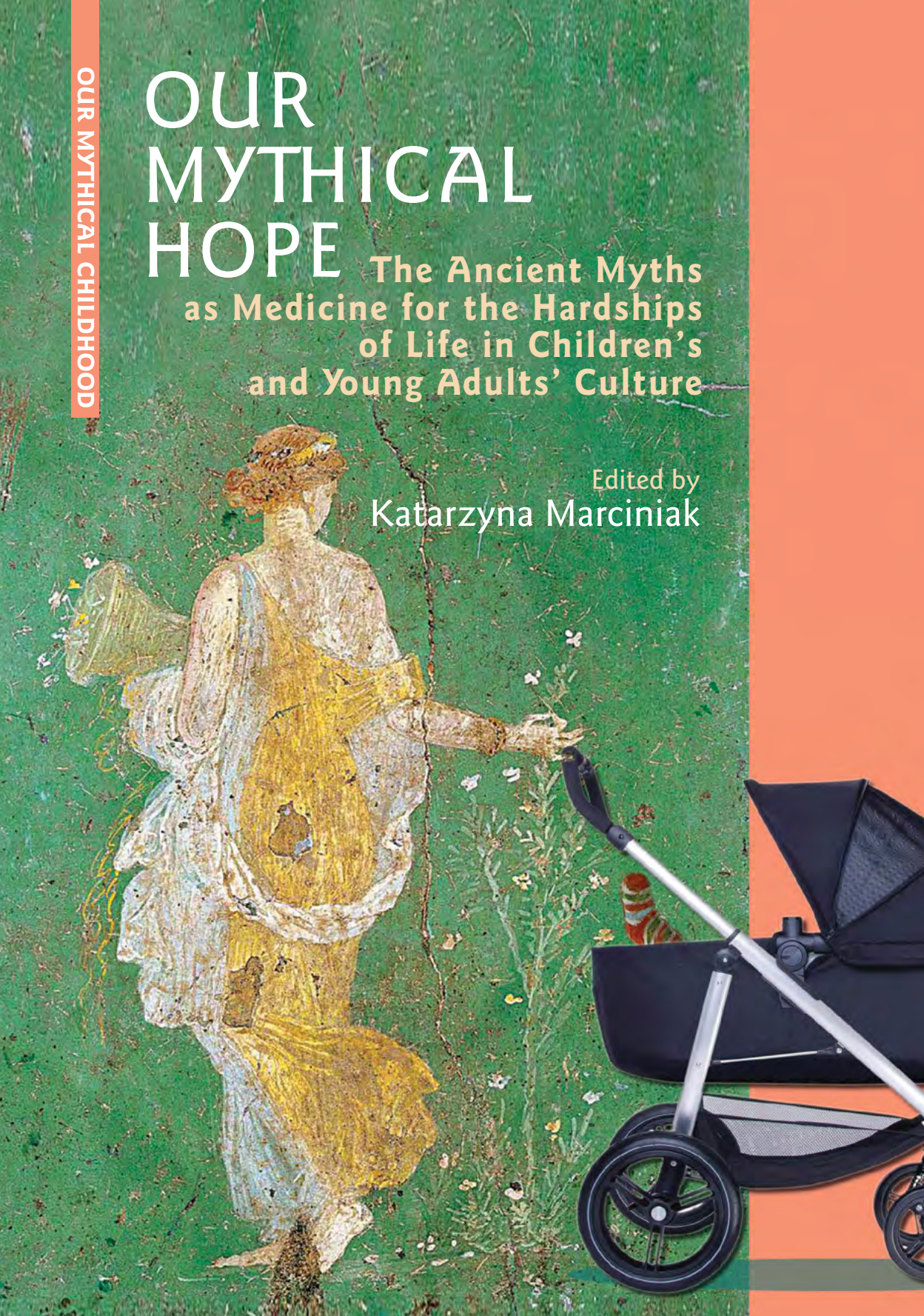
OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

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

Matylda Tracewska, *Our Mythical Childhood* (2013), artwork symbolizing the Programme.

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Edited by Katarzyna Marciniak

WYDAWNICTWA UNIWERSYTETU WARSZAWSKIEGO
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Markus Janka

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 ἁρμονία (*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 "mnemic 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 strongman 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 Κρονίωνι ἄνακτι·
> ἀλλά ἑ 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 Homerus, *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 characterization[7] 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 (Moīra), the fatal lot of the *condition humaine*, and to the hate of the jealous stepmother, Hera, which makes of Moīra 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

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[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 Sagendichtung*, 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 Sagendichtung 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 ἅλωσις [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*. 1.33–72[12] and *Isthm*. 4.70–91[13]) and Deianira (Bacchyl. 16 = *Dithyrambus* 2[14])

[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 (*aretḗ*; 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 schlangenwürgende 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.

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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*, Ruhpolding 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).

