MYTH AS MEMORY: FOLKLORE, COSMOLOGY, AND CULTURAL PATTERNING IN SELECTED ANCIENT GREEK HEROIC NARRATIVES

MICAH SUNSHINE CAMP

0000-0001-8841-0829

Full thesis submitted in fulfilment of the degree of Master of Arts at Rhodes University.

February 2025.

Abstract

This thesis explores the narratives surrounding the iconic Greek heroes Achilles, Odysseus, Heracles, and Theseus, considering the underlying cultural and symbolic meanings that are embedded in these narratives with a specific focus on ethnoastronomical and ethnobotanical folk knowledge, and emphasising how oral traditions transmit cultural beliefs. Through heroic narratives, this thesis considers the aspirational role of heroes and their reflection on societal and moral values and cultural themes that have endured through to modern times. The heroes' narratives evolved to reflect changing social and political landscapes, representing tensions between innovation and tradition in Greek society. This thesis takes a specific focus on how heroes and their narratives are connected to celestial and botanical symbols and knowledge. It further explores the way these symbols were utilised by the Greeks in conceptualisations of the world around them. These heroes continue to captivate modern audiences, providing reflections of enduring social, moral, philosophical, political, and religious ideas that evolve in response to a societal need. The folklore elements present in hero narratives can, and have, been used to reflect a reclamation of identity and as a propaganda tool. The enduring power of heroic narratives lies not only in their ability to reflect and shape cultural identities but also in their potential use as tools of political influence. They serve as both mirrors and moulds for our own time, presenting and shaping idealised representations of cultural values.

Contents

List of Figures

Dedication and Thanks

My utmost gratitude goes to my thesis supervisor, Dr Daniel Malamis, who has guided me in his astounding knowledge and supported me with steady hands and great kindness. Dr Peta Fox of Rhodes University is owed my genuine appreciation as my Ancient Greek lecturer and as a source of delightful debate around the Greek heroes.

This work is dedicated to my family, who have shown me the importance of continuous learning. To my father, Gerald, my mother Alison, and my brother Rory. My endless love to you all; your support has been instrumental in the completion of this thesis. My grandfathers deserve special mention. I was first introduced to folktales by my grandfather, Kelson, who instilled in me an absolute passion for African fables. My research has always been devoted to my late grandfather Stan, who desperately wanted to learn all he could about the world. His own education was limited by his circumstances, and I find myself following my pursuit of knowledge with his hands guiding the way.

To my family.

αἰὲν ἀριστεύειν

Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to compile narratives around four selected Greek heroes, but also to explore information embedded in the narratives surrounding matters such as astronomical and botanical associations. There is information imbued in oral traditions that, intentionally or not, indicates culturally specific beliefs and practices that are not obviously stated. Astronomical phenomena were an integral part of Greek conceptualisation of the world around them, botanical knowledge was crucial in many aspects of life, such as farming, medicine, and religious practice. This thesis aims to build a conceptualisation of the folklore surrounding the heroes Achilles, Odysseus, Heracles and Theseus, and the associations with their respective and combined *logoi* that would have informed Greek public thought in the 5th century BCE.

Heroes represent the ultimate aspirations of a civilisation: what goodness, bravery, chivalry, honour, and strength mean in the context of that culture, although the hero does not necessarily embody all these qualities at once.[1] The hero is not necessarily imitable, but rather stands apart from common humanity, greater than the rest in some way.[2] Some may be callous but have strength beyond measure, others generous but lack bravery.[3] Heroes in folktale and myth are paradigms, closer to gods than the ordinary person could hope to be, yet they are emphatically human. They are beings just out of reach of the ordinary person, endlessly holding our fascination. In the modern, globalised society of the 21st century, one sees both continued and resurgent interest in the tales of the ancient world. We continue to view Heracles, Achilles, Theseus, and Odysseus as aspirational ideals. We crave the strength and glory of these heroes for ourselves, unattainable though this may be. What then, is so alluring about these heroes? What does it say about the culture that created them, and of our own society that the appeal of these heroes has endured for so many centuries? Across the world folktales include gods, creation, destruction, magical beings and creatures, and places and times that do not exist in the contemporary world. Yet folktales are imbued with local, regional, and national cultural symbols and references.[4] While this seems contradictory, it is in fact complementary – the themes are universal, but the religious systems, moral values, languages and social experiences are unique to each culture.

[1] Allison & Goethals 2015: 188.
[2] Mills 1997: 4.
[3] Hughes-Hallet 2010: 2.
[4] Ben-Amos 2020: 4.

Folk narratives are socially encoded; they are direct expressions of a specific cultural community, but also, paradoxically, simultaneously universal across humanity:

> The themes, the metaphors, and the subjects of stories, songs, and sayings of peoples who lived in countries remote from each other, and who spoke completely unrelated languages, exhibited a high degree of similarity that history could not explain.[5]

Every culture that has ever existed has utilised the constellations in some manner, some of the best-known sky maps include those from the Inuit, Aztec, Mesopotamian, Chinese, Pacific Islanders, and Greek cultural groups, The increased use of and reliance on constellations as a primary sky map within cultures is believed to be in an effort to synchronise the solar and lunar calendars.[6] The constellations allow for a consistent schedule for the appearance of stars, and, used in conjunction with planetary rotations and alignments, lead to a more precise timeframe. The marking of time through astrological methods is usually tied to religious beliefs and holidays and continues to be used in the modern era for events such as the Chinese New Year, Christian Easter, Jewish Passover, Islamic Eid, and Hindu Diwali.[7]

To make information about the changing of seasons, for example, easily memorable, it may be embedded in aetiological narratives, as in the myth of the Rape of Persephone. In this myth, not only is a goddess abducted by another god, creating an engaging story, but the eating of the pomegranate seeds accounts for the third of a year that she is away in the Underworld.[8] But without familiarity with who Persephone is and her associations, this is merely a magic story about the gods. Persephone, as a daughter of Demeter, is intricately linked with agriculture, especially sowing times. Thus, this narrative is an aetiological account of the seasons, represented by a fundamental goddess of agriculture. The rising and setting of stars and planets was, and still is, used to indicate the passage of time, harvest seasons, religious occasions, and other significant events. As evidenced as early as Hesiod's *Works and Days*, agriculture is intricately tied to the astrological mapping of the sky. The very nature of the content of the *Works and Days* seems to reinforce the agricultural background that Hesiod claims to have been raised within, with the text containing fables, natural methods of divination, agricultural advice, and commentary on everyday life.

[5] Ben-Amos 2020: 3.
[6] Hannah 2015: 55.
[7] Hannah 2015: 48.
[8] *Hom. Hym. Dem*. 445-456.

To exempt such observations, especially in studies on hero narratives, leaves a gaping chasm in the scholarship. Heroes are consistently associated with constellations, and their receipt of aid by the gods – in Odysseus' case of *moly* particularly – can come through specific botanical information that cannot merely serve as a detailed description of a plot device. That hellebore was known and used as a treatment of madness to the Ancient Greeks means that its inclusion in Heracles' narrative must be considered, or we neglect a potential insight into thoughts about medicine in pre-Hippocratic Greece. Beyond the medicinal use of herbs, there are also uses of herbs and other plants in ritual, magical, and descriptive roles. To dismiss such approaches as irrelevant in characters idolised and emulated in fifth-century Greece and beyond often means superimposing ethnocentric perceptions of astrology and holistic medicine onto the narratives.[9] It is thus important to consider social understandings and conceptions of a plant's usage; religious plants are perceived to have specific additional effects related to their divine association.

The heroes in this study have been chosen primarily based on their familiarity to a modern audience, as well as their ancient popularity. This was done to ensure that the narratives linked with each hero influenced Greek society in a profound manner. Achilles and Odysseus cannot be separated from each other – though diametrically opposed in many regards, they are linked through their association with Homer, who would influence Greek society for thousands of years. Heracles and Theseus are, in some ways, similarly set in opposition to each other. All four are among the most famous heroes in Ancient Greek society and this fame continues to endure in the 21st century. The Homeric heroes have far more distinct canonical texts compared with Heracles and Theseus. The narratives of Achilles and Odysseus are entwined, particularly through the works of Homer. Similarly linked are the narratives of Heracles and Theseus, who frequently encounter each other through various texts. Heracles and Theseus, however, have substantially more varied accounts in the source materials than Achilles and Odysseus. Achilles, as a character, has a major canonical text – Homer's *Iliad*, while Odysseus' is the titular character in the *Odyssey.* As the Homeric heroes' narratives are largely contained in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, the epic genre requires contextualisation. Theseus and Heracles have far more scattered narratives that have been moulded though oral traditions and political exploitation. The term *logos* is subsequently used here in reference to the overall connected

[9] Hannah (2015: 49) makes clear that the modern distaste for astrology neglects the influence of the study of the development of modern astronomy: "we must never lose sight of the fact that however superstitious such activity appears to us now, it was this metaphysical activity which gave the impetus to astronomy as we know it, not only in antiquity but long afterwards as well."

narratives that are formed from a complex of narratives surrounding each character, rather than to a single, canonised narrative. Foley, in support of Paolo Vivante (1982): "promotes the interpretation of a hero's specific and resent actions against his overall mythic identity, in other words his whole, extrasituational character…it entails a larger reality than can be presented in any one narrative event."[10] The overall narrative is necessary in order to fully realise the extent of what aspects of a hero's narrative evolve and possible reasons why. Due to Homer's reputation and widespread reach, few later authors were able or willing to deviate too far from the portrayals of Achilles and Odysseus. Heracles and Theseus are civic heroes, and their archaeological, cultic, and social impact has a clearer role than the Homeric heroes, who are almost wholly defined by their epic portrayal.

These four heroes are among the most famous amongst the Greeks and remain some of the best-known heroic characters even in the 21st century. In this thesis, each character is explored in a separate chapter, but it is necessary from the outset to contextualise the major events and generational linkages between the selected heroes and the crucial events common in their narratives. A thorough, detailed treatment of each hero individually as well as their connections to each other is necessary in order to wholly appreciate the archetypes, themes, and characteristics present in the individual heroic narrative, as well as the commonalities between the selected heroes. These characters do not exist in a vacuum, and are influenced by the changes in time, culture, politics, and narrative methodologies: they evolved as their stories were told.[11] But for these to be sufficiently analysed, the narratives of each hero must be addressed. Figure 1 depicts a summary of the Trojan Epic Cycle. Many characters within the Trojan War are the primary figures in some of the best-known tragedies, and the events of the war form the bulk of Achilles and Odysseus narratives.[12] Of great importance are the links between the four selected heroes: according to the traditional chronology, Theseus is older than Odysseus, but not substantially, while Heracles is older than both. Neither Theseus nor Heracles fight in the Trojan War, as they are either too old or in the Underworld. These two heroes belong firmly to the generation of the *Argonautica*, which took place prior to the Trojan War. Odysseus is an older soldier during the Trojan War, while Achilles is a generation below, in the same generation as Theseus' son Hippolytus, and Menelaus and Helen's daughter Hermione. Figure

[10] Foley 1991: 141. Vivante (1982: 129-130) states: "the lack of meaningful characterisation in the epithets, which might be regarded as a defect, is really most effective poetically…they [epithets] enliven his outline with their passing touch, and do not predetermine at all his character or course of action."
[11] Hoff 2010: 161.
[12] Such as: Aesch. *Ag.; Cho.; Eum;* Soph. *Aj.;* Eur. *El.; Hipp.; Tro.*

2 depicts the genealogical and generational links between the selected heroes. In the case of this figure, marriage refers to both legitimate marriages and known affairs/relationships.

Title	Length (Books)	Common Attribution	Content
Cypria	11	Stasinus	Events prior to the Trojan War First 9 years of battle Judgement of Paris
Iliad	24	Homer	Covers four days and two nights in the tenth year of battle Achilles' rage Hector Death of Patroclus
Aethiopis	5	Arctinus	Arrival of Trojan allies Death of Achilles
Little Iliad	4	Lesches	Achilles' funeral games Building of Trojan Horse Ajax and Odysseus contest for Achilles' arms
Iliou persis	2	Arctinus	Destruction of Troy
Nostoi	5	Agais or Eumelus	Returns of Greek forces
Odyssey	24	Homer	Odysseus' voyage home
Telegony	2	Eugammon	Odysseus' final voyage to Thesprotia Odysseus' death at the hands of illegitimate son Telegonus

Figure 1

The aims of this thesis have informed its structure. Chapter 1 provides context to the scholarship of the field, exploring the concept of folklore itself and the pertinent elements of folk-knowledge such as astronomical and botanical identifications and conceptualisations. Further, Chapter 1 details the key sources of influence on the hexameter poets and their works that would inform Greek societal thought. The remaining chapters are dedicated to each hero, drawing on epic, lyric, dramatic, and prose accounts. Characterisation of each hero is analysed through these accounts in conjunction with pertinent archaeological sources to form a visual, moral, and social understanding of the depiction of the hero. Each chapter includes a review of

the aspects of folk memory that are present in the narratives. This folk memory includes visual depictions and cult associations, as well as embedded information relating to astronomical and botanical knowledge. Ultimately, this thesis seeks to form a conceptualisation of the sources of information that culminated in the portrayal and perceptions of the selected heroes in the fifth-century BCE Greek imagination.

All diagrams and tables are my own unless otherwise cited. All translations of ancient material are cited in the bibliography under 'primary source translations'. In the cases of Euripides' *Heracles* and Aristophanes' *Ranae*, the translations are my own. Greek editions cited are those of the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae*.

Marriage
Descendent
Hippodameia
Pelops
Atreus
Pittheus
Lysidice
Alcmene
Heracles
Menelaos
Agamemnon
Helen
Clytemnestra
Hermione
Orestes
Electra
Iphigenia
Acamas
Demophon
Phaedra
Theseus
Aethrea
Aegus
Nisos
Lykos
Pallas
The Erechthids
Ariadne
Hippolyta/Antiope
Hippolytus
Pallantids
Odysseus is in this generation.
Achilles is in this generation.

Figure 2

Chapter 1: Scholarship and Theoretical Basis of Study

Defining and Situating Folklore

Folklore is a broad term most often used to include traditional and oral narratives.[1] In *Folklore Concepts: Histories and Critiques* (2020), Ben-Amos distinguishes three conceptions that underly many of the differing definitions of folklore. He holds that folklore is one of three things: a body of knowledge, a mode of thought, or a form of art. The study of folklore, as a social discipline, has many paradigms and methods. This is largely because scholars themselves operate and think within their own cultural approaches. Ethnographic research methods are employed as a result, entailing the researcher observing, comparing, and compiling various versions of cultural artefacts, in an attempt to prevent the scholar's preconceived socio-cultural ideologies from interfering with the study of folklore.

History of Folklore Studies and Foundational Scholarship

Within mythography and folktale studies, there are certain methodologies that have proven invaluable in regard to studying the development, morphology, and comparisons of folk literature. This work utilises three foundational approaches that are I believe are intrinsic to the study of folklore, and literary texts at large: that every version of a text must be considered (oral, literary, visual); that comparisons must be conducted trait by trait; and that time and place of recording or composition must be considered. These principles allow a folklorist to consider works comparatively, without removing any of the imperative characteristics of the work. The Text-Critical approach, utilised increasingly since the mid-twentieth century, is concerned with the "seemingly intrinsic qualities…regardless of whether the perceived characteristics and meanings were intended, or could have been intended, by the creators of the works."[2] Culture biases and norms are entwined within narratives, whether intentionally or not. We can determine whether there is encoded information within a narrative, but we can often only derive the true intention of the information.

There are, historically, three dominant approaches to the empirical and thematic study of folklore, which are often in opposition to each other. The first holds that folklore comprises archaic relics of the past – of 'primitive' peoples and their traditions.[3] Most folktales take place in a time distinctly separated from the contemporary period: "Historically, folklore allegedly

[1] Fisher 1963: 236; Zipes 2012: 114.
[2] Tanselle 1989: 33-34.
[3] Ben-Amos 2020: 23.

dated back to time immemorial, and hence, at its original stage, preceded any known recorded history."[4] This perspective has shaped the *Naturvölker* approach to folklore studies.

The Grimm brothers, perhaps most memorably, utilised the leitmotiv of "romanticised primitives,"[5] but they are far from the only scholars and collectors subscribing to this notion. The *Naturvölker* represent the idealised past, reflecting on what is thought to be a period of youthful naivety and purity.[6] This largely stems from the post-industrialist sense of a fall from an ideal. As Western society separated itself from its past traditions and norms in an ever-increasing process of industrialization, the yearning for a romanticised past more connected with nature and community became stronger. This process is ongoing and is seen vividly in the continued and increasing use of folktales in political propaganda. Folktales continue to have their validity tied to traditionalism, irrationality, and a romanticised rurality.[7]

The stereotypical caricature of the romanticised 'primitive' has been used since ancient times and can already be found in the Julius Caesar's *Commentarii de Bellum Gallico* (58-49 BCE) and the Roman historian Tacitus' *Germania* (98 CE). The concept of 'Nature's Gentleman' is first encountered in philosopher Michel de Montaigne's essay *Of Cannibals* (1580), and echoes of Montaigne's philosophy can be found in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-1611). The specific term 'noble savage' was used to convey this same concept by John Dryden, in his play *The Conquest of Granada by the Spaniards* (1672). In the field of anthropology, Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality Among Men* (1754) shaped a legacy that has plagued anthropology: that urban civilisation has made mankind cruel and selfish, while 'primitives' – who appear more connected with nature than the Eurocentric world of the scholar – are pure and untarnished. Although modern scholarship understands this is a pervasive misunderstanding of cultural evolution, it has had significant repercussions on the curation and preservation of cultural artefacts. Most notably, the idea of the 'noble savage' has meant that it is predominantly previously colonised peoples whose artefacts and folklore become perverted or simply dismissed. The ongoing discussion on the repatriation of artefacts from museums outside the artefacts' country of origin is indicative of this mindset.

The second approach holds that folklore entails cultural objects and performances created with the intention of promoting nationalistic pride to shape socio-political futures, [8] promoting a

[4] Ben-Amos 2020: 4.
[5] Thomas 1990: 152.
[6] For more discussion on folklore studies in Germany post-1945, see Bendix 2012.
[7] Ben-Amos 2020: 1.
[8] Noyes 2012: 14; Ben-Amos 2020: 1.

nostalgic consideration of history, and the reclaiming of a cultural identity. These first two approaches have created the association between folklore and the 'village community,' juxtaposing the outsiders – such as the Roma 'Gypsy' – against the 'norm'. These 'rural outsiders' confirmed the social division between the historic and the modern, the folk and the cosmopolitan. This second approach can be seen as a reclamation of a previously othered or appropriated identity, compared to the *Naturvölker* as a distinct other that belongs firmly in the past, prohibited from evolving.

Historically, these two approaches have been used in conjunction as nationalistic propaganda tools by conservative politicians and their supporters, encouraging a 'return to tradition'. Folklore, transmitted from generation to generation, most often through oral performances, is largely anonymous.[9] With authorship unknown, most folktales assign authorship to either the gods (such as the key formulaic phrase, 'Sing Muse' in Greek Epic), or the community as a whole. The anonymity of folklore lends itself to the use of tales as propaganda tools, as one can shape the narrative as being indicative of the community's already established beliefs, rather than being the tool of a specific group. This is demonstrated in Türkiye, where speaking and publishing the Kurdish language was banned from 1925 onward, as the Kemalist republicanism elites saw Turkish folklore as a source to build Turkish identity.[10] While Kurdish nationalism threatened the Kemalist power, banning their language and their traditions led to the 'Turkification'[11] of the Kurdish language and the erasure and forced assimilation of the Kurdish existence. As a result, Kurdish folklore is presented both within and outside of Türkiye as Turkish folklore.[12] Kurdish oral poets were perceived by the state as dangerous and were "silenced on account of the challenge they posed to the territorial integrity of Turkey."[13] Poetry, reenactments, exhibitions and other forms of performance are the medium for the presentation of a national identity to both the world, and the nation itself.[14] The power folklore holds in the formulation of a cultural identity means that the dominant cultural group in a nation will often attempt to supress the folklore and traditions of a subjugated peoples, as the destruction of folklore means and intrinsic destruction of a cultural identity.

[9] Ben-Amos 2020: 2.
[10] Yüksel 2011: 82.
[11] Yüksel 2011: 89.
[12] Bocheńska 2022: 900.
[13] Yüksel 2011: 93.
[14] Aslan 2022: 394; Schmidtke 2023: 392.

This simultaneously means that the dominant ethnic/cultural/political group will impose their own folkloric ideals onto the subjugated people. Nazi-era Germany utilised the chimerical theory of antisemitism, as described by Gavin Langmuir.[15] Langmuir uses this to demonstrate how there may be fantastical and imaginative beliefs about Jewish people and Judaism, without any real-life bases for those beliefs.[16] Folkloric associations of animals are utilised to depict antisemitic beliefs, with propaganda depicting Jews as rats, associated with contamination and uncleanliness, and as snakes, associated with corruption and treason.

Figure 3
Nazi Propaganda Poster. September 1930, from the Reichstag election. Public Domain

Figure 4
Propaganda poster from Nazi-occupied 1940s Denmark. Public Domain.

The third approach, as proposed by Bauman (1972), holds that folklore exists in a social matrix, visible through "empirically traceable instances of performance."[17] This approach relies on the performative nature of folklore and runs the risk of dismissing some folk-mediums. Crucially, this third approach emphasises the orality often embedded in folk traditions. All three approaches rely on the dependence of culturally representative objects and actions on social structures. This is known as 'keying', a term coined by the sociologist Erving Goffman.[18] This includes coded phrases, epithets, special formulae ('once upon a time,' 'sing Muse'), specific styles of speech, and can include the contextual features: where the performance occurs and

[15] Langmuir 1996.
[16] Langmuir 1996: 14-15.
[17] Noyes 2012: 14.
[18] Goffman 1974.

the costumes of the performers.[19] Keying can be linked to the Jungian psychological concept of the 'collective unconscious', wherein the population who is in the collective will be able to interpret the coded information, often indicated by keying. Those who are not within the collective group will unknowingly break cultural norms or misinterpret the situation. A modern example can be seen in the world of stand-up comedy – there are pauses for laughter and tonal inflections indicating punchlines.[20] These 'key' the audience into what the performer's expectations of them are. Those within the 'collective unconsciousness' will read the situation and understand what is being asked of them.

Atti Aarne, Stith Thompson, and Hans-Jörg Üther: ATÜ Index

The study and classification of folklore is founded in the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index, which classified thousands of narrative works into a system that identified common themes and motifs. Antti Aarne, a Finnish folklorist, constructed a system classifying Scandinavian and European folklore in the early 1900s that was then refined by American folklorist Stith Thompson.[21] In the early part of the 21st century, Hans-Jörg Üther (2004) expanded on this system to explicitly include folktales from a much larger geographical region, including Native American territories, Africa, and India.[22] This system is known as the ATÜ system; it classifies all types of folk literature that arose from an oral tradition, including fables (animal-centric tales), religious tales, legends, anecdotes and "Tales of Magic", commonly referred to as fairy tales.[23] These classification systems are described as being among the "most valuable tools in the professional folklorist's arsenal of aids for analysis."[24]

Aarne initially categorised folktales into three main categories: animal tales (fables), ordinary folktales, and anecdotes. Each folktale was numbered, with 1-299 being animal tales, 300-1199 being ordinary tales, etc. Ordinary tales is subdivided into tales of magic, religious tales, novella-tales, and tales of the foolish devil.[25] Stith Thompson further developed this system; both scholars based the typology on the assumption that each tale type had a prehistory and an

[19] Abrams 2010: 134. On the use of epithets as metonymic devices that key the audience into the extratextual reference, see Foley 1991.
[20] Abrams 2010: 135.
[21] Goloway 2017: 89-90.
[22] Goloway 2017: 90.
[23] Goloway 2017: 90.
[24] Dundes 1997: 195.
[25] Harvilahti 2012: 397.

archetype.[26] It is now understood, largely due to Üther's contributions, that the types are flexible units, with multiple type codes being applicable to a single tale.

Matti Kuusi & the Text-Critical Method

Matti Kuusi specialised in Finnish proverbs and the *Kalevala* epic poem. He founded a universal database of proverbs, similar to the Aarne-Thompson Tale Type Index, which is used for fairy and magic tales. Kuusi's aim was to study proverbs comparatively, with the intention of discovering thematic commonalities between different cultural proverbs. This semantic classification can be seen in the subgroup C4c: "from a little comes much; from a small beginning or trifle comes great damage:"[27]

> Who steals a needle will steal an ox. (Korean proverb)
>
> Who steals an egg will steal a camel. (Lebanese Proverb)[28]

One can see that the thematic content is the same, even though the cultural context has changed. This methodology can be utilised in this study, as it is ultimately concerned with redactions and across various versions of a narrative. While Kuusi is concerned specifically with proverbs, and Aarne and Thompson with fairytales, their methodologies ultimately demonstrate how folktales can be catalogued and studied comparatively. This proves that there are mechanisms for considering heroic narratives, as well as other folktale-based narratives, across genres and cultures by considering the commonalities. The Text-Critical-Method is used in conjunction with the more commonly used Historic-Geographic folklore methodology.[29] This method involves comparisons of works along geographic lines. While this method is undoubtedly of great use in its goal of locating the initial source of a work, this goal is not aligned with this study, which is concerned with locating underlying, persistent folklore elements in texts – that is, with what has remained persistent and the possible reasons this may be. This means that the political context of authors, their goals and their literary traditions must all be considered alongside the development and evolutions of the selected *logoi*.

Milman Parry & Albert Bates Lord

Parry (1971) and Lord (1971) both focus on the nature and development of oral poetry, using Homer as the archetypal oral poet. Lord worked as Parry's assistant on ethnographic fieldwork

[26] Harvilahti 2012: 398.
[27] Lauhakangas 2015: 111.
[28] Champion 1950.
[29] Anderson 2006: 12.

undertaken in 1934-1935 in what was then Yugoslavia. Both scholars are deeply embedded in the study of the 'Homeric Question' and have revolutionised scholars' understanding of the interpretation of Homeric epic. They introduced the hypothesis that is largely accepted today with modifications: that the formulaic structure of Homeric epic is indicative of oral composition, known as the Oral-Formulaic Hypothesis.[30] By studying epithets and repeated formulaic phrases, Parry and Lord demonstrated that dependence on these poetic devices showcases the oral nature of the composition and performance of the Homeric texts – namely the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*: "Anyone who reads through a collection of oral epic from any country is soon aware that the same basic incidents and descriptions are met with time and again."[31] The Oral-Formulaic Hypothesis is used through this study, but particularly in the study of the Homeric texts

This research subscribes to the Oral-Formulaic Hypothesis and links it not only with the composition of the Homeric texts used but also with Jung's notion of the archetype and the collective unconscious. For, thousands of years apart, culturally and chronologically separated, heroic narratives continue to subscribe to established archetypes and poetic formulae.

Scott T. Allison & George. R Goethals and the psychology of heroism.

Allison and Goethals, in a psychological investigation on heroes, found that among 450 interviewees, fictitious heroes (ranging from Batman and Han Solo to Indiana Jones and Rocky Balboa) [32] comprised approximately 34% of the sample responses: "It doesn't seem to matter to us that these heroes are a total fiction. The themes they illustrate, the values they embody, the emotions they evoke, all seem to resonate with people at a deep level."[33] Heroes, as they are illustrated in this modern psychological survey, are consistently described as brave, selfless, and skilful.[34] This has not changed between the ancient world and today. Of course, literary

[30] Sale (1996: 374), in a well-rounded review and renewed demonstration of Parry's theories (Parry 1971) says: "while Parry was a consummate linguist, an excellent scientist, and a man of wide literary culture, he was an imperfect theorist who made a number of broad claims that conceal some deep and important confusions." Modern scholarship has generally accepted a less extreme version of Parry's approach. Parry held a position of extremism – either all or nearly all of the Homeric text is formulaic. Finkelberg (2012: 66) discusses how the unquestioned acceptance of the Oral-Formulaic Hypothesis has closed the door on other studies and approaches to studies of Homeric composition, countering Parry's more extreme stance, and declaring that: "even in traditional poetry a considerable allowance should be made for the poet's individual contribution." But even by using a less extreme stance, allowing for the likelihood that not all oral poetry is composed entirely in performance, for example, Parry's conclusion regarding the use of oral composition in Homer's works remains plausible. Ultimately, Parry's work continues to be relevant and influential when "reformulated in part and supported by mathematical analysis" (Sale, 1996: 375).

[31] Lord 1971: 68.

[32] Allison & Goethals 2011: 26.

[33] Allison & Goethals 2011: 25.

[34] Allison & Goethals 2011: 28.

figures are always designed per their creator's goals, so heroic characters are usually designed following a heroic prototype.

The use of epithets appears central in psychology studies of characters in ancient literature.[35] Psychological studies of heroism are used largely to understand the psychology of people who respond in a 'heroic' manner to disaster and those who choose high-risk careers like firefighting, in which the goal is to save human life at great personal risk. Behaviour that is deemed as 'heroic' is linked to the psychological concept of the id and is considered to stem from this instinctive component of the mind.[36]

Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey

The monomyth, coined by James Joyce and utilised in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell, demonstrates that actions, inspiration, and *pathos* are found universally in human culture: "With regard to the heroic, so much is unpredictable; but there are two matters, above all, about which a person can be certain—struggle on the journey is a given, but also there will be splendour."[37] Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* has provided us with the well-respected framework of the 'Heroes' Journey'. Campbell argued that the many heroic narratives he studied had a formulaic structure that paralleled that of Van Gennep's *Rites de Passage.*[38] Van Gennep, like Campbell, provides comparative models of analyses in his work concerning the transitional nature of ritual practices, allowing for more clearly defined conceptualisations of literary and orally transmitted historical and literary sources.

The hero leaves his home – voluntarily, abducted, or lured – because of a character or scene that provides him with the 'call to adventure'. There is often a brief 'refusal of the call', which usually showcases the character feeling out of his depth or overwhelmed by the prospect of the call.[39] A 'helper' then aids the hero either in physically reaching the threshold or in crossing it. There is a 'guardian' or a barrier at the threshold, which the hero must overcome in some manner in order to enter the 'special world' alive, or the hero is defeated by the guardian or barrier and descends into the 'special world' in death.

[35] Akondo & Shifulluah, 2024: 573.
[36] Akondo & Shifulluah, 2024: 574.
[37] Pinkola Estés 2004: xxvi.
[38] Van Gennep 1960 [1902].
[39] An example of this can be seen Virgil's *Aeneid*, 1.93-98, which introduces the character of Aeneas reluctant, and lamenting his task: "why could *I* not have fallen on Ilium's Plains, spilled forth my soul under *your* [Diomedes] right hand" (1.97-98).

Now past the threshold, the hero encounters various trials that threaten him. He also encounters more helpers who give him magical aid. In the so called 'innermost cave', the hero undergoes their penultimate ordeal in the 'special world'. He gains his reward, which may be triumphant: marriage, recognition by a superior character, or an apotheosis. His reward, if the powers in the special world are antagonistic towards him, may also be stolen through the 'boons' obtained in the 'special world': bride-theft, stealing of artefacts or elixirs. The hero then sets out, either with the protection of an emissary, or he flees and is pursued. He eventually returns to the threshold and must leave any powers or rewards behind. He travels across the threshold and returns or is resurrected back into the 'ordinary world', bringing with him the boon won from his ordeal which changes/restores the 'ordinary world'.

Certain texts will choose to emphasise a particular element of this cycle, while others will accord a treatment to each element: "If there is meaning to be found in mythology, this cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of a myth, but only in the way those elements are combined." [40] That the hero has universal characteristics is clear, but one must consider the particularities of the narrative on the one hand, and why they appeal to mankind universally on the other. Folktales and myths across the world contain paradigmatic narratives and characters that fulfil a key function: to instruct people about socially and culturally correct actions and thoughts, and to model appropriate behaviour.[41] Folktales are, in this sense, didactic narratives. This approach forms the basis for the conceptualisation of encoded social information within folktales – the information within the narratives represents beliefs and perceptions of societies without it being inherently obvious.

Carl Jungs' Archetypes

In his ground-breaking psychological work *Man and His Symbols,*[42] Jung defines his concept of the archetype as "representations of a motif" that can vary in many ways but maintain their basic pattern. [43] Although the focus is his work on dream symbolism, Jung demonstrates that there are thematic commonalities within portrayals and representations of figures and characters. Jung believes that the archetypes are instinctual, without a clearly known origin and can be reproduced anywhere in the world, at any time.[44] This aligns with what has been established about folktales. Jung correlates the 'archetypal' system with the unconscious mind:

[40] Lévi-Strauss 1962: 431. Vaz da Silva (2012: 40) echoes the sentiment.
[41] Campbell 2004 [1949]; Allison & Goethals 2015: 188; Sayer et al. 2018: 109; Goloway 2017: 89.
[42] Jung 1964.
[43] Jung 1964: 67.
[44] Jung 1964: 69.

"Something that is of a more or less unknown nature has been intuitively grasped in the unconscious and submitted to an archetypal treatment."[45] This aligns with the theories introduced by Campbell that demonstrate the universality of folktales and the archetypal characters and themes that appear within these narratives.

Jung situates the archetypes as being part of the unconscious mind, and thereby of the collective unconscious. Jung writes that: "the contents of the collective unconscious are invariably archetypes that were present from the beginning."[46] He differentiates the personal unconscious from the collective unconscious by declaring that the collective unconscious entails "contents and modes that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals."[47]

Jung's concept of the collective unconscious illustrates how insiders to a group or culture hold in common a cultural code that aids in distinguishing the identity of the group from outsiders.[48] This is ultimately the basis for the concept of keying. In the application of Jung's theories to folklore, folktales, being designed with the initial intent of being transmitted orally, can be seen to have core concepts that emphasise cultural information that is being imparted to the listener. These concepts contain the encoded cultural information that is indicative of a collective unconscious. One must be within the cultural group and context to wholly understand and interpret what the motifs indicate and reflect about the socio-cultural group.

Overview of Ancient Genres and Selected Authors

It is of crucial importance to firmly establish and contextualise the works of Homer and Hesiod. Almost every later reference to Achilles and Odysseus in particular, but also heroic values and codes generally, stem from the works of the epic poet Homer and didactic poet Hesiod. The social impact of these poets cannot be understated, as ancient convention holds that "Homer created archetypal characters,"[49] with the historian Herodotus declaring his opinion that Homer and Hesiod "were the ones who created the gods' family trees for the Greek world, gave them their names, assigned them their honours and areas of expertise, and told us what they looked like."[50] The immense influence of these authors, then, in social and religious thought and literary conventions, demands an in-depth analysis to establish the foundations that later authors would build upon.

