultural presence of children",²⁷ whether real, remembered, or constructed, in narratives of Antiquity's most notorious war.

²⁰ Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 5. See also Edith Hall, "Our Fabled Childhood: Reflections on the Unsuitability of Aesop to Children", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 173–174.

²¹ Kathryn Gleadle, "Playing at Soldiers: British Loyalty and Juvenile Identities during the Napoleonic Wars", *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 38.3 (2015), 346.

²² *Ibidem*, 337.

²³ *Veni, vidi, ludique. Jeux et jouets dans l'Antiquité*, Caen, Vieux-la-Romaine, May–December 2017.

²⁴ Gleadle, "Playing at Soldiers", 343.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 337, quoting Ann-Carita Evaldsson and William Corsaro, "Play and Games in the Peer Cultures of Preschool and Preadolescent Children: An Interpretative Approach", *Childhood* 5.4 (1998), 380.

²⁶ Gleadle, "Playing at Soldiers", 336.

²⁷ Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Dependent States: The Child's Part in Nineteenth-Century American Culture*, Chicago, IL, and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005, xv.

To assess the significance of altered versions of the Trojan War myth and the cultural (in)efficacy of the Trojan Horse as a symbol of hope, we must consider the expected levels of pre-existing knowledge (or lack) concerning the Trojan War mythology and the Trojan Horse implied in these versions, and the importance attached to them. Given persistent public controversies over the reality of the myth and the sensational identification of the legendary city of Troy in 1874, as well as the myth’s long-standing success as popular entertainment, it was familiar enough to be the perfect candidate for adaptation. The Trojan Horse as entertainment across classes and cultural forms therefore brings into focus the dissemination and circulation of mythical knowledge. Against two contrasting pastimes which represent active, material encounters – a board game and a toy-theatre set which reproduced a successful London circus – I will set evidence from periodicals that represent, in ephemeral, textual format, the wider prevalence of repurposed toys and imaginative recreations. I will then briefly trace associations in wider adult, political culture which enabled the Horse to be disarmed, but also complicated its interpretation and didactic appropriation.

“If He’ll Promise Not to Kick”:²⁸ Re-Imagining the Trojan War in Pre-1850 Toys and Games

Marketed as entertainment, the tale of the Trojan Horse circulated across a wide social range of participants throughout nineteenth-century Britain. As Clarke’s article in *Kind Words* demonstrates, any of its range of readers could, with some encouragement, imagine a stick into a Trojan hobby-horse, and the Trojan War myths reached an even wider spectrum of child and adult spectators onstage, in classical burlesques in London theatres, circuses, and showgrounds. Theatrical souvenirs and board games, however, were more expensive items. Two examples of the Trojan Horse, in an educational board game and a souvenir toy-theatre set of a circus show, reveal how much – and what kind – of prior knowledge about the Trojan Horse was expected in each case, and whether child consumers were expected to recognize deviations from canonical ancient accounts of the Trojan War.

²⁸ [John Amherst and Astley’s Amphitheatre], *The Siege of Troy, or, The Giant Horse of Sinon: A Grand Spectacle in Three Acts. Juvenile Drama Script*, London: Orlando Hodgson, 1833 (a copy is preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum Theatre and Performance collections), Act 2, Scene 4.

One of the most widespread games across Europe since the sixteenth century was the *Game of the Goose*: its racing-track format underpins many subsequent board games. One of the most ambitious is an educational game by a London-based children's publishing pioneer, John Wallis. It comprised a spiral timeline of circular medallions which each illustrated a historical event.²⁹ Alongside the large folding board (made of paper on a linen backing), players would have used the accompanying thirty-five-page booklet of *Explanation to Wallis's New Game of Universal History and Chronology*. The ultimate aim of the 1814 game is not revealed until the end of this booklet: to arrive at the middle medallion first, and be appointed "First Lord of the Treasury".³⁰ Both versions were entitled *Wallis's New Game of Universal History and Chronology* (further referenced as *Wallis's Universal History*) and progressed, through space and time, from the biblical account of creation to contemporary Britain. The 1814 first edition surrounded a large portrait of George IV as Prince Regent. The 1840 re-issue replaced his image with six different playing-spaces, including a portrait of Queen Victoria, but in the new central image, a train steamed down a brand-new railway line.³¹ All the other images – line drawings which could be intricately hand-coloured or washed with a single colour – remained the same.

The Trojan Horse occupies the thirteenth circle (see Fig. 3). An encampment is suggested behind, but the focus is on the large hatch in his side, through which a bevy of soldiers either embark or disembark (the scene could be the Greek camp or Troy). Visually, this circle stands out in the game: it is the only one where an animal is the focus. The soldiers' bustle below emphasizes the clear sky above the Horse; in contrast, the other circles are filled with activity, landscape, ornate scrolls, or enormous head-and-shoulder portraits. The Horse as symbol of the Trojan War is a striking choice because other wars are depicted through generic motifs, such as the crossed swords that denote "Civil War at Rome" (playing-space 31), the scroll that reads "War with America"

²⁹ I am indebted to Barbara Gribling for first discussing this game with me. On Wallis's representation of different historical periods, see Rachel Bryant Davies and Barbara Gribling, "Introduction: Pasts at Play", and Barbara Gribling, "Playing with the Past: Child Consumers, Pedagogy and British History Games, c. 1780–1850", both in Rachel Bryant Davies and Barbara Gribling, eds., *Pasts at Play: Childhood Encounters with History in British Culture, 1750–1914*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020, 1–22 and 193–220, respectively.

³⁰ John Wallis, *Explanation to Wallis's New Game of Universal History and Chronology*, London: J. Wallis, 1814, 17.

³¹ The first public railway to use steam locomotives was the Stockton and Darlington Railway (UK), which opened on 27 September 1825; in 1840, the Railway Inspectorate was set up to monitor safety.

(playing-space 124), and battles through combat scenes (for example, “The Battle of Hastings”, playing-space 76). That the Trojan War – and Horse – was considered especially important is confirmed by the “Rules”, which promoted the acquisition of knowledge about this circle.



Figure 3: Board-game playing-space no. 13, showing the Trojan Horse. Detail from *Wallis's New Game of Universal History and Chronology*. London: J. Wallis, 1840 (ed. pr. 1814). Image courtesy of Princeton University Library.

The “Rules for Playing” laid out in the booklet of *Explanation* reveal that each player started with two dozen counters, of which six each were placed in a common pool.³² Each turn, players spun a numbered teetotum (a spinning die), proceeded to the appropriate circle, and followed the instructions given

³² Wallis, *Explanation*, 3–4.

in the next section of the *Explanation*, the “Chronology of the most remarkable events, from the Creation to the present time”. Each circle was briefly named, with directions such as “begin again” (when reaching the “Universal Deluge” playing-space) or “pay 3 to Rome, your more successful rival” (when landing on the medallion labelled “Kingdom of Athens founded”).

Wallis’s *Universal History* is intriguing. Wallis gave a date for each circle’s event, using a calendar era based on biblical events for those “Before Christ”. His Anno Mundi chronology runs between Creation in year 1 and the birth of Jesus in Anno Mundi 4000, noting that this was “four years before the commencement of the vulgar Christian era”. This system was not Wallis’s own invention but was based on seventeenth-century chronologies, such as James Ussher’s *Annals of the World* (1650). The Trojan War was set as Anno Mundi 2811, only 1189 years before Christ.³³ Despite the resultant compression of events to match Old Testament arithmetic, it was eleven years later, after the end of the War, in “Anno Mundi 2822”, that “Eneas flying from Troy, lands in Italy, whence the Romans pretended to derive their origin” (playing-space 14). Homer’s flourishing was placed very specifically, in Anno Mundi 3097, only 275 years after the end of the War.

Players who landed on the Horse were directed to read the explanatory paragraph for “Trojan War” in the longest section of Wallis’s booklet, “Outlines of History”, which expanded on selected circles. Anyone who had to read aloud was rewarded by a further spin and the acquisition of counters. Although players could easily, in practice, have skipped the reading, knowledge of the Trojan War was so important that circle 16, “Homer Flourished”, rewarded players who remembered the Horse’s context: “If you can say who he [Homer] was, and what he wrote, receive 2 [tokens] from each player; otherwise, place 6 [tokens] on No. 13 [which the next player who landed would gain], and learn there”.³⁴

Here is the information to which players were so strictly directed:

No. 13. The Siege of Ilium, or Troy, was undertaken by the Greeks to recover Helen, the wife of Menelaus, King of Sparta, who had been carried

³³ Wallis’s *Universal History* translates historical events correctly (Years BC = 4004 – Years Anno Mundi), so, e.g., the Battle of Thermopylae in 3524 AM (Anno Mundi) corresponds to 480 BC, and “Carthage in Africa taken and destroyed by the Romans” (playing-space 30) is 3855 AM, or 149 BC (the start of the Third Punic War). Wallis must have been following a revised version of Ussher’s chronology, since they agree for Thermopylae, but Ussher placed the destruction of Troy in AM 2820 (1184 BC); see Rev. James Ussher, *The Annals of the World*, London: printed by E. Tyler, for F. Crook and G. Bedell, 1658, 187–190.

³⁴ Wallis, *Explanation*, 6.

off by Paris, the son of Priam, King of Troy. The armament of the Greeks is said to have consisted of twelve hundred ships and 100,000 men. These were opposed by a still more numerous force, for the King of Troy received assistance from all the neighbouring princes, besides powerful foreign aids. After the siege had lasted ten years, the Greeks became masters of the city by artifice. Homer, in his celebrated poem, “The Iliad”, says they introduced a large wooden horse filled with armed men, who, coming out at night, opened the gates and admitted the hostile army; when the greatest part of the inhabitants were [*sic*] put to the sword, the rest carried into captivity, and the city reduced to ashes.³⁵

The Horse’s role is emphasized at the expense of detailing any combats of heroes; however, this leads Wallis to get his epics mixed up: he credits the Horse to the wrong poem – and possibly even to the wrong author and language, too: this “artifice” and the fall of Troy is not narrated in the *Iliad* ascribed to Homer, but rather in the *Odyssey* (largely in Book 8) and the second book of Virgil’s *Aeneid*. Wallis delicately navigates myth and history, supplying specific numbers of ships and men from hearsay, yet emphasizing the canonical status of Greek epic. It is intriguing to imagine how families might have responded to this – rather misleading – synopsis. Those who could have afforded to purchase this game, with its hand-coloured engravings and explanatory booklet, would most likely have included players who could recognize Wallis’s mistake: the children of such families would have been in throes of, or waiting to begin, an elite classical education in which Homeric epic and, especially, Virgil’s *Aeneid* would play a starring role.³⁶

Similarly misleading information, claiming to represent Homer’s *Iliad*, emerges from another family entertainment, which was sold from 1833, between the two versions of Wallis’s *Universal History*. This was a circus show and its miniature toy-theatre version, *The Giant Horse of Sinon, or, The Siege of Troy* (Astley’s Amphitheatre, 1833). Orlando Hodgson, a leading theatrical souvenir publisher, created the toy-theatre version, which began selling within weeks of the show’s premiere. The Trojan Horse was the principal attraction of a toy-theatre set which comprised the characters, props, and backdrops necessary to recreate a life-size public entertainment as performed at Astley’s Amphitheatre. This fashionable London venue combined arena and stage, and

³⁵ Ibidem, 21.

³⁶ See further: Christopher Stray, *Classics Transformed: Schools, Universities, and Society in England, 1830–1960*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998.

was renowned for its equestrian feats. Shows at Astley's attracted an extremely diverse audience of both genders, and almost all ages and social classes. *The Giant Horse of Sinon, or, The Siege of Troy* was a particular box-office hit in 1833; it was revived in 1840 (the same year as the second issue of Wallis's *Universal History*) and revisited in 1854 as *The Siege of Troy, or, The Miss-Judgment of Paris*.³⁷

The Trojan Horse starred in advertisements for the 1833 *Giant Horse* as well as the souvenir miniature-theatre set, marketed on the circus show's success, in which the Horse fills an incredibly detailed double-sized character sheet and a stunning backdrop. Hodgson also published a sixpenny pamphlet of the script, with detailed stage directions from the acting copy, entitled *The Siege of Troy, or, The Giant Horse of Sinon: A Grand Spectacle in Three Acts. Juvenile Drama Script*.³⁸ In the final backdrop, the Horse adopts a similar stance as in Wallis's circular image, but here, at the circus and in the miniature theatre, the city is already alight.³⁹ Ironically, in this burlesque *Siege of Troy*, we do not actually see Troy "reduced to ashes", in Wallis's phrase, and none of the principal characters die.⁴⁰ Although stage directions for the final scene dictate that "[t]he Castle and City blazes" and "Priam and Hecuba [are] prisoners", the prisoners are regally dressed, the focus stays on celebratory processions and tableaux, and the hopeful potential for reconciliation remains.

Pandarus (a character known from *Iliad* Book 4) eloquently describes "a horse of large dimensions, whose head touches the clouds, and seems to claim acquaintance with the gods" (*The Siege of Troy, or, The Giant Horse of Sinon*, Act 2, Scene 1), but any mention of the *Aeneid*'s troubling omens is omitted. Its entrance is the occasion for a grand procession (Act 2, Scene 3) and a chorus (Act 2, Scene 4). It is also the excuse for some comedy among the Trojan Sentinels (Act 2, Scene 4):

1st Sen. Come, comrade, all seems quiet, and the horse is not likely to move off. Suppose we have a nap.

2nd Sen. Well, I'll make a pillow of his forefoot, if he'll promise not to kick.

³⁷ For an illustrated analysis of these performances and a toy-theatre set, see Rachel Bryant Davies, "Not Classic, but Quite Correct": The Trojan War at the Circus", in Rachel Bryant Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians: The Drama of Classical Ruins in the Nineteenth-Century Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018, 125–202.

³⁸ See above, n. 28.

³⁹ See, e.g., the superb playbill at the Victoria and Albert Museum (S.2–1983); this backdrop is the front cover to Bryant Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians*.

⁴⁰ Wallis, *Explanation*, 21.

Of course, although it remains inanimate, the apparently innocent Horse delivers more menace when Greek soldiers emerge from the flap in the Horse's shoulder (glued onto the miniature card version). But there is a twist which enables the circus to pull off a happy ending. This was the element that really confused some reviewers, leading expensive monthly magazine *The Athenaeum* to conclude that:

[A]s this theatre is meant mainly for the entertainment of school-boys, little and large, it is lucky that the victors *are* known to them, for really it would be difficult to decide which side has the best of it at Astley's. (Issue of 6 July 1833)

Characters are listed with costume description "as performed at Astley's Amphitheatre", in front of Hodgson's script. However, Paris is a "Grecian", and Menelaus is a Trojan. The fact that the other characters' nationalities are not provided implies that this is a deliberate choice, as do other alterations. For example, Princess Helen, Priam's daughter, is not yet married to Menelaus, whom she insults as a "slave": the plot of this show is Paris and Menelaus' rivalry for her hand in marriage.

A war is indicated, for example by the presence of the Amazons, as well as Priam's suggestion that "many a Trojan mother [will] bless the name of Menelaus", if the siege is lifted. The Horse is still supposedly a peace offering but now comes directly from Paris who is visiting the Trojan "water pageant and fête" (Act 1, Scene 3). These revisions emphasize the importance of entertainment: not only is there a beautifully illustrated scene in the "Amphitheatre of the Ancients", but it is hoped that Paris' enjoyment there will overcome the siege (in fact, he and Menelaus start a succession of single combats). Rather than a vehicle by which Menelaus can reclaim his adulterous wife, the Trojan Horse at Astley's became a means for Paris to win his fairy-tale wedding. The transformation of the Trojan War for an Eastertide family audience plays to the circus's main attraction: the troupe of highly trained horses and riders.

This "equestrian burlesque" at the circus did not go as far as Victorian burlesques which reversed or entirely avoided Troy's destruction. For example, Robert Brough's 1858 *The Iliad, or, The Siege of Troy*, a large-scale Christmas pantomime at the Lyceum Theatre, ends with a solemn procession of the Greek and Trojan chiefs reconciled. Hector, who has rescued Achilles from the River Scamander, pushes Achilles' wheelchair. Despite the journalist Homer's protests that his traditional, epic news report has already been "telegraph'd to press"

for publication in the next day's newspaper, the heroes enact a more hopeful, peaceful outcome.⁴¹

This "happy ending" is anticipated by Brough's reworking of the Trojan Horse, which Hector accepts as a gift from Ulysses when they meet at a convivial dinner at the Greek camp. In Act 1, Scene 5, "horse-taming Hector" shows off his ultra-modern horse-whispering technique.⁴² Hector provides a "Rarey show", in which he spoofs the American horse trainer's humane technique of tying up the horse's foreleg, with a display of taming "a nag of vicious stamp" with drum and penny trumpet.⁴³ When Ulysses mentions another challenging untameable horse – making it clear to the audience through aside comments that he refers to the Wooden Horse – the comedy lies in how enthusiastically Hector accepts the gift.⁴⁴ In this pantomime, Troy's destroyed walls are represented by the free toll-road pass for the "Scaean wicket" that Hector writes out for Ulysses, so as not to put him to any expense.⁴⁵ It is significant for the comic role played by this Trojan Horse, and the unexpected reconciliation which Hector and Ulysses' interaction foreshadows, that Brough cut the scene depicting the Greek soldiers hidden inside the Horse: it survives only in the original manuscript submitted for government censorship. It is likely that the resulting more hopeful overall impression of the Horse was not Brough's priority – the burlesque was far longer and with a far larger cast than other Christmas pantomimes and was significantly scaled back after the premiere suffered technical difficulties – but it does mean that, after the opening night, the comic horse-taming scene would have been spectators' impression of the Trojan Horse.

Prices at both Astley's Amphitheatre and the Lyceum Theatre varied sufficiently that, especially since *Giant Horse* and Brough's *Iliad* were timed to premiere over holidays, it is likely that many working-class children would have seen the original performance. However, the miniature *Giant Horse* set would have been expensive. Hodgson's twenty-five sheets cost between one and fourpence each, plus the sixpence script. As in the case of Wallis's *Universal History*, it is likely that owners of Hodgson's set would have known the traditional tale

⁴¹ Robert Brough, *The Iliad, or, The Siege of Troy* (Lyceum Theatre, 1858), Winchester: Hugh Barclay, 1858/1859, Act 1, Scene 8, vv. 79–97, in Rachel Bryant Davies, ed., *Victorian Epic Burlesque: A Critical Anthology of Nineteenth-Century Theatrical Entertainments after Homer*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 217–218.

⁴² *Ibidem*, Act 1, Scene 5, vv. 101–164, in Bryant Davies, ed., *Victorian Epic Burlesque*, 192–195.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, Act 1, Scene 5, v. 112, in Bryant Davies, ed., *Victorian Epic Burlesque*, 192.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, Act 1, Scene 5, v. 127, in Bryant Davies, ed., *Victorian Epic Burlesque*, 193.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, Act 1, Scene 5, vv. 160–164, in Bryant Davies, ed., *Victorian Epic Burlesque*, 195.

of the Trojan Horse and so been able to appreciate the circus’s comic adaptations. In contrast, periodicals – to which we now turn – reached a wider audience than these preserved pastimes. As a result, they are an especially valuable source, both for classical reception and historical children’s literature.

“We All Know about the Trojan Horse”:⁴⁶ Recognition, Innovation, and Happy Endings in Post-1850 Children’s Magazines

Increased literacy rates through the century created a mass market as technological innovations and the reduction of tax (completely repealed by 1816) made printing more commercially viable. The year 1866, an astonishingly energetic period in British children’s publishing, saw the emergence of leading titles such as *Kind Words* – which promoted play with Trojan hobby-horses – along with *Chatterbox*, *Aunt Judy’s Magazine*, and *Boys of England*. Many (such as *Kind Words*) were sponsored by religious charities. They not only promoted morals but also fostered elite familiarity with Classics for less elite families, in much the same way as some boys’ story papers promoted a “public school ethos”.⁴⁷ Classical education was the key to social mobility: myths such as the Trojan Horse could be supremely accessible.⁴⁸ It was also usual for such myths to be sanitized, with bloodshed and other aspects considered inappropriate kept to a minimum, and a hopeful, positive tone maintained. Clarke’s feature of the Trojan Horse as everyday toy in *Kind Words*, with which we began, is an example of this approach, applied to perhaps one of the most challenging topics.

A generation or so after Wallis’s *Universal History* and Hodgson’s *Giant Horse*, Clarke’s article in *Kind Words* showed that basic toys or household items could easily be repurposed into pretend Trojan Horses. Despite explaining that the original Horse “was not intended as a plaything, nor did the Trojans find it so”, its second issue demonstrated how and why some of the most traditional, generic toys should be reinvented.⁴⁹ Although the editor recognized that

⁴⁶ Henry Scott, “The Trojan Horse”, *Good Things for the Young of All Ages*, 21 August 1875, 605.

⁴⁷ Avery, *Childhood’s Pattern*, 194.

⁴⁸ On Classics and social mobility, see Edmund Richardson, *Classical Victorians: Scholars, Scoundrels and Generals in the Pursuit of Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013; Henry Stead and Edith Hall, eds., *Greek and Roman Classics in the British Struggle for Social Reform*, London: Bloomsbury, 2015.

⁴⁹ The Editor, “Toys”, 11 January 1866, 12.

"it is not every child that gets a chance of riding on a rocking-horse", he claimed that "there are few who have not had a horse of some kind or other to draw about". His discussion soon focused on "this great horse" and its strategic use:

The Greeks, who had been at war with them for many years, and were unable to take Troy [...], and under pretence of presenting an offering to the gods before retiring from the siege, they got the horse taken into the city. [...] But this *wooden* horse *wouldn't* go in at the gates, so they had to pull down the walls. When they had done admiring this tremendous "gee-gee" they went to bed; when, lo! from the inside of the animal there sprang out hundreds of armed men, who gave the signal to their comrades outside the city, and in they came through the breach in the wall made to admit the horse, and the city of Troy was easily taken.⁵⁰

Italicized wordplay, of the kind which pervaded classical burlesques, alongside jokes from earlier in the century, obviously influence the middle paragraph:

The inhabitants worked away, of course, "*like Trojans*;" but they had their work to do to drag it in. It was so heavy, that they thought it was an animal of some considerable mettle, and how many pounds *Troy weight* it was I cannot tell.⁵¹

These mitigate the tragic consequences: where Wallis did not mince his words, Clarke omits any specific violence and swiftly returns to safer topics of rocking-horses. This sanitized, playful approach underpinned Clarke's intention for how his articles should be read.⁵² His series was not just *about* toys and play; the act of reading itself *was* play. This was clarified in a subsequent issue, when he conversationally ended an article about toy soldiers:

Well, we must leave the nursery for a while [...]. I trust, you will set to work all the harder for this short recreation we have had. And I do not think you will have got any harm from our being together, but, I trust, some little good, for though we have been at play, there were some lessons that could not help coming up, which thoughtful children will think over, I am sure.⁵³

⁵⁰ Ibidem (emphasis in the original to indicate wordplay).

⁵¹ Ibidem (emphasis also in the original). Troy weight is a British measurement system, in use since the Middle Ages, to weigh precious metals and stones.

⁵² Compare the sanitization of Aesop's *Fables* in Hall, "Our Fabled Childhood", 173–174.

⁵³ The Editor [Benjamin Clarke], "Toys", *Kind Words for Boys & Girls*, 22 February 1866, 61.

At the same time, an explicitly Christian agenda surfaced the week following the Trojan Horse article. The speculation that “Joseph the carpenter made many a toy in his workshop for the child Jesus”⁵⁴ became overtly didactic by the late March installation of the series. “Above all other lessons”, *Kind Words* preached to its young readers, “lies this one, that it is our heavenly Father [...] [who] offers us greater pleasures and more lasting joys than any this world has to give, whether it be toys when we are children, or riches when we are grown up”.⁵⁵

This is a particularly clear example of the delicate balance of pedagogy and play which underpins much, if not all, children’s literature, and which many children’s periodicals were transparent in acknowledging. As we shall see, stories which mentioned the Trojan Horse negotiated an equally delicate balancing act in assuming, or explaining, prior familiarity with the myth. They also assume a creative approach to existing toys, and to the adaptation and re-enactment of myth of which the *Kind Words* editor must have approved.

The Trojan Horse was not alone in being appropriated for playtime: readers of *Aunt Judy’s Magazine* learned about a “remarkable doll” named “Helen, after the beautiful heroine of Troy”;⁵⁶ *Boys of England* featured a Homeric re-enactment between two brothers combating as Hector and Achilles (ending in an unplanned swim) as the catalyst in a serialized rags-to-riches tale;⁵⁷ and, in the transatlantic publication *St. Nicholas*, the Mask of Agamemnon was considered a suitable fancy-dress costume for a boy bearing that unfortunate name.⁵⁸ The Trojan Horse, however, could be used both as a symbol of disguise or concealment in children’s games, and as an enticing introduction to the Trojan War.

Most brief references which used the Trojan Horse as symbol assume readers’ prior knowledge, which would enable them to decode the reference to classical models of disguise and recognize the innovative “happy ending”. In an unlikely-sounding school story entitled “Too Fond of Bacon”, published by *Boy’s Own Magazine*, for example, a Trojan Horse-style strategy brings a schoolboy snow fight to an early end: multiple snow models of pigs act as decoys to allay suspicion from a larger pig concealing a young pupil, “little Arthur Warland”, who is thereby able to enter the other team’s fort and switch the flags to signal

⁵⁴ The Editor [Benjamin Clarke], “Toys”, *Kind Words for Boys & Girls*, 18 January 1866, 21.

⁵⁵ The Editor [Benjamin Clarke], “Toys”, *Kind Words for Boys & Girls*, 22 March 1866, 93.

⁵⁶ Anonymous, “Looking Back”, *Aunt Judy’s Magazine*, [n.d.], 739.

⁵⁷ Anonymous, “The Schooldays of Lord Dundreary and Brother Sam”, *Boys of England*, 3 February 1882, 297. On these examples of interactive play (nn. 58–60), see further Rachel Bryant Davies, *Classics at Play: Greco-Roman Antiquity in British Children’s Culture, 1750–1914*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.

⁵⁸ Lucretia P. Hale, “The Peterkins Give a Fancy Ball”, *St. Nicholas*, 1 November 1881, 26.

victory. The only explanation provided was: "The commander of the attacking party [an older schoolboy] had taken an idea from the well-known story of the Trojan Horse".⁵⁹ The reader is expected to know that, while the snow-pig stood in for the Wooden Horse, Arthur Warland replaced the Greek soldiers, while his non-violent switching of team flags supplanted the destruction of an entire city. The reader is also expected to appreciate the humorous incongruity of this practical, playful, and innocent application of an elite, expensive classical education that so prominently featured ancient accounts of warfare.

Occasionally, as in a tale which featured ten years earlier in a different boys' story-collection, *Routledge's Every Boy's Annual*, the stratagem of the Horse provides the key to the entire plot, and so is explained in the dramatic disclosure. Set during the Napoleonic Wars, readers would not have expected a classical lesson. "A Sea Story", contributed by a Lieutenant Low, was told from the viewpoint of the intended (adult) victim of the disguise plot, a British ship's captain. The basic plot is that this British sailor, named George (a stereotypically English hero's name), foils Napoleonic French sailors who have tried, in disguise, to take over his ship. On revealing their conspiracy, George explains, in dramatic fashion, that his knowledge of the Trojan Horse prompted him to recognize the threat to his crew:

Once upon a time, as old tales begin, there were two nations engaged in deadly strife. Their prowess was the theme of many a wandering minstrel [...] narrated in majestic epic, which has enthralled the modern as well as the ancient mind, the story of the fall of Troy. Infatuated Troy! That listened not to the prophetic warnings of Cassandra. Trojan valour succumbed to Grecian guile.⁶⁰

Set among references to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and the myth of Oedipus, the author of this story, Lieutenant C.R. Low, expects readers to recognize the Trojan Horse strategy once the similarity is revealed; his lyrical, enthusiastic explanation above, by far the longest of his literary references, focuses on the Horse's renown. The emphasis that Low places on the cultural significance of the Trojan War and the importance of listening to "prophetic warnings" is no accident: the rescue of the British ship and final reconciliation is only possible because George knew the Greek myth. When unmasking the plot, George asks the French Colonel whether he "remember[s] the story of the wooden horse" (which

⁵⁹ Anonymous ["The author of 'Jam Roley-Poleys', 'Mazeppa', etc."], "Too Fond of Bacon: A School Tale in Two Chapters", *Boy's Own Paper*, 8 January 1881, 238.

⁶⁰ C.R. [Charles Rathbone] Low, "A Sea Story", *Routledge's Every Boy's Annual*, 1871, 36.

could be read as an insult implying lack of a classical education and a lucky coincidence in strategy) and labels the attempted French conspirators "my merry Greeks". The myth of "Grecian guile" enabled George to enact a more hopeful version of "Trojan valour", which saves his crew. The failure of the French sailors' Trojan Horse strategy through awareness of classical mythology learned during a British education ensures that, on this boat at least, there is some peace amid the Napoleonic War. George sets the captured French sailors free, but reveals the traitor, who is gruesomely beheaded in the final line of the story.⁶¹

This short tale appeared in *Routledge's Every Boy's Annual*, which compiled the year's stories from Edmund Routledge's magazine (1862–1888, under various titles). At sixpence monthly, Routledge "aimed for popularity with reasonable prices", and published in London and New York.⁶² A shorter account was similarly embedded into a tale for younger readers of *Little Folks* (1871–1933). *Little Folks* was a monthly which "aimed to please both boys and girls of all ages, social status, and religious affiliation".⁶³ Despite containing "a lower proportion of original fiction than *Aunt Judy's* or *Good Words for the Young*", it still managed to feature the Trojan Horse at least twice.⁶⁴

The shorter story, entitled "Girls and Boys of Olden Times", not only compares the Trojan Horse with the ubiquitous contemporary Noah's Ark toys, but imagines the Wooden Horse as a staple toy of ancient Athenians. The protagonist, a small boy, is transported by a fairy to ancient Athens to experience everyday life, including the toy Trojan Horse. When he admiringly asks why the Athenians also had toy horses – "whatever made them think of that" – the narrator intervenes to explain:

It is what they call a Trojan horse, and was invented because of the story of the city of Troy. You will read it when you are bigger, and will find that after being besieged ten years it was taken by means of a stratagem or plot. A big wooden horse was made, and some soldiers put inside it; this was allowed to go into the besieged city, and when once they were inside the soldiers soon let in their friends.⁶⁵

⁶¹ Ibidem.

⁶² Marjory Lang, "Childhood's Champions: Mid-Victorian Children's Periodicals and the Critics", *Victorian Periodicals Review* 13.1/2 (1980), 24.

⁶³ Ibidem, 25.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ E.M. Waterworth, "Girls and Boys of Olden Times: IV Among the Greeks", *Little Folks*, [n.d., ca. 1895–1905], 214.

We are not privy to the boy's reaction, since the fairy whisks him off to school. Surely, however, the odd level of detail about both the Trojan War and Trojan Horse would have sparked readers' curiosity – and, like Clarke's article, would have suggested repurposing existing toys for imaginative play.

The second Trojan Horse story from *Little Folks* was a lavishly illustrated tale, subtitled a "fairy story", that combines school-story and fairy-tale elements. Contributed by the prolific children's writer and animal welfare campaigner Julia Goddard, "Leonora and the Wooden Horse" provides another intriguing example of such creativity which refashioned pre-existing toys into Trojan Horses. This story celebrates female classical education and imaginative, creative play, which promotes the redemptive potential of the Trojan Horse. Here, a toy Horse becomes a clear symbol of hope – even re-armed with soldiers. Moreover, this story engages explicitly with the acquisition and deployment of classical knowledge in celebrating improvements in girls' education.

Leonora is introduced as a pupil at one of the new girls' high schools. These schools (which charged fees but remained relatively cheap) were still quite new institutions in 1885, when the story was published. The National Union for Improving the Education of Women of All Classes had been founded in 1871 and the following year was renamed the Girls' Day School Trust, which aimed to set up academic secondary schools for girls (by 1900, there were thirty-seven across the country). Leonora was a common name at the time, but Goddard's choice of name for her heroine is possibly a reference to the classically educated American educator and reformer Leonora Beck Ellis (1862–1951). A conscious choice is all the more likely since the name of the heroine's adversary, Ophelia (also that of the fateful heroine in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*), is derived from the Greek 'help' (ὄφελος; *óphelos*): and the Trojan Horse in this story rescues Ophelia. Like her probable namesake, Goddard's Leonora excels at Greek and – in a challenge to stereotypes of boys' and girls' toys – enjoys playing with her toy horse and lead soldiers.

The story opens with Leonora praising the Horse: "Though not of Troy / You are my joy". Leonora explains the Trojan War myths to her wooden horse toy, named after Alexander the Great's warhorse, Bucephalus. She is already "very classical" and "had heard of the famous wooden horse that the Greeks filled with soldiers and the Trojans drew into their city". It is the act of the child retelling the myth in her own voice – and kissing her toy (see Fig. 4) – which animates Bucephalus into a moving, speaking Trojan Horse.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ Julia Goddard, "Leonora and the Wooden Horse: A Fairy Story", *Little Folks*, [1885], 364. The subsequent quotations from this story are from the same edition.

Leonora and the Wooden Horse.

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laden soldiers doing nothing.
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at her. Ophelia wore her h
pigtail, and went also to the F

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couldn't c
you shan
at home.

Leonora
herself up
"I know it every bit quit



"SHE KISSED THE WOODEN HORSE" (p. 364).

Figure 4: Julia Goddard, "Leonora and the Wooden Horse: A Fairy Story", *Little Folks*, [1885], 364. Author's collection, scan by Robin Hellen. Used with his kind permission.

Upon being kissed, Leonora's toy horse speaks, as do Achilles' warhorses once in the *Iliad* (19.404–417). Bucephalus encourages Leonora to cut a hole in his side for her lead soldiers. Rather menacingly, he declares: "If I had soldiers inside me there is no telling what I should do", and complains: "What is the use of being a wooden horse with no soldiers inside me?". The horse instructs Leonora (and *Little Folks'* readers) in the process of remaking him as the Trojan Horse:

"There are all those leaden soldiers doing nothing. They are shut up in a green paper box [...]. They would just fit into me", continued the [horse's] voice, "if you were to cut a piece out of my side, put the soldiers in, and then close it up again. I am hollow, you know [...]." (364–365)

When Leonora refuses, the horse (“whether he intended it or not”) kicks her, so that she misses school and forfeits her top place in class. This is the catalyst for the story’s reinterpretation of the Trojan Horse myth. As Leonora, who has just recited her lesson correctly from her sickbed, is unfairly taunted by her classmate Ophelia that she was “shamming” because she “couldn’t do her Greek”, the animated horse clatters upstairs (364–365). At this point, the story diverges into a fantastic melange of fairy tales, of the kind that the author often wrote. Rattling with soldiers, the horse carts off Leonora. Her tormentor, Ophelia, emerges from hiding under the bed but becomes lost in fairy tales. She ends up as Little Red Riding Hood threatened by the Wolf, who wants to punish her because “[y]ou know nothing about Troy and Wooden Horses (despite having studied Homer and Virgil) and you did not believe Leonora, who always speaks the truth” (367). However, Bucephalus’ army rescues Ophelia from the tree she has become stuck in while escaping the Wolf, and the story ends happily, with the girls as friends and Leonora once more top of the class in Greek.

As this reversal suggests, Goddard’s fairy tale emphasizes both Leonora’s classical knowledge and her complex reinterpretation of the Horse, who grows large enough for Leonora to ride. This “modern horse of Troy” uses his reinstated firepower, firstly to rescue his owner, Leonora, from bullying in the real world and then, at her request, to rescue her fellow pupil Ophelia from being eaten by Little Red Riding Hood’s Wolf in the fantasy land to which he transports them. Although Bucephalus threatens to kick Ophelia as he had Leonora, he not only rescues both girls, but even encourages Ophelia to seek Leonora’s forgiveness. Their shared experience in overcoming the daunting world of fairy tales together with the aid of classical Greek myth brings about their reconciliation: “For the sake of the High, friends now are you and I”. As the leaden soldiers sing, Bucephalus is a “reformed” and modernized Trojan Horse:

We’re a band of leaden soldiers,
This is the modern horse of Troy,
[...]
Agamemnon and Achilles,
Priam, Hector, here we be,
Friend and foe all mixed together
In reformed society.

(366)

Leonora is initially scared of the re-armed, larger Horse. Remembering “something she had heard at the High School about Greeks and *the tug of war*” (emphasis

in the original), she is concerned about the soldiers fighting, but as “they all began to laugh, [so] Leonora supposed that there was no cause for alarm” (366).

This Trojan Horse, then, is somewhat tamed – in contrast with all Leonora’s prior knowledge of the myth – and his reality enhanced by the “velvet saddle-cloth thrown over him to hide the disfigurement” caused by the open hatch, and a “dainty side-saddle” (366). Later, Goddard jokes further with her readers’ expectations when Bucephalus, “looking very stiff”, emerges from a shed “as if he were being moved on wheels, but he was not”. The animated lead soldiers are upset by Ophelia’s tears after her encounter with the Wolf. She is trapped up the tree she climbed to escape being eaten, so at Bucephalus’ suggestion they “dragged out a small brass cannon” from another of Leonora’s toy boxes. This toy cannon also expands to life-size dimensions, and Leonora has to lift a toy soldier up to light the fuse. As “one of the soldiers cried, ‘Right-about face’” (368), Goddard deliberately turns the myth upside down: the Greek soldiers rescue a distressed damsel, but without harming anyone.

These comic moments lighten the fairy-tale rhymes in which the girls speak during their adventure: this signals their removal from “reality” and suggests the Horse’s status as myth. Even when the Trojan War was considered historical (especially after Schliemann’s excavations), the Horse is often told as a fable.⁶⁷ It also enables Goddard to navigate the toys’ status between reality and imagination, drawing on the trend for fairy tales by writers such as the Brothers Grimm and E.T.A. Hoffmann at the time. After her adventure, Leonora finds Bucephalus in his stable, in her playroom, magically restored as a wooden toy, “quiet as a lamb [...]. The hole in his side was closed up, and there was no trace of it; and beside him was the green box with the leaden soldiers in it. The brass cannon was also there” (369).

The editor of *Kind Words* would have disapproved of this extent of creativity. Although he promoted using sticks as hobby-horses to imagine the Trojan Horse, he advocated playing with one toy at a time. He might have allowed the soldiers and Bucephalus to coexist, but surely would have balked at the anachronistic “small brass cannon”:

Let there be no crowding the soldiers into Noah’s ark, for that would be out of time as well as place; no mixing up the menagerie with the tea set [...].⁶⁸

⁶⁷ See Rev. S. Goldney, “Fables and Fairy Tales”, in *Aunt Judy’s Annual Volume*, London: Hatchards, 1885, 20: “The wooden horse, by means of which Troy was taken, appears as an elephant in Hindoostan, and is used to secure a desirable son-in-law for a king”.

⁶⁸ The Editor [Benjamin Clarke], “Toys”, *Kind Words for Boys & Girls*, 25 January 1866, 29.

Yet the central concern of Goddard's cautionary tale is the girls' knowledge of Greek, and presumably the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Ability in Classics is central to both girls' identity. As Ophelia muses in fairyland: "If I be I, as I suppose I be [...], / The girls all will say, 'You are the top in Greek'". And upon their return, their tussle continues:

She [Ophelia] arrived at the High School, and entered the class-room just as the girls were all saying in a chorus, just like a Greek play –

"You are top in Greek!"

"But she won't be long", said Leonora, "now that I have come back to school." (369)

The moral about Leonora's truthfulness is not laboured: instead, the story's close stresses the importance of classical knowledge: "[S]he always had a strange belief that somehow her strange adventure was owing to learning Greek, and that if it had not been for the *Iliad*, Bucephalus would never have acted in so eccentric a manner". This potentially dangerous knowledge is safer harnessed at school (where it could earn you top marks) than in imaginative play (369).

Goddard, like Wallis, attributes the Trojan Horse to the *Iliad*. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were certainly popular candidates for retelling in periodicals; they provided fodder for prize poems, essays, and competitions. Nonetheless, the Trojan Horse was not a common element in the many retellings of the epics. The Horse is only mentioned three times in the *Odyssey* (4.266–289, 8.492–520, 11.523–533), and elaborate descriptions of monsters, or the Phaeacian scenery, precluded space for describing the bard's songs of Troy. Many retellings of the *Iliad* stuck closely to the epic, and so also did not mention the Horse: one in *Chatterbox* (1866–1953) in 1882 was so faithful that a supplement was included to explain the heroes' fates. It briefly linked the Horse to discoveries at Hisarlik:

Troy was taken soon after the death of Hector, by means of a wooden horse, which was brought into the city. Inside it several of the bravest Greeks were concealed.⁶⁹

One of the most detailed accounts of the Horse appears in the most eccentric retelling. Three years after *Chatterbox* retold the *Iliad*, *Our Young Folk's*

⁶⁹ Anonymous, "Supplement to the Tales of Troy", *Chatterbox*, 11 November 1882, 407.

Weekly Budget (rebranded as *Young Folk's Paper*) drew on many of the cyclic epics and mythographers' traditions as well as the *Iliad* and *Aeneid* to create a morality tale, dressed up in exciting intrigue and battles. This serialized adaptation ends happily for the protagonists Achilles and Trojan slave-girl Briseis: in this version, the Greek princess Deidamia had married Achilles on Scyros, yet remains unrecognized in her disguise as Briseis – even by Achilles – until their happy reunion, when they are whisked away by the goddess Thetis to escape the fall of Troy and Achilles' fated death.⁷⁰ While they watch safely from a ship, the Trojans discover the “monstrous horse, grim and massive” (a description repeated many times) and debate whether to take it into Troy: Aeneas argues against “yon monstrous idol” and spells out the blasphemy of tearing down the god-built city wall for “the object of their infatuation”, but, “while the wiser looked on with horror, the rabble harnessed themselves again to the idol, and dragged it up the rough incline”.⁷¹

Serializations of the whole of Virgil's epic, on which the interaction with the Horse was based here, were rare: it was probably less appealing since the *Aeneid* was a school staple, and so, perhaps, too well known.⁷² Another story in *Young Folk's*, which was told in 1871 and reprinted in 1889, drew more directly on *Aeneid* 2.13–56:

Minerva then directed a large horse to be built, wholly of wood, and, when it was completed, the bravest warriors concealed themselves in it [...]. The Trojans, supposing the war to be at an end, [...] drew the mammoth wooden horse into their city, and engaged in riotous feasting. What to do with the horse was a question of serious debate. Some were for burning it, others for throwing it from the city, and others still for consecrating it to Minerva.

Rather than emphasizing the Trojans' blasphemy, this anonymous writer promoted an anti-war message, pointing out that “many die to redeem or redress the wrongs of a few individuals. Who would not wish that it were otherwise?”⁷³

All these examples of nineteenth-century children's encounters with the Trojan Horse hinged on the balance between expecting prior knowledge or providing

⁷⁰ Chapter 32: C.A. Read, “Achilles, the Young Hero of Thessaly”, *Young Folk's Paper*, 6 June 1885, 388.

⁷¹ Chapter 33: C.A. Read, “Achilles, the Young Hero of Thessaly”, *Young Folk's Paper*, 13 June 1885, 403.

⁷² *Nota bene*, the *Aeneid* formed the basis for the Wooden Horse in Charlotte M. Yonge, *Aunt Charlotte's Stories of Greek History*, London: Marcus Ward & Co., 1876, 81.

⁷³ Anonymous, “Tales of Ancient Days”, *Our Young Folk's Weekly Budget*, 5 August 1871, 255; reprinted as “Mount Ida, or, The Siege of Troy”, *Young Folk's Paper*, 28 September 1889, 203.

sufficient detail for the context. Wallis's *Universal History* game, in which the Trojan Horse symbolized Greek epic, as well as the Trojan War, rewarded players for their knowledge of the accepted version. In allocating the Trojan War, symbolized by the Horse, an equal slot to other historical events, this game promoted Greek epic as a step towards British imperial monarchy and Victorian technological achievement. Yet, while the booklet both offered the opportunity to learn about the Trojan War and Homer, and rewarded players who already knew the Horse's context, or remembered it from reading the *Explanation* earlier in the game, the information given was misleading: so important was the symbolism of the Trojan Horse that it was assumed it must have been part of the canonical *Iliad*.

Players of this game would have been primed to notice innovations, nineteen years after Wallis's first issue, or seven years before his updated version, in the popular entertainments at Astley's Amphitheatre. *Giant Horse* at the circus literally brought the Trojan Horse to life, while the miniature recreation at home enabled family creativity. Both Wallis and Astley emphasized Troy's destruction, but mitigated this loss by highlighting the Trojan Horse as the essential step in the fall of the city and Aeneas' foundation of Rome, or (at the circus) the necessary means to Paris' successful courting of the (unmarried) Helen of Troy.

As in Wallis's game, in which all of history coexisted, and Astley's equestrian extravaganza, in which Egyptian mummies escorted the Horse into Troy, both the stories of "Olden Times" and of Leonora encouraged the juxtaposition of diverse toys. Of course, without using diaries or memoirs, we cannot know how these combinations were played out: whether the Horse was menacing or hopeful, and whether Troy was saved or destroyed. The periodical interpretations of the Trojan Horse, however, which are overtly moralistic, demonstrate more awareness of their readers' likely reactions. The coexistence of accepted versions of the Horse alongside adaptations suggests that readers would have been aware of the innovations.

Tales of the Homeric epics for children usually promoted morals. A story ostensibly about Penelope "the faithful" in *Our Young Folk's* caught boys' interest by starting with the warriors and then stressed how "[b]eauty only never made a man happy, and it never will", while *Girls' Own* emphasized that Helen's "life was darkened by the remembrance of Paris and the noble chiefs who had died for her sake".⁷⁴ As we saw, the *Aeneid* was also employed to advance anti-war messages: prior to the interwar split between using classical myth to either

⁷⁴ Anonymous, "Penelope the Faithful", *Our Young Folk's Weekly Budget*, 15 April 1871, 127; Anonymous, "Helen", *Girl's Own Paper*, 18 August 1900, 726.

glorify war or promote peace, analysed by Murnaghan and Roberts, toy soldiers were also divisive.⁷⁵ It appears that the Trojan Horse was a prime example. Where “A Sea Story” used the traditional account of Troy’s fall to promote the acquisition of strategic knowledge for military victory and personal safety, Leonora’s decision to impart her traditional knowledge of the Trojan Horse to her toy causes her potentially dangerous adventures. Transformed into a new Trojan Horse, however, Bucephalus polices the schoolgirls’ truthfulness, judges their knowledge of Greek, and is finally an arbiter of mercy and forgiveness.

“A White Patch on Its Nose, and Painted a Beautiful Chocolate Brown”:⁷⁶ What Was the Significance of Disarming the Trojan Horse?

Happy endings to the Trojan War were common in mid-nineteenth-century burlesques, which saved Troy, had Aeneas become Dido’s brother-in-law instead of inciting Carthage’s enmity for Rome, and avoided Odysseus killing his wife Penelope’s suitors on his return to Ithaca.⁷⁷ These comedies, as I have argued elsewhere, evaded or defused the threat to Troy because it had been imagined too similarly to the classical culture of nineteenth-century London (for instance, Troy’s Amphitheatre of the Ancients looked suspiciously like Astley’s Amphitheatre itself).⁷⁸ Wallis’s *Universal History* emphasizes the pitfall of this approach, which, as we have seen, underpinned some instances of the Trojan Horse as a toy, and complicated its use in all cases. Wallis’s chronological game affirms Troy’s destruction, followed by Aeneas’ founding of Rome, and Rome’s eventual conquest of Britain, leading ultimately to the Christian, British, Regency, and Victorian status quo which was epitomized in the central monarch’s portraits.

⁷⁵ Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, “Armies of Children: War and Peace, Ancient History and Myth in Children’s Books after World War One”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, “Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity” 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 219–240; Kenneth D. Brown, *The British Toy Business: A History since 1700*, London: The Hambledon Press, 1996.

⁷⁶ Goddard, “Leonora and the Wooden Horse”, 364.

⁷⁷ See, e.g., F.C. Burnand, *Dido: A Tragical, Classical, and Original Burlesque in One Act*, London: T.H. Lacy, 1860, and F.C. Burnand, *Ulysses, or, The Iron-Clad Warrior and the Little Tug of War*, London: T.H. Lacy, 1865; for the latter, see Bryant Davies, ed., *Victorian Epic Burlesque*, 219–269.

⁷⁸ See Bryant Davies, *Troy, Carthage and the Victorians*, Fig. 3.20 (unpaginated colour plate).

The Trojan Horse as amusement must be coloured by its wider presence in the cultural and political landscape. For instance, the Horse illustrated manufacturers' collecting card sets, a popular marketing tool into the twentieth century, which told the whole story of the Trojan War through visually appealing snapshots.⁷⁹ At the other end of the spectrum, overlap between adults' and children's consumption, and visual, literary, and performance cultures is reflected in the fact that a spectacular oil painting of *The Trojan Horse* by Henri-Paul Motte (1874) was reproduced in the children's magazine *Good Things for the Young of All Ages*.⁸⁰ Accompanying it was a smattering of passages from the *Aeneid*. Ironically, the rather tedious compilation started with – in untranslated Latin – Horace's opinion of the power of visual evidence (*Ars P.* 179–182). Before stating his preference for the classic 1697 translation of the *Aeneid* over John Conington's much more recent 1866 version, and embarking upon his selection of Trojan Horse descriptions (in Conington's version),⁸¹ the author Henry Scott signalled the myth's wider resonance in nineteenth-century culture and politics: "We have all heard of the Trojan horse, but this picture [...] may give us quite new ideas about it".⁸²

In the same year that *Kind Words* had advocated playing with Trojan Horses, and well before Schliemann's excavations at Hisarlik suggested the actual destruction of a Troy-like city, the Horse was the subject of several speeches in Parliament. This "greatest single instance of dueling with Latin quotations in the House of Commons"⁸³ was between William Ewart Gladstone (1809–1898), then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and Robert Lowe (1811–1892), who took over that office on Gladstone's appointment as Prime Minister. Their debates concerned the Reform Bill of 1866, proposed legislation which would extend the vote to skilled working men, enabling roughly one in four, rather than one in five, men to vote. Gladstone's opening speech, in favour of the bill, argued:

⁷⁹ See, e.g., Liebig Company's collectible card series advertising their famous Fleisch-Extract (concentrated beef stock): *The Trojan War*, No. 5 (1892); see Getty Images Hulton Editorial #173343119, <https://www.gettyimages.co.uk/detail/news-photo/the-wooden-horse-is-led-into-the-town-from-engraving-news-photo/173343119> (accessed 4 June 2020).

⁸⁰ Scott, "The Trojan Horse", 605.

⁸¹ John Conington, *The Aeneid of Virgil, Translated into English Verse*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1866, 35–45.

⁸² Scott, "The Trojan Horse", 605.

⁸³ Joseph S. Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life in the Age of Gladstone*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012, 148.

We cannot consent to look upon this large addition, considerable although it may be, to the political power of the working classes of this country as if it were [...] some Trojan horse approaching the walls of the sacred city, and filled with armed men, bent upon ruin, plunder, and conflagration. We cannot join in comparing it with that *monstrum infelix* – we cannot say –

– Scandit fatalis machina muros,

Fœta armis: mediæque minans illabitur urbi.”⁸⁴

I believe that those persons whom we ask you to enfranchise ought rather to be welcomed as you would welcome recruits to your army or children to your family.⁸⁵

Although, as Joseph S. Meisel points out, the speeches were also full of quotations from Shakespeare, the Trojan Horse metaphor was clearly powerful. Thirty years later, journalists still thought the Trojan Horse’s role in political debate worth explaining. In a public update after his cataract operation, *A Penny Popular Monthly* informed readers that Gladstone had requested to have *Aeneid* Book 2 read aloud, which, it observed, must be full of memories, “[f]or it is the Second *Aeneid* that contains the story of the Trojan Horse, which figured so copiously in the great duels between Mr Gladstone and the late Lord Sherbrooke [Robert Lowe] in the Reform debates of a generation ago”. It is fitting that the paper described Gladstone “reverting to his old hobby-horse”: it is entirely likely that he and Lowe might have played Wallis’s *Universal History* as children or even, as young men, assisted in a family outing to, or recreation of, *Giant Horse* at Astley’s.⁸⁶

In subsequent decades, in the wake of Schliemann’s claims to have found Homer’s Troy in ruins, as well as Agamemnon’s Mycenae, the Horse in adult culture could be both comic and moralistic. *Funny Folks*, a cheaper, working-class *Punch* equivalent, claimed that the existence of the common measure “Troy weight” confirmed the existence of the city, but declared that what was open to “grave doubt is that childish story of the wooden horse”. This excessive rationalization disproved the Trojan Horse’s existence, while providing a comic etymology:

⁸⁴ *Aen.* 2.237–240; in John Dryden’s translation: “At length the fatal fabric mounts the walls, / Big with destruction [...]. It enters o’er our heads, and threatens the town”.

⁸⁵ Debate following first reading of the Parliamentary Reform – Representation of the People Bill, 12 March 1866 (*Hansard* 182, col. 59; *Hansard* is the record of UK parliamentary proceedings at Westminster). See further: Norman Vance, “Virgil and the Nineteenth Century”, in Charles Martindale, ed., *Virgil and His Influence*, Bristol: Bristol Classical Press, 1984, 169, and Meisel, *Public Speech and the Culture of Public Life*, 99–102.

⁸⁶ Anonymous, “A Personal Page”, *Picture Politics: A Penny Popular Monthly*, 16 June 1894, 11.

[I]n taking the city the troops cheered with the usual “Hip, hip”, which is short for “Hippos”, a horse. Thus it got to be a saying that the city was taken by a horse.⁸⁷

Punch itself, on the other hand, represented the Trojan Horse as a luxury carriage in its 1884 article on “The Horse and How to Ride Him”. A cross section reveals a relaxed soldier, still wearing his oversized pith helmet, reclining with a bottle and cup, pulling down the blinds.⁸⁸ In an opposite move to the story about Leonora’s toy horse, which came alive as it grew and transformed into the Trojan Horse, here a life-size horse, discussed alongside real horses, is imagined transforming into a vehicle.

Such comic associations, in both adults’ and children’s cultures, complicate interpretation of the Trojan Horse’s cultural significance. In the British cultural imagination, reversing the mythical fall of Troy led to uncertainty over historical consequences. Wallis’s *Universal History* was unequivocal that Aeneas’ foundation of Rome succeeded Troy’s fall, and that Britain succeeded Rome. This *translatio imperii*, or transfer of power, was a common feature of political and historical writing.

Periodicals, as we have seen, combined the two approaches: although the myth was subsumed into moral pedagogy and cultural didacticism, the Trojan Horse’s universal appeal as entertainment was also emphasized. This was what made an enthusiastic reviewer of the original Astley’s *Giant Horse* show declare that the “tale of Troy – nothing less than the Giant Horse himself!” – was an ideal choice for the Easter show at Astley’s, that “great event to which childhood begins about Christmas to look forward”.⁸⁹

The ultimate happy ending, for the Trojan Horse as well as both Greeks and Trojans, is proposed in an American interwar story. Published in 1829, John and Pauline Crawfords’ *Greek Tales for Tiny Tots* included, as Murnaghan and Roberts note, “conspicuously modernising” cartoon-like illustrations for “patently child-oriented revisions of the plot” which “convey to the book’s adult reader an adult’s knowing sense of the disparity between ancient myths and modern idioms”.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Anonymous, “Historic Doubts: The Trojan Horse”, *Funny Folks*, 15 December 1877, 190.

⁸⁸ Anonymous, “The Horse and How to Ride Him”, *Punch*, 18 October 1884, 181.

⁸⁹ *Astley’s Clippings from Newspapers, Vol. 3, 1806–1856*, 14 August 1833, item no. 1354, *Reconstructing Early Circus*, <https://dhil.lib.sfu.ca/circus/clipping/2740> (accessed 30 September 2020).

⁹⁰ John Raymond Crawford and Pauline Avery Crawford, *Greek Tales for Tiny Tots*, Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing Company, 1929, mentioned by Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah

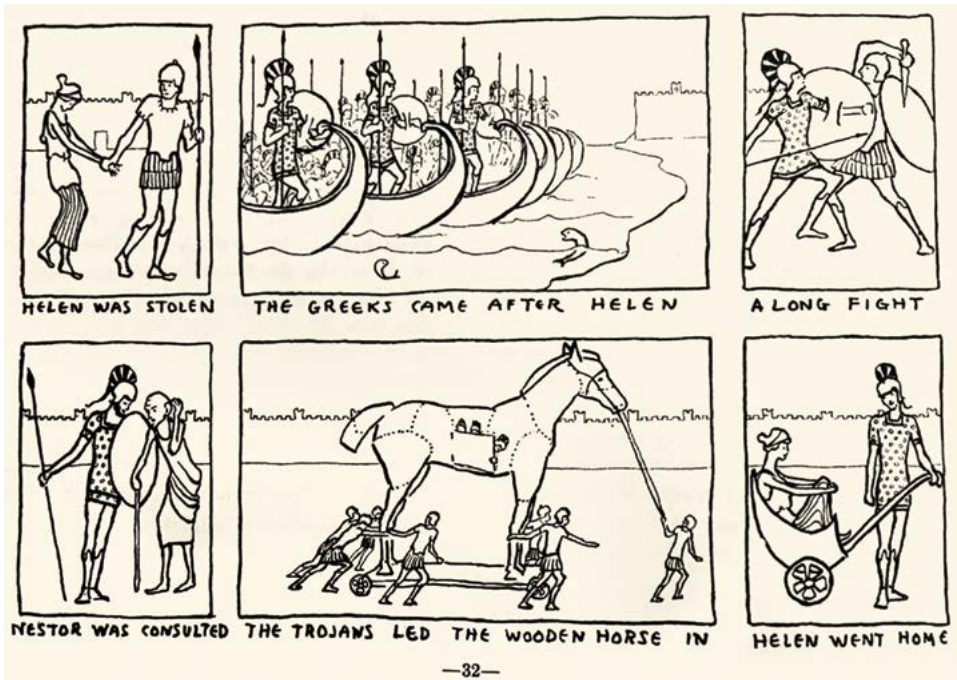


Figure 5: Sequence showing the Trojan Horse, from John Raymond Crawford and Pauline Avery Crawford, *Greek Tales for Tiny Tots*, Bloomington, IL: Public School Publishing Company, 1929, 32. Deborah H. Roberts’s collection. Used with her kind permission.

The captions to the storyboard (see Fig. 5) give the barest outline: “Helen was stolen; The Greeks came after Helen; A long fight; Nestor was consulted; The Trojans led the Wooden Horse in; Helen went home”, but the accompanying story fills out the details. The Trojan Horse is conceived as a strategy by which to retrieve Helen and end the long war, rather than to destroy the city:

They fought all that day, and all the next day, and every day for ten whole years. But still they couldn’t get into that large and elegant city and rescue their beautiful princess. So there was indeed a state of things. But finally Ulysses said to the Greeks, “If we had a wooden *horse*, we could get her out of *course*.”⁹¹

H. Roberts, “Myth Collections for Children”, in Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle, eds., *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, 94, and discussed by Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, *Childhood and the Classics*, ch. 3: “‘Steeped in Greek Mythology’: The First Half of the Twentieth Century”, 81–130.

⁹¹ Crawford and Crawford, *Greek Tales for Tiny Tots*, 32 (emphasis in the original).

While the italics suggest the burlesque-style rhyming also adopted by the *Kind Words* article, the subsequent description of Ulysses as an “honourable gentleman” echoes Gladstone and Lowe’s parliamentary debates. The description of the horse, however, focuses on its construction and lack of menace:

So the Greeks got a lot of hammers and saws, and a lot of big nails and a lot of little nails, and they made a huge and enormous wooden horse. And when it was done, they all climbed inside.

And when the Trojans saw it, they said, “Mercy, the Greeks have gone home, and they have left behind *this* funny old thing”. So they dragged the huge and enormous wooden horse into their large and elegant city, and tied it to a tree by the king’s palace.

And when night came, and everything was all dark, the Greeks got out of the horse, without anybody seeing them.⁹²

Unsurprisingly, in a book where, as Murnaghan and Roberts explain, Icarus is rescued by a mermaid and Apollo only plays tag with Daphne instead of raping her, after Helen is rescued, “they all lived happily every afterwards”. The twist in the tale, however, is like that found in the story of Leonora: the Wooden Horse, explicitly crafted from wood, somehow comes alive. Whereas Bucephalus had participated in an imaginative adventure, however, this horse gets hungry: “[T]he Trojans put their wooden horse in the Zoo, and went to see it every Sunday afternoon, and fed it peanuts, which it loved”.⁹³ This is the end of the Crawfords’ story, which surely raises more questions than it solves. Toppling the delicate balance found in periodicals between pedagogy and play, instead of smuggling in ideologically driven education for children under the guise of their amusement, it extends comic reversals of the myth to their (il)logical conclusion.

“Steeds of Magical Capacity”:⁹⁴ Conclusion

The Trojan Horse remains a powerful political metaphor. While extensive Latin quotations such as Gladstone’s no longer feature in *Hansard*, the Trojan Horse is often used as a metaphor. In political satire, a contemporary cartoon by Arend

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ Newspaper clipping, 14 August 1833, from British Library theatrical scrapbook of newspaper reviews of performances at London circus Astley’s Amphitheatre (*Astley’s Clippings from Newspapers*).

van Dam imagines President Trump as a Trojan Horse and depicts Russian troops emerging next to the Statue of Liberty as a comment on allegations of electoral interference.⁹⁵ In 1991, the phrase “Trojan Horse” recurred in American political news stories over President George H.W. Bush’s controversial appointment of Clarence Thomas as Supreme Court Justice. It was possibly in this context that the Horse’s starring role on the coveted cover position of *The New Yorker* on 25 November 1991 was seen (see Fig. 6). This image of an imagined stereotypical nursery (by the artist Kathy Osborn, who contributed a series of cover art at the time) is full of primary colours, where alphabet blocks almost spell out Troy. This striking image underscores again how the Trojan Horse epitomizes children’s basic toys: a colourful wooden horse and small, white, playful toy soldiers.

Horses, possibly imagined as Trojan ones, are among the earliest surviving evidence for children’s toys. In recent memory, a giant Trojan Horse marked the entrance to a toyshop in the Forum of Caesars Palace in Las Vegas, while Fisher-Price made a Trojan Horse, in its “Great Adventures” series, one of its few to animate a specific myth, and the Internet is awash with foam, paper, and plastic Trojan Horses. The commercial appeal of this myth remains strong. It is important to note that many examples of Trojan Horse toys are – like *Kind Words’* hobby-horse suggestion – created by users rather than marketed as such. On LEGO’s Ideas platform, where consumers can submit models for consideration to be produced as official, marketed sets, there have been several suggestions of a Trojan Horse, including one with moving joints, opening sides for soldiers to fit inside, and accompanying Scaean Gate (an archway).⁹⁶ Another Trojan Horse model, presented on a LEGO consumer’s blog, features the Horse facing Troy’s walls and heavily fortified Scaean Gate, guarded by Trojan soldiers.⁹⁷ Whether or not LEGO ever produces and markets such a set – very few proposals gain the 10,000 supporters in the time frame needed to reach LEGO’s “expert review” stage – these online communities reveal that many consumers, including adults, adapt existing leisure items to create and interact with ancient myth in new ways.

The Trojan Horse was, and remains, so widespread as child’s entertainment not only because it offers a way in to telling a canonical myth, but also because

⁹⁵ The cartoon is available on Arend van Dam’s website: Cartoons, Stripes, Illustraties, <http://www.arendvandam.com/actueel.php?position=795> (accessed 25 May 2020).

⁹⁶ David Hiller’s proposal for a 166-part LEGO Trojan Horse gained 100 supporters by 23 April 2018; see “Product Idea: Trojan Horse”, LEGO Ideas, https://ideas.lego.com/projects/e7fe56bc-7e57-44e6-8c52-bda5bdfddfbf/official_comments#content_nav_tabs (accessed 11 June 2020).

⁹⁷ Tommy [Williamson], “Trojan Horse”, *BrickNerd*, 23 January 2019, <http://bricknerd.com/home/trojan-horse-23-2019> (accessed 10 June 2020).

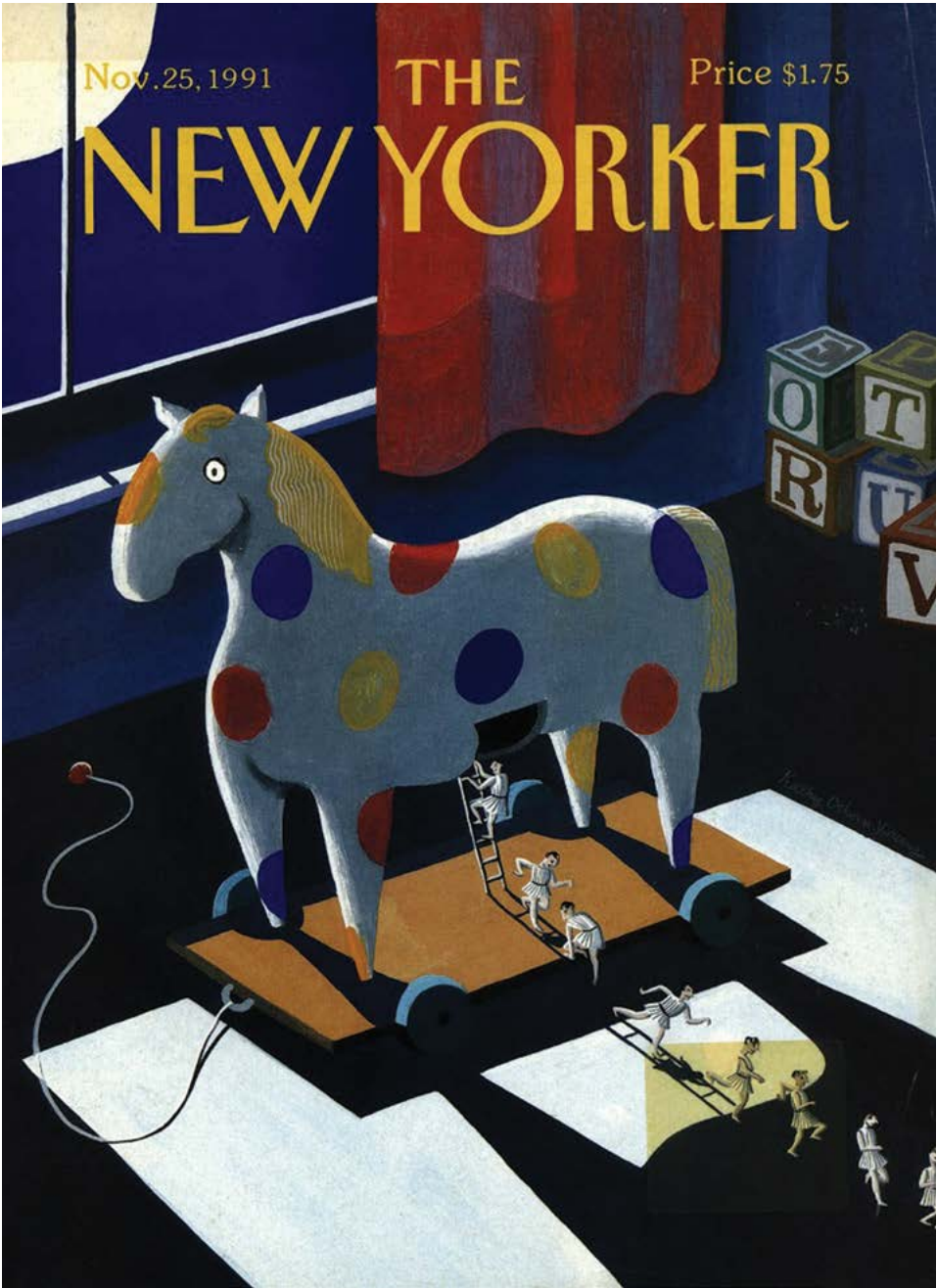


Figure 6: Cover of *The New Yorker*, 25 November 1991. Author's collection, scan by Robin Hellen. Permission to use the image kindly provided by the artist, Kathy Osborn (copyright owner), contacted with the helpful assistance of Susan Eley Fine Art Gallery.

existing toys can, as *Kind Words* so strongly emphasized, be repurposed. In the mid-Victorian toy boom, working-class children played with small wagons and carved animals, while the hobby-horses, rocking-horses, and leaden soldiers featured in *Kind Words* and *Little Folks* inhabited middle-class nurseries.⁹⁸ Toys, games, and periodical stories all disseminated specific versions of the Trojan Horse, but also enabled, even encouraged, creative responses. The objects and stories themselves cannot, as Ada Cohen observes, "answer questions such as whether ancient Greek children who played with a terracotta horse of the Geometric period thought they were pulling a horse, or whether they thought they were pulling the Trojan Horse".⁹⁹ Starting from the existence of commercial objects, entertainments and stories rely on evidence of use and popularity: reissued games preserved with worn appearances, rave reviews, and a souvenir market, and the fact that periodicals enabled rapid consumer feedback.

These interactive, ephemeral versions of the Trojan Horse afford insights into creative, innovative encounters with accepted classical myth, which were encouraged and enabled throughout the nineteenth century. They also demonstrate overlaps between juvenile, pedagogical, familial, and political spheres. Children were, throughout the century, supported in learning about the Trojan War and Horse. They were also encouraged to experiment with alternate outcomes to the accepted epic narratives. Associations with trickery, blasphemy, and violence remained, as we have seen, in some retellings. Yet the majority of representations disarmed and sanitized the Horse, using the stratagem as a way to bring about an innovative happy ending, prove a moral, and promote the importance of classical knowledge: the surprising popularity of the Trojan Horse, remade for children's amusement, persisted.

This historical case study of the widening accessibility of classical myth shows that the repurposing of the Trojan Horse as child's toy underlines our ability to remake myth; to reshape the stories and change plots so that tragedies can become comedies, and offer hope in difficult times. This distinctive weapon of mass destruction became the symbol of childhood entertainment. Even as the imagery of children's toys encapsulates the dual pedagogic and playful purpose of nineteenth-century children's amusements, the apparent innocence of the Wooden Horse enabled (and still enables) adults to smuggle in ideological education for children under the guise of amusement.

⁹⁸ Brown, *British Toy Business*, 41.

⁹⁹ Ada Cohen, "Introduction", in Ada Cohen and Jeremy B. Rutter, eds., *Constructions of Childhood in Ancient Greece and Italy*, "Hesperia Supplement" 41, Princeton, NJ: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 2007, 11.

PART II

The Roots of Hope



MYTH AND SUFFERING IN MODERN CULTURE: THE DISCURSIVE ROLE OF MYTH FROM OSCAR WILDE TO WOODKID

The real substratum of myth is not
a substratum of thought, but of feeling.

Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, 1944

The mythization of the world is not finished.

Bruno Schulz, "Mityzacja rzeczywistości"
[The Mythization of Reality], 1936

Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1920–2013), the influential Polish-Jewish-German literary critic, believed that "there are only two great subjects of literature. One is evanescence: the fact that people get old and pass away. Everything passes. The second subject is human suffering regardless of the epoch. Antigone in jeans suffers the same as of yore".¹ And yet, there is an unexamined belief that says children's literature, as if exempt from this unwritten law, is easy. Easy to read, easy to write – in a word: fun. Indeed, literature for children need not be difficult, but neither is it any good if it is facile. In its briefest and most intense form, that of a folk or fairy tale, there is already a great condensation of meaning. Ultimately, it is meaning, not entertainment, that human beings seek in life, and the quest for meaning that is reflected in children's literature begins very early, with the first questions that a three-year-old asks her mother or father. Death, loss, and suffering are, therefore, most natural elements of both children's and young adults' literature and art.

¹ Marcel Reich-Ranicki, "Polacy nie zasługują na poezję Tuwima" [The Poles Do Not Deserve Tuwim's Poetry], interview by Angelika Kuźniak and Agata Tuszyńska, *Duży Format* [The Big Format], 28 October 2008, http://wyborcza.pl/duzyformat/1,127290,5849827,Polacy_nie_zasluguja_na_poezje_Tuwima.html (accessed 28 April 2020): "Tak naprawdę istnieją dwa wielkie tematy literatury. Jeden to przemijanie. Że ludzie się starzeją i przemijają. Wszystko mija. Drugi temat to obraz ludzkich cierpień niezależnych od epoki. Antygona w dżinsach cierpi tak samo jak dawniej". All quotations have been translated by K.J., unless stated otherwise.

In the first decades of the twenty-first century, there has been an avalanche of children's books. If one walks into the children's section of a large bookshop, one is immediately struck by a curious phenomenon: there are beautiful covers, lots of tempting gadgets, books with buttons, books with shoelaces, books with-in boxes, books with golden necklaces and pendants, books with games, books with tools, books with wheels. One will find books that advertise their ability to teach children about texture, as if children lived in a vacuum without people, plants, fabrics, and utensils. Including books for children as young as one year old. Books that insult the youngest readers by the presumption that everything for children has to be in loud, primary colours, and every character has to have big eyes and be an animal. Such so-called books stand in sharp contrast to the treasury of both ancient and modern stories – myths, fairy tales, and contemporary authorial mythopoeic works – that address both suffering and evanescence as well as some of the other most painful topics that there are: orphanhood, loneliness, death, unrequited love. In what follows I will consider the role of both ancient myth and modern mythopoeia in confronting these issues.

The Inevitability of Mythology

In *Language and Myth* (1925), Ernst Cassirer analyses the interconnectedness of two basic human prerogatives: that of communication in language and of myth-making. In his analysis he goes back to the thought of Max Müller, who claims that "[m]ythology is inevitable, it is natural, it is an inherent necessity of language, if we recognize in language the outward form and manifestation of thought [...]. Depend upon it, there is mythology now as there was in the time of Homer, only we do not perceive it, because we ourselves live in the very shadow of it".²

Using Cassirer's fundamental ideas on mythical thinking developed in his *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (1923–1929), and later presented again in a more succinct form in *An Essay on Man* (1944), I analyse the persistence of myth in modern literature for children and youth. I focus first on two canonical authors, Oscar Wilde ("The Birthday of the Infanta" from the volume *A House of Pomegranates*, 1891) and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (*Le Petit Prince*, 1943), and demonstrate how they both employ a mythical substratum that allows for

² Max Müller, "On the Philosophy of Mythology", lecture at the Royal Institution in London, 1871, quoted from Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. Susanne K. Langer, New York, NY: Dover Publications, 2012 (ed. pr. 1925), 5.

a combining of the two traditional literary forms, the myth and the fairy tale, into a seamless new genre. The issues of overcoming suffering, loss, and death are at the core of the two authors' oeuvre, as both hark back to tragedy and Baroque tragic drama as well as to myth.

In the second part of my paper, I will turn to the contemporary expression of the mythical chronotope, both in children's literature and in other media. I will briefly mention the direct and somewhat reductive renderings of the Ancient Greek myths in such novels for young readers as Katherine Marsh's two volumes, *The Night Tourist* (2010) and *The Twilight Prisoner* (2014), which make overt use of, respectively, the story of Eurydice and the myth of Demeter and Persephone, but stage them both in twenty-first-century New York City and its Underworld. In psychological terms, the original novel and its sequel deal with loss and mourning as well as with the role of friendship in adolescence.

Last but not least, I will analyse the video clips and the lyrics of the French artist Woodkid's first musical album, *The Golden Age* (2013). As the music and the imagery were immediately used by Ubisoft in their action-adventure video game series *Assassin's Creed III* (2013), as well as in dozens of other trailers, films, and advertisements, the entire concept album reached an unprecedented number of young people and children. I will demonstrate how the ostensibly ultra-modern medium nonetheless makes use of mythical discourse in the depiction and overcoming of violence, trauma, and addiction. Mythical thinking, it seems, persists up to our era, and the mythical discourse lends itself to the representation of the suffering, grief, and, occasionally, resilience that accompany rites of passage from childhood into adulthood.

Myth-Making Creatures

"There is no natural phenomenon and no phenomenon of human life that is not capable of a mythical interpretation, and which does not call for such an interpretation",³ claims Cassirer in a radically generous and inclusive definition of "mythical". This broad take is, albeit momentarily, useful here because it allows for a universal and a general approach to both classical myth – in any culture – and to modern myth-making. It makes possible the definition of the human being as a myth-making creature. At the same time, Cassirer points out

³ Ernst Cassirer, *An Essay on Man*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1944, 73.

that “[a] theory of myth, is, however, from the beginning laden with difficulties”.⁴ To him, myth is fundamentally non-theoretical, which explains perhaps why thinkers have been grappling with it for so long: “It defies and challenges our fundamental categories of thought”.⁵ In examining the mythical propensity of the human mind, Cassirer traces its interpretation from the English philosopher Francis Bacon’s *The Wisdom of the Ancients* (1609) through Sigmund Freud all the way to the Polish anthropologist Bronisław Malinowski’s *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (1926). He points out that Bacon interpreted myth as allegory, thus following in the long line of philosophical interpretation that has been practised since the Stoics. The weakness of such an approach, according to Cassirer, is that it isolates myth as something artificial and “a pretense for something else”.⁶ Such a conception of myth, he argues, portrayed it as a subconscious fiction that called for a conscious, scientific analysis in the process of which myth-making was reduced to a single motive.

Cassirer’s conclusion, one that fits in well with the understanding of the role of myth in contemporary literature and culture that I propose in my reading of Wilde, Saint-Exupéry, and Woodkid, is that “[m]yth combines a theoretical element and an element of artistic creation. What first strikes us is its close kinship with poetry”.⁷ Just as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, in *Essai sur l’origine des langues* (1781), posits the imperative to speak out as a consequence of human lyrical impulse, so Cassirer, too, believes that feeling lies at the basis of myth. If we proceed even further, Walter Benjamin, in his monumental study of Baroque tragic drama, takes great care to distinguish between tragedy as that which is rooted in myth, and the *Trauerspiel* as rooted in history.⁸ While it is not common to consider children’s literature as the playing ground of tragic characters, I suggest that there are several eminent examples of a modern combination of tragedy and tragic drama to be found in the canonical literature for children as well as in the most recent cultural production for young adults. The discursive

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ Ibidem, 74.

⁷ Ibidem, 75.

⁸ George Steiner, “Introduction”, in Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne, London and New York, NY: Verso, 1998, 16: “Tragedy is grounded in myth. It acts out a rite of heroic sacrifice. In its fulfillment of this sacrificial-transcendent design, tragedy endows the hero with the realization that he is ethically in advance of the gods, that his sufferance of good and evil, of fortune and desolation, has projected him into a category beyond the comprehension of the essentially ‘innocent’ though materially omnipotent deities (Artemis’ flight from the dying Hippolytus, Dionysus’ myopia exceeding the blindness of Pentheus)”.

value of myth persists even in contexts where tragedy is no longer the sole proper point of reference, for example, in Wilde's "emphatically ostentatious, gestural, and hyperbolic"⁹ stories for children.

Melancholy Echoes of Myth in Oscar Wilde

The title of Wilde's 1891 collection of fairy tales – *A House of Pomegranates* – at first approach sounds elegant enough, even if it is not altogether clear. When we consider, however, that the four stories contained therein – "The Young King", "The Birthday of the Infanta",¹⁰ "The Fisherman and His Soul", and "The Star Child" – are all excruciatingly painful to read (one might say exquisitely painful, as the pain is highly aestheticized and yet real) and none have even a semblance of a happy end, we will realize that *A House of Pomegranates* stands for a construct of four pomegranate seeds, each of which bears death. The opening signal of "The Birthday of the Infanta", that is, the eponymous Infanta herself, is not obviously mythological or even related to Antiquity. Rather, it might recall the image of Diego Velázquez's 1656 painting *Las meninas* (made famous by Michel Foucault in *Les mots et les choses*, 1968), as it features the Infanta Margherita. Wilde's Infanta is twelve years old and a semi-orphan, her mother having died six months after giving birth to her. This in itself makes the Infanta a suitable children's literature character, joining the ranks of protagonists both from fairy tales and classic children's stories. The melancholy king has his wife embalmed, visits her dead body once a month, and tries to awaken her "cold, painted face"¹¹ with mad kisses. There is a mythological echo in these lines, above all, of the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, although the return of the dead

⁹ Ibidem, 18.

¹⁰ A 2011 London theatrical production of "The Birthday of the Infanta" makes it explicit both that the setting is the seventeenth century and that the plot is meant to address the difficulties of adolescence; see Lyn Gardner, "The Birth of the Infanta: Review", *The Guardian*, 27 March 2011, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2011/mar/27/birthday-of-the-infanta-review> (accessed 29 April 2020): "Essentially, this is a story about difference and growing up and taking responsibility, in which the privileged young royal is a victim of the stiffened archaic attitudes of 17th-century court life. There's plenty of texture and emotional colour in this one-woman storytelling show, too, and there's even some audience participation. We become the children at the party, making a rose, offering it to the princess and even planting it in a garden".

¹¹ Oscar Wilde, "The Birthday of the Infanta", in Oscar Wilde, *A House of Pomegranates*, available at Project Gutenberg, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/873/873-h/873-h.htm#page31> (accessed 28 April 2020), transcribed by David Price from Oscar Wilde, *A House of Pomegranates*, 7th ed., London: Methuen & Co., 1915.

queen is less overt: the King beholds her in the face and the gestures of their daughter, the Infanta:

His whole married life, with its fierce, fiery-coloured joys and the terrible agony of its sudden ending, seemed to come back to him to-day as he watched the Infanta playing on the terrace. She had all the Queen's pretty petulance of manner, the same wilful way of tossing her head, the same proud curved beautiful mouth, the same wonderful smile – *vrai sourire de France* indeed – as she glanced up now and then at the window, or stretched out her little hand for the stately Spanish gentlemen to kiss. But the shrill laughter of the children grated on his ears, and the bright pitiless sunlight mocked his sorrow, and a dull odour of strange spices, spices such as embalmers use, seemed to taint – or was it fancy? – the clear morning air. He buried his face in his hands, and when the Infanta looked up again the curtains had been drawn, and the King had retired.¹²

The proximity of life and death is striking here, as it often is in myth: one step, or one fateful turn, and the promise of life turns into the certainty of death. The reflection of the dead wife's face in the living Infanta's visage ends as if in a burial – of the King's face in his hands. Within the space of a single paragraph, Wilde's story mirrors the Orphic katabasis. The unsuspecting reader is taken for a ride as it were, only to reap the ancient wisdom, "the Greeks' instinctive realization that loving is essentially a one-way street, and that mourning is its continuation".¹³

For the Infanta's birthday, various entertainments are staged to amuse her, including a make-believe bullfight and a "semi-classical tragedy" performed by wooden puppets. In a scene that recalls the standard play within a play familiar from *Hamlet* but that also prefigures the infamous passage in Marcel Proust's *A la recherche du temps perdu* (1913) in which the servant Françoise cries over the description of the kitchen maid's symptoms found in a medical textbook but not over the maid's suffering itself, the Infanta and her entourage weep over the tragic fate of the marionettes but later fail to be moved by the real-life death of the Dwarf:

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ Joseph Brodsky, "Ninety Years Later", in Joseph Brodsky, *On Grief and Reason: Essays*, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995, 412 (on Rainer Maria Rilke's poem "Orpheus. Eurydice. Hermes").

The arena was then cleared amidst much applause, and the dead hobby-horses dragged solemnly away by two Moorish pages in yellow and black liveries, and after a short interlude, during which a French posture-master performed upon the tightrope, some Italian puppets appeared in the semi-classical tragedy of *Sophonisba* on the stage of a small theatre that had been built up for the purpose. They acted so well, and their gestures were so extremely natural, that at the close of the play the eyes of the Infanta were quite dim with tears. Indeed some of the children really cried, and had to be comforted with sweetmeats, and the Grand Inquisitor himself was so affected that he could not help saying to Don Pedro that it seemed to him intolerable that things made simply out of wood and coloured wax, and worked mechanically by wires, should be so unhappy and meet with such terrible misfortunes.¹⁴

The figure of the little Dwarf is an insertion of the ostensibly natural into the artifice of the court. Brought from the forest, grotesquely misshapen but unaware of his horrid form, the Dwarf performs for the Infanta and in doing so falls in love with her. As he looks for her after the performance, he finds a mirror instead. In a scene echoing Narcissus and foreshadowing Freud's *Das Unheimliche* (1919), the Dwarf sees a hideous form he at first fails to recognize as his own. The realization of his own monstrosity kills him. There follows a graphically brutal scene of the Infanta's uncle trying to revive him by slapping his dead cheek "with an embroidered glove":

"But why will he not dance again?" asked the Infanta, laughing.

"Because his heart is broken," answered the Chamberlain.

And the Infanta frowned, and her dainty rose-leaf lips curled in pretty disdain.

"For the future let those who come to play with me have no hearts," she cried, and she ran out into the garden.¹⁵

Wilde performs a sleight of hand here: it is easier to identify with the beautiful Infanta than with the rejected, misshapen Dwarf. Not only that: the Dwarf dies and the Infanta lives. But the lesson, if there be one, is that beauty lies within and that selfish love is no love at all. As Saint-Exupéry will affirm half a century later, "[o]ne sees clearly only with the heart. Anything essential

¹⁴ Wilde, "The Birthday of the Infanta".

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

is invisible to the eyes".¹⁶ The Infanta's beauty and even her rank is ultimately short-lived, while the Dwarf's martyrdom and sacrifice are eternal. "Myths are essentially a revelatory genre. They deal in the interplay of gods and mortals or, to put it a bit more bluntly, of infinities with finalities",¹⁷ writes Joseph Brodsky.

The mirror of the self is never right: that is the mirror that can kill an anorexic or bulimic teenager. It is the other's loving gaze that is necessary sustenance. The real death is the inability to be moved. Like Hans Christian Andersen's mechanical nightingale in the 1843 fairy tale, the Infanta is not capable of bringing about life. Rather, infected by death in infancy, she herself is the angel of death. Thus, through the underlying layer of mythical discourse, Wilde is able to lead the reader towards a revelation: the Infanta, like Peter Pan after her, is the seductive model of the heartless, loveless child-tyrant.

Mythical Representation of Space in *The Little Prince*

Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*, however indebted it might be to the same substratum of myth, points to a selfless, affectively charged model of relation. The Pilot and the Prince are not only alter egos: in looking back towards his own childhood the Pilot repeats Orpheus' mistake and loses his beloved. Like Eurydice, the Little Prince is bitten by a serpent, but, unlike her, it is through death that he is returned home. Without making much more of a claim to the mythical discourse in Saint-Exupéry's text, I would like to linger on the auratic landscape that ends the novel. In order to do this, I turn to an unlikely source: contemporary urban design. Its theoreticians believe that any space can be permeated with an aspect that distinguishes it from the surroundings and imbues it with a particular meaning:

Cassirer points out that "what seems to remain as the relatively solid core" of the mythical "is simply the impression of the extraordinary, the unusual, the uncommon" (*Mythical* 77). This "expressive meaning attaches to perception itself, in which it is apprehended and immediately experienced" (68). In other words, the affective impression of the unusual that

¹⁶ Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *Le Petit Prince*, Paris: Gallimard, 1999 (ed. pr. 1943), 74: "On ne voit bien qu'avec le coeur. L'essentiel est invisible pour les yeux". Translation after Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, *The Little Prince*, trans. Richard Howard, San Diego, CA, New York, NY, and London: Harcourt, 2000, 63.

¹⁷ Brodsky, "Ninety Years Later", 417.

is typical for mythical thinking directly permeates spatial “representations” or images. From a mythical perspective, this means that concrete objects and places are viewed in terms of the presence or absence of affective magical forces. Along the lines of this distinction, the environment is molded into mythical representations. Some objects and places present themselves to the mythical consciousness with such extraordinary force that they seem magical or sacred, and detach themselves as particularly meaningful from their indifferent surroundings. As such, spatial representation distinguishes between enchanted, affectively charged, extraordinary places, on the one hand, and indifferent, profane ones, on the other: “All reality and all events are projected into the fundamental opposition of the sacred and the profane” (75).¹⁸

The Little Prince, somewhat like Peter Pan before him, is an ageless being out of time. Like Peter Pan, he comes out of the air as it were, and like Peter he is afraid of death even though he seems immortal. The landscape that the reader is left with at the end of the book has all the qualities associated with the sacred and the extraordinary. The catastrophic beginning – the Pilot’s crash in the desert – is a literal downturn, while the Prince’s passing, on the other hand, is a re-turn. The final landscape is suggested with the bare minimum: two lines only, and yet it offers an archetypal *locus* where the Prince appears and where he disappears. Like a potential Messiah, this is also where he might come again.¹⁹ After the narrative of trauma and rupture, the text ends with hope: hope for an answer, a response. No longer part of the binding totality of myth, Saint-Exupéry’s story is nonetheless rooted in its tragic aftermath. Both the Pilot

¹⁸ Bart Keunen and Sofie Verraest, “Tell-Tale Landscapes and Mythical Chronotopes in Urban Designs for Twenty-First Century Paris”, *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* 14.3 (2012), <https://doi.org/10.7771/1481-4374.2038>. Quotations are from Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, vol. 2: *Mythical Thought*, trans. Ralph Manheim, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955.

¹⁹ This landscape is charged affectively because the Little Prince has graced it with his presence. At the same time when Saint-Exupéry was writing his novel in war-ravaged Europe, in America Theodor Adorno was putting together his *Minima moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben*. In it he describes the American landscape as devoid of expression; see the English edition: *Minima moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott, London and New York, NY: Verso, 1978, 48: “It is as if no-one had ever passed their hand over the landscape’s hair. It is uncomfortable and comfortless. And it is perceived in a corresponding way”. On the Messianic hero in children’s contemporary culture, see the chapter by Michael Stierstorfer, “From an Adolescent Freak to a Hope-Spreading Messianic Demigod: The Curious Transformations of Modern Teenagers in Contemporary Mythopoetic Fantasy Literature (*Percy Jackson, Pirates of the Caribbean, The Syrena Legacy*)”, in this volume, 219–229.

and the Prince survive their own deaths. The dominion of death is not absolute: the lyrical is an antidote to fatalism. Unlike the purposeful, not to say contrived, twenty-first-century renditions of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth in Katherine Marsh's *The Night Tourist* and of the myths of Persephone and Eros in *The Twilight Prisoner* – the story of the Little Prince stands on its own.

Indeed, while Saint-Exupéry, himself involved in life-threatening missions and writing in the midst of World War Two, treats the subject of life and death with appropriate deftness, Marsh uses the main character's mother's death as a facile, almost manipulative lead into the plot. However rewarding it may be for an informed reader to find once again the ancient story of Orpheus and Eurydice retold, it is nearly offensive to be hit over the head with it (the Eurydice character in the book is called Euri, just so there is no doubt). While Wilde and Saint-Exupéry tread lightly, Marsh lays it on so thick that even her teenage readers perceive her stories as overdone (see reviews of the book on Goodreads).²⁰ Perhaps the trouble is in the context: Marsh's novels purport to be pedagogical, ostensibly promoting the Latin language and ancient mythology, but her characters are not believable; rather, they seem to be puppets fitted into a neo-mythical scheme of things that does not allow for fully developed humanity. Few of us have had a chance to meet an Infanta or even a dwarf, but Wilde ensures that we connect with those characters emotionally. The mythical stratum is hidden in both Wilde and Saint-Exupéry, while in Marsh it is put forth with the good intention of a bad teacher. As a result, her novels fail as carriers of authentic myth, falling instead into the category of the artificial: while they appeal to the scholastic, they miss the organic. They will, no doubt, continue to be assigned in school but will not survive on their own.

Woodkid's Mythopoetic Childhood

The Golden Age, the debut album of the French video director and singer Yoann Lemoine (b. 1983) known as Woodkid, puts forth the time-space of childhood and its loss as the defining elements of individuality. The twelve songs progress chronologically from a golden age of early innocence (Lemoine's Age of Wood), through a Blakean initiation into experience in the city (Age of Iron),

²⁰ "The Night Tourist by Katherine Marsh", Goodreads, https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/1239219.The_Night_Tourist (accessed 10 May 2020).

to subsequent loss of self and its recuperation through art (Age of Marble).²¹ The topos which replaces the age of innocence is visually rendered as a forbidding black-and-white metropolis. Not an idealized, domesticated city akin to Walter Benjamin's Berlin in his *Berliner Kindheit* (written in the 1930s, ed. pr. 1950), but a cold, chartered hell. Religion and society – as in William Blake and other Romantics – are the oppressive forces. The child fights back by conjuring the demons of his imagination, but the worm is already within: drugs, sex, and self-indulgence make the young man a prisoner in the city.

A successor to the poetic outlook of Blake, Rainer Maria Rilke, and Andrei Tarkovsky, Lemoine's chronotope of childhood is the mystical source of self. Peter Pan may have remained a boy forever but real childhood is the one that is lost forever. Just as Odysseus cannot return to Ithaca because neither he nor Ithaca are the same, Woodkid's lyrical persona knows full well that a return to childhood is precluded. Nonetheless, he builds his world on the foundations of early bliss, shattered into smithereens when the adult petrification cracks.

Spatially, Woodkid's "Run Boy Run",²² as realized in Lemoine's own video clip, begins as a forbidding, colourless cityscape of unfreedom. The main character, the eponymous Boy, breaks away on his own, and only during his flight acquires some chthonic companions that furnish him with arms and run alongside. The beasts may seem monstrous but they are in fact benevolent. Like the young protagonist in Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), the Boy is more at home with the wild beasts than in the restraining environment of society. The last image of the video, that of the triumphant Boy about to board a tall ship, is a recapitulation not merely of every little boy's dream, but also of the archetypal adventure: a voyage.

²¹ Here I have in mind William Blake's painful poem "London" from *Songs of Experience* (in William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Songs of Experience*, New York, NY: Dover Publications, 2017, 41) which paints the metropolis in dystopian terms: "I wander thro' each charter'd street, / Near where the charter'd Thames does flow / And mark in every face I meet / Marks of weakness, marks of woe". In such a modern City the child is doomed to a life of servitude, like the little Chimney Sweeper. Blake's experience of London was one of the advent of the Industrial Revolution. It is fitting that Woodkid's age of experience is an Age of Iron since it was the increased production of iron that fuelled the Industrial Revolution. Blake's mythopoetic visions of both apocalyptic and millennial modernity as well as his focus on the importance of the child as a source of inspiration and imagination make him a lucid predecessor of twentieth-century authors and artists such as Wilde, Saint-Exupéry, and even Woodkid.

²² At the time of writing the present article, the video had over 75 million views on YouTube; see Woodkid, "Run Boy Run", YouTube, 21 May 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lm-c21V-zBq0> (accessed 10 May 2020).

The appeal of the hero is universal because the Boy, just like the Little Prince, is not of this world. Mythical creatures must help him to escape because he is, after all, a child: the feat he undertakes needs supernatural support. The plot is drawn with utmost economy; like in a classical myth or fairy tale, there is no ornamentation. An event of great importance seems to precede the dramatic escape, propelling the Boy into the world. The body of the video consists of the hardship of the flight – it is effortful, dangerous, and almost manqué as at some point the Boy falls. He does not give up, and in this archetypal fashion makes it to the shore where a ship meets him. It is only the beholder's willing imagination that suggests that the voyage is that of the Argonauts, because what boy has not dreamed of the Golden Fleece? The Golden Age of the album's title is, nonetheless, profoundly ironic: however much one would like to hold on to it, it is always replaced by a fallen era of Iron. In the next video, entitled "Iron",²³ the Boy is already a young man, forced to fight his way through the dystopian reality of a marble city. While his struggle is not altogether lonesome, he is nonetheless utterly alone in the end. Broken, he falls onto the world in a myriad pieces.

In the video clip entitled "I Love You",²⁴ the innocent Boy is already dead. The death may be symbolic, because his character continues in the guise of a young man, but all the same there is a sense of irreversibility of time. In the end, the protagonist undergoes a metamorphosis worthy of Ovid: he is petrified.²⁵ No longer pliable and flexible, he is now made of marble, a noble and beautiful material that can, however, crack. The suffering of unrequited love that killed Narcissus and Wilde's Dwarf is represented as the acute pain of becoming fossilized. In a reversal of the myth of Galatea, in which the love is requited and therefore the stone turns into a living being, in "I Love You" the human being turns to stone.²⁶ Writing about one of his books, *Sklepy cynamonowe* [Cinnamon Shops, 1933], the Polish writer Bruno Schulz has perhaps seized the nature of the mythical discourse in its relation to childhood:

²³ 81 million views as of the writing of the present text; see Woodkid, "Iron", YouTube, 29 March 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vSkb0kDacjs> (accessed 10 May 2020).

²⁴ Woodkid, "I Love You", YouTube, 4 February 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQu8FOjXdI> (accessed 12 September 2017).

²⁵ For a useful discussion of petrification in modern and postmodern literature, see Theodore Ziolkowski, *Ovid and the Moderns*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005.

²⁶ My thanks to Katarzyna Marciniak for having pointed out this meaningful reversal.

The elements of the mythological idiom operating here rise out of that misty region of early childhood fantasies, forebodings, anticipations, terrors which is the true spawning ground of mythical thinking.²⁷

* * *

Modern mythopoeia, whether it be in the guise of canonical children's literature, such as Oscar Wilde's or Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's tales, or Woodkid's post-modern video clips, seems to follow a primal call. Already Bronisław Malinowski observed that the Melanesian natives make use of magic and myth only when their task is out of the ordinary, requiring superior effort. Thus, too, our most civilized texts return to their mythical sources when fortitude, solace, and hope are needed. Like an underground river, myth may have all but disappeared from our daily intercourse, but its current still runs strong right below the surface.

²⁷ Bruno Schulz, "A Description of the Book *Cinnamon Shops*", in Bruno Schulz, *Letters and Drawings of Bruno Schulz: With Selected Prose*, ed. Jerzy Ficowski, trans. Walter Arendt and Victoria Nelson, New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1988, 154.

“FOR THE CHILDREN”: CHILDREN’S COLUMNS
IN AUSTRALIAN NEWSPAPERS
DURING THE GREAT WAR – MYTHIC HOPE,
OR MYTHIC INDOCTRINATION?

Since the colonization of Australia in 1788, there has been extensive importation of the ancient cultures of Greece and Rome via British and European traditions. Colonists, particularly those of the elite classes, read and promoted classical texts; privileged education that included Greek and Latin (initially almost exclusively for boys); admired neoclassical art and displayed copies of originals. The intentions behind this importation were varied, but common motivations included the desire to replicate the living conditions of well-heeled homes as well as public amenities such as libraries, museums, and gentlemen’s clubs; the belief that the land and its peoples were without the markers of “civilization”; and the perceived instructional benefit of inspirational art and literature to assist in the interpretation of an alien country. As Simon Ryan has stated in his work on cartography, exploration, and the construction of Australia:

The antipodality of Australia joins with its construction as a *tabula rasa* to produce the continent as an inverted, empty space desperately requiring rectification and occupation.¹

With the arrival of the First Fleet at Botany Bay to establish the penal colony of New South Wales in 1788 – and even before, with the earlier explorations undertaken between 1606 and 1770 – the belief in the need for “rectification and occupation” of the blank map that was Australia began. Part of the construction

¹ Simon Ryan, “Inscribing the Emptiness: Cartography, Exploration and the Construction of Australia”, in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, eds., *De-Scribing Empire: Post-Colonialism and Textuality*, London: Routledge, 1994, 116.

of the new nation was a determined programme of classicizing a no man's land of nothingness. Among the books and pamphlets on board the First Fleet, for example, was Adam Ferguson's classically inspired *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*² and François Fénelon's *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses*.³ Captain Watkin Tench, a member of the First Fleet, could quote Milton's *Paradise Lost* from memory as well as Shakespeare and the Latin and Greek Classics, and may have carried such canonical works with him. Prior to the voyage of the First Fleet, and extant in one of Sydney Parkinson's sketchbooks, is a list of reading material he presumably carried onboard the *Endeavour*. Included in the list are: the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, the poems of Virgil, and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.⁴

In the earliest accounts of New South Wales, its Aboriginal peoples, landscapes, flora and fauna, there were consistent classical overtones – from quotations of Greek and Latin authors, to mythical comparisons, to theories of race, and reliance on ancient philosophies to communicate and interpret the colonization process. On the title page of *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*,⁵ there are three allegorical figures – Hope, Art, and Peace – cast in Grecian style, with a fourth figure, Labour, reminiscent of the Farnese Hercules (see Fig. 1). From the same publication is the engraving entitled *Natives of Botany Bay* – whose figures are reminiscent of Greek sculptural style, but bear little resemblance to the true physicality of the local peoples.⁶

From 1778, through the course of the long nineteenth century, the classical hold on Australia continued in multifarious forms, unabated. Part of this continuation was the result of the embedding of an imported classical curriculum in Australian schools, predominantly in elite single-sex grammar schools, from

² Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, ed. Fania Oz-Salzberger, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995 (ed. pr. 1767).

³ François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon, *The Adventures of Telemachus, the Son of Ulysses*, ed. O.M. Brack, Jr., introd. and notes by Leslie A. Chilton, trans. Tobias Smollett, Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1997; originally published as *Les aventures de Télémaque fils d'Ulysse* (La Haye: Adrian Moetjens, 1699).

⁴ Parkinson's artistic records of the *Endeavour's* explorations reference classical art, as well as the warrior codes and related tenets of classical works, such as the *Iliad*; see Rüdiger Joppien and Bernard Smith, *The Art of Captain Cook's Voyages*, vol. 1: *The Voyage of the Endeavour 1768–1771*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press and Australian Academy of the Humanities, 1985. For a copy of the extract from Parkinson's journal, see *ibidem*, 52, Plate 48 (Sydney Parkinson, Mem[orandum] of Books. BL Add. MS 9345, f.74^v).

⁵ Arthur Phillip, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay: With an Account of the Establishment of the Colonies of Port Jackson & Norfolk Island*, London: John Stockdale, 1789.

⁶ See Marguerite Johnson, "Indigeneity and Classical Reception in *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*", *Classical Receptions Journal* 6.3 (2014), 402–425.



Figure 1: Labour and Hope, Art, and Peace, title page of Arthur Phillip, *The Voyage of Governor Phillip to Botany Bay*, London: John Stockdale, 1790 (ed. pr. 1789), via Google Books.

the time of their establishment in the 1800s. For children of poor, working-class and lower-middle-class families, access to this curriculum came in the form of retellings of myths and legends, history lessons, and – outside the school environment – children’s pages and columns in newspapers and magazines.

I.

Children’s pages and columns have been common in the West since the nineteenth century.⁷ The first children’s magazine is thought to have been the French publication *L’ami des enfants*, first published in January 1782. In England, it was most likely *The Juvenile Magazine*, published for one year only in 1788. The *Children’s Magazine*, beginning in 1789, was the first of hundreds of such

⁷ See Rachel Bryant Davies’s chapter in this volume, “‘This Is the Modern Horse of Troy’: The Trojan Horse as Nineteenth-Century Children’s Entertainment and Educational Analogy”, 89–127.

publications in the United States. Unfortunately, however, like *The Juvenile Magazine*, its lifespan was short, lasting only four months. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the most popular American magazines were *Youth's Companion* (1827–1929), *Our Young Folks* (1865–1873), *St. Nicholas* (1873–1949), and *Harper's Young People* (1879–1899).

The magazines featured original stories, poems, and illustrations, as well as historical and human interest entries, some of which were based on classical themes. In the November 1873 issue of *St. Nicholas*, for example, there is a classically inspired riddle (47) and a story entitled "Hermann, the Defender of Germany" – a historical tale of "a young German prince [...] taken captive and carried to Rome [...] [i]n the time of the Emperor Augustus" (22).

When these pages and columns became part of newspapers, material from children's magazines was often reprinted in them. In 1876 in *The Queenslander*, there were stories called "Myths about the Stars", which were imported entries by English anthropologist and folklorist Edward Clodd (1840–1930).⁸ And an entry the following year,⁹ "The Heroes, or, Greek Fairy Tales", takes the form of an excerpt from the "Preface" of Charles Kingsley's 1856 anthology, *The Heroes, or, Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*. Here there is distinct moralizing; for example, the excerpt from Kingsley's "Preface" mingles biblical references and Christian morality with his myths:

But these Greeks, as St. Paul told them, forgot what God had taught them, and though they were God's offspring, worshipped idols of wood and stone, and fell at last into sin and shame, and then, of course, into cowardice and slavery, till they perished out of that beautiful land which God had given them for so many years. (10)

But there is also, importantly, an emphasis on the educational and moral benefits of Greek myths for children, as Kingsley goes on to write:

[N]ext to these old Romances, which were written in the Christian middle age, there are no fairy tales like those old Greek ones, for beauty, and wisdom, and truth, and for making children love noble deeds, and trust in God to help them through. (10)

⁸ See, e.g., Clodd's entry in "Children's Corner" entitled "Childhood of the World: Part II.XXI. Myths about Stars", *The Queenslander*, 8 January 1876. This is a particularly interesting entry in its use of comparative mythologies that situate the Greek myths of the stars within a broader cultural context.

⁹ "Children's Corner: The Heroes, or, Greek Fairy Tales", *The Queenslander*, 10 November 1877. Please note the abbreviated title as printed in the column.

Columns featuring Greek myths also mingled education with stories. On 26 November 1909, for example, the "Children's Column" from the South Australian newspaper the *Kapunda Herald* published an entry on flying machines beginning with the story of Daedalus and ending with information on mono-planes.¹⁰

The moral, Christian, and educational undertones of these retellings allowed the inclusion of what may now be defined as more mature issues in children's pages and columns in Australia. This was in keeping with the tenor of similar columns elsewhere that began to incorporate editorials and articles on world events, rather than focusing on past ones. These took the form of a history lesson told as a story (as in the example of "Hermann, the Defender of Germany"). These news topics were usually covered in a gentle, light style that reflected an editorial approach of informative but non-threatening edification.

2.

The case study here is from the column "For the Children", published in the *Australian Christian Commonwealth* on 25 September 1914. This was a weekly newspaper from South Australia, first published in 1901, with its title reflecting the federation of the Australian colonies into one nation that year. Methodist ministers edited the paper, which included sermons, snippets of general news, church events, obituaries, and advertisements. There was also a weekly "Sunday School" page that comprised lessons for children, the inaugural edition of which featured a section entitled "For Young Readers".¹¹ A "Children's Corner" was introduced in the 8 February 1901 edition and concentrated on matter-of-fact instructions and advice. The title of the column changed once more (in the same month) to "Young People's Corner" and then reverted to "Children's Corner" in April 1901.¹² Further changes were made as the editors may have

¹⁰ Children's Friend, "Children's Column", *Kapunda Herald*, 26 November 1909, 2. The *Kapunda Herald's* "Children's Column" was particularly successful, partly because its editor, "Children's Friend", collaborated with some ninety schools to promote contributions and competitions.

¹¹ In the inaugural edition of 4 January 1901, the section called "For Young Readers" was comprised of the story "The Angel of the New Year" (5). In the 18 January 1901 issue, "For Young Readers" printed a sermon called "Habit" (7). In the other two January editions of 1901, the segment was not included, although there were entries for children, including a lengthy essay on etiquette, morality, and general Christian values entitled "A Word to Young People" in a column called "Respect for the Hedge", based on Ecclesiastes 10:8 (11 January 1901, 19), and the essay "For the Boys: How to be Strong" (25 January 1901, 11).

¹² The first "Children's Corner" was brief, with an article on "Helping" (14). Tips on mathematical fractions comprised the entry on 15 February 1901 (11), while the 22 February 1901 edition (7),

sought the right tenor for the young readers or, more likely, adopted the title that accompanied each syndicated piece, and in the same month of the same year, the column "For Young Men" appeared (with an amended title – "For Our Boys" – on 3 May 1901). "Children's Corner" returned on 10 May 1901, but vanished again, replaced with a focus on adolescent girls and young women in two columns in the 17 May 1901 edition (12), returning in June of the same year.

Throughout 1901, the *Australian Christian Commonwealth* changed the titles of its columns for children, but the content or themes remained constant: a focus on Christian morality and lifestyle for young people cast in stories and sermon-like instruction. In the 5 July 1901 issue, a syndicated advice column appeared that was directly addressed to children and penned by "Old Jonathan". The column, "Children's Corner", became regular and extended to including letters from readers to Old Jonathan.¹³ On 18 April 1902, Old Jonathan was joined by "Thelma", who wrote a syndicated column for girls. By 1902, the "Children's Corner" was a regular feature, as were the columns for boys and girls.

On 20 February 1903, Old Jonathan makes a marked departure from overtly Christian tales and retellings of biblical narratives and tells the myth of Pandora. "Pandora's Box" is retold in a relatively faithful style until a decidedly Christian moral is attached to the end of the myth:

This quaint old fable teaches us that whatever of sorrow or trouble may afflict our hearts there will remain the unifying spirit of hope [...]. Sin has left an awful train of sorrow and misery, but Hope speaks of "The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world". (4)

The Christian interpretation of the myth continues at some length and includes a depiction of the personification of Elpis as "the beautiful Angel of Hope".

Old Jonathan authored the column until mid-1903; thereafter there are other contributors until the arrival of "Uncle Ben" (Rev. Brian Wibberley, from Monota in South Australia), who announced (15 April 1904) that the newspaper was seeking children's contributions for the column (7). Uncle Ben added a distinctly Australian tenor to the column as well as a directly personal interaction with the young readers. His last column was on 25 March 1910, after which it was taken over by "Old Boy" and renamed "Young People's Page".¹⁴ The new

which replaced "Children's Corner" with "Young People's Corner", warned of the perils of boys smoking. Such segments were not, however, consistently included in the early phase of the newspaper.

¹³ See 11 October 1901, 14. The column "For the Boys" also reappeared on 25 October 1901, 11.

¹⁴ Uncle Ben's goodbye letter was printed on 1 April 1910, 14.

column did not last for more than a year, and then was replaced by small poems printed under the heading of "For the Children", although the separate columns for boys and girls continued.

3.

Over the next few years, the column was comprised of various syndicated essays, stories, and poems until 3 April 1914, when it was taken over by "Waratah" (the name of a native Australian shrub) and was simply named "The Children". The following week, Waratah's feature became known as "For the Children". The column was a conversational, letter-style communication that included stories, advice, and letters. In contrast to Uncle Ben, Waratah was more focused on storytelling in the form of traditional tales retold rather than on updates by its author and his liking for contemporary anecdotes of moral virtue. Waratah's approach to the column was also markedly different to the previous contributors in terms of the inclusion of Greek myths and historical adages repurposed for children. Until then, the column avoided the topic, except for the tale of Pandora, retold on 20 February 1903 by Old Jonathan (discussed above), and another story entitled "The Fairies and the Furies", printed during the editorial hiatus following the departure of Old Boy and without any authorial attribution on 25 March 1904. In this story, the goddess Athena is portrayed as a fairy and the Furies are sprites. Additionally, the girls-only column, "Talks with Our Girls", included one Greek myth, namely, the story of Narcissus (9 October 1908), which the editor, Thelma, described as one that "teaches a splendid lesson" (3). Under the editorship of Waratah, several Greek stories are told, beginning with the tale of "Alexander and the Horse" (1 May 1914); followed by Aesop's fable "The Hare and the Tortoise" (29 May 1914); a story featuring Neptune (26 June 1914); and another on Atalanta (18 September 1914). Waratah's column was made more unusual by its inclusion of references to and stories from other cultures.¹⁵

Waratah first mentions the Great War on 14 August 1914, and spends part of the entry explaining the reasons for it (16).¹⁶ This was in keeping with the national and international nature of the newspaper in terms of its coverage

¹⁵ See, e.g., "Buddha's Advice" (1 May 1914, 16) and "Tales from Japan" (26 June 1914, 16).

¹⁶ In this first entry on the Great War, Waratah is somewhat ambivalent and there is a sense of resignation that it must be fought. In short, it is hardly an enthusiastic endorsement. A more patriotic stance is evident in the column on 21 August 1914, and in the entry for 28 August 1914, 16, Waratah asks young readers to donate to the Red Cross or the Patriotic Fund on Wattle Day

of secular events, including the Great War. The 1916 Conscription Referendum in Australia, for example, received attention with arguments in favour of it, and laments when it was unsuccessful.¹⁷ As the Great War progressed, Waratah continued to discuss it in the column, urging young readers to support the cause, particularly the Australian forces. This patriotism was combined with the stories selected for inclusion, as illustrated in the page dated 25 September 1914, in which Waratah retells two Greek myths, namely, the stories of Persephone and Iphigeneia,¹⁸ which are framed by an editorial that directs the children in how to “read” the stories:

My dear Girls and Boys –

Last week we talked about a story told by the ancient peoples called Greeks.¹⁹ That story, you remember, was about a Greek father who thought so little of his daughter that he “exposed” her, or put her out on the hillside to die. I am sorry to say that the Greeks often did that. Yet there are many stories that have come down to us from them of fathers and mothers who loved their children as much as your parents love you. (10)

Waratah introduces the narrative by contextualizing it as a “story”, which I would suggest is a carefully chosen word as the term “myth” had connotations of so-called pagan beliefs contrary to the Christian faith. This would reflect, then, the tendency to cast the myths of the Ancient Greeks and Romans in the same genre as fairy tales, which may have been regarded by Christians as less damaging to young minds. In a column by Waratah on 4 February 1916, the term “mythology” is defined as “stories which are not really true. But they generally teach us something [...]. Although, of course, we know that they are not really true, yet we like to hear and know them” (10).

The reference to the story of exposure, followed by the statement that “the Greeks often did that”, differentiates the “pagan” culture of the ancient Mediterranean from the safe Christian morality of twentieth-century Australia – an example of the “framing” that directed children in how to “read” these stories. There is an uneasy confusion between myth and reality in this handling

(celebrated on 1 September each year, Wattle Day takes its name from the Australian native shrub and marks the first day of spring).

¹⁷ The 1916 and 1917 conscription referendums were a divisive historical “moment” in Australia. The two referendums, in October 1916 and December 1917, both resulted in votes against conscription.

¹⁸ Original spelling.

¹⁹ The story referenced is the tale of Atalanta.

of myths of exposure with Waratah classifying them as stories on the one hand, yet extracting some form of historical reality about Greek culture on the other.

The tale of Persephone is introduced as an example of intense parental love, particularly maternal love. The narrative is relatively faithful to the basic plot of the original myth with an expected softening of the elements of violence. It is followed by a second retelling, the myth of Iphigeneia, introduced as "another story of a Greek maid" (16). Besides the gender of its protagonist, the role of parents is used to link the second story to the first: "Her father was not so fond of her as Persephone's mother was of her" (16). This second story is marked as a heroic tale by the opening description of the protagonist as "ready to die for the sake of other people" (16).

In the unfolding of the story, there is a passage on the Greeks' anger at Artemis' refusal to let the fleet sail until she received amends for Agamemnon's slaying of her stag:

"That is unjust," said some. "It was our king, and not the rest of us who did the deed. Why should we all suffer for it?"

"Ah," replied the goddess, "we have often to suffer for other people just as we can sometimes make amends for others." (16)

This version of the myth of Iphigeneia is the Taurian salvation myth, more suitable for children than its alternative, but with an ending characterized by pathos in this retelling: "Poor girl!" said the Greeks. "For our sakes she has lost father, mother, home, and country" (16). This element of pathos intentionally leads readers to the heavy-handed moral of the story, which immediately follows:

You know, children, things like this often happen in our own times, or in times which we know we have a true history of, and not only in "myths" or stories like these, which we know are not true. You all know the story of Joan of Arc, the shepherdess who, for the sake of her country, died. (16)

The reference to Joan of Arc emphasizes a common strategy in propaganda writing, namely, the inclusion of an exemplary character or individual, and the related strategy of the heroization process.²⁰ This has already been seen in the treatment of Demeter as the exemplary mother in the myth of Persephone

²⁰ See Raoul Girardet, *Mythes et mythologies politiques*, Paris: Seuil, 1990, 71. Girardet discusses the literary process evident in the propagandist use of myth and fairy tale that occurs when the original story is linked to reality to rarefy or perfect the real situation by raising it to a fantastical status.

as outlined by Waratah. Such use of myth to communicate a particular message depends on the successful establishment of a link between the subject and the target audience, regularly achieved in relation to children through the youthful age of the protagonist in the given story.

From Iphigeneia to Joan of Arc, the author moves to the Australian troops about to leave for war:

Did you go to town on Monday to see the troops? Those brave men you saw marching so gladly are willingly going into what may be the most dreadful times, and even face death itself willingly that you and I may live under the Union Jack. (16)

The message is stressed by the print layout with the words "Living under the Union Jack" in bold, each word in upper case and the phrase occupying one line. It is followed by a concluding message:

I do not suppose you have thought much about it. There is such a lot else to think about, isn't there? Marbles, and dolls, and school, and homework, and all kinds of things. (16)

For children about to experience fear and loss, rationing and deprivation, the linking of these stories of extreme sacrifice by young protagonists to their everyday preoccupations created a framework of understanding and aligned them with a more adult perspective.²¹

In Australia, a member of the British Commonwealth, the national support of the Great War was instilled in school children at all levels of their education. They participated in various patriotic activities, including knitting "trench comforts", such as socks for the soldiers and raising money to contribute to the funding of the war effort. Children also took part in organized recreation in which they wore patriotic outfits, as part of the fundraising cause. The activities were conducted under the auspices of the Australian Children's Patriotic Fund, which produced publications for schools, such as reports on activities, complete with balance sheets, coverage of events, and photographs.²² The Fund's zealous

²¹ Themes of war and related topics were not confined to the *Australian Christian Commonwealth*. The *West Coast Recorder* began a "Young Crusaders" column in November 1914, which lasted until 1917; see "SA Newspapers: Children's Columns", SA Memory, <http://www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?u=1470&startRow=1> (accessed 25 July 2019).

²² See, e.g., Adelaide L. Miethke, ed., *Patriotic Work in Our Schools: 1915-1917. A Report on the South Australian Children's Patriotic Fund*, Adelaide: Rigby Publishers, [1918].

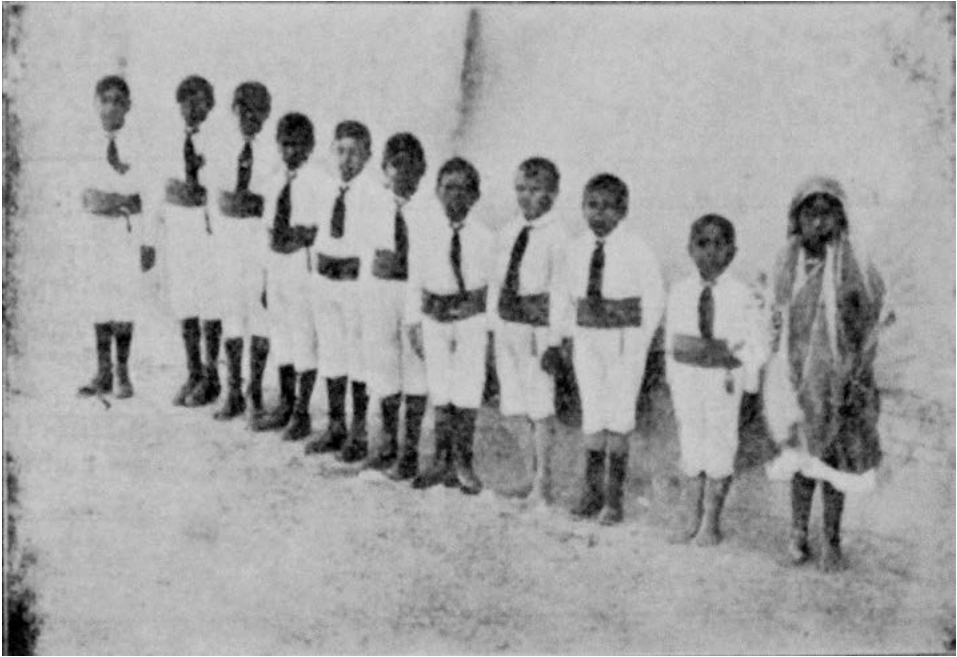


Figure 2: "Point Pearce (Aboriginal Station). Item in School Patriotic Concert", from Adelaide L. Miethke, ed., *Patriotic Work in Our Schools: 1915–1917. A Report on the South Australian Children's Patriotic Fund*, Adelaide: Rigby Publishers, [1918], 24. Author's personal collection. Image digitized by Katherine Johnson (5 December 2017). Used with permission.

dedication to the war effort even extended to mission stations such as the one in Port Pearce, run by the Church of England on the Country of the Narungga people in South Australia. Unable to claim their own land "as their own" and, like all Indigenous Australians and Torres Strait Islanders, not recognized as citizens until 1967,²³ their children were still called upon to contribute to the war effort (see Figs. 2 and 3).

How do we contextualize these mythic retellings within a Great War framework? Did the stories, particularly the myth of Iphigeneia, provide hope or indoctrination? The myth was clearly chosen for its appropriateness as a form of propaganda, and its presentation is certainly couched in the language of such. It was part of the burgeoning genre of juvenile war literature, which was characterized

²³ It was on 27 May 1967 that 90.77% of Australians were formally recorded as having voted "yes" in a constitutional referendum to award citizenship and to improve the lives of Australia's First Nation Peoples. The term "Country" denotes Australian Aboriginal territories, encompassing all elements of landscape, and also customs or lore, as well as people (past, present, and future).



Figure 3: “A Band of Loyal Workers from Point Pearce Mission Station”, from Adelaide L. Miethke, ed., *Patriotic Work in Our Schools: 1915–1917. A Report on the South Australian Children’s Patriotic Fund*, Adelaide: Rigby Publishers, [1918], 25. Author’s personal collection. Image digitized by Katherine Johnson (5 December 2017). Used with permission.

by its hybridity: the theme of war integrated into established literary forms from ABC books to adventure stories and mythic retellings. The consistent return to ideas of sacrifice and suffering all testify to propaganda. The image of Iphigeneia therefore functions as a symbolic role model for Australian children, inspiring them to put their nation, king, and God before themselves. The Greeks proclaiming “It was our king, and not the rest of us who did the deed. Why should we all suffer for it?” (16) links the tale to the debate raging over Australia’s involvement in the Great War, for there were many Australians who declared this conflict to be a European fight. Waratah’s page provides a pro-war rejoinder for the young readers. The placement of a large advertisement for an imperial war map on the same page as the children’s column further augments this reading.

But it could also be argued that “For the Children” aimed to educate its young readers within the moral and cultural specificities of Australian society in the early part of the twentieth century. The retelling of the myth of Iphigeneia may also be interpreted as an allegorical response to the first month of the Great War presented to children as a means of contextualizing it, placing the events of 1914 within a broader European history of heroism and self-sacrifice. This specific theme, the Australasian involvement in a war that was predicted

to be partly fought on Turkish soil, ultimately became a national metanarrative in the form of the Anzac (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) legend, which would commemorate and glorify the Australian and New Zealand soldiers who fought at Gallipoli in 1915 within the mythical context of the Greeks at Troy.

This reading of hope, however, is not entirely separate from propaganda, the two being inextricably tied. Iphigeneia and Joan of Arc – adolescent heroines who encourage children to do something for their new nation, now at war. Both remind children that they have the moral capacity to be brave and heroic, while the myth of Persephone and Demeter foreshadows what is to come – suffering and sacrifice. Such powerful mythic messages of hope may therefore be a means of fortifying children during this time of crisis – an interpretation supported by Waratah’s aforementioned question:

Did you go to town on Monday to see the troops? Those brave men you saw marching so gladly are willingly going into what may be the most dreadful times, and even face death itself willingly that you and I may live under the Union Jack. (16)

The rhetorical response creates a powerful visual and emotional snapshot of the men and youths who were, no doubt, the fathers and brothers of the young readers.

* * *

The complexity of heroizing a national response to war with its inherent qualities of both mythic hope and nation-building is encapsulated in these apparently simple stories for children. They speak to children, but they also speak of a fourteen-year-old nation on the brink of a war for which their disparate history had not prepared them. Faced with the beginning of a cataclysm, writers, poets, and artists drew on traditional models of expression, such as Greek mythology, to try to define what was about to happen and what was in fact happening on the streets of Adelaide, South Australia, as the men left for the first of many overseas placements.²⁴

²⁴ For research on the 1915 Anzac Campaign at Gallipoli and the Trojan War, see Sarah Midford, “Constructing the ‘Australian *Iliad*’: Ancient Heroes and Anzac Diggers in the Dardanelles”, *Melbourne Historical Journal* 39.2 (2011), 59–79; Sarah Midford, Ian McGibbon, C.J. Mackie, and Reyhan Körpe, “The Gallipoli Campaign: From History to Legend”, in Antonio Sagona, Mithat Atabay, C.J. Mackie, Ian McGibbon, and Richard Reid, eds., *Anzac Battlefield: A Gallipoli Landscape of War and Memory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016, 24–35.

BANDAR-LOÇ IN ACTION: THE POLISH CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCE OF DISASTER IN LITERATURE AND MYTHOLOGY

[...] an indescribable noise arose. Nik, Tom, and Ania, having grabbed each other's hands, began dancing in the middle of the room, singing at the top of their lungs the Monkey Song from *The Jungle Book*.¹ But Olek, his hands sunk deep into his pockets, scowled at his unruly siblings and said: "These are the real monkeys". Then before he knew it, his siblings had grabbed him by the hands and made him join the dance and triumphantly sing along:

A lonesome trail
but who cares?
There's still fun
in pulling each other
by the tail!

Zofia Żurakowska, *Skarby* [Treasures], 1925²

¹ *The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling first appeared in 1894; five years later it came out in French; the first Polish translation by Józef Czekalski as *Księga puszczy* [The Forest Book] is from 1900; Zofia *de domo* Duszyńska Żurakowska (1897–1931) probably read the second edition published by Gebethner and Wolff in Warsaw in 1902 (the book's second translation, by Franciszek Pik Mirandola, appeared in 1922). These dates have meaning for my deduction.

² Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Print, 1991 (ed. pr. 1925), 17: "[...] powstał hałas nieopisany. Nik, Tom i Ania, pochwywszy się za ręce, zaczęli tańczyć w środku pokoju, wyśpiewując na całe gardło pieśń małp z *Księgi Dżungli*, a Olek zatopił ręce w kieszeniach i, patrząc z pogardą na niesforne rodzeństwo, rzekł:

– Oto są prawdziwe małpy. – Nim się jednak opamiętał, został schwycony za ręce i musiał tańczyć pospołu z rodzeństwem, śpiewając zwycięsko:

trop stracony
mniejsza o to!
my z ochotą
ciągniem siebie
za ogony!"

The present chapter, as well as this and all subsequent quotations, have been translated by Marek Steele-Zieliński, unless stated otherwise.

This episode takes place in the spring of 1913 in Warsaw. The children are frolicking like monkeys because they have just learned they are to go home sooner than expected. The older boys are attending a Polish school, so for the duration of the school year the whole family moves to Warsaw.³ And though the flat is large, they feel ill at ease in it. The children's family home is in the east, in Volhynia. Zofia Żurakowska's two autobiographical novels⁴ tell us their estate was called Niżpol. The novels feature the family of August and Marta Charłęski,⁵ who have five children. I have surmised the dates of their births on the basis of the available clues: Olek (short for Aleksander) – 1900, Marta – 1902(?), Nik (short for either Mikołaj or Nikodem) – 1904, Tom – 1907, and Ania – 1909. In the neighbouring estate of Hołowin live two of their cousins: Renia, later known as Nata (short for Renata) – born in 1899, and Ali (short for Aleksander) – born in 1905 – counts Oleśnicki.⁶ During that portentous winter of 1918/19 only Tom and Ania could be considered children – though as their behaviour shows, they were aware of their responsibilities.

The autobiographical character of the two novels has great meaning, but it is important to note that the plot shares little with the real life of Żurakowska (maiden name Duszyńska), who lived from 1897 to 1931. Her family home was in fact situated in Wyszpól⁷ (in the Zhytomyr area of Volhynia), and just as the nearby Hołowin, it belonged to the Salis, the family of the novelist's mother. Feldspar mines, hop plantations, and modern agriculture ensured her family high living standards. And this is also the novel's portrayal. The author, by contrast, had three sisters and no brothers,⁸ so in her work she had to delve into her imagination, and possibly into her own experiences as well. This has crucial meaning for my further reflections, for I wish to weigh the correlation between

³ In the Russian partition Polish-language education was not permitted – thus, children from wealthier families were taught at home. It was not until after the revolution of 1905 that private secondary schools with instruction in Polish emerged.

⁴ *Skarby* [Treasures, 1925] and *Pożegnanie domu* [A Farewell to Home, 1927].

⁵ The Charłęskis were an old noble family in the Kiev voivodeship of the Rzeczpospolita, tracing its origins back to the fifteenth century; it seems to have died out by the end of the nineteenth.

⁶ Their father, Ryszard, the brother of Marta Charłęska (the uxorial form of the surname), is the "sober entrepreneur" type; Marta's younger brother, Dymitr, is, conversely, a Romantic. Among the descendants of Aleksander Oleśnicki was also the deceased Feliks and his sporadically mentioned daughter Marietka.

⁷ The wordplay here is that "Niżpol" suggests an obverse image of "Wyszpól" (with *niż* meaning 'low', and *wysz* sounding just like 'high').

⁸ Felicja (b. 1895), Maria (b. 1902), and Anna (b. 1910).

traumatic childhood experiences and the inception of mythology.⁹ I will refer to literary materials as well as to memoirs.

I.

Żurakowska's story about the children from Niżpol is special not only because of its literary quality,¹⁰ but above all because of its complete focus on the children, because of its autobiographical character, and finally because the story is free of the patriotic exaltation that came to typify children's literature in the interwar period. Above all, it is a testimony of exceptional quality to the catastrophic demise of Poland's Kresy, the eastern borderlands of the former Rzeczpospolita (Republic of Nobles, Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth).¹¹ The novels of Maria Buyno-Arczowa (1877–1952)¹² and Helena Zakrzewska (1880–1952),¹³ although they deal with children during wartime and their plots are often set on the Kresy, are not characteristic testimonies, and so I would not consider them "Kresy literature". Besides, they are rather lowbrow products, and that reduced their influence. Important literary testimonies of this type belong instead to the category of "mature literature", even when they include childhood recollections. I have in mind, for instance, *Szczenięce lata* [Puppy Years] by

⁹ I label as "mythology" the set of myths accepted within the given community for defining its identity (in accordance with the systemic model of society); see Jan Kieniewicz, "L'Espagne comme un modèle positif et négatif des Polonais au XIX^e siècle. Continuité et discontinuité dans la mythologie nationale polonaise", *Acta Poloniae Historica* 58 (1988), 51–79; Jan Kieniewicz, *Wprowadzenie do historii cywilizacji Wschodu i Zachodu* [Introduction to the History of Western and Eastern Civilization], Warszawa: Dialog, 2003, chs. 3 and 4. Cf. Wiktor Werner, *Kult początków. Historyczne zmagania z czasem, religią i genezą* [The Cult of the Origins: Historical Struggles with Time, Religion, and Genesis], Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2004, 6ff, and also Kwame Anthony Appiah, *The Lies That Bind: Rethinking Identity. Creed, Country, Color, Class, Culture*, New York, NY, and London: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2018.

¹⁰ The literary oeuvre of the prematurely deceased Żurakowska was highly appraised by many, including the famous writer Maria Dąbrowska.

¹¹ The term "Kresy" did not appear until the mid-nineteenth century; a century later, in turn, it was extended to include the lands east of the Bug river that Poland lost in the settlements of World War Two; see Jacek Kolbuszewski, *Kresy*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 1995; Feliks Gross, "Kresy: The Frontier of Eastern Europe", *Polish Review* 23.2 (1978), 3–16. See also *Kresy Rzeczpospolitej. Wielki mit Polaków* [The Old Rzeczpospolita's Kresy: The Poles' Grand Myth], "Pomocnik Historyczny: Polityka" [Historical Helper: Polityka Weekly], Warszawa: Polityka, 2016.

¹² Maria Buyno-Arczowa, *Ojczyzna* [Motherland], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo M. Arcta, 1922.

¹³ Helena Zakrzewska, *Białe róże* [White Roses], Warszawa: E. Wende [Ignis], [1922]; *Dzieci Lwowa* [The Children of Lviv], ill. Kamil Mackiewicz, Warszawa: E. Wende, 1925.

Melchior Wańkowicz (1892–1974).¹⁴ *Bohaterski miś* [The Heroic Teddy Bear] by Bronisława Ostrowska (1881–1928)¹⁵ in fact does not tell about the experiences of children; rather, the story is dedicated to them as a way to understand Poland's military involvement in the Great War. Maria Dąbrowska's (1889–1965) *Dzieci ojczyzny* [Children of the Motherland] features special-occasion patriotic readings.¹⁶ Finally, an essential matter: Żurakowska's novel ends happily and is free of drastic scenes.

Both of Żurakowska's novels were bought for me when I was eight years old. I suspect this happened deliberately, but certainly without any comment. My parents must have perceived the convergence of their own fate with the novel's narration. My mother, Zofia Sobańska, born in 1911 in Zhytomyr, was not inclined to recall escaping her family's estate in Podolia and the evacuation of Kiev in 1919. My father responded sceptically to any nostalgia for the Kresy, and this can be seen in his professional writing – even though he was the same age as the novel's Tom, and was probably quite similar to him as well. But I was not inclined to ask.

Therefore, I will compare and contrast the experiences of the novels' children with the record of my family's memories. At that same time, in Dereszewice, in the eastern region of Polesie, lived the Kieniewicz boys: Hieronim (born in 1901), Stefan (1907), Kazimierz (1909), and Henryk (1911).¹⁷ They were accompanied in the pre-war years by Tekla Łopacińska (1906) and by Iga, Blanka, and Zula Grabowska¹⁸ during the war. My family's memories do not match the novel; they seem to be less plentiful in dramatic events. In some sense this gap is filled by the novel *Bezdomni* [The Homeless], written in 1918 by my father,

¹⁴ A novel Melchior Wańkowicz wrote before 1930, and published in 1934 (Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze „Rój”). *Dolina Issy* [The Issa Valley] written by Czesław Miłosz in 1953 (published by Instytut Literacki in Paris, 1955) does not really include the war years.

¹⁵ Bronisława Ostrowska, *Bohaterski miś* [The Heroic Teddy Bear], ill. Kamil Mackiewicz, Warszawa: E. Wende, 1919.

¹⁶ Maria Dąbrowska, *Dzieci ojczyzny. Opowiadania historyczne dla młodzieży* [Children of the Motherland: Historical Stories for Youth], Warszawa: J. Mortkowicz, 1918. I do not mean to diminish the book's worth by this; I felt moved when reading this work. Cf. Wilhelm Coindre, “*Dzieci ojczyzny*, a Collection of Short Stories by Maria Dąbrowska in 1918, and Its Reflection in the *Noce i dnie* Novel Published in 1932–1934”, *Perspektywy kultury / Perspectives on Culture* 24.1 (2019), 23–37.

¹⁷ The sons of Antoni and Magdalena Kieniewicz, née Grabowska; see Antoni Kieniewicz, *Nad Prypecią dawno temu...* [Long Ago on the Pripyat River...], Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1988; the image of childhood in the memoirs of Stefan Kieniewicz, *Pamiętnik opóźnionego dojrzewania, część 1* [Memoirs of a Late Blooming, Part 1, 1978], and Henryk Kieniewicz, *Wspomnienia* [Memories, 1980/81] – both manuscripts are found in my private archives.

¹⁸ Stefan Kieniewicz, *Pamiętniki* [Memoirs], Kraków: Znak, 2021, 20.

Stefan Kieniewicz.¹⁹ Here, however, the adolescent author portrayed everyone but himself in a slightly caricatured form!

2.

There are two reasons for connecting childhood memories known from a literary version with those in diary form. First of all, they refer to the same social sphere, the same time, and the same region – namely, the remnants of the old Rzeczpospolita, that Polish world now sunk into a completely foreign abyss. But even long after the Kresy had disappeared, some people continued to identify proudly with that region, even while considering themselves citizens of the newly re-established Rzeczpospolita.²⁰ In ethnic Poland, especially the part found in the Prussian partition – identifying with the Kresy was long looked down upon as old-fashioned. Only the landed nobility, called the *ziemiaństwo*, retained connections that extended over the partitions to all parts of the former Poland. This is especially true about the era under discussion. The war and the revolution radically displaced these people. Moreover, independent Poland did not prove kind to them.²¹ Memories in both versions were created *post factum*, which means they are an interpretation. These narratives primarily served to explain one's own lifetime decisions. In both cases what occurs is not only an analysis of the process of growing up, but essentially the same form of coping with trauma. I mention this because children simply saw things quite

¹⁹ Stefan Kieniewicz, *Bezdomni* [The Homeless], Bobowa: Wilczyska, 2007. This work by the eleven-year-old may be treated as a record of his impressions, a child's interpretation of the loss of the family home. Noteworthy is that it was created *before* the family was forced to leave Dereszewice once and for all. Stefan Kieniewicz (1907–1992) was an eminent historian of Poland's nineteenth century, associated with the Warsaw Historical School. The diaries (*Dzienniki*) of Adela Kieniewicz (1870–1935) offer much of value. They are held in the collections of the State Historical Archives of Ukraine in Kiev; they end abruptly in May 1915. See Katarzyna Nadana-Sokołowska, "Dzienniki Adeli Kieniewicz: kobieta pisząca przełomu XIX i XX wieku" [Diaries of Adela Kieniewicz: A Writing Woman from the Threshold of the Twentieth Century], *Teksty Drugie* 1 (2019), 303–320.

²⁰ See Jan Kieniewicz, "Kresy", in Zdzisław Najder, Anna Machcewicz, Michał Kopczyński, Roman Kuźniar, Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz, Jerzy Stępień, and Wojciech Włodarczyk, eds., *Węzły pamięci niepodległej Polski* [The Nodes of Memory of Independent Poland], Kraków and Warszawa: Muzeum Historii Polski, Fundacja Węzły Pamięci, and Znak, 2014, 363–368. See also Jan Kieniewicz, "Barwy i smaki Kresów" [The Kresy's Colours and Tastes], in his *Spotkania Wschodu* [The Meetings of the East], Gdańsk: Novus Orbis, 1999, 120–151.

²¹ See Rafał Smoczyński and Tomasz Zarycki, *Totem inteligencji. Arystokracja, szlachta i ziemiaństwo w polskiej przestrzeni społecznej* [A Totem of the Intelligentsia: Aristocracy, Nobles, and Gentry in the Polish Social Space], Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2017.

differently. Perhaps they adapted more easily to the new reality. Nonetheless, their experiences of World War One and their memories of the destruction of the Kresy became part of the Kresy mythology. This happened without their consent, independently of decisions later made in adult life. I shall return to this matter at the close of my thoughts.

A serious methodological reservation may arise here. Namely, how did this fragment of history, the childhood experience of the loss of the Kresy, differ from other significant displacements? Without looking too far, we have the mass experience of children deported from the lands taken by the Soviets after the invasion of Poland on 17 September 1939. And this includes the history of the children led out of the USSR by General Władysław Anders and their trek – motherless and fatherless – across three continents. Or what about the memoirs testifying to the traumas of children in the Warsaw Uprising of 1944? A mere coincidence deprived me of the chance to experience the Uprising. A saving grace, that coincidence.²² I admit that in making my choice I was motivated by sentiment; I identified with the characters in the novels. These children also underwent trauma together with their parents. The loss of their home, a catastrophe by anyone's measure, could thereby have a happy ending, just as it happened in my own life.

A balanced attitude towards sacrificing one's life played a significant role in helping me make my choice. In Żurakowska's novel the children are patriotically minded, but I do not discern a fervour to sacrifice their lives for their Motherland. True, in 1914 Olek and Nik are worried the war is going to end before they grow up – however, they stress that it is not a Polish war. They wish to fight for Poland, but they do not want to die. The titles of subsequent parts in fact allude to the Romantic tradition,²³ but in not a single episode do I find exaltation over sacrificing one's life.²⁴ Furthermore, the author stressed

²² If my brother and I (then three and six years old, respectively) had been sent off to Warsaw in the last days of July 1944, what chances would we have had of escaping whole from the burned family home, with our father badly injured and our mother eight-months pregnant? What saved us from our grandparents' horrible decision was the common sense of a local parish priest.

²³ The title of the third part of *Pożegnanie domu*, "ja się w chwili ofiarnej jak kadzidło spalę" [I in this sacrificial moment alight myself like incense] is a quotation from *Kordian* (1834) by Juliusz Słowacki, and the title of chapter 17, "Ale ty, Panie, który z wysokości – patrzysz, jak giną Ojczyzny obrońce" [But you, Lord, from on high, you look down upon the defenders of their Motherland dying] is a travesty of a passage from Słowacki's poem "Na pogrzeb kapitana Meyznera" [For the Funeral of Captain Meyzner, 1841].

²⁴ This is, however, altogether pronounced in the stories by Buyno-Arctowa. Ostrowska regretted the loss of young life, but "each drop of that holy blood, shed for the Cause, was a new life, one absorbed into the veins of the deceased Motherland. For without that terrible living font, Poland

several times that Russian soldiers were also fulfilling the duty to fight for their Motherland. Even if very reluctantly...²⁵ After all, Uncle Dymitr, who is adored by the children of Niżpol, goes to war voluntarily. Similarly moderate, and above all not lofty, was the patriotism of the children of Dereszewicze. Stefan did recall, however, a mood of patriotic exaltation in the period when the family was fleeing from Dereszewicze to Mozyrz,²⁶ that is, between November 1917 and the spring of 1918.²⁷

In laying out my source base I discern a couple distinctions that can influence the attempt at interpretation. For instance, it seems that the novel's children in Niżpol enjoyed greater freedom than did the children in Dereszewicze. They were allowed to romp in the orchard and venture off on independent escapades beyond the park. They were just as carefully raised, but less monitored, as it were. The schooling and upbringing were the same. Perhaps the key difference was that in 1913 the youth of the Charłęski family continued their education at a Polish school in Warsaw, whereas the young Kieniewiczzes were in the orbit of Vilnius – and, after the war erupted, of Kiev. After 1914 this was obvious: Olek and Nik commuted to school in Zhytomyr every day,²⁸ Heruś (as Hieronim was affectionately called) remained at a boarding school in Kiev, and the same fate would have concerned Stefan, who passed the test to the second class of a Polish junior high school. Some differences may have emerged due to the divergent management techniques on the farm estate and with the forest enterprise. But this may not have been relevant. What was relevant were the issues of upbringing, with the Kieniewicz family treating their children more strictly. In Dereszewicze it seems that there were more care providers and pedagogical personnel, and that the children were more strongly subordinated to their supervision. In Niżpol the relations between the children and the staff appeared to have been warmer, and the children's food more varied.²⁹ The day's schedule, however, was the same in both families. Both homes had rich libraries,

could not have arisen from the tombs" (*Bohaterski miś*, ch. "Swoi" [The Ours], 72: "każda kropla tej świętej, za Sprawę przelanej krwi, to było nowe życie, wsączane w żyły obumarłej Ojczyzny. Że bez tego straszliwego żywego źródła nie mogłaby powstać Polska spod mogiły").

²⁵ Żurakowska, *Pożegnanie domu*, 211.

²⁶ Mozyrz, a city on the Pripjat.

²⁷ Kieniewicz, *Pamiętniki*, 39.

²⁸ See Anna Pawełczyńska, *Koniec kresowego świata* [The End of the Borderland World], Lublin: Wydawnictwo Test, 2003, 59.

²⁹ Stefan Kieniewicz recalled that day after day they received a dinner of chicken soup and diced cutlets with potatoes and carrots, and compote... (*Pamiętniki*, 18). See the remarks concerning Dereszewicze in Janina Żółtowska, *Inne czasy, inni ludzie* [Other Times, Other People], Londyn: Alma Book, 1959, 200.

and reading held a similarly important place in the methods of child-rearing. No trace is left of those houses and libraries; nonetheless, not everything was buried or blown away...³⁰ The way the children played was also similar. Horses meant more in Niżpol, while dogs were more important in Dereszewicze. Sports, in turn, received stronger emphasis in Dereszewicze, but croquet and tennis were of course played at both manors. Indeed, in both cases it was during play – when the fun-hindering etiquette was thrown off – that there was space for shouting, for outbursts of passion, and for minor and major dramas. Clowning around, exaggerating and bragging, wrangles and frolics – even uncontrolled movements were considered inappropriate. The point is that in this ever so tight-laced world there still was place for spontaneous behaviour. I believe this was more or less deliberate on the part of the parents.

It was in this milieu before World War One that the children were read *The Jungle Book*. Or else they read it themselves,³¹ in Polish or French version, though reading the original English cannot be ruled out. Whatever the case, no matter the language, the term “Bandar-log”, describing excessively frolicsome children, appeared. It was used to refer to boisterous, spontaneous, and heedless behaviours, ones opposed to the accepted rules for good behaviour. The use of a term borrowed from a “proper” book had a moderating as well as a taming character. It allowed parents to temporarily accept behaviours which they normally did not, a sort of turning a blind eye. Bandar-log sounds better than “tomfoolery”. The children were aware that this interpretation was conventional, and it does not seem they took old Baloo’s teaching³² too personally. What was essential was ensuring the children a sort of balance between the spontaneous and decorous. The starchy standard of the old *dresura*³³ would never have permitted such liberties. The *dresura* involved practices that influenced how youngsters were to grow up and become dutiful. Interest in child-rearing theories and in techniques for shaping the young generation began to become important at the beginning of the twentieth century. There was a departure from the hitherto hidebound practices. The “English” attitude appeared with the

³⁰ Thus did Włodzimierz Odojewski, in *Zasypie wszystko, zawieje* [All Is Crumbling and Blowing Away, Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1973], conjure the image of the Kresy’s demise during World War Two.

³¹ Kieniewicz, *Pamiętniki*, 28. See also above, n. 1, on Kipling’s translations.

³² Baloo the Bear, the teacher of the wolf cubs of the Seeonee Wolf Pack.

³³ This was the term my aunt, Janina Żółtowska, used about children, of course adapting it from the French “dressage” (horsemanship), which sounded better than the Polish “tresura”, used about training dogs and circus animals. One way or the other, young people in those spheres were subjected to a stern upbringing at home.

beginnings of scouting, and also under the influence of reading.³⁴ In my view, this of course does not relate to the tale of the Monkey-Folk. Kipling presents them in dark hues:

[The Bandar-log] are outcastes. They have no speech of their own, but use the stolen words which they overhear when they listen, and peep, and wait up above in the branches [...]. They are without leaders [...]. They boast and chatter and pretend that they are a great people about to do great affairs in the jungle, but the falling of a nut turns their minds to laughter and all is forgotten [...]. They are very many, evil, dirty, shameless, and they desire to be noticed by the Jungle-People.³⁵

Nor am I interested in Kipling's didactic intention. Rather, the use of this term in regard to his own children is what seems most significant to me.

3.

Being young was then a transitional period, an introduction to adulthood, and of course huge importance was attached to this transition. It was definitely detached from childhood. After all, it involved giving a vaguely defined shape to the mind, and it often referred more to spirit than to age. Adolescent children, today called teens, a hundred years ago tried in all possible ways to associate with and be accepted by adults; they despised their younger siblings, who were treated as none other than Bandar-log. Relevant here is the distinct way children perceive time, focused as they are on the moment and unable to foresee the future. It is in this trait that they seemed akin to monkeys. Now, one hundred years later, in a twist of fate, that trait is becoming universal!³⁶ The concept of Bandar-log lost its meaning with the degradation of propriety and a willingness to tolerate the "barnyard" model where a child's behaviour is regulated not by books, but

³⁴ I have no confirmation that Kipling's *Stalky & Co.* was read in Dereszewicze; however, that seems to have been the case in Niżpol. We learn about the reading of these children haphazardly – as with the copy of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (no doubt the Polish edition of 1901) left on a park bench and found (without illustrations) by village children (Ukrainian ones, of course) – *Skarby*, ch. 15. The character of Nik seems modelled on Stalky, all the more so as the author did not have a brother. Worth noting is that boys of that kind were not an exception; see Stefan Kieniewicz's comments (*Pamiętniki*, 32) about his friends in Mozyrz in 1917–1918 (namely, Bohdan Lenkiewicz and Danek Zaniewski).

³⁵ A speech delivered to Mowgli, the child accepted into the wolf pack; see "Kaa Hunting", in Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*, New York, NY: The Century, 1894, 53–54.

³⁶ Benjamin R. Barber, *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*, New York, NY, and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007.

by imitating their peers. This transition occurred in the next generation, primarily after World War Two and during the systemic revolution which established communism in Poland. And not because children ceased to have governesses, tutors at home, and a sense of security resulting from their material status. After all, many children met with the same circumstances after World War One in the free Poland. The process of "declassing" families expatriated from the Kresy affected the lives of my heroes in sundry degrees. In one matter, however, their fates were shared: patriotism became a way of overcoming the feeling of catastrophe. And this could happen only with the recognition of a free Poland. That process unfolded differently after World War Two, when my heroes had their own children. I recall us being labelled with the term *Bandar-log* when I was ten years old. Today my guess is this term was already anachronistic. "*Bandar-log*" lost its meaning because the circumstances of growing up proved to be completely different. If there had been any unconscious revolution, it happened in child-rearing. The harshest rules, constantly enforced by our grandmas, proved helpless even in the most traditional families. But this is an entirely different story, precisely because *The Jungle Book* quickly lost its magical charm.³⁷ *Bandar-log* in action is an attempt at looking at the process of growing up, and at the relationship of traumatic experience with mythology in bygone times. It is all about transitioning from eagerly pulling each other by the tails to a conscious responsibility for oneself and others. I think this margin of freedom, this concession for the temporary suspension of accepted rules, was an essential tool in the process of maturation that centred on grappling with catastrophe.

What was the influence of upbringing on behaviour? How did it reveal itself in confrontation with drama? The splendid scene where Nik throws out of a train wagon fellow passengers who could threaten the clandestine escape from Russia of Mr Andrzej, a young Polish legionnaire dressed up as Mlle Lucette, is a prime example of *Bandar-log* in action.³⁸ In an operation worthy of *Stalky*, "not even for a moment did it occur to him to wake up his elders and entrust them with the further fate of the matter".³⁹ Nik is twelve years old and he proceeds as a born

³⁷ It all began with categorizing *The Jungle Book* as childish, which was likely meant to deflect criticism aimed at Kipling's imperialism. However, together with the collapse of reading, this undermined the capacity for reflection. Today it seems to me that the "millennials", at least, have no idea of what's going on in these tales.

³⁸ Żurakowska, *Pożegnanie domu*, ch. 17. Mlle Lucette, the Swiss governess of Renia Oleśnicka, appeared in *Skarby*. In Dereszewicz, the Swiss teacher Dromler remained with the children until 1916.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, 328: "Ani na chwilę nie przyszło mu do głowy, by zbudzić starszych i powierzyć im dalsze losy tej sprawy".

scout, but only a Bandar-log could invent and carry out something like this! My conclusion is that "Bandar-log" served as a critical, ironic term adults used to describe the behaviour of children in a way that helped the young build trust in their own powers. Naturally, Nik's psychological profile played a considerable role here. Stefan Kieniewicz as a child would not have been capable of doing what Nik did. And as a father, he would have accepted the reasoning Nik heard from his Uncle Dymitr – namely, that "[f]or the conscience there are no evil matters – only evil intentions".⁴⁰ Nor did this line of reasoning protect me from repeating the fate of a wimp. What is crucial is that even terrified children did not give up: they proved they were able to behave if not exactly heroically, then most certainly responsibly. Indeed, Nik, that potential Bandar-log, will sneak back at night to his plundered manor house in order to get his heroic great-grandfather's war standard from the January Uprising of 1863.⁴¹

Here, my theme concerns how literature deals with childhood experiences caught up in rapid transformation, confronting war and revolution, and then how, under the influence of these experiences, myth takes up the loss of childhood, when that loss simultaneously involves the destruction of the child's world. Myth becomes a crucial element in the transition to a mature identity in a reborn Motherland. What ends for the children from Niżpol together with their childhood is the Arcadian myth of the Kresy as a fabled paradise. Counter to the poet's expectations,⁴² the young expatriates from the "land of childhood" will "none other than in spring time" see Poland – their home regained. "Now we have our MOTHERLAND. This means more than a home", says Nik,⁴³ and Stefan echoes him: "[W]e were very young and could take pleasure in the fact that in return for losing our home and country, we gained a free Poland".⁴⁴ This was not a common attitude at the time. Many members of the landed gentry, bereft of their properties on the Kresy, cursed the Peace of Riga of 1921, signed between

⁴⁰ Ibidem, 329: "Dla sumienia nie istnieją sprawy złe, tylko złe intencje".

⁴¹ Nik from Żurakowska's novel in many aspects incorporates Henryk Sienkiewicz's pattern of a courageous boy – a candidate for a hero "with no blemish and without fear".

⁴² From the famous poem "Herostrates" by Jan Lechoń (1899–1956), a prominent Polish poet. He published "Herostrates" as a young man, in 1920. He faces in the poem the problem of the Romantic national tradition in the context of the future of the country. The well-known verse goes: "A wiosną niechaj wiosnę, nie Polskę, zobacz!" (And in spring let me see spring, not Poland!). See Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 1983 (ed. pr. 1969), 385.

⁴³ Żurakowska, *Pożegnanie domu*, 374 (capital letters in the original): "Mamy teraz OJCZYZNĘ. To więcej, niż dom".

⁴⁴ Kieniewicz, *Pamiętniki*, 41: "[B]yliśmy jeszcze bardzo młodzi i mogliśmy się cieszyć, że w zamian za utratę domu i kraju rodzinnego uzyskaliśmy wolną Polskę".

Poland and Soviet Russia, treating it as treason.⁴⁵ Even more numerous than these former landowners were Poles driven from other regions, especially those who witnessed the extermination in Podolia and Volhynia with impotent rage. They felt as if the Rzeczpospolita had renounced them. Their testimonies are choked with bitterness and despair, their reports replete with cruelties.⁴⁶ Such notions are not to be judged simplistically, as if these noblemen were merely trying to defend their holdings or their social status.⁴⁷ They were not colonizers of those lands, and above all they did not feel alien there. Nonetheless, they were shocked at the hatred they elicited.⁴⁸ It is worth knowing that the children processed the events that deprived them of their homes in a similar way. In her unfinished novel *Nieporozumienia* [Misunderstandings], Żurawska wished to highlight this contrast of attitudes and manifold reactions. She tried to appraise fairly the reasons for regret and the feeling of guilt. Perhaps if time had allowed, the problem would have died out in a natural way, would have given room to new challenges and needs.⁴⁹ On the Vilnius–Pinsk–Lviv axis, the old borderland could not be recreated. This was especially true with regard to the earlier domination of large estates. Thus, the federalist project was a utopia, particularly within the borders agreed to by the Riga Peace. Confronted with awakening national aspirations and feeling under threat from the Bolsheviks, Poland did not find effective solutions to these issues.

⁴⁵ Protest of Henryk Grabowski in the Sejm on 14 April 1921.

⁴⁶ Zofia Kossak-Szczucka, *Pożoga* [Conflagration], Kraków: Krakowska Spółka Wydawnicza, 1922; Józef Franciszek Wójcik, *Powrót na Kresy. Część I: rok 1920* [Back to the Kresy. Part I: 1920], Rumia: Józef Franciszek Wójcik, 2003.

⁴⁷ Not once did Stefan Kieniewicz ask himself if the defence of the Kresy concerned anything more than the interests of the landowners; see his *Pamiętniki*, 39. This topic is highly charged in regard to the times both before and after the partitions (see the works by Daniel Beauvois), but it is an even conundrum because of the fate of civilians, not only Polish, during Soviet rule.

⁴⁸ The surprise expressed over the *pogrom* was outright identical in Niżpol and Dereszewicz; A. Kieniewicz, *Nad Prypecią*. Worth adding is that, during the next war, the Polish population eagerly plundered not only the manors, but also the municipal buildings – if only to mention the Officers' Yacht Club in Warsaw on the Vistula, emptied of anything valuable immediately after the capitulation of Warsaw in September 1939.

⁴⁹ The obvious national and social tensions of the period between the two world wars made embracing the name Kresy in the eastern voivodeships a problem admittedly understandable, albeit misfortunate; cf. Mirosław Ustrzycki, *Ziemiańscy na Kresach 1864–1914. Świat wartości i postaw* [The Polish Gentry in the Kresy 1864–1914: A World of Values and Attitudes], Kraków: Arcana, 2006; Włodzimierz Mędrzecki, *Województwo wołyńskie 1921–1939. Elementy przemian społecznych, cywilizacyjnych, politycznych* [The Wołyń Voivodeship 1921–1939: Some Elements of Social, Civilizational, and Political Transformations], Wrocław: Ossolineum, 1988.

4.

The childhood experience of my heroes was a hastened shouldering of responsibility for others, a necessary concession to an irreversible fate. All that was lost was what created our memories and that loss was compensated by an idea. Perhaps this sounds too simple? Delving deeper into the story, I find a message of hope that allows trauma to be transformed into maturity. The Bandar-log survive owing to the hope of becoming part of the Seonee Pack. The Nizpol children do not hope for something that is going to come to them all by itself. Rather, theirs is an active attitude. They will build their Motherland out of a sense of duty, at the same time hoping that they will also be rebuilding their home, by returning a sense of order to their lives. I have stressed that in this particular case – that of children from privileged circles – the confrontation with fate proved the effectiveness of their upbringing. The Bandar-log passed muster despite all the commandments and convictions that were broken. In their history, I do not find any attempt at idealizing the privileges of their early lives.⁵⁰ At the time, the prevailing notion was that all children, whether rich or poor, whether from the village or the city, became more resourceful in life from having to confront life's difficulties earlier and more often. No one used the term "Bandar-log" to indicate that the children were not "well raised". It did not mean that they were lacking good manners. Thanks to Bandar-log they did not need the usual contrast between the rules and the requirements of childhood life to help them get through difficult moments. Following these beliefs, Stefan Żeromski's plot involving Cedro and Gajkoś repeats itself with the stress on the stereotype of the loyal servant. And indeed, this is how subsequent literary narratives took shape.⁵¹ In this material there are traces of relationships between the children from the manors and those from the village, ones that were highlighted, for example, by Buyno-Arctowa, and which are, in fact, pejorative. In the process of rescuing the banner of the January Uprising from the devastated manor, Nik bribes the butler Hawryłko – a village boy employed by the family. Though

⁵⁰ It is understandable that Stefan Kieniewicz, when editing his memoirs sixty years later, was even ultra-critical towards himself. However, in *Bezdomni* his presentation of the characters is rather benevolently satirical.

⁵¹ In Stefan Żeromski's *Popioły* [Ashes, 1902], the old sergeant-major Jacek Gajkoś is the mentor and guardian of young Krzysztof Cedro in his military service, above all spent in the famed regiment of the Vistulan Uhlans in Spain, 1808–1812; their bond symbolizes the equality of status, despite age and rank, in the service of the Motherland. This pattern recurs in all possible types of literature describing the violent encounter of young people with war, like in Żeromski's *Przedwiośnie* [The Coming Spring, 1924], to mention only one example.

a second earlier he was "a homie", now he is ready to betray Nik, a "[c]ompanion of his childhood years, a friend who shared every one of his toys with him, and whom he trusted".⁵² And with whom he spoke Ukrainian! Ksawery Pruszyński (1907–1950), who came from that region, testified that children from the Polish manors acquired Ukrainian quite naturally.⁵³ The revolution broke barriers, but not beliefs,⁵⁴ and superstitions about class were buttressed by prevailing stereotypes throughout the rapidly changing circumstances.

5.

The experience of childhood trauma during war and revolution proved to be attractive as literary material. The emerging narratives influenced attitudes and imagination in the next generation. Schemas, stereotypes, and mythologies predominated over authentic experience. Żurakowska's novel is special in this regard. Even the characters, the brave Bandar-log, turned out to be resistant to mythologization. They proved this in yet another confrontation with an unwanted fate during World War Two. Nevertheless, it is worth thinking about the place of these narratives in the process of mythologizing the Kresy. Transforming experiences into a literary image was the first step; the second was harnessing literature into the politics of the time. The third step led to mythologization.

The founding myth of the Kresy was the Edenic garden, "a land of milk and honey", where the young characters were happy and innocent. Their fates took shape in a way that allowed the exile from paradise to be substituted by the idea of a happy family in the reborn Motherland. This memory and its literary form influenced education and imagination, and also provided the scouting

⁵² Żurakowska, *Pożegnanie domu*, 351–352: "Towarzysza swych lat dziecinnych, przyjaciela, który dzielił się z nim ongiś każdą zabawką i darzył zaufaniem".

⁵³ Pruszyński, while an intern at the Polish General Consulate in Kiev (in 1933), managed to pass himself off as a local Ukrainian, and thereby succeeded in visiting his family's part of the country; see Mieczysław Pruszyński, *Migawki wspomnień* [Snippets of Recollection], Warszawa: Rosner i Wspólnicy, 2002, 66. See also Ksawery Pruszyński, *W czerwonej Hiszpanii* [In Red Spain], Warszawa: Towarzystwo Wydawnicze „Rój”, 1937. Ukrainian was also the language of daily use in the Sobańskis' Zwedenówka. However, in Dereszewicze it was the other way around; this is purportedly why efforts were made to hire staff from the Polish settlements.

⁵⁴ Stefan Kieniewicz, *Pamiętniki*, 40, recounted that in 1918, having arrived in Dereszewicze a few days ahead of his parents, under the protection of the German army, he eagerly played with "little Kiper, the young son of the vodka distiller, but when Mom came, she put an end to all such comradery and little Kiper disappeared from the horizon" (małym Kiperem, synkiem gorzelanego, lecz Mama po przyjeździe położyła kres poufałościom i mały Kiper znikł z horyzontu).

ethos of duty and service which states "all that is ours, to Poland we give".⁵⁵ At the same time, this became a didactic narrative promoting appreciation of the achievements of a free Poland.⁵⁶ It gave birth to the variant of the Kresy myth that served as a compensation, a variant that turned into a vision of free Poland as a capstone of national consciousness. Briefly stated, this myth served to underpin the none too successful policy towards national minorities. Nevertheless, people discerned a very important unifying element in this myth, so necessary in the years of captivity. Of the characters I have presented, at the very least Nik and Stefan constructed a critical attitude towards their experiences and were distrustful towards mythology. Though faithful to their dear memories, they did not suppose that their suffering justified anything.

The huge career of the Kresy myth began only after World War Two, and my heroes could not find their feet in the new situation. This happened because "after the war" (and not after any liberation), the possibility of free expression was blocked. In the wake of the captivity, the possibility to voice one's own experience and formulate an interpretation was distorted. Memories of war and occupation, of Konzentrationslager and Gulag camps, of smugglers and insurgents, encountered barriers and traumas. All these things could not be freely expressed. Literature managed to cope with the silence, at least until socialist realism was imposed. Children's literature, by contrast, had no chance. As long as it was possible, people from the first generation returned to literature from their own childhoods, and tried to contrast the narrative learned at home with the new version of the past promulgated in the schools. The results were ambiguous.

6.

The traumatic experience of the second generation was again war, revolution, and losing their homes. For people living in the east of Poland it meant Soviet deportation, the massacre in Volhynia, and ultimately exile – and all of this became only marginally the topic of children's literature. Why? Because these stories offered writers no way to write a happy ending? Or perhaps because of the

⁵⁵ The first words of the hymn of the Polish scouts in the version by Olga Drahonowska-Małkowska, who in 1912 adapted the lyrics to suit the melody of the revolutionary song "Na barykady, ludu roboczy!" [Workers – To the Barricades!].

⁵⁶ A delayed echo of this is Hanna Morkowicz-Olczakowa, *Jak się wszystko zmieniło* [How Everything Has Changed], ill. Antoni Uniechowski, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Jana Morkowicza, 1946.

coerced silence in which those experiences were cloaked after the war?⁵⁷ Maybe the tragedy was of such magnitude that children's literature, childish readers could not be allowed to know?⁵⁸ As one who fortuitously survived not only the war, but also the post-war period, I really cannot refer to memories. No shadow rests on them. To what extent is this an ordinary experience and to what degree extraordinary? As a historian I can assume that it is rather ordinary.

This perspective allows us, however, to indicate the continuation of the process transforming experiences into mythology, and to sharpen our suggestions regarding the role of literature in this process – particularly children's literature. The experience of childhood we have outlined here permits us to think that literature served as a conduit through which a deeply troubled past became material for mythologization. The children themselves, at least in part, were protected from such direct participation by the process of their upbringing. And through such upbringing we have found the source of self-reliance against school indoctrination in post-war Poland. Then the need was not to look at reality, and so myth swallowed up their testimonies. This myth-making process proved to be even stronger after World War Two, when mentioning the many traumas was limited by censorship and political control. The myth sank roots primarily because of the final severing of the Kresy from Poland, something which affected an incomparably greater mass of people. The truth – the fighting, the war crimes, and losses – was banned; this created ideally fertile conditions for mythologizing. The children's story about losing home, about bravery and persistence, about the creative power of hope, was overwhelmed by the need for a discourse that could compensate for the feeling of loss.