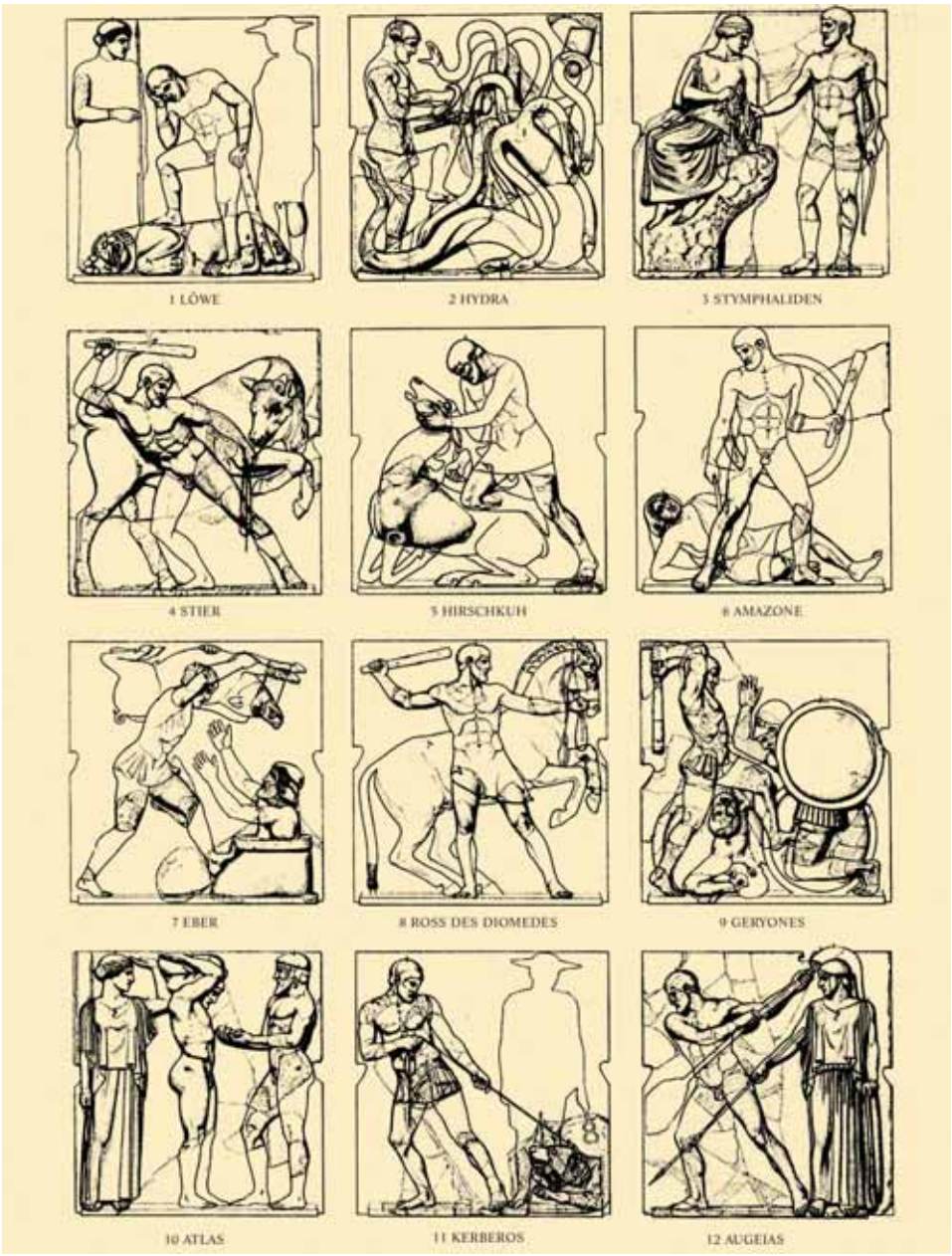

Figure 1: Reconstruction of the twelve metopes from the Temple of Zeus in Olympia, ca. 470–457 BC, by Max Kühnert, from Ernst Curtius and Friedrich Adler, eds., *Olympia. Die Ergebnisse der von dem Deutschen Reich veranstalteten Ausgrabung*, vol. 3: *Die Bildwerke in Stein und Thon*, ed. Georg Treu, 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 χέρες, χέρες,
ὦ νῶτα καὶ στέρν', ὦ φίλοι βραχίονες,
ὑμεῖς ἐκεῖνοι δὴ καθέσταθ' οἵ ποτε
Νεμέας ἔνοικον, βουκόλων ἀλάστορα,
λέοντ', ἄπλατον θρέμμα κἀπροσήγορον,
βίᾳ κατειργάσασθε, Λερναίαν θ' ὕδραν,
διφυῆ τ' ἄμικτον ἱπποβάμονα στρατὸν
θηρῶν, ὑβριστήν, ἄνομον, ὑπέροχον βίαν,
Ἐρυμάνθιόν τε θῆρα, τόν θ' ὑπὸ χθονὸς
Ἅιδου τρίκρανον σκύλακ', ἀπρόσμαχον τέρας,
δεινῆς Ἐχίδνης θρέμμα, τόν τε χρυσέων
δράκοντα μήλων φύλακ' ἐπ' ἐσχάτοις τόποις·
ἄλλων τε μόχθων μυρίων ἐγευσάμην,
κοὐδεὶς τροπαῖ' ἔστησε τῶν ἐμῶν χερῶν.
Νῦν δ' ὧδ' 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, "Scriptorum 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; ἐκπεπόρθημαι; *ekpepórthēmai*). 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, Centauromachy, 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 θρῆνος 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' ἥξει φιλτάτῳ ξένων ἐμῶν.
> οἴμοι, τί δράσω; ποῖ κακῶν ἐρημίαν
> εὕρω, πτερωτὸς ἢ κατὰ χθονὸς μολών;
> † 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, Alcides[27]/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 scene[32] 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:

> {Ἄδ.} ὦ τοῦ μεγίστου Ζηνὸς εὐγενὲς τέκνον,
> εὐδαιμονοίης καί σ' ὁ φιτύσας πατὴρ
> σῴζοι· σὺ γὰρ δὴ τἄμ' ἀνώρθωσας μόνος.
> πῶς τήνδ' ἔπεμψας νέρθεν ἐς φάος τόδε;
> {Ἡρ.} μάχην συνάψας δαιμόνων τῷ κυρίῳ.
> {Ἄδ.} ποῦ τόνδε Θανάτῳ φῆς ἀγῶνα συμβαλεῖν;
> {Ἡρ.} 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 Tirynthius 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]

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[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 Mythenadaptionen 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).

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

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