[45] Jung 1964: 78.
[46] Jung 1959 [1951]: 8.
[47] Jung 1954: 4.
[48] Noyes 2012: 14.
[49] Diggle 2004: 19.
[50] Hdt. 2.53.

The Epic Genre

Epic shares many traits with drama, prose and poetry, and its definition is therefore of utmost importance to distinguish the genre. An epic can be considered as such if the work is lengthy, and contains motifs, themes. and characterisation specific to the genre. These are often voyages or journeys in some manner, heroes defeating an identified enemy, a setting within wartime, concepts of nobility, cosmic or otherwise divine interference, and a distant past.[51]

The Trojan War and its aftermath form a clearly unified narrative that is covered through the Epic Cycle and forms the basis of the works of Homer. There was no single work which provides an authoritative account of the entirety of events within the war. Hence, the necessity of considering what we know about the lost Cyclic Epics. Scholars are almost entirely dependent on the summary of the Cyclic Epic poems found in the *Chrestomathia* (attributed to a certain Proclus, possibly the Neoplatonist Proclus Diadochus) and references in other works.[52] Herodotus in his *Histories*, Aristotle in his *Poetics,* Quintus of Smyrna in his *Posthomerica* and Pseudo-Apollodorus in his *Bibliotheca* all make mention of various texts within the cycle. There is also a multiplicity of Latin authors who do the same, including Hyginus, Ovid, and Virgil.

The lost *Cypria*, well-known in a standardised form in classical antiquity, appears to have covered the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, and the Judgment of Paris. Like many of the texts within the Epic Cycle, the *Cypria* was probably composed after the Homeric texts.[53] The *Little Iliad* is chronologically placed after the *Aethiopis* and is followed by the *Iliou Persis.* Nearly 30 lines of the original text of the *Little Iliad* survive, while only 10 lines of the original text of the *Iliou Persis* survive. The *Little Iliad* covers the judgment of Achilles' arms, the retrieval of Heracles' poison arrows, the death of Paris, the arrival of Neoptolemus in Troy, the theft of the Palladium, the murder of Hector's son Astyanax by Odysseus, and Neoptolemus' taking of Hector's wife Andromache. The *Iliou Persis* includes the emergence of the heroes from the Trojan Horse, the return of Helen to Menelaus, the Rape of Cassandra, and also covers the murder of Astyanax, and the captivity of Andromache. Though traditionally the content of epic poetry, the Trojan War is depicted throughout dramas and continues even in modern media to

[51] Martin 2005: 10.
[52] Much of the information known about the *Chrestomathia* and the content of the epic cycle (aside from the *Cypria*) is found in the 10th century CE manuscript of the *Iliad* - Venetus A, more formally known as *Codex Marcianus Graecus* 822, catalogued in Venice's *Libreria pubblica di san Marco.*
[53] An in-depth discussion of the 'prequel' type nature of many of the non-Homeric texts within the Epic cycle can be found in H.G Evelyn-White's preface to *Hesiod, The Homeric Hymns, and Homerica.*

be the subject of interest – characters like Agamemnon exist in both the epic cycle and tragic works like Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy.[54]

Homer

The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are attributed to Homer, a poetic figure thought to belong to the 8th century BCE. Revered in both the ancient world and modern history, little is known about Homer. Some ancient accounts depicted Homer as a wandering blind bard, residing in Chios and dying in Ios.[55] Other accounts consider 'Homer' as an authorial name, and not his true identity. Many modern scholars have taken 'Homer' as a name or tradition of composition, under which an unknown number of rhapsodes would compose.[56] The 'Homeric Question' is the focus of much modern Homeric scholarship, asking who, if any individual, Homer was, how he composed his poetry, and when he lived. Many ancient scholars believed Homer to have been an eyewitness to the Trojan War, which forms the content of the Homeric epics.[57] A number of quotes from various authors are attributed to a 'Homer,' but these sources are not known to scholars. Many of these are considered to be misattributions, corruptions of texts, or inaccurate recollections.[58]

The occasion for the performance of these poems is unknown, but the audience of Homer is not identified with a particular geographic location or ethnic group, leaving him truly panhellenic in this sense.[59] Interestingly, many ancient references to his name are made in conjunction with references to his intended audience, but he is never named in the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* – a considerable abnormality amongst ancient texts, which typically have the author's name at least introduced in the *prooimion.*[60] Many texts that have been designated at least a 'Homeric allusion' and that appear to date around the same period as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* seem to hint at authorship, such as the Homeric Hymns:

> To begin with, while they never mention Homer by name, they are not as silent about the poet's identity as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are. They use periphrases, hints and riddles which may or

[54] Comprising the *Agamemnon*, *The Libation Bearers*, and *Eumenides*.
[55] *Od.* 8.64ff. Simonides refers to the author of the *Iliad* 6.146 as a 'Chian man' (19.1 W). The blindness of Homer is attested to at *Hom. Hymn. Apol*. 165-173.
[56] Graziosi 2002: 52.
[57] Herodotus believes Homer and Hesiod both lived at most 400 years before his own time, placing both authors in the 9th century BCE. (Hdt. 2.53).
[58] West 2003: 35.
[59] Graziosi 2002: 58.
[60] Graziosi 2002: 58, 61. Xenophanes (Xenoph. fr. 10. DK) says that πάντες (everyone) learns from Homer, Pindar (Ist. 3.55-7) describe Homer's poetry spreading διὰ ἀνθρώπων (among humans), and Simonides (Simon. fr. 564 *PMG*) refers to the audience of Homer as λαοί (a generic, inclusive form of 'people'). Heraclitus (fr. 56 DK) depicts Homer as the universal (or at least, panhellenic) Greek poet.

> may not be read as references to Homer. It is, in fact, impossible to be confident that one is correctly identifying all the texts that are alluding to Homer in riddles and hints.[61]

The actual authorial dates of Homer's works are thus highly contested, and it is not the goal of this research to contribute to the debate. Rather, this research turns to one mostly uncontested facet of the debate over the Homeric Question – that of transmission through oral performance. As has already been discussed, Parry and Lord's work on the formulaic construction of epic poetry and the use of Homer as an archetypal poet is of key use in this work. Within the debate over the composition of the Homeric works, of such great length and quality, Parry and Lord have shown that oral poets can memorise, adapt, and compose during performance.

The content of the *Iliad* is dependent on and assumes knowledge about the Trojan War. The content of the *Odyssey* does so as well but is largely dependent on the action of the *Iliad*. Consequently, an overview of the crucial components of the narrative, which also forms the content of the Epic Cycle, is necessary. Traditionally, the war is triggered by the Judgement of Paris. Eris, goddess of strife, brought to the wedding of Peleus and Thetis a golden apple intended for the most beautiful amongst the goddesses. Hera, Athena, and Aphrodite demanded Zeus judge the contest between the three, but Zeus instead selected the younger brother of the Trojan prince Hector – Paris (also known as Alexandros). Each of the three goddesses attempts to bribe the young Paris, and he chose Aphrodite, who had promised him the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen of Sparta, wife of Menelaus. The abduction of Helen is the trigger for the Trojan War. This narrative is known to the contemporary audiences of the *Iliad*, as only a brief allusion at 24.25-30 exists. In revenge for the abduction of Helen, her husband Menelaus, King of Sparta, calls upon the Greek kings and other Greek leaders to attack Troy, as they are obligated to due to an oath sworn to protect Helen. Menelaus' brother, Agamemnon, leads the Greek forces. After ten years of battle, the end of which is covered in the *Iliad* and parts of the *Odyssey*, the Greeks are victorious. The surviving heroes then embark on their *nostoi*; Odysseus' spans a decade and forms the action of the Odyssey.

<u>The Theological and Didactic Genres</u>

Perceptions of didactic poetry vary, but find ancient definition in certain characteristics:

- Didactic poetry, because it utilises 'epic meter' – a type of hexameter, is therefore aligned with the genre of epic poetry.

[61] Graziosi 2002: 62.

- Didactic poets considered are more aligned with natural philosophy compared to most other poets, who are concerned with myth or great deeds of individuals.
- Didactic poetry is diegetic.
- Didactic works as a form of instruction *ad aliquem*, with the meter being the medium of instruction to a silent pupil.

All poets are considered to be teachers, providing guidance and instruction on societal thoughts and behaviours.[62] Ultimately, the fourth characteristic remains didactic poetry's most distinguishing trait. Though no truly set definition for the genre existed in the ancient world, it is acknowledged that there are commonalities in the poetry, much of which is modelled directly after the works of Hesiod, who himself was drawn on Near Eastern and Egyptian poetry. These commonalities could include the epic hexameter, the approximate length of the text, the presence of particular grammatical forms like the use of the imperative, and most importantly, the first-person mode of address and the presence of "an explicit instructional aim."[63] The mode of address and instructional manner of the poetry firmly positions the poet as a persona of authority. Didactic poetry usually encodes practical and moral advice within narratives, such as Hesiod's fable of the Hawk and Nightingale, used to show a societal condemnation of violence and the nature of injustice.[64]

Of didactic prose and poetry, the view is typically held that "the poets invest mundane subject matter from narrow prose treatises with metaphorical and wide-ranging significance."[65] While true, this understates the significance of what scholars have often seen as 'base' materials. Didactic works provide moral and practical instruction to the audience, often containing advice for farming, astronomy, interpreting weather signals and animal behaviour. This type of content has unfortunately been seen as mundane in comparison to the more dramatic content of other poems, due to its instructional goal rather than the dramatic and emotional manner of much other poetry. Theological poetry performs much the same function, but instead of utilising nature and scientific phenomena to illustrate moral guidance, it uses religious imagery, iconography and approaches. The moral guidance is illustrated through encouraging the audience to either mimic or refrain from the actions and thoughts of divine and supernatural beings.

[62] Cf. Pl. *Ion* 540d; *Phdr.* 245a; Hdt. 2.53.
[63] Buglass, Fanti, & Galzerano 2019: 220.
[64] Hes. *WD* 203-212.
[65] Hutchinson 2009: 196.

Hesiod

Like Homer, much of the extant information on Hesiod is derived from allusions in his works and traditions started well after his death. Unlike Homer, some very specific autobiographical information is present in Hesiod's works themselves. Supposedly born to a father named Dius, a native of Cyme in Aeolis, Hesiod lived a farmer's life until he encountered the Muses on Mt. Helicon.[66] Later in life, he claims to have achieved a victory in a poetry contest at the funeral games of one Amphidamas, in Euboea, where he won a tripod which he dedicated to the Muses of Helicon.[67] Once again, it is necessary to explore the extent of the historicity of this information. The dialect of the *Works and Days* contains distinctly Aeolian characteristics.[68]

While in no way a comprehensive treatment of any of these subjects, the distinctly human nature of the subject matter demonstrates what Evelyn-White claims to be the poem's true goal: "to show men how best to live in a difficult world."[69] Seen in this light, Hesiod's works are undoubtedly didactic in nature. The *Works and Days,* in particular, provides a reason for the state of the world and man's folly: a decline in moral values, over the ages of man, has reduced mankind to its current state.[70] The ages of man are frequently cited to explain the nature of heroes – more than normal men, capable of superhuman deeds, closer to the gods than any mortal can hope to be. The heroes come from previous ages of men. Within this research, this section of Hesiod's works is among the most important of ancient sources for contextualising the Greek approach to heroes within literature.[71] Hesiod's Heroic Age not only situates heroes in a time separate from our own (that being the Iron Age of Man), but also groups heroes together in a non-genealogical manner (see Figure 2). This has further allowed later poets and playwrights to extend and develop their characterisations and settings within their own works, as Hesiod has provided a near-canonical tradition for poets to work within.

[66] Hes. *WD* 636ff; Hesiod's name appears at *Theog.* 22.
[67] Hes. *WD* 651-659.
[68] Evelyn-White 1982: xiv.
[69] Evelyn-White 1982: xix.
[70] Athanassakis 2004: 110; Hes. *WD* 109-201.
[71] The 'ages of man' is a common concept in mythology and religion. Hinduism has the Yuga Cycle, Buddhist doctrine has the Three Ages, and Christianity has the concept of dispensationalism. Archaeology itself employs the use of the concept through the three-age system (that of Stone, Bronze, and Iron) to demonstrate the evolution and 'bettering' of mankind. The declining moral nature of humanity as the ages progress leads to an idealisation of previous ages. See this thesis' discussion on the concept of the *naturvölker* and 'noble savage.'

	Golden Age	Silver Age	Bronze Age	Heroic Age	Iron Age
Role of the Gods	Rule of Kronos	Rule of Zeus	Rule of Zeus	Rule of Zeus	Rule of Zeus
Nature of Man	Noble and peaceful. Died peacefully after living an exceptionally long time.	Lived for a hundred years, only for a short while as adults. Men fought each other as adults. Men refused to worship gods.	Tough. War is man's only purpose. Zeus created these humans from the ash tree.[72] Armour made of bronze. Men destroyed each other.	Age of the heroes who fought at Thebes and in the Trojan War – these are the men who are the subject of epic and tragedy.[73]	Hesiod's own age,[74] and the current age of Man. Humans live a life of hard labour and misery. The concept of *xenia*[75] is forgotten. Humans feel no shame at wrongdoing.
Perception of The Afterlife	Spirits live on as guardians of other men.	Spirits live on as blessed in the Underworld.	No named spirits. Shades live in the Underworld, now associated with darkness and gloominess.	Men died in the 'normal' way. Spirits went to Elysium.	No specific mention.
End of the Age	Zeus comes to power.	Zeus destroyed man for their impiety.	Flood of Deucalion destroys the world.[76]	Fades out after a time.	Continual degeneration, eventually Zeus will destroy this race of man and create a new one.

Figure 5

Appended to the *Works and Days* were other didactic works, now only fragmentary or remaining only in references by other ancient authors. These supposedly included *Precepts of Chiron*, which resembled the gnomic sections of *Works and Days,* and detailed lessons taught

[72] The ash tree has strong links to many different mythologies. The Norse Yggdrasil (the world tree) is an ash tree, and both the Gaels of Ireland and much of British folklore see the ash tree as a holy and protective tree. For further discussion on the immense global cultural significance of the ash tree, see Parker 2021: 79-112.
[73] Such as Oedipus, Cadmus, and all the named heroes of the Trojan War.
[74] "Would that I were not among the men of the fifth generation" (Hes. *WD* 174-175).
[75] The concept of *xenia,* or a guest-friendship, is of utmost importance in Ancient Greek society. For a detailed investigation into the concept of *xenia* and its representation in Greek society, see Herman 2002.
[76] One of the best-know versions of this tale can be found in Ov. *Met.* 1.253-415.

by the centaur Chiron to a young Achilles. Hesiod's *Ornithomanteia,* or *Divination of Birds*, was attached to the *Works and Days*, according to Proclus,[77] and there remains the possibility that the *Astronomy*, as named by Plutarch, and attributed to Hesiod,[78] was attached to the *Divination of Birds*. The *Astronomy* gave an account of the rising and setting of the major Greek constellations, and detailed the legends attributed to them and the stars' influence on human life.[79] There is also some possibility that texts on metalworking and identification were also attached to the *Works and Days*.[80] The *Works and Days* then, is a didactic work for daily life, while the *Theogony* is a didactic work in the sense that it provides a conceptual map of the cosmos – a lineage for the gods – and, much like Homer, assigns the gods personalities and human flaws that would go on to influence and inspire Greek society for its entire existence, subsequently inspiring Roman society to further develop these portrayals of the same gods under new names. Ultimately, our modern, 21st century society continues to write our works – novels, plays, films[81] – about the same gods that Homer and Hesiod did.

The *Works and Days* can be dated as considerably later than the *Iliad* and *Odyssey,* as it appears dependent on the Homeric diction and manner and also utilises dactylic hexameter (also known as epic meter). This can largely be seen through tracing the continually decreasing use of the digamma: "phrases with the digamma preserved are older than those which presuppose its loss"[82] The *Theogony* is a cosmogony after Hesiod's fashion, grouping both the gods and creation of the universe as a personified elements together to form a 'theogonic-cosmogonic'

[77] Procl. *Scholia in Hesiodum* 828.
[78] "and the author of the *Astronomy,* which is attributed forsooth to Hesiod" (*Astronomia* 1, Evelyn-White, 1982: 67) of Callisto, the Great Bear constellation, "Hesiod says she was the daughter of Lycaon and liven in Arcadia." (Pseudo-Eratosthenes *Catasterisms* fr. 1, Evelyn-White) and of Orion: "Hesiod says that he was the son of Euryale" (Pseudo-Eratosthenes *Catasterisms* fr. 32, Evelyn-White).
[79] Evelyn-White 1982: xix-xx.
[80] Evelyn-White 1982: xx.
[81] The immense influence of popular works such as Disney's animated film *Hercules* (1997, dir. Ron Clements & John Musker), *Troy* (2004, dir. Wolfgang Petersen), Madeline Miller's novels *The Song of Achilles* (2011) and *Circe* (2018), and Stephen Fry's novels *Mythos* (2017) and *Heroes* (2018) cannot be understated. Regardless of historical accuracy, medium, and genre, these works demonstrate that these gods and heroic characters continue to introduce, intrigue and inspire us in a world so set apart from the Homeric and Hesiodic origins of these characters. There continues to be an upward trend in the 2020s of revisiting and rewriting Greco-Roman myths which further demonstrates the sustained interest in these texts. For a discussion on the influence of Greco-Roman myth and folklore on modern art and architecture from the Middle Ages to the 20th century, see Faedo (2015), for the influence of the Classical world on art, see Vermeule 1964.
[82] Janko 2012: 24; also, Evelyn-White 1982: xxv. The digamma (Ϝ) is an archaic letter of the Greek alphabet, and a remnant of the original Phoenician alphabet. The use of the digamma was lost in most Ancient Greek dialects before the Classical period. It is not present in Homer's works, but traces of it remain where the epic meter proves defective. Interestingly, the Aeolic dialect seems to have retained the letter longer than other Greek dialects – leaving ancient grammarians to perceive it as a distinctly Aeolic feature. For a discussion on the role of the digamma in identifying the city of Troy, or Wilusa, in Hittite records see Bryce 2023. On the use of the digamma as statistically relevant dating evidence, see Janko 2012: 20-43.

poem that untimely focus' on Zeus' supremacy and how it came to be.[83] The *Theogony* invokes the Muses, then turns to the birth of the first beings (Gaia, Eros, Chaos), then recounts the birth of the subsequent personified elements (116-153), and the lineage of Zeus beginning with the birth of Ouranos. Thus follows the birth of Aphrodite from Ouranos' dismembered gonads (154-210), the monsters born of Nyx (211-413), and then the birth of the Olympian gods and the overthrow of Kronos (412-506). The poem then follows Zeus and how he came to and maintained his power. These lineages were undoubtedly selectively chosen by Hesiod (evident in the various accounts of Aphrodite's birth narratives) and were likely much of his own invention.[84] Hesiod appears to be our oldest extant source of individual names of Muses, Nereids, Oceanids, the children of Nyx and of Chaos. The Muses, for example, have self-explanatory, almost didactic, names, being named for the genre they represent.[85]

As Hesiod and Homer remain our oldest evidence for a Greek religious 'canon', we cannot truly account for the alterations they made. It is of little doubt that they could not fundamentally change the narratives to too great a degree; rather, Hesiod in particular alters "the schematic arrangement."[86] Where Homer uses the gods to showcase the frivolity of human matters to the divine and the personalities of the Olympians in particular, Hesiod focuses on the evolution of the pantheon, providing an aetiological reason for many earthly events and human manners of thought:

> And so, from the amorphousness of Chaos and the unruliness of the elements, the world graduates to a three-tiered pyramid in which man has a definite place within a framework that does not make his life a meaningless accident.[87]

The *Shield of Heracles*, also known simply as the *Shield*, is now almost entirely accepted as an non-Hesiodic text, due to major stylistic and grammatical disparities.[88] Yet, it remains important to consider the work as ancient audiences perceived it as a work of Hesiod.[89] Both Apollonius of Rhodes and Stesichorus considered the work to be a genuine part of the Hesiodic corpus. The debate regarding the true authorship of the *Shield* is beyond the scope of this

[83] Athanassakis 2004: 24, 27.
[84] Athanassakis 2004: 25.
[85] Daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne (Memory), the Muses' names and attributes are as follows: Calliope – epic poetry; Clio – historical poetry; Erato – love poetry; Euterpe – lyric poetry; Melpomene – tragic poetry; Polyhymnia – sacred poetry; Terpsichore – dance and choral poetry; Thalia – comedy and idyllic poetry; Urania – astronomy and astrology.
[86] Athanassakis 2004: 27.
[87] Athanassakis 2004: 31.
[88] Athanassakis 2004: 192.
[89] The same approach applies to the *Ehoiai*, or *Catalogue of Women,* too. Authorship is contested, even though the works are attached to most ancient collections of Hesiod's works.

research,[90] but the contents of the work provide an 'authorial' narrative of Heracles' birth and feats, as they come from the mouth of 'Hesiod' himself. The first fifty-six lines are generally accepted to be taken from the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women,* as suspected by Aristophanes of Byzantium – though again, he and most ancient critics believe the work to be genuinely Hesiodic.[91] The effect of this is that "the poet chose to preface his own verses with those from the *Catalogue*, thereby giving first an account of Heracles' divine birth at Thebes on the authority of 'Hesiod' himself, and then a vindication of his divine lineage through his heroic deeds."[92] Lines 57-480 are considered by nearly all modern editors to be interpolated, but Athanassakis defends the work from the harsh criticism it has attracted since the piece was declared not to be an authentic Hesiodic work:

> The *Shield* is not a mediocre *pièce d'occasion* but a powerful poem in which the personifications of the gruesome and the macabre interlace in a horrific phantasmagoria of apocalyptic power… The *Shield* is a martial poem and, therefore, very different from the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*.[93]

The work is considered by most to be a *pastiche*, which may have been performed at a Boeotian festival intended to celebrate midsummer, and the zenith of the Dog-Star, Sirius.[94] This suggestion stems from the proposed date of the work (590-560 BCE), coinciding with the First Sacred War (595-585 BCE).[95] Janko argues that the poem's probable performance was at the Heracleia or Iolaeia at Thebes.[96] As evidence for this, Janko refers to the honorific references throughout the poem to Thebes, reinforcing Heracles' connection to the city and the role his physicality plays in his heroics through the concluding depictions of the *Shield* of boxing and wrestling (*Sc*. 302), chariot-racing (*Sc*. 306), the prize of a tripod (*Sc.* 312), all set outside the walls of the city (*Sc*. 272-273). The emphatic placing of these scenes underscores the connection between the poem and the games of Heracles and Iolaus.

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[90] Discussion on the debates surrounding the authorship of the *Shield* can be found in: Lattimore 1970: 9; Janko 1986: 38-44; Athanassakis 2004: 192-200.
[91] Janko 1986: 39. For a statistical analysis of Hesiod's authorship of the *Catalogue of Women*, see Janko 2012: 41-43.
[92] Janko 1986: 39.
[93] Athanassakis 2004: 200.
[94] Janko 1986: 43.
[95] Also known as the Cirraean War, the war was fought between the Amphictyonic League of Delphi and the city of Kirrha, in Phocis. The war is known to have begun as a result of Crisa's mistreatment of pilgrims heading to the sanctuaries in Delphi. The war is particularly notable for the use of chemical warfare at the Siege of Crisa, in which hellebore was used to poison the city's water supply. The end of the war was marked by the first Pythian Games (Janko 1985: 43; Mayor 2009: 100). Of the Boeotian assumption, the only recorded hostilities between the Boeotians and the Thessalonians recorded by Plutarch to have happened at this time (Plut. *Camillus*.19.2).
[96] Janko 1985: 48.

The case of the *Shield* then provides a clear indication of encoded, possibly unintentionally revealing information regarding contemporary perceptions of Heracles. Imbued in heroic narratives especially but the Greek world at large are conceptualisations of the world around them. Astronomical information is, as evidenced by Hesiod, crucial in accurately determining matters such as seasonality for agriculture. But as astronomical phenomena are complex matters, information about them may be incorporated into a narrative that then functions as a mnemonic device. Botanical references are important as the Greek concepts of health and healing relied on botanical and religious thought. References to plants are often lost on a modern audience, as the significance of the plant beyond the description are culturally bound. This heightens the importance of a thorough analysis, identification, and critique of botanical references in texts as plants – like the stars – had religious, medical, and social associations imbued in them by Greek society.

Ethnoastronomy

The best known ancient Greek work on constellations is attributed to Eratosthenes of Cyrene, the *Catasterisimi*. The extant version of this text is said to have been abridged from a lost original during the 1st or 2nd century CE.[97] The work was intended to be read alongside the works of the astronomer, Eudoxus of Cnidus and didactic poet, Aratus. Both authors wrote a *Phaenomena*, though only Aratus' *Phaenomena* and *Diosemeia* remain extant. Eratosthenes was a near contemporary of Aratus, and his *Catasterisimi* includes physical descriptions of the constellations and the narratives connecting them to each other. The *Poetica Astronomica* of Hyginus (c. 64 BCE - 17 CE), followed the same approach as Eratosthenes, in that his work was centred on the mythological narratives and origins of the constellations. Ptolemy, whose 2nd century CE *Almagest* was responsible for the development of the geocentric model of the universe, which was almost universally accepted until the scientific revolution in the late Renaissance period. Alongside the *Almagest*, Ptolemy's *Procheiroi kanones*, though now lost in its original form, moulded the prototype of most Arabic and Latin astronomical calculations and predictions of planetary locations, eclipses, and risings of stars.[98] Prior to these works, the only known early Greek literary references were dissimilar in style:

> References to the night sky in Homer and Hesiod, the earliest Greek authors to mention specific stars and constellations, are purely observational in that they note the appearance of certain celestial bodies and connect them to seasonal events such as agricultural cycles or navigational

[97] Barnes 2014: 258.
[98] For more on this, see Jones 2017.

> aids. Hesiod, in particular, viewed the stars as signs from the gods telling men when certain actions should be performed or avoided.[99]

The narratives associated with stars and constellations can be considered a mnemonic and semiotic device with the tale aiding in identifying the shape of the constellation and its position in the sky: "a narrative arises from star clusters that are assigned a logical explanation, and that helps to orientate in the sky and describes the location of the neighbouring stars through the so-called mythological connections."[100] An example would be the hunting scene, which includes Orion (the Hunter), Canis Major (the Hound), and Lepus (the Hare). The hunting scene allows for the association of the constellations with each other, making it easier to situate them in the sky, as well as to track their movements across the sky in relation to each other: "Since Orion moves behind the newly named Pleiades, ancient Greek poets came up with the phrase that Orion is chasing the Pleiades".[101] Of the belt of Orion, comprised of the ε, δ, and ζ stars, Kuperjanov describes how the three stars are found to have formed various entities across different cultural groups, such as the Spear, the Flail, the Hunter, and the Snake.[102] Orion is positioned along the celestial equator, and is therefore visible in all hemispheres of the world throughout the year. Over time these narratives and explanations for the stars positioning in the sky evolved into their own astral myths, providing a genuine mythological and religious explanation for their movements and shapes.[103]

The position of α Sirius, the brightest star in the night sky and the primary star in the Canis Major constellation, is given the name of 'Orion's Dog'[104] by Homer, as the Canis Major constellation 'runs' alongside that of Orion. The constellation Canis Major is positioned to the left and below that of the Hunter, Orion. The position shows Canis Major as one of Orion's hunting dogs, poised to hunt the constellation of Lepus, the Hare.[105] The Greeks most often referred to Sirius as the Dog Star, and Homer's reference to the star as "Orion's Dog" not only illustrates the more common usage of the name, but also highlights the connection of Sirius to the constellation of Orion, the great hunter. Sirius has always played a role in mythology owing to its status as both the brightest star in the night sky and its visibility throughout the year in

[99] Barnes 2014: 259
[100] Kuperjanov 2006: 47; Hannah 2015: 49.
[101] Kuperjanov 2006: 46, see also pp. 41-42.
[102] Orion as a snake is attested to through some Estonian accounts and is a much larger constellation than many of the other more popular constellations formed around these three stars. See Kuperjanov (2006: 43-44) for discussion on the formation of this particular Estonian constellation.
[103] Kuperjanov 2006: 42-47.
[104] *Il*. 22.26-31.
[105] See Figure 5.

both north and south hemispheres.[106] Later Greek authors would often refer to Sirius simply as κύων – the dog. This is due to the obvious association of Sirius with dogs, as it is the primary star in the Canis Major constellation. Hesiod provides the first instance of the name Σείριος in *Works and Days*.[107] Sirius is associated with ominous signs. Although the etymology of Sirius is uncertain, it may be related to the Greek word σείριος, which in its adjectival form can be translated as 'destructive.' In *Works and Days*, Hesiod refers to how the Dog Star brings about a fever.[108] This 'fever' correlates to the rising of Sirius, occurring in a time of intense seasonal heat in the northern hemisphere at the end of July. This is the origin of the concept of the 'dog days' of summer – the hottest, most lethargic and uncomfortable days of summer.[109]

Comparisons of heroes to the brilliant star are common, particularly in the cases of the Homeric heroes. Laoupi describes the appearance of the name Si-ru or Se-ri-o on the Linear B tablet, seemingly representing a sun god. With Si-ru or Se-ri-o appears the name Nopina as the name of a new-moon goddess, and Ma the name of a full-moon goddess – a lunar/solar grouping that is frequent in Minoan iconography.[110] The island of Ceos (modern Kea/Tzia) celebrated Sirius' helical rising, as the hero Aristaeus sought aid from the Delphic Oracle over deadly drought caused to the islands around Crete, and sacrificed to Sirius and Zeus Icmaeus (Zeus of Moisture) on behalf of the islands.[111] Apollonius describes that "even now the priests offer sacrifices before the rising of the Dog-star."[112]

Throughout literature, the stars and their movements have proved vital in understanding time and literary references; contextualising and understanding the importance of this facet of ancient cultures at large and Greece in particular is crucial in comprehending the influence of folk narratives and possibilities for the inclusion of such key information. The borders and shapes of constellations have been strictly standardised since 1928 and are based on the Western sky maps. These are the sky maps used in modern astronomical research. This traditional sky map is based on the Greek star maps, combined with those of later Western astronomers. [113]

[106] For more on Sirius in legend, folklore, physics, and astronomy, Holberg 2007 provides a detailed demonstration of both ancient and modern understandings and perceptions of the star.
[107] Holberg 2007: xi.
[108] Hes. *WD* 582-588.
[109] Theodossiou *et al.* 2011: 26.
[110] Laoupi 2006: 133.
[111] Arist. *fr.* 511; Diod. Sic. 4.81.1.; Hyg. Poet. *Astr.* 2.4; Apollon. Rhod. *Arg.* 2.498-527.
[112] Apollon. Rhod. *Arg.* 2.527.
[113] Kuperjanov 2006: 45.

Ethnobotany

The development of medicine and therapeutic treatments in the Western world evolved directly from the Greek tradition; Hippocrates' conceptualisation of the four humours[114] was the dominant European medical perspective on the body until the scientific revolution (16th-17th centuries CE): "The repercussions of this physical classification have not subsided to date, especially in psychiatry and psychology, even though they are no longer part of standardised diagnostics."[115] Hippocrates referred to 277 pharmaceutical plants in his work as being assistive to recovery from injury and illness: "observational and empirical knowledge contributed to the fact that some plants had a therapeutic effect for humans and animals; they [ancient Greek practitioners] also determined the quantity for a therapeutic rather than toxic effect."[116]

Beyond the medicinal practice involving plants, they served a phenomenally important economic role in the ancient world, as today. Hesiod's *Works and Days* offers advice to farmers on how best to plant the land to ensure maximum productivity, spices and tea leaves (some of which were integral to specific religious practices), and cassia (from which frankincense and myrrh, two of the most expensive and sought after oils in the ancient world, are harvested) have formed the incentive for many colonial conquests through history: the colonisation of India by European powers during the Age of Discovery is an apt demonstration of this.[117]

The pharmacological properties of herbs have shaped traditional medicine in every culture throughout history – indeed, in the modern age one can find many practitioners of medicine who still follow these traditions: Southern African traditional healers, particularly the Zulu *sangomas,* utilise *muti* with great frequency, and Haitian Vodou's *manbo* and *oungan* continue to use their herbal remedies alongside Roman Catholicism. Today, herbal remedies are grouped under the umbrella term 'holistic medicine', which includes the use of herbs, diet changes, meditation, spiritual purification, and emotional healing, emphasising the whole of the body rather than the ailment in isolation: "holistic medicine is seen as the ideological forerunner of complementary medicine."[118] Herbal treatments of symptoms are crucial to contextualise, as many Greek narratives assume the audience's understanding of not only the use of plants in

[114] The four humours were linked to elements in nature: black bile (earth), yellow bile (fire), blood (air), and phlegm (water). Disease was believed to be caused by an imbalance of these humours. For more on Hippocratic medicinal thought and the influence of it, see Lazarević et al. 2022.
[115] Lazarević et al. 2022: 1050.
[116] Mavrogenis et al. 2018: 1530.
[117] The essential oils derived from these plants are noted in Mavrogenis et al. 2018.
[118] Lazarević et al. 2022: 1049.

treatment, but also the significance of specific herbs. The keying involved in this is thus significant, as the encoded social perceptions of the treatment would be embedded within the manner of description. Ultimately, understanding ethnobotany is important as Greek cosmology unites the physical, psychological, social and spiritual worlds – to exempt any one aspect from a study on folk traditions would impede the study.

These approaches, though drawn from a multiplicity of fields, allow for a weaving of these individual threads into a cohesive methodology, enabling the exploration of connections between ancient texts and cultural ideologies. The application of these approaches to the study of the Greek heroes, idolised as they are even today, allows for the value of folklore elements within these narratives to be shown. Through folklore, we gain insight into how societies have constructed their identities, expressed their values, and communicated knowledge over generations. As societies and cultures continue their eternal evolution, understanding folklore through these foundational methodologies will become increasingly crucial, as folklore serves as a repository of preserved knowledge that has been wielded as an emblem of identity and a nationalistic weapon. Heroic narratives are used as aspirational ideals and as propaganda tools. Revealing underlying biases and culturally encoded knowledge and perceptions within hero narratives can lead to the 'truth' behind the stories given to the best and greatest men to have ever lived.