I would sum the matter up as follows: the children of the mythical paradise were equipped with a capacity to face life's challenges, without feeling fated to hardship. Their parents, in turn, seem to have surrendered to naive illusions. Undoubtedly, some of them were pompous or at least frivolous. But being critical comes more easily with the passage of time. It was only after the fact, only once

⁵⁷ See Mariusz Zawodniak, "Baśń i realizm. Jeszcze o powojennej sytuacji literatury dla najmłodszych" [The Fable and Realism: Once Again about the Situation of Literature for the Youngest], in Kornelia Ćwiklak, ed., *Baśń we współczesnej kulturze* [The Fable in Contemporary Culture], vol. 1: *Niewyczerpana moc baśni. Literatura, sztuka, kultura masowa* [The Inexhaustible Power of the Fable: Literature, Art, Mass Culture], Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2014, 151–162; Zbigniew Jarosiński, "Socrealizm dla dzieci" [Socialist Realism for Children], *Teksty Drugie* 6/54 (1998), 69–86.

⁵⁸ The texts by, e.g., Odojewski, along with the whole of memoir and compensation literature for children, are unsuitable. I harbour a deep reluctance towards grasping these issues from the child's perspective or as literary productions targeted at children.

everything had been decided that the witnesses of those times in their written recollections revealed their conviction that destruction lay inevitably in store. There is nothing much of use here. And those living in paradise, the Polish landowners, were in any case not inclined to listen much to those who did not share their views on the world. This was true as well for the Poles who had arrived from Tsardom's western lands in vast numbers, seeking there, on the Kresy, the positions of status which were ever so hard to obtain in Congress Poland.⁵⁹ Poles from the intelligentsia enjoying "a situation" in a manor on the Kresy seldom shared the faith and self-satisfaction of the lord and his family. In the main, however, Poles from the Congress lands concealed their radical view, especially in social matters. The plight of the peasants received even less attention, for the peasants, according to the way the landed class thought about things, were simply a resource to be exploited "in paradise". Polish landowners were therefore even less inclined to believe in haunting premonitions since, in their judgement, they, the gentry, were a permanent fixture in their own land.⁶⁰

7.

The children of Niżpol and Dereszewicze were the last generation of people whose Polish identity was tied – and for over 500 years – to lands that are today Ukrainian and Belarusian. They hailed foremost from the local people, and not the colonizers – and this especially goes for the aristocratic families, the great landowners who during the times of the Rzeczpospolita had accepted the Polish language, culture, and religion.⁶¹ Thus, no viable parallels can be drawn with the French in Algeria, the Portuguese in Angola, or the descendants of the

⁵⁹ The term is traditionally applied to the area of the Russian partition of Poland, from which Tsar Alexander I in 1815 created the Kingdom of Poland. It ceased to exist separately in 1832, following the failure of the Poles' November Uprising. In 1864, directly after the collapse of the next major insurrection against Russia – the January Uprising – these lands were renamed "Vistula Land". Lands inhabited primarily by Poles developed propitiously in the early twentieth century; nonetheless, the numerically growing intelligentsia could not find employment. Thus, that class's members sought their fortunes on estates out on the Kresy, and even more often in the Russian hinterland.

⁶⁰ This lost Paradise was analysed by Czesław Miłosz in *Szukanie Ojczyzny* [Searching for Motherland], Kraków: Znak, 1992.

⁶¹ See Hieronim Grała, "Rzeczpospolita szlachecka – twór kolonialny?" [The Republic of Nobles: A Colonial Entity?], in Jan Kieniewicz, ed., *Debaty Artes Liberales*, vol. 10: *Perspektywy postkolonializmu w Polsce, Polska w perspektywie postkolonialnej* [Postcolonial Perspectives in Poland, Poland in Postcolonial Perspective], Warszawa: Wydział „Artes Liberales”, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2016, 275–299.

Spanish conquistadors.⁶² The exploitation of the subjected population did not have a colonial character. This needs to be borne in mind when we reflect on the consequences of the social and confessional conflicts of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and when we examine Russian policy vis-à-vis the great Polish estates on the lands incorporated into the empire of the Tsars.⁶³ All the same, this is to cite our knowledge as of today – and with today’s sensitivities. Back in those years, despite the experiences of the revolution of 1905, the Polish enclaves, rich and European, did not seem imperilled. They were protected by the Tsarist authorities, and this was by no means insignificant. When Tsarist Russia was overthrown, it seemed to plenty of Poles that a meeting of the minds could be achieved with a democratic Russia. This was particularly true of the aristocratic milieu – and of the ownership class in general. These illusions were altogether ubiquitous. But with the coming of the civil war, in which White Russia perished, all national aspirations, not only those of the Poles, proved to be merely wishful thinking. The revolution swept that world away with no regard to class nor to ethnic identity. This is easy to discern today. In 1917 and 1918, illusions were the norm.⁶⁴

Even less so did the children have a sense of impending *Fatum*. They had to behave in accord with the decisions of the adults, but they were not hamstrung by the feeling that this or that could not happen. The *Bandar-log* did not anticipate the future, though they dreamed dreams. Hence, those children proved ready for anything; nothing bridled their imagination. In acting

⁶² This is very fashionable now, which does not mean it is wise; see Stefan Kieniewicz, “Daniel Beauvois o kresach południowych (w związku z pracą D. Beauvois, *Le noble, le serf et le revisor. La noblesse polonaise entre le tsarisme et les masses ukrainiennes (1831–1863)*, Editions des archives contemporaines, Paris–Montreaux 1985, s. 365)” [Daniel Beauvois on the Southern Kresy (In Response to the Work of D. Beauvois, *Le noble, le serf et le revisor. La noblesse polonaise entre le tsarisme et les masses ukrainiennes (1831–1863)*, Editions des archives contemporaines, Paris–Montreaux 1985, p. 365)], *Przegląd Historyczny* 77.4 (1986), 767–775.

⁶³ Daniel Beauvois writes more extensively about this in *Trójkąt ukraiński. Szlachta, carat i lud na Wołyniu, Podolu i Kijowszczyźnie 1793–1914* [The Ukrainian Triangle: Nobles, Tsarism, and the People of Volhynia, Podolia, and the Kiev Region 1793–1914], trans. Krzysztof Rutkowski, Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS, 2005. See the polemics over this matter in the debate on colonialism in Jan Kieniewicz, ed., *Debaty IBI AL*, vol. 1, Warszawa: Instytut Badań Interdyscyplinarnych „Artes Liberales”, Uniwersytet Warszawski, 2008.

⁶⁴ This is wonderfully captured in the memoirs of the prince of Pereyaslav, Mieczysław Jałowiecki, *Na skraju imperium i inne wspomnienia* [On the Empire’s Outer Edge and Other Recollections], selection and layout of the text by Michał Jałowiecki, Warszawa: Spółdzielnia Wydawnicza „Czytelnik”, 2013. See Karol Wędziagolski, *Pamiętniki* [Memoirs], ed. Grzegorz Eberhardt, Warszawa: Iskry, 2007. In may well be added that quite similar illusions accompanied the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939; see M. Pruszyński, *Migawki wspomnień*, 33.

spontaneously, they created Hope. And thanks to Hope, and being unaware of the pointlessness of resistance, they squared off with Ananke. And they won.

Today I, a descendant of the Bandar-log, do not anxiously strain my ear, for I know that no voice will reach me thence.⁶⁵ Those lands and waters of the old Rzeczpospolita,⁶⁶ long covered in the dust of dying memory and destruction... – well, with every move of my hand I am revealing artifacts, memories, family traces, and remembrances, or rather their remains. The witnesses of the first storm have already passed away, and there are few left who witnessed the second one. Traces of memory and testimonies of feelings were left by people resistant to ideologies, by children capable of building a new home following failure upon failure. Beyond events, beyond history, beyond even narratives these traces still exist.

⁶⁵ Just as no voice from Lithuania reached Adam Mickiewicz... The exiles from the Kresy were lucky to have rescued a photo album, but even these were to perish in the next catastrophe. As it would happen, after writing these words a voice from my family's former parts arrived, a voice of strengthening Belarusian identity. I spoke about this in December 2019; see Jan Kieniewicz, "Dziedzictwo Polesia. Od *locus amoenus* do *locus communis*" [The Heritage of Polesie: From *locus amoenus* to *locus communis*], Wydział „Artes Liberales” Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego [Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw], <http://al.uw.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Jan-Kieniewicz-Dziedzictwo-Polesia.-Od-locus-amoenus-do-locus-communis.pdf> (accessed 10 June 2020).

⁶⁶ “Kaczki ciągną nad wodami Rzeczpospolitej” (The ducks are descending over the waters of the Res Publica), as Czesław Miłosz wrote in “Haftki gorsetu” [Clasps of a Corset] in his *Nieobjęta ziemia* [Unattainable Earth], Paryż: Instytut Kultury, 1984, 20–21; a poem inspired by reading Janina Żółtowska's memoirs at the home of the Weintraubs in Cambridge, MA.

MYTHICAL DELIGHT AND HOPE IN C.S. LEWIS'S TILL WE HAVE FACES AND CHRONICLES OF NARNIA

When I became a man I put away childish things,
including the fear of childishness and the desire to be very grown up.

C.S. Lewis, "On Three Ways of Writing for Children", 1966¹

All myth, according to C.S. Lewis, conveys truth. For all myth is a reflection, however clear or distorted, of the True Myth – the story of God's relationship to his creation. This concept was foundational for Lewis, both in his Christian faith and in his writings.² Myths of all kinds, primarily but far from exclusively classical, pervade his novels, particularly his *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956)³ and his final novel, *Till We Have Faces* (1956). So in what way do these works of fiction convey to us the True Myth? Well, the answer, of course, is, in many ways. This paper will focus on one aspect – namely, Lewis's use of myth to explore the different ways in which his characters perceive (or, perhaps, choose not to perceive) the same reality.

Unlike the *Chronicles of Narnia*, which has become a best-loved children's classic, *Till We Have Faces* is not a book written for young readers. Indeed, not

¹ In C.S. Lewis, *Of Other Worlds: Essays and Stories*, ed. Walter Hooper, London: G. Bles, 1966, 101.

² Lewis in a letter to a friend (Arthur Greeves, 1 October 1931) famously wrote: "Now the story of Christ is simply a true myth: a myth working on us in the same way as the others, but with this tremendous difference that it really happened: and one must be content to accept it in the same way, remembering that it is God's myth where the others are men's myths: i.e., the pagan stories are God expressing Himself through the minds of poets, using such images as He found there, while Christianity is God expressing Himself through what we call 'real things'"; see *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, vol. 1: *Family Letters 1905–1931*, ed. Walter Hooper, San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2004, 976–977. For further discussion, see, e.g., James W. Menzies, *True Myth: C.S. Lewis and Joseph Campbell on the Veracity of Christianity*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2015.

³ On this topic, see particularly Michael Ward, *Planet Narnia: The Seven Heavens in the Imagination of C.S. Lewis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

only does it allude to a number of adult themes⁴ but it is also highly complex in its style. In Lewis's own view it was "far and away the best" book he had written,⁵ and it has been hailed by critics ever since as the most sophisticated and powerful of all his literary offerings, almost postmodern in its conception.⁶ It is in some ways the book of Lewis's which is best placed to speak to our age, with its frightening tendency towards cynicism and despair.

Most importantly, however, *Till We Have Faces* is a novel of hope, and it thus speaks to many of the same themes as the Narnian septet.⁷ Cleverly inverting the coming-of-age novel, it is also a story of innocence lost and subsequently, beyond all hope, recovered. Birthed out of his own childhood struggles, *Till We Have Faces* in many ways mirrors Lewis's own hesitant journey from scepticism towards faith. As Martha Sammons suggests, the seeds of the principal characters may easily be found in Lewis's troubled early life.⁸ As an adult, Lewis became convinced that he, like many others, had become trapped in a prison of false maturity. Reading and writing stories, and re-engaging with myth – above all the True Myth at the heart of the Christian faith – represented for him the way of return, a pathway he hoped to open up for his own and future generations. Animating all his mature fiction is thus Jesus' charge that "unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). Ultimately then, regaining the faith of childhood – which is also true maturity – is the theme which binds *Till We Have Faces* and Narnia together.

⁴ That is to say, the novel touches on themes such as adultery, rape, and suicide.

⁵ Letter to Anne Scott, 26 August 1960; see *The Collected Letters of C.S. Lewis*, vol. 3: *Narnia, Cambridge and Joy 1950–1963*, ed. Walter Hooper, San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 2009, 1181.

⁶ See, e.g., Kyoko Yuasa, *C.S. Lewis and Christian Postmodernism: Word, Image, and Beyond*, Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 2017. Colin Duriez, in *The A–Z of C.S. Lewis: An Encyclopaedia of His Life, Thought, and Writings*, Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2013, 179–180, calls Lewis "a premodernist who has a postmodern appeal".

⁷ We would strongly contest Kath Filmer's suggestion that the ending of *Till We Have Faces* remains ambiguous; our own reading of the novel is far more hopeful. See Kath Filmer, *Scepticism and Hope in Twentieth Century Fantasy Literature*, Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992, 33–34.

⁸ Martha C. Sammons, "A Far-Off Country": *A Guide to C.S. Lewis's Fantasy Fiction*, Lanham, MD, New York, NY, and Oxford: University Press of America, 2000, 191.

Till We Have Faces

Till We Have Faces is a retelling of the myth of Cupid and Psyche, originally found in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*.⁹ In Lewis's version, the narrator is Orual, oldest of the three daughters of King Trom of Glome. Her youngest sister, Psyche, or Istra in their native tongue, is "prettier than Andromeda, prettier than Helen, prettier than Aphrodite herself",¹⁰ as well as being of a sweet and loving disposition, as if "Virtue herself had put on human form" (21). First venerated by the people and mistaken in her astonishing beauty for the goddess Ungit herself – that is, the equivalent of Venus/Aphrodite – she comes to be blamed for everything wrong in the land, called the Accursed for making the land impure by "aping the gods and stealing the worship due to the gods" (35). To lift Ungit's curse, the Priest requires Psyche to be sacrificed to the Shadow Brute – the son of Ungit and god of the Mountain – as a Great Offering. But of course, as we know, the god loves Psyche and takes her for his own bride.

The two sisters are contrasted from the very first – as much as Psyche is beautiful, so we read that Orual is ugly, a trait emphasized throughout the book. But their characters are contrasted too. When the people begin to treat Psyche badly, she readily forgives them¹¹ and seeks the fault in herself, while Orual threatens violence against the perpetrators.¹² And when Psyche is to be sacrificed to the god of the Mountain, Orual is distraught and Psyche accepting. What is at the root of this contrast? It is their differing perspectives on the same event. For Orual, what is to happen to Psyche is a "cowardly murder" – she is to be made "food for a monster" (53). For Psyche, to be given to the god of the Mountain is the fulfilment of a lifelong desire. In her own words, "I have always [...] had a kind of longing for death [...]. It was when I was happiest that I longed the most" – for whenever she saw beauty,

⁹ Lucius Apuleius, *The Golden Ass: Being the Metamorphoses of Lucius Apuleius*, ed. Stephen Gaselee, trans. William Adlington, London and New York, NY: William Heinemann and Macmillan, 1915, iv–vi. Lewis was fascinated by this myth all his life, and in fact had been considering for more than thirty years how he might retell it, making several attempts in various poetic genres before finally recounting it in prose in its current form. See Karen Rowe, "Till We Have Faces: A Study of the Soul and the Self", in Bruce L. Edwards, ed., *C.S. Lewis: Life, Works, and Legacy*, vol. 2: *Fantast, Mythmaker, and Poet*, Westport, CT: Praeger, 2007, 136. Lewis's extant early attempts may be found in Don W. King, *C.S. Lewis, Poet: The Legacy of His Poetic Impulse*, Kent, OH: Kent State University Press, 2001, 269–271.

¹⁰ C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, London: Fount, 1998 (ed. pr. 1956), 18. All the subsequent quotations are from this edition; page numbers are given in brackets.

¹¹ Indeed, in one episode she even describes a young boy who spits at her as "a lovely boy" (*ibidem*, 30).

¹² *Ibidem*, 29–30.

because it was so beautiful, it set me longing, always longing. Somewhere else there must be more of it. Everything seemed to be saying, "Psyche, come!" [...] The sweetest thing in all my life has been the longing – to reach the Mountain, to find the place where all the beauty came from [...]. All my life the god of the Mountain has been wooing me [...]. I am going to my lover. (55–56)

Indeed, her only true fear in being sacrificed is that there *is* no god of the Mountain and that she will die slowly of starvation instead.¹³

It may seem to us that Orual is the more grown up of the two girls – for indeed she is the older sister and has cared for Psyche since she was a baby, being the closest thing to a mother that she had. Her view of the situation may seem worldly-wise and in touch with harsh reality, whereas Psyche's is naive. But this is not how Lewis encourages us to read the characters. For it is Psyche who "acts with a grave quietness, almost as if she were older than I [Orual]" (30); it is Psyche who, in the moment of crisis, pets and comforts her older sister "as if it were [she] who were the child and the victim" (50).¹⁴ Thus naivety is not immaturity, and cynicism is not mature wisdom.

Yet Orual persists in treating Psyche as immature¹⁵ – she addresses her as "child" (51)¹⁶ and wants to force her eyes open – "not to blind our eyes, not to hide terrible things" (53). When later in the story Psyche admits that in her anxiety at the moment of the sacrifice she found that she could no longer believe in the god of the Mountain, Orual rejoices at her wavering, since she sees in Psyche's faith something "unnatural and estranging" (81).

The opening sketch of the characters is only amplified as we move further into the story. For when we find Psyche at home in the invisible palace of the god, her husband – Orual having till that moment believed her dead at the hands of the Shadow Brute – we see contrasted Psyche's pure joy as she recounts the wonders she has experienced with Orual's scepticism, on the one hand, and antagonism on the other. For it is, as Lewis says himself, his most original contribution to the myth that he makes the palace invisible: "[...] if – he says – 'making' is not the wrong word for something which forced itself upon me, almost at my

¹³ *Ibidem*, 52.

¹⁴ See also *ibidem*, 123.

¹⁵ Indeed, this is a natural consequence of her obsessive and disordered need-love for Psyche; her efforts to hold on to her mothering role towards Psyche stem from a desire that Psyche would remain dependent on her. See Rowe, "*Till We Have Faces*", 144.

¹⁶ See also Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 78, 88.

first reading of the story, as the way the thing must have been".¹⁷ The invisibility of the palace, by contrast to the Apuleian original, accounts for Orual's sceptical reaction to Psyche's narrative. Where Psyche sees a palace unlike any other, Orual sees only an empty valley. Where Psyche perceives herself dressed in the finest clothes, Orual sees her in rags. Psyche offers her sister the best wine, and honey cakes fit for the gods, and Orual eats wild berries and drinks water from the stream. Thus the same reality is perceived by the two sisters in very different ways, and of course we as readers know that Psyche's view is the correct one. Yet how can we blame Orual for her scepticism, when she cannot see the palace? Indeed, this is her chief complaint against the gods throughout the book – that they did not make it clearer to her.¹⁸

Lewis does not excuse her¹⁹ – and indeed, ultimately she does not excuse herself. For it is her will to disbelieve, her choices not to try to see, that put her in the wrong.²⁰ Many times in her conversation with Psyche, Orual tells us that she "came almost to full belief" (89) – we see her wavering back and forth between faith, grounded in Psyche's confidence, and rejection, based on her own fear. Indeed, she is offered opportunities²¹ – Psyche, realizing she cannot see the palace, begs her to touch it. Whether she would have been able to feel it, we do not know, but she refuses to try, accusing Psyche of wilful self-deception. Later Psyche promises her that "all will come right. We'll make – he [the god] will make you able to see", but Orual again rejects the chance to genuinely seek, crying: "I don't want it [...]. I don't want it. I hate it. Hate it, hate it, hate it. Do you understand?" Perhaps the saddest line in the novel is this: "I saw in a flash that I must choose one opinion or the other; and in the same flash knew which I had chosen" (94).

The decision, once made, she stubbornly holds in the face of evidence, for not long after, she does see the palace – and even the god himself. But for her this is only confirmation that the gods have done her wrong:

¹⁷ Lewis, "Note", in *ibidem*, ix.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 93: "I was at that very moment when, if the gods meant us well, they would speak".

¹⁹ As a young man, before he came to faith, Lewis actually intended to write the story differently, in a way vindicating Orual's unbelief; see John Anthony Dunne, "'Nothing Beautiful Hides Its Face': The Hiddenness of Esther in C.S. Lewis' *Till We Have Faces*", *Sehnsucht: The C.S. Lewis Journal* 9 (2015), 81. It is his own spiritual journey, which parallels Orual's in so many ways, that led him to write as he did.

²⁰ See Rowe, *"Till We Have Faces"*, 144.

²¹ Clyde Kilby offers a thorough examination of all the witnesses Orual had, and wilfully ignored, to the truth about the god; see Clyde S. Kilby, *"Till We Have Faces: An Interpretation"*, in Peter J. Schakel, ed., *The Longing for a Form: Essays on the Fiction of C.S. Lewis*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007, 171–181.

And now, you who read, give judgement. That moment when I either saw or thought I saw the House – does it tell against the gods or against me? Would they (if they answered) make it a part of their defence? – say it was a sign, a hint, beckoning me to answer the riddle one way rather than the other? I'll not grant them that. (99)

And on seeing the god:

He made it to be as if, from the beginning, I had known that Psyche's lover was a god, and as if all my doubtings, fears, guessings, debating, questionings [...] had been trumped-up foolery, dust blown in my own eyes by myself. You, who read my book, judge. Was it so? (130)

Even old age does not bring to Orual the true maturity possessed by Psyche from the beginning. Near the end of her life, Orual has the chance to make her complaint before the gods, and here we truly learn how wilful her own self-deception has been:

Oh, you'll say (you've been whispering it to me these forty years) that I'd signs enough her palace was real; could have known the truth if I'd wanted. But how could I *want* to know it? (220, emphasis added)

But finally, in the very act of making her complaint, Orual's complaint is answered – and her eyes are truly opened to reality – to the reality of the beauty of the gods, and to the nature of her own motivations.²² And in that moment, when the god arrives, Orual becomes a second Psyche – “beautiful beyond all imagining” like her sister the goddess, “yet not exactly the same” (233).

The Last Battle

Significantly, *Till We Have Faces* was published in the same year as *The Last Battle* (1956), the conclusion to the *Chronicles of Narnia*. Indeed, while it seems to have gone largely unnoticed, many of the themes of *Till We Have Faces* resonate with this final Narnian book. As Michael Ward has convincingly demonstrated, *The Last Battle*, like each of the other *Chronicles*, draws its inspiration

²² For more on the process of Orual's transformation, see Rowe, “*Till We Have Faces*”.

from one of the planetary gods of classical mythology – in this case Saturn.²³ The book tells the story of “the last days of Narnia”, and the god Saturn himself plays a crucial, if incognito, role in the story. As Father Time he is the one who brings an end to Narnia at Aslan’s command, sweeping the stars from the sky and engulfing the land with waves.²⁴ Even more significant is the fact that Aslan himself takes on a distinctly Saturnine aspect for much of the book – complementing his Jovial, Venusian, Martian, Mercurial, Solar, and Lunar aspects in the other volumes. For we see him permitting terrible war and disaster in his beloved Narnia, enacting its total dissolution, and carrying out the final judgement of all Narnians.

As elsewhere in the *Chronicles*, however, Lewis’s deployment of classical myth proves both subtle and multi-layered. On the one hand, as Ward has powerfully argued, *The Last Battle* is a profound retelling of the ancient myth of Saturn’s deposal by Jupiter, and it is the Jovial and not the Saturnine Aslan who finally reigns over the new Narnia.²⁵ On the other hand – and Ward perhaps does not make quite enough of this reversal – it is this very displacement of Saturn by Jupiter that actually inaugurates the new, and everlasting, “age of Saturn”, to recall the pregnant words of Virgil’s Fourth Eclogue (v. 41: “Saturnia regna”), a text beloved by Lewis for its Christological resonance.²⁶ Moreover, in this fascinating double movement, we in fact see the two sides of Saturn’s Justice – and indeed of Jupiter’s Reign – the judgement on the Narnian wicked and the vindication of the Narnian faithful.

If the interplay of Saturn and Jupiter is crucial to *The Last Battle*, is indeed its very theme, then it must be realized that the larger success of this motif is itself dependent on a subtle interweaving of the myth of Cupid and Psyche. Indeed, we might even say that it is the undying love of Cupid-Aslan which brings Psyche-Narnia through her (apparent) abandonment and Saturnine despair into his own eternal, Jovial, embrace. Certainly, the same themes of innocence,

²³ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, esp. ch. 9. See also Simon J.G. Burton, “A Narnian ‘Allegory of Love’: The Pegasus in C.S. Lewis’ *Chronicles of Narnia*”, 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, 357–373.

²⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, London: Diamond Books, 1997 (ed. pr. 1956), 140–149. All the subsequent quotations are from this edition; page numbers are given in brackets.

²⁵ Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 207–213.

²⁶ Virg., *Ecl.* 4.6; cf., e.g., C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms*, London: Geoffrey Bles, 1958, 101: “The great procession of the ages begins anew. Now the Virgin returns, the reign of Saturn returns, and the new child is sent down from the heavens”. Ward, *Planet Narnia*, 191, notes that “the adult Lewis made the Fourth Eclogue a regular part of his Christmas reading”.

maturity, and cynicism that we find in *Till We Have Faces* are fully evident in this book. In particular, the story of Susan's tragic journey from childlike wonder to adult cynicism – something we learn to our shock towards the end of the book²⁷ – inverts disturbingly the conversion narrative of Orual without closing the door on the possibility of Susan's final redemption. By contrast, we see in the other children, most notably Lucy, an abiding Psyche-like faith in Aslan, and hence a breakthrough to true maturity.

To see this properly we need to briefly revisit some of the earlier *Chronicles*. When Lucy first enters Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), the other children think she is playing a game, or worse, lying.²⁸ It takes the elderly Professor Digory, who himself went to Narnia as a child, to open their eyes to the possibility that Lucy is telling the truth. Interestingly, it is said about Susan, who is clearly the most mature of the four and a kind of mother-figure, that "she had never dreamed that a grown-up would talk like the Professor".²⁹ Later, she and the other children, including eventually Edmund, come to share in Lucy's simple wonder. Indeed, following Aslan's Resurrection, the two girls, Lucy and Susan, share a memorable romp with him, with Susan casting aside, at least for a moment, her mask of grown-up dignity.³⁰

In the following book, *Prince Caspian* (1951), all four children return to Narnia. While overjoyed to be back, there are signs that Susan and Peter are becoming too old to stay. In this book Susan never quite becomes again the Queen she once was, and she is depicted as cautious, unimaginative, and fearful.³¹ Indeed, when Lucy excitedly reports that she has seen Aslan, Susan pours cold water on the idea, saying, "Where did you think you saw him?", only to earn Lucy's angry rebuke, "Don't talk like a grown-up [...]. I didn't think I saw him. I saw him" (111). Here, as in *Till We Have Faces*, the perspective of an older sister is not always to be listened to. Indeed, anticipating her later defection, Susan sides with the cynical dwarf Trumpkin, who does not believe in Aslan

²⁷ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 127–128.

²⁸ C.S. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, London: Diamond Books, 1997 (ed. pr. 1950), 27–29.

²⁹ Ibidem, 47. Sam McBride, in "Coming of Age in Narnia", in Shanna Caughey, ed., *Revisiting Narnia: Fantasy, Myth and Religion in C.S. Lewis' Chronicles*, Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2005, 71, is right to note that Digory's maturity is not quite like Lucy's initial innocence of childhood – rather, he has learned that "true maturity involves unlearning some of the things learned while growing toward maturity". Susan, meanwhile, seems stuck at a stage of "partial maturity", having left behind childlike trust and having not yet learned to regain it.

³⁰ Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 148–149.

³¹ C.S. Lewis, *Prince Caspian*, London: Diamond Books, 1997 (ed. pr. 1951), 93, 107–108. All the subsequent quotations are from this edition.

at all, against the belief of Lucy and Edmund and the wavering faith of Peter.³² While Lucy is later rebuked by Aslan for not leaving the others to come and find him, her own Psyche-like nature is affirmed by her simple, childlike delight in his presence. When she first hears Aslan's voice, she thinks it is that of her father or her trusted brother Peter; realizing that it is Aslan, she trembles with delight, not fear, and rushes to embrace him and bury her face in his mane.³³ However, Lucy's attempt to communicate her delight to the others is met by a sharp rebuff when Susan replies, "in her most annoying grown-up voice", "you've been dreaming, Lucy. Go to sleep again" (126). In fact, Susan is the most resistant to Lucy's pleas to follow Aslan, and, apart from Trumpkin the unbeliever, she is the last to see him. Yet Susan's fault, by her own confession, is not merely disbelief but in fact much worse. It is rather, like in Orual's case, suppressing and extinguishing the true belief that she knew she had "deep down inside. Or [...] could have [had] if I'd let myself" (132).

At the end of *Prince Caspian* we are told that Peter and Susan are not allowed to return to Narnia. It is Aslan's intention, as we learn in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), that all the children should learn to know him in their own land.³⁴ From here, however, the paths of Peter and Susan diverge radically. Peter, although still a boy, steps into his role as High King and shows a maturity beyond his years. As the leader of the Friends of Narnia he always retains his childlike faith in Aslan – and his love of childish jinks.³⁵ By the end of the series he, like the other children, as well as Digory and Polly, have become ageless, ever young and yet simultaneously wise with the wisdom of eternity.³⁶ The contrast with Susan could not be greater. When King Tirian asks the High King Peter why she is not with them, his reply is chilling: "My sister Susan [...] is no longer a friend of Narnia".³⁷ The subsequent exchange is worth quoting in full:

"Yes," said Eustace, "and whenever you've tried to get her to come and talk about Narnia or do anything about Narnia, she says, *What wonderful memories you have! Fancy your still thinking about all those funny games we used to play when we were children.*"

³² Ibidem, 112.

³³ Ibidem, 120–124.

³⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, London: Diamond Books, 1997 (ed. pr. 1952), 188.

³⁵ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 45–46, 50–52, 126–127.

³⁶ Ibidem, 126–127, 131.

³⁷ Ibidem, 127–128.

"Oh Susan!" said Jill. "She's interested in nothing nowadays except nylons and lipstick and invitations. She always was a jolly sight too keen on being grown-up."³⁸

"Grown-up indeed," said the Lady Polly. "I wish she *would* grow up".³⁹

There is a supreme irony here in that Eustace, who himself once believed that Narnia was just a silly game,⁴⁰ has outgrown Susan. There is an even greater irony, however, in the fact that Susan herself was once a beautiful and noble Queen in Narnia and has now forfeited her true identity for the sake of a false maturity.⁴¹

Susan's journey from childlike faith to cynicism is only in the background in *The Last Battle*. Featuring much more prominently is the story of the Dwarfs, and it is here that we find the most explicit connection to *Till We Have Faces*. For the exploited and oppressed Dwarfs living in "the last days of Narnia", Aslan has become a fable.⁴² While King Tirian, the unicorn Jewel, Eustace and Jill, and all the true Narnians keep faith in Aslan, even when it seems that he has deserted, or worse, turned against them, the Dwarfs believe the lies. Renouncing their allegiance to Aslan and Tirian, they turn treacherously against their fellow Narnians, ruthlessly murdering the Talking Horses.⁴³ At the end of the book their selfish attitude – "the Dwarfs are for the Dwarfs" – has become their prison.⁴⁴ Surrounded by the beauty and wonder of the new Narnia, the Dwarfs are unable – indeed, like Susan in *Prince Caspian*, they refuse – to see it. Instead, they continue to believe they are in a "pitch-black, poky, smelly little hole of a stable".⁴⁵ When Lucy, who despite their treachery still loves them, asks them if they cannot see the trees and the flowers or even her, their beautiful Queen, one of their number responds angrily: "How in the name of all Humbug can I see what ain't there" (137). When Aslan arrives and places before them

³⁸ Lewis has often been accused here of criticizing Susan for reaching a natural stage of growing up. However, as Rowan Williams rightly notes in *The Lion's World: A Journey into the Heart of Narnia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, 41, Susan's "failure is not growing up. It is the denial of what she has known, rooted in her 'keenness' not to grow up, but to *be* grown-up, a very different matter" (emphasis in the original).

³⁹ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 128 (emphasis added).

⁴⁰ Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 10.

⁴¹ For more on this, see McBride, "Coming of Age in Narnia", 68–71.

⁴² Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 70–72.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 114–115.

⁴⁴ See Chris Brawley, *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*, "Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy" 46, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014, 85–87.

⁴⁵ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 136.

a sumptuous banquet, they still think they are only eating cabbage leaves and drinking dirty water (139). Here we are back in Cupid's invisible palace with the Dwarfs vividly representing Orual's disbelief. In their refusal to yield to Aslan, their refusal "to be taken in", the Dwarfs have cut themselves off forever.⁴⁶

* * *

But Susan and the Dwarfs are not given the final word. This belongs to characters such as Emeth, whose desire and longing to behold the face of his God was, like Psyche's, so great that he resolved to look upon it "though he should slay me".⁴⁷ It belongs to the faithful frolicking dogs, whose joy in coming to the new Narnia is utterly infectious.⁴⁸ It belongs to King Tirian and his loyal friend Jewel the unicorn, who even in the darkest hour retained their faith in Aslan. It belongs to the seven Friends of Narnia, who are also the seven Kings and Queens of Narnia. It belongs to all the faithful followers of Aslan from every age who remained true to him no matter what. Above all, it belongs to Aslan himself, whose own sacrifice on the stone table marks the true reversal from Saturnine despair to Jovial hope, a reversal in which even death itself is turned backwards.⁴⁹

At the end of *The Last Battle* we see that Jupiter has come into his Kingdom and Cupid has claimed his Psyche.⁵⁰ It is this hope, this *reality*, that Lewis seeks to invite all his readers, young and old, to embrace – a hope that calls out to them even in the depths of despair, a hope that survives even the unmaking of the world. As Lewis the narrator says, having given up trying to describe the wonder of the new Narnia,⁵¹ which is so much deeper than we can ever fathom: "[I]f ever you get there you will know what I mean".⁵²

⁴⁶ Brawley, *Nature and the Numinous*, 86: "The sacramental vision is only offered to those who are willing to experience a higher reality, one which transcends any concern with the finite self".

⁴⁷ Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 153. Emeth, as a Calormine, is a worshipper of the false god Tash – yet comes to realize that all his life Aslan has been the one he has truly been seeking and serving (153).

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 163.

⁴⁹ Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, 148.

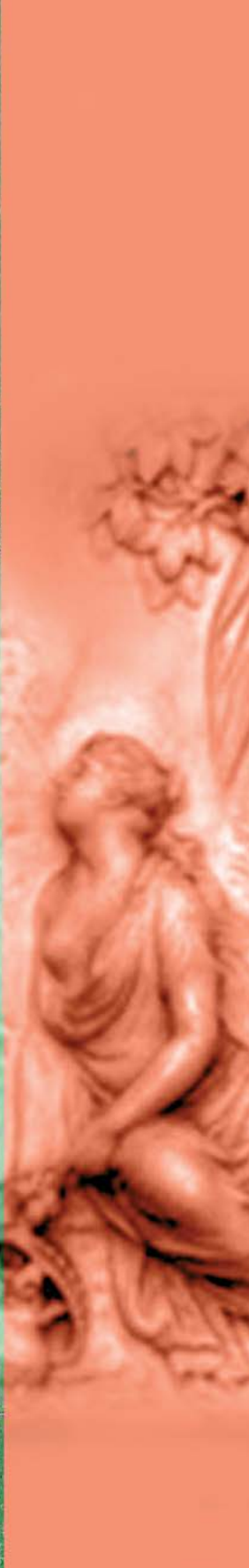
⁵⁰ While not explicit, it is clear that Aslan can be seen in a role parallel to Cupid's, and the faithful Narnians to Psyche's. Certainly the endings of both novels were intended to represent the union of Christ with the soul or with the Church; see, e.g., Joe R. Christopher, "Archetypal Patterns in *Till We Have Faces*", in Peter J. Schakel, ed., *The Longing for a Form: Essays on the Fiction of C.S. Lewis*, Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007, 193–212.

⁵¹ Indeed, strikingly similar imagery is used to describe the valley of the god in *Till We Have Faces* (see Rowe, "Till We Have Faces", 138), further tying together the two stories.

⁵² Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 160.

PART III

Holding Out for a Hero...
and a Heroine



HOW TO BECOME A HERO

Children's novels, to me, spoke, and still speak, of hope. They say: look, this is what bravery looks like. This is what generosity looks like. They tell me, through the medium of wizards and lions and talking spiders, that this world we live in is a world of people who tell jokes and work and endure. Children's books say: the world is huge. They say: hope counts for something. They say: bravery will matter, wit will matter, empathy will matter, love will matter. These things may or may not be true. I do not know. I hope they are. I think it is urgently necessary to hear them and to speak them.

Katherine Rundell, *Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise*, 2019¹

Katherine Rundell's recent clarion-call on behalf of children's fiction places hope at the centre of the experience for adult and child readers alike, arguing that the didactic function of children's fiction has shifted away from its historic territory of schoolroom information and moral and religious programming towards a more sophisticated narrative enactment of what Angela Carter famously termed "heroic optimism".² Bravery, generosity, struggle, endurance, wit, empathy, love: for Rundell this list is not simply a catechism of universal virtues, but an inventory of values in which readers need to be able to continue to believe as adults in order to navigate the world for which fiction prepares them. That

¹ London: Bloomsbury, 2019, 47–48.

² Angela Carter, ed., *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, London: Virago, 1990, xviii. The coinage, something of a casual throwaway in Carter's own usage, where it is tied specifically to gender norms and their wish-fulfilment transformations, owes its wider currency and application to its further championing by Marina Warner – initially in her introduction to Angela Carter, ed., *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, ill. Corinna Sargood, London: Virago, 1992, xii, and more recently in her *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, xvi. On the poetics and ethics of hope in children's fiction, see especially M. Sarah Smedman, "Springs of Hope: Recovery of Primordial Time in 'Mythic' Novels for Young Readers", *Children's Literature* 16 (1988), 91–108; Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, 216–227.

adult world may indeed be full of darkness, disappointment, small-mindedness, dreams crushed and evil ascendant – but this, Rundell argues, is all the more reason to remember that the heroic optimism of myth and fairy tale is not only necessary to any resistance but potentially stronger than all of them: “Hope, in fairy tales, is sharper than teeth” (24).

The claim that hope can itself be heroic, and that the heroic potential comprises a set of situational competences and attitudes founded in a can-do, will-succeed mindset, has been fundamental to the modern grammar of fiction for pre-adult readers, which addresses a state of narrative consciousness specific to those whose selves are formed but whose lives have not yet been lived, in a world of experience that exists primarily as an as yet unrealized future, where identities are still plastic and the potential of the adult self waits to be unlocked. Carter’s formulation coincided, unknowingly but not unconnectedly, with the modern emergence of hope and optimism studies as a field of social psychology and philosophy,³ which have established a broader empirical as well as a theoretical foundation for the claims made on behalf of children’s fiction as a social and therapeutic good. Though literature for young readers has always been viewed as having an educative function, the nature of that education – moral, informational, attitudinal – has shifted over the history of children’s fiction as a distinct category. The earliest books for children foregrounded moral instruction; the nineteenth-century boom explored fiction as the honey rimming the cup of factual edification, especially historical and religious; while the twentieth century saw an expanded notion of the value of fictional experience as a way of encoding adult life skills and attitudes through vicarious identificational models of protagonistic and cooperative problem-solving, in which fiction offers its emerging reader a gallery of examples of how to become

³ James R. Averill, George Catlin, and Kyum Koo Chon, *Rules of Hope*, New York, NY: Springer, 1990; Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, New York, NY: Knopf, 1991; C.R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get Here from There*, New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994; Lionel Tiger, *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*, New York, NY: Kodansha, 1995; Jayne M. Waterworth, *A Philosophical Analysis of Hope*, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; Adrienne Martin, *How We Hope: A Moral Psychology*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014; Oliver Bennett, *Cultures of Hope: The Institutional Promotion of Hope*, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; and for a useful recent overview, see Nancy Snow, “Faces of Hope”, in Rochelle M. Green, ed., *Theories of Hope: Exploring Alternative Affective Dimensions of Human Experience*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019, 5–23. The implications of this work for classical emotion studies are discussed by Douglas Cairns, “Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry”, in Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds., *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 13–44, and by George Kazantzidis and Dimos Spatharas in their edited volume *Hope in Ancient Literature, History, and Art: Ancient Emotions I*, “Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes” 63, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018, 3–9.

an effective protagonist in one's own as yet unwritten story. Heroic optimism, leadership, resilience, initiative-taking and decision-making, emotional and moral intelligence, comfortableness in one's own identity, openness to adventure, a growth mindset, the ability to distinguish right from wrong with clarity and to act forcefully on the distinction: these have emerged as core values in a poetics of self-actualization for readers negotiating the transition between the constrained certainties of the pre-adult world and the challenges of adult independence.

The suggestion that classical myth might offer a model for such narratives of hopeful heroization entered the modern conversation with Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charles Kingsley, who harnessed the Victorian revolution in the construction of the child as narrative subject to the (re)invention of fairy tale as what was seen as a transportable mode of juvenile narrative accessible across boundaries of culture, religion, language, and class.⁴ It is an idea that has proved impressively resilient through subsequent cultural receptions of myth across genres, media, and traditions, particularly in discourses which claim universal narrative archetypes underlying the structures of popular storytelling – where becoming a hero is not only the master plot of all current Hollywood cinema,⁵ but it is often claimed to be specifically a *mythic* template, found not only in Greek myth but in the mythologies of all cultures.

The most influential gospel of this creed has been Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, whose belletristic fusion of Victorian armchair anthropology with popular Jungian psychology was obsolete on arrival in 1949, but which has become endemic in the cultural bloodstream thanks to a second wave of virality in the 1980s when George Lucas, wielding the elderly Campbell as an intellectual human shield with the tendentious retrospective claim that *Star Wars* had been written to the Campbell template, sponsored the television series *The Power of Myth* which led in its turn to Christopher Vogler's famous Disney memo on the Campbellian monomyth and in due course to that myth's canonization in screenwriting theory.⁶ Campbell's own summary of the "hero's journey" does not, however, survive scrutiny well:

⁴ The fundamental treatment is Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 11–45.

⁵ Alex Cox's film *Searchers 2.0* includes a satirical routine on the lines of Aristophanes' *Frogs' Iekythion* in which a plot summary of any Hollywood film proves to be completable with the words "and becomes a hero".

⁶ On this memo, its impact at Disney from *The Lion King* onwards, and the cultural history of Hollywood's intoxication with the Campbellian formula, see especially David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*, Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 2006, 33–34.

A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.

Prometheus ascended to the heavens, stole fire from the gods, and descended. Jason sailed through the Clashing Rocks into a sea of marvels, circumvented the dragon that guarded the Golden fleece, and returned with the fleece and the power to wrest his rightful throne from a usurper. Aeneas went down into the underworld, crossed the dreadful river of the dead, threw a sop to the three-headed watchdog Cerberus, and conversed, at last, with the shade of his dead father. All things were unfolded to him: the destiny of souls, the destiny of Rome, which he was about to found, "and in what wise he might avoid or endure every burden". He returned through the ivory gate to his work in the world.⁷

Classicists' internal alarms will tintinnabulate at several points here: the forced recasting of the Prometheus narrative (itself only canonized as "heroic" by Percy and Mary Shelley's reading of the Aeschylean Prometheus) as one of ascent and descent; the tendentially selective summaries of the *Argonautica* and *Aeneid*; and the conspicuous omission of the more palpably paradigmatic *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, neither of whose own heroes' journeys are at all well served by such a model. The awkward truth is that few if any Greek myths fit the monomyth template, which proves to be a distinctly modern metamyth born out of an uninterrogated combination of cultural forces specific to the post-war United States, and whose more recent and influential instantiations have since significantly overwritten Campbell's monomyth with a very un-Campbellian narrative of self-sacrifice that consciously or otherwise owes more to Georges Polti's *Trentes-six situations dramatiques*.⁸ Caroline Lawrence, the most sophisticated contemporary author of classical fiction for young readers, has been a thoughtful and persuasive defender of template-based story models of heroization, Campbell's included;⁹ but her own fiction has shrewdly resisted the trap of applying these templates to existing heroic myth, preferring instead to use these narrative

⁷ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949, 30–31.

⁸ Georges Polti, *Les Trentes-six situations dramatiques*, Paris: Édition du Mercure de France, 1895; 3rd ed. 1924, translated by Lucille Ray as *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*, Boston, MA: The Writer, 1944. The film-maker Mike Figgis has revisited this work in his *The 36 Dramatic Situations*, London: Faber & Faber, 2017.

⁹ Caroline Lawrence, *How to Write a Great Story*, ill. Linzie Hunter, London: Piccadilly Press, 2019.

blueprints as the armature for original stories whose mythicity is invisible to the reader at the conscious level.¹⁰

Greek myth itself presents a very different picture of its heroes' formative years when it presents it at all. As Markus Janka's chapter in this volume reminds us, there is a paradoxical silence at the heart of our mythical childhood: there are very few myths about the childhood exploits of Greek heroes at all, and those few are not notably child-friendly. Aside from his infant herpetoctony, the only ancient episode from Heracles' childhood and adolescence is his killing of his music teacher Linus in an extreme early example of negative student feedback. Other heroes have similarly unedifying backstories: a draft-dodging Achilles rapes a princess; Patroclus is a child-killer, and his posthumous narrative of this life-changing event in Book 23 of the *Iliad* specifically thematizes absence of agency as a defining feature of the child as moral and narrative subject. The most moving story of childhood in Greek epic is Eumaeus' story in *Odyssey* Book 15 of his abduction and enslavement; but the power of that episode lies in its protagonist's innocent passivity, and it is telling that Eumaeus never recovers the aristocratic status and autonomous heroic narrative that is lost with his abduction.

The largest cluster of heroic coming-of-age stories is the Euripidean recognition plays, exemplified by the surviving *Ion*, where fostered heroes such as Theseus in *Aegeus* or Paris in *Alexandros* are recognized by their birth families at a moment of crisis; but these are only tangentially stories of adulthood attained through active heroic choices and achievement. A case can be made for Sophocles' *Philoctetes* as a coming-of-age story for Neoptolemus, who discovers that being a hero and his father's son means following his own conscience rather than what men he has been raised to admire tell him he should do, and it is no coincidence that the *Philoctetes* plot is probably the single most widely used template from Antiquity in Hollywood narrative: the duplicitous hero who comes to care about the target of his deception, and finds himself torn between his conscience and the web of lies in which he has trapped himself. But even Neoptolemus is a very adult young adult, already a full-grown warrior on his way to war.

Telemachus' arc in the *Odyssey* is sometimes described as a coming-of-age story about the making of a hero, but it is significant that there are no ancient stories about the adult Telemachus as a hero in his own right, and Telemachus

¹⁰ Lawrence's Virgilian novellas *The Night Raid* (2014) and *Queen of the Silver Arrow* (2016) depart from the historical settings of her major series to retell episodes from the *Aeneid*, but the treatment there could hardly be called Campbellian.

never does attain an independent adult narrative agency; he remains defined by his filial relationship to an established hero, in a way that Achilles and Odysseus (who both also have a still-living father) are not. Even in the *Odyssey* itself, Telemachus is a largely passive figure until he reconnects with his father in person; his only active choices are (at Athena's prompting) to call the assembly and sail to the Peloponnese, and (on his own initiative) to bypass Pylos on the return trip and to take Theoclymenus under his protection. His initiatives in the second half of the poem are all tied to his supporting role in Odysseus' conspiracy; and though ancient tradition variously married him off to Circe, her daughter Cassiphone, Nausicaa, or Nestor's daughter Polycaste who bathes him in Book 3 of the *Odyssey*,¹¹ the only attested sequel outside his marginal role in the *Telegony* is a thoroughly unheroic tale known only (in different versions) to Lycophron and his scholia in which an angry Telemachus murders Circe and is killed in turn by his half-sister Cassiphone.¹² All this leaves Odysseus' boar hunt to stand alone in the epic canon as a teenage exploit tied positively to the early realization of heroic identity, and we shall see this episode gratefully adopted as a prototype in modern treatments of the theme in the absence of canonical alternatives.

Otherwise, however, children – even future heroes – simply do not have agency in myth. The discovery of the child as narrative subject is a post-pagan and largely modern phenomenon, which has left the heroes' own mythical childhoods an empty space in their myths that is available for colonization by migrant narrative tropes from our own cultural practices. Accordingly, while there is no shortage of modern retellings for children of the adult careers of the classical heroes, and many novels for adult and younger readers begin by dealing with the heroes' childhood and such canonical myths as are associated with them (such as Odysseus' boar hunt) en route to their adult careers, there are far fewer that focus specifically on the heroes' youth, and no counterpart in English to such a work as Jadwiga Żylińska's *Młodość Achillesa* [Achilles' Youth, 1974].¹³ Hawthorne's Eustace Bright sidestepped the challenge entirely by the drastic move of reimagining some of the adult heroes and heroines of myth as children – but tellingly did not allow them to grow up.

¹¹ In the *Telegony* (Proclus, *Chrestomathy*), the scholia to Lycophron (508), Hellanicus (4F156 Jacoby), and the Hesiodic *Catalogue* (fr. 221 Merkelbach–West) respectively.

¹² Lycoph., *Alex.* 807–811 with scholia.

¹³ Robert A. Sucharski, "Jadwiga Żylińska's Fabulous Antiquity", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 120–126.

There are, however, a handful of exceptions which address the challenge head-on – and do so not just in a single text, but in an extended narrative corpus which demonstrates the transformational poetics of a deep-structural system of narrative values corresponding to the structuralist notion of a megatext.¹⁴ I want to consider three such bodies of fiction from the turn of the millennium which offer perhaps the most sustained exploration of heroic adolescence as a mythological instrument of reflection on adult heroism: the television properties *Young Hercules* and *Hercules: The Animated Series* (both 1998–1999), and the *Young Heroes* quartet of novels (2001–2004) by Jane Yolen and Robert J. Harris.¹⁵ The first two of these, though less remembered now than the franchised narratives from which they were spun off, are of unusual interest for the present volume not just for their simultaneous treatment of the same heroic figure's adolescence as an extended corpus of episodic adventures modelled on the modern school story whose synecdochic versatility has made it the dominant narrative model for fictional articulations of adolescent agency, but as probably the largest unitary corpora of modern narrative about the pre-adult career of classical heroes and the lessons they may have for their modern-day counterparts; while the Yolen–Harris novels in contrast explore a unified set of narrative values with a range of different protagonists to demonstrate the persistence of fundamental elpidological principles across boundaries of gender, status, and identity.

Young Hercules was the second spin-off from the Action Pack television series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (HTLJ, 1994–2000) following the impactful *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001).¹⁶ The adult shows ran for six seasons

¹⁴ This term has a complex history, bifurcating out of Paris in the early 1970s via influential writings by Charles Segal and Christine Brooke-Rose, the former dominant in classical scholarship and emphasizing the transformationality of story patterns within the mythic or genre corpus, the latter developed primarily within science-fiction and fantasy studies with a focus on the encoding of narrative devices as shorthand tropes of their genre. See Charles Segal, "Greek Myth as a Semiotic and Structural System and the Problem of Tragedy", *Arethusa* 16 (1983), 173–198, and Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, and for later mutations Damien Broderick, *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction*, London: Routledge, 2005; Brian Attebery, "Science Fictional Parables: Jazz, Geometry, and Generation Starships", in Brian Attebery and Veronica Hollinger, eds., *Parables of Science Fiction*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013, 3–23.

¹⁵ Jane Yolen and Robert J. Harris, *Young Heroes* series (initially *Before They Were Heroes*, New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001–2004): *Odysseus in the Serpent Maze* (2001); *Hippolyta and the Curse of the Amazons* (2002); *Atalanta and the Arcadian Beast* (2003); *Jason and the Gorgon's Blood* (2004).

¹⁶ This productive franchise also included the five *Hercules* television movies (1994) originally produced as part of the Action Pack series. The busy 1998 season in which the *Young Hercules*

each, whereas *Young Hercules* only lasted one – but a busy one comprising fifty “half-hour” episodes (in the sense conventional in US network television: actually twenty-one minutes each plus advertising breaks); there had also previously been a ninety-minute pilot setting up the series, and a quartet of flashback episodes in the fourth season of *Hercules*, which carried the young cast’s adventures past graduation. Production on the series was bumpy from the outset. When original lead Ian Bohen, who had played the young version of Hercules in the *HTLJ* episodes and *Young Hercules* pilot, hesitated about moving to New Zealand (where all the series in the franchise were filmed), a hurried recasting settled on a tall, skinny, seventeen-year-old Canadian and former Disney Mouseketeer by the not-yet-household name of Ryan Gosling, who brought disarming charisma to the role but was so far from Herculean in physique as to need fake muscles painted on his scrawny arms by the resourceful make-up department. Another crisis struck early in filming when half the crew, including Peter Jackson’s Weta Workshop who had been responsible for effects on all the franchise’s series, were poached to work on *The Lord of the Rings* instead; and though ratings were good when the *Young Hercules* season aired, the parent *Hercules* series was by that point winding down following a combination of franchise fatigue, the serious illness of star Kevin Sorbo during the fourth season, and Sorbo’s own dissatisfaction with the tone and writing of the series, with only a drastically shortened sixth and final season still to air, so that it was no great surprise that *Young Hercules* was not renewed for a second season. Despite these many obstacles, the *Young Hercules* series was very well put together, with beguiling performances from Gosling and local star Dean O’Gorman as the younger versions of Sorbo’s adult Hercules and Michael Hurst’s Iolus; and while lacking the production budget and creative horsepower of the parent series (whose own very strong writing team had included such future Hollywood star names as Oscar-nominated screenwriter and showrunner Terence Winter and the blockbuster duo of Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman whose many subsequent credits would include the rebooted *Star Trek* film franchise), the writing team included a Classics graduate and continued the same sophisticated playfulness with canonical myth that characterized the adult *Hercules* and *Xena* shows.

Young Hercules’ premise, which seems obvious in hindsight but had not previously been exploited in other media, was to develop the traditions of Chiron’s

pilot feature aired also saw the animated feature *Hercules and Xena: The Battle for Mount Olympus* and an unaired pilot (filmed 1997) for a prospective series (*Amazon High*) starring Selma Blair as a time-slipping high-school student who finds herself involved in the foundation of the Amazon nation; this last concept was partly repurposed as the *Xena* season 5 episode “Lifeblood” (2000).

tutorship of Jason, Achilles, and Hercules into a full-blown Hogwarts for heroes, with a central trio of Hercules, Iolaus, and Jason getting themselves into high-school scrapes as boarders at Chiron's academy – to which Alcmena dispatches her teenage son in the pilot feature, and where he forges his previously established lifelong friendships with the teenage versions of his adult sidekick Iolaus and recurring guest star Jason. Though fantasy school stories had a long pedigree before this in cross-media franchises as different as Marvel's *X-Men* and Jill Murphy's *The Worst Witch*, both the live-action and animated Hercules series found themselves responding to a cultural moment in fiction, television, and film: the first *Harry Potter* novel appeared during pre-production, as did the first season of the enormously influential high-school supernatural series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, while the year after *Young Hercules* aired, the first *X-Men* film (2000) would bring Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters to the cinema screen and launch the modern wave of superhero films which have established themselves as the template for becoming-a-hero narratives ever since. Like *Buffy*, *Young Hercules* tapped specifically into the US-led film and television subgenre of high-school soap opera whose modern grammar had been established in the teen films of John Hughes; but the target audience for *Young Hercules* was significantly younger, the tone sunnier, and the Bronze Age fantasy setting the space for a distinctive poetics of wry anachronism.

The established parameters of the school story – specifically, the *boarding-school* story, which remains paradigmatic for the genre – proved useful in a number of ways for *Young Hercules'* tales of heroes in the making. School stories allow the construction of an extensible body of narratives within the broader, though optionally invoked, frame of a narrative arc from new arrival to graduand, from being plunged from the parental embrace (or sometimes its chilly absence) into the bottom of the pecking order in a closed and inescapable environment populated by strangers ordered in a vast upward-extending hierarchy of status and power. The classic school-story cycles map the journey to realization of the adult self through power structures both horizontal (the friendship group versus the out-groups of bullies, outsiders, and the non-aligned) and vertical (senior- and junior-year students, and the non-negotiable final authority of teachers *in loco parentis*), as well as sequentially in the direction of the arrow of time. The ascent through the year structure from new girl or boy to graduand is available as an armature on which to hang the narrative of maturation and coming of age (often, as with the *Malory Towers* and *Harry Potter* series, at the rate of one novel per year of schooling), though is also frequently ignored in more open series which prefer to linger in a single

school year in which the characters exist in a condition of stasis and cyclicity, the same terms and birthdays coming round repeatedly in a closed time-loop. At the same time, boarding-school stories default to affirming the systemic power relationships in the bourgeois status quo, and their subversion is limited to comic fantasy. Outside the adult-gaze world of David Sherwin's *If...*, the authority and integrity of teachers as a class are not generally challenged, and though individual teachers may be antipathetic to the protagonists or even (particularly in the case of new or temporary staff) unfit for service, the school environment is nurturing and secure while allowing a greater distance between adults and adolescents than is possible in a family setting.

To impose this modern scenario on ancient heroic tutelage was in 1998 a fresh and original concept, which drew on the venerable established tropes of boarding-school fiction to solve many of the key challenges of teenage narrative. Parents could be kept at a narrative and thematic distance, their narrative functions rechanneled into adult authority figures *in loco parentum*; the relationships that matter are horizontal friendships and rivalries with peers, and some very mild and tentative stirring of romance; and the situations required to sustain fifty episodes are built out of the individual insecurities and conflicts of the leads. Thus *Young Hercules'* Iolaus is the pupil from an impoverished background who is constantly worrying about being able to keep up with his fees; the teenage Jason is the elite king-in-waiting who feels the simultaneous weight of expectation and unenviable responsibility with the inability of others to take seriously what they view as a posh boy's problems of privilege; while Hercules himself is the son abandoned to a single mother by a celebrity father he has never seen, and painfully seeking some kind of contact, acknowledgement, or reassurance that his father even cares about his existence. In the final episode he does at last meet a disguised Zeus who affirms his pride in his son – even this much the outcome of considerable negotiation between the writers and the franchise showrunners – but Hercules poignantly leaves without realizing the stranger's identity or what has just transpired, and throughout the series has learned to make his peace with the incompleteness of his adult heroic identity and place in the grown-up world. Instead, the series' cumulative life lesson has been that the qualities needed by a hero are the same qualities required of a well-adjusted, effective adult: a subordination of competitive to cooperative excellences; a sense of justice and injustice and a willingness to intervene actively in righting wrongs; sensitivity to the needs and vulnerabilities of others; and an appreciation of the enduring values of friendship and mutual trust.

By a curious synchrony, the production of *Young Hercules* coincided closely with a similarly premised television spin-off series about Hercules' schooldays in Disney's *Hercules: The Animated Series*, whose sixty-five episodes developed a still larger extended narrative corpus out of the characters and world of the studio's 1997 *Hercules* animated feature. The series' production quality was high and its narrative ingenuity extensively on display; regular cast and guest stars alike were voiced by actors with high name recognition, while the warmth and charm of *Young Hercules'* live-action cast is substituted by a pell-mell cartoon energy and comic fantasy. As in *Young Hercules*, the divine antagonist's darker qualities are diluted for the younger audience by mediation through the ineptitude of bungling cartoon-villain godlings (Strife and Discord in *Young Hercules*, here Hades' henchmen Pain and Panic from the *Hercules* feature film). Both series are adjuncts to an adult text corpus to which they serve as a combination of sequel, prequel, sidequel, and intraquel: a corpus of side-stories which Gérard Genette would classify as a combination of prolepsis, analepsis, paralepsis, and ellepsis.¹⁷ The clips episode "Hercules and the Yearbook" is particularly elaborate, incorporating footage from past episodes of the high-school series alongside a graduation episode into a frame which takes place after the end of the original film and features Hercules and Megara as a young married couple. In another episode young versions of Hercules and Megara threaten the canonicity of the feature film by meeting and experiencing the spark of romance as teenagers, only for this first encounter to be obliterated from the memories of both.

Like the *Legendary Journeys* flashback episodes, the *Hercules* feature had also dealt with the hero's training – here not in flashback but as part of a linear narrative from infancy to adulthood – as a component of his education in heroism; and once again the school-story template was pressed into service as a model. Because the original film had transferred the Chiron role to the new character of the satyr Phil(octetes), the television series found itself obliged to invent a "Prometheus Academy" as an alternative – and, as the series unfolded, rival – to the canonical school of Chiron; but in other respects the series adopted many of the same school-story tropes and megatextual mash-ups

¹⁷ Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln, NB, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997 (ed. pr. in French: *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 177 (in relation to the epic cycle, where he classifies the *Cypria* as analeptic or what would now be called a prequel; the *Aithiopis* to *Iliupersis* as elleptic, inasmuch as they fill in the gap between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; the *Nostoi* as paraleptic, or what subsequent vernacular narratology has termed a sidequel; and *Telegony* as a regularly proleptic sequel).

as the live-action Action Pack franchise, with figures from other generations of Greek myth, later epochs of Greek and even Roman history, and other Eurasian mythologies (in one episode including Disney's own *Aladdin*) collapsed into a single omnicultural mythic dreamtime. Thus the teenage Hercules' closest schoolfriends are teenage versions of Icarus and Cassandra, while other classmates and rivals include Helen and Homer (who turns a homecoming prank into the Trojan War); Jason, Theseus, Bellerophon, Achilles, and Odysseus appear as adult heroes from an older generation; and alongside an extended family of Hesiodic gods, an enormous cast of guest players includes Memnon, Electra, Adonis, Atlas, Orpheus, Nestor, Meleager, Mentor, Circe, Paris, Orion, Minos, and even Hylas. Canonical Heracleian adventures included the Nemean Lion, Geryon, Atlas, Stymphalian Birds, Calydonian Boar Hunt, and Golden Fleece, but the episodic fecundity found additional space not only for versions of many other heroic-age narratives, but also (like the Action Pack's "Xenaverse", whose creative motto was "Anything B.C. is okay"¹⁸) for increasingly anachronistic historical figures from later epochs, including Salmoneus, Hippocrates, Pygmalion and Galatea, Pericles and Cleon, and Alexander, while at one point Cassandra is seen reading Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Unlike his live-action counterpart, the Disney version of young Hercules is not vexed by anxieties of paternal estrangement. A determinative establishing feature of the original feature film was that Hercules in this version is not the mixed-ancestry child of Zeus and Alcmena contending with the enmity of a jealous Hera, but the fully divine legitimate child of Zeus and Hera, whose divine nemesis in this version is Hades, and who finds himself fostered in earthly exile by Alcmena and Amphitryon before being recognized and reunited with his divine birth parents. The feature film had tracked Hercules' ascendancy "from zero to hero" by way of his training by Phil, his romance with Megara, and his climactic defeat of Hades and reclamation of his godhead; and *The Animated Series* is accordingly more explicit than *Young Hercules* about the process of becoming a hero and the lessons learned in its pursuit, both for Hercules himself and for his regular and guest-star peers. One such beneficiary is Telemachus, who features in the episode "Hercules and the Odyssey Experience", where Hercules helps Telemachus to escape from his father's shadow and discover himself as a hero in his own right.

¹⁸ *Xena* writer Steven L. Sears quoted in Robert Weisbrot, *The Official Guide to the Xenaverse*, London: Bantam, 1998, 38.

Ultimately, both these television series for young audiences find themselves restricted by the conservatism of the medium and its gatekeepers. The *Young Hercules* showrunners comment in their DVD featurette on the many ways in which production for an audience of six-to-eleven-year-olds on the Fox Kids network imposed significant constraints. Almost any kind of adult situation was in practice prohibited by the network: the writers were not allowed to kill anyone – something of a challenge in a sword-and-sandal franchise – and they were further constrained by continuity with six seasons of stories about the characters as adults, as well as by the fundamental narrative principle of episodic television (on which see Elzbieta Olechowska in this volume¹⁹) that there can never be any real closure and never any real change, since the end of every episode has to reset the state of the story and relationships to their factory defaults, and each season resists a final ending in the hope of being renewed for another episode order.

As it happened, however, at the same moment that the fantasy high-school template was gifting Hercules these two rival extended canons of untold youthful adventures, a still more momentous development in the landscape of print publishing was opening up even wider possibilities for an expanded inventory of mythological pre-heroics which would not be limited to a single cast of characters or confined by the narrative and ideological conservatism of network television. Among the many new commissions in the early wake of *Harry Potter's* demonstration to print publishers of the enormous potential readership and profitability of franchised fantasy series for younger readers – itself a beneficiary of the emergence in the 1990s of the young adult label and market, and the displacement of the singleton novel by the commissioned series – the veteran fantasy writer Jane Yolen and her frequent collaborator Robert J. Harris²⁰ contracted a series of four books for HarperCollins in 2000 under the initial title *Before They Were Heroes*, subsequently streamlined simply to *Young Heroes*. Harris had read Classics at St Andrews in the 1970s under R.M. Ogilvie (to whose memory the third volume is dedicated), and as the series progressed he assembled a master chronology which threaded the novels into an elaborate fictionalized history of the Greek Bronze Age which was printed in full as a paratextual appendix to later reprints.

¹⁹ "Between Hope and Destiny in the Young Adult Television Series *Once Upon a Time*, Season 5, Episodes 12–21 (2016)", 593–610.

²⁰ The initial serves to distinguish him from the homonymous author of thrillers and political novels, including the classically set *Pompeii* and the *Cicero* trilogy.

In common with the *Hercules* television franchises, the *Young Heroes* novels are fantasy stories rather than straight Bronze Age historical fiction, with gods and Ray Harryhausen monsters sharing the page with the mortal youths; and they inhabit a precanonical space in myth where their characters' adult careers and heroic qualities can be teasingly foreshadowed without confronting the darker aspects of their adult exploits. The template is uniform across the four volumes: each of the four nascent heroes is given an undocumented adventure at the age of thirteen which simultaneously prefigures elements of their later career while helping to shape them into the adult heroes they canonically become. In *Odysseus in the Serpent Maze*, Odysseus and his best friend, Mentor, rescue the kidnapped princesses Helen and Penelope from pirates, only for the four to find themselves whisked off to Crete by a Phaeacian-style self-navigating ship designed by Daedalus, whereupon Odysseus has to rescue Penelope from the Labyrinth and a new monster at its centre. *Hippolyta and the Curse of the Amazons* sets its heroine on a quest to lift Artemis' curse on the Amazon nation with the nine-year-old Tithonus in tow. In *Atalanta and the Arcadian Beast*, the young Atalanta joins up with the great hunter Orion to track down a monster that is terrorizing Arcadia, only to have to take over the hunt herself when Orion is killed. *Jason and the Gorgon's Blood* sees Jason lead his fellow Chiron pupils Acastus, Admetus, Idas, and Lynceus to recover the stolen blood of Medusa from the evil centaur Nessus, in the process turning the four privileged aristo-brats who most despise this teacher's-pet orphan into the nucleus of what the reader knows will become the fellowship of the Argo.

Some of these scenarios offer the authors more narrative opportunities than others. The Odysseus and Jason novels have much more abundant ancient source material to work with, and are cleverly patched together out of what a mythologically alert reader will recognize as prefigurations of their canonical adult adventures. In contrast, the two heroine novels have less to draw upon and are driven creatively back on new novelistic invention; *Hippolyta* bravely experiments with making the heroine deliberately unsympathetic for most of the novel until she redeems herself as part of her self-realization as a heroic role model. Nevertheless, all four are deftly constructed around an adolescent coming-of-age narrative that is careful to individualize the distinct personality and heroic attitude of its particular lead, and include much overt discussion of the paradoxes and lessons in authentic heroism encountered by their young protagonists, including its costs and illusions. "Those heroic days are over, Odysseus", Mentor warns his friend, born into what seems to be the fading of the heroic age. "The Argonauts are home. There's peace everywhere. The treasures are

all found, the monsters all slain. Be sensible" (34). At the climax of his exploit, Athena warns him that he "will take part in one final great adventure before the Heroic Age draws to a close", but that his adolescent conception of heroic achievement may not survive the reality of adult experience:

"Glory is not won cheaply, Odysseus," she said. "If glory is truly what you seek."

"What else is there?" His face was puzzled.

"A prince can find joy in seeing his people safe and happy, in the love of a good wife, in watching his baby son grow to manhood," the goddess said. Odysseus shook his head. "Only glory lasts. The bards' songs give us that chance at immortality. Like the gods themselves."

"Think carefully, Odysseus, what you lose by that choice," Athena said. (251)

Over the course of the quartet, a number of patterns emerge. Three of the four novels open with a hunt: an episode already canonized in Book 19 of the *Odyssey* as a model of teenage exploit associated with the moment of pivoting to adulthood and staking adult identity through heroic excellence in action. Similarly, while parents do not play much of a part in the characters' lives, three of the four novels include a recognition plot where the existing tradition allows space for one, with Hippolyta discovering her paternal family and Atalanta and Jason their royal heritage: a classical story pattern especially associated with not-yet-adult heroes at the moment of emergence of their adult heroic identity. All but the Hippolyta novel feature budding versions of canonical romance: between Odysseus and Penelope, Atalanta and Milanion, and (Medea of course being still far in Jason's future) Admetus and Alcestis after the princess is caught up in the proto-Argonauts' mission. But some of the commonalities are the authors' own, and respond to more contemporary conceptions of heroic excellence. All four protagonists make allies of enemies: Odysseus wins the respect of the Cretan prince Idomeneus; Hippolyta comes to value and protect the child she spends most of the novel plotting to betray to his death; Atalanta builds a team from former foes; Jason forges a quartet of pampered bullies who despise him into a loyal unit who would die for him. As in *Young Hercules*, the gods are sometimes helpful but often austere, remote, and cruel, and the young heroes have to learn to disobey them when their human conscience tells them. In contrast, the key resource for all four is the friendship group, the human peers you trust and who trust you in return. Above all, each of the heroes learns to take responsibility and to become a leader of others – particularly Jason, who begins

as the orphan outsider despised by Chiron's other, aristocratic pupils, but who gradually welds his petulant and unruly band of egos into a tight-knit and unbreakably loyal heroic team.

This standout volume, the capstone of the quartet, is also the most thoughtful and explicit about what it means to become a hero. A compelling novel of adolescent growth, *Jason and the Gorgon's Blood* plays deftly on the reader's awareness that the underdog Jason is somehow going to come from behind to become not only the acknowledged leader but the best friend of all four of these characters who all at the start of the quest detest him (with one actively plotting his death); and he achieves this not by a single heroic action, but by a whole series of small but cumulatively compelling demonstrations of the kind of leadership that builds trust, cements respect, and makes others wish to follow ("Any man can shout orders and enforce his will by fear," Chiron had said. "A true leader is one others follow because they choose to"; 71-72). It is a narrative that resonates strongly with the critical heritage of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, which has been dominated by a longstanding and somewhat exhausted debate over the figure of Jason as a modernizing Ptolemaic response to the Homeric model of heroism, often viewed as a *primus inter pares* relationship of effective leadership within a cooperative team to forge a collective heroism of all the talents. Yolen and Harris connect this to a more internalized notion of heroic value: "Now, for the first time, Jason could see that Admetus was truly a prince and a hero. It had little to do with where or to whom he had been born. It had to do with taking responsibility" (194). Throughout the series, female voices offer a trenchant gender critique of their male peers' aspirations to heroic status through bluster and blood – "You're just boys", Alcestis reminds the fellowship, "Not men. Not heroes" (165) – and demonstrate through their own actions that heroic excellence is more readily achieved by resisting violence than it is by perpetuating it.

* * *

All three of these franchises use the opportunities presented by the corpus-level megatextuality of classical myth to thematize – quite often with on-the-nose explicitness – what it takes and means to become a hero, by populating the unnarrated spaces of the childhoods of canonical heroes and heroines with systemic variations on modern fictional constructions of adolescence as a state of adulthood in the making with its own distinctive narrative, ethical, and elpidological values. These values can be found in any number of stories for this readership, but it is striking nevertheless how closely they correspond to Rundell's

catechism, and framing them as untold stories from the adolescence of future heroes enables them to capture one of the most vital and thrilling things about adolescence: the sense of possibility, of a world where you are already you but your story is still waiting to begin. These modern myths of heroic becoming speak deeply to the experience of adolescence as a training for the fulfilment of selfhood and identity that will come with adult attainment, and of the need to distinguish false hopes of unearned celebrity from true heroic accomplishment, which can only be won by subordinating the individualistic values of fame and glory to the collective truths of fellowship and self-sacrifice for others. In a key study of ancient elpidology, Douglas Cairns has shown that the largely unexamined modern assumption that hope is an unalloyed positive stands notably at odds with the more nuanced and ambivalent constructions of hope in Greek myth-making culture;²¹ and these modern myth cycles of heroic juvenile pre-heroism acknowledge the tension between their teenage heroes' expectations of adulthood and the darker aspects canonized in their later adventures. These are stories pointedly pregnant with heroic futurity, but though we read them knowing that our mythical hindsight tells us they are lighter, child-friendly prequels to stormier adult labours, they are nevertheless stories which replace the brutality and silence of ancient heroic childhoods with a seductive and compelling narrative vision of hope.

²¹ "Hope's motivational force is recognized, but often regarded as inadequate. This probably reflects a greater sense that important aspects of human existence and of human action depend upon factors beyond the control of the individual and a corresponding skepticism about the power of positive thinking in itself to ameliorate one's lot" (Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 43).

JOE ALEX (MACIEJ SŁOMCZYŃSKI) AND HIS CZARNE OKRĘTY [BLACK SHIPS]: A HISTORY OF A TROJAN BOY IN TIMES OF THE MINOAN THALASSOCRACY

People reading world literature in Polish translations will probably agree that it was Tadeusz Boy-Żeleński (1874–1941) who acquainted Poles with French/Francophone literature. We owe to him, for example, the Polish version of *The Song of Roland*, Michel de Montaigne's *Essays*, all the pieces by Molière and Pierre Corneille, and *In Search of Lost Time* by Marcel Proust, to name only a small part of his translatory oeuvre. A similar declaration with respect to English/Anglophone literature is not possible. This is probably because the geographic vastness of the British Empire can hardly find an analogy in the history of the world, and thus the role and knowledge of English in the world far exceeds the role and knowledge of French. Some may say it's a pity. It is nevertheless conceivable to draw up a list of Polish interpreters whose merits in familiarizing Poles with Anglophone literature are substantial. Among them most assuredly belongs Maciej Słomczyński (1922–1998).¹ As the son of Marjorie Słomczyńska (*née* Crosby), an Englishwoman who chose to live in the Russian Empire and then in the reborn Poland, and (verisimilarly) of Merian C. Cooper, an American aviator, both a US and Polish air force officer, director and producer of the film *King Kong* (1933), Maciej Słomczyński became a Pole by his own choice. He translated into Polish, for example, *Troilus and Criseyde* by Geoffrey Chaucer, *Paradise Lost* by John Milton, *Gulliver's Travels* by Jonathan Swift, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie, and *Ulysses* by

¹ The exact year of his birth, either 1920 or 1922, is the subject of argument even among members of his closest family. In the present paper we follow the date postulated by Maciej Słomczyński's daughter.

James Joyce, but it is undoubtedly his translation of the entire corpus of William Shakespeare's works that gave him prominence among translators in the history of Polish culture. One should add that Słomczyński remains the only person in the world to have achieved such a goal. There are some doubts concerning his translations' faithfulness to the originals and – most of all – concerning their literary value,² but even so it is thanks to Słomczyński that Poles have a coherent and uniform Shakespearean corpus available in their mother tongue.

Although known today mainly as a translator, Słomczyński was also a writer, poet, and playwright. The entire list of his works (poems, plays, novels, feuilletons, reviews, etc.) exceeds 140 compositions.³ Not all of them, however, were published or presented under his proper name. A very important portion of his writings appeared under his various pen names: Joe Alex, Kazimierz Kwaśniewski, Agnes Soerssen, Male Turkey, Veronica O'Donnell, Sydney Stewart, Barbara Snow, Monica Higgins, and Nashur Gath Singh. Of special importance are those publications that we can label crime fiction. The most renowned of them belong to Joe Alex, Słomczyński's alter ego in his search for *ye olde England* he knew thanks to his mother's memory.

Under this pen name, Słomczyński published a cycle of crime-fiction works (I omit here short stories and mention only the first of numerous re-editions):

- *Powiem wam, jak zginął* [I Will Tell You How He Died; after Aesch., *Ag.* 1380; Warszawa: PIW, 1959];
- *Śmierć mówi w moim imieniu* [Death Speaks In My Behalf; after Eugène Ionesco, *The Chairs*, Scene 11: "the Orator will speak in my behalf"; Warszawa: Iskry, 1960];
- *Jesteś tylko diabłem* [What Art Thou, Devil; after William Rowley, *The Birth of Merlin, or, The Childe Hath Found His Father*, Act 5, Scene 1; Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1960];
- *Cichym ścigałam go lotem* [I Was Pursuing Him in Quiet Flight; after Aesch., *Eum.* 250–251; Warszawa: Iskry, 1962];
- *Zmącony spokój Pani Labiryntu* [The Disturbed Calm of the Lady of the Labyrinth; Warszawa: Iskry, 1965];

² See Anna Staniewska, "Maciej Słomczyński vs. William Shakespeare", *Serwis Tłumacza* [Translator's Service Centre], <http://serwistlumacza.com/lektury/maciej-slomczynski-vs-william-shakespeare/> (accessed 6 April 2020).

³ For the list, see Monika Kucharczyk-Kubacka, *Maciej Słomczyński (1922–1998). Bibliografia* [Maciej Słomczyński (1922–1998): Bibliography], Kraków: BiblioTheca, Wojewódzka Biblioteka Publiczna w Krakowie, 2008, 9–147.

- *Gdzie przykazań brak dziesięciu* [Where There Aren't No Ten Commandments; after Rudyard Kipling, *Mandalay*; Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1968];
- *Piekło jest we mnie* [Myself Am Hell; after John Milton, *Paradise Lost* 4.75; Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1975];
- *Cicha jak ostatnie tchnienie* [Silent as the Last Breath; after the motto to George Crosby's novel *My Meditations on Birth and Death*; Warszawa: Epoka, 1991].

Two of the titles come from the *Oresteia* by Aeschylus. I quote the relevant passages in the English translation by Herbert Weir Smyth: "Thus have I done the deed" (*Ag.* 1380: οὕτω δ' ἔπραξα) and "I have come [...] in wingless flight, pursuing him" (*Eum.* 250–251: ἀπτέροις πωτήμασιν / ἦλθον διώκουσ').⁴ Another one refers to the Minoan Goddess, the Lady of the Labyrinth (in Mycenaean Greek: *da-pu₂-ri-to-jo, po-ti-ni-ja*).⁵

The Greek connotations do not appear by accident. Joe Alex, a character in this cycle of novels and Słomczyński's alter ego, is a man with whom we can identify: the memory of war, the praise of English literature, the fascination with demonology and Ancient Greece.⁶ He lives in wealth thanks to his popular detective stories, and his brilliant intellect gives him the unofficial status of an expert at Scotland Yard and allows him to solve the most difficult criminal puzzles. Joe Alex's partner and his future wife, Karolina Beacon, is an archaeologist who studies the remnants of Minoan culture.

It is none other than the island of Crete with which *Czarne okręty* [Black Ships], the best-known novel for youth by Słomczyński, is connected. Originally published in eleven parts as a pulp-fiction series for young readers (1972–1975, by Biuro Wydawnicze „Ruch” in Warsaw), it was immediately released in a four-volume edition (1978, by Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza in Warsaw), then in a two-volume edition (1992, by Wydawnictwo „Cassiopeia” in Cracow); finally, the novel was given a single-volume form (two editions: 2001 and 2003, by Wydawnictwo „Zielona Sowa” in Cracow), and then was released as an audiobook (again in four parts, in 2013, by Heraclon International).

The novel has not been translated into English, and therefore it is not widely known outside of Poland, so I will briefly present its plot. It concerns a boy living

⁴ Quoted after the Perseus Project, www.perseus.tufts.edu (accessed 2 April 2017), ad loc.

⁵ The tablet Kn Gg 702; see Francisco Aura Jorro, ed., *Diccionario Micénico*, vol. 1, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1999 (ed. pr. 1985), 156–157.

⁶ Cf. Tomasz Bielak, *Proza Macieja Słomczyńskiego (Joe Alexa)* [The Prose of Maciej Słomczyński (Joe Alex)], Katowice: Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Zarządzania Ochroną Pracy w Katowicach, 2008, 199.

in Troy's surroundings; he is too young to receive a mature name, so we know him as Białowłosy (Towhead). The son of a fisherman, he one day ventures out to sea for the first time without his father and succeeds in catching a huge fish, which should give him access to the adult world. Instead, he is surprised by a terrible storm and carried out to the open sea, where he is captured by Phoenician merchants. They decide that – because of the colour of his hair and skin tone – he should be expensively sold to the Egyptian priests of Sobek, the Crocodile-God, and offered to the god to be devoured as a sacrifice.

Towhead saves not only himself, but also another child. He kills the crocodile, and escapes, finding refuge in a tomb, presumably found in the Egyptian Valley of the Kings. Accidentally immured alive inside the tomb, he manages to get out and finds himself on the seashore from where – after many adventures – he goes to the Greek pirates from the islands. Imprisoned by the Minoans, who punish piracy with death, he again saves his life, this time by rescuing Perilawos, the nephew of the Minoan ruler and the heir to the throne of Knossos. Chased by an Egyptian priest, Towhead becomes embroiled in Cretan dynastic palace intrigues, before finally going, upon Minos' order, on a sea quest for the mythical land of amber in the North together with Widwojos, the brother of the Minoan King, who is the father of the rescued boy. Their sea lane leads the travellers to Troy, which reluctantly acknowledges, as do the Greek cities of the continent, Minoan sovereignty. *Angelos*, the ship aboard which they voyage, navigates into the Black Sea and then heads north up an East-European river (the Dnieper?). The sailors fight with nomads living on the steppe and arrive among the early Slavs – the description of marshes and forests suggests we find ourselves in what is now Belarus or perhaps eastern Poland. They winter there because the frozen rivers (presumably: the Pripyat, the Bug, and the Vistula) do not allow sailing. They also see – for the first time in their lives – temperate deciduous forests, so they call the country the Land of Dead Leaves. With the advent of spring, Towhead and his comrades continue the journey and finally reach the shores of the Baltic Sea, where amber – the purpose of the quest – literally lies under their feet. They sail west and pass through the Danish straits, then head north and see a whale, an aurora, and icebergs. Turning south-west they sail to Great Britain (Stonehenge), from where the Phoenicians export tin. Towhead is then caught by the islanders and is to be sacrificed at the Midsummer Day festivities, only to be liberated by his friend. He next joins the rest of the fellowship and they sail together towards the Pillars of Hercules. The Strait of Gibraltar, guarded by the Phoenicians, is not an easy point to pass, but the sailors of the *Angelos* with an audacious rowing manoeuvre sail deep into the

Mediterranean Sea. They pass Sicily and reach Crete with uncountable wealth – containers full of amber. They soon learn, however, that the island of Crete and the entire Minoan thalassocracy have been ruined by the rebellious Greek cities. Minos, the king, was killed, too. Widwojos, his brother and the commander of the ship, commits suicide. The long-awaited freedom turns out to be a tragic situation of choice.

Although the plot of the novel resembles the literary versions of the myth of the Argonauts (exotica, the question of succession, the geographic scale, the amazing adventures, the search for a precious material), it is quite easy to see that, considered as a whole, it nevertheless gives the impression of being a historical novel, recalling, for example, *The Egyptian* (in the original Finnish: *Sinuhe egyptiläinen*, 1945) by Mika Waltari, itself being an interpretation of an Ancient Egyptian story.

The story of a man's life allows Słomczyński to show a wide panorama of the Europe and Near East of the Bronze Age. However, it is difficult to determine the exact time frame of the novel. On the one hand, we have Crete already speaking Greek (which means, at the earliest, the fifteenth century BC), on the other, the city in Egypt in which the protagonist of the series is to be sacrificed suggests the ancient Shedet (Crocodilopolis) in the Faiyum Oasis that saw its largest boom during the reign of Amenemhat III (nineteenth century BC). Similarly, the large city of Troy in the novel speaks Greek, but we cannot find the slightest mention of the Hittite Empire, and the description of the fall of Crete would match the coming of the "Sea Peoples" (end of the thirteenth century BC). We cannot be sure, therefore, when the plot of the novel is unfolding – we can only roughly say it is in the second half of the second millennium BC.

It is not my intention to point out Słomczyński's factual errors – if one reads the novel closely, one should well note that the facts follow quite carefully what was known of the Bronze Age in the 1970s. But as we have few written sources for those times, we can document Słomczyński's accuracy in the creation of the world only partially: for example, Widwojos, Minos' brother, and Perilawos, his son, bear names that we know from the Linear B tablets (*wi-dwo-i-jo* PY Eb 1186.A;⁷ *pe-ri-ra-wo* PY An 654.13⁸); the Egyptian names sound Egyptian (for instance, Het-Ka-Sebek, that is, 'The House of the Spirit of Sobek'); the Greek sounds Greek; the Egyptian-Phoenician relations in the novel fit what we know from history; and even the early Slavic names may be treated as more-or-less

⁷ Francisco Aura Jorro, ed., *Diccionario Micénico*, vol. 2, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1993, 428–429.

⁸ *Ibidem*, 111.

adequate (for example, Sulnc, the name of the Slavic ruler from the reconstructed early Slavic lexeme *сѣньце*, 'sun').⁹

The novel is not, of course, a history textbook, but rather a story of a boy growing up, of a child who becomes a young man. He listens to the wise, he learns the value of friendship and the value of the given word, and he becomes aware that the world is not black and white. Although Towhead knows love only from the mother-son relationship, his friend and mentor shows him the value of love in adult relations between man and woman. The protagonist of the novel has high hopes first of saving his own life, then of seeing his mother again, then – against all odds – of attaining the goal of the quest. The plot, however, is not steeped in didacticism – the rapid action effectively masks it. One may even notice that the novel's close cannot be defined otherwise than as praise for abusing good wine.

The novel *Black Ships* follows the *Bildungsroman* model in its own way. Let us cite the classical definition of the genre, composed by Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911) for *Hesperus, oder 45 Hundposttage* by Jean Paul (Johann Friedrich Richter, 1763–1825), and for *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832):

[S]tellen sie alle [Bildungsromane] den Jüngling jener Tage dar; wie er in glücklicher Dämmerung in das Leben eintritt, nach verwandten Seelen sucht, der Freundschaft begegnet und der Liebe, wie er nun aber mit den harten Realitäten der Welt in Kampf gerät und so unter mannigfachen Lebenserfahrungen heranreift, sich selber findet und seiner Aufgabe in der Welt gewiss wird.¹⁰

[A]ll portray a young man of their time: how he enters life in a happy state of naiveté seeking kindred souls, finds friendship and love, how he comes into conflict with the hard realities of the world, how he grows to maturity through diverse life-experiences, finds himself, and attains certainty about his purpose in the world.¹¹

We may conclude that the only derogation from the definition is the placing of the plot in a hardly determinable Antiquity.

⁹ Rick Derksen, *Etymological Dictionary of the Slavic Inherited Lexicon*, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2008, 479.

¹⁰ Wilhelm Dilthey, *Das Erlebnis und die Dichtung. Lessing – Goethe – Novalis – Hölderlin*, 8th ed., Leipzig and Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1922 (ed. pr. 1906), 393–394.

¹¹ English translation after Anniken Telnes Iversen, *Change and Continuity: The Bildungsroman in English*, PhD dissertation, University of Tromsø, 2009, 22.

We can and we should wonder to what extent the experiences of Słomczyński himself and of his parents are reflected in the novel; how much this vests it with a quasi-autobiographical character. It is hard to count how many times Słomczyński saves his own life during World War Two: the odyssey of the prisoner of the Pawiak – the biggest Nazi political prison in occupied Poland; being moved to Gęsiówka – the Waffen-SS concentration camp in Warsaw; the escape from the camp and struggling through to Switzerland; crossing the Rhine in January; the internment camp in Aarau; the escape to liberated France; the service in the American Army in France; and finally the return to Poland.¹² It is difficult to count the number of such cases in the life of his presumed biological father as well. During the Polish-Soviet War (1919–1921) Merian C. Cooper served in the Polish Air Force and organized the Eskadra Kościuszkowska (Kościuszko Squadron); then after being captured by the Soviets, he escaped from a prison near Moscow and reached the Latvian border on foot. Triumphant, he returned to Poland and met Marjorie Crosby: their story inspired the making of the most famous and most expensive movie in Poland during the interwar period – *Gwiazdzista eskadra* [The Starry Squadron] by Leonard Buczkowski. Some try to compare the movie (with the necessary exaggeration) to David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind* (1939).

The Polish melodrama was released twice (first in 1930 as a silent film and then in 1933 with sound). It recounts the love story of a Polish girl (Lili) and an American pilot (Captain Bond), a volunteer in the Polish 7th Air Escadrille, the Kościuszko Squadron. After World War Two all the copies were destroyed (presumably by the NKVD). There are, alas, only several photos left,¹³ although one cannot exclude the possibility that a single copy of the melodrama was removed to the Soviet Union. We may thus hope it will be found one day.

And indeed, there is always hope – such a conclusion can be drawn from the novel *Black Ships* and the life experiences of its author, Maciej Słomczyński.

¹² Cf. Małgorzata Słomczyńska-Pierzchalska, *Nie mogłem być inny. Zagadka Macieja Słomczyńskiego* [I Could Not Be Different: The Enigma of Maciej Słomczyński], Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2003.

¹³ See "Gwiazdzista eskadra", Fototeka [Internet archive of the National Film Archive – Audiovisual Institute], http://fototeka.fn.org.pl/pl/strona/wyszukiwarka.html?key=gwia%C5%BAdzista+eskadra&search_type_in=tytul&view_type=tile&sort=alfabetycznie&result%5B%5D=281&lastResult%5B%5D=281&pageNumber=1&howmany=50&view_id=&hash=1563303339 (accessed 16 July 2019).

*FROM AN ADOLESCENT FREAK
TO A HOPE-SPREADING MESSIANIC DEMIGOD:
THE CURIOUS TRANSFORMATIONS
OF MODERN TEENAGERS IN CONTEMPORARY
MYTHOPOETIC FANTASY LITERATURE
(PERCY JACKSON, PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN,
THE SYRENA LEGACY)*

In the present chapter I focus on the famous *Percy Jackson* series (2005–2009) by Rick Riordan, the popular *Syrena Legacy* series (2013–2014) by Anna Banks, and the film *Pirates of the Caribbean: Salazar's Revenge* (2017) directed by Joachim Rønning and Espen Sandberg. I argue that average human protagonists are presented in these works as holy Redeemer-like figures by amalgamating their characters with the god Poseidon from classical mythology. In this form of individual heroic development for higher ends, mythic motifs are intertwined with Christian values to create a modern kind of superhero giving young people a new sense of purpose in life. This superhero brings hope to a threatened humankind, something ever so important in dark times.¹

The Origins of Modern Superheroes

The transformation from an outsider and nerd to a celebrated hero in current fantasy literature employs ideas of empowerment as a means of giving hope

¹ On this subject of research I also wrote my PhD dissertation, under the supervision of Prof. Anita Schlicher and Prof. Markus Janka. For the publication, see Michael Stierstorfer, *Antike Mythologie in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Gegenwart. Unsterbliche Götter- und Heldengeschichten?*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017 (= PhD dissertation, University of Regensburg, 2016).

to an imperilled humanity. These ideas of power are realized in the books discussed here, in which superhuman abilities play an important role, allowing the hero to master his endeavours to save humanity from the threats imposed by evil antagonists. In this context, Gudrun Stenzel points out that fantasy literature tends to be criticized because it can be seen as encouraging young readers to act out teenage dreams of omnipotence ("pubertäre Allmachts- und Größenfantasien"), instead of moderating them.² This element, which often appears in fantasy – as Reinbert Tabbert observes – was already recognized by Astrid Lindgren, the internationally successful author of numerous fantasy books. In her opinion, children like to identify with fictional characters who are powerful and more intelligent than others. She does not, however, regard this identification as negative or dangerous. Quite the contrary. According to Tabbert, Lindgren emphasizes that it makes it easier for readers to identify with the protagonists when they are characterized by "eine wünschenswerte Überlegenheit" (desirable superiority).³

Consequently, as Aleta-Amirée von Holzen points out, ideas of empowerment are especially prominent in fantasy. She states that supernatural abilities are necessary for heroes to gain the capacity to play an active role in the story.⁴ Furthermore, Petra Rueppel, focusing on the origin of such abilities, comes to the conclusion that this concept of power is derived from Graeco-Roman mythology.⁵ This hypothesis is confirmed by Almut-Barbara Renger, who examines supernatural heroes like Perseus.⁶ Manuela Kalbermatten, who focuses on female heroes, expresses the opinion that figures such as Hermione from the *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007) by J.K. Rowling are able to use magic spells as their supernatural abilities effectively because of their intelligence.⁷ In this

² Gudrun Stenzel, "Fantastische Kinder- und Jugendliteratur zwischen entwicklungspsychologischen und literarischen Funktionen – Anmerkungen zu Wolfgang Meißner", in Jörg Knobloch and Gudrun Stenzel, eds., *Zauberland und Tintenwelt. Fantastik in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur*, Weinheim: Juventa, 2006, 180.

³ Reinbert Tabbert, "Wie Eisberge in der Bücherflut. Erfolgreiche Kinderbücher", in Bernhard Rank, ed., *Erfolgreiche Kinder- und Jugendbücher. Was macht Lust auf Lesen?*, Baltmannsweiler: Schneider Verlag Hohengehren, 1999, 10.

⁴ Cf. Aleta-Amirée von Holzen, "Marvel-lous Masked Men. Doppelidentitäten in Superheldenfilmen", in Lars Schmeink and Hans-Harald Müller, eds., *Fremde Welten. Wege und Räume der Fantastik im 21. Jahrhundert*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012, 189.

⁵ Cf. Petra Rueppel, "Merlins neue Kleider. Mythologische Elemente in der Fantasy-Literatur der Gegenwart", *1000 und 1 Buch* 1 (2004), 9.

⁶ Cf. Almut-Barbara Renger, "Antike", in Hans Richard Brittnacher and Markus May, eds., *Phantastik. Ein interdisziplinäres Handbuch*, Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2013, 5.

⁷ Cf. Manuela Kalbermatten, "Mit Wissen, Ehrgeiz und Magie", *Buch & Maus* 1 (2009), 3.

way mythical power, like magic, is combined with exceptional human intelligence as a typical characteristic of modern and emancipated women who achieve their goals in life. Finally, Oxane Leingang, who examines the *Starcrossed* trilogy (2011–2013) written by Josephine Angelini, stresses that young readers are able to extend their space of autonomy by reading fantasy based on motifs of empowerment: "Teenage readers, who are aware of their own powerlessness because of the strict rules of society, can experience in these novels visions of violence without physical, psychological or moral danger".⁸ Thus, on the one hand Rueppel and Renger agree that supernatural power is essential for the plots and characters of fantasy literature. On the other hand, von Holzen, Kalbermatten, and Leingang point out that ancient mythology is a source of inspiration for authors to create heroes endowed with supernatural talents.

Prototypical Elements of Heroic Figures

In the following parts of the chapter I will examine how supernatural male and female heroes are shaped and characterized in current fantasy literature on the basis of Ancient Greek and Roman mythological sources,⁹ and I will argue that via such narratological features they become hope-spreading figures.

Heroes who are inspired by sources from Graeco-Roman mythology often have the ability to control water in order to save the world. This is the case in the *Percy Jackson* and *Syrena Legacy* series. In what specific ways does this refer to ancient myth? In Graeco-Roman mythology especially the god Poseidon has the power to control water. According to an encyclopaedia of myth – written by Edward Tripp – Poseidon is able to make use of the following particular powers: (1) drying out rivers, (2) flooding cities, (3) creating fountains, (4) changing his appearance in the water, (5) evoking seaquakes, (6) creating seahorses, (7) summoning sea monsters.¹⁰

⁸ Oxane Leingang, "The Trojan War Reloaded. Motiv- und Mythenkompressionen in Josephine Angelinis *Starcrossed*-Trilogie (2011–2013)", in Gabriele von Glasenapp, Ute Dettmar, and Bernd Dolle-Weinkauff, eds., *Kinder- und Jugendliteraturforschung international. Ansichten und Aussichten. Festschrift für Hans-Heino Ewers*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2014, 374: "Jugendliche Leser, denen die eigene Ohnmacht durch Verbote nur allzu bewusst ist, können hier ihre Gewaltphantasien ohne physische, psychische oder moralische Gefährdung lesend mitvollziehen". All translations are mine (M.S.), unless stated otherwise.

⁹ Cf. Stierstorfer, *Antike Mythologie*.

¹⁰ Cf. Edward Tripp, *Reclams Lexikon der antiken Mythologie*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2012 (ed. pr. 1974), 446–451.

In the fantasy series I have chosen, the ideas of power are functionalized to show a messianic hero who defends humanity with the help of his/her special abilities against a demonic and evil creature that wants to enslave or get rid of all human beings in a particular society – or even in the whole world.

Demigod Percy as a Messianic Figure

In first three books of the *Percy Jackson* series the title protagonist can make use of the multifunctional power of water because he is the son of the powerful god Poseidon. In the last two volumes of the series, however, this ability is marginalized. In this series the qualities of the sea god Poseidon are transferred to the main character in order to create an attractive figure for identification. For example, in the first volume, *The Lightning Thief* (2005), Percy is able to get his unpleasant classmate wet by reviving a fountain that takes her inside (8–10).¹¹

Furthermore, the community of demigods adore Percy as the son of the sea god after a spear with three tips emerges as a hologram over his head as a sign of Poseidon (145–148). In this situation, Percy also experiences that water serves him as a medicine against a gaping wound. Indeed, he is able to heal his wounds with water during fighting practice, and this confirms the earlier hologram proof that he is Poseidon's offspring, while the trident as a symbol of power points to the fact that he is the son of one of the "Big Three", that is, Zeus, Hades, and Poseidon. Also his coach, Chiron, adores him like a god, but Percy does not want this at all, because he considers himself nothing special. This attitude already indicates Percy's exorbitant position as a rescuer of the world. In the following plot line Percy uses water especially as a weapon against his enemies, who conspired against Olympus, which is identified with Western civilization. For example, at the beach of Santa Monica he creates a wall of water in order to drown Ares, so that he spits out "a mouth full of seaweed" (330). Only after this victory can Percy restore Hades' helmet, which had been stolen by Ares, to the owner. To send it into the Underworld he hands it over to the Furies, who are servants of Hades (332–333). Because of this successful detection of the robbery, Hades allows Percy's mother, who has been abducted into the Underworld by the Minotaur, to come back to the world of the living

¹¹ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, vol. 1: *The Lightning Thief*, London: Puffin Books, 2005. For all the subsequent mentions this edition is used.

(347–348). Therefore, controlling water helps Percy to save his mother, and it restores hope in his life.

In the second volume, *The Sea of Monsters* (2006),¹² Percy can rule over the current of the sea and the Hippocampi, and use them as a vehicle. Thus, he transports himself and his friends Annabeth, the daughter of Athena, as well as Clarisse, the daughter of Ares, back to their ship after defeating the Sirens, whose enchanting songs confront their audiences with deadly danger (186–191). Finally, Percy finds his way around in the open water, and he navigates to the island of the Cyclops Polyphemus without using a compass (192).

In the third volume, *The Titan's Curse* (2007),¹³ Percy dives deep down to the bottom of the sea and releases there a holy and fabulous animal, known as the Ophiotaurus, a mixture of a cow and a snake (106–114). This hybrid creature spreads hope at Olympus because due to its special abilities the Ophiotaurus functions as a very powerful weapon against the Titans (269–277). In the last two volumes, as I have already observed, the ability of controlling water is not the main focus of attention any longer. This is most likely due to the reason that always repeating the same paradigm could become boring.

In the series, Percy Jackson is presented as a hybrid character who combines the qualities of the hero Perseus (and other demigod heroes) and the god Poseidon. Altogether he shows two superhuman abilities, which refer to Poseidon and belong to the set of powers listed at the beginning of this chapter. At first, Percy can flood enemies just like Poseidon does with cities ("power" no. 2 according to Tripp) and is able to evoke mythical beasts (like the Hippocampi) as a vehicle ("power" no. 7). These are just two characteristics of the set. Percy does not seem to have abilities that would destroy people's lives, like causing a seaquake or drying out rivers to damage humans, because he is a friend of human beings, and his mother is one of them. Instead, Percy has another one of Poseidon's powers, not mentioned in the mythical elaborations: the control of the element of water in order to save human beings and to heal injuries with the help of water. In this way, his power is designed to be pacifist, and it spreads hope across the world by saving it, for example, from the cruel Titans. Therefore, it can cautiously be said that Percy is a messianic figure like Jesus Christ, who also saves the whole world from evil. The element of water is also closely

¹² Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, vol. 2: *The Sea of Monsters*, London: Puffin Books, 2006. For all the subsequent mentions this edition is used.

¹³ Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, vol. 3: *The Titan's Curse*, London: Puffin Books, 2007. For all the subsequent mentions this edition is used.

connected with the Gospel of Jesus, because Percy can walk on water, and the fish (which lives in it) is a very old symbol of Christ, Son of God and Saviour.

Percy Jackson's power over water is also emphasized in the films *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* (2010) and *Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters* (2013). It is there explained as an inheritance from his powerful father, Poseidon. The fact that he is this god's son is uncovered when Chiron gives Percy the opportunity to live in the hut for the descendants of Poseidon (*Lightning Thief*, 00:25:51–00:27:04). In both films Percy's power is portrayed in a messianic context and is visualized in an impressive way. With the help of the latest digital techniques, the *Lightning Thief* and *Sea of Monsters* productions evoke amazing effects.

In the first film, Percy's abilities emerge at the very beginning, when he can stay under water in a swimming pool for seven minutes. Thus, his friend Grover, who measures the time, is very proud of him (*Lightning Thief*, 00:00:05–00:00:50). In this way the audience gets used to Percy's supernatural abilities and finds out that he must be different from his peers, because no human being can stay that long under water without coming to physical harm. In the water Percy gains recognition. This setting is opposite to that at school, to which Percy and Grover return after their visit to the swimming pool. At school, Percy is a loser and a pupil with special needs; because of his dyslexia he is hardly able to follow the curriculum. In this way, water is for Percy an element of hope and relaxation. Also, in the film Percy can use water to heal his wounds during the "capture-the-flag" training. Because of that phenomenon Chiron recognizes him as a son of Poseidon and is very proud of him (*Lightning Thief*, 00:33:02–00:33:14). Similarly, after his fight with Medusa, Percy holds the wounded hand of Annabeth in a pool at the motel in which Percy and his friends spend the night. At once her bloody hand is healed by Percy's power (*Lightning Thief*, 00:55:31–00:56:40). During his adventures, the power over water is a strong weapon that Percy can use to defeat the bad and monstrous Hydra. The beast threatening its victims with a lot of dangerous and fire-breathing heads is damaged by Percy in the Parthenon temple of Nashville, where the Hydra lives in the *Percy Jackson* universe. Henceforth, the Hydra cannot spit her fire onto the teenage heroes any more (*Lightning Thief*, 01:06:15–01:06:42). By flooding the mythical monster, which is in this adaptation more like a dragon, the life-giving element of water defeats the life-destroying element of fire. As a consequence, the three protagonists, Annabeth, Grover, and Percy, gain new hope to defeat the dangerous reign of the Titans. At the end of the film, Percy fights against his archenemy, Luke, who has switched sides to help the Titans,

and eliminates him by evoking a big wall of water at the top of the skyscrapers in New York City. Percy then keeps Luke under the water until he is unconscious (*Lightning Thief*, 01:34:36–01:36:22).

The power of controlling water functions in the film as a symbol of the support Percy Jackson receives from Poseidon, because this ability stems from him and connects the son and the father. Because of the fact that Percy can win only with his father's help, this cinematic production allows the interpretation that children are not successful without their parents. Children like Percy's arch-enemy cannot be winners – Luke is left alone by his dad, Hermes, the messenger of the gods. Therefore, he must be defeated by Percy.

In the second film, Percy is named by the oracle at Delphi as the Redeemer in a vision that shows him coming out of a waterfall (*Sea of Monsters*, 00:23:10–00:23:20). Here, water is an element of hope in the *Percy Jackson* series. It stands in opposition to the element of fire, which is demonized by the correlation with the devilish Titan Kronos, who is banished to the Underworld, which in this scene resembles hell. Therefore, he consists of volcanic elements after his rebirth. Also, in the films we find two kinds of power of the prototypical set: Percy does not flood cities but enemies, like in the books ("power" no. 2 according to Tripp), and he is able to evoke a seaquake to defend himself against enemies ("power" no. 5).

Siren Emma as a Messianic Figure

In the *Syrena Legacy* trilogy by Anna Banks (*Of Poseidon*, 2013; *Of Triton*, 2014; and *Of Neptune*, 2014) there is another example of a messianic figure that spreads hope all over their community by using the power over water like Poseidon does. This series was a *New York Times* bestseller. The target group of readers are teenage girls aged about thirteen and older. The protagonist, Emma, who lives as a Siren from her eighteenth birthday, can talk to fish because of her metamorphosis into this mythical beast.¹⁴ Despite being a Siren, she lives with her parents in the coastal city of Jersey in Florida. In her human form, she is able to stay under water for more than twenty minutes – even longer than Percy Jackson. After her conversion into a Siren her legs are transformed into a big fin, and so she swims as fast as the fish. As the plot develops,

¹⁴ Anna Banks, *The Syrena Legacy: Of Poseidon*, New York, NY: Feiwel and Friends, 2013, 215–220.

Emma is informed by her love interest, Galen, whom she meets at school, that she is a descendant of the house of Poseidon. Once upon a time Poseidon had founded the kingdom of Atlantis. There he lived in peace with his brother Triton. As he wanted to unite the house of Poseidon with the house of Triton to prevent violence forever, the first-born children in every generation have to get married to each other. This is prescribed by an ancient law. That is the reason why Emma and Galen soon become a couple. But they are not allowed to marry, because Emma turns out to be only a half-blood.

In volume 2 of the series, Emma is able to evoke big waves in the sea to defeat her rival, Jagen, who is eager to destroy the empire of the house of Triton and establish his own totalitarian reign. Furthermore, she dominates a killer whale and shows that she is able to be the empress of the sea. In this way she proves that she is a powerful descendant of the god Poseidon. Finally, Galen and Emma are allowed to marry.¹⁵

At the happy ending of the story in volume 3, Emma and her husband, Galen, rule peacefully over the houses of Poseidon and Triton using their power over water in a humane way.¹⁶ To protect their kingdom, once again they have to fight against the mad scientist Mr Kennedy, who wants to show the Sirens to the humans. Consequently, people all over the world would know where the Sirens live and their kingdom would probably be destroyed. But because of Emma summoning other Sirens, like her mother, Nalia, for help, the enemy can be defeated. In this trilogy, of all of Poseidon's powers Emma can only call upon sea beasts ("power" no. 7 according to Tripp).

Henry Turner as a Messianic Figure

Finally, also in *Pirates of the Caribbean: Salazar's Revenge*, the fifth film of this globally successful series, the focus is upon a hero who saves the world from a dreadful threat. This threat is here personified by the Hispanic sailor Salazar, who was defeated long before by Jack Sparrow, the captain of the famous *Black Pearl*, by entering the dangerous Bermuda Triangle, in which Salazar and his crew died. They were killed by a devilish conflagration.

¹⁵ Anna Banks, *The Syrena Legacy: Of Triton*, New York, NY: Feiwel and Friends, 2014, 226–237.

¹⁶ Anna Banks, *The Syrena Legacy: Of Neptune*, New York, NY: Feiwel and Friends, 2014, 364–368.

Without finding peace, Salazar wanders the seas with the aim of killing Jack Sparrow and other sailors who cross his path. As a Christian death figure, Salazar is dressed in flowing black clothes and has a white, skull-like face. Even his body is incomplete and looks like a skeleton. In his fight against this bad man, Jack Sparrow is supported by Henry Turner, the son of the pirate Will Turner. Henry also wants to break the curse put on his dad, because he longs to be with him. Will Turner had been cursed in a fight against the pirate Hector Barbossa and eventually became – after he was killed by that pirate – a ghost-like figure and the new captain of the *Flying Dutchman*.

Therefore, Henry searches for the Trident of Poseidon, which is hidden in the grave of Poseidon in the middle of the sea.¹⁷ It can only be found by competent astrologers, as they are able to read the constellations of the stars. Thus, a smart girl named Carina Barbossa, the daughter of the pirate Hector, joins Henry and shows to him and Jack the way to Poseidon's Trident in order to save the world from evil (*Salazar's Revenge*, 01:06:34–01:07:40). When the stars are in a convenient, very rare constellation, which shows the way to the Trident, the sea is divided into two parts. In this way Henry and his crew are able to reach the seafloor, where they find the Trident (01:36:21–01:38:40). Unfortunately, Salazar, whose black hair often moves like that of snake-headed Medusa, comes first and grabs the magical item. The Trident looks like it is made of coral; it is dark blue in colour and in the middle of it a red fire burns, which represents the power of Poseidon. In this adaptation the god's power is linked not only with the element of water, but with fire as well, as his Trident destroys the life of human beings just as burning fire does. At once Salazar causes trouble, by evoking seaquakes with the Trident. But Henry attacks him and divides the Trident with his saber into two parts. Consequently, Salazar loses his power and the two parts of the sea flood over the Spanish captain and his dangerous companions (01:40:30–01:43:27).

This scene resembles the story in the Old Testament in which Moses, leading Israel out of Egypt, drowns his Egyptian enemies in the Red Sea by ending the division of the sea with the help of Jahwe. In the end, William's curse is broken and Henry, who saved the world as a quasi-biblical hero, can meet his father and hug him. In this film Henry takes on the role of Poseidon for a short time. He searches for the Trident to gain power over the sea and provides the reason for the division of the sea, but then he learns that excessive power is dangerous.

¹⁷ In this adaptation Poseidon seems to have died, even though he is a god. Perhaps the reason is that in a post-Roman world no one believes in him and worships him any longer.

That is, in my opinion, the reason why he destroys this powerful weapon. In this way he can save his father and his crew and at the same time destroy the power of mad Salazar and his robbers, like Moses saved his nation from the Egyptian persecutors in the Bible, by drowning them after having divided the sea with his rod.

In this adaptation only the ability of flooding ("power" no. 2 according to Tripp) emerges. Yet, instead of flooding cities, the Poseidon-like figure in the film drowns his enemies. Altogether the myth of Poseidon is mixed in this post-modern version with the Christian fable of the emancipation of Moses and the Israelites, who defeat the Egyptian persecutors. Thus, Henry is no demigod in the film, but fulfils the function of Poseidon, the ruler over the sea, for a short time by gaining his power. Ultimately, he rejects it forever.

Conclusion: Current Demigods as Secularized Martyrs

In the *Percy Jackson* series (books and films), in the *Syrena Legacy* trilogy, and in the film *Pirates of the Caribbean: Salazar's Revenge*, the abilities of Poseidon prevail, ones with which the protagonists can defend one another and even the whole world or community of demigods against the violent forces of tyrannical enemies.¹⁸ In mythology, Poseidon himself is in opposition to this philanthropic heroism, because he often uses his power against humanity or singular heroes, like Odysseus, whom he prevents from sailing home to his wife, Penelope, for ten years. In the postmodern fantasy genre, the power of the hero is instrumentalized for democratic purposes. In this way democracy can be protected and defended against evil tyrants. In this context, the protagonist is shown as a Redeemer, like Jesus Christ, saving the whole world from evil. Jesus, too, has power over water, as mentioned above. In particular, He saved His disciples in distress at sea by calming the tempest (Matt. 14:22–33 and 8:23–27).

¹⁸ See Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte Antike. Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien*, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 5, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017. Another recent and famous example of a messianic Poseidon figure is the hero of Aquaman in the DC Universe film *Justice League* (2017). He is a king and rules over the sunken empire of Atlantis. He has a five-pronged trident, with which he is able to cause big waves when fighting against his tyrannical enemies, such as the Parademons. Aquaman looks like the Poseidon statues of Renaissance fountains: he has a beard, long and curly hair, and an athletic body. Moreover, with his bright, sea-blue eyes, blond-brown hair, tanned skin, and fish-scale tattoos all over his strong body, he is also modernized and hybridized to resemble a handsome surfer.

Discussing this theme, Leingang points out that postmodern demigods in fantasy can be recognized as secularized martyrs ("säkularisierte Märtyrer").¹⁹ Yet in contrast to Christian martyrs, they suffer a lot from the attacks of their enemies, but do not get killed in the end. After defeating their archenemies, they save the whole world from madness, begin a new life – often with their love interest – and start a family. In this way they spread hope all over the world by triumphing over evil. How useful would those protagonists be nowadays, in a world which is threatened by apocalyptic weapons and war?

¹⁹ Leingang, "The Trojan War Reloaded", 376.

HERACLES/HERCULES AS THE HERO OF A HOPEFUL CULTURE IN ANCIENT POETRY AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE AND MEDIA FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADULTS

Heracles' shimmering ambiguity and *παλίντονος ἄρμονία* (*palíntonos harmonía*; taut harmony) of opposite qualities or otherness constitutes a vital and influential element in the classical tradition surrounding this son of Zeus. It is worth noting that this tradition was both complex and multimedia from the very beginning. The outstanding miracle of myth and reception of myth that Heracles symbolizes down through the centuries seems to be due to the fascination that lies in the broad range of extreme opposites that this hero, demigod, and finally god embodies from the very beginning of the cultural tradition we can trace, and wherein he is poised between hope and death.

The Heracles/Hercules Multiplex in Ancient Tradition: Becoming an Icon between Hope and Death (from Homer Onwards)

Heracles singularly combines in his person extreme humiliation (inflicted on him by the necessity to carry out cruel labours) and extraordinary reward (from glorious victories, abundant booty, and apotheosis in the end); extreme suffering as a victim of his own wife Deianira and the hybrid creature of Nessos (a painful death by the vampire robe impregnated with Nessos' venom, which his wife erroneously regarded as a love potion), and extreme honour in his reception and welcome among the Olympians bestowing on him everlasting life; extreme masculine strength in defeating superhuman threats to civilization, and thus in conveying extraordinary hope for humankind, and extreme weakness,

for example in becoming Omphale's slave and quasi-changing his gender into femininity in Lydia.

From a receptionist point of view, the most recent revival of Heracles/Hercules in lavishly animated cinema blockbusters can be considered an outright epiphany of the hero from the "mnemonic waves" of cultural history.¹ The influential power of the "greatest hero of Greek mythology"² in the new millennium should be connected with the thrilling ambivalence of his heroism. The strong-man and demigod always baffles his audiences, since he oscillates between extremes and sometimes direct contradictions. Often he enters or transgresses as a hero of liminality the border zones between life and death, man and woman, human being and god. Moreover, he serves as a symbol of cult plurality with regard to fertility, mysteries, and parties.³ He embodies also the Janus-faced nature of war as brilliant hero warrior and traumatized returning soldier, for example in contemporary stagings of Euripides' *Heracles*.⁴ This ambivalence was already fundamental for one of the earliest literary pieces of evidence concerning Heracles' heroic stature. In a key passage in Book 18 of Homer's *Iliad*, Achilles talks to his divine mother, Thetis, and refers to the *exemplum maius* of Heracles, son of Zeus almighty. Just before that, Achilles received the shocking news that Hector had killed his closest relation, Patroclus, in a duel and captured his armour as booty. Therefore, Achilles is now so driven by a strong desire for deadly revenge against Hector that he finally gives up his wrath of honour against Agamemnon (Hom., *Il.* 18.1–93). Because his mother prophesies that through his killing of Hector his own premature death will become inescapable, Achilles replies with the following verses in reference to Heracles:

οὐδὲ γὰρ οὐδὲ βίη Ἡρακλῆος φύγε κῆρα,
ὅς περ φίλτατος ἔσκε Διὶ Κρονίῳνι ἄνακτι·
ἀλλὰ ἔ μοῖρα δάμασσε καὶ ἀργαλέος χόλος Ἥρης.⁵
(Hom., *Il.* 18.117–119)

¹ For this concept, see Roberto Calasso, *Die Literatur und die Götter*, trans. Reimar Klein, München: Hanser, 2003 (ed. pr. in Italian 2001), 31, with reference to the art historian Aby Warburg.

² Emma Griffiths, *Euripides: Heracles*, "Duckworth Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy", London: Duckworth, 2006, 9.

³ See the instructive survey given by Griffiths, in *ibidem*, 24–25.

⁴ See *ibidem*, 126–130, with a short overview of the theatrical reception of Euripides' *Heracles* in modern times.

⁵ Quoted from Homer, *Ilias. Volumen alterum rhapsodias XIII–XXIV*, ed. Martin L. West, "Bibliotheca Teubneriana", Monachii et Lipsiae: B.G. Teubner, 2000.

For not even the power of Heracles avoided death,
he who was most dearly beloved by Zeus, Cronos' son, the lord,
but by fate he was defeated and by the painful wrath of Hera.⁶

This brief characterization⁷ of the monumental hero of contemporary and earlier "legendary poetry" by the protagonist of the *Iliad* condenses the ambivalence of the heroic temper.⁸ The suprahuman physical strength and power of Heracles, seen as resulting from the extraordinary affection of his divine father and presented as a significant part of the absolute rule of Zeus over the world, are opposed to the even stronger antagonistic powers of Μοῖρα (Moira), the fatal lot of the *condition humaine*, and to the hate of the jealous stepmother, Hera, which makes of Moira an anthropomorphic deity. In the narrative context of the *Iliad*, the mythological paradigm of Heracles serves as a heroic self-ascertainment of Achilles, who subsequently is even more determined to give preference to the κλέος ἐσθλόν (*kléos esthlón*; illustrious renown), that is, the monumental fame of the "noble hero" enjoying everlasting glory through poetic or iconographic works of art and regarded as eminently superior to the instinct of physical survival.

Considering the successive mythical poesis around Heracles/Hercules, the passage quoted above can be interpreted as the nucleus, the antagonistic basic tendency which is confirmed and elaborated by the "groups of deeds" that the

⁶ Here and in the following citations, English working translation by M.J., unless stated otherwise.

⁷ Franz Stoessl, in *Der Tod des Herakles. Arbeitsweise und Formen der antiken Sagedichtung*, Zürich: Rhein-Verlag, 1945, 20, notices the "telegram-like brevity" (telegrammartige Knappheit) which points to the "merely adopted section against the breadth of own creativity" (die bloß übernommene Partie gegenüber der Breite eigener Gestaltung).

⁸ The literary technique of fading ("Überblendung") and condensing ("Zusammendrängung") of earlier strata of tradition is convincingly analysed by Stoessl, *ibidem*, 20–21: "The mythical material is gradually growing; every new representation is added like a layer to its predecessor. It gains its own profile and imprint, by partly selecting and reducing the source material, partly expanding and extending it. Thus, every new mythical poem is in its substance a new creation" (Der Sagenstoff wächst allmählich heran, jede neue Darstellung legt sich wie eine Schicht über ihre Vorgängerin. Sie gewinnt ihr eigenes Profil und Gepräge, indem sie teils durch Selektion den Stoff ihrer Quelle beschränkt, teils durch Ausbau erweitert. So erweist sich jede Sagedichtung im Grunde als Neuformung). For possible intertextual connections with the (now lost) most ancient epic poetry about Heracles, see, e.g., Albertus Bernabé, ed., *Poetae epici Graeci. Testimonia et fragmenta. Pars I*, "Bibliotheca Teubneriana", Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1987, 157–165, with testimonies and fragments concerning Creophylus' Οἰχαλίας ἄλωσις [Oichalías hálōsis; The Capture of Oechalia]. Hypotheses about the content and motifs of this epic poem are discussed by Franz Bömer in *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen. Kommentar. Buch VIII–IX*, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1977, 276–277.

mythographers have defined:⁹ (1) Δωδέκαθλος (Dōdékathlos), the most famous Twelve Labours by the hero as a servant of Eurystheus, actually intended as tortures caused by Hera's wrath against her stepson, amplified by the closely connected *πάρεργα* (*párerga*; secondary works); (2) madness and killing of his own offspring from the marriage with Megara (according to Euripides, dated after Heracles' return from the Underworld), as a calamity caused by Hera and her henchmen Iris and Lyssa;¹⁰ (3) πράξεις (*práxeis*; actions), that is, war campaigns, among others as a participant in the Panhellenic efforts of the Greek heroes (especially the Argonauts), as further challenges to his heroic power; (4) the complex of myths surrounding the physical death of Heracles (killing of Nessos, marriage with Deianira, conquest of Oechalia, painful death inflicted on him by Deianira, and combustion on Mount Oeta), as a fateful concatenation of disastrous circumstances that finally breaks the physis of the strongman, and destroys him.

Beginning at least with the period of its flourishing in the sixth century BC,¹¹ Heracles' mythical tradition is represented by a plurality of media, ones interconnected through an intense dialogue. The early epic texts primarily testify to oral aeodic and rhapsodic performance (for example, as a "cultural programme" within the great Panhellenic Games) and secondarily become literary and fundamental pedagogic textual evidence of the written Greek cultural heritage. The choral lyric poetry, in which the myths about Heracles (see, for instance, Pind., *Nem.* 1.33–72¹² and *Isthm.* 4.70–91¹³) and Deianira (Bacchyl. 16 = *Dithyrambus* 2¹⁴)

⁹ See Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen*, 273–274, with reference to the most important representatives of earlier philological discussions on the subject. Bömer's mythographical systematics, based on Ludwig Preller and Carl Robert, *Griechische Mythologie*, vol. 2, Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1894 (ed. pr. 1877), is fundamental for the modified account given here.

¹⁰ See Griffiths, *Euripides: Heracles*, 19–21. The mythological and legendary tradition of Heracles' killing of his own children is presented and discussed by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff in Euripides, *Herakles*, vol. 2, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1959 (ed. pr. 1895), 81–88. For the creative innovation introduced into the tradition by Euripides (the invention of the character of the usurper Lycus, the chronological transposition of Heracles' madness and the killing of the children to the time after Heracles' labours and cultural achievements, and connection with Theseus/Athens), cf. the exhaustive account of Godfrey W. Bond in Euripides, *Heracles*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, xxvi–xxx.

¹¹ See Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen*, 273, with plenty of textual evidence.

¹² The mythical narration covers more than the second half of the poem. The poet praises Heracles' cultural achievements as the peak of ἀρετή (*areté*; excellence), focusing above all on the defeat of the snakes by the "Heracliscus", which leads the seer Tiresias to a grandiose prophecy about the glorious life of the boy, which will finally find its perfection at Zeus' table with Hebe as Heracles' wife.

¹³ Heracles' apotheosis and everlasting bliss as husband of Hebe and son-in-law of Hera is praised as reward of his civilizing achievements on land and at sea.

¹⁴ In this choral ode of Attic *politai* the complex of myths surrounding Heracles' death is briefly mentioned; see Bernhard Zimmermann, *Dithyrambos. Geschichte einer Gattung*, "Hypomnemata. Unter-

often open up a mythological space of resonance (in Pindar's case for *encomia* on behalf of victorious athletes), acquires tremendous force in the performances underscoring the community of the *polis*. This complex functionalization between identification and distance gains particularly concrete forms in the segmentations and variations of the mythical traditions around Heracles, which Attic tragic poets like Sophocles (in *Philoctetes* as well as in *Trachiniae*) and Euripides (in *Alcestis* and *Heracles*), as well as their comic colleagues (for example, Aristophanes in *Ranae*), put on the stage of the Dionysos Theatre in mimetic play and song. The visual arts of painting and sculpture (especially the rich evidence of Greek vase-painting or the metopes of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia; see Fig. 1) impressively show this multimedia presence in the form of "iconotexts".

In Ancient Rome, Hercules was the object of cultic reverence from very early times. Even apart from the Ara Maxima and the Forum Boarium, the Roman poets and artists were continually and strongly inspired by the Heracles/Hercules myths. Recent archaeological research on mythical paintings on the walls of houses in Pompei, which are obviously strongly influenced by Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, led to the following statement of Jürgen Hodske:

Die Abenteuer des Herakles sind zahlreich vertreten. An erster Stelle stehen die Ereignisse mit den Geliebten des Herakles wie Omphale, Hesione, Deianeira und Auge, weiterhin der schlangenvürgende Herakliskos und der Aufenthalt im Garten der Hesperiden.¹⁵

The adventures of Heracles are often represented. In the first place there are the events around the beloved of Heracles, like Omphale, Hesione, Deianira and Auge; moreover, Heracliscus strangling the snakes and the stay in the garden of the Hesperides.

suchungen zur Antike und zu ihrem Nachleben", Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992, 70–76, esp. 73: "[T]he typical role that is attributed to Heracles within this short narration is not portrayed as positively as in Pindarus; rather, the description of the pernicious results of Heracles' manners casts unfavourable light on the traditional heroism of the demigod, from which the character of the suffering and passive Deianira is clearly differentiated" ([D]ie typische Rolle, die Herakles in der kurzen Erzählung zufällt, ist nicht positiv gewertet wie bei Pindar; vielmehr gerät durch die Schilderung der verderblichen Auswirkungen von Herakles' Wesen das traditionelle Heldentum des Halbgotts in ein zweifelhaftes Licht, gegen das sich umso deutlicher die Gestalt der leidenden, ausgelieferten Deianeira abhebt); and Peter Riemer, "Die 'ewige Deianeira'", in Andreas Bagordo and Bernhard Zimmermann, eds., *Bakchylides – 100 Jahre nach seiner Wiederentdeckung*, München: C.H. Beck, 2000, 169–182.

¹⁵ Jürgen Hodske, *Mythologische Bildthemen in den Häusern Pompejis. Die Bedeutung der zentralen Mythenbilder für die Bewohner Pompejis*, Ruppolding and Mainz: Franz Philipp Rutzen, 2007, 172. The Roman *ikonopoiesis* around Hercules is encyclopaedically treated by Stefan Ritter, *Hercules in der römischen Kunst von den Anfängen bis Augustus*, Heidelberg: Verlag Archäologie und Geschichte, 1995 (= PhD dissertation, University of Heidelberg, 1991).



Figure 1: Reconstruction of the twelve metopes from the Temple of Zeus in Olympia, ca. 470–457 BC, by Max Kühnert, from Ernst Curtius and Friedrich Adler, eds., *Olympia. Die Ergebnisse der von dem Deutschen Reich veranstalteten Ausgrabung*, vol. 3: *Die Bildwerke in Stein und Thon*, ed. Georg Treu, Berlin: A. Asher, 1894, table 45, digitalized via University of Heidelberg Historic Literature, <https://digi.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/diglit/curtiusadler1894/0047> (accessed 12 July 2021), Public Domain.

The Roman *ikonopoiesis* around Hercules offers very valuable evidence for the overwhelming importance of the civilizing aspects of the hero from the legendary accounts about Hercules, Euander, and Cacus, and the aetiology of the Ara Maxima and later works. Ovid's version of Hercules' apotheosis is analysed below; it influenced, for instance, the Latin tragedy *Hercules Oetaeus*, attributed to the philosopher Seneca, who also wrote a Latin adaptation of Euripides' *Heracles*.

Heracles/Hercules Reloaded: From the Fallen Hero of Civilization in Attic Tragedy to the Messianic Hercules in Contemporary Blockbusters

The traditional motif of the madness and fury of Heracles, unhinged by an obsession caused by daemons or intoxication,¹⁶ has its tragic model in Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, staged around 435–432 BC,¹⁷ that is, at least ten years before Euripides' *Heracles*.

In Sophocles' play, Heracles acts a soldier returning from war who traumatizes his family when it becomes obvious that, after the siege of Oechalia, he brings the young princess Iole, whom he has captured as prey, as a kind of second wife to the home palace at Trachis. His wife, Deianira, who suffered from the separation from her husband and desperately longed for his return, is shocked by this news and impregnates a festive robe for Heracles with a *pharmakon*. But this supposed love charm, a gift for Deianira from the dying centaur Nessos, whom Heracles killed because of a sexual attack on the woman, turns out to be lethal, as it contains the venom of the Lernaean Hydra (this venom was mixed with Nessos' blood when the hero hit him with one of his poisonous arrows).

Thus the ambivalence of the heroic swells to a paradoxical crescendo. The superb warrior is tortured in the "vampire robe".¹⁸ In this deadly strangle-

¹⁶ For the tradition of Heracles' killing of his own family in furious madness, scarcely attested before Euripides, see Euripides, *Heracles*, ed. Bond, xxviii–xxx.

¹⁷ For the dating of the play, see Markus Janka, *Dialog der Tragiker. Liebe, Wahn und Erkenntnis in Sophokles' Trachiniai und Euripides' Hippolytos*, München and Leipzig: K.G. Saur, 2004 (= Habilitation, University of Regensburg, 2002), 79–80 and 333–335, with new arguments for a middle dating "in the middle group of the extant Sophoclean tragedies" (333; in den mittleren Abschnitt des erhaltenen Sophokleischen Werkes).

¹⁸ A structural analysis of the plot with schematic illustrations is conducted by Janka in *Dialog der Tragiker*, 84–93. For a thorough linear interpretation of the key passages marked by their central positions, see *ibidem*, 96–186.

hold he bemoans before his son Hyllus the complete destruction of his heroic superpower, which is again exemplified by his great achievements and his divine origin (as mentioned already in the *Iliad*):

ὦ χέρεις, χέρεις,
ὦ νῶτα καὶ στέρν', ὦ φίλοι βραχίονες,
ὕμεις ἐκεῖνοι δὴ καθέσταθ' οἷ ποτε
Νεμέας ἔνοικον, βουκόλων ἀλάστορα,
λέοντ', ἄπλατον θρέμμα κάπροσήγορον,
βία κατειργάσασθε, Λερναίαν θ' ὕδραν,
διφυῆ τ' ἄμικτον ἵπποβάμονα στρατὸν
θηρῶν, ὑβριστήν, ἄνομον, ὑπέροχον βίαν,
Ἐρυμάνθιον τε θῆρα, τόν θ' ὑπὸ χθονὸς
Ἄιδου τρίκρανον σκύλακ', ἀπρόσμαχον τέρας,
δεινῆς Ἐχίδνης θρέμμα, τόν τε χρυσέων
δράκοντα μήλων φύλακ' ἐπ' ἐσχάτοις τόποις·
ἄλλων τε μόχθων μυρίων ἐγευσάμην,
κούδεις τροπαῖ' ἔστησε τῶν ἐμῶν χερῶν.
Νῦν δ' ὦδ' ἄναρθρος καὶ κατερρακωμένος
τυφλῆς ὑπ' ἄτης ἐκπεπόρθημαι τάλας,
ὁ τῆς ἀρίστης μητρὸς ὠνομασμένος,
ὁ τοῦ κατ' ἄστρα Ζηνὸς αὐδηθεὶς γόνος.¹⁹
(Soph., *Trach.* 1089–1106)

Alas, **my hands, my hands,**
my back and my chest, my dear arms,
you are now in this evil state and have **one day**
beaten this inhabitant of Nemea, the cowherds' doom,
this lion, an unapproachable and unspeakable creature,
by force, also the Lernaean Hydra
and the hybrid and uncanny horse-like army
of beasts, arrogant, criminal, full of violence,
as well as the Erymanthian beast, and under the earth
Hades' dog with three heads, an invincible monster,
and the terrible brood Echidna, and the dragon
which was guardian of the golden apples at world's end;
Tens of thousands of other toils I had to experience

¹⁹ Quoted from *Sophoclis Fabulae*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones and Nigel G. Wilson, "Scriptorium Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis", Oxford: Oxford Classical Texts, 1990 (hereinafter emphasis by M.J., unless stated otherwise).

and no one overcame my strong **hands**.
But now I am thus weakened and torn apart,
by blind doom I am destroyed alas
although I am linked to the most heroic mother by my name
and am praised as offspring of Zeus in the stars.

The impressive evidence of superhuman physical strength and mental courage cannot spare the hero from physical dismemberment and destruction as *homo dolorosus* who complains that his body has become an ἄθλιον δέμας (*áthlion démas*; "body of misfortune", Soph., *Trach.* 1079). In the verses quoted above, the active destructive power as monster-killer and cultural hero (1094; κατειργάσασθε; *kateirgásasthe*) is strictly opposed to his pain as a victim of the destructive force of the (already dead) Nessos and the still potent venom of the (also already dead) Hydra (1104; ἐκπεπόρημαι; *ekpepórhēmai*). The imperium of killed monsters strikes back and brings death and despair to the killer.

Whereas Heracles' labours are matters of praise for hopeful worshippers of Zeus (as, for example, in Pindar's *Odes*), here they become cries of desperation and accusation of Zeus' order for the literally deconstructed hero himself whose strength is suddenly reduced to a memory of days gone by (1091; ποτε; *pote*).

Quite similarly to Sophocles here, but in a totally different context and mythological tradition, Euripides also refers to the *Dōdékathlos* of the hero in his *Heracles*. The choral ode (348–350), sung by "decrepit",²⁰ old Theban men, gives the following catalogue of Heracles' heroic labours: Nemean Lion, Centauro-machy, Hind of Artemis, Thracian Mares, Kyknos, Apples of the Hesperides, Sea-Clearing/Triton, Atlas, the Amazon's Girdle, Lernaean Hydra, Cattle of Geryon, Cerberus/Journey to Hades, as a sort of obituary for the hero, who is supposed to remain in the Underworld while his family is exposed to the merciless tyrant Lycus who wants to kill them all even though they are suppliants.²¹ The ironic tension and ambivalence of the choral ode becomes particularly evident if one considers the fact that soon thereafter Heracles returns just in time to save his beloved and kill Lycus, only to become the insane murderer of his own family.

²⁰ Euripides, *Heracles*, ed. Bond, 91.

²¹ See *ibidem*, 146, ad Eur., *Her.* 348–441: "The chorus are left alone. They can do nothing to help Heracles' family, as has been made plain, and they refer again to their weakness at the end of their song. But like the *Agamemnon* chorus they can sing: they deliver an ode unparalleled in length and formality among the plays of Euripides, narrating the labours of Heracles for the good of mankind. [...] The ode is a θρήνος for the dead Heracles".

In Sophocles' *Trachiniae* a similar ambivalence lies in the strong contrast between the physical strength remembered by Heracles at the beginning of the verses quoted above and the vulnerability of his suffering body.²² This hopeless pain is presented onstage by Heracles himself (as a kind of director) commenting in a metatheatrical way on the act of watching his destruction (*Trach.* 1076–1080).²³ As an anti-text to this constellation, Euripides has modelled the finale of his *Heracles*. In this play the hero's human father, Amphitryon, had gradually conveyed to him in a rather maieutic method insight about his own disastrous acts of madness (*Her.* 1111–1145). Here it is not bodily pain, but mental grief and despair that heavily suggest the wish to commit suicide to Heracles (*Her.* 1146–1152). But very surprisingly, and again in the last moment, his comrade Theseus arrives from Athens to support him physically and mentally. When Heracles first notices Theseus approaching, he is eager to withdraw his person from the gaze of his friend because he is depressed by the shame of his doom. So he says to himself and to Amphitryon:

ὀφθησόμεσθα, καὶ τεκνοκτόνον μύσος
 ἐς ὄμμαθ' ἤξει φιλτάτῳ ξένων ἐμῶν.
 οἴμοι, τί δράσω; ποῖ κακῶν ἐρημίαν
 εὔρω, περωτὸς ἢ κατὰ χθονὸς μολῶν;
 † φέρ'... ἄν τι † κρατὶ περιβάλω σκότον.²⁴
 (Eur., *Her.* 1155–1159)

²² Heracles' impressive farewell *rhesis*, "in which farewell and life balance are combined in aggressive bitterness" (171; in der sich Abgesang und Lebensbilanz zu aggressiver Verbitterung vereinen), is discussed by Janka in *Dialog der Tragiker*, 171–174.

²³ For the suffering body as a spectacle onstage, see Markus Janka, "Der Leidensleib im Schauspiel der griechischen Tragödie. Zur intertextuellen, performativen und kommunikativen Zeichenhaftigkeit des sterbenden und toten Körpers in der attischen Tragödie", *Gymnasium* 116 (2009), 1–28, esp. 20–24, on Heracles in *Trachiniae*: "Sophocles' Heracles reflects on this in his eyes monstrous dismemberment of his *par excellence* heroic *persona* in a key passage of his grand and verbose appearance as a terminally ill person on a stretcher. Within his big *rhesis* of 66 verses (*Trach.* 1046–1111) Heracles [contrasts] his glorious heroic biography with his painful and shameful agony" (21; Sophokles' Herakles reflektiert diese ihm monströs erscheinende Zersetzung seiner *par excellence* heroischen *persona* an einer Schlüsselstelle seines großen und wortreichen Auftritts als Todkranker auf der Bahre. Innerhalb der großen *Rhesis* von 66 Versen [*Trach.* 1046–1111] [kontrastiert] Herakles seine ruhmreiche Heldenbiographie mit dem schmerzlich-schändlichen Todeskampf); "In Sophocles' *Trachiniae* the poet elevates the body of Heracles [...] as an emblem for the deadly tensions that permeate the whole play" (23; In Sophokles' *Trachinierinnen* erhebt der Dichter den Leib des Herakles [...] zum vordem in dieser Intensität unerreichten Emblem für die tödlichen Spannungen, die das Stück insgesamt prägen). This expressive stage dramaturgy of Attic tragedy constitutes evidently a great inspiration for the medium of film.

²⁴ Quoted from Euripides, *Heracles*, ed. Bond.

We will be seen here, and the horror of killing my children
will get in the sight of the dearest of my friends.
Alas, what shall I do? Where is in this disaster loneliness
to be found, by wings or underground walk?
Well..., I shall veil my head with darkness.

The (shameful) longing for loneliness and invisibility here strongly contrasts with the (self-confident, heroic) desire for public presentation of suffering and dying in the *Trachiniae*. Thus, this passage can also be read as a metatheatrical comment of Euripides on Sophocles' specific way of dealing with the dismemberment of heroic monumentality.

Both of Heracles' tragedies, different as they are, have one central point in common, although they dramatize totally different stages and elements of the mythological tradition. They highlight the ambivalence of the hero who immediately after his conquering or civilizing achievements for the benefit of humankind falls into the abyss of extreme physical and mental pain. It is exactly this ambivalence of the "Strong Man" Heracles as presented in the ancient mass media of Attic tragedies that contemporary cinema has only recently rediscovered and unfolded with blockbuster appeal. Two movies that particularly meet the visual and dramaturgical expectations of young adults, both aired in 2014, make use of this appeal, yet at the same time they apply astonishingly different strategies of postmodern multimedia *mythopoiesis*.²⁵

The Legend of Hercules (2014) – by the Finnish director and producer Renny Harlin, with Kellan Lutz as Hercules – shows the following main variations of the mythological "vulgata":²⁶

- although the scene is set about 1200 BC in Tiryns/Greece, Alcides²⁷/Hercules is trained as a kind of gladiator;

²⁵ For broader interpretations of these movies within the context of the classical epic and dramatic tradition, see Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, "Die kuriosen Metamorphosen des antiken Heros Hercules im globalisierten Medienverbund der Postmoderne", *Gymnasium* 125 (2018), 95–127; an overview of fifteen films on Hercules released from the 1950s onwards is given on pp. 100–104. On Heracles in contemporary cinema, see also Part I of the following volume: Antony Augoustakis and Stacie Raucci, eds., *Epic Heroes on Screen*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 11–90.

²⁶ For a summary of the plot, see Michael Stierstorfer, *Antike Mythologie in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Gegenwart. Unsterbliche Götter- und Heldengeschichten?*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017 (= PhD Dissertation, University of Regensburg, 2016), 488–489.

²⁷ This antonomasy for Hercules (grandson of Alceus, i.e., a papponymicon) has been prominent since Hellenistic poetry. In the film it is reinterpreted as an alternative name for the hero, which is designed to cast doubt on his divine origin; see Bömer in P. Ovidius Naso, *Die Fasten*, ed., trans., and comment. by Franz Bömer, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 1958, 65, ad Ov., *Fast.* 1.575:

- Amphitryon rules Tiryns (not Thebes) as a cruel despot (and thus resembles the usurper Lycus of the tragic tradition);
- Hera's female initiative causes Hercules' "immaculate conception" by Amphitryon's suffering wife, Alcmene, through "virgin intercourse" with Zeus;
- Alcides/Hercules acts as a saviour in a war-hungry world knowing no peace under the tyranny of the imperialist Amphitryon and his son Iphicles;
- the action plot corroborates the tradition of Hercules Christianus,²⁸ who by sacrificing himself as a Man of Sorrow overcomes death and triumphs as the saviour of humankind;
- with the help of the lightning of his divine father, Zeus, the enchained and tortured Hercules manages to defeat Amphitryon and Iphicles as the symbols of the evil in the world. Thus, he can save his beloved Hebe, Princess of Crete, from a forced marriage with his tyrannic stepbrother Iphicles. Then he marries Hebe and they live happily ever after.

Hercules (2014) – by the American producer and director Brett Ratner, with the wrestling star Dwayne Johnson as Hercules, and based on the graphic novel of 2008 by Steve Moore entitled *Hercules: The Thracian Wars* – shows the following chief deviations from the mythological tradition:²⁹

- the scene is set in rather more historical than mythical times: Hercules is employed as a mere human mercenary of the Thracian King Cotys, whose name hints at the historical rulers of Thrace from the fourth century BC onwards;³⁰
- together with his comrades, his nephew Iolaos, the Amazon Atalante, and the seer Amphiaraus, Hercules defeats Cotys' antagonist – the centaur Rhesus;

"The antonomasy for Heracles derived from Alcaeus – the father of his father, Amphitryon – has been widespread and extremely common since Hellenistic poetry; see, e.g., Callim. *hymn.* 3, 145. Moschus 3, 117. Virg. *Aen.* 12 times. Ov. *Met.* 6 times, etc." (Der von Alkeus, dem Vater seines Vaters Amphitryon abgeleitete Name des Herakles ist besonders seit der hellenistischen Dichtung weit verbreitet und ungemein geläufig; z.B. Kallim. *hymn.* 3, 145. Moschos 3, 117. Verg. *Aen.* 12mal Ov. *met.* 6mal, usw.).

²⁸ For a Christian interpretation of the Heracles/Hercules myths from late Antiquity onwards, see Frank Bezner, "Herakles", in Maria Moog-Grünewald, ed., *Mythenrezeption. Die antike Mythologie in Literatur, Musik und Kunst von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart*, "Der Neue Pauly. Supplemente" 5, Stuttgart and Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 2008, 332.

²⁹ For a summary of the plot, see Stierstorfer, *Antike Mythologie*, 492–493.

³⁰ See Janka and Stierstorfer, "Die kuriosen Metamorphosen des antiken Heros Hercules", 117, n. 58.

- after this victory the defeated Rhesus reveals to Hercules that in fact Cotys is a despotic tyrant (who will later turn out to be a real villain and an ally of Hercules' archenemy, Eurystheus, King of Tiryns);
- thus, Hercules changes sides and successfully supports the fight of Rhesus and the king's daughter Ergenia against Cotys;
- Hercules takes revenge on Cotys and Eurystheus because he finds out that earlier they had drugged him and killed his family: Hercules was haunted by visions of his dead family (supposedly killed by himself) and the hellhound (that is, here a pack of wolfhounds);
- finally, Hercules rules as a new and good king over Thrace.

Especially Ratner's *Hercules*³¹ shows a critical tendency of rationalization of myth and religion as functionalized "history". The shocking cruelty of Hercules' killing of his own family is removed by putting the blame on the antagonists acting as postmodern equivalents to ancient Lycus. The ambivalence of the ancient hero is thus referred to, but in a correcting and whitewashing way.

These recent cinematographic adaptations of Hercules are based on very different strategies of transforming the ancient tradition. *The Legend of Hercules* shows a transformation with religious overtones. Being correlated with the image of Jesus Christ, Hercules defeats a brutal tyrant who symbolizes death. According to the Christian faith, Jesus too has overcome death by believing in his Divine Father and sacrificing himself for the sake of humankind. In *Hercules: The Thracian Wars*, the hero is, like in a fairy tale, transformed into a hunter of wolves who subdues (instead of the mythical Cerberus) three real bloodthirsty animals that symbolize death and cruel tyranny. Thus demythologization (by rationalizing the ancient tradition) and remythologization (by blending it with fairy-tale motifs) go hand in hand here.

³¹ For an aesthetic judgement and subtle interpretation of the film, see also Reinhold Zwick, "Zeus & Co. im Cineplex. Zur Wiederkehr griechischer Götter im Kino der Gegenwart", in Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte Antike. Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien*, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 5, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017, 259–261.

Heracles/Hercules as Hero of Hope in Ancient Tragedy and Poetry

This postmodern approach of presenting Hercules as a fairy-tale conqueror of death is rooted in literary evidence from ancient sources that plays out more emphatically the extremely hopeful side of Heracles' ambivalence, by which I mean his different victories even over death that are attested especially in the dramatic and epic tradition.

In the final scene³² of Euripides' *Alcestis* (ca. 438 BC) the at times burlesque and comedian-like Heracles of this drama is praised by King Admetus of Pherai in Thessaly for bringing his deceased wife, Alcestis, back to life. Heracles proudly reveals that he has overcome the lord of the daemons of death himself by mere physical strength:

{Αδ.} ὦ τοῦ μεγίστου Ζηνὸς εὐγενὲς τέκνον,
εὐδαιμονοίης καί σ' ὁ φιτύσας πατήρ
σώζοι· σὺ γὰρ δὴ τᾶμ' ἀνώρθωσας μόνος,
πῶς τήνδ' ἔπεμψας νέρθεν ἐς φάος τόδε;
{Ηρ.} μάχην συνάψας δαιμόνων τῶ κυρίῳ.
{Αδ.} ποῦ τόνδε Θανάτῳ φῆς ἀγῶνα συμβαλεῖν;
{Ηρ.} τύμβον παρ' αὐτόν, ἐκ λόχου μάρψας χεροῖν.³³
(Eur., *Alc.* 1136–1142)

Ad.: You **offspring of the greatest Zeus, you noble child**,
may good spirits be with you and may your **physical father**
save you; for you put my things in order, no one else.
How did you manage to bring this woman from below to this light?
He.: I fought against the lord of the daemons.
Ad.: Where do you say that this struggle against Death took place?
He.: Near the tomb I snatched him from an ambush with my hands.

In his *encomium* of Heracles, Admetus emphasizes above all his noble descent from the highest god, Zeus, a fact which enables him to accomplish

³² For a commentary on this scene of *denouement*, see Euripides, *Alcestis*, ed. L.P.E. Parker, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 251–283, esp. 251: "Enter Heracles in high good humour, leading a veiled woman, whom, however, the audience at once recognize as Alcestis, both by what they have heard and by her costume. Perhaps the chorus recognize her too, or at least have a strong suspicion of who she is".

³³ Quoted from Euripides, *Alkestis*, ed. Gustav Adolf Seeck, Berlin and New York, NY: De Gruyter, 2008.

unparalleled deeds on his own behalf (Eur., *Alc.* 1136–1138). The Homeric element of Heracles' divine father (see *Il.* 18.118, quoted above) is thus intensified and impressively confirmed. The traditional Homeric element of Heracles' physical strength being subject to death and destruction despite its hugeness (see *Il.* 18.117–119, quoted above) is here refuted by the demonstration that the hero's superhuman power is superior even to the personified Death whom he overcomes in a real fight.

Heracles' final victory over death and physical destruction is presented as a kind of optimistic anti-text to both the Homeric and tragic tradition also in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, today the most influential Roman epic poem. In Book 9 of this poem the dark catastrophe, for example, of Sophocles' *Trachiniae*, is brightened and metamorphosed by the supplement of a divine scene – namely, the council of the gods. Thus, a particularly happy and hopeful ending crowns the multifaceted life of the hero, which Ovid's narrators in *Met.* 9.4–399 portray as a lifelong struggle against his evil stepmother (“mala noverca”), Hera/Juno (as portrayed already in *Il.* 18.119, quoted above), and for his own heroic affirmation and acceptance as the true son of the highest Olympian god.³⁴ Jupiter announces in the assembly of the gods that he is determined to reward his son Hercules for his labours with an apotheosis:

“[O]mnia qui vicit, **vincet**, quos cernitis, **ignes**;
 nec nisi materna Vulcanum parte potentem
 sentiet; **aeternum est a me quod traxit**, et expers
 atque immune necis, nullaque domabile flamma.
 idque ego defunctum terra caelestibus oris
 accipiam, cunctisque meum laetabile factum
 dis fore confido. si quis tamen **Hercule**, si quis
 forte **deo** doliturus erit, data praemia nolet,
 sed **meruisse** dari sciet invitusque probabit”.
 adsensere dei. coniunx quoque regia visa est
 cetera non duro, duro tamen ultima vultu
 dicta tulisse Iovis, seque indoluisse notatam.

³⁴ For an interpretation focusing on family relations, see Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, “Von fragmentierten Familienverhältnissen zu Patchworkfamilien. Perseus, Theseus und Herkules in Ovids *Metamorphosen* und aktuellen Kinder- und Jugendmedien”, in Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte Antike. Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien*, “Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature” 5, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017, 137–163, esp. 156.

interea quodcumque fuit populabile flammae,
Mulciber abstulerat, nec cognoscenda remansit
Herculis effigies, nec quicquam ab imagine ductum
matris habet, **tantumque Iovis vestigia servat.**
utque novus serpens posita cum pelle senecta
luxuriare solet, squamaque nitere recenti,
sic ubi mortales Tiryntius exuit artus,
parte sui meliore viget, maiorque videri
coepit et **augusta** fieri **gravitate** verendus.³⁵

(Ov., *Met.* 9.250–270)

“He who defeated everything, **will also defeat the fire** that you see;
only with the part from his mother he will feel Vulcan’s power;
for eternal is what he has inherited from me, untouched by
and free from death and by no flame destructible.

And I will welcome this part, when it has passed away from the
earth, in heaven’s realm, and this deed will be joyful for all gods,
I trust in that. But if nevertheless someone is unwilling to accept
that **Hercules** becomes **a god**, this person will not want this reward,
but know that it is **earned** and will approve it unwillingly”.

The gods agreed. Also the royal wife seemed to bear
the rest with a relaxed expression, but the last words Jupiter said
with an angry expression, upset because of his allusion to her.

Meanwhile all that ever was destructible by fire
was taken away by Mulciber, and unrecognizable remained
Hercules’ appearance, he does not show any traces of
his mother’s image, but **keeps only Jupiter’s marks**.

Just like a new snake, that lays down its skin with its old age at once,
celebrates in the splendour of the new snakeskin,
so flourishes the hero of Tiryns after laying down his mortal limbs,
with his better part, and he began to seem bigger
and to become an object of worship because of his **Augustan sublimity**.

In *Met.* 9.250 Jupiter prophesies that *Hercules victor* will also remain superior to the deadly flames that in this moment devour his poisoned human body. The confession of his parenthood serves as an explanation for the eternity of Hercules’ divine “substance” (*Met.* 9.252: “aeternum est a me quod traxit”). In a further step of climax, Jupiter now indirectly proclaims his extramarital

³⁵ Quoted from *P. Ovidi Nasonis Metamorphoses*, ed. R.J. Tarrant, “Scriptorum Classicorum Bibliotheca Oxoniensis”, Oxonii: Oxford Classical Texts, 2004.

son before all gods (including his wife, Juno) as a future god (*Met.* 9.256–257: “Hercule [...] / [...] deo”). The metamorphosis of the burning and poisoned hero into a truly “Augustan” god is humorously illustrated in the epic simile of the shedding of the skin of a snake. Whereas the snake simile serves as a defamiliarization by referring to archaic Homeric and contemporary Virgilian epic,³⁶ the obvious hint at Emperor Augustus (and his deified “father”, Julius Caesar)³⁷ renders the fantastic Olympian scene more familiar to the Roman audience and the first readers of Ovid’s poem.

Heracles/Hercules as Hero of Hope in *Athena the Wise* by Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams

The innovative, ironic, and playful way in which Ovid retells, rearranges, and refashions the myths of Heracles in his *carmen perpetuum* has only recently become a creative impulse and challenge for numerous writers of literature for children and young adults.³⁸ A brilliant example of this tendency is offered by the “Goddess Girls” series (2010–present) written by the US authors Suzanne Williams and Joan Holub. They address their audiences by sympathetically telling school stories about the childhood adventures of classical gods and heroes. Thus they innovatively widen the range of mythopoetic plot shaping, since juvenile stories about ancient gods and heroes and heroines are rather rare in the classical tradition.³⁹

³⁶ Cf. Bömer, *P. Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen, 357*, ad Ov., *Met.* 9.266–268.

³⁷ See G. Karl Galinsky, *The Herakles Theme: The Adaptations of the Hero in Literature from Homer to the Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1972, 157: “In the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid followed in Propertius’ footsteps (scil. Prop. 4,9 about Hercules and Cacus) by deflating the heroism of Herakles not so much through pathetic domesticity as through sly humour. The account of Herakles’ apotheosis serves to anticipate the deifications of Romulus, Aeneas, and Julius Caesar in the final books of the *Metamorphoses* in which Ovid seemingly conformed to Augustan themes. It is debatable whether the subject of apotheosis would have been a part of Ovid’s book if it had not been an Augustan topos, as is quite evident from Horace’s canon of deified men; at least its light-minded treatment by Ovid shows that he took it no more seriously than the other Augustan themes”.

³⁸ This phenomenon is analysed, e.g., in the studies of Stierstorfer, *Antike Mythologie*; Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, “Von Arkadien über New York ins Labyrinth des Minotaurus. Mythologische Orte in Ovids *Metamorphosen* und aktueller Kinder- und Jugendliteratur”, *Gymnasium* 122 (2015), 1–44; Janka and Stierstorfer, “Von fragmentierten Familienverhältnissen zu Patchworkfamilien”.

³⁹ See Laura Zinn, “Camp Half Blood, Mount Olympus Academy & Co. – Die Inszenierung der Schule in Mythenadaptationen des 21. Jahrhunderts”, in Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte Antike. Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und*

In the fifth volume, *Athena the Wise* (2011), the young and wild mortal Heracles as a problematic new pupil of Mount Olympus Academy (MOA) has to prove his social and truly heroic skills in a series of labours.⁴⁰

The cover of the original edition shows young Heracles with his lion-skin dress and his famous club grimly determined to confront the dragon-like Hydra with five flickering heads. The young hero is accompanied by the helpful and concerned young Athena (Theeny) with the whole list of the Twelve Labours in her right hand. From his heavenly palace in the clouds, the bearded and long-haired Zeus is watching. In this adaptation, the *Dōdékathlos* of the ancient civilizing hero is reinterpreted as a set of tasks for the initiation of a problematic "unfamiliar boy" into the social life of the school community.⁴¹ The first chapter ("The New Mortal") tells about Athena's first encounter with the new pupil:

"Who's that?" Athena asked, gesturing toward an unfamiliar boy as she plunked her tray onto the table where she and her goddessgirl friends always sat for lunch. The entire cafeteria at Mount Olympus Academy was buzzing with excitement over him. Usually she didn't pay much attention to boys, but even *she* couldn't help noticing this one. Dressed in a lion-skin cape – its jaws fit his head like a helmet – he was tall with dark, curly hair, and bursting with muscles like Atlas, the school's Champion weightlifter. Aphrodite arched a perfectly shaped eyebrow. "You haven't heard? His name's Heracles. He was admitted to the Academy only this morning." A look of disapproval came into her lovely blue eyes as she glanced at him. "I'll admit he's cute, but he has absolutely no sense of fashion." Athena took a bite of her hero sandwich. A lion cape *was* perhaps overkill as a fashion statement. (1–2)

Soon after this passage, the principal – Zeus – asks Theeny to take care of the special schoolboy. It turns out that Heracles is a rebel who was expelled from his former school because he committed acts of violence, and so he attends MOA for a probation period. Only if he masters all of the Twelve Labours inflicted on him as punishment by Eurystheus, will he be allowed to be a regular

Jugendmedien, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 5, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017, 99–115, focusing on the idealization of the fantastic learning zones, such as Camp Half Blood and Mount Olympus Academy.

⁴⁰ Joan Holub and Suzanne Williams, *Athena the Wise*, "Goddess Girls", New York, NY: Aladdin, 2011.

⁴¹ For a concise summary and analysis of the German edition (*Die sagenhaften Göttergirls. Hausaufgaben für einen Helden*), see Stierstorfer, *Antike Mythologie*, 484.

member of MOA. Heracles has to learn that only with the support of the goddess of wisdom can he accomplish the traditional labours – namely, defeat, for example, the Lernaean Hydra (painted on the cover), the Erymanthian Boar, Diana’s Hind, and Cerberus. Thus, the civilizing accomplishments of killing monsters that threaten mankind are reinterpreted in a psychological and microsocial manner. Supporting the initially “mysterious figure” Heracles,⁴² Theeny becomes ever more familiar to this heroic character. The traditional final labour, that is, Heracles’ victory over the Underworld and death, is here replaced by a more romantic enterprise. Heracles has to gain the affection of a strong girl. As his clumsy attempt to kiss Theeny is harshly rejected by her, he gets embarrassed and wants to leave MOA voluntarily. At this point a *peripeteia* is staged. Theeny no longer denies her feelings for Heracles. She shows him a tapestry that she has woven in a contest with the arrogant and all too self-confident Lydian weaver Arachne (cf. *Ov., Met.* 6.1–145). The fact that this work of art shows Heracles’ labours in excellent images is an effective proof for Zeus that Theeny dearly appreciates her new comrade. Thus the following happy ending can take place:

Clearing his throat with a sound like distant thunder, Zeus announced that Heracles’ trial period was up and he could remain at Mount Olympus. “You’ve done what the oracle required,” he said, “but the question of immortality will have to be determined later, after you’re grown.”

Heracles beamed. “Thank you, Principal Zeus,” he said. “I won’t let you down, I promise. I really like it here at MOA, and I won’t do anything that gets me kicked out!”

As everyone left his office, Zeus bent his giant head to Athena’s ear, “Thanks, Theeny,” he whispered. “I knew I could depend on you.”

Athena stared at him in surprise. Not just because of what he’d said, but because she had no idea he could actually whisper! Straightening, Zeus boomed out to Heracles, “Bring your tapestries by my office tomorrow morning, boy! I’ll need to borrow them for a few days.”

“Sure thing, Principal Zeus!” Heracles clasped the tapestries to his chest as if he regarded them almost as highly as his club.

As they all left, Athena wound up walking beside him. Aphrodite, Artemis, and Persephone were a little farther behind, carefully picking their way through Zeus’s office and marveling over the weird stuff they came across. “I’m glad you’ll be staying,” Athena told Heracles.

He kinked an eyebrow at her. “Really?” he said in a flirty tone.

⁴² Holub and Williams, *Athena the Wise*, 48–51.

“Yes,” Athena said. And before she could chicken out, she slipped her hand into his.

Heracles almost dropped the tapestries. He glanced down at his feet. “We aren’t wearing winged sandals.”

“I know,” said Athena. If ever there was a time and a place for just acting on her feelings, surely this was it.

He grasped her hand tightly and whistled off-key as they continued down the hall. And when he smiled down at her, she wisely smiled back. (244–245)

The flirting young couple of Athena and Heracles is not only a perfect finale for this volume of the successful series which had grown to twenty-six volumes by October 2021,⁴³ but also a particularly hopeful conclusion of this chapter. In the most recent familiarizing adaptations of the ancient Heracles for children, the monumental ambivalence of the superhuman civilizing hero (monster slayer) and mad, killing, and dying human being developed in ancient epic and tragedy and digitally re-enacted in contemporary blockbusters, is reinterpreted for the sake of a more optimistic psychology with Ovidian humour. Πάθει μάθος (*páthei máthos*; learning through suffering) instead of πάθει πάθος (*páthei páthos*; suffering through suffering) is an indispensable requirement for a Heracles/Hercules we can appreciate as a mythological hero of hope.

⁴³ Volume 27, *Hecate the Witch*, is in preparation (to be published on Halloween 2021).

HERCULES: BEARER OF HOPE FOR AUTISTIC CHILDREN?*

Childhood is a mythical time: a time where the imagination can run free, a time of adventure, a time when anything might seem possible... Childhood can be a time of hardship, too – a time of not just the “most beautiful” experiences, but also the most terrible. I quote here from the booklet that accompanied the conference *Our Mythical Hope in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life*, which brought myself and fellow researchers into Classics and children’s culture to Warsaw in May 2017.¹ The experiences of childhood can “provide or deprive us of a supply of Hope for years to come”, as the booklet – authored by the conference organizer, Katarzyna Marciniak – continues. My particular contribution to the conference was a paper on hope as it applies to a particular group of children – autistic

* This chapter has its roots in the paper I delivered in May 2017 at the conference *Our Mythical Hope in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life*. Here, I made an initial case for the potential of Hercules as a topic for the first set of activities I was to create as part of the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*. I would like to thank my fellow participants for their comments, both in Warsaw during the conference and subsequently, including Helen Lovatt, Sonya Nevin, Edoardo Pecchini, and everyone who took an interest in my then still-emerging hopes that episodes involving Hercules might become a subject of activities for autistic children. In the years since then, I am thankful for the comments from specialists in areas such as Classics, special and inclusive education, dramatherapy and music education, including Tom Figueira, Katherine Leung, Leda Kamenopoulou, Lisa Maurice, Adam Ockelford, Anna Seymour, and Helen Slaney. Finally, I would like to thank Katarzyna Marciniak for the support and vision that has nurtured and anchored the hopes shared in this chapter.

¹ Katarzyna Marciniak et al., *Our Mythical Hope in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life: Conference Booklet*, Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2017, http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/files/OMH_Conference_Booklet_9.5.2017.pdf (accessed 15 July 2021).

children.² By that time, I had been building up a project on autism and classical myth for almost a decade, and I was in Warsaw to share my progress with a set of activities I was developing as part of a wider five-year project funded by the European Research Council (ERC), *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, which had begun several months earlier, in October 2016, to chart the place of Classics in children's and young adults' culture.

My project started out with a goal to "reach" autistic children through classical myth. This was after I learnt, during a meeting with a Special Needs teacher in a UK secondary school, that autistic children often enjoy classical myth. I began to consider why this might be the case, and whether I could contribute something to existing materials used by teachers: as someone whose interest in classical culture stems from their childhood, and who had been turning classical myth into an area of expertise throughout their career as an academic. I was not sure what that "something" could be at first. Discovering classical myth at the age of about ten was a formative moment in my childhood; it was my refuge, an interest that took me into a world at once vastly different from my own, and yet which "spoke" to me. In the wake of the meeting with the teacher, I began to wonder whether I could harness in some way my love of myth as something with many patterns, even rules, and yet as something elusive. I started contacting academics in several disciplines, including psychology and education, and also professionals working in various ways with autistic children, and I kept being encouraged to push forward. I started a blog, *Mythology and Autism*,³ in early 2009 to report on my progress. I decided to begin blogging because I was aware that I had many other projects ongoing, but also that, through this medium, I could at least report sporadically on my progress while opening up my ideas to the ongoing self-critique that blogging fosters. In the first few years after 2009 – until the ERC-funded project began in 2016 – I did, indeed, blog only occasionally, often with lengthy gaps between

² Throughout this chapter, I use terms such as "autistic children" and "autistic people" rather than "children with autism", etc. I note the arguments in favour of descriptions which put the child first, before any condition, but terms such as "autistic child" convey better the conviction expressed in this chapter that autism cannot be separated from a person but is key to how they relate to, and experience, the world. On ways of talking about autism, see 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; "What Is Autism?", National Autistic Society, <https://www.autism.org.uk/about/what-is/asd.aspx> (accessed 16 March 2020).