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Figure 6

Chapter 2: Achilles

Life

Achilles is one of the most famous heroes in the Western world and beyond – the great, beautiful hero of the Trojan War: "Achilles is one of the only heroes whose life is documented quite literally from the cradle to the grave."[1] Achilles was born of the Nereid Thetis and Peleus, King of the Myrmidons. A prophecy declared that Thetis would bear a son who would surpass his father.[2] Zeus and Poseidon, who had pursued Thetis initially, then had her marry the mortal to avoid the threat the prophecy posed. Peleus and Thetis' wedding feast was attended by many Olympian gods, but Eris, goddess of strife, had not been invited, and as a result, presented the Apple of Discord.[3] This apple is the same one that featured in the Judgement of Paris, which led to the Trojan War. As part of the lineage given by Hesiod of the daughters of Nereus, the Nereids, Achilles' parentage is asserted: "And the silver-shod goddess Thetis was subject to Peleus and brought forth lion-hearted Achilles, the destroyer of men."[4] The lineage of Achilles, as given by the much-respected Hesiod and Homer, would likely be perceived as indisputable by the Greek populace.

The education of Achilles is varied – the *Iliad* itself mentions that he was taught by the centaur Chiron, and also describes how he was educated by teachers, like Phoenix, within his father's home.[5] It has been argued that the involvement of Chiron is a post-Homeric invention, attributing Phoenix's role to Chiron.[6] Chiron has always been represented as a centaur of a different kind from other mythical beasts. He is an immortal son of Kronos; according to the *Titanomachy*, Kronos took the form of a stallion and assaulted Philyra, an Oceanid, resulting in the birth of Chiron. He was educated by Apollo and Artemis, from whom he learned the skills of medicine, hunting, music, and prophecy, among others.[7] This is in stark contrast to the Centauromachy between the Centaurs and the Lapiths. Pholus, whom Heracles visited during his labours, is the only other 'civilised' centaur in Greek mythology.[8] Chiron is persistently shown as the teacher of all the best Greek heroes.[9] Why then, would such a hero as Achilles, in

[1] Wittenberg 2023: 48.
[2] Aesch. *PV.* 755-768; Pind. Nem.5.34-37; Pind. *Isthm.* 8.26-47.; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.13.5.
[3] Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 3.2.
[4] Hes. *Theog*. 1006-1007.
[5] *Il*. 9.438-445, 485-495; Hes. *Cat. fr.* 68.100-105 MW (Berlin Papyrus 10560). Eur. *IA* 219.
[6] March 1987: 22-25; Robbins 1993: 9.
[7] Apollod. Bibl. 1.8-9; Pind. *Pyth.* 9.65; Maurice 2015: 142.
[8] Almost all other centaurs in Greek literature are portrayed similarly to Nessus (again, a crucial figure in the Heracles narrative) – they are lustful, bestial, violent, oppose concepts such as *xenia* and marriage, and are easily corrupted by wine. For more on this, see Maurice 2015.
[9] Robbins 1993: 9.

a narrative that is not often contradicted by other authors, have variants of his upbringing in this specific manner? Phoenix makes mention of his role in Achilles' upbringing and education as it is part of his appeal to Achilles to rejoin the fighting: "so I have suffered much through you, and have had much trouble, thinking always how the gods would not bring to birth any children of my own; so that it was you, godlike Achilleus, I made my own child, so that some day you might keep hard affliction from me."[10] Phoenix, a respected leader, is a model instructor for a young Achilles, but Chiron serves a slightly different purpose. Many Greek men would be educated by tutors employed by their fathers, but only those who are perceived as heroes appear to have been taught by Chiron. Chiron's involvement in Achilles' upbringing sets Achilles apart from other youths and gives more credence to his heroic nature: not only is he a demigod, but he is also educated by a centaur who only taught heroes and gods.[11]

Achilles grew up alongside his companion, Patroclus.[12] One fragment describes Patroclus as a kinsman of Achilles: "for Hesiod says that Menoetius the father of Patroclus, was a brother of Peleus, so that in that case they were first cousins."[13] Statius, in his unfinished Roman epic, the *Achilleid*, claims that Patroclus was also a student of Chiron, though this is contradicted by Homer in *Il.* 11.830-831, where it is stated that Achilles taught Patroclus all that he had learned from Chiron. Throughout the *Iliad*, Achilles only refers to Patroclus as his equal, and since its conception, the relationship between the two has generated much discussion.[14]

A handful of post-Homeric sources cover an episode where either Thetis or Peleus dressed Achilles as a girl and hid him in the kingdom of Lycomedes, king of Skyros.[15] This is done to protect Achilles from another prophecy attached to him: he will either live a long life with little glory, or die young in battle and earn great honour. This prophecy can be found at *Il*. 9.140: "For my mother Thetis the goddess of the silver feet tells me I carry two sorts of destiny toward the day of my death. Either, if I stay here and fight beside the city of the Trojans, my return home is gone, but my glory shall be everlasting; but if I return home to the beloved land of my fathers, the excellence of my glory is gone, but there will be a long life left for me, and my end

[10] *Il*. 9.492-495.
[11] Chiron's students, aside from Achilles, include Aristaeus, a son of Apollo and god of beekeeping and other rustic arts (Ap. Rh. *Arg.* 2.500-527); Actaeon, a son of Aristaeus, and grandson of Cadmus (Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.4.4); Asclepius, who would become the god of medicine (*Il.* 4.204-219); Jason, the leader of the Argonauts in the quest for the Golden Fleece (Σ *Od*. 12.69; Hes. *Cat.* fr.13 MW); Medus, also known as Polyxenus and potentially a son of Jason. He would become the founder of the kingdom of the Medes (Hes. *Theog*. 1000-1002).
[12] *Il*. 11.764-779. Hes. *Cat*. fr. 204.87-89 MW
[13] Hes. *Cat.* fr. 61 MW.
[14] Wittenberg 2023: 50-51.
[15] Eur. *Skyrioi* (fr. 681-686 *TrGF* V); Ov. *Met.* 13.162-180; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.13.8.

in death will not come to me quickly." Providing the account of Aristonicus of Tarentum, Photius says that Achilles supposedly went by the names Cercysera, Issa, Prometheus, Aspetos, and Pyrrha.[16] While in Skyros, he fathered two sons: Neoptolemus and Oneiros. Present in the *Iliad* is Achilles' mention of Neoptolemus by name, but little is mentioned about Oneiros anywhere outside of references by Photius to a Ptolemaeus Chennus.[17] The *Little Iliad* was thought to include a quote from Achilles referring directly to Neoptolemus.[18] In this narrative, Odysseus has learned that the Achaeans would not be able to conquer Troy without the aid of Achilles, and as such leaves for Skyros in order to find Achilles. When Achilles reveals himself as a soldier, Odysseus convinces him to lead the Myrmidon ships to battle.

Trojan War

When Achilles arrives at Troy he is perceived as the saviour of the Greek forces. Achilles is the primary subject of the *Iliad*, with the famous opening lines cementing this from the outset: "Sing Goddess, the anger of Peleus' son Achilles."[19] The *Iliad* opens with a divinely sent plague in the tenth year of battle, Agamemnon is forced to give up his war prize, a daughter of a priest of Apollo. He refuses to do so initially, until Achilles assembled the soldiers. During this assembly, it is revealed that the plague is a result of Agamemnon's refusal to give up the woman.[20] Reasoning with Agamemnon, Achilles says:

> Ἀτρεΐδη κύδιστε φιλοκτεανώτατε πάντων…
> λαοὺς δ' οὐκ ἐπέοικε παλίλλογα ταῦτ' ἐπαγείρειν.
> ἀλλὰ σὺ μὲν νῦν τῆνδε θεῷ πρόες· αὐτὰρ Ἀχαιοὶ
> τριπλῇ τετραπλῇ τ' ἀποτείσομεν
>
> Son of Atreus [Agamemnon], most lordly, greediest of all men…
> it is unbecoming for the people to call back things once given.
> Give the girl back to the god; we Achaeans
> thrice and four times over will repay you.[21]

Agamemnon appears threatened by Achilles, who is himself a leader of an army, and viciously attempts to reassert his authority by claiming Achilles' own woman: "I myself shall take her,

[16] Phot. *Bibl.* 190.9.
[17] *Il.* 19.326; Phot. *Bibl*. 190.20. Ptolemaeus Chennus was an Alexandrine grammarian in the reigns of the Roman emperors Trajan (AD 98-117) and Hadrian (AD 117-138).
[18] Σ (T) *Il*. 19.326. "ὃς Σκύρωι μοι ἐνιτέφεται."; *Il.* 19.326 -327.
[19] *Il.* 1.1.
[20] *Il*. 1.53-100.
[21] *Il.* 1.122-128.

your own prize, or that of Aias, or that of Odysseus, going myself in person; and he whom I visit will be bitter." [22] It is then possible to deduce that Achilles is a high-level *basileus*, who not only leads the Myrmidons but is also on such a level that he can question the leader of the Greek forces himself – Agamemnon. This is reinforced in Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*, where Agamemnon presents Achilles as a suitable match for his daughter.[23]

Achilles, however, is young, selfish, and angry.[24] Achilles' arrogance is especially prominent at 1.165: "Always the greater part of the painful fighting is the work of my hands," insinuating that he is a better warrior than the commander Agamemnon.[25] In this argument between Agamemnon and Achilles, we see the first glimpse of Achilles' rage and what he presents as the justification for his actions:

> Then looking darkly at him Achilleus of the swift feet spoke: 'O wrapped in shamelessness, with your mind forever on profit….I for my part did not come here for the sake of the Trojan spearmen to fight against them, since to me they have done nothing…but for your sake, O great shamelessness, we followed, to do you favour , you with the dog's eyes, to win your honour and Menelaos' from the Trojans[26]… And now my prize my prize you threaten in person to strip from me… Always the greater part of the painful fighting is the work of my hands; but when the time comes to distribute the booty yours is the far greater reward, and I with some small thing[27]

Righteously angered and now humiliated by Agamemnon by the stripping of his war prize, a physical representation of his honour, Achilles declares that he will return to Phthia and no longer fight, and his anger goes so far as to make him draw his sword against Agamemnon.[28] Here, Achilles is selfish, ignoring his duties as a soldier and a leader in favour of his survival. His decision is likely influenced by the prophecy, as of all the soldiers fighting in the war, Greek and Trojan alike, only Achilles is *fated* to die should he engage in battle. This prophecy is what drives him away from battle, but his abstinence from battle is what prompts Patroclus to make his fateful decision to pretend to be Achilles at 16.40-45.

It is important to contextualise Achilles' reaction, both within the genre of epic poetry and the *Iliad* itself. Within the *Iliad*, Achilles' passionate, at times arrogant and antagonistic,

[22] *Il*. 1.137-139.
[23] Eur. *IA* 100-105, 363.
[24] Adkins 1982: 295.
[25] *Il*. 1.165.
[26] This is in reference to the oath sworn to defend Helen.
[27] *Il.* 1. 148-167.
[28] *Il*. 1.188-195.

personality is established as an aspect of his personality prior to the events of the war. In an imagined scenario by Odysseus, Peleus says to Achilles before he leaves for war: "My child, for the matter of strength, Athene and Hera will give it if it be their will, but be it yours to hold fast in your bosom the anger of the proud heart, for consideration is better."[29] Achilles' pridefulness and anger are known to his father, but importantly, Achilles does not act in the manner he does with Agamemnon until this point, suggesting that this is a breaking point between the two. In fact, Achilles, who is not subjected to the oath to protect Helen, is involved in the battle in a far more voluntary manner than many of the other soldiers: "Achilles had willingly given his life for promised honour, yet by being dishonoured he had lost both."[30] Again, line 1.165 proves important here: Achilles has been fighting on the front lines, deeply entrenched in a battle for which he has no real personal stake beyond accumulating honour.[31]

Achilles is exempt from the oath sworn to protect Helen, unlike the other Achaean leaders. The oath was undertaken by all those who competed for the hand of Helen. There are three known but not consistent lists of suitors: Pseudo-Apollodorus gives 31 names in *Bilbliotheca* 2.10.8, in the fragmentary *Catalogue of Women and Eoiae* Hesiod provides 12 names in fr.196-204, and Hyginus provides 36 in his *Fabulae* 81. Across all sources, there are 45 distinct names. Achilles is absent in all accounts, but this is explained away as being due to his being too young. Patroclus is present in Pseudo-Apollodorus' and Hyginus' narratives, demonstrating his need to be involved in the battle, but Achilles' reason to fight lies wholly in the prophecy and perhaps pride. The reasons for his involvement in the war to begin with are different from the other leaders, and this may contribute to Achilles' arrogance; he is their saviour needed to win the war but is not bound to fight in this war. The prophecy connected to his life has him dying in battle with glory, but he could also live a long life if he does not fight; the choice is his. Achilles' petulant response to Agamemnon when seen in this light appears a more understandable reaction; Achilles is risking his life for another man's cause and is having his accumulated honour and prizes for his deeds in battle stripped from him. This, however, justifies only Achilles' immediate reaction to Agamemnon in this situation – but does not explain away Achilles' pattern of antagonistic behaviour, which is a crucial component of his characterisation.

[29] *Il*. 9.254-256.
[30] Wittenberg 2023: 49.
[31] *Il.* 1.149-171 and 9.321-327.

To bring Achilles back into battle, an embassy is sent to Achilles, including Odysseus, Phoenix, and Ajax. Achilles welcomes them as friends but is not swayed by their arguments.[32] Indeed, Achilles is entirely unaffected by pleas made by other soldiers that are similar to the one made by Patroclus at 16.20-45, demonstrating that it is not the plea, but that it comes from his dearest companion, that persuades Achilles:

> Homeric values do not require the other chieftains to take Achilles' part in a dispute with Agamemnon and actively restrain him from depriving Achilles of Briseis. Achilles could not effectively censure them for failing to do so. Indeed, he is evidently not even angry with them. But he might well be unmoved by their protestations of past *philotes* and time, which require effective action. Their "eagerness"… to be "nearest and most *philoi*" to Achilles surely betrays their realization that they have not helped Achilles when Achilles needed help.[33]

Once Patroclus is killed in battle, Achilles immediately decides to return to battle, not for honour or glory this time, but rather a full-blooded need for vengeance: "since the spirit within does not drive me to go on living and be among men, except on condition that Hektor first be beaten down under my spear, lose his life and pay the price for stripping Patroklos, the son of Menoitios."[34] Upon hearing of Patroclus' death, Achilles, amid intense grief, flies into a rage and arms himself in armour divinely made by Hephaestus, including the shield of Achilles.[35] Achilles' rage has shifted from anger at being dishonoured by Agamemnon: "He [Agamemnon] cheated me and he did me hurt"[36] and perhaps a fear of the prophecy, to rage at Hector's murder of Patroclus, and an acceptance of his fate: "Now I shall go, to overtake that killer of a dear life, Hektor, then I will accept my own death…if such is the fate which has been wrought for me."[37]

Achilles appears in the *Odyssey* only twice, both in scenes set in the Underworld. Though the *Iliad* does not include the death of Achilles, he is a shade by the time of the *Odyssey*.[38] While many sections of the *Odyssey* are thought to be later additions, it is generally held that the interviews with Achilles, Agamemnon, and Ajax in the Underworld "belong to the oldest stratum of the poem."[39] In the *Odyssey,* Achilles' epithets are again predominantly based on

[32] *Il.* 1.197-198.
[33] Adkins 1982: 312.
[34] *Il*. 18.90-93.
[35] *Il*. 18.468-19.18. The shield of Achilles is famously described in the *Iliad* 18.478-608 and is regarded as the first known example of ekphrasis in ancient Greek poetry. Further discussion on this can be found in Francis 2009.
[36] *Il*. 9.375.
[37] *Il*. 18.114-120.
[38] Achilles' death occurred in the *Aethiopis* (Procl. *Chrest*. 172.)
[39] Edwards 1985: 9.

swiftness of feet, and he again is represented as hot-headed and reckless.[40] Achilles, although he died young, is still seen by Odysseus – his elder and an experienced soldier himself – as "far greatest of the Achaians"[41] and he says of Achilles: "no man before has been more blessed than you, nor ever will be. Before, when you were alive, we Argives honoured you as we did the gods."[42] Achilles retains his authority and power even in death, as well as his belligerent and impatient nature.[43] Achilles says to Odysseus:

> ᾽μὴ δή μοι θάνατόν γε παραύδα, φαίδιμ' Ὀδυσσεῦ.
> βουλοίμην κ' ἐπάρουρος ἐὼν θητευέμεν ἄλλῳ,
> ἀνδρὶ παρ' ἀκλήρῳ, ᾧ μὴ βίοτος πολὺς εἴη,
> ἢ πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι καταφθιμένοισιν ἀνάσσειν.
>
> Never try to console me for dying, radiant Odysseus.
> I would rather follow the plow as thrall to another man,
> one with no land allotted him and not much to live on,
> than be a king over all the perished dead.[44]

Achilles' perception of the prophecy, as detailed at *Il*. 9.140ff., is evident. He sees it as better to live as a poor man working for another, than to be an eternal leader with great honour. Edwards believes that Achilles' feelings here are harmonious with his characterisation in the *Iliad*: "the opinion which Achilles expresses in the *Odyssey* ought to be seen more as a continuation of his position in the *Iliad* than a reversal of it, since nowhere in that poem does he state a preference for κλέος (glory) over a νόστος (homecoming, return)" [45] This is in line with his possible fear of death in the *Iliad*; he returns to battle only because of Patroclus death: "Achilles is pictured here (*Od.* 11.488-491) as a melancholic shade still mourning his death, a conception in keeping with his preoccupation with his own fate and Patroclus' death in the *Iliad*."[46] Edwards holds that Achilles demonstrates an inability to come to terms with death in both Homeric epics. In the *Iliad*, this is most apparent in his prolonged mourning of Patroclus and the lack of peace he feels in book 24 after achieving his revenge,[47] and in the *Odyssey* this is present in his retrospective comment at *Od*. 11.488-491.

[40] Edwards 1985: 5-16.
[41] *Od.* 11.478.
[42] *Od*. 11.483-485.
[43] Edwards, 1985: 49.
[44] *Od.* 11.488-491.
[45] Edwards 1985: 51.
[46] Edwards 1985: 50 (parentheses added).
[47] *Il*. 24.1-18.

Contradicting this, however, are Achilles own words in the *Iliad* to his mother: "I will accept my own death, at whatever time Zeus wishes to bring it about."[48] Edwards' opinion then can only make sense in terms of Achilles' inability to accept the death of Patroclus and not his own. The restlessness he feels after killing Hector seems to have more to do with a lack of purpose and frustration than a lack of acceptance of death. The retrospective given by Achilles in *Odyssey* 11 speaks to Achilles' return to battle and his acceptance of his death as being motivated by vengeance rather than for κλέος. The *Odyssey* uses Achilles' death as a commentary on the heroic value system of the *Iliad,* through the Iliadic hero's own mouth: "The *Odyssey* turns Achilles' famous preference to its own advantage as an assertion that the eventual fate of its own hero is more desirable than the κλέος promised by the *Iliad* to Achilles for a hero's death."[49]

Achilles then inquires after his son, Neoptolemus (11.492-493) and his father, Peleus (11.494-503). Achilles has repeatedly expressed concern that his aged father will be driven from his kingdom, and Proclus' summary of the *Nostoi* confirms that this exile occurred.[50] The aged father being driven from his home is a common motif in heroic myth, and Achilles' concern for his father directly parallels later events in the *Odyssey,* when Odysseus discovers the situation with the suitors and Laertes' retreat.[51] Odysseus' concern for his father is particularly evident in lines 232-234 "Now when much-enduring great Odysseus observed him [Laertes], with great misery in his heart, and oppressed by old age, he stood underneath a towering pear tree and shed tears for him."

Death

There are many different versions of the death of Achilles. In Book 22 of the *Iliad*, Hector predicts Achilles death at the Scaean Gates by an arrow shot by Paris and Apollo.[52] In *Odyssey* 11, Odysseus encounters Achilles as a shade,[53] and in Book 24.35-97 Agamemnon, as a shade, gives an account of Achilles' funeral to him, saying

> μάλα γὰρ φίλος ἦσθα θεοῖσιν.
> ὣς σὺ μὲν οὐδὲ θανὼν **ὄνομ'** ὤλεσας, ἀλλά τοι αἰεὶ
> πάντας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους **κλέος** ἔσσεται ἐσθλόν, Ἀχιλλεῦ·

[48] *Il*. 18.115-116.
[49] Edwards 1985: 52.
[50] Procl. *Crest.* 277. Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 6-13.
[51] The motif of the aged father driven from his home is discussed in Edwards 1985: 56.
[52] *Il*. 22.358-360.
[53] *Od*. 11.467-564.

> You were very dear to the gods. So,
> even now you have died, you have not lost your name, but always
> in the sight of all mankind your fame shall be great, Achilleus.[54]

Undying fame and memory are integral to the Greek hero; in this passage Agamemnon asserts that Achilles' death has ensured his immortalisation in folk memory. Agamemnon also describes the placement of Achilles' funerary mound on a promontory at the Hellespont, overlooking the water and able to be seen from a distance.[55]Achilles' bones are mixed with those of Patroclus – "and apart from those of Antilochus, whom you prized above all the rest of your companions after the death of Patroclus."[56] This reinforces the connection between Achilles and Patroclus as being more affectionate and perhaps intimate than that of Achilles' other partner and potential *eromenos*, Antilochus.

The climax of the *Aethiopis* is the death of Achilles followed by his funeral games and the contest of Ajax and Odysseus. West describes how the presumed poet of the text, one Arctinus,[57] utilised an already existing account of Achilles' death like the account that was known to the poet of the *Iliad*.[58] The Muses' lament, the battle for Achilles' body and his funeral games are known to the poet of the *Odyssey*, and the *Aethiopis* largely includes narratives similar to these.[59] However, the Penthesilea episode does not appear in any other texts ascribed to Homer before the *Aethiopis* and is largely thought to be a late addition to the narrative.[60] The Amazon daughter of Ares, Penthesilea, sets out to fight the Trojans. She is purified by Priam for the involuntary killing of Hippolyta. Achilles kills her in battle, as well as Thersites, after he is abused and ridiculed by him for his alleged affections for Penthesilea.[61] Achilles then sails to Lesbos where he makes sacrifices to Apollo, Artemis, and Leto, after which he is purified for the murder of Thersites by Odysseus.[62] Achilles' death as a result of his heel occurs in Proclus' *Chrestomathia*, "at the Scaean Gates he is shot by Alexander and Apollo in the ankle."[63] The narrative of his mother dipping him in the river Styx to make him invulnerable – leaving only his heel out of the water – is a later narrative that is first found in the 1st century

[54] *Od*. 24.3-4
[55] *Od*. 24.80-84.
[56] *Od.* 24.78-79.
[57] *IG* 14.1284 I 10 = West 2003: 108.
[58] West 2003: 14.
[59] *Od.* 24.36-94; West 2003: 14; Procl. *Chrest.* 172, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 5.4 (West 2003: 112).
[60] West 2003: 15.
[61] Procl. *Chrest.* 172, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 5.1 (West 2003: 110).
[62] Procl. *Chrest.* 172, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 5.1 (West 2003: 110).
[63] Procl. *Chrest.* 172. suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 5.3 (West 2003: 112).

CE in Statius' unfinished *Achilleid*. Ajax collects Achilles' corpse after killing Glaucus, and carries it to the ships, while Odysseus fights off the encroaching Trojans.[64] This is then followed by the laments of Thetis, the Nereids, and the Muses. Unlike the Odyssean narrative of Achilles' death, Thetis removes her son's body from the pyre and takes it to the White Island.[65]

After his death, Achilles' divine armour was the object of a feud between Odysseus and Ajax, depicted commonly in art and literature.[66] Within the Epic Cycle these were covered in the *Aethiopis* and *Little Iliad.* The *Little Iliad* also includes mentions of the famed spear of Achilles, which only he could wield.[67]

Characterisation

Achilles is often given the title 'the best of the Achaeans', though Agamemnon is given this title in the *Iliad* as well, by virtue of being the leader of the best. Ajax is also given the title at *Il.* 2.768, though only because Achilles has abstained from battle. In the *Iliad*, only Achilles is called φέρτατ' Ἀχαιῶν, 'greatest of the Achaeans'.[68]

An author may explicitly describe a character utilising concepts of value and morality, in conjunction with physical or attribute depictions.[69] Within the works of Homer, these depictions are usually explored through epithets, which are used to complete the dactylic hexameter of the poets' works, as well as forming mnemonic aids, as illustrated by Parry (1971) and Lord (1971). Epithets are frequent within the works of Homer and have a "traditional status as compositional and referential elements in and of themselves…they provide access to the traditional signification through the agreed-upon referentiality of the unit they help to make up."[70] Achilles is referred to as σχέτλιε (hard, wretched, cruel), Πηλῆος υἱὲ (son of Peleus), πόδας ὠκὺς Ἀχιλλεύς (swift-footed Achilles), θεοείκελ' Ἀχιλλεῦ (godlike Achilles). These epithets build up a portrayal of Achilles:

> A Homeric audience steeped in metonymic referentiality would interpret the noun-epithet formula not as an especially subtle usage that reveals the poet's delicate sense of irony, nor as

[64] Procl. *Chrest.* 172. suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 5.3 (West 2003: 112).
[65] Procl. *Chrest.* 172. suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 5.4 (West 2003: 112). The White Island is the modern-day Ostrov Zmiinyi, also known as Snake Island, located in Ukrainian territorial waters in the Black Sea.
[66] Soph. *Ajax*; Ov. *Met.* 13.1-381
[67] Σ (T) *Il*. 16.142 ἀλλά μιν οἷος ἐπίστατο πῆλαί Ἀχιλλεύς.
[68] φέρτατ' Ἀχαιῶν occurs twice as a reference to Achilles in the *Iliad*, at 16.21 and 19.216.
[69] Passakos & Raad 2009: 78.
[70] Foley 1991: 142; Akondo & Shifullah 2024: 575.

> a metrical convenience…but as a traditionally sanctioned method of invoking a mythic figure more complex than his participation in any one situation.[71]

The epithet of 'swift-footed'[72] is Achilles' most frequently used epithet in the *Iliad*. Although Achilles is not involved in battle and spends his time being idle in the first eighteen books of the text,[73] the epithet is used frequently, creating an incongruity between Achilles' inaction and his most known aspect.[74] This incongruity provides more credence to Parry (1971) and Lord's (1971) depiction of epithets as stock phrases – it is not truly relevant to the poet that Achilles is not running in that moment, as his epithet is not intrinsically linked to his action in the moment of its use. The same can be said of the epithet "warlike Achilleus" at 16.166, used as Achilles is refusing to fight while Patroclus arms himself for battle. There is the potential for this to be an intentional act to create dramatic irony by playing on the juxtaposition between the effect of the epithet and the action of the hero in that moment; as with most work within Homeric studies, there is much debate to be had around this subject.

Achilles is frequently described as 'godlike' and 'leader of men' throughout the text. The effect of these epithets in the characterisation of Achilles is in line with what is considered typical of a hero – he is a demigod or at the very least, more than a mortal, and an effective leader of his people or his troops. In Book 19, Odysseus says to him:

> ὦ Ἀχιλεῦ Πηλῆος υἱὲ **μέγα φέρτατ' Ἀχαιῶν,**
> κρείσσων εἰς ἐμέθεν καὶ φέρτερος οὐκ ὀλίγον περ
> ἔγχει, ἐγὼ δέ κε σεῖο νοήματί γε προβαλοίμην
> πολλόν, ἐπεὶ πρότερος γενόμην καὶ πλείονα οἶδα.
>
> Son of Peleus, Achilleus, far greatest of Achaians
> you are stronger than I am and greater by not a little
> with the spear, yet I in turn might overpass you in wisdom
> by far, sinch I was born before you and have learned more things.[75]

Here we see the respect, more than just formal obligation, given to Achilles by Odysseus. Also present are the defining traits of both key Homeric heroes: Odysseus is older and wiser, Achilles is a strong, skilled soldier. Also present in this passage is μέγα φέρτατ' Ἀχαιῶν – a

[71] Foley 1991: 142.
[72] This includes all variants of this epithet as translated by Lattimore.
[73] During the embassy to Achilles in Book 9, Achilles is found "delighting his heart in a lyre…with this he was pleasuring his heart, and singing of men's fame." (*Il*. 9.186-189). For more on the incongruity of Achilles' epithets, in *Il.* 24, see Foley 1991: 139-140.
[74] Dunkle 1997: 227.
[75] *Il*. 19.216-219.

fundamental phrase in considerations about the character of Achilles. In comparison with the manner in which other soldiers are described, Achilles' personality can be deduced: Diomedes is represented as λίην μαίνεται – totally berserk in battle – by implication, Achilles is not as battle-mad.[76] Patroclus is perceived as having a moderating effect of Achilles by Menoitios, who appears to recognise Achilles' pride and reactivity.[77] Zanker describes Achilles' character in the early books of the *Iliad* as courteous and tactful, underlining that Achilles' rage is with Agamemnon alone – at least until Hector kills Patroclus.[78] Hector's stripping of Patroclus' corpse (the norm in Ancient Greek warfare) is decried by Zeus himself at 17.204-206. This is likely because Hector wears the armour as if he has killed Achilles (whom the armour is representative of), when in fact he has not.[79]

Even in victory, as he stands over his enemy's dying body, Achilles is far from the picture of a hero as morally right and upstanding. Achilles is the looming threat to the Trojans. Both from a distance and when face to face with him, Achilles is an omen; a dark, threatening presence. The events in Book 22 are primarily from the perspectives of the Trojan nobles, but even when Achilles himself speaks, he does so ὑπόδρα – 'darkly'. Achilles' actions are gruesome even to the gods, who anoint and protect Hectors corpse from Achilles' abuse:

> But the dogs did not deal with Hektor,
> for Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus, drove the dogs back from him
> by day and night, and anointed him with rosy immortal
> oil, so Achilleus, when he dragged him about, might not tear him.
> And Phoibos Apollo brought down a darkening mist about him
> from the sky to the plain, and covered with it all the space that was taken
> by the dead man, to keep the force of the sun from coming
> first, and wither his body away by limbs and sinews.[80]

There is very little of Achilles in Book 22 that is heroic, other than his physical feats. His gruesome defiling of Hector's corpse, graphically depicted at 22.395-400, is methodical and

[76] *Il.* 6.101; Zanker 1997: 74. Diomedes is referred to as being like a bright star – particularly Sirius: "[Athene] made weariless fire blaze from his shield and helmet like that star of the waning summer who beyond all stars rises bathed in the ocean stream to glitter in brilliance" (*Il.* 5.4-6). The association between Sirius and heroes appears to be common.
[77] *Il*. 11.785-790.
[78] Zanker 1997: 75. For more on Homeric arms in general, see Everson 2013.
[79] For more on the wearing of a vanquished enemies' armour, see Allan 2005.
[80] *Il*. 23.184-191

calculated. This is certainly the calmest the audience has seen Achilles in Book 22. His vengeance is satiated, but his cruelty persists.

Little is said of Achilles in terms of appearance. Achilles has blond hair and is handsome and tall. Achilles' hair is described in the *Iliad*: "the goddess standing behind Peleus' son caught him by the fair hair";[81] "He [Achilles] stood apart from the pyre and cut off a lock of fair hair which he had grown long."[82] In epic poetry, ξανθός is translated as 'golden', 'fair', 'blond', though it frequently implies 'auburn'. Post-Homeric literature uses ξανθός for all objects to denote the colour yellow or paleness. Of Achilles' stature, the *Iliad* again proves helpful: "Priam, son of Dardonos, gazed upon Achilleus, wondering at his size and beauty."[83] These are the attributes most often depicted in portrayals of Achilles, as in Plato's *Symposium* (180a).

Folk Memory

Cult worship of Achilles was believed to reinforce ownership over the land. Many of his sanctuaries held that Achilles would protect the surrounding community with his superhuman abilities.[84] Achilles, initially according to the poet Ibycus, married Medea. This tradition is also present in the *Argonautica*, wherein Achilles is said to have been fated to wed Medea in the Elysian fields.[85] Through this it is apparent that the Rhegium-born Ibycus may have drawn on local cult beliefs that emphasised intermarriage – a popular aspect of communities founded in the Archaic age that existed on the periphery of the Greek world. The island of Aegina has a strong attachment to Achilles, with the Aeginetan odes of Pindar celebrating Achilles as a prominent figure of the land.[86] Ibycus is not the only poet to depict Achilles; Simonides uses Achilles as "the mythological equivalent of the war dead at Plataea."[87]

> There is a paradox in traditions related to Achilles: as a literary figure he had enormous panhellenic significance, but his cults were associated with places on the periphery of the Greek world…This must be seen in conjunction with his significance as a literary figure in epics which circulated throughout the Greek world…Cult and poetry are different modes of existence for a hero.[88]

[81] *Il.* 1.197
[82] *Il.* 23.141.
[83] *Il*. 24.629-630.
[84] Michelakis 2002: 2.
[85] Apollon. Rhod. *Arg.* 4.811-6.816; Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 5.5. This marriage is first affirmed by Ibycus and is reinforced by Simonides, but Homer makes no mention of this narrative, making it likely a later addition to Achilles' *logos.*
[86] Pind. *Isthm*. 5, 8; *Nem*. 6.
[87] Michelakis 2002: 5.
[88] Michelakis 2002: 5-6.

The beautiful, tall, blond Achilles we have seen from the *Iliad* to the *Symposium* is present in vase paintings of Athens in the 5th century. One renowned red figure vase painter is the Achilles Painter, so called because his eponymous vase (Vatican 16571)[89], a large red-figure belly amphora depicting Achilles in a short transparent chiton (known as a chitoniskos) under an elaborate cuirass. Achilles appears in a contrapposto pose, looking pensively over his right shoulder. He holds a spear over his left shoulder, with his right hand placed on his hip. He has a cloak draped over his left arm. The reverse features a young woman, possibly Briseis, performing a pacificatory libation. The Achilles Painter's work represents the ideal of the 5th century BCE, the so called 'Golden Age' of Athens during the time of Pericles and Phidias.

The Archetypal *Eromenos*

Patroclus has been presented as the *erastes* in a pederastic relationship with Achilles, who is the *eromenos*. In favour of this pederastic view is the characterisation of the two, with the younger "still beardless."[90] Menoitios had told Patroclus, according to Nestor, that:

> τέκνον ἐμὸν γενεῇ μὲν ὑπέρτερός ἐστιν Ἀχιλλεύς,
> πρεσβύτερος δὲ σύ ἐσσι· βίῃ δ' ὅ γε πολλὸν ἀμείνων.
> ἀλλ' εὖ οἱ φάσθαι πυκινὸν ἔπος ἠδ' ὑποθέσθαι
> καί οἱ σημαίειν· ὃ δὲ πείσεται εἰς ἀγαθόν περ.
>
> 'My child, by right of blood Achilleus is higher than you are,
> but you are the elder. Yet in strength he is far the greater.
> You must speak solid words to him, and give him good counsel,
> and point his way. If he listens to you it will be for his own good.[91]

Achilles is brash and immature in many respects, while the older Patroclus is a more level-headed man who is able to give Achilles counsel – and in fact is the only man whose advice Achilles truly considers.[92] In favour of a more general homosexual relationship between the two is the manner of their address – they are each other's most dear companions, with Achilles wishing: "if only not one of all the Trojans could escape destruction, not one of the Argives, *but you [Patroclus] and I* could emerge from the slaughter so that *we two alone* could break Troy's hallowed coronal."[93] Achilles reveals that he is not motivated by the honour of a Greek

[89] Achilles Painter. (c.45-440 BCE) Attic red figure Amphora, Vulci, Gregorian Etruscan Museum,Vatican 16571.
[90] Pl. *Symp*. 180a.
[91] *Il*. 11.786-789.
[92] As compared to the convey to Achilles comprised of Phoenix, Ajax, and Odysseus - only Patroclus is able to sway the stubborn Achilles.
[93] *Il.* 16.98-100 (emphasis added).

victory over the Trojans, but only by personal honour (as seen at 16.84) and his affection for Patroclus. There are parallels here in the portrayal of this pederastic relationship with that of Gilgamesh and Enkidu.

In the *Symposium* Phaedra declares that Achilles put himself back in the battle due to his own grief, but also says that he honoured Patroclus' choices, and "didn't choose to die *for* Patroclus, but even to die *as well as* him, since Patroclus was already dead."[94] Further, Phaedra disagrees with Aeschylus' apparent belief that Achilles was the *erastes* in the relationship, citing the reasons that he was younger than Patroclus, beardless, and was the more handsome of the two "in fact he was the most attractive hero there was."[95] Plato very firmly presents the two as lovers, evidenced by fact that of the four times Achilles is mentioned by name in the *Symposium,* three of those instances pair the two together.[96] This often is the case still today, as any mention of Achilles is usually connected to Patroclus' name – an outright dismissal of their affection (of whatever sort that may be) would be utterly remiss. Further, Achilles is presented alongside Alcestis in terms of how "only lovers are prepared to sacrifice themselves."[97] There are also repeated mentions of the two as a pair the in the speeches of Diotima and Phaedrus, perhaps two of the most famous speakers on love in Plato's philosophical works.[98]

Associations with Sirius

Many heroes have links with celestial bodies and constellations, and Achilles is no different. He is repeatedly referred to as various stars. In Book 22, he is compared to Hesperus, and to Phosphorus in Book 23.[99] Hesperus is the evening star, half-brother of Phosphorus, the morning star. Both Hesperus and Phosphorus are the planet Venus, but in differing personifications of the planet.[100] At the onset of his duel with Hector, Achilles is referred to as being like "the star they give the name of Orion's Dog."[101]

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[94] Pl. *Symp*. 179e (emphasis added).
[95] Pl. *Symp*. 180a.
[96] Pl. *Symp.* 179-180, 208d.
[97] Pl. *Symp.* 179b.
[98] Kraut 2019: 552.
[99] *Il.* 22.317-320; 23.226-228.
[100] The Greek Ἕσπερος (Hesperus) corresponds to the Latin *vesper,* both meaning evening-star. The Greek Φωσφόρος (Phosphorus) corresponds to the Latin word *lucifer* – both translated as 'dawn-bringer' / 'light-bringer'. The genealogy of these stars is varied and has almost no continuity, with almost every mention of their lineage providing different parentage.
[101] *Il*. 22.29. The full simile is: "The aged Priam was the first of all whose eyes saw him [Achilles] as he swept across the flat land in full shining, like that star which on in the autumn and whose conspicuous brightness far outshines the stars that are numbered in the night's darkening, the star they give the name of Orion's Dog, which

Homer uses similes relating to Sirius and the star's attributes throughout the *Iliad,* although he never uses the name 'Sirius'. At *Il.* 5.5-6 Diomedes is referred to as wearing armour "like that star of the waning summer who beyond all stars rises bathed in the ocean stream to glitter in brilliance." By implication of a comparison to Sirius, Achilles, compared directly at *Il.* 22.29 to the Dog Star, is the one bringing this fever upon the world. This fever is most likely not the physical sickness that Sirius was thought to bring upon men, but rather indicates the effect upon the Trojans of the sight of Achilles.[102] The description of this reaction to Achilles as a 'fever' indicates its intensity – one pictures sweats, shivers, and weakness of the body and mind; a feverish man is not one fit for battle. The mere sight of Achilles brings the Trojans to such a state.

In the first part of Book 22, Achilles is hunting for Hector. When he finally meets Hector in battle, Achilles rejects any 'agreements' (συνημοσύνας) – used only here in the *Iliad.*[103] Here Achilles again refuses to abide by wartime conventions, as he has done so with Agamemnon early in the text, and rejects his humanity, comparing himself and Hector to animals in a hunt. Beyond the various hunting similes comparing Hector and Achilles to various animals engaging in hunts,[104] Achilles speaks as though he himself were a hunting dog: "I wish only that my spirit and fury would drive me to hack your meat away and eat it raw for the things you have done to me."[105] This gruesome depiction illustrates how Achilles has departed from his humanity. Sirius is also, throughout history, associated with wolves. Achilles' speech at 22.345-354 appears to favour the wolfish, wild, aspects of Sirius, and Achilles is again compared to a hunting dog at 22.188-193. Nagy holds that the heroes who are described as 'mad dogs' are those closely aligned with and modelled on the god Ares: "In war, a warrior who is possessed by the god Ares experiences a kind of martial fury that is typically bestial."[106]

The minor Greek goddess Lyssa (Λύσσα) is the goddess of madness and frenzy and is also personified as Madness. λύσσα is always used by Homer in reference to martial rage, while after Homer it is often used in reference to madness as caused by the gods. When used in

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is brightest among the stars, and yet is wrought as a sign of evil and brings on the great fever for unfortunate mortals. (*Il*. 22.25-31).

[102] When Patroclus charges into battle using Achilles' armour: "the battalions were shaken in the expectation that by the ships swift-footed Peleion had thrown away his anger and chosen the way of friendship. Then each man looked about him for a way to escape the sheer death." (*Il.* 16.280-283). Here the effect of the mere thought of Achilles rejoining the battle is shown.

[103] *Il*. 22.261.

[104] Such as that found at *Il*. 22.139-143.

[105] *Il*. 22.346-348.

[106] Nagy 2019.

reference to dogs, λύσσα is translated as 'rabies'. At *Il*. 8.299, Hector is described as κύνα λυσσητῆρα – a 'rabid dog'. The connection between rabid dogs and warriors is fairly common in Greek narratives, potentially to link the savage nature of the actions of a wolf in hunt with a soldier in battle. The dog, the wolf, and the man form a type of triad – dog and warrior are opposed to the wolf with regards to tame *versus* wild. But while the wolf is always wild, the dog and man can be driven from being tame to becoming wild – wolfish.[107] Achilles is possessed by *lyssa* at the moment of his most intense instance of martial rage at *Il.* 21. 542-3.[108]

Hector challenges the best of the Achaeans to a duel at *Il* 7.50, declaring that the tomb of this man, once he has been defeated, will lie over the Hellespont:

> τὸν δὲ νέκυν ἐπὶ νῆας ἐϋσσέλμους ἀποδώσω,
> ὄφρά ἑ ταρχύσωσι κάρη κομόωντες Ἀχαιοί,
> σῆμά τέ οἱ χεύωσιν ἐπὶ πλατεῖ Ἑλλησπόντῳ.
> καί ποτέ τις εἴπῃσι καὶ ὀψιγόνων ἀνθρώπων
> νηῒ πολυκλήϊδι πλέων ἐπὶ οἴνοπα πόντον·
> ἀνδρὸς μὲν τόδε σῆμα πάλαι κατατεθνηῶτος,
> ὅν ποτ' ἀριστεύοντα κατέκτανε φαίδιμος Ἕκτωρ.
> ὥς ποτέ τις ἐρέει· τὸ δ' ἐμὸν κλέος οὔ ποτ' ὀλεῖται.
>
> his corpse I will give back among the strong-benched vessels
> so that the flowing-haired Achaeans may give him due burial
> and heap up a mound upon him beside the broad passage of Helle.
> And some day one of the men to come will say, as he sees it,
> one who in his benched ship sails on the wine-blue water:
> 'this is the mound of a man who died long ago in battle, who was one of the bravest, and glorious Hektor killed him.' So he will speak some day, and my glory will not be forgotten.[109]

This boast does come to pass – Achilles, the *aristos* (best) of the Achaeans, is cremated and enshrined on the Hellespont, but it is Hector who is killed by the 'best of the Achaeans'.[110] The tomb of Achilles was the primary subject of his hero cult. The ceramic record of this location, known as Achilleion, demonstrates that it was settled in the early 6th century BCE – which is

[107] Nagy 2019.
[108] λύσσα δέ οἱ κῆραιὲν ἔχε κρατερή, μενέαινε δὲ κῦδος ἀρέσθαι. – "strong madness forever holding his heart and violent after his glory".
[109] *Il.* 7.84-91.
[110] *Il*. 7.50.

corroborated by the literary account of Herodotus.[111] Pisistratus, the Athenian tyrant, seized control of Sigeum, and set his illegitimate son, Hegesistratus, in command. During this time, Mytilene launched attacks on this territory from Achilleion, demanding the return of the land, though their claims on the land were refuted by the Athenians who argued: "Aeolians had no more right to the land of Ilium than themselves or any other Greeks who had helped Menelaus avenge the abduction of Helen."[112]

Archetypal Übermensch

The blond, hyper-masculine soldier is prototypically present in Achilles. The *Übermensch* or *hyperanthropos* that has become the quintessential heroic ideal is present in portrayals of Achilles from the beginning of his *logos* in Ancient Greece. Achilles has always been the best soldier amongst his peers, the most beautiful and beloved. This depiction of the hero persisted from Homer through the fifth century BCE, and into the minds of artists.[113] In the modern Western World, which takes a great deal of inspiration politically and socially from Ancient Greece, it appears that Achilles forms a foundation for the portrayals of heroes. The militarisation of heroes – perhaps best represented by the media propaganda during both World Wars – may draw on Achilles' role and almost sole purpose for existence, as being a man who could alone turn the tide of one of the greatest battles in history. The individualisation of the soldier as a hero in propaganda during this time certainly points to this. In *Alcibiades I* 115a-b and *Nichomachean Ethics* 9.8, the mark of a good man is linked to doing good in the name of someone dear, and dying for the sake of a cause or a friend is a noble choice. The continued, global, militarised exploitation of this concept in propaganda is immense – to die young for a patriotic cause is presented as nobler than living a long life.

Conclusion

Alexander the Great had a "well-attested obsession" with Achilles, to the degree that he almost undoubtedly consciously imitated the hero.[114] Plato's "imagination is fired, as Alexander's was to be, by the charismatic figure of Achilles: daring warrior, blood thirsty rebel, lover and brooding sceptic rolled into one."[115] At *Apology* 28b, Socrates draws a comparison between his willingness to become a martyr for his philosophy to Achilles' willingness to die to avenge

[111] Cook 1973: 185; Hdt. 5.94.
[112] Hdt. 5.94.
[113] For example, the *Anger of Achilles* by Jacques-Louis David (1819), currently housed in the Kimbell Art Museum in Fort Worth, Texas and *The Death of Achilles* by Peter Paul Rubens (1630) housed in the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen in Rotterdam.
[114] Hobbs 2006: 176.
[115] Hobbs 2006: 178.

Patroclus. The death of Achilles was thought of continually throughout the fifth century; Achilles was romanticised in thought as preferring death before dishonour. Contrary to this, however, is Achilles refusing to fight any longer. This can be explained by the fact that Achilles fought previously, with full knowledge of the prophecy, and only withdrew when he was slighted by Agamemnon. He evidently did not withdraw to save his own life, but his pride. The dishonour he faced was not a meaningless life, but rather the slights of Agamemnon.

Achilles' rage is, of course, the most famous characteristic linked with the hero, though that martial *furor* that is present in the *Iliad* is linked to Achilles' rather gentle affection for Patroclus. With this in mind, the vengeful soldier shining brilliantly in his divinely made armour on the battlefield, single-handedly turning the tide of a decades-long war, is inextricably triggered by the youthful pride and affection of a young man who is bound by a prophecy. The raw, wrathful, Ares-like soldier that Achilles is remembered as, that the opening line of the *Iliad* recalls, is only one aspect of his character.

One of the most famous paintings of Achilles *(Figure 12)* recalls the more affectionate side, depicting the hero tending to a wounded Patroclus.[116] The conceptualisation of Achilles as a model *eromenos* in the *Symposium* demonstrates that this was a consistent, detailed discussion surrounding Achilles' character. As a youthful, blond, educated man skilled in the arts, with his martial prowess taking prominence in depictions of his character, it is of little wonder that he was considered an archetypal Greek ideal. Present in the continued discussions of Achilles in the 5th century are indications that there is little evolution in the depictions of Achilles. With his life documented literally from cradle-to-grave by Homer and other poets of the Epic Cycle, later poets may have been limited somewhat in any adaptations of the hero – to change Achilles too much would be antagonistic to the teaching of Homer. This is not to say that no innovation occurs, only that these evolutions in character appear to be more in regard to differing emphasis on the attributes of Achilles.

To the Greeks of the 5th century, Achilles represented a 'pure' hero from the Age of Heros – out of Homer's mouth they received stories about and references to Achilles' entire life story. Even Odysseus had room for innovation separate from Homer, as his early life is not given such a degree of detail by the hexameter poets. To aspire to be a 'pure' hero of Homer would, to a fifth

[116] Sosias Painter (c.500BCE). *Achilles tending Patroclus wounded by an arrow,* tondo of an Attic red figure kylix. Vulci, Antikensammlung, Berlin F2278.

century Greek man, be the absolute pinnacle of what a man can be – as close to being a demi-god as a mortal man may ever come.

Figure 7

Chapter 3: Odysseus

Life

Receiving boons from gods is typical of heroes, as is a divine lineage. Though most heroes are immediately descended from divinities – either their father or mother is an immortal being – Odysseus' parents are not divine. Odysseus has divine lineage, but only from his great-grandfather, a more indirect manner than many other heroes. Odysseus was born to Laërtes, King of the Ionian Cephallenains, and Anticlea. In Sophocles' *Ajax* and Euripides' *Cyclops*, however, an alternate lineage is given through Sisyphus, who is renowned for his punishment for trickery and for escaping death twice.[1] Odysseus is a great-grandson of Hermes and is favoured by the military tactician goddess Athene.[2] He enjoys the aid of both Olympian gods throughout the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

The entire *Odyssey* centres on a theme of reclaiming and establishing Odysseus' identity: "he helps forge a new sense of Greek identity out of his experiences among the peoples and places overseas."[3] His name is central to this establishing of identity, famously so in the Polyphemus episode. Odysseus' name is the subject of a pun – his grandfather Autolycus tells his daughter that the infant must be named Odysseus, as he has come to a place that is ὀδυσσάμενος – hated.[4] Coming from Autolycus, the famed thief, the word can be perceived as more of a 'bane' or 'hostility' than genuine enmity.[5] Odysseus repeatedly proves himself to be this very thing: a bane to Poseidon, his primary antagonist in the text. For Homer to have included a narrative specifically focused on the naming of Odysseus and not merely his upbringing demonstrates that there is intentional dramatic irony in the very name 'Odysseus'.

Many of the sources for Odysseus' pre-Trojan War activities postdate Homer by a substantial amount of time – namely works by Pseudo-Apollodorus (possibly 2nd century BCE but thought to be later than this) and Hyginus (Latin author, c. 64 BC- 17 AD). These include an attempt by Odysseus to evade honouring his oath to Menelaos to defend Helen by feigning madness, and the journey of Odysseus to retrieve a disguised Achilles from Scyros.[6] The lack of detail in Odysseus' early life given by such authorial poets as Homer allowed for the possibility of a larger degree of innovation and evolution to occur among later poets. The tragedians would

[1] Soph. *Ajax.* 189-190; Eur. *Cyc*. 104.
[2] Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.9.16.
[3] Dougherty 2001: 161.
[4] *Od.* 19.407.
[5] Dimock 1956: 52.
[6] Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 3.7; Hyg. *Fab*. 95-96.

exploit the Homeric characterisation of Odysseus, particularly his silver-tongued nature, as well as the connotations of his descent from Hermes, and Laërtes or Sisyphus – all characters who are known to have trickster attributes. Tricksters serve a convenient narrative function; while a hero is concerned with upholding customs and a villain is focused on socially amoral actions, the Trickster is a morally grey character who embodies an often-paradoxical role. Heroes and villains are clearly defined and categorised, whereas Tricksters lack clear distinctions.[7]

War and Wanderings

Odysseus is an immensely influential Greek hero within Homer's *Iliad*. He is perceived as a trustworthy advisor, supporting Agamemnon's authority and providing a heroic model of morale, order, and great skill. On more than one occasion, Odysseus persuades Agamemnon not to withdraw from battle.[8] He is also part of the embassy to Achilles which attempts to convince Achilles to return to battle.[9]

Proclus goes on to describe the building of the Trojan Horse, which Epeios built at the behest of Athene.[10] Odysseus, while disguised, enters the city of Troy on a reconnaissance mission and is recognised by Helen and comes to an agreement with her regarding the attack on the city.[11] It is not specified by Proclus what this agreement is. The famous narrative of the Greek soldiers hidden inside the wooden horse is depicted at epit. 5.9:

> Then they put the leading heroes into the wooden horse. The rest of the Greeks burn their huts and they withdraw to Tenedos. The Trojans, believing themselves rid of their troubles, take the wooden horse into the city by breaching a portion of the wall, and start celebrating their supposed victory over the Greeks.[12]

The number of soldiers within the wooden horse varies between sources – Apollodorus describes fifty men, but adds that the *Little Iliad* describes thirteen.[13] Further, the date of the siege of Troy also varies. A Scholiast on Euripides' *Hecuba* cites Callisthenes for the detail that Troy was taken in the month of Thargelion,[14] supposedly on the 12th day of the month, "but

[7] Hyde 2010: 167.
[8] At *Il*. 2.169, Odysseus is referred to as "the equal of Zeus in counsel."
[9] *Il.* 9.165-170
[10] Procl. *Chrest.* 206. suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 5.8 (West 2003: 122).
[11] Procl. *Chrest.* supppleta ex Apollod. *epit* 5.8 (West 2003: 122).
[12] Procl. *Chrest.* supppleta ex Apollod. *epit* 5.9 (West 2003: 123-124).
[13] Apollod. *Bibl*. *epit*. 5.14. (West 2003: 132).
[14] A month occurring in the spring season of the Northern Hemisphere, approximately equivalent to May/June in the Gregorian calendar.

according to the author of the *Little Iliad* [Troy was taken] on the 23rd [of Thargelion]."[15] This may be Callisthenes of Olynthus, a famed historian who served Alexander the Great and had connections to Aristotle. Evidence given by Callisthenes for this is that the *Little Iliad* specifically describes that the siege occurred in the middle of the night with a bright moon rising, which was said to rise only at midnight on the 23rd of the month.[16] West notes that this calculation is based on that of Damastes of Sigeum, the 5th century BCE Greek geographer and historian (fr.7 Fowler), and Ephorus of Cyme, whose *Historiai* is generally believed to be the primary if not sole source for Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca historica* (*FrGrHist* F 226).[17]

The *Iliou persis*, attributed to Arctinus of Miletus,[18] is summarised by Proclus, with additions and variations from Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*.[19] The narrative of the wooden horse is present in this text as it is in the *Little Iliad*, including the murder of Astyanax by Odysseus.[20] There is fragmentary evidence from a Scholiast on the *Odyssey* that describes a debate on the usage of δέκτηι at *Od*. 4.248. The "Cyclic poet" takes the word as the name of a man from whom Odysseus borrows the rags which he uses to disguise himself, while "Aristarchus takes the word to mean 'a beggar.'"[21] In the *Nostoi*, Neoptolemus encounters Odysseus at Maronea, sometimes identified as the Ismaros of the *Odyssey,* on his return home.[22]

The events in the *Little Iliad* are listed in *IG* 14.1284 I 10 and include Odysseus and the wooden horse.[23] During the funeral games of Achilles, the quarrel between Ajax and Odysseus over the arms of Achilles occurs.[24] The suicide of Ajax is attested as belonging in the *Aethiopis* by a Scholiast on Pindar: "for the author of the *Aethiopis* says that Ajax killed himself towards dawn."[25] Nestor supposedly suggested that the Greek forces send some men to eavesdrop on Trojan women to get their opinion on the dispute:

> They heard some girls arguing, one of whom said that Ajax was much better than Odysseus, explaining: Ajax, after all, lifted up the warrior son of Peleus and carried him out of the fighting, but noble Odysseus would not. But the other retorted, by providence of Athena, what did you

[15] Σ Eur. *Hec*. 910; *FrGrHist* 124 F 10a (West 2003: 132), parentheses added.
[16] Σ Eur. *Hec*. 910; *FrGrHist* 124 F 10a (West 2003: 132).
[17] West 2003: 134 n.43.
[18] Procl. *Chrest*. 239, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl*. *epit*. 5.16; Dion. *Hal. Ant. Rom*. 1.68.2 (West 2003: 142).
[19] Procl. *Chrest.* 239, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl epit*. 5.16-25 (West 2003: 142-146)
[20] Procl. *Chrest.* 239, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl epit*. 5.20.
[21] Σ Od. 4.248, δέκτηι (West 2003: 130).
[22] Procl. *Chrest*. 277, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 6.1-30 (West 2003: 156; *Od*. 9.196-211; Isaac 1986: 113.
[23] *IG* 14.1284 I 10 (West 2003: 118).
[24] Procl. *Chrest.* 172, supppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 5.4 (West 2003: 112).
[25] Σ Pind. *Isth*. 5.58 (West 2003: 116).

> say? How can you be so wrong? Even a woman could carry a load, if a man put it onto her, but she couldn't fight.[26]

Proclus' *Chrestomathia* again proves to be one of our most detailed fragmentary sources, describing the events of the *Little Iliad* as including the awarding of Achilles' armour to Odysseus, the subsequent madness and suicide of Ajax, and the retrieval of Heracles' bow by Odysseus and Diomedes.[27] Herein we also have the mention of the retrieval of Neoptolemus by Odysseus, who then gives him Achilles' arms.[28]

Though blessed by Hermes and Athena, Odysseus makes a true enemy out of Poseidon.[29] By leaving Polyphemus alive, Odysseus leaves a loose end; Polyphemus prays to his father Poseidon to:

> Grant that Odysseus, sacker of cities, son of Laertes, who makes his home in Ithaca, may never reach that home; but if it is decided that he shall see his own people, and come home to his strong-founded house and to his own country, let him come late, in bad case, with the loss of all his companions, in someone else's ship, and let him find troubles in his household.[30]

Women in the *Odyssey* are depicted either as virtuous or transgressive and dangerous – the Madonna/Whore Complex ensures that a woman cannot be seen as both. The loyal, clever Penelope and virtuous, naïve Nausicäa are juxtaposed against the magical and emboldened Calypso and Circe. To differing degrees, women who lie outside the patriarchal portrayal of women in the *Odyssey* are viewed as dangerous: Circe is dangerous because she is a sorceress, but Calypso is dangerous primarily because she is a temptation to Odysseus. Hypsipyle in the *Argonautica*, Dido in the *Aeneid*, Ariadne in the Theseus *logos*; all are women who distract the hero from his goal. Calypso 'distracts' Odysseus from his attempt to return home – she is not the same as the wicked sorceress that Circe shows herself to be. She keeps Odysseus with her through ἴσχει – restraining him, but the force of ἴσχει is not nearly as strong as the image of a weeping Odysseus would lead one to believe.[31] Undoubtedly, Calypso desperately wants Odysseus to remain with her, but once she is prompted by Hermes to send Odysseus away from her land, her anger is at Hermes: "you [gods] are resentful towards the goddesses for sleeping openly with such men."[32] Even with her clear reluctance to assist Odysseus in leaving her lands,

[26] Σ Ar. *Equ*. 1056a.
[27] Procl. *Chrest.* 206, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl*. *epit.* 5.6-7 (West 2003: 120).
[28] Procl. *Chrest.* 206, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 5.7 (West 2003: 120).
[29] *Od.* 13.340-43; Segal 1992: 491.
[30] *Od.* 9.530-535.
[31] *Od.* 4.555-559.
[32] *Od*. 5.119-120.

she wishes him well, clearly knowing that he will leave as soon as he is able to, as the gods have decreed it.[33]

Hypsipyle is associated consistently with textiles, and these textile gifts are mentioned repeatedly in erotic scenes and scenes of betrayal, such as Dido's suicide.[34] Penelope is famously associated with woven garments – her continued and laborious weaving to keep the suitors at bay allows her to reject the suitors in a socially acceptable and feminine manner. The feminine art expressed in weaving is a common representation of femininity, marking Penelope as the ideal wife – loyal and feminine even in her bold actions in ruling in her husband's absence: "As Penelope is made almost a heroine when it is indeed Odysseus, her husband, is the hero of this epic, she is still restricted by the authority of her husband and the patriarchal system."[35]

Penelope's loyalty is consistently rewarded with the repeated desperation and longing that her husband shows for her (as at *Od*. 5.210), and the innocent Nausicäa is rewarded for her virtue in the honour Odysseus shows to her; but the transgressing women – Circe and Calypso – are abandoned.[36] Though Odysseus longs for Penelope, he lives with and sleeps with Calypso for seven years, most of his arduous *nostos*. Though they are undoubtedly lovers, they are not equals – Calypso, a goddess and Odysseus, a stranded mortal – Calypso is still female, and thus beholden not only to Zeus' orders but also the social implications of her femininity, she cannot do anything beyond complaining about the double standard and must let Odysseus leave.[37]

Hypsipyle's erotic cloak, given to Jason in the *Argonautica,* is linked to Calypso's gift to Odysseus.[38] There is much that can be said about the symbolism of the gift, but most relevant is the visual reminder that Jason abandoned Hypsipyle, as Theseus abandoned Ariadne, as Aeneas abandoned Dido, and as Odysseus abandoned Calypso. In each case, there is a degree of affection, or at the very least lust, between the hero and the 'other woman,' but the gods decree that the hero must leave her. Hypsipyle, Calypso, and Dido are the 'other women' on the hero's journey. They are 'distractions' from the goal; their associated heroes recognise this (after some divine prompting) and continue on their quest. Crucially, however, they are not the typical femme fatale that the hero's journey lays out for the hero – in Odysseus' case, these

[33] *Od.* 5.203-214.
[34] Krevans 2003: 181.
[35] Baysal 2024: 154.
[36] Baysal 2024: 149-152.
[37] Baysal 2024: 152.
[38] *Od*. 5.264.

seductresses are the Sirens and Circe; Calypso falls only on the periphery of this category. There is genuine affection, to a degree, between the hero and this 'other woman' – they do not seek to destroy the hero but are forced to love and lose him at the will of the gods.

With Nausicaä, Odysseus is respectful and flatters her with comparisons to the goddess of virgins, Artemis, and avoids erotic allusions in his speech to aid in making himself appear to be less threatening (as he is a naked, strange man):

> Although the hero will treat Nausicaa's interest with respect, he is careful not to encourage [her affections]. He understands that her attraction will be useful to him; but he takes care, throughout his stay amongst the Phaeacians, that this does not become a trap.[39]

When he arrives back at Ithaca, Athena disguises the land to him to the extent that it appears as yet another foreign land.[40] Odysseus' journey lends itself easily to images of colonial conquest – Odysseus lands on a new shore, encounters hostile inhabitants of some nature who are not nearly so civilised as he, and defeats them by either outright slaughter or by introducing more civilised behaviour. The suitors' behaviour is outside the just and moral expectation, with the verb δαρδάπτουσιν at *Od*. 14.93 used to describe the suitors devouring Odysseus' possessions, recalling the image of Polyphemus at 9.292 gruesomely devouring two of Odysseus' men. The force of this: "takes Ithaca out of the world of civilised men and locates it, in Odysseus' absence, in a primitive landscape of savage cannibals."[41] There are intentional parallels drawn between the Cyclops and the suitors regarding their behaviours, *Od.* 20.347-349, particularly, dealing with the monstrous, hostile Polyphemus, prepares Odysseus to deal with the threat of the suitors at home. The assimilation of the suitors' behaviour to that of the Cyclops legitimises their destruction at the hands of Odysseus, a particularly cruel one that, though legitimised by the poet, is not condoned by him. The colonial imagery throughout the *Odyssey* lends itself to a culmination in a metaphorical re-founding of Ithaca: "Thus Odysseus' re-foundation transforms Ithaca's landscape from a potential or ideal colonial site, as articulated through his experiences in his travels, to a fully realised one suitable for the real world of archaic Greece."[42]

[39] Minchin 2019: 356.
[40] *Od*.13.200-203.
[41] Dougherty 2001: 165.
[42] Dougherty 2001: 172.

Death

Odysseus' death was the content of the final poem in the Epic Cycle – the *Telegony.* The text is lost but supposedly told of the last voyage of Odysseus and his death at the hands of Telegonus, his son by Circe. The *Telegony*, as Proclus declares, was composed by a Eugammon of Cyrene, and contained the burial of the suitors, sacrifices made by Odysseus to the Nymphs, as well as a sacrifice to Poseidon, as specified by the seer Tiresias.[43] Odysseus then goes to the kingdom of the Thesprotians, where he makes this sacrifice to Poseidon. He then marries the queen of the land, Callidice, before war breaks out between the Thesprotians. After the queen's death, the kingdom is given to her son by Odysseus, named Polypoites. [44] Callidice does not appear in any other known text beyond the *Telegony.* Penelope also bore Odysseus a son named Ptoliporthes during this period.[45] The birth of this son under the same name is supported by Pausanias.[46] Odysseus then returns to Ithaca. Telegonus has sailed in search of his father, having learned of his patronage from Circe.[47] Landing at Ithaca, he ravages the land. Odysseus defends his land and is killed by Telegonus with a spear tipped with a barb from a stingray made of adamant and gold.[48] Telegonus does not know that the man is his father – when he learns of this, he takes his father's corpse, Penelope, and Telemachus to his mother, who grants them immortality. Telegonus "sets up" with Penelope, and Telemachus with Circe.[49]

[43] Procl. *Chrest.* 306, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl*. *epit.* 7.34 (West 2003: 166).
[44] Procl. *Chrest.* 306, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl*. *epit*. 7.35 (West 2003: 166).
[45] Procl. *Chrest.* 306, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 7.3 (West 2003: 168).
[46] Paus. 8.12.5.
[47] Telegonus is attested by Eustathius to be Odysseus' son through Calypso, rather than Circe. (Eust. *Od*. 1796.52 = West 2003: 170).
[48] Σ *Od*. 11.134, θάνατος δέ τοι έζ αλός. (West 2003: 170).
[4949] Procl. *Chrest.* 306, suppleta ex Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 7.35-37; Eust. *Od*. 1796.52 (West 2003: 170).

Characterisation

Odysseus' appearance has been contested in some regards, particularly his hair. The nature of a hero's appearance is important as it can be argued to represent the ideal form: "the colour and length of hair and the way it is worn, the Greek poets depicted youth or age, beauty or ugliness, nobility or baseness."[50] Long hair was an outward sign of a man being of noble birth, and this symbol was still in place by the battle of Thermopylae, as evidenced by Herodotus' description of the Spartan hoplites combing their hair before battle.[51] In Book 6, a description of Odysseus' hair depicts it as ὑακινθίνῳ ἄνθει ὁμοίας – resembling the flower of the hyacinth.[52] This hyacinth, however, is generally accepted not to be the *Hyacinthus orientalis*, but may be from the *Scilla*, *Delphinium*, *Iris*, or *Gladiolus* genera. One which is compatible with two occurrences of the hyacinth in Homer's works (also at *Il*. 14.348) is the *Scilla bifolia*, also known as the two-leaf squill. Eustathius believed this description to mean that Odysseus' hair is black in colour. Lexicographers have supported this claim, along with later English poets using 'hyacinthine' as a synonym for black as well as blue. The Ancient Greeks would refer to blue and purple tones in the same manner as they would black – "for the early Greek poets, value–relative darkness or lightness made a stronger impression than hue, particularly in dark-coloured objects."[53] Other versions of the phrase have taken it as meaning that his hair is curly, like the petals of the hyacinth. It is common in English to refer to colours through flowers: lily-

Figure 8
Hyacinthus orientalis flowers. 2017. Public Domain (CC0).

Figure 29
Scillia bifolia flowers. 2013. Björn S. Chaumont, France. CC BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

[50] Irwin 1990: 210.
[51] Hdt. 7.208.
[52] *Od*. 6.231.
[53] Irwin 1990: 207. An in-depth discussion on the Greek conceptualisation of colour can be found in Irwin 1974. *Od*. 5.132 ἐνὶ οἴνοπι πόντῳ (on the wine-dark sea) is often quoted in a demonstration of the peculiarities and difficulties of Homeric vocabulary with regards to colour.

white, a rose-coloured blush; it is not a stretch to imagine the Greeks utilising flower-based epithets for descriptions, in fact, translations into English will often resort to using the English practice. While English idiom uses these epithets primarily with regard to colour, the Greeks may have used flower-based comparisons to refer to colour as well as "a shared or derived quality of texture, sound, or fragrance."[54] There is evidence of this use of plant-based similes in *Hom. Hymn Demeter* (177-178), where the hair of the daughters of Celeus are described as flowing "like the crocus flower,"[55] as well as in the *Iliad* (6.146), in which Homer compares the ageing of leaves to the ageing of men. The reference to Odysseus' hair as hyacinthine appears then to have more relevance to the texture or shape of his hair than the common attribution of it to his hair colour.