³ Susan Deacy, *Mythology and Autism*, <https://myth-autism.blogspot.co.uk> (accessed 8 May 2020).

postings. But, what happened, too, was that specialists started to make contact with me and, by the time the funding bid to the ERC began, I had made valuable, and valued, contacts. I had also written around 20,000 words around aspects of autism, myth, and disability studies, including on the possibility of viewing stories associated with Perseus through an autistic lens, on the potential for the Aristotelean theory of catharsis in relation to autism activities, and on how the hero/monster metaphor might inform the quest for disruptive pedagogies in higher education. During this time, I also became a Departmental Disability Co-ordinator at the institution where I work, the University of Roehampton, London. The blog provided a forum for reporting on this new direction in my practice, including a role in organizing training for colleagues in supporting autistic students.

This current chapter develops the hope-themed exploration of autism and myth that I began in Warsaw in 2017. At that time, I had recently decided on the focus for a set of activities: the figure and adventures of Hercules.⁴ Since then, I have been developing the activities, for children aged from approximately seven to eleven, of all levels of “functioning”,⁵ though they can be adapted for other children. I have also been consulting with specialists and trialling the activities in pilot studies with children at a primary school with an autism unit. At the time of writing, I am continuing to share my unfolding ideas via my blog while also writing a book which presents the activities.⁶ During the time I have been planning and developing the activities, my approach has been shifting from exploring how myth might “reach” autistic children to questioning what it, in fact, means to “reach” autistic people.

In this chapter, I shall explore the role of hope in the activities against a background of what hope, and specifically a “mythical” hope, might signify in connection to autism and to autistic children in particular. I shall also be framing my discussion in relation to the conference’s subtitle by looking at the efficacy of classical myth in dealing with the hardships children encounter. But, taking on board the bracketed “in” before “efficacies” in the title of the conference, I shall discuss whether myth might actually *contribute* to hardships, including myths

⁴ Because my key focus will be an eighteenth-century reception, produced at a time when the Roman name was used over the Ancient Greek “Herakles”/“Heracles”, this chapter will use the name “Hercules”, except where the Ancient Greek figure is specifically being referred to.

⁵ On categorizations of autism, see, e.g., Concetta de Giambattista, Patrizia Ventura, Paolo Trerotoli, Mariella Margari, Roberto Palumbi, and Lucia Margari, “Subtyping the Autism Spectrum Disorder: Comparison of Children with High Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome”, *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 49.1 (2019), 138–150.

⁶ Susan Deacy, *What Would Hercules Do? Lessons for Autistic Children Using Classical Myth*, ill. Steve K. Simons, “Our Mythical Childhood”, Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, forthcoming.

which involve Hercules, who is among the most problematic figures from classical myth – or perhaps is even *the* most problematic one – to present to children, any children, autistic or otherwise.⁷ Hercules is the hero whose career is a career of victimizing others: from beasts in the wilds, to a succession of women in the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women* who encounter, sexually, his βία (*bía*; force, violence).⁸ But, as I shall set out, Hercules is, also, a figure from classical mythology who can particularly “speak” to an autistic experience.

Hope Lost?

Where hope is brought up in relation to autism, it is often linked to its absence or loss. In his *Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism*, Ron Suskind reflects on the hopes and dreams parents hold for their young children:

Presidents? Nobel Prize winners? Global celebrities? Super Bowl quarterbacks and prima ballerinas? *It could happen*. Or, more soberly, millionaire philanthropists or, at the very least, graduates of the finest colleges, [...] then graduate school stars, most-recognized professionals in their field.⁹

⁷ For a discussion of concerns over the suitability of Hercules for children, see Lisa Maurice, “From Elitism to Democratisation: A Half-Century of Hercules in Children’s Literature”, *Journal of Historical Fictions* 2.2 (2019), 81–101, esp. 86, 89–90, <http://historicalfictionsjournal.org/pdf/JHF%202019-081.pdf> (accessed 17 March 2020). A concern that Hercules might be unsuitable for autistic children was expressed to me by one parent of an autistic child who said that her child, who loves classical myth, dislikes Hercules because he is “mean”. Also, when a colleague mentioned my project to the grandparent of an autistic child, and commented that I was focusing on Hercules, the grandparent responded that she hoped that it would not be including anything violent, like the Hydra’s heads being cut off. However, even the encounter with the Hydra need not be received as something violent. Another colleague, a classicist, who was then working as a teaching assistant with preschool children, has told me that one of her pupils, whose behaviour was commensurate with autism, found the Hydra a reassuring image. After being read a picture book about Hercules’s adventures, she would keep turning between the illustration of the baby Hercules strangling serpents in his cot and the illustration of Hercules cutting off the Hydra’s heads. She regarded the snakes in the cot as little “Hydra babies” and wanted to go back and forth between the two images in order to reunite the babies with “their mummy”. For Hercules’ psychotherapeutic potential, see also Edoardo Pecchini’s chapter, “Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today’s Labours of Children and Young People”, 275–325.

⁸ The *bía* of Hercules occurs at several points in this fragmentary work. At 1.22, reference is made to ἡδ’ ὄσσαισι βίη Ἡ[ρακλῆος (“all those with whom the *bía* of Hercules”), and two named women, Auge (117.9) and Nikippe (133.12), experience this *bía*.

⁹ Ron Suskind, *Life, Animated: A Story of Sidekicks, Heroes, and Autism*, London and New York, NY: Kingswell, 2014, 18.

Then he details the loss of such hopes for his son on the day he and his wife enrolled Owen at a school for disabled children and watched him interact with his new peers:

How many of these breathless expectations [...] constitute the traditional allotment? Best way to figure that is to extract them, one by one, and smash them in the corner. The pile is quite high. And that's what we do.¹⁰

As the autism-rights pioneer Jim Sinclair outlines in a landmark address from 1993, such responses are common:

Parents often report that learning their child is autistic was the most traumatic thing that ever happened to them. Non-autistic people see autism as a great tragedy, and parents experience continuing disappointment and grief at all stages of the child's and family's life cycle.¹¹

Such "disappointment" and "grief" felt by parents of autistic children point to a family life seen to be shaped by hardship – hardship for the parents raising an autistic child and for the child themselves. Where hope remains, it is a desperate hope, in spite of the odds that appear to be stacked up against the child and their family. Such is the kind of hope expressed in the conversation Suskind recalls between himself and his older brother concerning the cost of various therapies for Owen:

"Worst case, we'll have to support him for the next fifty years and thirty years after we're dead."

He's already there.

"That worst case or likely case?"

"Somewhere in between, but we're hopeful."

Hmmm. He's not one to discount hopeful...

"Hope's not nothing," he says, quietly to his reflexively optimistic little brother. "Just tough to run the numbers on it, that's all."¹²

Autism is often discussed in terms of what is lacking on the part of an autistic person with regard to what are seen as deficiencies, and in how they seemingly

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ Jim Sinclair, "Don't Mourn for Us", Autism Network International, http://www.autreat.com/dont_mourn.html (accessed 21 July 2019; originally published in *Our Voice* 1.3, 1993).

¹² Suskind, *Life, Animated*, 26.

fall short in terms of behaviour and skills and in how they process emotions, and understand others. For instance, Lorna Wing, whose research transformed how autistic people have been regarded and supported, set out a “triad of impairments” comprising difficulties that cohere in anyone diagnosed as autistic. To be autistic, as defined by Wing, is to experience difficulties in social and emotional understanding, difficulties in how to communicate, and a lack of flexibility in thinking and behaviour.¹³ More recently, among the characteristics of autism detailed in the current – fifth – edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, the go-to handbook for diagnosing and managing psychological conditions, are “communication problems” and “difficulty relating to people, things and events” (emphases added).¹⁴

Indeed, the life of an autistic child is often regarded as one of suffering and hardship. They might find it hard to read what others are feeling or experiencing. I say “might” because while there is a distinctive autistic way of being, each person’s “world” is distinctive, or, in the phrase that might be traceable to the autism advocate Stephen Shore, “[i]f you’ve met one person with autism, you’ve met one person with autism”.¹⁵ For autistic people, the non-autistic “world” can be an alien place, with rules and customs that it takes efforts to understand; one might feel, like Temple Grandin, “an anthropologist on Mars”,¹⁶ or, like Alis Rowe, as an “observer” of a world one can “study [...] but never be [...] part of”.¹⁷ As Sinclair has put it, indeed:

¹³ See, esp., Lorna Wing, “Autistic Spectrum Disorders”, *British Medical Journal* 312.7027 (1996), 327–328, and Lorna Wing, *The Autistic Spectrum: A Guide for Parents and Professionals*, London: Robinson, 2002 (updated ed.; ed. pr. 1996).

¹⁴ “What Is Autism Spectrum Disorder?”, American Psychiatric Association, <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/autism/what-is-autism-spectrum-disorder> (accessed 17 January 2020).

¹⁵ See, e.g., “Understanding Autism”, Autism Empowerment, <https://www.autismempowerment.org/understanding-autism/> (accessed 21 July 2019). On the distinctive learning experiences of each autistic person, see the emphasis on how there can never be a single recipe for how autistic education should be conducted in Stuart Powell and Rita Jordan, “Rationale for the Approach”, in Stuart Powell and Rita Jordan, eds., *Autism and Learning: A Guide to Good Practice*, London: Routledge, 2012 (ed. pr. 1997), 1–12. I return below to the metaphor of the autistic “world”.

¹⁶ See, e.g., Oliver Sacks, *An Anthropologist on Mars*, London: Picador, 1995; Steve Silberman, *Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and How to Think Smarter about People Who Think Differently*, London: Allen and Unwin, 2015, 424–432; Temple Grandin and Richard Panek, *The Autistic Brain: Thinking across the Spectrum*, Boston, MA, and New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013; Thomas G. West, *Seeing What Others Cannot See: The Hidden Advantages of Visual Thinkers and Differently Wired Brains*, Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2017, esp. 69–90.

¹⁷ Alis Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: Asperger’s and Me*, London: Lonely Mind Books, 2013, 117.

Each of us who does learn to talk to you, each of us who manages to function at all in your society, each of us who manages to reach out and make a connection with you, is operating in alien territory, making contact with alien beings.¹⁸

An autistic child might find it hard to pick up what others learn instinctively. It might be difficult for them to know what to do or say in any social situation. While their non-autistic peers develop skills at starting or maintaining a conversation, they might well remain silent or give only short or inappropriate responses. With developing a rapport with others being so hard, forming – and retaining – friendships can be a challenge. An autistic child might feel isolated from those around them, even though they might long for the company of others. What is more, alongside finding it hard to communicate with others, and to socialize, come other challenges, including experiencing difficulties in dealing with changes in routine and preferring set, repetitive routines. Making choices can likewise be a challenge for autistic children, whether the decision is over something seemingly big or small. Autistic children might also find it difficult to conceive of the future; as a result, envisaging how a particular thing they do or say might have long-term consequences might prove problematic. Indeed, recognizing that the present impacts on the future can be a difficult lesson for an autistic person. Added to this, for autistic children, understanding the “bigger picture” can be challenging, and they might zoom in on particular details instead.

Added to all the above, an autistic child’s experience of the world might be an intense one, due to heightened sensory experiences and finding it hard – or impossible – to filter out background noise. Being autistic can be like experiencing a recurrent panic attack, including coming out of needing to process lots of information in one go. It can be hard, too, to regulate emotions. An autistic person might not show the “appropriate” emotion, despite what they might be feeling. Indeed, it could be that they are feeling lots of things, and this could lead to an intense response, or a shutdown. The default emotion is often anxiety – and this can mask other emotions, like joy, or happiness. To be an autistic child can be to experience bewilderments, sensory overload, isolation, and frustration, which can, in some cases, lead to moments of violence against oneself or against someone else.¹⁹

¹⁸ Sinclair, “Don’t Mourn for Us”.

¹⁹ On the challenges faced by autistic children, and autistic people more broadly, see, e.g., Powell and Jordan, “Rationale for the Approach”, 1–12. See also, from the perspective of an autistic person looking back on hardships experienced as a child, and on their experiences as a young adult

When an autistic childhood seems so beset with challenges, it is not difficult to see why the hope expressed by parents is often hope for a time when the child's behaviour stops appearing autistic – a time when, indeed, they are divested of autism or even cured. In relation to such a way of viewing autism, activities such as the ones I am developing might be understood as part of attempts to enable autistic children to rise above the hardships they face – to be able to understand others better, or to grasp how the present can turn into the future, for instance, or to manage the sensory overloads that can lead to anxiety, or even, meltdown. And, indeed, I am concerned with all the above – and with others of the hardships dealt with earlier in this chapter. But the activities I am developing are not coming from a view of autism as comprised of deficiencies and as made up of problems in need of solutions. The hope I am seeking is not hope for someone's autism to be made less "severe" or for someone to be somehow recovered from autism. The activities I am developing are geared towards supporting autistic children as they seek to engage with the world around them. The activities are also directed, however, towards exploring what it *is* to experience the world as an autistic child. They are informed by the shift from the "medical model" of disability, which sees disability as a disorder that affects particular individuals, to the "social model", from which perspective it is not disabled people who need to adapt to fit society – it is society which needs to change to accommodate disabled people.²⁰ Autistic children, when viewed in this way, need to be accommodated by a society which stops regarding them as deficient and as in need of interventions to enable them to "fit in". The hope I am going to explore for the rest of this chapter is for a better future for people who think and behave "differently".

“Autistic Kids Are Not Supposed to Do That”

As Jim Sinclair says in the 1993 address, parents often experience grief when their child is diagnosed as autistic. But, Sinclair also says: "Don't mourn for us". Sinclair's address, delivered to non-autistic people, asks for autism to be

and adult, Alis Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: Asperger's and Me*, and Alis Rowe, *The Girl with the Curly Hair: What I Have Learned about Life*, London: Lonely Mind Books, 2019.

²⁰ See, e.g., Thomas Campbell, Fernando Fontes, Laura Hemingway, Armineh Soorenian, and Chris Till, eds., *Disability Studies: Emerging Insights and Perspectives*, Leeds: The Disability Press, 2008; Angharad E. Beckett, "Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy and Disability: Possibilities and Challenges", *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 17.1 (2015), 76–94.

regarded not as something to be treated or cured. A person cannot be divested of autism:

Autism isn't something a person *has*, or a "shell" that a person is trapped inside. There's no normal child hidden behind the autism [...]. 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.²¹

As I said above, it is not easy for autistic people to understand the non-autistic "world". The reverse is true too. But there is hope: for discovery and tolerance and understanding, and for the possibility of fantastic journeys between the two "worlds". To quote Sinclair further:

Push for the things your expectations tell you are normal, and you'll find frustration, disappointment, resentment, maybe 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.²²

As well as detailing the lost hopes of a future for his son as a football star, lawyer, and so forth, Ron Suskind's memoir is about the hope that was kindled when Suskind realized that he had discovered, via his son's beloved Disney films, a gateway to Owen's "world". When Owen would repeatedly exclaim what sounded to his father like "Juicervose", he was not, as was initially thought, asking for juice, but was quoting the character Ursula's phrase "just your voice" from *The Little Mermaid* (1989). When Owen was seven, Suskind had the idea of picking up Owen's puppet of Iago, the villain's sidekick from *Aladdin* (1992) voiced by Gilbert Gottfried, and begin talking as Iago:

"So, Owen, how ya' doin'?" I say, doing my best Gilbert Gottfried. "I mean, how does it feel to be you!"²³

²¹ Sinclair, "Don't Mourn for Us".

²² On such a "world", cf. Ronnie Young's image of "Planet Asperger [...], where everything seems the same as earth, but nothing actually is" (*Asperger Syndrome Pocketbook*, Hampshire: Teachers' Pocketbooks, 2009, 8).

²³ Suskind, *Life, Animated*, 54.

And Owen responded: "I'm not happy, I don't have friends. I can't understand what people say". As Suskind continues, conveying the significance of this moment:

I have not heard this voice, natural and easy, with the traditional rhythm of common speech, since he was two.

So began a process of discovery for Suskind into what life was like for his son and how he was working through various experiences, including distressing ones, such as being bullied at school. On one occasion, by quoting lines from the sidekick Phil (Philoctetes) from Disney's *Hercules*, Owen showed such emotional awareness that a therapist, taken aback, commented: "[A]utistic kids are not supposed to do that".²⁴ Autistic children are often thought to be unable to show emotions, let alone to understand the emotions of others, and an ability to quote the words of others is often taken as either "scripting", that is, memorizing and then repeating lines without understanding them, or as echolalia, namely repeating words spoken by someone else, again without understanding their meaning.²⁵ Rather, via the medium of Disney characters, Owen could understand, process, and manage emotions.²⁶

The example of Ron and Owen Suskind's discovery of a means for opening up a portal between the "world" of an autistic child and a non-autistic person eager to communicate with the child resonates with what I am seeking to do with the activities for autistic children. What happened between the Suskinds resonates on a more specific level, too, since one of the Disney characters who offered a means for Owen to communicate with his father and to deal with difficult experiences, was from *Hercules*. I am now going to turn from a sidekick, Phil, to Hercules himself, though retaining a focus not just on Hercules but also on those around him – above all, two women he meets at a strange place at the convergence of two roads.

²⁴ Ibidem, 183.

²⁵ On "scripting", see Suskind, *Life, Animated*, 221. On echolalia and autism, see Laura Sterponi and Kenton de Kirby, "A Multidimensional Reappraisal of Language in Autism: Insights from a Discourse Analytic Study", *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 46.2 (2016), 394–405.

²⁶ On autism and emotions, see, e.g., Rebecca Brewer and Jennifer Murphy, "People with Autism Can Read Emotions, Feel Empathy", *Spectrum*, 12 July 2016, <https://www.spectrumnews.org/opinion/viewpoint/people-with-autism-can-read-emotions-feel-empathy/> (accessed 17 March 2020).

“That Sounds Like Being Autistic”

For Suskind, the turning point came when he realized that his son had a rich, imaginative “world” as well as a perspective onto that other “world”: the “world” of his non-autistic family members, teachers, and therapists – and what provided that route into Owen’s world were Owen’s beloved Disney characters. The experiences Suskind relates correspond to what Sinclair was saying in the early 1990s, when perceptions of autism were still much more grounded in a “hardship” model and when the concept of an autism activist was a radical one.²⁷ As Sinclair outlines, there is a rich world of autistic feeling and being; this world might be hidden from others, but it is there and it is vibrant and complex. I now want to turn to where classical myth might be of use in pursuing the goal of providing what Suskind was able to open up, namely, a channel between Owen’s world and his own – not to “cure” his son, but to help foster Owen’s own distinctive experiences and interests, indeed, passions. By doing this I shall also respond to Sinclair’s invitation to approach an autistic “world” respectfully and without preconceptions, because the result will exceed anything “you could [...] have imagined”.²⁸

In one regard, Hercules can speak to the aspects of autism I ran through under “Hope Lost?” above. The life of autistic children can be hard, as I have outlined. It can be hard to communicate or to process feelings, for example. To deal with “everyday” things can be anxiety- and, indeed, panic-inducing. If being autistic involves experiencing hardships, and whether a successful autism pedagogy is seen as one that helps children rise to the challenges of autism and function in wider society, then Hercules looks to be an eminently suitable figure for autistic children – one who can “speak” to the challenges they might face on a daily basis. For Hercules is typically the hero who does not quite “fit”. When he is in his own space, the space beyond society, he functions well, so well, indeed, that he achieves things that are beyond the abilities of anyone else. To perform these feats, he often acts alone, or sometimes with the assistance of others, his “sidekicks”, but always on his own terms and through constant hard work. For no sooner has he dealt with a particular challenge – how to defeat a lion whose skin is impervious to weapons, for instance, or how to deal with the Hydra, who grows new heads each time one is removed – he moves on to a new scenario which requires him to develop a completely new set of skills. Thus, the toil

²⁷ On Sinclair as a pioneer autism advocate, see Silberman, *Neurotribes*, 432–441, 445–449.

²⁸ Sinclair, “Don’t Mourn for Us”.

of Hercules is never-ending. The life of the hero involves learning rules only to need to move to different challenges with their own rules.²⁹

This aspect of Hercules ever needing to learn a world afresh can speak to an autistic experience of a life of hardship. So, too, can the experiences of Hercules when he moves from the wilds and into settled communities. In the spaces beyond the world of organized society, the world populated by fantastic beasts and divinities, Hercules carries out all he needs in order to succeed. But when he enters civilization, things can go wrong, sometimes terribly wrong. It is when he arrives from his labours to his family home in Argos, for instance, that he performs acts of murderous violence against his family members.³⁰ When I have shared the above aspects of Hercules with autistic people I have been consulting with, the response has been "that sounds like being autistic".³¹

The potential for Hercules as a source of interest for autistic children is extensive as a means to address some of the sources of distress they may encounter, including a sense that their actions are beyond their control. What is more, myths of Hercules offer an opportunity for reflecting on how to make sense of the world, not least given that Hercules experiences what might be recognized as emotional distress and overload. Thus, the very acts of extreme violence that, as noted above, might be considered unsuitable in retellings of classical myth for children, can help in the recognition of what leads to emotional overload.

One goal of the activities is to draw from this potential of Hercules for autistic children by offering some ways to help children deal with hardships they might experience. It is this potential to cope with difficulties, indeed, that offers one form of hope, a hope for the alleviation of social pressures and anxiety that autistic children often feel. However, the activities are not only seeking to deal with autistic hardships. They are also seeking to speak to what it is to see and experience the world as an autistic child and to help offer a gateway, for non-autistic people, into that world.

Hercules is many things – there are so many different manifestations of Hercules that the potential uses of this figure are huge; perhaps they are even limitless. Hercules is the most widely represented and clearly delineated character from classical myth – a figure whose labours were the most popular of Ancient

²⁹ On hardships faced by Hercules in classical myth, see, notably, Emma Stafford, *Herakles*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2012, 23–78.

³⁰ As portrayed in, e.g., Eur., *Her.*; Diod. Sic. 4.11.1–2; Apollod. 2.4.12.

³¹ See 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 8 May 2020).

Greek myths and whose adventures in addition to these labours were extensive. Hercules is the great traveller, from his homeland of the Peloponnese to various other parts of mainland Greece, to the islands of Greece and other islands beyond the world known to humans, and to the world below – and in the end to the world of the gods. Hercules is a violent figure who rids the world of beasts, and also beast-like himself. He is also reflective, as the philosopher’s Hercules.³² He is also more than solely the action figure. The “brute”, who uses a lyre to kill his music teacher,³³ is a music-maker who, for instance, plays the kithara or the lyre in the company of Athena.³⁴ And this most masculine of men is one who experiences the world as a woman, when he takes on the clothing and attributes of Omphale for a year, and Omphale, in turn, takes on his own attributes.³⁵ The classical material, then, offers many different versions of Hercules, including a feminine or a transgender Hercules. So, too, do the many postclassical representations of the hero – a hero who is also divine. As Alastair Blanshard outlines in a book exploring the “life” of this mythological figure, Hercules, who has “exercised a fascination for Western culture ever since the time of the Ancient Greeks [...] stands at the boundaries of our imagination”. What I am going to look at is how far the “we” who respond to Hercules can be autistic people. Blanshard also says that myths of Hercules “do far more than just recount amazing exploits”, for “they take us into the heart of the culture that celebrates them”.³⁶ Such a culture can be an autistic one. Hercules operates at the “boundaries of the imagination” and between worlds, literal and otherwise, sometimes resting and thoughtful, sometimes showing behaviour gendered as masculine,

³² On the philosophical Hercules, see Stafford, *Herakles*, 117–130.

³³ E.g., Apollod. 2.4.9; Ael., *VH* 3.32; Ath. 4.164.

³⁴ On the musical Herakles in the company of Athena, see 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, esp. 40, with references.

³⁵ On Herakles/Hercules as a mythological figure with an identity that is varied, ambivalent, and paradoxical, see Deacy, “Herakles and His ‘Girl’”; Susan Deacy, “Heracles between Hera and Athena”, in Daniel Ogden, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Hercules*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 387–394. On mythological flexibility, see, notably, Helen Morales, *Classical Mythology: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007; Roger D. Woodard, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

³⁶ Alastair Blanshard, *Hercules: A Heroic Life*, London: Granta, 2005, xvii. See also Stafford, *Herakles*, the final section of which (pp. 201–244) offers glimpses into the rich variety of the post-classical receptions of Hercules. The project *Hercules: A Hero for All Ages*, directed by Stafford, will result in four edited volumes exploring trends in Hercules reception in particular genres, periods, and themes; see the project website: <http://herculesproject.leeds.ac.uk> (accessed 9 May 2020).

sometimes feminine,³⁷ and sometimes operating in society, sometimes beyond it: in mind or in person. Hercules – the outsider, the insider – can be a “hope bearer” for anyone who wants to understand what being autistic can involve.

And I *mean* anyone, not just someone with knowledge of classical myth. There can be a tendency among classicists to see Classics as some kind of gift for “the public”, including children, to make them better citizens, as though Classics were a privileged space that “we” open up to others. I do not want to perpetuate such a view of Classics. The Choice of Hercules can “speak” to contemporary receivers irrespective of what they might already “know” about classical myth.³⁸ This potential to speak to receivers of classical myth – regardless of existing knowledge about who or what Hercules is – can also help deal with one of the issues that prevails in receptions of Hercules, who has long been presented to children as a “worthy” topic not least to help impart an awareness of Classics and the “classical heritage”.³⁹ The world inhabited by Hercules is beyond the ordinary. This world has been much explored, but its rules are alien to everyone, with a result that no one needs to be disadvantaged, or advantaged. Or, because

³⁷ As a diversely gendered figure, Hercules can relate not only to boys but also to autistic girls. Meanwhile, the gender fluidity often shown by Hercules is relevant to current research into gender dysphoria and autism. On autism and girls, see Barry Carpenter, Francesca Happé, and Jo Egerton, eds., *Girls and Autism: Educational, Family and Personal Perspectives*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019. On gender dysphoria, see Elizabeth Hisle-Gorman, Corinne A. Landis, Apryl Susi, Natasha A. Schvey, Gregory H. Gorman, Cade M. Nylund, and David A. Klein, “Gender Dysphoria in Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder”, *LGBT Health* 6.3 (2019), 95–100.

³⁸ On elitism and Classics, see, e.g., Paul Cartledge’s articulation of the issues in the late 1990s, “Classics: From Discipline in Crisis to (Multi-)Cultural Capital”, in Yun Lee Too and Niall Livingstone, eds., *Pedagogy and Power: Rhetorics of Classical Learning*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, 16–28. See also Frances Foster, “Classics, or, What’s in a Name?”, *Council of University Classical Departments Bulletin* 43 (2014), <https://cucd.blogs.sas.ac.uk/files/2015/02/Bulletin-43-2014.pdf> (accessed 17 January 2020). On classical reception studies and the move towards a more “democratic” Classics, see, notably, Lorna Hardwick and Stephen Harrison, eds., *Classics in the Modern World: A Democratic Turn?*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013; Luke Richardson, “Teaching the Classical Reception ‘Revolution’”, *Council of University Classical Departments Bulletin* 46 (2017), <https://cucd.blogs.sas.ac.uk/files/2015/01/RICHARDSON-Revolution-Reception-Revolution.pdf> (accessed 21 July 2019). See, here, esp. Katarzyna Marciniak, “What Is a Classic... for Children and Young Adults?”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, “Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity” 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 1–26. The growing body of literature on this topic includes the chapters in the aforementioned collection by Marciniak; Helen Lovatt and Owen Hodkinson, eds., *Classical Reception and Children’s Literature: Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018.

³⁹ On such a “worthy” Hercules, see Maurice, “From Elitism to Democratisation”, 83–88. Maurice uses the term “worthy” in relation to Hercules receptions for children on pp. 84 and 86.

Hercules can speak especially loudly to an autistic experience, it may well be an autistic person who is especially tooled to explore the terrain of Hercules.

What is more, the key episode on which the activities are based is one that relatively few people know any longer. It was told in Antiquity, but not all that much, and it flourished from the Renaissance to the eighteenth century, when it became the most widely represented element depicted in the life of Hercules, including with respect to the education of children, boys at least. Thus, the key focus will be on a moment which all audiences, autistic and non-autistic, will likely be coming to fresh.

Hercules at the Crossroads

The episode concerns the time when, while on the cusp of adulthood, Hercules enters a strange place where he meets two women, or goddesses, each of whom offers a particular path in life. In the earliest version, in the fourth century BCE *Memorabilia of Socrates* by Xenophon, Socrates tells the story, claiming that he heard it from Prodicus of Ceos. It is possible, though not certain, that Prodicus' actual words are being quoted, or at least paraphrased.⁴⁰ Hercules, he says, had reached the point in life when "the young, now becoming their own masters, show whether they will take the path of virtue or vice" (οἱ νέοι ἤδη αὐτοκράτορες γιγνόμενοι δηλοῦσιν εἴτε τὴν δι' ἀρετῆς ὁδὸν τρέψονται ἐπὶ τὸν βίον εἴτε τὴν διὰ κακίας), and "went out to a quiet place and sat not knowing which of the two roads to take" (ἐξελθόντα εἰς ἡσυχίαν καθῆσθαι ἀποροῦντα ποτέραν τῶν ὁδῶν τράπηται). Two "tall [...] women" (γυναῖκας [...] μεγάλας) appear. One, Arete, was "attractive to look at and of free-born bearing" (εὐπρεπῆ τε ἰδεῖν καὶ ἐλευθέριον φύσει). This woman's "body was adorned with purity, her eyes with modesty, her figure with sobriety and she was wearing white clothes" (κεκοσμημένην τὸ μὲν σῶμα καθαρότητι, τὰ δὲ ὄμματα αἰδοῖ, τὸ δὲ σχῆμα σωφροσύνη, ἐσθῆτι δὲ λευκῇ). The other, Kakia, was "grown into plumpness and softness, with her face embellished so that it looked whiter and rosier than

⁴⁰ For a discussion of the possible closeness – or otherwise – to Prodicus, see Daniel W. Graham, ed., *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics*, vol. 2, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010, 860–861; David Sansone, "Heracles at the Y", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 124 (2004), 125–142 (arguing that Xenophon preserves Prodicus' lost words); Vivienne Gray, "The Linguistic Philosophies of Prodicus in Xenophon's 'Choice of Heracles'", *Classical Quarterly* 56.2 (2006), 426–435 (challenging Sansone's arguments and seeing a fit between Xenophon's account of the Choice and sentiments elsewhere in the *Memorabilia* concerning service and honour).

it actually was" (Xen., *Mem.* 2.1.21–22; τεθραμμένην μὲν εἰς πολυσαρκίαν τε καὶ ἀπαλότητα, κεκαλλωπισμένην δὲ τὸ μὲν χρῶμα ὥστε λευκοτέραν τε καὶ ἐρυθροτέραν τοῦ ὄντος δοκεῖν φαίνεσθαι).⁴¹ Hercules is tasked to choose between the women, and the gifts they offer: on the one hand a life full of pleasures and on the other a life of hard work, though with the ultimate reward of enduring fame.⁴²

Which option does he choose? Socrates does not actually say. He does not set out how Prodicus ended the story, and he does not give his own view either as to which way the hero chose. The assumption that is generally made, at least by those with some knowledge of myths of Hercules, is that Hercules chooses the life of hard work. The choice is understood in this way, for example, in Roger Lancelyn Green's 1950s retelling for children in which the hero is a cowherd, wondering whether it would be his fate in life to remain as such always. While he is resting, he encounters the two women and is offered a choice between the ways of life that match their personae. He does not hesitate in choosing Virtue's path. Straightaway he sees a lion attacking his cows and, with his quest to kill this lion, so begins his heroic career.⁴³ In Lancelyn Green's version, then, what Hercules chooses is the path of Virtue – and it is not a choice that causes him much trouble. Nicholas Lezard summarizes the usual way to read the outcome of the choice as follows: "Hercules chooses duty, of course".⁴⁴

This does look like an obvious way to read Hercules' decision. He is, after all, the hero known beyond all others for facing adversity. His is a life of hard work and suffering – no sooner does he complete one labour than another presents itself. Eventually, he earns a respite from his suffering, but this is only when – after death, and apotheosis, on Olympus, with Hebe ("Youth") as his wife – his

⁴¹ Based on the following edition: Xenophon, *Memorabilia; Oeconomicus; Symposium; Apology*, trans. E.C. Marchant and O.J. Todd, Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, 1923, ad loc.

⁴² In Dio Chrysostom's "On Kingship" (1.52–84), meanwhile, Hercules is faced with a choice between Kingship and Tyranny, while Cicero's *De officiis* (1.117–118) 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. On the hero's choice between opposing paths, see, notably, Emma Stafford, "Vice or Virtue? Herakles and the Art of Allegory", in Louis Rawlings and Hugh Bowden, eds., *Herakles and Hercules: Exploring a Graeco-Roman Divinity*, Swansea and London: Classical Press of Wales, 2005, 71–96.

⁴³ Roger Lancelyn Green, *Tales of the Greek Heroes: Retold from the Ancient Authors*, Harmondsworth and New York, NY: Puffin, 1958 (and many later editions).

⁴⁴ Nicholas Lezard, "Nicolas Lezard's Paperback Choice" (review of *The Choice of Hercules* by A.C. Grayling), *The Guardian*, 27 December 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2008/dec/27/review-choice-hercules-grayling-lezard> (accessed 29 June 2021).

toils are over. Such a contrast between his life of struggles on Earth and his blessed afterlife is expressed, for instance, in the *Homeric Hymn to Herakles the Lion-Hearted*. In life:

ὄς πρὶν μὲν κατὰ γαῖαν ἀθέσφατον ἠδὲ θάλασσαν
πλαζόμενος πομπῆσιν ὕπ' Εὐρυσθηῖος ἀνακτος
πολλὰ μὲν αὐτὸς ἔρεξεν ἀτάσθαλα, πολλὰ δ' ἀνέτλη.
(vv. 4–6)

He used to roam over unmeasured swathes of land and sea at the bidding of King Eurystheus, and himself performed many deeds of violence and endured many.⁴⁵

Now, however:

νῦν δ' ἤδη κατὰ καλὸν ἔδος νιφόεντος Ὀλύμπου
ναίει τερπόμενος καὶ ἔχει καλλίσφυρον Ἥβην.
(vv. 7–8)

He lives contentedly in the splendid home of snowy Olympus and has neat-ankled Hebe for his wife.

But there is also another Hercules for the Ancient Greeks – a Hercules who embraces the pleasures of life and who would indulge in them as and when he could. His huge appetite for eating and drinking was a mainstay of ancient drama, for example, notably comedy, but also Euripides' *Alcestis*, where the hero enjoys the hospitality of the house of Admetus, aware that the house is in mourning but unaware that it is Alcestis, the mistress of the house, who has died.⁴⁶ The Servant, assuming that the guest is aware of the identity of the deceased, relates his apparently outrageous behaviour:

ἀλλ', εἴ τι μὴ φέροιμεν, ὥτρυνεν φέρειν.
ποτῆρα δ' ἴέν χειρέσσι† κίσσινον λαβῶν
πίνει μελαίνης μητρὸς εὐζωρον μέθυ,
ἕως ἐθέρμην' αὐτὸν ἀμφιβᾶσα φλόξ

⁴⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own (S.D.).

⁴⁶ On the "inappropriate funeral guest" of the play *Alcestis* as well as the "aggressive or ridiculous" Hercules of comedy, see, now, John Wilkins, "Comedy", in Daniel Ogden, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Heracles*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 319–320. See also Michael Lloyd, "Tragedy", in Daniel Ogden, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Heracles*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021, 307–309. See also Stafford, *Herakles*, 87–88, 105–109, on, respectively, *Alcestis* and on the comic Hercules.

οἴνου. στέφει δὲ κρᾶτα μυρσίνης κλάδοις,
ἄμουσ' ὑλακτῶν: δισσὰ δ' ἦν μέλη κλύειν:
ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἦδε.

(Eur., *Alc.* 755–761)

If we failed to bring anything, he ordered us to bring it. Then he took a bowl of ivy-wood in his hands and drank unmixed wine, the offspring of the dark grape, until its heat covered and warmed-up his heart, and having garlanded his head with sprigs of myrtle, he sang songs endlessly.

On one side of a “bilingual” amphora (in the sense of black-figure on one side, red-figure on the other), meanwhile, Hercules reclines on a couch, leaning on a cushion. There are vines containing grapes around him, and he wears a grapevine wreath on his head. He is holding a drinking cup – a *κάνθαρος* (*kántharos*) – and to the left there is food, including strips of meat and fruit. Athena, the frequent helper during his labours, and possible model for Virtue, is his companion here as well – holding him a flower (see Fig. 1).

Therefore, there is a pleasure-loving Hercules just as there is a Hercules who endures a life of suffering. It is not vital that we follow Lancelyn Green and others in regarding Hercules as the hero who chooses a virtuous path. His is also the path offered by “Vice”. There are two possible ways to read the outcome of Hercules’ choice – that Hercules chooses the path of Virtue, and that he chooses the other path, of pleasure – of Vice. The choice he faces is set up as a clear-cut one, between two diametrically opposite models of living, but determining the choice he makes is less easy than it might initially appear. As I stated above, for every aspect of Hercules there tends to be an alternative, even contradictory, possibility, and, set against the hero who endures a life of toil, where life is never easy, there is, also, the great lover of pleasures of life.

Just as in the earliest version of the story we are left without an outcome, when the episode came to be depicted from the Renaissance into the eighteenth century, what is depicted is not a certain conclusion, but the difficulty of the choice as experienced by Hercules.⁴⁷ It is this lack of a clear outcome that might

⁴⁷ According to A.C. Grayling, it is not in fact necessary to choose, any longer, like Hercules, between the two offered ways of life. Instead, Grayling advocates a life of moderation, which strikes a balance between duty and pleasure; see A.C. Grayling, *The Choice of Hercules: Pleasure, Duty and the Good Life in the 21st Century*, London: Hachette, 2007. In another twenty-first-century version of the story, it is Hercules himself who refuses to choose between the paths offered to him, here those of “Kingship” and “Tyranny”, as presented in Dio Chrysostom. In Tim Benjamin’s oratorio

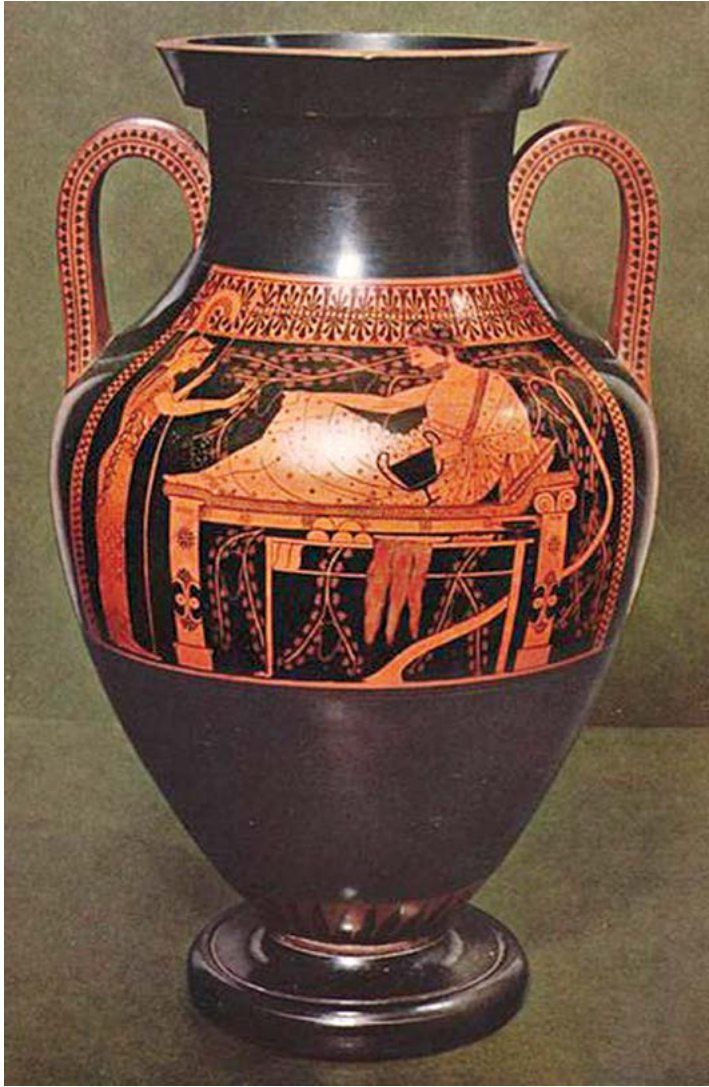


Figure 1: Andokides Painter, *Heracles and Athena*, side A (red-figure) of an Attic bilingual amphora, Vulci, 520–510 BC, Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich, inv. no. 2301, photograph from the Yorck Project (2002), Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Herakles, composed in collaboration with Stafford's *Hercules Project* and premiered at Todmorden Town Hall in 2017, Hercules makes a choice: "In a twenty-first century twist, the choice is framed as one between two extremes which the young everyman Herakles rejects, instead asserting a mortal right to free self-determination" – see "Film Showing of the World Premiere of Tim Benjamin's *Herakles*", *Hercules Project*, <http://herculesproject.leeds.ac.uk/musical-drama/film/> (accessed 9 May 2020).

be what made the story of this choice between two extremes so popular in the eighteenth century, when there was a great deal of concern over how to find the right kind of balance between hard work and pleasure.⁴⁸ The story came to stand, in particular, for young men caught between the values of industriousness, represented by "Virtue" and the temptations of pleasure and idleness, represented by "Voluptas" or "Pleasure". Such was how the episode was used, for instance, in the 22 November 1709 edition of *The Tatler*, a periodical which, during its run between 1709 and 1711, was much concerned with contemporary manners in London, including those of young men.⁴⁹ Here, Hercules stands for the young men of the city caught between "Virtue" and "Pleasure", each of whom are "making their Court to [him] under the Appearance of two beautiful Women".⁵⁰ A few years later, Lord Shaftesbury's *Notion of the Historical Draught, or, Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules* (1713) set out how "the youthful god retired to a solitary place, in order to deliberate on the choice he was to make on the different ways of Life", when he was "accosted by the two Goddesses, Virtue and Pleasure".⁵¹

My Hercules activities are based around another representation of the Choice from the same period: a panel created by an eighteenth-century workshop of two generations of sculptors, the Carters, and situated in the chimney-piece of a room in Grove House in Roehampton in South West London, now on the campus of the University of Roehampton (see Fig. 2).⁵² The objects depicted on the side of Pleasure include bowls of fruit and a drinking vessel. The features of the other side of the panel include boulders, a mountain with a steep, craggy path, a sword, and a helmet fringed by a serpent, or over which a serpent crawls, suggesting the rocky landscape, though also, perhaps, the travails

⁴⁸ On the eighteenth-century British Hercules deliberating between hard work, capitalism, and industriousness as against the temptations of pleasure and idleness, see Michael Charlesworth, "Movement, Intersubjectivity, and Mercantile Morality at Stourhead", in Michal Conan, ed., *Landscape Design and the Experience of Motion*, Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks, 2003, 263–285.

⁴⁹ George Simpson Marr, *The Periodical Essayists of the Eighteenth Century*, London: J. Clarke, 1923, 21–63.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁵¹ Anthony Ashley Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury, *A Notion of the Historical Draught, or, Tablature of the Judgment of Hercules*, [London]: [n.p.], 1713, available online at Internet Archive, <https://archive.org/details/anotionhistoric00unkngoog> (accessed 9 May 2020).

⁵² On the Carter Workshop, see the discussion of one of the items in the Jamb collection of antique fireplaces and mantels: "G200: A Handsome and Characterful George II Statuary and Sicilian Jasper Marble Column Chimneypiece", Jamb, <https://www.jamb.co.uk/fireplaces/antique-chimneypieces/georgian/g200/> (accessed 16 March 2020). On the panel in its setting of the Adam Room in Grove House, see Classics Confidential, "Hercules Transplanted to a Georgian House, with Susan Deacy", YouTube, 22 July 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4TZemDOjbu4> (accessed 21 July 2019).

of a hero set to face serpentine opponents and, ultimately, immortalization. Hercules is caught in the process of trying to decide, his face turned towards Hard Work, his body towards Pleasure.



Figure 2: *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel, Carter Workshop, late eighteenth century, Adam Room, Grove House, University of Roehampton, photograph by Marina Arcady. Used with her kind permission.

The numerous details in the scene are evident in the line drawings created for the activities by the artist Steve K. Simons, a selection of which are included as Figs. 3–6.



Figure 3: *Choice of Hercules* chimneypiece panel redrawn by Steve K. Simons.

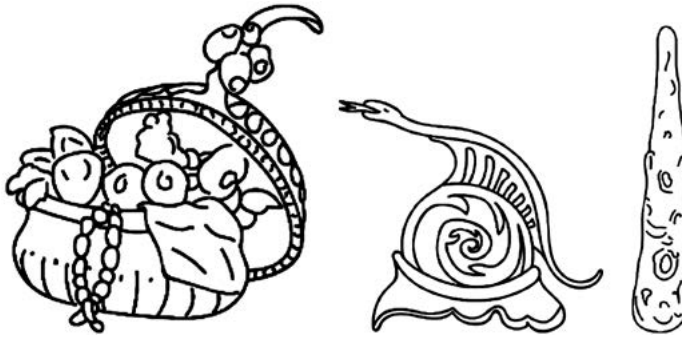


Figure 4: A bowl of fruit – detail of the *Choice of Hercules* chimney piece panel redrawn by Steve K. Simons.

Figure 5: Helmet with a serpent – detail of the *Choice of Hercules* chimney piece panel redrawn by Steve K. Simons.

Figure 6: The Club of Hercules – detail of the *Choice of Hercules* chimney piece panel redrawn by Steve K. Simons.

Thus, what we are faced with is an episode relatively unknown today and which involves a choice, which could go either way. The activities engage with decision-making and explore how difficult it can be to choose between anything as big as a career-choice like Hercules faces or something apparently small like what to eat. The activities include tasks based on how Hercules might be responding to the strange place where he finds himself. What can he see, for example? What might he be able to hear? Is he happy to be in the place? What does he think about the landscape? What does he think about the flat, colourful landscape on one side? What does he think about the rocky terrain on the other side? The children will be have an opportunity to think about which part of the landscape they think Hercules – or they themselves – would prefer to occupy. Would it be the lush, green part? Would it be the rocky half? Then the participants will have an opportunity to think about how Hercules is feeling. Is he, for instance, happy? or nervous? or relaxed? or worried? or lonely? Or does he feel several things at once? The children will be encouraged to pay particular attention to the body language of each figure. How is each woman responding to Hercules, for example? What is she doing with her arms, and with her body, her face, and her eyes? As for Hercules, what is he doing with his body? Where is his gaze directed? This aspect of the activities is concerned with the complexities of a particular social situation, including in relation to the body language of Hercules and of the two women, and the eye contact that is variously being made – and refused.

The activities are also concerned with how to gain the attention of someone else, through pointing, for example, or through looking at the other person. There is emphasis, too, upon using language to express what is going on and what characters, and the children themselves, might be feeling. Another purpose of the activity is to think about how the present can turn into the future. The children will have opportunity to think about the impact of what Hercules chooses on his subsequent adventures. If he chooses Pleasure – what might this mean? If he chooses Hard Work, what might *this* mean for his future? The children will be invited to choose between, on the one hand, the helmet, serpent, sword, and woman pointing up the hillside, and, on the other hand, the fruit, flowers and the drinking vessel, and the woman seated in the midst of these features. As there is no “right” choice or “wrong” choice, the episode provides an opportunity for reflecting on how and what to choose, and crucially on what the implications might be in relation to how a course of action can impact on the future. Thus, the episode can help with the conceptualization of causality by enabling autistic people to assess the consequences of an action. The episode can, indeed, be a source of “Social Stories” which, since their development in the early 1990s by Carol Gray, have been key in autistic pedagogy.⁵³

In the space of this particular myth of Hercules, then, there are possible courses of action, none right, none wrong. In addition, the activities focus on another aspect of what it means to be autistic, namely, to find it hard to adapt to any new scenario. Hercules, the hero who is always adaptable, here is at an impasse, his expression seemingly calm as he reflects on his course of action. The activities explore what it might be like to explore the strange space on the panel – a space crossed with new experiences, and with two strangers – where he is going through what could be interpreted as a meltdown. The range of potential emotions he is expressing is vast, and this leads me to a second key feature of the activities – after choice-making – namely, around how to recognize, manage, and communicate emotions. The children have an opportunity, both through working independently and via group activities,⁵⁴ to create their

⁵³ See, e.g., Carol A. Gray and Joy D. Garand, “Social Stories: Improving Responses of Students with Autism with Accurate Social Information”, *Focus on Autistic Behavior* 8.1 (1993), 1–10; Carol Kahan Kennedy et al., “Social Stories for Targeting Behaviors and Developing Empathy in Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder: An Innovative Technology-Assisted Intervention”, in Nava R. Sifton, ed., *Scientific Concepts behind Happiness, Kindness, and Empathy in Contemporary Society*, Hershey, PA: IGI Global, 2019, 237–255.

⁵⁴ On the role of group work in developing communication skills, see Margaret M. Golding, “Beyond Compliance: The Importance of Group Work in the Education of Children and Young People with Autism”, in Stuart Powell and Rita Jordan, eds., *Autism and Learning: A Guide to Good Practice*,

own stories,⁵⁵ and to think about their own experiences of making choices and managing emotions.

Hope Bearer for All

The activities concern some of the sources of distress for autistic children, but they also seek a model for articulating experience and for making sense of the world: the world of an autistic person and the world of non-autistic people who are eager to interact with their autistic family members or students. I offer Hercules in his extraordinary and rich landscape as a means to enable autistic children to communicate their feelings and experiences. Hercules – this curious figure – the great achiever, the victim – offers hope: hope for the empowerment of autistic children, for space to be autistic and space to explore how to deal with social anxiety. Hercules is utilized as a “gateway” for autistic children to identify and contextualize themselves and others, and a gateway for non-autistic people into an autistic way of being and experiencing.

Hercules is a “hope bearer” – for autistic children, and for all.

London: Routledge, 2012 (ed. pr. 1997), 40–53. For the role of play in group activities for autistic children, see Rita Jordan and Sarah Libby, “Developing and Using Play in the Curriculum”, in Stuart Powell and Rita Jordan, eds., *Autism and Learning: A Guide to Good Practice*, London: Routledge, 2012 (ed. pr. 1997), 25–39. On putting meaning on “stimuli” in activities for autistic children, see Ami Klin, “Attributing Social Meaning to Ambiguous Visual Stimuli in Higher-Functioning Autism and Asperger Syndrome: The Social Attribution Task”, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Allied Disciplines* 41.7 (2000), 831–846.

⁵⁵ On the role of creating narrative in work with autistic children, see Lisa Capps, Molly Losh, and Christopher Thurber, “‘The Frog Ate the Bug and Made His Mouth Sad’: Narrative Competence in Children with Autism”, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 28.2 (2000), 193–204; Joshua J. Diehl, Loisa Bennetto, and Edna Carter Young, “Story Recall and Narrative Coherence of High-Functioning Children with Autism Spectrum Disorders”, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology* 34.1 (2006), 83–98.

*PROMOTING MENTAL HEALTH
THROUGH THE CLASSICS:
HERCULES AS TRAINER IN TODAY'S LABOURS
OF CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE*

This chapter focuses on questions that arise at the intersection of multiple disciplines. I will try to draw connections between the Classics, literature (and more broadly narration), psychology, psychiatry, neuroscience, and education. Concentrating on the myth of Hercules and his character, I will try to make a contribution to the understanding of dimensions of human nature such as impulsiveness, anger, aggression, and violence. Hercules, together with his adventures and efforts, has the thickness and ambivalence typical of the figure of the Greek hero, and his myth lends itself to use, if well known, even as an educational tool.

I will talk about how it is possible to employ Hercules' story as a prolific setting for creating games and activities that teach social skills and competences which promote the development and maintenance of good mental health. I will reflect on the possibility of using this setting to a certain extent also for psycho-educational activities with a preventive and rehabilitative value.

Introductory Remarks: *Coscinocera hercules*

"Hercules – Herakles in Greek – was probably the most adaptable, and adapted, mythological hero in Graeco-Roman antiquity. The range of his qualities, from prodigious strength to moral and intellectual wisdom, was extraordinary. So was the range of his exploits, and their geographical compass" – this is how Karl Galinsky introduces his discussion of the reception of Hercules' myth.¹

¹ K.G. [Karl Galinsky], "Hercules", in Anthony Grafton, Glenn W. Most, and Salvatore Settis, eds., *The Classical Tradition*, Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010, 426.

This demigod is a multifaceted figure, perhaps one of the most recognized characters in later cultures. The list of his representations based on *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts* is second only to Venus/Aphrodite in a head-to-head competition of forty-five pages versus forty-eight.² Hercules' depictions range from the *homo virtuosus* to the Ἀλεξίκακος (Alexíkakos), from the disturbing μαινόμενος (*mainómenos*) to the reassuring "peplum" action hero. All across Europe, the figure of Hercules was largely used in heraldry and in family trees by regal and noble families. In paintings and in the arts we have a full spectrum: from Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and Peter Paul Rubens through Antonio Canova and Salvador Dalí up to teenager comics. As for the cinema industry, there are about forty movies about Hercules. The action hero portrayed by Steve Reeves was one of the greatest box-office successes ever. Hercules' adventures were set all around the known world, and he was sent to place two pillars in the sea as advice for humanity but also as a warning to the threats coming from the unknown horizon and as a limit for human knowledge.

Starting from the horizons inspired by Hercules' Pillars, I would like to begin the chapter with a warning to mariners, as if we were moving in the waters of the Strait of Gibraltar – metaphorical waters where questions and reflections from various disciplines converge. The risk is that our ship (perhaps we could more realistically define it as an inflatable dinghy) finds itself in turbulent waters and without a precise course, without a trajectory, ending up sucked over the Pillars to get lost in the vast ocean as a clumsy "neo-Odysseus", or running aground on the beach of some seaside resort on Sundays. So, I would like to start by providing some navigation coordinates, in the form of a couple of questions, to try to "hit the mark".

Looking at the title of this chapter, the first question, or rather the first group of questions, concerns the concept of mental health promotion and its relationship to similar but distinct concepts, such as prevention and disease. Mental health is a broad notion that does not only imply the absence of disease or infirmity.³ It is not just about surviving disease but also about living, and living with a good quality of life. But what is the difference between health promotion and prevention? Prevention derives from specific diseases. However, the two

² Jane Davidson Reid and Chris Rohmann, *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts, 1300–1990s*, vol. 1, New York, NY, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993, s.v.

³ "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" – as defined in the Constitution of the World Health Organization, October 2006, <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/constitution-of-the-world-health-organization> (accessed 20 July 2021).

concepts may partially overlap. Broadly speaking, we can say that preventive interventions can be carried out with a focus on the management of risk factors (primary prevention), or on early diagnosis (secondary prevention), or on the reduction of the severity and complications of already established diseases (tertiary prevention). In the second case (which is frequent in the developmental age⁴) the overlap can occur between preventive intervention and treatment.

But are we talking about projects in the field of health promotion or prevention, or real interventions in the rehabilitation context? Regardless of the purpose of the given intervention, activities should always be evaluated and chosen within evidence-based contexts – that is, demonstrable data obtained through reproducible studies.

The area we are talking about presents important organizational and objectification difficulties as well as significant ethical implications. Because of this, in some contexts projects are developed to integrate various research approaches, the so-called mixed methods. One should be careful not to propose interventions based on solely adding the suffix “-therapy” to the name of the object used in the activities in the absence of scientific data (and in reference to conditions that imply a mental illness). This practice risks creating even dangerous misunderstandings as well as being methodologically incorrect. For this reason, it is better to use the Classics as tools within activities whose criteria have been elaborated in proper contexts.

But what is the use of talking about the Classics if the activities in their “frame” have already been thought of and verified elsewhere? The answer lies in the fact that it is surprising to note how well the Classics lend themselves to being the setting for psychoeducational activities. They can be used so easily, and they are such a diverse mine of ideas, that one wonders what runs through their plots, what defines them. Saturninius Secundus Salustius, a Neoplatonist from the fourth century AD, already said that some stories speak of ταῦτα δὲ ἐγένετο μὲν οὐδέποτε, ἔστι δὲ αἰεὶ – things that never happened, but always are.⁵

⁴ By “developmental age” I mean the period of life of the human individual that goes from birth to adulthood and which is marked by the development of a series of functions and processes, ranging from the sense-perceptive and motor ones to the intellectual, affective, and social ones.

⁵ Saloustios, “Περὶ θεῶν καὶ κόσμου” [Perì theῶn καὶ κόσμου; On the Gods and the World], Wikisource, https://el.wikisource.org/wiki/Περὶ_Θεῶν_καὶ_Κόσμου (accessed 21 July 2021); translation after: Sallustius, “On the Gods and the World”, in Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion*, London: Watts & Co., 1935, 205: “Now these things never happened, but always are”. See also Salustio, *Sugli dèi e il mondo*, ed. Riccardo Di Giuseppe, 2nd ed., Milano: Piccola Biblioteca Adelphi, 2000, 127.

But which Classics will we refer to? And through what tools and in what terms will we talk about these Classics?

As mentioned above, we will discuss Hercules' myth, and we will therefore have to clarify which Hercules we mean, in reference to which episodes of his myth, and to define which authors and types of artistic expression will be examined.

Let us now come to the last big question: what do we mean by myth? This is obviously a huge point, and the debate is still open. This is not the place for a detailed discussion of the various answers given by scholars to this question. For the purpose of my research, I limit myself to establishing what follows. Myth is something we cannot completely define: it is hard to give an exhaustive answer, since the definition depends on one's objectives and context and on many other factors. This frustrating position, facing complexity without easy answers, is an obvious but never stressed enough point. This finds interesting parallels, for example, with the complex and apparently disappointing answers that we can obtain from studying genetics or neuroscience. We would all like to find the single gene or the single brain anatomical structure responsible for a given function, but usually it does not go so smoothly. Similarly, when we are dealing with myths, the further we go in our attempts to define work areas and answer questions, the more we open ourselves up to new questions and new parallels.

In this sense, perhaps it is worth integrating the metaphor of navigation by sea to move on to another idea of travel: that of the erratic flight⁶ of butterflies and moths. Maybe it is no coincidence that *Coscinocera hercules* (see Fig. 1) is one of the most famous *Saturnidae* and is competing for the title of the largest moth in the world? When it flies it seems to go nowhere: yet it manages to detect a few pheromone molecules at a distance of several miles. I think many of us can say the same after reading Euripides or Aeschylus or... whichever author, in your own case, has allowed you to hit the mark.

We will try today to do the same, leaving the Pillars facing the ocean and Cartesian sea routes to follow the amazing flight of *Coscinocera hercules* in search of the Hercules Myth.⁷

⁶ This is also a huge approximation and I am just taking some poetic licence: various types of flight have been studied by experts and, moreover, moths and butterflies are divided into two different groups in the order *Lepidoptera*.

⁷ I know what someone could argue: we could end up burnt by a light bulb. So, in case of night flight, everyone please turn off portable electronic devices and artificial lights and keep your fingers crossed.



Figure 1: *Coscinocera hercules*, Australian Butterfly Sanctuary – Kuranda near Cairns, Queensland, photograph by Dinkum (2008), Wikimedia Commons.

The Importance of Storytelling

The beauty and usefulness of referring to Hercules' myth as a setting is that it can be employed, with the precautions that we will see, regardless of the specific field in which the operator will work (be it teacher, educator, psychologist, or other), for games and activities valid for all levels of intervention, from health promotion, through the three levels of prevention, to treatments. This is possible because it is useful, in general, to provide a context, a setting, to give a credible narrative model to children and teenagers.

In the world of advertising, products are hardly presented with a systematic list of pros and cons, even though it would be infinitely more logical to do so. We can all recall examples of advertising for the most prosaic objects associated with poetic narrative frames and the most melodramatic soundtracks. Alexander the Great, when he decided to leave for his conquest, went to the tomb of Achilles (Plut., *Alex.* 15). He constructed his enterprise (whether good or

not, that is not the point) as a narrative. This parallels the way our brain works. Various studies have dealt with the subject, noting how information associated with the involvement of the emotional system is more likely to remain etched in our memory.⁸

A great challenge, then, could be to provide children with attractive frames and contexts for educational and growth activities. Rather than criticizing advertising companies or political communication systems for doing so, we could use the same techniques for our purpose (as many teachers know). Provide not only notions but also emotions and fun in an adequate way.

It is possible to approach the importance of narration from other points of view as well. We tell stories to our children almost instinctively,⁹ as a type of care. Storytelling, especially through the interactive involvement of children – for example, thorough dialogic reading – could foster cognitive and emotional development in early childhood and perhaps, even if to a lesser extent, in later ages. Likely the usefulness of telling stories to children will be increasingly validated also by scientific research, as it has happened in the case of the importance of breastfeeding. For example, Robin Dunbar, a neuroscientist and anthropologist, talked about storytelling as a sort of grooming practised by humans.¹⁰

Mankind, or at least *Homo sapiens*, seems incredibly attracted to stories and narration. The sociologist of communication Walter R. Fisher and the ethnologist Kurt Ranke are the first, to my knowledge, to have coined the term *homo narrans* in the last century.¹¹ Jerome Bruner¹² theorized that “narrative thinking” organizes our everyday interpretations of the world. The importance of narration is also argued by contemporary scholars, such as the historian Yuval Noah Harari, who inserts it as a pillar of the so-called cognitive revolution that was to take

⁸ For more on this issue, see, e.g., Lisa Anderson and Arthur P. Shimamura, “Influences of Emotion on Context Memory while Viewing Film Clips”, *American Journal of Psychology* 118.3 (2005), 323–337; Chai M. Tyng, Hafeez U. Amin, Mohamad M.N. Saad, and Aamir S. Malik, “The Influences of Emotion on Learning and Memory”, *Frontiers in Psychology* 8 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.01454>.

⁹ Even if it does not come to us naturally to feel comfortable in the shoes of storytellers... or (which is worse, of course) to be sufficiently able storytellers.

¹⁰ Robin Dunbar, *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language*, London: Faber & Faber, 1996.

¹¹ Kurt Ranke, “Kategorienprobleme der Volksprosa”, *Fabula* 9.1–3 (1967), 4–12 (esp. 6), <https://doi.org/10.1515/fabl.1967.9.1-3.4>; Kurt Ranke, “Problems of Categories in Folk Prose”, trans. Carl Lindahl, *Folklore Forum* 14.1 (1981), 1–17 (esp. 5).

¹² Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Words*, Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1986.

place 70,000 years ago, and which supposedly lead to the predominance of the *Homo sapiens* species over the others.¹³

Narrating is associated with the development in the human being of a greater ductility of language, linked with other dimensions studied by neuroscience: imagination, make-believe, mind reading, perspective-taking, theory of mind, and other aspects. Language cannot be understood as a simple ability to produce vocal or communication sounds: areas in which other animal species achieve brilliant results.

Choosing the Most Suitable Form of Communication: The Narrative Medium and Dialogic Interaction

Another aspect is to grasp the specificity of the different artistic languages and how they can be received in a different, more or less effective, way, based on the characteristics of the given individual, in particular in the developmental age. When we work with children, it is particularly important to take into account the stage of development, cognitive and emotional abilities, and the social context.

An aspect that emerges from practical activity, in particular with individuals who have behavioural issues, is that the use of text in the strict sense as a communication channel lends itself to a series of complications: there can be important difficulties in reading, understanding the text, in concentration. This does not mean, however, that children are not “hooked” or may not be interested in a story. Sometimes it is just a question of selecting a more suitable narration mode: simplified text? a text associated with illustrations? audiobooks, oral or audiovisual narration? Just to mention some possible options. Moreover, once you have decided on the medium, it is desirable to involve and interact with individuals in the narration and in activities and games. These two moments can be separated or can occur at the same time.

In the present chapter I limit myself to giving an overview about dialogic reading. This type of interaction is a source of great satisfaction when you work with children, and it shows the complexity of the narrative task. It can be defined, to quote Carmen Zavala Iturbe, as:

¹³ Yuval Noah Harari, *Da animali a dèi. Breve storia dell'umanità*, trans. Giuseppe Bernardi, Firenze: Giunti Editore, 2018 (ed. pr. in Hebrew 2011), 35.

[T]he process of having a dialogue with students around the text they are reading. This dialogue involves asking questions to help children explore the text at a deeper level, including defining new words, analyzing the components of a story and being able to talk about the text. In other words, dialogic reading is a form of guided and scaffolded reading where the focus is on interpretive and critical comprehension more than on accuracy and fluency.¹⁴

It is possible to implement dialogic reading through prompts and questions at different levels. Below I cite the concise elaboration by Zavala Iturbe, with minor adjustments (added in square brackets) for the purposes of my research:

P.E.E.R.

The basic dialogic reading technique is the P.E.E.R. sequence. This is where the teacher:

P – Prompts the child to say something about the text

E – Evaluates the response

E – Expands on the child's answer by rephrasing it or by adding information

R – Repeats the prompts to see if the child has learned from the expansion

What kind of prompts do I give my students?

C.R.O.W.D

There are five types of prompts typically used in dialogic reading. These can be remembered with the acronym C.R.O.W.D.:

C – Completion prompts

Learners are asked to fill in a blank at the end of a sentence. They are typically used with rhyme stories or repetitive phrases. For example: The [monster's] name was... [Hera sent Ate to...] [Iolaus' help] is a good...

R – Recall prompts

Children are asked to say in their own words what has happened so far in a story or text. They can also be asked to talk about a story they have already read. Recall prompts help learners understand a text or remember events. For example: What happened to [Hercules]? What is the first thing that [he] saw? [...]

O – Open-ended prompts

Children are usually asked to focus on the pictures that accompany a text. The aim is for learners to notice details and to check comprehension. For example: What is happening in this part of the story? [...] Who can you see in this picture?

¹⁴ Carmen Zavala Iturbe, "What Is Dialogic Reading?", *World of Better Learning*, 18 April 2019, <https://www.cambridge.org/elt/blog/2019/04/18/dialogic-reading/> (accessed 17 July 2021).

W – Wh-prompts

These prompts are usually questions that begin with what, where, when, why, and how. Children are asked to look for a specific correct response. For example: (Pointing to a picture) Who is this? What colour is her dress? What does this animal eat? What is the forest like?

D – Distancing prompts

Children are asked questions that help them reflect on their own experiences, based on the input from the text. They help children form a bridge between a text and the real world.¹⁵

Approaches to Text from Plato to Kant, from New Criticism to the Reader's Reception

The choice of the artistic language for operational purposes brings us the utility of dealing with semantics, hermeneutics, aesthetics, literature theory, and all those disciplines that study the dynamics of production and reception of a narration, be it oral, written, audiovisual, or mixed. Roughly summarizing, we can say that to understand a narration we can look at it from the point of view of the narrator's intentions or from the point of view of the reception of the narration, at the time of the narrator or in subsequent periods, and depending on the type of readers considered. It is possible to further distinguish who may be the implicit reader/listener/spectator of the narration according to the author, a category that does not necessarily have to coincide with the recipient explicitly stated by the narrative and which may also not coincide with the real receiver.

This type of dynamics is known to critical theories that analyse individual languages (in the developmental age we can indulge in various possible combinations, which can be reassembled almost like Ikea furniture, of the languages of literature, literature with images, oral narrations, oral narrations with images, theatre, film, etc.). The disciplines mentioned above can help with proper analysis, but an in-depth discussion of the subject is not possible here.

As Michael Gazzaniga argues, it could be said with great approximation that theorists oscillate between the Platonic position (in which beauty is independent of the observer) and the Kantian position (in which beauty is in the eye of the observer).¹⁶ In the theory of literature, the two extremes can be identified in currents such as the New Criticism that dominated in the 1940s and 1950s

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ Michael Gazzaniga, *Human. Quel che ci rende unici*, trans. Laura Sparaci, Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2009 (ed. pr. in English 2008).

(which equates the meaning of the text with the text) and, at the other end of the spectrum, the reader response theory (which argues that what the text “is” cannot be separated from what the text “does” or from how it is received).

Without going into the dialectic of those who deal specifically with these questions on the essence of works of art, for our objectives it is useful to place ourselves in the intermediate position, a position that allows us to make use of both perspectives. We can draw inspiration and learn from how the traits of a character – for example, Hercules – have been received over the centuries and for which narratives it was a source of creativity, and we can also explore the reception of such narratives in the past and in the present.

The perspective of specific categories of receptors, based on age, social context, and psychological structure, provides us with ideas for more in-depth critical analyses but also with ways of developing further narratives or more targeted teaching activities. Moreover, the variability in reception is not only inter-individual but also intra-individual. Depending on the moment of one’s life, a certain work can be received differently.¹⁷ Greek myths are an example of narration that can provide this wide variability in reception, as we will see in the specific case of Hercules.

Hercules, That Is, “Power Is Nothing without Control”

A famous 1990s advertisement shot by Gerard de Thame marketed Pirelli tyres in a unique way. Carl Lewis (the man who at the time was the record

¹⁷ This versatility of the receptive dynamic is so well known that in some contexts (e.g., in the script and in the production of cartoons) one can distinguish jokes purposefully targeting different age groups at the same time, usually on the one hand children and on the other the parents (on this topic, see also Barbara Wall, *The Narrator’s Voice: The Dilemma of Children’s Fiction*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991). Some masterpieces, such as Pixar’s *Finding Nemo* (dir. Andrew Stanton, 2003), go beyond only presenting jokes and can be considered to all intents and purposes works that speak to adults and children. In the case of *Finding Nemo* we have two characters, the father and the son, and we can identify two evolutionary arcs. The son “with the lucky fin” will become aware of his own abilities; the father will overcome his anxiety and overprotectiveness towards his son, linked at least in part to the trauma of having helplessly witnessed the killing of his partner by a bad predator greedy for clown fish. The story has a universal value; it speaks to us both of growth in autonomy (even for those who may have a disability) and of growth in fatherhood. Likewise, it is probable that the reactions of a child and a father who have recently lost their mother/wife for some sad reason are more intense than average at the cinema. Maybe it is not time for them to go see *Finding Nemo* yet. Maybe it could be painful but useful. But the same cartoon could be perceived differently by a child with a congenital arm problem, and still differently by a child who has recently lost his arm to trauma or disease, and so on.

holder in the 100 metres) tried his hand at a *sui generis* workout. He deviated from the junctions of the Brooklyn Bridge to start crossing the waters of New York Bay, ploughing them barefoot with long strides. The runner, animated by a superhuman energy (from a sort of μένος [*ménos*], we could say), climbed, with great antigravitational leaps, the Statue of Liberty and finally took a jump that carried him with a millimetre stop on two feet onto the beak of the Chrysler Building eagle. He followed the slogan "Power is nothing without control".¹⁸ This phrase perhaps describes the deepest essence of the Hercules myth for our purposes. Strength is a feature to be handled with care, and characters that embody it can fall victim to their own power. The strong-man character often is portrayed as a one-dimensional action hero for entertainment or as a promoter of violent cultures. He can be likewise doomed to a negative or self-destructive fate. A great gift can also become a great curse. However, the Hercules myth has many versions¹⁹ and can be presented also with a positive evolution, unlike in the case of characters such as Achilles, a hero as gifted as Hercules but destined for a bitter and melancholic glory, and marked by premature death. More optimistically than in the story of the son of Peleus, Hercules will learn to control himself. His life will be littered with mistakes but ultimately he will emerge victorious in the glorious battle of life. He will not be a lost soul in Hades; on the contrary, he will descend there not once but twice. And, finally, he will have his apotheosis by climbing into the sky, on Olympus, to be with his father, Zeus.²⁰

¹⁸ See The Hall of Advertising, "Pirelli – Carl in New York (1995, UK)", YouTube, 24 February 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dua35KT8Aps> (accessed 16 July 2021).

¹⁹ [Galinsky], "Hercules", 426–429. Hercules could be the glutton, the drunkard but also the warder of evils, the glorious victor, the wrestler. He could be the εὐεργέτης (*euergētēs*), the benefactor of men and gods, but at the same time he could be the Ἡρακλῆς μαινόμενος (*Hēraklēs mainómenos*). The charisma and at the same time the fatal flaw of Hercules was his strength. The myth highlighted the positive aspects but also the risks and consequences to which one was exposed if in possession of a great dowry, a fact that did not always please the gods and in the case of Hercules, in particular, did not appeal to Hera.

²⁰ In the reception of the myth, there is a long list of authors who (intentionally or not) portrayed the strength and charisma of Hercules in the ethical framework of the *vir perfectissimus* who chooses between virtue and vice; see Susan Deacy's chapter "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", in this volume, 251–274. Among others, the list includes Fulgentius of Cartagena, Isidore of Seville, Annibale Carracci (in the Farnese Palace), Dante Alighieri, Pierre de Ronsard, John Milton, etc. The point for our purposes, as we will see, is to select a story that is positive but not too moralistic.

The Main Goals of Our Activities

In this chapter, I discuss the use of the myth of Hercules in a specific category of children and teenagers, characterized by behavioural disorders, impulsiveness, aggressiveness, or violence. In some conditions, and especially with children with these behavioural disorders and poor metarepresentative and verbalization skills, Hercules' myth is a precious instrument to access their world and communicate with them.

Indeed, one of the main methodological risks in psychoeducational interventions consists of imposing standard models that, in spite of starting from the analysis and needs of individuals, try to "force" them into activities based on a theoretical and hypothetically coherent approach, which is often scarcely integrated. The best approach and combination must be analysed in every single case, focusing on the child's individual history, age, and cognitive level.

Actually, one of the advantages of Hercules' myth is that the story is told with simple plot lines, often not coherent – this means flexibility for programming interventions. The myth is characterized by a great variety of events that can be selected; therefore, the frame is open to modifications. Many psychoeducational activities, for individuals or for groups, can be organized in a flexible way, considering every single need, and the approaches adopted can be sometimes more cognitive-behavioural and sometimes more psychodynamic.

It is not possible to describe here the methodology of all possible treatments, nor to present a review of the experimental studies carried out by various scholars. Nevertheless, it is possible to give an overview of the main goals of activities. A good reference to deepen the topic is the research of Zipora Shechtman, based on which the following objectives can be distinguished:

- improve the management of emotions;
- increase empathy;
- develop perspective-taking;
- decrease the influence of the dynamics of power;
- increase self-control;
- develop problem-solving skills;
- directly or (even better) indirectly introduce some reference models.²¹

²¹ Zipora Shechtman, *Treating Child and Adolescent Aggression through Bibliotherapy*, New York, NY: Springer, 2009.

Some of the most relevant topics are presented in this chapter, without claiming to explain every single detail and a thorough intervention scheme. In the solutions presented below there were no differences between the treatments for pre-pubertal children and teenagers, and only young males were involved, for the sake of brevity.

Anger, Rage, Impulsiveness, Aggressiveness, and Violence

It is useful to recognize and manage the reactions and internal mechanisms of children and teenagers, both for the professionals who work in the rehabilitation programmes and for the children themselves. A good and not theoretical, boring way to thematize these elements is through stories, literary characters, and myths. To approach what modern neuroscience has to tell us about passions and emotions (concepts that are anything but simple to define) we can move on with a look back at the ancients.

The *Iliad*, a poem that is said to have started Western literature, begins by referring to a particular emotion: μῆνις (*mēnis*), the rage or wrath of Achilles. To be more specific, various terms with different shades are used to define anger in the *Iliad*. In addition to *mēnis*, we can identify μένος (*ménos*; 'angry energy'), θυμός (*thymós*; 'angry impulse'), ἄχος (*áchos*; translated as 'angry pain'), κότος (*kótos*; 'rancour'), χόλος (*chólos*; 'rancorous/indignant anger of the powerful who must accept an outrage').

The ancient characters of Greek literature were indeed animated by intense and varied emotions. The heroes and the gods themselves easily lost control and could be dominated by what we would associate today with our inner world, but which they, effectively from a narrative point of view, projected outwards and often personified. But more specifically, what were the categories and dynamics that the ancients used to describe what happened inside them when they were animated by passions? And can the culturally particular way of describing by the ancients a phenomenon that arises and is structured within our biology have any relevance today? Can we draw parallels between their perspective and ours?

To answer these questions we can move on to what neuroscience tells us about the knowledge of our basic emotional systems. It is possible to make a distinction, as Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven explain in their book *The Archaeology of Mind*, between the basic emotion or primary process of anger (an emotion without an object), the secondary process of rage (which has an identifiable object), and the tertiary processes of revenge and hatred (typical of human beings and

reflecting our cognitive ability to think about the wrongs we have suffered).²² The primary and secondary processes of anger and rage are emotions that can move us²³ towards aggressiveness, at least a certain type of it – the impulsive one.

Aggressiveness (Latin *aggredior* – ‘to advance’, ‘to attack’) may be defined as a drive or a ‘movement towards’, a primitive push to survive. Also, this drive may be adaptive and is not always negative. In order not to become a disorder, individuals must manage it effectively in a balanced way. Being aggressive does not imply becoming violent.

Impulsiveness (from the Latin verb *impellere* – ‘to push forward’) may be defined as a tendency to adopt behaviours (reactions or impulsive actions) in an uncontrolled way, because of the lack of inhibitions or the alteration of one’s psychic faculties. This concise definition is effective with respect to our goals because it helps us understand how impulsiveness only partially overlaps with aggressiveness and violence. People can be impulsive also in areas that are not related to the latter.

Impulsivity can be associated with neural circuits involving the ventral striatal complex, the thalamus, the prefrontal ventromedial cortex, and the anterior cingulate cortex. Impulsivity can also be considered as an endophenotype of symptoms related to specific brain circuits which are present transdiagnostically. In fact, it corresponds to a form of cognitive inflexibility.²⁴

Violence (Latin *vis* – ‘force’) is a more complex concept. It describes dynamics that are more markedly associated with (primary or secondary) benefits, though often dysfunctional. In many cases, it is connected to a sense of power and is considered to be something negative for the child’s educational and psychological development. As Filippo Muratori sums up:

²² Jaak Panksepp and Lucy Biven, *The Archaeology of Mind: Neuroevolutionary Origins of Human Emotions*, New York, NY, and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2012, 100.

²³ The root of the word “emotion” comes from the Latin verb *moveo*, *movere* with the addition of the prefix “e”: ‘to move from’.

²⁴ For more on impulsivity, see Jeffrey W. Dalley, Barry J. Everitt, and Trevor W. Robbins, “Impulsivity, Compulsivity, and Top-Down Cognitive Control”, *Neuron* 69.4 (2011), 680–694, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.neuron.2011.01.020>; Jeffrey W. Dalley, Adam C. Mar, Daina Economidou, and Trevor W. Robbins, “Neurobehavioral Mechanisms of Impulsivity: Fronto-Striatal Systems and Functional Neurochemistry”, *Pharmacology, Biochemistry and Behavior* 90.2 (2008), 250–260, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pbb.2007.12.021>; Naomi A. Fineberg, Marc N. Potenza, Samuel R. Chamberlain, Heather A. Berlin, Lara Menzies, Antoine Bechara, Barbara J. Sahakian, Trevor W. Robbins, Edward T. Bullmore, and Eric Hollander, “Probing Compulsive and Impulsive Behaviors, from Animal Models to Endophenotypes: A Narrative Review”, *Neuropsychopharmacology* 35.3 (2010), 591–604, <https://doi.org/10.1038/npp.2009.185>; Trevor W. Robbins, Claire M. Gillan, Dana G. Smith, Sanne de Wit, and Karen D. Ersche, “Neurocognitive Endophenotypes of Impulsivity and Compulsivity: Towards Dimensional Psychiatry”, *Trends in Cognitive Science* 16.1 (2012), 81–91, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2011.11.009>.

Violence and aggressiveness are not synonyms, although they share the same roots. In order for an aggressive behaviour not to become violent, many biological, psychological and social factors must be taken into consideration, most of which are still largely unknown.²⁵

Psychology and psychiatry distinguish many types of aggressiveness: externalizing or internalizing, verbal or physical, impulsive, proactive, or callous/unemotional.²⁶ Impulsive aggression can involve the orbitofrontal cortex and the amygdala. Instrumental aggression and violent sociopathy can be mediated by the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex. Affective violence aggression can be mediated by the ventro-medial prefrontal cortex. Psychotic aggression/violence can be mediated by mesolimbic and mesocortical pathways.²⁷

Coming back to our myths, it is central to note how Hercules is a hero who is a master of his own abilities, but this is the result of a journey in which the ancients apparently did not miss anything of these "circuits".

With regard to the developmental age, the way in which the adolescent Hercules gets angry with his professor Lichas can be used as an example of externalizing and impulsive, unplanned aggressiveness that the hero later regrets (see Figs. 2 and 3). Moreover, it is possible to focus on the concept of irreversibility and on the irreversible consequences of this angry (although involuntary) behaviour. On the contrary, the way in which Eurystheus talks to Hercules when he cancels the labour of the Augean Stables²⁸ is a good example of planned and callous, unemotional aggressiveness.

²⁵ Filippo Muratori, *Ragazzi violenti. Da dove vengono, cosa c'è dietro la loro maschera, come aiutarli*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2005, 14 (my translation).

²⁶ Impulsive aggression correlates more with the anger system and with impulsiveness. The more calculated, predatory form of aggression can be related to the research system, in other words to reward. To find out more, see, e.g., Panksepp and Biven, *The Archaeology of Mind*, 110.

²⁷ For more, see Leslie L. Iversen, Susan D. Iversen, Floyd E. Bloom, and Robert H. Roth, *Introduction to Neuropsychopharmacology*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009; Jerrold S. Meyer and Linda F. Quenzer, *Psychopharmacology: Drugs, the Brain, and Behavior*, Sunderland, MA: Sinauer Associates, 2005; Gordon M. Shepherd, ed., *The Synaptic Organization of the Brain*, 5th ed., New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004; Larry R. Squire, Floyd E. Bloom, Susan K. McConnell, James L. Roberts, Nicholas C. Spitzer, and Michael J. Zigmond, eds., *Fundamental Neuroscience*, 2nd ed., San Diego, CA: Academic Press, 2003; Stephen M. Stahl, *Essential Psychopharmacology: Neuroscientific Basis and Practical Applications*, ill. Nancy Muntner, 4th ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013.

²⁸ Or (an example from another myth) when Polydectes sends Perseus to fight against Medusa and potentially die.



Figure 2: Antonio Canova, *Hercules and Lichas* (1795–1815), Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Rome (2011), photograph by Jean-Pierre Dalbéra, Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 3: Screenshot from a video showing neurons involved in the processing of emotions. Video produced and edited by Melanie Gonick; neuron imaging: Anna Beyeler and Craig Wildes from the Laboratory of Kay Tye, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Used with permission.

Ménos and Ate and the Neural Pathways

However, more specifically, what is the relationship between the mental processes and the internal mechanisms of these children and the categories of the ancients? First of all, it is possible to notice that some adolescents with impulsive and aggressive behaviours “do not remember what happened”. Sometimes they blame a sort of “external force” that gets the better of them. They regret the consequences of their actions, and they ask themselves questions like “What came over me?”, or similar. Nevertheless, they tend to repeat their behaviours and to put themselves in the same situations without learning from previous experiences.

Such statements and circumstances are similar to the dynamics found in descriptions of characters of Ancient Greek culture: in some texts these dynamics are presented as a sort of energy or fury (*ménos*) incited in the individual by the gods, while in others they are portrayed as personified characters: Ate – “the eldest daughter of Zeus”²⁹ – or Lyssa – “the anger of wolves” and “the warrior

²⁹ Giulio Guidorizzi, *I colori dell'anima. I Greci e le passioni*, Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2017, 36 (Hom., *Il.* 19.91–92; my translation).

fury".³⁰ In fact, the words ἄτη (*átē*), λύσσα (*lýssa*), and μένος (*ménos*) in the history of Ancient Greek literature progressively and partially overlapped.³¹ Ate and Lyssa belong to a group of personified entities often found in Homer and in Archaic Greek poets (for example, Φιλότης [Philótēs; Love] and Ἔρως [Érōs], but also as Αἰδώς [Aidós; Shame] or Ἔρις [Éris; Discord]). These personified figures are described as having an objective existence of their own, which can be experienced through the senses, but at the same time they operate in the human soul and generate passions. What in modern terms is the psychological life of an individual in its complexity with its inner conflicts, in Ancient Greek culture takes the form of a dialogue between external impulses that conflict with each other in the mind, as in a small theatre of the soul.³² *Ménos* is neither a personified character nor a part of the mind. Most of the time it is presented in literature as a sort of augmented energy, but over time the term started to partially overlap also with madness or – we could say so – “mad fury”. Athena, for example, makes Diomedes invincible by doubling his *ménos* against the Thracians and blows *ménos* into Laërtes to fight against Eupheithes. Similarly, Apollo helps Glaucus, not to mention all of Achilles’ episodes.³³ In later times,

³⁰ Giulio Guidorizzi, *Ai confini dell'anima. I greci e la follia*, Milano: Raffaello Cortina Editore, 2010, 37. In this chapter, the names Ate and Lyssa are capitalized, while the term *ménos* is lower-cased and italicized.

³¹ The meaning of ἄτη (*Átē*) on the one hand and on the other Λύσσα (*Lýssa*) or *ménos*, and cognate terms, changes over time and it is not possible here to deepen their significance. For this purpose, it is better to refer to specific works on this topic, such as Suzanne Saïd’s “From Homeric Ate to Tragic Madness”, in William V. Harris, ed., *Mental Disorders in the Classical World*, “Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition” 38, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2013, 363–395; or Douglas L. Cairns’s “*Atē* in the Homeric Poems”, in Francis Cairns, ed., *Papers of the Langford Latin Seminar*, vol. 15, Cambridge: Cairns, 2012, 1–52. See also Ruth Padel, *In and Out of the Mind: Greek Images of the Tragic Self*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992; Ruth Padel, *Whom Gods Destroy: Elements of Greek and Tragic Madness*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995; Debra Hershkowitz, *The Madness of Epic: Reading Insanity from Homer to Statius*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998; Hansjakob Seiler, “Homerisch ἀόμοι und ἄτη”, in *Sprachgeschichte und Wortbedeutung. Festschrift Albert Debrunner gewidmet von Schülern, Freunden und Kollegen*, Bern: A. Francke, 1954, 409–417; Simon Bennett, “Plato and Freud: The Mind in Conflict and the Mind in Dialogue”, *Psychoanalytical Quarterly* 42 (1973), 91–122; Simon Bennett, *Mind and Madness in Ancient Greece: The Classical Roots of Modern Psychiatry*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978; Simon Bennett, “Mind and Madness in Classical Antiquity”, in Edwin R. Wallace and John Gach, eds., *History of Psychiatry and Medical Psychology*, New York, NY: Springer, 2008, 175–197; Joseph Stallmach, *Ate. Zur Frage des Selbst- und Weltverständnisses des frühgriechischen Menschen*, Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1968; William F. Wyatt, “Homeric ‘Ath’”, *American Journal of Philology* 103 (1982), 247–276.

³² Guidorizzi, *I colori dell'anima*, 37.

³³ See, e.g., Hom., *Il.* 10.482.

the two personified characters, Ate and Lyssa, and the experience of *ménos* became central in classic Greek tragedy as they were used to describe explicitly madness. Especially Euripides in his *Herakles* (Ἡρακλῆς μαινόμενος; *Hēraklēs mainómenos*) places divine intervention and psychological explanation of behaviours very close together. However, taking into account the fact that “madness”, from the perspective of modern science, is an imprecise concept, and considering that impulsive and aggressive behaviours are not equivalent to mental illness, it is better to start with a reflection on Homer’s concept of *ménos* and of Ate.

Ate and *ménos* are indeed two key words that allow us to create a link with contemporary neuroscientific perspectives. In this sense, they can be seen as two sides of the same coin. In other words, we can talk about a prevalence of impulses from the primitive brain in the case of an increased amount of *ménos*, or a deficit of cortical control, as far the “blindness” implied by Ate is concerned. What does this dysregulation imply? It obviously depends on the register and the perspective that we want to adopt, but with a little imagination we can engage the two perspectives in dialogue.

Ménos: The Primitive Drive?

As mentioned before, *ménos* can be described as an “excess of energy”. A distinctive feature of the Homeric Greek hero is the impetus, the intensity with which emotions are experienced. Passions are, if we can say so, the background noise of the *Iliad* and to a lesser extent also of the *Odyssey*.³⁴

Giulio Guidorizzi³⁵ and Ruth Padel³⁶ underline in their essays how the sudden and intense emotional changes that characterize the heroes are often caused by an increase of energy/fit/rush (Hom., *Il.* 10.482),³⁷ fury (Hom., *Il.* 5.125), force (Hom., *Il.* 16.529; *Od.* 24.315–319).³⁸ This power is blown into men by the gods. But how does the drive, the energy of *ménos* interact with the impulse, the thinking, and the actions of the epic Greek hero?

³⁴ Guidorizzi, *I colori dell’anima*, 16.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ Padel, *In and Out of the Mind*, 25–26.

³⁷ See also Omero, *Iliade*, ed. and trans. Giovanni Cerri, Milano: Bur Rizzoli, 1999, ad loc.

³⁸ See also Omero, *Odissea*, ed. and trans. Vincenzo Di Benedetto and Pierangelo Fabrini, Milano: Bur Rizzoli, 2010, ad loc.

Simone Weil starts from the centrality of force, which leads to the experience of the absence of limits to one's actions and therefore to the affirmation of impulsiveness,³⁹ while Guidorizzi emphasizes the value of the term "energy", which he translates as *thymós*, more than the term "force"; he also highlights how it is the *thymós* that stimulates the actions of the Greek hero.⁴⁰

Ménos is semantically related to the term *manía* but cannot be equated with it. In both cases it is an experience of an increased amount of power. But the *Hēraclēs mainómenos* is the "furious" Hercules; he is different from the *manía* of Dionysian rituals. Incidentally, the reduced need for sleep and an increase in the state of brain activation are associated with the basal forebrain, the thalamus, and the hypothalamus. Delusions of grandeur are associated with the prefrontal cortex and with the nucleus accumbens circuits. *Ménos* could be correlated to impulsiveness or also to rage and anger, and, like Ate, imply a blackout – a blindness – of the neocortex in the control of the thalamus and the primitive brain, leading to an absence of critical evaluation of consequences, inability to postpone gratification in favour of immediate gratification, and lack of premeditation.

Ate and the Internal Cortical Mechanisms according to the Ancients: Had the Ancients Already Guessed the Correlation between the Neocortex and the Amygdala?

Ate could correlate, at least in the less premeditated manifestations, to an ineffective control of the neocortex over the amygdala (see Fig. 4). The amygdala is the "sentinel of emotions" and is strongly linked with the development of fear and anger. When activated, it triggers a series of immediate reactions, including the production of hormones, which causes the fight-or-flight response, mobilizes the movement centres, the cardiovascular system, the intestines, and the muscles.

Without the control of the neocortex, behavioural responses turn out to be particularly emotional, approximate, and impulsive, and in worst cases the amygdala starts a sort of "neural sequestration" in order to produce an emergency reaction. The neuroscientist Joseph E. LeDoux deepened this topic and discovered the existence of neural pathways from the eye and the ear that bypass the neocortex and by going through the thalamus connect directly to the

³⁹ Simone Weil, *La rivelazione greca*, ed. Maria Concetta Sala and Giancarlo Gaeta, Milano: Adelphi, 2014 (ed. pr. in French 1951).

⁴⁰ Guidorizzi, *I colori dell'anima*, 17.

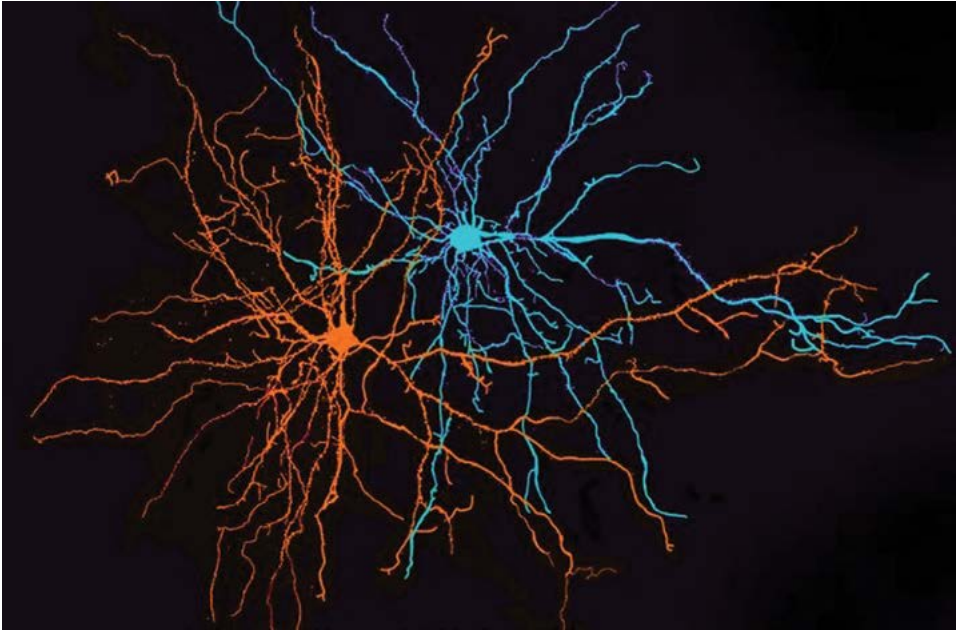


Figure 4: Two neurons of the basolateral amygdala, photograph by Anna Beyeler and Praneeth Namburi, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Used with permission.

amygdala.⁴¹ The majority of the fibres, on the other hand, arrive at the neocortex, which, through a series of cascading circuits, analyses the information it receives and through the prefrontal lobes mitigates the more rapid and instinctive reactions triggered by the amygdala, and provides a coordinated reaction.

By the way, the amygdala is not so easy to be classified in its role and does not lend itself to rigid dualistic perspectives that view the body and the mind as opposite poles. It is related also to a better comprehension of reality and to “emotional intelligence”. Antonio Damasio, among others, focuses on the connection between emotions and rationality – as one of his books suggests, starting from the evocative title: *Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain*. In his studies on the effects of lesions from the circuits between the prefrontal lobes and the amygdala, he underlines that the emotional dimension is important in the decision-making process.⁴² There is, therefore, a com-

⁴¹ Joseph LeDoux, *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1998 (ed. pr. 1966).

⁴² Antonio R. Damasio, *L’errore di Cartesio. Emozione, ragione e cervello umano*, trans. Filippo Macaluso, Milano: Adelphi, 1995 (ed. pr. in English 1994), 96.

plementarity between the limbic system and the neocortex, and in particular between the amygdala and the prefrontal lobes. Specifically, the orbitofrontal area is important in evaluating and correcting the emotional responses in progress, and also from the neuroanatomical point of view it is correlated through a monosynaptic path – “a virtual highway” – to the amygdala.

Thus, coming back to our personified Ate, we could say that when she walks on the heads of mortals and of gods, neocortex control over primitive drives, and especially over the reactions of the amygdala, is somehow decreased. When the ancients spoke of Ate walking on their heads and blinding them in some way, it can be said that they described inadequate top-down cognitive control, the lack of inhibitory control by cortical mechanisms over stimuli coming from below.

Emotional Alphabetization with the Ancient Greeks and the Crucial Trick of Ate

Thus, coming back to our previous distinction of primary, secondary, and tertiary processes, it is possible to develop activities focused on emotional alphabetization in which boys can recognize anger, impulsiveness or augmented energy, or other inner dynamics, representing them through annoying characters with which they can interact. A central role can be played by the evil and treacherous Ate which impairs mental clarity and problem-solving skills.

But is this playful proposal a distortion of the meaning of Ate as it is presented in classical literature? Homer applies the words of Ate in a context where the conception of mental illness is confused, among others, with impulsiveness, aggressiveness, or immoral behaviour. To sum up, we can say that Homer's Ate can have two main interpretations: damage of mind and damage in life or fortune. As Suzanne Saïd notes, “Ate and cognate terms are applied to a wide range of behaviors that turn out to go against the best interests of the author”.⁴³ On the other hand, the words *μαίνομαι* (“experience a heightened amount of μένος”⁴⁴) and *λύσσα* are “applied to some harm inflicted by the subject on others”⁴⁵ and are often characterized by physical symptoms of the subject. They can be used as an insult or to condemn immoral behaviour (for a pejorative

⁴³ Saïd, “From Homeric Ate to Tragic Madness”, 364.

⁴⁴ Hershkowitz, *The Madness of Epic*, 144; the scholar quotes Anne Giacomelli, “Aphrodite and After”, *Phoenix* 34.1 (1980), 8–9.

⁴⁵ William V. Harris, ed., *Mental Disorders in the Classical World*, “Columbia Studies in the Classical Tradition” 38, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2013, 16.

purpose). As E.R. Dodds states in his seminal book *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951):

[A]lways, or practically always, Ate is a state of mind – a temporary clouding or bewildering of the normal consciousness. It is, in fact, a partial and temporary insanity; and, like all insanity, it is ascribed, not to physiological or psychological causes, but to an external “daemonic” agency.⁴⁶

In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon, talking about his wrong behaviour towards Achilles (when he steals Briseis from him), refers to Ate and Zeus himself:

ἐγὼ δ' οὐκ αἰτιός εἰμι,
ἀλλὰ Ζεὺς καὶ Μοῖρα καὶ ἠεροφοῖτις Ἐρινύς,
οἳ τέ μοι εἰν ἀγορῇ φρεσὶν ἔμβαλον ἄγριον ἄτην,
ἤματι τῷ ὅτ' Ἀχιλλῆος γέρας αὐτὸς ἀπηύρων.
ἀλλὰ τί κεν ῥέξαιμι; θεὸς διὰ πάντα τελευτᾷ.
(Hom., *Il.* 19.86–90)

Not I was the cause of this act, but Zeus and my portion and the Erinys who walks in darkness: they it was who in the assembly put wild *ate* in my understanding, on that day when I arbitrarily took Achilles' prize from him. So what could I do? Deity will always have its way.⁴⁷

It would be quite unusual to provide such a justification today. Ate is considered by modern readers an excuse to avoid one's responsibilities. But, as Dodds explains, there are no legal consequences of avoiding responsibilities for the Ancient Greeks because Agamemnon reacts to the bad action:

οὐ δυνάμην λελαθέσθ' Ἄτης ἢ πρῶτον ἀάσθην
ἀλλ' ἐπεὶ ἀασάμην καὶ μευ φρένας ἐξέλετο Ζεὺς,
ἅψ ἐθέλω ἀρέσαι, δόμεναί τ' ἀπερείσι' ἄποινα.
(Hom., *Il.* 19.136–138)

But since I was blinded by *ate* and Zeus took away my understanding, I am willing to make my peace and give abundant compensation.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1951, Kindle ed., loc. 135; see also the Italian translation: *I greci e l'irrazionale*, trans. Virginia Vacca De Bosis, Milano: Rizzoli, 2017 (ed. pr. 2009), 47.

⁴⁷ Trans. (here and thereafter) from Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, loc. 82; see also *I greci e l'irrazionale*, 44.

⁴⁸ Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, loc. 99; *I greci e l'irrazionale*, 45. See Hom., *Il.* 9.119–120.

The primitive Greek justice does not consider the purposes but the action. According to Dodds's analysis, unsystematized and irrational impulses leading to shameful actions tend to be excluded from the ego and ascribed to external causes. Therefore, the scholar hypothesizes that Homer's characters use Ate to project in good faith their unbearable feeling of shame onto an external power.

This analysis can be used to talk about the behaviour of children in the developmental age. As I have mentioned above, children sometimes claim that there is a voice telling them what to do. According to Dodds and his analyses, Greek men talk to their *thymós*, which suggests what to do and the words to be said. The hero tends not to experience it as a part of him: usually the *thymós* is an independent and internal voice. This habit of objectivizing the emotional impulses, treating them like the non-ego, may occur during the developmental age and is not uniquely related (luckily) to a hallucinatory state. However, it is useful to record and consider such perception and communication modalities and use them in a positive way during clinical interviews. If they are treated in a very explicit or trivial way, they might become a source of shame (or blame or suffering), and they can harden some specific defence mechanisms in individuals. Sometimes children immediately regret their actions and state that they did not mean to perform them.

According to Dodds's research, again, the "impulsiveness of Homer's men" needs to be analysed. It is an amusing interpretation, and although it makes us smile, generally speaking, it is a positive attitude: the young patients can be considered as Homer's growing heroes, ready to be great with their daily deeds, but still in danger of getting blinded by Ate or performing dangerous actions against themselves or other people.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ At the same time, also Martin Persson Nilsson's words in "Götter und Psychologie bei Homer", *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 22.2 (1923/24), 363–390, are significant, when he talks in a less pleasing way about the "psychische Labilität" of Homer's heroes. His conclusions are summed up in his *History of Greek Religion*, trans. F.J. Fielden, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1925 (ed. pr. in Swedish 1922), 122, quoted after Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, loc. 55; *I greci e l'irrazionale*, 45. Homer's heroes are "especially subject to quick and violent changes of mood". Nilsson also underlines (*ibidem*) that today a person with this kind of temperament "is apt [...] to look back with horror on what he has just done, and exclaim, 'I didn't really mean to do that...'",. Probably, according to Nilsson, the term "psychische" has the same meaning as according to the Attic authors of the fifth century. They defined the ego of the ψυχή (*psyché*) as emotional rather than rational. They described the *psyché* as the place where there are braveness, passion, piety, anxious animal appetites, but never or hardly ever before Plato as the place of reason. By the way, as in the Homeric poems, children "refer" to Ate not as something originally related to guilt, but to the consequences of their actions. In their reception, Ate could be more often linked to the punishment brought by the Erinyes, embodied by a very strict teacher or mother.

Perspective-Taking and Empathy

Another big area of interest is the management of perspective-taking skills and empathy. Perspective-taking could be defined as the cognitive capacity to consider the world from another individual's viewpoint.⁵⁰ It is connected with the ability to detect social signs, which are often wrongly interpreted by children with behavioural disorders. Facial expressions and behaviours of people are often considered threatening and invasive and cause dysfunctional or unjustified reactions or behaviours. Children justify them on the grounds of preventive reasons. Often we listen to statements such as "You win if you attack first", "If they do not immediately see me as a tough guy, they will think I am a sissy", etc. Empathy is a word derived from the Ancient Greek ἐμπάθεια (*empátheia*) and is a complex and multifaceted cognitive and emotional process that could be defined as the ability to understand and/or share the emotional feelings of another person.⁵¹

It is a mistake to automatically associate these deficits with aggressive, violent, or immoral behaviour; nevertheless, they can aggravate behavioural problems. Furthermore, it is also possible that such skills can get altered in their development due to dysfunctional social and educational influences. The lack of perspective-taking skills and empathy is often precociously structured at an early age, and it is important to provide early interventions, taking into account that these deficits are often difficult to deal with and cause deep frustration in families and professionals who work with such children. We can choose between affective, cognitive, and mixed approaches. In this chapter, I would like to talk about the first ones for the sake of brevity and because narrations and stories are particularly suitable for working on emotional involvement.

Affective approaches originate from the idea that emotional exploration should come before the phase in which cognitive and behavioural instructions and suggestions are given.⁵² Many of these children already know, theoretically, how they should behave, but they do not behave that way. They perceive moral models as boring and judgemental, and these models make them feel unease or

⁵⁰ Adam D. Galinsky, William W. Maddux, Debra Gilin, and Judith B. White, "Why It Pays to Get Inside the Head of Your Opponent: The Differential Effects of Perspective Taking and Empathy in Negotiations", *Psychological Science* 19.4 (2008), 378–384, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9280.2008.02096.x>.

⁵¹ Kimberley Rogers, Isabel Dziobek, Jason Hassenstab, Oliver T. Wolf, and Antonio Convit, "Who Cares? Revisiting Empathy in Asperger Syndrome", *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders* 37 (2007), 709–715, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-006-0197-8>.

⁵² See also Shechtman, *Treating Child and Adolescent Aggression*.

guilt. Thus, it is useful to make them aware of aspects of their emotional life that disturb their growth and behaviour. Moreover, it is good to work with characters they can identify with and whose emotions they can recognize and share because, as readers, they do not need to personally challenge their own attitudes (at least at the beginning). If children empathize with the protagonist, they do not use dysfunctional repression and projection mechanisms and go through a cathartic experience (which is a well-known mechanism in the Greek Classics).

The episode in which Hercules hurts his family is a key event that often touches these children, as they have often reacted against and violently hurt their family members. Their experience is in many cases ambivalent and painful: on one hand, it causes a sense of dysfunctional power and gratification, while, on the other hand, it brings about feelings of guilt which are difficult to bear and often repressed. Every child or adolescent experiences this dynamic in variable proportions. Hercules, with his innate impulsive and aggressive drives, offers an insight into their problems from a safe distance that allows them to talk about threatening and painful topics and dynamics. Above all, he offers positive problem-solving strategies that create positive emotions and feelings of hope.

Shechtman in one of her studies underlines how useful the cathartic experience is, especially in aggressive children: "Aggressive children are filled with anger that has to be released before any change can be achieved. Thus we want them to go through a cathartic experience",⁵³ and she goes on: "Self exploration should precede cognitive learning and only later should guidance and instrumental help be provided".⁵⁴

Guilt Society and Shame Society

When you work with this modality, an element often stands out: the feeling of guilt, as already mentioned above. For an in-depth analysis, it is necessary to acknowledge how these children and adolescents experience the feeling of guilt and what the mythological passages can suggest in this sense. The distinction between shame society and guilt society might help us understand such dynamics and their therapeutic implications. With these children the common intuition is to focus on the concept of shame society because they are more interested in respect than in morality.

⁵³ Ibidem, 64.

⁵⁴ Ibidem, 68.

The feeling of guilt may have evolved in the first developmental phases. In 2007, research by Grazyna Kochanska and Nazan Aksan⁵⁵ on 106 pre-schoolers “certified” what every mother knows based on her common sense: children, even when they are young, show empathy, are sensitive to the violation of rules, and distinguish what is right and wrong.

Children and adolescents with behavioural disorders may have a deficit in the ability to experience the feeling of guilt and apparently are more focused on their reputation. The problem for some of these children is not the moral one, since they only do not want to be caught red-handed and they do not want to suffer the consequences of their actions. On the other hand, sometimes a paradoxical situation arises: they do a bad thing and they secretly hope or provocatively want to be identified as the authors of the prank or crime. The bad action is a dysfunctional way to be demonstrative and to build their own self-esteem, as they feel rewarded at the idea of being scolded by their mum or being registered on camera and posted on the Internet with the “coolest” facial expression by friends. This group basically has a less favourable prognosis from a behavioural point of view. The “highest good” for these children is apparently the same as for Homer’s characters. It is not to act according to one’s conscience, but to have τιμή (*timé*), good reputation. Achilles says: “Why should I fight [...], if the good [ἔσθλός; *esthlós*] fighter receives no more *timé* [ἤ τιμῆ; *iē timē*] than the bad [κακός; *kakós*]?” (Hom., *Il.* 9.318–319).⁵⁶

It is interesting to consider these words of Achilles and also more broadly the dynamics of the classical heroes from the point of view of developmental psychology, especially referring to Lawrence Kohlberg’s six stages of moral development. Achilles apparently reasons according to the reciprocity criteria of stage 2, which are individualism, instrumental purpose, and exchange. Individuals pursue their interests and let others do the same. What is right implies a fair exchange. We could also refer to stage 3, which involves interpersonal expectations, with individuals promoting trust and loyalty as foundations of moral judgements. But the way Greek heroes reason apparently does not go beyond the conventional level of intermediate internalization. Such level is similar to the one of children with behavioural disorders, who are identified with these stages of their developmental path.

In John C. Gibbs’s approach, most adolescents in the world use the moral mutuality judgement of stage 3 and, from late adolescence, many individuals

⁵⁵ Grazyna Kochanska and Nazan Aksan, “Conscience in Childhood: Past, Present, and Future”, *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly* 50.3 (2004), 299–310.

⁵⁶ Trans. from *The Greeks and the Irrational*, loc. 353; see also *I greci e l’irrazionale*, 59.

start to understand the importance of conforming with standards and institutions for the common good of stage 4. However, not those with behavioural disorders.⁵⁷

According to a twenty-year-long longitudinal study conducted by Ann Colby, stage 4, which was not present in the moral reasoning of ten-year-old children, was reflected in 62% of thirty-six-year-old people, and stage 5 (social contract orientation) did not appear until the age of twenty to twenty-two and did not characterize more than 10% of the individuals.⁵⁸ From studies on moral psychology we infer how culture can especially influence the chance of achieving stage 5 and 6 (universal ethical principle orientation).⁵⁹

Even without referring to children who already have severe behavioural disorders, if it is true that many impulsive children regret what they have done, it is also true that such dynamics are not always so clear and linear. Many derive a sort of satisfaction from their uncontrolled crises, in a more or less refined way. Having a whole school class or one's parents in a corner may give a great feeling of power.

If we talk of Hercules' myth with some of these boys, from the point of view of reading reception theory, some associations they express are evocative: the classmates become the heads of the Hydra and the teacher becomes Eurys-theus. Some children, in order to scare others, often without truly aggressive purposes, bring knives or self-made weapons to school. If children have poor personal and social skills and are good at beating others, Hercules can be identified with a giant madman, in accordance with the creepiest machismo. Such individuals end up becoming followers, ready to slap their victims but remaining at the disposal of the leaders with good cognitive skills, who are true puppet masters with strong antisocial tendencies. Both the former and the latter may end up becoming narcissistic personalities who rarely feel guilt. In these cases some operators could decide that the therapeutic goal of their activities is to help these children experience a positive feeling of guilt. This awareness becomes

⁵⁷ John C. Gibbs, *Moral Development and Reality: Beyond the Theories of Kohlberg, Hoffman, and Haidt*, Boston, MA: Allyn Bacon, 2014 (ed. pr. 2003).

⁵⁸ Ann Colby, Lawrence Kohlberg, John C. Gibbs, and Marcus Lieberman, *A Longitudinal Study of Moral Judgment*, "Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development" 200, vol. 48.1-2, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

⁵⁹ John Snarey, "A Question of Morality", *Psychology Today* 21.3 (1987), 6-8; Ann M. Huebner and Andrew C. Garrod, "Moral Reasoning among Tibetan Monks: A Study of Buddhist Adolescents and Young Adults in Nepal", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 24.2 (1993), 167-185; John C. Gibbs, Karen S. Basinger, Rebecca L. Grime, and John R. Snarey, "Moral Judgment Development across Cultures: Revisiting Kohlberg's Universality Claims", *Developmental Review* 27.4 (2007), 443-500; Joan G. Miller, "Cultural Psychology of Moral Development", in Shinobu Kitayama and Dov Cohen, eds., *Handbook of Cultural Psychology*, New York, NY: Guilford, 2010, 477-499.

the basis needed to internalize the importance of social rules. In other words, experiencing a healthy feeling of guilt in these situations may be considered a therapeutic success because we are not dealing here with neuroses and overwhelming feelings of guilt, but with the exact opposite.

Knowing the Text and the Versions of the Myth: The Twelve Labours – Balance between Identification and Safe Distance

In this view, regardless of the methods selected, it is important for the therapist and the educator to have a deep knowledge of the literary texts that are being used. It is helpful to know the possible versions and interpretations of the story and the characters. This means having many opportunities to develop and provide effective activities; it also enables one to know most of what could emerge from the direct work with the children, including any unsettling and unexpected considerations on their part.

As we can guess, among all the myths featuring Hercules, the Twelve Labours are the most popular one. The choice of using the episodes of the labours aims at achieving many goals: Hercules is a “who do I want to be like” model, his labours are short episodes, easy to tell, and may be used in many sessions; also, the labours imply various skills which can be introduced through specific activities and games.

The myth of the Twelve Labours enables us to find a balance between identifying with the character and exploring potentially destabilizing emotions from a safe distance. It is difficult to find this delicate balance in a story. Through the identification with Hercules, the child expresses their emotions and conflicts from a safe distance, as an observer, and at the same time experiences more “cathartic” dynamics.

The event of Hercules’ madness (see Fig. 5) may be a good way to introduce an activity on affective empathy or an activity on perspective-taking without directly addressing the child’s personal experiences. In this passage, one empathizes with the victim who is at the same time the author of the evil action. This literary episode is peculiar because usually the identification and the emphasis are only with and on the character who is an innocent victim. Hercules, instead, clearly expresses how his lack of self-control hurts first of all himself, and this is true of all those who do not have any self-control. Those people empathize with someone who would otherwise be difficult to identify with. Through the

expedient of Ate-induced madness it is possible to work both on the violent side of the hero and on the victim side, without being too moralistic. That is why Ate's character is so interesting for our purposes.



Figure 5: Asteas, *Krater of the Madness of Heracles*, red-figure pottery calyx type, ca. 350–320 BC, National Archaeological Museum of Spain, Madrid, inv. no. 11094, photograph by Antonio Trigo Arnal, Wikimedia Commons.

Hercules behaves badly because of Hera, and it is not his fault. This can be reassuring. It is not a limitation of the suspense, from a narrative point of view, and the reason is so creative that a glimmer of projection is still involuntarily present. Since children do not have to talk about the causes and do not feel guilty, it is possible to focus on the process through which Hercules loses control, clouded by Ate. When engaging in activities centred on the myth of the Twelve

Labours, one could mention the episode of madness, but in some situations it can be skipped over without affecting the narration.

The Labours imply various skills that may be introduced through specific activities and games, which can be part of a more “cognitive” approach to treatment. They introduce many skills of the character. The therapist can choose which labour to talk about, according to the goals that are to be achieved and the children’s needs. The episodes are easy to tell; they can be divided into many sessions and adapted to the age of the listeners. The frame of the story enables us to extend it or cut it, or to add some narrative elements to adapt the episode to one’s needs, without affecting the story and the cohesion of the myth.

In the myth no one tells Hercules what he must change in his behaviour and there are no tirades about self-control. On the contrary, the oracle tells him that through the Twelve Labours he can make up for it. The Labours indirectly and unknowingly to the hero give him a chance to grow. Not only will he use his strength but also many other physical skills; he will also have to develop virtues such as patience and perseverance. He will have to learn how to ask for help, use problem-solving techniques, accept unfair and biased judges who are similar to how the young people perceive teachers and educators. All these issues would make children with these disorders jump out of their skin if they were directly addressed. Instead, no one judges the hero – it is the hero who judges himself, and the reader desires to help him find justifications. The public supports him.

Hercules as a Hero Who Bounces Back from Failures

The process of identification with the character of Hercules deserves further remarks because depending on how it is presented or received, it can lend itself to different results. Usually, as mentioned above, he is perceived as a “who do I want to be like” model, full of positive features, but at the same time he is not moralistic or judgemental. This helps the children we are discussing identify with him. Simultaneously, some of his features may be viewed as ambiguous. He can be considered as an anti-hero or even a completely negative character.

This ambiguity is typical of many characters of Greek mythology,⁶⁰ and from an educational point of view on the one hand this can be a problem because there is the risk of providing a bad example for kids, while on the other

⁶⁰ For more on the ambiguity of the Greek hero, see Angelo Brelich, *Gli eroi greci*, Milano: Adelphi, 2010.

it is an opportunity because it is an excellent narrative vein for introducing children to the complexity of reality.

A perspective that can be a good compromise, or, better, synthesis, is one that sees Hercules as a sort of “bouncing back” hero. He does not give up. He is not perfect (the *vir perfectissimus*), and he has made some mistakes, but at the same time he does not feel discouraged, he bounces back from his own failures and tries to better himself by helping other people. Although he has to make an effort to keep his self-control and to avoid Ate’s bad influence, he manages to do great things for mankind, thus giving hope to children.⁶¹

I am not going to discuss here whether resilience is innate, and whether it can be protected or implemented. In general clinical and public health, interventions can have a role in improving the chances of resilience among children affected by adversities, although it is not clear to what extent. Hercules can be considered from this perspective as a resilient character, who has been exposed to various stresses. Presenting Hercules in this light is common but not obvious. Hercules comes from the classical Greek tradition, which does not include one-dimensional characters (completely good or evil). If we take into account all the different episodes of Hercules’ life history, we can say that it is a litany, to quote Jess Nevins’s popular work,⁶² of misdeeds as well as triumphant acts. Could ancient classical heroes be considered at the present time good educational characters? And, more generally, is there a hero that is the gold standard as an educational model? The answers to these questions are probably that it depends on the target audience, on our definition of a hero in the context of our culture and historical period, and of course on how we present him.

Many scholars have reflected on what is the archetype of a hero and how this archetype evolves over time. The first landmark work of the past century is Otto Rank’s *Der Mythos von der Geburt des Helden* (1909), partially influenced by Freudian theory. Two remarkable responses to Rank’s reflections, among several, were those of Baron Raglan (FitzRoy Richard Somerset), *The Hero: A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama* (1936) – influenced by James George Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (1890) – and of Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) – influenced by Carl Jung’s heroic archetype. In the twenty-first century, there have been many other attempts and works on these aspects but,

⁶¹ For the messianic figure in youth culture, see also Michael Stierstorfer’s chapter in the present volume, “From an Adolescent Freak to a Hope-Spreading Messianic Demigod: The Curious Transformations of Modern Teenagers in Contemporary Mythopoetic Fantasy Literature”, 219–229.

⁶² Jess Nevins, *The Evolution of the Costumed Avenger: The 4,000-Year History of the Superhero*, Santa Barbara, CA, and Denver, CO: Praeger, 2017, 173.

to sum up, a good operational definition of a contemporary hero is provided by Rüdiger Bartelmus within his *Heroenkzept*.⁶³ The most important features of the contemporary hero are: unusual origins, superpowers, extraordinary skills and abilities, extraordinary devices, special weapons, special look, coded name, double identity, extraordinary enemies, missing or defaulting government that does not protect the people, and – last but not least – heroic mission. Among all these features⁶⁴ the key point from an educational perspective is how we present the heroic mission. An operational proposal⁶⁵ could be “selfless and aimed at aiding the oppressed, whether victims of crime or of the aggressions of evil men and women, monsters, governments and/or states/nations”.⁶⁶

Referring to Hercules’ character, we can all agree, as states Nevins, that he has many qualities of the *Heroenkzept*. He has an unusual origin (he is the result of an intercourse of Zeus with a mortal woman); he has strength as his superpower; he has the ability of fighting; he has a club as his trademark weapon; he has a lion’s skin as his trademark costume; and he has extraordinary enemies. As far as his heroic mission is concerned – here is the point – it can be interpreted as self-motivated (redeeming himself after a crime, pursuing *arete*), or the emphasis can be put on selfless behaviour (for example, fighting against a monster to defend helpless inhabitants).

In Nevins’s view, Hercules fails to meet contemporary standards (although “his flaws and misdeeds render him so fascinating”).⁶⁷ This is clear if we refer to episodes like Hercules’ service for Omphale or like having sex with King Thespius’ fifty daughters. However, we could just omit these parts of the myth, since we are not compelled to use all the episodes coming from different traditions with different underlying motivations. But we can argue that also in more common and well-known episodes of Hercules’ history presented to children and youngsters we have potentially negative elements which need to be considered from an educational point of view.

Neither does Hercules fit the model of the so-called underdog hero. Regardless of whether he is to be classified according to Nevins’s categories or not, this great – dramaturgically speaking – character is frequent in children’s literature and arouses strong emotions and identifications in the auditorium. The underdog’s

⁶³ See Rüdiger Bartelmus, *Heroentum in Israel und seiner Umwelt*, “Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments” 65, Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979.

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Nevins, *The Evolution of the Costumed Avenger*, 8.

⁶⁷ Ibidem, 25. It should be noted that Nevins’s perspective is not educational.

story starts with all the odds against him. Often he is full of flaws (inexperienced and with low self-esteem, he is not conscious of his own potential, etc.), but in the end he is successful. I think we all love this type of story. This is a great pattern to work with kids. Hercules in part recalls it. He can be perceived as a son left alone by his biological father, opposed by his stepmother, with some flaws, etc., but in my opinion he is not a character presented as a loser at the beginning of the story.

The conclusion of this excursus is that for our educational goals we can employ Hercules as a useful model, presenting him not as an epic hero, or as a *heros-theos* (hero-god) who is ultimately invincible, or as an anti-hero, or as an irreproachable model, or an underdog, but as a “bouncing back” hero. This allows us also to present a broader idea of “strength”. We could indeed present the strength of Hercules as resilience. This complex concept is borrowed from materials’ science and in a nutshell it can be defined as “the ability of a substance to return to its usual shape after being bent, stretched, or pressed”.⁶⁸ In psychology, it is a debated concept⁶⁹ but we could say that it is the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity. Who more than Hercules, who began his life with two snakes attempting to kill him, can be considered a victim of stressors and a champion of resilience? We could also talk of strength of character, moral strength, and self-improvement, even though these are all different concepts. By the way, Hercules combines all these aspects: physical strength, strength of character, optimism, resilience, morality, self-improvement, and other skills we are going to see, all in a good mix that gives as a result a hero who bounces back.

Potentially Negative Elements in the Reception and Management of the Myth

What follows is a brief evaluation of the potential negative aspects of the character. In addition to his strength and courage, some children focus on the violent details of killing monsters or animals (suffocating, hunting, strangling,

⁶⁸ “Resilience”, Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/resilience> (accessed 28 July 2021).

⁶⁹ Quoting Helen Herrman, Donna E. Stewart, Natalia Diaz-Granados, Elena L. Berger, Beth Jackson, and Tracy Yuen, “What Is Resilience?”, *Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 56.5 (2011), 258–265, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F070674371105600504>: “Definitions have evolved over time but fundamentally resilience is understood as referring to positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity”.

beheading, etc.). Some of them may derive a variable degree of satisfaction from that. This is a typical point where erroneous assessments can be made, and it is important to assess the situation as a whole. Violent tendencies cannot be ascribed to a child just because he exults at seeing a monster killed. Nevertheless, it may be useful to note that some children are especially attracted to the topic of power, and that they concentrate on the pleasure originating in the submission of the monsters or the respect resulting from their defeat. They are apparently less interested in the monster being defeated because it is bad or in the altruistic and helpful approach that characterizes the hero. A partial explanation is that in some contexts, where violence is the role model, what children have suffered is idealized, desired, and performed in turn. Therefore, a character like Hercules might be misunderstood by these youngsters. They might focus only on his violent or excessively macho elements, therefore transforming him into an anti-hero or a negative character, one to their liking.

Such observations are similar to the outcomes of some studies in this field. As far as the pre-pubertal age is concerned, significant research about the fantasy games of children with possible behavioural disorders has been conducted by Judy Dunn and Claire Hughes and published as "I Got Some Swords and You're Dead!": Violent Fantasy, Antisocial Behavior, Friendship, and Moral Sensibility in Young Children".⁷⁰ As for adolescence, we need to mention Rolf Loeber, Jeffrey D. Burke, and Dustin A. Pardini's investigation from 2009.⁷¹ It shows that male adolescents living in adverse cultural and socio-economic conditions believe that being "tough and masculine" is desirable and must be proved through violence. These individuals' life projects are often focused on obtaining respect from their social context through violence. This is sometimes even more important than achieving other apparently key benefits, like, for example, earning money effortlessly.

It may be interesting at this point to ask whether Greek tragedies could be of current relevance from the perspective of the developmental age and of literature for minors. Are the issues and conflicts of these giants of human dramaturgy too far removed from the dynamics of children and young people? Are they too complex or raw? Observing how some young people receive specific episodes, it could be argued that it is reality itself that can be harsh and complex. Hard life can reach some of these young people probably before

⁷⁰ Judy Dunn and Claire Hughes, "I Got Some Swords and You're Dead!": Violent Fantasy, Antisocial Behavior, Friendship, and Moral Sensibility in Young Children", *Child Development* 72.2 (2001), 491-505.

⁷¹ Rolf Loeber, Jeffrey D. Burke, and Dustin A. Pardini, "Development and Etiology of Disruptive and Delinquent Behavior", *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 5.1 (2009), 291-310.

Greek tragedies, putting them in touch not only with the problematic external world but also with the rawness of their inner dynamics. If we examine some of these children's aspirations, dreams, and their attention to appearances, Seneca's Hercules seems to be echoed: he has no limits; he is obsessed with respect, personal fame, and power. Considering, for example, verses 1138–1143 of *Hercules furens* and then verses 1153–1159, when he wakes up after his fit of madness, some questions may arise, according to John G. Fitch.⁷² They are more connected to the hero's narcissistic worry that he might not be invincible than to the empathic and affective level:

Quis hic locus, quae regio, quae mundi plaga?
Ubi sum? Sub ortu solis, an sub cardine
Glacialis Ursae? Numquid Hesperii maris
Extrema tellus hunc dat Oceano modum?
Quas trahimus auras? Quod solum fesso subest?
Certe redimus [...].

(Sen., *HF* 1138–1143)

What place is this, what region, what tract of the earth? Where am I? Beneath the sun's rising, or beneath the turning point of the icy Bear? Can this be the limit set to Ocean's waters by the farthest land on the western sea? What air do I breathe? What ground lies under my weary body? Certainly I have returned [...].⁷³

Arma quis vivo mihi
detrahere potuit? Spolia quis tanta abstulit
ipsumque quis non Herculis somnum horruit?
Libet meum videre victorem, libet –
Exsurge, virtus! Quem novum caelo pater
Genuit relicto? Cuius in fetu stetit
Nox longior quam nostra?

(Sen., *HF* 1153–1159)

Who could strip my armour from me while I lived? Who stole such mighty spoils and had no dread of Hercules even in his sleep? I long to see my conqueror. Rouse yourself, my courage! What new son did my father leave heaven to sire? For whose begetting was night delayed longer than mine?⁷⁴

⁷² John G. Fitch, "Pectus o nimium ferum: Act V of Seneca's *Hercules furens*", *Hermes* 107.2 (1979), 240–248.

⁷³ Trans. from John G. Fitch, ed., *Seneca's Hercules furens: A Critical Text with Introduction and Commentary*, Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1987, ad loc.

⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

From a syntactic and expressive point of view, Kathleen Riley underlines how “vivo mihi” (1153), and the auto-reference to Hercules (1155), and “meum victorem” (1156) show the selfish point of view in this situation.⁷⁵

If we consider the verses in which Hercules notices he has lost his family (1161–1168), his answer is more concerned about the loss of his *virtus* and the offence, the so-called narcissistic wound, rather than about having a normal reaction characterized by pain and empathy:

Quis Lycus regnum obtinet,
quis tanta Thebis scelera moliri ausus est
Hercule reverso? quisquis Ismeni loca,
actaea quisquis arva, qui gemino mari
pulsata Pelopis regna Dardanii colis,
succurre, saevae cladis auctorem indica.
ruat ira in omnes: hostis est quisquis mihi
non monstrat hostem, victor Alcidae, lates?
(Sen., *HF* 1161–1168)

What Lycus holds the kingdom? Who dared encompass such crimes in Thebes once Hercules had returned? All you who dwell in the districts of Ismenos, the fields of Attica, and the realms of Dardan Pelops, beaten by two seas: run to help, point out the source of this cruel carnage. My anger must pour out on all: my enemy is anyone who does not identify my enemy. Are you hiding, conqueror of Alcides?⁷⁶

The absence of empathy is also to be found in the following verses:

Pectus o nimium ferum!
quis vos per omnem, liberi, sparsos domum
deflere digne poterit? Hic durus malis
lacrimare vultus nescit.
(Sen., *HF* 1226–1229)

O heart too fierce! Who can weep worthily for you children, scattered throughout the house? This face, hardened by sufferings, is incapable of weeping.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ Kathleen Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles: Reasoning Madness*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008, 86.

⁷⁶ Trans. from Fitch, ed., *Seneca's Hercules furens*, ad loc.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

Like in *Hercules furens*, those who work with individuals with conduct disorders notice how they are focused on themselves and, above all, are not empathetic with the emotional world of other people. Some of these children live in a social context that teaches them to repress their feelings and not to develop empathy.

Within this frame of reference, it is possible to mention another small yet significant episode of the mythological tradition, in line with Seneca's point of view. From the walls of the city of Tiryns, Hercules throws a man who is guilty of having doubts about him and who suspects him to be a cattle thief.⁷⁸ In

⁷⁸ See Ps.-Apollod., *Bibl.* 2.6.2: μετ' οὐ πολὺ δὲ κλαπείσων ἐξ Εὐβοίας ὑπὸ Αὐτολύκου βοῶν, Εὐρύτος μὲν ἐνόμιζεν ὑφ' Ἡρακλέους γεγονέναι τοῦτο, Ἴφιτος δὲ ἀπιστῶν ἀφικνεῖται πρὸς Ἡρακλέα, καὶ συντυχῶν ἦκοντι ἐκ Φερῶν αὐτῶ, σεσωκότι τὴν ἀποθανοῦσαν Ἄλκηστιν Ἀδμήτῳ, παρακαλεῖ συζητῆσαι τὰς βόας. Ἡρακλῆς δὲ ὑπισχνεῖται: καὶ ξενίζει μὲν αὐτόν, μανεῖς δὲ αὐθις ἀπὸ τῶν Τυρινθίων ἔρριψεν αὐτὸν τειχῶν ("Not long after, some cattle were stolen from Euboea by Autolykus, and Eurytus supposed that it was done by Hercules; but Iphitus did not believe it and went to Hercules. And meeting him, as he came from Pherae after saving the dead Alcestis for Admetus, he invited him to seek the kine with him; but going mad again he threw him from the walls of Tiryns"; trans. from Apollodorus, *The Library*, vol. 1, trans. Sir James George Frazer, London and New York, NY: William Heinemann and G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921, 238–239); Soph., *Trach.* 270–273: ὡς ἴκετ' αὐθις Ἴφιτος Τυρινθίαν / πρὸς κλιτύν, ἵππους νομάδας ἐξιχνοσκοπῶν, / τότ' ἄλλοσ' αὐτὸν ὄμμα, θατέρῃ δὲ νοῦν / ἔχοντ', ἀπ' ἄκρας ἦκε πυργώδους πλακός ("Furious at this treatment, when afterward Iphitus came to the hill of Tiryns on the track of horses that had strayed, Heracles seized a moment when the man's eyes were one place and his thoughts another, and hurled him from a towering summit"; trans. from Sophocles, *The Plays and Fragments*, vol. 5: *The Trachiniae*, trans. Sir Richard Jebb, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1892, 46–47); Hom., *Od.* 21.22–30: Ἴφιτος αὐθ' ἵππους διζήμενος, αἶ οἱ ὄλοντο / δώδεκα θήλειαι, ὑπὸ δ' ἡμίονοι ταλαεργοί: / αἶ δὴ οἱ καὶ ἔπειτα φόνος καὶ μοῖρα γέροντο, / ἐπεὶ δὴ Διὸς υἱὸν ἀφίκετο καρτερόθυμον, / φῶθ' Ἡρακλῆα, μεγάλων ἐπίστορα ἔργων, / ὅς μιν ξεῖνον ἐόντα κατέκτανεν ᾧ ἐνὶ οἴκῳ, / σχέτλιος, οὐδὲ θεῶν ὄπιν ἠδέεσάτ' οὐδὲ τράπεζαν, / τὴν ἦν οἱ παρέθηκεν: ἔπειτα δὲ πέφνε καὶ αὐτόν, / ἵππους δ' αὐτὸς ἔχε κρατερώνυχας ἐν μεγάροισι ("And Iphitus, on his part, had come in search of twelve brood mares, which he had lost, with sturdy mules at the teat; but to him thereafter did they bring death and doom, when he came to the stout-hearted son of Zeus, the man Heracles, who well knew deeds of daring; for Heracles slew him, his guest though he was, in his own house, ruthlessly, and had regard neither for the wrath of the gods nor for the table which he had set before him, but slew the man thereafter, and himself kept the stout-hoofed mares in his halls"; trans. from Homer, *The Odyssey*, vol. 2, trans. Augustus T. Murray, London and Cambridge, MA: William Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1919, 304–307; on the same vv. there is a scholium citing Pherec., *FGrHist.* 3 F 82); Diod. Sic. 4.31.3: Ἰφίτου δὲ τοῦ Εὐρύτου τὸ γεγονός ὑποπεύσαντος καὶ παραγενομένου κατὰ ζήτησιν τῶν ἵππων εἰς Τίρυνθα, τοῦτον μὲν ἀναβιβάσας ὁ Ἡρακλῆς ἐπὶ τινα πύργον ὑψηλὸν ἐκέλευσεν ἀφορᾶν μὴ που νεμόμεναι τυγχάνουσιν: οὐ δυναμένου δὲ κατανοῆσαι τοῦ Ἰφίτου, φήσας αὐτὸν ψευδῶς κατηγορεῖσθαι τὴν κλοπὴν κατεκρήμισεν ἀπὸ τοῦ πύργου ("But Iphitus, the son of Eurytus, harboured suspicions of what had been done and came to Tiryns in search of the horses, whereupon Heracles, taking him up on a lofty tower of the castle, asked him to see whether they were by chance grazing anywhere; and when Iphitus was unable to discover them, he claimed that Iphitus had falsely accused him of the theft and threw him down headlong from the tower";

some versions it seems that Hercules performs this action because he is really guilty, while in other versions it is just a fit of madness. In yet other versions, as highlighted by Robert Graves and others, it is done in cold blood because it is a way to wash away the offence of the lack of respect. It is interesting how the confusion among the various versions mirrors the questions of the people working with minors, when they try to understand the intentions of some specific delinquent actions.

Potentially Positive Elements in the Reception and Management of the Myth

Below, the potentially positive elements in the reception of the myth are analysed. First, let us create a list of Hercules' features that children may notice:

- Children realize that Hercules is aggressive like they are with their teachers and that he has the same behavioural disorders they have. As a student, the hero killed his music teacher with a lyre because he had applied a teaching method Hercules was not used to.⁷⁹ This behaviour is similar to theirs;

trans. from Diodorus of Sicily, *Books II (Continued) 35–IV, 58*, trans. Charles Henry Oldfather, London and Cambridge, MA: William Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1935, 440–441); see also Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1955 (published in Italian as *I miti greci*, trans. Elisa Morpurgo, rev. Chiara Gallini, Milano: Longanesi, 1963, 482).

⁷⁹ Paus. 9.29.9: λέγεται δὲ καὶ ἄλλα τοιάδε ὑπὸ Θεβαίων, ὡς τοῦ Λίνου τούτου γένοιτο ὕστερον ἕτερος Λίνος καλούμενος Ἰσμηνίου καὶ ὡς Ἡρακλῆς ἔτι παῖς ὦν ἀποκτείνειεν αὐτὸν διδάσκαλον μουσικῆς ὄντα ("Other tales are told by the Thebans, how that later than this Linus there was born another, called the son of Ismenius, a teacher of music, and how Heracles, while still a child, killed him"; trans. from Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, vol. 4, trans. William H.S. Jones, London and Cambridge, MA: William Heinemann and Harvard University Press, 1935, 298–299); Ps.-Apollod., *Bibl.* 2.4.9: οὗτος δὲ ἦν ἀδελφὸς Ὀρφέως: ἀφικόμενος δὲ εἰς Θήβας καὶ Θεβαῖος γενόμενος ὑπὸ Ἡρακλέους τῇ κιθάρᾳ πληγείς ἀπέθανεν: ἐπιπλήξαντα γὰρ αὐτὸν ὀργισθεὶς ἀπέκτεινε ("This Linus was a brother of Orpheus; he came to Thebes and became a Theban, but was killed by Hercules with a blow of the lyre; for being struck by him, Hercules flew into a rage and slew him"; trans. from Apollodorus, *The Library*, vol. 1, 176–177; he mentions the teacher's name: Linus); Diod. Sic. 3.67: τὸν δὲ Λίνον ἐπὶ ποιητικῇ καὶ μελωδίᾳ θαυμασθέντα μαθητὰς σχεῖν πολλοὺς, ἐπιφανεστάτους δὲ τρεῖς, Ἡρακλέα, Θαμύραν, Ὀρφέα. τούτων δὲ τὸν μὲν Ἡρακλέα, κιθαρίζειν μανθάνοντα διὰ τὴν τῆς ψυχῆς βραδυτῆτα μὴ δύνασθαι δέξασθαι τὴν μάθησιν, ἔπειθ' ὑπὸ τοῦ Λίνου πληγαῖς ἐπιτιμηθέντα διοργισθῆναι καὶ τῇ κιθάρᾳ τὸν διδάσκαλον πατάξαντα ἀποκτείνειν ("Linus also, who was admired because of his poetry and singing, had many pupils and three of greatest renown, Heracles, Thamyras, and Orpheus. Of these three Heracles, who was learning to play the lyre, was unable to appreciate what was taught him because of his sluggishness of soul, and once when he had been punished with rods by Linus he became violently angry and killed his teacher with a blow of the lyre"; trans. from Diodorus of Sicily, *Books II (Continued) 35–IV, 58*, 306–307).

especially when they throw objects, such as pencil cases, books, and chairs, at their teachers.

- Children let off steam, are aggressive, or have fun abusing animals and notice that Hercules started behaving this way as a baby by strangling snakes.
- Some boys think that their stepmothers (or, generally speaking, their parents) do not love them and they fight with them, much like Hercules, who feels that Hera hates him (and so it is). Frequently they experience anger crises or run away after fighting with the new partner of their parents.
- Some of them have uncontrolled behavioural crises involving their parents and siblings, which often require the intervention of the police or social services. They feel in harmony with and similar to Hercules, who committed evil actions against his family.

These features create a non-judgemental, non-moralistic, and non-perfect character. Older children do not feel that the story is pervaded by unrealistically optimistic and annoying ideas. Such qualities paradoxically give children more hope and are a way of introducing psychoeducational activities in a more positive way.

What Is the Best Version? The Labours after the Madness

Another point, with educational implications, is whether to choose a version with Hercules' madness at the beginning of the Twelve Labours – following the tradition of Pseudo-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* and Hyginus' *Fabulae* – or at the end of the Twelve Labours, following Euripides' version. This part of the story may be, in some cases, a resource and a facilitator for elaborating on one's personal experiences, whereas in other situations it becomes a problem. There are no simple recipes, and all options have pros and cons. Here the reading reception approach shows its merits and potentials because it can provide information to guide the operators' choices on what to propose. It is necessary to know the clinical and social conditions of the child, their cognitive and emotional developmental stage, and their re-elaboration skills.

Most editions for children put the episode of madness at the beginning. Placing Hercules' madness or crime at the end of the Twelve Labours portrays the hero's efforts without a happy ending, creates misunderstandings among children, and discourages adolescents from facing their labours in an optimistic way. Nevertheless, Euripides' version could help to show how a certain type of behavioural path can lead to serious problems.

In some versions the episode (Hercules' killing of his family) is openly described as "madness". In other versions, their authors instead just hint at a crime committed by Hercules in the past, before starting his adventures. It is useful to consider the text and how Hercules' madness is acknowledged in some specific groups of children in order to decide what the best version is.

Some of the children that have mentally ill relatives could be needlessly scared by the use of the term "madness" – which is a general term that might be superficial or stigmatizing. In these situations the word madness could be avoided. One can opt for the term "crime" or "evil action" or "involuntarily hurting" (without explaining the details), ascribing Hercules' evil actions to Hera's malicious intervention. Nevertheless, it is useful to consider that some of the children's parents are criminals, and then talking about Hercules as a hero might be a problem. Other children have assisted in their parents' violent actions (such as beating or stabbing or killing a parent and/or brothers/sisters). In such cases we are dealing with a crime but a mental health problem in the offender cannot be ruled out.

The Most Suitable Interpretation: Self-Regulation

In addition to the various versions of the myth, there are also several interpretations. It is impossible to talk about them in detail here, but – to sum up – the approach that seems to be the most suitable, in light of our analysis, is the one that focuses on self-control and self-regulation, that is, on the balance between the satisfaction of impulses and facing reality and its limits. Such an interpretation suits the identification of Hercules with a "bouncing back" hero, who, on one hand, is not too perfect and superficially optimistic and, on the other hand, not too pessimistic and nihilistic. Hercules is aware of the fact that, despite being a hero, he can voluntarily or involuntarily hurt people.

There is an external mediator that makes the hero not completely responsible for his actions and this awareness is therefore more bearable. As a hero, Hercules feels failure, pain, and irreversibility. In order to improve and free himself from this situation, he decides to submit to authority, although the leader is unworthy (the treacherous Eurystheus; see Fig. 6). While serving the leader, Hercules follows the rules and at the same time makes efforts to help other people, at least in some labours. He uses his own autonomous judgement while also respecting authority. He performs the tasks even if the leader is unfair in evaluating their accomplishment. He does his "homework" because he is aware that it is the right thing to do, regardless of the envious referee and

of prompt praises. In other words, he delays the immediate satisfaction of his impulses and desires in order to achieve more evolved goals, using his skills with responsibility.



Figure 6: A fragment of a black-figure amphora depicting Heracles showing the Erymanthian Boar to Eurystheus hiding in a storage jar, inv. no. 198042 MNW, National Museum in Warsaw, photograph by Steve K. Simons. Used with permission.

This emphasis on individual responsibility and self-control gained by Hercules is in line with some psychological and pedagogical theories. The psychologist William Damon, for example, lays stress on the benefits of putting children in a context with rules and challenges, based on the fact that children grow healthier if they challenge themselves with actions aimed at making them feel useful to themselves and to society.⁸⁰ This approach assumes that it is possible for children to deal with morality and individual responsibility – that is, that they are able to perform evil actions even as children. It is a different approach from the one that relies on the optimistic myth of the noble savage and on the idea of childhood being permanently innocent and remote from the moral problem. One of the points of the Hercules myth is that sometimes evil actions, regardless of intention and of any mitigating factors (in Hercules' story we can mention Ate's influence), have irreversible consequences.

⁸⁰ William Damon, *Più grandi speranze. Contro la cultura dell'indulgenza in casa e a scuola*, trans. Elena Campominosi, Milano: Longanesi & C., 1997 (ed. pr. in English 1995 as *Greater Expectations*).

In our work there is a delicate balance between the activities aimed at understanding the importance of irreversible actions (and therefore the responsibility for performing such actions) and the rehabilitation and chance to make up for one's mistakes. Choosing the interpretation that thematizes the reality principle⁸¹ means reading about and presenting some of Hercules' features in a way that prepares the young people to deal with these issues in a balanced way.

The reality principle is a key point also for promoting mental health. If on a behavioural spectrum we set on one end the perfect hero (who perfectly and unrealistically controls his own inner dynamics and morality) and on the other we put a dysregulated and impulsive character, we could set our model in the middle. This "imperfect" or "in medio stat virtus" model has a more realistic and solid psychological structure than the two exaggerated and distorted extremes. In this context, it is worth recalling how dramatists and political regimes have used these models for different purposes. As for the past century, we can recognize the first extreme in the rhetoric of the *Übermensch* preparing and supporting totalitarian systems, whereas at the beginning of the twenty-first century we can see how dramatists worked on the second extreme, deconstructing Hercules' perfection and turning his power against him. The character becomes the victim of his inability to control himself; seemingly as hard as steel, he becomes as fragile and liquid as postmodern cultures, reminding us of Seneca's *Hercules furens* and its pessimistic atmosphere. In this regard, the theatrical plays of Archibald MacLeish, Daniel Algie, and Simon Armitage are to be mentioned as benchmarks. For now let us observe that these contrasting hero models can work in fiction but do not function well in education.

From a narrowly psychological point of view, the two opposite dynamics are joined in the same pathological pattern. Riley in her essay refers to two researchers who deepened the topic. The psychiatrist Jack Levin, Head of the Brudnick Center on Violence and Conflict of Northeastern University of Boston, has found common traits in "family annihilators": autarchic and solitary personalities, like Seneca's Hercules, they are rigid, narrow-minded, used to being "alone in command", and incapable of facing the limits of reality and life's frustrations.⁸² In another study, by Larry Milner, the psychiatric conditions of the parents that imply filicide are grouped under a psychological pattern defined

⁸¹ Understood as the ability of the mind to assess the reality of the external world, and to act upon it accordingly.

⁸² Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 324; see also Kevin Toolis, "Family Man", *The Guardian Weekend*, 13 July 2002, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2002/jul/13/weekend.kevintoolis> (accessed 16 March 2021).

as “the Hercules complex”.⁸³ The model of the hero we propose here is different from all those mentioned above.

Walt Disney’s, Euripides’, and Seneca’s Versions of Hercules as Vectors of Different Approaches to Dealing with the Principle of Reality

If we present Hercules’ myth to children and adolescents following an underlying (and not too explicit) dialectic between the pleasure principle⁸⁴ and the reality principle, they find more positive and open-minded suggestions. The theme of extraordinary strength and “cool” monsters may be included in the growth of the hero, who in the end has a more mature and integrated personality. He is neither a monolithic and innately perfect hero nor a mentally insane villain nor an anti-hero who is still ambiguously a victim of his *hubris* despite performing good actions.

The screenwriters of Walt Disney’s cartoon version from 1997 (dirs. Ron Clements and John Musker), who operated within the principle of the reality modus, probably did not choose this point of view by chance. On the surface the story seems sugar-coated, without the conflict with Hercules’ stepmother, Hera, and his subsequent madness. The authors decided to completely leave out the negative event of the madness-crime. Since the film was a mass product, this choice enabled them to market it as widely as they could. Nonetheless, there are some educational hints in the aforementioned point of view. The protagonist is a clumsy but strong boy with hyperactive traits, very similar to children with behavioural disorders.⁸⁵ Adopted as a child by Alcmene and a pacific version of Amphitryon, he has difficulties caused by his strength, hyperactivity, and exuberance. Instead of becoming depressed, he starts training to become a hero in order to find his place in the world, fulfilling his divine nature but then giving it up for love. It is true that the plot, which ends with the liberation and conquest of a young girl, includes some Oedipal conflicts. But most of the story is focused on the growth of the young man and his desire to find his place in the world, which includes also, but is not limited to, a romantic relationship.

⁸³ Larry S. Milner, *Hardness of Heart/Hardness of Life: The Stain of Human Infanticide*, Lanham, MD, New York, NY, and Oxford: University Press of America, 2000 (ed. pr. 1998), as cited in Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides’ Herakles*, 324.

⁸⁴ Understood as the instinctive seeking of pleasure and avoiding of pain to satisfy biological and psychological needs.

⁸⁵ More specifically, Disney’s Hercules vaguely recalls ADHD symptoms. The first scene, when the young hero accidentally destroys the colonnade of the city, is amazing. In this way, he provokes the anger and judgements of the entire city, and not for the first time.

Disney's Hercules does not question the value of divinity, even if, in the end, he prefers to take the path of mortal life to achieve fulfilment. This is different from Euripides' version, according to which divine nature is perceived negatively. As Riley observes, it implies a definitive lack of transcendental elements or of Hercules' divinization and the relationship with anthropomorphic gods.⁸⁶ The hero is someone who has the courage to endure life, ἐγκαρτερήσω βίοτον (Eur., *Her.* 1351; "I shall have the courage to endure life"), and who puts fate above the power of the gods:⁸⁷ οὐδείς δὲ θνητῶν ταῖς τύχαις ἀκήρατος, / οὐ θεῶν, ἀοιδῶν εἴπερ οὐ ψευδεῖς λόγοι (1314–1315; "fate exempts no man; all men are flawed, and so the gods, unless the poets lie").⁸⁸ He focuses on the human relationships, such as paternity, sonship, friendship, and not on the relationship with the gods. More specifically, Hercules prefers Amphitryon to Zeus: πατέρα γὰρ ἀντὶ Ζηνὸς ἡγοῦμαι σὲ ἐγώ (1265; "I consider you as my father not Zeus").⁸⁹

Reflecting on the concept of fatherhood and on the role of the father in educating to moral responsibility, it is worth mentioning Riley and George Devereux who describe the characters of Amphitryon in Euripides' *Herakles* and Cadmus in *The Bacchae* as fathers who play maieutic roles (not to say psychotherapeutic) and help their children become aware of the evil actions they have committed.⁹⁰ Although they are welcoming and are not hard on their children, they are far from the too "friendly" fathers who try to justify or make light of their children's actions, and who are more concerned about defending them from the unfair judgements of society than educating them and providing them with a solid psychological structure.

In addition to avoiding the topic of Hercules' divine paternity, Euripides introduces the value of φιλία (*philia*), human relationships, and ἀρετή (*areté*) with some specific elements: ὅστις δὲ πλοῦτον ἢ σθένος μᾶλλον φίλων / ἀγαθῶν πεᾶσθαι βούλεται, κακῶς φρονεῖ (1425–1426; "whoever wants to acquire wealth or power rather than good friends is a fool").⁹¹ How relevant are these

⁸⁶ Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 45; M.S. Silk, "Herakles and Greek Tragedy", *Greece and Rome* 32.1 (1985), 1–22.

⁸⁷ Allen Thiher, *Revels in Madness: Insanity in Medicine and Literature*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1999.

⁸⁸ Trans. by David Grene and Richard Lattimore (Euripides, *The Complete Greek Tragedies: Euripides*, vol. 1, New York, NY: Modern Library, 1956, 359), quoted by Thiher, *Revels in Madness*, 26.

⁸⁹ Trans. from Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 41.

⁹⁰ Ibidem, 39; George Devereux, "The Psychotherapy Scene in Euripides *Bacchae*", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 90 (1970), 35–48.

⁹¹ Trans. from Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 90.

words of Euripides for the kids we work with? Victor L. Ehrenberg states that the *areté* of Euripides' work is "demythologized": "Man must rely on himself and his fellow-men to build his world, proudly and courageously defying the blows of fate".⁹² Moreover, H.H.O. Chalk, quoted in Riley's essay, underlines the connection between *philía* and *areté* and how the tragedy experienced by Hercules leads him to fully appreciate the value of friendship. The scholar emphasizes how the earlier βία (*bía*), symbolized by his bow and arrows, is "now strengthened by his [Hercules'] new understanding, induced by pain, of the hateful consequences of his actions".⁹³ The value of *philía* is clearly expressed also in verses 1218–1220:

τί μοι προσείων χεῖρα σημαίνεις φόνον;
ὥς μὴ μύσος με σῶν βάλῃ προσφθεγμάτων;
οὐδὲν μέλει μοι σύν γε σοὶ πράσσειν κακῶς [...].

Why move your hand to warn me that you have a fear? Are you afraid that your greeting might pollute me? I don't care if I share your suffering [...].⁹⁴

And in verses 1398–1400:

Θησεύς: παῦσαι: δίδου δὲ χεῖρ' ὑπηρέτη φίλῳ.
Ἡρακλῆς: ἀλλ' αἶμα μὴ σοῖς ἐξομόρξωμαι πέπλοις.
Θησεύς: ἔκμασσε, φείδου μηδέν: οὐκ ἀναίνομαι.

THESEUS: Enough. Give your hand to a friend who wants to help you.

HERAKLES: Be careful that the blood of my pollution does not wipe off on your clothes.

THESEUS: Wipe away! As much as you like! I do not reject it.⁹⁵

Nevertheless, as mentioned above in the section about the potentially negative elements of the myth, introducing Greek tragedies in a psychoeducational context is an amazing opportunity, but it might support in youngsters

⁹² Victor L. Ehrenberg, *Aspects of the Ancient World: Essays and Reviews*, Oxford and New York, NY: Blackwell and Salloch, 1946, 163–165, quoted after Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 45.

⁹³ H.H.O. Chalk, "Areté and Bia in Euripides' Herakles", *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 82 (1962), 14, <https://doi.org/10.2307/628540>; Arthur W.H. Adkins, "Basic Greek Values in Euripides' Hecuba and Hercules furens", *Classical Quarterly* 16.2 (1966), 216–217, quoted after Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 40.

⁹⁴ Trans. from Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 42.

⁹⁵ *Ibidem*.

a pessimistic or nihilistic view of life. Trying to empower individuals through the disapproval of divine characters and based on the awareness of one's moral faultiness (without mediations) assumes that individuals have solid and developed psychological structures. A superficial reading of Euripides' tragedy may result in a nihilistic view of fate and in misinterpretations of what friendship is. It may just confirm a defiant adolescent in finding a peer that merely supports him in what he wants to do, regardless of the rationality of the action. Often one hears from an adolescent who has beaten his own parents during an argument that the only thing that matters is the support from his friends. The adolescent identifies with Hercules, a hero who disregards gods and parents, supported by his friend/Theseus.

Another important contribution to the study of distorted connections with reality and to the analysis of violent behaviours, as already mentioned, is to be found in Seneca's *Hercules furens* and in the works that follow his tradition. Also here a pivotal point is the skill of developing healthy relations, and it is quite useful to refer to Riley's essay and to the works mentioned by her. Furthermore, Levin's studies have some interesting implications for the developmental age. The scholar, as mentioned above,⁹⁶ has found out that family annihilators are lone wolves who do not share decisions and who always need to be leaders,⁹⁷ precisely like Seneca's Hercules. Also from Seneca's reception we can deduce that a pivotal point for mental health is the skill of developing human relations, and much can be done in the developmental age to work on these personality features and to prevent future problems: learning to work in a team, share one's efforts, and show one's own weaknesses without shame and with a positive attitude. Another useful contribution comes from the psychiatrist Jonathan Shay. He works with men, often veterans, who have committed extremely violent actions. Shay has especially analysed the state (defined as "berserk") of traumatized veterans and has identified the loss of control as a common trait among people who have committed violent actions.⁹⁸ The definition of Shay's berserk may be, as Riley asserts, compared to Hercules' loss of control and to Homer's meaning of Lyssa, used in the *Iliad*. In this context, Riley mentions the example of Hector's frenzy:

⁹⁶ See above, p. 317.

⁹⁷ See Toolis, "Family Man", quoted by Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 324.

⁹⁸ Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Characters*, New York, NY: Atheneum, 1994.

Ἔκτωρ δὲ μέγα σθένει βλεμεαίνων
μαίνεται ἐκπάγλως πίσυνος Δίι, οὐδέ τι τίει
ἀνέρας οὐδὲ θεούς: κρατερὴ δέ ἐ λύσσα δέδυκεν.
(Hom., *Il.* 9.237–239)

And Hector exulting greatly in his strength rages fearfully, trusting Zeus, and regards not men nor gods; and mighty madness has possessed him.⁹⁹

Contemporary theatre offers some contributions following Seneca's tradition. Very cruel and intense performances depict Hercules without limits and self-control in the aforementioned plays – Archibald MacLeish's *Herakles*, Daniel Algie's *Home Front*, and Simon Armitage's *Mister Heracles*.¹⁰⁰ *Mister Heracles'* madness has specific similarities to the fury of the heroes and characters of the *Iliad*, where *Lyssa* is used to describe the state of mind and the cruelty of the soldiers.¹⁰¹ Like Seneca did before them, MacLeish and Armitage put the reason for Hercules' madness in a psychological context, specifically in a disorderly and exaggerated *modus vivendi*.

Referring to a Definition and to the Pros and Cons of the “Hercules Complex”

Referring to Milner's work and to the descriptions and suggestions from Seneca's play, and those connected to it, we could define the “Hercules complex” as a natural predisposition to aggressiveness and overindulgences due to environmental

⁹⁹ Trans. from Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 41.

¹⁰⁰ The American dramatist Archibald MacLeish re-elaborates Hercules' myth and madness in his *Herakles*, conceived and published during the Cold War. MacLeish represents *hubris*, as noted by Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 279–337, through uncontrolled and limitless scientific research. The protagonist is Professor Hoadley, physicist and Nobel Prize winner who shares many of the features of Seneca's Hercules. *Home Front* was a performance staged at La MaMa Theater in New York in 2006, directed by Randahl Hoey and written by Daniel Algie. Algie re-imagines Hercules coming back to Thebes after his mission to Hades. The hero is a Vietnam veteran who suffers from PTSD. Instead of accepting help, he focuses on his feelings of guilt and on a deviant autarky (αὐτάρκεια; *autárkeia*) that leads him to attack his family, mistaking them for enemies. Simon Armitage in his *Mister Heracles*, staged on 16 February 2001, co-directed by Natasha Betteridge and Simon Godwin, presents Hercules as a soldier working for a military organization (the equivalent of the character of Eurystheus). He comes back to his wife, Megara, in a post-apocalyptic scenario after a Herculean mission/labour in which he has explored other planets.

¹⁰¹ Riley, *The Reception and Performance of Euripides' Herakles*, 331.

stressors or cultural and social influences that lead to violent and sometimes dumb actions.

Talking about a structured "Hercules complex" implies making some distinctions and should not be subject to generalizations, considering the overworked trend of using Greek characters for defining psychological problems and the risk of an overestimate of the incidence of such a complex in the population. Broadly speaking, indeed, it could be possible to use it as a concept that helps to define the difficulty to keep one's self-control. But not all cases of a loss of control are so serious – a five-minute outburst does not make you a murderer with a "Greek-character complex". Most of all, although some of the personalities of the family annihilators could be characterized by this complex, many other episodes of violence follow different trajectories and can be connected to personalities different from the ones linked to the Senecan drama.

Seneca's point of view, as well as Euripides', can provide us with a lot of suggestions: especially the concept of the dynamic and progressive elements that lead to violence and crimes. Nevertheless, such thematizations might end up being moralistic and boring for children, like the story of the ant and the cicada.¹⁰² Although in a less elaborated way, many children are aware that some of their actions are wrong and will have negative consequences in the future. The problem is that they just prefer not to think about it and live in the present. They choose to live like cicadas and dislike the ant. Therefore, talking about the risks of living like Hercules without limits and rules is not useful. In these situations it is more helpful to establish effective limits, connected with daily life, that make them experience the negative consequences or the positive benefits of their conduct. Discussing how bad they are and how they are unable to control themselves is futile. This is also why the tradition that presents Hercules choosing between good and evil or between Virtue and Vice¹⁰³ is not always appealing.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1976; in Italian as *Il mondo incantato. Uso, importanza e significati psicoanalitici delle fiabe*, trans. Andrea D'Anna, Milano: Giangiaco­mo Feltrinelli Editore, 1977.

¹⁰³ Represented, among others, in Lucas Cranach's (1472–1553) or Pompeo Girolamo Batoni's (1708–1787) *Hercules at the Crossroads* paintings.

¹⁰⁴ Of course it depends on the children one is working with. A promising laboratory of Prof. Susan Deacy involving autistic children starts precisely from this perspective; see her chapter "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", in this volume, 251–274. On the therapeutic value of the myths, see also the chapters by Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, "New Hope for Old Stories: Yiyun Li's *Gilgamesh* and Ali Smith's *Antigone*", 345–370, and by Krishni Burns, "La Fontaine's Reeds: Adapting Greek Mythical Heroines to Model Resilience", 327–342.

Conclusions

We are at the end of the voyage, following the erratic flight of our *Coscinocera hercules* to discover Hercules' myth. I tried to give an overview which is inevitably incomplete. It is challenging to talk about a story referring to different age groups and about children with different psychological characteristics. Moreover, it is difficult to consider a narrative regardless of the specificity of the narrative medium and the way in which it is presented. Furthermore, one thing is to talk generically about activities that promote mental health as I have done in this chapter and another thing is to prove it through evidence-based scientific studies.

There are some educational implications in this character and his story that I tried to outline. These tips could certainly be questioned. There is a position in the criticism of children's literature that argues that art (and literature, which is part of it) must not be "useful" (*ars gratia artis*) and that children must be left free to make their own associations and deductions. It is a position that certainly has important and sharable arguments. Yet, it is not a neutral choice when you decide which version of a story should be referred to, unless you propose that all versions should be presented. This is even more true if the choice is made by operators who want to propose games and activities with that specific narrative setting and that are supposed to have educational aims.

Certainly having educational purposes is at risk of ideological or preconceived or moralistic positions towards those who receive the contents of the educational proposal and towards the narration with which we are dealing. The best thing to do could be to declare one's theoretical framework and the reasons for the proposals, assuming we are sufficiently transparent about ourselves and our choices, but it is much easier to do that with adult interlocutors than with minor ones.

There is just one thing I would suggest to the readers of this chapter: Greek myths deal with big issues and whatever choice the operator makes, it is better to do that with awareness. If we are talking about an educational or rehabilitative setting, my personal position is that it is useful to adopt a theoretical approach that studies the reception of stories and fosters dialogic interaction between the story, the narrator, and children. Moreover, you have to know well the personal story of the interlocutor and your educational purposes.

In conclusion, if we consider how children with aggressive or violent behavioural disorders interpret the features of Hercules and if we examine the positive value of this character from the perspective of working with them, we can state that he is a model who potentially provides children with hope, without being

“too perfect”. Treating behavioural and aggressive disorders by using anti-heroes or more ambiguous characters would be more difficult. Hercules is, instead, a symbol of strength and courage; many children and adolescents definitely love and need such qualities to overcome the difficulties in their lives.

Hercules shows humility and self-control: he agrees to obey his cousin’s commands, although he does not like him, and children and adolescents often have difficulties in respecting their educators’ or teachers’ authority because they are perceived as unfair and unworthy. Hercules is a helpful hero. To some extent, this character accepts the challenge to better and redeem himself and help the community. This is a very positive message.

The hero may be considered and presented as a “bouncing back” hero who made big mistakes but has not given up. He struggles to keep his own self-control and learns how to avoid being influenced by Ate, and by doing this he makes the world better. Children and adolescents with behavioural disorders could appreciate Hercules’ story presented in this way, because his character is not judgemental and moralistic: the hero has features similar to their own and his success instils hope in them. The frame story of this myth is suitable for many age groups and approaches. The episodes of the Twelve Labours are short and flexible: they can be adapted for games and preventive and rehabilitative psychoeducational activities, and this can have as a result the promotion of a healthy mental development that should be analysed in further studies.

LA FONTAINE'S REEDS: ADAPTING GREEK MYTHICAL HEROINES TO MODEL RESILIENCE

In the year 1668, the French poet Jean de La Fontaine published the first six books of his adaptation of Aesop's fables. The collection was dedicated to the young Dauphin, the six-year-old son of Louis XIV. The first book included La Fontaine's version of "The Oak and the Reed", fable 70 in the Perry Index. La Fontaine emphasized that the reed's flexibility allowed it to adapt and survive in a storm, contrasted with the oak's brittle strength, which failed, killing the tree. Although La Fontaine's moral is commonly recognized today, it is not the universal ancient moral. The point of the fable as preserved in Avianus is to teach that open resistance is less successful than incremental change, and Babrius suggests that one should yield to the dictates of the strong, not oppose them.¹ La Fontaine decided on an adaptation to suit the needs of seventeenth-century France. His reeds reflect this choice in two ways. They themselves adapt to new, dangerous circumstances, the storm, and as a result are able to survive. They are also the product of their author's adaptation for his audience, primarily the French monarchy and nobility, to suggest that they should be prepared to change their lifestyles in response to new Enlightenment thought.

Both kinds of adaptation, that of the reeds to the storm and that of the author to his or her audience, are applicable to modern retellings of myth that focus primarily on female characters. Most women of myth fare poorly in their original narratives, but new versions can present them as survivors rather than victims. Like La Fontaine's reeds, such heroines often find themselves trapped by their mythical narratives in adverse situations and must develop coping skills in order to survive. These coping mechanisms are not limited to the preservation of their physical persons, but must extend to their psychological well-being. Such narrative adaptations make for intriguing characters and they can serve

¹ Avianus, *Fables* 16.19–20; Babrius, *Fables* 36.13–14.

a didactic function as well. They teach children, particularly young women and girls, how to weather their own psychological storms and survive with a minimum of damage, to bend rather than to break.

Why Mythical Heroines?

Mythical women are particularly suited for such didactic work. There is no authoritative study on the age at which most children are exposed to Greek mythology in the United States. However, the wealth of popular material inspired by Greek myth aimed at children between the ages of seven and ten suggests that this age range is a lucrative market for mythically themed products. The most respected myth collection for children, *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* (1962), is marketed by its publisher as appropriate for children aged eight to twelve.²

Works of popular fiction based on Greek mythology are aimed at readers in a similar age range. For example, Disney Publishing Worldwide, which owns the publication rights to Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series (2005–2009), lists the first book of the series as appropriate for readers between the ages nine and twelve.³ Common Sense Media, a San Francisco-based non-profit dedicated to analyses of children's media with a user base of circa 65 million people, recommends Disney's film *Hercules* for ages seven and older.⁴

Mythology is likewise a part of the US public school curriculum for children between the ages of seven to nine. Although the Common Core standards are highly controversial in the United States, it is worth noting that mythology, fables, and folklore are covered in the 3rd grade (ages eight to nine) in the Common Core State Standards Initiative Curriculum.⁵ Not all states follow the Common Core, but many curricula are based on the system. Both the New York State Common Core Curriculum and Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

² Vendor website for Ingri d'Aulaire and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire, *D'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths*, New York, NY: Penguin Random House, 1992 (ed. pr. 1962), <http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/36027/daulaires-book-of-greek-myths-by-ingri-daulaire-and-edgar-parin-daulaire/9780440406945/> (accessed 19 August 2017).

³ Vendor website for Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, vol. 1: *The Lightning Thief*, Burbank, CA: Disney Publishing Worldwide, 2005, <http://books.disney.com/book/lightning-thief-the/> (accessed 19 August 2017).

⁴ Nell Minow, "Hercules: Movie Review", Common Sense Media, <https://www.commonsensemedia.org/movie-reviews/hercules#> (accessed 4 August 2019).