Regarding Odysseus' other characteristics, he is undoubtedly especially handsome. In epic poetry, "Dark skin is a mark of beauty in men; it makes a manly contrast with the idealized whiteness of women's skin,"[56] though this begins to change in later writers who use the colouring of a man to distinguish non-Greeks from Greeks. This dark skin of Odysseus is evidenced in *Od*. 16.175. Odysseus is also tall, a mark "by which a deity may be known,"[57] though he is explicitly shorter than Agamemnon, as evidenced at *Il*. 3.194. In this same passage of the *Iliad*, Odysseus is described as having broader shoulders than Agamemnon – a mark of a strong military leader: "shorter in truth by a head than Atreus' son Agamemnon, but broader, it would seem, in the chest and across the shoulders."[58] Odysseus' muscular build is attested to in the *Odyssey*, and it is considered impressive even without the disguise he is wearing:

> αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς
> ζώσατο μὲν ῥάκεσιν περὶ μήδεα, φαῖνε δὲ μηροὺς
> καλούς τε μεγάλους τε, φάνεν δέ οἱ εὐρέες ὦμοι
> στήθεά τε στιβαροί τε βραχίονες
>
> But Odysseus
> girded up his rags about his body, displaying his
> thighs, splendid and large, and one could see the wide shoulders;
> his chest showed, and his ponderous arms.[59]

[54] Irwin 1990: 208.
[55] *Hom. Hymn. Dem.* 177-178.
[56] Irwin 1990: 209.
[57] Irwin 1990: 210.
[58] *Il*. 3.193-194.
[59] *Od*. 18.66-69.

The character and nature of Odysseus that distinguish him most from the other Trojans appear to be his adaptability and resourcefulness; πολύμητις (of many counsels) and πολυμήχανος (resourceful) are used in the *Odyssey* to describe Odysseus alone.[60] There is ample evidence to argue that one of the most important aspects of his character is his emotional intelligence: his decision on how to interact with Nausicaä is a key demonstration of this.[61] The craftiness of Odysseus and his skill with words are evidenced in the *Iliad* in his envoy to Achilles, and is also a strong reminder that he has the boons of both Athene and Hermes, gods who are renowned for their cunning and guile. Contrary to how tragedians later portrayed Odysseus, Alcinoüs explicitly tells Odysseus that he does not see him as a liar, using ἠπεροπῆά (cheat/deceiver), which is also used as a descriptive of Paris and Hermes, and ἐπίκλοπον (cunning in speech, wily, tricky), which is used to describe slyness and skill in multiple Homeric heroes:

> ὦ Ὀδυσεῦ, τὸ μὲν οὔ τί σ' ἐΐσκομεν εἰσορόωντες
> **ἠπεροπῆά** τ' ἔμεν καὶ **ἐπίκλοπον**, οἷά τε πολλοὺς
> βόσκει γαῖα μέλαινα πολυσπερέας ἀνθρώπους
> ψεύδεά τ' ἀρτύνοντας, ὅθεν κέ τις οὐδὲ ἴδοιτο·
> σοὶ δ' ἔπι μὲν μορφὴ ἐπέων, ἔνι δὲ φρένες ἐσθλαί,
> μῦθον δ' ὡς ὅτ' ἀοιδὸς ἐπισταμένως κατέλεξας,
> πάντων Ἀργείων σέο τ' αὐτοῦ κήδεα λυγρά.
>
> Odysseus, we as we look upon you do not imagine
> that you are a deceptive or thievish man, the sort that the black earth
> breeds in great numbers, people who wander widely, making up
> lying stories from which no one could learn anything. You have
> a grace upon your words and there is sound sense within them,
> an expertly, as singer would do you have told the story
> of the dismal sorrows befallen yourself and all of the Argives.[62]

Odysseus responds to situations with a high degree of emotional intelligence that, contrary to what Alcinoüs implies, can seem to border on manipulation – he is far more tactical in his words than Ajax, for example, during the envoy to Achilles. His rhetorical skills are noted in the *Cyclops*, with Silenus proclaiming:

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[60] Πολύμητις is used to describe Odysseus at *Il.* 1.311 and *Od.* 21.274. πολυμήχανος is used as an epithet at *Il.* 2.173 etc. and *Od.* 1.205..
[61] *Od.* 6.141-149.
[62] *Od.* 11.363-369, emphasis added.

παραινέσαι σοι βούλομαι· τῶν γὰρ κρεῶν
μηδὲν λίπηις τοῦδ'· ἢν δὲ τὴν γλῶσσαν δάκηις,
κομψὸς γενήσηι καὶ λαλίστατος, Κύκλωψ.

Here's my advice, Polyphemus: don't chew the fat with the likes of him, that is, unless the fat you chew is his. I wouldn't let a bit of him be wasted, sir, if I were you. And after every delicacy's done, and finally you put his tongue into your mouth, just think how many tongues you'll speak in, then, preeminent Polyphemus, and all of them as eloquent as his.[63]

The emotional control and guile he embodies contrasts him directly with heroes such as Achilles and Heracles, both of whom are overtaken by rage, vengeance, and a general lack of control. Odysseus, out of his own mouth in the *Cyclops*, declares that δόλιος ἡ προθυμία – "I prefer a more cunning plan."[64] Odysseus is not immune to being consumed by his anger, but "he knows how to use his anger profitably"[65] in comparison to Achilles in particular. Anger is an important facet of the heroic character, but self-control is a marker of the mature hero.[66]

Folk Memory

If Odysseus' hair is taken to mean 'dark', as he often is presented in later artistic representations, this conflicts with the description in *Odyssey* Book 13.431, where his head is described as ξανθὰς – the translation of which as blond has already been discussed in reference to Achilles. Mentions of his hair as explicitly ξανθὰς provide stronger evidence in favour of the hyacinthine hair referring to Odysseus' hair as curly rather than dark.[67] There cannot have been a large degree of emphasis on blondness as an ideal beauty standard, as Zeus, Hera, and Poseidon are dark-haired.[68] Beauty was still linked to blondness however, as "beautiful women and beloved boys are usually blond, and occasionally brunette."[69] The motivation for the manner in which the Greeks thought to represent the heroes at Troy in particular is difficult to accurately declare; there are debates that the Greeks made their heroes in their likeness, and equally valid arguments that the Greeks made their heroes different to themselves, perhaps as they were believed to exist in the Heroic Age rather than their own.

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[63] Eur. *Cyc*. 313-315.
[64] Eur. *Cyc.* 449.
[65] Minchin 2019: 361.
[66] Van Wees 1992: 136.
[67] Irwin 1990: 208.
[68] Zeus, *Il*. 1.528; Poseidon, *Il.* 13.563, etc; Hera, *Il*. 15.102-103. Later authors also depict other deities as blond: Athena, (Pind. *Nem.* 10.7); Apollo (Pind. *Ol*. 6.41); Demeter, (*Hom. Hymn. Dem*. 279, 302). Dionysus sometimes described as having dark colouring (*Hom. Hymn. Dion*. 7.4-5) and other times he is depicted as blond (Hes. *Th.* 947). The lack of consistency points less to a beauty standard and more to representations of deities as similar or different to the typical Greek appearance.
[69] Irwin 1990: 210.

Hero or Villain

Odysseus' role as an advisor in the *Iliad* is his primary role in the text and leaves the impression of the hero as a collected, tactful man who can impart wisdom with great clarity. The aged Phoenix fulfils a role akin to this in the *Iliad* as well, but his magniloquence sets him up as the old, bumbling guide, while Odysseus is more able to relate to the young and brash Achilles by goading his pride and presenting him with practical rewards in his bid to persuades Achilles to rejoin the war.[70] Odysseus' practicality is key to his character, but he is also a man who seeks his desire at all costs. In the fifth century BCE, the alleged impiety shown by Odysseus towards the Cyclops (and thereby, Poseidon) led to widespread prejudice against Odysseus as an honourable Homeric hero.[71] Much of this perception of Odysseus came through tragedy, although a great amount of caution must be applied to any critique of the tragic Odysseus, as virtually all the tragedies featuring him are lost and the fragments that have come down to us do not give any true indication of plot: "it is in the nature of the genre to exploit characters in different ways according to dramatic needs as they arise—and in this regard polymorphic Odysseus was an ideal dramatic character."[72]

In all his appearances in extant tragedy (barring Sophocles' *Ajax* and, if including satyr plays, Euripides' *Cyclops*) portray Odysseus as a rogue – he is an outright villain in *Hecuba*, a devious trickster in *Rhesus*, a threating force in *Trojan Women* and both *Iphigenia in Aulis* and *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and a callous pragmatist in *Philoctetes*. Crucially though, the characters whose perceptions we see these works through often seem to have experienced some suffering at the hands of Odysseus or through his actions. *Trojan Women* and *Hecuba* demonstrate this particularly well, as the audience sees Odysseus primarily through the eyes of Hecuba and Cassandra. In *Trojan Women*, the animosity of the sympathetic characters encourages the audience to share their animosity towards Odysseus.[73] The description of Odysseus as "still wandering" in *Iphigenia in Tauris* appears to have appealed to the audience's perceptions of Odysseus as deserving of his fate.[74] Perceptions of Odysseus in tragedy seem to be linked to the superimposition of the Sophists onto Odysseus due to their "allegiance to language."[75] His careful, crafty words that obscure instances of outright manipulation mark him as a character whose motives the audience cannot help but question. Such intrinsic elements of his character

[70] *Il*. 9.254-306.
[71] Montiglio 2011: 21.
[72] Montiglio 2011: 3.
[73] Eur. *Tro.* 279-291, 430-433.
[74] Eur. *IT* 536; Montiglio 2011: 6.
[75] Montiglio 2011: 7.

– his wily words and resourcefulness – lend the character of Odysseus well to adaptations as an antagonist in tragedy.

Identifying Homer's *Moly*

One well-known pursuit in Classical ethnobotany is the pharmacological identification of the *moly* given to Odysseus by Hermes in Book 10 of the *Odyssey.* Hermes refers to the plant as "good medicine"[76] that will prevent Circe from enchanting Odysseus even if he drinks her potion. Odysseus proceeds to give a description of the plant that is somewhat perplexing in its detail, as the plant is never mentioned again after this.

> ὣς ἄρα φωνήσας πόρε φάρμακον Ἀργεϊφόντης
> ἐκ γαίης ἐρύσας καί μοι φύσιν αὐτοῦ ἔδειξε.
> ῥίζῃ μὲν μέλαν ἔσκε, γάλακτι δὲ εἴκελον ἄνθος·
> μῶλυ δέ μιν καλέουσι θεοί, χαλεπὸν δέ τ' ὀρύσσειν
> ἀνδράσι γε θνητοῖσι· θεοὶ δέ τε πάντα δύνανται.
>
> So spoke Argeïphontes, and he gave me the medicine,
> which he picked out of the ground, and he explained the nature
> of it to me. It was black at the root but with a milky
> flower. The gods call it *moly*. It is hard for mortal
> men to dig up but the gods have power to do all things.[77]

The details must be more than merely fleshing out the narrative – it is not uncommon to find embedded cultural and folk knowledge in texts that key the audience of the work into certain socially relevant knowledge. This is especially true of texts that have developed out of an oral history: "the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* should not be read as mere literary pieces but also as repositories of social memory and knowledge built through patterns"[78] In the case of the *moly* then, it is important to consider why the plant is included in the detail it is, when other plants are not. It might simply be due to the role the plant plays in the narrative, but that is not a sufficient explanation to account for the identifying information given. If it were merely to emphasise the magic of the plant, why identify a divine plant in a manner typical of ancient botanical identification methods?

[76] *Od*. 10.287.
[77] *Od*. 10.302-306. Phot. *Bibl*. 190.32.
[78] Molina-Venegas & Verano 2024: 12.

Ancient plant identifications were "mostly descriptions of plant parts."[79] Fitting the description of *moly* is not enough to cement an identification of the plant, but in combination with similarities to other ancient references to a *moly*, as well as the continued depictions of its effects when used as a medicinal treatment, Plaitakis and Duvoisin (1983) put forward a convincing argument that the European herb *Galanthus nivalis* could be identified with Homer's *moly.* The genus name *Galanthus* is derived from the Greek *gala* (milk) and *anthos* (flower). There is a direct link between this genus and the Homeric identification of the *moly* – with its γάλακτι δὲ εἴκελον ἄνθος – flowers like milk.[80] The most common species within the genus is the *G. nivalis.* Commonly called the snowdrop due to its brilliant white flowers, the perennial plant is common in its native areas of much of Europe, including Croatia, Macedonia, France, Germany and Greece. The plant is around 7-15cm tall and grows from bulbs. The bulb may be the reason the plant is deemed "hard for mortal men to dig up."[81] The dark-scaled bulb itself may be referred to as being "black at the root"[82] in contrast to the brilliant whiteness of the petals and the rich green of its leaves, possibly made darker still by being covered in the moist soil in which it thrives.[83]

Figure 10
'Delicate beauty of snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*).' Dominicus Johannes Bergsma. 2014. Broek, Netherlands. BY-SA 3.0. Wikimedia Commons.

Early Greek botanists did not distinguish between actual roots and bulbs, often referring to bulbs as being round or onion-like roots.[84] This is evidenced through the *Historia Plantarum*, the work of Theophrastus, who is considered the father of botanical science.[85] The snowdrop

[79] Hardy & Totelin 2016: 104.
[80] *Od*. 10.304.
[81] *Od*. 10.305-306.
[82] *Od.* 10.304-305.
[83] Molina-Venegas & Verano 2024: 12.
[84] Molina-Venegas & Verano 2024: 14.
[85] Cf. Theophr. *Hist. pl*. 6.6.7 on the 'roots' of κρίνον (Lilium genus), 66.6.8 the'roots' of the νάρκισσος (Narcissus genus), and 7.12.3 on the roots of φάσγανον (the *Gladiolus italicus,* commonly known as the sword lily or the *Gladiolus segetum,* known as the corn-flag). The blooming of the narcissus is connected to the setting of the star Arcturus, the primary star in the Boötes constellation (Theophr. *Hist. pl.* 6.6.8), reinforcing the use of the constellations as a method of telling time, seasonality, and mnemonic devices.

is one of several plants within its genus from which a compound known as galantamine has been isolated and used in the treatment of Alzheimer's disease.[86] The use of galantamine aids in "delaying deterioration in patient functioning."[87] This compound is an Acetylcholinesterase (AChE)-inhibiting drug, the use of which stabilises memory and attention by inhibiting the breakdown of acetylcholine, and remains in use in many rural areas of the world today.[88] Intoxication and poisoning as a result of the ingestion of acetylcholine are not uncommon:

> Thus, it is reasonable to think that the folks of ancient societies such as the Greeks of the early Dark Ages were also highly exposed to anticholinergic intoxication, hence the importance of having an AChE-inhibiting antidote at hand—allegedly *Galanthus nivalis*.[89]

Active production of plants such as the lily and narcissus for medicinal use is said by Pausainias to have occurred in Chaeroneia.[90] Theophrastus' *Historia Plantarum,* however, describes a *moly* that resembles Homer's *moly,* but has some differences:

> All-heal [πανάκεια] grows in great abundance and best in the rocky ground about Psophis, *moly* [μῶλυ)] about Pheneos and on Mount Kyllene. They say that this plant is like the *moly* mentioned by Homer, that it has a round root like an onion and a leaf like squill, and that it is used against spells and magic arts, but that it is not, as Homer says, difficult to dig up.[91]

The "all-heal" mentioned by Theophrastus is translated from the word πανάκεια, from which panacea is derived, and may be in reference to an actual herb known as Heal-All, the *Prunella vulgaris,* which is common in most temperate climates and is native in Europe, Africa, Asia, and North America. It is used in traditional Chinese medicine and herbal teas, wherein it is called *xia ku cao*.[92] Theophrastus describes the two plants, πανάκεια and μῶλυ, as having commonalities in their "round roots like an onion," likely referring to the bulbs of the plants. The leaves being "like a squill" is believed to refer to the sea onion – *Drimia maritima.* Theophrastus' passage thus reinforces the depiction of *moly* as a bulbous plant, adding another degree of confirmation to the identity of Homer's *moly* as the snowdrop. However, Theophrastus' description of the leaves resembling the sea onion has led to Theophrastus' *moly*

[86] Heinrich & Teoh 2004: 147.
[87] Heinrich & Teoh 2004: 151.
[88] Molina-Venegas & Verano 2024: 14.
[89] Molina-Venegas & Verano 2024: 14.
[90] Paus. 9.41.7.
[91] Theophr. *Hist. pl.* 9.15.7.
[92] Literally, this translates as 'summer-withering grass.'

being identified as broadleaf or black garlic – *Allium nigrum*. This plant matches a description of Homer's *moly* as having a black root – the garlic bulb itself is black.

These two depictions of *moly* appear to be referring to different but similar plants. The *A. nigrum* matches some traits of the description at *Od.* 10.304-305, but not all. The *G. nivalis* matches both the visual characteristics described by Homer, as well as the perceived effects that the *moly* was intended to have – protecting Odysseus from being bewitched by clearing his head and maintaining lucidity.

Conclusion

Odysseus, as a Homeric hero, is limited in his evolution by an obvious reluctance to outright dismiss the Homeric narrative surrounding him. Later poets would go on instead to exploit the intrinsic traits of Odysseus given by Homer – his slyness with words and his ability to influence decision-making. Where Homer presents this as an admirable facet of his character, the tragedians and the public of fifth-century Greek society show a clear distaste for this trait. The danger of a well-spoken word was known to the heavily politicised Athens of the 5th century, and the favouring of rhetoric common to both the Sophists and Odysseus meant that Odysseus was caught up in the sometimes-vicious attacks on Sophists. Odysseus' rhetorical abilities left him the subject of discordant discussion rather than the expected admiration given to Homeric heroes.

A second major component present in discussions, both ancient and modern, on Odysseus is the use and identification of *moly.* That it was a subject of continued debate in the ancient world indicates that it was enmeshed in folk considerations of the *Odyssey.* The presence of the *moly* passage evidently does not merely form a description of an assistive device but also provides an identification. The purpose of this identification may be an encoded direction towards the use of the plant in maintaining lucidity. Modern medicine continues to utilise natural substances in treatments; the common antipyretic and anti-inflammatory drug aspirin has been used for thousands of years in its source form as the bark of a willow tree, and in meadowsweet.[93] The continued use of natural substances in medicinal treatments means that we cannot merely dismiss Homer's *moly* as a magical agent, but must instead consider what the inclusion of this information would indicate to a Greek populace. To describe herbal remedies in the ancient world as merely 'magical' is a dismissal of the potential presented by the herb. A listener of the *Odyssey* may recall the identification and its use through the story associated with it, rather

[93] Desborough & Keeling 2017: 674.

than merely memorising the plant itself. As with ethnoastronomy, there is a reason that information is presented through stories; the encoded morality in its usage is presented in the narrative, as are descriptions that are designed to be mnemonic and outcomes of its usage. The fact that *moly* was a discussion point in fifth-century Athens means that it is necessary to consider not only what Homer may have intended by its inclusion in the narrative, but also why discussion surrounding *moly* endured in public memory.

Chapter 4: Heracles

Life

Heracles was born to Alcmene, a granddaughter of Perseus. Zeus appeared to her in the form of her husband, Amphitryon.[1] He spent a night with her, which he lengthened to three nights. When the real Amphitryon arrived the next day, he lay with his wife, who commented on how different the experience is than the night prior. The two realised only the prophet Tiresias would be able to discern the reality of the situation. Tiresias revealed that Alcmene's first partner was Zeus, and that Alcmene had been impregnated by both Zeus and Amphitryon. She was carrying twins, one son of Zeus, one of Amphitryon. Hera was more enraged by this affair than she had been regarding others, and as Hera is inclined to do, she plotted her vengeance.[2] Zeus declared that the next child born into the house of Perseus would rule Argolis – confident that this would be his child born of Alcmene, who was due very soon. Hera made him swear this, and then sent her daughter Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth, to interfere. She ensured that Heracles' cousin, Eurystheus, was born early, and Zeus was now under oath to ensure that he would rule over the Argolid – Mycenae, Corinth, Arcadia, and Argos. When the twins were born, Alcmene did not know which child was the son of Zeus and which was Amphitryon's, so they named the first born Alcides, and the second they named Iphicles.[3] Hera, uncaring which was her husband's child, sent two venomous snakes to kill the twins.

Hearing screams from the children's bedroom, Alcmene and Amphitryon rushed into the room and discover one of their sons terrified, and the other clutching a dead snake in each hand.[4] They now knew that Alcides was the son of Zeus. During the next night, while Alcmene and Amphitryion were consulting Tiresias again, Hermes abducted Alcides and took him to Olympus, where he and Athena placed the baby on the sleeping Hera's breast, upon which he promptly began to suckle.[5] Hera, realising what had happened, tore him away, her breastmilk spraying across the heavens and forming the Milky Way, known in Greek as Γαλαξίας Κύκλος. Diodorus Siculus gives a different reason for Hera's breastfeeding; in fear of Hera, Alcmene exposed Heracles, but Athena found him and took him to Hera who nursed the baby out of pity.

[1] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.4.8.
[2] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.4.8.
[3] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.8.
[4] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.8. Apollodorus also gives an account of Pherecydes, who holds that it was Amphitryon who placed the snakes into the children's bed.
[5] Paus. 9.25.2; Hard 2015: 132.

Baby Heracles suckled with such force that he caused Hera pain, and she wrenched him away from her breast. This was how the breastmilk of Hera formed the Milky Way according to Diodorus Siculus.[6] The plot had been Zeus plan, in order to have his child consume breastmilk that would make him immortal.[7] Alcmene and Amphitryon, meanwhile, had received advice from Tiresias to rename Alcides in a manner to appease Hera. The parents renamed the son of Zeus 'Heracles'. Heracles' birth narrative is accounted for in the *Theogony* where his mother is described as having given "birth to Heracles' force."[8]

Heroes' birth narratives follow a pattern – a god impregnates a mortal woman, or a mortal impregnates a goddess. Though a clear pattern, it is not a hard and fast rule; Odysseus is not born from a deity. It appears that this birth narrative is linked more to the nature of heroes as being 'more than man,' belonging to the Hesiodic Age of Heroes. Regardless, from this divine conception, a child with extraordinary talent is born; Heracles is the only one of the *hēmitheoi* (half-gods/demigods) who displayed his supernatural abilities as a child. In contrast, Theseus only gains his divinely sent abilities when he discovers his parentage as a young man, and Perseus only when he sets out on his quests. Heracles is set apart from the other heroes in the manner in which the gods deem them as threats to an established order. The demi-gods are by nature greater than men, but still lesser than gods; Heracles blurs this line more significantly than most of the other heroes as he repeatedly proves to be a genuine threat to the gods – the Gigantomachia and his ability to kill divine creatures demonstrates this – but he is not wholly divine.

Heracles' parentage proves one of the most central aspects of his *logos*, with literature often emphasising: "the double paternity of Heracles and the paradox inherent in being a mortal son of Zeus."[9] Of great interest are the references to Heracles as Amphitryon's son, although he is not Heracles' natural father. The paternal influence of Amphitryon on Heracles is present in Euripides' tragedy *Heracles* too, but in the *Scutum* Heracles is referred to alternately as the son of Zeus and son of Amphitryon. These references are particularly close together in places, as at 413-414 "son of powerful Zeus," and at 416 "Amphitryon's son, Herakles." The demi-god aspect of a hero is typical emphasised, and it is interesting to note that Amphitryon is almost always mentioned as Heracles' paternal figure alongside Zeus. This may perhaps account for the intense madness that influences Heracles during his life, but neither his mortal heritage nor

[6] Diod. Sic. 4.9.6-7.
[7] Pirenne-Delforge & Pironti 2022: 257-258.
[8] Hes. *Theog*. 943-944.
[9] Pache 2021: 4.

divinity usurp the other. Heracles' own parentage is asserted in the *Iliad* by Zeus himself, when he is seduced by Hera, when he asserts he has never loved any of his affairs like he does her, including "when Alkmene bore me a son, Herakles the strong-hearted."[10]

Heracles was raised alongside his twin half-brother but developed faster than his brother. His tutor, Linus, struck Heracles when the boy disobeyed, and in reaction, the young Heracles beat Linus to death.[11] His brother defended him, and Heracles was pardoned for this. The murder of Linus would be only the first death at the hands of a violently enraged Heracles. "Unlike the ambivalence of Heracles' killing of the snakes, the attack on Linus is invariably depicted as brutal and horrifying."[12] Like Achilles' gross abuse of Hectors' corpse, the murder of Iphitus by Heracles shocks the gods, as it goes against the rules of hospitality as ordained by Zeus Xenios. Heracles' violence was so ingrained in his character that Theseus would later use extreme violence as he imitated Heracles on his journey to Athens:

> For that hero [Heracles] punished those who offered him violence in the manner in which they had plotted to serve him, and therefore sacrificed Busiris, wrestled Antaeus to death, slew Cycnus in single combat, and killed Termerus by dashing in his skull.[13]

While only eighteen years old, Heracles' status was cemented by the slaying a lion on Mount Cithaeron. As a reward, Thespis, king of the land that this lion had destroyed, sent Heracles a different daughter of his for fifty nights. Every one of these women birthed a son, with the eldest and youngest daughters giving birth to twins.[14] On his return journey, he defended Thebes against an attack from King Erginos of Orchomenos. As thanks, Creon, king of Thebes, offered his daughter Megara as bride to Heracles.[15] Heracles and Megara had children, and time continued until Hera revisited her wrath upon Heracles. In the *Odyssey*, there is a mention of how Heracles belongs to a generation before Odysseus – "I will not set myself against men of the generations before not with Herakles…who set themselves against the immortal with the bow."[16] In Book 11, Odysseus has many encounters with various shades, including "wives and daughters of princes".[17] Alcmene is one of these women, and her appearance is followed by a

[10] *Il.* 14.324.
[11] Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.3.2, 2.4.9.
[12] Pache 2021: 11.
[13] Plut. *Thes*. 11.1.
[14] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.9.
[15] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.11.
[16] *Od.* 8.222-225.
[17] *Od.* 11.227.

description of Heracles' lineage.[18] A reference to Heracles' marriage to Megara immediately follows this.[19] The most significant appearance or mention of Heracles in the *Odyssey* is when he appears as a shade to Odysseus at 11.601-626, in which he asks Odysseus whether he is also "leading some wretched destiny such as I too pursued"[20] and describes his life as a "endless spell of misery."[21] He further describes that he was made a bondman to "one who was far worse than I," which is undoubtedly referring to Eurystheus.[22] He continues to say that it was this man who assigned him his labours – which is the more traditional narrative, whereas Euripides' alters this aspect in his *Heracles.*[23] Heracles closes his conversation with Odysseus by referring to his capture of Cerberus.[24]

The final mention of Heracles in the *Odyssey* is in Book 21, wherein a description of how Odysseus came to own his famed bow occurs. The bow was gifted by Iphitus, an Argonaut, who was murdered by Heracles in a fit of madness.[25] The two were acquainted after the completion of Heracles' labours when Heracles went to Oechalia to compete for the hand of Iphitus' sister Iole.[26] After being denied the hand of Iole on the grounds that he had already murdered one family of his and might do so again, a theft of cattle by the infamous thief Autolycus led to Heracles being held responsible for the crime. Iphitus, not believing this accusation, invited Heracles to aid him in searching for the cattle, during which Heracles again went mad and threw Iphitus from the walls of Tiryns.[27] Tlepolemus, Heracles' son by Astyocheia, fought in the Trojan War as the leader from Rhodes.[28] Tlepolemus escaped to Rhodes after killing his fathers' maternal uncle Licyminus. The manner of this killing is varied, with Apollodorus believing the killing was an accident, and Pindar stating it was an act of rage.[29] Tlepolemos fought against Zeus' son Sarpedon, "driven by his strong destiny against godlike Sarpedon,"[30] and boasts about Heracles' exploits, as he insults Sarpedon.[31]

[18] *Od.* 11.266-268: "I saw Amphitryon's wife, Alkmene, who, after lying in love in the embraces of great Zeus, brought forth Herakles, lion-hearted and bold of purpose."
[19] *Od.* 11.269-270: "I saw Megara, daughter of high-spirited Kreion, whom Amphitryon's bold and weariless son had married."
[20] *Od*. 11.618-619.
[21] *Od.* 11.620-621.
[22] *Od*. 11.621-622.
[23] *Od*. 11.622.
[24] *Od*. 623-625.
[25] *Od*. 21.27; Diod. Sic. 4.31.3.
[26] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.6.2.
[27] Diod. Sic. 4.31.3.
[28] *Il*. 2.655-660.
[29] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.8.2; Pin. *Ol.* 7.
[30] *Il.* 5.629.
[31] *Il*. 5.633-646.

Appearances of murderous rage or *mania* amongst descendants of Heracles are not infrequent and may have been sensationalised due to their familial connection to Heracles. Other descendants of Heracles are mentioned in the *Iliad*: Pheidippos and Antiphos are born from Thessalos, a son of Heracles (2.678-679).[32] This reinforces the conclusion that Heracles belongs to the generation of the Argonauts, prior to the Trojan heroes, as it is his sons and grandsons that are fighting at Troy.

The goddess Sleep refuses to put Zeus to sleep at the request of Hera, on account of how she had done so to enable Heracles' escape from Troy after "he had utterly sacked the city of the Trojans."[33] This sack of Troy by Heracles is attested to in digressions throughout the *Iliad*, in which references to Poseidon's' attack on Troy through a sea monster are evident (cf. *Il*. 20.145-148).[34] To appease Poseidon, Laomedon planned to sacrifice his daughter Hesione, but the arrival of Heracles led to the hero offering to kill the beast in return for Laomedon's horses – which he had received as compensation for Zeus' kidnapping of Ganymede. Heracles killed the monster, but Laomedon refused to give him the horses. Heracles subsequently attacked Troy and killed all of Laomedon's sons except Podarcis, who was renamed Priam, and gifted Heracles a golden veil made by Hesione.[35] The sea monster has an immortal form in the constellation Cetus – though the narrative connected with the constellation is the sea monster that Perseus killed, and the constellations' placement alongside the Perseus-Andromeda group reinforces this.[36] Regardless, the constellation aligns with the thematic assigning of constellations to heroic exploits, and illustrates how it is heroic narratives as a whole that are used as mnemonic devices in the representation of astrological phenomena.

The primary subject of the Pseudo-Hesiodic *Scutum* is the expedition of Heracles and Iolaus against Cygnus. Iolaus, Heracles' companion and charioteer, aids Heracles in his duel against the bandit Cygnus. Cygnus, a son of Ares, had seized control of a sacred grove of Apollo at Itonos in Thessaly, where he murdered worshipers and stole offerings intended for Apollo. Cygnus' great tomb is flooded and obliterated by the river Anauros as a result of these actions against Apollo.[37]

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[32] *Il.* 2.678-679.
[33] *Il*. 14.250-251.
[34] This narrative is recounted in Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.5.9. An especially clear reference to this earlier sacking of Troy by Heracles within the *Iliad* can be found at *Il.* 15.25-30.
[35] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.5.9.
[36] Cetus is most often called the 'Whale' in modern English astronomy, though it is traditionally depicted with a monstrous, dragon-like head attached to a snake-like body.
[37] Hes. *Sc*. 477-480.

Following a detailed depiction of Heracles' shield, reminiscent of and likely inspired by Achilles' shield in the *Iliad*, Heracles and Iolaus are addressed by Athene, who tells them that Zeus has allowed them to kill Cygnus and to strip his armour.[38] She warns them however to be wary of Ares, and that the horses of Cygnus and his armour are not destined for the pair to own.[39] When the pair meet Cygnus, Heracles address him: "Kyknos, old friend, why do you hold your fast horses against us now? We are men well versed in the toil and sorrow of battle. No, now, hold to one side your polished chariot, and let us go through on the road…Ares, old friend, will not be able to keep the ending of death from you, if ever we once come together in combat."[40] Cygnus does not heed this warning, and the two engage in combat; here again is a mention of Heracles as Amphitryon's son – it is clearly not intended to downplay his abilities and may perhaps serve instead to emphasise the degree of might which the hero has.

> And now Amphitryon's son, Herakles the powerful, swiftly struck, and forcibly with the long spear, between helm and shield, where the throat had been left unguarded, beneath the chin, and the manslaughtering ask spear cut through both tendons, for great was the strength of the man that was driven behind it.[41]

Heracles is described with martial epithets: "insatiate of battle" at 433 is a particularly interesting one as it depicts Heracles as he stands against Ares, the god of war. Aside from epithets referring to his parentage, he is also described throughout the *Scutum* as "powerful" (321, 416, 452) "mighty" (349), and various versions of 'strong of heart' (424, 447, 458). Once Heracles has wounded Ares, and both Ares and Athene return to the heavens, Heracles and Iolaos strip the armour from the corpse of Cygnus – and of note, here Heracles is referred to as "son of Alkmene" (467). The reference to Heracles' mortal mother may underscore his ability to wound a god. Heracles was also said to have wounded Hera when he shot her in the breast during his labour attempting to obtain the cattle of Geryon, and he also wounded Hades at Pylos. The fragmentary references[42] to these attacks are supported in the *Iliad*, wherein Dione tells a wounded Aphrodite: "Hera had to endure it when he strong son of Amphitryon struck her beside the right breast with a tri-barbed arrow…Hades the gigantic had to endure with the

[38] Hes. *Sc*. 325-329.
[39] Hes. *Sc*. 333-338.
[40] Hes. *Sc*. 350-358.
[41] Hes. *Sc*. 416-420.
[42] Clem. *Protr.* 2.36.2 (West 2003: 212).

rest the flying arrow when this self-same man, the son of Zeus of the aegis, struck him among the dead men at Pylos."[43]

In early Greek epic poetry, Heracles' "lasting appearances are few and far between, even if his associations with epic run deep."[44] Heracles' *fabulae* are extremely wide-ranging, across genres and mediums as well as time. He is known to Homer, who recounts his capture of Cerberus "as if it were a familiar story."[45] Pisander of Camirus had an epigram recorded by Theocritus that describes his writing about Heracles: "the son of Zeus, the lion-battler, the fierce of hand, and told of all the labours he worked his way through."[46] Pisander is referenced by a scholiast on Aristophanes *Clouds*, in which an account of the origin of the hot springs of Thermopylae is given: "Some say that when Heracles had toiled strenuously in the neighbourhood of Thermopylae Athena sent forth hot springs for him."[47] Heracles was said to have fallen sick on his adventures in Lydia, and was rejuvenated by the river Hyllus, or a tributary thereof, which is why he named two of his sons Hyllus, one of which was born to Omphale.[48] Specific attributes of Heracles can then be identified as having a long history, such as his connection to Omphale, divine aid, and some of his labours; but this does not necessarily account for the immense popularity the hero gained. It appears that his lack of a distinctive 'canon' meant that unlike many of the other Greek heroes, "Herakles' myths, in origin and transmission, tended to remain at an oral or sub-literary level, that is, as folktale".[49] In this medium, the narratives could spread rapidly and surpass any social boundaries. This medium would also explain the few appearances of Heracles in extant Archaic literature, though he is evidently well-known. As always, we are bound to the extant works, and there are many references to fragmentary or otherwise lost works on Heracles that date from the seventh century BCE onwards.[50]

Deeds

The Labours

Heracles' infamous labours were a penance. Heracles returned home one day to find two demons and a dragon in his home – after brutally murdering these beasts, Hera lifted the cloud of delusion she had sent upon him. The two demons were revealed to be his children, and the

[43] *Il.* 5. 392-400.
[44] Barker and Christensen, 2021: 283.
[45] Shapiro 1983: 11.
[46] Theocr. *Epigr.* 22 (West 2003: 176-178).
[47] Σ. Ar. *Cl.* 1051a.
[48] Σ(T) *Il.* 24.616b, "αϊ τ άμφ' Άχελώϊον" and Σ Αρ. Rhod. 4.1149/50 (West 2003: 210).
[49] Shapiro 1983: 7.
[50] Shapiro 1983: 8.

dragon was his wife Megara. Some narratives have Heracles murder only his children.[51] Heracles had to be purified for these horrific murders. He travelled to Delphi to seek the advice of the oracle.[52] He was told that, for ten years, he must do whatever is asked of him without any reward. He went to his cousin Eurystheus and begged him to cleanse him of his bloodguilt. King Eurystheus decreed that Heracles would only be purified after completing ten tasks for him over a period of 10 years. Until then, Heracles would not be forgiven and would be bound to Eurystheus as a slave.

The Nemean Lion

The Nemean Lion was large and was terrorising the village of Nemea in the northeastern part of the Peloponnese. Hesiod holds that it was born of Typhon and Echidna.[53] The lion's hide was impervious to weapons.[54] Heracles cornered the lion in its den and wrestled the lion before strangling it to death. He then skinned the creature and wore the hide as a cape – this becoming one of the best-known attributes of the hero. Hera transformed the lion into the constellation Leo.[55] The Nemean lion is described at *Theog*. 327-332, with a strong emphasis on the havoc it caused before being killed by Heracles.

The Lernaean Hydra

The Hydra, also a child of Typhon and Echidna, was raised by Hera.[56] Lerna, near Argos, was continually under attack by the monster. Each time one of its nine heads was cut off, two new heads grew.[57] Finding he could not defeat this creature with his club or sword, and with the assistance of his faithful servant Iolaus, Heracles burned the heads of the Hydra, and buried the ninth and only remaining head under a massive rock.[58] He then poisoned his arrows with the Hydra's bile, making any wounds inflicted by them incurable.[59] This victory was, however, declared invalid by Eurystheus, as Heracles had received the aid of Iolaus. While he was killing

[51] Apollodorus has Heracles gift Megara to Iolaos after the completion of his labours. (Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.6)
[52] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.4.12; West 2003: 193
[53] *Theog.* 327; Pin. *Isthm*. 6.46ff; Paus. 5.11.5 5.25.7; Diod. Sic. 4.11.3.
[54] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.5.1.
[55] Eratosth. *Catast.* 12.
[56] *Theog*. 313-315; Paus. 5.26.7.
[57] Pausanias expresses the opinion that Pisander of Camirus, the purported author of the fragmentary *Heraclea,* assigned the hydra more than one head in order to make it appear more terrifying and to "make his own poem more noteworthy" (Paus. 2.37.4).
[58] *Theog.* 313-318.
[59] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.5.2; Eur. *HF* 419,1188; Eur. *Ion*. 192.

the Hydra, Hera sent a crab to interfere; when the crab bit his foot, Heracles crushed it in a fit of anger.[60] Hera then placed the crab amongst the stars in the form of the constellation Cancer.

The Cerynitian Hind

Heracles spent a year trying to catch the golden horned deer sacred to Artemis, until he finally captured it in Arcadia. He had been ordered to capture it alive. The goddess complained that her deer had been poorly treated, as Heracles had broken off one of its antlers.[61] Heracles, however, managed to convince Artemis to allow him to use it to demonstrate the completion of his task.

The Erymanthian Boar

The Erymanthian boar ravaged the farms of Psophis in Arcardia, though the location varies greatly between sources.[62] Heracles was sent to capture the boar, and after pursuing the creature through deep snow, wore it out and captured it in a net or noose. While the boar's origins are never specified in the extant material, it is very similar in nature to the Caledonian boar and perhaps the boar in Herodotus' *Histories* 1.36.

Stables of Augeas

Augeas was the king of Elis, and he possessed an enormous herd of cattle. Heracles was tasked to clean the stables; in return Augeas offered him a tenth of the cattle as a reward. Heracles accomplished his task by diverting the Alpheus and Peneus rivers to run through the stables. Because he used the rivers, Augeas refused to grant him the reward. In response, Heracles declared war upon him, which ended in the death of Augeas and all but one of his sons.[63] This son, Phyleus, was placed on the throne of Elis by Heracles. To celebrate his victory, Pindar declares that Heracles founded the Olympic games near the town of Pisa.[64]

The Stymphalian Birds

The Stymphalian birds were a flock of man-eating birds which were found at Lake Stymphalis in Arcadia. The details of these birds vary greatly between accounts, but they were all undeniably dangerous.[65] Heracles destroyed them by creating a noise that drove the birds into

[60] Eratosth. *Catast.* 11.
[61] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.5.3; Diod. Sic. 4.13; Eur. *HF* 378; Pind. *Ol*. 3.24,53.
[62] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.5.4; Diod. Sic. 4.12; Eur. *HF* 368.
[63] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.7.2; Diod. Sic. 4.13, 33.
[64] Pind. *Ol*. 2.1-4, 3.11-38.
[65] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.5.2; Paus. 8.22.4; Hygin. *Fab.* 30; Apoll. Rhod. *Arg.* 2.1052ff; Σ Apoll. Rhod. *Arg.* 2.1053.

the air over the water, he then shot them down with his sling or his arrows.[66] Like many of the creatures in Heracles' labours, it is thought that the birds were set into the constellations as Aquila and Cygnus – though Cygnus is more identifiable with Apollo. The only apparent reason for this identification is that the two bird constellations sit on either side of the constellation Sagitta, the poison arrow of Heracles.[67]

The Cretan Bull

The Cretan Bull fathered the Minotaur, after Queen Pasiphae of Crete, imbued with lust for the creature, coupled with it by hiding inside a wooden cow created by Daedalus.[68] Heracles was tasked with fetching this bull, upon doing so he freed the creature which then laid havoc to the countryside of Marathon.[69] Here, it was known as the Marathon Bull and was ultimately destroyed by Theseus. The bull was placed among the stars by the gods as the constellation Taurus, though the constellation may instead be the bull that carried Europa.[70]

Mares of Diomedes

Diomedes, the king of the Bistonian tribe of Thrace, fed his mares human flesh. Eurystheus ordered Heracles to fetch these mares and bring them to Mycenae. Heracles succeeded in capturing the mares alive, and left them with his servant, Abderos. Heracles killed Diomedes, who had pursued him, and returned to find Abderos had been eaten by the mares. In a rage, Heracles fed them Diomedes' corpse, which finally stopped their abnormal appetite.[71]

The Belt of Hippolyte

The queen of the Amazons, Hippolyte, had a belt given to her by Ares, as she was the best warrior amongst the Amazons. She used her belt to carry her sword and spear. King Eurystheus wanted the belt to gift to his daughter and so sent Heracles to obtain it. Most versions indicate that Hippolyta was so impressed with Heracles that she gave him the belt. According to

[66] Pausanias records the opinion of Pisander of Camirus, who believes that Heracles did not kill the birds, but only scared them off (Paus. 8.22.4). in line with this is the belief that these are the same birds that the Argonauts encounter the Euxine.
[67] Not to be confused with the far larger and more well-known zodiac constellation of Sagittarius.
[68] Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.8; Diod. Sic. 4.77.1.
[69] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.7; Paus. 1.27.9; Hygin. *Fab.* 30.
[70] Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 3.20 holds that Taurus is either the bull that carried Europa to Crete, or Io in her metamorphosised form. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* this is the Bull of Heaven sent by Ishtar.
[71] Apollod *Bibl.* 2.5.8; Eur. *Alcest*. 483, 493; *HF* 380.

Apollodorus, the armed Amazons unnerved Heracles, and he suspected an ambush. In the ensuing battle, Heracles killed Hippolyta and took the belt.[72]

The Cattle of Geryon

Geryon was a three-bodied giant with four wings, who lived on the island of Erytheia. He owned a herd of cattle whose coats were stained red by the sunset.[73] Heracles was tasked with fetching these cattle. He reached the island by sailing across the ocean in a golden cup-boat borrowed from Helios.[74] Upon arriving at the island, he slayed Eurytion, the cattle herder, and Orthos, the two headed guard dog, before finally killing Geryon himself.[75] Heracles then herded the cattle onto his boat and sailed back to the Peloponnese. Geryon may be associated with constellations, as many of Heracles' labours are. He may be associated with the constellation of Orion, his two headed dog Orthos may be associated with Canis Major and Canis Minor, which are adjacent to Orion. Further evidence for a connection is Geryon's father's name 'Khrysaor' ('Golden Sword'), which was another name of the constellation of Orion.

The Apples of Hesperides

The Nymphs were entrusted with the care of the tree of golden apples, which had been presented to Hera on her wedding day by Gaia.[76] The Nymphs were assisted by Ladon, a hundred-headed dragon who never slept.[77] Heracles was sent to fetch the apples as one of his labours. On his journey to locate the garden in which the tree grew, Heracles game across Prometheus. Heracles shot the eagle eating his liver, and in return Prometheus told him that his brother Atlas would know where the garden was.[78] The release of Prometheus by Heracles is also detailed in the *Theogony*:

> It [the eagle] was killed by Heracles, the strong son of beautiful-ankled Alcmene, who warded off the evil plague from Iapetus' son and released him from distress - not against the will of Olympian Zeus, who rules on high, so that the glory of Theban-born Heracles would become even greater than before upon the bounteous earth.[79]

[72] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.9.
[73] *Theog.* 980; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.10.
[74] Apollod. 2.5.10; Ath. 469c, 469d (West 2003: 184, 198). See figure 17.
[75] *Theog*. 287-294, 979-983.
[76] *Theog*. 215; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11.
[77] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11. Ladon is the same dragon later encountered by Jason and the Argonauts.
[78] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11.
[79] *Theog.* 525-531. The specific arrow used to shoot the eagle may have been immortalised in Sagitta constellation, rather than Heracles' poisoned arrows in general.

Atlas agreed to tell Heracles, if he would hold up the sky while he was gone.[80] Atlas tricked Heracles, but Heracles eventually convinced Atlas to resume his burden of holding up the heavens. The Hesperian Dragon was placed into the night sky in the form of the constellation Draco.[81] Heracles succeeded in his task after slaying Dragon and stealing the apples - Athena later returned them to the Hesperides.[82]

The Capture of Cerberus

Cerberus, the enormous, three headed hound belonging to Hades, guarded the gates of the Underworld and prevented shades from escaping.[83] Heracles was sent to fetch Cerberus, finding him near the gates of Acheron. Eurystheus had believed this task to be impossible, but Heracles struck an agreement with Hades that he would not use weapons against the hound. Unarmed, Heracles grabbed the hound by all three heads simultaneously and wrestled him into submission.[84] Heracles then took Cerberus to Mycenae. Cerberus was then returned unharmed.

Life after the Labours

Heracles was a part of the crew of the *Argo,* until the crew docked at Mysia.[85] The Dryope prince, Hylas, had been given to Heracles to be his weapon bearer after Heracles had killed their king Theiodamas, and is described as Heracles' *eromenos*. At Mysia, Hylas was kidnapped by the nymphs of a nearby spring. Heracles searched from him, but Hylas had disappeared – some versions hold that he had fallen in love with the nymphs, others that he had drowned.[86] Herodotus says simply that Heracles "had been sent ashore in search of water"[87] and was left on the gulf in Magnesia. Irrespective of why Heracles was off the ship and what happened to Hylas, the Argo continued its voyage without Heracles and Hylas. Apollodorus claims that Herodotus believes Heracles could not have been an Argonaut, as at this time he was a slave at the court of Omphale.[88]

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[80] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11.
[81] Diod. Sic. 4.26-4. Apollodorus gives an account that has Prometheus fetch the apples on Heracles behalf. Panyassis is thought to have discussed this in his Heraclea, according to Aratus. Phaen. 64-70. Draco is a contested constellation – though mostly linked with the Kneeler (later Hercules) constellation, it is often but not always a dragon or a serpent. It is otherwise believed to be connected to the identification of the Kneeler as Theseus, with what we know as Draco being the rock at Troezen as it is lifted. This connection to Theseus is enforced by the connections between Lyra and Corona Borealis.
[82] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.11.
[83] *Theog*. 311; Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.12; Eur. *HF* 24, 611.
[84] Paus. 5.26.7.
[85] Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.9.18-19.
[86] Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.19.
[87] Hdt. 7.193.
[88] Apollod. *Bibl*. 1.9.19.

Heracles married four times and had numerous affairs. His first wife was Megara. After murdering their children – and in some versions, Megara as well – Heracles was given the labours to purify him of the bloodguilt. After completing his tasks, Heracles fell in love with Princess Iole of Oechalia. Her father, King Eurytus, promised his daughter to whoever could win an archery contest against his sons.[89] Heracles won, but Eurytus did not fulfil his promise. Heracles killed the king and all his sons, aside from Iphitus and abducted the princess. Heracles and Iphitus became extremely close, until Heracles' madness overcame him a second time. He threw Iphitus over the city wall, killing him.[90] Following this, "Hermes sold Heracles" as a slave to the Lydian queen Omphale.[91] Aeschylus was aware of this 'marriage' to a Lydian, but Diodorus Siculus provides the earliest literary treatment of Omphale.[92] Sophocles, in *Trachniae*, appears to have found it shameful that Heracles had to serve a barbarian women in this manner.[93] Heracles is known to have had a child with a Lydian woman, but the names of both the woman and the son vary greatly between sources. Herodotus refers to a Heraclid dynasty who ruled Lydia, and various founders of settlements are said to be descended from Heracles throughout the *Histories*.

Heracles' third wife was Deianira, for whom he fought the river god Achelous. Soon after their marriage, a centaur named Nessus offered to aid the couple in crossing a river. Nessus attempted to rape Deianira, and an enraged Heracles shot him with an arrow tipped with the Lernaean Hydra's blood.[94] In revenge, Nessus gives Deianira his blood-soaked tunic (now poisoned with the Hydra's blood), telling her it will reinvigorate her husband's passions for her.[95] Several years later, thinking her husband's attention had strayed, she gave him the bloodstained shirt. When Heracles put the shirt on, the Hydra's blood immediately poisoned him as if it were acid, ripping his skin and exposing his bones.

Apotheosis

Knowing he was dying, Heracles chose to be burnt on a pyre, which he built himself. As his body burned, his immortal half remained, and he ascended to godhood in an apotheosis.[96] He reconciled with Hera, and received his fourth and final wife, Hebe.[97] For a hero to have some

[89] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.6.1.
[90] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.6.2.
[91] Apollod. Bibl. 2.6.3.
[92] Aesch. *Ag*. 1024-1025; Diod. Sic. 4.31.5.
[93] Soph. *Trach.* 230-252.
[94] Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.8.1, 2.7.7; Hyg. *Fab.* 31.
[95] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.7.7.
[96] Apollod. Bibl. 2.7.7.
[97] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.7.7; *Od.* 11.603-604; *Theog*. 950-955; Paus. 1.19.3.

existence after death is not uncommon, as evidenced through the engagement of shades with heroes, particularly in the *Odyssey*. That we are specifically told that Heracles lives with the gods on Olympus after he is dead is "a very different matter" entirely.[98] It is clearly not a commonality in Greek mythology, as Heracles alone is accorded the honour. Dionysus and Asclepius, for example, are also born to a mortal, but they are always presented as divine in nature. Heracles lives as a mortal hero (though a larger than life one, even by Greek standards) and dies before he becomes an Olympian.

Cult practice distinguished between heroic and divine worship, leaving Heracles to occupy a dilemma-inducing ambiguity, leading to "the need for a myth narrating the hero's death in a manner compatible with a subsequent apotheosis resulted in the curious device of deliberate self-immolation, an idea unparalleled in the rest of Greek mythology."[99] The self-immolation resolved the conflict between ritual protocol: Heracles himself is the sacrifice. Hero cults burned a sacrifice whole, with nothing left for worshippers, while the sacrifices to gods were divided, and the parts not burned for the gods would be eaten by the worshippers. Heracles burns himself whole, and his divine half of his soul, like the smoke from sacrifices to the gods, floats up to Olympus. Immortality and the frequent crossing of boundaries of life and death are old motifs present in Heracles' *logos*. Heracles enters the Underworld to capture Cerberus and the reaching of the 'end of the world' in both the quest for the Cattle of Geryon and Apples of the Hesperides are transgressions across the threshold from mortal to divine. Heracles' grappling with Thanatos and wounding of Hades, known to Homer (evidenced at *Il*. 5.395-397) are explicit commentaries on this motif. The victory of Heracles over the two chthonic deities and his familiarity with Persephone and Hades – shown on vases of the sixth century BCE as willingly loaning Cerberus to Heracles – allude to the subsequent immortality that Heracles attains.

Characterisation

The audience first encounters Heracles in Aristophanes' *Ranae* after Dionysus raps on his door. Upon opening, Heracles is met with the sight of Dionysus dressed up in a costume resembling his own identifying attributes:

Heracles: Οὔ τοι μὰ τὴν Δήμητρα δύναμαι μὴ γελᾶν.
Καίτοι δάκνω γ' ἐμαυτόν· ἀλλ' ὅμως γελῶ.

[98] Shapiro 1983: 9.
[99] Shapiro 1983: 10.

…Ἀλλ' οὐχ οἷός τ' εἴμ' ἀποσοβῆσαι τὸν γέλων
ὁρῶν λεοντῆν ἐπὶ κροκωτῷ κειμένην.
Τίς ὁ νοῦς; Τί κόθορνος καὶ ῥόπαλον ξυνηλθέτην;

Heracles: O by Demeter I cannot stop laughing! Indeed, even though I bite my lip I nevertheless laugh! …But I cannot keep away this sort of laughter, I see a lionskin laid over a yellow robe. Of what mind are you? Why the buskin and the club together?[100]

Here the audience is given a description of what the actor playing Dionysos would have been dressed in – the yellow robe of female initiates and buskins indicative of Dionysiac worship, and likely padding to emulate the massive body of Heracles, as well as his lionskin and club.[101] The *Suda* heralds Pisander's *Heraclea* as the first to "equip Heracles with a club," though it is contested that Stesichorus (PMGF 229) was the first to represent Heracles wearing a lionskin and carrying a club and bow.[102] The club is recorded by the geographer Strabo as being "much more recent than the Trojan saga, a fiction of whoever wrote the *Heraclea*".[103] The costume is then clearly playing to fundamental attributes of Heracles, which identify him in art.

Of κόθορνος, which has been translated as 'buskin' rather than 'boot' in the interests of specificity, Dover describes "a boot which could be put on either foot, mainly worn by women, but characteristic of Dionysos in vase-painting."[104] The disguise later plays a humorous role when an innkeeper in Hades mistakes the Dionysos disguised as Heracles for Heracles disguised as Dionysos. In this exchange, the buskins are again shown as emblematic of Dionysos, in the same way that the lionskin and club are of Heracles.

Οὐ μὲν οὖν με προσεδόκας,
ὁτιὴ κοθόρνους εἶχες, ἂν γνῶναί σ' ἔτι.

You expect me to not recognise you with the buskins on,
you thought that didn't you?

In this humorous exchange, Dionysos' plan backfires – though he hoped to benefit from Heracles' previous encounters and relationships in Hades, he instead encounters the negative aftermath of Heracles' actions.[105] Xanthias, when he is in disguise as Heracles, receives the positive reactions that Dionysos had hoped for. For the comedic reversals to be effective,

[100] Ar. *Ran.* 42-47.
[101] Padilla 1992: 362; Edmonds 2003: 181.
[102] West 2003: 81 n. 3.
[103] Strab. 15.1.8.
[104] Dover 1993: 195.
[105] Edmonds 2003: 190.

Aristophanes assumes his audience has knowledge of Heracles' labours and *katabasis*.[106] Aristophanes relies not only on his audiences' knowledge of the Heracles *logos*, but also on "the variety of depictions of Heracles familiar to his audience from the Greek mythic tradition."[107] Herein lies the comedic effect of the disguise – it is only at line 58 with the use of ὦδέλφ' (brother) that the reader is aware that it is Heracles who has opened the door, but it must have been immediately clear to the audience based on the costume worn by the actor. This effect is then doubled by the reversal when the disguised Dionysos is 'recognised' by the innkeepers.

The Madness of Heracles

Euripides' *Heracles* focus heavily on the effects of the madness of Heracles. The image of the bound Heracles, deeply lamenting with cries of αἰαῖ· στεναγμῶν γάρ με περιβάλλει νέφος – "Alas! A cloud of lamentation engulfs me",[108] illustrates what Lloyd terms the 'suffering Heracles': "the *Trachiniae* and *Heracles* are the only known tragedies before the end of the fifth century about…the 'suffering Heracles' as opposed to Heracles acting as saviour."[109] Euripides presents Heracles as a saviour when he initially appears on stage – Heracles has just exited the Underworld, defying death and competing his super-human tasks, when he arrives to see his family being harassed by Lycus. Heracles kills Lycus in vengeance for his attacks on his family, and the middle of the play has all the hallmarks of the typical end of a tragedy, with the hero having vanquished his foe and reunited with his family: "It would be easy to demonstrate that the prologue and the three *episodia* up to Lycus' murder by themselves form a very satisfactory dramatic action, comparable to others in Euripides' plays in which suppliants at an altar are ultimately rescued from mortal peril."[110] Euripides then takes this heroic Heracles and brings him low, a decision that is innovative in its reversal of the typical dramatic format.[111] Euripides' intentions with his portrayal of Heracles are however not wholly in line with the traditional tragic characterisation of Heracles. The *pathos* invoked by the reorganising of events is immense: "at the peak of his good fortune, when all his cares seem to be at an end and the tyrant is slain, horror and madness ensue."[112] Euripides subverts the audiences' expectation of the known Heracles narrative, and aside from the *pathos* this gives the text, it is ultimately

[106] Edmonds 2003: 191.
[107] Edmonds 2003: 182.
[108] Eur. *HF* 1140.
[109] Lloyd 2021: 303.
[110] Kamerbeek 1966: 4
[111] Davie 2002: 4-6.
[112] Davie 2002: 3.

necessary to place the labours prior to the events of the *Heracles*, as the narrative relies on the involvement of Theseus, whom Heracles rescues while in Hades – "if in the pre-Euripidean tradition the murders preceded the labours, Theseus cannot have played any part."[113]

The madness of Heracles has proved to be one of, if not the, most enduring facets of his character. The cause of the hero's madness is something that was considered throughout the existence of the hero's *logos*, with Euripides providing one of the most famous presentations of the onset of the madness, as well as the murders. Euripides alters the traditional timeline of events, placing the labours prior to the madness and murders of Megara and the children. Euripides' innovation within the text further includes a conversation between Iris and Lyssa, the only involvement of the gods in the text, immediately before the Messenger's speech at 910. This conversation, made more emphatic by it being the only appearance of deities in the work, presents the madness of Heracles as an affliction brought on by Lyssa – an external force. Through the combination of the innovated timeline and the characterisation of Lyssa, Euripides makes astounding use of dramatic irony and a reversal of the typical tragic hero narrative. The presentation of Heracles' madness is central to the effectiveness of this.

In this passage the infection of madness is depicted. Until this point, Heracles has not appeared to be in any particularly strong state of mind, aside from his justified anger at Lycus which he quickly resolves in his typical manner of violence and murder.[114] Euripides' ordering of the labours prior to the murders informs Kamerbeek's opinion that Euripides' intention is to show that the madness is a result of the deep-seated grudge Heracles holds towards Eurystheus that has built up over the course of the labours, until Lyssa's interference.[115] However, Kamerbeek's examples used to demonstrate Heracles' madness as 'within', while not necessarily weak, could be used to argue the opposite – that Heracles' madness is caused by an external force or forces. Kamerbeek argues that Lyssa loosens Heracles' mind allowing for the internal madness to overcome him, but it would be fair to view Lyssa's interference as the very act which turns Heracles mad. To argue this, it is crucial to consider Lyssa's own words in the text:

> τάχα σ' ἐγὼ μᾶλλον χορεύσω καὶ καταυλήσω φόβωι.
>
> Lyssa: I will soon very much put you to dancing and put fear in you through my flute playing.[116]

[113] Bond 1981: xxx.
[114] Wilkins 2021: 317.
[115] Kamerbeek 1966: 15.
[116] Eur. *HF* 871.

This line appears to intentionally refer to Bacchic possession, which is supported by Amphitryon's depiction of Heracles as Ἅιδου βάκχος εἶ, being a "Bacchant of Hell".[117] This association with Bacchanal madness is not the only form Lyssa's infection takes. The word λύσσα is always used by Homer in reference to martial rage, but after Homer it is often used in reference to madness as caused by the gods.[118] Of the nature of depictions of λύσσα, Nagy uses the example of line 934: "Comparable is the wording that we read at line 934 in the *Herakles* of Euripides, where Herakles is pictured as rabidly foaming at the mouth while he is possessed by the 'wolfish rage', *lyssa*, of Lyssa."[119]

> ἀλλ' ἐν στροφαῖσιν ὀμμάτων ἐφθαρμένος
> ῥίζας τ' ἐν ὄσσοις αἱματῶπας ἐκβαλὼν
> ἀφρὸν κατέσταζ' εὔτριχος γενειάδος.
> ἔλεξε δ' ἅμα γέλωτι παραπεπληγμένωι·
>
> And blood veins grew in his two eyes and
> foam was thrown from out of his mouth,
> dripping down his thick beard.
> He spoke at once with a deranged laugh.[120]

This depiction of a mad Heracles as a rabid dog is not the only description of his madness as animalistic. Lyssa describes Heracles as various beasts, including a restless horse, a bull ready to charge.[121] Heracles is depicted in his madness with διαστρόφους ἑλίσσει σῖγα γοργωποὺς κόρας (silently turning those distorted pupils in his fearsome eyes). The comparison of Heracles' eyes to a monstrous Gorgon's appears a handful of times in the text, such as the use of γοργῶπες (fierce or grim-eyed) in line 131-132, Γοργὼν (Gorgon) in line 883, and Γοργόνος (Gorgon) in line 990.

It would be remiss to dismiss the involvement of Lyssa and the conversation between the goddesses as insignificant in any capacity. The dialogue here presents the traditional cause of the madness of Heracles, that being the hatred of Hera.[122]

[117] Eur. *HF* 1119.
[118] Nagy 2019.
[119] Nagy 2019.
[120] Eur. *HF* 928-935.
[121] Eur. *HF* 867-869.
[122] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.4.1: "Heracles was driven mad through the jealousy of Hera."

{Ιρ.} μὴ σὺ νουθέτει τά θ' Ἥρας κἀμὰ μηχανήματα.

{Λυ.} ἐς τὸ λῷιον ἐμβιβάζω σ' ἴχνος ἀντὶ τοῦ κακοῦ.

{Ιρ.} οὐχὶ σωφρονεῖν γ' ἔπεμψε δεῦρό σ' ἡ Διὸς δάμαρ.

Iris: Do not rebuke the plot of mine and Hera's!

Lyssa: I am trying to guide your track against this wrong and towards a better one.

Iris: It was not for temperance that Zeus' wife sent you here.[123]

It is clear in this dialogue that Iris, the handmaid of Hera, is a part of a plot to destroy Heracles. Crucially, it is clearly stated that Heracles *could not* be harmed by Hera until he completed his labours – which due to Euripides' timeline innovation, by the events of the text, he already has:

πρὶν μὲν γὰρ ἄθλους ἐκτελευτῆσαι πικρούς,
τὸ χρή νιν ἐξέσωιζεν οὐδ' εἴα πατὴρ
Ζεύς νιν κακῶς δρᾶν οὔτ' ἔμ' οὔθ' Ἥραν ποτέ·
ἐπεὶ δὲ μόχθους διεπέρασ' Εὐρυσθέως,
Ἥρα προσάψαι κοινὸν αἶμ' αὐτῶι θέλει
παῖδας κατακτείναντι, συνθέλω δ' ἐγώ.

Iris: Before he had accomplished his bitter tasks,
destiny saved him, nor would his father
Zeus allow either myself or Hera to ever do him harm.
Since he has passed through Eurystheus' labours,
Hera wishes to brand to him the trait of murder of common blood,
by having him killing his children, and I have the same wish.[124]

This is not perceived by many scholars as 'enough' of a justification to cause Heracles' madness. Davie argues that there is no clear reason for Heracles to suffer but holds that one can supply Hera as the cause, with her traditional hatred of Zeus' bastards as the justification. He also notes that the motif of this receives limited attention within the text.[125] Indeed, this motif appears almost solely in the discussion between Iris and Lyssa. Clearly, the inclusion of Lyssa is at the behest of Hera and Iris, with Iris openly admitting this to be so, and Lyssa consistently declares her involvement to be against her wishes:

[123] Eur. *HF* 855-857.
[124] Eur. *HF* 827-832.
[125] Davie 2002: 5.

{Λυ.} Ἥλιον μαρτυρόμεσθα δρῶσ' ἃ δρᾶν οὐ βούλομαι.
εἰ δὲ δή μ' Ἥραι θ' ὑπουργεῖν σοί τ' ἀναγκαίως ἔχει,
εἶμί γ'·

Lyssa: I call to witness Helios, that I do that against my wish.
If I must indeed help you and Hera as imposed by fate,
then I will have to go.[126]

A possible motive for Hera's wrath could be that Heracles is both a hero and a god, greater than even other demi-gods, making him perhaps the most threatening of Zeus' bastards.[127] Heracles is referred to by Pindar as ἥρως θεός (Hero-god)[128] in the Nemean Odes. This status may have made Heracles appear as a threat to the gods. Regardless of her potential reasons, it is generally accepted that the traditional cause of Heracles' madness is Hera. Heracles declares οὐ γάρ τι βακχεύσας γε μέμνημαι φρένας – "I have no memory of being deranged".[129] Heracles' reaction speaks more towards a type of possession than an innate mental illness, but this same evidence could argue that Lyssa, as an external agent, only *unleashed* the madness, rather than infecting Heracles with it. However, Lyssa's declaration almost immediately prior to the murders off-stage can counter this:

ὁ δὲ κανὼν οὐκ εἴσεται
παῖδας οὓς ἔτικτεν ἐναρών, πρὶν ἂν ἐμὰς λύσσας ἀφῇι.

Lyssa: the slayer will not see
that he has killed his children until he is discharged of my madness.[130]

Lyssa foretells exactly how Heracles will act after completing the intended action. Rather than his grudge towards Eurystheus overcoming him and being unleashed by Lyssa, Heracles follows Lyssa's intended course of action, with his hallucinations taking the shape of the cause of his absence from his family, which in turn was the reason for Lycus to harass his family. Heracles indeed bears a grudge towards his cousin, and his labours have taken a toll on him. However, it is presumptuous to declare that this is the driving force behind his madness, with the unabashed Iris declaring that her and Hera can only harm Heracles now that his labours are over. It is far more in line with the traditional Heraclean narrative that Hera would lie in wait

[126] Eur. *HF* 859-861.
[127] Papadimitropoulos 2008: 131.
[128] Pindar. *Nem.* 3.22.
[129] Eur. *HF* 1122.
[130] Eur. *HF* 865-866.

and attack Heracles as soon as she was able, than the great demi-god Heracles was reduced to incoherence after completing the ultimate heroic acts.

In the *Ranae*, once Heracles composes his laughter, he begins to question Dionysos' reasons for the disguise. Dionysus has sought out Heracles to find guidance in reaching the Underworld. It is during this conversation with Heracles that his goal in doing so is revealed, through the use of an analogy that plays on the motif of Heracles as a glutton:

{Dionysos}: Οὐκ ἔχω φράσαι.
Ὅμως γε μέντοι σοι δι' αἰνιγμῶν ἐρῶ.
Ἤδη ποτ' ἐπεθύμησας ἐξαίφνης ἔτνους;
{Heracles}: Ἔτνους; Βαβαιάξ, μυριάκις γ' ἐν τῷ βίῳ.
{Dionysos}: Ἆρ' ἐκδιδάσκω τὸ σαφὲς ἢ πέρα φράσω;
{Heracles}: Μὴ δῆτα περὶ ἔτνους γε· πάνυ γὰρ μανθάνω.

Dionysos: I have no way to tell you.
Nevertheless, let me tell you this in a riddle.
Have you ever suddenly set your heart upon pea soup?
Heracles: Pea soup? *(wistfully)* Oh, ten thousand times in my life!
Dionysos: Have I explained clearly or do I need to explain further?
Heracles: No need, concerning pea soup, I comprehend fully. [131]

There is much in this passage that warrants examination. Firstly, there is the comic characterisation of Heracles as a glutton, which is considered a standard motif of the character in comedy.[132] Heracles as a glutton is shown early in the text: Μὴ δῆτα περὶ ἔτνους γε· πάνυ γὰρ μανθάνω.[133] This motif of the hungry Heracles is also very obvious later in the text, in the scene with the two female innkeepers reprimanding Dionysus in disguise as Heracles for eating up all their stock (549-560). This scene plays on the audiences' knowledge of the mythic tradition and traditional portrayal of Heracles' character as a rather brutish figure – "Heracles has angered the inhabitants of Hades by his violation of their realm, and Aristophanes thus can posit a hostile reception for Heracles at his next appearance."[134]

[131] Ar. *Ran*. 60-65.
[132] Padila 1992: 363; Wilkins 2021: 316. Aristophanes himself has utilised this motif of Heracles as a glutton in *Vesp.* 60f.
[133] Ar. *Ran*. 65.
[134] Edmonds 2003: 191.