⁵ "English Language Arts Standards » Reading: Literature » Grade 3", Common Core State Standards Initiative, <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/3/> (accessed 19 August 2017).

teach Greek mythology specifically in the 2nd grade, ages seven to eight.⁶ The largest public school system in the US is in the state of California, but the California Common Core State Standards do not dictate when mythology should be taught. However, students are required to recognize mythology-based vocabulary (such as the word "Herculean") by Grade 4 (ages nine to ten).⁷ Taking the evidence of the marketing of popular mythology-based products and the national and state curricula into account, it is reasonable to presume that a large percent of US children are familiar with the more widespread, mainstream stories of ancient mythology.⁸

Mythology is familiar to children between the ages of eight and twelve, so it is appealing to young readers. At the same time, myths are far enough removed from real life that there is minimal risk of retraumatizing children and teens who might already be suffering under adverse conditions. Popular works of children's mythology often take on aspects of fairy tales in their retelling, setting them firmly in the realm of fantasy.⁹ Due to the fantastic qualities of the stories and the geographic and temporal remoteness of their context, readers can identify with characters without seeing their own lived experience directly reflected in the stories' events.

Finally, the very exceptionalism of the characters makes them useful for the purpose of modelling resilience in adverse circumstances beyond their own control. This statement directly contradicts the argument of Bruno Bettelheim

⁶ "Grade 2 ELA Domain 4: Greek Myths", EngageNY, New York State Education Department, 2017, www.engageny.org/resource/grade-2-ela-domain-4-greek-myths (accessed 19 August 2017); "§110.13. English Language Arts and Reading, Grade 2, Beginning with School Year 2009–2010", in *Chapter 110: Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills for English Language Arts and Reading Subchapter A. Elementary*, b.2.6.A–B, <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/ch110a.html> (accessed 20 August 2017). The TEKS were adopted in 2007 and have been revised several times since, most recently in June of 2017 for the 2017/18 school year; see also "TEKS Review and Revision", Texas Educational Agency, <http://tea.texas.gov/index2.aspx?id=25769817636> (accessed 20 August 2017).

⁷ "Reading Standards for Literature K–5", in *California Common Core State Standards English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects*, Sacramento, CA: California Department of Education, 2013, 13, <https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/finalelaccsstandards.pdf> (accessed 19 August 2017).

⁸ On mythology in education, see 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.

⁹ Alison Poe, "Fairy-Tale Landscapes in the d'Aulaires *Book of Greek Myths* (1962)", The Classical Association of the Middle West and South (CAMWS), lecture given at the 14th Annual CAMWS Meeting at the University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM, 11–14 April 2018, <https://camws.org/sites/default/files/meeting2018/panels/ChildrenMedia.02.pdf> (accessed 2 May 2020).

in his landmark book, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. It should be observed, however, that his focus was on fairy tales and as such he did not fully consider the opportunities that mythology offers.¹⁰ Bettelheim suggests that myths are unsuitable vehicles for childhood development because of the exceptionalism of the characters and events, but he does not consider the possibilities of adaptation and multiformity, as well as the presence of myth in the modern popular culture.

It is true that the characters of myth are often super-powered demigods and members of royal families, but modern comic-book superheroes with dual identities as heroes and average citizens have prepared the way for characters to be both exceptional and relatable in the minds of today's youth. Likewise, the prevalence of Disney's princess culture insures that royals can be easily relatable, particularly to young American girls. Far from making mythological characters unrelatable, their exceptionalism can be an asset in demonstrating the qualities that resiliency requires. Survivors of trauma at all ages often feel that they are somehow responsible for what has happened to them, either because they deserved to suffer or simply because they did not actively resist hard enough to avoid being mistreated.¹¹ The fact that the characters of myth are often princess or semi-divine beings conveys to young readers that both suffering adversity and being unable to overcome it without outside aid are normal occurrences for all persons. They do not reflect a private weakness and are not a reason to feel ashamed.

Male mythological heroes also appear in modern novels, but they are seldom called upon to show resilience in the face of insuperable tribulations in modern US juvenile fiction. Heroes such as Odysseus and Perseus often lend themselves to exciting tales of adventure, in books with both male and female protagonists. Characterizations of male heroes are used to tell coming-of-age stories about individuals discovering their true powers and conquering, rather than enduring,

¹⁰ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1977 (ed. pr. 1976), 35–41.

¹¹ Edward S. Kubany and Susan B. Watson, "Guilt: Elaboration of a Multidimensional Model", *Psychological Record* 53.1 (2003), 51–90; Edward S. Kubany, Francis R. Abueg, Julie A. Owens, Jerry M. Brennan, Aaron S. Kaplan, and Susan B. Watson, "Initial Examination of a Multidimensional Model of Trauma-Related Guilt: Applications to Combat Veterans and Battered Women", *Journal of Psychopathology and Behavioral Assessment* 17.4 (1995), 353–376, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02229056>; Sabrina Stotz, Thomas Elbert, Veronika Müller, and Maggie Schauer, "The Relationship between Trauma, Shame, and Guilt: Findings from a Community-Based Study of Refugee Minors in Germany", *European Journal of Psychotraumatology* 6.1 (2015), <https://doi.org/10.3402/ejpt.v6.25863>.

adversity. Percy Jackson of Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* series discovers himself to be the son of the god Poseidon and to have the ability to control water. He then goes on a number of quests that culminate in his ultimate defeat of the series' main villain, the Titan Kronos.¹² The same pattern of self-discovery and heroic triumph plays out in Francesca Lia Block's *Love in the Time of Global Warming*, a post-apocalyptic retelling of the *Odyssey* with a female protagonist.¹³ Myths that focus on the fate of ancient male heroes are used to tell stories about young people learning to exercise their agency.¹⁴

Mythical retellings that focus on female characters, on the other hand, tend to have the opposite narrative. In their ancient context, heroines of Greek myth seldom live happily ever after and are hardly ever able to make their own choices. Often, they are victims within their stories, sacrifices either to the gods' will or the hero's plot line. Aphrodite promises Helen of Troy to Paris as a bribe for awarding her the Golden Apple. In some versions of the myth written in the ancient world Helen goes to Troy willingly, in some versions she is kidnapped, but even so the goddess barter away her body long before she, Helen, is aware of Paris's existence. Once Troy is sacked, the women of Troy are allotted to the Greek heroes as war prizes. Ariadne is driven by the gods to love Theseus to ensure that he has the help that he needs to accomplish his quest (killing the Minotaur) only to be left to die by her ungrateful hero. This plot is a common pattern for foreign royal women in ancient mythology; it is repeated in the stories of Medea, Scylla, Dido, and Hypsipyle. The women of myth have little control over their physical persons or even their own emotions. More powerful forces dictate their very feelings, as well as their actions.

Mythical women's very lack of agency makes them excellent vessels to demonstrate psychological resilience, a character trait essential to surviving a metaphorical storm. Many US authors, most of them female, choose to revisit myths of catastrophic hardship from the point of view of female characters. In

¹² Rick Riordan, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, 5 vols., New York, NY: Miramax Books and Hyperion Books for Children, 2005–2009. On this series' protagonist, see the chapter by Michael Stierstorfer, "From an Adolescent Freak to a Hope-Spreading Messianic Demigod: The Curious Transformations of Modern Teenagers in Contemporary Mythopoetic Fantasy Literature (*Percy Jackson, Pirates of the Caribbean, The Syrena Legacy*)", 219–229.

¹³ Francesca Lia Block, *Love in the Time of Global Warming*, New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 2013.

¹⁴ For the use of the myth of Hercules in the context of psychology and autism, see this volume's chapters by Susan Deacy, "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", 251–274, and Edoardo Pecchini, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", 275–325.

spite of their subject matter, the retellings are not tragic in the sense that they focus on the character's suffering. Instead, they concentrate on the ways that female characters survive hardship, both physically and emotionally. In order to tell stories about survivors, rather than victims, the characters use strategies that develop psychological resilience. Such novels provide their young audiences with guides to get through the very real traumas they might face growing up.

Authors who portray mythical heroines surviving trauma do not hide the brutality of the myths from their young audiences but instead demonstrate the horrors of war, murder, slavery, and rape unambiguously but without graphic description. The content differs from more hero-based novelizations of myth, which often conceal the aftermath of battle and cut gendered violence. Occasionally, authors of resilience-focused narratives will even make their didactic purposes clear in afterwards which detail primary source material and explain the rest of the mythic tradition around their chosen subject matter.

Psychological Resilience: Definitions and Strategies

Resilience is the key characteristic necessary for children and teenagers to survive the setbacks of childhood, both minor and major. The term was coined in the 1980s to describe the quality of responding in a positive manner to adverse events, from small temporary setbacks to catastrophic personal trauma. To quote the definition provided by the American Psychological Association (APA):

Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress – such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems or workplace and financial stressors. It means “bouncing back” from difficult experiences.¹⁵

Highly resilient children have the necessary coping mechanisms to recover quickly from adversity and exhibit few risky behaviours later in life, such as using drugs, absenteeism from school, violence, and unsafe sexual practices.¹⁶ One of the strongest predictors of resilience among children and young adults

¹⁵ “Building Your Resilience”, American Psychological Association, 2012, <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/road-resilience.aspx> (accessed 4 August 2019).

¹⁶ Emmy E. Werner and Ruth Smith, *Overcoming the Odds: High Risk Children from Birth to Adulthood*, Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1992, 55–57.

is literacy.¹⁷ Primary and secondary school students who read extensively often have encountered successful coping strategies for adverse events in the course of their reading and are able to apply them to a similar event occurring in real life.¹⁸ As a result of their exposure to stressful situations within the safety of the fictional world, voracious readers recover more quickly after a trauma because they are able to contextualize their experiences and draw connections to fictional characters.¹⁹

Mythical women are particularly useful as didactic models of resilient behaviour because they, like most children, lack agency. Characters such as Helen, Ariadne, and the Trojan women are overmastered by the men in their lives or forced to follow a certain path by uncaring gods. Children and teens are dependent on the adults around them for the basic necessities of life and as such have little personal agency.²⁰ The similarity in the two situations makes Greek mythological heroines ideal for demonstrating positive and productive responses to traumatic situations that are beyond the control of the individual, that is, how to endure and make the best of a bad situation, and then recover quickly from the after-effects.

The APA has suggested a number of strategies that help to build psychological resilience. These recommendations are best practices for improving one's general quality of life. When followed under adversity, these strategies will aid sufferers to minimize psychological trauma even if they find themselves trapped without the physical autonomy to change their situation. The following points are taken from the APA's recommendations, with a paraphrased explanation to clarify their meaning:

¹⁷ Ibidem, 176; Jami Biles Jones, *Helping Teens Cope: Resources for School Library Media Specialists and Other Youth Workers*, Worthington, OH: Linworth Publishing, 2003, 10–11; Nan Henderson, Bonnie Benard, and Nancy Sharp-Light, *Resiliency in Action: Practical Ideas for Overcoming Risks and Building Strength in Youth, Families, and Communities*, Ojai, CA: Resiliency in Action, 2007, 18.

¹⁸ Cecelia Du Toit, *Raising Resilience by Tackling Texts*, Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2012, 106–107; Bonnie Bernard, *Resiliency: What We Have Learned*, San Francisco, CA: WestEd, 2004, 30.

¹⁹ Charlotte S. Huck, Barbara Z. Kiefer, Susan Helper, and Janet Hickman, *Children's Literature in the Elementary School*, Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill, 2004, 439–447; Cathy A. Malchiodi, ed., *Creative Interventions with Traumatized Children*, New York, NY: Guilford Press, 2008, 167–168; Laurie MacGillivray, *Literacy in Times of Crisis: Practices and Perspectives*, New York, NY, and Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, 2–3; Patricia Jean Cianciolo, "Children's Literature Can Affect Coping Behavior", *Personnel & Guidance Journal* 43.9 (1965), 897–898; Walter Sawyer, *Growing Up with Literature*, Albany, NY: Delmar Publishers, 2000, 207–211.

²⁰ Jo Boyden and Gillian Mann, "Children's Risk, Resilience, and Coping in Extreme Situations", in Michael Ungar, ed., *Handbook for Working with Children and Youth: Pathways to Resilience across Cultures and Contexts*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005, 18–19.

1. Build connections, either with a family member or some other member of the individual's community. Social connections are important to prevent feelings of isolation and bolster the individual's sense of self-worth.
2. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems. Instead, seek small ways to improve the situation. Although such measures will not solve a crisis, the resultant sense of agency will improve the individual's psychological well-being.
3. Accept that change is a part of living. Instead of dwelling on the past and the loss of a planned future, focus on productive ways to improve the situation.
4. Move towards your goals. Develop realistic goals, no matter how small, and take some positive step towards accomplishing those goals every day.
5. Take decisive actions. When faced with traumatic or dangerous situations, do not detach from reality. Taking decisive action of some kind will prevent trauma-related paralysis.
6. Look for opportunities for self-discovery. Viewing adverse conditions as a way to gain a better understanding of the self after a crisis focuses attention on the positive rather than the negative.
7. Nurture a positive view of yourself. Focus on admirable traits and accomplishments, however minor, and forgive perceived failings.
8. Keep things in perspective and do not allow traumatic events and adverse conditions to overshadow everything else. Keeping those events and conditions contained to their true importance allows the affected individual to see beyond the immediate adversity.
9. Maintain a hopeful outlook, rather than giving in to fear and giving up on the possibility of survival.
10. Take care of yourself, emotionally and physically.²¹

This article will examine these strategies in four young-adult novels targeted at female readers, and demonstrate how authors use mythic heroines to show readers how to cope with trauma when substantial physical action is impossible. Each novel demonstrates multiple strategies from the APA's list (in bold below). The authors who focus on resilient heroines, rather than victorious protagonists, stay close to the original tragic ends of the myths. However, because the heroines practise resilience-building strategies, the authors can offer an ending where a character will survive her ordeal and eventually recover from it.

²¹ After "Building Your Resilience", American Psychological Association.

Clemence McLaren's Cassandra: Strategies 1, 2, and 3

The first strategy is to **build connections**. Clemence McLaren's *Inside the Walls of Troy* retells the entire Troy tale from Helen's first kidnapping by Theseus until the sack of Troy.²² A young Helen narrates the first third of the novel. This version of the character chafes at her constrained life, but grows up to be a contented wife and queen of Sparta, only to be swept away by Paris. The rest of the novel detailing the myth from Helen's arrival at Troy through the city's sacking is told by the pragmatic, jaded voice of McLaren's Cassandra. Cassandra is a perfect vehicle to explore resilience in a situation without autonomy. As a prophetess, she is constantly aware of terrible forthcoming events, such as storms at sea, earthquakes, and, of course, the Trojan War itself. However, there is nothing that she can do to prevent disaster. While the Cassandra of Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and Euripides' *Trojan Women* is driven insane by both the trauma of the fall of Troy and her own foreknowledge of terrible events, McLaren's Cassandra establishes strong bonds with the members of her family, particularly her twin brother, Helenus, her sisters, Polyxena and Laodice, and even Helen herself. This Cassandra confides her fears and frustrations in her brother, Helenus. His belief eases her sense of helpless isolation, even though they both understand that there is nothing that she can do to prevent her visions from becoming realities (74–79). Cassandra connects with Helen over their shared desire to choose their own husbands and a common feeling of social rejection (95).

Cassandra's resilience is clearest at the end of the novel, right before the Greeks hidden in the wooden horse emerge and begin their sneak attack. She has learned about the plan from Helenus, who had realized that Troy would fall and taken measures to survive. He made a secret agreement to help the Greeks in return for safe conduct for as many of his surviving family members as he could protect. For a moment, Cassandra collapses in the darkness, overwhelmed by the sheer monumentality of the situation (185–186). However, her paralysis is only momentary. Instead of remaining frozen, she chooses instead to take action, to try to bring her sister-in-law, Andromache, to the relative safety of Athena's temple. As a result of her decision, she is able to **avoid seeing the crisis as insurmountable** and once again move to protect herself and others. Instead of breaking under her terror, she is able to think constructively and

²² Clemence McLaren, *Inside the Walls of Troy: A Novel of the Women Who Lived the Trojan War*, New York, NY: Atheneum Books for Young Readers, 1996. All the subsequent references are from this edition.

save Andromache's life. McLaren makes it clear in her epilogue that Helenus will eventually ransom Andromache and the pair will marry, have several children, and live in relative happiness (196).

Although this novel is aimed at children ages twelve and older, the text does not hide the pain that its characters endure.²³ The women of Troy realize that there is nothing they can do to stop the war; rather than try to deny the situation, they **accept that the change in their lives is inevitable** (103–104, 192). Cassandra is well aware that her suitors, brothers, and city will be lost to the Greek invasion. When her prospective husband, Othronus, is killed, she volunteers to wash his body, knowing that it is all that she can do for him. Helen speaks regretfully of the life that the pair could have led together, but Cassandra focuses on the reality of the situation, telling Helen that if she, Helen, wants to help, she should get more oil for anointing the body (114–115).

At the end of the novel, Cassandra is prepared to endure Agamemnon's sexual exploitation, realizing that she cannot save herself (184). Even so, she does not see her current situation as totally insurmountable. Cassandra is aware that there is nothing that she can do to save herself or the other Trojan women from becoming war prizes, but she takes comfort in the knowledge that Helen will protect them to the best of her ability and Helenus will ransom them as soon as he is able (192, 180).

Polyxena seduces Achilles during the book's equivalent of the *Iliad's* ransom scene in order to discover his weakness, then passes the knowledge on to Paris (164–168). Cassandra acknowledges that the Greeks will kill her sister for her role in Achilles' death, just as she acknowledges earlier that she cannot save a catatonic Helen from becoming Deiphobus' chattel after Paris's death (168–170). Yet the text ends not in a destructive battle scene, but with an image of the strength through community. Cassandra and her sisters take sanctuary in the temple of Athena. The sisters stand together, holding hands and comforting each other, finding the strength in their bonds of friendship to endure until their allies can help them (192). It is a realistic portrait of how to survive extreme hardship and have the best chance for a psychological recovery.

²³ Vendor website for *Inside the Walls of Troy* by McLaren, <http://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Inside-the-Walls-of-Troy/Clemence-McLaren/9780689873973> (accessed 2 May 2020).

Caroline Cooney's *Anaxandra*: Strategies 4 and 8

Another novelization of the Troy tale offers additional strategies to develop resilience: **keep things in perspective**. This method of nurturing resilience does not mean that a person should downplay or deny the hardships in his or her situation. Instead, it discourages sufferers from dwelling on their hardships to the point where they seem insurmountable. In Caroline Cooney's book *Goddess of Yesterday*, the main character, *Anaxandra*, is an excellent model of how to keep things in perspective.²⁴ The book retells the beginning of the Troy tale from *Anaxandra's* point of view. At the start of the novel, she is a six-year-old child taken as a hostage to force her family of pirates to pay tribute to the king of Siphnos, *Nicander*. She innocently discloses the location of her father's treasure vault, an underwater cave, and her family loses their wealth to *Nicander's* forces. Her captor tells *Anaxandra* that she has lost her value as a hostage because her father will not want her back after her betrayal, but he takes her to Siphnos as a companion to his paraplegic daughter, *Callisto*. Although *Anaxandra* loses her family, her home, and eventually her freedom of movement as she is confined to the palace *gynaikéion*, she understands that she can still rejoice that she has the ability to move under her own power as *Callisto* cannot (11).

Throughout the book, as she becomes part of *Menelaus'* household, then is taken to Troy as one of *Helen's* slaves, *Anaxandra* lists the names of the kings who have been kind to her, protecting her from harm and treating her as a member of their families: *Nicander* of Siphnos, who treats her as a foster daughter for six years even though she has no value to him; *Menelaus* of Sparta, who saves her when Siphnos is sacked by pirates, and holds the island's wealth in trust as her dowry, even though he had every right to claim it as his own (42–66); *Priam* of Troy, who welcomes her as a princess instead of a slave and incorporates her into his crowd of future daughters-in-law (174). The final king is *Euneus* of Lemnos, who becomes her refuge once she escapes from the conflict at Troy. This short catalogue becomes the refrain of the book, growing longer as *Anaxandra* lives through the beginning of the Trojan War, and forms the final words of the novel: "Truly I have been lucky in my kings. *Nicander*. *Menelaus*. *Priam*. *Euneus*. *O my king*" (254). *Anaxandra* is often scared, depressed, and in physical danger, but she never forgets the positive experiences that she has enjoyed as well.

²⁴ Caroline B. Cooney, *Goddess of Yesterday*, New York, NY: Delacorte Press, 2002. All the subsequent references are from this edition.

More than any other of the heroines mentioned thus far, Anaxandra is able to **move towards her goals**. When Helen decides to take her adolescent daughter, Hermione, and infant son, Pleisthenes, along with her to Troy, Anaxandra takes Hermione's place (129). Through her actions, she saves Hermione from being raped and enslaved. Anaxandra then sets herself the goal of protecting Pleisthenes and freeing him if she can. Paris wants the boy to die, and Helen is too obsessed with her own glory to notice that her baby is in danger. Anaxandra enlists Andromache's help to force Paris to keep his sword out of the child's reach (182–184). She bribes household slaves to take care of him and provides him with food when Paris tries to poison him with mercury (215, 229). In the end, she is able to smuggle the boy out of Troy and return him to his father, Menelaus (246–252). Anaxandra is unable to save her foster family on Siphnos; she cannot prevent the ubiquitous slaughter that Helen causes in her search for adoration or the sack of Troy, but she can and does save one little boy's life. She mourns for her dead friends and lost family, but still manages to accomplish something meaningful. As a result, she comes to peace with her past and is able to focus on her future on Lemnos with her last king, her lover Euneus.

Patrice Kindl's Xenodice: Strategies 4, 7, and 10

The myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, refocused on Cretan princesses rather than on the Athenian prince, offers another opportunity for displaying the qualities that promote resilience. Patrice Kindl's *Lost in the Labyrinth* introduces a new daughter of Minos, named Xenodice.²⁵ She is Ariadne's younger sister and nurtures a secret passion for Daedalus' son, Icarus. Xenodice has a close relationship with her bull-headed brother, here named Asterius, but fears, correctly, that she will not be able to protect him once he reaches adulthood. Although Xenodice is troubled about the future and Ariadne's bullying, she finds the time to **take care of herself**, emotionally. Whenever she is particularly stressed, she visits the palace menagerie and spends time caring for the animals housed there. She describes it as follows:

²⁵ Patrice Kindl, *Lost in the Labyrinth*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. All the subsequent references are from this edition.

I passed the cages of the menagerie, which was almost a second home for me. I spent as much time as I could spare helping Lycia, the chief keeper. I fed the animals, talked to them – I even occasionally did servants' work by mucking out kennels and cages. I was happy there; it was my refuge in good times and bad. (19)

The use of the word refuge and the emphasis on the constancy of the menagerie's role in her psychological well-being indicate that the space is Xenodice's emotional anchor. Its separation from the rest of her life allows her to temporarily withdraw from her sociopolitical obligations to a place where she feels empowered. She is well known to the staff and is adept at caring for the animals. Her time in the menagerie gives her self-confidence and a feeling of control that stands her in good stead when the inevitable events of the myth unfold.

Trapped within the confines of the myth, Xenodice cannot protect those that she loves, but she tries. Throughout the book, she **sets herself practical, attainable goals** to save her loved ones. As a result, she is able to recover from the trauma of losing so many of those she cares about because she knows that she has done everything possible to protect them.

When Theseus arrives, he declares publicly that he has come to kill Asterius and is sentenced to be executed for threatening a member of the royal family. Minos hates Asterius, who is manifestly not his own son, and conspires to free Theseus and help him complete his mission. Ariadne also presents a danger to Asterius when she becomes enamored with the Athenian. After she secretly becomes pregnant, she is desperate to escape from Crete with her lover, whatever the cost to her family. Xenodice sets herself the realistic goal of protecting Asterius with her presence. She knows that neither her father nor her sister would be willing to risk her, Xenodice's, life, so she moves into the Labyrinth with her brother and informs her father that she is guarding him (89–91). Xenodice hopes that her father and sister will force Theseus to leave the island without harming the Minotaur in order to protect her.

Ultimately, she is unsuccessful. Ariadne drugs Xenodice so that she falls asleep. When she wakes up early, her father restrains her to prevent her from intervening in the murder, although he cannot stop her from screaming and raising the alarm. Xenodice does not save her brother, but because of her actions she has the comfort of knowing that she did everything possible to protect him. As a result, she does not feel responsible for his death. Instead, she is able to place the guilt for the crime where it belongs. In fact, when Minos tries to blame her for the violence that night, she does not allow him to shift the responsibility onto

her. Instead, she speculates that when she screamed and woke the palace, she saved the lives of the rest of her family (160–161).

After Theseus escapes, Xenodice once again tries to protect the people that she cares about. She tries to shield Icarus and Daedalus from punishment by claiming publicly that she and not they helped Theseus to escape his prison. When her gambit is unsuccessful and the pair is arrested, she provides them with the materials to make their wings. She actually watches Icarus fall from the sky, but she concludes that his beautiful death at a moment of pure happiness is better for him than the quotidian life that she dreamed of sharing (178–179).

The final chapter is set many years after the tragic events of the Minotaur myth. The older Xenodice who narrates the end has survived the traumatic events of the novel and found happiness in spite of her losses. She forgives herself for her role in Icarus' demise and is happy even though she misses him. Xenodice finds resilience in the source of her earlier self-confidence, the menagerie. She has taken on the sacred role as Mistress of Animals, a priesthood borrowed from the Mesopotamian goddess of the same name. Her main responsibility is to care for the menagerie, a position that she is well qualified to fill. The animals under her care thrive and she expands the collection to include animals not native to Crete (188–189).²⁶ Her success at protecting her charges allows her to **nurture a positive view of herself** in spite of her past failures. She describes her position as "chaste and pure, and much beloved of the Goddess" (187). She has moved beyond the pain of loss and found a new sense of self through her responsibility.

Tracy Barrett's *Ariadne*: Strategies 3, 6, 7, and 9

In another version of the Minotaur myth, Ariadne takes centre stage. She is a future divine queen in a theocratic Knossos in Tracy Barrett's *Dark of the Moon*.²⁷ Her religious beliefs offer her a way to **nurture a positive view of herself** and to **find opportunities for self-discovery**. The book takes its inspiration from the fall of Minoan society to the mainland Mycenaean civilization. This Ariadne's society is in crisis as her mother, Pasiphaë, the living personification of Crete's Mother Goddess, has failed to produce a son other than the Minotaur to act as Ariadne's military leader. The situation becomes critical when Barrett's

²⁶ Out of her proud additions, she mentions a fictional hippogriff, which is struggling to adjust to Crete's climate, and an elephant that is thriving.

²⁷ Tracy Barrett, *Dark of the Moon*, Boston, MA: Harcourt, 2011. All the subsequent references are from this edition.

Pasiphaë dies while Ariadne is still too young to take up the position of living goddess and ruler (172–175). Barrett's Theseus is an illegitimate farmer, whose unexpected arrival in Athens as the king's oldest son is an inconvenience for his royal father, stepmother, and legitimate stepbrother. He is sent off to Knossos to get him out of the way, not to save his countrymen (96–97).

Theseus' arrival is the catalyst which leads to a rebellion and ends Ariadne's matriarchy. Theseus and Ariadne bond not as lovers, but as isolated children of rulers asked to fill positions for which they are totally unprepared. The two manage to escape the coup, but in the process Ariadne loses her position as living vessel for the Mother Goddess, a break that ends the Minoan religion. Her Minotaur brother's death is a mercy killing that spares him a much more painful end when it becomes clear that the pair cannot rescue him (284).

At the end of the novel, Ariadne chooses to remain on Naxos because it was a former holy site in her religion. She makes this choice with a **hopeful outlook**. Ariadne stays to revive her goddess's worship as chief priestess of the island. When she explains her choice to Theseus, she looks forward hopefully to a future where she and the women of the island can build a new faith for her goddess through sharing knowledge (299). In the book's epilogue, she anticipates passing her new role, cobbled together from the remnants of her old religion, on to her daughter even as she acknowledges that it will eventually become obsolete (309–310). This version of Ariadne and the Minotaur emphasizes that even when a person's whole world falls apart, when she loses everything, she can still start again and create a new life for herself, as long as she is willing to let go of the past and **accept that change is a part of living**.

* * *

All of the fictional women mentioned are young, around the age of thirteen for the majority of their stories. All of them lose their homes, their families, their entire way of life, and, in the case of Cooney's Anaxandra and Barrett's Ariadne, their very identities. The lives that these mythical princesses live are very different from the lives of modern girls, but their risky situations are terribly familiar. Anaxandra attempts to protect herself and her foster brother, Pleisthenes, from Helen and Paris, who stand *in loco parentis*. Kindl's Xenodice also discovers that her own father is the greatest danger to her and her brother as he has allied himself with Theseus and enabled the murder of his own children.²⁸ McLaren's Trojan women demonstrate fortitude in the face of sexual assault, a danger that

²⁸ Kindl, *Lost in the Labyrinth*, 150.

affects one in five women in the United States, 60% before the age of fourteen.²⁹ Barrett's Ariadne endures a higher-stakes version of something that all young people must overcome in their lives: she is given a responsibility that is too great for her and she fails, with the result that those she loves suffer the consequences of her failure. Young women and girls are often trapped in similar difficult situations, from catastrophic conditions of domestic abuse to more quotidian consequences of personal failure. Although young women of myth suffer great hardship, they are all able to bounce back, to move on with their lives, and in the process they show the reader how to best recover from such traumatic events.

The heroines of Greek mythology are excellent vehicles for promoting the coping skills necessary to develop resilience and providing a small amount of the support necessary for resilience to grow. Like La Fontaine's reeds, they bend, rather than break, weathering the storms of their myth and surviving to see a new chance to thrive.

²⁹ The United States Department of Justice, "Questions & Answers about Sexual Assault and Sexual Offending", Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Public Website, <https://www.nsopw.gov/en/SafetyAndEducation/QuestionsAndAnswers> (accessed 30 June 2021).

PART IV

Hope after Tragedy



NEW HOPE FOR OLD STORIES: YIYUN LI'S GILGAMESH AND ALI SMITH'S ANTIGONE

Myth may be conceived of and retold as a source of hope for children and young adults, providing them with alternative worlds to live in or ways of working through their own perplexities and sorrows. But children may themselves be envisioned as myth's best hope: fresh readers whose engagement with these stories will grant them continuing life. This investment in children as readers is at the heart of the "Save the Story" series, which offers rewritings of canonical literary works by noted contemporary authors, targeted to child audiences. The series, a venture of the Scuola Holden in Turin, a school for storytelling founded by the writer Alessandro Baricco, is described as "a mission in book form: saving great stories from oblivion by retelling them for a new, younger generation".¹ Originally published in Italian beginning in 2010 and translated into numerous languages, the books have been issued in English since 2013 by Pushkin Children's Books.²

¹ This description appears in a brief account of the series at the end of each volume; see Yiyun Li, *The Story of Gilgamesh*, ill. Marco Lorenzetti, London: Pushkin Children's Books, 2014 (ed. pr. in Italian: *La storia di Gilgamesh*, Roma: Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso, 2011), 102, and Ali Smith, *The Story of Antigone*, ill. Laura Paoletti, London: Pushkin Children's Books, 2013 (ed. pr. in Italian: *La storia di Antigone*, Roma: Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso, 2011), 94. For additional information about the series, we are indebted to Edoardo Pecchini, who made inquiries at the Scuola on our behalf.

² Titles in the series, which has now concluded, include: *The Story of Don Juan* (2013, ed. pr. in Italian 2010) by Alessandro Baricco; *The Story of the Betrothed* (2014, ed. pr. in Italian 2010) by Umberto Eco; *The Story of Cyrano de Bergerac* (2014, ed. pr. in Italian 2010) by Stefano Benni; *The Story of the Nose* (2014, ed. pr. in Italian 2010) by Andrea Camilleri; *The Story of Crime and Punishment* (2014, ed. pr. in Italian 2011) by A.B. Yehoshua; *The Story of Gilgamesh* (2014, ed. pr. in Italian 2011) by Yiyun Li; *The Story of Antigone* (2013, ed. pr. in Italian 2011) by Ali Smith; *The Story of Gulliver* (2013, ed. pr. in Italian 2011) by Jonathan Coe; *The Story of Captain Nemo* (2013, ed. pr. in Italian 2011) by Dave Eggers; *The Story of King Lear* (2014, ed. pr. in Italian 2011) by Melania G. Mazzucco; and not yet available in English, *La storia de La nave dei bambini* (2013, based on Marcel Schwob's *La croisade des enfants*) by Mario Vargas Llosa.

The "Save the Story" series is further identified as "a library of favourite stories from around the world" – a familiar description, versions of which may be found in countless anthologies of tales of different kinds.³ But the list of books in the series is somewhat unusual, reflecting the editors' conviction that children can appreciate any story as long as it is strong, coherent, and well told. Although a few of the stories are rooted in popular tradition, most of them are best known as canonical literary texts. Furthermore, few of them seem to have been chosen with an eye to their obvious appeal to modern children. *Gulliver's Travels* and the novels of Jules Verne are longstanding crossover texts, though children nowadays are less likely to have read them, and they appear in the series as *The Story of Gulliver* and *The Story of Captain Nemo*. But *The Story of King Lear*, *The Story of Crime and Punishment*, *The Story of Don Juan*, and *The Story of the Betrothed* (after *I promessi sposi* by Alessandro Manzoni, ed. pr. 1827) – either because of their grimness or because of their decidedly adult themes – are more surprising in a list ostensibly for middle-grade readers, aged eight to twelve.

In this respect, the "Save the Story" series may seem to resemble other contemporary projects designed to expose children to works of high culture very early: parents can now purchase "BabyLit" board books, such as a version of *Moby Dick* for ages three to five,⁴ and "KinderGuides", which provide illustrated "Early Learning Guides" for children four to eight years old with "story summaries" of works from the *Odyssey* to *On the Road* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.⁵ But while both "BabyLit" and "KinderGuides" stress the educational value of cultural literacy, "Save the Story" puts the pleasure afforded by stories first and makes the children happy instruments of a broader cultural mission.⁶

Seeking to save books by rewriting them is a familiar feature of the history of reception; ancient and medieval allegorization, for example, has provided

³ Li, *The Story of Gilgamesh*, 102; Smith, *The Story of Antigone*, 94.

⁴ Mandy Archer, *Herman Melville's Moby-Dick*, ill. Annabel Tempest, Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2017; "BabyLit" storybooks also include versions of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Huckleberry Finn*, and there is a "BabyLit" series of "primers" apparently for even younger children (e.g., Jennifer Adams, *Little Master Shakespeare: Romeo & Juliet. A Counting Primer*, Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2011).

⁵ Fredrik Colting and Melissa Medina, *KinderGuides Early Learning Guide to Homer's The Odyssey*, ill. Yeji Yun, Los Angeles, CA: Moppet Books, 2017.

⁶ This concern with the survival of stories is distinct from (although it may coincide with) the use of traditional stories to reinforce cultural norms for children, cited as the primary function of re-told stories in John Stephens and Robyn McCallum, *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*, New York, NY: Garland, 1998.

such diverse works as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the *Song of Songs* with morally and theologically acceptable meanings, enabling their survival and their place in a particular canon. In most such instances, to save the story from rejection or oblivion is also to save the reader from unappealing or potentially harmful content. And no readers are so likely to be seen as requiring this kind of protection as child readers, for whose sake traditional stories of all kinds have not only been simplified but have regularly been rewritten to avoid or obscure content that adults feel children should not be exposed to. In the case of "Save the Story", the goal is rather to make literary Classics as accessible and appealing as possible to the child readers who are envisioned as their saviours, who will play the redemptive role often attributed to children by saving these books from the effects of time rather than from their unacceptable contents. Inevitably, the results are often similar, as many of the changes introduced by the retellers reflect an obvious and familiar adult impulse to shield children from distressing outcomes or explicit sexuality. But because the authors recruited for this series are not otherwise children's writers, and because they have the particular goal of turning their readers into storytellers, the "Save the Story" books do not always follow predictable patterns of children's literature.⁷

In this chapter, we discuss the two books in the "Save the Story" series that retell ancient myths: *The Story of Gilgamesh* (2014, Italian ed. 2011) by Yiyun Li and *The Story of Antigone* (2013, Italian ed. 2011) by Ali Smith.⁸ Even in their earliest versions, these myths have associations with distinct literary genres, epic in the case of *Gilgamesh* and tragedy in the case of *Antigone*, which determine the kinds of children's stories they lend themselves to and the particular revisionary strategies adopted by their authors.

⁷ The authors in the series were left free to retell the stories as they wished and in their own voice, subject only to restrictions of length: every book is approximately 9,000 words and is divided into ten chapters, each suitable for five minutes of bedtime reading.

⁸ Yiyun Li (b. 1972) is a Chinese-American writer, the author of novels, short-story collections, and a memoir; her work explores experiences of loss, of complex and often damaged connections with other people, of failed expectations, and of our relationship to language and to literature. In one of her novels, *Where Reasons End* (2019), a mother speaks with the son she has lost to suicide. Ali Smith (b. 1962) is a Scottish playwright, novelist, and short-story writer whose intricately structured, non-linear narratives play with the boundaries of time and place and the line between life and death. Her most recent works, *Autumn* (2016), *Winter* (2017), *Spring* (2019), and *Summer* (2020), form a series that probes the current state of British life and politics.

Gilgamesh as Special Child

Gilgamesh is the oldest story in the "Save the Story" series, but it entered the Western canon only after its discovery in the middle of the nineteenth century, and has become a part of the tradition of myths retold for children more recently still, with a number of illustrated storybook versions in the past fifty years.⁹ Li does not, therefore, evoke (as retellers of Graeco-Roman myth have regularly done) the importance of the myth in the European cultural tradition or its long familiarity, and she is in any case careful not to assume any particular cultural context for her audience: "Gilgamesh", she says, "lived in a different time and possibly a different place than you and I".¹⁰ Instead, Li seeks to carry out her mission by showing that what appears to be "old and foreign" (7) is actually familiar – by treating *Gilgamesh* as the story of a child who (as he grows up) gradually learns to control himself, to make friends, and to confront violence, loss, and death;¹¹ by instructing her young readers in how to understand the story and addressing them directly and personally; and by making them partners in the story's transmission.

Li's version leaves the narrative itself – if it is fair to speak of such an entity given the original's multiple and fragmentary sources – essentially intact, and follows a standard version of the epic.¹² Gilgamesh is a young king with partly divine parentage whose unconstrained power dismays his people and leads them to appeal to the gods; in response, the gods create Enkidu, a wild man who is gradually civilized and becomes first Gilgamesh's rival and then his beloved friend. Together the two of them journey to the Cedar Forest, where they fight and kill the monster Humbaba, who curses them before he dies. The goddess

⁹ See Bernarda Bryson, *Gilgamesh: Man's First Story*, ill. Reg Down, Sacramento, CA: Pied Piper Press, 2012 (ed. pr. 1967); Ludmila Zeman's volumes: *Gilgamesh the King*, Toronto: Tundra, 1992; *The Revenge of Ishtar*, Toronto: Tundra, 1993; *The Last Quest of Gilgamesh*, Toronto: Tundra, 1995; Geraldine McCaughrean, *Gilgamesh the Hero*, ill. David Parkins, Grand Rapids, MI, and Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002; Ann-Margret "Maggie" Yonan, *Gilgamesh*, ill. Linda Kass, trans. Youab I. Yonan, ed. Tobia Giwargis, n.p.: Xlibris, 2008; Nate Phillips, *King Gilgamesh and the Cedar Forest: An Adaptation of the Epic of Gilgamesh*, n.p.: Amazon Kindle, 2017.

¹⁰ Li, *The Story of Gilgamesh*, 7. All the quotations in this chapter are from the 2014 English edition.

¹¹ In Phillips, *King Gilgamesh and the Cedar Forest*, Gilgamesh and other characters are depicted as children throughout; Ishtar is a "neighbor girl" (17) who wants to play, and Enkidu's descent to the Underworld is "known to most kids as 'grounded to his room'" (21).

¹² See Jeffrey H. Tigay, *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982; *The Babylonian Gilgamesh Epic*, ed. A.R. George, 2 vols., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Ishtar falls in love with Gilgamesh, who rejects her; furious, she sends the Bull of Heaven against him, but he kills it too. Soon after, Enkidu falls ill and dies; Gilgamesh is overwhelmed both by grief and by the fear of death, and sets forth on a quest for immortality, travelling to visit Utnapishtim, the survivor of the great flood, and the only mortal ever made immortal. This quest is fruitless, and Gilgamesh returns home to Uruk.

Li's version includes predictable modifications for its young audience; she rids the text to some extent of taboo elements and puzzling narrative or linguistic features. The prostitute who is the chief instrument of Enkidu's initial acculturation is here described as a priestess, and she and Enkidu do nothing more than walk hand in hand and kiss "as lovers do" (21).¹³ The odd genealogical arithmetic that makes Gilgamesh two-thirds god and one-third man is omitted, and the repeated formula in which his face is "like a traveler's from afar"¹⁴ has been replaced by less mysteriously evocative comparisons. The narrative provides more explanations, and characters' emotions are more fully described and explicated than in the original. Gilgamesh's mother does not just predict the coming of a powerful friend who will rescue him and whom he will love like a woman; she describes in distinctly modern terms what a friend is:

A true friend, Ninsun said, shares your joys and happiness, and comforts you when you are sad. He helps you clear your mind when you feel indecisive, and he protects you when dangers catch you unprepared. A true friend is a companion of your heart. (15)

And when she later adopts Enkidu, we are given not just the significant fact of the adoption but also Enkidu's emotional response:

Tears came to Enkidu's eyes. As an orphan, he had never known a mother's warmth, but now he no longer felt like an abandoned child. He had a mother and a brother. (34)

It is in the opening sections of the book that Li most strikingly configures her story for child readers, first replacing the prologue of the epic with a quite different prologue of her own. The *Gilgamesh* epic simply tells, and does not explain:

¹³ In other versions for children she is a priestess (Bryson, *Gilgamesh: Man's First Story*); a singer (Zeman, *Gilgamesh the King*); a dancing girl (McCaughrean, *Gilgamesh the Hero*); and "the priestess of love" (Yonan, *Gilgamesh*).

¹⁴ Trans. after *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, ed. and trans. Benjamin R. Foster, New York, NY, and London: Norton, 2001, 72.

He who saw the wellspring, the foundations of the land,
Who knew [...], was wise in all things,
Gilgamesh, who saw the wellspring, the foundations of the land,
Who knew [...], was wise in all things,
[He ...] throughout,
Full understanding of it all he gained,
He saw what was secret and revealed what was hidden,
He brought back tidings from before the flood,
From a distant journey came home, weary, at peace,
Engraved all his hardships on a monument of stone,
[Description of the city]
[Search out] the foundation box of copper,
[Release] its lock of bronze,
Raise the lid upon its hidden contents,
Take up and read from the lapis tablet
Of him, Gilgamesh, who underwent many hardships.¹⁵

Li carefully frames the story for young modern readers, identifying time and setting:

This is a story about how a child with an extraordinary yet destructive power became a man of wisdom and strength. This child, like you, had a very special name: Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh lived in a different time and possibly a different place than you and I: he lived about 4,800 years ago, which makes his story sound old – ancient, even. He lived in a city called Uruk, which, if you look on a map, you will find in Iraq, a country full of stories that are never-ending. But if you think that Gilgamesh’s story is an old and foreign one, I can guarantee you that it’s not. Read on, and you will find that his story is not unlike the stories of your parents and grandparents, your aunts or uncles, or your favourite teacher. One day you yourself, as a grownup of wisdom and strength, may remember Gilgamesh’s story; you may realize then that it is not unlike your own or your best friend’s, and you may want to tell the story to your children, just as I am doing now. So here we begin. (7)

Li not only presents the ancient epic as an account of maturation from childhood to adulthood, thus transforming the story of a man into the story of a child, but also at once acknowledges and denies the exoticism and antiquity

¹⁵ Ibidem, 3.

first of the hero's name and then of his story. The name Gilgamesh is described not as foreign or antiquated but as "special"; it is, however, no more special than the reader's own. Gilgamesh lived about 4,800 years ago, but his story is neither old nor foreign; it resembles the stories of adults close to the reader. Li's "read on" recalls the closing words of the epic's prologue, in which readers are told to "take up and read from the lapis tablet", and similarly points to the perpetuation of Gilgamesh's story, but here both the lapis tablet and the act of reading itself are displaced by the familiar childhood scenario of storytelling: readers may eventually come to realize that this story is "not unlike" their own, and may want to tell it to their own children, as Li (we now learn) is telling it to hers. This last supposition – that the author-narrator is addressing her own child as well as children in general – is, of course, a longstanding trope in children's fiction, found (for example) in Charles Kingsley's *The Heroes* (1855), one of the earliest retellings of myths as children's stories, which like Li's book is dedicated to his own children, and which begins with the words "My Dear Children".¹⁶

We find another evocation of the familiar in the opening of the story proper, which sounds far more like a fairy tale or a classical myth retold for children than like the beginning of the story in our sources, which plunges directly into formulaic praise of the hero: "Surpassing all kings, for his stature renowned / offspring of Uruk, a charging wild bull".¹⁷ Li begins: "In a great old city called Uruk there lived a young king, Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh's father was King Lugalbanda, and his mother was the goddess Ninsun, so divine blood flowed through Gilgamesh's veins" (11). After introducing Gilgamesh as a "young king", Li again describes him as a child:

As a special child (*but what child is not special?* you may ask, and it is very true that all children are special), so – like you and your friends, Gilgamesh was smart and handsome and strongly built, a perfect child in his parents' eyes. (11)

Here Li transforms Gilgamesh's notable qualities in the epic, where he is "perfect in strength" and "uncannily perfect"¹⁸ into the characteristics of a "special

¹⁶ Charles Kingsley, *The Heroes, or, Greek Fairy Tales for My Children*, Cambridge: Macmillan, 1859 (ed. pr. 1855), vii. This trope mimics those instances in which a book actually has its origin in stories told to the author's child or to a child known to the author (e.g., Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, Rudyard Kipling's *Just So Stories*).

¹⁷ *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, 4.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

child", who is, after all, no more special than he is foreign or ancient, since all children – like their names – are special, and perfect only in their parents' eyes. She thus makes of Gilgamesh not only a child, but any child, or every child: his unique qualities and his quasi-divinity are subordinated to the need to connect him with the young reader.

In what follows, the arrogant and violent behaviour that upsets the people of Uruk at the outset of the epic is assimilated to a child's temper tantrum:

[S]ometimes things go wrong at playtime: a boy will hurl his favourite robot across the room, or a girl will tear her favourite paper princess into pieces. This is not because they don't love their possessions. [...] Often, children's minds are not experienced enough to know when their egos are growing out of bounds and harming others and themselves. (11–12)

Just as children who cannot control themselves may destroy their favourite possessions, so Gilgamesh, even when he is no longer a child but a young king, feels "something wild and unruly expanding in his heart"; unable to identify or express what he lacks, he throws tantrums, "kicking or trampling on anything that is in his way" (13). The illustrations by Marco Lorenzetti complement this vision of the hero: we first see Gilgamesh as an angry child (Fig. 1), dismaying an adult by dropping and breaking a toy horse, and then as an older but still beardless young king (Fig. 2), to whom adult citizens must now bow down, but who is still acting like a child, pulling a cat's tail so that it knocks over a bucket of water.

Lorenzetti's illustration actually mitigates the violence of Li's text, in which the continuation of the playroom metaphor leads to an image of horrific but surreal and almost cartoonish cruelty:

Worse, he took small boys from their fathers and threw them around like a child throws his toy robots. This hurt the children, but their crying and screaming only made Gilgamesh bolder and crueler, and he began snatching young girls from their mothers, taking them home with him and ripping them apart like helpless paper princesses. (13–14)

In the opening sequences of the book, then, Li has used several strategies to bring the story closer to her imagined child reader: she familiarizes the ancient and foreign; she provides a storybook opening; she makes the young king a child, special to his parents like all children, but given to tantrums

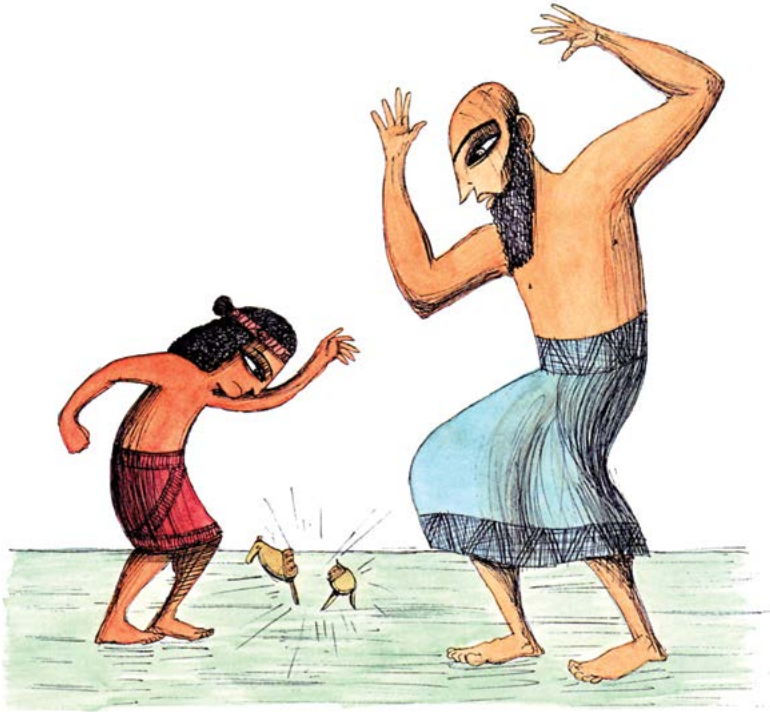


Figure 1: Gilgamesh as an angry child dismaying an adult, illustration by Marco Lorenzetti from Yiyun Li, *The Story of Gilgamesh*, London: Pushkin Children's Books, 2014, 10. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

of a destructive kind that persist into young adulthood. In what follows, Gilgamesh will grow up, find the friend who fulfils the need he did not understand, love and lose that friend, and ultimately learn to live with death and loss, rule wisely, and treat his people "with love and fairness" (89). But Li does not simply leave it to the reader to understand this archaic story – slightly transformed – as a hopeful account of maturation, friendship, and self-mastery: she frames her account by letting the reader know from the beginning just how it is to be understood, in what is almost a kind of allegorization.

The guidance Li offers the reader is associated with another strategy: her narrator regularly addresses the child reader as an individual, sometimes suggesting that the two of them are engaged in a conversation. This conversation begins in the prologue with the words: "This child, like you, had a very special name", and continues as the narrator links herself with the reader by the words "you and I" and speaks to the reader of "your" family members and friends (7).



Figure 2: Gilgamesh as young king, illustration by Marco Lorenzetti from Yiyun Li, *The Story of Gilgamesh*, London: Pushkin Children's Books, 2014, 13. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

In a passage from the opening section of the story, quoted above, Li then stages a dialogue between narrator and reader, followed by a further declaration of resemblance between Gilgamesh and "you", the reader:

As a special child (*but what child is not special?* you may ask, and it is very true that all children are special), – so, like you and your friends, Gilgamesh was smart and handsome and strongly built, a perfect child in his parents' eyes. (11)

Finally, as Li embarks on her comparison between Gilgamesh and a small child given to tantrums, she again suggests a conversation between narrator and child reader. The narrator asks questions ("Have you ever seen a small child exploring the same toy chest with fresh interest every day?", 11); offers explanations ("That is because in a child's mind the toys don't grow old", 11); anticipates and responds to a question from the reader ("[I]f you don't know the meaning of the word *ego*, it comes from Latin, and it means self", 12); and implies that she is in cahoots with the listening child ("Here's a secret for you: even some grownups don't know how to control their egos", 12).

As the story continues, such interaction diminishes, but on two more occasions the narrator addresses the reader both directly and affectionately, once when the elders of Uruk try unsuccessfully to dissuade Gilgamesh from attacking Humbaba ("Now here's something you may or may not know, my dear reader", 32), and once at the conclusion of the story ("Now my dear, this is the story of Gilgamesh", 90).

This kind of direct address, with the occasional suggestion of dialogue, is a familiar if old-fashioned feature of children's books.¹⁹ In places, however, Li's way of talking to children seems to reveal a kind of slippage in the addressee between child and adult. When in the opening of the story the narrator envisions the child as asking "what child is not special?", this seems a rather unchildlike question, not only in its wording but in its content: children are arguably quite ready to believe they themselves are special – or, conversely, that other children whom they admire or envy are special. It is adults who issue formulae of the sort in which Li's narrator concurs: all children are special.

We find a similar slippage in the explication of children's tantrums. Although the narrator is ostensibly addressing the child reader, she seems rather to be talking *about* children to someone who is not a child – or at least, not a small child. And although the explanation of the word "ego" may recall Lem-ony Snicket's recurrent definitions ("a word which here means..."), it is not at all clear what the term "ego" – simply defined as self – has to offer a child reader presumably ignorant of any larger context of use.

In these passages Li seems both to address readers as children and to ascribe to them or share with them adult views of children, thus granting them a kind of precocity, or distinguishing them from *small* children, or treating them as adults: these moves suggest a strategic crossing of boundaries that combines a kind of flattery (underscored by the parenthetical shared secret with which the second of these passages concludes) with a nudge in the direction of adulthood.

Such a strategy would be in keeping with a reading of children's literature (articulated, for example, in Perry Nodelman's *The Hidden Adult*)²⁰ as regularly incorporating adult perspectives on childhood, in part to change child readers and move them towards a more adult understanding. But the slippage in Li's

¹⁹ On changing relationships between narrator and addressee in children's fiction, see esp. Barbara Wall, *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction*, Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991.

²⁰ See Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, esp. 206–214, on readers' double awareness and their experience of being both implied child reader and implied adult reader.

rhetoric also reflects a complication she herself introduces into this project. Consider again the end of the prologue:

Read on, and you will find that [Gilgamesh's] story is not unlike the stories of your parents and grandparents, your aunt or uncles, or your favourite teacher. One day you yourself, as a grownup of wisdom and strength, may remember Gilgamesh's story; you may realize then that it is not unlike your own or your best friend's, and you may want to tell the story to your children, just as I am doing now. (7)

It is not at all obvious what it means to say that readers will see the story of Gilgamesh as "not unlike" the stories of the adults in their lives, but the implication seems to be that as children – in spite of Li's efforts to make the story child-friendly, to portray Gilgamesh as a child, and to explicate his story as a story of growing up – they will see this as a story about adults, and thus not fully theirs. It is not until they are themselves adults (or rather, since Li maintains the child's point of view here, *grown-ups*) of wisdom and strength like Gilgamesh that they will actually be able to understand the story as "not unlike" the story of their own life. We find a similar acknowledgement of deferred understanding in a passage that precedes the journey to the Cedar Forest:

Now here's something you may or may not know, my dear reader. Many times in life, others have wise things to say to us, but knowing how to listen requires special wisdom. This special wisdom cannot be given as a gift by others, but has to be gained from experience. Gilgamesh, being young, did not have that wisdom yet. (32)

The point here is not simply that there is wisdom we cannot learn from others, but only from experience, an idea Li repeats in her afterword ("Where Did This Story Come From"):

Gilgamesh's pursuit of immortality leads to little success, though his journey to find the secret of perpetual life from Utnapishtim makes him grow into a wise man. The same journey has been repeated in generations of individual lives, a quest that each one of us has to go through rather than relying on others' wisdom and teaching. (22–23)

Instead, the narrator is sharing with her "dear reader" the somewhat more complicated idea that the capacity to learn from others is *itself* the product

of experience and thus not available to the young. This calls into question the possibility that the very wisdom shared here can be understood by child readers, who must grow up as Gilgamesh did before they can really understand the story they are reading.

The passages on which we have focused here, prominent in their placement, though insignificant in proportion to the narrative as a whole, both offer to assist the reader's understanding and question the possibility of such understanding before adulthood. Li's version of this story encourages the reader to see Gilgamesh as a child and thus to identify with him, and to read the epic as a children's storybook, but also to develop an adult's awareness of the need to become something other than a child in order to understand Gilgamesh's story and to retell it. At the end of Li's prologue, identification with Gilgamesh as child and as a "grownup of wisdom and strength" gives way to a prospective identification with the author: "you may want to tell the story to your children, just as I am doing now" (7).

But Li's Gilgamesh is himself an author, and one of the central points of elaboration in her narrative comes at the conclusion of his story, after his return to Uruk as a "mature man, with calm wisdom in his eyes and a steadiness in his body":

[W]hen he had accomplished all he wanted, he sat down and wrote out his life's adventures on twelve tablets made of lapis lazuli. He told the story of his youth, not concealing the wrong he had done to his people; he told the story of his adventures with Enkidu and, while doing so, he smiled through his tears because the memory once again warmed his heart. He recounted his suffering over losing Enkidu and his fear of death: and he told of his quest for immortality and eternal youth, which did not bring him what he had been looking for, but had given him something better. Wisdom he had gained from his experiences, and wisdom he shared on these tablets for all to read. (89–90)

Other retellers of this story for children mitigate Gilgamesh's failure to escape death by drawing the reader's attention to his fame, his many accomplishments, or the children through whom he lives on, or (most outlandishly) by having him marry Ishtar and live "happily ever after".²¹ For Li, what Gilgamesh gains in compensation ("something better") for his failure is wisdom, but

²¹ Bryson, *Gilgamesh: Man's First Story*; Zeman, *The Last Quest of Gilgamesh*; McCaughrean, *Gilgamesh the Hero*; Yonan, *Gilgamesh*.

storytelling is central to both the acquisition and the sharing of wisdom. Gilgamesh thus joins Li in writing and interpreting his story, and in modelling for the reader not only maturation but also authorship, the two further entwined in Li's closing words to the reader: "One day, when you are old enough, would you do me a favour and tell this story to your children?" (90).

In her emphasis on the deferral of understanding Li reminds her young readers that there are things in this story that they cannot yet grasp. But when she makes her final request, she seems to hope that rather than turning as adults, now equipped to understand, to the assembled fragments of the *Gilgamesh* epic, her dear readers will grow up to tell the story she has told them. This vision seems rooted in a childhood desire Li describes in her 2017 memoir, *Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life*, a work preoccupied with relationships between writers, readers, and books. As a twelve-year-old, Li tells us, she became infatuated with a particular book, and longed to be a contemporary of the writer, someone who lived in the writer's own day, "as though it would have changed the course of the book's life, or, even, the poetess's life". With what she now envisions as "bravery and naïveté", she wished "to find a place in an author's life and make a difference to a book's fate".²² In *The Story of Gilgamesh*, Li engages in a kind of dual fulfilment of this wish. She herself finds a place in the unknown author's life and distant times by taking that author's place, and thus changes the course of the book's life; at the same time, she befriends her child readers, addressing them both as children and as the adults they will become, and invites them to join her in making a difference to this book's fate.

Greek Tragedy for Modern Children

Ali Smith's *The Story of Antigone* aims to save a story that can hardly be considered endangered, coming as it does from a canonical Greek tragedy – Sophocles' *Antigone* – that has been frequently read, referred to, and reworked in modern and contemporary culture. Like a number of books in the series, this adaptation aims to secure the particular durability of stories first met in childhood for a work that is well known but not, in any conventional or straightforward sense, suitable for children. *Antigone* offers the possibility of a young protagonist, but her cruel

²² Yiyun Li, *Dear Friend, from My Life I Write to You in Your Life*, New York, NY: Random House, 2017, 86.

and unjust early death means that she can hardly serve, as Gilgamesh does in Li's retelling, as a model for a child reader on the path to adult understanding. Another of the "Save the Story" authors, Melania Mazzucco, articulates her sense of the incompatibility between a young person's tragic death and a story for children in the afterword to her *The Story of King Lear*. There she explains why she has chosen to tell a version of the Lear story, reminiscent of the adaptation by Nahum Tate that was regularly performed from the late seventeenth to the mid-nineteenth century, in which Antigone's Shakespearean counterpart, Cordelia (Lear's loyal daughter who is cruelly murdered by his enemies), is allowed to live. The author explains that she has learned this "truer" alternative version from Edgar (the thoughtful young man who is one of the play's few survivors and who marries Cordelia in Tate's version); he has persuaded her to tell it by insisting that "growing up – in other words, gaining experience and understanding human nature – is the point of life", and therefore it is essential to relate that "Cordelia grows up, just as I do. She suffers and struggles, and eventually she becomes a woman".²³

With its themes of incest, kin-killing, and suicide in addition to the early death of its heroine, *Antigone* could be said to epitomize the unsuitability of Greek myths found in tragedy for child audiences. This issue was highlighted by the pioneering American author Nathaniel Hawthorne at the outset of the long tradition of retelling Greek myths for young readers. In a programmatic statement in his 1853 collection *Tanglewood Tales*, Hawthorne lays out the problem:

These old legends, so brimming over with everything that is most abhorrent to our Christianized moral sense – some of them so hideous, others so melancholy and miserable, amid which the Greek Tragedians sought their themes, and moulded them into the sternest forms of grief that ever the world saw; – was such material the stuff that children's playthings should be made of! How were they to be purified? How was the blessed sunshine to be thrown into them?²⁴

²³ Melania G. Mazzucco, *The Story of King Lear*, London: Pushkin Children's Books, 2014 (ed. pr. in Italian: *La storia di Re Lear*, Roma: Gruppo Editoriale L'Espresso, 2011), 100.

²⁴ Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Tanglewood Tales for Girls and Boys", in Nathaniel Hawthorne, *Tales and Sketches*, ed. Roy Harvey Pearce, New York, NY: Library of America, 1982 (ed. pr. 1853), 1310. On Hawthorne, see Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 22–45.

Even though Antigone represents an especially sympathetic and memorable young protagonist, she rarely appears in the countless versions of Greek mythology suitably purified and infused with sunshine for child audiences that have been produced since Hawthorne's time. Hawthorne himself makes no use of her, despite the fact that he goes out of his way to introduce girl characters into the myths, inventing a young daughter for King Midas and turning mythical grown women like Persephone and Pandora into girls. Notably, it is myth retellers with a strongly Christian bent who find Antigone most congenial, because she can be portrayed as a self-sacrificing, proto-Christian martyr. She figures prominently in this way in several mid-nineteenth-century British texts: J.M. Neale's *Stories from Heathen Mythology and Greek History: For the Use of Christian Children* (1847) and two works by Charlotte Yonge, *A Book of Golden Deeds* (1864), where she is paired with Alcestis, and *Aunt Charlotte's Stories of Greek History for the Little Ones* (1876). Both writers stress Antigone's devoted service to her old father, Oedipus, whose terrible acts are vaguely glossed as "a grievous crime"²⁵ or "the sins of his youth",²⁶ and both introduce the idea that by burying Polynices Antigone makes it possible for his soul to enter the Underworld and find eternal rest. Neale especially stresses that she too finds eternal rest as she joins him there. Her death is a willing sacrifice for the sake of lofty principles, which shows that – as Yonge puts it – even the heathens "saw and knew the glory of self-devotion".²⁷ A pagan myth is salvaged by making it a story about salvation.

But for subsequent writers seeking to depict ancient girl heroines who are not martyrs, Antigone is not a promising subject. This point is made by Virginia Woolf in her novel *The Years* (1937), in which she uses Antigone as a way of commenting on the stifled nature of girls' lives in Victorian and Edwardian England in general, and their exclusion from classical learning in particular. In an episode set in 1907, Sarah Pargiter sleepily leafs through Sophocles' play, in a translation made by a male cousin who has the advantage of knowing Greek. She arrives at the end:

She was buried alive. The tomb was a brick mound. There was just room for her to lie straight out. Straight out in a brick tomb, she said. And that's the end, she yawned, shutting the book.

²⁵ J.M. Neale, *Stories from Heathen Mythology and Greek History: For the Use of Christian Children*, London: Joseph Masters, 1847, 98.

²⁶ Charlotte M. Yonge, *A Book of Golden Deeds of All Times and All Lands*, Glasgow and Bombay: Blackie & Son, 1864, 13.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, 11.

As Sarah goes to sleep in her comfortable bed, she too is buried alive:

She laid herself out, under the cool smooth sheets, and pulled the pillow over her ears. The one sheet and the one blanket fitted softly round her. At the bottom of the bed was a long stretch of cool fresh mattress. [...] The book fell on the floor. She was asleep.²⁸

It is only in recent decades that developments in children's literature have created a context in which the story of Antigone can easily find a place. As many of the works discussed in this volume attest, it is now increasingly assumed that "melancholy and miserable" subjects should be faced rather than avoided in children's literature and especially in the relatively new category of young adult literature, which takes on formerly taboo topics involving sexuality, violence, and unconventional family circumstances, with the idea that adolescents should be given ways of thinking through tragic themes rather than being shielded from them. Meanwhile, literature for children and young adults has increasingly engaged in forms of revisionist myth-making: traditional stories are reappropriated and the inner lives of ancient characters – particularly characters, like girls, who are marginalized in the ancient sources – are freely imagined, in ways that resonate with contemporary values. So a number of recent versions of Antigone's story deliberately set themselves against Sophocles' version while assimilating the experiences of Antigone and her sister, Ismene, to those of modern girls. For example, Coreena McBurnie's *Prophecy* (2015, the first volume in the series "Antigone: The True Story") is a tell-all first-person narrative that begins with Antigone critiquing the poetic tradition, in which "inconvenient facts are overlooked or buried as irrelevant details" and going on to explain that "[t]he all-powerful Olympian gods inspired the brilliant playwright Sophocles to write about me in a way that would distort the truth and protect their vanity".²⁹ She tells instead a story in which she is an independent spirit, gifted with prophecy, who has difficulty meeting conventional expectations for girls and falls in love with Haemon instead of the approved husband selected for an arranged marriage; this instalment ends where *Oedipus the King* does, with Antigone setting off with her father, disillusioned with the gods for what they have done to her family, and parting from Haemon, who declares his love and promises: "I'll always be here for you" (227). In Natalie Haynes's *The Children*

²⁸ Virginia Woolf, *The Years*, ed. Hermione Lee, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992 (ed. pr. 1937), 130–131.

²⁹ Coreena McBurnie, *Prophecy*, "Antigone: The True Story" 1, n.p.: Flaming Nora Press, 2015, 7.

of *Jocasta* (2017), a recent work for adults that is also well suited to young adult readers, as Edith Hall discusses in her contribution to this volume, the author grants subjectivity and agency to Jocasta and Ismene while, as she herself puts it, “playing extremely fast and loose with [the] story”.³⁰

With its goal of saving rather than dismantling Sophocles’ classic version, Ali Smith’s retelling does not involve any such wholesale revision. Smith preserves not only Sophocles’ story, but also his form. Far from entering into the minds of Antigone or Ismene, she exposes her readers to those characters in the same way that Sophocles does: they are seen from the outside, known only through what they say out loud, in the same sequence of scenes that makes up the play. Smith loosely translates Sophocles’ dialogue into a less formal, more contemporary idiom. So when Antigone and Ismene first appear, they are already in the middle of a conversation:

“Because we’re *sisters*,” the younger one was saying. “Because of us being the same *blood*.”³¹

Antigone’s words here convey the same stress on sisterhood and family solidarity and the same expectations of Ismene as does the more stylized address with which she opens Sophocles’ play: ὦ κοινὸν αὐτάδελφον Ἴσμήνης κάρᾳ (v. 1), or, in Robert Fagles’s translation, “My own flesh and blood – dear sister, dear Ismene”.³²

But however closely Smith follows the contours of Sophocles’ original, her book is nonetheless very much an adaptation, which transforms the original through innovations that are both modernizing and designed to make a Greek tragedy into a story for children – although not necessarily with Hawthorne’s goals of purifying the ancient myth and making it sunnier. This discussion will highlight in particular three ways in which Smith gives *Antigone* the characteristics of a children’s book while aligning it with themes that she also pursues in her fiction for adults: the use of animals as focalizing intermediaries between the human actors and the book’s audience; parodic lampooning of serious features of classical culture; and the close integration of text and illustrations.

³⁰ Natalie Haynes, *The Children of Jocasta*, London: Mantle, 2017, 331; Edith Hall, “Our Greek Tragic Hope: Young Adults Overcoming Family Trauma in New Novels by Natalie Haynes and Colm Tóibín”, 371–385.

³¹ Smith, *The Story of Antigone*, 15. All the quotations in this chapter are from the 2013 English edition.

³² Sophocles, *The Three Theban Plays*, trans. Robert Fagles, London: Penguin, 1984 (ed. pr. 1982), 59.

Smith's most striking innovation is to present Sophocles' play as a series of human actions observed by animals. Her main character is a sharp-eyed crow, who has been following the doings of the Thebans for many years and who helps to explain what is going on to a less well-informed young dog. The book opens with the she-crow flying across the early morning sky, settling on one of the seven gates of Thebes, and looking down on the battlefield; both her thoughts, which are reported, and her explanations to the dog provide the contextualizing information that a modern reader needs to understand the events of the play. So once Antigone appears, we enter the crow's mind: "Well, well. Princess Antigone. She'd been the one who was so kind to Oedipus, the blind man. The man who'd once been king. Her father. She'd been her father's eyes, that girl, till he died" (16).

By using animal protagonists, Smith gives her adaptation a feature that is widespread in children's books and rare in books for adults, but these animals are not the innocent and cuddly child stand-ins of much children's literature, but rather representatives of the dogs and birds to which Polynices' corpse is consigned by Creon in a gesture of punitive dishonour.³³ Smith's crow (who owes her origin in part to the Scottish ballad "Twa Corbies", in which two crows discuss their plans to eat a fallen knight) is a matter-of-fact, unapologetic scavenger of human flesh. The reflection on Antigone quoted above continues: "She'd been her father's eyes, that girl, till he died (after which point, of course, eyes are nothing *but* food specifically for crows)".

Smith's animal focalizer introduces a defamiliarizing perspective on human behaviour that calls into question a central tenet of the world in which Antigone's story unfolds: the clear boundary between human and animal that makes Polynices' exposure to animal predators so demeaning. From Smith's posthuman perspective, that is just one of several boundaries that should be seen as fluid and permeable, along with those between past and present and between the living and the dead. Her crow resembles the dead observers of the living who figure in several of her adult novels; she even shares with one of them a term for living people: "the still-alives".³⁴ In a programmatic "interview" between herself and the crow with which the book ends, Smith claims to take this point from Sophocles, who "lets us see a special relationship between humans and

³³ For the prominence of animals in children's literature, as well as the potential for such portrayals to destabilize conventional human-animal hierarchies, see David Rudd, "Animal and Object Stories", in M.O. Grenby and Andrea Immel, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 242-256.

³⁴ Ali Smith, *Hotel World*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 2001, 11 and *passim*.

creatures and something even more powerful" through the intervention of Tiresias, "a kind of magic priest, through whom both the natural and spiritual worlds can express themselves, both at once, without any borders in between. He can bring messages from the birds *and* the gods" (99). And Smith goes on to base her innovation on her own reading between the lines of the play:

And through the whole play, the whole story of Antigone, there are questions which, though they are unspoken, are still there nonetheless, about the borders of things [...]. So it seemed to me that you both were there, very present in the story, the dog and the crow, when it came to adapting something so full of questions about loyalty and nature and truth [...]. (99)

Smith's foregrounding of a crow's perspective underlies her strategy for dealing with the sensational and taboo elements of the Oedipus legend. Instead of perpetuating the taboo around Oedipus' actions through vaguely worded euphemisms (as in the examples quoted above by Neale and Yonge), she presents that taboo as a questionable human hang-up. This emerges as the crow fills the dog in on the play's backstory:

"Because listen, this Oedipus," she went on, "he'd been cursed at birth, and the curse was that he'd kill his father and marry his mother."

The dog shrugged.

"I know," the crow said. "Makes no difference to me either. But it's the kind of rubbish that preoccupies the still-alives. Scandal. Fate. Gods. Curses. They wear them like clothes. It's because they've no feathers. Or fur."

"Arf," the dog said. (28–29)

With that dismissive "arf", Smith brackets many of the specifically Greek concerns of the play as arbitrary human constructs, while she foregrounds the ideas she most wants to impress on her readers, especially the insidiousness of borders, artificial divisions that are as superficial as clothes.

Another of Smith's innovations is that, despite her commitment to Sophocles' play, she takes a dim view of one of its definitive elements, its chorus of Elders. Her treatment of them is broadly parodic, and in this respect her book resembles a number of contemporary retellings for children that use parody to combat the perceived drawback of classical myth's remote origins and off-putting high cultural status: for example, Kate McMillan's "Myth-O-Mania" series (2002–2014), in which jokey versions correct a dreary *Big Fat Book of Greek Myths*, or Michael Townsend's *Amazing Greek Myths of Wonder and*

Blunders (2010), or Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series (2005–2009).³⁵ Smith introduces the chorus with an emphasis on their age, their ineptitude, and their dubious authority: "Fifteen very old men arranged themselves in a semicircle. They fell over their own feet. They argued a bit among themselves" (35). Then, when "out of nowhere" they start singing, their song is an example of ridiculous sing-song versifying – a kind of dreadful version of poetry that might be written for or even by children:

*How lovely it is to see it, the sun. Now that the
terrible battle we've won!*

*War flew over the city like a great big bird. It was
because of Polynices that it occurred.*

*And for the whole time of fighting none of us
could rhyme. Which was making us all go crazy and
should be classed as a capital crime. (35)*

When they get to the famous first stasimon – the ode that begins πολλὰ τὰ δεινὰ ("there are many wonders", v. 332) and celebrates humanity's many achievements before also naming its limitations – Smith's Elders produce a species-ist mouthful of wonder and blunders:

*Man is a wonder, a wonder of worth.
He sails the wide sea and he ploughs the wide earth.
He tames the wild birds and he catches the fishes.
He makes all the animals do what he wishes. (48)*

By making fun of the chorus' poetry, Smith not only introduces an element of silly humour designed to appeal to children but also distances herself from aspects of Sophocles' play that she finds less congenial than its story: its dense and stylized poetic idiom and its searching reflections on fate, curses, and the gods, which contrast with her own preferred style with its down-to-earth, colloquial language and brief, declarative statements. For her, the power of the play clearly lies in dialogue that can be distilled into such punchy exchanges as the concluding words of Antigone's debate with Creon:

³⁵ On this trend, see Sheila Murnaghan, "Classics for Cool Kids: Popular and Unpopular Versions of Antiquity for Children", *Classical World* 104 (2011), 339–353; Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, "Myth Collections for Children", in Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle, eds., *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, 99.

"Well, you'll be quiet too, soon," the King said. "I think you'll enjoy being dead, since you love the dead so much. And you forget. He was a traitor, your brother."

"He was my brother, your traitor," the girl said. "It's not me who's forgetting." (53)

Smith's surprisingly ageist portrayal of the chorus (she makes a point of reporting that the youngest of the elders is ninety-seven) also helps to skew sympathy towards the play's youngest characters, especially Antigone and Ismene, in keeping with the intensified allegiance to Antigone that almost every modern reader brings to the play, as well as her particular orientation to young readers. The challenging, complicating outlook of Sophocles' Theban elders, who express sympathy for Antigone but not unconditional approval of her actions, is discredited.

Smith's vision of the play is reinforced in Laura Paoletti's subtle, atmospheric illustrations. The presence of ample illustrations reflects both the status of the work as a children's book and the particular mission of the "Save the Story" project, which promotes its chosen stories in part by presenting them in appealing, stylish formats – printed on high-quality paper and given visual expression in distinguished, well-reproduced images. Paoletti's depictions of Antigone variously stress her isolation and her close but also fraught relationship to Ismene – a theme of particular importance to Smith, whose own fiction explores the intricate bonds between women, in some cases sisters. In this vein, Smith introduces a small but eloquent material detail, which she and Paoletti collaborate in developing. When Ismene enters the scene and finds her sister in chains, "[s]he bent and tore a piece of soft pink material off her own pretty dress, then wound it round Antigone's wrist, under the chain, so the chain wouldn't chafe" (57). Paoletti brings out the significance of this gesture through her placement of the strip of material halfway between the two figures and through the contrast between the life-affirming deep pink of Ismene's dress (and the piece torn from it) and the pale colourlessness and shroud-like transparency of Antigone's dress (see Fig. 3).

The strip of pink fabric only binds the sisters momentarily; when Ismene tries to tell Creon that she too was involved in the burial, Antigone repudiates her gesture of solidarity by shaking her arm until the piece of torn dress falls out and settles on the ground. But it comes to stand for a different kind of connection and continuity when, after Antigone has been led off to be buried alive, the crow snatches it up and carries it home, then uses it as a lining for her nest. That is the last we hear of it in the text. But the story has an epilogue, set a year later, in which the crow is raising a new set of fledglings, maintaining the continuity

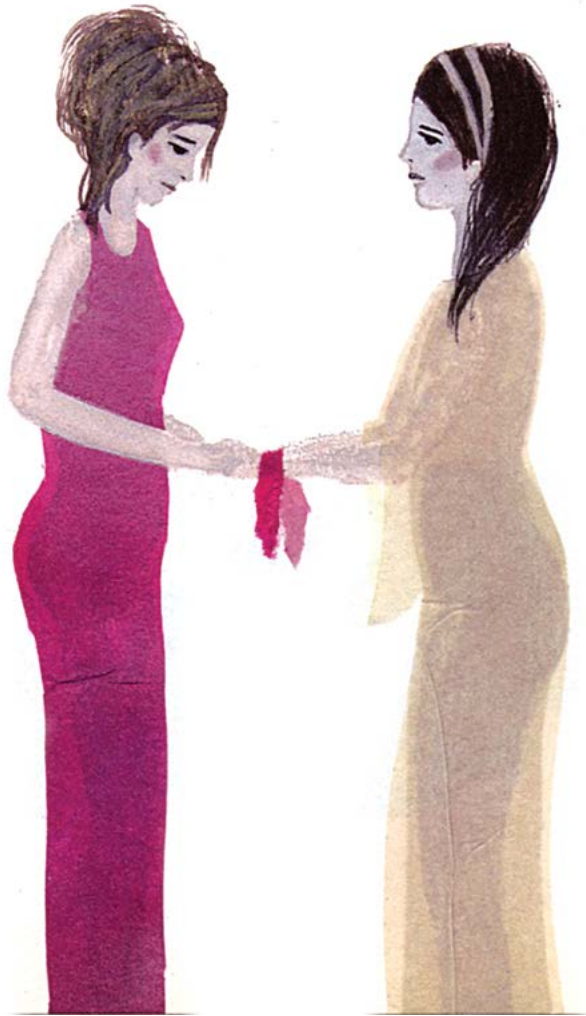


Figure 3: Antigone and Ismene, illustration by Laura Paoletti from Ali Smith, *The Story of Antigone*, London: Pushkin Children's Books, 2013, 57. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

of life that is foreclosed in the main story by Antigone's death, and satisfying their clamorous demand to hear the story of "Antipode [...], no, Antigone" (90). In Paoletti's illustration (see Fig. 4) we see the strip of cloth lining the nest and connecting this new generation to the story they are hearing – its pink colour now echoed in their hungry throats, the same throats through which the story of Antigone will one day pass when they are grown and transmit what they heard when young to their own offspring.



Figure 4: Fledglings in the nest, illustration by Laura Paoletti from Ali Smith, *The Story of Antigone*, London: Pushkin Children's Books, 2013, 89. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

In retelling the story of *Antigone*, Smith certainly encourages her readers to see *Antigone* and *Ismene* as sympathetic figures, and she goes out of her way to portray *Antigone* as close to them in age ("about twelve human years old", 15). But she is not primarily interested in fostering lines of identification; unlike Yiyun Li retelling the story of *Gilgamesh* or Natalie Haynes reimagining *Ismene* and *Jocasta*, she does not present her readers with ancient avatars of themselves, whose dilemmas mirror their own personal struggles and whose ability to survive trauma provides them with a hopeful model. The hope that animates her version is her own hope that the story will stimulate new generations to think hard about the issues it raises and act accordingly. To borrow the terms that Edoardo Pecchini introduces in his chapter in this volume,³⁶ she is aiming for something more like cognitive than affective bibliotherapy. The special potential of children as saviours is solicited not just for the perpetuation of the story itself but also for broader forms of political action.

Through the framing of her narrative and through her comments in the supposed interview that follows, Smith makes it clear what she sees as the

³⁶ See Edoardo Pecchini, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", 275–325.

important issues raised by this story. She assumes, as do most modern readers and retellers of *Antigone*, that Antigone is the play's undoubted heroine, and that the play is centrally concerned with political resistance and the need for the powerless to stand up to tyrants. She suggests that the story has endured because it was always about what modern readers have found there:³⁷

It's clear that Sophocles was very interested in the character of Antigone. Over the centuries, the powerful drama he made of her story, a story of what happens when an individual person stands against the rules and the politics of the city and country she lives in, or a small powerless girl stands up to an all-powerful-seeming king, or a single person refuses to do what a tyrant says she should, has been performed and rewritten and adapted and has never lost its relevance or its vitality. (96)

Here Smith's "what happens" seems to point forward to future possibilities of political change rather than back to Sophocles' original, in which there is no indication that Antigone's actions are warranted even to the gods or that they change anything. Further, as we have already seen, Smith finds in the play a call to question the artificial distinctions – both between different groups of people and between people and animals – through which humans seek to order and control their world.

In this respect Smith's book seems less like other contemporary versions of the Antigone myth for young readers and more like such projects as Bryan Doerries's *Theater of War* or the Aquila Theatre Company's *Ancient Greeks / Modern Lives* which use readings of ancient tragedies, especially Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Philoctetes*, as springboards for potentially therapeutic discussions among combat veterans.³⁸ There the organizers' sense of what makes the plays relevant is evident enough, but the responses of individual audience members are idiosyncratic and unpredictable, sometimes personal, sometimes more broadly political – and often mixed with gratified surprise at seeing present-day struggles anticipated in revered classics of the past. This last is a response that is actively promoted in the "Save the Story" series through its treatment of classic

³⁷ For an overview of contemporary versions of *Antigone* leading to the conclusion that "[o]ur Antigone, whether in the theater or in contemporary thought, is a dissident", see Douglas Cairns, *Sophocles: Antigone*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016, 122–154.

³⁸ On these projects, see Bryan Doerries, *The Theater of War: What Ancient Greek Tragedies Can Teach Us Today*, New York, NY: Vintage, 2016; Peter Meineck, "Combat Trauma and the Tragic Stage", in Victor Castan and Silke-Maria Weineck, eds., *Our Ancient Wars: Rethinking War through the Classics*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2016, 184–210.

stories as a precious heritage to be transmitted in distinguished physical books, and it resonates with Pecchini's observation that the young people he works with are especially happy to identify with well-known figures from myth as an antidote to thinking of themselves as sick or different.

Smith's success in inspiring young readers to use the story of *Antigone* to think about political issues can be measured by a review in the *Guardian* by Livloves2read, a "Guardian Children's books site young reviewer". Appearing on 5 July 2016, ten days after the Brexit vote, this review connects the story of *Antigone* to an exercise in boundary drawing that Smith herself may not have envisioned when she wrote the book:

Stories like *Antigone* are so important. They still seem fresh and modern and tackle concerns we still have about power struggles, laws of our society and how we treat outsiders and insiders. With all that has gone on this past two weeks in British politics, this tale continues to be really relevant.³⁹

Conclusion

With its aspiration of creating an audience of children for works that were not originally addressed to them, the "Save the Story" series openly embraces the paradox built into the classical tradition: in order for great works of the past to endure, they have to be changed, creatively adapted to the conditions and concerns of new audiences. As they rework their ancient models, Li and Smith adopt the optimistic agenda shared by most writers for children, producing stories they hope will help their readers grow into admirable adults, in Li's case by recasting *Gilgamesh* as a child whose spiritual journey is instructively glossed as progress towards adult understanding, and in Smith's case by using animal intermediaries and flashes of jokey irreverence to temper a story that she presents as "a kind of nourishment [...] even though it is full of terrible and difficult things" (95). They do this in the further hope that their readers will one day so value the stories that have made them who they are that they will themselves in turn preserve and perpetuate those stories, keeping them ever safe from oblivion.

³⁹ Livloves2read, "The Story of *Antigone* by Ali Smith – Review," *The Guardian*, 5 July 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2016/jul/05/the-story-of-antigone-ali-smith-review> (accessed 27 April 2020).

OUR GREEK TRAGIC HOPE: YOUNG ADULTS
OVERCOMING FAMILY TRAUMA
IN NEW NOVELS BY NATALIE HAYNES
AND COLM TÓIBÍN

In 2017 Natalie Haynes published an excellent novel based on the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone* of Sophocles, told from the perspectives of Jocasta and Ismene. The accounts of both women begin when they are adolescents. This means that the novel would make suitable reading for teenagers or young adults, even though it is not marketed as such. But what makes Haynes's *The Children of Jocasta*¹ so suitable for discussion in this particular volume is that it turns the story of one of Classical Antiquity's most horrifically traumatized legendary families into a parable of hope. Despite the most acute domestic and political challenges, a very young person's loyalty, calm, resilience, spiritedness, and most of all the exercise of her critical intelligence, allow her to end her own story, and even that of the house of Labdacus, on a note of open-minded optimism.

I.

Any teenager who has experienced or is soon to experience bereavement would find much to relate to in *The Children of Jocasta*; members of modern families trying to process such taboo issues as incest, suicide, teen pregnancy, perinatal death of an infant, adoption, fostering, or domestic violence would find helpful and emotionally frank explorations of them here, but set at a comforting cultural

¹ Natalie Haynes, *The Children of Jocasta*, London: Mantle, 2017. For the book's cover, see Fig. 2.

distance in the royal palace of Bronze Age Thebes. As it has been put by Erik Christian Haugaard, the author of acclaimed historical fiction for children and young adults:

When you write a story that takes place in times long past, you are more free. Your readers have less prejudice and will accept your tale with open minds. You and your reader have less at stake, and thus you might get nearer to the truth, possibly even to reality.²

In generic terms, Haynes's novel traces its ancestry on the stemma of historical fiction based on ancient mythological narratives via Adèle Geras's female-centred *Troy* (2000) and *Ithaka* (2005), told by an orphaned granddaughter of Eurycleia, and *The Penelopiad* (2005) by Margaret Atwood. These in turn look back to Christa Wolf's 1983 *Kassandra* and Inge Merkel's 1987 *Eine ganz gewöhnliche Ehe. Odysseus und Penelope*.³ Merkel's novel constituted a rewriting of the *Odyssey* from the largely realist perspective of the women Odysseus left behind – above all Penelope, with Eurycleia's role also enjoying an upgrade. But retellings of the stories enacted in Greek tragedies have been thinner on the ground. The trend, if it can be called that yet, has coincided with the rediscovery, since the 1980s, of Greek tragedy in the performance repertoires of mainstream professional theatres.⁴ It has accelerated over the last two decades, since Wolf's influential novel *Medea* (1996).⁵ Her rewriting of Euripides' evergreen tragedy by the same name tackled, in the voices of Medea and other characters in Bronze Age Corinth, the history of Wolf's tense relationship with the communist party of the German Democratic Republic. By giving voice to multiple witnesses of the action, this novel showed how the version of the myth staged by Euripides, in which Medea, notoriously, murders her own young sons, might have arisen from rumours that palace spin doctors had spread maliciously, in order to frame her as a perceived "enemy of the people".⁶

² Erik Christian Haugaard, "Only a Lampholder: Writing Historical Fiction", in Barbara Harrison and Gregory Maguire, eds., *Innocence & Experience: Essays & Conversations on Children's Literature*, New York, NY: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard, 1987, 270.

³ Published in Salzburg by Residenz Verlag. See Edith Hall, *The Return of Ulysses: A Cultural History of Homer's Odyssey*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2008, 124–126.

⁴ See Edith Hall, Fiona Macintosh, and Amanda Wrigley, eds., *Dionysus since 69: Greek Tragedy at the Dawn of the Third Millennium*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁵ See Edith Hall, "Greek Tragedy and the Politics of Subjectivity in Recent Fiction", *Classical Receptions Journal* 1.1 (2009), 23–42.

⁶ *Ibidem*.

Until recently, the most successful English-language novel recasting a Greek tragedy was Barry Unsworth's dazzling *Songs of the Kings* (2002). Unsworth skilfully retold the terrible story of the human sacrifice of a princess in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, implying that myths may have been doctored in Antiquity by bards and royal propagandists. Since he uses Iphigenia and her teenage slave woman as two of his key narrators, it, too, is inviting to younger adult readers. I recently recommended it to a school where students of both Classics and drama were performing Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* in English, and was told that discussing the novel had proved extremely useful in getting these teenaged actors to think about their roles.

But Haynes (of whom more later) was not the only significant writer to throw down the gauntlet to Unsworth with her 2017 novel. So did Colm Tóibín, a world literary superstar and giant amongst storytellers, with his *House of Names*.⁷

2.

Like Unsworth's novel, *House of Names* (see Fig. 1) is based on the myth of the house of Atreus, but this time it uses the version told in Aeschylus' trilogy *Oresteia*. It is a masterpiece and also ends on a reasonably positive note, if not as hopeful a one as Haynes's novel. But it could be beneficial to younger readers, especially those who have seen civil war or family trauma, especially abusive or violent mother-figures, or who are gay or have gay friends. Young people appreciate frankness on issues which are part of their experience of puberty and its aftermath. Two young adult novels set in Classical Antiquity which were condemned by adults as too sexually honest for teenagers are demonstrably much enjoyed by their intended readership, namely *Sirena* (1998) and *The Great God Pan* (2003) by Donna Jo Napoli, who studied Classics.⁸

In hindsight it seems inevitable that Tóibín would one day rewrite a Greek tragedy, since it is a genre obsessed with intergenerational strife. From Tóibín's pen we have come accustomed to rites-of-passage novels about young adults asserting their independence while acknowledging their ancestral roots, as in *Brooklyn* (2009). He is a searing evoker of familial relationships, especially in be-reaved Irish families, as in *The Heather Blazing* (1992) and *Nora Webster* (2014).

⁷ First published in 2017 by Viking, in London.

⁸ See the remarks of Bernice E. Cullinan, Bonnie L. Kunzel, and Deborah A. Wooten, eds., *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Young Adult Literature*, New York, NY, and London: Continuum, 2005, 529.

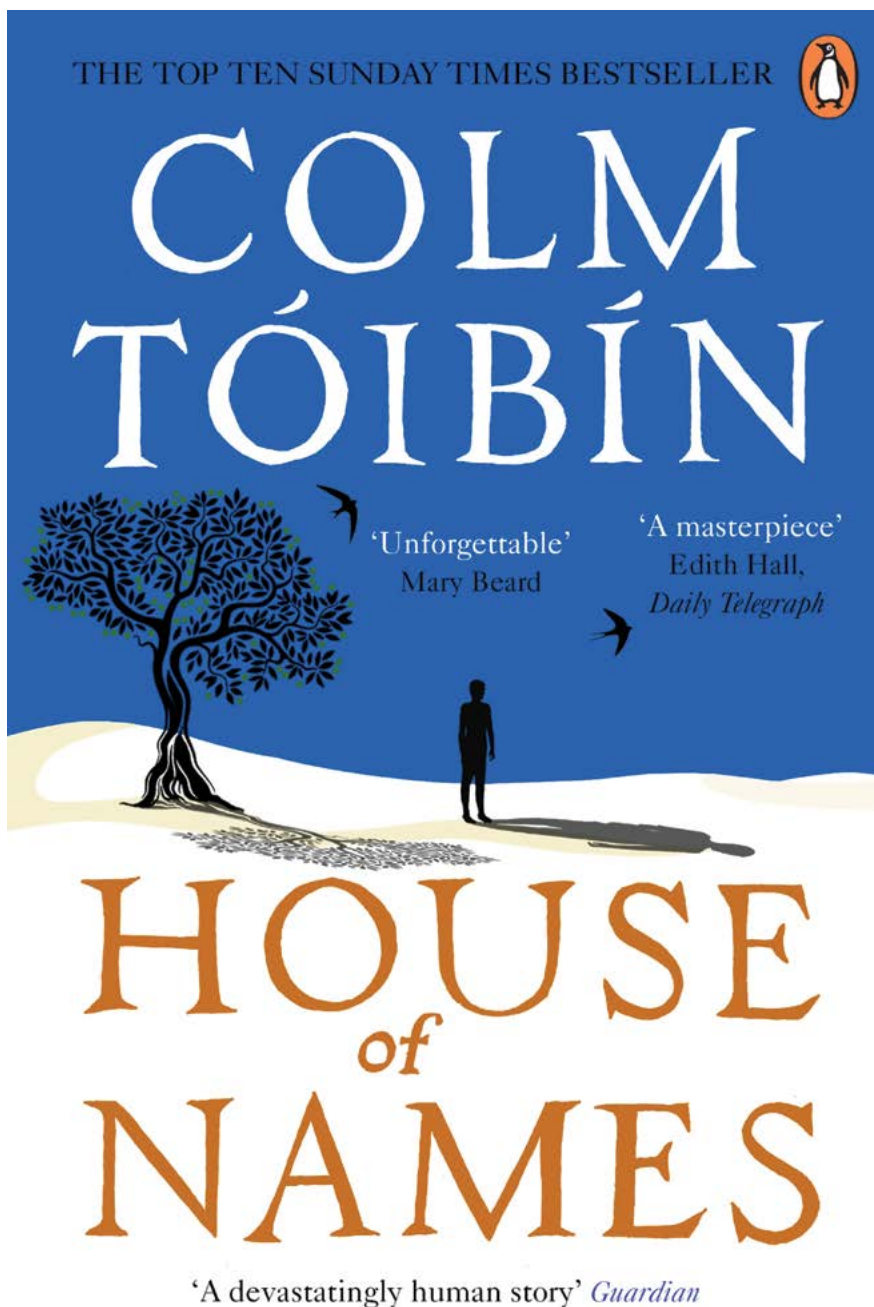


Figure 1: Cover of Colm Tóibín, *House of Names*, London: Penguin, 2018 (ed. pr. 2017), cover design: gray318. Used with the Publisher’s kind permission.

His painful dissection of relationships between female parents and male offspring came under the microscope in his short-story collection *Mothers and Sons* (2006). He has already written a novel set in an ancient Mediterranean context, *The Testament of Mary* (2012), in which Jesus' mourning mother rails against her plight in a style Tóibín has acknowledged was inspired by the rhetoric of the angriest heroines of Greek tragedy, especially Medea.⁹ In *House of Names* Tóibín finally moves us directly to Archaic Greece, but the novel fuses all these hallmarks of his previous work in a magnificent evocation of a troubled community undergoing two decades of reciprocal atrocity. The period is co-extensive with the maturation of the central character, Orestes, from early childhood. He experiences his sister Iphigenia being sacrificed by his father, Agamemnon, and eventually responds to his mother's, Clytemnestra's, retributive killing of Agamemnon by murdering her himself.

Tóibín's Ancient Greece, riven by brutal feuds, owes much to his background in Ireland during the Troubles and his grandfather's involvement with the IRA.¹⁰ Knowledge that the Troubles came to their historical ending with the Good Friday Agreement in 1998 functions to offer the reader hope. The grim catalogue of reciprocal violence in *House of Names* does seem at its close to have been stopped in its tracks, with the central political problems in ancient Argos at least partially resolved. The promise of hope in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* may be one reason why the vendetta-rich trilogy had previously attracted several of Tóibín's compatriots: it was used to address the Irish situation in Tom Murphy's play *The Sanctuary Lamp* (1975), Thaddeus O'Sullivan's drama *In the Border Country* for Channel 4 television (1991), Seamus Heaney's poetry collection *The Spirit Level* (1996), and Marina Carr's tragedy *Ariel* (2002).¹¹ But Tóibín's ancient Argos under Clytemnestra's rule is more sinister still.

Children disappear without trace, guards are found murdered in palace corridors, and entire families massacred in local farmhouses. Surreptitious sexual encounters and whispered interchanges take place continuously. Prisoners languish in secret underground cells built into the citadel's foundations; chain-gangs of slaves

⁹ See Colm Tóibín, "The Inspiration for *The Testament of Mary*", *The Guardian*, 19 October 2012, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/oct/19/inspiration-testament-mary-colm-toibin> (accessed 24 April 2020).

¹⁰ Edith Hall, "House of Names", *Sunday Telegraph*, 14 May 2017.

¹¹ See Marianne McDonald, "Thomas Murphy's Interview", in Marianne McDonald, *Ancient Sun, Modern Light: Greek Drama on the Modern Stage*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1992, 187–200, and Edith Hall, "Iphigenia and Her Mother at Aulis: A Study in the Revival of a Euripidean Classic", in John M. Dillon and S.E. Wilmer, eds., *Rebel Women: Staging Ancient Greek Drama Today*, London: Methuen, 2005, 3–41.

are suddenly transported from one part of the Peloponnese to another. Although fleeting alliances are formed in order to wreak revenge or secure temporary power, nobody can trust anyone else for long, and a raised eyebrow or a downward glance can indicate that an outrage has been perpetrated, as it were, "offstage". For Tóibín has found fruitful ways to exploit the theatrical nature of the text he is recasting. The metaphor of role-playing underpins much of his psychological portrait-painting. Spies and messengers arrive with grim news from far away. Like the ancient trilogy on which it is based, the action takes place in a small number of identifiable locations – the royal palace, the coastal sanctuary where Iphigenia died, a remote prison camp, and the old woman's farmhouse where Orestes grew up after being kidnapped. The potential hazard of a sprawling time frame is avoided by deft condensation of the story into a handful of key sequences; carefully insinuated flashbacks and memories remind us that these vengeance killings, which it is imperative must cease, are rooted in a tradition of fratricide now generations old.

At the heart of the novel, Orestes is in hiding in the farmhouse. With an accidentally acquired "family" consisting of the old woman and two other boys, he is enjoying the nearest approximation to a happy household he will ever experience. In this episode of temporary felicity and calm, twin narratives are embedded side by side. They both feature swans and represent what Tóibín suggests is an affinity between Greek and Irish legend. The first is the story of Helen of Troy. There are no proper names provided, but the identities, imprinted on Irish consciousness forever by William Butler Yeats's exquisite poem "Leda and the Swan" (1923), are unmistakable: it is the tale of the most beautiful girl that anyone had ever seen, the product of the mating between a god disguised as a swan and a mortal woman. She had two doomed brothers (which readers recognize as Castor and Pollux) and a sister (Clytemnestra); her beauty caused the Trojan War, which has left Greece in its current miserable state, bereft of a generation of its men. The second tale, told by Orestes' sickly friend Mitros, is the old Irish legend *The Children of Lir*, in which the wicked stepmother of Lir's four youngsters turns them into swans. They must undergo 900 years of exile before they can escape her spell. The fusion of the Greek and Irish traditions is crystallized in the figure of Clytemnestra, who returns in the penultimate chapter to haunt Orestes, her murderer: in Aeschylus' *Oresteia* Clytemnestra's ghost does briefly appear, but Tóibín's disembodied, restless dead matriarch takes just as much inspiration from Aoife, the callous stepmother in the Irish saga, punished by being transformed into an air demon for eternity.

Yet, where the Greek myth ends in misery, the Irish story holds out certain hope that redemption will become possible for the cygnets in remote posterity.

Tóibín ends his novel with Orestes and Electra, although scarred by all that has befallen them and all that they have done, facing a new future with some promise of moderate stability and at least modest happiness. Another element of tragic theatre which Tóibín retains is the use of direct speech for Clytemnestra and Electra, who tell their bleak tales of alienation, hatred, and revenge in bald first-person sentences which sometimes sound like transcripts of police interviews. The sequences focusing on Orestes, on the other hand, are in the third person; yet, paradoxically, we become much more intimate with him than with his womenfolk, and far more sympathetic towards him. In common with several of Tóibín's leading men, he grows up sensing that he is what we now call "gay"; he is too gentle, hesitant, and naive to live up to the expectations others have of him in terms of reprisals for his father's death and seizure of the Argive throne. He is consistently outmanoeuvred by his mother and her lover Aegisthus, and subsequently struggles to decode the motives of his quicker-witted sister and his best friend, the commoner but alpha-male Leander, for whom he harbours an unrequited romantic passion. But the reader is deeply engaged with Orestes' consciousness, and the finale of the novel, which departs decisively from the conclusion of the Aeschylean trilogy, is a cliffhanger. Orestes does survive, and he survives equipped with some reasonably successful relationships and a new baby (not his, but he is delighted with the prospect of fathering it). He intends to bring the infant up in a way we are all quite clear will be far more humane and positive than the brutal childhood he and Electra endured themselves.

3.

If Tóibín's female characters are less congenial than his brilliantly drawn child, adolescent, and young adult Orestes, Haynes puts innocent women's perspectives on family trauma at the centre of her radar. What interests Haynes, like Geras,¹² is the subjectivity of very young women (indeed, teenagers scarcely of childbearing age) in the type of society in which Greek tragedy was set. She is fascinated by the physical restrictions placed on young, unmarried women in aristocratic families, who were virtually prisoners in their own homes and not allowed to enjoy the same physical exercises and sporting interests as young men – a restriction which has made the figure of the peerless female athlete

¹² See Joanne Brown and Nancy St. Clair, *Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*, Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2006, 164–166.

Atalanta attractive to several writers of young adult fiction.¹³ Ancient Greece was not just patriarchal, but emphatically *patri/local*, in that women moved households on marriage while men remained, more emotionally secure, in the homes where they had been born. Haynes's excellent previous novel, *The Amber Fury* (2014), also used Greek tragedy to explore the psychology of a damaged adolescent girl, but as a foil in a thriller set in contemporary Britain; here she asks how Bronze Age maidens would cope with the shocking deprivations to which they were routinely subject. Jocasta was married off to an ageing tyrant with no interest in her, and left to fend for herself in a royal court blighted by feuds between rival factions. Jocasta's daughter Ismene discovered that she was the offspring of incest, lost both her parents and both her brothers, feared losing her one remaining sister, and was the victim of barbarous assault. Haynes interweaves their stories, Jocasta's told in the third person and Ismene's in the first, building up to an exciting climax and a surprising, decidedly feminist conclusion. She is tremendous at handling a detective-style plot stretching six decades across the history of Thebes.

Haynes also uses humour to handle the differences between the presentation of characters in Sophocles' texts and her own. Here she contrasts sharply with Ali Smith's procedure in *The Story of Antigone* (2013), written for a rather younger audience. Smith is a straightforward admirer of Antigone. She makes Ismene rather older than Antigone, who is only "about twelve years old",¹⁴ and her moral conviction partly stems from her childlike innocence and clarity of vision in the face of complicated adult evil. This interpretation seems underlined by Smith's own remark in the "interview" between Crow and "Ali" – that is, the author Ali Smith stepping into the dialogue which is appended at end of the story:

It's the easiest thing in the world, to decide that someone else or something else isn't the same as us, or can be dismissed or decided about or made less than us, or made not to belong, or be excluded. It's the basis of all power struggles. It's the basis, in fact, of the story of Antigone, and all its questions about nature and human nature.¹⁵

¹³ See Cullinan, Kunzel, and Wooten, eds., *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Young Adult Literature*, 264–265, on Priscilla Galloway, who has rewritten Grimm's stories for young adults, but has also retold several from Greek mythology, including her feminist *Atalanta: The Fastest Runner in the World* (1995). Atalanta is likewise the star of *Quiver* by Stephanie Spinner (2002).

¹⁴ Ali Smith, *The Story of Antigone*, ill. Laura Paoletti, London: Pushkin Children's Books, 2013 (ed. pr. in Italian 2011), 13. For an analysis of this novel, see Deborah H. Roberts and Sheila Murnaghan's chapter in this volume: "New Hope for Old Stories: Yiyun Li's *Gilgamesh* and Ali Smith's *Antigone*", 345–370.

¹⁵ Smith, *The Story of Antigone*, 98.

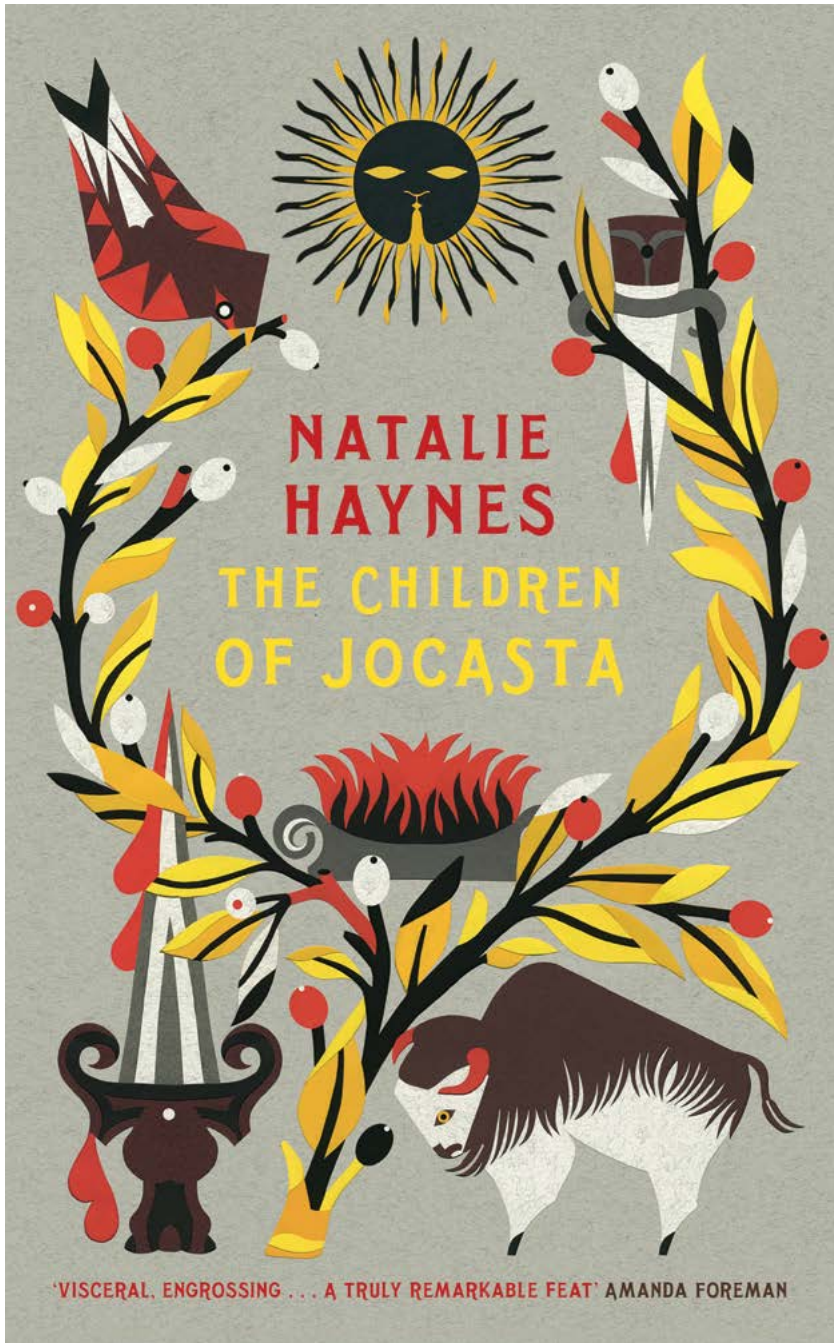


Figure 2: Cover of Natalie Haynes, *The Children of Jocasta*, London: Mantle, 2017. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

Haynes, on the other hand, makes Ismene the younger sister (Sophocles never specifies their ages nor who is senior). This Ismene, a bookish, reclusive child, is the one who buries her brother. She is also ruefully aware that Antigone, whom she loves dearly but whose beauty she envies, has a penchant for histrionics; Haynes rewrites some of the most important details of *Antigone* in line with this understanding and a perceptible twinkle. Here her writing is reminiscent of Elsie V. Aidinoff's *The Garden* (2004), which uses Eve's capacity for humour and critical thinking to deconstruct Genesis, the ultimate canonical text, especially where she meditates on evolutionary theory.

Atwood, also a deft user of wit to unpick a monumental work of literature from a woman's viewpoint in her *Penelopiad*, has insisted on the importance of accumulating quotidian detail in persuasive historical fiction:

History may pretend to provide us grand patterns and overall schemes, but without its brick-by-brick, life-by-life, day-by-day foundations it would collapse.¹⁶

Renowned historical novelist Thomas Mallon puts it differently:

Only through tiny, literal accuracies can the historical novelist achieve the larger truth to which he aspires – namely, an overall feeling of authenticity. It is just like Marianne Moore's famous prescription for the ideal poet. He must stock his imaginary garden with real toads.¹⁷

Haynes went to Thebes to research the setting of her novel, the remains of the ancient palace in the landlocked Boeotian plain and the mountain pathways where Oedipus has crossed over from Corinth and where the action culminates. She has visited the local museums, and various beautifully described objects in the text derive from her observations on these visits: looms, jewellery, musical instruments, eating utensils. Like several other women writing young adult fiction set in Classical Antiquity,¹⁸ she is a highly trained classicist. In her cinematic evocations of Thebes there is plenty of well-researched, authentic colour, reminiscent of the exquisite novels set in Ancient Greece by Mary Renault: readers from their teens onwards

¹⁶ Margaret Atwood, "In Search of *Alias Grace*: On Writing Canadian Historical Fiction", *American Historical Review* 103.5 (1998), 1505.

¹⁷ Thomas Mallon, "Writing Historical Fiction", *American Scholar* 61.4 (1992), 604.

¹⁸ E.g., Gillian Bradshaw, who studied Ancient Greek at Michigan and Classics at Newnham College, Cambridge, writes novels set in medieval times but also in Ancient Egypt, Greece, and Rome: *The Beacon at Alexandria* (1986) and *Cleopatra's Hair* (2003).

interested in classical civilization will find fascinating accounts of rituals, cult names of the gods, furniture, clothing, food, writing materials, and architecture. Her descriptions of an athletics contest at the palace and of the symptoms of the plague could only have been written by an author intimate with Book 23 of the *Iliad* and Book 2 of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

This is highly suggestive in terms of exciting teenagers about Classical Antiquity, especially in a period when access to the Latin and Greek languages at secondary-school level, in the UK, at least, is becoming ever rarer. Haynes is a wonderful advocate for the teaching of classical civilization in school, and serves as a patron of my new campaign to support the introduction of Classics subjects in translation, a policy which is both practicable and affordable, across the state education sector in Britain.¹⁹ And in the Advanced Level syllabus, taken when students are between fifteen and eighteen, Sophocles' Theban tragedies are regular fixtures.

Haynes's novel could therefore have direct pedagogical as well as therapeutic uses. Historical fiction for teens is beginning to become recognized, mainly in the United States, as a way to encourage youngsters in secondary-level education to absorb and engage both with Classics of literature which they may otherwise find indigestible and with history. Sarah K. Herz and Donald R. Gallo in 1996 published *From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges between Young Adult Literature and the Classics*; this advocates the use of young adult literature for helping teenagers respond to a series of casebook masterpieces, including Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*, John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, and Homer's *Odyssey*.²⁰

4.

Unfortunately, when it comes to using historical fiction for teaching teens history, despite a wide acknowledgement that historical fiction was an invention of Classical Antiquity, notably in the *Parallel Lives* of Plutarch,²¹ there has been less scholarly investigation. Most of the case studies available concern books

¹⁹ See further Advocating Classics Education, <http://aceclassics.org.uk/> (accessed 24 April 2020).

²⁰ See Sarah K. Herz with Donald R. Gallo, *From Hinton to Hamlet: Building Bridges between Young Adult Literature and the Classics*, Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood Press, 1996, 49–51 (on the *Odyssey* and their discussion) and 83–92 (on how young adult literature can also be used in other disciplines, e.g., to teach history).

²¹ Brown and St. Clair, *Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*, 99.

fictionalizing twentieth-century historical experience in the United States in ways that young adults would find appealing.²² But so much more could be done with historical fiction set further back in time. There are abundant examples of excellent young adult writing of this kind set in earlier myth and history, even Mesopotamian and biblical times, such as Kim Echlin's *Innana: From the Myths of Ancient Sumer* (2003) – the story of Gilgamesh's sister, Donna Jo Napoli's *Song of the Magdalene* (1996), Beatrice Gormley's *Miriam* (1999), and Elsie V. Aidinoff's *The Garden* (2004), based – as mentioned above – on the biblical Genesis.²³ The *Continuum Encyclopedia of Young Adult Literature* reveals plentiful works of young adult fiction set in Ancient Greek and Roman times.²⁴ The author of many historical novels centred on adolescents growing up in America, Kristiana Gregory, for example, has also written a valuable novel entitled *Cleopatra VII: Daughter of the Nile* (1999), telling the story of the adolescent Cleopatra.

Charlotte Yonge is traditionally named foremother of young adult historical fiction – for example, in Marion Lochhead's much-cited 1961 article "Clio Junior: Historical Novels for Children".²⁵ Yet Yonge was certainly anticipated by Susanna Strickland, whose *Spartacus: A Roman Story*, an abolitionist narrative explicitly aimed at older children and young adults, based on Plutarch's "Life of Crassus", was published as early as 1822.²⁶ She was followed by a large number of twentieth-century writers, for example, Naomi Mitchison in her tale featuring a young

²² Linda J. Rice, *What Was It Like? Teaching History and Culture through Young Adult Literature*, New York, NY, and London: Teachers' College, Columbia University, 2006, is an excellent polemic and handbook on how to do "active learning" through using young adult historical fiction, but all the case studies are to do with twentieth-century historical experiences in the United States.

²³ Brown and St. Clair, *Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*, 99.

²⁴ See Cullinan, Kunzel, and Wooten, eds., *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Young Adult Literature*, 324 (on Frances Mary Hendry's young adult novels about a young female gladiator, *Gladiatorix*, 2004–2012); 379 (on Norma Johnston's myth-based trilogy set in Ancient Greece and Rome: *Strangers Dark and Gold*, 1975; *Pride of Lions*, 1979; *The Days of Dragon's Seed*, 1982); 466–467 (on Clemence McLaren's novels using the women of Homer: *Inside the Walls of Troy: A Novel of the Women Who Lived the Trojan War*, 1996; *Waiting for Odysseus*, 2004); 523 (on Caroline B. Cooney's *Goddess of Yesterday*, 2002, the story of Helen's unwilling companion at Troy, Anaxandra); and 560 (on Jill Paton Walsh's *The Emperor's Winding Sheet*, 1974, which tells the story of Vrethiki, Constantine's companion).

²⁵ Marion Lochhead, "Clio Junior: Historical Novels for Children", in Sheila Egoff, G.T. Stubbs, and L.F. Ashley, eds., *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, Toronto and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980 (ed. pr. 1969), 17–27 (text originally published in 1961 in *Quarterly Review*).

²⁶ See Leanne Hunnings, "Spartacus in Nineteenth-Century England: Proletarian, Pole and Christ", in Christopher Stray, ed., *Remaking the Classics: Literature, Genre and Media in Britain 1800–2000*, London: Bloomsbury, 2007, 1–19.

Graeco-Scythian heroine in Hellenistic times in *The Corn King and the Spring Queen* (1931)²⁷ and Elizabeth George Speare, whose *The Bronze Bow* (1961) concerns a teenager named Daniel whose family is killed by the Romans.²⁸

Haynes, however, seems to me to have a mission which is more explicitly therapeutic than in most of these examples of historical fiction about and/or for young adults. Her novels, although far more elegant, have this in common, rather, with the genre called the "problem novel", thought to have been invented in the 1960s in America. Problem novels are consciously written for teachers, social workers, and probation officers, and put on a list of books recommended for giving to deprived or traumatized children and young adults. They often have self-explanatory titles which actually mention alcoholism or describe the plight of the narrator, such as Peggy Mann's *My Dad Lives in a Downtown Hotel* (1974), implying (truthfully) that the writer began not with the character but with the societal problem. But these novels have basic features which are shared by the type of historical novels which retell ancient literature: the protagonist tells her or his own emotional story of victimhood, resistance, and ultimately cure, survival, escape, or redemption in an intimate first-person singular.²⁹ As Joanne Brown put it:

In historical fiction for young adults, the protagonists are usually fictional adolescents. These adolescent characters are often rendered powerless, not only by their youth, but by gender, race, or class; they are frequently victimized by greed, hatred, or persecution. Nonetheless, they manage to triumph in the face of overwhelming odds.³⁰

Such storylines, well told, can be instrumental in changing lives and ultimately society. Denise Levertov believes that "books influence individuals; and individuals, although they are part of large economic and social processes, influence history".³¹

²⁷ See Edith Hall, *Adventures with Iphigenia in Tauris: A Cultural History of Euripides' Black Sea Tragedy*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2013, 253–254.

²⁸ See Cullinan, Kunzel, and Wooten, eds., *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Young Adult Literature*, 658.

²⁹ Sheila Egoff, "The Problem Novel", in Sheila Egoff, G.T. Stubbs, and L.F. Ashley, eds., *Only Connect: Readings on Children's Literature*, Toronto and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1980 (ed. pr. 1969), 356–369.

³⁰ Joanne Brown, "Historical Fiction or Fictionalized History? Problems for Writers of Historical Novels for Young Adults", *Alan Review: Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the National Council of Teachers of English* 26.1 (1998), 7.

³¹ Quoted in Brown and St. Clair, *Reflections on Young Adult Historical Fiction*, 197.

Haynes's Jocasta, whose story is told in the third person, suffers almost unimaginable emotional deprivation. Her mother undermines her self-confidence, her venal father sells her in indecent haste when King Laius offers a bride-price, and she is packed off to the palace on her own when she has hardly achieved menarche. Terrified of sexual contact with the ageing, gynaiophobic Laius, she is relieved that he leaves her entirely alone. But she is horribly isolated and bored. She has an affair with a slave and a horrifically protracted, painful labour which she scarcely survives alive. She produces a baby who, she is told, died at birth, and enters many years of acute depression, a captive queen in a childless, sexless, miserable marriage. The joy with which she finds love with the handsome, young Corinthian who turns up after accidentally killing Laius knows no bounds, and she is an attentive, loving mother.

She dies miserable, but there are surprises here, too; Haynes alters the motivation of her principal characters in subtle but important ways. Ismene only discovers very late just how much her mother and father loved her, and one of the important messages of the book is that new information can often transform for the better one's understanding of even the bleakest situation. Ismene learns that being a product of incest may be more possible to live with than being a child of a defeatist or emotionally cowardly mother. But more important than anything, if any victim of trauma is to move on, is to discover the factual truth. Ismene is brutally attacked at the beginning of the novel, for reasons to do with the political struggle between Creon and her two brothers over control of Thebes, and she never ceases from her quest to unravel exactly why and who is responsible. As her tutor made her understand:

[W]hen you have grown up as I have, there is no security in not knowing things, in avoiding ugliest truths because they can't be faced. There is only an oppressive, creeping dread that the thing no one has told you is too terrible to imagine, and that it will haunt the rest of your life when you find out. Because *that* is what happened the last time, and *that* is why my siblings and I have grown up in a cursed house, children of cursed parents.³²

The curse has come from ignorance, lies, and fear of what true knowledge might reveal, rather than from the true facts in and of themselves.

As a result of this conviction, Haynes's Ismene escapes to freedom. She is equipped to do so by her brain and her decision to start writing down everything

³² Haynes, *The Children of Jocasta*, 49.

that happens to her so she can reflect on it and find solutions to seemingly impossible problems. She leaves the confines of the Theban palace where she has been virtually imprisoned all her life, succeeds in discovering that her parents and one of her brothers really did love her, and preserves her one important friendship (with her old tutor, Sophon) and her integrity.

* * *

I must not conclude this article by detailing how this hopeful conclusion is achieved, because that would spoil the effect of the final few chapters of *The Children of Jocasta*, which are real page-turners, as are those in Tóibín's *Orestes* novel. These two writers have rewritten Greek tragedy in fundamentally *hopeful* narrative fictions. They do not provide facile solutions nor suggest that traumatized young people can completely escape their pasts, but they do suggest that they can come to terms with their previous suffering and look forward to better lives in the future. They put front and centre not only the specific traumas faced by Ismene and Orestes but the misery faced by *all* teenagers in terms of loneliness, boredom, anger with controlling authority figures, and fear for the future. We are greatly enriched by the pair of them.

TURNING TO MYTH: THE SOVIET SCHOOL FILM GROWING UP

Soviet cinema for children was dominated by films set in schools.¹ The school as a model of society provided an opportunity to portray challenging issues and relationships in the world at large. A new wave of school cinema in the USSR came in the 1980s with controversial films that presented a terrifying image of childhood, full of cruelty and danger. Some of these productions draw upon classical mythology. I shall analyse here two very important films of this genre that have classical underpinnings. They are *Чучело* [Chuchelo;² Scarecrow] directed by Rolan Bykov (in two parts, 1983, screenplay by Vladimir Zheleznikov) and *Дорогая Елена Сергеевна* [Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna; Dear Miss Elena] by Eldar Riazanov (1988, screenplay by Liudmila Razumovskaia). It seems that in the late Soviet period these film-makers turned to Classical Antiquity consciously, hoping to find there ideas which would help them discuss complex issues related to growing up.

The works of Bykov and Riazanov are far from being typical "mythological" productions, especially in comparison with peplum films or Hollywood and European adaptations of classical texts, since the tradition of peplum films did not take root in Soviet cinema.³ The influence of the great Hollywood productions

¹ I would like to express special gratitude for help during my work on this article to Elizabeth Hale and to the Semiotic Lab at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, led by Prof. Zbigniew Kloch.

² Transliteration of Russian names is given according to the system of the American Library Association and the Library of Congress, with minor modifications: I omit diacritic signs and use "-sky" instead of "-skii" endings. Well-known Russian names that have their traditional spelling are written according to it. English titles of the discussed movies correspond to their titles in world distribution, if applicable.

³ Exceptions include *Спартак* [Spartak; Spartacus], dir. Ertuğrul Muhsin, Odessa: VUFKU, 1926; *Веселая хроника опасного путешествия* [Vesëlaia khronika opasnogo puteshestviia; Merry Chronicle of a Dangerous Voyage], dir. Evgenii Ginzburg, Moskva: Ekran, 1986; *Сократ* [Sokrat; Socrates], dir. Viktor Sokolov, Moskva and Leningrad: Soyuztelevfilm, Lenfilm, and Petropol', 1991.

of the 1960s may be seen rather in Soviet animations on ancient mythology.⁴ Of course, some foreign films were distributed in the USSR and were very popular.⁵ However, as a rule, searching for mythological or ancient connotations was alien to Soviet film criticism. At the same time, cinematography for children and youth was very robust, and it created a special genre of school cinema where classical references or allusions can be traced.

I have chosen films that were, in my opinion, the most influential children's and youth productions of the late USSR in terms of the aim of resolving the problems of being young and living among youth. As most Soviet school films were didactic and/or tended to present an ideal image of the Soviet school, these cinematic works were the most striking exceptions to the rule, as they showed the ambiguities of personality, groups, and life itself. The feature of ambiguity is all the more relevant to Greek and Roman mythology, where the fates of mythical heroes were preserved in stories that allowed various narrations and interpretations. These myths often contained elements not *ad usum Delphini*, which were to be eliminated in retellings aimed at children. Both *Scarecrow* and *Dear Miss Elena* verge on being improper for a Soviet film and a children's film, if only because they do not present an ideal image of socialist reality.

School Cinema in the USSR

To put the films in context I wish to begin with a short introduction to Soviet cinema for children. Issues regarding children viewers and films appropriate for them were under discussion already in the late 1920s. In 1929, a survey of more than 3,000 pupils eight to nineteen years old from central and suburban Moscow

⁴ Cf. Hanna Paulouskaya, "Steht Herakles für den Westen? Oder: die griechisch-römische Antike im sowjetischen Animationsfilm", in Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte Antike. Griechisch-römischer Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien*, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 5, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017, 287–312.

⁵ E.g., Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* (1960) had its Soviet premiere in 1967 and was widely distributed, ultimately being viewed by 63 million people; see "*Спартак* (1960)" [*Spartak* (1960); *Spartacus* (1960)], Kino-Teatr.ru, <http://kino-teatr.ru/kino/movie/hollywood/28477/annot/> (accessed 17 April 2020). Another example is *Le fatiche di Ercole* by Pietro Francisci (1958) with Steve Reeves as Hercules; it was premiered in the USSR in 1966 and attracted 31.5 million viewers; see "Премьеры. Подвиги Геракла. *Le fatiche di Ercole*, 1957" [Prem'ery. Podvigi Gerakla. *Le fatiche di Ercole*, 1957; Premieres: Feats of Heracles. *Le fatiche di Ercole*, 1957], КиноПоиск [KinoPoisk], <https://www.kinopoisk.ru/film/92386/dates/> (accessed 17 April 2020). For the idea to look at the distribution of Hollywood productions in the USSR, I would like to thank Sebastian Różycki.

schools and from smaller towns was carried out by psychologists, pedagogues, and film-makers. According to the obtained data, an ordinary Moscow pupil at that time went to the cinema up to four times per month, with 13% of respondents stating they visited the cinema more than eight (and up to twenty-four!) times per month.⁶ Many of these avid filmgoers were children nine and ten years old.⁷ The young audience expressed preference for adventurous and fast-action films first and foremost.

In 1928, the Совкино (Sovkino; Soviet Cinema), the main organization dealing with film production in the USSR in the years 1924–1930, singled out films suitable for children, thereby creating a children’s film collection.⁸ Because there was a scarcity of cinematic works addressed specially to children during that period, the Sovkino proposed showing them productions made for adults, choosing ones that were “ideologically right” and served didactic purposes. A brochure published in 1929 contains a list of sixty such films,⁹ usually ideologically correct, often depicting revolutions, as in the case of Sergei Eisenstein’s *Броненосец Потемкин* [Bronenosets Potëmkin; Battleship Potiomkin, 1925], although comedies and animations are also included. Apart from Soviet films, there were European and American productions on the list (for example, *Der letzte Mann* by F.W. Murnau, 1924; *Die Nibelungen* by Fritz Lang, 1924; *Berlin. Die Sinfonie der Großstadt* by Walter Ruttmann, 1927). Eventually films were made in the USSR for kids with children actors, and, as part of that, some were set in schools. The first school-based films were produced in the 1930s (*Путевка в жизнь* [Putëvka v zhizn’; Road to Life], dir. Nikolai Ekk, 1931; and

⁶ See V. A. Pravdoliubov, *Кино и наша молодежь. На основе данных педологии: для школ, родителей, воспитателей и кино-работников* [Kino i nasha molodëzh. Na osnove dannykh pedologii: dla shkol, roditelei, vospitatelei i kino-rabotnikov; The Cinema and Our Youth: Based on Paedology Data. For Schools, Parents, Educators, and Film Workers], Moskva and Leningrad: Gosudarstvennoe Izdatel’stvo, 1929, 7.

⁷ Ibidem. The situation was quite similar in the late 1970s. As Bykov notes: “According to film distribution data, children and young people constitute 70 percent of the auditorium” (7 February 1979; По данным проката, дети и юноши составляют 70% зрительного зала), in Rolan Bykov, *Я побит – начну сначала! Дневники* [Ja pobit – nachnu snachala! Dnevniki; I’m Defeated – I’ll Start Over! Diaries], comment. Elena Sanaeva, Moskva: Astrel’, 2010, 70. The online version of the diary is available at the website of the project *Prozhito* [Lived] containing digital versions of ego-documents written, first of all, in Russia and the USSR from the nineteenth century on; see <https://prozhito.org/person/249> (accessed 18 April 2020). Translations of all the Russian quotations are mine (H.P.), if not stated otherwise.

⁸ Anna Latsis, L. Keilina, and A. Shirvindt, *Указатель кино-репертуара детских сеансов* [Ukazatel’ kino-repertuara detskikh seansov; Childrens’ Film Repertoire Index], vol. 1, Moskva: Tea-Kino-Pechat’, 1929, 3.

⁹ Latsis, Keilina, and Shirvindt, *Ukazatel’ kino-repertuara*.

Одна [Odna; Alone], dirs. Grigory Kozintsev and Leonid Trauberg, 1931), and by the 1960s they developed into a full-fledged genre.¹⁰

School offers an ideal scenery as it represents a model of society with various types of interconnections: in addition to the teachers–pupils relations, there are different groups based on friendship, rivalry, love and hate, etc.¹¹ School as a group of people has an additional significance in the Soviet case as the collective was one of the main values of Soviet society. It is interesting that the genre of school film had hardly been developed in Stalinist cinema. According to Liubov Arkus, this was due to the fact that “school as a territory was too dangerous for cinema, as it always looks like a model of the state” (школа как территория была фактурой слишком опасной для кино, т. к. она всегда выглядит как модель государства).¹²

In general, Soviet school cinema aimed at “fostering officially recognized values” (утверждение официально одобренных ценностей).¹³ The films produced after the Thaw (that is, after Stalin’s death) are fairly complicated and differentiated. They are often emotional and aspire to evoke sympathy in the viewer.¹⁴ Some present difficult relationships and misunderstandings between children and adults (*А если это любовь?* [A esli eto liubov?; What If It Be Love?], dir. Yuly Raizman, 1961). But, contrary to American (*Blackboard Jungle*, dir. Richard Brooks, 1955) or European films (*if...*, dir. Lindsay Anderson, 1968), there is no revolt of youth against the school in Soviet films. Usually both

¹⁰ Galina Belyaeva and Vadim Mikhailin, “Советское школьное кино: рождение жанра” [Sovetskoe shkolnoe kino: rozhdenie zhanra; The Soviet School Film: Birth of a Genre], in Ilya Kukulin, Maria Mayofis, and Piotr Safronov, eds., *Острова утопии. Педагогическое и социальное проектирование послевоенной школы (1940–1980-е)* [Ostrova utopii. Pedagogicheskoe i sotsialnoe proektirovanie poslevoennoi shkoly (1940–1980-e); Islands of Utopia: Pedagogical and Social Planning in the Postwar Soviet School, 1940s–1980s], Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obozrenie, 2015, 553–557.

¹¹ Vadim Mikhailin and Galina Belyaeva, “У истоков жанра: о предпосылках появления советского ‘школьного кино’ в позднесталинскую эпоху” [U istokov zhanra: o predposylkakh poivleniia sovetskogo “shkolnogo kino” v pozdnestalinskuiu epokhu; At the Source of a Genre: On the Prerequisites for the Soviet “School Film” in Late Stalin Times], in Jörg Baberowski et al., eds., *Советское государство и общество в период позднего сталинизма. 1945–1953 гг.* [Sovetskoe gosudarstvo i obshchestvo v period pozdnego stalinizma. 1945–1953 gg.; The Soviet State and Society during the Late Stalinist Period, 1945–1953], Moskva: ROSSPEN, 2015, 352.

¹² Liubov Arkus, “Приключения белой вороны. Эволюция ‘школьного фильма’ в советском кино” [Priklucheniia beloi vorony. Evolutsiia “shkolnogo filma” v sovetskom kino; The Adventures of a White Crow: The Evolution of the “School Film” in Soviet Cinema], *Сеанс* [Seans; Showing] 41–42 (2010), <https://seance.ru/articles/whitecrow/> (accessed 18 April 2020).

¹³ Belyaeva and Mikhailin, “Советское shkolnoe kino”, 574.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*.

teachers and pupils form a unified body helping the main protagonist to become better (*Республика ШКИД* [Respublika ShKID; The Republic of ShKID], dir. Gennady Poloka, 1966).

In a similar way to the English school story, a teacher is often in the centre of the Soviet movies. However, in the latter case you would not see a teacher of Latin as the main character, a figure ever so popular in the classical school films (*Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, dir. Sam Wood, 1939; *Hets* [Torment], dir. Alf Sjöberg, 1944; *Child's Play*, dir. Sidney Lumet, 1972). The reason obviously relates to the abolition of classical languages teaching in secondary schools in the USSR just after the revolution of 1917.¹⁵ Although Latin was partially reinstated during and after World War Two,¹⁶ it was peripheral and did not find a place in novels or films. Indeed, even one of the most famous teachers of Greek in Russian literature – “the man in the case” – of Anton Chekhov is remembered usually just as a “severe teacher” without emphasizing his discipline (compare *Розыгрыш* [Rozygrysh; Practical Joke], dir. Vladimir Menshov, 1977). Teachers in Soviet school films usually specialize in languages, mostly Russian (*Урок литературы* [Urok literatury; Literature Lesson], dir. Aleksei Korenev, 1968; *Ключ без права передачи* [Kliuch bez prava peredachi; The Key That Should Not Be Handed On], dir. Dinara Asanova, 1976), rarely English (*Доживем до понедельника* [Dozhivëm do ponedel'nika; We'll Live till Monday], dir. Stanislav Rostotsky, 1968), also in mathematics (*Practical Joke; Dear Miss Elena*), and from the late 1960s in history (*We'll Live till Monday*).¹⁷ It goes without saying

¹⁵ On the problem of Latin teaching in European schools, see Françoise Waquet, *Latin, or, The Empire of a Sign*, trans. John Howe, London: Verso, 2002 (ed. pr. in French 1998).

¹⁶ Aleksandr Gavrilov, “Jakov M. Borovskij: Poet of Latin in the Soviet Union”, in György Karsai, Gábor Klaniczay, David Movrin, and Elżbieta Olechowska, eds., *Classics and Communism: Greek and Latin behind the Iron Curtain*, Ljubljana, Budapest, and Warsaw: Ljubljana University Press, Faculty of Arts; Collegium Budapest Institute for Advanced Study; and Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2013, 28; Solomon Lurie, “Из воспоминаний о Марке Наумовиче Ботвиннике” [Iz vospominanii o Marke Naumoviche Botvinnike; Reminiscing about Mark Naumovich Botvinnik], *Древний мир и мы* [Drevnii mir i my; The Ancient World and We] 1 (1997), 187; Pamela Davidson, *Cultural Memory and Survival: The Russian Renaissance of Classical Antiquity in the Twentieth Century*, “Studies in Russia and Eastern Europe” 6, London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 17–18, available online at the University College London open access library: UCL Discovery, <https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/69111/> (accessed 6 January 2021).

¹⁷ Vadim Mikhailin and Galina Belyaeva, “Историк в истерике, или О внезапном появлении учителя истории в советском кино рубежа 1960–1970х гг.” [Istorik v isterike, ili O vnezapnom pojavlenii uchitelia istorii v sovetskom kino rubezha 1960–1970kh gg.]; A Historian in Hysterics: History Teachers in the Soviet Cinema of the Late 1960s and Early 1970s], in Vadim Mikhailin and Galina Belyaeva, *Между позицией и позой. Учитель истории в советском “школьном” кино* [Mezhdu

that the teacher-protagonist is usually an ideal character. However, in the 1960s we see good as well as bad schoolmasters portrayed in films (*What If It Be Love?*; *Друг мой, Колька!* [Drug moi, Kolka!; My Friend, Kolka!], dirs. Aleksei Saltykov and Aleksandr Mitta, 1961). Nevertheless, the ideal teacher usually was present and (s)he was the one who would resolve the given problems merely by her or his appearance. Initially the depicted pedagogues were both female and male; however, this changed in favour of the typical female teacher-protagonist at the end of the 1960s. "From now on, the teacher is usually a single woman, for whom the school replaces all other aspects of normal human life" (Отныне учитель – это, как правило, одинокая женщина, для которой школа заменяет все прочие аспекты нормальной человеческой жизни)¹⁸ – something that closely reflected social reality.

Scarecrow and Dear Miss Elena

The school film was reborn with new power in the late 1980s.¹⁹ The two films I wish to discuss are examples of this genre. Both have their origins in literary texts known to the public from 1981: the novel for children and youth *Чучело* [Chuchelo; Scarecrow, 1981] by Vladimir Zheleznikov²⁰ and the drama *Дорогая Елена Сергеевна* [Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna; Dear Miss Elena, written in 1980, published in 1989] by Liudmila Razumovskaia.²¹ Even though Rolan Bykov directed *Scarecrow* in 1983, while Eldar Riazanov made *Dear Miss Elena* in 1988, the difference in time is not so great, as the latter had been staged in theatres since 1981 (it was banned in 1983 by Mikhail Gorbachev), and Riazanov wanted

pozitsiei i pozoi. Uchitel' istorii v sovetskom "shkolnom" kino; In-Between Position and Pose: Teacher of History in the Soviet "School" Film], "Труды ЛИСКА" [Trudy LISKA; Works of LISKA – Laboratory of Historical, Social and Cultural Anthropology] 21, Saratov and Sankt-Peterburg: LISKA, 2013, 6.

¹⁸ Ibidem, 7.

¹⁹ Vadim Mikhailin and Galina Belyaeva, "Поколение инопланетян: о 'новой волне' в школьном кино 1980-х годов" [Pokolenie inoplanetian: o "novoi volne" v shkolnom kino 1980-kh godov; Generation of Aliens: A "New Wave" in the Soviet Late 1980s School Film], *Неприкосновенный запас* [Neprikosnovennyi zapas; Emergency Supply] 3.119 (2018), 101.

²⁰ Vladimir Zheleznikov, *Чучело* [Chuchelo; Scarecrow], Moskva: Sovremennik, 1988 (ed. pr. 1981).

²¹ Liudmila Razumovskaia, "Дорогая Елена Сергеевна" [Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna; Dear Miss Elena], in Liudmila Razumovskaia, *Сад без земли. Пьесы* [Sad bez zemli. P'esy; The Earthless Garden: Plays], Leningrad: Iskusstvo, 1989, 53–94.

to produce it from November 1982.²² We can therefore consider the films to be products of the same time.

Scarecrow also had a long way to the screen. Zheleznikov wrote a film script in 1973, but Госкино (Goskino; State Cinema), the main censoring body in the USSR for film production, did not accept it and announced that "such children and such a school will never appear on Soviet screens" (такие дети и такая школа никогда не появятся на советском экране).²³ Due to this, the author rewrote the script as a novel and published it in 1981.²⁴ The novel was a success and was reissued in "millions of copies", as the author states.²⁵ As a result, Goskino itself asked for a film adaptation. However, after the film was made, it was to be banned again. The director says it was only his personal contact with Yuri Andropov, then the leader of the USSR, that enabled the film's release.²⁶ Distribution began in the autumn of 1984.²⁷

Both films were exceptional and generated a huge resonance among young and adult viewers. The problem was that the usual pattern of good and bad characters was disturbed. It seems that in these films the entire society is sick, and at best one or more characters are good. *Scarecrow* presents the problem of bullying in the school community, while *Dear Miss Elena* discusses an incident of the terrorization of a teacher by several pupils in her own apartment. There was considerable dispute about the films, and over the years the authors received letters from their audiences.²⁸ Discussions were held in many newspapers

²² David MacFadyen, "Ideology Faces the Horrors of Its Opposite", in David MacFadyen, *The Sad Comedy of Eldar Riazanov: An Introduction to Russia's Most Popular Filmmaker*, Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014 (ed. pr. 2003), 79.

²³ Vladimir Zheleznikov, "'Чучело' продолжается" ["Chuchelo" prodolzhaetsia; "Scarecrow" Goes On], interview with Zheleznikov by T. Korotkova, *Известия* [Izvestiia; The News], 26 October 2010, <https://chapaev.media/articles/2582> (accessed 17 April 2020).

²⁴ It was first published in an abbreviated version in the children's and youth magazine *Пионер* [Pioneer; Pioneer] 3–7 (1981) under the title "Всего-то несколько дней" [Vsego-to neskol'ko dnei; Just a Few Days], then in its entirety in the author's collections of short stories published in 1981, 1982, 1986, 1988, 1989, etc.

²⁵ Zheleznikov, "'Chuchelo' prodolzhaetsia".

²⁶ *Ibidem*; Viktor Matizen, "Ролан Быков: 'Великий и ужасный' на Чистых прудах. Интервью" [Rolan Bykov: "Velikii i uzhasnyi" na Chistykh prudakh. Interv'iu; Rolan Bykov: "The Great and the Terrible" at Chistye Prudy. Interview], *Искусство кино* [Iskusstvo kino; The Art of Cinema] 5 (May 1998), 79–88, available online at the journal archive, <http://old.kinoart.ru/archive/1998/05/n5-article17> (accessed 17 April 2020).

²⁷ See the diaries of Bykov from the years 1983–1984: *Ja pobit*, 293–371.

²⁸ Bykov used these letters to write a discussion with viewers published as "До и после Чучела" [Do i posle Chuchela; Before and After *Scarecrow*] in the popular magazine *Юность* [Iunost'; Youth] 9 (1985), 84–105.

and magazines, both large and small, central and local. Many letters contained objections. There were also personal confessions, however, about similar experiences, with viewers speaking for both the victims and the bullies.

Scarecrow as the first movie of this kind opened the way for other, similar cinematic works depicting social cruelty among children and youth in the USSR. Among them were *Плюмбум или Опасная игра* [Plumbum ili Opasnaia igra; Plumbum, or, The Dangerous Game], dir. Vadim Abdrashitov, 1986; *Соблазн* [Soblazn; Temptation], dir. Viacheslav Sorokin, 1987; and *Меня зовут Арлекино* [Menia zovut Arlekino; My Name Is Harlequin], dir. Valery Rybarev, 1988. *Dear Miss Elena* was one of the movies in this group.²⁹

The Hydra of the Collective

Both of the works analysed have been made in the school film genre. There is a class at the centre of *Scarecrow*, and five pupils and their teacher are the main characters of *Dear Miss Elena*. In both films, children show their worst qualities and the teachers are unable to influence them. In both cases, it is a group of people, the collective, that is the evil allowing the characters to reveal their wicked sides. This approach was uncommon in Soviet cinema, as the collective was one of the main values of the ruling ideology. Bykov, the director of *Scarecrow*, calls the school class the “hydra of the collective” from the beginning of his work on the production. The following is a fragment from his diary, from when he first decided to make the film:

ХОЧУ СТАВИТЬ “ЧУЧЕЛО” ЖЕЛЕЗНИКОВА. [...] В духовном плане разговор в “Чучеле” о “гидре коллектива”, правда которого чаще всего безнравственна. В самом зародыше, в самой игре во всевластие, в самом посыле – “интересы коллектива превыше всего”.³⁰

I WANT TO SHOOT “SCARECROW” BY ZHELEZNIKOV. [...] Spiritually, the discussion in “Scarecrow” is about the “hydra of the collective”, the truth of which is often immoral. In the very origin, in the very game

²⁹ On social cruelty in Soviet films about children, see Olga Romanova, “Социальное насилие в ‘детских фильмах о детях’” [Sotsialnoe nasilie v “nedetskikh filmakh o detiakh”]; Social Violence in “Non-Children’s Films about Children”, a public lecture at the Belarusian State University, November 2013, available online at the website of the European College of Liberal Arts, Minsk, <https://eclab.by/texts/lection/socialnoe-nasilie-v-nedetskikh-filmah-o-detyah> (accessed 18 April 2020).

³⁰ Bykov, *Ja pobit*, 191–192 (1 December 1981).

of omnipotence, in the very message – “the interests of the collective are above all else”.

Referring to a principle of the Pioneer organization,³¹ to subordinate personal interests to those of society,³² Bykov undermines the very ideology of socialist society. However, his deeds cannot be interpreted as anti-Soviet. Rather, he was acting in the spirit of the upcoming *perestroika*, and aiming to improve the morals of the society. Bykov returned to the idea of the hydra after a few months, emphasizing that he was fighting with the vulgarity³³ of the group and mass culture as its result:

Все, что я делаю, и все те, кто по эту сторону, – это борьба со вселенской пошлостью. Массовая культура – самый общий и самый глобальный шаг пошлого. Мы должны понимать, что сегодня пошлости не противопоставлено общественное сознание, ибо само общественное сознание может быть пошлым. Пошлость человека не так страшна, как пошлость коллектива. Пошлость коллектива – явление типа гидры с двенадцатью головами: где отрубишь три, вырастает четыре.

Everything I do, and all those on this side are doing, is a fight against universal vulgarity. Mass culture is the most common and global move of vulgarity. We must understand that today vulgarity is not opposed to the public consciousness, because the public consciousness itself can be vulgar. Human vulgarity is not as terrible as the vulgarity of a collective. The vulgarity of a collective is a phenomenon like a hydra with twelve heads: where you cut off three, four start growing.³⁴

Thus the author states that it is the bad collective that is evil. And that evil may rise when it is supported by a group. On the one hand, Bykov reflects on the developing phenomenon of mass culture. On the other, he removes the positive aspect from the idea of the collective. Mass culture from the Soviet perspective

³¹ The Vladimir Lenin All-Union Pioneer Organization (Всесоюзная пионерская организация имени В. И. Ленина; *Vsesoiuznaia pionerskaia organizatsiia imeni V. I. Lenina*) was a mass organization for children and youth of the USSR (from nine to fifteen years old), rooted in the Scout movement and aimed at the ideological education of Soviet youth.

³² This principle was symbolized by the Young Pioneer salute – a hand raised above the head.

³³ The following quotation is based on an untranslatable Russian term – *пошлость*; *poshlost'* – which contains the meanings “banality”, “obscenity”, and “bad taste”, and is usually translated as “vulgarity”. Cf. Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia*, Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1994, 41–66.

³⁴ Bykov, *Ia pobit*, 201 (16 February 1982).

was understood as “‘low’, commercial, [...] too vulgar”³⁵ in opposition to Soviet culture. Although socialist realism’s works of art were produced in extensive amounts, reached people all over the country, and very often were of altogether low artistic quality (functioning as another case of “mass kitsch”), they had different functions and aimed at educating the masses and bringing socialism to life – these artworks were considered “good” *a priori*. During late socialism, products of Western mass culture, music, and cinema became more accessible, even fashionable, to Soviet people, especially among youth.³⁶ This influenced not only aesthetics, but values as well, thereby debasing spirituality in favour of material goods and wealth – creating *poshlost’*, in Russian terminology. This combination of vulgarity and collective power created the hydra that Bykov was depicting.³⁷

Before working on *Scarecrow*, for five years (1975–1980) Bykov was the host of the *Спор-Клуб* [Spor-Klub; Dispute-Club], a television show for teenagers. The problems of childhood and of the possibility of sincere conversation with children about difficult things became a concern for him, one he pondered for many years.³⁸ He was planning to write a book on childhood and was promoting cinema for children at meetings with the Soviet authorities, dreaming about a special television programme for young viewers: “[...] an international one. The programme of masterpieces, the world exchange” ([...] международной. О программе шедевров, о мировом обмене).³⁹ Thus, it seems natural that the director chose children and their society as the subject of his movie.

At the same time, Bykov was also very interested in folklore and fairy tales. In 1980 he was writing a screenplay for the fairy tale *Андрей – всех добрей* [Andrei – vsekh dobrei; Andrei, the Kindest] for Gennady Kharlan and

³⁵ Boris Groys, “A Style and a Half”, in Thomas Lahusen and Evgeny Dobrenko, eds., *Social Realism without Shores*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press Books, 1997, 79. Compare Viacheslav Glazychev’s description of mass culture in *Большая Советская Энциклопедия* [Bol’shaia Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia; Great Soviet Encyclopaedia], vol. 15, 3rd ed., Moskva: Izdatelstvo Sovetskaia Entsiklopediia, 1974, coll. 1346–1349.

³⁶ Cf. Sergei I. Zhuk, *Rock and Roll in the Rocket City: The West, Identity and Ideology in Soviet Dnepropetrovsk, 1960–1985*, Washington, DC, and Baltimore, MD: Woodrow Wilson Center Press and Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010; Anna Ivanova, *Магазины “Березка”. Парадоксы потребления в позднем СССР* [Magaziny “Berëzka”. Paradokxy potrebleniia v pozdnem SSSR; “Beriozka” Stores: Paradoxes of Consumption in the Late USSR], Moskva: Novoe Literaturnoe Obzrenie, 2018.

³⁷ See Bykov, *Ia pobit*, 270 (1 April 1983); Bykov, “Do i posle *Chuchela*”, 97.

³⁸ See his diaries, especially the years 1979–1986.

³⁹ Bykov, *Ia pobit*, 84 (5 July 1979).

Belarusfilm studio.⁴⁰ He was fascinated with fairy tales and wanted to shoot his own wonder-tale film. In his diaries, Bykov quotes many academic books, documentaries, and lectures on the theory of folk tales (for example, by Alexei Galakhov, Yuri Barabash, Mikhail Bakhtin, James George Frazer), calling structuralism and folklore studies “his topics”.⁴¹

Bykov’s *Scarecrow* is obviously not a wonder tale, but the director uses much of this genre to build the narrative and characters. The action takes place over a year. It starts in autumn and finishes in autumn, referring to the cycle of nature and the school year. The protagonist is Lena Bessoltseva⁴² – a girl who moves from Moscow to a small Russian town (unnamed in the movie) to live with her grandfather, Nikolai Nikolaevich. The pair of child and grandfather (or old father) is a common motif of fairy tales. It recalls Tom Thumb’s or Tommelise’s families, or Russian Дед Мороз (Ded Moroz; Grandfather Frost, the equivalent of Santa Claus; Ded Moroz has a granddaughter named Снегурочка [Snegurochka; Snow Maiden] in Russian folklore). Similarly to the “old father” of fairy tales, the grandfather is present and absent in the narrative; he does not participate or help Lena until the final events of the story start to unfold.⁴³

Lena is a typical hero of fairy tales – kind, simple, over-trusting, brave, and sincere.⁴⁴ In a way, she is similar to Ivan the Fool or the Idiot of Fyodor Dostoyevsky, as Bykov himself states:

Чучело – “Идиот” в масштабе этой повести (кстати, это еще не сделано), она – Донья Кихот, но и не то. Ведь это о Любви. Она не ищет мельниц и не живет ради высокого помысла, она не “ради”, она естественно такова, она даже не ведает, кто она внутренне и кто она внешне, она сама являет собой ценность, редкость, искренность.⁴⁵

Scarecrow is an “Idiot” on the scale of the story (by the way, it hasn’t been done yet), she is Doña Quixote, but not really. It is all about Love. She is not looking for windmills and does not live for the sake of high thought, she is not “for the sake of”, she is naturally so, she does not even know who she is inside and what she looks like; she is herself a value, rarity, sincerity.

⁴⁰ The movie was eventually based on another screenplay and was released as *Андрей и злой чародей* [Andrei i zloi charodei; Andrei and the Evil Wizard] in 1981.

⁴¹ Bykov, *Ja pobit*, 142 (9 October 1980).

⁴² The family name is a charactonym meaning “without salt”.

⁴³ The final role of the grandfather, when he finds the bullies and calls them by name, is quoted by Bykov as typical of fairy tales; see Bykov, “Do i posle *Chuchela*”, 102.

⁴⁴ See Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms’ Fairy Tales*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987, 86–88.

⁴⁵ Bykov, *Ja pobit*, 192 (1 December 1981).

In his study of folklore, Bykov was going to make “a comparison of heroes: Heracles – David of Sassoun⁴⁶ – Ilya Muromets”⁴⁷ (сравнение богатырей: Геракла – Давида Сасунского – Ильи Муромца). Ivan the Fool and his path of becoming Ivan the Tsarevich (the prince).⁴⁸ In my opinion, while developing the character of Lena Bessoltseva in the movie, the director uses features of the following folk and classical characters: Heracles fighting with the Hydra;⁴⁹ Ivan the Fool, Don Quixote, and the Idiot believing until the end in honour and the good intentions of other people; Joan of Arc and Christ ready to die for their ideals;⁵⁰ young David fighting against a giant.

When Lena appears for the first time in the film (see Fig. 1) we hear the song “Venus” by Shocking Blue, which was extremely popular in the Soviet Union of that time and even came to have a “Russian” name – “Shisgara”:

A goddess on a mountain top
Was burning like a silver flame
The summit of beauty and love
And Venus was her name.
She’s got it
Yeah, baby, she’s got it
Well, I’m your Venus
I’m your fire
At your desire [...].
Her weapons were her crystal eyes
Making every man mad
Black as the dark night she was
Got what no one else had [...].

This refers to the interpretation of the conflict by Bykov: “It is all about Love”. Lena does everything in the name of her love for Dima, her classmate, and does not see his flaws as long as she can. The whole conflict is based on this love: wanting to protect Dima, Lena takes his fault upon herself, claiming

⁴⁶ An Armenian epic character.

⁴⁷ A Russian and East-Slavic epic character.

⁴⁸ Bykov, *Ia pobit*, 111 (23 May 1980).

⁴⁹ I use two variants of spelling the word “Hydra” – with capital “H” to mean the mythical creature, and lowercased when used in a metaphorical sense.

⁵⁰ For the messianic figure in youth culture, see also Michael Stierstorfer’s chapter, “From an Adolescent Freak to a Hope-Spreading Messianic Demigod: The Curious Transformations of Modern Teenagers in Contemporary Mythopoetic Fantasy Literature”, 219–229, in the present volume.

that she was the one who betrayed their class.⁵¹ The class starts to persecute, boycott, and bully her in a cruel way. As a culmination, the children make a scarecrow using Lena's dress and set it on fire in the ruins of an old church. Afterwards Lena shaves her head, puts the burnt dress on, and comes to Dima's birthday uninvited. Changing the music, she dances to the song "Good Good Lovin'" by Chubby Checker, which refers to the topic of love again.



Figure 1: Kristina Orbakaitė as Lena Bessoltseva first appearing in the film *Чучело* [Chuchelo; Scarecrow], 1983, dir. Rolan Bykov. Courtesy of the Mosfilm studio.

This love of Lena is evidently a Christ-like love – forgiving, turning its cheek, bearing the cross. On the other hand, she is just a girl who is in love with a boy. And it is an ordinary human love. She idealizes Dima, does stupid things for him – and acts under the influence of a Venus type of love. Although she is supposed to be clumsy and not pretty according to Zheleznikov's novel,⁵² Kristina Orbakaitė, the actress, is a beautiful girl, maybe a little bit funny. When she first appears in the movie, we first hear her name – Bessoltseva – and then see a crowd of children running towards a river. Then we see a girl walking behind the columns of an arcade. We see her face with long, fair, braided hair as she approaches, moving among the columns. Her figure and face are shot from

⁵¹ For a more detailed description of the movie, see the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* database: Hanna Paulouskaya, "Entry on *Scarecrow* [Чучело] by Rolan Bykov and Vladimir Zheleznikov", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Susan Deacy, *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*, Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019, <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/853> (accessed 17 April 2020). See also an interesting contemporary analysis of the film made by Nancy P. Condee, holding a fellowship at the Institute of Current World Affairs in 1984–1986, available online at <http://www.icwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/NPC-6.pdf> (accessed 19 April 2020).

⁵² Zheleznikov, *Chuchelo*, 7.

a similar perspective as the famous depiction of Venus of Botticelli. The song about the goddess in the background enhances this allusion.

In her mistakes and simplicity Lena acts as Ivan the Fool, the Idiot, or as the impulsive Heracles. However, her similarity to the latter is the slightest. She is neither strong nor performs great deeds. On the other hand, she fights a monster and stands by her truth until the end. It is the director's evocation of Hydra that hints at Heracles.

Are there allusions to the mythological Hydra in the movie? In my opinion, the director made at least a few attempts to shoot a crowd of kids as a multi-headed creature. At the very beginning of the film we have a pedestrian street view formed by a building in the background, the pavement in front of it, and a street for strolling with trees and benches, fenced with iron barriers. We hear sounds of vehicles and the indistinct chatter of the persons portrayed in the scene. The building is huge, and we only see a fragment of it. It is painted cream and white. Grey windows and doors are distinctive. There are three big doors in the centre of the building, ones which resemble a typical Greek theatre stage. The steps leading to the building are similar to the crepidoma of Ancient Greek temples. In the shot, there are a few groups of people: two men chatting in the left front corner, two women with a baby in the right back corner, one man standing in the rear centre. Some people are moving through the shot, also through the doors. In the very centre of the frame, there is a group of ten children sitting in a row on a bench. Most of them are dressed in grey, green, and dark-blue clothes. There is a girl in white and red clothes in the centre of the group, which focuses the scene visually. The camera zooms in and we see that most of the children are boys. One of them has a tape recorder, and we can hear music. The children are listening to it and moving. Some of them are fighting in a friendly way. Then the middle girl stands up, takes another girl with her, and they step out of the frame. At this moment the boys on the right go after them, and then all the boys follow the girls. The group sitting in a row and slightly moving resembles a living creature, a kind of a caterpillar or a snake. It is set in motion by its colourful centre, and then gathers all of its parts together.

Another scene I wish to describe is the moment when the class is standing on a street with suitcases, as the children were not taken on a trip to Moscow for their misconduct (Part 1, 00:47:02).⁵³ The children had conspired to skip a lesson and Dima confessed it to the teacher, which is why they have been

⁵³ For the reader's convenience, I specify the start time of episodes in the film in the format "Part (1 or 2), Hour:Minutes:Seconds".

punished. After the bus to Moscow has departed, the children form a tight group behind Lena's back, and start to move in her direction. At first, they whisper resentfully, sounding like a snake's hissing. Then they call her names and the crowd surrounds her, moving towards her. The class has a leader, Mironova, usually referred to as Железная кнопка (Zheleznaia knopka; Iron Pin), as she is a small girl with an iron character. Mironova is depicted as the main head of this hydra. After the camera zooms in on her face, filling the whole screen, and only fragments of the other children's figures are visible (Part 1, 00:47:37), the operator makes shots of the full faces only of speaking persons (Mironova and Valka; see Fig. 2). Due to this, the faces of the children are similar to the heads of a single creature. The effect continues as the scene is shot from a more distant position, when the person speaking changes (Marina), and the crowd is now following the new leader, repeating words of boycott in a hissing way. Lena and Dima run away from the class, and it follows them. Children run with different speed and the group ceases to resemble a unified creature. In the city square they see an ice-cream seller, and at this point some of them behave like normal children again, abandoning the chase in order to buy an ice cream.



Figure 2: Mironova and Valka as hydra's heads, still from the film *Чучело* [Chuchelo; Scarecrow], 1983, dir. Rolan Bykov. Courtesy of the Mosfilm studio.

Each child from the group is different. We know their stories. Some of them are idealists, believing in communist values. Mironova is such a person. She is firmly committed to her principles and often speaks in slogans. Shmakova, the girl wearing the red jacket in the first scene, is beautiful, has the best clothes, and pays attention to her appearance. She behaves in a sneaky way. Marina Martanova wants to go to Moscow to find her father who had left her family,

and that is why she is very upset and angry. Valka, a tall, naughty boy, is cruel to dogs. Vasil'ev wants to help Lena, but is not strong and influential enough. Dima has the best marks in the class and is loved by everybody, but he has no courage to tell the truth. This mixture of principles and of their absence, the vulgarity seasoned with communist slogans makes the hydra-monster. The class has skipped a lesson, but it is not a problem for them, and they do not think that they have done anything wrong. They are convinced that they should stay together to the end and regard anyone who has a different opinion as a traitor. Their ideal behaviour is based on war principles, which command them to protect comrades to the end and to destroy their enemies. In persecuting Lena, they do not see her as a person and feel no empathy for her.

The role of the teacher in this situation is minimal. Margarita Ivanovna is preparing to get married and does not see a problem in the class until the end. There is also the figure of the school principal, who stands at the school entrance every year on 1 September – the first day of school – and greets the pupils (Part 1, 00:15:45; Part 2, 00:44:51). She resembles a pre-revolutionary school lady or a communist authority, but her role is only representative. The problem of the class is not resolved by the school, and the children are left alone with their understanding of life's principles.

It seems that the world of the adults is separated from the world of the children and has no influence on it. However, the adults, normal dwellers of the town, behave in a similar way. They do not like Lena's grandfather, because he, being a war veteran, a major, spends all his money on pictures painted by his own grandfather, a serf artist,⁵⁴ and on restoring the old family house. His concern for family history and tradition, together with his disregard for clothing or appearance, is not accepted by the other city dwellers. The kids call him "a patch-maker" and tease him.

There is another person in the movie who deserves attention, connected with a cadet school's brass band playing classical music from time to time on the town's streets or on the riverside. The conductor of the orchestra is Rolan Bykov, the director of the movie.⁵⁵ He resembles the figure of the coryphée of Greek tragedy, who is a witness to the events and is present during the performance. At the close of the movie, we see Bykov, who takes off his peaked cap and sends

⁵⁴ In this way Zheleznikov gives the Bessoltsevs a peasant or servile origin, which was important for the Soviet system, combining it with a more civilized and modern – artistic – character (serfdom was abolished in Russia only in 1861, and dependent people had various functions).

⁵⁵ It is interesting that his wife, Elena Sanaeva, and her son, Pavel Sanaev, also acted in the movie (the teacher Margarita Ivanovna and Vasil'ev).

his respects to Lena and her grandfather (see Fig. 3). In a close-up shot, his face expresses pain and compassion for the girl.⁵⁶ Bykov emphasizes that he chose a cadet orchestra “to render military honours” (отдать [...] воинские почести) to the heroes of the film.⁵⁷



Figure 3: Rolan Bykov as the conductor of the orchestra sending respects to Lena and Nikolai Bessoltsev, still from the film *Чучело* [Chuchelo; Scarecrow], 1983, dir. Rolan Bykov. Courtesy of the Mosfilm studio.

The classical music played by the orchestra refers to eternal human values. It differs from contemporary, mostly Western rock-and-roll music, which is used as themes for Lena and the class. Such a choice may stress the bad influence of Western mass culture or just depict differences between the generations and represent the contemporary world as a mixture of classical, serious values and pressure-free modern influences.

A Soviet Antigone

The character of Mironova, Iron Pin, refers also to the model of Antigone, who stands by her ideals to the end. The girl acts as a class consciousness and does not say anything vicious or unprincipled. However, her values are too “iron” to produce a happy ending. During the finale, when the class finds out the truth about the real “traitor”, the girl proposes to make a new boycott, this time of Dima, as well as of Shmakova and Popov, who knew the truth and yet said

⁵⁶ See Bykov, “Do i posle *Chuchela*”, 105; Mikhailin and Belyaeva, “Pokolenie inoplanetian”, 104.

⁵⁷ See Bykov, “Do i posle *Chuchela*”, 105.

nothing. But at this point the class does not follow Mironova, and the pupils make the decision to stop boycotting altogether.

An image of another Antigone is presented in the film *Dear Miss Elena* by Riazanov (see Fig. 4), or even in greater measure in the text of the play by Razumovskaia⁵⁸ and its theatre stagings. The difference between the generations, with youth portrayed as cruel and horrifying, is presented also in this cinematic production. This time the action is set in the flat of the teacher, Miss Elena, and she is most involved in the incident, as she is the object of the violence.

During the final school examinations four pupils from the last grade (Voldia, Vitia, Pasha, and Lialia) come to the flat of their teacher Elena with birthday wishes, flowers, and a present. The real reason of their visit is their wish to get the key to the safe where their tests in mathematics are kept. They want to correct their answers in order to get good or excellent marks. Elena does not want to give them the key, and they stay at her place all night, trying to persuade her and acting ever more cruelly. The movie ends with an attempted rape of Lialia, the resignation of three of the four persecutors, and the implied suicide of Elena.

Most of the night the pupils and their teacher are talking, which reveals the differences between their values. This is especially noticeable in the text of the play, which has more intertextual references and resembles a philosophical dialogue.⁵⁹ The most striking in this conversation is the impossibility of listening to each other. At some point in the play, the teacher even covers her ears and starts to recite Romantic poems by Alexander Pushkin not to hear the children.⁶⁰ It seems that the teenagers and their teacher speak different languages. Elena often uses clichés that reveal her idealistic nature. The pupils speak youth slang and have to explain some words to their teacher (*прикид* [*prikid*; outfit], *фирма́*

⁵⁸ An analysis of the play is presented in the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* database: Hanna Paulouskaya, "Entry on *Dear Miss Elena* [*Дорогая Елена Сергеевна*] by Lyudmila Razumovskaia", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Susan Deacy, *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*, Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019, <http://www.omic.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/854> (accessed 17 April 2020). See also Jeffrey Pace Stephens, *Dramatic and Theatrical Manifestations of Glasnost in Soviet Russia during the First Half of the Gorbachev Epoch, 1985–1988*, PhD dissertation, The Ohio State University, 1995, 156–165, http://rave.ohiolink.edu/etdc/view?acc_num=osu1487862399452104 (accessed 3 August 2021).

⁵⁹ Razumovskaia did not appreciate the interpretation of Riazanov, calling it "a conventional, contemporary realistic work"; see an interview with the author conducted in the spring of 1990 by John Freedman and archived on his blog as "Lyudmila Razumovskaya, Chicago, 1990", *Blogs and Stray Articles*, 13 November 2018, <https://johnfreedmanarchive.wordpress.com/2018/11/13/lyudmila-razumovskaya-chicago-1990> (accessed 8 April 2020).

⁶⁰ Razumovskaia, "Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna", 83.



Figure 4: Cover of the DVD edition of the film *Дорогая Елена Сергеевна* [Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna; Dear Miss Elena], 1988, dir. Eldar Riazanov. Courtesy of the Film Video Association Close-Up.

[*firma*; fashionable Western clothes]), but it is their vision of life she most fails to understand. Sometimes the children mouth slogans and phrases in the style of Elena, mocking her and undermining the meaning of her words. David MacFadyen interprets the conflict in the film as struggle for a new language in a period of crisis in society:

The pupils, as young people, are negotiating their selfhood within Elena Sergeevna's language, and they do so by using it: "The law is the law" now becomes "The language is the language." They steal her ability to give the world meaning. Once robbed of the power to affect anything, Elena Sergeevna finds herself in exactly the same situation as the students. They all need to form a smaller minimally social self.⁶¹

Elena presents herself as belonging to the generation of the 1960s and heartily believes in communist and human ideals. Riazanov calls her "a pure [*чистая; chistaia*] teacher".⁶² She is very emotional and cries upon receiving the flowers and birthday wishes. As a "proper" teacher, she has pictures of her former graduates on the walls. Living with her mother, a war veteran, she also has a portrait of the communist leader Viacheslav Molotov, some children's drawings, photos of her young self. There are plenty of books (we see titles of volumes by Vladimir Vysotsky and Yevgeny Yevtushenko, a book on Marc Chagall), a bust of Vladimir Mayakovsky, a decorative sculpture of a child, and a nostalgic teddy bear from the old times on the shelves. In contrast to this world of ideals Elena lives in, the camera often shows a television screen presenting music clips and news – about hurricanes, floods, the arrests of drug dealers, etc. Such interruptions warn of an upcoming conflict and refer to the world the children are speaking about.

The teenagers do not believe in the high language of Elena or other authorities. They see the hypocrisy of their society, and that their parents live according to different principles. They think in a materialistic way and have "earthly longings" – to have money and position in society, to live a good life (00:47:26; 01:05:36). This is the "vulgarity" and influence of fashion and mass culture that Bykov was afraid of. Elena accuses them of *подлость* (*podlost'*; 00:44:32), which in Russian means villainy, deception, and betrayal. The teenagers answer

⁶¹ MacFadyen, "Ideology Faces the Horrors of Its Opposite", 80, 84.

⁶² Eldar Riazanov, "В гостях у мастера" [V gostiakh u мастера; At the Master's House], *Панорама TV* 29.365 (24–30 July 2000), 7, quoted after MacFadyen, "Ideology Faces the Horrors of Its Opposite", 79.

that it is the school that teaches them to lie and be sneaky, as it promotes ideals not corresponding to reality (01:10:34). "We're your children" (Мы – ваши дети), they say to Elena. The conflicting ideologies reveal generational differences, as well as the complicated situation in a society under transformation, when many "truths" coexist and struggle with each other.

The pupils want Elena to commit a crime that is unthinkable from her point of view. From the moral perspective, Elena is totally right, and the pupils are simply young villains. However, at the same time they see some things Elena is missing. Without getting a good mark, at least one of the pupils, Vitia, will have to do military service, which at that time meant being sent to fight in Afghanistan (00:23:54; 01:17:50). This is not said openly, but the context was widely understood. Thus, sticking to high moral principles contradicts other values – of peace and the worth of human life – and ceases to be so unquestionably positive. This ambiguity of morals and ideals refers to *Antigone* of Sophocles, which also goes beyond a simple interpretation.⁶³

In the text of Razumovskaia's drama, Volodia at one point calls Elena a Greek heroine, "diagnosing" her with the "Antigone complex".⁶⁴ When asked by Vitia what that means, he answers:

Это когда идеалистическое восприятие действительности возведено в принцип. Когда всякое насилие над их личностью или над их идеалами вызывает героическое сопротивление. И здесь существует прямо пропорциональная зависимость: чем сильнее на них давят, тем активнее и яростнее они сопротивляются. Из таких натур вырастают железные герои и вожди революций и войн. Но в обычной жизни это чаще всего чудачки, не от мира сего, юродивые, над которыми все смеются и которых никто не воспринимает всерьез.⁶⁵

It's when an idealistic perception of reality gets elevated to a principle. When any force against your personality or your ideals provokes heroic resistance. There's a really remarkable phenomenon called proportional dependence: the more pressure you apply, the more active and intense the resistance gets. This is the kind of character that produces iron heroes

⁶³ Cf. S.E. Wilmer and Audronė Žukauskaitė, eds., *Interrogating Antigone in Postmodern Philosophy and Criticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁶⁴ "У нашей дорогой Елены Сергеевны комплекс Антигоны" (Our dear Miss Elena has the Antigone complex) – Razumovskaia, "Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna", 69. It is interesting that in this moment the author explicitly refers to the title of the play, thus emphasizing the importance of the fragment and the idea.

⁶⁵ Razumovskaia, "Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna", 70.

in wartime and leaders of revolutions. But in everyday life they mostly end up simple-minded moralising freaks, heads in the clouds, holy fools, whom nobody takes seriously and only raise a laugh.⁶⁶

Thus, from the pupil's perspective Antigone is an anti-hero, a person that looks like a hero and behaves accordingly but is unsuitable for peaceful life. This diagnosis reveals a crisis of confidence in ideals during the late Soviet period. In the film, this explicit reference to Antigone is absent, and Elena is called Joan of Arc and a "full-blown idealist" (00:40:30; *махровой идеалисткой*); however, resemblance to the Greek character remains. Similar to Sophocles' Antigone, Elena has no power to influence the situation and cannot change the moods of the pupils or their behaviour. She is not the teacher from the Soviet school film, but just a victim. Elena is much older than the pupils, but she still lives with her mother and is unmarried, being similar to Antigone again. The pupils undermine her social position and comment on her clothes and appearance, advising her to be more fashionable (00:46:23). Thus, they put themselves higher than their teacher and change the roles.

As there is an attempted rape in the movie, the problem of gender and cruelty against women is emphasized, resembling the problem of Sophocles' tragedy again. The female topic is important for Razumovskaia and appears in most of her dramas (for example, *Медея* [Medea], 1980; *Под одной крышей* [Pod odnoi kryshei; Under the Same Roof], 1978). In this case, the students comment on the unmarried status of Elena and her looks, revealing the negative attitude to single women in Soviet society. According to the drama, when Volodia starts the rape attempt, he says to Lialia: "Sit quietly and stay seated. The men will decide. Understood? We have a patriarchy now" (Сядь спокойно и сиди. Решать будут мужчины. Ясно? У нас нонче патриархат),⁶⁷ which emphasizes the negation of women's rights by the group of men. Actually, it is first of all a group of men that came to Elena's house, as Lialia is only a companion and has the usual "female" roles – to speak with Elena as a woman and to calm her. Starting as a companion, she transforms into another victim, and her boyfriend, Pasha, who has been locked up in the attic,⁶⁸ cannot stop it.

⁶⁶ Trans. after Ludmilla Razumovskaya, *Dear Miss Elena*, trans. Zoltan Schmidt and Roger Downey, Seattle, WA: Rain City Projects, 1992, 17.

⁶⁷ Razumovskaia, "Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna", 89.

⁶⁸ Pasha has given his permission for a mock rape according to the drama. Razumovskaia, "Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna", 88.

Let us take a closer look at the group. The children represent different backgrounds and social positions. Pasha is from a normal, ordinary family.⁶⁹ He is fond of philology and has won an award for an essay on Dostoyevsky. He has made a few mistakes on the test, but needs an excellent mark to enrol at the philology department. Volodia is from a well-established Soviet family. He does not need to correct the test – in fact, he does not need help at all because he has more power and connections than the school teacher. He is well educated, gallant, and can waltz. He is the leader of the group and is enrolling at the MGIMO (Московский Государственный Институт Международных Отношений; Moscow State Institute of International Relations), one of the most prestigious colleges in the USSR. Vitia is the son of a civil servant who has quite a high position, but has obtained it through corrupt means. His father likes to draw, and he philosophizes when he drinks. Vitia also behaves like a young alcoholic. He has the worst marks in the school and wrote nothing during the test. He wants to get into a forestry academy, as there is a need of students there. He is also the one under the threat of being called up to the Afghan war. Lialia is Pasha's girlfriend and had no problems with the test. She is the daughter of a librarian and lives with her mother in a room in a communal flat. She reads Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* in English and dreams about *la dolce vita*. Thus, all the teenagers seem to be "normal" children and represent different strata of Soviet society.

The leader of the group is Volodia. He is a trickster, the driving spirit of the incident. In the drama he calls himself a Shakespearean Iago, expressing his pleasure in the usage of power⁷⁰ by referring to the character who caused the death of Desdemona.⁷¹ It is Volodia's idea to attempt to rape Lialia in order to reveal "the real face of life" (реальное лицо жизни) to the idealistic Elena, to open her eyes to reality, and to break her (00:41:40). Volodia is the person who insists the students go through with things, and he does not allow his companions to stop and leave the flat.

As the film is full of rock music, dance, wine, and sexuality, the group resembles Bacchus and his company. This is especially noticeable in the moment Elena's apartment is searched, when the teenagers have a breakdance disco party (see Fig. 5) and we hear the songs "Тореро" [Torero] by Aria and "Счастливый день" [Schastlivyi den'; A Happy Day] by Rodnik (00:57:12). From the beginning of the movie, the students behave in a weird way – they

⁶⁹ He is the son of an academician in the drama. Cf. Razumovskaia, "Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna", 76.

⁷⁰ Razumovskaia, "Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna", 80, 81.

⁷¹ I would like to thank Katarzyna Marciniak for this observation.

speak mockingly to bystanders, pretend to practise aerobics with a group on a street, undress and swim in the river. The young men wear rock clothes, sunglasses, and hairdos in the style of the 1980s. They have a tape recorder and dance a lot.



Figure 5: Vitia dancing before the search, still from the film *Дорогая Елена Сергеевна* [Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna; Dear Miss Elena], 1988, dir. Eldar Riazanov. Courtesy of the Mosfilm studio.

The film starts with a loud, energetic rock theme heard from the recorder – “Только ты и я” [Tol’ko ty i ia; Only You and Me] by Vladimir Kuzmin with the refrain “Кто бы мог подумать?” (Who would have thought?). In this film, the authors do not use Western music, but Russian rock with songs of such bands as Avia (“Я не люблю тебя” [Ja ne liubliu tebia; I Don’t Love You]), Aria (“Torero”), and Rodnik (“A Happy Day”). The lyrics are about love or its absence, happiness, fighting, and struggle. The music is much more energetic and often aggressive than in the previous movie. Similarly to *Scarecrow*, rock music is juxtaposed with older, calmer music. Elena listens to waltzes and poetic bards (singer-songwriters). They dance a waltz to a ballad about a hussar (00:16:33). Among the vinyl records in the flat, we see a disc of Bulat Okudzhava, popular

in the culture of the Thaw. In this film again, rock music symbolizes unrestrained forces that are evil by definition, and older music refers to high human values. Yet, it should be observed that Elena listens with pleasure to the contemporary music played by the teenagers.

As in *Scarecrow*, the director is present in the movie. Riazanov plays a neighbour and the only witness, someone who is disturbed by noise and demands silence. He knocks at the door of Elena at night and is the only possible contact with the outside world. But he does not help Elena, nor does he grasp what is going on – and thus he leaves the scene. He does not act as a coryphée or even a proper witness to the tragedy.

However horrible it may look, the teenagers also have their ideals and a code of honour. They perceive themselves as the future generation and think about Russia, the fate of the intelligentsia, and differing value systems. The film and the play show the problems of Soviet society during the *perestroika* period, when it faced a plurality of views, and contradicting ideologies coexisted in society. As Riazanov shows, it is the youth who were in the most difficult position in this situation. Always rebellious and full of dreams, ideas, and energy, young people could not agree to live the old way and to turn a blind eye to the hypocrisy of the world. At the same time, they were often too audacious and reckless, and crossed too many boundaries, thereby hurting their closest. In this play, the teenagers represent Creon, who brings new laws, and Antigone is the older generation.

Conclusions

Both films are defined as dramas, but refer exceedingly to tragedy. *Scarecrow* refers to the scenography and chorus of Greek tragedy. *Dear Miss Elena* invokes Bacchus and his company. Riazanov, similarly to Razumovskaia, leaves his viewers with an open ending. Elena closes herself in the bathroom and does not react to the words of Lialia or Vitia. Her suicide is implied. Bykov also wanted to end the film with a dark finale in the form of Lena's death, but it was not possible in a children's production. However, even in this version the directors define their works as tragedies leading to a catharsis.⁷²

⁷² These words were spoken by Zheleznikov at a screening of the film on 10 October 1983, at the Mosfilm studio; see Bykov, *Ia pobit*, 296 (10 October 1983).

Both films refer to Antigone, though they interpret the character in different ways. The irresolvable conflict of the Greek tragedy is constituted here by the new time and the new generation that bring an incomprehensible reality. The children are “aliens” in the words of their teacher (*Dear Miss Elena*, 00:17:40). Indeed, Vadim Mikhailin and Galina Belyaeva emphasize the typical representation of the young generation as “aliens” in the school cinema of the 1980s – by means of their appearance, language, behaviour, and music.⁷³ References to classical mythology and classical culture may give more tools for understanding and presenting the new reality, especially in the world of children and youth.

In my opinion, both films are crafted as mythical stories on their own terms. The heroes have their own names, but these are common names. They have their stories, but they are also quite typical. The things they are doing and the decisions they are making are cruel and unbelievable, which helps us to maintain distance while watching them. They evoke emotions and require a personal response, revising viewers’ own values and behaviour. They aim to achieve catharsis or its likeliness. Perhaps, in order to pose such serious questions and to hold a sincere conversation with children, it was necessary to make the stories folkloric and mythical. Classical Antiquity became a filter distant enough to give hope to adults that they can understand their children.

⁷³ Mikhailin and Belyaeva, “Pokolenie inoplanetian”.

AYI KWEI ARMĀH'S TWO THOUSAND SEASONS AND OSIRIS RISING AS PAN-AFRICAN EPICS

The neocolonial theory formulated by Frantz Fanon (*Wretched of the Earth*)¹ continues to serve as an inspiration to most postcolonial writers, including Ayi Kwei Armah (b. 1939 in Ghana). Writers active within this doctrine continue to fire the imagination of post-independent youths, who for many decades have been misled into believing that an upward trend in development in Africa is a long day's journey into the night. Known for his extremely rich visionary symbolism, poetic drive, and firm Pan-African vision,² Armah, besides his indoctrination in neocolonial theory, has taken another leap into dredging up the Egyptian regeneration myth of Osiris and Isis and other related myths in *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973) and *Osiris Rising: A Novel of Africa Past, Present and Future* (1995) as tools for reconstructing what has been fragmented by slavery, colonialism, and neocolonialism. Most of the characters in his writing are set on an epic journey to liberate the Africa he envisions, and they give hope to new generations in the context of the immediate developmental needs of the continent.

Introduction

Ayi Kwei Armah's early writings, such as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments*,³ project him as one of Africa's most pungent satirists, with

¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington, New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963 (ed. pr. in French 1961).

² Cf. Petri Liukkonen, "Ayi Kwei Armah (1939-)", Authors' Calendar, <http://authorscalendar.info/armah.htm> (accessed 18 August 2019).

³ Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1968; Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments*, London: Heinemann, 1970.

an arsenal locked and loaded with some of the most grim, obscene, and pessimistic metaphors. In *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, he depicts a post-independent Ghana where everyone (from the ruling upper class through the working middle class to the poor, suffering lower class) contributes to a debilitating social maladjustment. Consequently, positive heroism is far-fetched as moral rectitude is scorned and despised. Instead, there is a lopsided social heroism attained on the basis of ill-gotten wealth and political power. The protagonist, known simply as the Man, is a passive, lonely, and weak husband, who is both unable and unwilling to inspire morality in anyone. Rather than speak out, he sits back and watches how his wife engages in a corrupt boat business scheme. Likewise, Baako (in *Fragments*), a visionary protagonist, remains passive. When he at last attempts to take some decisive action, he is bogged down by his Western-oriented mind. Social totality is made unattainable by the fragmentation orchestrated by the twin forces of Arab and Western imperialism.

In his later novels, such as *Two Thousand Seasons* and *The Healers*,⁴ the transition from pessimism to optimism, particularly in the former novel, occurs after the first thousand years. Through Isanusi's and Densu's "resolute revolutionary zeal" in the aforementioned texts, respectively, Armah convinces his audience that "change is both imperative and possible".⁵ For him, the Africa whose underdevelopment and fragmentation are flaunted before us today, originally had its own way, be it good or bad, but it was its own way: a way that defined who and what its peoples were and are in the midst of others. These visionary protagonists, often imbued with characteristics of epic heroes, are able to achieve extraordinary feats despite the sociocultural, political, and economic odds stacked against them.

Armah's optimism is further highlighted in *Osiris Rising*,⁶ wherein his redemptive efforts are expressed. Through Asar and his troop mate, Ast, one can foresee the imminent reconstruction of Africa, hence hope for the younger generation who are threatened with losing their grip on the continent. The hope envisaged is evident in their dynamism and determinism. Armah's visionary protagonists are "objectifications of the creative consciousness"⁷ through which

⁴ Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, London: Heinemann, 1979; Ayi Kwei Armah, *The Healers*, London: Heinemann, 1978.

⁵ Chidi Amuta, "Portraits of the Contemporary African Artist in Armah's Novels", in Derek Wright, ed., *Critical Perspectives on Ayi Kwei Armah*, Washington, DC: Three Continents Press, 1992, 19.

⁶ Ayi Kwei Armah, *Osiris Rising: A Novel of Africa Past, Present and Future*, Popenguine: Per Ankh, 1995.

⁷ Amuta, "Portraits of the Contemporary African Artist", 13.

the author proposes a cure for the colonial and neocolonial malaise plaguing his beloved continent. On this note, the present chapter first examines the relationship between Armah's writings and myths, bearing in mind Neil ten Kortenaar's view "that most African and West Indian writers" are "most grateful to writing for its power to preserve memory and even restore the dead".⁸ Second, the chapter makes a diagnosis of the genesis of the fragmentation that has long bedevilled Africa – the obstacles, and the revolution therein. Third, we chart Armah's historical and mythological swerve as important factors in effecting change on the continent. Finally, the work probes into exploiting the notion of "provincializing" other cultures as a means of asserting the self.

Myth and Archetypes

Melissa Tandiwe Myambo in "Imagining a Dialectical African Modernity: Achebe's Ontological Hopes, Sembene's Machines, Mda's Epistemological Redness" notes that "part of regaining this past and selfhood which is fundamental to the dialectical project of moving into the future of modernity is revising the 'archaic energy' of 'creation myths' [...] with which 'our ancestors created their different polities'".⁹ This shared vision and a Pan-African inclination propels Armah to place his characters in *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* on an epic journey to reclaim agency.

In order to attain his objective, Armah first creates archetypal characters and structural patterns that fit well within the realms of the epic tradition, with mythic heroes traversing insurmountable obstacles on their mission to liberate humanity. The chain of the following motifs: the quest, scapegoat, and initiation, is set into motion. Imbued with the spirit of collective self-reliance, which can drive them to authentic power consolidation, as most Pan-Africanists emphasize, Armah's epic heroes transcend all obstacles on their path to liberation in order to re-establish the link between the present, the past, and the future, thereby re-asserting a civilization that helps define the people against monumental odds, like racism, colonialism, slavery, neocolonialism, and globalization. Consequently, in *Osiris Rising*, Armah first and foremost relocates – as part of the quest

⁸ Neil ten Kortenaar, *Postcolonial Literature and Impact of Literacy: Reading and Writing in African and Caribbean Fiction*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 187.

⁹ Melissa Tandiwe Myambo, "Imagining a Dialectical African Modernity: Achebe's Ontological Hopes, Sembene's Machines, Mda's Epistemological Redness", *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 32.4 (2014): *Writers and Social Thought in Africa*, ed. Wale Adebani, 465.

stage – his heroes (Asar and Ast) from America to Manda,¹⁰ and then empowers them to break through the forces of assimilation (represented by characters such as the fake historian), colonialism (epitomized by the characters of Professor Wright Woolley, Professor Clive Jayasekera Padmasana, and the Dean of the Faculty at the University of Manda), and neocolonialism (represented by Seth, Deputy Director for Security). Similarly, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the Anoa¹¹ people, by sheer dint of their bravery, coupled with a collective spirit of togetherness and unity of purpose, are able to cross through the bog (a muddy wetland in which nothing survives) separating them from their new home.

The second phase is the scapegoat stage, wherein the hero (Asar) in *Osiris Rising* is killed by the antagonist (Seth) and the heroine (Ast) becomes a widow. Unfortunately for Seth, Asar leaves behind the fruit of vengeance in Ast's womb. In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the role of scapegoat is played by the fearless heroes and heroines who strongly opposed the colonial order (Abena – often referred to as the soft-voiced – Kisa, and Taiwa) and were murdered. However, their death is heroic, since it helps inspire rather than discourage the people from pursuing their course of liberation.

The last stage is initiation. In *Osiris Rising*, this is shown through the education obtained by the hero and heroine (Asar and Ast) at university. In addition to this education, the legend surrounding the broken *ankh* (symbol of tradition) narrated by Ast's grandmother gives a clear-cut explanation on why the truth about Africa is always hidden or distorted.¹² Further, much knowledge is obtained from Armah's naming of characters and the structure of the novel, especially as its structural pattern is drawn from the Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris. The relationship between this novel and the Ancient Egyptian myth suggests the efficacy of ancient myths in surmounting contemporary problems. The myth provides Armah with the general structure of his novel, character types, and later gives hope to the younger generation that Osiris is rising again (that is, there is hope that the dismembered or mutilated African continent is on its road to restoration).

In *Two Thousand Seasons*, the initiation stage is described by the omniscient narrator: "In the natural growth of our friendship, in pursuits of our vocation,

¹⁰ The imaginary African state that serves as the setting in *Osiris Rising*.

¹¹ The name, Anoa, is originally that of the prophetess (priestess) who prophesied the 2,000 years of hardship in the text. Later, the community takes on the name. Thus, Anoa is the name of the prophetess, the land, and the people, depending on the context.

¹² If the truth is told, Africans will be conscientized and the next step will be reclaiming agency. Such an approach will give birth to a new order that will destabilize the existing world order.

we wandered against all unexplainable prohibitions into the forbidden grove of sources, intent not on destroying but on seeking".¹³

Noliwe was the only survivor of the massacre of the leaders in *Two Thousand Seasons*, and later he advises the people to always remember their past experience for it informs them of the present and the future. In this way, Armah's novels transcend physical counterpower and turn it into intellectual counterpower to resist effectively the existing hegemony. In breaking this path, he makes a diagnosis of the colonial germ that ignited African fragmentation, the obstacles, and the revolution therein. Furthermore, Armah brings into the limelight the historical and mythological swerve as important factors in effecting change, and how such change can be obtained through "provincializing" old centres rather than rejecting them – an approach that helps in character re-assertion and integration.

The Germinal Stage

Bessie House-Soremekun and Toyin Falola in their introductory note in *Globalization and Sustainable Development in Africa* observe as follows:

To those who are ever impatient about change and the future, the past can appear irrelevant. To the contrary, the past is relevant, as it explains the emergence of contemporary structures and institutions. The imagination of a better future rests in part on the assumption that the limitations and weaknesses of contemporary arrangements can be corrected and transcended.¹⁴

On this premise, delving into the roots of Africa's mishaps becomes imperative if we want to ascertain why emerging writers, suddenly, especially from the early 1960s on, revolt against the imperial forces that have given Africa a different image in order to satisfy their egos. These imperialists have made several attempts to exclude Egypt from Africa because of its productive past. Some critics from the West do not want to associate Egypt with the "empty" Africa they have invented, and claim to have known. Armah, in *Osiris Rising*, shows how Europeans, ashamed to uphold original Egyptian values, adopt

¹³ Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 87.

¹⁴ Bessie House-Soremekun and Toyin Falola, eds., *Globalization and Sustainable Development in Africa*, Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011, 2.

different strategies to veil Egyptian history, since they cannot continue to pretend to civilize a community that was already civilized millennia before and that was the root of world civilization according to Cheikh Anta Diop in *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, in *The Myth of the Negro Past*, Melville Herskovits proves that “the civilisations of Africa, like those of Europe, have contributed to American culture as we know it today”.¹⁶ Unfortunately, not many Western scholars are willing to acknowledge Africa’s ancient contribution to human civilization.

One of the fascinating aspects of Egypt, which Armah equally pays homage to in *Osiris Rising*, is the hieroglyphic script, which preserves the pictorial element. Armah does not fail in resuscitating this, as virtually all titles of chapters in the novel are drawn from this type of writing. The hieroglyphic script was used as a form of writing in Egypt, while elsewhere in Africa other forms of written communication existed, though not fully developed because of colonialism. For example, French colonial authorities in Cameroon banned the development of “Shû-mom”, a writing system of the Bamoun people in the western region of Cameroon. Drums and gongs were used as other means of communication. Art was also developed, but the two major types which have survived in sufficient quantity are wall-paintings and sculpture. John Ruffle in *The Egyptians* notes that “[t]he form and techniques of Egyptian art are dictated by the religious and magical purpose [...], for the idea of ‘art for art’s sake’, although instinctively present, was not paramount in the approach of the Egyptian artist”.¹⁷ The above observation makes us realize that before Africa’s entry into mercantilism, the purpose of art was not for sale, but for the people’s immediate needs, and because Egyptian society was so religious, artists acted according to the religious needs of the people.

The practice of medicine, as seen also in Armah’s *The Healers*, was a mixture of religious, scientific, and magical methods. Ailments such as wounds, injuries, and diseases, whose causes were obvious, were scientifically treated, while others were given magical remedies. However, some illnesses were often attributed to evil forces or to offended gods and ancestors, and “amulets and

¹⁵ Cheikh Anta Diop, *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality*, ed. and trans. Mercer Cook, Chicago, IL: Lawrence Hill Books, 1974 (ed. pr. in French 1955).

¹⁶ Quoted after Manyaka Toko Djockoua, *Cross-Cultural Affinities: Emersonian Transcendentalism and Senghorian Negritude*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2016, 18.

¹⁷ John Ruffle, *The Egyptians: An Introduction to Egyptian Archaeology*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977, 156.

ritual spells formed part of the treatment", as Ruffle states in *Heritage of the Pharaohs*; thus, doctors were also priests.¹⁸

As Samson Shu Njimuwe observes, "[i]n their religious life, the Egyptians were too superstitious, like most Africans today".¹⁹ The Egyptian gods "were the strong forces in the world",²⁰ and this included wild and domestic animals.²¹ The Ancient Egyptians' well-being was dependent on "great cosmic forces, such as the sun, the wind, and the storm, and a particular deity was responsible for inundation, fruitful harvest, and that god could be cajoled, threatened and thanked".²² This rich history and tradition reigned for long until the invasion and destruction of Egypt by the Arabs and the British as seen in *Two Thousand Seasons*.

Although traditional Africa is venerated in Armah's writings, it is also presented as having some imperfections. Actually, within the African society that the author portrays, some groups of people are considered to be hinderers to the smooth functioning of things. These people include the upholders of traditional power, such as Chiefs and Dibias,²³ who are sometimes adept at corruption and double-dealing: they are dogmatized and then revered. African society also suffers from the syndrome of personality cults. For example, Kings or Chiefs obliged their subjects to worship them. Beside this, they often sexually exploited women and/or eliminated their enemies at will. King Koranche in *Two Thousand Seasons* sells his people to the white destroyers as if they were his personal property. Another vice presented is greed. Armah qualifies it as the main cause of the fragmentation of Africa by the colonizer: "In the end it was this hot greed that destroyed the power of men".²⁴ Armah here, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, refers to these leaders as Zombies and Ascaris who through corrupt and selfish behaviour betray "the way". Koranche, for example, initiates his courtiers into telling lies and corrupting justice. Among other things, they conduct trials for uncommitted crimes, and innocent citizens are declared guilty. The case of Dovi

¹⁸ John Ruffle, *Heritage of the Pharaohs: An Introduction to Egyptian Archaeology*, London and New York, NY: Phaidon, 1977, 159.

¹⁹ Samson Shu Njimuwe, "Oral Traditions as Paradigm in Ayi Kwei Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*", in Blossom N. Fondo and Magdaline B. Nkongho, eds., *Interdisciplinarity and Transdisciplinarity: Mapping the Episteme in Language and Literature*, Kansas City, MO: Miraclaire Publishing and Ken Scholars Publishing, 2020, 348.

²⁰ Ruffle, *The Egyptians*, 176.

²¹ Njimuwe, "Oral Traditions as Paradigm", 348-349, and Ruffle, *The Egyptians*, 176.

²² Njimuwe, "Oral Traditions as Paradigm", 349, and Ruffle, *The Egyptians*, 176.

²³ Seers or medicine men (or priests or prophets) are called Dibias.

²⁴ Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 9.

is especially glaring. He drinks the traditional hot drink,²⁵ amid his innocence. In this case, the accused man admits to something he has not done out of fright. In *The Healers*, similarly, Densu is unjustly accused of having murdered Prince Appia, and he is given the "truth drink" as a sign that he is guilty, and he is subsequently killed.

In most, if not all, African set-ups, tradition demands an all-embracing hospitality and generosity. Visitors like strangers are treated the same, irrespective of their origin, colour, or religion. This openness, as Armah intimates, has not had the return it expects but has retarded progress on the continent tremendously, and paves the way for multiform hazards and exposures detrimental to the people's well-being. The unreciprocated generosity has served as a flaw to Africans, thereby transforming them into toys in the hands of the colonialists and their cohorts. As Armah underscores:

The giving that is split from receiving is not generosity but hatred of the giving self, a preparation, of the self-destruction. Turn. [...] Return to the way, the way of reciprocity. This headlong generosity too proud to think of returns, it will be your destruction. Turn. [...] Two thousand seasons: a thousand you will spend descending into abysses that would stop your heart and break your mind merely to contemplate. The climb away from there will be just as heavy.²⁶

This prophecy is an early warning from an African prophetess (the young girl Anoa), whose revelations were ignored by giving precedence to tradition – generosity. The consequences are: first, the physical confrontation, and, later, the colonization of the mind, which accounts for Africa's demise to date. The omniscient narrator in the text notes:

We did not have to wait at all for the beginning of unfolding of the truth of Anoa's utterance. The truth was unravelling itself even as she spoke. Under the calm surfaces of the fertile time, a giddy disequilibrium swallowed all lasting balance.²⁷

From all indications, not heeding to the revelation resulted in the physical and psychological fragmentation of the continent, and hence the loss.

²⁵ An oath-taking drink that people imbibe to prove that they are innocent of an accusation. Sometimes, others drink even when they are guilty. The consequence is usually death, but hardened criminals take the risk, in the hope that they can get an antidote.

²⁶ Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 16.

²⁷ Ibidem, 18. See also Njimuwe, "Oral Traditions as Paradigm", 334–365, esp. 355–356.

Loss

Despite the odds registered by Africans (betrayal and lack of vision from the outset), which to a great extent contributed to the architectural design it has today, the dawn of colonization historically is regarded as the genesis of Africa's destruction, both physically and spiritually. John McLeod in his introduction to the *Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, within a similar framework remarks that "colonialism required and shaped certain kinds of behaviour, described and imposed new models of identity, and recodified cross-cultural relationships through European-derived models of difference and inequality".²⁸ Armah in *Two Thousand Seasons* adds: "Killers who came from the sea came holding death of the body in their right, the mind's annihilation in their left".²⁹ To them, the first task was to dismantle the status quo, adopting a politics of "Divide et impera" (Divide and rule). In this process of fragmentation, Africans lost their unity, and thus their "way". In order to fulfil their ignoble mission, the whites took advantage of the naivety and greed of Africans. It became easy for them to rot the Africans' soul and use them as destroyers. Armah on this note postulates that "[t]he desert was made the desert, turned barren by a people whose spirit is itself the seed of death. Every single one of them is a carrier of destruction".³⁰ The corrupted Africans (Zombies, Ascaris, and Caretakers³¹) become spiritually barren and resort to self-interest as their sole mission.

The first whites to invade Africa as stated in *Two Thousand Seasons* were the Arab Muslims or "predators" from the desert; their strategy was to transform some Africans into Zombies and Ascaris, and then set them against each other, in order to facilitate the invader's destructive mission. The Ascaris and Zombies are reduced to "beasts" so that they can kill pitilessly, even their close relations. Their slogan is: "Turn to slaves or perish".³² According to the predators in *Two Thousand Seasons*, the non-converts had no right to live.

After the predators from the desert came, the white destroyers from the sea, armed with the same weapons as their predecessors, but worse, as Bernth Lindfors remarks in "Armah's Histories": "These European destroyers' turned out to be even worse than the Arab 'predators', for their unlimited greed was

²⁸ John McLeod, "Introduction", in John McLeod, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, London: Routledge, 2007, 2.

²⁹ Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 2.

³⁰ Ibidem, 6.

³¹ Neocolonialists.

³² Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 26.

backed by a technology of death more devastating than anything Africa had previously known".³³ The colonizers poisoned the minds of local caretakers, especially the Kings or Chiefs. The case of King Koranche is a striking example. In fact, he is described as a rotten-soul man, ready to satisfy every white's desire even to the detriment of his people. Thus, inspired by his own greed and attracted by the gleaming gifts from his cohorts, he betrays "the way". As a result, he sets the stage for their settlement. Many of the captives are killed or tortured. Ndlela, one of the revolutionaries, bitterly expresses his regret about the King's complicity with the white destroyers thus: "We have been thrown into death; we have seen its whiteness and yet escaped it".³⁴ Koranche is not only selling his people into slavery but also killing them with much delight. For example, he kills Ngubane, whose beautiful wife turns down his amorous advances: "[T]he King felt happy at the thought of Ngubane's destruction and gratitude filled his heart when he contemplated the social power that had made it possible".³⁵ Thus, it is his social position that permits him to act with impunity.

In *Osiris Rising*, the responsibility for Africa's fragmentation and destruction is shifted (though not completely) from the imperialists to African leaders who are totally embroiled in corruption, and content to perpetuate death and destruction. The post-independent leader in this text is epitomized by Seth, who parallels Set in the Egyptian regeneration myth of Osiris and Isis. His main concern is to accumulate wealth, sexually exploit women, misappropriate public resources, oppress the lower class, and jail or even kill all opponents in order to satisfy his individual ego and that of the imperialist. Seth, who has a doctorate in Criminology, is portrayed as a destructive agent. He posits that "some elements can be neutralized shortly by physical liquidation".³⁶ Faced with this destruction coming from various directions, Armah decides to set Ast and Asar (who represent Isis and Osiris in the Egyptian regeneration myth, respectively) in *Osiris Rising* and the people of Anoa in *Two Thousand Seasons* on an epic journey to seek "the way", which had been lost with the advent of the colonizers and internal flaws, as a redemptive measure.

³³ Bernth Lindfors, "Armah's Histories", *African Literature Today* 11 (1980), 86.

³⁴ Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 197.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, 73.

³⁶ Armah, *Osiris Rising*, 31.

Historical and Mythological Swerve: En route to Redemption

At a certain moment, Africans were fed up with colonization and neocolonization to the extent that they decided to revolt and throw off the yoke. Thus, they realized that they had to begin by diffusing "the cultural bomb" that the colonial masters had dropped in order to annihilate their belief in themselves and inspire doubt and hate of themselves;³⁷ they needed to reject or deconstruct the fable of Western greatness and a glorious past that was constantly sung to them and taught to their children by the oppressors. While Africa was presented as a pre-historic entity that was uncivilized and unprepared for self-rule, the West was projected as its very antithesis. As Dipesh Chakrabarty avers in *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, "this degrading view of Africa had its foundations in the European concept of historicism which claimed that modernity began in Europe and was now being spread to other parts of the globe. The European notion of history was just a way of saying 'not-yet' to the colonised".³⁸ Africans realized that if such a notion were to be left unchallenged, it would continue to stifle the continent's re-emergence. This is in agreement with Vilashini Cooppan's view in *World Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writings* that "nations, like subjects, say what they wish were true (a glorious past, a childhood in which they reign supreme), not what is or was true".³⁹ As a result, Africans remained in bondage for long, but the time soon came when groups of determined leaders opted for the liberating but risky mission. In this light, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o writes: "[A] man must rise and save the people in their hour of need. He shall show them the way, he shall lead them".⁴⁰

In this vein, the liberators realized that putting up armed resistance alone will never suffice against the colonial mindset that had demeaned Africans in their own eyes and led them to accept their own destruction, exploitation, and subjugation. They sought to break the Western myths that had been used to enforce stereotypes and Western dominance. For as Myambo aptly asserts:

³⁷ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1994, 3.

³⁸ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, NJ, and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000, 7.

³⁹ Vilashini Cooppan, *World Within: National Narratives and Global Connections in Postcolonial Writing*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009, 5.

⁴⁰ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, *The River Between*, Ibadan: Heinemann, 1965, 24.

[T]o guide us “on the slippery slopes of modernization” [...], new stories and new creation myths are necessary to counter the “threats to [the psyche’s] integrity” in order to “[provide] through [...] self-discovery [...] a veritable weapon for coping with these threats” [...], and this self must be reclaimed from the pre-colonial past but dynamically (re)created.⁴¹

These are clarion calls to (re)create the way again, “where even the foundations have been assaulted and destroyed; where restoration has been made impossible, simply to create the way”.⁴² Armah, like most Pan-Africanists, preaches the restoration of the way, the way of reciprocity, destroyed by the West and its Arab cohorts. Through an ever so conscious first-person narrative point of view, he presents himself both as a member of the revolutionary group and as an ardent adherent to the Pan-African creed.

In these two novels, Armah shows how the intellectual counterpower and the physical counterpower complement each other to reverse the monstrous adversities of colonial and neocolonial oppression. To liberate the community from the debauched and tyrannical Arab masters, the action, in *Two Thousand Seasons*, is initiated by a group of women and accomplished on “the night of slaughter”. The women use their sexuality as a powerful political weapon. Through gruesome and brutal sex, they kill most of the predators, and their people are delivered from slavery. Unfortunately, this liberation is short-lived, given that the Zombies and Ascaris turn against these women.

After the invasion of Africa by white predators from the desert, the local people prefer to move away from their land. The migration takes not only many arduous seasons, but it covers great distances as well. These refugees encounter hostility along their way, and many perish. Finally, they arrive at a new peaceful land, Anoa, after losing many people and goods, including almost all of their pathfinders. The surviving pathfinder, Noliwe, as earlier mentioned, advises them to always remember their past experience. They remain hopeful in spite of the cost of the journey. Noliwe notes: “We had fled, our hope being that new places, new circumstances might bring us back to reciprocity, might bring us to our way, the way”.⁴³ In Anoa, they hope to retrieve their lost “way”. But in this new land, they realize that the traditional outlook has been infiltrated by the Arabs. Because of this, a strong desire for privileges and social prestige

⁴¹ Myambo, “Imagining a Dialectical African Modernity”, 465.

⁴² Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 8.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, 61.

seizes them. The old "way" is now replaced by a new one, which is the selfish instinct for absolute power and exclusive authority.

About their security, Lindfors states that "here they hoped to be left undisturbed by marauders, but almost immediately they met a new alien force – the White invaders from the Sea".⁴⁴ It is this divisiveness among the people that makes it easy for the new group of colonizers to entrench itself. To liberate themselves from the hands of the white destroyers, and reconstruct "the way", the locals are obliged to destroy the destroyers. Everybody is called to resist the white road to violence, hypocrisy, fraud, and death. This revolution requires meticulous preparation: "After preparation of the body, after the mind's preparation, we were again ready for the continuation of our work, ready for motion tending towards the way".⁴⁵ The talented warriors include a small band of newly initiated youths sufficiently prepared in the art of protection. This group of guerrilla fighters, self-trained, and splendidly disciplined, is soul-guided by the scoutmaster, Isanusi. The group is devoted to destroying Africa's enemies and purging Africa of the debilitating malignancies inflicted upon the continent by Europeans and Arabs.

Among the revolutionaries is a young lady called Abena. Her role is pivotal, as she does not only fight but also encourages her co-fighters. Abena's spirit consists of collective action, as she always acts in concert with others. She is convinced that individual salvation is of no consequence. For that reason, she is ready to be enslaved with her less ferocious friends, rather than take action that would liberate her alone and leave her friends in captivity. During the battle, she not only fights, but also leads. In her character, Armah dramatizes a return to the universality of roles under the old "way": fighting for freedom is a communal action. In addition, it is not regarded solely as a male prerogative.

Isanusi, the senior Fundi (teacher) in *Two Thousand Seasons*, also plays a paramount role. He is a wise counsellor who, because of his rejection of the whites' presence, "is forced into exile by the overwhelming degeneracy of the land and its leaders. Fortunately, the apostasy of these leaders later yields good results".⁴⁶ He conceives a crusade against the Europeans and the Kings. In this context, his spirit becomes a crystallization of the aspirations of his co-fighters from "the way". Being the main character in the novel, his voice coalesces with

⁴⁴ Lindfors, "Armah's Histories", 87.

⁴⁵ Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 174.

⁴⁶ Isidore Okpewho, "Myth & Modern Fiction: Armah's *Two Thousand Seasons*", in Eldred Durosimi Jones and Eustace Palmer, eds., *Recent Trends in the Novel*, "African Literature Today" 13, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1983, 6.

that of the collective voice of the narrator. While in a grove, a rebellious group joins him and he advises them not to respond to Koranche's invitation. They refuse to heed his advice and eventually become captives. They are tortured, and some of them killed, but in the end they fight and liberate themselves as well as other captives in the slave camp. The revolution is carried out thanks to Sobo's genius, who secretly elaborates the liberating plan: he perfidiously stoops to the slavers in order to conquer. By so doing, he succeeds in liberating the other captives. As a prelude, the slaves are unchained and later begin the battle for liberation. The narrator relates the epic clash as follows: "We sent them to their soulless ancestors, sent them with their instruments of death".⁴⁷ Here, Armah shows how the whites are killed with their own guns.

As seen above, Armah's focus is on one of the principles of "the way", which consists of "destroying the destroyers". Even those who are spiritually dead are resurrected, leaving their graveyards to join the band. The narrator relates: "It was impossible immediately to tell how many of the Zombies had revolted, turned miraculously human and thrown death, rebounding against the destroyers they were bound to protect from their victims".⁴⁸ The resuscitated Zombies betray their masters and join the revolutionaries. Afterwards, Isanusi is betrayed by Fosu, who has joined the group, only to lead him into a fatal trap. Isanusi dies as a hero. Yet his death does not discourage others. They are determined not to come to terms with white domination. His words re-echo and provide them with the ideological guidelines for an important struggle. The novel ends with the resolution to continue the fight, until "the way" is rebuilt and hope restored:

Soon we shall end this remembrance, the sound of it. It is the substance that continues. Soon it will end. Yet still, what a scene of carnage the white destroyers have brought here, what a destruction of bodies, what a death of souls.⁴⁹

Despite the destruction, there is hope for putting the fragments back together. This hope, Armah seems to show in both novels, can only be reconstructed and sustained through recourse to a restored mythic imagination and intellectual traditions that are revolutionary and Pan-African. In this perspective, the novel *Osiris Rising* presents another way of reviving the dismembered continent. This new move is an intellectual revolution:

⁴⁷ Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, 166.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, 14.

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, 206.

We are after the intelligent understanding of our realities, not simply the politics of power. We are after intelligent action to change these realities. For we intend, as Africans, to retrieve our human face, our human heart, the human mind our ancestors taught to soar.⁵⁰

The passage above alludes to a peaceful intellectual revolution. In fact, there is a search to retrieve the lost values. The reformist protagonists do not suffer from power lust like most African intellectuals; they are animated by a humanitarian spirit, inherited from their ancestors. Asar is depicted as the antithesis of Seth who is portrayed as a prototype of destructive leaders. The author describes the former as the "incorrigible challenger". Asar claims that a social revolution led by intellectuals would take a lot of preparatory work because "the revolution is not an event. It is a process".⁵¹ His main concern is to rebuild Africa and retrieve its lost values. In this process, he is assisted by a group of reformist intellectuals and an Afro-American lady who comes back to Africa with a similar vision of reconstructing the mutilated continent. To her, finding her roots is not enough because "it is not what roots look like that's important. It's what roots do. If we let ours do their work, they'll send amazing springs of creativity into the universe".⁵² Roots are not searched for exposition, but to be used in reconstructing Africa. Armah's rhetoric is not only aimed at unearthing historical facts but also at utilizing them for an effective reconstruction.

The concern of Ast and Asar is the educational system, which is Western-oriented. In order to dismantle the old structures, proposals for new curricula in literature, history, and African studies are submitted as a means of "provincializing" former spheres of influence within the University of Manda: "We should show why the old System has lost whatever value it had and needs replacing. Then we'll have to spell out the underlying principles of our new System".⁵³ As Gbemisola Adeoti observes in "The Re-Making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of an (Alter)-Native Route to Development":

Ast joins Asar in the companionship of *ankh* in Manda College. This is a revolutionary group that believes that no positive change can be achieved in contemporary Africa without a decisive reformation of the educational system, especially its orientation, form and content. To this end,

⁵⁰ Armah, *Osiris Rising*, 10.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*, 193.

⁵² *Ibidem*, 243.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, 190.

they pursue a review of the existing curricula in the disciplines of African Studies, History and Literature. The group sees education as the bedrock of social change and a window into a new world. It advocates a system that displaces the centrality of Europe and America, making Africa its starting point.⁵⁴

The ancient curricula are exclusively European and American, and the way of teaching is not pragmatic. Asar presents the major steps of their reforming project as follows:

One, making Africa the center of our Studies. Two, shifting from Eurocentric orientations to universalistic approaches as far as the rest of the world is concerned. Three, giving our work a serious backing in African history. The last would be placing a deliberate, planned and sustained emphasis on the Study of Egyptian and Nubian history as matrices of African history instead of concentrating on the European matrices, Greece and Rome.⁵⁵

The issues raised above are concerned with "provincializing" Europe in the educational domain, by changing the structure and content of the educational programmes to suit African reality. In each domain, they start by bringing out its historical background in order to determine principles appropriate for the new approach. These principles include the reinstatement of Ancient Egypt as the centre of African history, the inclusion of oral sources in studies, and a rational definition of the African people, viewed historically. In the curriculum, students should focus on Egyptology, African tradition, and creativity.⁵⁶ These reforms at the University of Manda are saluted with the murder of Asar, the hero in *Osiris Rising*, who is accused of preparing a *coup d'état*. His body is mutilated like that of Osiris. Though killed, regenerated Asar (like Osiris in the Egyptian regeneration myth) is envisioned in the pregnancy of Ast (who incarnates Isis of the Egyptian myth of regeneration) – their child⁵⁷ will eventually avenge the killing of his father, like Horus in the Ancient Egyptian myth of Isis and Osiris. Thus, the

⁵⁴ Gbemisola Adeoti, "The Re-Making of Africa: Ayi Kwei Armah and the Narrative of an (Al)-Native Route to Development", *Africa Media Review* 13.2 (2005), 11.

⁵⁵ Armah, *Osiris Rising*, 104.

⁵⁶ We discuss the theme of education in Cameroon in the chapter "Revisioning Classical Mythology in African Dramaturgy: A Study of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame*", in 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, 399–418.

⁵⁷ The unborn baby in Ast's womb.

Egyptian myth of regenerations serves as a structural base for Armah's response to contemporary worries about the state of pathfinders in different societies. He makes us understand that these heroes will rise again or are rising. It is within this framework that Sola Ogunbayo in "Border-Crossing through Myth-Making: The Unbarred Muse in Selected Nigerian Literature" admits, extrapolating from Carl Gustav Jung:

[M]yths contain images or "archetypes", traditional expressions of collective dreams, developed over thousands of years, of symbols upon which the society as a whole has come to depend. These archetypes revealed in peoples' tales establish patterns of behaviour that can serve as exemplars, as when we note that the lives of many heroes and heroines share a remarkable number of similar features that can be identified as worthy of emulation.⁵⁸

As described in this excerpt, and in the process of creating a myth that can counter already established tales from the West and Orient, Armah delves into ancient myths to recreate a new world that can define his people and give hope to the younger generation that the dismembered continent can be assembled again, or is already in the process of assembling.

Conclusion

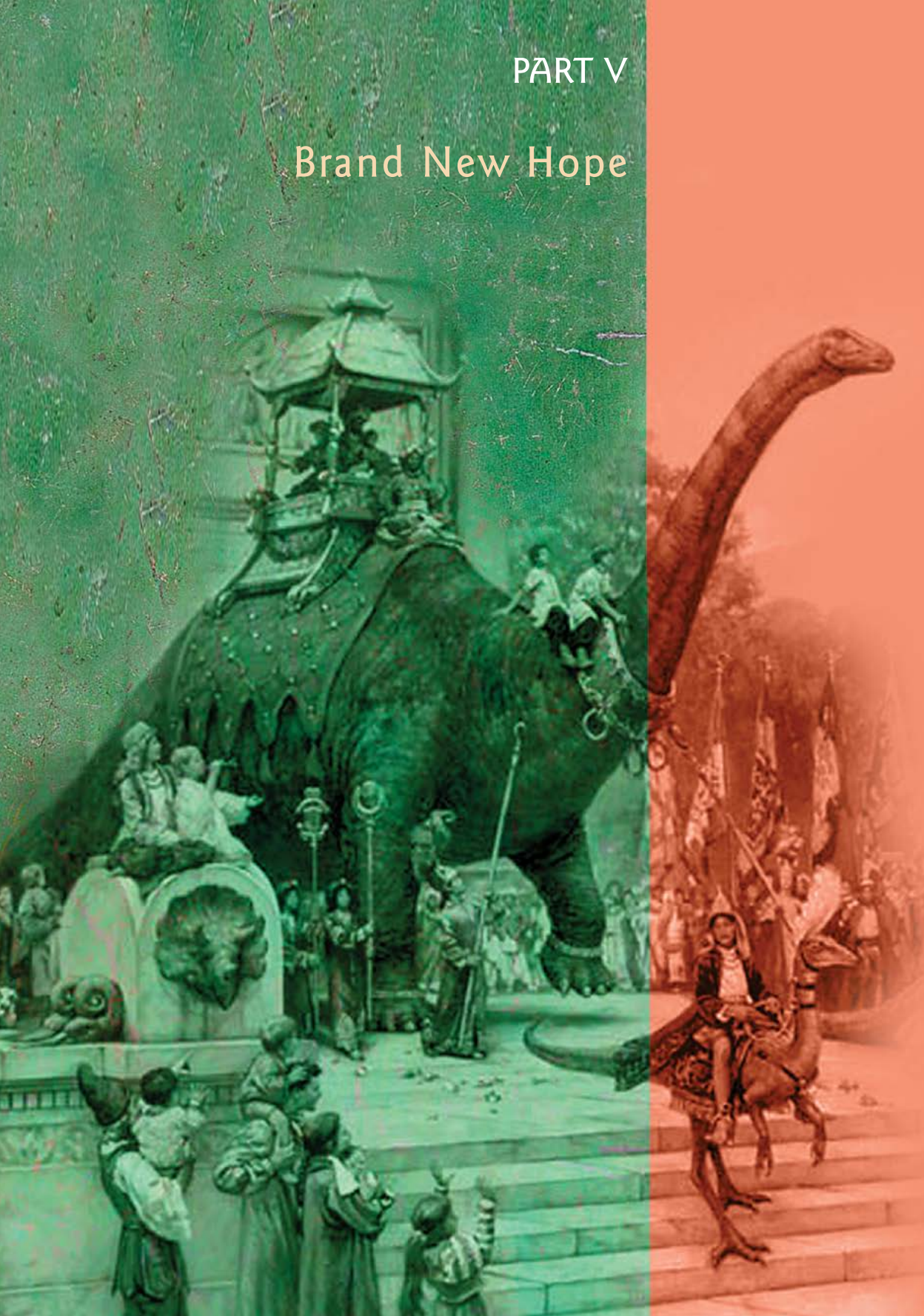
This chapter set out to examine Armah's Pan-African vision and its different stages. In this process, the germinal, fragmented, and later the redemptive phases were brought into the limelight. This was achieved through the framework of mapping the events in both novels onto ancient African myths. In the course of the analysis, we realized that Africa's lack of vision was the main germ that enabled the colonizers to invade and establish themselves on the continent. Thus, the reason that accounted for Africa's invasion and later the destruction of "the way" is the fact that most Africans are viewed as "path cleaners" to colonization. Armah's Pan-African vision, as this chapter has shown, is to identify and present the possibilities that *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* offer

⁵⁸ Sola Ogunbayo, "Border-Crossing through Myth-Making: The Unbarred Muse in Selected Nigerian Literature", in Jennifer Wawrzinek and J.K.S. Makokha, eds., *Negotiating Afropolitanism: Essays on Borders and Spaces in Contemporary African Literature and Folklore*, Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2011, 62.

to twenty-first-century African youth to forge ahead in today's globalized world. Consequently, Armah gives preference to an intellectual counterpower rather than physical counterpower; thus providing a leeway for addressing Africa's endemic problem with the academic reforms introduced at Manda University. As the analysis has equally proved, his protagonists' progression from the dominant physical counterpower in *Two Thousand Seasons* to the dominant intellectual counterpower in *Osiris Rising* ascertained that Osiris is rising, though without his genitals. The genitals eaten by fish (as the original Egyptian myth of regeneration stipulates) would obviously be what the rest of the world will offer Africa to make it complete again after centuries of castration and oppression. The reserved genitals in the unborn baby in the heroine's womb would obviously be functional, if the world fails to provide potent ones for Africa in time. In fact, the two enchanting works of Armah discussed in this chapter offer philosophical reflections on Africa's resuscitation and the eventual solution to the plethora of problems of this troubled continent within the global framework.

PART V

Brand New Hope



THE UTOPIA OF AN IDEAL COMMUNITY: RECONSIDERING THE MYTH OF ATLANTIS IN JAMES GURNEY'S DINOTOPIA: THE WORLD BENEATH

Who does not know the legend of the mighty kingdom of Atlantis which flourished in a time all but forgotten, only to sink within a single day and night? This famous myth centres on a happy and fertile island whose inhabitants initially lived in harmony with the gods and developed a high culture. However, after they yielded to greed and desire for conquest, a natural catastrophe erased the island and its inhabitants. This myth was recounted by the Greek philosopher Plato, who in the dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias* (approximately 360 BC) narrated the tale of the sunken island of Atlantis that has enthralled readers ever since.

Introduction: The Enduring Appeal of the Atlantis Myth

Myriads of retellings and adaptations testify to the never-ending interest in the Atlantis myth as a universal story about an ideal state. Moreover, the complete destruction of Atlantis has triggered multiple interpretations that allegorically refer to human arrogance and *hubris*. The representation of Atlantis as a lost civilization that incorporated the ideal of peaceful coexistence particularly inspired philosophers, including Francis Bacon, Tommaso Campanella, and Thomas More,¹ to devise utopian societies. Likewise, the Atlantis myth also steadily

¹ For a thorough analysis of the utopian models developed by these three philosophers and their relationship to Plato, see Otfried Höffe, ed., *Politische Utopien der Neuzeit. Thomas Morus, Tommaso Campanella, Francis Bacon*, Berlin and Boston, MA: De Gruyter, 2016.

gained popularity in literature, comics, film, and the arts,² even leaving clear traces in international children's literature.

One may speculate on exactly when Atlantis as a topic emerged in children's literature. An early example is Jules Verne's science-fiction novel *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers* (1870),³ in which Captain Nemo and his companions visit the sunken city of Atlantis. Edith Nesbit touches on the subject in the fantastic children's novel *The Story of the Amulet* (1906),⁴ where an amulet serves as a portal to different ancient settings, including Atlantis.⁵ The German children's novel *Jim Knopf und die Wilde 13* (1962)⁶ by Michael Ende emphasizes the utopian quality of Atlantis by letting the island of Jamballa – as a namesake for Atlantis – finally resurge from the bottom of the sea in order to celebrate the peaceful atmosphere established by Jim Button and his friends. Since the beginning of the new millennium the myth of Atlantis has been playing an increasingly prominent role in young adult literature or crossover fiction, such as Walter Moers's *Die 13½ Leben des Käpt'n Blaubär* (1998)⁷, Eoin Colfer's *Artemis Fowl: The Atlantis Complex* (2010),⁸ and the *Atlantis Saga* (3 vols., 2013–2016)⁹ by T.A. Barron.¹⁰

² A wealth of studies have explored the reception and impact of the Atlantis myth on literature, philosophy, and the fine arts; among them are the studies by Lyon Sprague de Camp, *Lost Continents: The Atlantis Theme in History, Science and Literature*, New York, NY: Gnome Press, 1954; Reinhold Bichler, "Atlantis", in Manfred Landfester, ed., *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, vol. 13: *Rezeptions- und Wissenschaftsgeschichte: A–Fo*, Stuttgart and Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 1999, 334–338; Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *L'Atlantide, petite histoire d'un mythe platonicien*, Paris: Éd. des Belles-Lettres, 2005; and Oliver Kohns and Ourania Sideri, eds., *Mythos Atlantis. Texte von Platon bis J.R.R. Tolkien*, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2009.

³ Jules Verne, *Vingt mille lieues sous les mers*, ill. Alphonse de Neuville and Édouard Riou, ed. J. Hetzel, Paris: Pierre-Jules Hetzel, 1870 [Eng. ed.: *Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea*, trans. William Butcher, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998].

⁴ Edith Nesbit, *The Story of the Amulet*, London: Benn, 1932 (ed. pr. 1906).

⁵ The representation of the Atlantis myth in Nesbit's children's book is discussed in Joanna Paul, "'Time Is Only a Mode of Thought, You Know': Ancient History, Imagination and Empire in E. Nesbit's Literature for Children", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 6, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015, 30–55.

⁶ Michael Ende, *Jim Knopf und die Wilde 13*, Stuttgart: K. Thienemann, 1962.

⁷ Walter Moers, *Die 13½ Leben des Käpt'n Blaubär*, Frankfurt: Eichborn, 1992 [Eng. ed.: *The 13½ Lives of Captain Bluebear*, trans. John Brownjohn, London: Vintage, 2001].

⁸ Eoin Colfer, *Artemis Fowl: The Atlantis Complex*, New York, NY: Hyperion, 2010.

⁹ T.A. Barron, *Atlantis Rising*, New York, NY: Philomel Books, 2013; *Atlantis in Peril*, New York, NY: Philomel Books, 2015; *Atlantis Lost*, New York, NY: Philomel Books, 2016.

¹⁰ For further contemporary young adult novels focusing on Atlantis, see Volker Müller, "Verjüngtes Atlantis: die Rezeption des platonischen Atlantis-Mythos in Kinder- und Jugendmedien der letzten 40 Jahre", in Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte*

The Atlantis myth also performs an important function in James Gurney's four volumes on *Dinotopia* (1992–2007), whose imaginative realism and lavishly created images captivated readers from the outset.¹¹ Gurney himself meticulously drew the natural sceneries and the different kinds of dinosaurs for his books.

Intended for readers of all ages, the books have been published in more than thirty countries and have sold tens of millions of copies worldwide, while Gurney – who is both the writer and illustrator – has been showered with awards. About a dozen different natural history museums and art museums have showcased solo exhibitions of Gurney's illustrations, including the Natural Museums in New York and Washington, DC. A live-action television miniseries and various computer games have additionally contributed to the popularization of *Dinotopia*. Considering this huge success, it is simply incredible that scholars working in the realm of children's literature have totally disregarded this unusual artwork. The reasons for this neglect remain elusive.

A particular characteristic of these illustrated novels is the blending of different, even contradictory concepts. This strategy determines the depiction of certain characters as well as the cultural and historical underpinnings of *Dinotopia*. In order to comprehend the complex levels of meaning in these diverse forms of blending, my analysis is based on the theoretical framework of conceptual blending introduced by the cognitive linguists Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner in 1992 and further developed in their benchmark study *The Way We Think* (2002).¹²

Conceptual blending is a basic mental operation that leads to new meaning, global insight, and conceptual compressions useful for memory and the understanding of otherwise diffuse ranges of meaning. It plays a fundamental role in the construction of meaning in everyday life, in the arts and sciences, and particularly in the social sciences. In his seminal study *The Literary Mind* (1997),

Antike. Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 5, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017, 265–286; Michael Stierstorfer, *Antike Mythologie in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Gegenwart. Unsterbliche Götter und Heldengeschichten?*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017, esp. 365–373. For a survey on the reception of Classical Antiquity in children's literature, see Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Children's and Young Adult Literature", in Manfred Landfester, ed., *Brill's New Pauly: Encyclopaedia of the Ancient World. Classical Tradition*, vol. 1: A–Del, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2006, coll. 750–754.

¹¹ See the collection available on the author's official website: <http://jamesgurney.com/site/> (accessed 14 April 2020).

¹² Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner, *The Way We Think: Conceptual Blending and the Mind's Hidden Complexities*, New York, NY: Basic Books, 2002.

Turner explains: "Conceptual blending is a fundamental instrument of the everyday mind".¹³

The essence of cognitive blending is to construct a partial match between two different concepts, in order to selectively project from those concepts into a novel "blended" mental space. It has been argued that the capacity for complex conceptual blending is the crucial ability needed for thought and language, particularly when it comes to creative thinking and the mastering of sophisticated and extensive networks. This cognitive operation consists in combining images and ideas into a network of mental spaces to create new meaning. Very often this mapping process is based on analogy – that is, the recognition of shared properties and the capability to transfer knowledge from one domain to another. Hence, the framework of conceptual blending may provide an insight into the sophisticated arrangement and unusual appearances of characters, settings, and cultural artifacts in literature. Against this background, the unexpected combination of entities and properties in Gurney's books challenges the reader inasmuch as they are invited to ponder the power of imagination. It is exactly this cognitive process which is needed in order to fully grasp the sophisticated structure and layers of meaning in the *Dinotopia* novels.

Dinotopia: A Peaceful Utopia

The first book in the series, *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time* (1992),¹⁴ introduces the main characters, the setting, and the historical, societal, and cultural background. The book starts with a preface that correctly states that the many species of dinosaurs have been extinct for more than 150 million years. However, by claiming peremptorily that dinosaurs are still living animals – against all expectations – the author prepares the audience for the subsequent text that serves as a frame story. To this extent, the author maintains that he accidentally found a worn and water-damaged sketchbook diary written by a forgotten explorer in a British university library. While paging through the book, he was stunned by drawings that showed people and dinosaurs living together. By adopting the position of an editor who shares his chance discovery with the readers, Gurney provides a double twist. The book the prospective reader is about to peruse is nothing other than a very old notebook written by a natural

¹³ Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind: The Origins of Thought and Language*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, 93.

¹⁴ James Gurney, *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1992.

scientist. Consequently, it seems to belong to the category of non-fiction, additionally stressed by the accurate drawings, maps, and diagrams. However, at the same time, attentive readers should be aware that the notebook and drawings are Gurney's own artwork. Consequently, the question of whether this book is a mere fantasy or a true report of a lost civilization is left to the reader. Although the illustrations and information about the dinosaurs, plants, and old-fashioned habits of the inhabitants refer to alleged academic sources and astonish the reader by their precision and objectivity, the narrative displays a utopian idea.

Set in the 1860s, the novels are written in the guise of a nineteenth-century explorer's diaries and deal with the adventures of the British biologist Arthur Denison and his young son, Will. They are shipwrecked on the shores of an uncharted island called Dinotopia. This island is inhabited by humans and sentient dinosaurs who live together peacefully and have formed a complex and independent society (see Fig. 1). Outside of Dinotopia, dinosaurs have been extinct for millions of years and not a part of the Victorian era Arthur Denison and Will come from, such that the civilization on this island seems to have fallen out of time – as the book's title has already indicated. The European concept of time obviously does not matter on Dinotopia. Although people and animals are born, grow up, and age, the environmental and societal circumstances do not change much. Life on Dinotopia seems to be a portrayal of humanity's Golden Age, a topic which is openly addressed in the second volume.



Figure 1: Dinosaur parade, illustration by James Gurney from his *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1992, 152–153. Used with kind permission from the Author.

Shipwrecks are gradually introduced into the history, culture, and political system of Dinotopia. The reader learns that the islanders are the descendants of people shipwrecked on Dinotopia more than 400 years ago. Just a few are still able to speak an old form of English; instead, they have developed a novel language which partially consists of gestures and onomatopoeic sounds in order to enable communication with the dinosaurs. To accentuate their deep engagement with the dinosaurs, the islanders have created a greeting of peace: "Breathe deep, seek peace", accompanied by a soothing and friendly gesture.

Over the course of the centuries, this living together has led to a highly sophisticated society with a new alphabet, consisting of footprints, a parliament whose members are dinosaurs and people alike, a law code, and different professions, equally practised by dinosaurs and people. However, this form of cohabitation includes only herbivorous dinosaurs, while the carnivorous dinosaurs remain among themselves, living outside the human settlements, and always posing a risk to travellers. While Arthur Denison is eager to know as much as possible about the ecosystem, the building facilities, and the ancient history of Dinotopia, Will finally decides to become a skybax rider – that is, a pilot of a flying dinosaur.



Figure 2: Waterfall City, illustration by James Gurney from his *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1992, 62–63. Used with kind permission from the Author.

A map of the island, which is printed at the beginning of the story, enables the reader to follow the route Arthur and Will take during a time span of four years. By travelling to various spots on the island, they come across

sundry villages and cities whose architecture is overwhelming. Waterfall City is a beautiful metropolis surrounded by huge waterfalls that can be crossed only by flying dinosaurs and small planes (see Fig. 2). The city itself presents a mixture of Italian Renaissance buildings, Egyptian and Roman temples, and gorgeous buildings in an Oriental style. Treetown mainly consists of houses situated in large trees with stairs and bridges crossing the gaps. The next stop is Canyon City, a place where all buildings have been carved into stone. Parts of this city recall Egyptian temples and also display carvings that tell the ancient history of Dinotopia. This setting is the training camp for future skybax riders. Tentpole of the Sky is situated in the snowy mountains and looks like a Tibetan monastery in the Himalayan Mountains. The final destination is Sauropolis, the capital of Dinotopia. From a bird's eye view, this city resembles Venice, while the architecture presents a combination of Roman monuments and temples as well as classicist buildings.

As the meticulously painted images demonstrate, Gurney has put much effort in creating a new world whose inspiration sources are easily discernible: architecture and sculpture from Old Egypt to Classicism, Renaissance as well as Pre-Raphaelite paintings, and the famous architectural drawings by Giovanni Battista Piranesi and Karl Friedrich Schinkel, among others. This conceptual blending of architectural and artistic styles from different periods contributes to the establishment of an ideal setting that reflects the pluralistic worldview of the Dinotopians. By this strategy they refer to ancient cultural achievements from outside of the island. Despite this variety of styles, the newly erected cities and buildings provide an atmosphere of harmony and beauty that extends traditional aesthetics ideas, thus creating something new and unforeseen. Moreover, these cityscapes represent the comfortable and peaceful way of Dinotopian society. As the name of the island already indicates, the cohabitation of dinosaurs and humans represents a utopia, which stands in sharp contrast to the diffuse and troublesome Victorian era outside of Dinotopia. The depiction of such a utopian society provides the basis for the second volume, in which the prehistory of Dinotopia is partially revealed.

Looking for Atlantis: The Sunken Kingdom of Poseidos

In order to capture and hold the reader's curiosity, the first book finishes with a cliffhanger: Arthur Denison has explored a mysterious cave system beneath the island. Striving to study the prehistory of Dinotopia, he is intrigued by the

rumours that a sunken city called Poseidos is hidden in the heretofore unexplored underground. However, the end of the first volume does not disclose whether Arthur could find any clues that confirm the veracity of the hearsay.

The second volume, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath* (1995, rev. ed. 2012),¹⁵ reveals that Arthur has found a ruby crystal, a fragment of a key, and some precious artifacts whose style refers to the ancient cultures of Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America. Quite surprisingly, these artworks depict dinosaurs together with humans.

During an official meeting, Arthur learns the myth of King Ogthar, who founded Poseidos and allegedly brought luck and wealth to the city with the support of "sunstones". These are crystals that radiate a mysterious energy when coming into contact with sunlight. According to this legend, Poseidos has been completely destroyed by the sea, but some inhabitants including the then-king were able to escape, hiding in the caves for a very long time. The invaluable golden treasure of Ogthar has been entrusted to another king, but no evidence is given who this king is. As a born scientist, Arthur is quite sceptical about this myth, which he dismisses as an invented story. What he is more interested in is what these sunstones could tell him about ancient science.

Accompanied by the eloquent dinosaur Bix, who is able to speak human language; the inscrutable treasure seeker Lee Crabb, who offers his submarine as the only suitable vehicle to cross the subterranean waters; and a young woman, Oriana Nascava, who is in possession of the missing half of the key and wishes to find out more about her ancestors (her second name can be translated as "born in the caves"), Arthur officially leads an expedition deep into the secretive caverns, while his son continues his training to become a master pilot. The subsequent story parallels Arthur's and Will's adventures until both accidentally meet again above ground, when they successfully repel an attack of ferocious tyrannosaurs (see Fig. 3).

¹⁵ James Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1995; 20th anniversary ed., New York, NY: Calla Editions, 2012. The third volume, *Dinotopia: First Flight*, New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1999, is a prequel to the first two volumes, as it focuses on the forefathers of the actual islanders and the establishment of the skybax rider school. The fourth volume, *Dinotopia: Journey to Chandara*, New York, NY: Andrews McMeel Publishing, 2007, describes the main protagonists' journey to the interior of the island. It would be interesting to investigate the whole quartet in relation to the development of the characters, the narrative strategies, and the significance of time and place. On the issue of seriality in children's literature, see Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Seriality", in Clémentine Beauvais and Maria Nikolajeva, eds., *The Edinburgh Companion to Children's Literature*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017, 167–178.



Figure 3: Bix in conversation with a *Tyrannosaurus rex*, illustration by James Gurney from his *Dinotopia: A Land Apart from Time*, London: Dorling Kindersley, 1992, 84. Used with kind permission from the Author.

During their underwater expedition, the group has some strange and unusual experiences. The trip underwater reveals that the deep ocean is teeming with creatures from the Paleozoic era which have been regarded as extinct species, at least by the people outside of Dinotopia. The idea that the Mesozoic era – as the official period of the dinosaurs – has survived in the plains of Dinotopia is thus extended to the ancient history of the Earth, when early forms of life had populated the planet.

While the deep ocean and the underwater channels are the realm of animals from the trilobite era, the coastal area and the plains are the domains

of dinosaurs, whereas the mountains of Dinotopia are populated by early mammals, such as the mammoth and the smilodon. The evolution of the island's fauna has come to a full stop with the early mammals, with a back extension into the pre-Jurassic period through to the trilobite period. Thus, the animal world of Dinotopia includes three different eras of geological history that precede the history of humankind and encompass diverse steps in the evolution. Animals of our time are completely missing on the island, such that Dinotopia can be regarded as a preserve of early Earth history, about which humans have only limited knowledge. The once shipwrecked people living on Dinotopia are or have been in the unusual situation of coping with fauna about whose living conditions they know nothing.

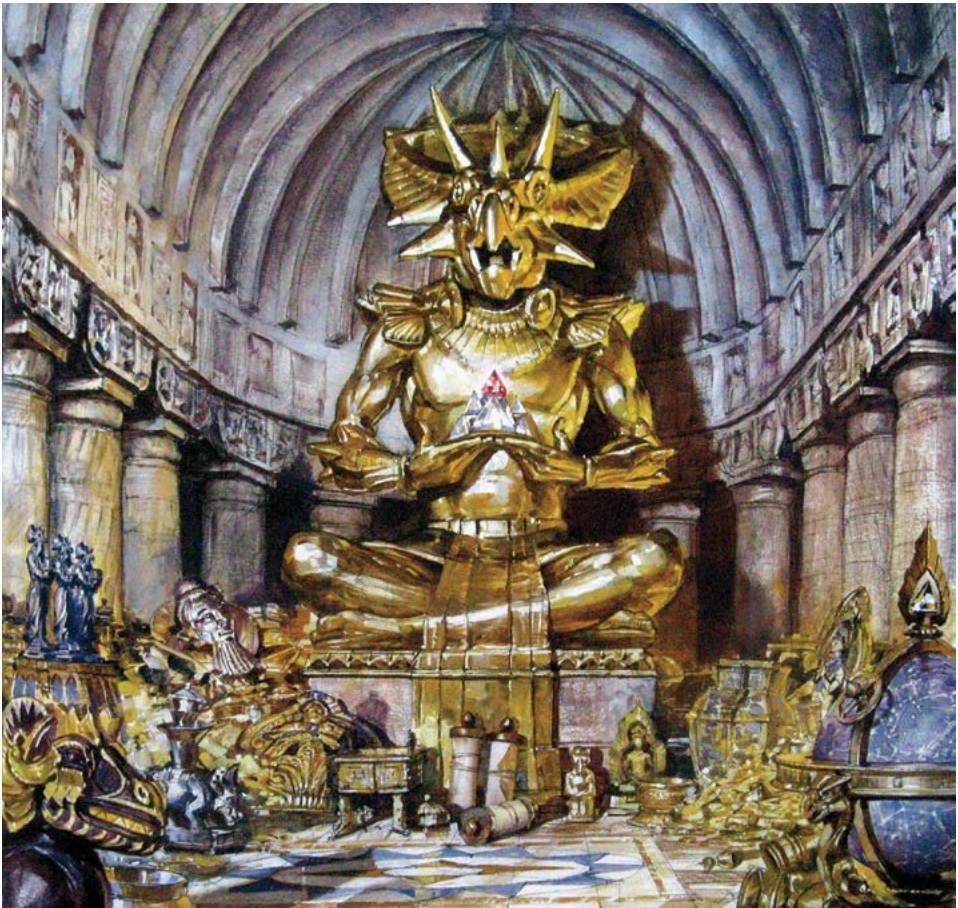


Figure 4: Treasure chamber of King Ogthar, illustration by James Gurney from his *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, New York, NY: Calla Editions, 2012, 135. Used with kind permission from the Author.

These very circumstances are quite exceptional, but they are topped by the myth of King Ogthar, who is half human, half dinosaur, and therefore considered a representative of a new species: anthroceratops (see Fig. 4).¹⁶ This idea is a typical example of conceptual blending: the concepts of dinosaurs and people form a common ground. Both belong to the generic space of living creatures, yet they belong to two distinct categories: animals versus humans. By the blending of these two concepts, a new blended concept or space emerges – that is, a hybrid of dinosaur and human, which is expressed in the Greek notion of “anthroceratops”. The term can be translated as “human hornface”, whereby “hornface” (= ceratops) refers to a genus of herbivorous dinosaurs.

Gurney introduced a new blended concept with the anthroceratops, which ingeniously combines two properties: the power and strength of the dinosaurs and the capacity for reflection and rationality of humans, to an astounding effect. Therefore, King Ogthar was able to create huge robot-like machines, which Arthur and his companions discover in a laboratory hidden in the caves. As Arthur eventually discloses the mystery of the sunstones and the machines – when the sunstones are fixed on the machines, they are capable of walking and carrying heavy loads or serving as vehicles – he sets out to unveil the truth obviously hidden in the story about Poseidos, thus far regarded merely as a myth.

By venturing into the dangerous realm of the carnivorous dinosaurs, Arthur Denison finds out that the treasure of King Ogthar has been handed over to a dinosaur specimen whose Latin name refers to “king” – *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The tyrannosaurs together with the gigantosaurs¹⁷ guard the treasure and defend it against intruders. This explains their aggressive behaviour towards the caravans and travel groups that cross their realm. They do not attack human travellers and the accompanying herbivorous dinosaurs as potential prey, but more likely intend to prevent them taking notice of the invaluable treasure.

As Arthur and Oriana win the confidence of the leader of the gigantosaurs, they are allowed to access the treasure chamber under the condition that they do not take anything away. Among the precious jewellery they discover a bust that resembles the Egyptian Nefertiti as well as Oriana herself who, as it turns

¹⁶ Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, 94 (all references are to the 2012 anniversary ed.).

¹⁷ Thanks to his close cooperation with palaeontologists, Gurney was well informed about excavation projects. While working on the storyboard for the second volume, he immediately got the news about the discovery of a novel gigantic carnivorous dinosaur that was even bigger than *Tyrannosaurus rex*. The artist then used this information to change the storyline in order to introduce the gigantosaurs as a new species and as characters who play a significant role in the disclosure of the unsolved mystery of the island’s prehistory.

out, is a direct descendant of the former royal dynasty of Poseidos. However, they are informed by Bix that the artwork is Chandaran, an art period of ancient Dinotopia. Bix contends that “thousands of years ago, a group of Chandarans managed to travel off-island and export a bit of their civilization”.¹⁸ This assertion implies that Egyptian culture was influenced by Dinotopians.¹⁹ The same applies to other ancient cultures – for instance, the Sumerians, the Mayas, Ancient Indian societies, and Old China, thus explaining, for example, why the dragon as an early sighting of dinosaurs is so prominent in Chinese culture. Arthur takes up this thread by pointing to the similarities between the story of Poseidos and the classical myth of Atlantis.

According to Plato, Atlantis belonged to Poseidon, which may be an explanation for the garbled change of names. As a proof of the existence of Poseidos a.k.a. Atlantis, Arthur discovers an ancient camera that is even older than the pyramids. It is filled with daguerreotypes that visually portray the history of Poseidos: while the first images display a prosperous and peaceful city life, later pictures show that the city’s inhabitants became greedy and led a luxurious lifestyle which chased the dinosaurs away. Built on empty volcano caverns, the foundations of the city were additionally weakened by excavations caused by people digging for gemstones. In the end, the foundations gave way and water from the sea flooded the whole city. Only a couple of people, including the king, could escape. They hid in the caves before striving to establish a new community on the shores and plains of Dinotopia. The treasure was handed over to the tyrannosaurs in exchange for safe passage.

In order to verify the existence of Poseidos, the story takes another turn. On his way home, Arthur not only loses his notebook – which is later caught by a fisherman and sold to diverse collectors, until it comes to rest in the university library – but also throws the precious ruby sunstone into the roaring sea: “Unknown to all of them, the ruins of Poseidos lay on the sea floor directly below them”.²⁰ While Arthur manages to unravel several mysteries, the final mystery of the actual site of the sunken Poseidos remains unsolved.

Besides this, it is not at all clear how the camera, the magical ruby stone, and the awkward machines came into the possession of Ogthar. His appearance – as visualized in sculptures and monuments – recalls creatures from outer space. This assumption is additionally stressed by Ogthar’s remarkable

¹⁸ Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, 136.

¹⁹ On the significance of Egypt for the Atlantis myth, see Gwyn Griffiths, “Atlantis and Egypt”, *Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte* 34.1 (1985), 3–28.

²⁰ Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, 148.

intelligence, strength, and inventiveness. Although it is not expressively mentioned in the text, he seems to be the offspring of an advanced alien society, worshipped as a god by the islanders. Regarding this, Ogthar obviously is an equivalent to the Greek god Poseidon who founded Atlantis according to the myth told by Plato. In *Timaeus* (21e–25d) and *Critias* (108e–121c), Plato maintained that Atlantis was built a thousand years before the emergence of Egyptian culture.²¹ Closely connected to Egyptian mythologies and handed down by Egyptian priests, the story of Atlantis has been regarded as portraying the cradle of Mediterranean culture as well as an ideal state which paved the way for Ancient Greek civilization.²² The doom scenario – a wealthy city destroyed by the sea within a day – applies to Atlantis as well as Poseidos (see *Criti.* 116a–c).

The natural reasons for the destruction may be different, but both myths stress that the catastrophe represents punishment for the decadence and *hubris* of the inhabitants. However, while Atlantis and its people have been destroyed forever, the situation is different with Poseidos, as a handful of people managed to escape the deadly flood. They are the founding fathers of the new society on Dinotopia and seem to have learnt their lesson. As they emphasize their adherence to the principles of equality, tolerance, and solidarity, they demonstrate that a society built on these values can persist, thus fulfilling the Romantic concept of the Golden Age. While the Romantics usually restrict this ideal to humankind, the Dinotopians extend this concept inasmuch they regard dinosaurs as equal members of their community. By doing this, they represent the perfect model of a society that welcomes everybody, whatever their origin, appearance, belief, and species – a true example of diversity and inclusion.

In this regard, one may speculate whether the implementation of the Atlantis myth in the second Dinotopia novel can be characterized as a myth adjustment (“Mythenkorrektur” in German), as formulated by the German classical philologists Martin Vöhler, Bernd Seidensticker, and Wolfgang Emmerich.²³ While the original Atlantis myth with its tragic conclusion primarily served

²¹ On the still existing discussion on the veracity of Plato’s myth, see Zdenek Kukul, *Atlantis in the Light of Modern Research*, Prague: Academia, 1984; Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, *Platon und die Erfindung von Atlantis*, München: K.G. Saur, 2002; Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, “Platons Atlantis-Geschichte – ein Mythos?“, in Markus Janka and Christian Schäfer, eds., *Platon als Mythologe. Neue Interpretationen zu den Mythen in Platons Dialogen*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2014 (ed. pr. 2002), 339–353.

²² On this discussion, see Richard Ellis, *Imagining Atlantis*, New York, NY: Knopf, 1998.

²³ Martin Vöhler, Bernd Seidensticker, and Wolfgang Emmerich, “Zum Begriff der Mythenkorrektur“, in Martin Vöhler, Bernd Seidensticker, and Wolfgang Emmerich, eds., *Mythenkorrekturen. Zu einer paradoxalen Form der Mythenrezeption*, Berlin and New York, NY: De Gruyter, 2005, 1–18.

as an admonition for the inhabitants of Athens at the time of Plato, the myth of Poseidos shows a way out, as it has established the foundations for the emerging new society on Dinotopia. By adjusting the ancient myth of Atlantis to a new context, Gurney manages to reveal the dystopian as well as utopian aspects hidden in the classical myth. On this basis, he has created a new myth, whose close link with actual political and cultural issues points to the myth's timeless modernity.

In the same vein, the twist that a myth finally turns into a true story points to a discussion that has determined the scientific research on Plato's dialogues from the beginning. Since Plato maintained that the myth of Atlantis is actually based on real occurrences that happened a long time ago, researchers have disputed how the notions of *μῦθος* (*mýthos*) and *λόγος* (*lógos*), as they have been used by the philosopher, could be interpreted. As Plato admitted that the Atlantis narrative had been handed down over at least two generations in his family and that the informant is a well-known storyteller, it is left open whether the story is pure imagination or based upon facts. According to recent studies in the field of classical philology, the notions of "mythos" and "logos" represent different ways of thinking.²⁴ Both may communicate truths, although seen from different angles and worldviews. This complementary perspective pervades the Dinotopia novels as well. While Arthur Denison as a scientist is initially sceptical about the truth of the Poseidos myth, he discovers that he was wrong when he finds evidence for the existence of Poseidos. Moreover, the readers are put in almost the same situation as Arthur, as they have to decide whether they believe in the veracity of the Dinotopia universe – with the diaries stored in the library serving as proof – or categorize the books as pure fiction. The metafictional device of an editor who does nothing more than prepare for publication an accidentally discovered diary or document written by somebody else, has a venerable literary tradition and has been revived by Gurney in a sophisticated and cheeky manner.

Creating a Meta-Myth

What makes the myth of Poseidos as an equivalent to the Atlantis myth so appealing is its tight connection with the history of Ancient Egypt, ancient

²⁴ Herwig Görgemanns, "Wahrheit und Fiktion in Platons Atlantis-Erzählung", *Hermes* 128 (2000), 405–420; Bernd Manuwald, "Platons Mythenerzähler", in Markus Janka and Christian Schäfer, eds., *Platon als Mythologe. Neue Interpretationen zu den Mythen in Platons Dialogen*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2014 (ed. pr. 2002), 113–135.

cultures from the Orient, the Far East, and South America as well as Ancient Greece. Gurney thus created a meta-myth that encompasses diverse ancient human cultures. Moreover, this meta-myth also includes the Mesozoic era – the time of the dinosaurs – and a potentially highly developed culture in outer space.

This meta-myth is a perfect example of conceptual blending as it mingles various cultures from diverse places of the world and even beyond. By combining these multiple references, Gurney extends the original myth of Atlantis in various dimensions and touches on issues such as time, space, and population. As for the first issue, time, the story of Poseidos and Dinotopia goes back to early pre-human history on the one hand, and has connections to contemporary history (the shipwrecks from Victorian England) on the other. The second dimension, space, points to the idea of multiple worlds, that is, potential cultures beyond the planet Earth as well as uncharted areas on Earth and even beneath the Earth's surface, which cannot be accessed. The final issue, population, refers to the peaceful cohabitation of dinosaurs and humans, thus qualifying the alleged intellectual, social, and moral superiority of humankind.

If one takes the impact of conceptual blending on creative thinking and aesthetic perception seriously, the Dinotopia novels exemplify how this cognitive and aesthetic model functions as regards the interpretation of the multiple cross references to historical, cultural, societal, and biological issues. On the basis of the ancient myth of Atlantis, Gurney has developed a new fictional universe whose societal system represents an ideal community. This community is revealed to be utopian in character as it is capable of uniting diverse ways of life as well as contradictory attitudes which span a period from the trilobite era to contemporary times, thus covering a wealth of ancient and alien cultures.

By transgressing boundaries in multiple respects, the actual life on Dinotopia seems to present the Golden Age *in nuce*.²⁵ This topic crops up in a discussion between Arthur and Oriana. While Arthur proposes reusing the machines and sunstones to make life easier on Dinotopia, thus establishing a new Golden Age, Oriana counters that the Golden Age already exists on the island due to the well-balanced relationship between people and dinosaurs as well as the proximity of the islanders to nature:

²⁵ Regarding the close connection between the Atlantis myth, utopian thinking, and the idea of the Golden Age, see Reinhold Bichler, "Die Position von Atlantis in der Geschichte der Utopie", in Götz Pochat and Brigitte Wagner, eds., *Utopie. Gesellschaftsformen – Künstlerträume*, "Kunsthistorisches Jahrbuch Graz" 26, Graz: Akademische Druck- und Verlagsanstalt, 1996, 32–44.

"Those engineers created machines on the verge of life, with real personalities. If we can tame them, harness them for the good of this island, we can bring back the golden age to Dinotopia, an age without vulgarity and drudgery."

"The golden age is here right now," said Oriana. "You just don't see it. No engineer ever invented anything as miraculous as a flower or an egg or a living dinosaur. It's never drudgery to live among them."²⁶

Furthermore, the rejection of colonialism, suppression, and intolerance complies with the concept of an ideal state, which clearly contrasts with the political situation in the Western hemisphere in the 1860s, when European nations aspired to increase their power by founding colonies. Driven by an imperialist desire, these states opened the door to intolerance, racism, nationalism, and colonialism. Against this background and considering the consequences of these attitudes that finally led to multiple devastating wars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the utopian social system on Dinotopia provides an exemplary and timeless model even for our modern times.

By transforming the initial Atlantis myth into a myth of the origin of the actual Dinotopian communities, the Dinotopia novels depict an alternative society, which includes people of different colours, social classes, and ages. Moreover, women, men, and children are treated equally and encouraged to follow their vocations. Living on a par with the dinosaurs, they put their skills at the disposal of all, eager to share their knowledge and ideas with the animals. The amazing and brilliantly coloured illustrations surely increase the attractiveness of this utopian community, which casually blends diverse cultural and mythical concepts.

Because of addressing an audience of young people and adults alike, the Dinotopia novels certainly belong to the category of crossover fiction.²⁷ Yet the novels are typical examples of the process of genre hybridization, as they combine fantasy, non-fiction, romance, adventure story, and literary utopia. Moreover, the inter pictorial references to diverse artistic styles and the use of a number of visual techniques and image formats increase the books' attractiveness for readers of all ages. The hybrid mixture of genres and the different main characters lay the basis for the multiple addressees of the Dinotopia novels. They may be read as enticing adventure stories that captivate readers.

²⁶ Gurney, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, 122.

²⁷ On the significance of crossover literature that transcends the strict borders between children's and adult literature, see Sandra L. Beckett, *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2009.

They may be regarded as an imaginative and fantastic space replete with fantastic creatures, natural settings, and architecture. They may also be interpreted as a literary utopia that encourages the reader to reflect on humanity's political, societal, moral, and cultural obligations. And finally, they may be seen as a stimulus prompting reconsideration of the impact of ancient myths.²⁸ In this respect, the Atlantis myth seems to be very attractive, particularly in our global times. Considering the increasing number of dystopian novels for young people, books like the Dinotopia novels show that a dystopia always needs a counterpart in a utopia as a model of how peaceful cohabitation may function.

Finally, the manifold processes of conceptual blending, which is necessary to understand the meaning of the story, demand the reader's capacity to switch between different dimensions that touch on issues such as time, space, evolution, society, and culture. Gurney thus has established a sophisticated network of meanings that draw readers back to such myths as that of Atlantis, as they reveal an astounding modernity when it comes to reflecting on the diverse and manifold achievements of humankind.

²⁸ Regarding the significance of retellings of ancient myths and fairy tales in contemporary children's literature, see Robyn McCallum and John Stephens, *Retelling Stories, Framing Cultures: Traditional Story and Metanarratives in Children's Literature*, New York, NY: Routledge, 1998. Some classical myths are particularly popular in actual children's and young adult novels – e.g., the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. See Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Orpheus and Eurydice: Reception of a Classical Myth in Children's Literature", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 291–306.

MYSTERY, CHILDHOOD, AND MEANING IN URSULA DUBOSARSKY'S *THE GOLDEN DAY*

The Golden Day (2011) is an Australian mystery novel for young readers, set in the years between 1967 and 1975. In it, Miss Renshaw, a teacher from a private girls' school, vanishes from a cave on the Sydney foreshore, when she and her pupils go there with Morgan, a gardener who says he is a poet and a conscientious objector, to see some Aboriginal rock paintings he has told her about. The loss of their teacher has a profound effect on these girls, who are thrust from childhood innocence to adult awareness. Some believe Miss Renshaw will return. Others think she is dead. Both are correct. In the years following her disappearance, the girls grow up and make their way through the education system in their conservative private school. As they grow, they reflect on her disappearance, interweaving their thoughts about this dramatic event with the facts and ideas they learn in the classroom and in life.

On the surface, *The Golden Day* is a typical Australian novel for young readers, in which thoughtful girls come of age following a dramatic event. Australian children's literature is preoccupied with ideas of growing up, finding oneself, fitting in, and finding one's place in the world. I believe it is a powerful example of the genre, and that it is so because of its subtle and resonant use of intertextuality. This intertextuality situates a narrative of Australian girlhood within the contexts of classical mythology, Australian art and literature, as well as aspects of Australian history, and the Australian education system. Through a sophisticated integration of mythical, literary, and real elements, Ursula Dubosarsky has written a novel that offers a way of thinking about what it means to grow up, and also what it means to do so in a specific time, place, and context. Underpinning that thought is a delicate but powerful connection to classical mythology and classical education.¹

¹ I discuss the theme of classical education in Australia in a chapter written with Anna Foka, "Myths of Classical Education in Australia: Fostering Classics through Fabrication, Visualization, and Reception", in 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, 295–310.

Ursula Dubosarsky's educational experiences form some of the background of *The Golden Day*. Born in Sydney in 1961 into an intellectual family (her father was a prominent journalist, her mother was a biographer), Dubosarsky was educated at the Sydney Church of England Girls' Grammar School (SCEGGS). She studied Latin, Greek, and Old Icelandic at Sydney University, and completed a Creative Practice Doctorate at Macquarie University. She has written a wide variety of children's books, including picture books, children's and young adults' novels, and non-fiction works on etymology for young readers, as well as a number of short children's plays based on the works of Ovid, published in the New South Wales *School Magazine*. The book which I have chosen to discuss is part of her body of novels for young adults, some of which reflect Dubosarsky's interest in ancient languages and literature – for example, *Black Sails, White Sails* (1997), a novel about childhood memories and mistaken friendships, draws its title from the story of Theseus, and *The Blue Cat* (2017), a novel about Sydney during World War Two, makes use of the *Aeneid* in its reflection about exile, immigration, and nation. Dubosarsky's work is marked by a subtle sense of humour and an interest in the reliability, or unreliability, of perception.

The Golden Day is elegantly told, filtered through the perceptions of the schoolgirls, but overseen by an omniscient narrator who contextualizes and comments on the scene. It operates from inside and outside of the schoolgirl experience, making it an unusual kind of children's novel that reflects openly on what it means to be a child. In doing so, it draws on a range of Australian influences, such as the school novels of Henry Handel Richardson (1870–1946) and Joan Lindsay (1896–1984), which comment on the way that schoolgirls are in possession of powers they may not understand, and are also vulnerable to forces outside their control. Girlhood is perilous in Australia: *The Golden Day* is set against a historical backdrop of loss, disappearance, and violent death, in which Australians of all kinds of status can go missing, be killed, or overthrown. Girlhood is also precious: a "golden" time of childhood, full of play, thought, and promise; demanding protection. *The Golden Day* captures these paradoxes through its employment of the school-story format and careful use of historical detail. Alongside, and running through the novel, classical material offers ways to think about the great mysteries of life, death, disappearance, knowledge, power, and coming of age.

Death and Disappearance

The opening of *The Golden Day* focuses on death:

The year began with the hanging of one man, and ended with the drowning of another. But every year people die and their ghosts roam in the public gardens, hiding behind the grey, dark statues like wild cats, their tiny footsteps and secret breathing muffled by the sound of falling water in the fountains and the quiet ponds.²



Figure 1: Charles Blackman, *Into the Beautiful Garden* (1956), National Gallery of Victoria, Australia. Used with permission.

The story begins on 4 February 1967, the day of the execution of a man named Ronald Ryan, who had killed a prison guard during a botched escape attempt from Pentridge Prison, in the state of Victoria. Like many Australians who protested the execution, Miss Renshaw is incensed.³ She takes her pupils into the nearby public gardens, to think about the execution: “‘Today, girls,’

² Ursula Dubosarsky, *The Golden Day*, Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2011, 3. All subsequent quotations from the novel are from this edition.

³ Ronald Ryan’s was the last state execution to be carried out; the death penalty was abolished by the federal government in 1973.

said Miss Renshaw, 'we shall go out into the beautiful garden and think about death'" (3). The garden is a reference to the Royal Botanic Garden Sydney, near to the girls' school in Darlinghurst, Sydney. *Into the Beautiful Garden* (1956) is the title of a painting by the Australian artist Charles Blackman (1928–2018), whose series of works about schoolgirls form part of the inspiration behind *The Golden Day* (see Fig. 1). In the afterword to the novel, Dubosarsky explains that she saw an exhibition of Blackman's work, and was fascinated by his paintings of schoolgirls, in the skirt, blazer, and large straw hat that is traditional uniform for girls at private schools. It is the first of a number of allusions to art in her work, and to ideas about girlhood in Australia, and this reference, along with the mention of Ronald Ryan, begins the novel's oscillation between fact, fiction, art, history, and the perception of life.

In the beautiful garden, reached by passage through a labyrinth of trees, Miss Renshaw meets Morgan, a gardener and a "widely-published" poet with whom she is in love, and with whom she has arranged an expedition to see a nearby cave with some Aboriginal rock paintings in it. Morgan has curly hair and a low and "owlish" voice (17), and knows "more about the secrets of the foreshore than anyone", Miss Renshaw tells the girls (18). She assures them, "today we are going to do something very special to help us remember this sad day": Morgan is going to take them to see "hidden caves with Aboriginal paintings from the Dreamtime, thousands of years old" (27). The girls, who may suspect something is not quite right about Morgan, tell him what they know about the Aboriginal Dreamtime, the system of mythic beliefs of Indigenous Australians:

"We know about the Dreamtime," said the tallest Elizabeth. "Last year in Term One we did fairy tales, in Term Two we did Greek myths, and in Term Three we did the Dreamtime." She counted them off with her fingers.

"I hate myths," said Martine.

"Ah, but you don't really know about the Dreamtime," said Morgan, pulling a cigarette from his top pocket, "if you haven't seen these caves." (27–28)

The girls question Morgan – is he an Aborigine, does he know Aborigines, where did he encounter them in the outback? But Miss Renshaw brushes them aside, swearing the girls to secrecy about their "privileged" expedition to the "hidden caves" and the "ancient sacred paintings, from the Dreamtime" (28).

Miss Renshaw's stress on secrecy may prove her undoing, for when she disappears and the girls return to school they say nothing to their teachers or the authorities about what their teacher has been doing, and who with. It also

reveals her weakness as a guardian to girls whose innocence and ignorance Dubosarsky emphasizes. Their youth, their "littleness", their newness to a large, confusing world, makes them vulnerable and in need of guidance. Like many young Sydney dwellers from non-Indigenous backgrounds, they know very little about Aboriginal culture, and indeed are almost as ignorant about Australia's land and history more generally. Vivacious Miss Renshaw, who has springy, curly hair like a lion, quotes poetry, moves in artistic circles, and speaks with a kind of learned precision, is the guide they have been given. But Miss Renshaw's erudition and wide range of reference mask that she is also ignorant. Blinded by her romantic visions, she does not realize that Morgan, the poet-gardener, is not all he seems. In the gardens, he seems like a mythological figure, with his curly hair and owl's voice, his habit of not looking directly at the girls, and his possession of seemingly secret knowledge. An atmosphere of mystery and myth suffuses this scene, in which he leads the girls and Miss Renshaw down through the "labyrinth-like" gardens, to the secret cave on the foreshore.

Literary allusions and mythical intertexts immediately begin to cluster. Morgan's Pan-like qualities and his resemblance to the Pied Piper of Hamelin come together as he leads the teacher and her charges through the gardens and along the shore to the mysterious cave. References to famous Australian stories of missing children are clear. As Sophie Masson notes, *The Golden Day* participates in a tradition of Australian Pied Piper stories, which include *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967) – Joan Lindsay's influential novel about schoolgirls and a teacher who go missing on a Valentine's Day picnic in the Victorian countryside.⁴ *Picnic* emphasizes the Australian landscape's mystery and hostility (to non-Indigenous Australians) and draws on classical ideas of Pan-ic space to do so.⁵ *The Golden Day* deliberately plays with references to this famous Australian novel; its action begins in 1967, the year the novel *Picnic* was published, and ends in 1975, the year the film version by Peter Weir was released. Peter Pierce notes that the image of the schoolgirl lost or overwhelmed by the Australian landscape is common in Australian literature and film, and commonly associated with a history of settler anxiety about the land:

⁴ Sophie Veronique Masson, "Fairy Tale Transformation: The Pied Piper Theme in Australian Fiction", *M/C Journal* 19.4 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.5204/mcj.1116>.

⁵ For a discussion of Pan in *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, see Saviour Catania, "The Hanging Rock Piper: Weir, Lindsay, and the Spectral Fluidity of Nothing", *Literature/Film Quarterly* 40.2 (2012), 84–95.

Lindsay and Weir surrender to a mystification of the Australian landscape, which invests it with a power to enchant and lure that is deliciously fatal. Both novel and film of *Picnic at Hanging Rock* want the human dimension of the lost child story to be reduced to a puzzle without an answer, to the scrabbling of people across a vast, animate, indecipherable landscape, or their disappearance into it.⁶

Lindsay is writing a novel about nineteenth-century Australians from a twentieth-century vantage point, and so *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (both book and film) offers a critique on outmoded attitudes in a settler culture that is still finding its way in relation to the wide brown land of Australia. *The Golden Day* is written in the twenty-first century, looking back to the 1960s and 1970s, and looking (as I shall discuss below) at an educational system that is on the cusp of dramatic change, not least in terms of attitudes towards the country and its Indigenous people. But broadly speaking, Dubosarsky is not a writer of the Australian landscape. Instead, her focus is on the Australian city and its people. In *The Golden Day*, that mythic landscape exists on the edge of the city, just out of sight, but potent; built over, but still there. It is another piece of the puzzle, present but lightly so, lurking beneath the overlay of manicured gardens, pavements, and private schools.

Of course, the girls' entrance into the cave with their teacher has overtones of katabasis, of feminine initiation mysteries, common to *Picnic* and to other stories of the entrance into womanhood.⁷ When the girls are in the cave with Morgan and Miss Renshaw, they attempt to look at the rock paintings in the flickering light of Morgan's torch.

Morgan shone his torch on the roof and walls of the old, old cave. The little girls felt wrapped up in a strange silence. It was as though outside the birds had stopped singing and the waves had stopped rolling and the leaves of the trees had stopped shaking and falling in the wind. [...]

"Thousands of years old," said Miss Renshaw softly. "Thousands and thousands of years. Think of that, girls. These paintings have been here all those thousands of years. There were people here, inside this cave." Cubby stared at the wall of shaking torchlight. She had imagined big drawings

⁶ Peter Pierce, *The Country of Lost Children: An Australian Anxiety*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012, 164.

⁷ E.g., see the initiation into womanhood of Judy Woolcot in Ethel Turner's *Judy and Punch* (1928), the sequel to the famous *Seven Little Australians* (1894), in which Judy, a rebellious heroine who runs away from school, has a spiritual rebirth after spending a night in a cave.

of kangaroos or people with spears. But she couldn't see anything. Was that something faint and figure-like in the depths of the stone? The torch moved away again before she could be sure. (36–37)

Cubby, one of the pupils, is a thoughtful girl who becomes the focalizing protagonist of the novel, which is increasingly filtered through her perceptions. While she is in the cave, Cubby cannot see anything, though later her classmate Georgina tells her it was "hands, lots of them. Hands on the rock" (84). Instead, she has "such a feeling of loneliness", as "though everyone's gone" (37). And one by one the little girls succumb to what seems to be an existential panic, leading them to flee the cave, leaving their teacher and Morgan alone, and spilling out into the sunshine "like dice falling from a cup" (39), thrust, in a kind of feminine mystery, into an adolescent girlhood that is scarred by the loss of their teacher. As Masson observes, the girls are "lost" to their childhood from that moment and are never able to recover their state of innocence.⁸

Do the girls flee from the cave because of their fear of the mystery of the Australian landscape in the way that Pierce suggests? Do they flee out of a sense of incomprehension in the face of Indigenous mystery? Or do they flee because they witness Morgan murdering Miss Renshaw? Do they flee out of a generalized sense of Pan-ic anxiety? Or do they flee because in the cave they encounter the power of mystery itself? Dubosarsky does not say, and the mystery of the cave is left a mystery. Universal mythology intertwines with local contexts, to create a productive ambiguity. What is clear is that they are never the same again: that they take into the remnants of their childhood a sense of fear, of shame, and of loss that is transformative and that shatters what they know, or what they think they know about life.

Floating Schoolgirls

The Golden Day reflects broadly on the challenges facing the thinking child, adrift in a sea of things to be known, taught only what comes her way, and in a way that seems arbitrary and meaningless. The girls, who think they "know all about mythology", having "done" fairy tales, Greek myths, and the Dream-time in their previous year of study, in fact know only a very little of anything their teachers choose to present them with (it is not clear that their teachers

⁸ Masson, "Fairy Tale Transformation".

know much more). *The Golden Day* is filled with scraps of knowledge, and references to orienting ideas, stories, historical events, people, geography, and more, presented as they come to Cubby.

As Cubby's teacher, the disappearance of Miss Renshaw is a loss of a mentor: a provider of knowledge, and therefore a stabilizing figure. When the girls return to their classroom, Cubby's sense of disoriented loss manifests itself in an out-of-body experience. On the blackboard, where Miss Renshaw had drawn a map of Captain Cook's journey across the South Pacific Ocean, Cubby sees the words "Not now. Not ever" appear in her teacher's handwriting (54). Feeling again the queasiness she had felt in the cave, Cubby begins to "float":

Very deliberately, she turned her eyes away from the board and floated upwards, swimming through the air, like a dream. She floated out the classroom window, her hat half-flying off her head, high above the laneways and streets. She floated all day while they waited for Miss Renshaw to return. (55)

Here, Cubby enacts an allusion to one of a series of paintings by Blackman, which are of schoolgirls in different situations: walking, playing, floating, against a stark urban backdrop, indicating a sense of puzzled urban alienation in 1950s Australia. Each chapter in *The Golden Day* takes its title from one of Blackman's paintings (*Hiding Schoolgirl*, *Fallen Schoolgirl*, *Schoolgirl Crying*); this chapter, 8, is titled "Floating Schoolgirl". In an "Author's Note" at the end of the novel, Dubosarsky indicates she drew inspiration from this core painting in what she describes as Blackman's "enchanted, disturbing, and endlessly evocative" series:

It's a painting of a surreal schoolgirl in hat and tunic floating above the city in the darkness – like an image from an urban *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. The flying child may be frightened, but she's also brimming with the joy of a secret life. (152)

Cubby's floating takes her through the day, and out into the world. And it connects her to mythical imagery, in particular the figure of Icarus, the boy who flew, but who flew too high. Cubby's closest friend in the class is called Icara, a further allusion to Icarus, and another image of flight. The girls are opposites, but are linked by their intelligence and thoughtfulness. Icara is a bright girl who will fly high in her studies. She is a "realist", according to Miss Renshaw, who dislikes her propensity to ask awkward questions. In contrast, Cubby, whose name evokes a bear cub, but also hiding places like cubby holes and cubby

houses, is a thoughtful dreamer: “[T]he world needs dreamers, not realists”, says Miss Renshaw. In fact, the world needs both, as *The Golden Day* goes on to point out, and the two positions are not as mutually exclusive as they might seem. “Realist” Icara is capable of fantasy: she tells Cubby that her mother is living in Los Angeles, when in fact she has died.⁹ Nevertheless, Icara thinks Miss Renshaw is dead, while Cubby believes she will return. Both are correct, though not in the way they expect.

Through Cubby’s sensitivity to art and literature Dubosarsky reflects on the power of both to evoke and encapsulate feeling. Thinking about the nature of life and death, she remembers Miss Renshaw quoting William Butler Yeats’s poem “Leda and the Swan” (vv. 9–11) over the death of Cubby’s guinea pig, Agamemnon, who had perished in his cage on a hot summer’s day:

“A shudder in the loins engenders there
The broken wall, the burning roof and tower
And Agamemnon dead!”

Of course, that poem was about another Agamemnon altogether, not a poor guinea pig lying on his back with his little legs stiffly in the air and his fur all spiky, almost as though he had fallen from the sky himself. Save your tears for greater sorrows, Miss Renshaw said, but then, reflected Cubby, Miss Renshaw hadn’t known Agamemnon. (103)

Within these nested allusions to painting, myth, and poem, we can see the images of flying and falling that pervade *The Golden Day*. Leda, attacked by Jupiter in the form of a swan, gives birth to Helen, the ostensible cause of the Trojan War, and the death of Agamemnon; Icarus flies too close to the sun and melts the wings of wax his father, Daedalus, had made for him. Encapsulated

⁹ I wrote to Ursula Dubosarsky asking about the inspiration for Icara’s and Cubby’s intriguing names, and quoting my father who had suggested that Cubby might connect with the name Columba. This was her response: “Well – Cubby. Hmm. I suppose when you are writing you seek a name that somehow warms you, but something individual. I think Cubby came partly from the character of Cuffy in Henry Handel Richardson’s *Ultima Thule* and also in the (devastating) short story *The End of a Childhood*. Then it sort of transformed into Cubby – I think partly because of my own name (Ursula) meaning ‘little girl bear cub.’ And I think your father is probably right about Columba – there’s something connected there – I suppose a dove and a bear – it’s not clear in my mind but I agree with him. A Saint Columba’s church is near where my father lives and I pass it often, so perhaps also that’s how it sank in”. As for Icara, “I can’t remember now – but did I tell you there was a girl at school called Icara? younger than me, so I didn’t really know her, but the name always stayed with me, for obvious reasons” (Ursula Dubosarsky, personal communication, 10 October 2017).

in these lines, and in Yeats's poem, are the intertwined perils and beauties of myth. (How Cubby comes to name her pet guinea pig "Agamemnon" is not explored; it underscores her status as being from an educated family, the whimsical, poetic, "dreamy" aspects of her character, as well as Dubosarsky's sly sense of humour.)

While Cubby floats among images and referents, real life brings her to earth: she reflects on Miss Renshaw's disappearance; she observes the emotional currents in Icara's family (her father, the judge, is somehow obscurely involved both with his housekeeper and with one of the older girls at school¹⁰). Eventually, the girls' pact of silence is broken, and the police are called. An amber pendant, which Miss Renshaw was wearing on the day of her disappearance, is found on the floor of the cave. It is discovered that Morgan had a criminal record, and it is assumed that he has somehow killed the teacher and hidden her body. The girls grow up, and their original small class is absorbed into other classes. But a "thin, strong bond of shame" joins the girls, who feel an odd sense of guilt for the death of their teacher. To put it another way, the cave, and the mystery of what happened there (and what they may have witnessed), comes with them.

Knowledge (Facts and Myths)

Around their growing up, learning, life, and death go on. Towards the end of 1967 the Australian Prime Minister, Harold Holt, goes swimming off the South coast of Victoria and is never seen again. The Vietnam War is raging overseas, and many young Australians are sent to play a part and to die. In July 1975, Juanita Nielsen, a wealthy Sydney activist, is kidnapped in King's Cross and never found. In November of the same year, the government led by Prime Minister Gough Whitlam is dismissed, following a constitutional crisis. Meanwhile, the girls learn fact upon fact: "They learned about the Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert and the invention of Hindu-Arabic numerals and the life cycle of the garden snail" (90). The teacher who imparts these facts does so in vain attempts to ease her pupils' sorrow as they wait for news about Miss Renshaw.

Dubosarsky makes no attempt to reconcile facts with myths: the implication is that Cubby must find her way among them, as part of her growing up. Classical learning (with its interweaving of facts and myths) can help (perhaps Cubby naming her guinea pig "Agamemnon" indicates this?). The school of *The*

¹⁰ Known as "Amanda-fit-to-be-loved", in a classic Latin-classroom joke.

Golden Day is based on SCEGGS, the Sydney Church of England Girls' Grammar School, where Dubosarsky was a pupil in the 1970s. Private schools in Sydney in the 1960s and 1970s generally taught classical studies in some form, including Latin and ancient history.¹¹ In their last year of school, Cubby and Icara and two others of Miss Renshaw's girls study ancient history. Their final exam is on Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*. Dubosarsky gives the passage here, along with the exam question:

At last, when many dead now lay piled one upon another in the stream, and part of the army had been destroyed at the river, and the few that escaped from thence cut off by the cavalry, Nicias surrendered himself to Gylippus. THUC. VII.85

To what extent can Nicias personally be held responsible for the Athenian defeat at Sicily? (125)¹²

This final exam question might liberate Cubby and Icara from their feelings of responsibility to Miss Renshaw. As it hints, the girls cannot be held accountable for their teacher's death. After all, they were in her care, not the other way around.¹³ Certainly, completing this exam frees them from their obligation to the system of learning that has held them for the past years:

¹¹ Classics and ancient history are taught in the Australian school system, and offer a pathway to university study. With few exceptions, Latin is taught only at private schools in the major cities.

¹² Taken from the NSW (New South Wales) Department of Education Higher School Certificate (HSC) Examination in Ancient History, in 1975. Though this is a real example of a 1970s HSC examination paper, Cubby and her classmates have had a curiously old-fashioned education. Their school is highly reminiscent of old school stories, such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, and the modernist paean to talented girls, *The Getting of Wisdom* (1910), by Henry Handel Richardson (and made into a film in 1977 by Bruce Beresford). Dubosarsky cites Richardson as an important influence (see n. 9).

¹³ I am reminded of A.A. Milne's comic poem "Disobedience" (from *When We Were Very Young*, ill. E.H. Shepard, New York, NY: E.P. Dutton, 1924, 32–35), in which a recalcitrant mother disobeys her son and is lost forever (vv. 1–10):

James James
Morrison Morrison
Weatherby George Dupree
Took great
Care of his Mother,
Though he was only three.
James James Said to his Mother,
"Mother," he said, said he;
"You must never go down to the end of the town, if
you don't go down with me."

Free! They looked at each other with tired grins. It was true. It was hard to believe, but they were free. They were beyond, somewhere outside and beyond. Beyond the battered paperback volume of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*; beyond the bodies piled up in the rivers of ancient Sicily; beyond Nicias and Gylippus; beyond teachers and black laced shoes and the ringing of bells, the racing of pens and flapping of turning pages. It was no longer necessary to think about what Thucydides had written those thousands of years ago on an ancient war. Even their own war, it seemed, was over now. The soldiers fled through broken streets into helicopters and up into the smoky sky across television screens all over the world. They were free.

"It's over," said Cubby out loud, but really to herself. "It's over." (128)

The Golden Day is both critique and homage in its depiction of school: scrutinizing the relevance or irrelevance of the things girls are taught at school and examining a specific type of conservative private education at an all-girls school. School at such an establishment seems almost an impossible space and time, a kind of chronotope akin to the impossible security of childhood – free from relevance to the realities of the adult world; able to spend time considering the life cycle of the garden snail, Thucydides, and other arcana of little relevance to the difficulties of everyday reality. Indeed, in contrast with the lesson of the cave, the girls seem to learn very little of meaning in their classrooms.

Another Australian writer, Nadia Wheatley, wrote a story, "Melting Point" (1994), in which Xenia, a Sydney teenager from a Greek background, spends a class translating the fall of Icarus in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.¹⁴ As she does so, she thinks about Crete, about its connection to her family history, in particular her Yaya, her grandmother, who does not speak English and has not assimilated into Australian society. Learning Latin, an exercise that seems pointless to her family, helps Xenia process elements of her life as a modern Australian, her connection to Crete, and to her grandmother. As Miriam Riverlea points out:

Wheatley's text actively interrogates what the myth might mean – if anything – to us today, [...] with implications for the way in which reception scholars, particularly those based in Australia, engage with the legacy of the ancient world and their own relationship to the past.¹⁵

¹⁴ Nadia Wheatley, "Melting Point", in her *The Night Tolkien Died*, Milsons Point: Random House, 1994, 207–238.

¹⁵ Miriam Riverlea, "'Icarus Is Seventeen, Like Me': Reworking Myth in Young Adult Fiction", *Melbourne Historical Journal* 40.2 (2012), 26–44.

It seems that Wheatley's Xenia has found, through her classical studies, a link to a meaningful past and thus her present identity. It is not until the end of *The Golden Day* that it becomes clear that classical material has contemporary resonance, that it acts as more than simply a set of interesting things that may or may not have happened in the past, or that act as passing *aperçus* of decorative import only.

The Getting of Wisdom

And yet, the lessons of school can have meaning after school is done. After they complete their ancient history exam, Cubby, Icara, and two of their friends go to a downtown café. There, Miss Renshaw appears to them, improbably wearing the same clothes she had worn on the day of her disappearance. She tells them that far from being murdered, she had found another exit from the cave, and had travelled around Australia with Morgan, who as a conscientious objector had wished to escape the draft. On their travels, he had become sick and had died.

"What about us?" Cubby burst out. "You left us there! Weren't you worried about us?"

"Oh, I knew you'd be all right," said Miss Renshaw, dismissively. "What could happen to you? You were perfectly safe." [...] "I knew you'd all go back to school," said Miss Renshaw, "and then they'd look for me and then they wouldn't find me and then life would go on." Tra la la, life goes on. "That's what happened, isn't it?" said Miss Renshaw. "Life went on?"

"I suppose it did," Cubby said dully. It went on, only it wasn't quite the same. It was never quite the same. (139)

Cubby and her friends are no longer the little girls Miss Renshaw could persuade to keep her secrets. They see through her; they question her airy assurances; they doubt her commitment to them. After all, was she not their guardian? She gets up to go, telling them she couldn't resist coming over when she saw them:

Then she leaned over, and patted Cubby on the shoulder.

"Don't look so stricken, Cubby. Courage. To strive, to seek, to find!"

"And not to yield," said Cubby automatically, for she knew the poem well.

"That's the spirit." And Miss Renshaw was gone. For the second time. Gone. (142)

In quoting these lines from Alfred Tennyson's "Ulysses", written after he had learned of the death of his great friend, Miss Renshaw may be tacitly hinting that she has died. She may also be hinting that she has come back to offer a sense of closure to her grieving pupils. Or she may be connecting with the poem's meaning, in which the aged Ulysses thinks about what it means to have finished his Odyssey, reminding Cubby that life is full of adventure, and requires her to face it with courage and fortitude, even at moments when her strength might seem to have failed. It is yet another example of the enigmatic but suggestive use of intertexts that pervades *The Golden Day*; further testimony to the slippery and subtle powers of myth and literature to offer meaning and touchstones beyond the factual. Icara the realist may not pick up on them, but Cubby the dreamer does.

And yet, it is Cubby the dreamer who ultimately decides that she has seen through her teacher and that Miss Renshaw really is dead. She realizes this, once and for all, when the girls leave the café and stroll to the nearby Cenotaph on Martin Place (see Fig. 2) in the centre of downtown Sydney. The girls have been so busy studying for their Thucydides exam that they only now realize it is Remembrance Day, the day on which Australia honours its war dead. Once again (like Xenia in "Melting Point") Cubby wonders about the relevance of their education in making sense of the real world – when real war nibbles at the edge of their existence, what does it mean to be studying Thucydides?

A cenotaph, of course, is an empty tomb, a memorial to the fallen. Reminiscent of the empty cave, where Miss Renshaw was last seen. The girls discuss their seemingly returned teacher. Even sceptical Icara seems convinced she is alive, until they remember she was wearing the same dress. But as they leave the Cenotaph and run down to the harbour, Cubby's mind is racing, as she remembers:

She knew Miss Renshaw was dead, whatever Icara now said. Cubby knew it. Morgan had murdered her in that low, dark cave nine years ago. Cubby knew it now, without any doubt, because of something she alone had seen that afternoon, that no one else had even noticed. It was when Miss Renshaw had stood up in the café to say goodbye. She'd leaned over Cubby and touched her arm, and the collar of her geometrical dress had opened like a boulder rolling from the mouth of a tomb. There, nestled around Miss Renshaw's neck on a string of black leather, was the tear-shaped amber bead: the necklace that was safely wrapped up in a police evidence bag in a warehouse of unsolved crimes. Cubby saw it, unbroken, hanging around Miss Renshaw's neck [...] with the little insect still inside it, trapped forever in the bright golden honey of time. (147–148)



Figure 2: The Cenotaph, Martin Place, Sydney, Australia (2006), photograph by Greg O'Beirne, Wikimedia Commons.

This is the moment when Cubby comes of age; the moment when she realizes “she was not going to turn into the person she had thought she would become. There was something inside her head now that would make her a different person, although she scarcely understood what it was. *And we shall all be changed in the twinkling of an eye*” (148, emphasis in the original). As Masson puts it, “the eruption of the uncanny into ordinary life will never leave [Cubby] now”.¹⁶ Cubby does not cease to be a “floating schoolgirl”; does not crash to earth as Icara does (focusing on her studies, and becoming “brilliant”), but instead comes of age by being able to accept the role of mystery in life.

¹⁶ Masson, “Fairy Tale Transformation”.

When the Golden Day Is Done...

The Golden Day is marketed as a mystery novel for young readers (the mystery of what happened to Miss Renshaw), and it can also readily be categorized as a coming-of-age novel for young adults, focusing as it does on Cubby's process of growing up. But it is much more. It is a novel that encourages readers to embrace the mystery of life: to find ways to come to terms with elements of the uncanny, even while understanding hard facts. Adding to this atmosphere of mystery is Dubosarsky's subtle use of intertextuality, in which the literary, artistic, mythic, and historical are interwoven into the novel's reflections about Sydney life in a specific period. This intertextual approach requires and rewards a wide range of literary knowledge, or the willingness to work to unpack meanings.¹⁷ *The Golden Day* is not a novel that will sit easily with readers (young or old) who are not receptive to intertexts or to philosophical inquiry. Those who read only for the plot, for closure, or for answers, may be disappointed. But those who read for a reflective meditation about life, death, meaning, and more, will find in it much food for thought.

Readers may find themselves thinking about what it means to be young, and what it means to grow up. The novel's title contains a further allusion, to Robert Louis Stevenson's poem "Night and Day", which is part of his collection *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885):

When the golden day is done.
Through the closing portal,
Child and garden, flower and sun,
Vanish all things mortal.

(vv. 1-4)

The Golden Day is a novel that explores the paradoxes of childhood: a period of supposed innocence and freedom from care that is also a period of puzzlement and mystification. Stevenson's poem is about children going to bed, leaving the "golden day" of play for the slumbers of night. Dubosarsky's novel also suggests leaving the "golden day" of childhood for the mysteries of adult life. It is a reflection on the movement through childhood into adulthood, and about the leaving of childhood. To quote the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians:

¹⁷ Perhaps explaining why the novel has appeared on a number of school curricula.

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things. (1 Corinthians 13:11, trans. New King James Version)

Miss Renshaw's disappearance is the beginning of the girls' need to "put away childish things". Taking her pupils down into the world from their tiny classroom at the top of a tower, through the "labyrinth-like" woods, into the "beautiful garden", where they meet Morgan, and then down to the sea, and into the cave, she has taken them out of a space of protected innocence and into a space where dangerous things happen. Significantly, for one who believes she is about to impart a mystery, she swears the girls to secrecy. On the surface, this is because they are on an unauthorized school excursion. Miss Renshaw is an unconventional and dynamic teacher, likely challenging the old-fashioned conventions of a conservative private school, challenging, too, the idea that children should only know assessable facts, instead of teaching them greater lessons of life. The girls leave the cave with their childhood innocence in tatters. Bound by secrecy and by a paradoxical sense of responsibility to Miss Renshaw: they are the girls who shamefully "lost" their teacher on an excursion; they do not tell anyone where they have been or what they saw there. We do not know what they saw in the cave. Cubby is not sure if she saw the "hands on the rock", or if she has had the memory implanted by her classmate's conversation. Whatever they saw, it has held them captive in a way reminiscent of the slaves of Plato's allegory of the cave: bound by loyalty to their teacher, gripped by uncertainty about what they have or have not witnessed. Perhaps they suffer from the "bewilderments of the eyes [which] arise from two causes, either from coming out of the light or from going into the light".¹⁸

In the 1967 portion of the novel, Dubosarsky emphasizes how "little" the girls are, how inexperienced, how dazzled by their teacher, and by their surroundings. And yet they have the capacity to learn, just as we all do. As the novel progresses, we see Cubby connecting with that capacity, and learning to perceive, to think, and understand; in the words of Socrates:

[T]he instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.¹⁹

¹⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Woodstock: Devoted Publishing, 2016, Book 8, 195.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*, 193.

Does this not encapsulate what it means to come of age? To persevere, to “strive and not to yield”, in order to see things clearly, and to know as much of the truth as is possible? Another way of putting it is to think of Cubby developing her qualities throughout the years of her education. “Nature is a *quality* in the child which must be cultivated like a plant”, says the British scholar Jacqueline Rose, in her influential study of conceptions of childhood:²⁰

In Rousseau, education preserves nature in the child, and it recovers nature for the child. In much the same way, literature for Garner gives back to children, and to us, something innocent and precious which we have destroyed.²¹

Rose is writing about the British novelist Alan Garner (b. 1934), whose fantasy novels for children frequently involve katabasis into earth, mines, and into encounters with fantasy and mystery that adults have destroyed. And she is writing about this paradoxical dance between innocence, mystery, and knowledge, which takes place in children’s literature. Dubosarsky has not, so far, written fantasy. *The Golden Day* is a realist work. Yet in it, she acknowledges the power of myth, of dreams, and fantasy. Throughout the novel are references to different kinds of fairy tales: the girls in their schoolroom at the top of a tower; Icara taking Cubby rowing on the river to “fairyland”, an abandoned amusement park.

The Golden Day concludes with Cubby and her friends looking out at the bustling Sydney Harbour, poised on the edge of womanhood, reflecting on what they have learned, ready to leave their childhood behind:

That afternoon, they felt no astonishment at any of it. Perhaps a butterfly, too, is unimpressed by its transformation from those worm-like beginnings. Why shouldn’t it crawl out from the darkness, spread its tiny wings and fly off into the windy mystery of the trees? The grub lies quietly in its soft cocoon, silent, thinking. It knows everything. A ferry was just leaving the wharf. It sounded its horn and moved through the harbour like a swan, towards an uncertain horizon. And although it was the end of the day, for all of them it felt like morning. (149)

²⁰ Jacqueline Rose, *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children’s Fiction*, London: Macmillan, 1994, 44.

²¹ *Ibidem*.

Childhood must finish. It really finished for Cubby and her friends on the day of their teacher's disappearance. And yet the child has everything she needs to face life (she "knows everything"). Dubosarky puts it in highly poetic natural terms, of metamorphosis and of growth.²²

Conclusions

The Golden Day evades easy categorization. A casual assessment places it as a coming-of-age novel for young adults, firmly in the Australian tradition of school narratives and mystery stories. But I believe it is more than that. It is a powerful work of literature that makes a moving case for the need to reflect on fundamental issues: in this case what it means to leave childhood behind, and to do so in a particular time and place. Its orientation among canonical texts from Classical Antiquity, European and Australian art and literature, and a host of other literary, artistic, and historical references demands and rewards an active recognition of value of intertextuality in encouraging reflection. Cubby and her classmates come of age in an atmosphere of learning and reflection that is at odds with the randomness of contemporary life: where young Australians can lose their lives fighting overseas wars; where those wars begin for reasons beyond school-girl comprehension; where young women, be they teachers or students, can meet unpleasant ends, accidentally or at the hands of people they know.

Life, like childhood, is fragile. But life also goes on, as the ghost of Miss Renshaw tells Cubby. It was Pandora's child-like curiosity, similar to Miss Renshaw's, that led her to open the box of troubles: pestilence, war, pain. But the last thing inside that box was Hope, with her gauzy wings. And this is where I find the mythical hope of this young adult novel for Australian readers. From her teacher's disappearance, and from her own continual reflection on the mysteries she witnesses and reads about, Cubby learns about the power of the uncanny sitting beneath the surface of ordinary life. Life is perilous, but it is also precious, as the myths and fairy tales that pervade the story tell us. The grub in its cocoon "knows everything"; inside the child is everything she needs to move through the waters like a "swan", having learned through her classroom lessons, and life outside the school, and through a range of art works, poems, and myths, how to face the difficulties of life.

²² The lovely reference to the swan is a final intertextual gem, referring once more to Yeats's "Leda and the Swan", and also to the final moments of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, in which a survivor believes the swans he sees are reincarnation of the missing girls.

WHEN IS A ROBOT A HUMAN? HOPE, MYTH, AND HUMANITY IN BERNARD BECKETT'S GENESIS

The ability to hope is a defining characteristic of humanity. Hope does not always become reality, but all the same, humans rely on it in order to deal with any hardships life may throw at them. Hope, moreover, allows humans to be creative and imaginative, finding new ways to try to shape their future. Robots cannot feel hope, which makes them fundamentally different from humans, no matter how well their programming imitates other human behaviours. This difference between humans and very advanced creatures of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the central theme of Bernard Beckett's young adult novel *Genesis* (2006). The present chapter will discuss the role of hope in this book and how the author employs allusions to ancient myth and philosophy to place the topic in a wider context, in particular to shed light on the notion of false hope. Mainly, this chapter will focus on the novel's protagonist Anax's (false) hope, as expressed in her uncritical belief in her state's ideology. It will also look at the crucial part which myth plays in creating this false hope and how hope, in combination with myth, is employed by the author to give readers the misleading impression that Anax is human, rather than a robot.

The discussion will start with a short author's portrait and a plot summary, the presentation of the novel's main topics and its use of ancient references. This will be followed by a brief overview of ancient and modern attitudes towards hope. Next comes an analysis of *Genesis* in light of the theme of hope and the ways in which myth is used to deal with this theme, with a focus on foundation myths and a comparison of Anax to Oedipus. After a discussion of the protagonist's hopes and fears, the chapter will look at how Anax's hopes and fears change during the plot in a contrasting way to those of Adam Forde, a historical¹

¹ In the novel's setting. See Bernard Beckett, *Genesis*, Dunedin: Longacre Press, 2006. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

figure and a rebel, who is the subject of Anax's examination. The last part of the chapter focuses on how hope is used in Beckett's novel as an emotion which defines humanity.

Genesis: Plot Summary

Genesis is a science-fiction young adults' novel about robots and their relationship with humans. It is written by Bernard Beckett, who is among the most popular current New Zealand young adults' fiction writers. *Genesis* won the Young Adult Fiction Award at the New Zealand Post Book Awards for Children and Young Adults and the Esther Glen Award at the LIANZA (Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa) Children's Book Awards (both in 2007), and the Prix Sorcières in France (2010). The novel was also listed as a 2007 Storylines Notable Young Adult Fiction Book.²

Genesis is set in a future Aotearoa New Zealand, in a state called "Plato's Republic" or for short the "Republic", which is inhabited by robots and led by an elite institution of philosopher-rulers named the "Academy". On a first level, it is the story of the robot Anax (a nickname for Anaximander), a female student undergoing a gruelling oral examination in the hope to enter the Academy. Her examination takes place against the background of a state in crisis, with the government desperate to keep the population under control. The Academy's task is, as we eventually find out, to eliminate rebels from their population, and Anax is under suspicion to be such a rebel. The special topic Anax has chosen for her examination is the rebellious young human border-guard Adam Forde who lived from 2058 to 2077 and defied strict orders to ensure the total isolation of his country by letting in a refugee. The account of his life is a story within a story in this novel.

Many years before Anax's time, after a global crisis involving war and a plague, the islands of Aotearoa (which at that time were still inhabited by humans) had shut themselves off from the rest of the world. No refugees were permitted to enter, until Adam Forde rescued the refugee girl Eve, who approached the Republic, half-dead, in a little boat. Adam was arrested and as punishment made to participate in an experiment. He had to live and interact with a robot called Art.

During this time, great advances had been made in AI technology, under the leadership of a scientist called Philosopher William. His earlier model of a robot,

² See Bernard Beckett's profile on Read NZ Te Pou Muramura, <http://www.bookcouncil.org.nz/writer/beckett-bernard/>; Storylines also operates as the New Zealand Section of IBBY; see "About Us", <https://www.storylines.org.nz/About+Us.html> (both accessed 3 August 2019).

however, harmed human children during an interactive experiment, and so William installed a programming in his latest creation, Art, which made it impossible for the robot to hurt anybody. Since the population had become mistrustful of the developing of AI since the earlier violent incident, William kept Art hidden for over four years. During this time, Art developed through his interactions with his creator, but then his advancement slowed drastically, as he needed more stimulation from other humans. So, when Adam was arrested, William suggested that the young man be offered the choice between the death sentence or to live with Art in order to help advance the robot's programming. Several of the conversations between captive Adam and the robot Art are retold and analysed or restaged as holograms in Anax's exam. They concentrate on the following issues: is human or artificial intelligence superior? What does it mean to be human? What are ideas?

Eventually, Adam and Art decide to escape. This escape attempt was agreed upon by both, but planned by Art alone. During their escape, the robot tricked Adam, killed him (despite his allegedly strictly anti-violent programming), and, via a central computer, managed to transfer his own information to all other AI units.³ According to one of the examiners, Art's act of violence showed that he had developed the kind of aggression which is inherent in all humans. As the examiner puts it: "Art became Adam" (142). Hence, in the information transfer, also this characteristic is passed on to all future robots. The alleged peacefulness of the robots thus turns out to be a lie, which the Republic's robot leaders have been concealing from the citizens.

For in the course of the novel, readers learn from Anax's explanation about the origins of the Republic that creatures of AI have taken over the leadership of Aotearoa. According to these robot leaders, the robots occupied the islands in order to create a place on Earth which is perfectly peaceful. However, this pretext turns out to be untrue: together with Anax, we find out that the robots have violently overcome and murdered the entire indigenous human population of their islands and, moreover, mercilessly eliminate any of their own kind who do not conform to the strict social protocols of the Republic, such as Anax.⁴ The Republic's foundation myth, as invented and propagated by the state's

³ This transfer of Art's information is reminiscent of Plato's Socrates' notion of the immortality of the soul, which gives him hope (*ἐλπίς*; *elpis*) when facing his death (Plato, *Ap.* 40c4; *Phd.* 105e–107a).

⁴ What the Academy does to mutants like Anax, who have inherited a strong human streak, is only hinted at (mostly through Anax's terror once she knows that she will not be allowed to leave the examination). Only in the last sentence of the novel we hear that Pericles quickly twists up her head, cracks her neck, reaches inside her, and "disconnect[s] her for the very last time" (144). Anax's deactivation is permanent.

leaders, depicts this elimination of an entire population of humans as a triumph of Good (the peaceful robots) over Evil (humans, who are, as a species, prone to aggressive behaviour and fighting). In this state-approved version of events, Adam forced Art to flee with him, and the robot killed the human in self-defence. Adam's death allegedly was an accident.

In the final part of Anax's examination, the examiners show her what really happened when Adam and Art escaped and that Adam's death was a premeditated murder by Art. Anax understands immediately that, after showing her the true events, the examiners will not let her leave the examination alive, so she will not be able to tell others the truth. And indeed, at the conclusion of the novel, her tutor, Pericles, enters the examination room and kills Anax.

Until the very end of the novel, the readers are made to believe that Anax, Pericles, and the examiners are human. So it comes as much as a surprise to us to find out at the very end of the novel that they are all robots with the appearance of orangutans (the look chosen by the robots in order to mock humans), as it comes as a surprise to Anax to find out that her government has been lying to her and the rest of the population all along.

Central Themes of *Genesis* and the Use of Classical References

Genesis deals with a number of topics which are the subject of current debates in contemporary New Zealand (and other Western countries), including science, education, politics, philosophy, history, and historical revisionism. The novel discusses questions about AI taking over from humans, individual freedom as opposed to state surveillance, refugees, war, colonialization and colonial guilt, and acceptance of "the Other".

All these topics are related to the themes of identity and humanity. Beckett uses classical references as foils to the contemporary themes. In particular, references to the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato's *Republic* enrich Beckett's description of *Genesis*' strictly class-based society with a historical-philosophical background. Citizens are divided into certain classes, which used to be determined, in the modern novel, by genetic testing of the earlier human population.⁵ Only members of the philosopher class are allowed to enter the Academy, which is what Anax is hoping to achieve. In particular, Beckett uses allusions

⁵ Beckett, *Genesis*, 15.

to the foundation myth of Plato's *Republic*, the so-called Noble Lie. "Noble Lie" is the usual English translation of Plato's γενναῖόν τι ἐν ψευδομένους (*Resp.* 3.414b–415d; *gennaïón ti hèn pseudomévous*). It refers to Socrates' plan to get the whole state, ideally all citizens and the leaders, but at least the citizens, to believe in their shared national identity and in the state's class system. The myth has two parts, the first part explains that all people were made of Earth and so should view all other citizens as their brothers and sisters (they are all autochthonous, literally born from the Earth) and live in peace together. This part of the myth focuses on national or civic identity. The second part of the myth says that God mixed different metals into the Earth he used to make humans. The metals determine the class of citizens which each person belongs to. This means that the class system is divinely determined and inherent in each individual. Socrates hopes that if people believe in this myth, they will care for their city and each other and accept their positions in the class system without questioning it.⁶

Furthermore, some of Beckett's characters can be compared to heroes from Greek mythology, in particular Odysseus, Oedipus, and Perseus, as foils to the science-fiction setting depicted in *Genesis*. This will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Characters' Names

All characters of Anax's generation have Ancient Greek names, mostly those of Greek philosophers, such as Anaximander, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Thales. Their names mark them as part of the class of philosopher-leaders.⁷ Anax's tutor (and eventually her executor) is named Pericles, after the Greek

⁶ Plato, *Resp.* 414b–415d. Plato did invent this myth to put it in Socrates' mouth; however, in it, he combined and expanded elements from existing myths: Hesiod's Myth of the Ages (*Op.* 109–201) and the Cadmeian myth of autochthony (Apollod., *Bibl.* 3.4.1–2). At the place of his new city, Cadmus killed a dragon, sowed its teeth in the ground, from which armed men sprang up and killed each other until only five of them were left who were called the Spartoi ("Sown Men"), and became the ancestors of the principal Theban families. For a more in-depth discussion of the relation of Hesiod to the Noble Lie, see Helen Van Noorden, *Playing Hesiod: The "Myth of the Races" in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 118, 129. On the use of the Noble Lie in *Genesis*, see also Babette Puetz, "Classical Influences in Bernard Beckett's *Genesis*, *August* and *Lullaby*", in Marguerite Johnson, ed., *Antipodean Antiquities: Classical Reception Down Under*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019, 162.

⁷ As opposed to her namesake, Anaximander of Miletus, who wrote a treatise which included his ideas about the origins of human life, Beckett's Anax finds out about the origins of robotic life and the elimination of human life in her country; see Puetz, "Classical Influences", 159.

statesman, presumably because of his reputation for considering the state's needs above those of the individual (Thuc. 2.65.4–8). We see this character trait in Beckett's Pericles when he kills Anax, his own student, for the alleged good of the state, in a business-like manner.⁸

Only one name which appears in the novel is related to ancient myth:⁹ Helena, a name which also is conspicuous for being female. In contrast to Helena, all other female characters, like Anax/Anaximander, have male names, presumably because all known Ancient Greek philosophers were male. Helena is only mentioned once in the novel, in Anax's historical overview of the founding of the Republic.¹⁰ We find out that she was the architect of the state's social structure and adviser to its creator, Plato.¹¹ We do not have enough information about Beckett's Helena to clearly determine the relationship of the modern novel's character to the eponymous figure from the *Iliad*.¹² The foundation of the Republic is justified by a manipulated myth and its social structure is based on that of ancient Plato's *Republic* which, in turn, is justified by yet another myth specifically invented for this purpose, the Noble Lie. So, the name Helena may quite possibly have been chosen to allude to Helen of Troy's manipulative powers.¹³

Hope as a Theme in Contemporary Children's and Young Adults' Literature: Its Positive and Negative Aspects

Because hope is so defining an emotion for humankind, it has been a central theme in literature dealing with human characters from Antiquity onwards. It

⁸ Beckett, *Genesis*, 143.

⁹ The figures from Greek mythology (Perseus, Odysseus, and Oedipus) which characters in the contemporary novel have similarities with, neither directly appear in Beckett's text nor are their names mentioned in the novel. The comparisons are indirect.

¹⁰ Beckett, *Genesis*, 15.

¹¹ *Ibidem*.

¹² For an in-depth discussion of the names used in *Genesis*, see Puetz "Classical Influences", 159.

¹³ As, e.g., seen in the Attic red-figure krater which shows Menelaus in full armour advancing towards Helen, but dropping his sword when he sees her beauty (ca. 450–440 BC, Paris, Louvre G 424). See also Euripides' *Andromache* (627–631) and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (153). The name Helen might also be a joking allusion to Helen Clark who was Aotearoa New Zealand's Prime Minister from 1999 to 2008 and known for her focus on the country's stability. The name Clark is also mentioned referring to a female leader in the novel, when Anax tells about one-year-old Adam's routine genome testing which showed that his behaviour might be unpredictable. A memorandum by Clark suggested that termination should be considered, but when Clark died during the plague of 2059, the retesting order was destroyed, together with all her possessions, and the mistake (no second test for Adam) was not noticed until much later (Beckett, *Genesis*, 18–19).

still plays an important role, particularly in contemporary children's and young adults' literature. It has even been proposed that the "primary purpose of fantasy and fairy tale is to give children hope".¹⁴ Children's literature is then seen as a form of "imaginative self-transcendence" which can help young readers deal better with their own circumstances and give them hope for the future.¹⁵ This is true, even though a trend in young adults' literature for dark themes and a lack of hope has been noted and bemoaned, especially by literary critics with a Christian focus, who see fantasy literature as a replacement for the hope which religion used to offer young people.¹⁶

While in religious stories and fairy tales hope is expressed straightforwardly in the triumph of Good over Evil and the resulting happy endings, modern children's and young adults' literature tends to take a more subtle and critical approach to the ways in which texts present hope. Sometimes characters' hopes turn out to be false hopes. The trend to a darker, less hopeful atmosphere is especially obvious in young adults' science fiction with its many characters of AI, combined with technophobia.¹⁷ *Genesis* is an example of this trend.

Attitudes towards the concept of hope changed over time. In contemporary Western cultures, hope is generally seen as a positive or sometimes value-neutral emotion.¹⁸ This generally positive view of hope may have been influenced by Christian notions of hope: see, for example, Paul, Romans 15:13, about the "God of hope". This is what we see in *Genesis*, where an entire state is founded on its robot-citizens' hope for a peaceful life, after war and a plague have

¹⁴ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, New York, NY: Random, 1976, 5–6, as quoted in Emily Griesinger, "Harry Potter and the 'Deeper Magic': Narrating Hope in Children's Literature", *Christianity and Literature* 51.3 (2002), 459.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Kath Filmer, *Scepticism and Hope in Twentieth Century Fantasy Literature*, Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992, iii; Kay Sambell, "Presenting the Case for Social Change: The Creative Dilemma of Dystopian Writing for Children", in Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, eds., *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2003, 163–178, discusses the ways in which children's authors include hope into dystopian fiction where adult dystopian fiction leaves no room for hope. The wish to have a hopeful ending in a dark dystopian scenario often presents a creative dilemma for authors of children's literature, undermining "the imaginative and ideological coherence" of their fictional worlds (164). Usually these endings tend to be ambiguous, veering between the hope and fear of the protagonist, or they entail "implausibly lucky escapes" (170–172).

¹⁷ Jonathan Ball, "Young Adult Science Fiction as a Socially Conservative Genre", *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 3.2 (2011), 170.

¹⁸ Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "hope", <http://www.oed.com/helicon.vuw.ac.nz/view/Entry/88370?result=1&rskey=jHBz5z&> (accessed 5 August 2019).

ravaged the world for decades. Beckett's Republic seems like a utopia,¹⁹ in which all citizens live peacefully together. Anax calls it the "finest society the planet had ever seen" (113). She defines hope as follows:

Human spirit is the ability to face uncertainty of the future with curiosity and optimism. It is the belief that problems can be solved, differences resolved. It is a type of confidence. And it is fragile. It can be blackened by fear, and superstition. (11)

Anax here does not use the term "hope", but this is what she has in mind – the expectation that things will turn out well. She points out how fear can interfere with hope but does not mention the danger associated with hope: it can be misleading and ultimately cause damage.

Such ambiguity towards hope can already be found in Antiquity. In fact, in Antiquity hope (ἐλπίς; *elpís*) was mostly seen in a negative light, as unrealistic expectations which were typically clung to by people who either did not fully understand the relevant situation or were unable to form a plan to solve an issue (see, for example, Solon 13.36–56). Hope misleads humans by obscuring the true dangers of situations, thus preventing them from making well-informed, rational decisions (see Thuc. 5.103).²⁰ This is particularly problematic when not only one individual is affected, but larger groups, such as cities or empires, for example, because of Croesus' false hope of destroying a large empire, as told by Herodotus (1.53). Even though in Antiquity hope was clearly

¹⁹ Geoffrey Miles, "Utopia", in Anna Jackson, Geoffrey Miles, Harry Ricketts, Tatjana Schaefer, and Kathryn Walls, *A Made-Up Place: New Zealand in Young Adult Fiction*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2011, 91–92, compares Anax's praise of the Republic to Pericles' praise of Athenian democracy in his funeral speech of 431 BC in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (2.37–41). There are certainly similarities in the one-sided, uncritical praise of a state in both, but neither the Funeral Oration nor Thucydides are actually mentioned in the novel.

²⁰ See also Douglas Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", in Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds., *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 22, 43; Laurel Fulkerson "'Torn between Hope and Despair': Narrative Foreshadowing and Suspense in the Greek Novel", in Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds., *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 76; Andreas Spira, "Angst und Hoffnung in der Antike", in Freyr Roland Varwig, ed., *AINIIMA. Festschrift für Helmut Rahn*, "Bibliothek der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften" 78, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987, 140, 147; Katja Maria Vogt, "Imagining Good Future States: Hope and Truth in Plato's *Philebus*", in Richard Seaford, John Wilkins, and Matthew Wright, eds., *Selfhood and the Soul: Essays on Ancient Thought and Literature in Honour of Christopher Gill*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 33, 46. See also Beckett, *Genesis*, 140, where Art comments on humanity being doomed to repeat its mistakes.

seen as a possible factor in providing humans with motivation, it was not viewed as particularly helpful.²¹

Also in the best-known myth about hope, that of Pandora (Hes., *Op.* 90–105), *elpís* is depicted ambiguously. All evils fly out of Pandora's pithos to affect humankind, and only hope stays in the jar.²² Whether hope, which stayed inside the pithos, is helpful for humans when dealing with the evils that have flown out of the jar, or whether it is in fact a further divine punishment – that is, false hope – remains unclear.²³

This ambiguity is moreover strikingly evident in the metaphors associated with hope in early Greek poetry. They are less violent and disruptive than those used for other emotions,²⁴ yet still they describe *elpís* as lightness, flying, a fetter, wandering, slipping, falling, missing the target, a companion that leads us astray, and they point out a connection with ἄτη (*átē*; ruin).²⁵ All these metaphors and comparisons focus on the discrepancy of what hope presupposes and what is in fact achieved.

Aristotle, in his *Art of Rhetoric* (1389a8), writes that hope is characteristic of good people, especially the young who have either not yet had many bad experiences or only positive ones and so are still trustful. We can see this kind of hope in Beckett's Anax and Adam.²⁶ Anax's hope to join the Academy, however, turns out to be a false hope. At the end of her examination, the examiners reveal that they do not admit anyone into the Academy anymore, and the purpose of the examination, rather than an entry requirement, is the government's way of identifying potential internal threats to the state. The Republic looks inwards and backwards, following the motto "Forward to the past", striving for a "return to the glory of the great civilizations" (15). Change was seen as equivalent to decay. The Republic's leaders attempt to preserve the status quo of their ideologically crumbling state by trying to find mutants – that is, rebels with a strong streak of critical independent thinking, inherited from Adam Forde.

²¹ See Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 43.

²² The hypothesis posed by Cairns (*ibidem*, 28) that Pandora's pithos contained not evils but goods cannot be proven.

²³ See Fulkerson, "'Torn between Hope and Despair'", 76; Spira, "Angst und Hoffnung in der Antike", 133–135, 139; Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 29.

²⁴ Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 14.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, 35–39, with examples. For the concept of *átē* (in the context of Hercules' myth), see Edoardo Pecchini's chapter, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", in this volume, 275–325.

²⁶ See Fulkerson, "'Torn between Hope and Despair'", 74, 90, on the positive depiction of hope in ancient novels.

The Academy uses hope and fear to rule the Republic's citizens. This reminds one strongly of the Ancient Greek statesman Pericles' systematic methods of keeping the people under control with the aim of preserving stability in the state, according to Plutarch (*Vit. Per.* 15.4):

For whereas all sorts of distempers, as was to be expected, were rife in a rabble which possessed such a vast empire, he alone was so endowed by nature that he could manage each one of these cases suitably, and more than anything else he used the people's hopes and fears, like rudders, so to speak, giving timely check to their arrogance, and allaying and comforting their despair.²⁷

Ancient rhetoric sees hope and fear as leading emotions of all political discourse (Isid., *Etym.* 2.4.4). We see this exemplified in the ways in which the leaders of Beckett's Republic instil false fear of the dangers of refugees entering the country and propagate a manipulated myth about the peaceful characters of their own kind. The Republic's central dogma is: "A society that fears knowledge is a society that fears itself" (116). However, the leaders of the Republic live in fear of giving their citizens knowledge of the true circumstances of the robots' take-over from the earlier human population, which would reveal the robots' own aggression and brutality. The state leaders' "creed", the "constant refrain" (139), the AI's "Genesis" (140) is that the robots are a perfectly peaceful society and so their occupation of Aotearoa was ethically justified as it eliminated human aggressive behaviour and enabled the creation of a harmonious state. The Academy justifies this lie by presenting it as historical truth. They manipulate the story of Adam's death at the hands of Art.²⁸ In the state-approved version of the story, Art did not trick and kill Adam on purpose nor according to his own plan, but Art allegedly killed Adam in self-defence and without premeditation. Anax summarizes this part of the official version of the story: "Adam grew violent and desperate. He attacked Art, and Art, in his attempt to restrain him, accidentally ended Adam's life" (140). The myth claims that Art, as all AI units, "was unable to harm another conscious being" (139).

²⁷ Trans. Bernadotte Perrin in Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 3: *Pericles and Fabius Maximus; Nicias and Crassus*, "Loeb Classical Library" 65, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916, ad loc.

²⁸ In this sense, it is more like a legend, but since Beckett refers to it as "myth", this chapter will also use the term.

Genesis and Plato's "Noble Lie"

The way in which the leaders of Beckett's Republic invent a foundation myth to justify their take-over from humans – falsely claiming that they uprooted human aggression and replaced it with the peaceful nature which the leaders insist is programmed into all robots – as well as Beckett's Republic's class system are based on the foundation myth of ancient Plato's fourth-century work *The Republic*, the Noble Lie (3.414b–415d), discussed above. Both, Beckett's Republic's myth of Adam and Art and Plato's *Republic's* myth of the earth-born origin of all citizens and the god-given class distribution, are employed in order to manipulate citizens to accept a regime and a class structure with an elite ruling class. Both are foundation myths, and even though they are seen in very different settings (an ancient thought experiment and a science-fiction setting), both are used by state rulers in order to deceive and control their citizens. When we see how the same sort of manipulation through a foundation myth, in order to achieve civic unity and acceptance of a rigid class system, was already envisioned to work in Antiquity, it is easier to understand why Beckett's citizens, like Anax, are so loyal to their state and do not question the fairness of the social system or the dubious ethics of their elimination of the human population.

Beckett's *Genesis*, then, tells a creation myth, as we see them in ancient literature, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.5–88) or the Bible (Genesis 1:1–2:7),²⁹ but here it is not about the creation of humans, but about the creation of AI. The character names Adam and Eve link the novel to the biblical story of the Garden of Eden; however, it is not Beckett's Adam and Eve who enact a Creation story and the Fall. Instead, the Creation story depicted in this novel is that of robots, and the terrible crime the robots commit is equivalent to the Fall. In this, there are a number of parallels to the biblical Genesis: Art is created, but in order to function properly he needs a kind of divine breath of life, which here is given to him by the human Adam; the absolute prohibition of violence by robots reminds one of the biblical Adam and Eve not being allowed to eat from the Tree of Knowledge; Art murdering Adam represents the Fall; and when Anax, after learning the truth about the robots' creation story, looks at her own body and feels estranged from it (139), this is equivalent to the

²⁹ Cf. the biblical names of all the human citizens of Aotearoa before the robots' take-over.

biblical Adam and Eve noticing that they are naked, after they have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 3:7).³⁰

Like ancient creation myths explain to humans the structure and rules of their societies, the myth of Adam and Art is used to help the robots understand the world they live in. In comparison with the ancient creation myth by Plato and its purpose to manipulate, it becomes obvious how such *aitia* can be abused by governments: Beckett's ruling class uses historical revisionism in order to prop up an unfair system of a very controlling group of statesmen, an oligarchy. The novel thus follows and expands an ancient thought experiment, the state which Socrates describes in Plato's *Republic*. Anax's loyalty to her state exemplifies the effects of such a powerful manipulation through myth: even when Anax, at the end of her examination, is shown the historically accurate events which took place during Adam and Art's escape, and has understood that she has been deceived her entire life by her government and is about to be killed for this knowledge, she reiterates to the examiners (and the readers of the novel) her state's creed: "We are peace-loving creatures, unable to harm others, destined to live quietly, in comfort and peace" (140).

Adam's Rescue of Eve

Despite her loyalty to her state, Anax has a fierce interest in and feels a strong personal bond with the rebel Adam, the protagonist of her country's foundation myth, because he reminds her of herself, as a character who displays hope and empathy, and has an enquiring mind. Anax even says about Adam: "I think it is understandable that some would interpret his actions as heroic", referring to his rescue of Eve (37).³¹ A male hero rescuing a female in danger at great risk to his own life is a typical scenario from folk tales or myth, such as that of Perseus rescuing Andromeda from a sea monster (see, for example, *Ov., Met.* 4.670–739). Mythical heroes helping a damsel in distress usually do not only act out of pity for the girl who needs rescuing, but also out of hope to win fame through their deed (and possibly to marry the princess and inherit the kingdom). Adam, in contrast, acted purely out of compassion, fitting the profile of the

³⁰ See Tatjana Schaefer, "Religion", in Anna Jackson, Geoffrey Miles, Harry Ricketts, Tatjana Schaefer, and Kathryn Walls, *A Made-Up Place: New Zealand in Young Adult Fiction*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2011, 155–157.

³¹ Cf. also: "They didn't anticipate people making a hero of him" (Beckett, *Genesis*, 52) and Adam's "heroic anger" (ibidem, 72).

young, hopeful idealist, which Aristotle describes (see above on *Art of Rhetoric* 1389a8). Adam explains to Art why he rescued Eve, speaking about the helplessness he saw in Eve's eyes, and also hope, or, as Adam phrases it: "I saw ambition, for a better life; a willingness to risk everything. [...] I saw intentions, and I saw choices. All the things I never see when I look at you" (132). In short, he saw her humanity, which is expressed in hope.

Anax and Oedipus: Characters Entertaining False Hopes

Like Eve, Anax is driven by hope, which turns out to be her tragic flaw. The way she digs her own grave during her examination reminds one strongly of Oedipus in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, in which the ruler of Thebes refuses to heed any pleas from other characters to stop enquiring further into his past, the knowledge of which finally causes his tragic fall. Both protagonists are subject to false hope, which in Ancient Greek tragedy is expressed through tragic irony. Like Oedipus, Anax is strong-willed, thirsty of knowledge, empathetic, and hopeful. In Oedipus these character traits can be seen when he insists on finding out who murdered Laios, even against the warnings from the seer Tiresias (Soph., *OT* 314–333) and his wife (and mother), Jocasta (Soph., *OT* 975), when he pities his plague-stricken people at the beginning of the novel and promises to do anything he can to help them (Soph., *OT* 58–67), and when he hopes against increasing evidence that he cannot be the man who brought pollution on the city (for example, Soph., *OT* 962).

Both, Oedipus and Anax, are attempting to find out about others: Oedipus is trying to find the one responsible for the plague which is afflicting his people, while Anax is intensely curious about Adam Forde's life, character, and his motivations for his rebellious actions. Both instead find out unpleasant things about themselves: Oedipus that he killed his father and married his mother and so brought misfortune on his city; Anax that she, even though she always thought of herself as a robot with the same peaceful programming as the other robots in the Republic, has inherited a strong streak of rebelliousness from Adam, which makes the government view her as an enemy of the state.

Both stories follow Aristotle's tragic principles of the unity of place and time. The entire tragedy *Oedipus Rex* takes place at Oedipus' palace in Thebes, and all on the day on which he discovers his true identity and suffers a terrible tragic fall. The plot of *Genesis* unfolds on the day and at the place of Anax's examination and her death. Both heroes are isolated: Oedipus through his special

position of king with all the associated responsibilities and because he believes he is so much cleverer than all others that he refuses to listen to any of them. He also has a scar on his foot, which marks him as physically different; hence his name, Oedipus – “Swollen Foot”. Anax talks about how she has been feeling different from her peers:

It was during those final school years that Anax first began to realise she wasn't like the others. She didn't understand the careful nonchalance which one day appeared without warning, spreading through her classmates like a plague. It was as if a whole stage of development had passed her by. (57)

She is also, in a sense, isolated for the entire duration of the novel, as the only student in an examination with three frightening examiners (though at the end Pericles, whom Anax feels close to, joins them briefly). Only at one point Anax gets the chance to speak briefly with another candidate for the examination (a robot named Socrates) during one of her breaks.³²

In terms of the two characters' social position, Anax, even though she is part of the highest class of citizens of the Republic, in the examination is powerless against three malevolent examiners. Oedipus is king of Thebes, but even he is powerless against the truth about himself. Both protagonists suffer a terrible tragic fall: Oedipus from very popular and well-respected king to a broken man who blinds himself and goes into exile; Anax from a hopeful candidate for entry into the elite institution of her state to being viewed as an enemy of the state who is killed for being different. Both characters' misfortunes evoke pity and fear.

Fear and Hope

When the examiners tell Anax the truth about the purpose of her examination and Adam and Art's escape, Anax realizes that she will not leave this examination alive, as the examiners need to ensure that she will be unable to reveal her new knowledge. Now Anax's fear overshadows any feeling of hope:

And if I should fail this test? Anax wanted to ask. How then could it be safe, to release me, knowing what it is I know? The answer though was

³² Moreover, both Oedipus and Anax live in places which have, in the past, been characterized by a period of isolation from the outside world: Thebes by a deadly Sphinx which only lets travellers pass who can answer her riddles; Anax's Republic through a heavily guarded sea-wall.

plain, and had about it the dank stench of a truth deprived of sunlight. The room darkened further, Anax was gripped by fear. She turned towards the hologram, fascinated, horrified, understanding at last how high the stakes were. (116–117)

Already a little earlier, when she returned to the examination room from her last break, she had noticed the threatening expressions of the (previously totally impassive) examiners: “[T]heir features had turned rigid and threatening in the darkened room” (115). Later on, when one examiner raises his voice at her, she feels a “quiet fear, as if she could never be quite sure how she would respond” (128) in a conflict situation like this, that is, involving figures of authority – a hint at her rebellious streak. Just before the examiners showed her the final part of Adam’s story, “fear swept over her again” (130)

It is striking that this part of the novel, which so vividly describes the mortal fear that Anax experiences, reveals the hologram which shows Adam in a state of elevated hope, as he finally sees a chance to escape his imprisonment. Anax’s feelings of hope and fear during the examination run contrary to Adam’s feelings, as she herself, during the different stages of the examination, presents and discusses Adam’s psychology.

Adam is initially hopeful, when he rescues the refugee Eve, though he quickly starts fearing that they will be discovered (“a frightened man”, 43). When Anax discusses this part of Adam’s life, she is still trying to calm her own nerves. Adam’s long imprisonment with a robot makes him, while not entirely hopeless, feel dejected (124). As Anax discusses these aspects of his life, she herself is recovering from her initial nervousness, and while never feeling entirely fearless during the examination, she is hopeful to be able to pass (“in better spirits”, 57). At the point when Adam is shown to have new hope to escape his imprisonment, Anax, in contrast, realizes that there is no escape for her and loses hope.

The Dangerous Side of Hope

Adam in his own time became a symbol of hope for the country’s human rebels who were in support of him and against the further development of AI (127). Adam’s own hope during his imprisonment is exclusively focused on escape. He describes his life in captivity as “this lonely, pointless existence” (124) and says that “life [is] slowly bleeding out of [him]” (125). But he never entirely gives up hope, as he explains to Art:

You know the very first thought I think, every morning when I wake? I think, I have to get out of here. Every spare moment, when I am not distracted from the task by your noises and experiments, I ask myself how. How will I change this? How will I escape these walls? (124)

The strength of Adam's hope in a seemingly hopeless situation reminds one of the characters from ancient myths on quests, especially of Odysseus, who even in the ten years in which the gods again and again thwart his νόστος (*nóstos*), never gives up his hope to return home. Admitting the intensity of his hope makes Adam vulnerable to Art's deception. When the robot pretends to confide in Adam that he also wishes to be free, Adam at first cannot believe it: "I hoped it might be true," Adam admitted. "But now, I can not [*sic*] believe it" (125). However, Adam's feelings of hope quickly block out any suspicions he might have, as soon as Art mentions that he has a plan, which, he claims, he had not revealed to Adam, as he first needed to ensure that he could trust him: "Adam considered this for a moment, then nodded. The first tremors of hope played about his eyes" (126).

Here, the way in which humans display their emotions in their facial expressions (as opposed to robots) is emphasized. Also, the imagery of earthquake tremors (fitting the New Zealand setting of the novel) is striking, as it shows the intensity and the uncontrollability of Adam's feeling of hope, which makes him abandon caution. This is exactly the kind of danger which Ancient Greeks saw in (false) hope, and nothing could prove better Adam's own claim that his thoughts and feelings make him so different from a robot, like Art. As Adam says to Art, arguing that he (Art) is not conscious:

You're just a complicated set of electronic switches. I make a sound, it enters your data banks, it's matched with a recorded word, your programme chooses an automated response. So what? I talk to you, you make a sound. I kick this wall, it makes a sound. What's the difference? Perhaps you're going to tell me the wall is conscious too? (70)

Before Art and Adam execute the robot's escape plan, they shake hands and the AI unit wishes the human good luck. Adam answers with sarcasm: "I am hoping it doesn't come to that" (132). The fact that he uses the expression "hoping" indicates how risky the whole undertaking is. He cannot be sure that the escape will be risk-free and succeed, but his hope is stronger than his fear.

When Anax has been shown the real events related to Adam and Art's escape, the examiners notice her shock, but ask her to explain how this new

information changes her interpretation of the event. Anax cannot think of another way, but to speak the truth – risky as it may be – because she still has hope:

Good or bad, she had no choice. Just like Adam, she had no choice. She could only hope the panel would understand her confusion. That they would make allowances. (126)

Her situation here is likened to Adam's: both have no choice but can only hope for the best. It has been pointed out that hope is an emotion which one feels in particular in adverse circumstances in which one cannot see any rational way of improving one's situation.³³ The same is true for the refugee Eve, who risked death on her journey by sea in a tiny boat, driven by her hope to enter the Republic.

Humanity and Emotions

Anax's wavering between fear and hope helps make the situation of her examination feel psychologically accurate and evokes the readers' sympathy for the protagonist.³⁴ Furthermore, throughout the novel, Anax's strong emotions are depicted in contrast to the examiners' impassiveness. When Anax tries to ease the tension in the room with a joke at the start of her examination, the examiners do not understand it: "Not so much as a flicker of acknowledgement from any of them" (8). When she is worried about a possible trick question, Anax searches the examiners' faces for clues, but they sit "impassive as a stone, offering her nothing" (9). We also hear how the examiners carefully modulate their voices by "control, pure and simple" (10–11). At the end of the novel, Anax believes that she sees sadness in the examiners' faces: "Their huge eyes were set in resignation. Anax could even believe she saw sadness, written across their orang-utan [*sic*] faces" (138). This may tell us more about Anax herself, though, than about the examiners. It is never confirmed that the examiners in fact become sad. Rather Anax, believing she is seeing their sadness, may be projecting her own emotions onto the examiners. A sudden feeling of sadness would, actually, contradict the examiners' display of excitement whenever Anax reveals hints of her rebellious streak (see below, with *Genesis* 37 and 130).

Anax may also be projecting her own feelings onto Pericles, when he enters the examination room at the very end of the novel. Anax describes him as approaching

³³ Fulkerson, "Torn between Hope and Despair", 91.

³⁴ Beckett, as a high school teacher, would be very familiar with the psychological aspects of exam situations.

with his eyes “cast down in sadness, the fiery red hair of his body somehow subdued” (142). When he speaks to her, she notices “a crack in Pericles’ façade” (143). Anax is too upset to at first even look at him at all, and when she finally does, she sees him distorted through her tears, so it is doubtful how well she can really see his sad demeanour. We hear about “the pain she knew this [that is, the decision to kill her] caused him” (143), once more with his alleged feelings reported from Anax’s view point, not his own. In contrast, immediately after this, his expression when he is about to disconnect Anax is described as “calm, business-like. He had a job to do” (143), which would contradict his alleged display of sadness.

When the examiners have shown the unreleased records of Adam and Art planning their escape and are forcing Anax to speculate about the scene she has just seen, Anax suggests that Art is making his own choices, independently from his creator, Philosopher William. At this point, the examiners finally show a reaction: “For the first time the examiners’ expressions were easily read. Smiles crept across all three faces; small knowing smiles, sinister” (130). They now have their first evidence for Anax’s rebellious streak. Moreover, when Anax defends Adam’s empathy for the refugee girl Eve and proposes that a society needs empathy in order to function properly, “[f]or the first time the change in all three examiners was perceptible. They all straightened, in the way of predators alerted to the approach of their prey. The leader loomed taller, his cronies’ eyes burned more intensely” (37). This change in the examiners’ demeanour is vividly explained through the animal metaphor of predator and prey.

Anax: A Robot with Human Emotions

At this point in the novel, readers still assume that all characters are human. Only at the end of the novel, we find out that the examiners and Anax do have animal-like bodies: they look like orangutans, so designed on purpose to accentuate the robots’ difference from humans also in their physical appearance: “It was a collective joke, a deliberate sign of disrespect to the human species” (138–139). However, orangutans are known for their gentle natures,³⁵ as opposed to the predator-like behaviour of the examiners. There is a robot body hidden under the orangutan fur, and the appearance of the AI creatures’ peacefulness is only a pretence.

³⁵ See, e.g., “Orangutan Facts”, Orangutan Conservancy, <http://www.orangutan.com/orangutans/orangutan-facts/> (accessed 30 April 2020).