The tone with which Heracles responds to Dionysus' peculiar description of the extent of his lust, with the comparison to pea soup, is rather wistful, indicating how Heracles' mindset regarding food is 'lustful' in a sense, particularly so after the discussion previously, in which Dionysos describes his reading of the lewd *Andromeda*, a play now lost, and Heracles plays on the stock joke about Cleisthenes.[135] The gag is present in *Lysistrata* at line 1092: οὐκ ἔσθ' ὅπως οὐ Κλεισθένη βινήσομεν. – "we shall find no resource but to fuck Cleisthenes". The joke, around for at least twenty years before the production of the *Ranae* (*Acharnenses* 117-121; *Thesmophoriazusa* 574-654) relies on the perceived femininity of this Cleisthenes and his supposed sexual preferences favouring penetration.[136] More than merely a crude joke typical of Greek comedy, out of the mouth of Heracles there is an escalation of the sexual tone present. Heracles as an insatiably lustful man, evidenced most explicitly in the episode of Thespis' fifty daughters.

In a comic spin on his infamous madness, Heracles acts mad in order to scare off the innkeepers and avoid paying his fee:

{Innkeeper}: Κἄπειτ' ἐπειδὴ τἀργύριον ἐπραττόμην,
ἔβλεψεν εἴς με δριμὺ κἀμυκᾶτό γε …καὶ τὸ ξίφος γ' ἐσπᾶτο μαίνεσθαι δοκῶν
Thereafter, when I was asking for the money,
he perceived me keenly and even bellowed … and he drew his sword and appeared mad!

Here we see Heracles rely on his usual solution for most of the problems arising during his labours, violence. This is a typical trait of Heracles in literature and can be found alongside other characteristics features of Heracles in all three dramatic genres (tragedy, comedy, and Satyr plays). These characteristics play on the consistent excess found in Heracles, including his physique, his unsatiable appetite for food, his virility, his madness, and his *katabasis* and *apotheosis*.[137]

Folk Memory

The duality of Heracles is not limited to his role in Euripides as a saviour and killer, nor in his paternal connections being both mortal and divine. Heracles is contrasted against Theseus as the Doric counterpart to the Attic hero – but Heracles has been panhellenic since a date so early

[135] Ar. *Ran*. 48-57.
[136] Dover 1993: 196.
[137] Wilkins 2021: 317.

that we cannot definitively pinpoint his origin.[138] He is panhellenic, yet distinctly Doric – with fair claim as either a Theban or Argolid hero. He may have been a Mycenaean hero as much of his narrative is known to Homer. His popularity is intense across almost all of the Greek world: "even among ancient Greek heroes, Heracles stands out as a superlative figure: the strongest, the one who suffered the most, and the most celebrated in both poetry and cult"[139] Pindar calls Heracles *herōs theos*, and this is an immensely apt description with Heracles alone worshipped not just as a hero, but as a god.[140]

Heracles is shown in the *Ranae* to act mad to get out of paying for his meals, but his madness in the *Heracles* is more tragic than even the genre would necessitate due to the innovations of Euripides with regards to the timeline of events. Euripides' Heracles is associated with his weaponry. His costume is his weaponry itself, which once was a symbol of protection and heroicness, and is now the very thing that causes him such a degree of grief that he veils himself in his cloak.[141] This depiction of Heracles as a "weeping, broken figure,"[142] essentially shrouding himself as his family will be in funerary shrouds,[143] is contrary to the long-enduring perception of Heracles, who from early texts such as Pseudo-Hesiod's *Scutum* is referred to with epithets such as "powerful,"[144] "mighty,"[145] and various versions of 'strong of heart.'[146] With such a large disparity between portrayals of Heracles, it is necessary to briefly consider the possible intentions for this. Heracles as a glutton has already been considered, and as noted is in line with the typical comedic portrayal of the demi-god. Aristophanes "comically exploits the variety of imagery and ideas associated with Heracles to create a situation in which Dionysus is trapped between the conflicting consequences of the contradictory associations of the character he has adopted."[147]

Appetites of Heracles

In both the *Republic* (435e-444e) and *Phaedrus* (246a-247b), Plato describes the soul as having facets to its existence: the rational part, the spirited part, and most relevant for this discussion, an appetitive part. It is the attainment of harmony between these three parts that culminates in

[138] Larson 2007: 183.
[139] Pache 2021: 3.
[140] Pind. Nem. 3.22.
[141] Eur. *HF* 1159-1160.
[142] Davie 2002: 5.
[143] Worman 1999: 98.
[144] Hes. *Sc.* 321, 416, 452.
[145] Hes. *Sc*. 349.
[146] Hes. *Sc*. 424, 447, 458.
[147] Edmonds 2003: 189.

the virtuous individual. The appetites of Heracles are not an element of hybris, but are a transgression that is allowed in Heracles, and virtually in Heracles alone. Heracles is a glutton, with sexual desires that border on the ridiculous – yet he is still an aspirational ideal and idealised to the degree that he and he alone amongst the heroes receives an apotheosis. Excess is contrary to Greek ideals, yet again Heracles is allowed to transgress into absurd excess without this affecting the legitimacy of his character as one to be worshipped. Excess is also present in the Heracles' *logos* in the description Apollodorus gives of the blessings he receives from the gods: a sword from Hermes, a bow and arrows from Apollo, a golden breastplate from Hephaestus, and a robe from Athena.[148] While most heroes have some divine aid, Heracles is again set apart from the other heroes through the sheer exorbitance of the divine gifts to him.

Heracles and Hercules in Art

Heracles is an extremely common hero to see on black figure pottery, with the primary depiction being the events of his labours.[149] The same applies to red figure, but there is a gradual reduction of Heracles' appearances in favour of Theseus: "if painted vases were the icons of the predominantly illiterate Greeks of the Archaic period, then Herakles' unchallenged place in their hearts and minds is spelled out clearly in black and red."[150]

Figure 31

Much like his stage presence, Heracles' image in art includes the club, lion skin, and often his bow as identifying features.[151] These features make the hero extremely recognisable in art, as does the hyper-muscular body that he would come to possess by the time of the Romans.[152] The presentation of the lion and the club immediately indicates Heracles, and the massive bulk of the hero was honoured in the gymnasium as patron of wrestling.[153] The

[148] Apollod. *Bibl*. 2.4.11.
[149] Smith 2021: 345.
[150] Shapiro 1983: 8.
[151] See Figure 17: Douris, (c.480 BCE). *Heracles on the sea in the bowl of Helios,* tondo of an Attic red figure kylix, Vatican City, Museo Vaticano 16563.
[152] See Figure 18: Glycon of Athens (c.216 BCE, copy of an original by Lysippus from the 4th century BCE). *Hercules Farnese,* Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale. Inv. 6001.
[153] Paus. 4.32.1.

specular strength and physical domination shown by Heracles persists in Roman representations, and it is through this that the best remembered elements of the hero come through to us in the 21st century –which we continue to aspire towards.

The image of the monster-slayer has endured alongside his strength.[154] Often, Heracles is in a dynamic pose in depictions right through from Classical Greece to the Renaissance, usually naked, [155] and almost always heavily muscled:

Figure 12

> the rounded deltoids, the sculpted pectorals, the 'six-pack' abdomen, the pronounced quadriceps, the protruding buttocks– the physical structure of an athletic male has not changed significantly in 3000 years– even though the amount of muscularity deemed aesthetically pleasing wavers constantly.[156]

Outside of Heracles, it seems that 'heavy' athletes – boxers, wrestlers, and the like – do not appear to have been subjected to the same erotic gaze that 'lean' athletes were.[157] The explicitly lithe, supple body of characters like Theseus is contrasted against the large Heracles. This seems in part to be influenced by the Attic opposition of Theseus to Heracles, as well as a perception of youthful beauty.[158] Aristotelian perceptions of moderation and balance is embodied in perceptions of athletic beauty – if Heracles was the typical perception of beauty, the heavily muscled man would be presented in literature as the ideal, rather than the lean *ephebe*. Rather, the portrayal of Heracles as (sometimes excessively) heavily muscled again points to the idea of excess associated with the hero.

[154] Stafford 2012: 23. For the hyper-muscled Heracles, see Rubens' *Hercules Fighting the Nemean Lion* (c.1608, Bucharest) as an especially beautiful example.
[155] Stafford 2012: 212.
[156] Reid 2012: 283.
[157] Reid 2012: 283.
[158] Arist. *Rhet*. 1361b11.

Much like the creatures he slays during his labours, Heracles himself is immortalised in the form of a constellation. In combination with his apotheosis, this creates an extremely emphatic notion of Heracles as divine and heightens his status as one of the greatest heroes.

On his return to Mycenae after having obtained the cattle of Geryon, Heracles encountered two sons of Poseidon who were giants. Alebion and Dercynus engaged in battle with Heracles. They proved difficult enough for Heracles that he prayed on his knees to his father, Zeus.[159] Under the aegis of Zeus, Heracles defeated the giants. Because of this position of supplication the name Engonasin (Εγγόνασιν), which translates to 'on his knees' was given to the Heracles constellation.[160]

[159] Apollod. *Bibl.* 2.5.10; Strab. 4.1.7.
[160] The primary star of the constellation, Alpha Herculis, is traditionally named Rasalgethi, Arabic for 'Head of the Kneeler.' See Hard 2015: 26-31.

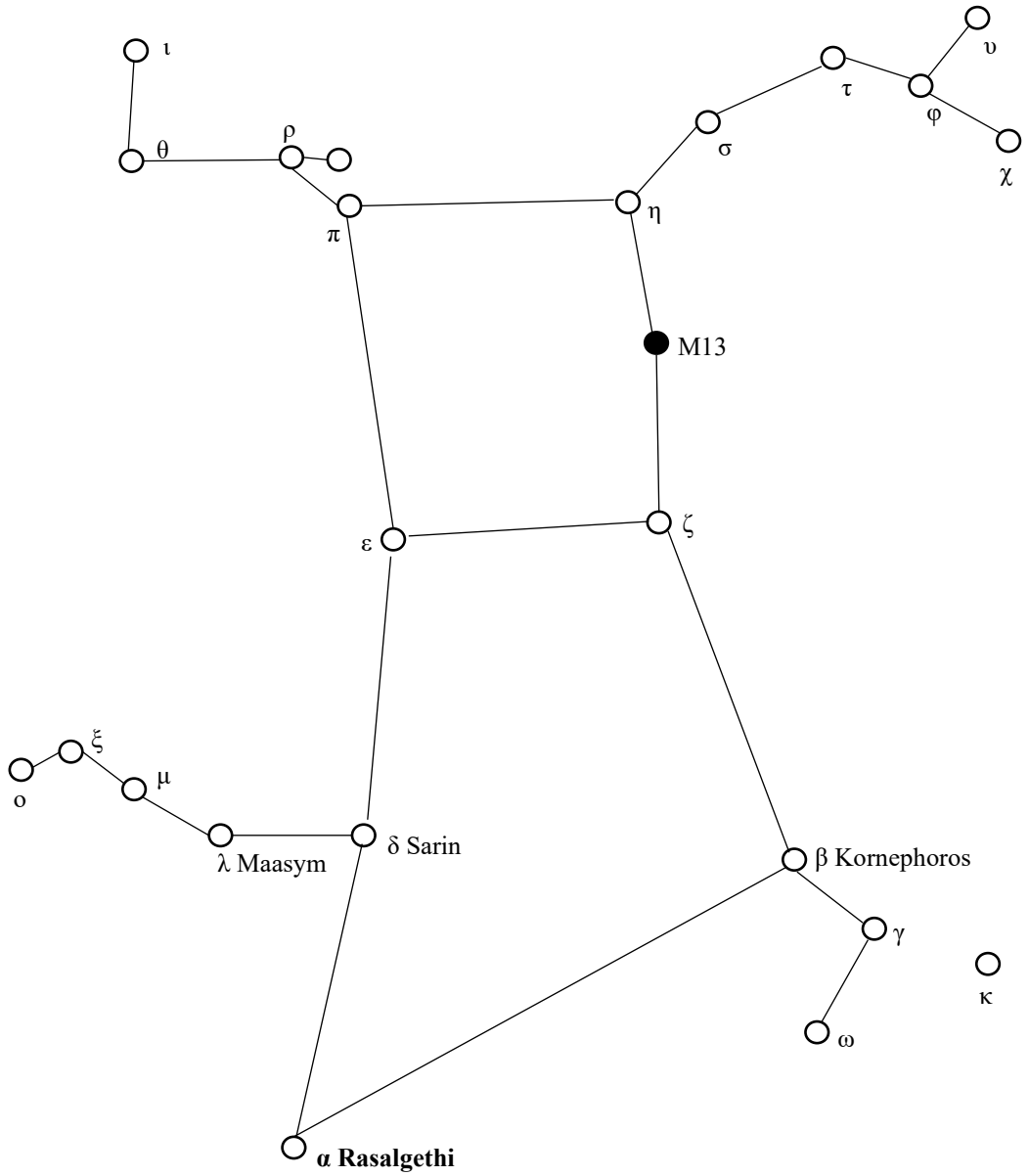
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Figure 13

The Sacred Disease

The symptoms of Heracles' madness given in Euripides *Heracles* has similarities to depictions of epilepsy:

Messenger: μέλλων δὲ δαλὸν χειρὶ δεξιᾶι φέρειν,
ἐς χέρνιβ' ὡς βάψειεν, Ἀλκμήνης τόκος
ἔστη σιωπῆι. καὶ χρονίζοντος πατρὸς
παῖδες προσέσχον ὄμμ'· ὁ δ' οὐκέθ' αὑτὸς ἦν,
ἀλλ' ἐν στροφαῖσιν ὀμμάτων ἐφθαρμένος
ῥίζας τ' ἐν ὄσσοις αἱματῶπας ἐκβαλὼν
ἀφρὸν κατέσταζ' εὔτριχος γενειάδος.
ἔλεξε δ' ἅμα γέλωτι παραπεπληγμένωι·

Messenger: Alcmene's son **froze, keeping silent**, ready to raise the firebrand in his right hand to dip it into the holy water. And the children held their eyes at their father as he hesitated. He was no longer himself,
but in his corruption **his eyes rolled.**
And blood veins grew in his two eyes and
foam was thrown from out of his mouth, dripping down his thick beard.
He spoke at once with a deranged laugh[161]

In the ancient world what we now know to be called epilepsy and seizure disorders was referred to as the 'sacred disease' and was believed to be a manifestation of pollution.[162] There are common symptoms given in Hippocrates' treatise *De morbo sacro* that align with the depiction of Heracles' madness – the rigidity of the body and the presence of some degree of vacancy, the rolling eyes, and the foaming of the mouth. These symptoms recur "a great deal" in tragedy; διασροφή and ἀφρός are given as symptoms of madness in *Ba.* 1122f. and *Or*. 220, 253.[163] At *Med.* 1173, they are used to described symptoms of poisoning. Mentions of ἀφρός dripping down a beard can be found at *IT* 308. With the existence of similarly described manifestations of madness across his works, it is clear that in *Heracles*, Euripides is using a conventional model of the manifestation of madness; that this image was effective enough to use repeatedly points to at least some degree of accuracy in its depiction. This madness of Heracles was said to have been cured with Hellebore.[164]

[161] Eur. *HF* 928-935.
[162] Larson 2007: 11; Imai 2016: 2.
[163] Bond 1981: 309.
[164] Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἀντίκυραι; Phot. *Bibl.* 190.10.

Acknowledging the capacity for medicinal use of the roots of black hellebore (*Helleborus niger*), Hippocrates and Theophrastus, as well as later sources such as Dioscorides (c. 40-90 AD) and Celsus (25-50 AD), make mention of the plant's use in treating imbalances of the humours that could lead to madness.[165] The white, or false hellebore (now known as *Veratrum album)* and black hellebore had similar pharmacological effects, and ancient medicinal recipes designed to treat gout, insanity, and epilepsy appear to rarely specify what type of hellebore was needed.[166] The hellebore genus as a whole has many medicinal uses, leading to some degree of confusion over which species is actually referred to in ancient texts. The prolific use of the hellebore genus continues today in aid of toothache, constipation, joint-pain, abortion, and skin diseases.[167] Mentions of the use of hellebore as a drug that was well-known to Greek society also occur in Plutarch's *Demetrius* (20.2), and Aristophanes' *Vespae* (1489). Pausanias attests to the use of hellebore (10.36.7), and accounts for the use of hellebore in a chemical attack by Solon in a siege against the Cirrhaeans. The use of hellebore as a known treatment of madness generally is attested in Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales* 6.7.2.

Figure 14
Helleborus odorus subsp. Cyclophyllus.
Mount Chortiatis, Thessaloniki. 2012.
CC-BY 4.0 Wikimedia Commons.

Generally, ethnobotanists have accepted that the hellebore used to treat madness in ancient Greece is *Helleborus cyclophyllus*. A substantial motivator for the identification of this plant is its geographic distribution – it is native to Greece and southern regions of Europe. *H. cyclohyllus* is the only *Helleborus* subtaxon found in Greece.[168] *H. niger* in contrast is native to Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. This distribution, in combination with the high frequency of prescription of hellebore as a pharmaceutical drug, indicates that the hellebore used to cure Heracles of his madness is likely *H. cyclophyllus,* as it was readily available.

[165] Brillatz et al. 2020: 2.
[166] Paus. 10.36.7; Totelin & Hardy 2015: 73.
[167] Brillatz et al. 2020: 2.
[168] Brillatz et al. 2020: 2.

Conclusion

Heracles' dual nature is a crucial part of his identity. His apotheosis cements his status as a god, but throughout his *logos* there is a constant tension between mortality and divinity. Not only is this present in references to his paternity, but also in his constant transgression of boundaries – moral, social, and physical – that is indicative of his status as a literal *herōs theos*. The theme of mortality and the unique trait of Heracles in overcoming this sets him beyond the other Greek heroes. Not only does Heracles transcend the ordinary mortal limitations like the other heroes, but he also goes beyond this and transgresses across the boundary even heroes cannot cross – between life and death.

An excessive nature is characteristic of Heracles. His appetites are immense and go beyond any perceived propriety of Greek society. Heracles is antagonistic to Aristotelian and Platonic ideas of modesty, but whereas Odysseus' nature became scrutinised in later literature, Heracles is permitted this opposition. In some regards, this is because he is directly contrasted with the civic, controlled Theseus, which reinforces the Attic conceptualisation of the monstrous and excessive 'other' that is contrary to Athenian ideals.

Hybris typically destroys a hero, but Heracles' own actions do not bring disaster upon himself. Rather, divine interference causes the tragic events in his *logos*; Hera brings on his madness that drives him to kill his children, and it is at the behest of a corrupted oracle that he serves Eurystheus. Yet this does not account for a good deal of his excessive, transgressive actions. He sleeps with fifty women in the same night and impregnates all of them. He kills his tutor in a fit of vindicative rage. These are not events in which he is possessed by a separate force that pushes him beyond a mortal threshold; they are actions that are in line with his characterisation. He is excessive in his appetites for sex and violence, surpassing most moral boundaries put in place by Greek society. If Odysseus has the aid of Hermes and Athena, and an enemy in Poseidon, Heracles must surpass this by having more divine aid, and the wife of Zeus himself as his antagonist. If Achilles' tortured grief drives his great deeds and Theseus defeats a monstrous beast, Heracles must have a greater tragedy and destroy multiple creatures that are not of earthly nature. Every component of Heracles' character is excessive – he more muscular, more virile, more monstrous, more popular, more tragic, more transgressive, more divine than the other famous heroes of Classical Greece.

Heracles does not merely surpass mortal limitations; he challenges the division between the divine and the mortal. His cults treat him as both a hero and a god, he does not lose any

component of his identity in this regard. His ability to physically injure gods and monstrous beasts indicate his status as a figure who challenges the hierarchy. He is corrupted by the gods – perhaps to reduce the threat he poses to the order. This corruption is through the 'sacred disease', accounting for his madness and the epileptic-like symptoms ascribed to the manifestations of madness. But with his status as an immensely powerful hero that can only be brought low by the gods themselves, we would expect Heracles, familiar to some of our oldest extant sources, to have appeared far more abundantly than he appears to. This can be accounted for through the likely spread of Heracles' *logos* through folk-mediums such as oral traditions. The liberal attribution of constellations and astrological phenomena to events that occur within Heracles' *logos* may also indicate the prevalence of his *logos* as a 'pure' folk narrative spread orally. The mnemonic benefits of having a hero who is so excessive and larger than life are immense; it ensures that the hero is immortalised and that his attributes and actions are remembered in perpetuity, even if the reason for their inclusion is forgotten.

Chapter 5: Theseus

Theseus was the most revered hero in ancient Athens, celebrated as the city-state's founder as well as for his grand adventures. It is essential to note that there is no single canonical text for Theseus, as there are for Achilles and Odysseus. Like Heracles, Theseus' adventures are scattered across a complex of myth and literature. No connected account of the Theseus narratives survives earlier than those of Pseudo-Apollodorus and Plutarch.[1]

Life

In the time before the Trojan war, a daughter of Pittheus, one of the lines of the Pelopid dynasty which includes Heracles, Agamemnon and Menelaus,[2] lived in a town called Troezen in the north-eastern Peloponnese. This princess of Troezen was named Aethra. The King of Athens, named Aegeus, came to Troezen to seek the advice of Pittheus. Aegeus had received a typically cryptic oracle from the Oracle at Delphi, which he had sought out for advice regarding his childlessness. The oracle told him: "loose not the jutting neck of the wineskin, great chief of the people, till you have come once again to the city of Athens."[3]

Pittheus understood the oracle as meaning that Aegeus was to remain celibate until he returned to Athens, but persuaded Aegeus to engage in intercourse with his daughter Aethra.[4] Aegeus did so but was not aware of her identity. When he discovered that she was the king's daughter, he formulated a plan in case a son was born. He hid a sword and a pair of sandals beneath a large rock, and told Aethra that if a son was born, to wait until he reached maturity, and then when he could lift the rock, to send the youth to Athens with the sword and sandals as proof of his paternity.[5]

A son was indeed born to Aethra, and she named him Theseus. She kept his lineage secret from him, and people began to believe he was the son of Poseidon. This was in fact a version of the Theseus narrative that was especially widespread at Troezen, whose patron deity was Poseidon.[6] It does not seem to have been uncommon for Greek heroes to have a dual paternity, with both a divine father and a mortal one. Theseus' paternity through Poseidon was a popular account, often appearing in conjunction with the myth of his journey to find King Aeacus.

[1] Pseudo-Apollodorus is usually dated to the 1st or 2nd century CE, Plutarch dates to c. 46-120 CE.
[2] Plut. *Thes.* 7.1. See Figure 2.
[3] Plut. *Thes*. 3.3.
[4] Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.16.1.
[5] Plut. *Thes*. 3; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.16.1.
[6] Plut. *Thes.* 6.1; Edwards 1970: 9.

Bacchylides makes mention of Theseus travelling to "the home of his father, lord of horses."[7] When he reached early manhood, at the age of sixteen according to Pausanias, he had proven himself to be of great physical strength, but also courage and intelligence.[8] His mother then revealed Aegeus' plan, and took Theseus to the rock that hid the sword and sandals. Theseus raised the rock easily, collected the articles, and left for Athens.[9] Rather than travelling by sea, which would have been a quick, straightforward journey, he travelled by land along the Saronic Gulf.[10] This path was infested with bandits, and Theseus sought to "punish those who offered him violence."[11] This choice of the more dangerous route is said by Plutarch to have been inspired by Heracles' deeds.[12] A crucial differentiation between Heracles and Theseus is the dichotomy set up between the two through the panhellenic representation of Heracles and the distinctly Attic representations of Theseus. Heracles defeated mythical beasts and was perhaps the most godlike amongst the heroes, while Theseus was more of a benefactor to mankind, in particular the Athenians. Attic artists played heavily on this contrast between the two, with Theseus set up as the Ionic counterpart to the "disagreeably Dorian" Heracles.[13] Theseus was said to idolise his older second cousin, and the closeness of the two can be seen in *Thes.* 30.5, where Plutarch claims that it was at the behest of Theseus that Heracles was initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries. Theseus seeks to emulate Heracles:

> But he, as it would seem, had long since been secretly fired by the glorious valour of Heracles, and made the greatest account of that hero, and was a most eager listener to those who told what manner of man he was…In like manner Theseus admired the valour of Heracles, until by night his dreams were of the hero's achievements, and by day his ardour led him along and spurred him on in his purpose to achieve the like.[14]

Theseus dispatched many bandits on his route, as well as the Crommyonian Sow, before arriving in Athens.[15] Of the sow, Plutarch describes the beast as being "fierce and hard to master"[16] and also reports that there was the belief that the sow was actually a female robber;

[7] Bacchyl. 17.99-100; cf. Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 2.5.3.
[8] Paus. 1.27.7.
[9] Plut. *Thes.* 6.2.-3; Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.16.1.
[10] Edwards 1970: 9.
[11] Plut. *Thes.* 7.2.
[12] Plut. *Thes.* 6.6.
[13] Agard, 1928: 86; Davie 1982: 25.
[14] Plut. *Thes.* 6.6-7.
[15] Plut. *Thes.* 8.1-11.2. Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.16.1 provides a brief account of Theseus' killing of these bandits.
[16] Plut. *Thes.* 9.1.

support for this lies in the fact that the sow – whether pig or woman – had a name: Phaia.[17] At the river Cephisus, he was purified of the bloodguilt he accrued during this journey.[18]

Plutarch records the date of Theseus' arrival in Athens as "the eighth day of the month Cronius, now called Hecatombaeon."[19] The city of Athens was in a state of utter disorder, with Aegeus living in fear of his nephews, Pallas' fifty sons (the Pallantids), who were vying for the throne as Aegeus was apparently childless. The Athenian king was also under the influence of his foreign wife, the sorceress Medea.[20] At a dinner given in honour of Theseus, Medea persuaded Aegeus to poison Theseus. Before this attempt on his life could be made, Theseus drew his sword, apparently intending to carve the food, and Aegeus, recognising the sword as the one he had concealed beneath the rock in Troezen, knocked down the cup of poison.[21] He acknowledged Theseus as his son and heir. In response, the Pallantids attacked Theseus, but were defeated by him.[22] On his own initiative, according to Plutarch, Theseus proved himself further by seeking out the savage Bull of Marathon, which he captured alive and dedicated to Apollo Delpinios – Apollo the god of prophecy at Delphi.[23] But according to Apollodorus, Aegeus sent Theseus out to kill the bull prior to the dinner, a task which Theseus completes; the narrative then follows the same path as Plutarch's account.

Evidence for and accounts of Theseus in epic poetry are limited and are almost wholly fragmentary and come from later in Greek history: "Homer scarcely knows him, yet he was a household word to the Athenians of Pericles' day."[24] There are references to a *Theseis* in various Scholia as well as Plutarch's *Life of Theseus,* suggesting that Theseus' *logos* was a patchwork of narratives, in contrast to the canonical Homeric narratives accorded to Achilles and Odysseus. Even Heracles' narratives tend to focus on singular aspects, while Theseus has many versions of the same narrative.[25]

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[17] Plut. *Thes*. 9.1. Apollodorus claims that the sow was the offspring of Echidna and Typhon and was named Phaia after the "old woman who had reared it" (Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 1.1).
[18] Plut. *Thes*. 12.1.
[19] Plut. *Thes*. 12.1. Hecatombaeon is the first month of the Athenian calendar, beginning at the first new moon after the summer solstice. It is equivalent to July or August in the Gregorian calendar.
[20] Plut. *Thes*.12.2. Medea had fled from Corinth in a chariot driven by dragons and sent by her grandfather Helios, after she murdered her children. She received refuge in Athens by King Aegeus when she promised to use her magic to get an heir.
[21] Plut. *Thes.* 12.2-3. Plutarch accounts for the name of a statue at Delphinium at *Thes*. 12.3: "And it is said that as the cup fell, the poison was spilled where now is the enclosure in the Delphinium, for that is where the house of Aegeus stood, and the Hermes to the east of the sanctuary is called the Hermes at Aegeus's gate."
[22] Plut. *Thes.* 13.1-3.
[23] Plut. *Thes.* 14.1.
[24] Higgens 1970: 1
[25] Σ Pind. *Ol.* 3.50b (West 2003: 218); Plut. *Thes.* 28.1.

Pausanias cites Panyassis in reference to Pirithous and Theseus' confinement in the Underworld; saying that they "did not give the appearance of being bound there, but instead of bonds the rock had grown onto their flesh."[26] This confinement was due to the attempted abduction of Persephone. The lost *Pirithous,* tentatively attributed to Euripides may have centered around the attempted abduction and the subsequent punishment.[27]

Famed Deeds

Minotaur

With all these adventures and conquests already accomplished, Theseus was already established as a worthy future King of Athens. He next had to face his best-known conquest, the Minotaur. The slaying of the Minotaur is one of the most stable elements in the Theseus *logos*. Although early Greek poetry does not mention the monster, artistic evidence from the sixth century BCE proves the existence of the story ad its popularity throughout Greece, particularly in Athens.[28] The depiction and role of the Minotaur evolved with Theseus: "as Theseus himself underwent subsequent transformations of character and significance, we can imagine the Minotaur's symbolic significance shifted correspondingly."[29] Trzaskoma describes the Minotaur's narrative as having a "clear skeleton" that remains relatively unchanged throughout its depictions - allowing Apollodorus' *Library*, though a comparatively late source, to be used as the 'standard' version of the narrative.[30]

The king of Knossos in Crete, the immensely powerful Minos, had a wife named Pasiphaë. Pasiphaë, whether as punishment from Poseidon or Aphrodite, conceived an unnatural passion for a bull. With the aid of the renowned Athenian craftsman, Daedalus, Pasiphaë coupled with the bull while hidden inside a wooden cow. Against the laws of nature, she fell pregnant and birthed a ferocious monster, with the body of a man and the head of a bull, who ate human flesh; Plutarch claims that the Minotaur was of διπλῇ φύσει – dual origin: "Euripides says, [the Minotaur] was 'A mingled form and hybrid birth of monstrous shape, two different natures, man and bull, were joined in him.'"[31] To hide both the horrible monster as well as the shame

[26] Paus. 10.29.9.
[27] Eur. fr. 593 & 594 Nauck = Critias fr. 4 & 3 *TrGF*; Malamis 2025: 374.
[28] Trzaskoma 2024: 203.
[29] Trzaskoma 2024: 203.
[30] Trzaskoma 2024: 204.
[31] Plut. *Thes*. 15.2.

of his wife's acts, King Minos had the creature confined in a specially constructed Labyrinth designed by Daedalus.[32]

The Minotaur was named after Minos' stepfather, Asterius. [33] We have components of the story of the Minotaur in both the *Odyssey* and epic fragments. At *Odyssey* 11.322, Odysseus describes meeting Ariadne amongst the dead in Hades and refers to her as κούρην Μίνωος ὀλοόφρονος – "daughter of malignant Minos". Odysseus then briefly narrates that Theseus was bringing her from Crete to Athens, when "Artemis killed her in sea-washed Dia, when Dionysos bore witness against her."[34] Here we find another different version of the abandonment of Ariadne. Clearly, components of the Theseus *logos* existed long before the most popular accounts of the narrative.[35] By the fifth century BCE however, the central elements of the narrative were clearly in place. The oldest connected narrative surrounding Theseus and the Minotaur appears in the 5th century BCE poems of Bacchylides, whose fragmentary Poem 26 details Pasiphae, her lust, and the construction of an apparatus that would enable her to have sex with the bull.[36] Sophocles' fragmentary *Minos,* all but lost to us now, likely centred around the same narrative.[37] Euripides composed the *Cretans* around the conception and birth of the Minotaur.[38]

King Minos, in an act of vengeance for his sons' death in Attic territory, conquered Megara and continually harassed Athens.[39] Athens, at this point, was afflicted with divinely wrought famine, plague, and drought, and the city subsequently was advised by the gods to give Minos whatever he demanded, and they would be freed of their strife.[40] Minos cruelly demanded a tribute every nine years of seven youths and seven young girls, who would be sent to Crete and thrown into the Labyrinth.[41] The third tribute had Aegeus selecting by lot the tribute from his population, and out of pity, Theseus volunteered, boasting that he would slay the Minotaur and

[32] Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.15.8-9.
[33] Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.8-11.
[34] *Od*. 11.322-325.
[35] Trzaskoma 2024: 206.
[36] Trzaskoma 2024: 207.
[37] Soph. fr.407.*TrGF*; Trzaskoma 2024: 207.
[38] Eur. fr. 471-472g *TrGF*; POxy. 2461; Tzraskoma 2024: 207
[39] Plut. *Thes*. 15.1; Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.15.7.
[40] Plut. *Thes.* 15.1. Apollod. *Bibl*. 3.15.8.
[41] Plut. *Thes.* 15.1-2. According to Plutarch at *Thes*. 16.2, Aristotle in his lost 'Constitution of Bottiaea' strongly believes that these youths were not put to death but were rather enslaved in Crete.

rid Athens of this tribute.[42] He swore that if he was successful, he would change the black sail of the ship which sent the tribute to Crete to a white one.[43]

Theseus sailed to Crete, where Minos' daughter, Ariadne fell in love with him and decided to aid him. Ariadne, gave him a ball of thread to aid him in navigating his way out of the Labyrinth.[44] In the Labyrinth, Theseus found the Minotaur and killed him in single combat.[45] He then fled from Crete, taking Ariadne with him.[46] Daedalus, because he had suggested the idea of the thread to Ariadne, was imprisoned along with his son Icarus in the Labyrinth – from which he would escape in the well-known narrative of Icarus' flight.[47]

On his way back to Athens, Theseus abandoned Ariadne on the island of Naxos. The accounts of this abandonment vary widely between sources, and this lack of any agreement appears to have frustrated Plutarch:

> There are many other stories about these matters, and also about Ariadne, but they do not agree at all. Some say that she hung herself because she was abandoned by Theseus; others that she was conveyed to Naxos by sailors and there lived with Oinarus the priest of Dionysus, and that she was abandoned by Theseus because he loved another woman.[48]

Apollodorus gives an account where Ariadne and her children by Theseus arrived on Delos, where Dionysos fell in love with Ariadne, abducted her, and fathered children with her.[49] In his grief at this, Theseus forgot to change the colour of the sails. This frustration with incongruent evidence evidently affected ancient audiences as well: Plutarch cites a Naxian tradition at *Thes*. 20.1 wherein there were two Ariadnes – one who married Dionysos and one who was abandoned by Theseus. Whatever happened to Ariadne, Theseus sailed from Delos without her. Folk practices were set up on the island, supposedly founded by Theseus himself, and discussed below.[50] From Delos, Theseus returned to Athens, apparently in his excitement, forgot to change the colour of his sails.[51] Aegeus, who had been eagerly awaiting his only son's return, threw himself from a cliff, thinking his son had perished in the Labyrinth.[52]

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[42] Plut. *Thes*. 17.2; Pl. *Phaed.* 58a10.
[43] Plut. *Thes.* 17.4.
[44] Plut. *Thes*. 19.1.
[45] Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 1.9. The method of dispatching the Minotaur varies, sometimes a club or sword is used.
[46] Plut. *Thes*. 19.1.
[47] Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 1.8-9,12-13; Ov. *Met.* 8.183-235.
[48] Plut. *Thes.* 20.1.
[49] Apollod. *Bibl*. *epit*. 1.9-10.
[50] Plut. *Thes* 21.1-2.
[51] Plut. *Thes.* 22.1.
[52] Plut. *Thes.* 22.1.