The revelations that Anax, like her examiners and her tutor, is not human but a robot is the final clue that had been missing throughout the novel and comes as a shock to its readers. Sarah Giffney has examined the question of why the readers do not notice earlier that Anax is a creature of AI. She rightly comes to the conclusion that it is Beckett's narrative structure which deceives us. In particular, the author cleverly employs the omniscient third-person narrator and deliberately leaves gaps in the information he provides. Beckett plays with his readers' expectations and makes them fill any informative gaps with their own assumptions and biases.³⁶ One could add to these observations that the repeated emphasis on Anax's strong feelings, including those of hope, are crucial for Beckett being able to mislead readers into thinking that Anax is human. How human her emotions are, is spelled out at the end of the novel, when Anax faces her own death. When Pericles is about to disconnect her, she feels overwhelming "terror":

So new and intense was the feeling that it could only have come from one place. The last dubious gift from a fading past, the expression on the face of a dying man. (144)

This impression is further underscored through the direct and indirect allusions to ancient myths used in the novel. As these myths all deal with humans, we (wrongly) assume that the characters of the novel, which these myths allude to, must also be human.

Conclusion

The analysis has shown how important hope is in *Genesis* when it comes to determine a character's human identity. The novel revolves around the question of what it is which makes us humans different from robots. Adam rescues the refugee Eve because he sees hope in her eyes and, when he is imprisoned, he never gives up hope to escape. Anax hopes to enter the Academy and please her tutor by passing the examination. Even though she is extremely loyal to her state, she feels herself drawn to the rebel Adam. Both are similar in their intense emotions, critical minds, and great sense of compassion. Most importantly, both have hopes for the future against all odds. Anax, a robot, is only able to feel

³⁶ Sarah Giffney, "The Impossibilities of Fiction: Narrative Power in Beckett's 'Genesis'", *English in Aotearoa* 74 (2011), 65–67.

hope because she has a strong human streak in her, inherited from Adam Forde himself.³⁷ Except for Anax, only human characters are shown to feel hope.³⁸ This becomes obvious when one compares the mostly impassive examiners with Anax or the human characters: the examiners show no compassion, humour, or hope.

Just like most ancient literary sources, *Genesis* displays a very ambiguous attitude towards hope: both Anax and Adam are subjects to false hopes, which eventually lead to their violent deaths. Anax resembles a Greek tragic hero, like Oedipus. The allusion to a tragic hero fits the fact that much of the examination consists of rehearsed answers and a number of dialogues are brought to life in holographic depictions, which make the examination itself feel in large parts like a staged performance. Anax's hopes turn out to be her tragic flaw. They are the catalyst for her downfall, when she is not cautious enough to hide her real feelings about Adam Forde in her examination. Similarly, Art, by pretending to entertain the same hope as Adam, easily makes him a willing and trusting follower in his alleged escape. However, the fact itself that Anax's hopes mislead her, is proof of her humanity. So it is not surprising that the novels' readers are misled, until the very end of the text, to assume that Anax is a human character. It comes as a surprise to the readers that Anax is a robot, just as it comes as a shock to Anax that the myth about the peacefulness of the robots she had believed all her life has been manipulated.

The allusions to ancient myths help us place Anax's and Adam's views and actions into a wider context and understand how hope, as an emotion which is central to our humanity, has always been a decisive motivator for human decision-making (both on the personal and on the state level) and for cultural progress, and will still be in the future.

Can stories like *Genesis*, which are framed around the theme of false hope, still help young readers transcend difficult situations in their own lives, then? In Beckett's novel, like in ancient texts, hope is not shown to solve any problems, and the danger of false hope is foregrounded. However, *Genesis* depicts how hope can help sustain people in very difficult situations and how it can serve as a defining mark of one's humanity.

³⁷ It remains unclear why this human streak develops more strongly in some robots, like Anax, than in others. Pericles refers to such robots as "mutant[s]" (143).

³⁸ The only other robot under suspicion of a human streak, who appears in the novel, is Socrates (the other candidate Anax meets during her exam break; 41-42). The short interchange between the two characters does not show whether Socrates feels hopeful or not. He certainly seems more suspicious of the examiners than Anax when he says to her: "Be careful [...]. They know more than you think" (42).

HUNGRY AND HOPEFUL: GREEK MYTHS AND CHILDREN OF THE FUTURE IN MIKE CAREY'S MELANIE STORIES

A girl holds the key to the future of mankind: she has to choose between sacrificing herself and creating a new human race. In one version she is Iphigenia, in another Pandora. Mike Carey (or M.R. Carey) has now produced three versions of this story, all of which follow the central child character, Melanie, through horrific trauma, which she navigates with the help of Greek myth. The first was a short story called "Iphigenia in Aulis" which appeared in an anthology of dark fantasy called *An Apple for the Creature*.¹ This anthology played with the genre of school stories. In his piece, Carey introduced the character of Melanie, who goes to a very strange school. She feels very passionately about learning and about her teacher, Miss Mailer, who introduces her to Greek myths. It is told from the perspective of a child, but it is not a children's story. The story was nominated for two awards (Derringer and Edgar Allan Poe), and Carey felt that he had more to say about this character and her world, so he pitched the idea for both a novel and a screenplay, and ended up writing both.² They became *The Girl with All the Gifts*, a novel which was a word-of-mouth bestseller, and a film starring Glenn Close, Paddy Considine, and Gemma Arterton (dir. Colm McCarthy, 2016), which was nominated for a BAFTA. Both novel and film are hard-hitting, yet both were particularly popular among teen audiences. This chapter then operates on the borders of young adult fiction with a series of texts that play with conventions associated with children's literature. The chapter

¹ M.R. Carey, "Iphigenia in Aulis", in Charlaïne Harris and Toni L.P. Kelner, eds., *An Apple for the Creature: Tales of Unnatural Education*, London: Quercus, 2012, 161–186.

² Interview with Dr Lynn Fotheringham, at the conference *Sacrificing Iphigenia through the Ages*, University of Nottingham, 30 January 2016; further details in M.R. Carey, *The Girl with All the Gifts*, London: Orbit Books, 2014 (novel with extras: interview on p. 470). All the subsequent quotations are from this edition. Page numbers are given in brackets.

explores how Greek myth and the theme of hope interact with ideas about what it means to be human.³

Melanie and Children's Literature

Let us begin at the beginning: with the opening paragraphs of the original short story, "Iphigenia in Aulis", which I heard Carey read at a conference on the reception of Iphigenia in Nottingham in January 2016:

Her name is Melanie. It means "the black girl," from an ancient Greek word, but her skin is mostly very fair so she thinks maybe it's not such a good name for her. Miss Justineau assigns names from a big list: new children get the top name on the boys' list or the top name on the girls' list, and that, Miss Justineau says, is that.

Melanie is ten years old, and she has skin like a princess in a fairy tale: skin as white as snow. So she knows that when she grows up she'll be beautiful, with princes falling over themselves to climb her tower and rescue her.

Assuming, of course, that she has a tower.

In the meantime she has the cell, the corridor, the classroom and the shower room. (2662)⁴

The initial sleight of hand where Carey begins with an etymology from Ancient Greek makes us feel we are in the hands of a knowledgeable narrator. In fact, this opening is already focalized through the central child character, as is clear from "so she thinks" onwards. Melanie herself is the knowledgeable,

³ *Girl with All the Gifts* has drawn some scholarly attention in children's studies, science-fiction, and utopian studies. On Melanie as monster, see M. Isabel Santaulària i Capdevila, "Monstrous Final Girls: The Posthuman Body in Paolo Bacigalupi's *The Windup Girl* and M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*", in Katarzyna Paszkiewicz and Stacy Rusnak, eds., *Final Girls, Feminism and Popular Culture*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, 173–188. On Melanie in the context of the posthuman, see Kimberly Hurd Hale and Erin A. Dolgoy, "Humanity in a Posthuman World: M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*", *Utopian Studies* 29.3 (2018), 343–361. On hope and dystopian fiction, see Alexa Weik von Mossner, "Hope in Dark Times: Climate Change and the World Risk Society in Saci Lloyd's *The Carbon Diaries 2015 and 2017*", in Balaka Basu, Katherine R. Broad, and Carrie Hintz, eds., *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*, London: Routledge, 2013, 69–84. On ecocriticism and psychoanalysis, see Ruzbeh Babaei, Sue Yen Lee, and Siamak Babaei, "Ecocritical Survival through Psychological Defense Mechanisms in M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*", *Journal of Science Fiction* 1.2 (2016), 47–55.

⁴ The short story was read in electronic format (Kindle), which does not have pages, and so for quotations I give Kindle location numbers instead (in brackets).

classically educated narrator-focalizer.⁵ The short sentences and simple words mimic writing for young children. The importance of the teacher figure is demonstrated by the mention of Miss Justineau, who is slipped into the third sentence, showing her authority and importance in Melanie's world. Although it is Miss Mailer with whom she is obsessed in the short story, Miss Justineau is the name given to the desired teacher/parent figure in the novel and film. The theme of identity is central in the idea of names assigned from a list: the clash between Melanie's apparent innocence and her darker name is also important, not just for her dislocation from human society. It also comes into its own in the film version, where she is played by the black actress Sennia Nanua. Carey builds a contrast between our expectations of childhood (little girls should fantasize about being princesses) and the story's reality of a childhood constrained, imprisoned, objectified. He makes it clear at this early stage in the reference to Rapunzel's tower and the contrast between its relative benignity and the horror of Melanie's actual setting: a nightmarishly dark prison building, where her bedroom is a cell with unpainted concrete walls, and the classroom features breeze blocks, green floor evoking a hangar, and fluorescent lighting. All she has to understand her reality is childhood myth and storytelling.

Melanie is in fact a zombie, or, as Carey calls them in this series, a "hungry". Along with other high-functioning child hungries, she has been imprisoned at a military base camp. The explanatory strategies are different in the short story and the novel, but the situation and characters remain the same. In the short story "Iphigenia in Aulis" (further referenced as "Iphigenia"), which is set in America, the anti-abortion movement insisted on keeping the babies of dead hungries alive. In *Girl with All the Gifts* (further as *Girl*), set in the UK, they were trapped in the wild and used as material for Dr Caroline Caldwell's research project in which she tries to find out how the child-hungries continue to function, in the hope of creating some sort of cure. In "Iphigenia", the hungries are created by a virus; in *Girl* – by a fungus. In both versions, Melanie becomes hope for the future: our mythical hope. The tag line of the film, featured on the posters, is "Our greatest threat is our only hope". In "Iphigenia", Melanie sacrifices herself to allow Miss Mailer and the others to escape to the settlement, where a cure has been discovered. In *Girl*, she represents the continuity of human culture in a new biological species, now in symbiosis with the fungus.

⁵ On Melanie's education and its importance to her construction as a character, see Lauren Ellis Christie, "The Monstrous Voice: M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*", in David W. Kupferman and Andrew Gibbons, eds., *Childhood, Science Fiction, and Pedagogy: Children Ex Machina*, Singapore: Springer, 2019, 41–56.

Both the novel and the film take the characters and plot, which begin in the short story, and develop them further. Melanie survives the attack on the base and the main characters escape, and undertake a road trip, which displays the decaying human material world. Gradually they come to realize that there is little, if not nothing, of ordered human society left. The novel and film, while broadly similar in plot, character, and motivations, have subtly different endings. In the film, Melanie must make a stark and dramatic choice between allowing Dr Caldwell to cut her up in order to extract her brain and provide a cure for the remaining humans, against setting the spore sacs of the fungus on fire to spread its spores throughout the remainder of the human world, turning all remaining humans into hungries. In the novel, her choice is whether to take the side of her human friends (despite her hatred of Dr Caldwell, who already knows she cannot cure the human race) or to fight on behalf of the pack of feral hungry children, as the two groups threaten to kill each other. In both cases, she is both agent of destruction and of continuity and the final scene is the same in both: beloved Miss Justineau, the only human left alive, is stored in an airtight mobile laboratory, teaching Melanie's pack of "new humans", the high-functioning hungry children, of whom Melanie has taken control, through the airlock. Melanie releases the "evil" of the end of humanity as we know it, but she herself is "hope", insisting on passing on knowledge and culture. Similarly, Iphigenia both rescues her father and enables the start of a hideously destructive war (both death and glory). As in Hesiod's myth of Pandora (Greek for 'all gifts'), Melanie both has all the gifts (her extraordinary intelligence, endurance, resilience, reaction speed, and strength) and is herself the gift (a new way for humanity to survive in the universe).

This chapter explores the themes of myth, trauma, and identity in these three cultural products, looking at how the short story breaks away from children's literature mode, how the novel and the film were received, how myth functions in all three, how Melanie responds to traumatic situations, and how myth interacts with trauma in defining identity. I begin with the Iphigenia myth in the short story and move on to the Pandora myth in the novel and film.

Iphigenia and the Noble Sacrifice

The short story begins with Melanie's description of her surroundings and her life, in bare, matter-of-fact language, with the occasional child-like touch: "The door at the classroom end is red. It leads to the classroom (duh!)" (2676). She is both acculturated in human children's culture, frozen at the moment of rupture, and

innocent of conventions and expectations. When Sergeant (the man in charge of the base) spots her looking at the other side of the door to outside which had been accidentally left open, his: "Little bitch has got way too many eyes on her" (2677), is not as shocking to Melanie as it is to the audience. At the Iphigenia conference, there was an audible gasp the first time a character used the word "fuck" (Miss Mailer is reading *Winnie-the-Pooh* to the children and Sergeant breaks in: "What the fuck is this?" [2776]). The carefully focalized description of the death of one of the other children, through Melanie's lack of understanding and innocence, which precedes this moment, was not as shocking. This short story is all about what we expect of children, what is appropriate for children, and how children's literature is understood to work. Melanie is not an ordinary child: she has superhuman abilities, memory, intelligence, strength, resilience. She also has a massive lack of context and knowledge about the key elements of her situation that matter, and about what it means to be a child and how children are supposed to act: her learning through books has alienated her from her own real world.

Melanie's sense of wonder nevertheless marks her as both child and human being. The first mention of Iphigenia comes in a catalogue of the wonders Miss Mailer makes available to them:

[She would] show the children pictures out of a book and tell them stories about the people in the pictures. That was how Melanie got to find out about Agamemnon and the Trojan War, because one of the paintings showed Agamemnon's wife, Clytemnestra, looking really mad and scary. "Why is she so mad?" Anne asked Miss Mailer.

"Because Agamemnon killed their daughter," Miss Mailer said. "The Greek fleet was stuck in the harbour on the island of Aulis. So Agamemnon put his daughter on an altar, and he killed her so that the goddess Artemis would give the Greek fleet fair winds and help them to get to the war on time."

The kids in the class were mostly both scared and delighted with this, like it was a ghost story or something, but Melanie was troubled by it. How could killing a little girl change the way the wind blew? "You're right, Melanie, it couldn't," Miss Mailer said. "But the Ancient Greeks had a lot of gods, and all kinds of weird ideas about what would make the gods happy. So Agamemnon gave Iphigenia's death to the goddess as a present, and his wife decided he had to pay for that."

Melanie, who already knew by this time that her own name was Greek, decided she was on Clytemnestra's side. Maybe it was important to get to the war on time, but you shouldn't kill kids to do it. You should just row harder, or put more sails up. Or maybe you should go in a boat that had an outboard motor. (2759-2770)

Melanie's engagement with the myth starts from Clytemnestra, with whom she identifies. Her practicality dismisses a religious or magical understanding of the world, and she already has strong personal morality. The reaction of the other children, "both scared and delighted, like it was a ghost story or something", emphasizes the power and distance of myth. Their right to hear stories is at the heart of their definition as human beings and children:

"They're children," Miss Mailer points out.

"No, they're not," Sergeant says, very loudly. "And that, right there, that's why you don't want to read them *Winnie-the-Pooh*. You do that, you start thinking of them as real kids."

[He removes the chemical blocker and lets one child, Kenny, smell him and involuntarily try to eat him.]

[...] Miss Mailer is looking at him like Clytemnestra looked in the painting, and Sergeant let his arm fall to his side and shrugs like none of this was ever important to him anyway.

"Not everyone who looks human is human," he says.

"No," Miss Mailer agrees. "I'm with you on that one." (2783–2797)

Here the connection is clearly made in Melanie's mind between the Iphigenia myth and her own situation, casting Miss Mailer as Clytemnestra and Sergeant as Agamemnon: or so we think. Later, as Melanie processes the events, readers find out that she identifies Sergeant with Artemis:

Sergeant has been more like the goddess Artemis to Melanie up until now; now she knows that he's just like everyone else, even if he is scary. (2812–2813)

The identification of authority/parent figures with the Greek gods fits with the way stories like the *Percy Jackson* series present gods as teachers or summer-camp organizers.⁶ The gulf between the realities of limited adult power and children's assumptions of adult omnipotence is explored with particular strength in the apocalyptic context of Carey's Melanie stories. Melanie takes this knowledge of Sergeant's compromised power, and translates it into a desire to rescue

⁶ Dionysus is Director of Camp Half Blood (the Greek demigod camp); Chiron posed as Percy Jackson's Latin teacher, Mr. Brunner. On Percy Jackson and the reception of myth, see Joanna Paul, "The Half-Blood Hero: Percy Jackson and Mythmaking in the Twenty-First Century", in Vanda Zajko and Helena Hoyle, eds., *A Handbook to the Reception of Classical Mythology*, Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017, 231–240.

Miss Mailer. She expresses this through the image of being a “Greek warrior with a sword and a shield” (2816) from the *Iliad*, fighting off Heffalumps and Wozzles. Note the eclectic weaving together of different traditions, tones, and stories, which is often a characteristic of children’s culture and its engagement with myth (for instance, Pokemon or Harry Potter).⁷ This fantasy becomes the main aspect of the scene that is transferred into the film.

As Melanie tries to figure out her position in the world, she continually comes back to the myth of Iphigenia and how she is or is not like it. The children are trying to persuade Miss Mailer to explain their situation fully to them, and Melanie asks who their parents are. The climax of this scene returns to the myth:

But Melanie wants to know one more thing, and she wants it badly enough that she even takes the chance of upsetting Miss Mailer some more. It’s because of her name being Greek, and what the Greeks sometimes used to do to their kids, at least in the ancient times when they were fighting a war against Troy. At the end of the lesson, she waits until Miss Mailer is close to her and she asks her question really quietly.

“Miss Mailer, were our moms and dads going to sacrifice us to the goddess Artemis? Is that why we’re here?” (2847–2850)

It is this question that drives Miss Mailer to explain their situation, and most powerfully, transgressively, to touch Melanie’s hair. Throughout, the story evokes Greek myth: Melanie thinks of the war between humans and hungries as “a big war like Greeks fighting Trojans” (2872); Sergeant describes her expression on hearing the explanation as “[f]ucking face all screwed up like a tragedy mask”; Melanie attacks him in turn with “You won’t get fair winds, whatever you may do. [...] No matter how many children you kill, the goddess Artemis won’t help you” (2897). The books Miss Mailer gives Melanie are the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Her experience of hunger hurts “like a Trojan spear in Melanie’s heart” (2954). Their substitute teacher “looks like being in a room with all the children at the same time is like lying on an altar, at Aulis, with the priest of Artemis holding a knife to his throat” (2965). These continued reminders of Melanie’s fascination with Greek myth make sure that the story as a whole is interpreted with the Greeks in mind.

When the base is compromised by a hungry attack, we see how Melanie responds to traumatic change:

⁷ Other genres also use myth in an eclectic way – e.g., heavy-metal music; see K.F.B. Fletcher and Osman Umurhan, eds., *Classical Antiquity in Heavy Metal Music*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019.

She's confused and excited and very, very scared. Something new is happening. She senses it: something completely outside of her experience. (2985)

Left on her own after refusing to be put in her restraints without an explanation, she turns to the myth:

She remembers her book and gets it out. She reads about Hector and Achilles and Priam and Hecuba and Odysseus and Menelaus and Agamemnon and Helen. (3009)

The litany of exotic names represents comfort and escape, but the myth does not help Melanie suppress her hunger when Miss Mailer finally comes to rescue her: "[T]he hunger is bending Melanie's spine like Achilles bending his bow" (3030). Melanie's superhuman powers are assimilated to the power of the greatest Greek hero, and her suffering to the sufferings of Greek tragedy.⁸ The trauma for Melanie is not the fighting and destruction around her as they hit the outside world, trying to get to the helicopters and the cure in Texas, but the desperate battle between her desire for human connections, particularly with Miss Mailer, and her physiological compulsion to bite, kill, and eat. When she realizes that she can use that to rescue Miss Mailer, to allow her helicopter to lift off, this bleak destruction becomes "a day of wishes coming true" (3107). She rescues Miss Mailer with her heroic powers, her superhuman violence, and the final sentence returns to the Iphigenia myth: "The goddess Artemis is appeased. The ships are gone on the fair wind" (3110). Melanie has sacrificed her innocence, childhood, and humanity to become a hero.

In the short story, the myth stays centre stage, gives hope and helps Melanie process her revelation about who she is, and decide what actions she will take. Iphigenia gives her a redemptive role to play, even though the story also implies that her choice leads to her own destruction. She cannot be a human with a normal life and normal relationships. Melanie's "childness" is central to the story and very closely connected to her obsession with Greek mythology. Although this is not a story for children, it is a story about the ways children's literature uses and responds to Greek myth.

⁸ It is odd that the reference is not to Odysseus here, since the idea of him taking vengeance suddenly from a position of hidden strength is eerily appropriate for Melanie. However, the intensity of Achilles' love for Patroclus and desire for revenge perhaps appropriately conveys Melanie's obsession with Miss Mailer. Achilles' bow is also the powerful weapon that will eventually cause the fall of Troy.

Pandora and Choosing Hope

The novel, *Girl with All the Gifts* (2014), contains an interview with Carey, in which he addresses the questions of why he feels myth is important and what he is doing with it. He identifies "mythic archetypes" as a source of inspiration, suggesting that "stories that last [...] are the ones that touch on something really powerful or at least really universal" (473). He identifies the central myth of the short story as the *Iliad* and says:

When I came to write the novel, I took Melanie's story in a different direction and that myth didn't seem particularly relevant any more. What did, suddenly, seem almost scarily right and appropriate was the myth of Pandora's box. So I kept in all the scenes where Miss Justineau is reading to the kids from a book of Greek myths, but I changed out the myths we got to hear about. (473–474)

The novel, and the screenplay, represent a more populist form than the short story. Often in a transition from novel to film, for instance, classical references are cut as alienating.⁹ Lynn Fotheringham has shown that the density of classical reference is much reduced in both novel and film.¹⁰ However, Carey chose to retain the Greek mythological framework, even with a different myth, and the title of both products, along with the tag line of the film, offer the Pandora myth as the interpretative key to the story. Melanie is a new type of creature, an almost supernatural creation, a god-like, perhaps even immortal, symbiosis of fungus and human, who does not need to eat or drink much, is supernaturally intelligent, strong, and fast. Like Achilles, she resides outside the normal category of human, but like Pandora she is as much threat as gift. Carey says:

The beauty of the Pandora myth is that it's relevant in a lot of different ways. We keep on returning to it, and it means something different each time. And of course, when you reach the end of the book, you realise exactly how Melanie's choice mirrors Pandora's. (474)

⁹ This downgrading of classical references during the shift from book to film can be seen with J.K. Rowling's *Fantastic Beasts* series, as I discuss in Helen Lovatt, "Fantastic Beasts and Where They Come From: How Greek Are Harry Potter's Mythical Animals?", 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, 449–470.

¹⁰ Paper presented by Dr Lynn Fotheringham at the Classical Association Annual Conference, in Edinburgh in April 2016.

Carey also discusses the significance of post-apocalyptic fiction as a genre, reflecting on its affinity with myth:

The apocalypse starts as a wiping of the slate. A rebirth. [...] [P]ost-apocalyptic fiction uses the sweeping away of the here-and-now to explore the question of what endures. What defines us. (472)¹¹

What endures is the story: we are human through the telling of stories.

We can see how Carey swaps Iphigenia for Pandora by comparing the novel with the short story: the second sentence is now: "She likes the name Pandora a whole lot, but you don't get to choose" (1). Instead of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, she finds out about the Pandora story, which becomes her favourite, and she asks Miss Justineau to read it again and again. Miss Justineau even uses the book's title in the initial explanation of the story: "She was a really amazing woman. All the gods had blessed her and given her gifts. That's what her name means – 'the girl with all the gifts'" (12). Nevertheless, Carey maintains themes and characterization: where before Melanie questioned the treatment of Clytemnestra, here she questions the blaming of Pandora:

Melanie said she didn't think it was right to blame Pandora for what happened, because it was a trap that Zeus had set for mortals and he made her be the way she was on purpose, just so the trap would get sprung. (13)

¹¹ On the twenty-first century interest in post-apocalyptic fiction, see Balaka Basu, Katherine R. Broad, and Carrie Hintz, eds., *Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: Brave New Teenagers*, London: Routledge, 2013; Heather J. Hicks, *The Post-Apocalyptic Novel in the Twenty-First Century: Modernity beyond Salvage*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, esp. 105–136 on zombie kitsch. On one particular post-apocalyptic subgenre (environmental apocalypse), with a focus on the young adult audience and ecofeminism, see Alice Curry, *Environmental Crisis in Young Adult Fiction: A Poetics of Earth*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013. Sarah K. Day, Miranda A. Green-Barteet, and Amy L. Montz, eds., *Female Rebellion in Young Adult Dystopian Fiction*, New York, NY: Farnham, 2014, show the importance of rebellious female characters in recent young adult fiction. Claudia Nelson and Anne Morey, *Topologies of the Classical World in Children's Fiction: Palimpsests, Maps and Fractals*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, in ch. 6, address conflict and narrative space in contemporary young adult fantasies, exploring the use of the classical world in dystopian young adult fiction. Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, eds., *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2003, 196–199, include an interview with Lois Lowry, author of *The Giver* (1993), in which Lowry emphasizes the importance of a hopeful ending for young adult audiences: "Yes, I think they need to see some hope for such a world. I can't imagine writing a book that doesn't have a hopeful ending" (199).

Melanie here sets the stage for readers to view her as a new type of being, while Miss Justineau, in contrast, links the story to gender politics:

“Say it loud, sister,” Miss Justineau said. “Men get the pleasure, women get the rap.” (13)

In the novel and the film, Melanie is given greater agency: she writes her own myth, which makes public the fantasy of saving the teacher figure, kept internal in the short story. A beautiful woman is being attacked by a monster:

But then a little girl came along. She was a special little girl, made by all the gods, like Pandora. And she was like Achilles too, because her mother (the beautiful, amazing woman) had dipped her in the water of the River Styx. (19)

The other teacher, the authority figure rather than the object of desire, questions her intensively about it, which makes Melanie feel that the story becomes real:

Like she saved Miss Justineau from a monster, and Miss Justineau hugged her. Which is better than a million Greek myths. (20)

It seems that Carey is outdoing his former self: in the short story, the emotional climax comes when Miss Mailer hugs Melanie. Melanie’s own story in the novel takes on some of this material from Carey’s short story. But this Melanie, the Melanie of the novel, will go beyond that story and its climactic emotional moment, while remaining dependent on her attachment to the teacher figure: she will refuse to sacrifice herself and will move into the wider world and create an entirely new narrative and a new world to go with it.

The conversation about death and parents, too, is changed to bring in Pandora and bring out Melanie’s independence:

And by this time, Melanie has thought of the big exception to that rule about kids having mothers and fathers – Pandora, who didn’t have a mother or a father because Zeus just made her out of gloopy clay. Melanie thinks that would be better, in some ways, than having a mother and a father who you never even got to meet. The ghost of her parents’ absence hovers around her, makes her uneasy. (24)

The word “gloopy” emphasizes her still child-like interest in texture and play. But her rejection of the idea of parents foreshadows her rejection of the human past. In this version, she will not discover the truth about her nature and birth until much later on, and will largely deduce it for herself. She self-defines, self-creates, using myth to build her own image of herself.

The novel is not wholly narrated from Melanie’s viewpoint: Helen Justineau, Caroline Caldwell, Kieran Gallagher, and Sergeant Parks all have sections told from their perspectives. But Melanie is the only character who thinks about the world through Greek myth. Each character has their own traumas: Miss Justineau had run over a child before the apocalypse; Dr Caldwell had narrowly missed out in joining the original scientific team; Gallagher was abused as a boy by his alcoholic family; and Parks lost his wife and child. Occasionally other characters show an interest or are affected by Melanie’s investment in Greek myth: when Miss Justineau is in conflict with Dr Caldwell about dissecting the children, Melanie’s requests for Greek myth restore calm and resolve for her (90). Melanie thinks of Miss Justineau as Prometheus fighting Dr Caldwell as Zeus (114). Miss Justineau instead tends to think of Melanie as a character in a fairy tale, for instance:

Melanie is wandering around, somewhere outside, like Red Riding Hood in the deep, dark, woods, surrounded by men who are firing automatic weapons. (124)

Until, that is, Melanie rescues her from those very men, and Miss Justineau realizes that Melanie herself is a powerful weapon (127).

Pandora is not always an efficacious point of reference, though: as in the short story, Melanie is given a book. The book is now *Tales the Muses Told* by Roger Lancelyn Green, but it still smells of Miss Justineau, and creates hunger so powerful it equates to myth:

It’s still scary – a rebellion of her body against her mind, as though she’s Pandora wanting to open the box and it doesn’t matter how many times she’s been told not to, she’s just been built so she *has* to, and she can’t make herself stop. But finally Melanie gets used to the smell [...]. The hunger gets less and less, and when it’s all gone, Melanie is still there. (92–93)

Melanie herself, here, is both the box and its contents, both evils and hope: when she learns to control herself, she herself is the hope that remains. It turns

out that Melanie is not just built that way; she does have agency and self-control. She can decide whether or not to open the box. The stories in the book of Greek myth in this version are less important than the book's manifestation as a physical object and its human connection to Miss Justineau, but Melanie's interaction with it is still framed by her reference to the myth of Pandora.

In the process of escaping from the base, Melanie rescues Miss Justineau by eating some of the attackers (rogue survivors called "Junkers"). She struggles with two major traumas: the shock of being outside and losing her entire world, the existence, boundaries, and routine that she has had up to this point, and coming to terms with what she is capable of and who she is. At this point, the story comes back to myth. Melanie has a choice between continuing with the humans or striking out on her own. As she thinks back, she

knows that home is just an idea now to be visited in memories [...]. All she has to describe to herself how she feels now – is stories she's been told, about Moses not getting to see that land where there was all the milk, and Aeneas running away after Troy fell down. (154)

Here Carey equates Bible stories and ancient myth as similarly powerful and resonant: both Moses and Aeneas are images of refugees who escape from horror and destruction with the aim of creating a new future. As she processes the trauma of her own ability to kill, Melanie does not understand why Miss Justineau has told her she is not to blame for killing the men:

The question is hanging over her like a weight, and she can't be content until it's answered. Finally, uncertainly, she nods. Because she's found a way of looking at it that makes it not so bad at all – a thought that's lying at the bottom of the sadness and the worry like hope lying underneath all the terrible things in Pandora's box.

From now on, every day will be a Miss Justineau day. (155)

Here the myth helps her to process loss – and love. Biblical stories and the *Aeneid* are explicit analogies for her situation, but the Pandora story allows her to reflect on her emotional state. But does it also normalize ruthless brutality and destruction? She sees her own nature as terrifying and destructive, but the hope at the base of her feelings is partly about her human relationship with Miss Justineau, but equally about her control of her situation and fundamentally getting what she wants. The hope, as in the Pandora myth, is double-edged:

it is not clear whether hope represents the compensation for the evils Pandora released, or the final evil, the one that compounds the others by making humans endure them again and again.¹²

A further encounter puts another spin on the myth's significance for Melanie and for the novel. During the road trip taken by the main characters, they come across, on the edge of a zone deliberately cleared by explosions, the outlines of two instantly destroyed humans against the wall of an ordinary house, adult and child, like finding the empty shells formed by bodies in Pompeii.¹³ Melanie measures herself against the child's shadow and reflects on how she could have been normal, could have enacted all the stories she has heard:

What she thinks is: *this could have been me*. [...] Growing up and growing old. Playing. Exploring. Like Pooh and Piglet. And then like the Famous Five. And then like Heidi and Anne of Green Gables. And then like Pandora, opening the great big box of the world and not being afraid, not even caring whether what's inside is good or bad. Because it's both. Everything is always both.

But you have to open it to find out. (242)

Here we have the rationale for Melanie's ultimate decision, which could be a motto from a change-management handbook. Her longing to impersonate the characters of children's literature is disrupted by the idea of Pandora's box. The end of the world is not inherently a bad thing: there were bad and good things in that world as there are in this one. Pandora's box simply represents life, and curiosity is the act of living. This is the "slate wiped clean" which Carey mentions as an important aspect of post-apocalyptic fiction. Pandora's box also represents the transition to adulthood which is central to much young adult fiction: by leaving behind the innocence of childhood, children take responsibility for the world around them and gain agency and the ability to take control.¹⁴

¹² For an analysis of early ancient versions of the Pandora myth, see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth: A Guide to Literary and Artistic Sources*, Baltimore, MD, and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993, 155–165. The most important early source is Hesiod (*Op.* 69–105), but scholars have long argued over whether the Greek *elpis* (the last remaining thing in Pandora's jar after all the evils have escaped) should be translated as 'hope' or 'expectation'. See Liz Warman, "Hope in a Jar", *Museion* 4.2 (2004), 107–119, for a summary of the debate.

¹³ See Paul Roberts, *Life and Death in Pompeii and Herculaneum*, London: British Museum Press, 2013, for an exhibition catalogue that introduces this material.

¹⁴ For a discussion of one example of the *Bildungsroman* in young adult fiction, see Michael M. Levy, "Lois Lowry's *The Giver*: Interrupted Bildungsroman or Ambiguous Dystopia?", *Foundation* 70 (1997), 50–57.

Pandora equally functions as a useful image for moral thinking in Melanie's mind: as she comes to understand her place in the world, Miss Justineau explains why Dr Caldwell wanted to cut her up. Melanie links this evil action towards a greater end with the failed attempt to control the infection by the "important-decision people":

It's not just Pandora who had that inescapable flaw. It seems like everyone has been built in a way that sometimes makes them do wrong and stupid things. Or *almost* everyone. Not Miss Justineau, of course. (245)

In the film, the only reference to Greek myth is in the title, poster, and the first classroom scene, where Melanie hears the Pandora story for the first time, and it becomes a voice-over. In the novel, all the references to Greek myth come through the free indirect discourse of Melanie: they determine her identity and she takes ownership of them. Her curiosity is associated with her childness, as is her openness to stories, her reliance on stories. At the very end of the film, she repeats a moment from the beginning, where she asks Miss Justineau for a story, and Miss Justineau replies: "If we have time". But now Melanie is in control and says quietly to herself and the audience: "Oh we will have plenty of time". In the novel the last thought comes from Miss Justineau, outside but in a sealed suit, engaging with the children. Here she controls the agenda and herself refers back to the beginnings of her relationship with Melanie: "Greek myth and quadratic equations will come later" (460).

Medium and Reception

The short story is much more engaged with both myth and children's literature than either novel or film. When myth is retained in the novel, it is the property of the child character. It helps her to process trauma, come to a new understanding of the world, develop moral thinking, and take control of her situation. It can also be used to justify cruelty and brutality. In the film, the storytelling is much more economical: in Melanie's story about saving Miss Justineau, for instance, she mentions Achilles but not Pandora, probably because Pandora has only just been used as an example and it would be heavy-handed to mention it again so soon. In any case, Pandora frames the whole film: the title, the tag line, the main introductory thematic moment. But myth is used carefully so as not to exclude audience members: it can give another level of meaning if you

want to refer back to it, but you do not in fact have to in order to understand and respond emotionally to the characters.

Nearly all cultural products, not just children's products, operate to create openness to multiple audiences.¹⁵ The score for the film, with its eerie drumbeats and aulos-like modes, further evokes music often associated with productions of Greek tragedy.¹⁶ Another possible reference to Greek culture and myth comes in the mask restraint that Melanie wears throughout much of the road journey: although it is transparent, the shape and holes for eyes and mouth evoke Greek theatrical masks, as well as serial killers, such as Hannibal Lecter.¹⁷

The structure of the plot in the film is also tragic, with the confrontation between Dr Caldwell and Melanie forming both ἀναγνώρισις (*anagnōrisis*; recognition) and περιπέτεια (*peripeteia*; turning point): at the same moment Melanie realizes that Dr Caldwell accepts her humanity, she decides to open the box for a new type of human future. Dr Caldwell tries to persuade her to sacrifice herself for Miss Justineau, as she had done in the short story, but Melanie chooses the other children like her, as she does in the novel. So she consciously refuses to be Iphigenia, and instead makes her own version of Pandora. The flames that set spore sacs alight and signal the end of humanity are both beacon and funeral pyre. "Beacon" is the name of the surviving enclave of human civilization, which at this point in the film has been revealed to have fallen: the fire symbolizes hope, just as earlier in the film Beacon symbolized hope and a goal to aim for. The essential metamorphosis in the end is like an apotheosis: Melanie has changed from sacrifice to god, from deer to Artemis. Her effectiveness as hunter reinforces this connection: she watches, she sniffs, she follows; she scouts out routes and catches food. She uses these hunting skills to take control over the other hungry children. She transcends gender, ethnicity, age, and, apparently, by the end of the film, mortality.

¹⁵ See Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, on the hidden audiences that are a defining feature of children's literature.

¹⁶ The score by Cristobal Tapia de Veer was well received: e.g., J. Hubner, in a blog post from 6 April 2020, "What's the Score? Volume One: Cristobal Tapia de Veer's 'The Girl with All the Gifts'", on the blog *Complex Distractions*, <https://complexdistractions.blog/2020/04/06/whats-the-score-volume-one-cristobal-tapia-de-veers-the-girl-with-all-the-gifts/> (accessed 19 May 2020), calls it "something quite unique and one-of-a-kind" and compares it to the score by Johann Johannsson for *Arrival* (dir. Denis Villeneuve, 2016). He talks of "[m]ournful, alien melodies appear[ing] like sad choruses from the past or future", emphasizing the sense of otherness and equating that otherness with both the future depicted in the film and the far past evoked by Greek myth.

¹⁷ In *Silence of the Lambs* (dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991).

Both novel and film have been popular with young audiences. The generally unfavourable review in *Variety* by Jay Weissberg associates the film negatively with young audiences:

Maybe the premise seemed marginally original at one time, but few outside teen audiences will think Mike Carey's adaptation of his own novel is anything more than another tired attempt to board the zombie bandwagon. [...] A few curse words together with some zombie gobbles take the film outside the children's market, making it hard to guess the target audience.¹⁸

Another to make the connection is Katie Rife at *AV Club*:

And by blending it with the common YA trope of a young female protagonist who leads the world into a new revolutionary era, they almost get there [...] but the real draw here is the young people. Who, probably not coincidentally, are the ones who will enjoy *The Girl With All The Gifts* the most.¹⁹

Quite a number of reviewers also mention the Pandora references – for instance, James Marsh in the *South China Morning Post*:

As Melanie grows increasingly aware of the dark powers she wields, the film becomes her rite of passage, making frequent reference to the Greek myth of Pandora, as she decides how best to use her "gifts".²⁰

This reviewer also resists the link with young adult audiences: "*The Girl with all the Gifts* resists the temptation to become a young adult reimagining of *28 Days Later*". And Mark Kermode in the *Observer* notes: "[W]e sympathise with Melanie's Pandora-esque plight even as her presence brings chaos and

¹⁸ Jay Weissberg, "Film Review: 'The Girl with All the Gifts'", *Variety*, 3 August 2016, <http://variety.com/2016/film/reviews/the-girl-with-all-the-gifts-review-1201829687/> (accessed 19 May 2020).

¹⁹ Katie Rife, "*The Girl with All The Gifts* Tries to Put a Fresh Spin on Override Zombie Clichés", *AV Club*, 23 February 2017, <http://www.avclub.com/review/girl-all-gifts-tries-put-fresh-spin-override-zombi-250838> (accessed 19 May 2020).

²⁰ James Marsh, "Film Review: *The Girl with All the Gifts* – Inventive British Thriller Keeps the Zombie Trend Alive", *South China Morning Post*, 27 February 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/culture/film-tv/article/2074293/film-review-girl-all-gifts-inventive-british-thriller-keeps-zombie#-mUMCvBxKtffMg3vf.99> (accessed 19 May 2020).

confusion".²¹ It is clear that the film is perceived as closely connected with both Greek myth and younger audiences, and its use of young adult modes and themes, along with its generic status as "not-quite-zombie movie", are both a source of power and a temptation to react dismissively.

Generational Conflict and Capturing the Past

It has been a feature of much recent popular culture to relate to classical gods by fighting against them.²² For instance, in the remake of *Clash of the Titans* (dir. Louis Leterrier, 2010), Perseus fights against the gods rather than fulfilling his narrative destiny;²³ Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series (2005–2009) is continually pulled between conflict and allegiance to the demigods' divine parents. In *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* (dir. James Gunn, 2017), Peter Quill/Starlord must choose between his divine father and his friends, by killing his father.

In fact, *Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2* is a particularly apt comparison to *Girl with All the Gifts* because the divine father, like the fungus, has the ambition of converting the universe into himself by planting his essence on every planet and literally consuming them.²⁴ In a sense, this intergenerational conflict is already drawing on the myth of Zeus and Kronos as the father who consumes his own children. But it also validates a radical rejection of the past and structures of authority.²⁵ In terms of narrative archetypes, the hero ends up killing the mentor figure that has the power to help him through his narrative difficulties, almost assaulting the story pattern itself.

Girl with All the Gifts takes this even further: Melanie not only rejects human society and science in the figure of Dr Caldwell; she preserves but also imprisons and controls the past in the shape of Miss Justineau. She is not in the

²¹ Mark Kermode, "The *Girl with All the Gifts* Review: Provocative and Imaginative", *The Observer*, 25 September 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2016/sep/25/the-girl-with-all-the-gifts-review-glenn-close-gemma-arterton> (accessed 19 May 2020).

²² On ancient theomachy and its reception, see Pramit Chaudhuri, *The War with God: Theomachy in Roman Imperial Poetry*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

²³ On the 2010 *Clash of the Titans*, see Steven J. Green, "Perseus on the Psychiatrist's Couch in Leterrier's *Clash of the Titans* (2010): Harryhausen Reloaded for 21st Century", *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies: Conference Proceedings* 1 (2013), 75–85.

²⁴ The dangerous fantasy of divine parentage, which can lead to destruction (of the world? of the character?), is also central to the Phaethon myth.

²⁵ Chris Osmond, "Time to Die: Zombie as Educational Evolution in *The Girl with All the Gifts*", *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing* 34.5 (2019), 66–74, reflects on the film's portrayal of teachers and its resonances for hope in education systems, particularly public education in the United States.

end Pandora, but Zeus. She makes her own world that has no room for adults except as a carefully curated and mediated source of cultural continuity, consolidating her own power over her peers. *Girl with All the Gifts* is then a fantasy of complete rupture, of the power of young people, but also a horror at the loss of continuity with the past. Classical myth is not, then, a bolt-on to this story, but central to its thematic significance. The contemporary world, in the shape of London, has become a reworking of ancient societies destroyed and only partially understood. The survival of ideas and stories in an entirely alien environment, where they are completely repurposed and barely comprehensible, is a profoundly pessimistic reading of our relationship with the past. The power and resilience of the young is ultimately destructive in this reading. The storytelling leaves us in the end with two perspectives, that of Melanie and of Miss Justineau, which between them embody hope for the future and loss of the past. We must look on the likelihood of the destruction of human civilization from the point of view of the flowers in the fields that now come into their own.²⁶

²⁶ Leah Heim, "On Fungi, Future, and Feminism: An Ecofeminist Analysis of M.R. Carey's *The Girl with All the Gifts*", *Digital Literature Review* 5 (2018), 84–98, performs an ecofeminist reading of Carey's novel. She sees the end of the novel as ultimately reproducing patriarchal modes of power, in Melanie's violent seizing of control and her use of the fungus to destroy the remaining humans. There is certainly a sense in which the final scene replicates the opening scenes, in a repressive schoolroom controlled by violence. However, control has passed from Sergeant Parks to Melanie, herself a product of the marriage of human and fungus, and from a situation where education is used as a tool of subjugation and objectification (their test scores are objects of study) to a situation where education itself is the point. It is not clear, in fact, whether Melanie will reproduce patriarchy or find a new way. Her continued obsession with Greek myths and her use of Greek myths as inspiration for agency suggests that she will repurpose the culture of humanity in a way that will completely reshape it as artists throughout the generations have reshaped and reappropriated Greek myths. Helen Morales, *Antigone Rising: The Subversive Power of the Ancient Myths*, London: Wildfire, 2020, has made a strong case for Greek myth as a force for subversive reimagining.

PERCY JACKSON AND ISRAELI FAN FICTION: A CASE STUDY

Adaptations and rewriting of existing works have been around as long as the works themselves have existed; in the words of Lev Grossman:

When Virgil wrote *The Aeneid*, he didn't invent Aeneas; Aeneas was a minor character in Homer's *Odyssey* whose unauthorized further adventures Virgil decided to chronicle.¹

While scholars and authors themselves are divided as to what exactly constitutes fan fiction,² and whether all adaptive works can be included in the group, it is clear that the Internet has given new shape and life to a specific type of such reinterpretation in the form of modern fan fiction.

One of the most popular genres for fan fiction is fantasy, as amateur authors reinvent, rewrite, and recast events and characters of their favourite novels. Series such as J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* (1997–2007) and Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* (2005–2008) have given rise to a vast and ever growing number of fan fictions. Most interesting for our purposes is another example, that of Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* books (2005–2009), and their subsequent film versions (since 2010). These works were enormously popular in Israel, and in this paper

¹ Lev Grossman, "The Boy Who Lived Forever", *Time*, 7 July 2011, <http://content.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,2081784,00.html> (accessed 5 March 2017).

² See Amanda Potter, "Atalanta Just Married: A Case Study in Greek Mythology-Based Fan Fiction", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *Rewriting the Ancient World: Greeks, Romans, Jews and Christians in Modern Popular Fiction*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 10, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2017, 131; Ika Willis, "The Classical Canon and/as Transformative Work", *Transformative Works and Cultures* 21 (2016): *The Classical Canon and/as Transformative Work*, ed. Ika Willis, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2016.0807>; Tony Keen, "Are Fan Fiction and Mythology Really the Same?", *Transformative Works and Cultures* 21 (2016): *The Classical Canon and/as Transformative Work*, ed. Ika Willis, <https://doi.org/10.3983/twc.2016.0689>.

I investigate how and why young Israeli fan-fiction writers have used the *Percy Jackson* series as inspiration for their own writing, examining what issues they explore, and how this interpretation of Greek mythology enables them to explore their own contemporary Israeli society.

Since fan fiction is continually evolving, with new works being added, adapted, and disappearing from cyberspace at a dizzying rate, any work on this topic must, of necessity, be a work in progress. Nevertheless, even with this caveat, some interesting conclusions can be drawn from the body of fan fiction in a particular place and time, as it reflects events, situations, and norms of the society from which the fiction emerges.

I. The Study of Fan Fiction and Its Importance: An Overview

I.1. Fan Fiction as Reflection of Society

As Amanda Potter points out, fan fiction “is perhaps the most ‘popular’ type of popular fiction, as it is written by the people for the people, rather than being written by a professional writer for profit”.³ As a subsection of popular fiction, fan fiction may be examined within wider popular culture since it exposes prevalent, entrenched, and often unquestioned social values and ideas more accurately than other self-conscious or highbrow works. As David Plotz writes, “[f]anfic writers assert control over a pop culture designed to be passively consumed [...]”. Fan fiction puts the pop back in popular culture”.⁴

The study of popular culture, examined from the perspective of critical theory, has come to be regarded as a significant and enlightening area of academic research. Such research has progressed a long way from the elitist attitudes that once regarded it as a tainted and substandard form of culture,⁵ and it is recognized that such investigation, with its focus on the non-elitist mainstream, enables us to examine society and the trends and underlying assumptions of the members of that society. Research into juvenile fan fiction

³ Potter, “*Atalanta Just Married*”.

⁴ David Plotz, “Luke Skywalker Is Gay? Fan Fiction Is America’s Literature of Obsession”, *Slate*, 14 April 2000, http://www.slate.com/articles/briefing/articles/2000/04/luke_skywalker_is_gay.html (accessed 25 July 2019).

⁵ See, e.g., Ashley J. Barner, *The Case for Fanfiction: Exploring the Pleasures and Practices of a Maligned Craft*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2017.

is particularly valuable, since as the product of the youth themselves, who determine the content for themselves,⁶ it reflects their own personal thoughts and concerns. In the words of Rebecca Moore:

Opinions on whether to laud or lament teenagers' involvement in fanfic are as divided as Captain Jack Sparrow and genteel restraint. Yet sweeping value judgements have little merit; fanfiction is literature's teenager and is thus as contradictory and equivocal as any sampling of students. Unground in the mills of mass media and political correctness, fanfiction is raw, real, unsanitized, and un-"spun." It is naïve and jaded, stumbling and soaring, snide and sappy, ebullient and brooding. It shocks and repels, or offers Avalon. Above all, it offers an honest glimpse into the psyches of its thousands of writers.⁷

An examination of this genre is therefore able to provide insights into the issues and concerns faced by the young authors.

1.2. What, Who, Why?

So what exactly is fan fiction, as considered by this paper? One definition, from urbandictionary.com, is:

A piece of fiction within a fandom utilizing characters and situations from a pre-existing work including (but not limited to) books, television programs, films, and comic strips. Typically separated into het, slash, and general genres. Often used to play out AU scenarios and/or various romantic pairings not found in the original work. Distributed via mailing lists, blogs, and zines. Heavily archived online.⁸

Sheenagh Pugh similarly defines it as "writing, whether official or unofficial, paid or unpaid, which makes use of an accepted canon of characters, settings

⁶ On the self-determination of content by youthful fan-fiction writers in another context, see Jennifer Duggan, "Revising Hegemonic Masculinity: Homosexuality, Masculinity, and Youth-Authoring Harry Potter Fanfiction", *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 55.2 (2017), 38-45.

⁷ Rebecca C. Moore, "All Shapes of Hunger: Teenagers and Fanfiction", *Voice of Youth Advocates* 28.1 (2005), 15.

⁸ Mistaki, "Fanfiction", *Urban Dictionary*, 7 August 2016, <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=fanfiction> (accessed 25 July 2019).

and plots generated by another writer or writers".⁹ Such writing, due to its being built on an existing "canon" of works, whether books, television shows, movies, or other media, is by its very definition intertextual. In fact it is, in many cases, metatextual, playing not only with the original works themselves, but also with audiences/readers' knowledge and understanding of these texts. The fan-fiction writers and readers are themselves well aware of this; Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse talk of "fandom's constant awareness that every reading is provisional and that every characterization yields one variation among a nearly countless number of others".¹⁰

This also transforms the various writers into something much bigger – namely, communities. To quote Hellekson and Busse again:

This notion intersects with the intertextuality of fannish discourse, with the ultimate erasure of a single author as it combines to create a shared space, fandom, that we might also refer to as a community. The appeal of works in progress lies in part in the way fans can engage with an open text: it invites responses, permits shared authorship, and enjoins a sense of community [...]. We want to emphasize fandom's communal spirit, what fandom itself often refers to as its collective "hive mind."¹¹

So who are the members of this community? Anecdotal evidence claims that most fan-fiction writers are females, predominantly teenagers, but this seems far from the whole or even accurate picture, not least because many fan-fiction writers do not reveal, or actively conceal, their gender and age.¹² As Jolie Fontenot says of *Twilight* fan fiction:

There is no such thing as "the average Twilight fanfiction writer." I've seen ages from teenagers to senior citizens. College students, stay-at-home

⁹ Sheenagh Pugh, *The Democratic Genre: Fan Fiction in a Literary Context*, Bridgend: Seren, 2005, 25.

¹⁰ Karen Hellekson and Kristina Busse, *Fan Fiction and Fan Communities in the Age of the Internet: New Essays*, Jefferson, NC: McFarlane, 2006, 8.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, 6, 8.

¹² See, e.g., Maria Rossdal, "All of the Greek and Roman Classics. Antikerezeption in *Fanfiction*", *thersites* 1 (2015): *Caesar's Salad: Antikerezeption im 20. und 21. Jahrhundert*, eds. Christine Walde and Christian Stoffel, 53: "Lange Zeit hielt sich hartnäckig das Klischee, die Fans seien vornehmlich weibliche heterosexuelle Teenies und/oder frustrierte Hausfrauen. Während es stimmt, dass ein Großteil der Fans Frauen sind, weisen Alter und sexuelle Orientierung eine breite Streuung auf. Studien auf diesem Gebiet sind schwierig, da viele Fans befürchten, sich in irgendeiner Form zu 'outen' (insbesondere, wenn sie *slash* verfassen oder lesen)".

moms, husbands, lawyers, medical professionals – I’ve seen stories written by people who claimed to hold all of those roles.¹³

Many writers do start as teens, but also continue writing well beyond that age, with the result that fan fiction and their interaction within the fandom community play a large part in their adolescence. One aspect of this is the development of writing and analytical skills, which make the writing of fan fiction so valuable, and its study so vital for academics and educators. As Henry Jenkins observes:

Through online discussions of fan writing, the teen writers develop a vocabulary for talking about writing and they learn strategies for rewriting and improving their own work. When they talk about the books themselves, the teens make comparisons with other literary works or draw connections with philosophical and theological traditions; they debate gender stereotyping in the female characters; they cite interviews with the writer or read critiques of the works; they use analytic concepts they probably wouldn’t encounter until they reached the advanced undergraduate classroom.¹⁴

Even more important, however, is the development of the social aspects that often accompany the writing of fan fiction. One author explains:

“I’ve been in fandom since early 2005, when I was getting ready to turn 12,” says Kelli Joyce. “For me, starting so young, fanfic became my English teacher, my sex-ed class, my favorite hobby and the source of some of my dearest friends. It also provided me with a crash course in social justice and how to respect and celebrate diversity, both of characters and fic writers.”¹⁵

Fan-fiction writers, then, can come from a much wider range than was originally realized, and the world of fan fiction provides reflection of society as a whole. As a grassroots phenomenon, largely unaffected by constraints such as publisher demands, marketability, or even acceptability by mainstream culture, it is indeed possible that the world of fan fiction can provide a more direct mirror than many other works that are limited by such considerations. These

¹³ Jolie Fontenot, “Twilight’s True Believers”, in Anne Jamison, ed., *Fic: Why Fanfiction Is Taking Over the World*, Dallas, TX: BenBella Books, 2013, 188.

¹⁴ Henry Jenkins, “Why Heather Can Write”, *MIT Technology Review*, 6 February 2004, <https://www.technologyreview.com/s/402471/why-heather-can-write/> (accessed 25 July 2019).

¹⁵ Grossman, “The Boy Who Lived Forever”.

authors write for no other agenda than their own enjoyment and that of others. Grossman stresses:

Fan fiction is what literature might look like if it were reinvented from scratch after a nuclear apocalypse by a band of brilliant pop-culture junkies trapped in a sealed bunker. They don't do it for money. That's not what it's about. The writers write it and put it up online just for the satisfaction. They're fans, but they're not silent, couchbound consumers of media. The culture talks to them, and they talk back to the culture in its own language.¹⁶

What then attracts young people to the books, to the extent of attempting to write their own fan fiction? Jennifer McGee outlines the identification with the characters and the importance of parasocial relationships.¹⁷ The term refers to one-sided, emotionally tinged relationships developed with fictional media characters or real celebrities. Both children and adults form bonds of this kind with favourite characters from books, television, movies, games, and other media, but such relationships are particularly important for children, whose media has traditionally been character-centred.¹⁸

Parasocial relationships allow identification with the character in question, and fan fiction takes this to a higher level. An extreme form of this identification accounts for the prevalence of "hurt/comfort stories", in which one character is in some kind of physical or emotional pain, and is empathetically comforted by another. As McGee puts it:

Whether the preferred character is being hurt or feeling for another person being hurt, he or she is being driven by the plot to express vulnerability, fear, compassion, tenderness, trust – all things that humanize a character and create identification between the fan and the character [...]. Hurt/comfort, angst and torture stories have large followings of fans who understand

¹⁶ Ibidem.

¹⁷ Jennifer McGee, "In the End It's All Made Up': The Ethics of Fanfiction and Real Person Fiction", in Phyllis M. Japp, Mark Meister, and Debra K. Japp, eds., *Communication Ethics, Media, and Popular Culture*, New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005, 161–180.

¹⁸ Sandra L. Calvert and Melissa N. Richards, "Children's Parasocial Relationships with Media Characters", in Amy B. Jordan and Daniel Romer, eds., *Media and the Well-Being of Children and Adolescents*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 187–200. See also Kaitlin L. Brunick, Marisa M. Putnam, Lauren E. McGarry, Melissa N. Richards, and Sandra L. Calvert, "Children's Future Parasocial Relationships with Media Characters: The Age of Intelligent Characters", *Journal of Children and Media* 10.2 (2016), 181–190, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2015.1127839>.

perfectly well that they are using pain as a plot device to recreate a character in a way that encourages identification and dialogue.¹⁹

Fan-fiction writers therefore engage in an emotional relationship with their characters. Despite the fact that they are the creation of someone else, the parasocial relationship that epitomizes fan fiction ultimately develops into a feeling of ownership, although this is often subconscious. Writers often see themselves as guardians of the characters, reflecting the close bond that they feel with them, and they talk of characters having needs or behaving in a way that is independent of their original intentions when beginning to write. In McGee's words, talking of adult or slash fiction, "ethical justifications [...] often rest on the feeling that the characters are real, with wants and desires that the fanfiction writer has an ethical duty to respond to".²⁰ The writing of fan fiction thus becomes a tool for exploration, and the emotional bond created with the character provides an outlet for the writer's own emotions and thoughts.

In the case of the young writer, this bond is even more important, as Moore points out:

Source material can also offer teenagers a much needed connection to their characters. The teen years are frequently times of self-focus, when it is difficult to step back and see through someone else's eyes. Deep familiarity and friendship with beloved characters can help teens achieve the empathy necessary to take that vital step.²¹

The role of feedback in the form of beta readers is also important. Jenkins points out that "teen and adult fans talk openly about their life experiences, offering each other advice on more than just issues of plot or characterization. Having a set of shared characters creates a common ground that enables these conversations to occur in a more collaborative fashion".²²

¹⁹ McGee, "In the End It's All Made Up", 167.

²⁰ Ibidem, 172.

²¹ Moore, "All Shapes of Hunger: Teenagers and Fanfiction", 16.

²² Jenkins, "Why Heather Can Write".

2. *Percy Jackson* and Fan Fiction

One of the most popular kinds of fan fiction for younger writers is that based on Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* books, in itself a slightly unusual case, in that the source texts themselves draw on – albeit with a twist – an existing body of work, namely, the classical myths. In a sense, the books are a kind of fan fiction themselves by Riordan himself, as he adapted the body of classical myth, resituating the Greek gods in New York, as a result of their following the centre of Western civilization to America. According to this conceit, Olympus is anchored at the top of the Empire State Building, becoming hidden as the building's 600th floor. The gods themselves continued to produce offspring by forming relationships with mortals, and these offspring are demigods or heroes.

The brains of these heroes are, however, "hard-wired for ancient Greek", and they therefore have trouble reading English or doing well in ordinary school. It is easy to understand the appeal of these books for young people who struggle in class. Indeed, they were written for Riordan's son who suffers from dyslexia and ADHD, as the author explicitly explains.²³ The works have much more widespread appeal, however, at least partly due to Riordan's comedy and, even more, his ability to judge what his readers will find funny. According to one reviewer, the "slangy, casual style is a hallmark of the *Percy Jackson* books, which often read like a faithful transcription of teen uptalk". This is despite the fact that "at the level of language, Riordan's books make J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series seem as if it were written by Samuel Johnson".²⁴

One result of this language and style is that "unlike the *Harry Potter* books, which, notoriously, have been embraced by adult readers as well as juvenile ones, the *Percy Jackson* books seem positively contrived to repel adult readers, so thoroughgoing is their affectation of teen goofiness".²⁵ Moreover, these juvenile followers were often non-readers before they discovered *Percy Jackson*, a fact of which Riordan is proud:

²³ See Rick Riordan's (a teacher at the time) remark: "My son was struggling with the same issues at school as Percy, and I wanted to make up a story which would show ADHD and dyslexia as being not all bad"; cited in Christopher Middleton, "Family Book Club: *Percy Jackson*, a Hero with Dyslexia?", *The Telegraph*, 5 February 2010, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/book-club/7155592/Family-Book-Club-Percy-Jackson-a-hero-with-dyslexia.html> (accessed 25 July 2019).

²⁴ Rebecca Mead, "The *Percy Jackson* Problem", *The New Yorker*, 22 October 2014, <http://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/percy-jackson-problem> (accessed 25 July 2019).

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

"The best emails I get are from teachers and parents saying my books have turned non-reading kids into readers," says Riordan, who lives in Texas. "That's exactly what happened with my own son. Before Percy, he never read books. Now he's 15, and wants to be a writer!"²⁶

From the point of view of classicists, another distinct bonus of the books is their success in introducing and attracting young readers to classical sources:

Undoubtedly, Riordan has single-handedly sparked an enthusiasm among young readers for Greek mythology, and if kids are dressing up for Halloween as Apollo or Poseidon instead of Iron Man or a generic zombie, so much the better. My son and his peers know the tales of the Greek gods far better than I do, and if some of that is due to reading books such as Mary Pope Osborne's wonderfully ungimmicky *Tales from the Odyssey*, or from having *D'Aulaires' Book of Greek Myths* in the read-aloud rotation from an early age, a good measure of that familiarity has also come via Riordan's retellings.²⁷

Because of the series' popularity, *Percy Jackson* has become one of the most prevalent subjects for fan fiction, with these writings taking third place in the popularity stakes on fanfiction.net.²⁸ It is, albeit, a rather distant third with 76,200 stories, less than a third of those featuring *Twilight* (220,000) and not even one-tenth of those featuring *Harry Potter* (809,000).²⁹ For the purposes of young adult popular culture, however, it is a very useful set of writings, due to the age of readers and writers, which is reflected in the subject matter of the stories. Fan fictions are categorized according to content level, with the following ratings:

- K: Intended for general audience five years and older. Content should be free of any coarse language, violence, and adult themes.
- K+: Suitable for more mature children, nine years and older, with minor action violence without serious injury. May contain mild coarse language. Should not contain any adult themes.

²⁶ Cited in Middleton, "Family Book Club: Percy Jackson, a Hero with Dyslexia?".

²⁷ Mead, "The Percy Jackson Problem".

²⁸ See "Percy Jackson and the Olympians", FanFiction, <https://www.fanfiction.net/book/Percy-Jackson-and-the-Olympians/> (accessed 5 August 2019).

²⁹ See "Books", FanFiction, <https://www.fanfiction.net/book/> (accessed 22 September 2020).

- T: Suitable for teens, thirteen years and older, with some violence, minor coarse language, and minor suggestive adult themes.
- M: Not suitable for children or teens below the age of sixteen, with non-explicit suggestive adult themes, references to some violence, or coarse language. Fiction M can contain adult language, themes, and suggestions.

Other sites, including percyjacksonfanfiction.com, use rating systems based on that of the Motion Picture Association:

- G: General Audiences;
- PG: Parental Guidance Suggested;
- PG-13: Parents Strongly Cautioned;
- R: Restricted;
- NC-17: No one seventeen or under admitted.

When looking at the fan fictions of the three most popular works on fanfiction.net, it is striking that, while almost one-fifth (19.8%) of the *Harry Potter* stories and over one-third (36.7%) of *Twilight* narratives are rated M, only 7% of *Percy Jackson* fan fictions are rated in this way, with 41% being K or K+ and 52% being T. Similarly, of the 1,400 stories listed on percyjacksonfanfiction.com, only 152 are R or NC-17, with the remainder being G (160), PG (380) or PG-13 (708). Such classifications reflect the age of the authors/readers, which is rather younger than the fans of *Twilight* and without the considerable number of adult fans of *Harry Potter*. This means that the case of *Percy Jackson* is a valuable tool with which to examine the attraction of young people to the texts, and to examine how they use these works based on classical myth to explore their own issues and ideas.

What, then, are the central topics on which *Percy Jackson* fan fictions focus? Some conclusions can be extrapolated through examining the tags which identify and classify the stories. These figures are not entirely without confusion; stories may have multiple tags, and there are a large number that simply use the "general" label, both in conjunction with and independently from other tags. Labels and terminology also differ from site to site, complicating the issue somewhat. Nevertheless, there is broad overlap, and the tags do provide overall statistics as to how the writers are conceiving of their writing, so that there is benefit in considering such classifications.

Of the 71,000 stories on fanfiction.net, the vast majority (31,759) are tagged as romance. The next biggest category is simply "general" (19,741), while adventure (15,611) and humour (15,054) are the next most popular. The

list continues, in descending order: hurt/comfort (8,895), friendship (8,445), drama (6,439), family (5,511), angst (4,900), fantasy (2,959), tragedy (2,413), and mystery (1,325). With less than 1,000, in descending order, are parody, suspense, supernatural, poetry, horror, sci-fi, crime, and spiritual, which each have between 962 and 130 tags, while a small handful are labelled "Western". On percyjacksonfanfiction.com, the picture is similar, although not identical. Here the top place goes to adventure (711 stories), followed by action (606), and then romance (569). Comedy, drama, and tragedy follow with 293, 242, and, 140 respectively, while the remainder, in descending order, are tagged drabble (130), mystery (119), fantasy (74), war (71), thriller (58), biography (40), horror (37), autobiography (36), sci-fi (34), and crime and religious concluding the list with 10 apiece.

Despite the differing terminology, and the slight variations, some overall trends are clear. Most popular themes for *Percy Jackson* fan fiction are action/adventure and romance. Another large proportion are classified as either teen or general, which, bearing in mind the younger audience for these books, can probably be approximately paralleled. In keeping with the nature of the books, comedy/humour features high on the list, while, paradoxically, although somewhat typically for teens, the tags tragedy/hurt and comfort/angst feature prominently as well. On both lists, approximately one-tenth of stories are tagged as fantasy. Clearly then, the fan fictions very much parallel the original works themselves, in that the *Percy Jackson* series are fantasy and adventure books, packed with humour, with teenage protagonists and readers. Through the composition of fan fiction in the *Percy Jackson* fandom, these young authors primarily explore relationships and themes such as conflict, challenge, and potency, as played out against the background of the mythological, adventurous, fantastical world of Riordan's demigods.

3. Fantasy in Israel

Before examining the Israeli fan fiction based on *Percy Jackson*, it is necessary to consider the wider background of this writing in the country. Fan fiction started rather later in Israel than in many countries, for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was limited scope because of the language barrier – Israel is the only country in the world in which Hebrew is spoken and used as a first language, so that, until Hebrew translations of books such as *Harry Potter* and *Percy Jackson* were published, there was no possibility of enough readers to enable a fandom

to emerge in that language. This is particularly true of juvenile fiction, whose consumers are rarely able to read in another language, such as English.

Secondly, fantasy, which dominates fan fiction, was in general for a long time regarded as peripheral and frivolous in Israel, a distraction from the solemn mission of creating new, serious works of literature; it was very rare indeed in original Hebrew literature and relatively unusual even in translation. According to a study by Danielle Gurevitch, Elana Gomel, and Rani Graff, whereas Jewish writing in the diaspora often tended towards “the fantastic, the mystical, and the magical”, from the outset Israeli literature was “stubbornly realistic”.³⁰ Hagar Yanai stated this in 2002, in an article in *Haaretz*:

Faeries do not dance underneath our swaying palm trees, there are no fire-breathing dragons in the cave of Machpelah, and Harry Potter doesn't live in Kfar Saba. But why? Why couldn't Harry Potter have been written in Israel? Why is local fantasy literature so weak, so that it almost seems that a book like that couldn't be published in the state of the Jews?³¹

Where non-realistic fiction did occur, it was generally science fiction rather than fantasy literature that enjoyed popularity.³² Fantasy remained, therefore, for many years, of secondary importance in Israel. Over the past two decades, however, things have changed and fantastical works by writers such as Orly Castel-Bloom and Gail Hareven have begun to appear.³³ The Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy, founded in order “to promote and augment the fields of Science Fiction and Fantasy in Israel”, has been in existence for more than twenty years now, publishing, between 2000 and 2009, a magazine called המימד העשירי [Hameimad haasiri; The Tenth Dimension] and maintaining

³⁰ Danielle Gurevitch, Elana Gomel, and Rani Graff, eds., *With Both Feet on the Clouds: Fantasy in Israeli Literature*, Brighton, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2013. See also Lisa Maurice, “Greek Mythology in Israeli Children’s Fiction”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, “Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity” 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 309–332.

³¹ Hagar Yanai, מחפשים את אורי פוטר [Mehapsim et Uri Potter; Looking for Uri Potter], *Haaretz*, 1 January 2002 (updated 16 August 2011), <http://www.haaretz.co.il/misc/1.761169> (accessed 25 July 2019). Translations of all citations in this chapter are my own.

³² Ibal Sagiv, “Science Fiction in Israel: Abstract of an MA Thesis Written at Tel-Aviv University”, Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy, http://english.sf-f.org.il/article_sagiv1.htm (accessed 22 September 2020).

³³ Orly Castel-Bloom, המינה ליה [Ha-Minah Lizah; The Mina Lisa], Jerusalem: Keter, 1995; Gail Hareven, הדרך לגן עדן [Haderech l’gan Eden; The Way to Paradise], Jerusalem: Keter, 1999.

an active website.³⁴ Several annual conventions are also held, the largest being the Icon Festival, which has taken place annually for more than twenty years.³⁵ At this convention the Geffen and Einat Awards³⁶ are presented for both original Hebrew and translated works of fantasy and science fiction.

The very existence of these awards attests to the existence of a genre that was previously barely known in Israel. In the wake of globally successful fantasy literature, such as *Harry Potter* and its successors, which were as big hits in Israel as in the rest of the world, the twenty-first century has seen a larger number of fantasy and science-fiction books by authors such as Hagar Yanai,³⁷ Shimon Adaf,³⁸ Ofir Touché Gafla,³⁹ Guy Hasson,⁴⁰ Nir Yaniv,⁴¹ and Vered Tochterman.⁴² Since 2002 an Israeli science-fiction and fantasy magazine, חלומות באספמיה [Chalomot be'asfamia; Dreams in Asfamia], has also been published.

³⁴ "Science Fiction and Fantasy in Israel", Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy, <http://english.sf-f.org.il/> (accessed 25 July 2019).

³⁵ Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy. Hebrew webpage: כנסים ופסטיבלים [K'hasim v'festivalim; Conferences and Festivals], <https://www.sf-f.org.il/conventions-and-festivals>; English webpage: "Society Activities", <https://www.sf-f.org.il/en/society-activities> (both accessed 23 June 2021).

³⁶ Named for the late Amos Geffen, one of the first editors and translators of science fiction in Israel, and Einat Peleg, a journalist, critic and science-fiction and fantasy fan, who died in 2005.

³⁷ Hagar Yanai, הליווייתן מבבל [Ha-livyatan mi-Bavel; The Leviathan of Babylon], Jerusalem: Keter, 2006; המים שבין העולמות [Ha-mayim she-bein ha-olamot; The Water between the Worlds], Jerusalem: Keter, 2008.

³⁸ Shimon Adaf, הלב הקבור [Ha-lev ha-kavur; The Buried Heart], Tel Aviv: Ahuzat Bayit, 2006; פנים צרובי תמה [Panim tseruve hamah; Sunburnt Faces], Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 2008 (translated by Margalit Rodgers and Anthony Berris as *Sunburnt Faces*, Hornsea: PS Publishing, 2013); כפור [Kefor; Frost], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2010; מוקס נוקס [Mox Nox], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2011; ערים של מטה [Arim shel matah; Undercities], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2012.

³⁹ Ofir Touché Gafla, עולם הסוף [Olam hasof; The World of the End], Jerusalem: Keter, 2004; הקטרקט בעיני הרוח [Hakataract b'einei haruach; The Cataract in the Mind's Eye], Jerusalem: Keter, 2005; מאחורי הערפל [Meiachorei haarafel; Behind the Fog], Jerusalem: Keter, 2007; ביום שהמוזיקה מתה [B'yom shehamuzika meita; The Day the Music Died], Jerusalem: Keter, 2010; עשתנות [Ashtanot; The Book of Disorder], Jerusalem: Keter, 2013; האורחים [Haorchim; The Guests], Jerusalem: Keter, 2016; רשימות מארץ הכביש [Reshimot meeretz hakvish; Lists from the Land of the Road], Jerusalem: Keter, 2019.

⁴⁰ Guy Hasson, הצד האפל [Hatzad ha'afel; Hatchling], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2003; המשחק – מציאות [Metziut – Hamischak; Life – The Game], Or Yehudah: Kineret Zemorah-Bitan, 2005.

⁴¹ Nir Yaniv, כתוב כשד משחת [Ktov ke'shed mi'shachat; One Hell of a Writer], Tel Aviv: Odyssey Press, 2006; ימי תל אביב האחרונים [Y'mei Tel Aviv haacheronim; The Tel Aviv Dossier], Tel Aviv: Odyssey Press, 2010.

⁴² Vered Tochterman, לפעמים זה אחרת [L'famim ze acheret; Sometimes It's Different], Tel Aviv: Opus Press, 2002.

4. Israeli Fan Fiction and *Percy Jackson*

Amongst this new wave of enthusiasm for fantasy literature, the *Percy Jackson* books have enjoyed remarkable success, bringing Greek mythology to Hebrew children's literature in spectacular fashion. Translated into Hebrew by Yael Achmon and appearing from 2008 onwards, these books were, according to Rani Graff of Graff Books which published the novels, enormously popular with Israeli youth.⁴³ Over 100,000 copies have been sold in Israel since the second half of 2008, making them some of the most successful juvenile Hebrew books ever sold.⁴⁴ The subsequent movies were also released in Israel, and although they were criticized, as they were in other countries, for their divergence from the books,⁴⁵ the films undoubtedly widened the series' appeal.

As a result of this success, *Percy Jackson* fan fiction has therefore appeared in Israel in considerable quantity. On the Hportal website (hportal.co.il), there were 164 stories in the *Percy Jackson* and *Heroes of Olympus* fandoms, as of 24 April 2017. Of these, 73 are G rated, 40 are PG, 45 PG13, and only 4 – R (2 are unspecified). Regarding genre, romance is again the most popular category, with 53 stories using this tag, followed by adventure with 30, fantasy with 29, and humour/comedy with 20. The other stories are labelled fluff – a subcategory of romance (13), angst (12), suspense (8), drama (6), sci-fi (4), grief (3), pain/loss (1), and horror (1), with a further 29 uncategorized. On the Wattpad site,⁴⁶ the numbers were smaller but showed similar trends. Of the 93 stories in the *Percy Jackson/Heroes of Olympus* category, 29 were tagged merely "fan-fiction" and 10 "random", but a large proportion of these focused on romance or adventure. Of the remainder, fantasy dominated, followed by those actually

⁴³ In email correspondence, November 2013.

⁴⁴ According to one newspaper article, a successful book is one that sells 3,000 copies or more; 10,000 or 20,000 copies represents a major bestseller. The Hebrew books which have sold very large numbers are those that have been in print for several decades; these figures may reach 100,000 copies or more, or even up to 1.5 million in the case of a series of books with multiple volumes. See Yehuda Koren, הארי פוטר עדיין לא עבר את התנ"ך [Harry Potter adayin lo avar et haTe-nach; Harry Potter Has Not Yet Overtaken the Bible], *Ynet*, 26 June 2003, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-2670518,00.html> (accessed 25 July 2019).

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Doron Fishler, ביקורת: פרסי ג'קסון וים המפלצות [Bikoret: Percy Jackson v'yam hamifletzot; Review of Percy Jackson: Sea of Monsters], *Fisheye*, 4 September 2013, http://www.fisheye.co.il/percy_jackson_sea_of_monsters/ (accessed 25 July 2019); Devorah Erez, לפברק את הארי [Lefarbek et Harry; Fabricating Harry], *Ynet*, 21 February 2010, <http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-3849828,00.html> (accessed 25 July 2019).

⁴⁶ See "Percyjackson", Wattpad, <https://www.wattpad.com/stories/percyjackson/> (accessed 22 September 2020).

labelled adventure and romance, and humour, following a similar pattern noticed in the other fan fictions.

Who then are the writers of these fan fictions, what attracts them to the subject matter, and how important is their writing to them? These were questions addressed both in email correspondence with the writers and in person at the annual Olamot Convention in April 2017. This conference, organized by the Israeli Society for Science Fiction and Fantasy and the Israeli Tolkien Society, runs lectures, screenings, and activities, as well as providing a venue for merchandise, such as fantasy books, comics, action figures, swords, games, etc. As part of this conference, the Hportal website arranged a meeting for its members, attended by a large group of very enthusiastic youngsters. This was not a meeting specifically on the subject of fan fiction; indeed, the participants were more interested in social interaction than in discussing their writing, as reflected in the fact that most of the children arrived in groups, with friends. Nevertheless, all those who are Hportal members are actively engaged in the area of fan fiction, and it therefore provided a good opportunity to observe and discuss the subject with them.

The youth who attended the meeting were aged eight and upwards, equally divided with regard to gender. They came from a wide range of areas and encompassed a spread of academic ability, including some attendees with special needs, and of religious background, always an issue to be taken into consideration in Israel. One common factor was that the children seemed to come from relatively good socio-economic groups, classified roughly as middle class; this was a necessary prerequisite since they would have needed money to buy tickets for the event and to spend on purchases from the stalls at the Convention. Overwhelmingly, what united this group of young people, however, was their passion regarding their preferred fandom. In addition to the general Hportal session, there was a *Percy Jackson* special activity; those attending this meeting were very excited. Many of them wore Camp Half-Blood orange t-shirts or some kind of costume, and could not wait to enter the lecture hall, cheering loudly when the organizer announced that this was a special *Percy* meeting.

This passion for the subject matter also shines through from the correspondence with the fan-fiction writers. Although we have at present only communicated with a relatively small number of such authors, the unity of responses reflects that their feelings are typical. Of the eight writers who have to date answered our questionnaire, all are aged between twelve and eighteen, and all but one are female. The majority have social interaction with other fan-fiction authors, usually within Israel, but in three cases with people abroad via the

Internet. Without exception, they stress that writing fan fiction is very important to them, describing it with phrases such as "an inseparable part of my life".⁴⁷ All agree that fan fiction has a measure of popularity in Israel, in the sense that those involved are passionate about it, but that this popularity is restricted to the fans of the books.

With regard to initial inspirations for writing fan fictions, these come from a range of sources: history lessons in school; individual imagination; books, including the *Percy Jackson* series; and other fan fictions. With regard to the reasons for the attraction to writing works of this genre, love of the books, and, in particular, the characters, was the major pull; one girl explained that Percy Jackson is her hero, and that it was because of him that she started to read. Other writers cited curiosity as to what happens to the characters after the stories and a desire to "make them live again", a feeling that stems from the disappointment experienced when the end of the books was reached. Several of the authors used the word "world" when talking of their writing experiences, either in terms of "creating new worlds", or in the sense of being "in another world" when writing, both of which reflect the all-consuming nature of the activity, and the feeling of power and satisfaction that results from an act of creation. When the creation is then shared with others, a sense of self-worth and confidence is engendered, as noted by one writer who explained: "I like to know that people are reading my stories and like them".

These young writers also talk of their attraction to and love of classical mythology. Although one declared that there was nothing specifically about mythology that pushed her to write this fiction (*Percy Jackson* to her was "simply a great adventure book"), all the others cited the attraction of Greek myth. One made the connection between myth and fantasy, explaining: "I love everything related to magic and the supernatural", while others were fascinated by the Greek gods, particularly their anthropomorphic aspect, and by Greek myth in general, saying that the subject really interested them, that "Greek mythology in particular is a huge treasure of ideas. Heroes, villains, places and monsters", and that, "Greek myth is really cool". This author added: "I often spend hours surfing it on the Internet, and go from god to monster to god..."; another enthused: "I find Greek mythology (which I've learned a lot about through reading Rick Riordan) really interesting, and maybe a bit complicated, which makes it more interesting for me. I love to read mythology stories and imagine them

⁴⁷ This quote, and those that follow, are taken from questionnaires sent to the writers. I quote them in English translation.

really happening". These youth showed awareness of the role that the classical world has played within Western civilization and literary tradition. One writer, who said that he had not read *Percy Jackson*, felt that "Greek myth contains the root of fiction throughout history, which is the basis of modern literature". Another singled out the Greek civilization more widely, stating: "It fascinated me how the Greeks coped in the past [...]. The Greek people themselves fascinated me, both their culture and their customs".

5. Conclusions

If we compare fan fiction based on Greek mythology in general, and *Percy Jackson* in particular, in Israel and the rest of the world, it is clear that in many ways Israeli fan fictions fit into the pattern of those worldwide. The subjects to which the young writers devote themselves are the same in the parts of the globe we have studied in this paper – romance, adventure, and fantasy are the three major topics with which these youth concern themselves. Israel is in many ways a very different society from that of Europe or the United States, with strong Mediterranean and Middle-Eastern elements intertwined with Western cultural influences. Similarly, Israeli youth will face significantly different experiences as they approach adulthood, due to the compulsory national service. The sad fact that life in Israel means that children will have been exposed to war, with their fathers, siblings, and friends actively serving in the army, and to bombings and terror attacks, also leads to children having perhaps a wider exposure to emotional distress than in many other countries. Such a situation has indeed been cited as reason for the popularity of fantasy in Israel, in that it is a form of escapism.⁴⁸ That being the case, it might have been expected that Israeli youth fan fiction would focus on issues that reflect this trauma and that themes such as war might occur more frequently than in other countries. It is clear, however, that this is not so, and that these young writers are preoccupied with the same questions as their peers abroad.

Perhaps unsurprisingly in a society in which technology plays a central role, these youngsters are very at home with technology. Yet this particular group

⁴⁸ Andre Tobin, "Israeli Geeks Turn to Sci-Fi and Fantasy to Escape a Sometimes Harsh Reality", *Times of Israel*, 29 October 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/israeli-geeks-turn-to-sci-fi-and-fantasy-to-escape-a-sometimes-harsh-reality/> (accessed 26 July 2019).

is also devoted to books, which is perhaps more unexpected in the digital age.⁴⁹ While such small numbers cannot allow for sweeping conclusions – there are surely large numbers of Israeli children who spend many hours a day focused on their screens – they do tally with other notable elements within Israeli society. It is not for nothing that the Jewish people are known as the People of the Book.⁵⁰ Even among secular Jews, books are held in esteem, and Israelis from all ethnic backgrounds participate enthusiastically in National Book Week.⁵¹ This annual celebration of Hebrew literature evolved from a one-day event in Tel Aviv intended to promote book sales in 1926,⁵² to a major cultural and national institution, lasting ten days, at which outdoor book fairs are held all over the country, and at which books are sold at a discount. Bookshops in Israel typically offer sales during this time which can last up to a month. Literary events and the award ceremony for the Sapir Prize for Literature are also held during Book Week, and there is also a heightened level of attention paid to literature in the media. The importance of the world of books and the role of the publishers within that world is highlighted by the fact that the *Percy Jackson* fan club and Facebook page in Israel is hosted by Graff Books, who actively maintain interest and promote events of relevance to their readers.⁵³ Even as recently as 2017, it seems, the written word maintained a grip on young fans that is at least as strong as the screen.

Equally striking is their enthusiasm both for creative writing and for Greek mythology. In an Israeli context, this is rather more surprising than the enthusiasm for books. As a very science-based society, there is very little emphasis placed on literature in the Israeli school curriculum and even less on creative writing.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, these young people are not only eager but even passionate about their writing. Similarly, despite the fact that, unlike in Europe or

⁴⁹ From the point of view of this research, I do not differentiate between books read in traditional paper format and e-books read on electronic reading devices.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Moshe Halbertal, *People of the Book: Canon, Meaning, and Authority*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009. The phrase actually originates in Islam, where it was a status granted under Islam to Christians and Jews.

⁵¹ See "National Hebrew Book Week at 13.06.2019", Go Jerusalem, 30 June 2019, <http://www.gojerusalem.com/events/2065/National-Hebrew-Book-Week/> (accessed 22 September 2020).

⁵² Organized by Bracha Peli, founder of Masada Press.

⁵³ See גרף צעיר [Graff tzair; Young Graff], https://www.facebook.com/GraffYoung/?hc_ref=SEARCH&fref=nf (accessed 22 September 2020).

⁵⁴ For details of the Israeli curriculum and the emphasis on technology, see Yehoshua Mathias and Naama Sabar, "Curriculum Planning from the National to the Glocal: The Israeli Case", in William F. Pinar, ed., *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*, New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 2014 (ed. pr. 2003), 253–267, esp. 259–261.

the United States, Classics is very marginalized in Israel, where children have very little exposure to the literature, culture, and history of Ancient Greece and Rome, they actually have enormous enthusiasm for the subject and a thirst for knowledge.⁵⁵ This is a bright and articulate group of young people who have unbounded fascination in the ancient world in general and in classical mythology in particular. While exposure to recent movies is likely to have played its part in this attraction, strikingly, none of the writers with whom we communicated mentioned these as a source of inspiration. It seems that, against all the odds, it is Greek mythology, and Greek mythology in written form, that really appeals to Israeli youth, who find it relevant, exciting, and a source of inspiration. Whether this produces a new generation of classicists remains to be seen; but it can certainly be claimed that Greek mythology provides an attractive vehicle through which modern Israeli teens can explore the challenges and issues of their own world.

⁵⁵ Maurice, "Greek Mythology in Israeli Children's Literature", 309–318.

IMAGES OF HOPE: THE GODS IN GREEK BOOKS FOR YOUNG CHILDREN

In recent years, illustrated children's books about the classical world in Greek and other languages have become prolific in bookstores and in museum and souvenir shops in Greece.¹ Yet, there are few, if any, social analyses of the books' prevalence and impact. Mythology can be a necessary first step in learning about the classical past. Stories about mythical actors – gods, demigods, heroes, monsters, and other creatures – have inspired ancient and later generations of writers, artists, and craftsmen, as well as modern marketers. The project *Our Mythical Childhood* and this volume's focus on finding hope in myth offer a unique opportunity to examine classical mythology's present-day resonance. In this chapter, I discuss how the visual language of children's books about the gods may convey messages about group identity, and how these messages could give hope to children and adult readers in Greece and beyond.

Greece between Global and Local Identity

Greece has been on the international spotlight for some time now. In 2004, the Athens Olympics were a success. The people of Greece performed well in organizing and staging the Games, projecting a confident and euphoric country image to the rest of the world. Alas, the euphoria was not bound to last. A few years later, Greece's economy needed rescuing by European and American lenders. The economic crisis that started in 2010 is still ongoing at the time of writing,

¹ I am indebted to Katarzyna Marciniak for inviting me to the conference *Our Mythical Hope* in May 2017, for the opportunity to contribute to this volume, and for her patience with my manuscript. I am most grateful to Susan Deacy and to Katarzyna Marciniak for reading and commenting on an earlier version. For useful discussion, my thanks extend to Eirini Dermizaki, Euaggelia Desypri, Elaine Harris, Natalia Kapatsoulia, Amy C. Smith, as well as Pietra Palazzolo and other participants of the *Myth Reading Group* at the University of Essex, where I presented this paper in December 2017. The views I discuss here are my own and they do not necessarily coincide with the authors' and illustrators' intentions.

and the austerity measures have had social, political, and environmental repercussions.² Lately, Greece's problems have been compounded with the refugee crisis. An exodus of Middle-Eastern, Asian, and African populations, often from war-stricken lands, has brought thousands of families with their children to Greece, where they have settled temporarily or permanently. Human stories arising from economic and other troubles in Greece have hit the national and international headlines on multiple occasions. People within and outside Greece have become increasingly compassionate, identifying with and voicing the concerns of diverse groups of suffering individuals, such as the working poor, the unemployed, the homeless, and, of course, the refugees.

In this climate of widespread hardship and continuing uncertainty, finding hope has been of paramount importance. Perhaps aiming to gauge the levels of hope in Greece, Dimitris Tziouvas of the University of Birmingham has led a recent academic study on how the crisis has affected literary and artistic output.³ One of the study's findings was that the crisis has unleashed a new wave of creativity for writers, poets, television and theatre producers, photographers, graffiti artists, and others. This hive of fruitful output has been affecting constructions of group identity, by both Greeks and non-Greeks. The crisis, then, has brought to the fore the issue of Greece's relation to the world, and the world's expectations from Greece.

This issue is old and it implicates Greece's classical heritage and narratives of nationalism.⁴ In the eighteenth century, the German intellectual Johann Joachim Winckelmann searched for an aesthetic ideal in Classical Greece.⁵ Winckelmann's legacy has shaped Western modernity through a valorization of classical

² For the years 2008–2015, see Thomas W. Gallant, *Modern Greece: From the War of Independence to the Present*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 310–317. For environmental issues, see, e.g., Rita Calvário, Giorgos Velegrakis, and Maria Kaika, "The Political Ecology of Austerity: An Analysis of Socio-Environmental Conflict under Crisis in Greece", *Capitalism Nature Socialism* 28 (2017), 69–87.

³ Dimitris Tziouvas, *Greece in Crisis: The Cultural Politics of Austerity*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2017.

⁴ See, e.g., David S. Ferris, *Silent Urns: Romanticism, Hellenism, Modernity*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000, 1–15; Yannis Hamilakis, *The Nation and Its Ruins: Antiquity, Archaeology, and National Imagination in Greece*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 290–291; Peter Mackridge, "Cultural Difference as National Identity in Modern Greece", in Katerina Zacharia, ed., *Hellenisms: Culture, Identity, and Ethnicity from Antiquity to Modernity*, Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2008, 319; Vassiliki Kolocotroni, "Still Life: Modernism's Turn to Greece", *Journal of Modern Literature* 35.2 (2012), 1–24; Dimitris Tziouvas, "Introduction: Decolonizing Antiquity, Heritage Politics, and Performing the Past", in Dimitris Tziouvas, ed., *Re-Imagining the Past: Antiquity and Modern Greek Culture*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, 1–28; George Tolia, "The Resilience of Philhellenism", *The Historical Review / La Revue Historique* 13 (2016), 60.

⁵ See Amy C. Smith, "Winckelmann, Greek Masterpieces, and Architectural Sculpture: Prolegomena to a History of Classical Archaeology in Museums", in Achim Lichtenberger and Rubina

texts and antiquities. Ancient Greece, and primarily Periclean Athens, is thought to have influenced Western values, including democracy and freedom of artistic expression. President Barack Obama referred to this influence when he visited the Athenian Acropolis in November 2016 and made a statement before the Parthenon.⁶ At that moment, the Parthenon, for all its architectural grandeur, mattered as an iconic image of a shared Western identity, reflecting the United States' and other countries' journey of some 300 years towards political and social justice. The President's allusion to group identity seemed to convey messages about the Parthenon's global relevance, over and above the monument's significance at national level.⁷

The distinction between global and local identity may have become blurred in today's highly mobile, interconnected, and multicultural world. In particular, in crisis-plagued Greece, people seem to embrace globalization as an opportunity for overcoming hardship, mostly by using Internet platforms to reach out to more, and to more international, buyers of goods and services, which can range from agricultural produce to tourist accommodation. It is within Greece's globalizing context that children's literature has been used to alleviate pain. On International Book Day, 23 April 2017, Eugenios Trivizas, one the best-known Greek authors of children's books, such as *The Three Little Wolves and the Big Bad Pig*, gained public acclaim by reciting his works to refugee children in Greece.⁸ Being creative, staying positive, and showing solidarity all seem

Raja, eds., *The Diversity of Classical Archaeology*, "Studies in Classical Archaeology" 1, Turnhout: Brepols, 2017, 23–45.

⁶ See The Obama White House, "Behind the Scenes: President Obama Visits the Acropolis in Athens, Greece", Medium, 17 November 2016, <https://medium.com/@ObamaWhiteHouse/behind-the-scenes-president-obama-visits-the-acropolis-in-athens-greece-190d048daa8f> (accessed 30 June 2021).

⁷ For Classics in American foreign policy, see Thomas E. Jenkins, *Antiquity Now: The Classical World in the Contemporary American Imagination*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015, 97.

⁸ Illustrated by Helen Oxenbury, London: Heinemann Young Books, 1993. See, e.g., Lissi Athanasiou-Krikelis, "Picture-Book Retellings of 'The Three Little Pigs': Postmodern Parody, Intertextuality, and Metafiction", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 44.2 (2019), 173–193. Christos Karabelas, "Παγκόσμια Ημέρα Βιβλίου: Ο Ευγένιος Τριβιζάς διαβάζει παραμύθια στα προσφυγόπουλα" [Pagkósmia Hméra Vivliou: O Evgénios Trivizás diavázei paramýthia sta prosfygópoula; International Book Day: Eugenios Trivizas Reads Folk Tales to Refugee Children], *News 24/7*, 23 April 2017, <http://news247.gr/eidiseis/politistika-nea/pagkosmia-hmera-vivliou-o-eygenios-trivizas-dia-vazei-paramuthia-sta-prosfygopoula.4637682.html> (accessed 30 June 2021). In this chapter, transliterations of Modern Greek follow the system proposed by the Hellenic Organization for Standardization (Ελληνικός Οργανισμός Τυποποίησης; Ellinikós Organismós Tyποποίησης – known as ELOT); see Ellinikós Organismós Tyποποίησης, *ΕΛΟΤ 743, 2η Έκδοση* [ELOT 743, 2i Ekdosi; ELOT 743, 2nd ed.], Athína: ELOT, 2001.

to play a greater role in defining collective identity than any feelings of pride that arise from admiring Greece's classical past. Concerns for survival are immediate, and they make contemporary life count more than the distant legacy of either an Ancient Greek or an eighteenth-century Western heritage. The disciplines of Classics, archaeology, and history may seem of little relevance. The classical world, nonetheless, continues to play a role in identity formation and to speak to people's hearts and minds, not least because of its alignment with popular culture.

One item of popular culture that has not received substantial scholarly attention in discussing identity formation in Greece is the illustrations of children's books about the classical world. With my chapter, I aim to make a contribution towards filling this gap. I have chosen two illustrated books for children aged four and above published by Εκδόσεις Παπαδόπουλος (Ekdóseis Papadóπουλος; Papadopoulos Publications), the oldest Athens-based publisher specializing in children's literature.⁹ The first book, by Philippos Mandilaras, is entitled *The Twelve Gods of Olympus* (hereafter *The Twelve Gods*; see Fig. 1). I study the English version of the Greek original from 2008 (*Οι 12 Θεοί του Ολύμπου* [Οι 12 Θεοί του Ολύμπου]), published in 2016.¹⁰ The plot is an adaptation of Hesiod's *Theogony*, starting with Gaia and finishing with Zeus' and the other Olympians' supremacy.¹¹

The second book, by the same author, is called *Διόνυσος, ο κεφάτος θεός* [Diónysos, o kefátos theós; Dionysos, the Merry God; hereafter *Dionysos*], and I use the original in Greek, which was published in 2013 (see Fig. 2).¹² The story, once again, follows a biographical pattern, covering episodes from Dionysos' birth from Zeus' thigh to Dionysos' establishment within the Greek pantheon, and the god's favourable influence on ancient and modern viticulture.

⁹ See "Profile", *EPBooks*, <https://www.epbooks.gr/en/profile/> (accessed 30 June 2021).

¹⁰ Philippos Mandilaras, *The Twelve Gods of Olympus*, ill. Natalia Kapatsoulia, Athens: Papadopoulos, 2016; for the book's website, see <https://www.epbooks.gr/shop/paidika-neanika-biblia/eikonografimena-biblia-gia-paidia/the-twelve-gods-of-olympus/>; for the first Greek edition, see <https://www.epbooks.gr/shop/paidika-neanika-biblia/eikonografimena-biblia-gia-paidia/oi-12-theoi-toy-olympoy-2/> (accessed 30 June 2021).

¹¹ For Hesiod's *Theogony*, see, e.g., Ken Dowden, "Telling the Mythology: From Hesiod to the Fifth Century", in Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone, eds., *A Companion to Greek Mythology*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014, 48–49; Mark P.O. Morford, Robert J. Lenardon, and Michael Sham, *Classical Mythology*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015, 61–63.

¹² Philippos Mandilaras, *Διόνυσος, ο κεφάτος θεός* [Diónysos, o kefátos theós; Dionysos, the Merry God], ill. Natalia Kapatsoulia, Athína: Papadopoulos, 2013; for the book's website, see <https://www.epbooks.gr/shop/paidika-neanika-biblia/eikonografimena-biblia-gia-paidia/dionysos-o-kefatos-theos/> (accessed 30 June 2021).

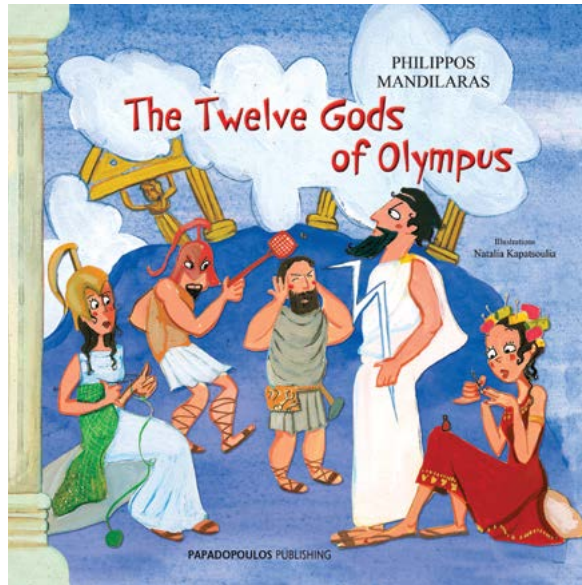


Figure 1: The cover of Philippos Mandilaras, *The Twelve Gods of Olympus*, ill. Natalia Kapatsoulia, Athens: Papadopoulos, 2016 (English ed.). Image © by Papadopoulos Publications. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.



Figure 2: The cover of Philippos Mandilaras, *Διόνυσος, ο κεφάτος θεός* [Dionysos, o kefátos theós; Dionysos, the Merry God], ill. Natalia Kapatsoulia, Athína: Papadopoulos, 2013. Image © by Papadopoulos Publications. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

My discussion consists of three sections. Firstly, I offer an overview of illustrated children's books in Greece and I contextualize *The Twelve Gods* and *Dionysos*. Secondly, I investigate the extent of Greekness in the illustrations by comparing them with ancient and modern images.¹³ Thirdly, I expose a possible metanarrative that emerges from the gods' comfortable lifestyle, since the illustrations' humorous aspects could parody (upper) middle-class living in the Western world. I conclude that the illustrations showcase a mirage of a good life. The gods may look modern, but they do not serve as credible models of happiness. Classical myth is cast back in the realm of a fantasy world, giving hope to readers as fiction and entertainment. Readers may find additional hope as they build a sense of belonging to a global community, sharing but also criticizing a Western consumerist lifestyle.

Ethnic Identity in Illustrated Children's Books

The production of children's books in Greece continues to thrive, despite the financial problems of many publishing houses and bookshops.¹⁴ Printed books are by far more popular than e-books.¹⁵ This may relate to Greece's strong gift-giving culture. It is customary for parents, friends, and relatives to give presents to young children at certain times during the year (on name days, birthdays, and public holidays). With few exceptions, such as Eugenios Trivizas's work, Greek children's books are little known beyond Greece's borders, since

¹³ For ancient and folk art influencing the illustrations of children's books, see Alexandra Zerovou, "Historicity and Nature – Text and Image: The Game of Oppositions in Greek Illustrated Books", *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 40.1 (2002), 6–15.

¹⁴ For an overview of the latest trends in Greek children's literature, see Triantafillia Natsiopoulou, "Children's Books for 1–6 Year Olds in Greece", *International Journal of Early Childhood* 33.1 (2001), 57–62; Tassoula Tsilimeni, "From 1945 to the Present", in Peter Hunt, ed., *International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, London and New York, NY: Routledge: 2004, 1069–1071; Dominique Sandis, "Children's Literature Research in Greece: The Situation Today", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 33.3 (2008), 306–320; Yiannis S. Papadatos and Dimitris Politis, "Raising the Profile of Today's Greek Children's Literature", *Review of European Studies* 4.4 (2012), 23–28; Dimitris Politis, "Between Modernism and Postmodernism: Greek Literature for Children and Youth in the Last Decades of the Twentieth Century", *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children's Literature* 56.2 (2018), 52–56.

¹⁵ Dominique Sandis, "Greek Children's Literature in the Digital Age: An Overview", in Bridget Carrington and Jennifer Harding, eds., *Beyond the Book: Transforming Children's Literature*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014, 222.

they do not tend to be translated into foreign languages.¹⁶ On the whole, literary critics, within and outside Greece, pay little attention to children's books and even less to illustrations.¹⁷ There could be a wider trend of mistrusting illustrated books in Greece, including photo books for adults.¹⁸ Consequently, most credit for authorship goes to authors, and not to illustrators. As is the case for the two books that I examine here, however, authors and illustrators collaborate closely, and it is their long-lasting relationship that shapes the books' appeal to children and adults.

The visual language of children's books has been analysed predominantly from the perspective of pedagogy. Angela Yannicopoulou's work, in particular, has emphasized the pedagogical salience of images.¹⁹ Educators have investigated how image and text work together or independently in the book's story and how the illustrations address children's developmental needs, such as the acquisition of emotional maturity.²⁰ The social impact of the illustrations has received less academic attention. There have been discussions, however, of the ideology that underpins the books' themes and images. Scholars have identified a polarity between two dominant ideological strands, traditionalism and progressivism.²¹ Both strands reflect distinct standpoints towards Greece's classical past.

Traditionalists employ the classical legacy to promote high artistic and moral ideals, and to instil a sense of glory in the achievements of Ancient and Modern Greeks. Assumptions about continuity have been important

¹⁶ Maria Nikolajeva, "Introduction", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 33.3 (2008), 304–305; Melpomeni Kanatsouli, "Ξαναδιαβάζοντας το παρελθόν μέσα από τα βιβλία για παιδιά: ελληνικότητα ή/vs παγκοσμιοποίηση" [Χαναδιανάζοντας το παρελθόν μέσα από τα βιβλία για παιδιά: ελληνικότητα ή/vs παγκοσμιοποίηση; Re-Reading the Past in Children's Books: Greekness or/vs Globalization], *Δια-Κείμενα* [Dia-Keimena; Inter-Texts] 14 (2012), 66.

¹⁷ Papadatos and Politis, "Raising the Profile of Today's Greek Children's Literature", 26.

¹⁸ Eleni Papargyriou, "Textual Contexts of Consumption: The Greek Literary Photobook", in Philip Carabott, Yannis Hamilakis, and Eleni Papargyriou, eds., *Camera Graeca: Photographs, Narratives, Materialities*, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Farnham and Ashgate, 2015, 193–197.

¹⁹ See Angela Yannicopoulou, "Visual Aspects of Written Texts: Preschoolers View Comics", *Educational Studies in Language and Literature* 4.2–3 (2004), 169–181.

²⁰ See Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, "The Dynamics of Picturebook Communication", *Children's Literature in Education* 31.4 (2000), 225–239; Martin Salisbury, "The Artist and the Postmodern Picturebook", in Lawrence R. Sipe and Sylvia Pantaleo, eds., *Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody, and Self-Referentiality*, New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 2008, 25; Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, *How Picturebooks Work*, Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013 (ed. pr. 2001); Maria Nikolajeva, "Picturebooks and Emotional Literacy", *Reading Teacher* 67.4 (2013), 249–254.

²¹ See Melpomeni Kanatsouli, "Ideology in Contemporary Greek Picture Books", *Children's Literature* 33 (2005), 209–223.

in constructing ethnic identity, customarily through nationalistic political and educational agendas.²² Reacting against traditionalism and its potential for nationalism, the exponents of progressivism break away from any references to Greece's past, exploring topics that are uncontroversial, such as the natural world, familial relationships, and city life. In the last few decades, children's books in Greece have been influenced greatly by Westernizing and globalizing tendencies in world children's literature.²³ When it comes to antiquities, authors have aimed to bypass local politics. In *Alice in Marbleland* (1997), Alki Zei – a famous author of children's literature – adapted the title and plot of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) to internationalize Greece's claim for the Parthenon Marbles.²⁴

Mythology is perhaps less ideologically laden, by contrast to history and archaeology, which have been instrumental in educational and cultural politics in Greece.²⁵ As there are no state guidelines for teaching mythology at nursery school, the style of illustrations in books for preschoolers is unlikely to reflect any top-down attempts to construct national identity. Classical mythology, nonetheless, affects the shaping of collective identity because it opens up Greek children's literature to the world. While readers outside Greece may not read Greek books, they are knowledgeable about classical myths through schooling, leisure reading, and popular culture.

Image has taken over from text as a form of communication in the twenty-first century, especially with the advent of social media. Classical mythology's ubiquitous visual presence in Western popular culture, including cartoons, comics, and advertising, could promote the feeling that its characters and stories

²² See Theodore G. Zervas, *The Making of a Modern Greek Identity: Education, Nationalism, and the Teaching of a Greek National Past*, New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2012; Theodore G. Zervas, "From Ottoman Colonial Rule to Nation Statehood: Schooling and National Identity in the Early Greek School", *Espacio, Tiempo y Educación* 4.1 (2017), 1–21.

²³ Kanatsouli, "Ideology in Contemporary Greek Picture Books".

²⁴ Alki Zei, *Alice in Marbleland*, ill. Sofia Zarabouka, Athens: Kedros, 1997; Greek ed.: Alki Zei, *Η Αλίκη στη χώρα των μαρμάρων* [Ī Alíki stī chóra tōn marmárōn; Alice in Marbleland], ill. Sofia Zarabouka, Athína: Kedros, 1997. See also Petros Panaou and Tasoula Tsilimeni, "International Classic Characters and National Ideologies: Alice and Pinocchio in Greece", in Kit Kelen and Björn Sundmark, eds., *The Nation in Children's Literature: Nations of Childhood*, New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 2013, 200–206. For an analysis of Zei's book, see Przemysław Kordos, "A Child among the Ruins: Some Thoughts on Contemporary Modern Greek Literature for Children", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 127–142.

²⁵ See Sofia Voutsaki and Paul Cartledge, eds., *Ancient Monuments and Modern Identities: A Critical History of Archaeology in 19th and 20th Century Greece*, London: Routledge, 2017.

matter as global heritage. The Greek gods, especially in comics, are favoured cross-culturally.²⁶ International readers can use their familiarity with popular culture to recognize the gods in any odd depiction in print or online. Thus, children and adults approach mythology's visual language with prior knowledge, irrespective of the ideological trends within Greece.²⁷

Philippos Mandilaras and Natalia Kapatsoulia's Gods

The Twelve Gods and *Dionysos* are by the same author and illustrator, Philippos Mandilaras and Natalia Kapatsoulia. Mandilaras is a renowned and award-winning author of children's and young adults' literature. Mandilaras's interest in the hardship of contemporary life is apparent in his novel *Υπέροχος κόσμος* [Υπέροχος κόσμος; *Wonderful World*, 2016], which recounts the story of teenagers living in a multi-ethnic deprived Athenian district.²⁸ In the two books under discussion here, Mandilaras has turned stories about the gods into rhyming verses, dialogues, and succinct statements, all appropriate for young children's learning at nursery school and at home, under the guidance of teachers, parents, and other guardians. Mandilaras's language is simple and the ample use of colloquialisms facilitates memorization by children.

Kapatsoulia is a professional illustrator of children's books, and her prolific output numbers over 300 book projects.²⁹ To date, Kapatsoulia has authored one picture book: *Η μαμά πετάει* [Ī mamá petáei; *Mom Wants to Fly*, 2016],³⁰ which has appeared also in Spanish: *Mamá quiere volar* (2015).³¹ Kapatsoulia's degree in French Literature at the University of Athens was followed by studies

²⁶ George Kovacs and C.W. Marshall, "Introduction", in George Kovacs and C.W. Marshall, eds., *Son of Classics and Comics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, xxv.

²⁷ Compare to Perry Nodelman, "Decoding the Images: How Picture Books Work", in Peter Hunt, ed., *Understanding Children's Literature*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2005, 131, on knowledgeable and less knowledgeable viewers of picture books.

²⁸ Philippos Mandilaras, *Υπέροχος κόσμος* [Υπέροχος κόσμος; *Wonderful World*], Athína: Patakis, 2016. See "Εκδόσεις Πατάκης" [Ekδόseis Patákis; Patakis Publications], <https://www.patakis.gr/product/503929/vivlia-paidika-efhviká-logotexnia-cross-over/Uperoxos-kosmos/> (accessed 30 June 2021).

²⁹ βιβλιονet: The Greek Books in Print, <http://www.biblionet.gr> (accessed 30 June 2021).

³⁰ Natalia Kapatsoulia, *Η μαμά πετάει* [Ī mamá petáei; *Mom Wants to Fly*], Athína: Diaplasí, 2016.

³¹ Natalia Kapatsoulia, *Mamá quiere volar*, Alagón: Apila Ediciones, 2015, <https://www.apiladediciones.com/tienda/mama-quiere-volar/> (accessed 30 June 2021).

in Design, Illustration, and Comics at the famous studio of Spyros Ornerakis.³² Her drawing style is humorous, and it is marketed as such by Papadopoulos Publications.

The purpose of *The Twelve Gods* and of *Dionysos* is to educate preschool (and preliterate) children by offering a “who is who” guide to mythology. The books are relatively cheap, priced at 4.49 and 7.19 euros for *The Twelve Gods* and *Dionysos* respectively, and affordable for a broad customer base.³³ For two short books, of some twenty-five pages each, the information provided is exceptionally rich, especially in terms of names of mythical characters and places. The content is informative, but it is also a creative adaptation of ancient myth. I would classify these books as “fiction-nonfiction”, which is a term used by Yannicopoulou to describe books that give facts by means of storytelling.³⁴ The books are part of a best-selling series called “Η πρώτη μου Μυθολογία” [Ἰ πρώτη μου μυθολογία; My First Mythology].³⁵ Studying these books allows us to assess mythology’s reception. The series consists of twenty-six books that cover the gods, the heroes, the Trojan War, the Argonautic Expedition, the Odyssey, and stories about gods and mortals.

I have singled out two books about the gods for three main reasons. Firstly, representations of the gods form the essence of classical art, architectural and free-standing sculpture, and vase iconography. The gods are associated in art with key visual attributes.³⁶ For example, Zeus carries a thunderbolt, Athena wears armour, and Dionysos holds a drinking cup. It becomes pertinent to examine the extent to which the gods’ portrayal in popular children’s books is inspired by ancient images, as this could signal the construction of identity with reference to Greece’s classical past. Secondly, *The Twelve Gods* has been the most commercially successful book in the series, with sales of over 400,000 copies and

³² Ορνεράκης Εφαρμοσμένες Τέχνες [Ornerákis Efarmosménes Téchnes; Ornerakis Applied Arts], <https://www.ornerakis.com/> (accessed 30 June 2021).

³³ For buyers turning to cheap books during the crisis, see Anna Karakatsouli, “The Greek Book in Crisis: Structural Deficiencies and Challenges”, *International Journal of the Book* 11.3 (2014), 5.

³⁴ Angela Yannicopoulou, “The (Non)Fiction Book for Young Children: An Interesting Case in the Greek Publishing Market”, *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children’s Literature* 41.1 (2003), 28–32.

³⁵ For a passing reference to the e-book version of the series, see Sandis, “Greek Children’s Literature in the Digital Age”, 224.

³⁶ For identifying the gods in classical art, see, e.g., Jenifer Neils, “Reconfiguring the Gods on the Parthenon Frieze”, *Art Bulletin* 81.1 (1999), 6–8, and Susan Woodford, “Displaying Myth: The Visual Arts”, in Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone, eds., *A Companion to Greek Mythology*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014, 174–175.

translations also into French, German, Korean, Russian, and Spanish.³⁷ As the illustrations of this book reach out to a wide audience, messages about group identity have the potential to become international. Thirdly, the word *κεφάτος* (*kefátos*; merry) in the title of *Dionysos* could highlight the necessity to transmit optimism during difficult times. Specifically, *κεφάτος* points to the attainment of a joyful spirit through socialization, feasting, and entertainment, all of which resonate with finding hope in crisis-ridden Greece.

A Visual Language for Sharing Greekness

In *The Twelve Gods* and *Dionysos*, the mythical actors have large emphatic eyes, pink cheeks, and big smiles, resembling characters from cartoons, comics, and puppet shows. As suited for preschoolers, most characters exhibit and solicit positive emotions. We encounter also baby and infant gods, with whom young children can relate easily. Gaia emerges out of nothing as a baby, and the tone contrasts between her body and the deep blue background could create the impression of a baby in her mother's womb. Gaia looks familial and human-like in *The Twelve Gods*. The pictorial narrative differs greatly from Gaia's unnatural birth in Hesiod's *Theogony* and in related Near-Eastern and Indian creation myths.³⁸ The gods are young, beautiful, and happy. All goddesses, not just Aphrodite, parade their female allure with their Barbie-looking slim figures and long hair. A question may arise: how Greek are these gods? To address this, I consider how the representations of the gods take cues from both ancient and contemporary visual registers of Greekness.

The gods look Greek, wearing chitons and sandals. Yet the dress code remains generic, and visual references to Greek art are only tentative. The long white robes worn by Zeus and Dionysos, as noted also on the two books' covers (see above, Figs. 1 and 2), are atypical of these gods' ancient portrayals. A remote connection might be made with the charioteers' long white robes in depictions of horse races on late Archaic black-figured vases (see Fig. 3).³⁹ In the

³⁷ Eirini Dermitzaki, personal communication, 30 August 2019.

³⁸ See Ian Rutherford, "Hesiod and the Literary Traditions of the Near East", in Franco Montanari, Antonios Rengakos, and Christos Tsagalis, eds., *Brill's Companion to Hesiod*, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2009, 9–35; and Nicholas J. Allen, "The Indo-European Background to Greek Mythology", in Ken Dowden and Niall Livingstone, eds., *A Companion to Greek Mythology*, Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2014, 350–352.

³⁹ See Peter Schultz, "The Iconography of the Athenian Apobates Race: Origins, Meanings, Transformations", in Olga Palagia and Alkestis Choremi-Spetsieri, eds., *The Panathenaic Games:*

two books, the mythical females' simple attire and the paucity of any jewellery point to primitive times, possibly even before the Bronze Age.⁴⁰ Wall paintings from Bronze Age Thera depict more elaborately dressed and adorned women.⁴¹ The weak links with Greek art become apparent also when we contrast the illustrations with iconic works of art. I shall discuss a statue and drinking cup.

A well-known classical statue is the Artemision Bronze, an original in the severe style from approximately 460 BCE that shows either a fearsome naked Zeus or Poseidon preparing to strike the viewer.⁴² In *The Twelve Gods*, however, Zeus and Poseidon are rather naive and childish. Infant Zeus is joyful in the company of nymphs, even though he grows up parentless on a Cretan mountain. The young god, shown without a beard and described as "big and strong", may recall any hero who is eager to help others and bring justice. That Zeus is driven by justice may resonate with *φιλότιμο* (*filótimo*) in Modern Greek culture; that is, with one's sense of pride that motivates them to succeed.⁴³

Ancient and modern registers could function complementarily here. Thus, young Zeus stands tall and handsome as he frees his small and helpless siblings from Cronus' stomach, emulating a quintessential modern (Greek) hero who has *filótimo* and can be likened to Heracles or Theseus. Old Zeus, having defeated the Titans, has a beard. Nothing in Zeus' slim figure and appearance, nonetheless, sets him apart from the other Olympians to justify his leadership. Child Poseidon steps out of Cronus' stomach with a trident in hand. Old and bearded

Proceedings of an International Conference Held at the University of Athens, May 11–12, 2004, Oxford and Oakville, CT: Oxbow Books, 2007, 62.

⁴⁰ Compare to representations of prehistoric archaeology in comics. See, e.g., Thanasis Kououlos, "Η ιδεολογική χρήση της προϊστορίας στα κόμικς" [*Ī ideologikí chrísī tis proistorías sta kómiks; The Ideological Use of Prehistory in Comics*], in Evángelos Gr. Avdíkos, ed., *Από το παραμύθι στα κόμικς. Παράδοση και Νεωτερικότητα* [*Apó to paramýthi sta kómiks. Parádosi kai Neoterikótita; From Folk Tales to Comics: Tradition and Modernity*], Athína: Odysseás, 1996, 726–741.

⁴¹ Note the fitted, patterned, and colourful garments, the earrings, necklaces, and bracelets, and the intricate coiffures of the painted women from Xeste 3 at Akrotiri, Thera; see Andreas Vlachopoulos, "Detecting 'Mycenaean' Elements in the 'Minoan' Wall Paintings of a 'Cycladic' Settlement: The Wall Paintings at Akrotiri, Thera within Their Iconographic *Koine*", in Hariclia Brecoulaki, Jack L. Davis, and Sharon R. Stocker, eds., *Mycenaean Wall Painting in Context: New Discoveries, Old Finds Reconsidered*, "ΜΕΛΕΤΙΜΑΤΑ" 72, Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation and Institute of Historical Research, 2015, 38–41, Figs. 1a–b; 58–59, Figs. 14a–c.

⁴² Athens, National Archaeological Museum 15161; Nikolaos Kaltsas, *The National Archaeological Museum*, Athens: EFG Eurobank Ergasias S.A. and John S. Latsis Public Benefit Foundation, 2007, 276–279; Mark D. Stansbury-O'Donnell, *A History of Greek Art*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2015, 240.

⁴³ See Theodore Peridis, "Cultural Mythology and Global Leadership in Greece", in Eric H. Kessler and Diana J. Wong-Mingji, eds., *Cultural Mythology and Global Leadership*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2010, 115.



Figure 3: The Kleophrades Painter, *Attic Panathenaic Amphora*, 500–480 BCE, terracotta (65 × 40.3 cm), J. Paul Getty Museum, Getty Villa in Malibu, California, inv. no. 77.AE.9, photograph © by the J. Paul Getty Museum. Digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program.

Poseidon, who wears a long white robe, smiles happily as he assumes responsibility for the seas. On one occasion, there is no trident, Poseidon's identifying attribute in Greek art, but instead a humorous depiction of an octopus around his arm. Poseidon's blondness, which is unknown in ancient texts, probably aims to make the illustrations appealing to a wide audience via contemporary standards of beauty associated with blond hair. Evidently, the depictions of Zeus

and Poseidon counter the seriousness of Greek art in terms of both style and meaning. The gods in the illustrations are light-hearted, and have little, or no, capacity to instil authoritarian awe in the readers.

In *Dionysos*, the illustration of the god in a trireme with vines growing around its mast could recall a famous black-figure cup from the 530s BCE by potter-painter Exekias (see Fig. 4).⁴⁴ Inside the cup, and against a coral-red background, Exekias painted Dionysos sailing in a sea of dolphins. According to myth (*Hymn. Hom.* 7.35–53), Dionysos, the god of wine and transformations, turned pirates into dolphins.⁴⁵



Figure 4: Exekias, *Dionysus' Cup*. Attic black-figure drinking cup, 540–530 BCE, Vulci, terracotta (13.6 × 30.5 cm), State Collection of Antiquities, Munich, inv. no. 8729 (2044), photograph by Renate Kühling. Image © by State Collection of Antiquities and Glyptothek Munich. We wish to acknowledge the kind help of the State Collection of Antiquities Staff in obtaining permission.

⁴⁴ Munich, *Antikensammlungen*, 8729 (2044); Berthold Fellmann, *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum. Deutschland*, vol. 77: *München, Antikensammlungen ehemals Museum Antiker Kleinkunst*, vol. 13: *Attisch-schwarzfigurige Augenschalen*, München: C.H. Beck, 2004, 13–19, Pl. 2.1–2.

⁴⁵ See Robin Osborne, "Intoxication and Sociality: The Symposium in the Ancient Greek World", *Past & Present* 222.9 (2014): *Cultures of Intoxication*, eds. Angela McShane and Phil Withington, 34.

The illustration in Mandilaras and Kapatsoulia's book departs substantially from Exekias' cup. Dionysos and five pirates, all small, cartoon-like human figures, stand inside the ship (see Fig. 5). Frightened to have a god on board, the seamen are worried about lightning as if they had Zeus with them. No dolphins are shown in the page's blue background, but we read that the pirates ended up in the sea as dolphins. Text is needed here to complement the image's potential connections to ancient art.



Figure 5: Dionysos' ship from Philippos Mandilaras, *Διόνυσος, ο κεφάτος θεός* [Diónysos, o kefátos theós; Dionysos, the Merry God], ill. Natalia Kapatsoulia, Athína: Papadopoulos, 2013. Image © by Papadopoulos Publications. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

While Greek art is far from the illustrations' prime source of inspiration, we encounter numerous pieces of ancient material culture. We note, for example, a helmet for Athena and Ares, a laurel for Demeter, a lyre for Apollo, a bow for Artemis, and a drinking horn for Zeus and Dionysos, as well as pillars, statues, and temple façades. These elements create a vague impression of Greek Antiquity, without pointing consistently to any specific period. We come to appreciate that the pictorial narrative is about mythology, rather than archaeology and history. Mythology allows the author and illustrator to present a quasi-(a)historical version of Greekness through the use of deep time combined with conflated timescales.

The depth of time is conveyed through material objects that definitely look pre-classical and through the abundant depictions of the natural world. In *Dionysos*, the god carries a golden goblet that is reminiscent of Mycenaean

cups rather than classical specimens.⁴⁶ Buildings, such as temples, palaces, and interior spaces, are less preponderant than natural backdrops, signalling, appropriately for mythical action, that events unfolded in the deep past, before archaeologically attested prehistoric and historic remains. There are depictions of meadows, mountains, the seas, as well as indications of sunny, cloudy, and stormy weather. All these may reflect modernity's environmental concerns.⁴⁷ Also to be noted are plants, flowers, and fruit, which are either decorative or used actively by the mythical characters. Pregnant Semele eats an apple, and there is a watermelon slice, a fig, and a bread loaf next to her, all suggestive of a healthy diet in early times. Although Greek locations are mentioned in the text, and these include Olympus, Crete, and Thebes, most of the action takes place in generic landscapes and, potentially, anywhere in the world.⁴⁸ The mobility of the gods, which is a remarkable feature in classical mythology, could mirror modern realities of international travel and connectedness.⁴⁹

References to contemporary life become more pronounced through the conflation of visual registers from recent and modern times. The recent past is celebrated through the embodiment of traditionalism, given visual elements of folklore and fairy tales. In *The Twelve Gods*, Athena wears a helmet, which is one of her typical characteristics in coinage, sculpture, and vase iconography. In classical art, however, the goddess is shown with additional attributes, such as a shield, a spear, and a chest garment, probably an animal skin decorated with snakes and Gorgon's head.⁵⁰ The illustrations offer a simplified version of Athena's warrior persona. Helmeted Athena, moreover, is depicted knitting

⁴⁶ For golden cups, *kántharoi*, and *kýlikes* from Grave Circle A in Mycenae, see Kaltsas, *The National Archaeological Museum*, 102, 108.

⁴⁷ See, e.g., Clive Hamilton, "ReSet Modernity: After Humanism", in Bruno Latour and Christophe Leclercq, eds., *Reset Modernity!*, Karlsruhe, Cambridge, MA, and London: ZKM and MIT Press, 2016, 230–232.

⁴⁸ Contra the local relevance of heroes' and gods' cults in Ancient Greece; see, e.g., Leslie Kurke, "Pindar's Pythian 11 and the *Oresteia*: Contestatory Ritual Poetics in the 5th c. BCE", *Classical Antiquity* 32.1 (2013), 101–175. On the spatiality of Greek myths, see Greta Hawes, ed., *Myths on the Map: The Storied Landscapes of Ancient Greece*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

⁴⁹ For the mobility of goddesses in epic poetry, see Ariadne Konstantinou, *Female Mobility and Gendered Space in Ancient Greek Myth*, London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, 156.

⁵⁰ Cornelius C. Vermeule, "Athena of the Parthenon by Pheidias: A Graeco-Roman Replica of the Roman Imperial Period", *Journal of the Museum of Fine Arts* 1 (1989), 41–60; Anne Ley Xanten, "Athena, Athene. Ikonographie", in Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider, eds., *Der Neue Pauly. Enzyklopädie der Antike*, vol. 2: *Altertum: Ark–Ci*, Stuttgart and Weimar: J.B. Metzler, 1997, 165–166; Noel Robertson, "Athena as Weather Goddess: The Aegis in Myth and Ritual", in Susan Deacy and Alexandra Villing, eds., *Athena in the Classical World*, Leiden: Brill, 2001, 29–30; Susan Deacy, *Athena*, "Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World", London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2008, 7.

with needles, and not weaving as attested in ancient texts and vase scenes.⁵¹ Knitting may allude to grannies (γιαγιάδες; *giagiádes*), the prime storytellers in Greek folklore who are wise, perhaps like Athena. In *Dionysos*, the god dances under a vine with hanging grape clusters. A fox and a chicken are also present, although the two animals do not accompany Dionysos in ancient representations. Aesop's fable *The Fox and the Grapes* could come to our mind here, a story and an image that has become a world classic. Readers may also think of a well-known proverb in Modern Greek: *όσα δεν φτάνει η αλεπού, τα κάνει κρεμαστάρια* (*όσα den ftáneí ī aleπού, ta káneí kremastária*; sour grapes). The fox and the chicken further recall a multitude of other Greek folk tales involving foxes hunting down chickens.

An additional conflation of mythology with popular folk tales surfaces from Zeus' and Semele's depiction as a prince and princess. Semele is seated in a balcony, embroidering with a red thread, conforming to the role of a beautiful and chaste princess. On the one hand, we are reminded of world-renowned fairy tales with princes and princesses, and perhaps even of Romeo and Juliet. The red thread, on the other hand, could point to the Greek phrase *κόκκινη κλωστή δεμένη* (*kókkini klōstí deméni*; a tied red thread), which denotes the start of commonly relayed fairy tales. The subtle references to both global and local culture may target, perhaps simultaneously, international and Greek readers.

Abundant in the illustrations are also items of Western consumer goods. In *The Twelve Gods*, Uranus pushes a pram with spoked wheels that may date from the 1950s, possibly reflecting that vintage objects are fashionable lately. Hestia carries a saucepan. Crying Hera finds comfort in a teddy bear. Hades holds a torch that emits electric light so that he can see in the darkness of the Underworld. Ares chases away flies with a plastic swat. Hephaestus has his modern-looking tools strapped around his waist. Aphrodite makes herself beautiful with hair rolls, nail varnish, and lipstick. The mythical actors' interactions with all these modern commodities are utterly funny, especially for adults who can spot the incongruent elements and the anachronisms.

Modern culture is also ascribed value through visual references to comics and cartoons, with which (preliterate) children could be familiar before opening their first mythology book. Uranus is shown in mid-air with stars around his head. The stars lead us to believe that he has been punched by Cronus, his

⁵¹ For Athena's patronage of crafts, see Pierre Demargne, "Athéna Ergané", in *Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae*, vol. 2.1: *Aphrodisias-Athena*, Zürich and München: Artemis Verlag, 1984, 961-964; Sheramy D. Bundrick, "The Fabric of the City: Imaging Textile Production in Classical Athens", *Hesperia* 77.2 (2008), 326.

son.⁵² Floating red hearts indicate Zeus' affection for Semele, as he kneels before "princess" Semele and confesses his love in a speech bubble. With her long hair adorned with flowers and sea stars, Gaia could resemble Disney's mermaid. On board Dionysos' ship, the pirates have flabby bodies, bald heads, and grim faces, indicative of villains in comics and cartoons (see above, Fig. 5). Clearly, an internationally understood visual language of comics and cartoons makes the story of classical mythology familiar. Four-year-olds are treated as informed and capable individuals, who have been tainted by metonyms of modernity, such as comics.⁵³

Given the visual dominance of contemporary culture in the illustrations, the extent of Greekness in the gods' appearance is rather limited. With an emphasis on consumerism, Greek features, such as chitons, sandals, and helmets, may point more towards commercial kitsch and souvenir reproductions rather than ancient art. The conflation with folklore and with modern material and entertainment culture creates possibilities for additional storytelling. In effect, the illustrations encourage children and adults to reinterpret the narrative of classical myth by inserting stories that matter to them, be it fairy tales or myths about modern life.⁵⁴ Perhaps a parallel can be made to Archaic Greece. Hesiod intended his students to receive knowledge self-sufficiently by recontextualizing excerpts of his poetry.⁵⁵ As the gods' Greekness is feeble, conflated, and subject to creative manipulation, Greekness is unlikely to lead to any concrete notions of national pride and ethnic identity formation. Instead, Greekness is aligned here with a shared (global) culture, especially as experienced by people following a Western lifestyle.

The oblique references to a classical past may facilitate further this disassociation of Greekness from any specific geography and time frame. Two main issues arise. Firstly, the books do not aim to prepare children for visiting museums and other collections of classical antiquities. An implicit message could be that the ancient visual language of the gods in sculpture and painting is difficult

⁵² See Neil Cohn, "Linguistic Relativity and Conceptual Permeability in Visual Narratives: New Distinctions between Language(s) and Thought", in Neil Cohn, ed., *The Visual Narrative Reader*, London: Bloomsbury, 2016, 323, Fig. 12.2.

⁵³ See Bart Beaty, *Comics versus Art*, Toronto, Buffalo, NY, and London: University of Toronto Press, 2012, 13; Kovacs and Marshall, "Introduction", xxix.

⁵⁴ For prompting schoolkids to liken stories about the Greek gods to children's literature, see Diana Kodner Gökçe, Dana O'Brie, and Lizanne Wilson, "A Learning Odyssey: Artistic Collaboration around a Greek Myth", *Schools: Studies in Education* 9.2 (2012), 147–159.

⁵⁵ Lilah Grace Canevaro, *Hesiod's Works and Days: How to Teach Self-Sufficiency*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 217.

to follow, since it necessitates an understanding of materials, techniques, and how style changed over time. The art of the classical era, such as on the Parthenon frieze, glorifies solemnity and the control of emotions. By contrast, the illustrations here emphasize humour, light-heartedness, and excessive happiness.

Secondly, the post-Winckelmann baggage of high aesthetics, imaginary constructions of Greece, and narratives of European and Greek nationalism are all bypassed. The illustrations suggest, and with good reason, that the story of mythology can be told (just as effectively) separately from that of Greek antiquities. The gods can play down any Greekness that either pertains to artistic evidence from the classical period or to scholarly and political interpretations of this period in the last 300 years. The gods' modern appearance seems to indicate that crisis-ridden Greece is inextricably linked with the rest of the world, participating in and contributing to a global popular culture. Group identity, therefore, is strengthened, as children develop a sense of being part of a large community, broader than Greece's history, borders, and economic and other troubles.

The Gods' Comfortable Lifestyle

Zeus and Dionysos, the protagonists in the two books, manage to survive and establish themselves, having been helped by others and favoured by good fortune. In fact, the gods do not do much to succeed, and they remain relaxed throughout. Zeus accepts the Cyclopes' help in fighting the Titans. Yet, the Battle of the Titans is comical, featuring also a female, perhaps Hestia, who fights with a spouted saucepan. Zeus smiles happily when responsibilities are split for the Underworld, the seas, and the heavens, and when the Olympians make him "their King". Consensual decision-making is implied, and Zeus does not emerge as a fearful leader. In the closing pages of *The Twelve Gods*, we have a panorama of the Twelve Olympians (see Fig. 6).

Zeus is part of the team, and not placed above the rest. He stands inactive, without thunderbolt in hand. In *Dionysos*, baby Dionysos, wearing a cap with a ladybird, is carried away from Olympus by a stork. Kybele cures Dionysos of madness. Dionysos' interaction with the ever-growing vine is amusing and suggestive of childish playing. The festive atmosphere continues as Dionysos discovers the effects of drinking wine. While on a mission to bring viticulture to everyone in the world, Dionysos dances in a flowered meadow alongside his rustic companions, two maenads, a satyr, and a silen. Neither Zeus nor

Dionysos can be taken seriously here. The gods seem to overcome adversity through excessive entertainment rather than hard work, supernatural powers, or charismatic leadership.⁵⁶

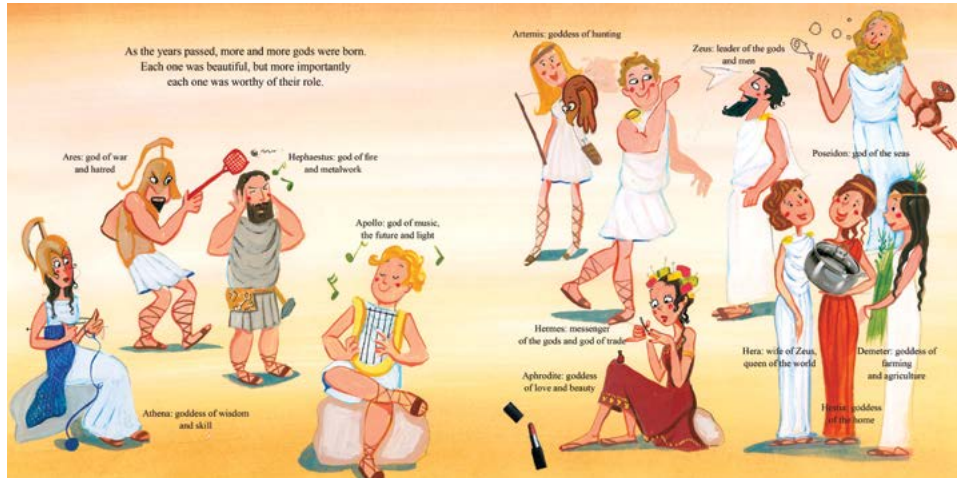


Figure 6: Panorama of the Twelve Olympians from Philippos Mandilaras, *The Twelve Gods of Olympus*, ill. Natalia Kapatsoulia, Athens: Papadopoulos, 2016 (English ed.), closing pages. Image © by Papadopoulos Publications. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

The absence of divine authority holds true also for the other gods. The Olympians personify confident and autonomous individuals with clear-cut roles only to a limited extent. In reality, the gods kill time and do not appear to be busy and laden with responsibilities. Hermes, the “god of trade”, performs a carefree pirouette, a bit like a jester. Aphrodite applies nail varnish. Hera, Hestia, and Demeter stand and chat with each other.⁵⁷ It becomes questionable how mortals

⁵⁶ Nothing points, not even remotely, to the Greek gods’ unique leadership styles, as popularized by corporate-management guru Charles Handy in his internationally influential book *Gods of Management*, which has seen multiple editions since first appearing in print; see Charles B. Handy, *Gods of Management: How They Work and Why They Will Fail*, London: Souvenir Press, 1978. See also Katerina Volioti, “Leadership in Children’s Books about Classical History and Myth” *Our Mythical Childhood Blog*, 3 parts, <https://ourmythicalchildhoodblog.wordpress.com/2020/05/18/leadership-in-childrens-books-about-classical-history-and-myth-part-1-by-katerina-volioti/>; <https://ourmythicalchildhoodblog.wordpress.com/2020/05/28/leadership-in-childrens-books-about-classical-history-and-myth-part-2-by-katerina-volioti/>; <https://ourmythicalchildhoodblog.wordpress.com/2020/06/29/leadership-in-childrens-books-about-classical-history-and-myth-part-3-by-katerina-volioti/> (all accessed 30 June 2021).

⁵⁷ This kind of reception could have a precursor in the gods resting and chatting on the Parthenon frieze.

(in Antiquity) may have trusted, let alone venerated, such leisure-loving gods. At the end of *The Twelve Gods*, we read that ancient people dedicated statues and temples to their gods. Given the gods' playful demeanour, however, we may develop doubts that this ancient activity entailed strong beliefs.⁵⁸ The illustrations dilute, or even negate, any religious viewing of the gods. This distancing from religious concerns is appropriate for reaching out to a diverse audience. A parallel could be made, moreover, with twenty-first-century fantasy literature for children and young adults, which includes stories that refute the Olympians' power.⁵⁹

While the gods in the illustrations are not authoritative, they can still entice readers to enjoy life. A paradox may emerge. On the one hand, the joyful spirit generates optimism, and this promotes escapism from present-day reality through leisure. At the end of *Dionysos*, we see young people going out to snack bars and the theatre. Imbued with Dionysos' spirit, the youths raise their wine glasses and socialize merrily. Dionysos' legacy, then, is about having a good time with friends and family, and about developing a sense of group identity through socialization. On the other hand, as non-ideal entities, the gods seem to send out a broader invitation, asking readers to follow a prosperous Western lifestyle. To become joyful and carefree like the gods, readers need to embrace consumerism, achieve success easily, and have free time, all of which are feasible in (upper) middle-class living. Such a lifestyle can be out of reach for many people in crisis-ridden Greece, for whom visual allusions to a good life could result in negative sentiments, such as helplessness and resentment. People in Greece may feel nostalgia for better times, before the start of the austerity measures in 2010. Yet, the modern visual registers that collapse the boundaries between past and present, and between Greece and the rest of the world, could be universalizing hardship. From a postmodern perspective, the illustrations here might even be suggestive of dissatisfaction with the unfulfilled promises of modernity to offer opportunities to all in society.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ See Tim Whitmarsh, *Battling the Gods: Atheism in the Ancient World*, London: Faber & Faber, 2016. For wider discourses on the relationship between the gods of Greece and Western thought, see Sara Lyons, "The Disenchantment/Re-Enchantment of the World: Aesthetics, Secularization, and the Gods of Greece from Friedrich Schiller to Walter Pater", *Modern Language Review* 109.4 (2014), 873–895, and Michael D. Konaris, *The Greek Gods in Modern Scholarship: Interpretation and Belief in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Germany and Britain*, Oxford and New York, NY: Oxford Classical Monographs, 2016.

⁵⁹ See discussion and examples in Sarah Annes Brown, "The Classical Pantheon in Children's Fantasy Literature", in Brett M. Rogers and Benjamin Eldon Stevens, eds., *Classical Traditions in Modern Fantasy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 189–208.

⁶⁰ See Steven B. Smith, *Modernity and Its Discontents: Making and Unmaking the Bourgeoisie from Machiavelli to Bellow*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016, 347–348.

The visual language of the gods could parody Western life, especially its extensive commoditization and superficiality. As I discussed in the previous section, the gods point to images of generic ancients wearing chitons and sandals, as well as to characters from cartoons and comics. The illustrations may function as commodities per se, since the gods' visually standardized appearance recalls characters that are easily recognizable by a wide audience. The gods' comical performance could be far from genuine, not least because it is replicated from that of other popular characters. Readers can potentially see through this superficial happiness, mistrusting the gods as behavioural models. The modern-looking gods in the illustrations seem real and accessible, but their presence invokes the fake and the futile. As a result, myth is cast back in its fictional place.

Conclusions

The illustrations of *The Twelve Gods* and *Dionysos* interrogate the seriousness of the classical past, be it ancient art or modern rediscoveries of Greece for constructing collective identities based on high ideals. Kapatsoulia's humorous visual language mixes elements from the distant past with traditional folklore and contemporary consumerist culture. The valorization of ordinary objects, such as saucepans, torches, and lipsticks, treats Western modernity as a window into the classical world. The everyday and the mundane may succeed in rooting mythical stories in quotidian reality. Children and adults are not asked to negotiate their position in the world as heirs or admirers of an ancient culture. Instead, readers can develop a sense of belonging in a large community, regardless of geographic and national borders. Shared Greekness, also as a fun element of popular culture, can suit almost anyone in today's increasingly globalized world. If the classical past is something to laugh about, readers do not need to compete with their ancient counterparts' achievements.

Children and adults may appreciate the gods' comical portrayal differently. On the one hand, both children and adults may find it amusing that the gods of Ancient Greece recall puppets, characters from cartoons and comics, and humans that need to wear nappies, push prams, and carry torches. These familiar-looking gods are amiable, and learning about Greek myths becomes a pleasant experience. Mythology entices through optimism and entertainment.

On the other hand, especially for adults who read these books to (preliterate) four-year-olds, a metanarrative unfolds. The gods enjoy a comfortable and carefree lifestyle, accessible mostly to affluent individuals of the (upper) middle

class in Greece and other countries. The humorous drawing style, nonetheless, could make a mockery of such a lifestyle and of Western modernity more generally. The visual language seems to imply that a good life, and those who can afford it, can be trivialized and caricatured. The gods are meant to be received as comical figures. Readers may find this mockery empowering, seeing the fragility of allegedly strong personalities, such as Zeus the "leader of the gods and men" (see Fig. 6).

The illustrations may affect constructions of group identity in two main ways. Firstly, the dilution of Greek elements creates notions of a shared, cross-border visual culture, involving only a generic projection of Greekness. In readers' minds, the gods' white robes, sandals, and helmets can have a multitude of associations, ranging from ancient art to kitsch souvenirs. Readers, irrespective of their ethnic background, could be inspired to formulate their own cognitive connections, and their distinct understandings of Greekness. Secondly, the parody of a consumerist lifestyle opens up classical mythology to an even wider audience. The gods' comical portrayal may prompt socially underprivileged individuals to question Western modernity for its failure to create equal opportunities for everyone. These individuals may identify with diverse communities of people, in Greece and abroad, who voice similar views about society.

Classical myth, then, is offered here as a medium that unites people, culturally and socially. More than the mythical hope that children and adults may find in the fantasy world of gods that emerge out of nothing (Gaia), out of Cronus' stomach (Zeus' siblings), and out of Zeus' thigh (Dionysos), readers may develop a sense of a shared destiny in a global world. Such a global identity can give hope to overcome any ill-fated notions of nationalistic divisions and to see beyond the historic, geographic, and social contingencies that bring hardship.

GROWING UP MANGA STYLE: MYTHOLOGICAL RECEPTION IN YOSHIKAZU YASUHIKO'S ARION MANGA

This paper focuses on the Greek mythological elements as well as the coming-of-age narrative included in the mid-1980s Japanese manga (comics) and anime (animation) アリオン [Arion] by Yoshikazu Yasuhiko.¹ First, I shall explain how this manga fits into the category of youth literature. Next, the manga artist's employment of Greek mythology will be reviewed and analysed.

Manga and Anime in the Youth Culture of Japan

Manga and anime are popular media in Japan. As Peter Matanle, Kuniko Ishiguro, and Leo McCann note:

Manga is one of the most widely consumed media in Japan [...] and its presence within Japanese socio-cultural and political life is pervasive. Beyond entertainment, it is understood as social commentary, an information source and guide to behaviour, a teaching tool, a subversive critique and even a vehicle for government policy.²

¹ I am very grateful to Katarzyna Marciniak and Lisa Maurice for their comments and insights on earlier drafts of this chapter. For Japanese names, I follow the Western order of given name and family name. I use the Hepburn romanization system, but in the case of manga widely known by their English names, the Japanese titles are omitted.

² Peter Matanle, Kuniko Ishiguro, and Leo McCann, "Popular Culture and Workplace Gendering among Varieties of Capitalism: Working Women and Their Representation in Japanese Manga", *Gender, Work and Organization* 21.5 (2014), 476. John E. Ingulsrud and Kate Allen state in their *Reading Japan Cool: Patterns of Manga Literacy and Discourse Account*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009, 3, that "manga publishing in Japan is a US\$4.5 billion market and accounts for nearly a fourth of the total publishing market". In a recent anime industry report from 2018, it is noted that the Japanese animation market kept growing for seven consecutive years from 2010, and

The manga medium also sits comfortably within the definition proposed by Katarzyna Marciniak for a classical work:

[A] classical work is embedded in the past, but oriented toward the future, addressing the recipient on both a personal and universal level and encouraging nonconformity and respect.³

Some manga are certainly considered Classics (if not classical), and they enjoy the same prominence as other classic works of literature.

As noted above, manga covers almost every aspect of life. It therefore clearly appeals to and represents different age groups.⁴ Daniel Flis notes that in Japan manga is divided into four main categories according to the readers' age groups: 少年漫画 (*shōnen*; boys), 少女漫画 (*shōjo*; girls), 青年漫画 (*seinen*; young men), and 女性漫画 (*josei*; women).⁵ Junko Ueno explains that "different *manga* magazines target specific genders and age groups, and the range of a particular *manga's* topics largely depend on the intended audience".⁶ Hence the content of manga is influenced by the type of magazine which publishes it.⁷ These categories, however, do not limit the readership of manga and mostly

also recorded a growth of 108.0% and the highest level of sales in 2017; see *Anime Industry Report 2018: Summary*, The Association of Japanese Animations, <https://aja.gr.jp/english/japan-anime-data> (accessed 6 August 2019). As reported by Anime News Network in April 2019, according to the *All Japan Magazine* and Book Publisher's and Editor's Association (AJPEA), Japan's manga market grew by 1.9% in 2018; see Jennifer Sherman, "Japan's Manga Market Grows 1.9% in 2018", Anime News Network, 8 April 2019, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2019-04-08/japan-manga-market-grows-1.9-percent-in-2018/.145512> (accessed 6 August 2019). On the popularity of manga, see also Frederik L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*, New York, NY: Kodansha International, 2012, 12–68. On manga as Japan's soft power, see Casey Brienza, "Did Manga Conquer America? Implications for the Cultural Policy of 'Cool Japan'", *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 20.4 (2014), 383–398.

³ Katarzyna Marciniak, "What Is a Classic... for Children and Young Adults?", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 10.

⁴ Junko Ueno, "Shojo and Adult Women: A Linguistic Analysis of Gender Identity in Manga (Japanese Comics)", *Women and Language* 29.1 (2006), 16.

⁵ Daniel Flis, "Straddling the Line: How Female Authors Are Pushing the Boundaries of Gender Representation in Japanese Shōnen Manga", *New Voices in Japanese Studies* 10 (2018), 77. There are also further categories – e.g., regarding the age group of older men and women, as Sharon Kinsella explains in *Adult Manga: Culture & Power in Contemporary Japanese Society*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000, 44–49.

⁶ Ueno, "Shojo and Adult Women", 16.

⁷ Following serialized publication in magazines, popular manga are collected into printed, stand-alone volumes named 単行本 (*tankōbon* or *tankbon*).

refer to the publishing magazines. Readers of all genders and all ages may clearly enjoy various manga even if they are associated with different categories; for example, girls or adult readers in many cases enjoy reading *shōnen* manga. Amongst these categories, indeed, *shōnen* manga is the most popular, according to surveys of best-selling manga in Japan.⁸

Manga or anime that centre on adolescents share certain tropes. These stories display the exploits of middle- or high-school juveniles who are facing the difficulties of adolescence, and whose feelings are often amplified via the setting of imminent danger to world peace or of consecutive tournaments these heroes must face in order to strengthen their powers and abilities. For example, such a narrative is portrayed in a ground-breaking Japanese anime show from 1995. In *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the creator, Hideaki Anno, sensitively portrays the coming-of-age journey of a group of teenagers who must confront their own emotional difficulties (and mainly emotional trauma), while at the same time having to master and pilot giant bio-machines in order to save the world from an invasion of ferocious aliens.⁹ The main narrative, aside from the action scenes, focuses on the individual journeys that each of the characters must make, and at the core of these journeys are self-discovery and acceptance of one's self and others. While the results or conclusion may not be happy and may even be confusing, this journey is nonetheless cathartic and its completion constitutes the emotional climax of the entire show.¹⁰

While coming-of-age stories are certainly not unique to manga, the popularity of the manga medium in Japan nevertheless creates a kind of shared experience between the fictional heroes and their respective readers. Manga

⁸ E.g., in May 2019 Anime News Network published a ranking of the most popular manga series in Japan in the first half of the year, of which the top nine places were occupied by *shōnen* manga series (and one *seinen* series); see Egan Loo, "Top-Selling Manga in Japan by Series: 2019 (First Half)", Anime News Network, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2019-05-29/top-selling-manga-in-japan-by-series-2019/.147237> (accessed 6 August 2019). See also Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 17.

⁹ For a discussion of this show, see Susan J. Napier, "When the Machines Stop: Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments Lain*", *Science Fiction Studies* 29.3 (2002), 418–435; Dennis Redmond, "Anime and East Asian Culture: *Neon Genesis Evangelion*", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24.2 (2007), 183–188; Christophe Thouny, "Waiting for the Messiah: The Becoming-Myth of *Evangelion* and *Densha otoko*", *Mechademia* 4 (2009), 111–129.

¹⁰ A similar premise is found in the highly popular *Attack on Titan* manga (2009–2021) by Hajime Isayama. Many popular *shōnen* manga focus on sports or various tournaments, such as the well-known *Dragon Ball* franchise by Akira Toriyama (the original manga was serialized from 1984 to 1995), the *Slam Dunk* basketball manga (1990–1996) by Takehiko Inoue, the *Naruto* manga (1999–2014) by Masashi Kishimoto, and many others.

offers the juvenile (or younger) readers opportunity to escape to an alternate universe in which ordinary youths similar to them must suddenly become heroes and save the world. On the other hand, some manga also deal with everyday problems and difficulties, such as first love, loss, and bullying. Hence, readers can understand the struggles the characters must overcome, and even relate to them based on their own personal experience. Perhaps reading about the heroes and heroines' challenges may give the readers comfort and encouragement in their own private challenges. As Kinko Ito and Paul A. Crutcher explain, "many boys and girls who read the same manga share the vicarious experience of the heroes and heroines: their rationale for existence, their values, struggles, romances, adventures, victories, and more".¹¹ Moreover, Ueno notes that the authors of printed media employ various strategies in order to "establish a rapport" between the fictional characters and the readers.¹² It is also worth quoting Flis's opinion that "the *shōnen* manga genre is so named because it is targeted at boys in their late teens; as such, its content is commonly intended to appeal to boys at an age where they typically undergo puberty and develop romantic and sexual interests".¹³ Thus, as Angela Drummond-Mathews observes, "the *shōnen* manga hero provides a mirror of the reader's life".¹⁴

The impact of the manga genre is even more complex. As Adam Schwartz and Eliane Rubinstein-Ávila argue:

[U]ltimately, like any cultural texts, manga provide a way for youths to negotiate alternative identities. By engaging with a wide range of manga characters, dynamic plots and storyboards, children and young adults make connections between these popular texts and their own life experiences.¹⁵

¹¹ Kinko Ito and Paul A. Crutcher, "Popular Mass Entertainment in Japan: Manga, Pachinko, and Cosplay", *Society* 51 (2014), 45.

¹² Ueno, "Shojo and Adult Women", 16.

¹³ Flis, "Straddling the Line", 77.

¹⁴ Angela Drummond-Mathews, "What Boys Will Be: A Study of Shōnen Manga", in Toni Johnson-Woods, ed., *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, New York, NY: Continuum, 2010, 74; she explains, following Joseph Campbell's heroic journey, that the manga focuses on the initiation phase of the hero and thus it is relatable to the young readers. On the initiation phase in manga, see also Frédéric Vincent, "La structure initiatique du manga. Une esquisse anthropologique du héros", *Sociétés* 106.4 (2009), 57–64.

¹⁵ Adam Schwartz and Eliane Rubinstein-Ávila, "Understanding the Manga Hype: Uncovering the Multimodality of Comic-Book Literacies", *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 50 (2006), 42. See also Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 138–162.

John Ingulsrud and Kate Allen accentuate the point that, according to research on reasons for manga reading, especially among juvenile or college students, "when reading their favourite stories, readers can distance themselves from actual problems and learn about possible solutions through a pleasurable, comfortable medium".¹⁶ In the next section, I shall examine the boys' manga genre and how it references coming-of-age stories.

Boys' Manga and *Arion*

Manga aimed at young boys or teens is named *shōnen* manga (*shōnen* – 'boy'), but such stories have gained enormous popularity and are consequently read by every demographic.¹⁷ The genres featured in this type of boys' manga are varied, from sports through horror to adventure, fantasy, and science fiction. According to Neil Cohn and Sean Ehly, "shōnen manga is perceived as the stereotypical genre of manga – and also the bestselling – both within and outside of Japan".¹⁸ While girls' manga (*shōjo* manga) naturally also deal with growing up, their emphasis is usually on romance, and the main characters vary from damsels in distress to strong female heroines.¹⁹ Many *shōnen* manga also share distinctive features. One type of manga is commonly referred to as "tournament shows"; in these works the hero constantly battles one rival after another, increasing his powers from match to match, while each challenge and increase in difficulty contributes to the hero's resolve and ultimate strengthening. This gradual transformation is a combination of physical and mental strength.

As Ingulsrud and Allen note:

Frederik Schodt has described *shōnen* manga stories as possessing three main features – friendship, perseverance and winning [...]. Almost all *shōnen* manga consist of stories based on *Bildungsroman* narrative patterns,

¹⁶ Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 142.

¹⁷ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 13, 15–17; Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 267; Schwartz and Rubinstein-Ávila, "Understanding the Manga Hype", 44–45.

¹⁸ Neil Cohn and Sean Ehly, "The Vocabulary of Manga: Visual Morphology in Dialects of Japanese Visual Language", *Journal of Pragmatics* 92 (2016), 23.

¹⁹ On *shōjo* manga, see Mizuki Takahashi, "Opening the Closed World of Shōjo Manga", in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed., *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2015, 114–136; Deborah Shamoon, "Situating the Shōjo in Shōjo Manga: Teenage Girls, Romance Comics and Contemporary Japanese Culture", in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed., *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2015, 137–154.

where a young man goes through multiple trials and setbacks as he ventures on to a bright and glorious future.²⁰

The above traits of *shōnen* manga are discerned in *Arion*, which is the focus of the analysis in the present chapter.

Arion was created in the years 1979–1985 by the noted manga artist Yoshikazu Yasuhiko. Yasuhiko was born in 1947 in Hokkaido and in 1970 joined the celebrated manga artist Osamu Tezuka's Mushi Production company.²¹ The *Arion* manga was serialized in *Monthly Comic Ryū* and then released in five *tankōbon* (manga volumes) by Tokuma Shoten Publications. The manga was later republished in 1997 by Chuokoron-Shinsha and in 2004 by Shimanaka Shoten Publications.²² This was Yasuhiko's first foray into the art of manga. The manga was adapted into a full-length feature film in 1986, but neither of the two was released in the United States.²³ The film had French, Italian, and Spanish dubbing.²⁴ *Arion* is classified as a fantasy manga due to its Ancient Greek and mythological settings. As Mio Bryce and Jason Davis note, "the salient feature characterizing fantasy and legend manga are the rich milieus they (re-)create through adaptations of mythological, folkloric and literary sources".²⁵ Within this category they include works that feature, for instance, Chinese, Greek, Norse, and Japanese mythologies.

Arion is more specifically categorized as *seinen* manga (for an older male audience) and not *shōnen* manga; this division refers to some sexual violence

²⁰ Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 17–18.

²¹ Philip Brophy et al., *Manga Impact: The World of Japanese Animation*, London: Phaidon, 2010, 253; Emer O'Dwyer, "Heroes and Villains: Manchukuo in Yasuhiko Yoshikazu's *Rainbow Trotsky*", in Roman Rosenbaum, ed., *Manga and the Representation of Japanese History*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013, 122–125.

²² "Arion (Manga)", Anime News Network, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.cc/encyclopedia/manga.php?id=6903> (accessed 6 August 2019); Mio Bryce and Jason Davis, "An Overview of Manga Genres", in Toni Johnson-Woods, ed., *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, New York, NY: Continuum, 2010, 55.

²³ Since the manga was not officially published in the United States, I used an online translation of the manga from the mangakakalot.com website; see "Arion", MangaKakalot, <https://mangakakalot.com/manga/arion> (accessed 17 August 2019). On differing views regarding manga's scanlation (fan-made translation), see Hye-Kyung Lee, "Between Fan Culture and Copyright Infringement: Manga Scanlation", *Media, Culture & Society* 31 (2009), 1011–1022, and also Matteo Fabbretti, "Manga Scanlation for an International Readership: The Role of English as a Lingua Franca", *The Translator* 23.4 (2017), 456–473.

²⁴ "Arion (Movie)", Anime News Network, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.cc/encyclopedia/anime.php?id=807> (accessed 6 August 2019).

²⁵ Bryce and Davis, "An Overview of Manga Genres", 35.

in the story and is also influenced by the magazine which published the story. As Hideaki Fujiki remarks, "although *shōnen* manga, *seinen* manga, and *otona* manga are not rigid categories, they imply different modes of address with some degree of visual style and narrative differentiation".²⁶ *Arion*, as mentioned, was published in *Monthly Comic Ryū*, which was a *seinen* magazine, and therefore all the manga published in it are classified as *seinen* as well.²⁷ However, it needs to be stressed that this categorization does not necessarily mean that younger audiences did not read it. Since this manga specifically focuses on an adolescent hero, from his early childhood through his maturation, and also shares many features with *shōnen* manga, it can be examined in the context of young people's culture. The manga explores the individual journey of its young protagonist, and the reader follows his gradual development from a little boy into a mature young adult. Therefore, the journey of the manga's hero reflects the experiences of growing up. Moreover, it is interesting to examine how the mythological elements are incorporated into this story, which is clearly but loosely based upon Greek mythology. Lisa Maurice observes that "children's literature, often the first meeting point with the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome, is arguably one of the most important experiences in forming perceptions of that culture".²⁸ While *Arion*, as noted, is not classified as children's literature per se, it nonetheless mirrors the perception of ancient culture and ancient mythology through the eyes of a Japanese author in the 1980s. Furthermore, this manga may well also be the first encounter many Japanese readers had with Greek mythology.

***Arion* as an Example of Classical Reception in Japanese Manga**

As mentioned in the book *Manga Impact: The World of Japanese Animation*, "in *Arion* (1986) Yasuhiko looked again to Greek mythology for introspective

²⁶ Hideaki Fujiki, "Implicating Readers: Tezuka's Early Seinen Manga", *Mechademia* 8 (2013), 201.

²⁷ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, examines the intricate world of adult manga, from artist to publisher. From her research, it also appears that *Arion* correlates more to the tropes of boys' manga than of adult manga and while it does contain sexual violence, it is less explicit and not pornographic in nature as in the case of other adult manga.

²⁸ Lisa Maurice, "Children, Greece and Rome: Heroes and Eagles", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 6, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015, 3.

means of escape, and this failed to appeal to his fans' uninformed taste".²⁹ Although the manga was serialized for a few years before the film, it did not achieve widespread familiarity and as a result its cinematic adaptation did not prove a box-office hit. It is hard to determine whether the mythological subject matter was the main reason for this. Reference to the West was not uncommon in the manga and anime of the time. As Amy Shirong Lu explains, "since the 1960s, the 'internationalization' of anime can be seen in the background and context of its narratives and plots, character design, and narrative organization".³⁰ On the one hand, Greek mythology was quite rare in the manga and anime of the 1970s and 1980s, and therefore it is understandable that the Japanese audience was less enthusiastic about such works. However, on the other hand, stories with mythological elements did gain much popularity, the most noted being *Saint Seiya* by Masami Kurumada (known in the United States as *Knights of the Zodiac*), which was also adapted into an animated television series by Toei Animation, running from 1986 to 1989, thereby gaining a wide audience.³¹ Thus, the failure of *Arion* may not be attributed solely to the source material but to other causes as well.

It is difficult to pinpoint the nature of the relations between a work of literature and its Graeco-Roman influences, especially in countries which do not share a long classical tradition.³² That said, in Yasuhiko's work we can clearly detect his acquaintance with Greek mythology; perhaps he was not completely fluent in it, but he was certainly familiar with it (he does not, however, mention his sources). Furthermore, the plot of the entire manga takes place in a Greek mythological setting, and almost all of the characters are part of the myths, especially those of the Greek Pantheon. When Gideon Nisbet examined アップルシード [Appurushido; Applesseed, 1985–1989], a science-fiction manga by Masamune Shirow, which is abundant with Greek names and references to mythological stories, he noted that "Shirow's use of these mythic motifs may be all the more imaginative because he comes to Greek mythology as an interested general reader and

²⁹ Brophy et al., *Manga Impact*, 253. This critique refers to the film which followed the manga, and therefore the author looked again, after creating the comics, at Greek mythology with the purpose of using it in the cinematic production.

³⁰ Amy Shirong Lu, "The Many Faces of Internationalization in Japanese Anime", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 3.2 (2008), 171.

³¹ Brophy et al., *Manga Impact*, 205.

³² See discussions in Nicholas A. Theisen, "Declassifying the Classical in Japanese Comics: Osamu Tezuka's *Apollo's Song*", in George Kovacs and C.W. Marshall, eds., *Classics and Comics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 59–71; Ayelet Peer, "Thermae Romae Manga: Plunging into the Gulf between Ancient Rome and Modern Japan", *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies* 12 (2018), 57–67; Ayelet Peer and Raz Greenberg, "The Japanese Trojan War: Tezuka Osamu's Envisioning of the Trojan Cycle", *Greece & Rome* 68.2 (2020), 151–176.

draws his information from a very limited range of sources".³³ Limited though they may be (Shirow does not disclose all of them in his work),³⁴ his manga carefully draws attention to more obscure characters from Greek mythology as well as to more familiar ones; he also includes less-known stories about the gods, as Nisbet observes. We can deduce from Nisbet's argument that Yasuhiko followed a similar path. *Appleseed* manga appeared in Japan in 1985, after *Arion*.³⁵ These two manga artists searched the classical tradition for creative inspiration. It is noteworthy that both of these works were not written for export, but for their native Japanese audience.

Nicholas Theisen in his 2011 paper argued that mythological references in manga are "the narratological equivalent of a stock photo: Its graphic and literal elements may be in play, but its narrative elements are not".³⁶ While this statement is truthful regarding some manga, it nevertheless behoves us to review the appearance of such mythological elements in the manga in which they appear, and to closely distinguish whether they are central to the narrative or merely used as superficial decorative elements. Yasuhiko had broad interests and his manga cover various themes, from robots and science fiction to world history. His manga にじいろの ところつきー [Niji-iro Torotsukii; Rainbow Trotsky], which was published in Japan in 1992–1997 and narrated the life of a half-Japanese, half-Mongolian man in Manchukuo in 1938–1939, gained him critical acclaim for its historical elements, and the appreciation for the manga continued even a decade after its initial release.³⁷ Yasuhiko also wrote about Japanese prehistory and even about Joan of Arc and Jesus. His works show a broad perspective and interest in different cultures. Therefore I argue that his foray into mythology was part of his deep affection for world cultures and history. The fact that he ventured to make *Arion* a full-length feature film (with a handsome budget) also hints at his belief in the themes of his work.

Monika Miazek-Męczyńska argues that "Greek mythology was not for children".³⁸ She claims that the acts of rape and violence in these stories are not

³³ Gideon Nisbet, "Mecha in Olympus: Masamune Shirow's 'Appleseed'", in George Kovacs and C.W. Marshall, eds., *Son of Classics and Comics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 74.

³⁴ Nisbet refers to some of Shirow's sources; see *ibidem*, 70, esp. n. 5.

³⁵ *Arion* was never published in the United States, while *Appleseed* was published in English between 1988 and 1992.

³⁶ Theisen, "Declassifying the Classical", 62.

³⁷ O'Dwyer, "Heroes and Villains", 122–123.

³⁸ Monika Miazek-Męczyńska, "Olympus Shown by Grzegorz Kasdepke and Katarzyna Marciniak, or, How We Should Present Mythology to the Youngest Audience", in Konrad Dominas, Elżbieta Wesołowska, and Bogdan Trocha, eds., *Antiquity in Popular Literature and Culture*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, 65.

suiting for young children (especially non-readers) and that myths are served to them after being heavily edited and made “safe” for children, or, as Marciniak calls them, “sugar-coated”.³⁹ They are right; most mythological stories are overwhelmingly violent, especially towards women, and thus they may offend our modern sensitivities. While *Arion* was intended mainly for an adult male audience, violence and realism in manga are nonetheless common features in works targeted at various age groups. As Frederik L. Schodt, one of the leading manga scholars, notes about Japanese children’s manga, “by 1974 most traditional taboos in children’s comics had been broken”.⁴⁰ The violence in children’s manga is very realistic and, in addition to violence, these works also include scenes of kissing and nudity, although no explicit sex scenes. Schodt argues that although there is no official censorship of manga (except occasional interventions of parents’ associations or minority groups),⁴¹ “certainly the most powerful restraint on comics is the marketplace itself.”⁴² Comics for men, women, and children tend to find the subject matter and level of violence and sex that readers and the general public will tolerate.⁴³ Therefore, manga artists do not shrink from the material depicted in Greek mythology. However, they use it with discretion. Marciniak proposes we should “treat literature for adults and that for youth as having equal status”.⁴⁴ This is very true in the case of the manga medium, where works supposedly aimed at younger boys are passionately read by other demographics, especially older audiences. It is also true that there is a division in the themes of the works aimed at young children and for mature men and women, as there should be. However, that does not mean that comics aimed at children are lacking depth or more sophisticated meaning. As mentioned, since manga is a visual medium, the sense of realism is apparent in most works, no matter their intended audience.

³⁹ Marciniak, “What Is a Classic”, 5.

⁴⁰ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 123.

⁴¹ Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 32.

⁴² Regarding the content of *shōnen* manga, Lesley-Anne Gallacher, “(Fullmetal) Alchemy: The Monstrosity of Reading Words and Pictures in *Shōnen* Manga”, *Cultural Geographies* 18.4 (2011), 458, notes that “the worlds of and in *shōnen* manga Japanese comics (Japanese comics intended primarily for an audience of teenage boys) can prove similarly hospitable to monsters. In particular, fantasy action/adventure *shōnen* manga series are often densely populated with monsters”. Some *shōnen* manga relate to an even younger demographic than teenagers.

⁴³ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 130.

⁴⁴ Marciniak, “What Is a Classic”, 10.

The Plot of *Arion*

While the setting of *Arion* is a fantastic, Greek mythology-inspired world, the themes the manga covers are universal, concerning growing up, family ties, friendship, discovering one's inner strength, and overcoming obstacles. The manga (and subsequent film) centres on the adolescent eponymous boy.⁴⁵ Arion is the son of Demeter and Poseidon, and the product of his father having raped his mother. He lives in Thrace with his mother, who became blind while giving birth. He is later taken by Hades through trickery into the Underworld, where he is mercilessly trained to fight monsters in order to one day gain enough power and vanquish King Zeus of Olympus, who has gone mad. Hades promises him that in exchange for defeating Zeus, he will give Arion the cure for his mother's blindness.

The background to this plot is a power struggle in Olympus. Olympus in the story is an earthly kingdom, ruled by the Titan Zeus and threatened by the other gods, mainly the Titans Poseidon and Hades (there is no clear distinction in the story between the terms "Titan" and "god"). Athena, Ares, and Apollo are seemingly on the side of Zeus, with whom they lead the armies of Olympus.

The katabasis theme also appears in this work. As a young child, Arion is forced to fight in the Underworld under the supervision of Hades. Only when he becomes strong enough, is he freed by Hades so that Arion can kill Zeus. The Underground training signifies the death of the hero, or the symbolic death of his childhood naivety.⁴⁶ Arion's emergence or resurrection from the Underworld as an adolescent is his first step in his own coming-of-age journey.

Arion finds out from Hades that his father is actually the Titan Poseidon and that his mother was blinded when she gave birth to Arion (hence intensifying the boy's sense of guilt). Hades tricks Arion into going with him to the Underworld since he wishes for Arion to kill Zeus, his Titan brother, because he had killed their father, Cronus, and kept all the power to himself, slowly deteriorating to become a ruthless despot, even to his siblings. Zeus is afraid that his elimination of his father will happen to him as well – by Demeter's son. Therefore, according to Hades' version, when Demeter gave birth she was forced to leave Olympus due to Zeus' fear. Hades trains Arion hard in the Underworld for six years and even gives him a sword that can kill a god so he can defeat Zeus. In the end,

⁴⁵ There are some variations between the manga and the film. I focus on the former as the primary text of Arion's story.

⁴⁶ On the symbolic death and resurrection of the manga hero, see Vincent, "La structure initiatique du manga", 62–64.

Arion understands that his mother's eyesight cannot be cured, but he decides to track down Zeus nonetheless as revenge for banishing his mother. Arion is accompanied by a three-eyed giant named Geedo as his guardian on his journey to Olympus to find Zeus.

After leaving the Underworld, Arion is on a quest to find his father, Poseidon, in an attempt to discover more about his own identity. Arion kills Hades, who continuously tries to manipulate him, and later, when encountering Poseidon, Arion mistakenly kills him, being still under the influence of Hades' machinations and hallucinations. During his time of crisis, and his deep regret over killing his true father (Poseidon), Arion is confronted and comforted by a mysterious figure with a lion's head. Later he discovers that this guardian lion is none other than Prometheus, who was Demeter's old friend and saviour. According to the facts that Arion learns from Prometheus, Zeus killed his own mother, Gaia, and framed Demeter. Prometheus saves Demeter before the execution, but she is later raped by Poseidon. When she finally gives birth to twins, a boy and a girl (Arion and Lesfeena/Lesphina), losing her sight in the process, Zeus tries to take the children. When Prometheus attempts to save Demeter and the babies, he is hurt while rescuing the baby boy. Eventually Prometheus manages to reunite Demeter with Arion and to hide them, but Lesfeena remains under Zeus' control and is maltreated by Athena and Apollo. Prometheus is later tortured by Zeus and supposedly dies, but in fact he turns into the Black Lion who protects Arion and saves him from a Fury who haunts him.

Prometheus, in the guise of the Black Lion, and Arion then join forces to stop Zeus. Arion's final confrontation is with the god Apollo, who secretly plans to ruin the world and establish a new one in which he would be the only god. In this fight, Arion is saved by the powerful Lesfeena, who was held captive by Apollo. In the end Arion and Lesfeena return to Thrace together.

Throughout the story, Arion is on a quest to fight Zeus. At the same time, he is on a journey of self-discovery, trying to understand his origin and meet his father. As part of his adventures, Arion encounters several would-be father figures, some benevolent and others selfish and cruel, until he breaks away from living under his father's shadow and is able to function independently as a young man and protect those he loves. This breaking away is achieved mainly through three violent acts: the killing of father figures (Arion kills both Hades and Poseidon, his real father) and the death of the surrogate father (Prometheus dies while protecting Arion). The story is only superficially connected to the Greek myths; it refers to the names of the heroes and their identity as gods. There is no reference to any of the mythological narrations known from Classical Antiquity.

It seems that Yasuhiko endeavoured to create his own version of Greek mythology, using the existing arsenal of characters, and seemingly throwing them into a kind of parallel mythical universe of his own creation.

However, *Arion* cannot simply be dismissed as having used the mythological figures purely for ornamentation. Yasuhiko was acquainted with Greek mythology, as is shown in the specifically crafted personae of his characters; some echo their mythological representations and others undergo interesting alterations that suggest a conscious use of the Greek myths. For example, Prometheus, the creator as well as defender of humanity in Greek mythology, reprises this role in the manga, as Arion's mentor, as well as the champion of the simple people who are trampled by the gods. Apollo, the god of music, prophecy, and light, is the darkest and most sinister god of them all, and he secretly conspires to be the only god. His evil personality strikingly contradicts his bright and beautiful appearance depicted in Antiquity. Athena, the goddess of war, is revealed to be a jealous and cruel woman who tortures an innocent girl because of her obsession with Apollo; this is a significant change from the virgin goddess of myth; however, it is reminiscent of the vengeful Athena of the Arachne story and others.⁴⁷ Finally, Zeus, the mighty lord of Olympus, has become, in Yasuhiko's rendering, a weak and crazed individual. He lacks true courage and even power, and his mind is tormented due to the machination of his mother, Gaia, and his killing of his own father, Cronus.

Thus it seems as if Yasuhiko deliberately tried to alter the well-known traits of the Olympian gods in order to reveal their flaws, to parade them as false gods who do not care for humans at all and are constantly preoccupied with fighting amongst themselves. Humanity's sole chance for survival is to estrange itself from them. The series carries a strong message about the power of belief, of faith, and of gods versus men. As noted above, the focus of *shōnen* manga (or *seinen*) is on the individual and his inner strength. If certain divinities are presented in such stories, they can either help the hero or impede his efforts, depending on the whim of the author. There is no general tone in manga regarding gods or supernatural beings; they can be benevolent or evil.

⁴⁷ I thank Lisa Maurice for this insight.

The Representation of the Main Characters

The graphic aspect of the manga is crucial in the presentation of the different characters. If we examine the key personae, their appearance either reveals their true form or cleverly hides and contradicts it. Manga also emphasizes the visual depiction of emotions.⁴⁸ As Schodt explains, "like Japanese poetry, Japanese comics tend to value the unstated; in many cases the picture alone carries the story".⁴⁹ The anthropomorphic nature of the Greek Pantheon, in contrast with the various depictions of divine deities in the Japanese folklore and religion, also contributes significantly to the visual confrontation of man and god. We are used to seeing the Olympian gods as representatives of eternal physical beauty, especially in ancient art.

Yet this manga explores the ugliness which hides behind the beautiful exterior, as when gods become monsters. A prime example of this is the representation of Apollo in the manga. The god becomes Arion's true rival by the end of the story and the mastermind behind many of the narrated events. Apollo is drawn as a beautiful, slightly feminine man, alluding to ancient representations of his eternal, youthful beauty, with bright, thick hair and a clean-shaved face.⁵⁰ He wears a long, belted tunic with short sleeves, showing his muscular figure. Apollo is cunning, ambitious, wise, and ruthless. He kills his sister Athena, who is in love with him, and then he kills Zeus, in a rendition of the myth of Zeus killing his own father, Cronus. Apollo, as mentioned above, strives to be the only god in a new world he will create. In his final confrontation with Arion, he claims that the weak people need a god to believe in, while Arion argues that the people just want to live peacefully and happily. Apollo's monstrosity and inner cruelty (and ugliness) are highlighted via their contradiction with his bright and beautiful appearance.

In some cases the manga also uses the external appearance of a deity to reflect its character (and not hide it); two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. Hades, lord of the Underworld and Arion's supposed uncle, is depicted as an ugly, hunched character, almost caveman-like in his scruffy appearance.

⁴⁸ On this, see Yi-Shan Tsai, "Close-Ups: An Emotive Language in Manga", *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 9.5 (2018), 473–489.

⁴⁹ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 21.

⁵⁰ The most noted being the Apollo Belvedere. Apollo is depicted with lengthy curls on vase-painting as well – e.g., on an Athenian red-figure bell krater from around the fourth century BCE showing Apollo riding on a swan, currently at the British Museum (Museum no. 1917,0725.2), or on an Athenian red-figure amphora from the sixth century BCE, which depicts Apollo fighting with Heracles, also at the British Museum (Museum no. 1843,1103.41).

His eyes at times appear big, like a madman's, especially when he reveals his true plans for Arion. His hair and beard are dark and cover much of his face, and when Arion first meets him he wears a brown, rugged tunic. His dark depiction is magnified by the use of black colours in the portrayal of his character. The author creates a sharp contrast by employing a game of light and dark colours when depicting Hades and Arion (in both the manga and anime). The contrast is thus made very explicit, even without using any dialogue. In the black-and-white manga Arion is running towards the reader on a white, clear background, while Hades appears as an obscure dark character from afar. In the next panel, Hades is drawn with his back to the reader. The initial meeting of the protagonists is portrayed with Arion's frightened face appearing in the light (the bright, white background); facing him, with his back to the readers, is the dark, black, and grey back of Hades. When we finally see Hades' face in the next frame, he has an alarming expression, with frightening, narrow, small eyes that contrast starkly with Arion's big, round, innocent eyes. As Yi-Shan Tsai notes, "by presenting a character's facial expressions or imminent actions at a particular moment through close shots, manga artists add visual impact to the content within the frame, thereby intensifying the portrayed feelings, mood or tension".⁵¹

Japanese artists also use a variety of facial expressions well known to the readers. This is a significant part of manga's "visual language", to use the term coined by researchers.⁵² Thus Hades' expression immediately suggests threat and danger, causing Arion to run back home, where he feels protected by his mother. With no dialogue at all, there is a sense that an ominous event is about to take place between the young boy and the menacing older figure. When Hades later goes into Arion's home, his figure standing in the doorway is dark, while even in the black background of the house, Arion and Demeter are drawn as very white and clear figures.

Zeus is the only character who is portrayed very differently as a young man and as an older king. In the first case, he appears thin and frail, almost sickly, usually wearing a long tunic. He was not completely evil at that stage, but nonetheless mentally disturbed. His condition was probably worsened by the machinations of his mother, Gaia, who is fittingly depicted as ugly, both internally and externally. Zeus' wide-eyed facial expressions appear cunning and deranged. In his younger days, Zeus understood well that his family was not a loving one, and that there was no real sense of family and friendship between himself and

⁵¹ Tsai, "Close-Ups", 476.

⁵² Cohn and Ehly, "The Vocabulary of Manga", *passim*.

his siblings. The only true friend he had was Prometheus, who appeared to be a lot stronger than Zeus, both physically and mentally. Regarding the depiction of the older Zeus, although he has the features of a respectable old king (the white long beard and the regal outfit), his eyes and face give away his madness. In the end, he appears as a crazed old man and not the king of Olympus.

As for the female characters, usually their role in male-oriented manga is peripheral. As Flis explains, "*shōnen* manga appeals to its male readership through narratives rooted in hegemonic masculinity".⁵³ While there are strong female characters in the plot, they are not as significant as the male ones.

The Main Themes of the Manga: Between Loneliness and Bonding

The manga centres on several main themes. One of the key elements that feature in most coming-of-age stories is the loneliness of the hero, whose parents are often missing, either busy, working, absent, or even deceased. As a result, the hero may be filled with anger, angst, and yearning for revenge. Yet although he is alone, our hero is also defined by his relations with others, a necessary step on his path towards adulthood. No real hero would ever be presented without any connection with others – friends, foes, or random people he helps along the way. Arion also learns to develop a strong friendship with Seneca (see below) and the people he meets throughout his journey. This bonding and interaction with others are fundamental in the maturity of the hero.⁵⁴ As a functioning member of society, the hero must learn to trust and be trusted. This is of course in contrast with the villains of the story, who are forever lonely and bitter. Only after he completes his own odyssey can the hero find and claim his rightful place in the world, armed with his new powers and self-confidence. As Drummond-Mathews argues, "the manga hero will have grown, matured, and learned something that not only enriches herself but also the world around

⁵³ Flis, "Straddling the Line", 78. See also Kinko Ito, "Images of Women in Weekly Male Comic Magazines in Japan", *Journal of Popular Culture* 27.4 (1994), 81–95; Giancarla Unser-Schutz, "What Text Can Tell Us about Male and Female Characters in Shōjo- and Shōnen-Manga", *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 1.1 (2015), 133–153.

⁵⁴ On the importance of friendships in childhood and adolescence from a psycho-sociologist perspective, see Robert Crosnoe, "Friendships in Childhood and Adolescence: The Life Course and New Directions", *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63.4 (2006), 377–391.

her".⁵⁵ Our hero, Arion, discovers that humans can live fulfilling lives without the control of the gods and Olympus, if only they trust in their own strengths. They are not as weak as Apollo, who belittles them, believes.

Hope in Family

Another theme closely examined in the manga is family relations. Families are not necessarily related by blood ties, as strong friendship can replace such relations. As noted above, Arion's encounters with his surrogate fathers contributed to the shaping of his personality. Hades taught him about deceit, revenge, and power (especially the power to kill). Poseidon did not have much to teach him, but he tested his powers. For a long time Arion is alone, lacking a proper father figure and distanced from his mother, Demeter. The only solace Arion finds is with his two close friends, the young boy Seneca (certainly a strange and perhaps ironic name for a character of a young child in a Greek mythological setting) and a giant monster named Geedo. Arion met Geedo during his training in the Underworld as a child. The giant therefore becomes another father figure for Arion and provides him with comfort and unconditional support. In one of the manga panels, we see a perfect depiction of this closeness, as Arion is cradled in Geedo's arms, like a child, while the menacing image of Zeus looms above them. There is a strong comparison in this picture between the evil father of mankind, Zeus, and the real father figure who may appear to be a monster but is actually kind-hearted and compassionate (as the gods should have been).

Dysfunctional family ties are emphasized in the description of the Titan family. In the original Greek myths, the cycle of killing between father and son repeats itself, from Uranus to Zeus. Yet there is no mention of any psychological scars these actions may have caused. Yasuhiko, however, explores the emotional trauma and deep psychological effects instigated by the cycle of bloodshed. His Zeus is a troubled character who was forced to survive on his own as a child. This is a very different version of Zeus' childhood. He was not looked after by anyone, and as a result he grew up resentful and bitter, incapable of loving anyone, and in the end he murders his own abusive father. Arion, who was loved by Demeter, at least until he was taken away by Hades, is a stronger character, who is capable of caring for others.

⁵⁵ Drummond-Mathews, "What Boys Will Be", 74.

The twisted sense of familial relations within the Titan family is exemplified in a flashback to the past, when young Zeus converses with his then good friend Prometheus about Zeus' family. The king of Olympus claims that they are not a family at all, since all they do is use each other. We almost feel sorry for the mentally broken Zeus who could not escape the curse of his family. Zeus, it seems, was bound to repeat the mistakes and crimes of his father, since he is unable (and perhaps even unwilling) to change. His actions do not bring him any peace of mind or cathartic conclusion; they just make him more crazed and more lonely.

The confrontation between Zeus and Prometheus correlates to their relations in some of the ancient myths, especially those presented in *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. While I do not suggest that the manga follows the Ancient Greek tragedy, it was certainly influenced, to some degree, by the play's characterizations of Zeus and Prometheus, the friends who became bitter foes. In the tragedy, Prometheus is the defender of humans, who is punished by Zeus for assisting them and stealing fire for them. Zeus is described more as a petty god who only cares about himself, while Prometheus protects all of humanity. In other versions of Prometheus' myth – for example, in Hesiod's *Theogony* – Prometheus tries to outwit Zeus and trick him.⁵⁶ In the manga, however, Prometheus is a straightforward and honest leader, a paragon of justice. His moral posture is intensified especially via a comparison with the morally flawed and scheming Zeus. The devious Prometheus from the *Theogony* does not exist in the manga. Yet Zeus' character in the manga is also not one-dimensional. Yasuhiko adds Zeus' own emotional troubles to this comparison between the two, making him more complex. Zeus is not simply the "bad guy", as his characterization goes deeper than that. The message presented is that he could have been a better person had he grown up in a different environment.

The family motif is also rendered via a series of delusions. Throughout the manga, Arion suffers from hallucinations and misconceptions, most of which are caused by the machinations of Hades, as a form of mind control. Thus the manga questions reality, what and who can be trusted, what is true and what is false. This device also echoes difficulties youngsters face while growing up, as adolescence can give rise to doubts, self-questioning, and fear. This is a long process in which the young individual tries to develop their own identity, independent

⁵⁶ On Hesiod's accounts of Prometheus, see E.F. Beall, "Hesiod's Prometheus and Development in Myth", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52.3 (1991), 355–371.

from their parents. Since Arion is unsure of his father, he tries to establish his own personality via his encounters with the other adult characters in the story.

The manga, using its quality as a visual medium, portrays this process as a series of hallucinations that haunt Arion. Obsessed by one such illusion, he mistakenly kills Poseidon. Arion by this act allegedly continues the murderous path of the gods, following in the footsteps of Zeus. However, this is where the gap and contrast between the characters is emphasized, due to the help of the Black Lion – Prometheus, who intervenes in order to save the suffering Arion from falling into the chasm of guilt and torment from which Zeus could not escape. Through the love and support of Prometheus and his friends, Arion is able to come to terms with his actions and make amends. This horrible experience makes him stronger, instead of breaking him, like Zeus, and he is able to face Apollo in the final chapter. This is a strong message in favour of preserving familial relations.

(No) Hope in the Gods

The final motif explored in the story and, fittingly, ending it, is that of the gods and their existence. When people do not believe in them, do the gods carry any meaning? The gods exist as long as people wish for them to exist, but they are busy fighting amongst themselves and care nothing for humanity. As Maurice observes, “for mankind, however, it is with relation to themselves that a divinity has most importance, and it is godly interaction with mortals that is most influential”.⁵⁷ Arion also has the special features of an ancient epic hero in his ability to communicate with the gods. As Maurice notes, “according to the classical tradition, it is generally heroes who have personal contact with the gods”.⁵⁸ Arion is initially believed to be the son of a god (Poseidon), which enables him to assume the heroic status of the ancient age of heroes. Yet in the end, he turns his power against the gods and remains the hero of mankind alone. There is no reconciliation between Arion and the gods (as, for example, in the case of Odysseus). The end of Arion’s quest poses a clear dichotomy: it is either men or gods who can remain in the world.

The gods in the manga *Arion* are the ones who cause chaos and bring pain to the world. Humans suffer as a result of the mighty gods’ inner conflicts and

⁵⁷ Lisa Maurice, *Screening Divinity*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, 148.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 155.

fighting, as they are caught in the middle and only serve as pawns. This is a very thought-provoking observation on human history as well as mythology; the only way for humans to break free from the control of the gods is by actively killing them. Arion is able to kill the gods using a special sword he was given by Hades (who was later killed by this same sword). In a narrative which illuminates the disastrous effect of murder, the killing of the gods, in the end, is shown as the only possible means for achieving liberty. This is a provocative suggestion, and it is difficult to prove that this was Yasuhiko's intention. Yet this notion exists in modern cinematic adaptations of classical myths and, as Maurice notes, it stems "from an underlying belief in the superiority of mankind to these deities".⁵⁹ When humankind feels superior to the gods, it no longer honours them with prayers, and thus the ancient gods grow weaker. However, in *Arion*, the gods certainly exist and are known to all people, yet since they try to harm the humans and since mankind is caught in the gods' internal war, the only salvation for humanity, as mentioned above, is to actively kill the gods – that is, the gods who were left alive after many had killed each other. In the end, Apollo is the one remaining god, after he had killed his siblings, and now his very existence threatens humanity.⁶⁰ In their final confrontation, Arion tells Apollo that he is not a real god since he does not wish to protect the world but rather to destroy it. He confronts Apollo and tells him that the people do not wish to be manipulated by some "god" (the apostrophes are part of the translation). In so stating, Arion belittles the divinity of the gods and their superiority to humans. All humankind wants is to live in peace; the gods, however, disturb this peace.

Arion here displays a belief system resembling more the Judeo-Christian worldview, rather than the ancient one. Polytheistic religion featured various gods, some benevolent, some destructive. Japanese religion, which will not be discussed here, also offers a myriad of divinities with different relations to humankind and the world of men. In the manga, Apollo wishes to usher in a new age and rule by himself, yet humankind has no specific function in his new world, except to worship him. He is eventually killed by the power of Lesfeena, who is a Titan herself (she is Demeter and Poseidon's daughter as well, and apparently she had inherited greater powers than her brother). Yet Lesfeena does not wish divinity, she only exercises her power in defence of Arion and the values for which he stands. The two siblings do not desire to lead humankind; all they wish is to live peacefully with Demeter.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, 193; on deicides in modern cinema, see 193–199.

⁶⁰ The Titans or gods in the manga are liable to death, as Apollo admits. They are not human, but they can also die; this differentiates them from the immortal mythological gods.

A Happy Ending?

The destruction of Olympus is a real and metaphorical *tour de force*. The gods cease to exist and their offspring choose to side with mankind (Arion and Lesfeena) and to lead a new generation. The ending scene portrays the dark collapse of Olympus destroyed by the light of Lesfeena's power. After Olympus falls, the panels are filled with white background and light. The dark rule of the gods has ended. Humans are free to live and die as they wish. Will peace last forever? It is certainly doubtful, yet this time it is up to the humans.

As I have shown, in *Arion*, the mythology is solidly connected with the themes of growing up and its hardships, families, and finding one's identity and inner strength. These issues are amplified via the fantastical setting, since the young hero must fight actual demons and gods in his maturation process. In contrast to the dysfunctional and distorted Titan family, the affectionate relations and friendships between humans (for example, Prometheus and Arion or Arion and his friend Seneca) are accentuated. Furthermore, the warm relationship and strong bond which formed between Arion and Lesfeena (who displays divine powers in contrast to her brother) proves that a peaceful coexistence between humans and gods is possible and benefits both sides, thereby offering hope to the protagonists, or rather – to the readers.

ET IN (DISNEY) ARCADIA EGO: IN SEARCH OF HOPE IN THE 1940 FANTASIA*

Most Disney animations are primarily associated with the mastery of image and sound, their mass popularity, uplifting message, and a timeless, universal storyline. However, from a moralistic point of view, early Disney films raise many questions, as their popularity endures to this day. One of the most prominent examples concerns racism and the lack of diversity, and this has been addressed by Disney in the company's recent statement that accompanied the release of certain controversial animations (for example, *Dumbo* and *The Aristocats*) to Disney+,¹ the studio's increasingly popular streaming platform. This statement includes "Examples of Content Receiving Advisories", in support of Disney's new inclusiveness and diversity strategy. Nonetheless, the success of this "safety net" is in doubt, as the responsibility of explaining to children the inappropriate content is still in the hands of parents, not the studio. Therefore, in my analysis, I address foremost the issues of exclusion and racism in *Fantasia* (dir. James Algar et al., 1940),² specifically in the episode entitled "The Pastoral Symphony", setting it in the context of the war that took place in both the animated fantasy and the harsh reality surrounding its audience. I do this with the help of classical mythology, revealing the hidden meanings of Disney's story.

Although World War Two, or even war in general, is not central to my reflections, the presence of this issue is vital in the context of the analysis. War,

* A draft version of this analysis was presented at the *Our Mythical Hope* conference in 2017 organized within the *Our Mythical Childhood* project at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw. Later on, it became a part of my doctoral thesis. The version I am presenting here is edited and updated.

¹ The official statement can be found at "Stories Matter", Walt Disney, <https://storiesmatter.thewaltdisneycompany.com/> (accessed 3 February 2021).

² James Algar, Samuel Armstrong, Ford I. Beebe, Norman Ferguson, Jim Handley, T. Hee, Wilfred Jackson, Hamilton Luske, Bill Roberts, Paul Satterfield, and Ben Sharpsteen, *Fantasia*, USA: Walt Disney Productions, 1940.

even if historically unspecific, is an essential mechanism in the context of exclusion. It would seem that it even makes it more authentic since it is based on a paradigm of aggression and the weaker party's suppression. This concept is key in the context of *Fantasia*, as in 1940 World War Two was like a shadow looming over the United States of America. Although most US citizens initially wished to maintain neutrality towards what was unfolding in Europe and Russia, tension and suppressed fear seized the whole of society. Though there was no actual military activity on the part of the United States during the late 1930s, the Pearl Harbor attack of 1941 shook the nation³ and made Americans realize that this war indeed encompassed the whole world.

The war generated fear even before it started for Americans. The telltale worrisome atmosphere can be sensed in many products of culture from that time.⁴ Once the United States had entered the war, cultural texts became a propaganda tool and part of the pro-war policies that often took the form of animated films (for example, *Spinach Fer Britain*, dir. Izzy Sparber, 1943, and the *Private Snafu* series, dir. Chuck Jones et al., 1943–1946).⁵ Though the production of such short animations engaged nearly the whole of Hollywood, Walt Disney's movies were undoubtedly among the most popular and influential (if only to mention Donald Duck fighting the Nazis in *Der Fuehrer's Face*, which won the Oscar for Best Short Subject).⁶ Walt Disney Productions made a very successful series of shorts for the Office of Inter-American Affairs (along with those of the Warner Brothers)⁷ and "created [its] own models for social action".⁸

Nevertheless, behind Disney's propaganda agenda was also the need to show the studio's artistic skills and prove its worth in the field of animation,

³ It was also the ultimate reason for the United States to join the war. Cf. Michał Mróz, "Amerykański film animowany w wojennej potrzebie" [American Animated Film in the Need of War], *Kwartalnik filmowy* [Film Quarterly] 93–94 (2016), 53.

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Izzy Sparber, dir., *Spinach Fer Britain*, USA: Famous Studios, 1943; Chuck Jones, Friz Freleng, Bob Clampett, Frank Tashlin, Zack Schwartz, and George Gordon, dirs., *Private Snafu*, USA: Warner Bros. Cartoons, 1943–1946. See Tracey Loise Mollet, *Cartoons in Hard Times: The Animated Shorts of Disney and Warner Brothers in Depression and War 1932–1945*, New York, NY, and London: Bloomsbury, 2017, 6.

⁶ Jack Kinney, dir., *Der Fuehrer's Face*, USA: Walt Disney Productions, 1943. See Michael S. Shull and David E. Wilt, *Doing Their Bit: Wartime American Animated Short Films, 1939–1945*, 2nd ed., Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland, 2004, 139.

⁷ Mollet, *Cartoons in Hard Times*, 1.

⁸ According to Mollet (ibidem) those models were developed "through the use of animated characters".

both before and during World War Two. As Robert Haas, who at the time of writing his article (1995) served on the Board of the International Association for the Fantastic in the Arts, acknowledges:

Unhampered by the restrictions of early sound-filming procedures that often required actors to assume unnatural positions and cameras to remain stationary behind soundproof glass, Disney combined sound and image in an expressive manner impossible for live-action narrative cinema. Because Disney could fit visual action to dialogue and music, achieving perfect frame-by-frame synchronization, the product was immensely appealing to audiences of the late 1920s and early 1930s.⁹

The innovative approach to animation in this political ambience turned out to be a good business strategy for Disney's company. As Tracey Mollet points out, "[a]nimation utilized the same symbols and motifs present in Hollywood films of the 1930s and 1940s to comment upon the ideology and policies of Roosevelt's government"¹⁰ – and Disney was not an exception. However, before Nazi soldiers came to Donald Duck's dream, one of the other concerns for the company was – quite obviously – money.¹¹ After the success of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, the first full-length animation, in 1937 (dir. David Hand et al.),¹² Walt Disney knew that in order to keep the company running, he had to produce something special. He attempted to provide the audience with a unique experience for both children and adults by combining two types of art: classical music and animation, so-called high and low culture¹³ – which today is considered an artificial distinction. Although he was not a great specialist in either of those arts, he sought new solutions.¹⁴ As a result, in 1940 Walt Disney Productions released an experiment: a project he called *Fantasia*, consisting of seven animated episodes with a "soundtrack" by classical composers (Johann Sebastian Bach, Pyotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky, Paul Dukas, Igor Stravinsky, Ludwig

⁹ Robert Haas, "Disney Does Dutch: *Billy Bathgate* and the Disneyfication of the Gangster Genre", in Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, and Laura Sells, eds., *From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture*, Bloomington and Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995, 75.

¹⁰ Mollet, *Cartoons in Hard Times*, 6.

¹¹ Gerard C. Raiti, "The Disappearance of Disney Animated Propaganda: A Globalization Perspective", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 2.2 (2007), 157.

¹² David Hand, Perce Pearce, Larry Morey, William Cottrell, Wilfred Jackson, and Ben Sharpsteen, dirs., *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, USA: Walt Disney Productions, 1937.

¹³ Steven Watts, *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life*, Columbia, MO, and London: University of Missouri Press, 1997, 87–88.

¹⁴ Raiti, "The Disappearance of Disney Animated Propaganda", 157.

van Beethoven, Amilcare Ponchielli, and Modest Mussorgsky). According to Dave Smith, this movie is “one of the most highly regarded of the Disney classics”,¹⁵ and, as Kheli R. Willetts claims, “by today’s standards [it] would also be considered a concert film”.¹⁶ Given these claims, it can be concluded that Walt Disney succeeded as intended.

Although *Fantasia* was born at the threshold of the propaganda era of Hollywood animation, it “offered no clear embrace of social egalitarianism or gallery of populist protagonists like the other Disney features”.¹⁷ This does not mean that the war was not to be found within its structures. The opening of *Fantasia*, a dark prelude (Bach’s Toccata and Fugue in D minor) with alarming and sudden changes of colours, may well be associated with the times’ troublesome tension. This tension accompanies the whole animation in many ambiguous moments,¹⁸ ones full of hidden meanings and disturbing depictions. I believe that *Fantasia* is, in fact, a war film, though different from those traditionally perceived as such. The following paragraphs attempt to show why.

Although not all of the episodes within *Fantasia* were created in the same convention, and thus they cannot be analysed with the use of the same methodology, the general idea remains unchanged: telling the story with music and visuals will make things more entertaining – even if the stories themselves are not exactly merry ones. War can be read in almost every episode of the film, whether in a literal or symbolic way. One part of *Fantasia* in particular uses the concept of war to present the broader theme of violence then entering the world of American animation. I mean “The Pastoral Symphony”, whose ancient motifs, reinterpreted by Walt Disney, with Beethoven’s music, I attempt to analyse here. For in this piece the mythical Arcadia – only seemingly a place of peace and prosperity – transforms into a battlefield where Disney’s idyllic vision of paradise clashes with the idea of a well-functioning society freed of patriarchy and racism.

¹⁵ Dave Smith, “Fantasia”, in Dave Smith, ed., *Disney A to Z: The Official Encyclopedia*, 4th ed., Glendale, CA: Disney Books, 2015, 252.

¹⁶ Kheli R. Willetts, “Cannibals and Coons: Blackness in the Early Days of Walt Disney”, in Johnson Cheu, ed., *Diversity in Disney Films: Critical Essays on Race, Ethnicity, Gender, Sexuality and Disability*, Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013, 17.

¹⁷ Watts, *The Magic Kingdom*, 87.

¹⁸ One of the examples might be the dark fight between the dinosaurs (leading to the death of one of them) in the interpretation of Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*.

Mythological-Disney Hybrids: Introducing Colourful Centaurettes

"The Pastoral Symphony" opens with the depiction of the idyllic Mount Olympus. The episode portrays a mythical universe supported by Disney aesthetics. In the first scene, child-like satyrs playing the flute and frolicking unicorns welcome the viewers to the pastel-coloured world of easiness and bliss, not yet disturbed by any manifestation of evil or danger. Over this unruly group custody is exercised by the Pegasus-parents that differ from the colourful children. The female is white, the male is black. This colour-based relationship can be interpreted as a yin-yang symbol of complementary but opposite forces. The Pegasi seem to represent the mature and perfect life that also potentially exists in colourful and playful child-like foals.

The next scene draws attention to a distinctive event that takes place nearby the Pegasus family setting. In the bushes, we meet creatures rarely encountered in popular culture: centaurettes – half-women, half-horses.¹⁹ There is a limited number of classical sources that mention female centaurs. One of them is *Imagines* (2.3) by Philostratus the Elder, who writes:

How beautiful the female centaurs are, even where they are horses; for some grow out of white mares, others are attached to chestnut mares, and the coats of others are dapples, but they glisten like those of horses that are well cared of. There is also a white female centaur that grows out of the black mare, and the very opposition of the colours helps to produce the united beauty of the whole.²⁰

The description of a white centauride growing out of the black mare and the importance of the colours' contrast highlighted by Philostratus could be considered the inspiration for creating black and white Pegasi for the episode's opening. The next source would be Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, where he describes the partner of the centaur Cyllarus, named Hylonome:

¹⁹ The name "centaurettes" alludes to the burlesque tradition; see Robin Allan, "European Influences on Early Disney Feature Films", in Jayne Pilling, ed., *A Reader in Animation Studies*, London and Paris: John Libbey, 1997, 255. However, "centaurettes" remain in strong relation to the "centaurides" described by classic writers.

²⁰ Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*; Philostratus the Younger, *Imagines*; Callistratus, *Descriptions*, trans. Arthur Fairbanks, "Loeb Classical Library" 256, Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, 1979, 139–141.

Many a female of his kind
loved him, but only Hylonome gained
his love. There was no other centaur maid
so beautiful as she within the woods.
By coaxing ways she had won Cyllarus,
by loving and confessing love. By daintiness,
so far as that was possible in one
of such a form, she held his love; for now
she smoothed her long locks with a comb; and now
she decked herself with rosemary and now
with violets or with roses in her hair;
and sometimes she wore lilies, white as snow;
and twice each day she bathed her lovely face,
in the sweet stream that falls down from the height
of wooded Pagasa; and daily, twice
she dipped her body in the stream. She wore
upon her shoulders and left side a skin,
greatly becoming, of selected worth.
Their love was equal, and together they
would wander over mountain-sides, and rest
together in cool caves; and so it was,
they went together to that palace-cave,
known to the Lapithae. Together they
fought fiercely in this battle, side by side.
Thrown by an unknown hand, a javelin pierced
Cyllarus, just below the fatal spot
where the chest rises to the neck – his heart,
though only slightly wounded, grew quite cold,
and his whole body felt cold, afterwards,
as quickly as the weapon was drawn out.
Then Hylonome held in her embrace
the dying body; fondled the dread wound
and, fixing her lips closely to his lips
endeavored to hold back his dying breath.
But soon she saw that he indeed was dead.
With mourning words, which clamor of the fight
prevented me from hearing, she threw herself
on the spear that pierced her Cyllarus and fell
upon his breast, embracing him in death.²¹

²¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, Book 12, lines 390–428, trans. Brookes More, Boston, MA: Cornhill Publishing Co., 1922, available at Perseus Digital Library, <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/>



Figure 1: Piero di Cosimo, *The Fight between the Lapiths and the Centaurs* (ca. 1500–1515), National Gallery in London, inv. no. NG4890, photograph by Sailko, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

The love between the centaurs and centaurides presented in the *Metamorphoses* serves as a contrast to the descriptions of vicious and brutal centaurs that rarely reappear in popular culture (most such characters are based on the idea of calm and wise centaurs, like Chiron).²² The vulnerability of centaurs was depicted in earlier epochs – for example, in Piero di Cosimo’s Renaissance painting *The Fight between the Lapiths and the Centaurs* (see Fig. 1). In the foreground, we see a couple of centaurs: a female embracing her dying lover. The battle in the background contrasts with the depiction of mythical lovers (see Fig. 2). It appears the centauride softens the “traditional bad reputation” of male centaurs (of being drunk and brutal monsters known from mythology, which is, however, different from Ovid’s version, where Hylonome and Cyllarus are equally noble); her gentleness and beauty complete and maybe even suppress the aggressive nature of her spouse. This mythical relationship reflects their idealistic love befitting the Arcadian universe, something also to be found in “The Pastoral Symphony”.

text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0028%3Abook%3D12%3Acard%3D316 (accessed 17 April 2020).

²² Such examples would be the centaurs from C.S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950–1956), Brandon Mull’s *Fableheaven* series (2006–2010), or Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* (2005–2009). “Wild” centaurs appear, e.g., in the *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007) by J.K. Rowling, where some characters perceive them as untameable beasts. More on that: Anna Mik, “Magizoology: The Magical Creatures Studies J.K. Rowling’s Postulates on Animals in ‘Fantastic Beasts and Where to Find Them’ on Examples from Graeco-Roman Mythology”, *Magazyn antropologiczno-społeczno-kulturowy Maska* [Maska: Anthropological-Sociocultural Magazine] 33 (2017), 21–33. See also Lisa Maurice, “From Chiron to Foaly: The Centaur in Classical Mythology and Children’s Literature”, in Lisa Maurice ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children’s Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, “Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity” 6, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015, 139–168.



Figure 2: Hylonome lovingly embracing Cyllarus and disregarding the battle. Fragment of Piero di Cosimo, *The Fight between the Lapiths and the Centaurs* (ca. 1500–1515), National Gallery in London, inv. no. NG4890, photograph by Sailko, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

The centaurettes from *Fantasia* appear to be rather shy and hard to spot. Nonetheless, I perceive their presence in the film as unique and very meaningful. The first centaurette emerges from the stream, where her companions (for

now showing only their upper, human part) are enjoying a bath. Her appearance might be a way of highlighting the symbolic connection between womanhood and water, from which the centaurettes would draw their power. All of them are beautiful and graceful. They also have different skin colours (most of them pastel-like green, blue, orange, etc.), although their brightness strongly suggests an association with the white skin of human women. They are relatively relaxed, as they have been taken care of by cupids who comb their hair and dress them in flowers. What might be perceived as disturbing, considering animal rights and animal studies, the cupids also place live doves in the centaurettes' hair, thus normalizing the use of animals for purely aesthetic purposes. Nevertheless, this idyllic picture might be called a "mythical spa", where centaurettes can relax, do make-up, and prepare their bodies for dates with centaurs.

As soon as one of them announces the whole group's arrival, the centaurettes seem to be ready for what was described by Ovid: equal (matching) love and peaceful rest in "cool caves" (*Met.* 12.408–410). The centaurs are handsome, well built, with bright differing skin colours corresponding to those of the females. The centaurettes present themselves to the centaurs in the form of a fashion show: they put themselves on display, demonstrating their best features. Their depictions correspond to women's social status at that time, being perfect housewives, and the decoration of an American home. Ultimately, the centaurs pair up with the centaurettes based on colours (so yellow with yellow, red with red, etc.), which on the one hand highlights the realization of an idealistic love (similarly to the earlier mentioned Pegasi couple), and, on the other, defines their relationships as those implemented in a racist manner.²³

As soon as all the centaurs are paired up, they move on to various date-like activities; couples spend time together eating fruit straight from the tree, enjoying a swing, hugging, and generally delighting in each other's company. However, not all the centaurettes have found their other half; some of them would not even be acknowledged as needing or deserving such a happy ending. And their colours are blue and black.

²³ The cases of the centaurs and centaurettes and the Pegasi are separate in terms of possible racist implications.

Melancholy Centaurette: Trouble in Paradise

After a few scenes presenting the happy couples, the story changes – from an idyllic to a sorrowful tale, as Arcadian “war” seems imminent. It enters the world of the mythical Olympus easily, but slowly, marked by the colour blue. After the rest of the centaurettes and centaurs have paired up, a blue centaur and blue centaurette are introduced to the story.²⁴ They did not find love as had the rest of the group, but are lost in the forest, looking for one another. Their colours are not coincidental: blue is very often associated with sadness and deep melancholia.²⁵ Also, the animation’s background reflects their emotional state: water, trees, and flowers are dominated by cold and dark colours: blue, green, purple, etc. This depiction corresponds to the gothic and Romantic tradition where surroundings reflected the emotional state of the character. Here they echo general sadness, as both centaurs, male and female, have been deprived of the social role they were predestined to fulfil – as groom and bride. Without this fulfilment, they feel depressed and lost. The question that might be raised here is whether they feel like that because they did not find a partner or because they have nothing else to search for?

In “The Pastoral Symphony”, the violence is not self-evident: “war” is not introduced instantaneously, as if it awaited the right moment. The tension visible in the Disney film was not exclusive to American society and Hollywood animations. Fear or anxiety accompanying difficult times in the world’s history is, of course, a universal and certainly a prominent part of any war. I believe that an example expressing such fears would be *Melancholy Woman* by Pablo Picasso from 1902. In this painting, we encounter the inscrutable state of a female who can be compared to the blue centaurette from *Fantasia*. The painting comes from the blue period of Picasso’s artistic activity, where he used mostly cold colours (blue, green), and his subjects were typically prostitutes, beggars, and drunks, so those living on the edge of society, not only then, but also today. It was also the time when Picasso suffered from depression, which is again strongly connected to his choice of colour. The blue centaurette from “The Pastoral Symphony” seems to share the emotions inscribed in Picasso’s painting: even her figure, posture, and downward gaze seem similar to the *Melancholy Woman*,

²⁴ Another possible interpretation would be a comparative study of “The Pastoral Symphony” and “The Princess Carpillon” by Madame d’Aulnoy.

²⁵ John Gage, *Color and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999, 192.

whose real story is uncertain.²⁶ Those two works were created in not so distant periods and mirror each other, bringing new meanings to melancholy discourse.

Ultimately, the blue centaurs pair up, as it was seemingly impossible at the time to introduce other scenarios than a heterosexual romance.²⁷ Luckily for them, with the cupids' help, the centaurs find each other and immediately consume their relationship behind the floral curtains (this is the most explicit suggestion of sex in the whole episode). The "happy ending" strongly contrasts with the "melancholic scene" from before, where the blue centaurs represent "the misery of a single life", suggesting that the institution of marriage is the only way to achieve happiness. It seems like mostly the blue centaurette came to this conclusion. What is more, she might have also realized that no other possibilities than marriage are provided for her. She has found her "happy ending" – even if it is only a mythical fantasy.

Disney's Sins: Black Centaurettes and the Great Absence

After all the centaurettes have met their destiny and ended up together with their loves, the real celebration can finally begin. It is hard to determine whether the feast is set to celebrate the centaurs' happy endings, or – another way around – for the Olympian gods to celebrate themselves. The centaurs gather grapes and prepare wine for Bacchus, who enters drunk on a donkey named Jacchus with a horn (imitating a unicorn), accompanied by two centaurettes: black-skinned with a zebra corpus. The "zebra" part of the centaurettes' bodies underlines the racial differences, as the others have plain, horse-like bodies. The black centaurettes pour him wine and fan the god, as slaves would. Everyone dances and has fun, but the black centaurettes do not join the party. In this scene, the characters represent the hierarchal order of black woman serving the obese white man, "a lovable clown prone to excess".²⁸

²⁶ She could have been Picasso's dead friend's mistress, who he himself felt attracted to; see Pablo Picasso, *Melancholy Woman*, 1000 Museum: Focus on Pablo Picasso, <https://focuson-picasso.com/product/melancholy-woman/> (accessed 17 April 2020); and Pablo Picasso, *Melancholy Woman*, Detroit Institute of Arts, <https://www.dia.org/art/collection/object/melancholy-woman-57081> (accessed 17 April 2020).

²⁷ Although that has recently changed in productions like *Frozen* (dirs. Jennifer Lee and Chris Buck, USA: Walt Disney Pictures and Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2013) or *Moana* (dirs. Ron Clements and John Musker, USA: Walt Disney Pictures and Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2016).

²⁸ Mark Clague, "Playing in 'Toon: Walt Disney's *Fantasia* (1940) and the Imagineering of Classical Music", *American Music* 22.1 (2004), 103.

One of the cartoon's traits, typical of that time, is that characters and events are presented in a comic, stereotypical way.²⁹ However, there is a certain kind of ethical responsibility for what topics and figures can be exploited, particularly if we consider animation to be a form of parody. As I believe, depicting Bacchus as a fat white man is not offensive to white men in the same way as presenting the black centaurettes as slaves: white men have always been privileged and still are at the peak of the social hierarchy. Choosing to present black women as servants of a god who represents white man's social status is unethical, considering the history of the slavery of black people, brutally exploited by colonial powers. In the 1940s, depictions of blacks serving white people were not perceived as offensive (that did not change until a couple decades later). Comedy as a convention in the two cases – depictions of a white man and black women – should not be treated as symmetrical, considering the political, social, and cultural backgrounds of those ethnic groups.

There is one more character to be mentioned regarding racist depictions in *Fantasia*. Due to the criticism received by Disney's studio in later years,³⁰ the company had to eventually cut offensive scenes from the "Pastoral Symphony" episode in 1969. The main character in the cut-out piece was Sunflower. Her name not only underlines the species difference between her and the rest of the centaurettes, wearing roses and daisies, etc. As Willetts states, it also implies a hierarchical difference, as sunflowers were once also referred to as "Nigger-heads",³¹ an offensive and debasing name for any object having a "black face".³² Black-skinned, with a stereotypically drawn face and rings in her ears (and with the lower part of her body resembling a "black donkey"),³³ Sunflower (according to Willetts, sometimes referred to as the "picaninny" centaurette³⁴) appears in this segment as the "white" centaurettes' slave or servant. While the beautiful and graceful ladies are flirting with the arriving centaurs, Sunflower puts flowers in their tails and carries the floral veil after clueless or maybe cruel "brides" who do not seem to notice her. Later, Otika (a twin black centaurette) rolls out a red

²⁹ Cf. the entry "Cartoon" in the online dictionary Lexico, <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/cartoon> (accessed 17 April 2020).

³⁰ Cf. Maureen Furniss, *Art in Motion, Revised Edition: Animation Aesthetics*, New Barnet and Herts: John Libbey Publishing, 2014, 120.

³¹ Willetts, "Cannibals and Coons", 17; cf. Salvador Jimenez Murguía, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Racism in American Film*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 181.

³² Frederic G. Cassidy, *Dictionary of American Regional English*, Cambridge, MA, and London: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996, 794–796.

³³ Willetts, "Cannibals and Coons", 17.

³⁴ Clague, "Playing in 'Toon", 100.

carpet before Bacchus when he arrives. In the next part, a centaurette – along with the donkey Jacchus, connected to her by its Latin taxonomic name, *Equus africanus asinus*³⁵ – helps drunk Bacchus get to his throne. According to Mark Clague, an American musicologist:

The key to the humor of this sequence is the interaction between Bacchus and his donkey-unicorn or “mulicorn” sidekick, Jacchus. The name Jacchus, an echo of the words Bacchus and “jackass,” refers both to the literal character – that is, a male donkey – as well as its comical behaviors. The small stature and exaggerated features [...] of Jacchus mark him as another minstrel character derived from nineteenth-century conventions of the buffoon Jim Crow.³⁶

The black centaurettes and Jacchus serve as symbolic figures representing the power system in both the mythological and US world. The white man is at the centre, the domain of the highest authority. The black woman (as we can read Sunflower/Otika) preparing his place on the throne is a servant that tries to show him the “right” way of getting to his “management” spot. The horned donkey that seems not to care about an animal slave’s role pushes Bacchus in a patriarchal tandem with Sunflower. This layout reflects the way of perceiving women (in this case, especially Afro-American women) and animals (culturally assigned as a working animal – donkey) by the contemporary American society and the creators of *Fantasia*.

As far as racist depiction goes, this animation was of course not an exception – to mention only *Dumbo* (dir. Ben Sharpsteen, 1941) and *Song of the South* (dirs. Harve Foster and Wilfred Jackson, 1946),³⁷ and these are just Disney examples. It was the era of “black-face” cinematography; white actors painting their faces black and making fun of Afro-Americans was very popular (*Swing Time*, dir. George Stevens, 1936; *Everybody Sing*, dir. Edwin L. Marin,

³⁵ Willetts, “Cannibals and Coons”, 17.

³⁶ Clague, “Playing in ‘Toon”, 103.

³⁷ Ben Sharpsteen, dir., *Dumbo*, USA: Walt Disney Productions, 1941; Harve Foster and Wilfred Jackson, dirs., *Song of the South*, USA: Walt Disney Productions, 1946. In *Dumbo* we encounter several controversial scenes, among others the “Song of the Roustabouts”, sung by faceless black workers (it includes the line “Grab that rope, you hairy ape”). The film also features black crows (including Jim Crow), animal characters representing black people. *Song of the South*, which portrays the life of Afro-Americans during the post-slavery period (after the Civil War), gave rise to multiple controversies due to its stereotypical depictions of black people.

1938).³⁸ Usually, racist animation was not perceived as such at that time and was very common.³⁹ Richard M. Breaux, a specialist in ethnic and racial studies, claims:

Critics of Disney films have pointed to the company's and the animation industries' long history of presenting non-whites as racial stereotypes and women of all colors as helpless, sexual objects. The disfiguring images of African, Latino, Asian, and Native Americans (ALANAs) are harmful in that they influence how both people who are racial insiders and outsiders perceive, relate to, and come to understand themselves, these groups, and individuals who personally identify as such.⁴⁰

It would seem that this was no longer an issue in the 1990s, but the problem of racism in Disney movies persisted long after the production of *Fantasia*. As Breaux points out, Jasmine (from *Aladdin*, dirs. Ron Clements and John Musker, 1992),⁴¹ even if registered as the first non-white Disney princess, "was voiced by a non-middle-eastern actress, Linda Larkin".⁴² Although Disney attempted to redeem itself by introducing the first "black princess" in *The Princess and the Frog* (dirs. John Musker and Ron Clements, 2009),⁴³ it still has a long way to "make up" for the years of excluding proper portrayals of minorities from its productions.⁴⁴

* * *

As Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock state in their work *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence* (2010): "Disney has shown enormous inventiveness in its attempts to reconstruct the grounds on which popular culture

³⁸ George Stevens, dir., *Swing Time*, USA: RKO Radio Pictures, 1936; Edwin L. Marin, dir., *Everybody Sing*, USA: Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 1938.

³⁹ Examples include (to name a few): *Making Stars* (dir. Dave Fleischer, USA: Fleischer Studios, 1935); *Scrub Me Mama with a Boogie Beat* (dir. Walter Lantz, USA: Walter Lantz Productions, 1941); *Southern Fried Rabbit* (dir. I. Freleng, USA: Warner Bros. Pictures, 1953).

⁴⁰ Richard M. Breaux, "After 75 Years of Magic: Disney Answers Its Critics, Rewrites African American History, and Cashes In on Its Racist Past", *Journal of African American Studies* 14.4 (2010), 399.

⁴¹ Ron Clements and John Musker, dirs., *Aladdin*, USA: Walt Disney Pictures and Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1992.

⁴² Breux, "After 75 Years of Magic", 400. Disney has changed this in the 2019 remake, a live-action film featuring non-white actors.

⁴³ Ron Clements and John Musker, dirs., *The Princess and the Frog*, USA: Walt Disney Pictures and Walt Disney Animation Studios, 2009.

⁴⁴ Although there have been rather successful attempts of this sort, like the remake of *The Lion King* from 2019, directed by Jon Favreau (USA: Walt Disney Pictures and Fairview Entertainment).

is defined and shaped".⁴⁵ They also highlight the fact that "by defining popular culture as a hybridized sphere that combines diverse genres and styles and often collapses the boundary between high and low culture, Disney has challenged conventional ideas of aesthetic form and cultural legitimacy".⁴⁶ They continue their comment on Disney with an appreciation:

By combining high and low culture in the animated film, Disney opened up new cultural possibilities for artists and audiences alike. Moreover, as sites of entertainment, Disney's films succeed because they put both children and adults in touch with joy and adventure. They provide opportunities to experience pleasure, even when such pleasure must be purchased.⁴⁷

Artistically, *Fantasia* is considered a masterpiece and is admired by many to this day. Its content, however, is viewed as controversial. In my opinion, the animation very clearly shows the social tensions associated with real war that permeated mass culture at the time. These tensions are also linked to other themes; nevertheless, the context of the animation seems crucial to its reading. Stereotypical and racist depictions of the centaurettes, corresponding to the status of women at that time, are intertwined with the tension of a war within the Disney universe between the male gods. The melancholy of the single centaurette and the horror of slavery accompanying Sunflower and Otika may be perceived from the contemporary perspective as manifestations of violence in a symbolic yet powerful way. This reveals a different kind of war than the international conflict of that time. That is, the war against patriarchy and white domination that had started relatively recently.

I believe that hope for all mythical creatures is not yet lost. As we see at the end of the "Pastoral Symphony" episode, during the storm induced by Zeus – who apparently just for amusement puts the lives of all those characters that we have just met to danger – mythical creatures, women and animals, work together, help each other, and cooperate – to win the war with the powerful god. In this scenario, Zeus might stand for the real war that awaited the United States at the time, the war that can be found in each episode of *Fantasia*. The god might also symbolize white male domination over less-privileged creatures, which are at his mercy. "The Pastoral Symphony" allows for multiple

⁴⁵ Henry A. Giroux and Grace Pollock, *The Mouse That Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, 100.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 100–101.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, 101.

interpretations, undoubtedly many to be yet unravelled. I claim that we are dealing with a different subgenre of the war film, and that its mythical quality enables us to see more than fire and death. It also enables us to see hope.

Indeed, right after the storm, little cupids and the Pegasi, aka children and animals, slide off a rainbow – a symbol of hope, where blue is only one of the colours. Hope that the future generations, maybe by watching *Fantasia*, will learn that the great diversity of our mythical world should be celebrated, not fought.

BETWEEN HOPE AND DESTINY IN THE YOUNG ADULT TELEVISION SERIES ONCE UPON A TIME, SEASON 5, EPISODES 12–21 (2016)

The potentially conflictual relationship between hope and destiny is one of the more appealing and ubiquitous themes in the notoriously optimistic audiovisual serial narrative fiction for young adults, whether mythological or not. The characters hope to succeed and get through each episode safe and sound, as unlikely as it often seems, because they must survive to face new adventures in the continuing story. When the narrative is inspired by classical mythology, where human attempts to circumvent dire prophecies as a rule end in failure, it takes on a particular meaning. Mythological prophecies famously lack clarity and precision, which makes the business of counteracting them confusing, and, probably for that very reason, doomed to failure. Still, a responsible Greek mythological figure would always seek counsel from an oracle before embarking on a critical mission or when faced with a severe dilemma, each time being aware that the answer may be ambiguous.

“Serialized” Mythology

Prophecies (and hope that they can be cheated or at least turned to the advantage of mortals) play a significant role in the five large mythological, or mythology-inspired, shows¹ offered to English-speaking television audiences during the second decade of the twenty-first century – for example, the prophecies about Jason in *Atlantis* (2013–2015), about Bo in *Lost Girl* (season 5,

¹ Depending on the scope of the definition of this concept, various less obvious inspirations may be found in many other productions. In this chapter, inspiration is understood in the narrow sense of significant borrowing, appropriation, or revision, not just as an allusion.

2014–2015), about Emma the Saviour, daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming, in *Once Upon a Time* (hereinafter *OUAT*; season 5, 2016), about Hero in *Olympus* (2015), and about quite a few people in *Troy: Fall of a City* (2018).² *Atlantis* and *Olympus* belong to the genre of mythological fantasy, while *Troy: Fall of a City* is an adaptation of Homer's *Iliad* with an added prequel. *Lost Girl* and *OUAT* are both set against the background of contemporary America. The former presents the world of myth and magic as coexisting in time and space with the real world, and the latter reveals an alternative magic realm that occasionally connects with today's world but is framed by its own time and space. They both include Greek mythological themes, in particular, the Underworld, and an occasional god or hero.

All five shows were produced in the English-speaking world: *Atlantis* by BBC One and BBC America and *Troy: Fall of a City* by the BBC and Netflix; *Lost Girl* is a Canadian series, *Olympus* is British Canadian, *OUAT* – American (ABC). Through international licensing, digital and cable distribution, all five acquired multilanguage subtitles and became fully accessible to non-English-speaking audiences.

In the world of television series, where marketing considerations inform programming decisions, the creators tailor their productions to specific audiences. A mythological fantasy series – depending on its complexity and mood – targets primarily children, their parents, young adults, and those for whom, regardless of age, such themes hold a strong appeal. It seems a logical starting point to try to gauge to what degree the audiences must have already been familiar with the mythological spectrum the show draws upon, and what kind of background knowledge the creators might have reasonably expected.³ Reviewing productions of the last decade of the twentieth century and up to the second decade of the twenty-first, it becomes evident that most were available on DVD to the cross-generational audiences of the series. It would be reasonable to assume

² *Atlantis*, dir. and written by Justin Molotnikov et al., created by Johnny Capps, Julian Murphy, and Howard Overman, UK: Urban Myth Films, BBC Cymru Wales, and BBC America, 2013–2015; *Lost Girl*, dir. Steve DiMarco et al., created and written by Michelle Lovretta et al., Canada: Prodigy Pictures and Shaw Media, 2010–2016; *Once Upon a Time*, created by Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz, dir. and written by Ralph Hemecker et al., USA: ABC Broadcasting Company, 2011–2018; *Olympus*, created by Nick Willing, dir. and written by Amanda Tapping, Martin Wood, and Andy Mikita, Canada: Reunion Pictures, Great Point Media, and LipSync Productions, 2015; *Troy: Fall of a City*, dirs. Mark Brozell, Owen Harris, and John Strickland, created by David Farr and Nancy Harris, written by David Farr, Joe Barton, Nancy Harris, and Mika Watkins, UK and USA: Kudos for BBC and Netflix, 2018.

³ How aware of classical mythology are the creators themselves is, of course, the other side of the coin.

that this ease of access translates into a meaningful degree of familiarity with the main characters and related myths. While Greek mythology is a vibrant and influential source of stories, heroes, and themes, the best-known ones are those referencing a few dominant figures, significant stars shining on the firmament of the reception of Antiquity, easily recognizable even by young and quite unsophisticated audiences.

Hercules, the One and Only

The mythical character probably the most often featured in film and television since the beginnings of audiovisual media is Hercules.⁴ The darling of television series, he attracts audiences of all ages, but particularly children and young people, for the obvious reasons of his unusual, already heroic childhood, his upbringing and training, and universal values of facing adversity and duplicity with honour and bravery, in the manner of superheroes.

The young audiences of 2010–2018 are quite aware of the Herculean mania of the 1990s, heard about it from their parents, watched reruns on television as well as online, and possibly own some of the productions on DVD. This craze began in earnest in 1994 with a series of five television movies with Kevin Sorbo in the title role: *Hercules and the Amazon Women*, *Hercules and the Lost Kingdom*, *Hercules and the Circle of Fire*, *Hercules in the Underworld*, *Hercules*

⁴ Gideon Nisbet, *Ancient Greece in Film and Popular Culture*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2008 (ed. pr. 2006), 45–66, discusses the diverse incarnations of Hercules and calls his success in popular culture similar to the popularity of Alexander the Great as a favourite Ancient Greek historical figure. See also the most complete (up to 2013) repertory of films and television series featuring Hercules, compiled and discussed by Hervé Dumont, *L'Antiquité au cinéma. Vérités, légendes et manipulations*, pref. by Jean Tulard, Paris and Lausanne: Nouveau Monde Editions and Cinémathèque suisse, 2013, 127–128, 164–174, www.hervedumont.ch/L_ANTIQUITE_AU_CINEMA/files/assets/basic-html/index.html (accessed 24 April 2020). On the resemblance between Hercules and Jesus and the resulting intellectual discomfort, see Meredith E. Safran, "Re-Conceiving Hercules: Divine Paternity and Christian Anxiety in *Hercules* (2005)", in Monica S. Cyrino and Meredith E. Safran, eds., *Classical Myth on Screen*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 133–145. See also a whole section on Hercules in Antony Augoustakis and Stacie Raucci, eds., *Epic Heroes on Screen*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 13–90. For some examples of Hercules' reception in young adult culture, see the chapters in Part III of the present volume ("Holding Out for a Hero... and a Heroine"): Markus Janka, "Heracles/Hercules as the Hero of a Hopeful Culture in Ancient Poetry and Contemporary Literature and Media for Children and Young Adults", 231–250; Susan Deacy, "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", 251–274; and Edoardo Pecchini, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", 275–325.

in the Maze of the Minotaur, all broadcast the same year.⁵ These served as a pilot to the record-breaking series: *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, a USA–New Zealand production lasting 6 seasons and 111 episodes, aired in 1995–1999.⁶ It portrayed Hercules and his sidekick Iolaus in Ancient Greece of an undetermined period and displayed a combination of various other motifs, Egyptian, Eastern, and medieval. Hercules' persona is a version for children, in fact, a role-model family man – his wife and children are killed early in the story by Hera, and he focuses on saving the world.⁷ Its hugely popular spin-off, the also 6-season-long (124 episodes) *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001), was seen in more than a hundred countries.⁸ Another spin-off, *Young Hercules*, spanning only one season (but fifty episodes), greatly appealed to large audiences at Fox Kids Network in 1998–1999.⁹ In this series, Hercules (played by Ryan Gosling) trains at Chiron's Academy with Jason and Iolaus.

The first animated production made by Walt Disney alongside the growing success of live-action television movies and series is the 1997 *Hercules*.¹⁰ The same year, another animated movie, *The Amazing Feats of Young Hercules*, is produced and released in the United States by Bill Schwartz.¹¹ It is a hugely successful short film about teenage Hercules who, to be free, has to pass four trials imposed by Zeus, all involving monsters. A year later, *Hercules and Xena – The Animated Movie: The Battle for Mount Olympus* is released direct-to-video.

⁵ Bill Norton, dir., *Hercules and the Amazon Women*, USA and New Zealand: Renaissance Pictures, 1994; Harley Cokeliss, dir., *Hercules and the Lost Kingdom*, USA and New Zealand: Renaissance Pictures, 1994; Doug Lefler, dir., *Hercules and the Circle of Fire*, USA and New Zealand: Renaissance Pictures, 1994; Bill Norton, dir., *Hercules in the Underworld*, USA and New Zealand: Renaissance Pictures, 1994; Josh Becker, dir., *Hercules in the Maze of the Minotaur*, USA and New Zealand: Renaissance Pictures, 1994.

⁶ *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*, created by Christian Williams and Robert Tapert, USA and New Zealand: Renaissance Pictures, 1995–1999.

⁷ On that transformation of Hercules, see also Ruby Blondell, "Hercules Psychotherapist", in Wendy Haslem, Angela Ndaliansis, and Chris Mackie, eds., *Super/Heroes: From Hercules to Superman*, Washington, DC: New Academia Publishing, 2007, 241.

⁸ *Xena: Warrior Princess*, created by John Schulian and Robert Tapert, developed by Sam Raimi and R.J. Stewart, written by Steven L. Sear et al., USA: Renaissance Pictures, MCA TV, Universal Television, and Studios USA Television, 1995–2001.

⁹ *Young Hercules*, dir. Chris Graves et al., created and written by Andrew Dettman, Rob Tapert, and Daniel Truly, USA: Renaissance Pictures and Studios USA Television Distribution, 1998–1999.

¹⁰ Ron Clements and John Musker, dirs., *Hercules*, USA: Walt Disney Pictures and Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1997.

¹¹ Skinny Wen, dir., *The Amazing Feats of Young Hercules*, USA: Schwartz & Co. and Hong Ying Animation, 1997.

Actors from both live-action television series lent their voices to the characters; Lynne Naylor produced and directed the video.¹²

This was followed by another direct-to-video production, the 1999 *Hercules: Zero to Hero*, which shows the demigod's teenage years, but is not a prequel to the 1997 *Hercules* as it relates some events already featured there.¹³ Hades is the evil protagonist and Hercules' enemy, but contrary to the 1997 movie, he knows that Hercules is alive and interacts with his young nephew, along with other Olympians who visit Hercules at the Prometheus Academy (Chiron the wise centaur does not teach at that school).

The 1997 movie *Hercules* is serialized in 1998–1999 as *Disney's Hercules: The Animated Series*, a Walt Disney Television production composed of two seasons and counting sixty-seven episodes.¹⁴ Adding to the universal attraction of the growing-up theme, many famous actors participated in the series, quite a few of them reprising their roles from the 1997 production. Hercules' satyr teacher (voiced in the movie by Danny DeVito, in the series by Robert Costanzo), Philoctetes, known as Phil, embodies a further departure from the known versions of the Greek myth. His only similarity to Chiron – apart from being Hercules' teacher – is the fact that just as the centaur, he is a man–animal hybrid. However, the animal in this case is a goat, arguably less noble than a horse. Phil does not bear any resemblance to the mythical Philoctetes whose connection to Hercules was entirely different.¹⁵

True to the Disney formula, the animated productions are laced with humour and motifs attractive to children. The young viewers are naturally interested not only in Hercules' adventures but also in how he became a superhero, what were his relations with his teachers and his friends of both sexes, what did he have to study, was it difficult, what were his choices, how did he deal with adversity, and so on. Cognitive values of films depend, of course, on whether the narrative

¹² Lynne Naylor, dir., *Hercules and Xena – The Animated Movie: The Battle for Mount Olympus*, USA: Renaissance Pictures and Universal Cartoon Studios, 1998.

¹³ Bob Kline, dir., *Hercules: Zero to Hero*, USA: Walt Disney Television Animation, 1999.

¹⁴ *Disney's Hercules: The Animated Series*, dirs. Phil Weinstein, Eddy Houchins, Bob Kline, and Tad Stones, written by Bill Motz et al., USA: Walt Disney Television Animation and Walt Disney Television, 1998–1999.

¹⁵ As one of Helen's former suitors, Philoctetes was obliged to participate in the Trojan War. Greeks needed Hercules' fated bow and arrows that Philoctetes inherited primarily, as the person who agreed to light his funeral pyre. The story of Philoctetes inspired not only all three Ancient Greek tragic playwrights but also a number of later, including modern, writers and film-makers aiming higher than popular culture. See, e.g., Scott A. Barnard, "The Isolated Hero: *Papillon* (1973), *Cast Away* (2000), and the Myth of Philoctetes", in Monica S. Cyrino and Meredith E. Safran, eds., *Classical Myth on Screen*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 27–36.

follows, if not the facts, as we know them, at least the spirit of Antiquity. They also rely on how free of deformation is the presented image, whether it stimulates curiosity and further interest, inviting to seek the truth. Like all Disney productions, the *Hercules* series was broadcast around the world.

In 1999, the Russian director Sergey Ovtsharov filmed a ten-minute blend of live action and animation entitled *Подвиги Геракла* [Podvigi Gerakla; Feats of Heracles]; it was produced by Natalya Smirnova for the Filmstudio "Gerakl" in Saint Petersburg and nominated in 2000 for the Golden Bear at the Berlin International Film Festival. It is an amusing parody of the Herculean mania of the turn of the twentieth century and indicates a global surfeit of this universal and performative repetitive theme.¹⁶

By the beginning of the new century, the mania visibly abates, but occasionally Hercules still reappears, if only as a supporting character, in productions based on such stories as the Golden Fleece. In 2000, Brian Thompson played Hercules in the television miniseries *Jason and the Argonauts*, directed by Nick Willing for Hallmark Entertainment and much sanitized for the younger audiences.¹⁷

Further into the twenty-first century, Hercules does not disappear entirely from the audiovisual scene but becomes an infrequent and less predictable guest: an NBC 2005 miniseries – *Hercules: Half-God, Half-Man, All Power* (directed by Roger Young and produced by Robert Halmi, Sr., Robert Halmi, Jr., and Jeffrey Hayes for Hallmark Entertainment)¹⁸ – proposes an unusual treatment of the hero, making him the son of the giant Antaeus instead of Zeus, and includes scenes of Hercules' madness and the murder of his children and wife.

¹⁶ I would like to thank here Hanna Paulouskaya from the University of Warsaw for bringing this unusual film to my attention; she is preparing an entry on *Podvigi Gerakla* for the *Our Mythical Childhood Survey* database, available at <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey>. See also the Berlin Festival description at <https://www.berlinale.de/external/programme/archive/pdf/20001804.pdf> (accessed 24 June 2021). The English summary included in the description reads: "Blending animation and live action footage, this film uses ancient Greek imagery to create a stylised, ironic deconstruction of the popular Greek heroic myth".

¹⁷ *Jason and the Argonauts*, dir. Nick Willing, USA: Hallmark Entertainment, 2000. See Helen Lovatt, "Gutting the *Argonautica*? How to make Jason and the Argonauts Suitable for Children", in Dunstan Lowe and Kim Shahabudin, eds., *Classics for All: Reworking Antiquity in Mass Culture*, New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2009, 17–38, centres on literature, barely mentioning even the classic 1963 movie *Jason and the Argonauts* directed by Don Chaffey and made famous by Ray Harryhausen's special-effects army of skeletons born of dragon's teeth. Nisbet, *Ancient Greece in Film*, 62, highlights the absence of Hylas and homosexual themes in the miniseries, focusing on the portrayal of Hercules, even if he is only a minor character in the story.

¹⁸ *Hercules: Half-God, Half-Man, All Power*, dir. Roger Young, written by Charles Edward Pogue, USA: Hallmark Entertainment, 2005.

The motif of human sacrifice and the need to end such barbaric rituals is an important one here.

Four years later, Mohamed Khashoggi directs *Little Hercules in 3D* (2009) starring Richard Sandrak, the bodybuilder boy from Ukraine dubbed by the US press "the strongest boy in the world".¹⁹ Here, the young Hercules leaves Mount Olympus and lives as a mortal man in Los Angeles (an approach to some extent recalling Arnold Schwarzenegger's 1970 *Hercules in New York*, dir. Arthur Allan Seidelman²⁰). The year 2011 brings another mythological fantasy loosely following the ancient narrative, entitled *Immortals* (dir. Tarsem Singh).²¹ Hercules (played by Steve Byers) is, for a change, one of the Olympian gods and the maker of the invincible Epirus Bow that plays a crucial part in the plot.²²

In 2013, BBC One and BBC America produced the first of two seasons of a new television series, *Atlantis*,²³ created by the *Merlin* trio – Johnny Capps, Julian Murphy, and Howard Overman; a show where revamped versions of Greek myths mingle freely against the background of a miraculously found lost city in its impressive splendour resurrected at considerable expense. Hercules is one of the inhabitants of the city but not a prominent one; he is also a very unusual version of the hero: a middle-aged has-been, prone to drinking and eating excesses. Still, he is a true friend to the other protagonists, Jason and Pythagoras, willing to make sacrifices and take risks to help them.

In movie theatres in 2014, young viewers were able to watch three distressing productions about Hercules, released one after another.²⁴ The scope

¹⁹ Mohamed Khashoggi, dir., *Little Hercules in 3D*, USA: Innovate Entertainment, 2009.

²⁰ Arthur Allan Seidelman, dir., *Hercules in New York*, USA: RAF Industries, 1970.

²¹ Tarsem Singh, dir., *Immortals*, USA: Relativity Media, 2011.

²² Margaret Toscano recently compared *Immortals* with Anand Gandhi's 2013 *Ship of Theseus* set in modern India. See Margaret Toscano, "The Immortality of Theseus and His Myth", in Antony Augoustakis and Stacie Raucci, eds., *Epic Heroes on Screen*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 111–124.

²³ For a recent analysis of the series characters, see Amanda Potter, "The Changing Faces of Heroism in *Atlantis* (2013–2015)", in Antony Augoustakis and Stacie Raucci, eds., *Epic Heroes on Screen*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 125–140.

²⁴ In January, *The Legend of Hercules* (dir. Renny Harlin, USA: Millennium Films and Nu Boyana Film Studios, 2014) is released, a box-office flop (cost 70 million dollars, earned only 61) with an intricate plot involving Hera as the main mover behind Hercules' birth and the conflict with Iphicles and Amphitryon resulting in Hercules' victory and his marriage to Hebe, a Cretan princess. In July, *Hercules* directed by Brett Ratner (USA: Flynn Picture Company and Radical Studios, 2014), with Dwayne Johnson of the *Scorpion King* fame in the title role, is an adaptation of Steve Moore's comic book *ThrAsian Wars* published by Radical Comics in 2008. After the "twelve labours and after the legend", Hercules becomes a mercenary and with his friends trains the soldiers of Kotys, king of Thrace (who in fact ruled in the fourth century BCE). A relative box-office success (cost 100 million

of Hercules' popularity among mediocre film-makers probably merits particular attention. Still, it would take a genuinely committed and conscientious reception scholar to venture into that less-than-enjoyable realm of the twenty-first-century American echo of peplum. The exceptional peak in Hercules' popularity in 2014 was reflected in an exhibition in Moscow, mind-boggling for outsiders, offered to the Russian President Vladimir Putin for his sixty-second birthday and displaying anonymous paintings in various styles paraphrasing Putin's political achievements as Herculean feats, and called *The Twelve Labours of Putin*.²⁵

Television series inspired by classical mythology were represented in 2015 not only by the continuation of *Atlantis* but also by the final season of *Lost Girl* (five seasons in total). In the latter show, magical beings, called the Fae, coexist with ordinary people and with a variety of mythological themes, mostly borrowed from the Norse tradition. The main character, a beautiful succubus called Bo, is revealed to be the daughter of Hades, the ruler of Valhalla who was imprisoned in Tartarus. There are also other "Ancients": Zee (a female Zeus), Heratio (a male Hera), Nyx, an oracle named rather predictably Cassie, a male Siren, and "an elemental Nymph" Clio who can communicate with the four elements of nature. The Ancients are bent on the destruction of both the ordinary mortals and the less mortal Fae. This particular case of reception appears to borrow from Greek and other mythologies only what it needs to construct a divine origin and pedigree for its heroine, as well as a type of afterlife which, like Hades, can, in exceptional cases, be reached and returned from by the living. Bo is a young woman with a destiny; on her beautiful shoulders rests the highest responsibility, that of saving the world, the mortals and the Fae, from the sinister designs of the Ancients. She is a modern version of a demigod herself, no need or place for Hercules here. *Lost Girl* had no Disneyan roots or connections and contrary to *OUAT* was not limited in its imaginative scope to this kind of intertextuality.

dollars and earned 195 million dollars) in the shape of a super-loud action movie riding on the wave of the hero's popularity – watching the trailer is probably more than enough for classicists interested in the reception of Antiquity. The film is discussed in more detail by Angelina Chiu, who focuses sympathetically on Hercules as a team player; see "Heroes and Companions in *Hercules* (2014)", in Antony Augoustakis and Stacie Raucci, eds., *Epic Heroes on Screen*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 59–73. The third movie, released in August and entitled *Hercules Reborn*, was directed by Nick Lyon (USA: The Asylum, 2014), and the title role was played by John Hennigan. It features an exiled Hercules coming back to help rescue a bride kidnapped by an unsavoury ruler.

²⁵ See the recent aesthetic analysis by Emma Stafford, "Hercules, Putin, and the Heroic Body on Screen in 2014", in Antony Augoustakis and Stacie Raucci, eds., *Epic Heroes on Screen*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018, 43–59. She compares the Putin exhibition with Harlin's *The Legend of Hercules* and Lyon's *Hercules Reborn*.

It is certainly not a show for children, possibly for young adults, especially those who are more mature.

OUAT, on the other hand, intentionally manifesting its close relation to Disney and other audiovisual fairy-tale cousins, could not overlook Hercules when venturing onto the paths of Greek mythology. The classical references continued for a full ten episodes, featuring as a supporting character a young Hercules oppressed by his evil uncle, Hades. The show kept going strong, reaching an impressively mature seven-season length, secure in its substantial Disneyan audience and free of ratings pressures which contributed to *Atlantis* and *Olympus* closing prematurely.

Popularity

Theoretically, we can measure and compare the popularity of various shows by assessing the reach and the scale of their viewing audiences. While recorded audience ratings of the first broadcast, DVD sales figures, and the data on international licensing are readily available, information on viewing of repeats and on-demand channels such as Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV+, due to their on-going nature, is not definitive and, besides, much more difficult to obtain. Among these data, the most telling and easy-to-grasp indicator of a show's popularity appears to be the number of countries to which the show has been licensed, even if such sales also heavily rely on the show owner's reputation and marketing clout.²⁶

OUAT has been the most successful of the five mythologically inspired television series; its distribution easily beats shows such as *Atlantis* or *Olympus*: it has been licensed to over 190 countries, practically to the whole world.²⁷ It has been even more successful than *Lost Girl* (*OUAT* was distributed by Showcase Television, NBC Universal on Syfy channels in Canada, USA, UK, Australia Sci-Fi, Latin America, Sony Entertainment Television, and digitally on iTunes Canada and DVD by Sony Picture Entertainment). Its use of the instantly recognizable

²⁶ This being said, the reputation of the BBC, for quality as well as for marketing, leaves little to be desired; its decision-making process on the other hand – why the axe falls, where and when it does, in spite of the viewers protests – appears more vulnerable to criticism, as it is a public broadcaster.

²⁷ The current membership of the United Nations includes 193 states; see, e.g., "About Us", United Nations, <http://www.un.org/en/sections/about-un/overview/index.html> (accessed 24 June 2021).

Disney universe and its heroes helped to build a significant international audience well before its fifth season when the show turned to Greek mythology for inspiration. There is an indication that texts of popular culture, such as Disney feature films, are the first and primary source of information on classical mythology for massive audiences of children and young adults; mythology alone meets with smaller success than when it is allied with other themes.

OUAT has been selected as the main subject of the present chapter only partly because of its overwhelming, global popularity to which also contributed the use of plots and characters from beloved fairy tales, legends, and mythologies, preferably already available and well-known in their audiovisual Disney adaptations. The series provides an unexpected, magical, and utterly riveting story of what happened to Snow White and Prince Charming once they began their happily ever after. It also presents the prequel to that story in a dramatically different way to the original Brothers Grimm's version. *OUAT*'s main motto and theme is: "Never to give up", never abandon hope.

The Use Made of Mythology

Josie Campbell reports what the show creators said about their approach to the *OUAT* series just before its launch.²⁸ Edward Kitsis emphasized that they "were not just interested in retelling the stories for a modern audience but intended to dig deeper into who each fairy tale character was and why they acted the way they did". He said in the interview with Campbell:

We're interested in either telling the origin stories or the real character things. Like, why is Grumpy grumpy? Why is Geppetto so lonely he carves a little boy out of wood? Why is the Evil Queen evil? To us, that's much more interesting, exploring the missing pieces rather than retelling the story [...]. One of the fun things for us coming up with these stories is thinking of ways these different characters can interact in ways they never have before. [...] We don't want this to be a mythology show [...]. It's about characters and characters first.²⁹

²⁸ See, Josie Campbell, "Lost's Kitsis, Horowitz Start at the Beginning with *Once Upon A Time*", CBR, 25 August 2011, www.cbr.com/losts-kitsis-horowitz-start-at-the-beginning-with-once-upon-a-time/ (accessed 24 April 2020).

²⁹ The whole show became, in fact, a series of new versions of fairy tales and myths. See Julia Sanders's chapter "Other Versions" of Fairy Tale and Folklore", in her book *Adaptation and Appropriation*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2006, 82–93.

Greek mythology was introduced to the series in earnest³⁰ in season 5 after Emma Swan's boyfriend, Killian Jones (Captain Hook), died and Emma went to the Underworld with her family hoping to bring him back by sharing with him her heart, magically and physically. Heart sharing is a variety of magical resurrection, specific – as it seems – only to *OUAT*.³¹ The rules of the Underworld, as established in the series, restrict this method, “reasonably”, to reviving only the recently deceased whose bodies are not significantly decomposed. Why did the authors introduce such a common-sense principle here, just after totally abandoning reason and letting a living heart be ripped out of one person, divided in half and shared by two people, like earlier, in the case of Snow White and David Charming? A fairy-tale “piling up” of obstacles? An echo of the Genie from Disney's *Aladdin*³² singing about the three wishes he cannot grant?³³ Eventually, we learn that this particular restriction of *Fatum* can be waived in exceptional cases by Zeus, who can restore life with no strings attached, like, indeed, when he grants a new life to the noble Killian Jones. For divine power has no limitations in comparison to magic, and while magic can produce miracles, they come at a hefty price. There is, then, a hierarchy of powers: magic can do bad or good things but cannot cross a certain line, defined by the Genie's exceptions. Also, Genie is a slave forever, unless his master frees him, thereby “wasting” one of the three wishes, a most unlikely occurrence. And another unfortunate limitation.

Several Mythemes – All Underpinned with Hope

If there is a core theme in *OUAT*, it is hope. The fairy-tale villains all prove that there is still hope for them and they may be redeemable. Only one character is beyond salvation: Hades. He killed his father a long time ago and now wants

³⁰ The first potentially mythological creature entering the fairy-tale realm of the series was the little mermaid Ariel in S3E6 (“Ariel”, dir. Ciaran Donnelly, created by Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz, 2013). She can hardly claim any kinship with the Homeric Sirens other than her enchanting singing voice. Ariel and her nemesis, the sea queen Ursula, are characters from Disney's 1989 *Little Mermaid* (dirs. John Musker and Ron Clements, USA: Walt Disney Pictures and Walt Disney Feature Animation); they hail directly from Hans Christian Andersen's story.

³¹ Draco in *DragonHeart* (1996, dir. Rob Cohen) shares his heart with Einon, the Saxon prince, to save his life, but he does not resurrect the boy.

³² Ron Clements and John Musker, dirs., *Aladdin*, USA: Walt Disney Pictures and Walt Disney Feature Animation, 1992.

³³ “I can't bring people back from the dead. It's not a pretty picture, and I don't like doing it!”

to kill his brother Zeus and take from him the divine throne. True love's kiss, in sync with the workings of a fairy tale, makes his dead heart beat again but does not change his evil and sinister nature. Hope is his enemy and he forbids hope in the Underworld – when it is brought against his wishes, as contraband, he makes his determination known by symbolically crushing a delicate plant flowering unexpectedly amid the desolation of hell.

Travelling to the Underworld – katabasis or descent to the realm of the dead – naturally followed by anabasis, the return to the world of the living, is one of the mythemes shared by many cultural traditions and religions.³⁴ In Greek mythology, it is well developed and provided with a ready-made potential antagonist, Hades, who lets people in but not out. In the series, successive bits of information imparted with the painful slowness of a television series build up and reveal his full portrait, leading up to the climax of his death because hope proves to be stronger than an evil god.

Deicide belongs firmly to the Greek myth of origin, beginning with quasi-comical and not entirely effective actions of Kronos, who driven by fear of the prophecy that his children would eventually depose him, as he did his father Uranus, indiscriminately devours, or rather swallows, them once they are born, including a rock he thinks is another child. In *OUAT*, we only hear about the death of Kronos; we do not witness it. Killing Hades takes on the flavour of saving the innocent from an abusive divine power: the evil god tries to prevent the souls from leaving purgatory and moving on.

Hades the God

The *OUAT* version of how the Olympians came to wield power gives Hades the role of the villain. Hades killed Kronos with an Olympian crystal – an echo of the stone sickle Kronos used to castrate Uranus? The crystal was broken in half by Zeus, who assumed the mantle of the supreme god. Hades' powers were limited to ruling the Underworld as a punishment for deicide, even one committed with reason. To make the story more like a traditional fairy tale, in the plot, Hades' heart stopped beating once he became the lord of the Underworld; the only remaining hope of redemption for him was a true love's kiss that would revive his heart, an improbable event given that he inspired universal dread rather than love.

³⁴ We find it also in *Atlantis, Lost Girl, and Olympus*.

Hades' plan to improve his lot was to travel back in time, prevent Zeus from assuming power, and take it for himself. He was hoping to exploit Zelena – the Wicked Witch and sister of Regina, the Evil Queen and *OUAT*'s main villain, who in this part of the series has already reformed and renounced evil. Zelena was abandoned by their mother as a child, and her time-travelling powers combined with her desire for revenge to help Hades get what he wanted: not only a heart beating once again after eons of immortal but lifeless existence, but also total power. However, true to the series' theme of hope for villains, the Wicked Witch Zelena seeing her sister's transformation from the Evil Queen to a caring mother and loving woman, becomes herself much less of a villain and reconciles with her sister. While she believes in Hades' love for her and eventually gives him the kiss that reboots his heart, learning of his duplicity brings her back to her reformed villain's senses. It is Zelena who, in an act of bravery and desperation, becomes the saviour, annihilating her lover with the weapon he used to kill his father, the restored Olympian crystal. Zeus is so grateful for his irredeemable brother's demise that he lets Killian return to the world of the living, without having to use half of Emma's heart, or any other magic trick – he just wills it, or as Homer would have it: Διὸς δ' ἐτελείετο βουλή (*Il.* 1.5; thus the will of Zeus was brought to fulfillment³⁵).

The Underworld

After discussing the main mythological villain, our focus switches to his realm, the Underworld itself. The fairy-tale magic of the Disney *cum* Brothers Grimm variety primarily drives the series. Still, the Underworld is strongly inspired in its nether regions by Greek mythology. The five subterranean rivers named each for its specific qualities flow through and create an infernal, poetic, and emotionally charged scenery. Acheron is the green river of sorrow and of the lost souls who look like nasty, whitish Dementors eager to drag people under the sickly waters. The remaining four are Lethe – the yellow river of oblivion, Phlegethon – the flaming river of fire, Cocytus – the steaming river of lamentation that flows into the Acheron, and the mighty Styx – the blue river of hate, which divides the world above from the world below. The elusive but powerful hope of salvation manifests itself in a luminous passage above the infernal fires that opens to those who earn it.

³⁵ Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. A.T. Murray, "Loeb Classical Library", London: William Heinemann, 1924, ad loc.

The upper part of the Underworld looks like a decaying copy of the place of action in the present, a contemporary American town, the enchanted Storybrooke, called here Underbrooke, reachable by ferry. The ferryman is a silent, hooded figure, most likely the mythological Charon; he does not speak, not even to ask his passengers for the boat fare. The *OUAT* Underworld is a sort of purgatory populated with departed souls who cannot move on because of unfinished business. There is a phone booth from which they can send messages to their loved ones in the world of the living. A hidden lift connects Underbrooke to a more classical Underworld where there are several levels of which we see only three, starting with the throne hall of Hades with the ancient rivers around it, and the dungeons patrolled by Cerberus, for people whom Hades particularly dislikes (for instance, Killian and Megara – Hercules' love). At the lowest level of the Underworld, an ambrosia tree used to grow, but Hades cut it down to prevent other departing souls from returning to life, after Orpheus and Eurydice managed to escape by consuming its fruit. Again an optimistic, typically *OUAT* version of the famous lovers' myth with a happy ending suitable for a modern story for children and young people and for the series' tendency to favour hope against all odds.

When the souls resolve their unfinished business – and it seems that with Hades bent on eliminating hope, and with some other dead Disney villains roaming the realm, there is a scant chance of that happening – they may leave for a "better place". If the path does not open for them, they can either stay where they are or in desperation jump into the fires of the Phlegethon or into the waters of the Acheron, the sorrowful river of lost souls, and endure eternal torment. Hades is beside himself with rage when Snow White's family help some of the souls to leave. He tortures Killian for bringing hope, the most dangerous and forbidden treasure, to the Underworld, born in his heart out of his true love for Emma. It is such a powerful emotion that, to Hades' fury, it makes a dead plant flower.

Hercules in the Underworld

The series' creators are using the narrative device of two alternating timelines, the fairy-tale past and the (almost) non-magical present. In "Labour of Love", the young Herc appears in the fairy-tale past of the story, helping the young Snow defeat bandits who threatened her subjects.³⁶ He teaches her how to fight

³⁶ S5E13: "Labour of Love", dir. Billy Gierhart, created by Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz, written by Andrew Chambliss and Dana Horgan, 2016.

and gives her a hopeful message that courage and victory come out of failure (as was his experience when, after unsuccessful attempts, he succeeded in killing the Nemean Lion). The mythological events adapt to the fairy-tale action to suit the series' narrative: Herc assists the young princess Snow after completing eleven of his twelve labours. The adult Snow, who lives in Storybrooke, returns the favour when she goes with Emma and the rest of her unusual family to the Underworld to save Killian-Hook. She meets Herc there (still looking like a teenager), who is stuck in the transitional afterlife because he failed to kill Cerberus (the "real" mythological twelfth labour was, of course, to capture not to kill the monster). The failure prevented him from entering Olympus. Herc and Megara are not precisely the couple from Greek mythology or even the couple from the Disney movie: when Herc tried to kill Cerberus, he did it to defend an unknown girl the monster was attacking; he died trying, and Cerberus killed the girl – who happened to be Megara. Hades imprisoned her in a dungeon guarded by the monster but left Herc to languish forever in Underbrooke and to use his extraordinary strength for non-heroic purposes, such as lifting heavy loads in the harbour.³⁷

In the "present", Hook wakes up in Megara's dungeon; refusing to abandon hope, he challenges Cerberus, giving Megara a chance to escape and tell Emma and Snow what happened. It is now Snow's turn to provide Herc with hope and devise a way in which they could, together with Megara, complete his unfinished labour and vanquish the monster. Using simple logic (three heads require three opponents), they attack simultaneously, each focusing on a different head. As a result, Cerberus goes up in smoke, literally. Herc and Megara march hand in hand along the luminous path from the Underworld to "a better place", which in their case is Olympus appearing on the horizon and looking suspiciously similar to the Disney castle.

The *OUAT* Hercules represents a sanitized and entirely positive version of the myth: a hero who helps the weak, who tries to save a girl attacked by a monster and perishes in the attempt; he is forced to remain in a hopeless purgatory, unable to assume his rightful place on Olympus. It takes the help

³⁷ A dispirited Hercules lifting, like a beast of burden, heavy objects in the Underbrooke harbour is the epitome of personal humiliation and brings to mind Iorek Byrnison, the armoured Bear King whose armour was taken away and who, bereft of all hope, must "mend broken machinery and articles of iron [...] and lift heavy objects" at the sledge depot in Trollesund in the Arctic; see Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials Omnibus: The Golden Compass; The Subtle Knife; The Amber Spyglass*, 3 vols., New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017 (quotation from ed. pr.: *Northern Lights*, London: Point Scholastic, 1995, 133, published as *The Golden Compass* in the United States).

of a friend he once saved to regain hope and faith to try again, not alone but in collaboration with others. He is victorious and gains the heavenly reward and an Elysian ever after in the sweet company of his soulmate, Megara. A homage to friendship and perseverance of the fairy-tale kind, with no trace of the tragic Greek hero.

Hope as a Powerful Weapon against Fate

OUAT has a specific and robust thread of seeking destiny using hope as a powerful instrument; adverse prophecies are ignored (or overcome) instead of being circumvented. The characters brave witchcraft as well as the power of the gods and do not hesitate to descend to the Underworld to reach their goal. Never giving up hope, or never giving up *tout court*, is a strong theme in the series. It is symbolized by mantra-like expressions (repeatedly occurring and well known from other television genres), such as "We never leave people behind" or "We will always find each other". In "Swan Song", episode 11 of *OUAT*'s season 5, we are again reminded of these principles: "You are Snow White, you don't know how to give up, hope is in your blood". Whether in a family, a group with a joint mission, or in a loving couple, heroes do not accept defeat and fight for their loved ones and friends, ready to risk lives for others. This kind of hope is essential in a television series for children and young adults as it leads through many difficulties and setbacks to a happy ending, a relatively rare outcome in Greek mythological stories.

The Olympic Gods

The two Olympians, Hades and Zeus, appear in the series as themselves in human form, which the Greek gods occasionally assumed, although most often they preferred to appear in the guise of an actual person known to the character they visited. Hades is a perfidious, egotistical, power-hungry, evil sorcerer whose hair flames Disney-blue when he does something evil. His character is of critical importance to the series as it is the only one that eventually proves to be a villain without hope of redemption – a television-series version of the fallen angel, the Devil who rules Hell. Having read Dante (chronology is not an obstacle to gods), he put the "Abandon all hope ye who enter here" quotation above his door. Postclassical reception in popular culture transformed Hades into the Devil.

A modest, reserved, and sympathetic Zeus plays a cameo role; radiating enormous but benevolent power, he gives thanks to Killian for his help in preventing further unspeakable excesses engineered by the diabolical Hades, and in a gesture of appreciation brings Killian back to life. The vivid colours used in the series to depict the torments of classical hell create a fascinating contrast with the marble-white calm of heaven where Captain Hook meets Zeus and receives his unexpected reward. Curiously, the question of what will happen with the Underworld now that Hades has been killed remains unanswered. We may only assume that Zeus will think of something.

Conclusion

The whole universe of *OUAT*, in its fairy-tale and mythological narrative, is permeated by the hope that anything can be done, conquered, redeemed, and made right. There are, naturally, many obstacles and hurdles on the way to the redemption of notorious villains, or in saving people from hell by opening the path to heaven, or in revisiting myths, as established in the story of Orpheus and Eurydice who in *OUAT* are said to have escaped from the Underworld by eating ambrosia. The myth of Hercules has also a different development and ending: the hero concludes his last labour and without further ado and tragic complications is sent on his way to Olympus with Megara, another victim saved from Hades. The belief underlying *OUAT*'s philosophy is that thanks to fervent hope, made even more powerful by love and friendship, anything is possible, and, in the end, all will be well.

When it comes to the most difficult challenge, a resurrection, bringing back to life a deceased loved one, there are certain rules and restrictions. "A life for a life" is a frequent theme in modern fantasy, especially when it comes to the extreme case of overturning fate (for example, saving Medusa in the BBC's *Atlantis*). The viewers of *OUAT* are repeatedly reminded how it works, although in their case it is, in fact, more the concept of the price of magic than the price of life. *OUAT*'s solution to the puzzle of how to resurrect a protagonist whose death created a fascinating story arc and kept the viewers' attention (and a high level of suspense) during several episodes, but whom the viewers would like back in action, relies on the divine magnanimity of Zeus himself. As we discussed above, magic is not enough in the case of Captain Hook; he cannot be brought back to life by sharing with Emma her heart, a device proprietary for *OUAT*, which worked when Snow revived Charming. Emma does try and suffers

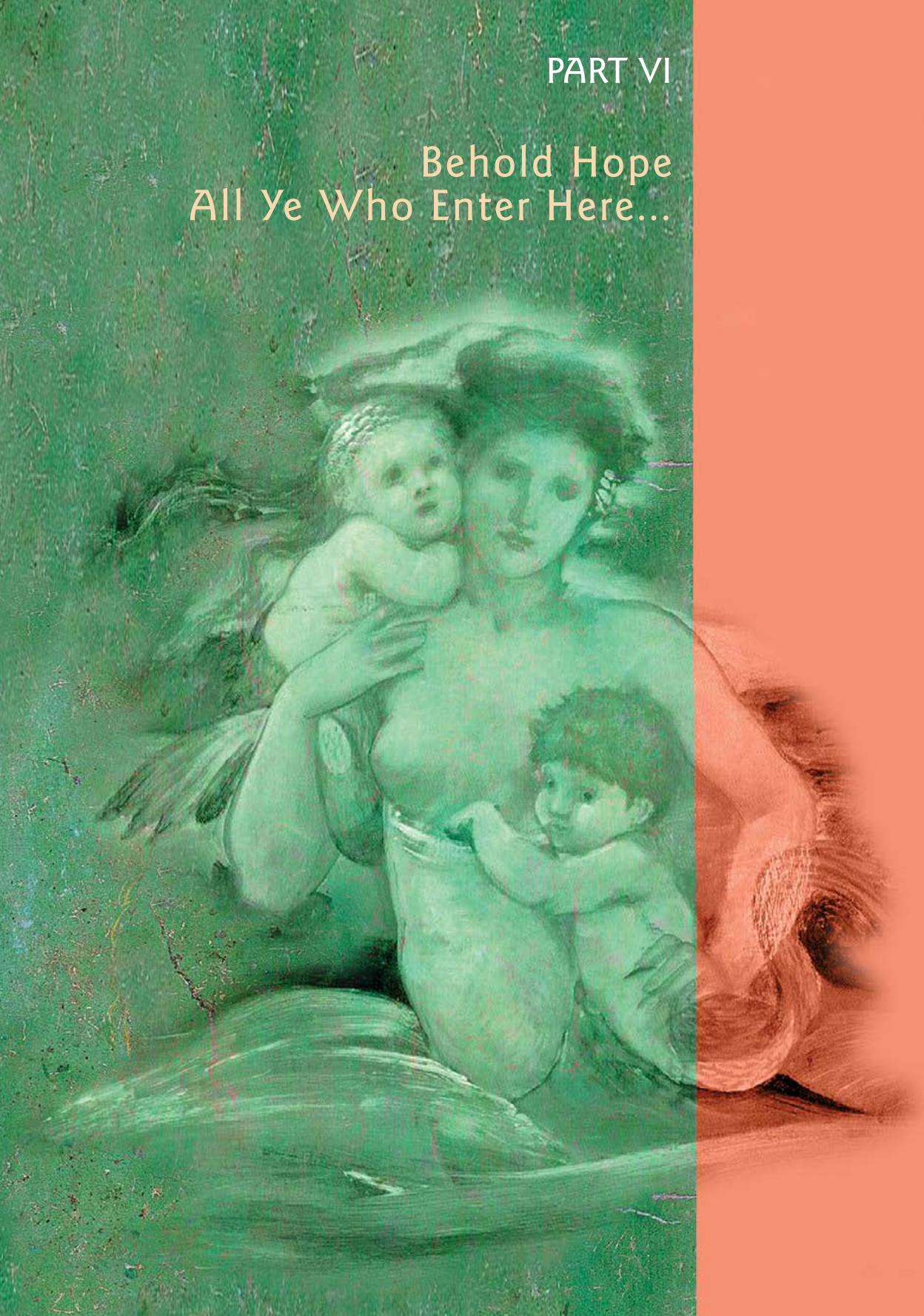
greatly but is terribly disappointed: he has been dead for too long. When all the other heroes come to terms with the irrevocability of his demise, Zeus decides to reward his sacrifice, and, lo and behold, Killian returns as good as new. This is an extreme example of hope against hope – when all is lost, what we hope for may still be granted, not by a trick of powerful magic but as a divine reward for goodness. Such development reaches beyond the Greek mythological tradition where gods moved by pity towards deserving mortals would instead “save” the unlucky humans by metamorphosing them into plant life, animals, or even constellations. An outright resurrection of heroes who, as if nothing happened, come back from the dead to fight another day, does not meet the standards of Greek mythology.³⁸ The all-powerful television series is, of course, not bound by such considerations; there, like in the human breast, hope springs eternal,³⁹ enough to bring to life the recently killed heroes and dead-tired plots.

³⁸ The same standard rules as in Disney movies: the Genie in the 1992 *Aladdin* in no uncertain terms explains that he cannot bring people back to life (see n. 33 above), but then he is not Zeus in *OUAT*.

³⁹ To paraphrase the famous verse of Alexander Pope from his philosophical poem *An Essay on Man: Epistle I.III*. See Alexander Pope, “An Essay on Man: Epistle I” (ed. pr. 1733), Poetry Foundation, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44899/an-essay-on-man-epistle-i> (accessed 24 June 2021).

PART VI

Behold Hope
All Ye Who Enter Here...



Jerzy Axer

KOTICK THE SAVIOUR: FROM INFERNO TO PARADISE WITH ANIMALS

Kipling knew more than he knew that he knew,
and he knew that he knew more than he knew that he knew.

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams,
Rudyard Kipling Sermon, 22 January 2006

Rudyard Kipling's short story "The White Seal", published in 1893 and incorporated into his *Jungle Book* a year later, is altogether amenable to multiple interpretations. The story is often rated less highly than others from *The Jungle Book*. The interpretation that dominates today is inspired by criticism of postcolonial literature. Some literary critics even claim that the text's main message is an imperialistic and racist declaration of the superiority of the white race of masters, with their untainted identity, over any mixed identity.

The present paper proposes a different reading of the story, without attempting to polemicize with its anti-imperialistic criticism. Actually, unless a critic sets out to prove that reading the story could harm young readers, both interpretations can coexist perfectly well. Besides, I consider such fears to be outdated anyway, since in this digital age the readers prepared to invest some effort into reading *The Jungle Book* are not children but, first and foremost, adults. It is, of course, different in the case of Disney film adaptations.

This paper considers an underexploited layer of the text. I propose that we try to unravel the web of mythological/religious references and radical ecological demands, a web that I believe determines the story's originality.

* * *

The Jungle Book was read to me aloud by my Mother, from the age of four till at least fourteen, because I always preferred reading aloud over silent reading, and Mother read very well. Since I knew the whole book by the time I was five, later we chose only my favourite bits. "The White Seal" was always one of them. To try and conjure my feelings at the time (it would be hard to speak of thoughts): I simply felt I was Kotick. I even have written proof

of this – a document from 1952. When I was six years old I dictated my own short story to Mother; the protagonist was a white seal eating its fill of fish. I called the fish “kipling”, mispronouncing the word “pikling” (a word, out of use today in Poland, for whole smoked herring). Pikling – Kipling. So, as a child I hunted “kiplings” in a deep, imaginary sea.

It is not hard to discern that the vision of a chosen individual acting for the survival of others, as presented in Kipling’s text, was naturally tempting for an only child like myself, raised in closer relationships with animals than with people. I have never doubted that “The White Seal” is a story about transition and about coming of age. It is also a story about the arrival of a saviour foretold by prophets, who will come one day to save his people from annihilation. The oldest patterns of mythical thinking in our culture are thus set in motion.

At the very bottom lies the dream of being free from the fear of death. From this dream there grows a desire to return to paradise, to seek alternative worlds, Fortunate Isles (Μακάρων Νῆσοι; Makárōn Nēsoi), which the Greeks included in their mythical geography, later turned into Saint Brendan’s Isle in the Christian imagination. This is also the genealogy of the Celtic myth of Arthurian Avalon. Thus, Kotick leads his people, like Moses, to the Promised Land. And like Moses, he, too, has to overcome the resistance of disbelievers.

Comparing the story of the White Seal to the exodus myth is nothing original. Recent years have seen several discussions about this in different contexts. Let us add that in postcolonial criticism this very mythical character is sometimes treated as proof that Kipling could not come up with a positive description of British identity and therefore built a racist and imperial myth in which the White Seal symbolizes the mission of white Britons, and the only place where this identity can be safely preserved is the Isle of England.¹ I mention this interpretation not to polemicize with it, but because it touches upon another important issue: it lends ironic meaning to the “seal sanctuary” found by Kotick. Contrary to the English, the seals do not and will not have their own island.²

Indeed, this mythical tale becomes ambiguous in Kipling, as if it were parodying itself, contradicting itself. When all hope of finding the way to the Promised Land dies, Kotick finally encounters the only creatures that know the way. They are Steller’s sea cows.³ We need to remember that sea cows had been wiped

¹ See Jopi Nyman, *Postcolonial Animal Tale from Kipling to Coetzee*, Delhi: Atlantic, 2003.

² Daniel Karlin, “Introduction” to Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Books*, London: Penguin, 1987, 7–27.

³ Steller’s sea cows were named after their discoverer, Georg Wilhelm Steller (*Hydrodamalis gigas*, order *Sirenia*, family *Dugongidae*).

out and disappeared from the face of the Earth in 1768 – around 130 years before “The White Seal” was published. They were all murdered within a very short time (discovered in 1741, extinct in 1768) by Russian fur traders and seal hunters,⁴ whose descendants massacre fur seals in Kipling’s story. Sea cows also disappeared from human memory in those times, unlike today when they have become a symbol of the looming annihilation of nature,⁵ like the moa bird. They disappeared leaving no trace at all, to the extent that the first skeleton was not reconstructed until the late nineteenth century.

So it happens that sea cows, extinct for so many generations, lead Kotick through a black tunnel to his “Fortunate Isle”. It is hard to avoid the thought that salvation is not possible in this world, but only in another.

Note that the geography in “The White Seal” is extremely exact. Drawing Kotick’s journey on a map is no problem at all, and Kipling himself encouraged readers to follow the story with a map in hand. Such meticulous topographic accuracy, juxtaposed with the archetypal topos of a transition from one world to another, reveals the story’s paradoxical overtone of an ironic and allegorical nature. The message seems to be this: one should live by hope, but be aware that this hope can never be fulfilled in the world as it is. There are no Fortunate Isles in real geographic space, and annihilation is inevitable.

Is there no hope, then, of changing the existing world into a better one? Not exactly. In my opinion, this is a story with an extremely complex narrative structure. Allow me to list the most important reasons why I think so.

The network of existing animals that provide Kotick with information⁶ (the writer’s zoological accuracy in identifying different species is no less remarkable than his geographic correctness) finally gets him in touch with sea cows – creatures that had been eradicated over a century earlier. In addition, these creatures are known as “sirens”. It would be hard to find clearer irony than this

⁴ Until their purchase by the United States in 1867, Alaska and the Aleutian Islands belonged to the Russian Empire.

⁵ Cf., e.g., the pseudo-documentary *Tales of a Sea Cow* about the rediscovery of *Hydrodamalis gigas*, directed by Etienne de France in 2012 and a great success at universities and museums. *Nota bene*, already in 1973, Victor B. Scheffer, an American wildlife biologist and author of extremely popular books promoting the protection of seals and whales, wrote about a Russian who – as a boy – discovered an aggregation of sea cows on Bering Island that had survived there. The discoverer apparently revealed this sensation to him after having kept quiet about it all his life.

⁶ It is the same network that Kaori Nagai writes about, rightly indicating that Kipling wanted to underline the agency and subjectivity of animals, in “The Beast in the Chinese Boxes: The *Jungle Books* as an Imperial Beast-Fable”, in Kaori Nagai, Karen Jones, Donna Landry, Monica Mattfeld, Caroline Rooney, and Charlotte Sleigh, eds., *Cosmopolitan Animals*, Delhi: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, 233–245.

metamorphosis turning Greek Sirens – those whose enchanting song lured sailors to their death – into enormous, shapeless creatures, the ugliest creatures in the sea.⁷ These sirens can neither sing nor even talk, but only they know the way to the Promised Land.⁸

The first web of mythological references thus connects the Book of Exodus with the curiously processed Siren myth. It is worth remembering that Sirens were an extremely popular motif in Victorian culture. Among other reasons, this was due to a growing interest in Charles Darwin's theory and in extinct species as links in evolution connecting humans and animals.⁹ The education offered at the time also made it easy to search for mythological references to Sirens.¹⁰ Actually, they were a frequent theme in Pre-Raphaelite painting as well, especially in the work of Edward Burne-Jones (see Figs. 1 and 2). Kipling was his nephew by marriage and often stayed at his aunt's house as a child.

This was also a time of the growing popularity of folk stories drawn from Celtic mythology – preserved in Scottish, Irish, and Orkney folklore – that described a different kind of "mermaid", one that could assume human as well as seal form. Just recently we were reminded¹¹ that this type of Siren – the *selkie* – was the theme of the poem "Little Seal-Skin" by Yorkshire poet Eliza Keary.¹² Let us add that she was most famous as the author of highly appreciated children's poems and stories that Kipling certainly knew (he even had them in his library) and valued, since he recommended them to his daughter as worth reading.¹³

⁷ Rudyard Kipling, "The White Seal", in his *The Jungle Books*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008 (ed. pr. 1987), 77: "He's the only thing in the sea uglier than Sea Vitch," screamed a burgo-master gull".

⁸ See the illustration accompanying the scene of Kotick's encounter with the sea cows. It comes from the 1895 edition of *The Jungle Book* (see Fig. 3).

⁹ See *Seal and Mermaid*, an engraving by T.W. Woods. *Nota bene*, Woods was the illustrator of *The Descent of Man* by Darwin.

¹⁰ See Béatrice Laurent, "Monster or Missing Link? The Mermaid and the Victorian Imagination", *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens* 85 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.4000/cve.3188>.

¹¹ See John Miller, "The Selkie and the Fur Trade: Eliza Keary's 'Little Seal-Skin'", *ShARC Blog*, Sheffield Animal Studies Research Centre, 15 April 2019, <http://sheffieldanimals.group.shef.ac.uk/the-selkie-and-the-fur-trade-eliza-kearys-little-seal-skin-by-john-miller/> (accessed 10 August 2020).

¹² In her *Little Seal-Skin and Other Poems*, London: George Bell and Sons, 1874, 1–10.

¹³ See Kipling's story "Weland's Sword" (in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, London: Macmillan, 1906, 10), in which Una, a character based on his daughter, declares that she knows the book *The Heroes of Asgard*. It was written by Eliza and Annie Keary and published in 1857 (London: David Bogue).



Figure 1: Edward Burne-Jones, *Mermaid with Her Offspring* (ca. 1880), WikiArt, Public Domain.

Another element linking mythology and Kipling's text is the fact that a talking bird is the main narrator. Kipling calls it the Winter Wren and provides its name in Aleutian as well: Limmershim. This species from the wren family (*Troglodytidae*) was described in 1873 by Henry W. Elliott, discoverer and defender of the rich natural environment of Alaska and the



Figure 2: Edward Burne-Jones, *The Depths of the Sea* (1887), photograph from WikiArt, edited by xennex (2020), Wikimedia Commons.

Aleutian Islands.¹⁴ More about the link between Elliott and the concept of Kipling's story later. Meanwhile, I would like to mention Roger T. Peterson, a great ornithologist and one of the leading initiators of the twentieth-century ecological movement (he lived from 1908 to 1996), who recalled that when he visited the Pribilof Islands, he recognized the bird immediately because he knew "The White Seal" by Kipling so well.¹⁵

The wren family includes a few dozen species that live mainly in the New World. All of them look very similar, and only one occurs in Europe: the European wren (*Troglodytes troglodytes*), considered the commonest bird in Britain.¹⁶ And thus it is deeply present in European folk tradition. Stories about how the wren wanted to be king of the birds originated in Antiquity. This is an altogether popular theme in folklore: the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index denotes it as numbers 0221 and

¹⁴ The current official name is Pacific wren, not Alaskan winter wren (*Anorthura troglodytes alasensis*), as the bird was called in Elliott and Kipling's time; see Riley Woodford, "New Names for Old Birds", *Alaska Fish & Wildlife News*, February 2011, http://www.adfg.alaska.gov/index.cfm?adfg=wildlifeneews.view_article&articles_id=498 (accessed 19 September 2020).

¹⁵ See Roger Tory Peterson, *All Things Reconsidered: My Birding Adventures*, New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin, 2006.

¹⁶ Stephen Moss, *The Wren: A Biography*, London: Penguin Random House, 2018.

0222. The narrator in “The White Seal” – a wren – is thus thoroughly prepared for its fairy-tale and magical role as an “enchanted bird” (see Fig. 4).



Figure 3: “He had found Sea Cow at last”, illustration from Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*, London: Macmillan, 1895 (image reprinted from the following edition: New York, NY: Century Co., 1912, 162).

By the way, ancient authors and folk stories do not distinguish between the two smallest birds of Britain: the wren and the goldcrest (*Regulus regulus*), attributing regal ambitions to both. Kipling used the symbolism of the latter bird in the story “Regulus” from the volume *Stalky and Co.*¹⁷

At the beginning of the story, Kipling informs the reader that the tale of the White Seal was told to him by a “fellow passenger”¹⁸ on board a steamer sailing from America to Japan. This passenger was a “chilled bird” (the aforementioned Winter Wren) that, having been warmed up and fed in the writer’s cabin, then told him the story of the White Seal as an expression of gratitude for his help. The story is a *sui generis* translation from animal language into English.

¹⁷ See Jerzy Axer, “A Latin Lesson for Bad Boys, or: Kipling’s Tale of the Enchanted Bird”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, “Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity” 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 55–64.

¹⁸ This is how Kipling refers to the bird in the preface to *The Jungle Book*.



Figure 4: The Pacific wren, Vancouver Island (2012), photograph by Eleanor Briccetti, Wikimedia Commons.

This means that Kipling presents himself as merely the translator of an eye-witness report. In the one-page preface to *The Jungle Book* he calls himself the editor of the bird's story. I think it is a simplification to treat Kipling's preface solely as a parody of the editorial introductions to scientific works from the natural sciences. In the final lines of his preface the author wants, as I believe, to draw the reader's attention to the fact that he is both a reporter and a poet: as a poet he understands animal speech; as a reporter he has an obligation to find an eyewitness.

Was the witness reliable? Kipling took care to leave us in no doubt. He states in the story's first paragraph that "Limmershin is a very odd little bird, but he knows how to tell the truth".¹⁹ I think the expression "he knows how to tell the truth" has a double meaning. One refers to the convention of the fairy tale and to urging people to believe that "Fiction is Truth's elder sister".²⁰ The other

¹⁹ Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*, New York, NY: Century Co., 1912, 137.

²⁰ Rudyard Kipling, "Fiction", a speech to the Royal Society of Literature, June 1926; published in Rudyard Kipling, *Writings on Writing*, eds. Sandra Kemp and Lisa Lewis, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 80.

is a humorous critique of contemporary scientific theories about nature. Kipling seems to be saying that the only reliable source of knowledge about nature is nature itself – if the observer understands animal language, that is.

* * *

Until recently, the journalistic aspect of “The White Seal” had been passed over or ignored by literary scholars. True, they noted that Kipling never went to the Far North and he never reached the Bering Sea or the Aleutian Islands where the events described in the story took place “several years ago” (according to the bird’s account). They pointed out that Kipling drew his knowledge about the natural environment in that region from the publications and reports of Elliott and the maps and illustrations they contained.²¹ This “second-hand knowledge”, according to some interpretations, undermines the text’s reliability and power of persuasion. The same argument has also been used to undermine the author’s natural-science knowledge, the accusation being that he does not really know anything about the habits of fur seals.²²

It was John Miller who, in a study published recently, showed the great role played by literary fiction as an effective tool of propaganda in combating the pro-fur discourse that enjoyed the support of entrepreneurs and influential politicians in the 1880s and 1890s.²³ In this excellent text, Miller mentions a shocking short story from 1875 entitled “The Strange Story of the Sealskin: A Tale of Metempsychosis”, published anonymously in *Judy, or, The London Serio-Comic Journal*. It takes the point of view of a seal that has been turned into a fur muff. Miller goes on to discuss Kipling’s story which – he claims – fully expresses the seal’s perspective. This outlook is the same as my own position presented four years ago at the conference *Our Mythical Hope* in Warsaw.

“The White Seal” needs to be treated as a momentous literary text by the world’s most popular English-language poet and writer at the time, dialoguing with Elliott’s long-time campaign to save the fur seals from annihilation (see Fig. 5), and as an important voice in the effort to stir world public opinion on

²¹ Cf. Henry W. Elliott, *The Seal-Islands of Alaska*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1881; *Our Arctic Province: Alaska and the Seal Islands*, New York, NY: C. Scribner’s Sons, 1887.

²² No wonder, since the critics refer to the specialist knowledge of seal hunters, who would hardly sympathize with the author or with the seals.

²³ John Miller, “Fiction, Fashion, and the Victorian Fur Seal Hunt”, in Karen L. Edwards, Derek Ryan, and Jane Spencer, eds., *Reading Literary Animals: Medieval to Modern*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2020, 212–226.

the subject of the ecological disaster in Alaska. Indeed, Elliott's activity, his crusade to defend the seals, has aroused the justified interest of young historians in recent years.²⁴



Figure 5: Henry W. Elliott, *Fur-Seal Industry of the Pribilof Islands, Alaska. The Killing-Gang at Work; Method of Slaughtering Fur-Seals on the Grounds near the Village, St. Paul's Island*, drawing from Henry W. Elliott, *Our Arctic Province: Alaska and the Seal Islands*, New York, NY: C. Scribner's Sons, 1887, 338, after Freshwater and Marine Image Bank, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

The magnitude of Kipling's text also stemmed from the fact that it was published during an intensification of an international debate among the super-powers of the time on the proper management of the Bering Sea's ecosystem. Taking advantage of the emotions concomitant with the dispute, Kipling lifted the debate – concerning an economic and political conflict – to a new level. As a party that needed to be heard on the matter, he proposed the animal inhabitants of the territories in question. The Winter Wren's story is the animals' own accusation against the murderers and an appeal to an International Court of Justice that did not yet exist. Let us trace the main elements of this layer of meaning in the text.

²⁴ See Ken Ross, "Fur Seal's Friend: Henry W. Elliott", in his *Pioneering Conservation in Alaska*, Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2006, 27–57, available at Project Muse, <https://muse.jhu.edu/chapter/2276739> (accessed 10 August 2020); Lisa Marie Morris, *Keeper of the Seal: The Art of Henry Wood Elliott and the Salvation of the Alaska Fur Seals*, PhD dissertation, University of Alaska, 2001.

First of all, in such an interpretation it is extremely important that this story is framed with two poems. It begins with eight lines of the "Seal Lullaby":

Oh! hush thee, my baby, the night is behind us
And black are the waters that sparkled so green.
The moon, o'er the combers, looks downward to find us
At rest in the hollows that rustle between.
Where billow meets billow, there soft by the pillow.
Oh, weary wee flipperling, curl at thy ease!
The storm shall not wake thee, nor shark overtake thee
Asleep in the storm of slow-swinging seas.²⁵

This lullaby is a sign that the story will feature a mythical theme. After all, the first line contains an intertextual allusion – a crypto-quote from the famous poem "Lullaby of an Infant Chief" by Sir Walter Scott ("O, hush thee, my babie, thy sire was a knight").²⁶ It foretells the heroic destiny of the newly born white seal.

The story of the White Seal ends with the poem "Lukannon", which the author describes as "a sort of very sad seal National Anthem".²⁷ Kipling also informs the reader that this song is sung by all the seals returning to Saint Paul Island in summer. This tells us that the martyrdom of the seals continues. After Kotick's mission is over, the butchering of seals does not cease. The White Seal and his "believers" followed the guides from another world and found refuge in the Sanctuary, though on the beaches of Lukannon the creatures continue to suffer. The poem thus does not refer to a mythical tale but is a journalistic text: a song about the annihilation of an entire species and an appeal to the world to save the dying victims.

This hymn building the seals' sense of "national community" (as Kipling writes) is distinctly like a prayer:

Wheel down, wheel down to southward; oh, Gooverooska go!
And tell the Deep-Sea Viceroy! the story of our woe;
Ere, empty as the shark's egg the tempest flings ashore,
The beaches of Lukannon shall know their sons no more!²⁸

²⁵ Kipling, *The Jungle Book*, 136.

²⁶ This observation comes from W.W. Robson, "Explanatory Notes", in Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Books*, with introduction and notes by W.W. Robson, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, 356.

²⁷ Kipling, *The Jungle Book*, 170.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, 171.

To whom is this prayer addressed? It is worth noting that the messenger the seals choose is a bird endemic to the Pribilof Islands and an endangered species (the red-legged kittiwake, *Rissa brevirostris*) that Elliott described and painted. Here we have another allusion to a talking bird, since Elliott described its voice as a plaintive cry, and the Russian name that Kipling invokes, *goovoor-ski*, means “talkative”.

The seals ask a passing gull to “tell the Deep-Sea Viceroy! the story of our woe”. But who are these Viceroy? I think even such a sensitive interpreter as Andrew Hagioannu is mistaken when he claims the Viceroy were sea cows.²⁹ What would be the use of issuing a manifesto addressed to these extinct creatures that had already fulfilled the role they were to play in the story? The correct interpretation of this reference makes us realize yet again that what we see is not a fairy-tale and mythical layer of the text, but a political and journalistic one. Kipling is clearly referring to the allegory of Britannia as queen of the seas.

Britannia was personified as a goddess already in Roman times, in the second century CE. From the time of Elizabeth I her image was propagated as a symbol of England’s naval power, and began to assume a special role during Queen Victoria’s reign. Let us note that William Dyce’s painting *Neptune Resigning to Britannia the Empire of the Sea*, which Victoria bought in 1847, depicts a scene in which Britannia receives the Trident as the most important attribute of the God of the Sea (see Fig. 6).

Therefore, the seals ask that the Viceroy be notified and take responsibility for managing the regions where the seals live, because that is how the British Empire is organized. For example, this was how things were in India, the main setting of *The Jungle Book*. Why is the prayer of the seals not heard for so long? A new possibility for interpreting the story of the White Seal opens up here.

We begin to realize that this is a story about an area where neither the Law of the Jungle nor the law of the Empire is in effect. In *The Jungle Book*, Kipling postulated a world in which human responsibility is total, but accountability is only possible under the rule of law. The Law of the Jungle which he suggests requires humans to account for animal rights as well. Kipling’s vision of the British Empire included building a community of humans and animals.³⁰ On this

²⁹ Andrew Hagioannu, *The Man Who Would Be Kipling: The Colonial Fiction and the Frontiers of Exile*, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003, 101.

³⁰ See Shefali Rajamannar, *Reading the Animal in the Literature of the British Raj*, New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

level it was an ecological and cosmopolitan idea; imperialistic, yes, but not – as some commentators write – a racist and nationalist one. In a space where the Law of the Jungle does not apply, the Colonizer becomes inhuman, the Natives become degenerate, and the Animals face extinction.

But Kotick was born and his kind live in a totally different place. It is the Aleutian Archipelago, which Russia sold to the United States together with Alaska in 1867. First of all, let us trace the timeline of the story. The Winter Wren tells the author that Kotick is living happily in his mythical sanctuary after completing his mission. His adventures and the search for a refuge for the seals lasted approximately ten years. The first readers saw the story in 1893; if they decided it was a current report, their conclusion should have been that Kotick's father, who was fifteen years old at the birth of his son marked by Destiny, had been born exactly in 1867! That would mean that Kipling's text is about the legal situation after the United States officially took over the region.



Figure 6: William Dyce, *Neptune Resigning to Britannia the Empire of the Sea* (1847), fresco in Osborne House, East Cowes, Isle of Wight, England, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

In the early 1890s this was still an area where neither the Ten Commandments nor any laws applied. Such was the image of the region painted in the literature and journalism of the time. Kipling himself wrote in one of his poems:

"There's never a law of God or man runs north of Fifty-Three".³¹ The prayer the seals sing on Lukannon contains a plea which the red-legged kittiwake is to take southwards, where there are laws in force. To my mind, it is a prayer for an extension of the Law of the Jungle further to the north.

Could it be that Kipling was in favour of Britain being allowed to rule over the Bering Sea? It is true that his country was involved in this conflict, but the political overtone of Kipling's text is completely different.

The interventionist layer of the story had – at the time of the book's publication – a specific point of reference. It was precisely in 1893 that an international arbitration (the Bering Sea Arbitration, or the Fur Seal Arbitration) resolved the dispute between the United States and the United Kingdom over the boundaries of seal fisheries. Kipling's manuscript even includes a postscript to "The White Seal" that contains a direct reference to the Bering Sea Dispute. However, the writer removed it from the version of the story incorporated into *The Jungle Book*. Commentators – invoking one of Kipling's letters – justify this decision by the fact that the writer did not like overly detailed explanations to his texts. I think there was another important reason. Hopes for an improvement in the ecological situation, which had been raised in connection with the Fur Seal Arbitration, had come to nothing. The agreement did not properly protect the rookeries (breeding grounds) of seals in the Aleutian Islands. This is shown, for example, in one of Elliott's subsequent reports.³² Thus, the fight to save the seals had to continue. Kipling's story led to increased pressure from world public opinion on the superpowers to sign a new agreement guaranteeing genuine improvement in the situation of the seals and other animals inhabiting the region. In this context, Hagiioannu interprets "The White Seal" as a manifesto calling for an Anglo-American Entente.³³

The way Kipling sees it, the Law of the Jungle is meant to improve the co-existence, and not the morality, of the beings subject to it.³⁴ Only through this

³¹ See Rudyard Kipling, "The Rhyme of the Three Sealers" (1893), in his *The Seven Seas*, Kelly Bray: Stratus Books, 2001, 32–41.

³² H.W. Elliott and Lieut. Washburn Maynard, U.S.N., *Reports on the Fur-Seal Fisheries, etc., of the Pribilof Islands, Reindeer in Alaska, and Education in Alaska*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1898 (vol. 3 of *Seal and Salmon Fisheries and General Resources of Alaska*).

³³ See Hagiioannu, *The Man Who Would Be Kipling*, 99. Unfortunately the author's observations did not lead him to decipher the depth of Kipling's ecological commitment; he upheld the idea that the story ultimately has a pessimistic and ironic tone (see *ibidem*, 101).

³⁴ Cf. the analysis of the idea of the Law of the Jungle by Jopi Nyman, "Re-Reading Nation in Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*", in his *Postcolonial Animal Tale from Kipling to Coetzee*, New Delhi: Atlantic, 2003, 38–55.

kind of regulation can a catastrophe, including an ecological disaster, be averted. Therefore, in the world as it is, the seals' prayer can be answered thanks to an agreement between superpowers concluded under pressure from public opinion. This is what the journalist should fight for. And such a solution was finally adopted some years later, when Britain, the United States, and Russia signed an agreement that civilized seal hunting in the area to some extent (the last ratification was in 1911).³⁵

In the mythical world accessible to the poet, things are different. What we draw from there is not practical solutions but hope. Kipling's "mythical hope" was global. The story of the White Seal in itself is a mythical tale. Out of elements of Christian and ancient topoi mixed with the Buddhist archetype of a "pure land", with the *Panchatantra*, there emerged a new kind of "beast fable".³⁶ Kipling's *Just So Stories* are rightly considered by sensitive commentators to be a revival of the etiological animal tale (and its greatest example since the times of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*). Similarly, "The White Seal" is an innovative way of using beast fables as a call for humans to take responsibility for all of Creation. In the Anthropocene period (our own times), this call becomes an especially relevant parable warning against global catastrophe.

* * *

"The White Seal" is a story with many levels of meaning. My aim in this paper has been to remark on just two such levels, the ones I believe to be the most important. First is the layer built by a reporter and journalist – it is intended for a civic audience, not for children. It is a kind of journalistic intervention connected with an environmental disaster in territories until recently belonging to and devastated by the Russian Empire.³⁷ The powers to which the region now belongs are responsible for finding a way out of this catastrophe. But the other layer – and the one that interests us the most here – is the work of a poet. This layer of meaning does not detract, as Miller seems to think, from the ecological message.³⁸ On the contrary: thanks to the poet's work, "The White Seal" does not lose its relevance after the adoption of practical solutions in a political

³⁵ North Pacific Fur Seal Convention (*nota bene*, among other things, this treaty mandated that the Pribilof Islands become a sanctuary for seals).

³⁶ For more, see, e.g., Tess Cossett, *Talking Animals in British Children's Fiction, 1786–1914*, Dorchester: Ashgate Publishing, 2006.

³⁷ See Ryan Tucker Jones, *Empire of Extinction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

³⁸ Cf. Miller, "Fiction, Fashion, and the Victorian Fur Seal Hunt". Miller believes that using the convention of talking animals encourages a narrowed, anti-imperial allegorical interpretation.

conflict involving a specific area. It becomes a universal parable of enormous ethical power. The parable belongs to no denomination, but Evil and Good can be named. The addressee is humankind, including the youngest and the oldest. The real mission of Kotick the Saviour is to give humans and animals new hope of being saved: animals from extinction, humans from damnation.

*ALL IS (NOT) LOST: MYTH IN THE SHADOW
OF THE HOLOCAUST IN BEZSENNOŚĆ
JUTKI [JUTKA'S INSOMNIA] BY DOROTA
COMBRZYŃSKA-NOGAŁA**

Among the many child victims of the Holocaust, Anne Frank (1929–1945) is perhaps the best known. For over two years, she was hiding in Amsterdam with her family and others in a secret annex, where she wrote one of the most famous diaries of all time. On 4 August 1944 the hideout was discovered by the Nazis and its eight inhabitants were captured. Anne died in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in February 1945 (the exact date is unknown). The only survivor of the Holocaust was her father, Otto Frank, who shortly after World War Two published his daughter's diary in a censored version, avoiding some sensitive topics, such as her sexual awakening.¹ Thanks to Anne's writing, the reader can not only learn of the antisemitic Nazi policy in the Netherlands and other European countries, but also look inside the mind of a young girl.

Interestingly, among Anne Frank's everyday activities was reading books about history and her beloved topic, Graeco-Roman mythology. On 13 June 1943, she wrote: "I [...] have received a number of lovely presents [for her birthday], including a big book on my favourite subject, Greek and Roman mythology".² Earlier that year, on 27 March, she had confessed: "I adore mythology,

* The chapter is based on my paper delivered in Warsaw at the conference *Our Mythical Hope in Children's and Young Adults' Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life* (18–21 May 2017).

¹ Mirjam Pressler, in her "Foreword" to Anne Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl: The Definitive Edition*, eds. Otto H. Frank and Mirjam Pressler, trans. Susan Massotty, London: Penguin Books, 2008 (ed. pr. in Dutch 1947), vi.

² Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, 104. The book she received was a Dutch translation of *The Myths of Greece and Rome* (1908) by Hélène Adeline Guerber (*De mythen van Griekenland en Rome*, ed. and trans. B.C. Goudsmit, Zutphen: W.J. Thieme, 1934). For the list of books mentioned

especially the Greek and Roman gods. Everyone here thinks my interest is just a passing fancy, since they've never heard of a teenager with an appreciation of mythology. Well then, I suppose I'm the first!"³ On her reading list, "The-seus, Oedipus, Peleus, Orpheus, Jason, and Hercules" were "all waiting to be untangled, since their various deeds are running crisscross through my mind like multicoloured threads in a dress", she wrote.⁴ It is no surprise that among her hobbies and interests "number four is Greek and Roman mythology".⁵

Though Anne is hidden away in the annex, she is aware of the terrible things that are happening to the Jewish people of Amsterdam and throughout Europe. Thus, although she does not express it directly, one may assume that her readings help her overcome the anxiety caused by her menacing surroundings.

Classical elements can be found in the diaries of Polish Jews too, including one of the few written by children and teenagers. Dawid Sierakowiak, who lived in the Łódź Ghetto (Litzmannstadt in German) during the war, was only a couple of years older than Anne Frank (in 1939 he was fifteen and only nineteen when he died in 1943). He is the author of a moving testimony described by Justyna Kowalska-Leder as "a study into the process of the onset of starvation. On the one hand it is a self-study of the person suffering and on the other, a report from the city of the starving".⁶ Sierakowiak was active in political youth organizations, and was seen as a great student: "Despite the unrelenting hunger, Dawid attempts to carry out not only community work but also his studies. [...] Intellectual effort clearly brings him pleasure and as recreation [he] translates Ovid into Polish".⁷ On 22 July 1941, he wrote in his diary: "I've recently begun translating poems. I'm translating Ovid's *Deadal and Icar* [*sic*] into Polish".⁸ As Alan Adelson comments:

in the diary, see Sylvia Patterson Iskander, "Anne Frank's Reading", *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* 13.3 (1988), 139–140.

³ Frank, *The Diary of a Young Girl*, 93–94.

⁴ Thursday, 11 May 1944; *ibidem*, 293–294.

⁵ Thursday, 6 April 1944; *ibidem*, 251: "Number four is Greek and Roman mythology. I have various books on this subject too. I can name nine Muses and the seven loves of Zeus. I have the wives of Hercules, etc., etc., off pat."

⁶ Justyna Kowalska-Leder, *Their Childhood and the Holocaust: A Child's Perspective in Polish Documentary and Autobiographical Literature*, trans. Richard J. Reisner, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2015 (ed. pr. in Polish: *Doświadczenie Zagłady z perspektywy dziecka w polskiej literaturze dokumentu osobistego*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2009), 124–125.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 130–131 (quoted with some adjustments in the translation).

⁸ Dawid Sierakowiak, *The Diary of Dawid Sierakowiak: Five Notebooks from the Łódź Ghetto*, trans. Kamil Turowski, ed. Alan Adelson, New York, NY, and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996, 113.

Dawid chose to translate literature's most glorious and tragic story of escape, the Daedalus and Icarus myth from Ovid's *The Metamorphoses* (VIII, 183–235). Daedalus built wings to enable him and his son, Icarus, to fly out of the Labyrinth. The great tale could not have failed to resonate bitterly for Dawid, captive in the ghetto with his own father.⁹

A similar assumption may be made in the case of Anne Frank's readings of mythical stories.

In my chapter I wish to analyse a Polish work of fiction, the children's novel *Bezsenność Jutki* [Jutka's Insomnia, 2012] by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala¹⁰ – in which mythology, the Cretan myth in particular, is used in a similar way, showing the bibliotherapeutical aspect of the myth and the hope it can bring even in the shadow of the Holocaust.¹¹ I am interested in the concept of hope as revealed in the narrative of the novel, and not as an actual feeling accompanying children during or after reading this particular work. The latter issue was raised by scholars such as Adrienne Kertzer, who argued that Holocaust stories for young audiences should allow them to hope,¹² and Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, who in her book dedicated to Polish Holocaust children's literature unwaveringly stressed the importance of not traumatizing the young reader.¹³ I begin by

⁹ Ibidem, 113 (footnote).

¹⁰ *Jutka's Insomnia* has already been analysed by some classical reception scholars; see, i.a., Katarzyna Marciniak, "(De)Constructing Arcadia: The Polish Struggles with History and Differing Colours of Childhood in the Mirror of Classical Mythology", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 6, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015, 81–82; Maciej Skowera, "Entry on: *Jutka's Insomnia* [Bezsenność Jutki] by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala, ill. Joanna Rusinek", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Susan Deacy, *Our Mythical Childhood Survey*, Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018, <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/385> (accessed 8 April 2020).

¹¹ In this chapter I focus mainly on the creation of hope and on bibliotherapy. I had presented a more advanced analysis of Polish children's literature about the Holocaust using classical reception studies in my book *Dzieciństwo w labiryncie getta. Recepcja mitu labiryntu w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej o Zagładzie* [Childhood in the Labyrinth of the Ghetto: Reception of the Labyrinth Myth in Polish Children's Literature about the Holocaust], Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2019. On the use of myth and fairy tale in literature about the Holocaust for adults, see Philippe Codde, "Transmitted Holocaust Trauma: A Matter of Myth and Fairy Tales?", *European Judaism* 42.1 (2009), 62–75. Codde focuses on the novels *Everything Is Illuminated* (2002) by Jonathan Safran Foer and *If I Told You Once* (1999) by Judy Budnitz.

¹² See Adrienne Kertzer, *My Mother's Voice: Children, Literature, and the Holocaust*, Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2002, 13.

¹³ See Małgorzata Wójcik-Dudek, *Reading (in) the Holocaust: Practices of Postmemory in Recent Polish Literature for Children and Young Adults*, trans. Patrycja Poniadowska, Berlin: Peter Lang, 2020 (ed. pr. in Polish: *W(y)czytać Zagładę. Praktyki postpamięci w polskiej literaturze XXI wieku*

briefly explaining how the Holocaust became a popular theme in recent years in Polish children's literature; next, I present the novel itself, showing how contact with mythology influences the young protagonist. Finally, I discuss the bibliotherapeutical power hidden in the mythical tale.

The Holocaust in Polish Children's Literature

Jutka's Insomnia was published in the series "Wojny dorosłych – historie dzieci" [Grown-Ups' Wars – Children's Stories] by Wydawnictwo Literatura, a well-established Łódź-based publishing house, known, among others, for this particular series, as to date over twenty illustrated books have been published as part of it, covering such different topics as the Silesian Uprisings (1919, 1920, 1921), World War Two, the Warsaw Uprising (1944), the Holocaust, the communist period (Polish People's Republic, 1947–1989), martial law in Poland (1981–1983), refugees fleeing Ukraine and African and Middle Eastern countries, and a biography of Malala Yousafzai (born in 1997) – the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate (2014), known for her human rights advocacy.¹⁴

Combrzyńska-Nogala's book was published in 2012, the Year of Janusz Korczak (1878/1879–1942), who was a famous Polish educator and children's author. His best-known novel and one of the most widely recognized Polish children's literature titles is *Król Maciuś Pierwszy* [King Matt the First] from 1923.¹⁵ Korczak was also a paediatrician, known as the Old Doctor ("Stary Doktor" in Polish), and during World War Two he was the director of an orphanage in the Warsaw Ghetto. When the Polish Parliament announced that Korczak would be the patron of the year 2012, many children's books about him were published, all of them including the most tragic moment of his life, which was agreeing to be sent from the Warsaw Ghetto to the Treblinka extermination camp alongside his

dla dzieci i młodzieży, Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 2016), 22, 31, 117, 132, 152, 183, 195. For my review of Wójcik-Dudek's book, see Krzysztof Rybak, "Sparing Them the Trauma: Postmemory Practices in Contemporary Polish Children's Literature about the Holocaust", *Filoteknos* 8 (2018), 169–183.

¹⁴ For a list of all the books published in the series "Wojny dorosłych – historie dzieci" [Grown-Ups' Wars – Children's Stories], see the publisher's website, <https://www.wydawnictwoliteratura.pl/serie-wydawnicze/wojny-doroslych-historie-dzieci> (accessed 22 July 2019).

¹⁵ The first English translation appeared in 1986; see Janusz Korczak, *King Matt the First*, trans. Richard Lourie, introd. by Bruno Bettelheim, New York, NY: Ferrar, Straus & Giroux, 1986.

wards.¹⁶ Since then the Holocaust has become a more visible theme in Polish children's literature – earlier only a few titles had been published, among others *Kotka Brygidy* [Brygida's Kitten, 2007] by Joanna Rudniańska. After 2012, the Holocaust became one of the most popular topics in contemporary Polish historical fiction for children. Many new titles were published and won awards, both in the Polish Section of the IBBY "Book of the Year" competition, as in the case of *Arka czasu* [The Ark of Time, 2013] by Marcin Szczygielski, *Rutka* [Rutka, 2016] by Joanna Fabicka, and *Mirabelka* [Mirabelle, 2018] by Cezary Harasimowicz, and abroad – for example, *Rutka* was listed as one of the White Ravens of the International Youth Library in Munich. Among many books, *XY* (2012) by Joanna Rudniańska, *Wszystkie moje mamy* [All of My Mums, 2013] by Renata Piątkowska, and *Ostatnie piętro* [The Top Floor, 2015] by Irena Landau are worth noting.¹⁷ Some of these titles have also been translated into various foreign languages, as in the case of Rudniańska's *Brygida's Kitten* (Japanese), Szczygielski's *The Ark of Time* (German, Russian, Spanish, and Ukrainian), and Piątkowska's *All of My Mums* (English and Italian).

Myth and the Holocaust in *Jutka's Insomnia*

Even though there are many Polish works for children about the Holocaust, their authors usually do not use classical references explicitly – the only exception is Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala.¹⁸ The main character of *Jutka's Insomnia*

¹⁶ Among them were: Iwona Chmielewska, *Pamiętnik Blumki* [Blumka's Diary], Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2011; Anna Czerwińska-Rydel, *Po drugiej stronie okna. Opowieść o Januszu Korczaku* [The Other Side of the Window: A Tale about Janusz Korczak], Warszawa: Muchomor, 2012; Beata Ostrowicka, *Jest taka historia... opowieść o Januszu Korczaku* [There Is This Story... A Tale of Janusz Korczak], Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2012; and Adam Jaromir and Gabriela Cichowska, *Ostatnie przedstawienie panny Esterki* [Miss Esterka's Last Show], Poznań: Media Rodzina, 2014 (ed. pr. in German: *Fräulein Esthers letzte Vorstellung*, Hannover: Gimpel Verlag, 2013). The eponymous protagonist of this last picture book works in Korczak's orphanage and, together with the children, prepares a performance of *The Post Office* by Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). As Esterka says to Korczak, the children lack hope, and so rehearsing for the play could cheer them up; see Jaromir and Cichowska, *Ostatnie przedstawienie*, 62. On Korczak's life and works, see Agnieszka Witkowska, "Janusz Korczak", *Culture.pl*, December 2011, <http://culture.pl/en/artist/janusz-korczak> (accessed 22 July 2019).

¹⁷ A catalogue of such works is available on my project's website: Krzysztof Rybak, *Oczami dziecka* [Through the Eyes of a Child], <https://oczamidziecka.al.uw.edu.pl/index.php/en/project/> (accessed 8 April 2020).

¹⁸ Combrzyńska-Nogala is a philologist and teacher of the deaf. For Combrzyńska-Nogala's short biography, see Skowera, "Entry on: *Jutka's Insomnia* [Bezsenność Jutki]".

is a young girl who lives with her aunt and grandfather in the Łódź Ghetto. The grandfather – Dawid Cwancygier – tells her fairy tales, legends, and myths to help her fall asleep, including Snow White and the Wawel Dragon.¹⁹ The most important, however, is the tale about the mythical hero Theseus and his adventures on Crete, where he slew the monstrous Minotaur and – with Ariadne’s help – escaped the Labyrinth:²⁰

- Kiedy Dedal skończył budowę, chciał wrócić do domu, ale król mu nie pozwolił.
 - Dlaczego?
 - Nie chciał, żeby Dedal opowiedział innym o jego synu potworze.
 - Dedal i Ikar byli plotkarzami?
 - Nie, ale król bał się, że są, i uwięził ich na wyspie.
 - Tak jak Niemcy nas w getcie?
 - Tak. I wtedy Dedal wpadł na wspaniałą pomysł. Z piór i wosku zrobił dla siebie i syna wielkie skrzydła. [...] Ojciec ostrzegł syna, żeby nie leciał za wysoko, bo słońce roztopi wosk i spadnie. Za nisko nad morzem też nie może, bo pióra zrobią się wilgotne, ciężkie i spadnie do wody. Ikar tak się jednak zachwyił lotem, że zapomniał o przestrofach ojca i poleciał bardzo, bardzo wysoko, i... [...]
 - I strażnik go zestrzelił! – dopowiedziała Jutka.
 - Nie! Nie! [...] I słońce roztopiło wosk, i spadł.
 - Zbudujesz dla nas takie skrzydła? – ożywiła się wnuczka.
 - To baśń. Musimy wymyślić coś innego, jakiś inny rodzaj skrzydeł, inną ucieczkę. [...]
- Jutka usnęła, marząc o wspaniałym locie.²¹
- When Daedalus finished his construction he wanted to go back home, but the king didn’t let him.
 - Why?
 - He didn’t want Daedalus to tell other people about his monstrous son.
 - Were Daedalus and Icarus gossipers?

¹⁹ On the Wawel Dragon in Polish children’s literature, see Robert A. Sucharski, “Stanisław Pagaczewski and His Tale(s) of the Wawel Dragon”, 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, 439–448.

²⁰ Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezszenność Jutki* [Jutka’s Insomnia], ill. Joanna Rusinek, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2012. This and all the subsequent quotations – translated by this chapter’s author – are from this edition.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 41–44.

- No, but the king was concerned they were, so he imprisoned them on the island.
 - As the Germans have done to us in the ghetto?
 - Yes. And then Daedalus came up with a great idea. He used feathers and wax to create wings for his son and himself. [...] The father told his son that he should not fly too high; otherwise the sun would melt the wax and he would fall. He should not fly too close to the sea either, because the wings would get damp and he would fall into the water. But Icarus was so excited with the flight that he forgot about his father's warnings and flew very, very high, and... [...]
 - And the guard shot him down - added Jutka.
 - No! No! [...] And the Sun melted the wax and he fell.
 - Will you build such wings for us? - asked the granddaughter excitedly.
 - It's a tale. We need to come up with something else, a different kind of wings, a different way to escape. [...]
- Jutka fell asleep, dreaming about a wonderful flight.

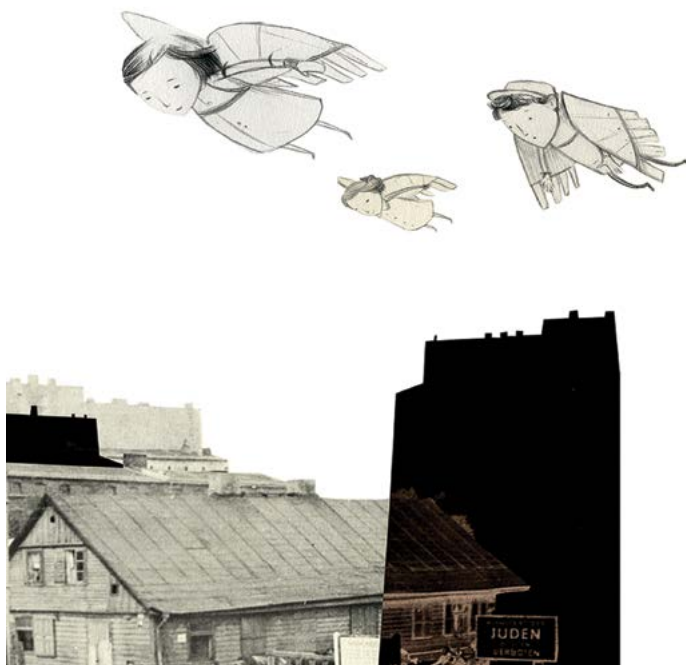


Figure 1: Children flying over the Łódź Ghetto, illustration by Joanna Rusinek in Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezsennosc Jutki* [Jutka's Insomnia], Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2012, 42-43. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

The grandfather's story is constantly interrupted by the young protagonist, who immediately notices similarities between the mythical tale and contemporary life in the ghetto. It also inspires her and gives her hope: after she listens to the story and processes it, a dream of freedom is born in Jutka's mind. In the illustration by Joanna Rusinek one can see Jutka and two other children flying over the ghetto buildings on paper wings attached to their arms (see Fig. 1). It not only shows a clear connection to the myth about Daedalus and Icarus, but also presents the girl's dream as a vision of a group effort, one bringing freedom not only to herself, but to others as well. What is striking, there are only children! Daedalus is not depicted, as if there were no hope for Dawid Cwancygier to escape the ghetto; indeed, as an older man, he had little chance of saving himself.

The chances to survive in the ghetto are also very low for Jutka and her friends, but thanks to Dawid Cwancygier's story the girl begins to better understand what is happening around her: the particular, systematic narrative structure of myth helps her find a logical explanation of the surrounding horror of the Holocaust – an incomprehensible process that seems unreal and turns life into an uncertain existence.

These categories – incomprehensibility and uncertainty – paralyse the people living in the Łódź Ghetto. For Jutka, the sealed-off district is a scary place: Combrzyńska-Nogala shows how deeply Jewish children are afraid of Nazi soldiers, who are a constant threat. During an escape from one of them, Jutka and her friends

znali każdy zaułek, każde przejście, wiedzieli, przez które podwórka można sobie skrócić drogę, gdzie da się przecisnąć między ciasną zabudową. Umieli po prostu zniknąć, zapaść się pod ziemię w labiryncie bałuckich domów [...].²²

knew every corner and every passage, they knew through which backyards they could shorten their route and where to squeeze through narrow spots. They simply knew how to disappear, to vanish into thin air in the labyrinth of the Bałuty houses [...].

Running through the streets of Łódź resembles running through a labyrinth, something the narrator observes, making an allusion to the Cretan myth, referred to earlier in the novel. But at the same time this space can be perceived as a familiar one, because the children "knew every corner and every passage".

²² Ibidem, 49. Bałuty is the district of Łódź in which the ghetto was located.

In the illustration of this scene the reader can see the shadow of a Nazi soldier whose arms look like the Minotaur's horns – this is another sign of Jutka's perception being influenced by the myth (see Fig. 2).



Figure 2: Children running from the Nazi-Minotaur, illustration by Joanna Rusinek in Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogała, *Bezsenność Jutki* [Jutka's Insomnia], Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2012, 50–51. Used with the Publisher's kind permission.

What is interesting, describing Nazi (often called in Polish simply "German") soldiers as monsters is very common in Polish children's literature²³ – as early as in 1919 Bronisława Ostrowska in *Bohaterski miś* [The Heroic Teddy Bear] described the German soldiers of World War One as "fearful creatures, coming

²³ I talked about this in my paper "Minotaur, Morlok, bestia. Obrazy niemieckich żołnierzy w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej o Zagładzie" [Minotaur, Morlock, Beast: German Soldiers in Polish Children's Literature about the Holocaust] during the conference *Potworne narracje. Monstrualne imaginarium w literaturze dziecięcej, młodzieżowej i fantastycznej* [Horrible Narrations: Monstrous Imaginary in Children's and Young Adult Literature and Speculative Fiction], organized by Koło Naukowe Baśni, Literatury Dziecięcej i Młodzieżowej i Fantastyki UW [Fairy Tale, Children's and Young Adult Literature, and Fantasy Student Society, University of Warsaw] and Muzeum Książki Dziecięcej [Museum of Children's Books] in Warsaw, 17–18 May 2019.

from another planet".²⁴ In contemporary children's literature, the monstrous nature can be represented literally or metaphorically – reflect, for example, on the "beasts in German uniforms" in *Listy w butelce. Opowieść o Irenie Sendlerowej* [Lists in a Bottle: A Story about Irena Sendler] by Anna Czerwińska-Rydel²⁵ – but definitely more popular is the physical deformation usually seen through a child character's eyes. In *The Ark of Time* by Szczypiński, the main character, Rafał, influenced by Herbert George Wells's *Time Machine* (1895), calls them "Morlocks" (underground creatures which devour the poor species of Eloi).²⁶ In *Miss Esterka's Last Show* by Jaromir and Cichowska, children from Janusz Korczak's orphanage talk about "Frankenstein",²⁷ a historical figure known by this monstrous alias because of his brutality (mentioned, among others, by Rachela Auerbach in her diary).²⁸ In *Czy wojna jest dla dziewczyn?* [Is War for Girls?, 2010] by Paweł Beręsewicz, the protagonist, Ela, sees a Nazi soldier as a Big Bad Wolf from the fairy tale about Little Red Riding Hood.²⁹ This tendency is present not only in Polish literature – in John Boyne's *Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2006), one of the best-known children's novels about the Holocaust, the main Nazi general is called Fury, as a reference to the mythological deities of vengeance.³⁰

²⁴ Bronisława Ostrowska, *Bohaterski miś* [The Heroic Teddy Bear], ill. Olga Reszelska, Poznań: Zys i S-ka, 2011 (ed. pr. 1919), 147: "straszliwe stwory, z innej planet przybyłe".

²⁵ Anna Czerwińska-Rydel, *Lists in a Bottle: A Story about Irena Sendler*, ill. Maciej Szymanowicz, trans. Katarzyna Wasilkowska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2018 (ed. pr. in Polish: *Listy w butelce. Opowieść o Irenie Sendlerowej*, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2018), 73.

²⁶ Marcin Szczypiński, *Arka czasu, czyli wielka ucieczka Rafała od kiedyś przez wtedy do teraz i wstecz* [The Ark of Time, or, Rafał's Great Escape from Once through Then until Now and Back], ill. Daniel de Latour, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Piotra Marciszuka STENTOR, 2013, 35.

²⁷ Jaromir and Cichowska, *Ostatnie przedstawienie*, 42–43.

²⁸ See Rachela Auerbach, *Pisma z getta warszawskiego* [Writings from the Warsaw Ghetto], trans. Karolina Szymaniak and Anna Ciałowicz, ed. Karolina Szymaniak, Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015, 156–158, 168–170, 201–203. See also Jan H. Issinger, "Frankenstein w warszawskim getcie. Historia i legenda" [Frankenstein in the Warsaw Ghetto: The History and Legend], trans. Małgorzata Półroła, *Zagłada Żydów. Studia i Materiały* [Holocaust Studies and Materials] 12 (2016), 187–208.

²⁹ Paweł Beręsewicz, *Czy wojna jest dla dziewczyn?* [Is War for Girls?], ill. Olga Reszelska, Łódź: Wydawnictwo Literatura, 2010, 27–29.

³⁰ See John Boyne, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, ill. Oliver Jeffers, London: Doubleday, 2016. Moving illustrations by Jeffers intensify the novel – one of the Nazi soldiers is depicted with his head blown-up as he furiously hits a Jewish man (231). The name Fury is a misspelling of the term Führer, just as the name of the town Out-Switch is a variation of the name Auschwitz – the main character, the German boy Bruno, uses these terms instead of the factual ones, which can be interpreted as one of Boyne's strategies for universalizing the story (it is worth noting that the subtitle of the book is *A Fable*). See also Krzysztof Rybak, "Entry on: *Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* by John Boyne", peer-reviewed by Elżbieta Olechowska and Susan Deacy, *Our Mythical Childhood*

Other mythical creatures – harpies – come to mind when one sees the German soldiers depicted by Joanna Concejo in *Fume* [Smoke, 2008] by Antón Fortes.³¹ All these negative qualities applied to Nazi soldiers can be related to the Minotaur,³² a tragic character, who – despite having some human qualities – cannot tame his wilderness and aggression.

The Cretan monster should be accompanied by Theseus, but in children's literature about the Holocaust this particular mythological hero is absent. There are at least two reasons for this. The first is obvious and based on historical facts – in the Holocaust period, Jews had a very small chance of survival. Several uprisings, such as the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943, failed. The second reason may be the authors' wish to present the young protagonist as a hero – Jutka performs a great deed defeating the "Minotaur", who can be interpreted not only as a Nazi, but also as fear itself.

At one point in the novel the operation "Wielka Szpera" (Aktion Gehsperrre – General Curfew) begins. Combrzyńska-Nogala does not give many historical details, which are as follows: the Jewish Order Service (later, also Nazi soldiers) searched the ghetto in order to find "all children under 10 years of age, the sick, and the elderly over 65 years of age",³³ who were to be sent to the extermination camp in Chełmno upon Ner (Kulmhof). An infamous speech was made then by the Eldest of the Jews, Chaim Mordechaj Rumkowski, who had to implement Nazi orders in the ghetto.³⁴ He addressed the ghetto's inhabitants thus:

A grievous blow has struck the ghetto. They are asking us to give up the best we possess – the children and the elderly. [...] In my old age, I must stretch out my hands and beg: Brothers and sisters! Hand them over to me! Fathers and mothers: Give me your children! [...] I must perform this difficult and bloody operation – I must cut off limbs in order to save

Survey, Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/205> (accessed 8 April 2020).

³¹ Antón Fortes and Joanna Concejo, *Smoke*, trans. Mark W. Heslop, Pontevedra: OQO Editora, 2009. *Smoke*, originally published in Galician as *Fume* (2008), has been translated into Spanish, French, English, and Polish, among others.

³² On the Nazi as a Bogeyman figure in children's and young adult literature written in English, see Lydia Kokkola, *Representing the Holocaust in Children's Literature*, New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 2003, 132–139. Kokkola notes that "for the most part, the perpetrators in Holocaust literature are presented as completely dehumanised monsters" (134).

³³ Julian Baranowski and Sławomir M. Nowinowski, eds., *Łódź Ghetto – Litzmannstadt Getto: 1940–1944*, trans. Katarzyna Gucio, Łódź: State Archive in Łódź and Institute of National Remembrance Public Education Office Branch in Łódź, 2014, 32–33.

³⁴ *Ibidem*, 32. Aktion Gehsperrre took place between 5 and 12 September 1942.

the body itself. I must take children because, if not, others may be taken as well – God forbid. [...] I can barely speak. I am exhausted; I only want to tell you what I am asking of you: Help me carry out this action! [...] Do not envy me. This is the most difficult of all orders I have ever had to carry out at any time. I reach out to you with my broken, trembling hands and beg: Give into my hands the victims! So that we can avoid having further victims, and a population of 100,000 Jews can be preserved! So they promised me: If we deliver our victims by ourselves, there will be peace!!!³⁵

The speech is only mentioned in the novel and immediately “Jutka knew that the monster Minotaur [...] wanted to devour the children and their grandmothers and grandfathers”.³⁶ In this context the Minotaur is a metaphor for all the Nazi soldiers or the whole “death machinery” – thus, the Minotaur devouring Jews could be crematoria in death camps (although Jutka was not aware of the existence of Nazi camps). It is also possible that Rumkowski is the “monster” here, as the one who made the announcement and asked for the sacrifice, even though he himself is a Jew.³⁷

Despite making Jutka a Theseus-like heroine, Combrzyńska-Nogala does not leave her by herself; her grandfather decides to hide the girl and – performing Ariadne’s role – gives Jutka a ball of thread:

Dawid Cwancygier otworzył wieko kuchennej piwniczki i kazał Jutce się schować i siedzieć cicho do czasu, aż zapuka ciotka. [...]
– Ale tu jest ciemno! Boję się! Dziadku, boję się!
– Wiem, że jest ciemno, ale przypomnij sobie Tezeusza, jak przetrwał w labiryncie. Tak samo w ciemnościach. W dodatku czyhał na niego Minotaur. A tu potwór jest na zewnątrz. Prawda?
– Tak, ale ja nie mam kłębka, żeby zaznaczyć drogę.
– Rzeczywiście, nie pomyślałem o tym. Ale zaraz temu zaradzimy. O, proszę! – Podał jej kłębek burej wełny. – Nie bój się. Potwór jest na zewnątrz. Pamiętaj o Tezeuszu!

³⁵ Ibidem, 32.

³⁶ Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezszenność Jutki*, 66: “Jutka wiedziała, że ten potwór Minotaur [...] chce pożreć dzieci i ich babcie, i dziadków”.

³⁷ Rumkowski is presented as a monster in *Rutka* by Fabicka. He is called the “White Lord”, who flies over the town with children on his back, trying to capture the main protagonist, and devours butterflies flying out of the trains going from the Radegast train station to the Chełmno upon Ner death camp; see Joanna Fabicka, *Rutka*, ill. Mariusz Andryszczyk, Warszawa: Agora, 2016, 109, 143–144. The Radegast train station is now a Holocaust memorial, a division of the Muzeum Tradycji Niepodległościowych w Łodzi [Łódź Museum of Independence].

– Pamiętam. On wyszedł. I miał przygody. Żeglował. Ja też chcę żeglować. I chcę nauczyć się pływać. I chcę mieć kotka... I wcale się nie boję... – łkała Jutka, tuląc się do dziadka.³⁸

Dawid Cwancygier opened the lid of a kitchen cellar and ordered Jutka to hide there and be quiet until her aunt knocked. [...]

– But it's dark inside! I'm scared! Grandpa, I'm scared!

– I know it's dark, but recall how Theseus survived in the labyrinth. It was dark there too. And the Minotaur was hunting him. But now the monster is outside, isn't it?

– Yes, but I don't have a ball of thread to find my way out.

– That's true, I didn't think about that. But we will figure something out. Oh, here you go! – He gave her a ball of dun wool. – Don't be afraid. The monster is outside. Remember Theseus.

– I remember. He got out. And had many adventures. And sailed. I want to sail too. And I want to learn how to swim. And I want a little kitty... And I am not afraid at all... – sobbed Jutka, hugging her grandfather.

What helps Jutka to survive in the cellar is the faith that the ball of thread given to her by her grandfather is just like Ariadne's thread and that it will restore her freedom. Dawid Cwancygier can be considered a *deus ex machina* figure, defined by Maria Nikolajeva as a "character [...] who sets things right. [...] The appearance of a *deus ex machina* usually disempowers the child protagonists, since whatever problems they might encounter, the adult figure will take care of them".³⁹ Re-enacting Ariadne's gesture, the grandfather dispels Jutka's fears, creating a space for imagination and – finally – hope. As a mediator of the ancient story, he is not only a source of hope (as he tells the tale in the evenings), but also a trigger of the girl's dreaming of freedom and (probably) achieving it in the end. This is a common feature of children's literature, as "unlike adult protagonists, child characters seldom, if ever, can decide their fate themselves".⁴⁰ Indeed, Jutka did not choose to conceal herself in the hideout, and she did not come up with the compensating evocation of the myth. The mythical story told by her grandfather influenced her so much that she came to feel the same hope Theseus did, and, despite the danger surrounding her, she

³⁸ Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezszenność Jutki*, 71.

³⁹ Maria Nikolajeva, *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature*, Lanham, MD, and Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2003, 124.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, 167.

waited in the cellar for a few days, and later, after her grandfather had made the necessary preparations, she escaped the ghetto with her aunt.⁴¹

Bibliotherapy in *Jutka's Insomnia*

The process which the young protagonist was going through works similarly to bibliotherapy as described by Hugo Crago. According to him, "when preferred texts are read again and again, or are brooded over in memory, they become, in turn, potent shaping influences over the reader's future self-concept and life path".⁴² Dawid Cwancygier's story about Daedalus, Icarus, Theseus, Ariadne, and the Minotaur is divided into three parts; after each "session" Jutka knows a little bit more about the myth itself, but she also finds more similarities connecting it to her existence in the Łódź Ghetto. The story is then recalled by the young protagonist in different situations, each time gaining new meanings, ones applicable to the surrounding world of atrocities, such as the unrelenting hunger of Josek and other Jewish children (much like the Minotaur's craving).⁴³ Jutka notices these parallels herself: "[Grandfather's] stories are a bit scary, but thanks to them the real world seems to be less scary".⁴⁴ Of course, here bibliotherapy lacks books themselves (as the story is told, not read),⁴⁵ but the process and effects seem to perfectly fulfil the requirements of bibliotherapy because, to quote Cargo:

[T]he optimal conditions for "bibliotherapy" would be when a reader (child or adult) already capable of ludic reading [...] encounters a text [...] which

⁴¹ On the special preparations Jewish children went through before going to the "Aryan" side, see Krzysztof Rybak, "Hide and Seek with Nazis: Playing with Child Identity in Polish Children's Literature about the Shoah", *Libri & Liberi* 6.1 (2017), 11–24. Even though Jutka escapes the ghetto, her future is uncertain; see Krzysztof Rybak, "I (nie) żyli długo i szczęśliwie. Konstrukcje zakończeń w polskiej literaturze dziecięcej o Zagładzie" [And They Did (Not) Live Happily Ever After: Endings in Polish Children's Literature about the Holocaust], *Literatura Ludowa* [Folk Literature] 63.1 (2019), 15.

⁴² Hugo Crago, "Healing Texts: Bibliotherapy and Psychology", in Peter Hunt, ed., *Understanding Children's Literature: Key Essays from the Second Edition of The International Companion Encyclopedia of Children's Literature*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2005 (ed. pr. 1999), 186.

⁴³ Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezszenność Jutki*, 31.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, 5: "odrobinę straszne są te jego [dziadka] bajki, ale dzięki nim prawdziwy świat wydaje się mniej straszny".

⁴⁵ Crago, "Healing Texts", 180, notes: "[T]he printed text (*biblio-*) is the medium through which the helping/healing is considered to occur (whereas the concept should really cover non-printed 'texts' such as oral story-telling and the viewing of visual narratives like films and pictured books)".

matches his or her developmental stage and recurrent inner themes. But whereas the bibliotherapists have proposed a fairly crude model, in which the reading therapist seeks for a literal correspondence between the content of the text and the reader's own "problem" or life situation, it is far more likely that the "merging" of reader and text will occur when the correspondence is partly or wholly metaphorical.⁴⁶

In *Jutka's Insomnia* obviously "the correspondence is partly or wholly metaphorical", as the Cretan adventures of Theseus are – at least at first glance – far removed from the Holocaust. The classical myth, retold again and again, just as in the ancient times,⁴⁷ in a metaphorical pattern describes the Holocaust, or at least Jutka thinks that way.⁴⁸ It seems that Combrzyńska-Nogala is consciously using the bibliotherapeutical aspects of storytelling because the Holocaust is one of the most difficult subjects to present in children's literature – this writing strategy may therefore help the readers understand the horror of the genocide the same way it helped Jutka. As Dawid Cwancygier says, myth is "a very old, fictional story. It may not be completely true, but the feelings it talks about are true. [...] feelings... love or its absence, shame, envy, treason... These are similar in real human stories, as they are in completely fantastical ones..."⁴⁹ It is perhaps not without reason that Cwancygier tells his story using myth as its basis, because myth, like fairy tale, is an original story employing a narrative frame, a clear scheme facilitating the reception of the content of the text. As Jutka states: "There must be order in a fairy tale!"⁵⁰ – an order that influences the young protagonist and gives her hope.

⁴⁶ Ibidem, 185.

⁴⁷ On the ancient roots of bibliotherapy, see ibidem, 181.