Founding of Athens

Theseus now became king of Athens and unified the scattered populations of Attica, under the capital of Athens.[53] Plutarch associates this synoecism with facets considered central to civic life: the foundation of democracy, the naming of the town as Athens, the establishment of festivals such as the Panathenaia and the Oschophoria, the division of the population into classes (noblemen, peasants, and artisans), the introduction of coinage, and the re-founding of the Isthmian games.[54] The first breath of democracy comes through Theseus, who after founding the Panathenaea: "then, laying aside the royal power, as he had agreed, he proceeded to arrange the government, and that too with the sanction of the gods."[55] Atthidographers agree that the development of early Athens occurred in three steps: Cecrops' division of Attica into twelve city-states under his rule, followed by Theseus' *synoikismos* of these city-sates, which in turn was followed by Cleisthenes' democratic constitution.[56] Theseus, though contradictory in modern minds in his identity as a monarch and a democratic leader, was accepted by the Athenians as a democratic monarch, a 'hero-king.'[57]

Further Adventures

After he became king, Theseus became known as a friend to those in distress. He received the elderly, exiled, blind Oedipus with kindness,[58] and befriended Heracles while he was coping with the aftermath of his madness-driven murder of his children.[59] He is also mentioned in some sources as an Argonaut, accompanying Jason on his voyage to obtain the Golden Fleece.[60] This, however, contradicts the more famous versions of Theseus' adventures. The *Argonautica* portrays Medea as a young maiden, while in the Theseus narrative she is generally accepted as being Aegeus' wife. Furthermore, the journey of the *Argo* appears to coincide with the period wherein Theseus is in the Underworld, as Heracles' separation from the Argonauts allows him to be able to enact the rescue of Theseus from the Underworld.

Some writers have Theseus as member of Meleager's hunt for the Caledonian boar, and claim that he was a part of Heracles' campaign against the Amazons.[61] Some narratives say that

[53] Plut. *Thes*. 24.1.
[54] Plut. *Thes.* 25.3-4.
[55] Plut. *Thes.* 24.4.
[56] Philochoros fr. 94 Jacoby; *Thes*. 24-5; Arist. *Ath. pol.* 41.2.
[57] Davies 1982: 31.
[58] At *OC* 1770, Oedipus says to Theseus "you dearest of friends yourself, this land and these your citizens- blessing upon you!" after Theseus agrees to help him.
[59] Eur. *Her*. 1166ff.
[60] Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.16. Hyginus also lists Theseus as an Argonaut, but Apollonius does not.
[61] Plut. *Thes.* 26.1; Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 1.16.

Theseus initiated his own campaign against the Amazons, and carried off the queen Hippolyta, or in some narratives, her sister, named Antiope.[62] In revenge, the Amazons invaded Attica. Plutarch dismisses the account written by the author of the *Theseid* who writes, "how, when Theseus married Phaedra, Antiope and the Amazons who fought to avenge her attacked him, and were slain by Heracles, has every appearance of fable and invention."[63]

Theseus had a child by Antiope/Hippolyta, and she birthed a son named Hippolytus. After Antiope died, Theseus married a woman named Phaedra, who was a daughter of Minos.[64] Plutarch gives little attention to this relationship, justifying this by declaring that "as for the calamities which befell Phaedra and the son of Theseus by Antiope, since there is no conflict here between historians and tragic poets, we must suppose that they happened as represented by the poets uniformly."[65] Phaedra is either cursed by Aphrodite or falls in love of her own volition with her stepson, Hippolytus.[66] When she reveals this lust for him, or her nurse does so on her behalf, her son rejects her. Humiliated and fearing the consequences of her actions, she lies and claims Hippolytus tried to rape her.[67] Her lies lead to a furious Theseus, who requests that his father Poseidon use one of the ἃς ἐμοί ποτε ἀρὰς ὑπέσχου τρεῖς (three prayers which you once promised me) to kill Hippolytus. The god summons a bull that rises from the sea and startles Hippolytus' horses.[68] Hippolytus is dragged to his death by his own horses. Phaedra kills herself, but the reasons vary between sources – the traditional version, most versions of which are not known to us, holds that she kills herself after her lies are discovered, others such as the famous Euripidean tragedy *Hippolytus*, that she is so humiliated by her feelings for her stepson that she kills herself and blames Hippolytus for rape in a suicide note.[69]

In many of his adventures, Theseus is joined by his close friend, the Thessalian king of the Lapiths, Pirithous. The two became friends after Pirithous sought to test Theseus' bravery.[70] When Theseus pursued him with the intent to attack him, Pirithous did not run but faced him.

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[62] Plut. *Thes.* 26.1. Once again, the lack of consistency in some episodes of the Theseus *logos* proves frustrating. The naming of the Amazonian woman who bore Hippolytus is inconsistent. Plutarch gives he names Hippolyta as an alternative name rather than Antiope (*Thes.* 27.4.), and Apollodorus gives multiple names: "he abducted Antiope, or according to some, Melanippe, or according to Simonides, Hippolyte" (Apollod. *Bibl*. *epit*. 1.16).
[63] Plut. *Thes*. 28.1.
[64] Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 1. 16.
[65] Plut. *Thes*. 28.2.
[66] Apollod. *Bibl. epit*.1.18 says that her affection for Hippolytus was of her own volition; but the *Hippolytus* 27-28 explicitly describes that the passion was brought on by Aphrodite.
[67] Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 1.18; Eur. *Hipp.* 885; Soph. fr. 679-680 Pearson; fr.428 Nauck TFG^2 (Kiso 1973: 26).
[68] Apollod. *Bibl epit*. 1.19; Eur. *Hipp*. 1166.
[69] Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 1.19 and Eur. *Hipp.* 771-775 hold that she hung herself in humiliation of her incestual affection.
[70] Plut. *Thes.* 30.1.

Impressed by his courage, Theseus stopped his advance, and the men ratified their friendship with oaths.[71] When Pirithous married Hippodamia[72] Theseus attended the strange wedding. Amongst the guests where Centaurs, who upon becoming drunk began to assault the Lapith women.[73] A full-scale battle broke out, and Theseus helped Pirithous to drive the Centaurs out from Thessaly. Herodorus is said to have had a different account. Here Theseus, while en-route to the aid of the Lapithae, who were in the midst of battle, encountered Heracles at Trachis, where Heracles was "already resting from his wandering and labours."[74]

Another of Theseus' famous exploits with Pirithous was the abductions of Helen and Persephone. When Theseus was about 50 years old, he and Pirithous carried off a then 10 or 12 year old Helen as she was dancing in a Spartan temple of Artemis.[75] Because she was not yet of marriageable age, they left her in the town of Aphidnae in Attica, aided by Aethra, Theseus' mother.[76] The Dioscuri, the twins Castor and Pollux,[77] set out to rescue their young sister, and seized the town of Aphidnae.[78] They carried away both Helen and Aethra, who would later serve Helen at Troy.[79] Pirithous attempted to abduct Persephone, or Kore and was aided by Theseus.[80] An act of such impiety would, of course, never succeed, but the two were punished by Hades by either being imprisoned within the Underworld, or as in the account given by Apollodorus, seated on thrones of rock from which they could not rise.[81] Pirithous appears to have either been held prisoner forever in Apollodorus' account, but Plutarch says that he was dispatched by Cerberus immediately after being caught by Hades.[82] Heracles, upon hearing of the fates of the two men, begged for the release of Theseus; this plea was granted and Theseus made his return to Athens.[83] This action allows for Theseus' inclusion into Euripides' *Heracles*, as well as having pre-established the loyalty Theseus shows Heracles in

[71] Plut. *Thes*. 30.2
[72] Plutarch gives her name as Deidameia (*Thes.* 30.3).
[73] Plut. *Thes.* 30.3; Apollod. *Bibl. epit.* 1
[74] Plut. *Thes.* 30.4.
[75] Plut. *Thes.* 31.1.
[76] Plut. *Thes.* 31.3.
[77] Castor and Pollux are themselves immortalised in the stars, as the α (Castor) and β (Pollux) stars of the Gemini constellation.
[78] Plut. *Thes.* 31.3.; Apollod. *Bibl. epit*.1.23.
[79] Plut. *Thes*. 31.1-3, 34.1.
[80] Plut. *Thes*. 31.4. Plutarch gives Kore as the name of Hades and Persephone's' child, though it is usually in reference to Persephone herself.
[81] Apollod. *Bibl. epit*. 1.4; also Paus. 10.29.9.
[82] Apollod. *Bibl. epit* 1.24; Plut. *Thes.* 31.4, 35.1.
[83] Eur. *HF* 621; Plut. *Thes*. 35.1.

the text. If Heracles had not yet completed his labours, he could not have released Theseus from Hades.

Death

While Theseus was in the Underworld, Menestheus, son of Peteos, a descendent of Erechtheus, from whose line the Pallantids were born, usurped the throne.[84] Athens became divided, and after sending his two sons by Phaedra, Acamas and Demophon, to Euboea, Theseus sailed to Scyros, where he had ancestral connections and anticipated being well-received.[85] The king, Lycomedes, lured him up to the highest point of the island's cliffs, claiming to be showing Theseus his estates, and pushed Theseus off the cliffs to his death.[86] The reason for this act is uncertain, and there are accounts that Theseus slipped and fell accidently down the cliffs.[87] The Athenians mourned Theseus, and there are accounts of an apparition of an armed Theseus appearing at the Battle of Marathon.[88]

Characterisation

Theseus is characterised generally as a friendly *ephebe* who is generous and kind. His youthful appearance and perceptions of his build are linked to his involvement in gymnasiums alongside Heracles and the institution of athletic games in Delos.[89] His friendly nature is exhibited through his giving of aid to Heracles and Oedipus when they are brought low alongside his volunteering to be a sacrifice given to King Minos and the Minotaur. He is an intentionally crafted character of the Athenian imagination designed to form a model to aspire to. In this way, Theseus' characterisation is intensely political. To account for the monarchical power that he gains by birthright – contrary to democratic ideologies – Athens models him into a king of their own ideals, having him voluntarily abdicate the throne and gives power to the people. The attribution of many feats to Theseus is indicative of an asserting of the involvement of Athens in the mythological events that form the cultural history of Greece. As a hero, Theseus is militarised but distinguishing him from Achilles and Odysseus is his more civic approach to battle. The battles are perceived as colonial conquests rather than 'true' warfare.

[84] Plut. *Thes*. 32.1.
[85] Plut. *Thes.* 35.2-3; Paus. 1.17.6.
[86] Plut. *Thes*. 35.4.
[87] Plut. *Thes.* 35.4.
[88] Plut. *Thes.* 35.5.
[89] Paus. 4.32.1; Higgins 1970: 6.

Folk Memory

The proverb οὐκ ἄνευ Θησέως – 'not without Theseus' is given by Plutarch in reference to the popular perception of fifth-century Athens, that numerous feats and famous exploits were said to attributed to Theseus himself and that he had played a role in other narratives.[90] Theseus was thought to have been a part of Meleager's expedition to hunt the Calydonian boar, and was believed to have been an Argonaut.[91]

An especially well-known association with the name 'Theseus' is the philosophical quandary of Theseus' ship. Plutarch gives a clear account of this:

> The ship on which Theseus sailed with the youths and returned in safety, the thirty-oared galley, was preserved by the Athenians down to the time of Demetrius Phalereus. They took away the old timbers from time to time, and put new and sound ones in their places, so that the vessel became standing illustration for the philosophers in the mooted question of growth, some declaring that it remained the same, others that it was not the same vessel.[92]

Philosophically, this quandary continues to raise various propositions regarding identity, constitution, growth, and change. The "continuity of form" between the original ship and the one built from replacement parts leads to one discerning that the replaced parts constitute Theseus' ship; the "continuity of matter" between the original ship and its original parts leads one to believe that the parts are Theseus' ship, rather than the vessel built from replaced timbers.[93] The *Phaedo* describes the ship Theseus sailed to Crete in as being the one that was still being sent to Delos in honour of Apollo on the 6th day of Mounichion, which Plutarch says the Athenians 'still now' celebrate as the day Theseus departed for Crete.[94]

There are several festivals that commemorate Theseus, or at least in part claim an aetiology from his *logos*. At the festival of Oschophoria, held in the month of Pyanepsion honour of Dionysos, certain rituals were connected to the return of Thesesus.[95] On the 7th day of Pyanepsion, the custom of boiling "all sorts of pulse" arose from the return of Theseus, when the crew boiled all their remaining provisions in a communal pot and feasted on it.[96] Plutarch reports that the cry of ἐλελεῦ ἰοὺ ἰοὺ (Eleleu! Iou! Iou!) is cried by the attendees: "the first of

[90] Plut. Thes. 29.3.6; Davie 1982: 27.
[91] Apoll. Rhod. *Arg*. 1.101-4; Davie 1982: 27.
[92] Plut. *Thes*.23.1
[93] Rose et al. 2020: 5.
[94] Pl. *Phaed.* 58a7-8; Plut. *Thes.* 18.2. Mounuchion (Μουνυχιών) is equivalent to the Gregorian months of April/May.
[95] Pyanepsion (Πυανεψιών) is equivalent to the Gregorian months of October/November.
[96] Plut. *Thes*. 22.4.

which cries is the exclamation of eager haste and triumph, the second of consternation and confusion" [97] because the messenger who was sent to announce their arrival back in Athens was met with both the public's joy at their arrival and their grief at the king's death. The messenger twined garlands given by the public around his staff and made his way back to the crew. Finding that Theseus was still making his libations to the gods, he did not immediately inform the men that Aeceus was dead. The men, seeing the garlands, celebrated their arrival back in Athens, but when they were told of the kings' death, their cries turned from elation to grief.[98]

The Synoikia was a distinctly Athenian festival celebrated on the 16th day of Hekatombeion that commemorated the political unification of Attica, celebrating Theseus as the city founder and Athena as the patron goddess: "from him [Theseus] dates the Synoecia, or Feast of Union; which is paid for by the state, and which the Athenians still keep in honour of the goddess".[99]

The Delians in the time of Plutarch, had a traditional dance called "the Crane" in which both young men and maidens would imitate the winding pathways of the Theseus' journey through the Labyrinth.[100] Plutarch relates that Theseus danced the Crane around an altar called Keraton, which is described as being constructed of horns taken from only the left side of an animal's head.[101] This description brings to mind the Horns of Consecration, as coined by Sir Arthur Evans, which have proven through expansive archaeology work to be ubiquitous artefacts of Minoan Civilisation.[102] The connection between Theseus and bulls does not end with the Minotaur *logos*, but extends to iconography on coins. Plutarch attributes the invention of coinage to Theseus, and says that Theseus stamped the coins with an image of an ox: "from this coinage, they say, 'ten oxen' and 'a hundred oxen' came to be used as terms of valuation"[103]

The association of heroes with constellations continues with Theseus. Furthering the connection between Theseus and Heracles is the placement of the Hercules constellation in relation to that of the constellation connected with Theseus: Corona Borealis. Bordered by the Hercules and Boötes constellations, Corona Borealis is in the midst of hero-based constellations. The Kneeler, known in modern astronomy as Hercules, was thought by

[97] Plut. *Thes.* 22.4.4-5.
[98] Plut. *Thes*. 22.2-3.
[99] Thuc. 2.15; Plut. *Thes.* 24.
[100] Plut. *Thes*. 21.1-2; Edwards, 1970: 17.
[101] Plut. *Thes*. 21.2.
[102] Evans 1901: 107. Large versions of the horns found on top of buildings have been suggested as being used to track the movements of celestial bodies.
[103] Plut. *Thes*. 25.3.

Hegsianax to be Theseus lifting the stone at Troezen.[104] The Lyre constellation, located nearby, was also thought by both Hegesianax and Anacreon to be the lyre of Theseus, "skilled in all the arts."[105] Known as the Northern Crown, the mythology associated with Corona Borealis links it to the crown of Ariadne.[106] The narrative surrounding the crown varies: the dominant tradition holds that the crown was given to Ariadne by Dionysos after she was abandoned by Theseus. She wore the crown during her wedding to the god, and to commemorate this he

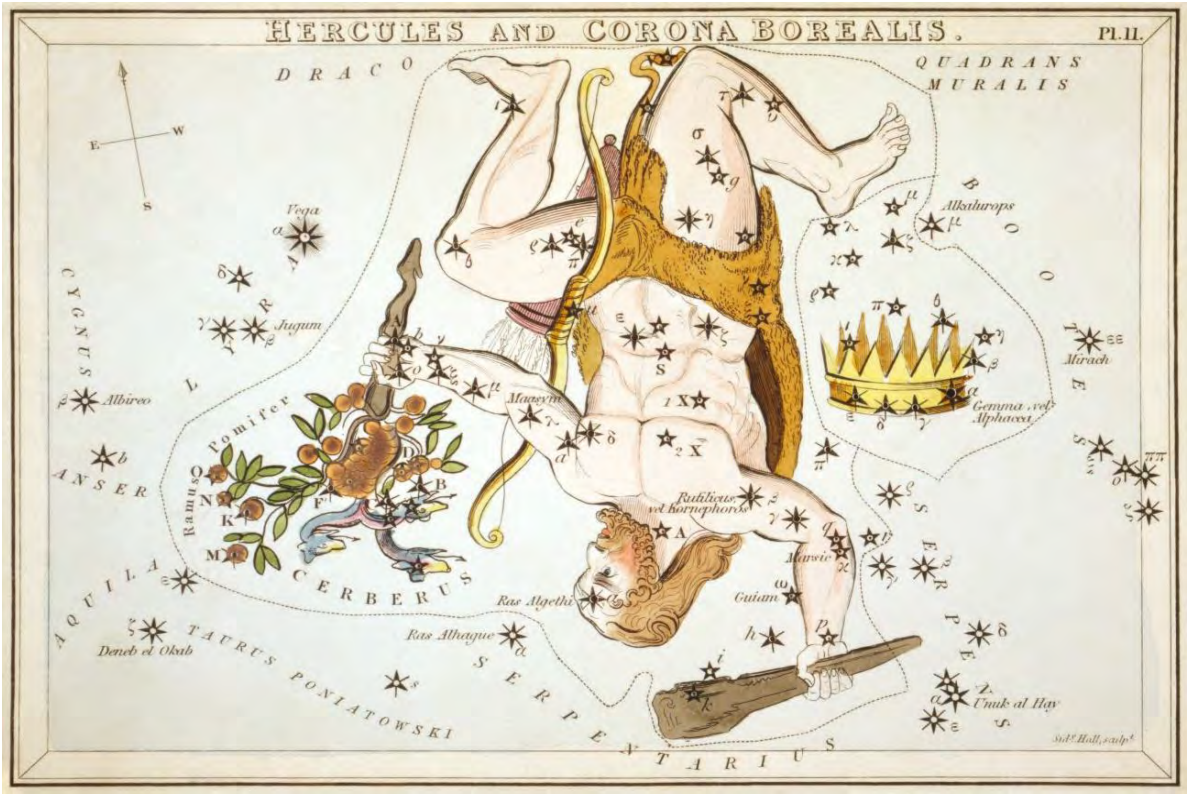

Figure 15
Hercules and Corona Borealis, as depicted in Plate 11 of *Urania's Mirror* (c.1825). Public Domain.

placed it in the heavens.[107] Another narrative, described by Bacchylides, holds that the crown was owned by Theseus, who was given it by Amphitrite, wife of Poseidon.[108] Theseus gave the crown to Ariadne, and Dionysos enabled the catasterism – in line with the popular narrative. Pausanias writes that the crown was given to Theseus by Amphitrite after Minos challenged Theseus' divine ancestry. The same narrative given by Pausanias is also given by Bacchylides in *Dithyramb 3*, and Hyginus at *Astronomica* 2.5.3; Pausanias' narrative is as follows:

[104] Hyg. *Poet. astr*. 2.6.3.
[105] Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 2.6.3.
[106] Hyg. *Poet. astr.* 2.5.1; Hard 2015: 35.
[107] Ridpath & Tirion 2001: 126–128.
[108] Periboea was the mother of Telamonian Ajax (Ajax the Great).

> When Minos was taking Theseus and the rest of the company of young folk to Crete he fell in love with Periboea, and on meeting with determined opposition from Theseus, hurled insults at him and denied that he was a son of Poseidon, since he could not recover for him the signet-ring, which he happened to be wearing, if he threw it into the sea. With these words Minos is said to have thrown the ring, but they say that Theseus came up from the sea with that ring and also with a gold crown that Amphitrite gave him. [109]

Hyginus describes the crown as being made of gold and gems, and claims that Theseus used the crown to light his way through the darkness of the Labyrinth.[110] This use of the crown substituted the use of Ariadnes' thread in this version, and the crown was catasterised in recognition of their love – evidently, Ariadne was not abandoned in this version, but nothing further is mentioned of her.[111]

Many centuries after his death, around 475 BCE the Athenians, in response to an oracle, went to Scyros to seek out Theseus' bones.[112] Cimon, the leader of the group, captured the island by force, and seeing an eagle dig at a raised mound, dug up a massive coffin that contained a huge skeleton with a bronze spearhead and sword beside it.[113] The Athenians welcomed these bones with great reverence, and entombed them in the middle of the city, where the tomb became a refuge for runaway slaves and persecuted men, due to Theseus' association with being a friend to those in need.[114]

Athenian Propaganda Tool

Theseus is the patron hero of Athens, and the political role of the hero has long been understood to be a crucial aspect of their status: "In studying the character of Theseus, then, we may expect to get some insight into the interests and ideals of Athens; and as the prevailing conception of him changed, we may see mirrored in his evolution that of the people who cared for him."[115] Of interest is that, though the founder of democracy in Attic thought, there remains the unavoidable existence of Theseus as a king. Though this facet of his story could not be dismissed outright without compromising the legitimate right to rule that Theseus possessed, which would necessitate a dismissal of his birth narrative as a whole. Theseus was instead

[109] Paus. 1.17.3.
[110] Hyg. *Poet. astr* .2.5.1.
[111] Bilić 2006: 20; Hard 2015: 3.
[112] Plut. *Thes.* 36.1; Paus.1.17.6.
[113] Plut. *Thes.* 36.1-2. The massive size of the coffin may be rooted in the idea of the heroes as quite literally larger than life figures.
[114] Plut. *Thes.* 36.2.
[115] Agard 1928: 84.

portrayed as a *basileus* after Athens' own style.[116] The zenith of Theseus' evolution into the democratic hero occurred just after the reforms of Cleisthenes, where his role of a civic leader crystalised into the form we recognise today.[117]

Heracles by his very nature cannot be sanitised or domesticised, but Theseus can be through a process of reorientating his motives and exploiting the variety in his narratives. The magnificent deeds accomplished by Theseus are for the benefit of the city, the impious acts of abduction are repositioned to have Theseus as the additional party to the deed, bound by promises sworn to friends. A civilising power is imbued in his adventures – ridding Crete of a monstrosity against nature, unifying lands, and being a moral foil to those who have the propensity to be morally or physically dangerous, such as Heracles and Oedipus. Theseus is a benefactor to those in need, providing a safe model of behaviour which an Athenian should aspire towards:

> the figure of Theseus in the public genre of tragedy is moulded according to certain public, 'official' Athenian perceptions of the Athenian national character, so that he comes to represent the idealized imperial Athens, the city of justice and mercy that is familiar from a substantial body of Athenian writing about Athens.[118]

It is not a stretch for a 21st century scholar to begin drawing parallels between Theseus as a national hero and the use of Aryan imagery in Nazi Propaganda. In a similar manner to how Theseus is the civilised Ionic answer to the wild and brutish Heracles, the use of Aryans as the civic, evolved, 'correct' version that a 'true' German should aspire towards is set up against the Jews.[119] Adolf Hitler situated the Aryan as a divinely chosen peoples, associating them with industrialisation and economic prosperity.[120] Athens believed themselves to be the economic hub of Greece, and that their founder, Theseus, with his development of coinage elevated Athens into its industrially orientated self.[121] The perception of Hitler as leader was heavily aligned towards him being a representative of the 'right' Germany itself – he was perceived by Joseph Goebbels, and the supporters of the Nazi party, to be a man of the people: "Hitler's human side was important for the propaganda, otherwise his followers would not have been able to identify with him."[122] Theseus was perceived as the champion of Attic ideals, aiding

[116] Arist. *Ath. pol.* 41.2.
[117] Hoff 2010: 164.
[118] Mills 1997: 2.
[119] Welch 2004: 213.
[120] Kohl 2011: 10-11.
[121] Davie 1982: 26.
[122] Kohl 2011: 13.

"Hellenism in its struggle against barbarism."[123] Like the blond, blue-eyed Aryan that was pursued as the 'ideal' form, Theseus' appearance is a political component of his identity. He is portrayed as a lithe, young *ephebe*, [124] setting up a strong visual disparity between his appearance and that of his muscular cousin Heracles. His propensity towards artistic endeavours also sets him up as the ideal Athenian, even though he carries a club won from his victory over Periphetes, "just as Heracles did with the lion's skin."[125]

Why then is Theseus then comparatively poorly represented in cult practice, if he is such an important character to the Athenian folk-identity? Essentially, the Atthidographer Philochoros designed a narrative that put forward the idea that Theseus had willingly transferred all his festivals to Heracles in gratitude for his rescue of Theseus from the Hades.[126] This may explain why the known festivals of Theseus are based firmly in his political sphere and his early deeds. The tomb of Theseus was seen as a sanctuary for all those in need, and Plutarch presents this right of sanctuary as well-established one, but extant evidence for it dates to after 476/475 BCE and only refers to slaves.[127] This may then be an invention of fifth century Athens intending to magnify Theseus' political characterisation as a defender of the people.

Conclusion

Theseus is a civic hero who has been carefully cultivated by the Athenian imagination. He is very intentionally set up as a colonial diplomat that calms and controls the wild and untamed lands and men such as Heracles. Almost everything about Theseus is crafted in intentional opposition to Heracles. The lithe *ephebe* who brings order to chaos has been moulded to distinguish the Attic hero from the distasteful Doric other of Heracles with his intense emotions, uncontrolled appetites, and the persistent excess associated with him. The moderate Theseus calms Oedipus and Heracles, offering aid and kindness – the political angle of this representation is obvious. Theseus is designed to reflect the Athenian ideal; the variety in his narratives and his relatively unknown existence to poets of the epic cycle made him an ideal character to exploit. He was designed to be a hero of Athens, by Athenians.

[123] Davie 1982: 27.
[124] Davie 1982: 25.
[125] Plut. *Thes*. 8.1.
[126] Davie 1982: 27.
[127] Davie 1982: 28.

Conclusions

All four heroes have divine lineage, as well as divine and supernatural interferences. Belonging to the Hesiodic 'age of heroes' means that these characters encounter monstrous and mythical creatures, and they defeat these otherworldly beings with the aid of, and sometimes in spite of, the gods. Involvement with the divine is ubiquitous amongst heroes, although the manner differs. Consistent amongst the four heroes is a motif of duality. Achilles is simultaneously a vicious warrior and the prototypical lover – qualities that are not necessary contradictory but certainly indicate opposing aspects of Achilles' character. Odysseus is both a wise hero with sage advice and a manipulative villain. The same character traits are used to emphasise these contrary representations of the hero. Heracles is astounding in his duality, with many components of his character relying on and exploiting this. His duality as the monstrous/colonial hero, the almost equal presentation of Amphitryon and Zeus as his fathers, his role as both the saviour and murderer of his family: all these traits illustrate the complexity of the hero and his nature as a hero who challenges not only the boundaries of mortals but also threatens the divine order. Theseus' duality is largely confined to his identity as a monarch born with the right to rule and as the founder of Athenian synoecism and democracy.

Enhancing this duality is the theme of excess versus moderation. The pairing of Achilles and Odysseus through Homer is clear, as is the pairing of Heracles and Theseus. Heracles and Achilles can also be paired through the theme of excess – Heracles is saturated with excessiveness and Achilles' rage and grief embody an emotional excess. Odysseus and Theseus can be paired together in their embodiment of moderation, with Odysseus representing control and rationality – but also a form of excess in an intellectual regard. His ability to outwit his enemies may be considered as going beyond typical limitations. Theseus is distinctly moderate in nature, a controlled and diplomatic character. Knowing how moulded Theseus is by Attic propaganda and ideologies, it may be that excess forms a crucial component of the heroic identity. This is in line with the idea of the heroes of the 'age of man' being 'greater' than contemporary man – greater in skill and connection with the gods, but perhaps also more emotional, craftier, or stronger and thus subjected to greater tragedy and destruction than is possible in the contemporary world. This may also function as a mnemonic feature: lacklustre heroes are of course less memorable.

All four heroes discussed have captivated the imagination of the public for most of their known existence. There are key commonalities between the heroes that demonstrate similarities in

their purposes and uses within society. The heroes serve as teachers of morality and behaviour – though they are not intended to be characters to emulate exactly. Their flaws form the thematic content and action of their texts and provide an entertaining display of the positive and negative consequences of their actions and choices. Because the heroes exist in an age separate from contemporary society, they are given allowance to act beyond what is otherwise acceptable and even possible. The heroes are more than mortal men, and for better or worse so are their emotions and actions.

Soldiers must go to war and do their best in battle – but will never have the circumstances and repercussions Achilles experienced. Nevertheless, Achilles' unchecked pride models the consequences of behaving like Achilles. The construction and depiction of the heroes is deliberate, but this is the case with Theseus to a far greater extent than the Homeric heroes. Heracles, in contrast, evolved far more organically. This aids in setting him against the crafted, civic Theseus. Though deliberate, the *logoi* and characterisation of the heroes was emphasised differently as Greek society evolved and changed. Odysseus is a prime example of this. His cunning and rhetoric abilities remained intrinsic to his character from Homer through to fifth-century Athens, but he faced greater scrutiny. His traits were unsettling in the political climate of fifth-century Athens, where rhetoric was still valued, but was highly scrutinised. The tension between tradition and innovation is always present in the heroes. The Homeric heroes had to evolve within the gaps left by Homer and Hesiod, for fear of contradicting the highly respected poets. As such, traits of the Homeric heroes tend be emphasised rather than revolutionised. This is not the case of Heracles and Theseus, owing to the more composite development of their narratives. The two are set up as diametrically opposed in many aspects, but both are colonial heroes. The wild, violent, insatiable Heracles is contrasted with the collected, civic, political Theseus. That the two frequently appear in each other's *logoi* allows for writers to exploit the social, mythological, and philosophical oppositions present in the two heroes' portrayals.

Achilles and Heracles are possessed by *lyssa* while their counterparts, Odysseus and Theseus respectively, triumph in their diplomacy. The four heroes form a well-rounded selection of Greek hero narratives. Achilles and Odysseus are forever entwined through the events of the Trojan War and their depiction in a crystalised form by Homer, Theseus and Heracles are entwined in each other's narratives. A survey of the four indicates that not only are there common motifs of heroic archetypes – demi-gods, prodigious deeds, great beauty, and an ideal physical form. The point of interest remains, why do they have commonalities?

The stories of heroes provide a medium through which cultural, social, and political thought can be discussed, critiqued, and modelled. The Hesiodic 'age of heroes' situates the heroes in a time separate from the contemporary age, allowing for reflection on moral, political, and mythological thought to be considered through a reflection into a mythical past. The Greek conceptualisation of the poet as a teacher fulfils the same role as anonymous tales do: the authors build on collective repositories of knowledge, reinforcing and reconsidering communal beliefs and collective identities. Through Theseus the audience sees what it means to be a 'proper' Athenian.

Embedded within social and cultural knowledge are conceptualisations of ways of thinking. Social conceptualisations about the night sky are used in navigation, understanding weather patterns, and agriculture: the Greeks made use of the sky and celestial bodies in their daily lives and utilised it as a conceptualisation of how the world around them worked. The heroic connections with constellations are more than literary devices, and associations with Sirius in particular are indications of what the star meant to the Greeks; the brightness and terrible heat brought on by the star is comparable to Achilles on the battlefield in his divinely made armour. That Homer used the comparison to Sirius particularly means that later poets attempting to invoke the poet would mimic the comparison, perpetuating the link between the hero and the star even as astronomical conceptualisation evolved. Greek cosmology influenced medicinal practice and thought, culturally bound information was entwined with poetry. Identification of plants that had therapeutic benefits, like the Hellebore and Galanthus genera, was not only a medical practice but also a culturally significant component woven into social, religious, and poetic contexts. Ethnoastronomy and ethnobotany are interconnected concepts that were entwined with Greek understandings of the world and universe.

The selected heroes are reflections and conceptualisations of philosophical, moral, and political thought. The nature of their evolutions indicates that the heroes served a need within Greek society. Our continued fascination with them indicates that they serve a need within us that goes beyond mere entertainment. The heroes Achilles, Odysseus, Heracles, and Theseus evolved to suit the needs of ever-changing society, and they did not cease doing so at the end of the 5th century BCE. Our enduring fascination with these heroes continues their evolution, adapting their narratives for our own philosophical, political, and social purposes. Yet the intrinsically ancient Greek nature of their *logoi* remains through the culturally specific knowledge and indications entrenched within their stories. One cannot separate Heracles from

his labours, Theseus from the Minotaur, Odysseus from his guile, nor Achilles from his status as φέρτατ' Ἀχαιῶν – greatest amongst the Achaeans.

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Abbreviations

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