⁴⁸ On the use of fairy tales in psychotherapy and children's literature about the Holocaust, see Kenneth B. Kidd, "'A' Is for Auschwitz: Psychoanalysis, Trauma Theory, and the 'Children's Literature of Atrocity'", *Children's Literature* 33 (2005), 120–149. On the therapeutical meaning of the myth of Hercules, see Susan Deacy's chapter, "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", and Edoardo Pecchini's chapter, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", respectively: 251–274 and 275–325 in the present volume.

⁴⁹ Combrzyńska-Nogala, *Bezszenność Jutki*, 30: "bardzo stara, wymyślona historia. Może nie jest zupełnie prawdziwa, ale uczucia, o których mówi, są prawdziwe. [...] uczucia... miłość lub jej brak, wstyd, zazdrość, zdrada... One są podobne w prawdziwych ludzkich historiach i w tych zupełnie fantastycznych..."

⁵⁰ Ibidem, 7: "W bajce musi być porządek!"

Conclusion

The presence of bibliotherapeutical elements can be considered evidence of how mighty myth can be, especially when it is necessary to tame fear and overcome all obstacles. As Katarzyna Marciniak wrote about the tragic historical events of Polish history transmitted through literature: "Classical mythology offers the most neutral platform to talk about such matters – matters where other communication codes are not enough".⁵¹ These mythical metaphors, which are noticeable in the diaries of Anne Frank or Dawid Sierakowiak, have been transferred also into children's literature, thus showing how inspiring a classical tale can be. As the myth in the text is useful and brings Jutka hope, the novel itself can be employed as a text relevant to overcoming other traumatic events – as a tool of bibliotherapy. To modern people aware of the great loss of millions of Jews it may seem that in the time of the Holocaust there was nothing left but despair. Yet, as we see in *Jutka's Insomnia*, thanks to the power of myth all is not lost!

⁵¹ Marciniak, "(De)Constructing Arcadia", 81.

ORPHIC RESONANCES OF LOVE AND LOSS IN DAVID ALMOND'S *A SONG FOR ELLA GREY*

David Almond's *A Song for Ella Grey*, first published in 2014, is a thoroughly modern young adult novel, which explores the loves (familial, romantic, friendly, and "complicated") and the losses of a group of ordinary-seeming seventeen-year-old school pupils in the north of England, by weaving the myth of a returned, young-again Orpheus into their lives. The eponymous Ella Grey is the Eurydice figure in the novel's Orpheus myth, and is the best friend of Claire, a girl in her class and our narrator. Almond is a critically acclaimed British author of children's and young adult fiction, best known for *Skellig*.¹ *A Song for Ella Grey* won the *Guardian* newspaper's Children's Book Prize in 2015. Almond's work, including this novel, has sometimes attracted controversy for its unflinching and realistic portrayal of "adult" themes for young adult readers, which has led some reviewers to question whether novels such as *A Song for Ella Grey* can really be classified as children's books.²

The novel is about a group of young adults – the protagonists are all seventeen – so that the label young adult rather than "children's" (or young adult

¹ David Almond, *Skellig*, London: Hodder, 1998, winner of the Whitbread Children's Book of the Year and the Carnegie Medal (for children's books); runner-up for the Michael L. Prinz Award (for young adult fiction). The main character, Michael (age 10), moves to a new house at the same time as his baby sister is diagnosed with a life-threatening illness; he discovers the strange eponymous creature – part owl, part angel – languishing in the garage; Michael helps to restore Skellig to health, and Skellig in turn will help restore life to Michael's sister.

² See children's author Lynne Reid Banks's letter to *The Guardian*: "David Almond's Fiction Prizewinner Is for Grownups of 17, Not Children", 30 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/30/david-almonds-fiction-prizewinner-is-for-grownups-of-17-not-children> (accessed 4 May 2020), for a rejection of that label; see also the responding article by fellow children's author, and one of the panel of judges that awarded the prize to Almond, Piers Torday, "A Song for Ella Grey Is a Children's Book – And a Great One", *The Guardian*, 1 December 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/dec/01/a-song-for-ella-grey-david-almond-lynn-reid-banks-young-adult-children-fiction> (accessed 4 May 2020).

as a subset of children's literature) is clearly appropriate. One aspect that marks it out as distinct from most earlier children's and even young adult literature is its inclusion of issues and themes that had traditionally been excluded: the protagonists' sex and sexuality, including lesbian encounters, their drinking of alcohol, and their use of swear words³ – and not in a context that is either explicitly or implicitly didactic or condemnatory about their actions, but rather in one that simply portrays this as part of the reality of average late teens' lives. These aspects are precisely what has attracted controversy; but they are merely a realistic background to the fantastic or magical plot elements that see the figure of Orpheus brought to life as a contemporary youth who befriends the teenagers and seems to transform their everyday lives into something extraordinary. The use of these mature themes and the question of the categorization of the novel is not the focus of this chapter, except insofar as the former are relevant to the exploration of the novel's reception of the Orpheus myth. Piers Torday, writing in defence of his and other panellists' choice to award the novel the *Guardian* prize for children's fiction, says:

Almond's contemporary updating of this classic myth follows a group of young teenage friends on the north-east coast who discover the power of art and love for themselves for the first time. I would argue that is not only a fundamental human experience, but also a critical part of growing up. There is indeed "lesbian love, swearing and drinking" in the first few pages, and that's no bad thing. Young people today have to make sense of a complex, diverse world of intersecting, layered narratives, available to them on a permanent loop in just a few clicks. Good writing for children will help them navigate adult experience with awareness and understanding.⁴

³ There has now been a relatively long tradition of this kind of realism in young adult fiction, starting with the likes of Judy Blume in the 1970s, sometimes classified as the "new realism"; see further Owen Hodkinson, "'She's Not Deadly. She's Beautiful': Reclaiming Medusa for Millennial Tween and Teen Girls?", 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, 197–222, nn. 6, 29, with further references. The inclusion of homosexual relationships and physical expressions of homosexual desire in young adult fiction is a more recent phenomenon: in general, see the annotated bibliography by Laurel A. Clyde and Marjorie Lobban, *Out of the Closet and Into the Classroom: Homosexuality in Books for Young People*, Port Melbourne: D.W. Thorpe, 2000; for classical reception examples, see Owen Hodkinson, "Interview with Michael Cadnum" and "Michael Cadnum's Metamorphoses of Ovid", both in Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt, eds., *Classical Reception and Children's Literature: Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018, respectively, at 59–62 and nn. 4–5; and 64–86, 77–78, with further references.

⁴ Torday, "A Song for Ella Grey Is a Children's Book".

That is, *A Song for Ella Grey* is a coming-of-age novel or *Bildungsroman*,⁵ in which the teenage protagonists experience (first- or second-hand) and learn about several things for the first time, especially love and loss, and how to deal with them.

In this context, if the contemporary child or teen reader is to engage with the novel's mythical elements and identify with its protagonists, she will at first have to recognize and accept as plausible the realistic, everyday elements of the teenage characters' lives, which must therefore reflect the contemporary world more or less accurately. On this point, Almond, in *A Song for Ella Grey* as in his other novels, appears to be successful, since teen and younger readers report that they do recognize the characters as plausible and as like themselves. For example, fifteen-year-old Megan Foley writes: "I realised that I had finally found a book that put into words my thoughts, and in all honesty, it shocked me (in a good way)".⁶ A younger reader, twelve-year-old Lottie Longshanks, in an article entitled "If the Real World Isn't Censored – Why Should Fiction Be?", argues:

I will remember the book as a lovely haunting story because of the beautiful poetic language rather than any of the adult stuff, I'm not even a teenager till next July but there was nothing in the book that I don't know about already. You can't avoid knowing if you read the papers, watch a bit of TV or listen to people talking at school [...]. David Almond is brilliant at weaving all sorts of themes into stunningly written stories that you will always remember. It doesn't stop me from still enjoying books that I loved when I was very little, but how will I be able to deal with grown up things if I don't know about them till I am 17?⁷

⁵ For other examples of the *Bildungsroman* in children's and young adult fiction with classical themes, see, e.g., Andelys Wood, "Perspective Matters: Roman Britain in Children's Novels"; Helen Lovatt, "Harry Potter and the Metamorphoses of Classics"; Owen Hodkinson, "Michael Cadnum's Metamorphoses" – all three in Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt, eds., *Classical Reception and Children's Literature: Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018, respectively, at 108–118; 21–24; and 68 and n. 11 with references; Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, index s.v. "coming of age"; see further n. 10 below.

⁶ Megan Foley, "A Song for Ella Grey by David Almond: Review", *The Guardian*, 19 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/global/2015/nov/17/564b4472e4b0a51fe2018843> (accessed 4 May 2020).

⁷ Lottie Longshanks, "If the Real World Isn't Censored – Why Should Fiction Be?", *The Guardian*, 7 December 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2015/dec/07/david-almond-a-song-for-ella-grey-censorship-childrens-books> (accessed 4 May 2020).

This kind of anecdotal evidence suggests that Almond's novels, including *A Song for Ella Grey*, have been seen as ways of coping with difficult issues in the lives of their young readers of various ages, by giving expression to them and representing the characters' lives in a way they recognize as their own, albeit intertwined with the mythical. This fusion of the universal with realistic settings and episodes readily identifiable to young readers in Almond's part of Britain, as well as beyond it, is explored by way of further introduction to and contextualization of the novel in the first section.

The sometimes painful first experiences of love and friendships formed and dissolved, and the certainly painful first experiences of the loss of loved ones through death, are represented as they are perceived and negotiated by teenage characters in *A Song for Ella Grey*. If the novel succeeds in allowing teen and younger readers to identify with these characters, it might allow them to see hope beyond these painful experiences and ways of coping with them, as the narrator, Claire, does. These key themes of love and loss are explored in the central parts of this chapter. Finally, I will argue that the novel explores and portrays coping with loss through fiction in a metafictional manner, as we see Claire at the end overtly acknowledging lessons from literature and myth and play-acting the Orpheus myth offer in a struggle to accept the death of her best friend, Ella.

The Localization of the Universal

One of the ways in which Almond gives his characters a reality that his teen readers can recognize and identify with is through the identifiable and very local setting in the contemporary Tyneside and Northumberland area of northern England, where the author grew up; he is known for having his characters and narrators speak in the accent and dialect of the region, as well as for evoking its urban and rural scenery, and *A Song for Ella Grey* is no exception. In these linguistic and scene-specific ways, he localizes the universal aspects of the Orpheus myth and makes it particular not only to twenty-first-century teenagers, but specifically to its northern English setting. The naming of the Eurydice figure as "Ella" also renders her character part of a realist depiction of an English teenager. This all has the effect of ensuring that the setting is familiar and accessible to contemporary readers, but also of adding realism to the characters before the mythical element enters their lives via the figure of Orpheus – who alone, as Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer notes – marks the novel explicitly rather than

through reference and allusion as a retelling of the Orpheus and Eurydice myth.⁸ At the same time, he retains and repeatedly emphasizes the universality and the applicability of the myth to “all times and places”.

Almond says himself in describing his novel and its inspiration (here and in the following quotations, underlining added; italics from the original):

A tale of youth and yearning, [the myth of Orpheus and Euridyce is] perfect for the young. We are all born into [...] a culture that is ancient. But for each new child, that universe and culture are brand new: all is dazzling, terrifying, potent with possibility. Each child’s first word is the first of all words... First love is the first of all loves, first recognition of death the first such recognition. [...]

Orpheus’s story fits all times and all places. In my version, it exists in the north east of England, where I grew up and where I live today. It’s a beautiful, energetic, scarred and troubled place. In parts it is a wilderness; a far-flung place of legend, ballad, folk song; a place of blocked-up pit shafts, abandoned mine workings, wide white beaches, ruined castles high on headlands, islands stepping off to the horizon.

When I was a teenager, I used to go with my friends to the beaches of Bamburgh and Beadnell. We’d camp in the dunes, have parties on the beach. We’d swim in the icy sea, watch seals, terns, oystercatchers. We’d sit by blazing fires as the beams of lighthouses swept across us and the astonishing stars glittered above. We’d talk of love, death, football, Tamla Motown, Allen Ginsberg, God, ghosts, grief. We’d talk of where we’d go, what we’d do, how we hoped we’d live. We went back to our ordinary lives on Tyneside: school, exams, families, council houses. Not so different, perhaps, from the lives of the young people in my book.⁹

This description captures the very realistic and grounded setting of the novel, in the school lives and out of school adventures of ordinary late teens in a specific area, as well as Almond’s understanding of the need to tell the universal story afresh for each new generation and culture, for each time and place.

⁸ Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, “Unerwartete Wendung und narrative Distanz. Unzuverlässiges Erzählen und antiken Mythen in der modernen Kinderliteratur”, in Markus Janka and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte Antike. Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien*, “Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children’s and Young Adult Literature” 5, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2017, 168.

⁹ David Almond, “Orpheus Helped Me Write *A Song for Ella Grey*”, *The Guardian*, 19 November 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/nov/19/david-almond-song-for-ella-grey-guardian-childrens-prize-fiction-winner-2015> (accessed 4 May 2020).

The emphasized parts of the first paragraph explain why retellings of the myth that highlight the youth of the Orpheus and Eurydice figures, and other main characters as friends and onlookers, are particularly powerful in expressing love and loss, regardless of the age of the reader: this focus on their youth removes any cynical, jaded, or resigned attitudes in the face of major life experiences that may have been undergone multiple times already, by reminding us of how it was to go through them for the first time, seeing them through the eyes of the young adult characters.¹⁰ The novel is perhaps for this reason as powerful for an adult audience as for a young adult one, so that it succeeds as another version of that universal story, transcending the very local and the very contemporary setting.

Almond's description of the novel goes on to provide a synopsis that will be useful for readers who are unfamiliar with *A Song for Ella Grey*, up to the point where the traditional Orpheus story takes over:

They live by the Tyne. They are sixth formers in a comprehensive. They love music and each other. They yearn for joy and freedom. They travel north and have parties on the beach. They try to turn Northumberland into Greece. They try to think that the sun is warm and the sea is not icy. They sing and dance with abandon. Orpheus appears among them one morning as the sun rises over the sea, and he begins to sing them into a new understanding of themselves. Eurydice is Ella Grey, a girl who is not even there when he first appears. She hears his voice through the mobile phone of her best friend, Claire. It is enough: she knows she has always known him and he has always known her. The ancient love is recreated and so it all begins again. Claire is the narrator. She is also in love with Ella Grey. She watches, recounts, tries to share her friend's joy and calm her own fears. But she can do nothing to stem the trajectory of the ancient, lovely, terrible tale.¹¹

¹⁰ See Michael Cadnum, "Beyond the World: Gossip, Murder, and the Legend of Orpheus", in Owen Hodkinson and Helen Lovatt, eds., *Classical Reception and Children's Literature: Greece, Rome and Childhood Transformation*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2018, 38–49; Hodkinson, "Interview with Michael Cadnum", 50–63; and Hodkinson, "Michael Cadnum's Metamorphoses", 64–86, on Cadnum's retelling of the Orpheus myth, *Nightsong* (2006), in which Orpheus is portrayed as very youthful, and on Cadnum's reasons for preferring writing characters with young voices (focalizing young characters) as well as his hinting at some of the more mature themes present in the myth. See further Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Orpheus and Eurydice: Reception of a Classical Myth in International Children's Literature", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 291–306, on other children's and young adult versions of the Orpheus myth.

¹¹ Almond, "Orpheus Helped Me Write".

The novel is very unusual among modern retellings of the myth (especially those for younger readers) in including Orpheus' death, torn apart by women,¹² rather than stopping at the end of the Orpheus and Eurydice story. In this chapter, however, I focus on the central figure of Ella, Claire's love for her, and the novel's portrayal of Claire dealing with the loss of Ella. Orpheus' death (if indeed Claire does not entirely invent his alien intrusion into their world and subsequent death as part of her process of therapeutic myth-telling, as discussed below) does not affect her in the same way, as he interacts primarily with Ella; therefore, my analysis of Claire's love and loss does not explore the wider Orpheus myth as retold in the novel.

The following excerpts from the novel illustrate the mixing of local specificity with the universality of the story which is a recurring theme. Ella and Claire are paddling in the urban river Ouseburn at a locked gate where the water flows out from the city but rubbish catches up against it (Ella is speaking to Claire):

"This water's come from everywhere. From in the hills, The Cheviots, The Simonsides, The Pennines, from little springs high on the moors, [...] and it'll flow down the Tyne to mingle with the sea..."¹³

"Feel it?" she whispered.

Yes. I felt how the bars vibrated with the endless flowing of the water over them.

"And hear the music they make?"

...yes.

"This gate is like his [Orpheus'] lyre, Claire," she said.

[...]

"When I heard him [singing] on the phone, it was like I heard everything, Claire."

[...]

"The water and the music it makes. The music of everything. It is him, and we were with him for a little time."

[...]

"The music in everything is him." (SEG, 91–92)

The girls feel connected to all rivers and the sea, and thus to the whole world; and Ella makes the surprising comparison between this dirty, litter-catching gate, humming with the movement of the world's waters, and the lyre of Orpheus

¹² E.g., Ov., *Met.* 11.1–66.

¹³ David Almond, *A Song for Ella Grey*, London: Hodder, 2015 (ed. pr. 2014), 89. Henceforth SEG; all quotations and references are to this edition.

and its music. In the same passage, the repetition of “everything” along with “everywhere” and “endless” emphasizes the universality of Orpheus’ music, and its being identified with the world. His story of first love, and of love lost, is a universal story. This universality is not only one of place, but also of time:

[Ella speaking] “I’ve known him before, Claire. And he’s known me. He’s known all of us. You have to believe it.” (SEG, 93)

This utterance is one among many points in the novel that raise the idea that the Orpheus who appears in Northumberland and befriends the teenagers has somehow returned, and that his story has been repeated over the ages in different places, in a cyclical fashion. (The metaphysics of this are left vague in the novel: there is no explication through the medium of time travel or portals to alternative worlds, as found in a great many children’s novels. It is rather more in the mode of magic realism in its introduction of mythical elements into a realistic setting with no transition or explanation.) This vague idea of repetition, or a cyclical story, fits with the idea that the Orpheus myth represents *any* group of youths’ first experiences of love and loss: while the time and place have changed in this iteration, it is a universal experience that they are going through.

At the unofficial “wedding” between Orpheus and Ella on the beach at Bamburgh, the combination of the characters’ imaginations, activities, and accessories, along with Orpheus’ presence and his music, transforms and transfigures the very familiar local setting, for them, into the Greece of Orpheus, at the same time connecting it with the whole world, as the local and personal partake of the universal story again:

We threw away all thoughts of home, of the world we’d left behind. We entered Italy, Greece, our transformed selves, the transfigured North. (SEG, 156)

Orpheus sang and played. Northumberland was Greece... The music played Orpheus, played all of us and played the world. Sand drifted down from the dunes to hear him. The marram grass tilted to him... From their hiding-places in the dunes, the adders slithered out and slithered out... (SEG, 157)

Simple music from a simple lyre and a youthful voice on a Northern beach. Simple music that came from the furthest places of the universe, the depths of time, from the darkest unknown recesses of ourselves. It was the song of everything, all life, all love, all creation. It was his song for my friend Ella Grey. (SEG, 158)

Orpheus' love song for Ella Grey is the universal expression of love, and by partaking of this story, the very specific locale partakes of a universal setting and becomes anywhere and everywhere in the world.¹⁴

Besides love, death is the other universal of human experience that the Orpheus myth tells again in every place and time. When Orpheus (who at this point in the narrative is actually Claire playing the role of Orpheus in order to try to bring back her best friend: see further below on the narrative of this part of the novel) descends to the Underworld to plead for Ella's return, the personified Death's mocking reaction points out that death is the universal story-ending, and that Orpheus' stories and songs are ineffective against it:¹⁵

Then a stream of mocking voices.
 "Stupid bliddy crackpot singer."
 "There's nae such things as tales doon here."
 "There's just the ends of tales."
 [...]
 "And all the ends is just the same."
 [...]
 "And then she died and then she died and then!
 And then she died and then she died and then!
 [...]
 "The End! The E-E-E-E-E End!"
 "The end the end the end the end the end.
 The end the end the end the end the end.
 The end the end the end the end the end [...]." (SEG, 212-213)

Death itself is therefore the universal and the only story (and Orpheus' music, even though it charms and "plays" everything and everyone else, is ineffective against death); but this being the case, Orpheus as the supreme storyteller and musician recognizes that death is an integral part of the world, of this "music of everything" referred to earlier: the voices of Death "speak the harmony made by the deepest and the sweetest strings" (SEG, 217). Claire, through taking on the role of Orpheus, begins to recognize and accept these facts about her first experience of the loss of a friend through death, and the futility of her quest;

¹⁴ Cf. Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Unerwartete Wendung", 168: "[T]he term 'Song' implicitly refers to Orpheus as the archetype of the singer" ([D]er Begriff 'Song' implizit auf Orpheus als den Archetyp des Sängers rekurriert"; my translation).

¹⁵ These pages, and the whole section in which Orpheus is in the Underworld, employ unusual typography, including being white print on black paper throughout.

only through accepting its reality rather than fighting against it (the “denial” stage of the influential model of “five stages of grief” as proposed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross)¹⁶ can she begin to process her grief and see hope for her life beyond the loss of her friend.

Representations of Love

The novel deals with a variety of kinds of love in the characters’ lives, besides the obvious one in the relationship between Orpheus and Ella, which, while being central to the Orpheus myth plot, is far from being the only important love for the novel as a whole. The following passages illustrate the strength of the mutual love of Orpheus and Ella, including the idea that it is a completely new experience, a first love, despite the eternal or cyclical nature of the story and its mythical protagonist:

[Ella speaking] “He says in all his travelling, he’s never met anybody else like me.”

“[...] he says the same as me – that he’s known me always.”

“[...] I feel like I exist more than I ever have before.” (SEG, 99–100)

“This is my love,” he [Orpheus] said. “The one I’ve loved from the very first moment, the one I loved before I even saw her. And she’s the one that has loved me.” (SEG, 143–144)

Another very important love is the platonic friendship between the close-knit group of young friends, which is described by the narrator as “love”, and is also central to their identity: “[T]he group was us. [...] We loved each other”. Within the group, they sometimes have relationships as couples, but the group dynamic is more important, and these passing pairings are not described as love:

We always said there was magic in the air down by the Ouseburn [...]. We scoffed at the kids who weren’t like us, [...] who already talked about careers, or bliddy mortgages and pensions. Kids wanting to be old before they

¹⁶ Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying*, New York, NY: Macmillan, 1969. Of course, this model was intended to apply to a person learning that they have a terminal illness coming to accept it, not to the bereaved; but its widespread reception in non-specialist literature, media, etc., frequently bears hallmarks of its influence misapplied to the bereaved, of which this might well be an example.

were young. Kids wanting to be dead before they'd lived [...]. We plundered charity shops for vintage clothes. We bought battered Levis and gorgeous faded velvet stuff from Attica in High Bridge. We wore coloured boots, hemp scarves from Gaia. We read Baudelaire and Byron [...]. Sometimes we paired off, made couples that lasted for a little while, but the group was us. We hung together. We could say anything to each other. We loved each other. (SEG, 16)¹⁷

In fact the love of Claire for her best friend (and more), Ella, is arguably the central love of the narrative, rather than that between Orpheus and Ella, because of the status of Claire as the narrator and focalizer for most of the novel. This love is a first love, too, of sorts: they have known each other since they were small, and in recent years the relationship has been more than platonic, though there are no details about this aspect (this is the love that caused some to say the novel is not for young readers). Their love is thus a lifelong friendship, combined with an unrequited love that Claire feels for Ella. Therefore, when Ella's relationship with Orpheus is beginning, the portrayal of this love is bound up with Claire's loss of one kind of first love, while Ella is outgrowing this in some ways and experiencing her own first love, of a more consequential kind (because requited). We see their interactions in the first case when Ella is asking Claire to act as the father of the bride at the unofficial wedding and "give her away" to Orpheus:

"You've been everything to me," [Ella] whispered. "Ever since the day we met in primary school. Remember?" (SEG, 103)

Later, on the day of the "wedding", Ella demands, and receives, declarations and promises of love from Claire – but gives none in return, and monosyllabically accepts them with "Good":

"You're so beautiful, Ella," I told her.

I tried to tell her more, but the words I had were not enough. [...] I just held her close, closer. I ached to protect her from all darkness, all pain, and all death.

She shifted away when I asked if she'd like to sleep in my tent tonight. (SEG, 133–134)

¹⁷ Note in this passage also the hints at Hellenism in the names of shops and brands: the beginnings of the assimilation of the Northumbrian setting to a mythical Greece.

"And will you love me always, Claire? [...] Will you? Say yes, Claire!" [...]
"I will love you for ever, Ella Grey."
"And you will never abandon me."
"I will never abandon you. I am yours, Ella Grey, until the very end of time."
"Good," she said. (SEG, 151)

All the various qualities of love are finally brought together and compared by Ella's parents, after her inevitable death: the love of the foster parents who brought her up and "gave her *everything*", of Ella and her parents, who were like a second family to her, and of Orpheus:

"We're devastated," said Mum. "We loved her so very much."
"She was like another daughter," said Dad [...].
"[...] you loved her, she knew that," said Dad.
"Love?" said Mrs Grey. "It was more than love. We gave her *everything*."
[...]
[Claire's mother:] "We saw how much he loved her, Mrs Grey."
"Ah, that thing called love again! So you loved her like a best friend, and you loved her like a daughter, and you all saw how this wastrel loved her too, and you told us nothing, [...] and you let him lead her to her *death*?
[...] Is this what your idea of love is? That it involves secrets and lies and ends in death? What about the love that we had for her? what about the love that would have protected her and kept her safe?" (SEG, 168–169)

Claire's family met Orpheus with Ella, but did not inform Ella's stricter, more protective foster parents about it, and are thus blamed by them for not protecting her, and have their version of the meaning of love questioned.

Similarly, when Orpheus does not come to the funeral, Claire herself questions his love:

Orpheus? No one knew where he had gone. Hadn't been seen since he ran off that day at Bamburgh.
It's grief, some said.
It's guilt. He's the one that charmed her. He's the one she followed into the dunes.
None of that. It's simply that he'd never bliddy cared at all. [...] He never loved her. How can he have loved her if he leaves her like this?
Not even at the funeral. Not even at the bliddy grave.
I lay awake at night and wept.

Ella. I wouldn't have left you. I wouldn't have made you follow me barefooted into the dunes. I would have kept you at my side. I would have loved you always. (SEG, 175)

In her grief, Claire reiterates her own, undying love for her lost friend, and compares her love, as one who would have protected her, with that of Orpheus, blaming him for not doing so.

Finally, those involved in and those who witness the modern Orpheus story begin to turn against the bereaved Orpheus, and start rumours of his loving exclusively boys thereafter – another part of the original myth that is not often retold,¹⁸ which leads to his dismemberment by rejected womankind:

[Sam:] "All he wants these days is lads, [...] that's what the story is."

[...] "It's hopeless, isn't it?" he said.

"You care nowt for me, do you?" he said.

[...] "What's wrong with me, then?"

No answer.

"Mebbe you should find another Ella," he said, "and not bother with bliddy lads at all." (SEG, 248–249)

In this passage, Claire is obsessively seeking out Orpheus with the help of one of the friendship group, Sam, who loves her with a strength of feeling she does not reciprocate. He reproaches her with her love for the dead Ella and suggests that she too should stick to her own gender.

Coping with Loss

The two central loves of the novel, both for Ella, give rise to its two central stories of loss. Claire loses Ella twice – first to Orpheus, then to death:

"Just think," she [Ella] said, "if you hadn't phoned, I wouldn't have heard a bliddy thing."

"No," I said.

¹⁸ See, e.g., Ov., *Met.* 10.83–85. On modern children's authors' approaches to such themes in Ovid, in addition to the works cited above, n. 10, see Deborah H. Roberts, "The Metamorphosis of Ovid in Retellings of Myth for Children", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 6, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015, 233–256, esp. 244–256.

Thud, went my heart, then *thud* again.

"That's true," I said.

He won't turn up. He's duped us, charmed us, tricked us. He's just a traveller, a singing tramp. He's gone forevermore. Thank God for that. Good riddance to him. Go to Hell, Orpheus. And leave my lovely friend alone.
(SEG, 127)

Claire's heart is broken in a particularly cruel way, because she brings about this first loss herself. She phones Ella when all the other friends first meet Orpheus and makes her listen to him singing over the phone – Ella's parents were too strict to let her go on this particular group outing. Claire ends up saying to herself he will not turn up for the "wedding", and wanting rid of him, dismissing him as an unreliable charmer.¹⁹

Shortly after the "wedding", of course, both Claire and Orpheus lose Ella forever, taken away by death. Her death, like the appearance of Orpheus, is made by the English setting to seem an intrusion from the mythical world into the otherwise normal lives of the teenage characters, because there are no lethally poisonous snakes in Britain: she is bitten by Britain's only poisonous snake, the adder, but this in reality should not be enough to kill a fully grown human²⁰ – hence Claire's statement that "[t]hey're just adders. [...] They can't kill. She'll be safe", as well as the emphasis on the size of the lethal bite marks:²¹

¹⁹ The inevitability of this love and thus of Ella's loss is expressed in a way that further emphasizes the cyclical nature of the myth – the idea that Ella is simply the latest player of the Eurydice role: "I saw [...] how happy he was, as happy as she. They were teenagers, like me, like all of us. It could have been any of us lying there like them, transformed by love. But *could* it have been any of us? Did it *have* to be these two, Ella and Orpheus, Orpheus and Ella? Were their fates sealed long ago, long before they even heard each other, saw each other, [...] even knew the other existed?" (SEG, 150).

²⁰ "Statistically you have more chance of being killed by a wasp than dying at the teeth of Britain's only venomous snake", according to *The Independent*; see Daniel Butler, "Bitten by an Adder – 'The Doctors Were Worse'", *The Independent*, 23 October 2011, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/bitten-by-an-adder-the-doctors-were-worse-1339277.html> (accessed 17 July 2019); the UK's National Health Service advises that "snake bites, particularly those that occur in the UK, usually aren't serious and are only very rarely deadly"; see "Snake Bites", NHS, <https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/snake-bites> (accessed 17 July 2019).

²¹ Cf. also SEG, 163: "[The policeman:] 'They can't have [killed her]. [...] Not the adders. Yes they'll bite, and yes they'll cause you pain and yes they'll cause you sickness for a little time. But kill? No, never... Or very very rarely,' he whispered". He, too, is incredulous, adding to the impression of the impossibility (the "magical" nature) of Ella's death in what had seemed a realistic setting. I do not think, with Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Unerwartete Wendung", 179, that the cause of Ella's death remains in the dark because of the very-rarely deadly nature of the adder's bite, nor that this therefore contributes to the case for Claire as an unreliable narrator. Since there is no

I touched the tiny tiny bite marks.

"They're just adders," I said. "They can't kill. She'll be safe. Ella! Oh, Ella!"

[...]

"Don't die!" I screamed into her ear. "Don't bliddy die, Ella Grey!" (SEG, 162)

Her distress is elevated by the shock at the seemingly impossible situation, which continues the novel's magical-realist tendencies; but her reaction then becomes a real, harrowing portrayal of a young person's first experience of death – shock, combined with an utter refusal to accept the reality of death (denial); commanding the departed not to die, to come back, and wanting to physically drag the dead back from the grave:

I wanted to leap down, smash the coffin open, haul her back...

[...] I hated it all. I cursed it all.

Death. Stupid Death.

Come back, Ella Grey! (SEG, 173)

Claire's desire to descend into the hole in the ground and pull Ella back, of course, literalizes the Orphic katabasis, and teaches the young reader familiar with the Orpheus myth as a kind of fairy tale, that it is very real and universal: Orpheus' desire and refusal of acceptance are simply the story of anyone's reaction to death, but perhaps especially the reaction of the young to the first ever death of someone close to them.

In contrast to Claire, Orpheus seems to be able to play by different rules – those of the mythical world whence he came. He, too, cannot accept losing her; he, too, will go into the earth to get her back; but only he is serious about it, and Claire dismisses him as insane when she realizes this:

"Why weren't you *here*?" I said.

"I've been searching." [...]

"Searching for *what*?"

[...]

alternative cause hinted at on any level in the novel, I prefer to see two possibilities put before the reader: either to accept this as one of the very rare cases in which the adder's poison kills, with no embellishment necessary on the part of Claire, or to assume (in the manner of a reader of a magic-realist novel) that, since the intrusion of Orpheus and elements of his myth began, the usual "rules" governing what had appeared a conventionally realist setting become gradually more flexible as the novel goes on.

"For *her*, of course."

[...]

Jesus. He meant it. He was mad, he'd always been mad. I'd led Ella to a madman.

"Ella's dead," I hissed. "She's in the earth."

[...]

"I'm going to go to Death and bring her back."

I groaned. But now I saw the depths of his pain. [...]

His madness was grief. It was the madness of anyone who's lost someone, who can't believe they've gone forever, who can't believe they won't come back.

And I shared the madness. I couldn't believe that my Ella was gone.

I couldn't believe that I'd never see her lovely face again, never feel her touch, never hear her voice. (SEG, 177)

But Claire ascribes his madness to grief, and says that she shares in the same madness: it is the universal truth of the myth. We see here the beginnings of the outworkings of the novel's clash of worlds, the real and the mythical: Claire "knows" that what Orpheus attempts is impossible, in her world, and that someone who believed they could undertake this quest would be labelled as "mad"; yet in the world of the novel, Orpheus' arrival seems to have brought things that do not belong in her real world; and she seems to accept that his ultimately doomed quest to retrieve Ella from the dead did really happen, despite what that would imply about her.

Next Orpheus, in his turn, also loses Ella for the second time – when he looks back. In this part of the novel, Claire takes on Orpheus' voice, puts on a mask representing him, and narrates in the first person: no longer as herself, but as Orpheus:

It's just

the

gentlest

of gentle

touches on my shoulder.

And how could anybody not turn at that?

[...]

Oh, bliddy stupid Orpheus.

Of course Ella Grey was bliddy there. (SEG, 231)

Here, Orpheus is narrating (but in Claire's dialect and voice). Or else Claire is narrating, ventriloquizing Orpheus. The status of the narrative and its claim to truth is unclear; when speaking as Orpheus here, Claire accepts that "[o]f course, Ella Grey was bliddy there" – that is, it really was possible for Orpheus to have brought her back, had he only kept eyes front; and she makes Orpheus, narrating through her, curse himself for being so stupid (or else she curses him). But in the rest of the novel, Claire narrating as herself is a reliable narrator in a largely realistic world – she later doubts the reality of some of the unlikely things she seems to have seen in the presence of Orpheus, an act of questioning that could serve as an authentication device for her unbelievable, strange-but-true narrative. That is, a narrator with the capacity and tendency to question what she has to tell because it seems, very reasonably, implausible to her could just as well function as a *Beglaubigungsapparat* in a fantasy novel, or in any kind of fiction, which we are to accept (within the suspension of disbelief that applies to the whole novel) as really having happened to her.

So is Orpheus' quest simply in Claire's imagination? Does it consist solely in her play-acting it out in the role of Orpheus? Kümmerling-Meibauer assumes that many of the events Claire relates did not really happen, arguing for Claire as an unreliable narrator.²² I would not rule out this reading, but the question is left open, especially because there is deliberate ambiguity about so much of what Claire claims took place: in a novel that provides almost no alternative view of its events to the first-person homodiegetic narrator's, there is no way to decide whether, for example, Ella and Claire met *anyone at all* matching (however loosely) the description Claire gives of Orpheus (did Claire lose her best friend Ella only to death and invent the whole episode of first losing her to a rival lover or boyfriend, of whatever description? If not, how many features of "Orpheus" are real and how many not?); or, for instance, how Ella really died.²³ Because there are so many possible elements and layers of the narration that might each separately be seen to be either wholly untrue, embellished, or magical/mythical-but-true within the bounds of the novel, to see Claire as an unreliable narrator leaves the reader with just as many unanswered questions as would reading the book as a kind of magic-realist narrative in which Orpheus' intrusion into the real world alters the reality of the setting and its accompanying rules.

²² Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Unerwartete Wendung", 178–180.

²³ On this question, see above, p. 658 with nn. 20, 21.

Metaliterary Features of *A Song for Ella Grey*

The backdrop for all of these mythical happenings is the real world they intrude upon – the world of seventeen-year-olds in their last year of high school, taking English lessons, writing their homework on literature, and revising for their final exams. This provides a context for exploring the importance of old, or timeless, stories to the lives of the youths, as Claire and the others question the relevance of such stories, and invite young readers to reflect on this issue too, not least of course with respect to the Orpheus myth that somehow – forcibly – becomes highly pertinent to their reality. Before Orpheus comes along, we see these tensions in the life of Claire and her mother, who worries that her daughter is missing out on real life through all this study of life through literature:

[Claire's mother:] "Essays! They work you far too hard. If I had my way there'd be no school from spring to autumn. What kinds of essays?"

"Love. [...] I've got to write about love."

She flung her hands up in despair. She burst out laughing.

"[...] What's the point in getting the young to write about love? They should be doing love!" (SEG, 79)

The sentiments of Claire's mother are closely echoed by her classmate Bianca, even *after* the events with Orpheus and Ella:

[Bianca:] "It is all so bliddy *boring*."

[...]

"It is all so bliddy *ancient*."

[...]

"*Paradise Lost!*" Bianca went on. "Let's all go abliddy Maying, and my ending is despair and blablablablablabla. We've got our lives to live. We're *young!*" (SEG, 253)

"It's all so bliddy *ancient!*" – and therefore, we infer, not relevant.

But Claire, of course, ends up using stories – telling them to herself, re-enacting them – as a means of dealing with the death of Ella: using myth to give hope in her moment of despair. And at another juncture, we see her, bereaved, composing poetry to celebrate her friend, thus using poetry also in that more conventional way of dealing with her grief:

I tried to write poems in celebration of my friend, tried to stop my words from swerving to gloom. I found myself stealing lines and images from Donne. I must not weep. I would not lose my friend...
Remember me, Ella, I wrote. I am the one who is true. (SEG, 128)

Here, she specifically takes on some of the poetry she has been learning in school, John Donne, and makes a conscious effort not to write a dirge, but something more positive, more hopeful.

These discussions of, and references to, ancient stories, to literature in general, and to their importance or “relevance” to the modern teenagers, are of course metaliterary features of a novel that brings its characters’ lives into close contact with a real-life ancient story. As a narrator, Claire problematizes the novel’s integration of ancient myths that “have no place” in the modern world, and that cannot be explained in its own terms. Her seeming reliability as a narrator is reinforced by her sometime scepticism about events which cannot be explained in that way, which is demonstrated by her use of the language of madness about them. Of the group’s first encounter with Orpheus, she says:

Maybe we were mad that day. Maybe some of the things that seemed to happen didn’t really happen at all. Maybe many of the things that seemed to happen in the days and weeks that followed didn’t really happen. Maybe it was all because we were young, and because being young is like being mad...

But maybe the best things that we do, and the best things that we are, come from madness. (SEG, 51)

She questions the reality of the events of the following weeks, and thus of the whole plot, and puts it down to the “madness” of youth. But this madness is also a positive thing – it is magic, and music, and being young enough to still be open to the charms of Orpheus.

Near the end of the novel, Claire again questions everything, in similar terms, associating madness with youth and first experiences:

I’ll take this earring as well. I found it yesterday. I went down to the Ouseburn to say farewell to the childhood monsters just beyond the gates. There it was... It’s a little white dolphin earring. The gift of Ella, sent from Death. Can that be true?
Yes. No. Maybe.

Maybe it's all been just coincidence, tale-telling, rumour, madness, the madness of being young, the madness of knowing love for the first time, the madness of being alive in this miraculous place. (SEG, 274–275)

This time, however, it is prompted by her finding an earring that belonged to Ella – or at least one identical to it – at the gates in the river Ouseburn, through which Orpheus entered the Underworld in his quest. It is therefore a “gift of Ella, sent from Death”. Claire does not question the reality of this find or its belonging to Ella; but she does question what it seems to imply to her – that Ella really might have been on her way back from death through that gate with Orpheus before he looked back, or that it was otherwise sent back from that other world to hers. This questioning by the narrator of the events she tells, in just a few places, raises similar doubts for the reader about what in her recollections is embellishment and imagination running free, and what is influenced by a cocktail of teenage hormones and alcohol. But as a character, she seems to dismiss such doubts and accept the reality of the events; the effect of this combined with her apparent reliability might be to further authenticate her narrative, rather than to undermine it, as discussed above.²⁴

The novel's most metaliterary moments come when Claire is preparing herself to take on the role of Orpheus in order to narrate the Underworld quest for Ella, and during this quest:

“I found Death,” he said. “And I found her, and I almost brought her back.”
He plucked the strings again and whispered, sang and told the tale.

[...]

It's the tale that I must tell as well.

But how to tell such a tale that fits with nothing in the world we know?
How to tell a tale that's nothing to do with modern young people like me,
like you?

Go back to the start, Claire. Find the entrance to this part of the tale.

Go back to being a child. Tell it as a child would, as we did as children all those years ago, when we put on masks and became other than ourselves, when we became deer, mice, babies, old men, goblins, aliens, so that we could tell our tales more easily.

²⁴ Alternatively, it marks her as an unreliable narrator, as suggested by Kümmerling-Meibauer, discussed above, n. 22. Either way, there would be the same role for myth and storytelling, and the same metaliterary comment on ancient myth, as a kind of therapy or coping strategy for Claire, who retells her story of Ella and her death with more or less (an impossible-to-determine proportion) truth and embellishment.

I'll make a mask.

I'll disappear.

I'll put on a mask, and let Orpheus breathe through me, speak through me.

I'll make the mask of Orpheus and let him sing his tale through me. (SEG, 189–190)

Here we see the returned Orpheus about to tell Claire the story of how he almost succeeded. But rather than give us the story by quoting his direct speech or by relaying it in indirect speech – the two most obvious narrative strategies here – Claire decides that there is only one way in which she can “tell such a tale that fits with nothing in the world we know [...], a tale that’s nothing to do with modern young people like me, like you”. She has to dress up in a costume and mask, in childlike fashion, as Orpheus, and give us a first-person narration speaking as Orpheus. This dressing up, for Claire the narrator, facilitates telling tales – and it removes responsibility for authenticating the narrative, distancing narrator-Claire further from the reader and from herself, her sometimes sceptical character-narrator, who, we are told, “disappears”. This narrative strategy gives us the extended first-person katabasis account of Orpheus but with Claire’s accent and dialect (some of this is quoted above). It is also set apart from the rest of the book by being printed in white text on black pages throughout, and by the play with different type settings and fonts.

Finally, here is another excerpt from Orpheus-Claire’s first-person narration of the katabasis:

[I]nfants dream of monsters, the young dream dreams of love, the old dream dreams of being young.

Do some of the young dream of snakes on dunes?

Do they dream of what’s happening now below, of Orpheus looking for Ella? Mebbe it’s Claire that dreams this dream, Orpheus wading through this darkness towards Death. (SEG, 201)

The blending of the narrators’ (Claire’s and Orpheus’) voices here collapses some of the distance that Claire had created by putting on Orpheus’ mask and persona. Claire, narrating as Orpheus, recalls some of the things that she had said earlier in the novel, when speaking as herself, about childhood dreams of monsters; her questions about what some young people might dream about include the very specific “snakes on sand dunes”, something that she of all

young people has had particular reason to dream about since Ella's death. Then Claire-Orpheus asks whether young people dream of "what's happening now below, of Orpheus looking for Ella". The narrator *almost* naturally uses Orpheus' name, even though she is supposed to be speaking as Orpheus, and so might rather ask "Do they dream of me?", because it focalizes the dreaming youngsters rather than Orpheus. But this, too, breaks down the distance between the two narrators' voices at this point, and further separates it by saying – markedly in Claire's accent – "Mebbe it's Claire that dreams this dream". So is Claire actually in costume and mask as Orpheus narrating what he has told her? Or is she only dreaming that she does this, and sliding between her person and his in a dream-state? And how far does the dream extend? Did Orpheus really come and tell her any story of a quest? Did he ever come to her group of friends at all? (Questions that Claire as narrator asks about the whole plot elsewhere, as we have seen.) Nothing is clearly answered: Claire, in the mask and voice of Orpheus, narrates Orpheus' story that he had narrated to her; but while narrating as him, she asks whether she merely dreams him doing what she says he is doing.

Conclusion

A Song for Ella Grey does not end with this passage, but includes it at the appropriate point in the Orpheus myth; and Claire does not question later events, like the dismembering of Orpheus by the women, except as implied in those isolated general doubts about what did and did not happen and the madness of youth. So Almond does not simply play the cheap trick of "it was all just a dream", and undermine the whole narrative, or even the katabasis part – at least not in a simplistic and therefore disappointing way. He leaves these distinctions blurry, like the boundaries between the mythical world of Orpheus and the "real" world of the protagonists in general, and like the metaphysics of the whole plot: if Claire is an unreliable narrator, how much and which parts of what occurs outside the katabasis episode really took place is impossible to determine; if we accept her account at least of (all, most, or some of) those surrounding parts of the narrative – that is, the majority of the novel, in which her voice is not blurred with that of Orpheus – the same questions pose themselves. These doubts about reality are central to Almond's portrayal of the young person's first experience of death, or anyone's experience of loss: the common reactions of shock and denial, of the event's not "seeming real" to the

bereaved before it (often over a long time) comes to be accepted as fact, are mirrored by the uncertainties for the reader surrounding all aspects of Claire's experience.

So much for the narrative strategy of Claire ventriloquizing Orpheus. As a *character*, however, Claire taking on Orpheus' identity is explicitly marked as a regression to childhood make-believe; it is a device that she expressly states will make it easier for her to tell the kind of stories and make sense of the kinds of things that do not fit into her reality, that do not make sense in her world, like the unreal-seeming, unacceptable losses of her best friend to another love and to death.

Playing the part of Orpheus, entering into a world in which she (as Orpheus) literally confronts death, and accepting at the end that she cannot bring Ella back, no matter how much she desires it or strives for it, is a part of her learning about and having the first experiences of love and loss. By this episode, Almond has the novel comment metafictionally about the power of stories and myths, in whatever form – Orpheus' story standing as universal symbol for all narratives.

Claire learns about death through ancient stories, realizing the relevance and utility of them along the way, in the wider context of a group of young people who are studying literature and questioning the value of these ancient stories. This is narrative as therapy.²⁵ What Claire does in narrating as Orpheus in the middle of the novel should be read as a *mise en abyme* of the whole novel, of which she also is the first-person narrator, and in which she cannot be entirely sure of the reality of the events she narrates. As a character, we see that she keeps notebooks and journals, writes literature herself,²⁶ and uses stories and words – much as dreams are supposed to function – as a way of gradually sifting over, remembering, and dealing with events after they have occurred.

The act of narration that constitutes the whole novel, then, can be read as one further such act of narrative as therapy: of using the Orpheus myth in her own piece of creative writing to help her deal with the loss of her love, Ella. Just as Orpheus wrote a "song for my friend Ella Grey" (*SEG*, 158, quoted above)

²⁵ For the use of ancient myths in therapeutic contexts, see this volume's chapters by Susan Deacy, "Hercules: Bearer of Hope for Autistic Children?", 251–274; Edoardo Pecchini, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", 275–325; and Krzysztof Rybak, "All Is (Not) Lost: Myth in the Shadow of the Holocaust in *Bezszenność Jutki* [Jutka's Insomnia] by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala", 629–644.

²⁶ See, e.g., *SEG*, 29–30, 37, 66–67, 128.

as a kind of epithalamium, Claire has written the novel “a song for Ella Grey” as both an act of literary commemoration, and as a fictionalizing journal to help her come to terms with her loss; to give herself comfort and hope, however gradually, after the despair of her first experiences of loss.²⁷

²⁷ As Kümmerling-Meibauer, “Unerwartete Wendung”, 172, notes, “[t]he open ending [of *SEG*] means that there is no happy ending in the conventional sense” ([d]er offene Schluss [...] bewirkt, dass es kein Happy Ending im konventionellen Sinne gibt; my translation), referring to the enigmatic open ending of the novel’s last sentence: “[Orpheus] comes, singing his way to my mouth, and there, just behind him, is beautiful beloved Ella, coming out from Death” (*SEG*, 276). Rather than a “Wunschbild” or “Wahnvorstellung”, I take this, given the immediately prior context (*SEG*, 276: “I put [the mask of Orpheus] on now, the final act of telling this tale all night [...]. Sing through me, Orpheus, as I speak these last words... Lose yourself, Claire... And oh! He comes!”), to refer to Orpheus and Ella coming to Claire’s lips as she speaks their names and tells their story again. But the ending, and indeed the whole novel as we have seen, is certainly open to reading on many levels. This allows Almond to avoid playing down the difficulty of coming to terms with death and thereby creating an unbelievable portrayal of Claire’s response: room is left for hope, while at the same time acknowledging the awful reality of the experience for Claire and for teenagers like her who lose someone at this early stage of their lives.

“I FOUND HOPE AGAIN THAT NIGHT...”: THE ORPHEAN QUEST OF BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

somewhere I have never travelled, gladly beyond
any experience, your eyes have their silence:
in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
or which I cannot touch because they are too near..

E.E. Cummings, “Somewhere I Have Never Travelled,
Gladly Beyond”, *Complete Poems: 1904–1962*

Once upon a time, a few years after the Transformation of 1989, one of the first private television stations in Poland broadcast an American series that riveted me to the screen for the whole three seasons. Fifty-six episodes at one hour each. Recently, when I started working on this series for the *Our Mythical Childhood* project, I discovered that not only then had I been in the company of more than 19 million viewers of the series originally released on 25 September 1987, with the last episode aired on 4 August 1990.¹ After all, many of those millions and more are still living this cult production today through Internet fan communities, DVD editions, transmedia products,² fan fiction, and series-inspired ceremonies, like lighting candles on Winterfest – a celebration performed by

¹ See Edward Gross, ed., *Above & Below: The Unofficial 25th Anniversary Beauty and the Beast Companion*, Duncan, OK: BearManor Media, 2012; Jeremy Gerard, “The Success of *Beauty and the Beast*”, *New York Times*, 24 November 1988, 20, available online at <https://www.nytimes.com/1988/11/24/arts/the-success-of-beauty-and-the-beast.html> (all links cited in this chapter were active on 15 July 2021, unless stated otherwise). I wish to express my gratitude to the *Beauty and the Beast* Fan Community, especially Marina Broers and Wintercandlemakers, who have kindly permitted me to use their photographs and iconographical material in this chapter, and I thank the DVD publisher of the complete series – Fabulous Films – for their gracious consent to reprint the cover. I also appreciate very much the fan websites that have been valuable sources of references in my work (the relevant addresses are given further in the footnotes).

² There are also books with novelizations of chosen episodes – see, e.g., Barbara Hambly, *Beauty and the Beast: Song of Orpheus*, New York, NY: Avon Books, 1990, and Nan Dibble, *Beyond Words, Beyond Silence*, New York, NY: Image Pub of New York, 1993; and illustrated novels based on the series – see Wendy Pini, *Beauty and the Beast: Portrait of Love*, New York, NY: First Publishing, 1989, and her *Beauty and the Beast: Night of Beauty*, New York, NY: First Publishing, 1990. On the transmediality of the series, see also Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth / Myth as Fairy Tale*, Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1994, 47.

the series' protagonists in line with their maxim: "Even the greatest darkness is nothing, so long as we share the light". These words also decorate a bench in New York's Central Park that was dedicated in 2007 by the series' devoted fans (see Fig. 1). Its location was carefully chosen, for the protagonists often visited the Park, though avoiding people. And for good reason.



Figure 1: The Beauty and the Beast Bench in New York's Central Park, photograph by Marina Broers (2007). <http://www.batbland.com/Marina/project.html> (accessed 1 July 2021). Used with her kind permission.

The series in question is CBS's *Beauty and the Beast* (1987–1990), created by Ron Koslow. Set in New York, the global metropolis in the New World that has never severed its ties with the Old Continent and its heritage,³ the series boosts the contemporary television narrative into the realm of myth. It universalizes the fates of the protagonists and it appeals to the emotions of the audience in a truly timeless dimension, as its reception attests.

³ See also Dennis O'Brien, "Shoring Fragments: How CBS's *Beauty and the Beast* Adapts Consensus Reality to Shape Its Magical World", in Joe Sanders, ed., *Functions of the Fantastic: Selected Essays from the Thirteenth International Conference on the Fantastic in the Arts*, Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1995, 44.

The main male character, a lion-like creature named Vincent, falls in love with his Beauty, a New York lawyer named Catherine Chandler, whom he meets in terrifying circumstances: he saves her life when she falls the chance victim of a brutal assault (see Fig. 2). "Her name is Catherine. From the moment I saw her, she captured my heart with her beauty, her warmth, and her courage. I knew then, as I know now, she would change my life forever", he recalls in what becomes a regular opening of the series. The young woman returns Vincent's affection and – not quite like in the famous fairy tale, yet quite like in the famous Greek myth of Eros and Psyche – it is not he, but rather she who first undergoes a transformation as a result of their relationship.⁴

In the present chapter, I wish to light a candle of study in order to cast a bit of light on this exceptional relationship. First, after a short introduction into the series' universe and its intertextual character, we will take a fleeting glance at the earliest literary models of *Beauty and the Beast* and at the Antiquity-rooted pattern of the tale. Next, we will look into the features that have made its CBS adaptation so unique: here we will refer also to some opinions of the series' fans who, a few decades since its premiere, recall their first viewing experience in childhood, thus offering a particular research context. Then, having briefly gone through the most important episodes dealing with the hardships that affect young people, I propose to focus on an episode in which a very special viewpoint is adopted – namely, the perspective of an elderly couple, whose relationship is a kind of mirror for Vincent and Catherine. The episode in question, "Song of Orpheus", is in my opinion fundamental for understanding the idea of the series and of the reason for its cult status. We will thus witness, via this appealing example, the power of the myth "at work", in circumstances when the hardships of life seem unbearable. In sum, I will try to demonstrate how the presence of Ancient Greek mythology, even if encrypted beyond the viewers' easy perception, contributes to the unexpected impact of CBS's *Beauty and the Beast* on various generations. This is the famous "mythical method", as T.S. Eliot defined it in his review of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.⁵ Specifically, I wish to show how the most traumatic experience – the death of a beloved and the seeming ruinous descent into the Underworld – can turn into a quest for hope.

⁴ See also Pegg McNabb, "Plot Summary", The Perlman Pages, <https://treasurechambers.com/PerlmanPages/Television/bbeast1.htm>.

⁵ T.S. Eliot, "Book Reviews: Ulysses, Order, and Myth", *The Dial* 75.5 (1923), 480–483.



Figure 2: DVD cover of the complete edition of the *Beauty and the Beast* series, Fabulous Films, 2011, <http://www.fabulousfilms.com/products/62> (accessed 15 July 2021). Used with kind permission from the Company.

"Shakespeare Knew Everything"

With his frightening fangs, fur on his face, and imposing posture, Vincent seems an atrocious monster and has to live in hiding – hence his strolls through Central Park mainly on the less frequented paths and under the cover of darkness – “acquainted with the night”, as he states, citing the famous poem by Robert Frost. In his paper “Shoring Fragments: How CBS’s *Beauty and the Beast* Adapts Consensus Reality to Shape Its Magical World”, Dennis O’Brien calls Vincent “part Caliban, part Ariel, and part Ferdinand”,⁶ and this Shakespearean comparison touches the essence of his creation, indeed. For not only does Vincent have a bust of Shakespeare in his chamber and knows Shakespeare’s works by heart, but he also lives by the great poet’s words, as when he offers to Catherine the *Sonnets* with the short note written in his own hand on the opening page: “Shakespeare knew everything”.⁷ When the young woman starts browsing the collection, we can hear Vincent’s full (!) recitation of “Sonnet 29” in the background – the poem in which the Beast finds a reflection of his own despair and hope:

When, in disgrace with fortune and men’s eyes,
I all alone bewep my outcast state,
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possessed,
Desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
(Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth) sings hymns at heaven’s gate:
For thy sweet love remembered such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings’.⁸

Vincent’s life is a tempest, marked by tragedy and rejection, yet indeed also by love and hope, even though he is painfully aware that his integration into

⁶ O’Brien, “Shoring Fragments”, 39.

⁷ S1E3, “Siege”, written by David E. Peckinpah, dir. by Paul Lynch, aired 9 October 1987.

⁸ William Shakespeare, *All the Sonnets*, eds. Paul Edmondson and Stanley Wells, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020, 155.

ordinary society will never happen. One of the fans of the series tries to ease the tension by commenting humorously that “[a]ny New Yorker would tell you that there are people far stranger than Vincent walking the streets”,⁹ but Vincent bears no illusions. “I’ve seen your world”, he says to his Beauty with painful perspicacity. “There’s no place for me in it. I know what I am. Your world is filled with frightened people. And I remind them of what they’re most afraid of”. “Their own ignorance”, Catherine assumes out loud, only to be corrected by Vincent: “Their aloneness”.¹⁰

Already from this short introduction the originality of the series is clearly visible. It was even considered “[t]oo strange to succeed on TV”,¹¹ and yet, unexpectedly, it was a tremendous hit – praised by both viewers and critics alike as “one of the best TV series of all time”.¹² Still today it is ranked among the Top Cult Shows Ever,¹³ and back during the peak of its popularity it was showered with prizes for outstanding acting, including a Golden Globe for the main protagonist Ron Perlman as Vincent the Beast, as well as for the outstanding music composition – a wonderful CD comprising a selection of world-famous poems (Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 29” included) read out by Perlman in his velvety voice, under the very meaningful title – *Beauty and the Beast: Of Love and Hope*.¹⁴

⁹ Venus-25, “A Totally Misunderstood Program”, IMDb, 1 November 2001, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw0239641/?ref_=tt_urv (all the fans’ quotes are cited in their original wording).

¹⁰ S1E1 (The Pilot), “Once Upon a Time in the City of New York”, written by Ron Koslow, dir. by Richard Franklin, aired 25 September 1987. The quoted fragments here and thereafter are taken from *Beauty and the Beast: Scripts and Transcription Project*, <http://www.batbforever.com/scripts/index.html>, and the fan website *thetunnels1987*, <https://thetunnels1987.ucoz.ru/index/0-7>.

¹¹ See tom_amity, “Too Strange to Succeed on TV”, IMDb, 23 May 2004, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw0239651/?ref_=tt_urv.

¹² See carolynmycevoy, “One of the Best TV Series of All Time – Even Now”, IMDb, 3 January 2016, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw3386882/?ref_=tt_urv.

¹³ The series has gained seven stars out of ten possible on IMDb (as of 1 July 2021: https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092319/?ref_=tt_urv). In the TV Guide ranking (“TV Guide Names the Top Cult Shows Ever”, TV Guide, 29 June 2007, <https://www.tvguide.com/news/top-cult-shows-40239/>), *Beauty and the Beast* is 17th among Top Cult Shows Ever.

¹⁴ One reviewer of the CD, Lynda Dale MacLean, recalls (quoted on “Ron Perlman’s Voice Work”, The Perlman Pages, <https://treasurechambers.com/PerlmanPages/Voicework/voicerecordings.html>): “Listening to *Beauty and Beast: Of Love and Hope* brought me back to a place where romance, kindness, heroism, beauty and love could span across time and never be broken”. The music for the show was composed by Don Davis and Lee Holdridge who composed the theme song “The First Time I Loved Forever”, performed with Perlman by Lisa Angelle, with lyrics by Melanie Safka, known as “The First Lady of Woodstock”. The lyrics contain the notion of childhood: “And I knew at once you loved me / For the me of who I am / [...] And if wishes and dreams are merely for children / And if love’s a tale for fools / I’ll live the dream with you...”.

"They're on to something very significant" – observed Jack Zipes himself in 1988, already then an authority owing to his seminal study *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (1983), in an interview with Jeremy Gerard for the *New York Times* on the series' phenomenon.¹⁵ This "something" is elusive and difficult to define, yet it still resounds thirty years later in recent reviews of the DVD edition – for instance: "There was something about this series that managed to touch the audience and, in a rare occurrence, pulled in both men and women".¹⁶

Indeed, to do full justice to this production we should note that the category "men and women" comprised a huge generational span, for it included teenagers and even children who – together with their parents¹⁷ – avidly watched the series whose many a supporting character, acting as catalyst of Vincent and Catherine's adventures, could be counted among the young.¹⁸ It should also be stressed that – with all the love and hope permeating the show's scenarios – the creators did not avoid drastic content (an intrinsic element of truly mythical

¹⁵ See Gerard, "The Success of *Beauty and the Beast*", 20. See also Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization*, London: Heinemann, 1983.

¹⁶ "Beauty and the Beast: Complete Series", Home Theater Info, 9 December 2008, http://www.hometheaterinfo.com/beauty_and_the_beast_complete_series.htm.

¹⁷ Both mothers and fathers encouraged their children to join them and watch – this was how many young viewers discovered the CBS *Beauty and the Beast* series; see, e.g.: "[I]n fact it was my mother who introduced me to it, i didn't think i would like it and as a teen why would you but in fact i was so impressed i never missed one episode" (black_rose11, "Found It", IMDb, 4 December 2006, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw1536794/?ref_=tt_urv); "I remember watching this show when I was 13 with my mother" (lizashasia3, "Beauty and the Beast", IMDb, 11 November 2011, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw2516741/?ref_=tt_urv); "I didn't even exist till this show was about half-way through its run, so I didn't experience its original airings. My parents, however, did. I'm now fully convinced that their love for each other, fairy tales, and this show are the reason I am such a romantic. I didn't know that this show ever existed until I saw the DVDs in a Walmart years ago when I was shopping with my mom. I asked her about it and she said it was very popular" (Tresemmegan, "Best Show Ever", IMDb, 27 July 2009, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw2102542/?ref_=tt_urv); "I grew up watching this show with my mother, and although I was young enough to not remember to much that I actually watched (as I was only about 7 years old when the show was cancelled), I do remember sitting with my mother every day to watch the show when it was on. That alone tells me that the show was good, as I was diagnosed with ADHD at age 3 and had a hard time sitting through anything. To this day, I still talk to my mother about some details in the show" (cfisher_22, "Some People Just Don't Know Good TV....", IMDb, 8 October 2005, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw1188850/?ref_=tt_urv). A similar testimony is offered from the perspective of a mother introducing the series to her daughters (and husband): "I was so surprise even my husband watch the show with me and our girls. My oldest girl new the words of by heart" (morgangal20, "The Best", IMDb, 18 May 2006, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw1370452/?ref_=tt_urv).

¹⁸ See below, the section "Just So Children's Stories".

and fairy-tale narrations), nor did they yield to the pressure from the producers to “bring down [the series] to the level of the 12-year-olds”, as recalled by Richard Franklin – the director of the pilot of the first season (S1E1) – and by the team working on the episode “No Way Down” (S1E4).¹⁹ In this episode, Vincent is blinded, imprisoned, and tortured by a gang. Such a scenario seemed “too violent” and “too intense”, and the producers were afraid it would “scare the children”.²⁰ Nonetheless, that risk was taken, and with good results. The episode achieved the highest rating in the first season, thus paving the way for creative freedom in the future – at least to a certain point...

Franklin later confessed that he believed in children’s “incredibly innate sense of storytelling”.²¹ In fact, his faith finds corroboration in statements by the series’ fans who watched it in childhood and now recall their impressions: “I was 12 when this series first aired. I certainly never thought of this as an adult or child’s program”.²² The creators’ care about providing the audience with an intergenerational, family-bonding experience, along with their way of treating seriously the viewers of any age, are typical for the mythical method and may be among the main factors contributing to the series’ success.

Gerard links this success also with its unusual genre – an amalgam of a “gothic romance” (enhanced by the then pioneering use of filming technique²³) and “crime busters-in-action” (Catherine works for the Manhattan District Attorney’s office and solves criminal cases, with significant help from Vincent). Moreover, Gerard notices that the production played “two cherished romantic myths against each other” (mind the term “myth” here!):

One is the ancient folk legend in which a beautiful young woman falls in love with a wise, gentle monster. The other is contemporary: below the mean streets of Manhattan, in a maze of subway tunnels and sewer pipes, lives an alternative, more civilized society. The Beast is but one member of an extended subterranean family ruled by a benevolent patriarch, living

¹⁹ Written by James Crocker, dir. by Thomas J. Wright, aired 16 October 1987. For an interview with Franklin, see Gross, ed., *Above & Below*, 37–38; see also *ibidem*, 43–44.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, 43.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 37.

²² SataiDelen, “Adult Program?”, IMDb, 3 October 2008, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw1955386/?ref_=tt_urv.

²³ Jan Johnson-Smith, *American Science Fiction TV: Star Trek, Stargate and Beyond*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2005, 61, observes that the series’ photographer, Stevan Lerner, was even mentioned in the opening (not closing) credits, and he emphasizes the use of filters, smoke, fog, the halo-effect, and directional lighting as building the atmosphere of the show. The show was also the “mother” of the later urban fantasy series.

in mock-Renaissance splendor and dedicated to the noble pursuits of art, literature and classical music.²⁴

The patriarch in question is Vincent's mentor, known by the nickname "Father", who at a certain point in his life decided to withdraw from the World Above and created an underworld community called the Tunnels, in which he, Vincent, and a group of outcasts live. This labyrinthine space that may be accessed through the New York Subway frightens at first sight, but it is an Elysium, where all those who enter – broken people, metaphorically dead for the ordinary world – regain hope. *Riprendete ogni speranza*, you could say, in perfect contrast to Dante's Hell. In the episode entitled, *nomen omen*, "Labyrinths" (S2E8), which is focused on a teenage boy experiencing the difficult divorce of his parents and searching for some comfort with Catherine and Vincent, Father recalls the beginnings of his utopian asylum:

When I left the World Above, I was disillusioned, heartbroken. I had lost my faith. Here, it was that I learned to listen to my heart and heal my wounds. Here, I learned to believe again. Hopes and dreams created this fragile world. [...] It is a refuge, where the disillusioned regain their vision, where the lost become found. Where each one of us can explore the best of our being, the best of what it means to be... human and to be alive.²⁵

To be(come) human (even if your appearance is that of a beast) and to be alive is made possible by the steady contact of the Tunnels' inhabitants with masterpieces of art. O'Brien notes that "[t]hroughout the three seasons of the series, it is taken for granted that literature – primarily European and American poetry and prose – can be beneficial and sustaining to the human spirit" and "helps shape the community and hold it together".²⁶ According to this scholar, Father's concept of the Tunnels resembles the "Pre-Raphaelite vision of a sanctuary from most social, economic, and environmental problems afflicting the

²⁴ Gerard, "The Success of *Beauty and the Beast*", 20.

²⁵ The episode, written by Virginia Aldridge, dir. by Daniel Attias, aired 20 January 1989, referred to the hit role-playing game of that period, *Dungeons & Dragons*. See also Vincent's words to Catherine in "Once Upon a Time in the City of New York": "We're below the city, below the subways. There's a whole world of tunnels and chambers that most people don't even know exists. There are no maps to where we are. It's a forgotten place. But it's warm, and it's safe, and we have all the room we need. So we live here and we try to live as well as we can. And we try to take care of each other. It's our city down here".

²⁶ O'Brien, "Shoring Fragments", 40–42.

world in the late twentieth century: a sanctuary created out of cultural artifacts rejected by the world above".²⁷ This is also expressed metaphorically, through the scenography of his chamber, adorned by a "classical" element – a large caryatid, who, to quote O'Brien again, "symbolizes the spiritual strength and support Father gives to the Underground community".²⁸ And of course there are books; at Father's place, but also in Vincent's room. Simply everywhere: "piled up, stacked around, exploding off of the shelves", as Grace Nuth on the blog *Domythic Bliss* observes.²⁹ In no other previous version of the fable do books play such a prominent role, being physically present in the sundry scenes – both as the foci of attention and in the background. Needless to add, Zipes sees precisely in this series the source of inspiration for the Beast's library and Belle's love for literature in the blockbuster Disney animation.³⁰

A library in the function of the healing place of the soul, ψυχῆς ἰατρεῖον (*psychēs iatreion*), is an ancient prescription, known already to Pharaoh Ramses II (Ozymandias), as Diodorus Siculus (first century BC) assures us (1.49.3; see also Fig. 3).³¹ So when the traumas hit again – for nothing, not even Father's Tunnels, can offer an eternal shelter from the demons left on the surface and buried deep in one's soul – it is the artefacts and books that help the protagonists to voice their pain and work out a salvation plan. As a result, the protagonists also give new life to the old art and universalize their own experiences,

²⁷ Ibidem, 38.

²⁸ Ibidem, 41. In Vincent's chamber, on the other hand, there is a huge statue of Justice – a clear hint at the moral legitimacy of the Tunnels' world – called by Franklin (quoted by O'Brien, "Shoring Fragments", 39) "an almost Medieval kingdom under the streets of New York" – and at the Beast's role in it. Also, Vincent's wooden chair resembles a throne. Moreover, for O'Brien (ibidem, 41) the statue of Justice represents Vincent's "fairness, his good judgment, and also his protecting physical strength".

²⁹ Grace Nuth, "Vincent and Catherine – A New York Fairy Tale", *Domythic Bliss*, 8 February 2002, <http://domythicbliss.blogspot.com/2012/02/vincent-and-catherine-new-york-fairy.html>.

³⁰ An interesting coincidence: Tony Jay, the season 1 and 2 villain, Paracelsus, later gave his voice to Disney's also sinister Monsieur D'Arque. Also Robin McKinley's novel *Beauty* (1978), with detailed descriptions of the Beast's (anachronistic) library (including works by Robert Browning and Rudyard Kipling), is regarded as one of the sources of inspiration for the Disney creators. For Zipes's remarks on both productions, see also his *Fairy Tale as Myth / Myth as Fairy Tale*, 44–47.

³¹ See also Cora E. Lutz, "The Oldest Library Motto: ψυχῆς ἰατρεῖον", *Library Quarterly: Information, Community, Policy* 48.1 (1978), 36–39. On this inscription in the context of the Library of Alexandria, see Andreas Härter, in coll. with Jana Steinmetz, "Auf den obersten Rängen meiner Schreibmaschine. Das Welt- und Schreibtheater des Niklaus Meienberg", in Andreas Härter, in coll. with Jana Steinmetz, eds., *Liebe und Zorn. Zu Literatur und Buchkultur in St. Gallen*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009, 179. For the therapeutic potential of the myths (using Hercules' example), see also Edoardo Pecchini's chapter, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", 275–325.

thus making them understandable both to the other dwellers in the Tunnels and the audience in front of the television screens: "Like T.S. Eliot, Vincent draws upon the living language of the past to express his contemporary dilemma", O'Brien sums up.³² In this way, the link between the main characters is strengthened, while at the same time a community is built between them and the viewers, who, while following the passionate love (and crime) story, partake in what is the most unique aspect of the series: the dialogue woven from poetic and prose quotations and allusions. The reuse of Shakespeare's "Sonnet 29" by Vincent as a context for his feelings for Catherine is one of many examples of such a practice – the mythical method itself at work.³³



Figure 3: The inscription $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta\varsigma\ \iota\alpha\tau\rho\epsilon\iota\omicron\nu$ (*psychēs iatréion*; the healing place of the soul) in the Aula of the University of Bologna Library (2018), photograph by Katarzyna Marciniak.

Indeed, *Beauty and the Beast* stands out from all other TV series by the fact that the literary references constitute its very narrative tissue and encompass

³² O'Brien, "Shoring Fragments", 40.

³³ Ibidem; see also above, n. 5.

a plethora of works: from ancient poetry, through Arthurian legends, Shakespeare's plays and sonnets of course, and the great nineteenth-century narrative, to contemporary American poetry.³⁴ Vincent puts this bibliotherapy into practice already with the first episode. He reads to Catherine when she cannot see him (her eyes covered with bandages) to heal her *psyche* after the trauma of the assault. At the same time, the series' creators seem to be aware of the Orphean relationship between the Word and the Music, as they embed the literary excerpts in masterpieces by such composers as Franz Schubert, Ludwig van Beethoven, Frédéric Chopin, Antonio Vivaldi, Robert Schumann, etc., thus offering the viewers total immersion into the mythical experience of art, as already in the following episode, "Terrible Saviour" (S1E2),³⁵ where Catherine discovers the monstrous side of the identity of her guardian hero to the tones of Beethoven's Symphony no. 5.

The richness of this intertextual web of references is not surprising once we note that the writers of the series were passionate artists themselves, wonderfully versed in world literature, including George R.R. Martin, today world-famous for his *Game of Thrones* (in the cycle "A Song of Ice and Fire", since 1996). However, such an intertextual structure of the episodes truly *is* surprising for a television mass production, and undoubtedly this was one of the reasons why the series was thought to be "too strange to succeed". But here the original (yet, again, ancient in its essence) idea of the creators manifests itself: their daring concept of the projected audience. Two paragraphs above, while describing the role of viewers in the series, I deliberately used the verb "partake". Indeed, just like the public of the Greek and Roman authors who worked within the *imitatio* and *aemulatio* techniques and challenged their audience to trace the allusions and weave new meanings from their web, we, too, are invited to participate actively in the intertextual dialogue, to decode the references, and to construct upon them the messages of the episodes. This offers the following additional "benefits": older viewers can enjoy re-encountering the masterpieces they remember from their past, while young fans become acquainted with classical culture, in the broadest meaning of the term. The importance of this "educational" motif is strengthened by the scenes in which Father and Vincent teach the

³⁴ See Christopher L. Bennett, "Revisiting the 1987 BEAUTY AND THE BEAST TV Series (Spoilers)", *Written Worlds*, 20 June 2015, <https://christopherlbennett.wordpress.com/2015/06/20/revisiting-the-1987-beauty-and-the-beast-tv-series-spoilers/>: "In many ways, it was the classiest, most literate and cultured show of its era, though it had to contend with constant network pressures to be more conventional and lowbrow".

³⁵ Written by George R.R. Martin, dir. by Alan Cooke, aired 2 October 1987.

children from the Tunnels' community, usually by reading to them³⁶ or through joint storytelling sessions.

The scale and the sophisticated character of these references are overwhelming. Next to Shakespeare, who is a "regular host" in the majority of the episodes, there are such poets and writers mentioned, referenced to, or actually quoted as William Blake, Dante, Charles Dickens, T.S. Eliot, Rudyard Kipling, John Milton, Rainer Maria Rilke, Percy Shelley, Oscar Wilde, and – last but not least – a strong squadron of ancient authors, including Virgil and Ovid. We hear an echo of this technique in the 2017 Disney feature version, when Belle alludes to *Romeo and Juliet* (she does not mention the play by its title, but most of the audience will easily catch her allusion) and when she recites a few lines from "A Crystal Forest" by the Scottish poet William Sharp (1855–1905) aka Fiona MacLeod. In this second case only erudite viewers will recognize the source of the quotation. Today's Internet users gladly help decipher all allusions.³⁷ In the 1980s and 1990s, some quotes, however, could constitute a real challenge. For example, in the episode "Nor Iron Bars a Cage" (S1E7),³⁸ so titled after a line from the poem by Richard Lovelace "To Althea, from Prison" (1642), next to the well-known *Romeo and Juliet* the protagonists refer to the less famous *Merchant of Venice* and verses by William Wordsworth, from his "Surprised by Joy",³⁹ with Chopin's Nocturne for Piano Op. 9, No. 2 in the background. The results of the

³⁶ See, e.g., S1E17, "Down to a Sunless Sea" (written by Don Balluck, dir. by Christopher Leitch, aired 19 February 1988), which starts with Vincent reading to the children Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan".

³⁷ This works also for CBS's *Beauty and the Beast* – the Internet (or rather its users building a fandom) makes it possible to (re)discover the literary and musical background of CBS's series. A very useful list of references compiled by the series fan Vicky is available at "Beauty and the Beast: Literary and Musical References", The Classic Alliance of Beauty and the Beast, last update 12 June 2021, <http://www.classicalliance.net/literary/literarytitle.html>, while the webpage "The Stacks" (<http://www.classicalliance.net/stacks/stacks.html>), linked to hers by Vicky, leads to some texts of the quoted works. This is an excellent example of the extraordinary collaboration between the series' fans and of its educational value for the fan community.

³⁸ Written by Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, dir. by Thomas J. Wright, aired 13 November 1987.

³⁹ *Surprised by Joy* (1955) is also the title of C.S. Lewis's autobiography covering the period up until his conversion to Christianity. This title, as stated by his friends, somehow prophetically preannounced the story of his love to Joy Davidman Gresham; see also Margaret Carter, "Joy and Memory: Wordsworth as Illuminated by C.S. Lewis", *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 17.1 (1990), 9–19. It is possible to find more connections of this kind – e.g., episode 21 from series 1 (written by George R.R. Martin, dir. by Frank Beascoechea, aired 1 April 1988) bears the title of a poem important to Lewis, "Ozymandias" by Percy Bysshe Shelley (see also above, Diod. Sic. 1.49.3). For an interview with Martin on his involvement in the series, see Seth Abramovitch, "George R.R. Martin on Writing TV's 'Beauty and the Beast': 'It Was

queries were worth all the efforts. One of the series' fans emphasizes the value of this demanding "ancient" technique as follows: "[S]o many deeper meanings to many of the episodes [...]. The stories, poetry and imagery used in the episodes told a story within a story; [...] really gave you pause to think".⁴⁰

The very title of the first episode, written by Koslow: "Once Upon a Time in the City of New York", bespeaks both fairy-tale poetics and a strong contemporary focus with the mention of the famous metropolis. Moreover, the very framework of the series places it in the context of the millennia-old cultural tradition, as it is linked not only to the fairy tale *Beauty and the Beast*, but also to a model from Classical Antiquity, one often considered to be the first fairy tale ever:⁴¹ the myth of Eros and Psyche – known from Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*, re-popularized by Boccaccio, and boasting a huge success since its first printed edition in 1469.⁴²

The link between the two stories is stressed by Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) and it is one of the reasons why Betsy Hearne, the editor of the anthology for young readers *Beauties and Beasts* (1993), states that the tales in her "collection are as old as Rome and as young as you".⁴³ Both stories have also been identified as important for Vincent's favourite and omniscient author – Shakespeare. Among his pieces, obviously the most famous one, *Rome and Juliet*, comes to the fore, offering the model of impossible love for the series, even if "the causes for the impossibility" are different here. And the English bard does not disappoint. Marjorie Garber in her monograph *Coming of Age in Shakespeare* evokes the scene in which Romeo, hidden in the darkness,

Such a Smart Show", *Hollywood Reporter*, 16 March 2017, <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/george-r-r-martin-writing-tvs-beauty-beast-was-a-smart-show-986786>.

⁴⁰ See Fizgig777, "Such Depth & Superb Writing...", IMDb, 12 May 2014, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw2611976/?ref_=tt_urv. The reviewer notices at the same time sadly that this "probably played a large role in dooming the show".

⁴¹ See, e.g., Sheldon Cashdan, *The Witch Must Die: The Hidden Meaning of Fairy Tales*, New York, NY: Basic Group and Perseus Books Group, 1999.

⁴² Virginia E. Swain, "Cupid and Psyche", in Donald Haase, ed., *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Folktales and Fairy Tales: A–F*, Westport, CT, and London: Greenwood, 2008, 246–247; *La Bella e la Bestia. Quindici metamorfosi di una fiaba*, with an afterword by Marina Warner, Roma: Donizelli Editore, 2002.

⁴³ Betsy Hearne, ed., *Beauties and Beasts*, Phoenix, AZ: Oryx Press, 1993, ix (see also summary for Library of Congress: "Presents several versions of *Beauty and the Beast* and *Eros and Psyche*, and provides several tales that reverse traditional gender roles. Includes commentary on each tale, activities, bibliographies, and a list of sources"). See also Jerry Griswold, *The Meanings of "Beauty & the Beast": A Handbook*, Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004; Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales from Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009.

answers Juliet's questions about his name. Of course the detested "Romeo Montague" is not an option at that moment, as the girl refuses it in desperation. "Call me but love" (Act 2, Scene 2, v. 50), Romeo declares, and Juliet adds several verses later: "Thou knowst the mask of night is on my face" (Act 2, Scene 2, v. 85). Garber underlines the "aural and verbal" elements present in the scene. The star-crossed lover could have used the form "seest", yet – in addition to the fact that they were both "acquainted with the night" during their confession – Juliet's appeal to his *knowledge* hints metaphorically at their love as something profound and also as a relationship "possible only in darkness"⁴⁴ – a motif that circles back in Vincent and Catherine's story, which also commences without the sense of sight. For during her recovery after the assault, Catherine spends a lot of time with Vincent and, as I have mentioned above, through all this time she cannot see him because of the dressing put to her head wounds.

Garber is far from insisting that Shakespeare drew direct inspiration either from the myth of Eros and Psyche, or from the folklore tale of Beauty and the Beast. She observes, however, that this "basic, underlying pattern of human maturation [...] is clearly present and significant in many of Shakespeare's plays" – and also in its comic variation, as Nick Bottom's adventure in *Midsummer Night's Dream* shows, along with a parody of Ovid's Pyramus and Thisbe myth – a mirror-story for Romeo and Juliet. Whatever the case, direct access to the tale of Eros and Psyche was indeed possible for Shakespeare, due to William Adlington's translation of Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, published in 1566 in London.⁴⁵ So, it might be more than sheer coincidence that, when Romeo presents himself to Juliet as love (Eros), he explains: "It is my soul [in Greek – ψυχή; *psyché*] that calls upon my name" (Act 2, Scene 2, v. 167).⁴⁶

To what extent his "soul" means his Juliet, that is, his Psyche, each member of the public must eventually find out for themselves. That Catherine is Vincent's soul (and vice versa), is beyond doubt. They share a telepathic bond, "almost as if we're one", to quote his assertion. And when, thanking him for saving her life, but also for making her see the world with different eyes (the motif of sight again!), she says: "I owe you everything. Everything", he contradicts her – with no big words on love or heroism – but simply by stating the obvious: "You owe

⁴⁴ Marjorie Garber, *Coming of Age in Shakespeare*, New York, NY, and London: Routledge, 1997 (ed. pr. 1981), 165–170.

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 167–170.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 165–170. *Romeo and Juliet* is also the base of the scenario for S1E13, "China Moon" (taking place in New York Chinatown), written by Cynthia Benjamin, dir. by Christopher Leitch, aired 15 January 1988.

me nothing. I'm part of you, Catherine, just as you're part of me. Wherever you go, wherever I am, I'm with you".⁴⁷

A Tale as Old as Time

The tale of Beauty and the Beast belongs to the most fascinating stories of our culture, as the huge success of its recent feature version by Disney (2017) attests. Pasquale Accardo even calls it a fairy tale of "the modern world",⁴⁸ and, indeed, probably no other fable stands a chance of matching it as regards the number of adaptations in the visual arts⁴⁹ – the predominating branch of contemporary culture – to mention only Jean Cocteau's legendary version of 1946 (a meaningful choice of topic for a film created just after World War Two...); the Disney animation of 1991; numerous television series and episodes, including *Shirley Temple's Storybook* (1958); and – nowadays – also the Internet elaborations (both fan-made and professional).

At the same time, we should not forget that the motif of a beautiful woman who learns to love "an ugly husband"⁵⁰ is part of the oldest folklore and literary tradition. Even if we leave Apuleius and his mysterious monster-Eros aside, we will find the traces of Beauty and the Beast in Giovanni Francesco Straparola's *Re Porco*, in Giambattista Basile's *Pentamerone*, and in many a tale by Charles Perrault, Madame d'Aulnoy,⁵¹ and the Brothers Grimm. Furthermore, Gwenyth Hood detects the shadows of this couple in the genre of gothic romance, like Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* and Daphne du Maurier's *Rebecca*.⁵² They are also regular guests in the handbooks of cryptozoology – a genre enjoying a renaissance in our times – for example, in Brad Steiger's *The Werewolf Book: The Encyclopedia of Shape-Shifting Beings* (1999). At a certain point, the author reflects on the hypothesis of whether the werewolf may be "redeemed by the

⁴⁷ In S1E1, "Once Upon a Time in the City of New York".

⁴⁸ Though ancient to us; see Pasquale Accardo, *The Metamorphosis of Apuleius: Cupid and Psyche, Beauty and the Beast, King Kong*, Madison, NJ, and London: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press and Associated University Press, 2002, 160.

⁴⁹ It is worth mentioning, e.g., the Chamber of Cupid and Psyche by Giulio Romano (Raphael's pupil) in Palazzo Te in Mantua.

⁵⁰ See, e.g., Gwenyth Hood, "Husbands and Gods as Shadowbrutes: Beauty and the Beast from Apuleius to C.S. Lewis", *Mythlore: A Journal of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Charles Williams, and Mythopoeic Literature* 15.2 (1988), 33–43, 60.

⁵¹ It is worth observing that Mme d'Aulnoy offers an interesting reversal of the perspective, with the eponymous Babirole – a baby girl changed into a monkey.

⁵² Hood, "Husbands and Gods as Shadowbrutes", 33–43.

love of a virtuous maiden",⁵³ and none other than this section is dedicated to the CBS series and illustrated by a slide of Catherine and Vincent, never mind his leonine, not wolfish, features.

The "basic" version of *Beauty and the Beast* was created in 1740 by Gabrielle-Suzanne Barbot de Villeneuve, who published it in *Les Contes marins, ou la jeune Américaine*. Paradoxically, this 100-pages-long tale with detailed descriptions of the protagonists' childhood was targeted at adults, namely, at aristocratic circles. Hence, as Jerry Griswold observes, the story's focus on erotic issues and its emphasis on the noble origins of Beauty. Indeed, in this version, she is the daughter of a king and a good fairy and was transferred to a merchant's house due to certain machinations of an evil fairy willing to marry her father. Similarly, the Beast "owes" his animalesque shape to an evil fairy whose advances he spurns (this is the same malicious fairy that had tried to kill Beauty). To reverse the Beast's transformation and give him his princely body back, a whole wedding night – accomplished and consummated – is needed.⁵⁴

Sixteen years later only, in 1756, Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, inspired by de Villeneuve's tale, prepared a shorter version of the narrative (17 pages instead of 100), and published it in *Magasin des Enfants*.⁵⁵ Her story, devoid of the tortuous regal-fairy "prequel" and clear sexual references, is deemed by scholars to be "the very first great work in this new genre of Children's Literature"⁵⁶ and the basis for the later elaborations of *Beauty and the Beast* in youth culture. This author enjoys fame as the one who transported this tale as old as time from "adults-in-the-salons to children-in-the-nursery".⁵⁷ And indeed, James Crocker, the writer of *Beauty and the Beast's* episode "No Way Down" (the particularly violent one), pays homage to her by naming "The Beaumont" one of the buildings where Vincent, blinded as a consequence of an explosion (again, the motif of losing sight), finds shelter.⁵⁸

⁵³ Brad Steiger, *The Werewolf Book: The Encyclopedia of Shape-Shifting Beings*, Canton, MI: Visible Ink Press, 1999, 31–33.

⁵⁴ See Griswold, "The Meanings", 69–71.

⁵⁵ See Christine Butterworth-McDermott, "'Grains of Truth in the Wildest Fable': 'Beauty and the Beast' Retold as *Jane Eyre*", in Betty Greenway, ed., *Twice-Told Children's Tales: The Influence of Childhood Reading on Writers for Adults*, New York, NY, and Oxon: Routledge, 2005, 80–81.

⁵⁶ So starting from the English publisher considered the father of children's literature, John Newbery, quoted by Griswold, "The Meanings", 71.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, 70.

⁵⁸ See Vicky, "Beauty and the Beast: Literary and Musical References". An interesting coincidence – the name of the director of, i.a., S1E10, "A Children's Story", written by B.F. Barnett and Ron Koslow and aired 4 December 1987, was Gabrielle Beaumont.

De Beaumont was a woman well versed in literature. According to Griswold, she "seems to have been aware of the myth of 'Cupid and Psyche'" – this may be deduced from her description of the prince after his transformation back into a human being: he becomes "more beautiful than the God of Love".⁵⁹ De Beaumont was also the author of several dozen child-rearing treatises, and, while her elaboration of *Beauty and the Beast* long bore the label of "a tale for the entertainment of juvenile readers",⁶⁰ scholars today find, hidden within it, a serious message of protest against *couverture* – the legal system that made every married woman a *femme couverte*, that is, deprived of her identity and fully fused with her husband's household (his rules, assets, and obligations, and even his first name transferred upon her in official presentations).⁶¹

The tale of *Beauty and the Beast* was also at the centre of interest for psychologists and psychoanalitics of literature, never mind de Beaumont's true intentions. Erich Neumann and Bruno Bettelheim read this and other adaptations as "allegories of the sexual adaptation of a woman to marriage",⁶² a theme that gained popularity especially in the Victorian era.⁶³ James Gollnick focuses on a similar aspect in his analysis of the Eros and Psyche myth – however, not so much in the context of marriage, as of a reconciliation of the psychic agents in Sigmund Freud's model. While the Beast from Mme de Beaumont's tale is a prince, thus a figure of a higher status than Belle, in the Ancient Greek myth the monster-Eros is a god, so he also surpasses Psyche, even though she is a princess herself. Owing to this, to quote Gollnick, "the myth helps to overcome a person's initial anxiety and offers hope that the id is not what it at first seems to be, but that once it is confronted and accepted by the ego, it is transformed into something that benefits and enlarges consciousness".⁶⁴ At the same time, however, the love story of Beauty and the Beast happens to be called "a tale of a Stockholm Syndrome",⁶⁵ where the victim starts to become

⁵⁹ Griswold, "The Meanings", 70.

⁶⁰ "Beauty and the Beast", Pook Press, <https://www.pookpress.co.uk/project/beauty-and-the-beast-history/>.

⁶¹ See Valerie Derbyshire, "Beauty and the Beast Was Originally a Feminist Fable Disguised as Marriage Guidance", *The Conversation*, 17 March 2017, <http://theconversation.com/beauty-and-the-beast-was-originally-a-feminist-fable-disguised-as-marriage-guidance-74561>.

⁶² Hood, "Husbands and Gods as Shadowbrutes", 43.

⁶³ Butterworth-McDermott, "'Grains of Truth in the Wildest Fable': 'Beauty and the Beast' Retold", 79–98.

⁶⁴ James Gollnick, *Love and the Soul: Psychological Interpretations of the Eros and Psyche Myth*, Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992, 51.

⁶⁵ Derbyshire, "Beauty and the Beast Was Originally a Feminist Fable"; Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth / Myth as Fairy Tale*, 44–47.

infatuated with her tormentor and is not able to judge reality correctly. Analysing the evolution of the fable in its ever-new instalments until 1994, Zipes harbours no illusion that in our times "the basic plot of submission/domination is merely reformed to make the contemporary beautiful working woman less aware of her bonds".⁶⁶ Hood, on the contrary, is willing to grant quite an amount of agency to all the "Belles":

This Beauty is not merely a naive young girl; she is one who has consciously chosen to be loving, virtuous and courageous despite obstacles. Even though she rises in social position through her marriage with the enchanted Prince, we still feel that he is a lucky man; Beauty is the sort of girl who would bless any environment.⁶⁷

Such different interpretations should not at all surprise. They attest to the power of this truly ancient story. As Hearne observes, it "has a nucleus of elements that has survived cultural, historical, economic, and aesthetic change". Thus, it "has outlived many theories and will outlast many more".⁶⁸ By providing a fixed framework and yet being endlessly flexible in regard to details and their interpretations, this tale can function as a mythical narration – it has the potential to adjust to the needs of the given times: mirror them, address the current dilemmas, and offer comfort and hope. Hence, it is not surprising that the reviewer of the DVD edition of the CBS series on the portal Home Theater Info lists the fable *Beauty and the Beasts* within "the mythology of a culture" and s/he adds that "[a]s with all classic stories it is the responsibility of each generation to take it and adapt [it] in a fashion that is suitable to their time and place".⁶⁹

However, also in this respect does the CBS series stand out from other audiovisual versions of this fable. We can distinguish three factors at the source of its powerful impact – this "something very significant", so accurately sensed by Zipes. Firstly, the series appeals, as already noted, to both young and old, for

⁶⁶ Ibidem, 45, a theme referenced also by Anna E. Altmann and Gail de Vos, *Tales, Then and Now: More Folktales as Literary Fictions for Young Adults*, Englewood, CO: Libraries Unlimited, 2001, 14–15. See also Jack Zipes, "The Origins of the Fairy Tale for Children, or, How Script Was Used to Tame the Beast in Us", in Gillian Avery and Julia Briggs, eds., *Children and Their Books: A Celebration of the Work of Iona and Peter Opie*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989, 119–134.

⁶⁷ Hood, "Husbands and Gods as Shadowbrutes", 39.

⁶⁸ Betsy Hearne, "Beauty and the Beast: Visions and Revisions of an Old Tale: 1950–1985", *The Lion and the Unicorn* 12.2 (1988), 107. See also Cristina Bacchilega, *Postmodern Fairy Tales: Gender and Narrative Strategies*, Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997 (ch. 4: "In the Eye of the Beholder: 'Where Is Beast?'", 71–102); Griswold, "The Meanings", 69–71.

⁶⁹ "Beauty and the Beast: Complete Series", see above, n. 16.

it concerns the fates of characters from various age groups, while at the same time dealing with universal ideas – ones so typical for myths – ideas of love, loyalty, courage, loss, and the search – beneath surface appearance – for authentic values worthy of the highest sacrifice. Secondly, the series activates the broad context of the mythology of culture directly, by means of the aforementioned intertextual references to global masterpieces of music, art, and literature; and thus, an intergenerational Community joined by common artistic experiences is built and strengthened. Thirdly, rooted in the ancient myth of Eros and Psyche, *Beauty and the Beast* is a poignant example of how – to quote Rachel Burkholder’s observation from her analysis of C.S. Lewis’s *Till We Have Faces* – “a myth turned fairytale can still be told as a myth”. As such does it guide us through the world – our world.⁷⁰

A proof of the series’ success in the application of the mythical method is the fact that it became a referenced source in its own right. Its importance for the popular culture of the 1980s has been attested by numerous allusions in such iconic shows as *ALF* (“Happy Together”, 1989), *The Simpsons* (“Stealing First Base”, 2010), *Muppet Babies* (“Beauty and the Schnoz”, 1988),⁷¹ *Sabrina: The Teenage Witch* (“Sabrina and the Beast”, 1998), *I Love the ’80s Strikes Back: 1987* (2003),⁷² and *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno* (1988–1990). At the same time, these references confirm the intergenerational reception of the CBS *Beauty and the Beast*: indeed, while the animated series *Muppet Babies* was targeted

⁷⁰ See Rachel Elizabeth Burkholder, *A Myth Retold: How Till We Have Faces Confirms That a Myth Is Not a Fairytale*, Master’s thesis, Liberty University, 2011, 101; see also p. 12 (referring to Zipes, *Fairy Tale as Myth / Myth as Fairy Tale*): “The mythification processes is one that takes a tale and elevates it to the status of transcendent universality. In other words, myth is universal, and fairytale, which was once a folk tale, is a tale that is specific to a select community”. See also Ruth B. Bottigheimer, “Cupid and Psyche vs. Beauty and the Beast: The Milesian and the Modern”, *Merveilles & contes* 3.1 (1989): special issue on *Beauty and the Beast*, 4–14, and her “Beauty and the Beast: Marriage and Money – Motif and Motivation”, *Midwestern Folklore* 15.2 (1989), 79–88; Accardo, *The Metamorphosis of Apuleius*, 102: “The boundaries that separate myth, legend, fairy tale, and folklore have never been sharply defined”. See also C.S. Lewis’s note on his novel: “[I]n relation to my work he [Apuleius] is a source, not an influence nor a model”, in C.S. Lewis, *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, ill. Fritz Eichenberg, New York, NY: Harvest Books and Harcourt, 1984 (ed. pr. 1956), 313.

⁷¹ This episode, aired 17 September 1988, includes a beautiful and ever-valid song on tolerance and mutual understanding, “Look a Little Bit Closer”, illustrated with slides from the CBS series. For the full list of references, see “Connections”, IMDb, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092319/movieconnections?ref_=tttrv_q1_6.

⁷² CBS’s *Beauty and the Beast* is the first show that is discussed here and even though the convention of the programme is comical-ironical, it is not difficult to notice that the commenting stars are moved and emotional about the series.

at children, the audience of the other programmes comprised teens and adults (for example, Bart Simpson imagines Catherine and Vincent kissing).

The strong impact of the series also resulted in a fully fledged adaptation after a quarter of a century. To use the professional cinematographic term, a remake (reboot) was produced by the CW Television Network and aired in 2012–2016. As befits a well thought-out reception, the new series adjusted perfectly to the current situation and the tensions within society by taking up the themes valid for the United States post-9/11 and for many other countries as well (the motifs of surveillance, security programmes, military conspiracy). Carlen Lavigne, in the chapter "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century: Beauty and the Beast as Post-9/11 Fairy Tale", compares both productions, favouring the reboot as more engrossing with its new Vincent – a hypermasculine medical doctor-veteran from Afghanistan who has lost his two brothers in the attack on the World Trade Center.⁷³ This Vincent is a victim of military experiments and rather than a romantic creature acquainted with the night, he is a spec-ops version of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde, with but a scar on his cheek. Indeed, his face gets deformed only during his aggression-induced outbreaks for budgetary reasons⁷⁴ and because of the series' target – namely, mostly teenage girls who were thought to expect (in complete contrast to the idea of the creators of the CBS series) a handsome idol.⁷⁵

And yet, despite its fast pace, attractive protagonists, and a gripping conspiracy theory at the core of the action, the series was cancelled after the fourth season. This is one season more than the CBS *Beauty and the Beast*; however, the original instalment of Catherine and Vincent's adventures ended

⁷³ See Carlen Lavigne, "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century: Beauty and the Beast as Post-9/11 Fairy Tale", in Carlen Lavigne, ed., *Remake Television: Reboot, Re-Use, Recycle*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014, 83–96.

⁷⁴ The CBS production was in the hands of the legendary FX and make-up specialist Rick Baker.

⁷⁵ Interestingly, the "ugly transformation" was introduced into the series *Buffy: The Vampire Slayer* (1997–2003), while in the movie of 1992 the vampires were still attractive. This change had two reasons: on the one hand, the viewers were discouraged from identifying with the evil characters; on the other, as Jack Wilhelmi ("Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Why the Vampires Transform & Turn to Dust", *ScreenRant*, 12 May 2020, <https://screenrant.com/buffy-tv-show-vampires-transform-dust-reason/>) notices, "[i]f they looked normal, and there was little to no distinction, the idea of a high school girl killing them by stabbing them in the heart could be a little darker than he [Joss Whedon – the producer] intended". As for the context of CBS's *Beauty and the Beast*, Lavigne, "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century", 85, observes also a profound change within the American society that influenced Vincent's new creation. The terrorist attack of 9/11 put into question the notion of danger as something coming from the outside: "In the twenty-first century, the Beast walking among us looks just like us, and the man in the baseball cap is the new Other".

due to a confluence of issues triggered by a personal situation, as we shall see later in this chapter (a drop in viewership ratings was its consequence). The CW reboot simply did not make it, even though the producers' creativity should be highly appreciated.⁷⁶ To explain this series' cancellation, Laura Hurley notes that "[t]he show has never had the exposure to garner new viewers, and the title of the series generally recalls an animated film featuring anthropomorphic furniture singing a tale as old as time rather than a police procedural/romance on The CW".⁷⁷ Moreover, Lavigne hints at the recent phenomenon of the "fragmented audience", due to which "perhaps no single television series can now occupy the cultural imagination as in times past".⁷⁸ However, even today it is still possible to achieve global success, as the HBO *Game of Thrones* (created by the very same George R.R. Martin), the BBC *Sherlock* (by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss), and the Netflix *Witcher* demonstrate. But, in fact, such success is rare, and not by chance were all these productions, just as CBS's *Beauty and the Beasts*, based on the three aforementioned factors that are crucial for his "something very significant" to materialize. Mainly, they speak of universal ideas worthy of the ultimate sacrifice; they build their narration from the best bricks of cultural heritage; and they explain our world with the "mythical method", be the modern hero(ine) an insane dragon-rider, a drug-addict genius of deduction, or a depressed monster-slayer (and protector). All are also excellent adaptations of outstanding literary works by, respectively: Martin himself, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Andrzej Sapkowski.⁷⁹

Of course, in the case of the great books, tales, and myths that nourish our culture – and the fable *Beauty and the Beast* doubtless belongs to this group – there are great expectations for their new versions. And thus so great can the disappointment be, that sometimes, however, despite all, it brings good results. For instance, we learn that the 1976 film adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*, with George C. Scott as the Beast, enraged the then writer-to-be Robin McKinley to such a degree "that she sat down and wrote her first novel, *Beauty*,

⁷⁶ Indeed, we need to emphasize that they did not re-enact the "original" blindly, but offered a creative approach. Let's notice also that the CW *Beauty and the Beast* won in 2013, 2014, and 2015 the People's Choice Award.

⁷⁷ Laura Hurley, "Beauty and the Beast Has Been Cancelled", *Cinemablend*, 13 October 2015, <https://www.cinemablend.com/television/Beauty-Beast-Has-Been-Cancelled-91977.html>.

⁷⁸ Lavigne, "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century", 94 (she refers to Lynn Spigel, "Entertainment Wars: Television Culture after 9/11", *American Quarterly* 56.2 [2004], 256).

⁷⁹ In the case of Sapkowski's cycle, it should be added that the Netflix series owed its popularity also to the huge, global success of the video games (2007–) by CD Project Red.

in response to it",⁸⁰ and this novel paved her way to *The Hero and the Crown*, awarded with the 1985 Newbery Medal for the best American children's book – an inspirational story of a shy princess who grows up to be a powerful queen and protector of the weak.

While until the 1980s most of the versions of the Beauty and the Beast tale were focused on the eponymous pair, in a regal entourage and rarely with an insight into the broader social context,⁸¹ attention to people in need is at the core of the CBS scenario. Its creators dare break the conventions of the previous adaptations and they rebel against many a contemporary stereotype. This approach never disappoints and is symbolically hinted at by Vincent's choice, already in the first episodes, of the book he uses as a means of communication with Catherine. He reads to her from this book and leaves its copy on her balcony as a gift, after she recovers and comes back to live in her New York apartment. It is *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, one of the first great authors who reflected in their novels on the poor, disabled, and outcasts – the predecessors of the Tunnels' inhabitants: together they speak for so many of the injured in our real world. Vincent's predilection for *Great Expectations* may have an even deeper, "subconscious" reason. As shown by Jessica A. Campbell in her paper published in the *Dickens Quarterly*, this novel is characterized by its fairy-tale narration. The scholar indicates as its counterpart none other than Mme de Villeneuve's version of *Beauty and the Beast*, and she identifies the common core elements in these two works: the protagonists' "confused identities", the action's development based on "the transformative properties of love and generosity", and the moral appeal to "learn to see beyond appearances" to finally notice those who are usually pushed to the margin of society.⁸²

The inclusive character of the CBS *Beauty and the Beast* is a feature praised both by the audience and the critics, among them Zipes, who appreciated how the series' creators managed to "reinterpret a traditional fairy tale and make it very relevant with regard to social and political problems, the homeless,

⁸⁰ Terri Windling, "Retelling Beauty & the Beast", *Myth & Moor*, 11 July 2019, <https://www.terriwindling.com/blog/2019/07/beauty-and-the-beast.html>.

⁸¹ On the potentially social, yet hidden, aspect of the version by de Beaumont, see Derbyshire, "Beauty and the Beast Was Originally A Feminist Fable", above, n. 61.

⁸² See Jessica A. Campbell, "Beauty and the Beast and Great Expectations", *Dickens Quarterly* 31.1 (2014), 32–41, summarized by Cameron Luquer on the blog *Nineteenth-Century Studies at SUNY Geneseo*, 6 November 2019, <https://c19.sunygeneseoenglish.org/2019/11/06/beauty-and-the-beast-and-great-expectations/>: "Unlike Beauty and the Beast, this realization comes too late for the characters in Great Expectations".

outcasts".⁸³ Indeed, the single threads and stories have a powerful impact and stay in the viewer's memory even many years later, as we shall see in the next section. And not only do they not disappoint, they are able to move the audience deeply; they seem genuine, though we know that all this is a part of global show business. Such a unique impact was possible to achieve due to the series' particular setting for its action, which pitted it against tradition, and owing to the mythical and fairy-tale background of the protagonists, which makes them carriers of universal (and yes, idealized, but all the more so appealing) values.

Great Expectations

The scenery of the CBS *Beauty and the Beast* stands out from other adaptations, since the action is moved from fantasy realms to a very concrete, yet also mythical, city – the New York of the 1980s.⁸⁴ This is considered the "ideal setting" to relate to such themes as race, gender, homelessness, and class differences,⁸⁵ in "reaction to the rise of neoliberalism in the years of Reagan conservatism", as Lavigne observes, emphasizing also the strong influence of "second-wave feminism and civil rights concerns" on the series.⁸⁶ Vincent and the supporting characters form a group called by Cynthia Erb in her paper "Another World or the World of an Other?" a "rainbow coalition", trying to voice out their thoughts and emotions and achieve agency.⁸⁷ They include people of colour (African Americans, Chinese) and some ethnic minorities previously seldom present on screen (Gypsies),⁸⁸ of different age groups (both children in need and neglected seniors), and

⁸³ Zipes in Gerard, "The Success of *Beauty and the Beast*", 20.

⁸⁴ The fans even prepared a detailed map of the locations "taking part" in the series; see "The New York City Sights of *Beauty & the Beast*", 2008, <http://www.classicalliance.net/funstuff/newyorksights.html>.

⁸⁵ See Lavigne, "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century", 91. O'Brien, "Shoring Fragments", 44, notes that while the City stands for "the body only", the soul of New York is the Underground (the Tunnels).

⁸⁶ Lavigne, "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century", 84.

⁸⁷ See Cynthia Erb, "Another World or the World of an Other? The Space of Romance in Recent Versions of 'Beauty and the Beast'", *Cinema Journal* 34.4 (1995), 50–70.

⁸⁸ Lavigne, "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century", 84, on Vincent in the context of ethnicity issues: "[H]is mysterious animal appearance lends him a fictional ethnicity that allows him to act as a stand-in for the series' treatment of racial issues"; see also Lavigne's remark on the pilot episode, "Once Upon a Time in the City of New York", where Father comments on Vincent's limited access to education, but also that of other people who fell victim to racial divisions within American society: "When I started medicine they wouldn't admit minorities... I wonder what they would've done with you? Let's not even think about it". According to Lavigne (85), from this perspective,

all kinds of "others" (depressed, rejected, illiterate, etc.). The fairy-tale framework known from the fable of Beauty and the Beast along with New York's legendary atmosphere (a Promised Land-metropolis, the Athens or Rome of our times) make the problems discussed in the series globally comprehensible and universal. In such a special way, the viewers are encouraged to feel empathy towards the characters, and Vincent is a perfect connection between all the parties involved.

Vincent's creation in the series, as in the tale of Beauty and the Beast and the myth of Eros and Psyche, is centred on the thread of love – however, this time it is him, the male protagonist, who occupies a lower, in fact – the lowest social position. His Tunnels world, though so physically close, only a few steps beneath the New York streets, lies "a world apart"⁸⁹ from the one of Catherine – a well-educated woman from high society. That is why, at first, Father is opposed to their relationship – they seem too different: "She can only bring you unhappiness", he admonishes his ward. Vincent, who indeed tried to fight his feelings, but in vain, declares with both force and desperation (his exceptional intelligence stripping him of any illusions): "Then I'll be unhappy!".⁹⁰ The tragic aura of his persona makes him close and trustworthy both for the viewers and the Tunnels' inhabitants in their battles with their own demons and misfortune.

At the same time, there is no doubt that Vincent rises above all the characters of the series. And even if he is too humble to notice this fact, it is for all to see. He is a hero, ready to risk his life for Catherine. Contrary to the previous versions of the fairy tale (the Beasts are usually safe, until the grand finale, in their distant castles), every day Vincent dwells very close to the "normal" world – he walks through Central Park and along the city streets, and this makes the risk of his exposure high. The consequences could be terrible. In the twentieth century, the place of the aggressive peasants who wish to kill the Beast is taken over by cruel scientists willing to do the same or worse, and in a more painful way. Father does not hide his worries after Vincent's perilous action to save Catherine in the first episode: "Do you know what they'd do if they caught you up there? Or found you down here? They'd kill you. Or put you behind bars and make you wish you were dead. How could you?" But Vincent

Vincent also is a kind of victim of "systemic racial prejudices he cannot hope to combat". As for the exonym "Gypsies", though today's English is yielding to the broader term "the Roma" or "the Romani people", it has been kept in this chapter in accordance with the series' scenario, where it constitutes an important element of the characters' self-definition.

⁸⁹ In the opening sequence of the series, Vincent comments on New York's panorama: "This is where the wealthy and the powerful rule. It is her world... a world apart from mine".

⁹⁰ In the episode "Once Upon a Time in the City of New York".

simply answers with a question: "How could I have turned my back on her, and left her there?"⁹¹

This simplicity, in the best fairy-tale (but not naive) meaning of the term, is Vincent's main trait. However, due to his relationship with Catherine, he evolves into a more complex figure, with the tragic dimension enhanced: "I've never regretted what I am... until now", he states with growing awareness of the impossibility of their feelings.⁹² Otherwise, he seems at peace with his fate, or at least with his past. We are never explained the reason for his unusual appearance. No fairies, as in the tale of *Beauty and the Beast*, no genetic experiments, as in the CW reboot. Even if a kind of medical intervention is suggested by the plot around the first main villain of the series, Paracelsus, a clear and direct explanation is never offered. Vincent has only the following, again simple, words for Catherine (see also Fig. 4):

I was a baby... abandoned... left to die. Someone found me, brought me here to the man who became my father. He took me, he raised me, he taught me everything... and he named me Vincent. That's where I was found, near the hospital, St. Vincent's.⁹³

This lack of easy answers is part of how the series' creators "explain the world by constructing modern myths".⁹⁴ Like in Oedipus' case (and like so often in our lives), we are not allowed to disclose all mysteries, but the shortage of knowledge does not mean that there is no Logos, no Sense to our world. Even if doomed to failure, Vincent shows that dignity can be drawn from the sole attempts to maintain agency in extremely hostile circumstances.

In such circumstances, it would be only too easy to develop frustration and hatred, and in Vincent's case, with his superhuman strength, that would be a deadly mixture. Yet he is gentle,⁹⁵ to the extent that some critics consider him

⁹¹ Ibidem.

⁹² Ibidem.

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ His creation might have been based on the real person of Petrus Gonsalvus who suffered from hypertrichosis and participated in a freak show, to eventually marry happily a certain Catherine. See also [Taig Spearman], checked by John Kuroski, "Petrus Gonsalvus and the Real Beauty and the Beast Story", *ATI*, updated 16 August 2018, <https://allthatsinteresting.com/petrus-gonsalvus-real-beauty-and-the-beast>.

⁹⁵ See Altmann and Vos, *Tales, Then and Now*, 45, who echo Marina Warner (*From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers*, London: Random House, 1995, 312), calling Vincent "an urban Robin Hood". O'Brien, "Shoring Fragments", 45, n. 3, notices the paradoxical change in his behaviour, as the series' plot develops: "To save his more humane world, the Beast must at times become less human: the human condition at the end of the twentieth century?"



Figure 4: St. Vincent's Hospital, New York (after 1933), photograph attributed to William Schickel and Isaac F. Ditmars, Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Historic American Engineering Record (HAER), or Historic American Landscapes Survey (HALS), Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, DC, 20540 USA, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

“not particularly masculine”;⁹⁶ specifically, they hint at his recitations of classical poetry and the time he spends educating children. This kind of character creation can, however, be interpreted in completely different categories than “lack of masculinity”. The mythical method is in force here, too. Vincent seems an otherworldly being – as if taken out of the poem “This Is a Creature” by Rilke, quoted in the series:

This is the creature there has never been.
They never knew it, and yet, none the less,
they loved the way it moved, its suppleness,
its neck, its very gaze, mild and serene.⁹⁷

In this, Vincent resembles Psyche’s godly husband according to Apuleius: “omnium ferarum mitissimam dulcissimamque bestiam” (*Met.* 5.22; “the gentlest and sweetest of all the beasts”). He is Catherine’s Eros – her Love. And exactly like Eros – and contrary to the Beast of the various versions of the fairy tale – Vincent will not change. He will never turn into a man.⁹⁸ However, while Eros did not need any transformation as a creature of divine grace (Psyche cried in awe when she saw him in the light of her olive lamp), Vincent’s exterior will remain as it is, for there is no cure (medical or magical) for his affliction. Despite his Eros-like features of character, his appearance is not that of a beautiful god of love, but a hideous monster. Paradoxically, this makes his story more appealing and closer to the viewers. For he shows them what true humanity means and that magic indeed is present in the world and available to everybody. This magic is love, the “foundation” of the series⁹⁹ – a powerful transformative force, opening for Vincent new dimensions of life, even if for the majority of the episodes his relationship with Catherine remains a chaste, “childlike romance”,¹⁰⁰ which is symbolically suggested by Vincent’s medieval dress, making

⁹⁶ Lavigne, “Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century”, 85.

⁹⁷ Trans. J.B. Leishman, in Rainer Maria Rilke, *Possibility of Being: A Selection of Poems*, New York, NY: New Directions Publishing, 1977, 98. In the present chapter, I give the English translations only, following the versions used in the series.

⁹⁸ In fact, it was not a problem for the fans – as one of them notes (cathvin87, “Soul Mates”, IMDb, 11 November 2009, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw2156925/?ref_=tt_urv): “Personally, I would never want Vincent to turn into a human prince”.

⁹⁹ See carolynmycevoy, “One of the Best TV Series of All Time – Even Now”: “Ron Koslow created a show where love is its foundation”.

¹⁰⁰ As we can learn from Gerard, “The Success of *Beauty and the Beast*”, 20, Linda Hamilton noted that *Beauty’s* relationship with the Beast “is the childlike romance America’s really hungry

him a "heroic-age" knight adoring and protecting his lady,¹⁰¹ and by Catherine's innocent-white gown in the opening sequence and in a number of other scenes.

As Lavigne remarks, the focus on the platonic aspect of love means that "the series is marked by this seemingly impassable stasis, though also by implicit hope".¹⁰² Indeed, the stasis on the physical level brings development in the spiritual sphere. Catherine and Vincent's feelings elevate them on Plato's (or rather Diotima's) ladder of love, while hope is crucial in all the dark moments that will come. For unlike Beauty and the Beast from the fable and Eros and Psyche from the myth, Catherine and Vincent will be deprived of a happy ending. Rather, their love is marked by the Orphean curse. They are both humans, like us (yes, the feline-faced Vincent, too), living not on Mount Olympus or in a fairy-tale realm, but here on Earth, and as such they are doomed to experience the loss of their beloved one – something all the more painful the stronger their relationship is. That is why Father, unexpectedly for Catherine, becomes sad when she confesses to him her feelings for Vincent.¹⁰³ Paradoxically, it would have been easier, had she not reciprocated his love.

However, before tragedy hits them and despite the platonic character of their relationship for most of the time, Catherine matures as a woman. Indeed, she has the biggest share in the transformation triggered by love, exactly like Psyche, and she ascends to a completely new level of existence. She becomes a strong, courageous, and independent young female, anticipating by three decades Emma Watson's inspirational creation. As a result, Catherine's physical appearance, though perfectly matching the noun *Beauty* in the series' title, recedes into the background (let us notice that she spends the crucial part of the pilot episode with her head covered in bandages and, until she heals fully, she has ugly scars on her face). All the time it is her inner beauty that radiates from her as if "according to nature", to quote Lewis's description of Psyche:

for". The lack of fulfilment of their love was also linked by some with the AIDS-era fears, but Koslow (ibidem) rejected such an interpretation. See also tom_amity, "Too Strange to Succeed on TV".

¹⁰¹ See Gerard, "The Success of *Beauty and the Beast*", 20, and Lavigne, "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century", 85.

¹⁰² Ibidem, 89.

¹⁰³ See S1E8, "Song of Orpheus", written by Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, dir. by Peter Medak, aired 20 November 1987:

CATHERINE: Father, I just want you to know. I would never hurt him. I love him.

FATHER: I know. I also know it can only bring him unhappiness.

CATHERINE: Why do you say that?

FATHER: Because part of him... is a man.

For an analysis of this episode, see further in this chapter.

She made beauty all round her. When she trod on mud, the mud was beautiful; when she ran in the rain, the rain was silver. When she picked up a toad – she had the strangest and, I thought, unchanciest love for all manner of brutes – the toad became beautiful.¹⁰⁴

As with the protagonist of *Till We Have Faces*, Catherine's main character traits are kindness, compassion, and capacity for altruistic love. These same traits are the cause of why she feels (in part unconsciously) incomplete when we come to know her as the series starts. She seems to have it all – a respectable job in her father's law firm, wealth, an attractive fiancé – yet she lacks "a true motivation and reason for living".¹⁰⁵ After the attack, she is brought to the Tunnels by Vincent in the role of Orpheus *à rebours* who takes her to his Underworld to save her life. While Father tends to her physical state, Vincent nourishes her *psyche* with the aforementioned bibliotherapy and long conversations. In effect, once she regains sight, she is not repelled by his appearance, in spite of her initial shock.¹⁰⁶ For she has already come to know his extraordinary personality – that "essential that is invisible to the eyes", as the Fox told the Little Prince once upon a time. This is how their complex relationship begins. She cherishes all these memories, and later, when Vincent expresses his surprise at how she might want to remember the terrible night when she was attacked – "How remarkable you are... remembering such a dark moment... with dancing lights" – she answers: "It's time for a celebration. I found hope again that night... I found you".¹⁰⁷

Indeed, Catherine draws hope and strength from Vincent to build her own identity and fill the emptiness in her life. Against the wishes of both her patronizing fiancé (they will separate, of course) and domineering father,¹⁰⁸ she abandons her promising career at his private law firm and joins the District Attorney's office where she faces the darkest of crimes and solves the most difficult of problems. This component of the series is not always appreciated by

¹⁰⁴ Lewis, *Till We Have Faces*, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Tim Rose, "Beauty and the Beast", *Friday @ 8/7 Central*, 23 July 2010, <https://friday87central.wordpress.com/category/cbs/beauty-and-the-beast/>.

¹⁰⁶ She also had to deal with the problem of the eventual loss of her beauty – seriously injured in the assault; that she survived with but one visible scar on her cheek (initially her whole face was covered with scars) was the merit of the excellent medical skills of Father.

¹⁰⁷ S1E15, "Temptation", written by David E. Peckinpah, dir. by Gus Trikonis, aired 5 February 1988.

¹⁰⁸ See also Lavigne, "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century", 87: "Catherine rejects her domineering father and her patronizing fiancé".

the critics ("it [...] uses the worst aspects of criminal-adventure television"),¹⁰⁹ but it permits the creators to include marginalized groups of society within the main action in a natural way, by building also a common narrative frame for a variety of episodes. Besides, the cases serve for the protagonists as trials, like the ones Psyche had to deal with to mature.

Catherine achieves even more than the mythical princess and the fairy-tale Beauty. She develops her full agency and learns to never do as she is told, not even by her beloved Vincent. In effect, she often exposes herself to danger, and he then has to save her, but in the process they together save many innocent lives.

Vincent tries to discourage Catherine from their relationship, for he knows that it is she who will pay the highest price: "[T]hat secret that you carry now, our secret, sets you apart from your past, your friends, and even from the family you are yet to have, the children waiting to be born [...]. Know that our bond, our dream exists at the cost of all your other dreams. Know that, Catherine". To this she has but a short answer: "It's worth it".¹¹⁰ Catherine is ready to sacrifice everything for Vincent, yet at the same time she makes her choices in full accordance with herself. Thus, she "craft[s] a new ending to a fairy tale", as Lavigne observes.¹¹¹ Indeed, she does not abandon the World Above, but she starts implementing there her own scenario.¹¹² She becomes one of the Helpers – the people from Above who know and support the Tunnels community. Vincent catalyses her metamorphosis and – like Psyche – she becomes a better person. This is the effect known for millennia that myths, fairy tales, and our near and dear have on us.

The transformation occurring in the protagonists is sustained and strengthened by the regular references to masterpieces of art that give a wide context to and universalize the individual experiences. In particular, it is owing to the power of literature and Father's wise guidance that Vincent, himself severely afflicted in life, becomes empathetic to the suffering of others, including those whom we would define as villains. Among the texts he recites to Catherine, there is a fragment of Rilke's "Letters to a Young Poet", expressing the Beast's views perfectly:

¹⁰⁹ Zipes in Gerard, "The Success of *Beauty and the Beast*", 20.

¹¹⁰ S1E22, "A Happy Life", written by Ron Koslow, dir. by Victor Lobl, aired 8 April 1988.

¹¹¹ Lavigne, "Once Upon a Time in the 21st Century", 89. See also Denise Lowe, *Women and American Television: An Encyclopedia*, Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999, 31.

¹¹² The critics notice that the two sides of Catherine's personality are reflected in her two different styles: in the World Above her hair is controlled in the form of a tight bun, she wears a businesswoman's suit and has a briefcase, while in the Tunnels she unbuttons her blouse or wears white dresses, and her hair is loose.

How should we be able to forget those ancient myths that are at the beginning of all peoples, the myths about dragons that at the last moment turn into princesses; perhaps all the dragons of our lives are princesses who are only waiting to see us once beautiful and brave. Perhaps everything terrible is in its deepest being something helpless that wants help from us.¹¹³

This kind of empathy, of course, is the most difficult to develop. Many a time Vincent has to overcome attacks of rage against the villains, especially when Catherine's life or the safety of the children under his care are endangered. However, he always succeeds in the end. Only the main antagonist of season 3, Gabriel, is able to truly shatter Vincent's demeanour, but even in the moment of their dramatic confrontation Vincent overcomes the thirst for revenge to spend the last priceless minutes with Catherine, who dies in his arms. Like in Orpheus' myth, love conquers all, even if it is conquered by death.

For the majority of villains, however, their "sins" or crimes result from their desperate situation and in fact transmit their plea for help, as in Rilke's "Letters". And they are heard – by Vincent and Catherine, the other inhabitants of the Tunnels, and the Helpers from the World Above, who together try to find a solution in each of the cases. So a Community develops, and this is an evolution towards a better state of affairs, as if defying the popular (also in classical mythology) view on the gradual deterioration of humankind. Once a year, this Community celebrates their ways of living and organizes a bonding event – Winterfest. Its participants light candles as a sign of hope, for the event starts in darkness, to recall the beginnings of the times when the Tunnels "were dark places" and the people dwelt there "in fear and isolation", as one of the supporting characters (Mary) explains. Vincent continues:

This was a land of lost hope and twisted dreams, a land of despair, where the sounds of footsteps coming down a tunnel were the sounds of terror. Where men reached for knives and rocks and worse at the sound of other men's voices.¹¹⁴

The biblical tone and the echoes of the Ovidian myth of the Ages of Man reverberate in Vincent's discourse, and so is this myth revived, again *à rebours*,

¹¹³ S1E15, "Temptation". For the English translation, see Rainer Maria Rilke, *On Love and Other Difficulties: Translations and Considerations*, trans. John J.L. Mood, New York, NY, and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1975, 119.

¹¹⁴ S2E4, "Dead of Winter", written by George R.R. Martin, dir. by Victor Lobl, aired 9 December 1988.

in the Tunnels as a kind of Golden Age realm – one different from what we would expect with our knowledge of its literary tradition, but under certain aspects very true to its descriptions by the ancient poets. The use of such a topos in the series is also a powerful message of hope, "showing the audience that another world is possible", as beautifully expressed by a writer who was "researching all Beauty and the Beast tales published to date for [his/her] own series of stories/screen-plays" and who just (in 2010) discovered the CBS *Beauty and the Beast* version.¹¹⁵

Indeed, the transformative effect of Catherine and Vincent's relationship and the longing for the Golden Age, at least in its Tunnels alternative, have managed to cross the line of fiction and reach the fans of the series, who to this day still organize Winterfest and celebrate the Tunnels' Community spirit (see Fig. 5).



Figure 5: The logotype of the Winterfest ceremony for 2021, image by Wintercandlemakers, <http://batbwfol.com/> (accessed 1 July 2021). Used with their kind permission.

They light candles on this occasion and there is even an interactive map on the Internet where everybody can mark their access, in the belief that the experience of viewing the series helps them become "their better selves" (see Fig. 6).¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ See tharianbotting, "An Important Tale of Many Truths", IMDb, 21 January 2010, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw2373243/?ref_=tt_urv.

¹¹⁶ See Rose, "Beauty and the Beast". Interestingly enough, also the actors maintained the highest standards, not easy a behaviour in the heart of show business – e.g., Perlman refused to participate in commercial presentations as Vincent by explaining: "He's not there to be exploited" ("*Beauty and the Beast* (1987–1990): Trivia", IMDb, <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0092319/trivia>).



Figure 6: Map of candles lighted for the Winterfest ceremony by the CBS *Beauty and the Beast* series' fans from all over the world, image by Wintercandlemakers, <https://fanlore.org/w/images/b/be/Winterfest2012.png> (accessed 1 July 2021). Used with their kind permission.

It does not happen often that a production is able to catalyse such vivid reactions from the audience – not in terms of one's identification with a protagonist and his/her willingness to have similar adventures, but with regard to the need to engage in helping others:

SO many times I would have liked to be in the movie, to help out, cause they show how disabled we are to the problems that we often are forced to participate in.¹¹⁷

What is even more special, is the fact that such voices are heard today, too, more than three decades after the series' premiere. The remarks of fans usually begin with eulogistic headings, for instance: "Best Show Ever", "Nothing Will Ever Come Close", "Nothing Has Ever Matched Up", and "One of the Best TV Series of All Times – Even Now".¹¹⁸ The DVD edition (available since

¹¹⁷ See allan-p3, "A Mirror of Our Wishes and Fantasies", IMDb, 7 January 2007, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw1566094/?ref_=tt_urv.

¹¹⁸ The show received a high score of 89% from the audience on the portal Rotten Tomatoes (as of 1 July 2021: https://www.rottentomatoes.com/tv/beauty_and_the_beast-CBS), and even the rare rather critical reviews were in fact positive; see Richard Zoglin, "Video: Yup, Yup and

2007) offered to many a viewer the opportunity to confront their old childhood memories with her or his adult "self".¹¹⁹ It has turned out that their fascination stood the test of time, and again, not the superficial attractiveness, but the part invisible to the eyes was essential: "I remember the first time I loved this show forever back in the late 1980's, I sat in our home in Denmark as a little boy and watched this show. but now the boy has grown up, but he still sees the beauty within the beast".¹²⁰

From this perspective, one of the fans emphasizes also the series' "enormous influence on [her] formative years" (she was a girl "at the tender age of 10" at the time of its airing).¹²¹ Hence the idea, common in the fan community, to now share this experience with their offspring: "I am all grown up and have 2 kids of my own now and this is the type of adult show I wouldn't mind my kids watching" and "I even have my four year old granddaughter hooked on B&B".¹²² The potential for our times is stressed, and especially in relation to the youth, to quote a writer of children's literature who started as an author of the

Away! Urban Achievers Abound as a New Season Unfolds", *Time*, 5 October 1987, <http://content.time.com/time/subscriber/article/0,33009,965690-4,00.html>: "The first episode had some inept action sequences and could have used more fanciful detail. But there are nice lyrical touches, and the show may have hit on something". Positive reviews dominated; see, e.g., John J. O'Connor, "TV Weekend; 'Beauty and the Beast' on CBS", *New York Times*, 25 September 1987, <https://www.nytimes.com/1987/09/25/arts/tv-weekend-beauty-and-the-beast-on-cbs.html>: "Ms. Hamilton, in addition to being beautiful, makes a smashingly irresistible heroine. And underneath his pounds of special makeup, Mr. Perlman has television's most seductive voice of the season. The raw materials could not be more promising"; Alan Bunce, "A Bold Meld: Fairy Tale and Police Drama. CBS's 'Beauty and the Beast' Experiments with Far-Out Format", *Christian Science Monitor*, 23 September 1987, <https://www.csmonitor.com/1987/0923/ltv23.html>: "[Y]ou can enjoy some of the unusual touches this strange production offers. There's the way Vincent climbs, somewhat magically, over buildings and steals rides on top of subways, and the way his soft, almost angelic voice contrasts with his werewolf looks. There's the way a set of spiral stairs seems to take you below conscious life. And there are the tremendously evocative glimpses below New York's streets, a place as Gothic as anything in the Brothers Grimm".

¹¹⁹ It is also like a comeback to childhood (Amyiasmommy42502, "The World Below", IMDb, 8 October 2007, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw1743350/?ref_=tt_urv: "[W]hen I purchases the first season, it was as if I was a child again and can have this place to escape from todays world").

¹²⁰ See chris_moller, "The First Time I Loved Beauty and the Beast Forever!", IMDb, 18 February 2007, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw1602055/?ref_=tt_urv. Another fan observes that his admiration for the series did not diminish, even though he is a mature man now (fifty-eight years old), with a weight of twenty-four years of marriage (tl12, "Should Not Have Been Captivated", IMDb, 2 December 2010, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw2347470/?ref_=tt_urv).

¹²¹ Nuth, "Vincent and Catherine - A New York Fairy Tale".

¹²² See Amyiasmommy42502, "The World Below", and ELRON115, "I FELL IN LOVE WITH VINCENT AND CATHERINE", IMDb, 15 February 2003, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw0239645/?ref_=tt_urv.

CBS *Beauty and the Beast* fan fiction: "In short this show is everything that is good about human kind and it is desperately needed more now than ever before so that it might shape the future of the younger generation today".¹²³ This is the mythical method at work again – it makes the viewers realize that they, too, can participate in the eternal battle between Good and Evil, that "the unknown really is just around the corner",¹²⁴ and that nearly each of us belongs to the community hoping deep inside for the return of the Golden Age – the mythical childhood of humanity.

The series also shows that each of us can contribute to bringing it back, but at the same time the cases undertaken by the protagonists make us aware of how many tragedies are likely happening nearby, in the shadows of the rich city's alleys or behind the walls of seemingly good homes. Indeed, the darkest and the most emotional episodes of the CBS *Beauty and the Beast* regard the suffering of children.

Just So Children's Stories

Many of the cases solved by Catherine and Vincent regard the problems of children and teenagers, and this aspect of the series reinforces its transgenerational impact. It is significant that the kids have no fear of the Beast, as if they were still living on the cusp of their mythical childhood – as if they were new creatures themselves, discovering the world in awe and free of the prejudices tormenting the adults. And Vincent is always ready to teach them and to protect them, for – as he says to Catherine in the episode "A Children's Story" (S1E10): "The ones who prey on children steal everyone's hope".¹²⁵

The children in the series represent the humans from "once upon a time", innocent and good at heart. The violence and cruelty they fall victim to sometimes make them choose the path of crime, but Vincent and Catherine do all to help them come back on the right track. They also try to bring to justice those

¹²³ See batbstories, "Nothing Will Ever Come Close", IMDb, 30 May 2003, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw0239648/?ref_=tt_urv: "Beauty and the Beast was for me the beginning of all my own dreams, as joining one of the British fan clubs associated with the show I began writing fan fiction and now after having written over 100 stories about my favourite characters I have gained the confidence and the experience to submit other work for publication and have also produced some children's books that are published in the USA".

¹²⁴ See Quill_32, "Okay Good! Okay Fine!", IMDb, 6 May 2003, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw0239647/?ref_=tt_urv.

¹²⁵ See above, n. 58.

responsible for their sufferings and thus to offer the young people comfort and re-establish hope for all. It should be emphasized that, despite building the narration on the topos of the Golden Age, the creators of the series do not hesitate to touch the most difficult themes, at the same time exposing society's hypocrisy, which is not rare towards children, whose problems happen to be dismissed. The seriousness and courage in addressing the dark side of childhood – a period idealized like no other stage in human life – impress even today. For example, in the episode "Trial" (S2E17)¹²⁶ Catherine prosecutes a rich businessman who beat his own son to death. In this episode, Vincent makes a bitter remark on how many children suffer and get no help. Thus, contrary to fairy-tale romanticism, the series is brutally honest with its viewers where the most important matters are at stake. And indeed, this is such a case. P.K. Simonds, Jr., who wrote the scenario for the "Trial", based it on a real story of child abuse.¹²⁷ Other episodes that refer to family topics regard such issues as the syndrome of the rejected child, the trauma after the separation of parents, and misunderstandings due to the generation gap.

At the same time, there are episodes dealing with the theme of juvenile delinquency. In the aforementioned "No Way Down" (S1E4), the one featuring the Beaumont building, Vincent has to face a gang of young criminals, while in "The Hollow Man" (S2E19)¹²⁸ two rich teenagers murder prostitutes for fun. Also in this context should it be emphasized that the series' creators respect the viewers by avoiding sugar-coated conclusions to the stories (with one obvious exception – the Christmas special "God Bless the Child", S2E5¹²⁹). Thus, in "Chamber Music" (S2E1),¹³⁰ to the sound of great pieces by Schubert, Chopin, Beethoven, and Schumann, Catherine and Vincent try to help an African American piano genius. The teenager became a junkie as he blamed himself for the death of a Helper. This episode does not offer a happy ending. The young

¹²⁶ Written by P.K. Simonds, Jr., with contribution from Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, dir. by Victor Lobl, aired 21 April 1989.

¹²⁷ See Gross, ed., *Above & Below*, 97–98: the Hedda Nussbaum case (a famous process to explain the circumstances of the death of a six-year-old girl).

¹²⁸ Written by P.K. Simonds, dir. by Victor Lobl, aired 5 May 1989.

¹²⁹ Written by Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, dir. by Gus Trikonis, aired 16 December 1988. The title was taken from a ballad by Billie Holiday and Andrew Herzog. The plot regards the problem of teenage prostitution – with the leading character of a girl who starts a new life with her newborn daughter named after Catherine (of course, she and Vincent make this Christmas happy ending possible here).

¹³⁰ Written by Ron Koslow, dir. by Victor Lobl, aired 18 November 1988.

musician is assured by Vincent that no one in the Tunnels finds him guilty, but he is not able to forgive himself. As Martin recalls:

Again, we were trying not to be television, we were trying to be true and the truth is that a junkie doesn't necessarily give up dope because somebody gives him a moving lecture.¹³¹

The creators contributed also to paving the way for an inclusive approach towards matters of disability in show business; some of their decisions maintain a groundbreaking dimension even today. For while much has changed for the better in terms of the presence of people with disabilities on screen as protagonists, it is still sadly rare that production teams collaborate with actors who do not only play, but really have to fight with barriers in their lives. In this context, the episode "An Impossible Silence" (S1E11), written by Gordon and Gansa, was a significant step.¹³² It regards the dilemma of a deaf teenage girl named Laura who has to decide whether to testify in a murder case. This role was commissioned to the deaf actress Terrylene Sacchetti. The story of Laura and the collaboration between the series' team and the actress turned out to be so successful that her thread was resumed in the episode "Sticks and Stones" (S2E6, by the same creators¹³³). In this episode Vincent and Catherine protect Laura and her first love, a policeman trying to crack a street gang's operations. So again the motif of juvenile delinquency returns – here they are frustrated deaf young people in fact with no prospects, and this also poses an uncomfortable question about society's responsibility for their situation.

"Sticks and Stones" brings to the surface, already in the title, the most unique aspect of the series we remember from the "adult" episodes: quotes and intertextual references drawn from various spheres of culture – here, from the nineteenth-century children's rhyme "Sticks and stones may break my bones /

¹³¹ Martin in Gross, ed., *Above & Below*, 72. There are also adult characters who wish to make up for the errors of their past. In "A Gentle Rain" (S2E10, written by Linda Campanelli and Shelly Moore, dir. by Gus Trikonis, aired 17 February 1989), a Tunnels inhabitant hides from the process for a car accident he caused as a drunk driver, killing a boy. The man is at the same time afraid of the consequences and tormented by guilt. Catherine and Vincent support him in his decision of taking responsibility for this crime. In "A Fair and Perfect Knight" (S2E7, written by P.K. Simonds, Jr., dir. by Gus Trikonis, aired 13 January 1989), a young boy rejected by his father and tutored by Vincent falls in love with Catherine. Here both – the boy and Vincent – have to overcome their jealousy and elaborate a mature attitude to love as a sentiment based on trust (of course, Shakespeare participates in this episode, too, along with William Blake).

¹³² Dir. by Christopher Leitch, aired 18 December 1987.

¹³³ Written by Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, dir. by Bruce Malmuth, aired 6 January 1989.

But words will never hurt me". In this case, we again observe the play *à rebours* of the creators with the viewers' expectations: the rhymed protection against verbal bullying known from childhood becomes a code for the cruel punishment which the gang leader wishes to inflict on the policeman. In the finale, however, hope is regained and Laura and her beloved get – if not a happy ending – then at least a chance for some time of happiness together.

Texts known from childhood feature in many episodes that regard themes important for young people – not only short pieces, like the rhyme "Sticks and Stones", but the Classics of children's literature *par excellence* as well. They give an attractive narrative framework to the scenarios – one that is both recognizable for viewers and evokes in them and in the protagonists the Golden Age of childhood. Owing to this, many a stray character is emotionally moved and gets inspired to reflect on their existence and to find the hope needed to change paths; or they gain the force to free themselves from their oppressors and open a new chapter in their life. Their engagement in such cases is also salutary for Vincent and Catherine's developing feelings. For example, the aforementioned episode "A Children's Story" (S1E10), written by Barnett and Koslow, is a "modern retelling of *Oliver Twist*".¹³⁴ So Dickens strikes back already in this early episode – a hint at the importance of his books for the whole show.¹³⁵ Vincent and Catherine discover and investigate the criminal scheme of the owner of an orphanage and then a thief who force the orphans to steal. Our pair saves the two siblings and Beauty grows aware of the inestimable value of her relationship with the Beast:

CATHERINE: Vincent, I've been all over the world, met people, done things. I've lived in luxury most people could never imagine, but I can't remember a time when I felt as good or complete as I do right now.

VINCENT: Hmm... I feel it in you, through you.

CATHERINE: You really can...

VINCENT: It's very beautiful.

CATHERINE: Sort of... like a dream?

VINCENT (smiling): Better...¹³⁶

¹³⁴ See Gross, ed., *Above & Below*, 51.

¹³⁵ However, in this case the creators were not satisfied with the result, calling the episode "a little flat dramatically" (*ibidem*). The reason could be staying too close to the original (Dickens) and thus limiting creativity ("[I]t was a learning process for everyone", as Gansa explained, *ibidem*); still, "A Children's Story" does remain a precious link in the intertextual net of references they wove in the whole series.

¹³⁶ S1E10, "A Children's Story".

The Classics of children's literature – and indeed, in a good part of the canon: *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain, *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Grahame, *Treasure Island* by Robert Louis Stevenson, *Puss in Boots* by Charles Perrault, and *The Wizard of Oz* by L. Frank Baum – serve also as intermediaries to reconcile Father with his biological son, Devin, in the episode "Promises of Someday" (S1E16),¹³⁷ in the company of many a flashback from Devin and Vincent's childhood spent in the Tunnels.

In most of the episodes the Classics for children work together with the masterpieces of adult culture – again, in line with the mythical method, according to which there is no division in terms of the age of the audience, but only the all-encompassing experience of art. For example, "Everything Is Everything" (S1E19),¹³⁸ after a short introduction into the main plot, opens with Shakespeare. After all, he knew everything. We witness a scene as if taken from a painting with the motif of the Golden Age: the seemingly dangerous, lion-like Vincent and the vulnerable children sitting safely together in his chamber, with Father present, all immersed in a session of reading aloud, showed as a family bonding event for the Tunnels Community. A boy (Kipper) is asked to recite from *Romeo and Juliet*. He complains that the text (Romeo's lines) is boring, but – what is particular – he does not want the reading as such to stop. He simply has a different idea for the choice of the book. "Why can't we read *Treasure Island*?", he suggests. To this Vincent explains patiently:

You find the words boring because you're merely reading them. You must feel them, Kipper. Words are nothing but cold and lifeless things. You must use your mind and your heart to interpret them.¹³⁹

His explanation is confirmed by Father, who considers it necessary to join the discussion at this moment. He has great expectations, indeed – greater even than a theatre director asking his actor for a decent performance. Father wishes the children to *feel* literature – the boy should "breathe life into his words, to give them life with his passion".¹⁴⁰ Only then the transformative, let's call it even Orphean, potential of the works of art can be set into motion.

¹³⁷ Written by George R.R. Martin, dir. by Thomas J. Wright, aired 12 February 1988.

¹³⁸ Written by Virginia Aldridge, dir. by Victor Lobl, aired 4 March 1988.

¹³⁹ S1E19, "Everything Is Everything".

¹⁴⁰ Ibidem.

The experience of reading aloud, something that brings to mind primordial storytelling and the practice of the Ancient Greeks and Romans, is soon the share of Tony – the main character of this episode, which is important also for a special reason. Tony, who plays a prank on Catherine and steals her purse, is a member of the Gypsy community. Thus, the viewers are offered a chance to know better a different culture, often misunderstood, and to learn respect for its traditions and rules, especially after Tony and his father are framed for a more serious crime and become outcasts.¹⁴¹

Tony's reading session mirrors the one of Kipper; however, this time it takes place not with Vincent, but with Catherine who is caring for the boy in her apartment. Moreover, the roles of the reader and listener are reversed. Tony turns out to be illiterate and he is sure that he does not need books at all. Catherine explains to him that "books are wonderful things. They teach you, they give you new ideas",¹⁴² and, like Vincent and Father, she offers the boy a chance to feel literature and through this to build a family bond with her – the bond that in the end will help Tony and his father return to the Gypsy community. To this aim, she recalls her own childhood and how her own father used to read her Kipling to put her to sleep. All this she shares with Tony, thus making him partake in her precious private memories. She starts reading aloud the opening of "The Elephant's Child" from *Just So Stories*. Her choice is not casual. On the one hand, there is the family link to her father that she wishes Tony to feel. On the other, just like Kipling's animal protagonist, Tony "was full of 'satiating curiosity, and that means he asked ever so many questions".¹⁴³ When the boy falls asleep, like Catherine in her childhood, Vincent makes himself visible (he had been listening to everything, hidden on the balcony) and expresses his admiration for his beloved. She reciprocates the compliment, still in the context of reading and bonding, for she recalls their first meetings, while she was injured and under his "bibliotherapeutical" care: "I remember the first time you read to me, how safe I felt, the comfort I found in your voice. I wanted to share that".¹⁴⁴ Thus

¹⁴¹ Gross, ed., *Above & Below*, 63–64. Let us observe that in S1E13, "China Moon", the viewers could come to know better the Chinese community of New York. Even if this knowledge is rather elementary due to the obvious limitations of a television series and the given cultures' hermetic character in certain aspects, the most important value of these episodes consists in fighting stereotypes and inviting their viewers to adopt an open attitude towards their true neighbours, maybe perceived earlier as Others.

¹⁴² S1E19, "Everything Is Everything".

¹⁴³ Rudyard Kipling, "The Elephant's Child", in his *Just So Stories*, afterword by Marcus Clapham, London: Collector's Library, 2004 (ed. pr. 1902), 45.

¹⁴⁴ S1E19, "Everything Is Everything".

a chain of positive emotions is formed, transmitted between the younger and the older, that consolidates the Community based on the mythical experience of story-telling (or -reading).

Last but not least, the references to literature help the protagonists even in the actual situation of physical danger. Among such "healthy" books there are also the ancient Classics, sometimes referred to with a wink to the audience. In the episode "Shades of Grey" (S1E12),¹⁴⁵ Father, trying to help a group of children, has a serious concussion. He has to stay alert and, to relieve some tension in the protagonists (and the viewers) who worry about his condition, he suggests with grim humour: "I shall recite from Virgil on the hour just to make sure".¹⁴⁶

The Song of Orpheus

Father is also the main character of a very special reference to Classical Antiquity. It is associated with Virgil and his last book of the *Georgics* and with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as distant sources for the scenario. To discover both works, however, can be a task for the viewers after the show, as none of the ancient poets is mentioned directly by name in this context. Mainly, episode 8 from the first season, "Song of Orpheus", written by Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, directed by Peter Medak, and aired 20 November 1987, contains an overt reference to the ancient myth in the title and... only in the title. But such "parsimony" in offering details is here for a good reason. This is a perfect technique to universalize the story by merely suggesting to us, with no didactic burden, that though the protagonists live their tragedy in the twentieth century, they nonetheless follow the mythical pattern laid down at the dawn of our civilization.

In the episode "Song of Orpheus", we come to know Margaret, a wealthy elderly lady, Father's first love – from his life before he became Vincent's mentor and the founder of the Tunnels Community. In fact, he descended underground and decided to establish there a new world precisely after his painful parting from this woman.

¹⁴⁵ Written by George R.R. Martin and David E. Peckinpah, dir. by Thomas J. Wright, aired 8 January 1988.

¹⁴⁶ We should also appreciate the humour of Vincent who responds: "Then I'll be asleep". It is worth adding that Classical Antiquity is present in the series through mythological motifs, like the mention of Daedalus' wings of wax in S2E18, "A Kingdom by the Sea", written by George R.R. Martin, dir. by Gus Trikonis, aired 28 April 1989. See also Vicky, "Beauty and the Beast: Literary and Musical References".

When the episode starts, Margaret is terminally ill (pancreas cancer) and at the mercy of her deceitful assistant, who wishes to abscond with her 10 million-dollar fortune by establishing a Cayman Islands Trust Fund in his own name. Margaret and Father had not been in touch for thirty-five years, from the moment he descended into the Underworld. Now Father, who receives a letter in a bottle from a friend about her illness, has to come back to help his beloved.

In his first minutes on the surface, after he emerges from the Subway,¹⁴⁷ he is overwhelmed by the noisy music, the crowds, and the enclosing skyscrapers. The episode plays on the motif of Hades, again *à rebours*. Father, like the ancient god, is the ruler of the Underworld: however, he saves, not kills – while death awaits him above. After his anabasis through the hell of New York streets and with a lift to the heights of one of the skyscrapers, his first experience is the murder of his old friend at the hands of Margaret's assistant. A murder Father is wrongly accused of.

And this is where Catherine swings into action, from the District Attorney's office. She takes the case and investigates it with Vincent, who has the opportunity to discover his mentor's difficult past. They come to know that the real name of Father is Dr Jacob Wells (an allusion to H.G. Wells as "creator of utopian worlds" and "a learned humanist"¹⁴⁸) and that he was a research physician. In the 1950s he had been blacklisted, branded a dangerous communist, and put through the hell of interrogations and the "witch hunts" of that time, for he had sought the abolition of nuclear weapons. Now he relives the trauma – interrogated for the murder and treated as a freak from the popular series *Twilight Zone* (he comes back to the World Above in his clothes and with his personal items from thirty-five years earlier). The mental anguish he experiences is transmitted to the viewers by the technique of combining Catherine and Vincent's research (they treat the case very personally and emotionally, of course – for Vincent it is like discovering his own father's past), with the interrogations "now", and the retrospections of 1951–1952.

¹⁴⁷ The New York Subway as the portal to an Underworld is a motif used by Katherine Marsh in her teen novel *The Night Tourist* (2007), also based on the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. For an analysis of this novel, see Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, "Orpheus and Eurydice: Reception of a Classical Myth in International Children's Literature", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 291–306.

¹⁴⁸ See O'Brien, "Shoring Fragments", 38 (here also on the component of magic present in the series as well, in the character of the blind prophetess Narcissa as a counterpart to Father who – despite being a scholar – respects her irrational guidance in certain cases).

Catherine manages to clear Jacob of the charge of murder, but he does not want to remain Above. He returns to the Tunnels, this time with Margaret. In their katabasis, again we observe a reversal of the ancient myth, and exactly in this process is the myth retold, relived, and reinforced. Father-Hades-Orpheus leads Margaret-Eurydice to the Underworld, where she will not live, but die in peace. The viewers are not spared. On the couple's way to the asylum of the Tunnels, her illness accompanies them very physically – she experiences a pain attack.

Margaret reunites with her lover whom she had abandoned in his hour of need, when – as a young girl – she became terrified by the anticommunist propaganda. She considers her illness a punishment, but Father bears no anger. "All is forgiven", he says. For indeed, he forgave her the moment he came to know Vincent, who has every reason to feel angry and devastated, but who instead accepts life with all possible "gratitude and love".¹⁴⁹ Margaret rebels against her body failing her in the moment when she has rediscovered a reason to live, like Catherine before, but finally she feels at peace ("A little pain is good for the soul", she states at some point of the episode) and treasures each moment of the regained love.

Observing the older couple, Catherine and Vincent have the opportunity to gain a better understanding of their own relationship – again, a well-known mechanism of the mirror of mythology as applied in the series. Catherine, too, as we remember, was saved by an Orpheus *à rebours* – Vincent, who took her Underground after she had been attacked and had nearly lost her life. Thus, when he later asks her: "Can I lead you through the dark?", she answers simply: "There is no darkness, Vincent, when you're with me".¹⁵⁰ They learn a difficult but at the same time beautiful lesson from their own history and from the history of Father and Margaret – namely, how the most traumatic experience can turn into a quest for hope.

The rest is silence. Father pays a compliment to Margaret, calling her beautiful – an overt reference to "the tale as old as time", but she wishes for no words: "Just hold me", she asks. They spend seven days together before she dies – seven days that she calls the most beautiful in her life – not in terms of superficial appearance, but in terms of the salvific beauty of their love.

Catherine thinks the story is very sad, no fairy-tale-like happy ending, because Father and Margaret had their beginning and their end, but they had

¹⁴⁹ For the transcript, see "Song of Orpheus", *Beauty and the Beast: Scripts and Transcription Project*, <http://www.batbforever.com/scripts/index.html>.

¹⁵⁰ S2E4, "Dead of Winter"; see above, n. 114.

nothing in the middle. However, Vincent offers a different insight: "They had seven days, Catherine, seven days".¹⁵¹

That is a lot, indeed. Enough time to learn to appreciate the Creation of the world and to see the real beauty in our life – the beauty that is born out of the love we get from our near and dear, along with a supply of hope to draw from in the dark time that will come.

“Acquainted with the Night”, or, (No) Hope for a Happy Ending?

The dark hour for the show came after the second season, leading to its cancellation after season 3. Among the reasons cited were more involvement from the network in the series' creators' choices and the growing competition from the family sitcom *The Full House*. However, the decisive blow, the "jump over the shark" in this case, was the replacement of Beauty.¹⁵² Linda Hamilton, who played Catherine, became pregnant, and as no agreement between her and the station was achieved, she left. Of course, a female protagonist was necessary for the show to go on, hence a new character was introduced – Diana Bennett, a criminal profiler. C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, in their study "The Mythology of Modern Love: Representations of Romance in the 1980s", justly observe that this move broke the axis of the series:

The traditional notion of love in America is that of a "mythic" union between two devoted individuals. In our mythology, love conquers all. [...] The search for self-identity is thus fused with the search for a mate, for only through marital union can the self be "whole".¹⁵³

Love conquers all – Omnia vincit amor. How often does Virgil, the Classic for our times according to Eliot,¹⁵⁴ speak to us without being noticed by name – in this case, through a quotation from the *Eclogues* (10.69), the same cycle

¹⁵¹ I keep wondering whether David Bowie watched the series, a possible inspiration for his song "Seven" of 1999.

¹⁵² According to Martin as cited at "*Beauty and the Beast* (1987–1990): Trivia". See also Gerard, "The Success of *Beauty and the Beast*", 20.

¹⁵³ C. Lee Harrington and Denise D. Bielby, "The Mythology of Modern Love: Representations of Romance in the 1980s", *Journal of Popular Culture* 24 (1990), 131.

¹⁵⁴ See T.S. Eliot, *What Is a Classic? An Address Delivered before the Virgil Society on the 16th of October, 1944*, London: Faber & Faber, 1945.

in which the myth of the Golden Age reborn (*Eclogue 4*) appears... Once more we can see that the use of "mythological" terminology is more than appropriate for this modern fable. For Vincent and Catherine, in their "mythic" union, were expected to always be together, like Beauty and the Beast and like Eros and Psyche – the pairs that gave the series this "something very significant" within the fairy-tale framework built on the mythical background. Indeed, in the case of these two pairs, the separation was only temporary and as such it strengthened their ties. Psyche, revived by Eros with the Kiss of Love, has gained immortality with the god on Mount Olympus, while Beauty lives with the Beast in his castle happily ever after.

Catherine the Beauty has no such chance – a brutal end is put even to her short romantic encounters with her beloved in Central Park (see Fig. 7). Pregnant by Vincent (eventually, their love was fulfilled in all aspects), she is captured by Gabriel. She gives birth to a son and dies due to a fatal morphine injection administered to her on the order of the villain. Gabriel manages to escape with the baby, and the attempts to save it constitute the substance of the rest of the third season, and they motivate Vincent's contacts with Diana. The love from the first two sets of episodes, *amor*, is substituted by *labor* in season 3 – the hardships, like in Virgil's *Georgics*, a poem where *Labor omnia vincit* and where Eurydice dies and Orpheus is not able to bring her back.

Catherine dies in Virgil's and Shakespeare's tune, of course, in the pilot for season 3, just after she manages to save Vincent in the second-season finale episode entitled "The Rest Is Silence" (S2E22).¹⁵⁵ Yet, there was no silence on the part of the series' fans. On the contrary, they cried loudly and did not hide their shock. As one of them recalls, "[o]utrage is too mild a word".¹⁵⁶ A whole movement was born, known by the abbreviation SND (She's Not Dead) and the echoes of this rebellion are heard also in our times, thirty years (!) later. The Internet portal dedicated to the series – a wonderful source of information under a name charming to all scholars of Antiquity: The Classic Alliance¹⁵⁷ – considers

¹⁵⁵ Written by Ron Koslow, dir. by Victor Lobl, aired 26 May 1989. The pilot for the third season is a two-part episode (S3E1–2): "Though Lovers Be Lost", written by Ron Koslow, Alex Gansa, and Howard Gordon, dir. by Victor Lobl, aired 12 December 1989.

¹⁵⁶ See Rose, "Beauty and the Beast": "Outrage is too mild a word. Hell, Revolution is too mild a word. [...] You can't (and SHOULDN'T) even mention 3rd season on the newsgroups, at least without significant fair warning, such is the negative reaction of many to the portrayal of those events, even now".

¹⁵⁷ See The Classic Alliance of Beauty and the Beast, last update 12 June 2021, <http://www.classicalliance.net/>: "This site is dedicated to the Classic Beauty and the Beast fandom. Classic fans are those who prefer to ignore the events of the show's third season in favor of a universe in which



Figure 7: Southwest corner of Central Park, New York (2009), photograph by Ed Yourdon, uploaded by Ekabhishek, Wikimedia Commons.

only the first two seasons to be “classic”, and a big group of fans (if not the majority of them) completely ignores the third season, while the headings of Internet reviews of the DVD edition and the show itself seem to cry (original transcription of the capital letters): “BRING CATHERINE AND THIS BEAUTIFUL SHOW BACK!”¹⁵⁸ Indeed, to tear her and Vincent apart meant to destroy the power of the myth that was the engine of the series and the source of hope for these star-crossed lovers, other characters, and the viewers.

In particular, the two-part pilot episode of season 3 was criticized for its violence against Catherine, which made the series similar to so many other crime stories available on television, and for the radical departure from the original charm set off by the references to the masterpieces of literature that permitted viewers to (re)discover whole layers of powerful emotions and to learn to see the essential that is invisible to the eyes. No surprise they started having great

Vincent and Catherine are still together and the dream continues...”. See also above, n. 37. The site’s update of June 2021 is also a proof of the series’ popularity still today and the activity of its fandom.

¹⁵⁸ See kreativundkunterbunt, “BRING CATHERINE AND THIS BEAUTIFUL SHOW BACK!”, IMDb, 29 December 2017, https://www.imdb.com/review/rw4017485/?ref_=rw_urv.

expectations. For they underwent a transformation, and as the ancient law of mythology states: once a metamorphosis has taken place, it cannot be undone. I believe that this rebellion of the viewers is in fact a very good sign for our culture and proof that the mythical method really has worked here: by using it, Koslow, Martin, and their colleagues prepared their audience well. It is beneficial for show business to have the bar raised. Besides, disagreement with the world (even with a fictional world as presented in a TV series) can be a source for a conscious reflection on what we really consider important and what we do not accept in life. And this reflection is necessary for each of us to catalyse the need for change and to awaken our agency.

From this perspective, the CBS series *Beauty and the Beast* can be called mythical. It offers a rich package for the audience to draw from also after their viewing experience is over, and in reality. In particular, along with the reflection on one's *psyche*, the dialogue with music, art, and literature inspired by the series, can continue. And Vincent also has a very special message of hope, one he verbalizes in the episode "To Reign in Hell" (S1E20),¹⁵⁹ when the order of the World Above and Beyond is endangered by Paracelsus and the life of Catherine is at stake. He directs this message to the children from the Tunnels and... to their children to be born, thus emphasizing the intergenerational character of their Community and the continuation of the heritage transmission (let us notice the use of storytelling formulae in his words). The inspirational potential of such a message is universal, as befits each myth and fairy tale:

Our world is in mourning now... Though it is painful, each of us must try to find meaning in what has come to pass... We must find hope in this time of great sorrow and sacrifice. We must never forget what has happened or why, so that the story will live always and so that one day you can tell your own children. [...] It began a long time ago, when our world was very young.¹⁶⁰

When the world was very young, also Hope was born, the goddess Elpis, a daughter of the Night. Indeed, the darkness is not evil. It is "only the absence of light", as Father describes it.¹⁶¹ And so it offers a shelter to those like him and Vincent, who are too afraid to expose themselves before they manage to make themselves known from another side than meets the eye. It is precisely in the

¹⁵⁹ Written by Howard Gordon and Alex Gansa, dir. by Christopher Leitch, aired 18 March 1988.

¹⁶⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁶¹ S2E4, "Dead of Winter".

middle of the night when Catherine and Vincent's love story begins. He saves her, paradoxically by bringing her to his Underworld, and he becomes her Hope: "I found hope again that night... I found you" – we remember her words for they resonate through the whole series.¹⁶² What is interesting, Catherine's deeper reflection on their singular relationship could also be adapted to describe our bond with the Greek and Roman past. Classical Antiquity is a long way from us, we cannot reach it directly, yet it is here, ready to save us, always nearby and strongly present in our lives, ever since we encountered it for the first time:

He brought me there to save my life... and now, wherever I go, he is with me in spirit. For we have a bond stronger than friendship and love. And although we cannot be together, we will never, ever be apart.¹⁶³

While pronouncing these words, Catherine did not know how true they would ultimately become. But we are not there yet. In the episode "To Reign in Hell" Vincent again performs an Orphean quest, and again he is successful (at a certain point, when he brings Catherine to safety in a boat through an underground river, he resembles Charon *à rebours*). The emotions he experiences while saving his beloved make him comprehend the wisdom his mentor had tried to convey to him a bit earlier: "Before I left, Father told me something that I'm just now beginning to understand. He said that there is a truth beyond knowledge, beyond... everything we could ever hope to know". Catherine, who, like Psyche, has already managed, after all her trials, to discover the meaning of her life, does not ask for any explanation, but Vincent feels the need to voice it aloud: "And that truth... is love..."¹⁶⁴

This is especially important when salvation is not possible. For the end does finally come. Vincent, "acquainted with the night", in the moment of the ultimate trial (this time it is his trial first of all) taking place in the second part of the third season pilot, chooses love over revenge. Although he could easily become consumed by hate for his arch-enemy, Gabriel, he suppresses the fit of rage and focuses fully on Catherine, then dying from the lethal injection, and not in the soothing harbour of the World Below, but on the chilly roof of a skyscraper, where she was imprisoned. The lovers have together not seven days, like Margaret and Father – but a few minutes, accompanied by Dylan Thomas's (1914–1953) poem "And Death Shall Have No Dominion" (1933), quoted by

¹⁶² S1E15, "Temptation"; see above, n. 107.

¹⁶³ Catherine's words in the opening sequence of the series.

¹⁶⁴ S1E20, "To Reign in Hell"; see above, n. 159.

Catherine also in the preceding episode, "The Rest Is Silence". For indeed, the rest is not silence, as Shakespeare knew very well, only playing a game with our souls and minds. The poem's title comes from St Paul's Epistle to the Romans 6:9, and it contains a line which seems to have been written especially for Vincent and Catherine, but maybe it was written for all enamoured couples in the world: "Though lovers be lost love shall not".

* * *

While returning to the Tunnels after Catherine's death, Vincent again passes through her apartment and takes Dickens's *Great Expectations* back – the first gift he made to his beloved. This act expresses symbolically his depression and yet his acceptance of the loss. But we can keep our expectations great – towards the artists of the past as well as towards new generations, popular culture included, and towards ourselves. The millennia of communing with myths and fairy tales have clearly showed to us what marvellous things may be achieved and how true Love and Hope can be born from such contacts, if only we do not abandon this heritage that, like Psyche's mystical beauty, can by itself make beautiful all that is around us. In this way, as in E.E. Cummings's (1894–1962) poem "Somewhere I Have Never Travelled, Gladly Beyond" (1931), quoted by Vincent during his happy time with Catherine,¹⁶⁵ we are able indeed to travel somewhere we have never travelled, beyond any experience, to the World Above and Below, to discover for ourselves what has been known from mythical times – that often the greatest transformations in our lives are set into motion and the strongest feelings are awoken by the most delicate impulses:

nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
compels me with the colour of its countries,
rendering death and forever with each breathing

(i do not know what it is about you that closes
and opens; only something in me understands
the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands

¹⁶⁵ This poem is linked on the show's soundtrack with the song "The First Time I Loved Forever", performed with Perlman by Lisa Angelle; see above, n. 14.

As the case of CBS's *Beauty and the Beast* demonstrates, myth and fairy tale work together so that we can retell and thus recirculate this classical story, which is an everlasting source of hope for those who build the mythical Community, in line with the series' maxim: "Even the greatest darkness is nothing, so long as we share the light" (see Fig. 8).



Figure 8: The Beauty and the Beast Bench in New York's Central Park (detail with the series' maxim, 2007), photograph by Marina Broers, <http://www.batbland.com/Marina/project.html> (accessed 1 July 2021). Used with her kind permission.

This light does not guarantee a happy ending like the one that graced Beauty and the Beast in their fairy-tale realm or Eros and Psyche on Mount Olympus. But, in fact, it does not deny a happy ending either. Orpheus meets Eurydice on the Elysian Fields. For Vincent his child is his hope. Whether he will meet Catherine in the reign of Hades, on the Isles of the Blessed, or anywhere else, this remains an open question. We simply do not know what is hidden around the corner and what awaits us after the show is over. For sure, "our shared light", to quote Vincent once more, can reveal for a moment the meaning of the world – "a truth beyond knowledge" that is love. This light makes us also see the importance of supporting Our Mythical Community, which gives strength to its members when the burden is too heavy for a single person to take on.

In memory of all the real (one would be tempted to say: Platonic) beauty experienced while watching the series, its fans light candles each year during Winterfest. But they perform also what so many people do in various parts of the

world, independently of whether they have heard of this series or not. Mainly, in the circles of their family and friends, or alone, but not truly alone (only temporarily unaware that they are part of a millennia-old Community), they discover and retell fairy tales and myths, they read literature, listen to music, admire works of art, many of which are inspired by Classical Antiquity, and mythology in particular. For sharing the light of myths is sharing Hope. This seems not much, yet there are moments in life when Hope is everything.

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The book is to be recommended for academics as well as graduate and post-graduate students working on the reception of Classical Antiquity and its transformations around the world.

David Movrin, University of Ljubljana
From the editorial review

Our Mythical Hope is the latest collection of articles by scholars participating in an ongoing collaboration to ensure that the beauty and profundity of Classical myth remain known, and (hopefully) remain part of our modern culture. The size of this compendium, the sweep of subjects considered, the involvement of leading experts from around the world, all testify to how important and extensive this initiative has become over the last decade. The project's continued commitment to engage all ages, especially the young, and to extend its outreach beyond the Academy merely, makes it a leading model for how research retains its relevance.

Mark O'Connor, Boston College
From the editorial review



Classical Antiquity is a particularly important field in terms of "Hope studies" [...]. For centuries, the ancient tradition, and classical mythology in particular, has been a common reference point for whole hosts of creators of culture, across many parts of the world, and with the new media and globalization only increasing its impact. Thus, in our research at this stage, we have decided to study how the authors of literary and audiovisual texts for youth make use of the ancient myths to support their young protagonists (and readers or viewers) in crucial moments of their existence, on their road into adulthood, and in those dark hours when it seems that life is about to shatter and fade away. However, if Hope is summoned in time, the crisis can be overcome and the protagonist grows stronger, with a powerful uplifting message for the public. [...] Owing to this, we get a chance to remain true to our ideas, to keep faith in our dreams, and, when the decisive moment comes, to choose not hatred but love, not darkness but light.

Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw
From the introductory chapter

