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(EDS.)



ANTIQUITY IN PROGRESS

INTERMEDIAL PRESENCES OF
ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN CULTURES
IN THE MODERN WORLD

Propylaeum
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SERVICE ANCIENT STUDIES

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*Intermedial Presences
of Ancient Mediterranean Cultures
in the Modern World*

edited by

Markus Stachon,
Antonella Lipscomb,
and Penelope Kolovou

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Introduction

Chapter 1

MARKUS STACHON

Has Classical Antiquity Ever Ended? Reception, Memory, and Cultural Evolution

Classicists working on the *Nachleben* of classical Greco-Roman literature commonly argue that ancient ideas and stories have ‘shaped’ modern Western culture and that they ‘pervade’ every part of it.¹ Even the name of the continent Europe itself is explained to be a reminiscence of the ancient Greek myth of Zeus abducting Europe, the daughter of Agenor.² Thus, it is argued, it is important to know the origins of our culture in order to understand its present shape. As the reader of this very book, you will probably agree with this perception or, at least, share a similar view.

In fact, this is only one side of the medal. The other side is the unfortunate truth that almost all those who are not classicists manage to live very well without having any idea about ancient mythology, literature, or history. Some associate the name of ‘Apollo’ not with the god of oracles, healing, arts and sunlight, but with NASA’s moon mission. Others watch movies like Wolfgang Peterson’s *Troy* (2004) or Zack Snyder’s *300* (2007) without ever having heard of Homer or Herodotus. For them, the word ‘odyssey’ denotes ‘a long wandering or voyage usually marked by many changes of fortune’ rather than the epic poem the word stems from.³ The best known ‘Homer’ is probably not the allegedly blind bard, about whom even classicists, albeit in a different way, do not know very much, but the protagonist of the American animated sitcom *The Simpsons*, Homer Simpson. One of the world’s currently most valuable brands may be called *Amazon*, nevertheless our packages we buy on their website are not delivered to our homes by furious women warriors but by modern day mail carriers. One can walk around

1 See, e.g., Demandt (2012: 89): ‘Fragt man: “Was verdankt Europa der Antike?“, so lautet die kürzeste und treffendste Antwort: “sich selbst“; or Möller (2016: 100): ‘Wer die moderne europäische Kultur begreifen will, der kommt an Ovid nicht vorbei.’

2 See, e.g., Demandt (2012: 89) or Möller (2016: 3–5).

3 *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary* ([2024]: s. v. ‘odyssey’).

whistling catchy tunes from Jacques Offenbach's *Orphée aux enfers* (1858) or one can pogo dance to Iggy Pop's *American Caesar* (1993) without recalling ancient mythology or history. Reminiscences of antiquity may be everywhere, but it is not necessary at all to understand them as such.

Some scholars even talk about 'memory' of ancient times and assume that it forms 'cultural identity'.⁴ Let's face the facts once again. The moments when a nation feels most 'united' in present times is not when a new movie on their early historical predecessors enters the cinema screen, but during the football world cup.⁵ In Germany, most people remember the 2014 semi-final in which Germany defeated Brazil with 7–1, but they do not 'remember' Arminius's victory over Varus in the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest.⁶ As they have not experienced this event of 9 AD, there is in fact nothing to 'remember'. In contrast to what scholars on *lieux de mémoire* believe, a monument, nowadays, is not a reminder of the history that shaped our present 'identity', but it is rather an occasion for a history lesson itself. How can cultural heritage then shape 'national identity'? When Richard Wagner's *Ring of the Nibelung* (1876), which is an adaptation of the 13th century *Song of the Nibelungs*, was staged at the Opera Bonn in 1999 by Siegfried Schoenbohm with Siegfried fighting an excavator instead of a dragon,⁷ the audience might have been surprised about such an interpretation, but they most probably wouldn't have related it to their so-called national hero Siegfried in any way.⁸ They wouldn't even have experienced 'common identity' with the stranger sitting next to them. One may keep in mind that I am talking about people who are so educated that they visit opera houses – outside such elite circles there is certainly even less identification with centuries-old foundations of their cultural surrounding: If we take a step outside humanities departments and ask random people how much their lives are indebted to Achilles, Aeneas, or Zeus in his bull costume, most people won't understand the question at all. The truth may be painful, but in the real world there is no 'common Western identity' formed by 'memory' of ancient history or myth.⁹

4 See, e.g., the collections of national and transnational *lieux de mémoire* by Nora (1984–1993), François/Schulze (2001), den Boer et al. (2012), and others. On the problems behind terms like 'cultural memory' and 'collective identity' see Chaniotis (2009).

5 The importance of football in the formation of 'cultural identity' is highlighted by Gebauer (2001).

6 However, Arminius is considered a *lieu de mémoire* by Doye (2001).

7 See Schmöe (1999).

8 On the Nibelungs and Wagner see Wapnewski (2001) and Münkler (2001).

9 Thus, most topics do not meet the criterion for a *lieu de mémoire* as it was formulated by den Boer et al. (2012: I 10), that not only the academic elite, but a broader mass should consider it a piece of common heritage ('ein Punkt im Ablauf der Geschichte, an dem sich positiv oder negativ besetzte Erinnerung breiterer, nicht nur elitärer Schichten kristallin verfestigt und eine Idee von etwas Gemeinsamem – einem gemeinsamen Erbe – entstehen lässt').

However, if ancient history and mythology are declared to be supposedly meaningless for the understanding of the present world and considered some kind of very special knowledge limited to a small number of people, what is the purpose of this book? Even if we reject the idea that common people experience any feeling of common identity with their predecessors or contemporaries by the consumption of cultural artifacts, we still cannot deny that time moves on not century by century, but day by day. At every moment in time, the great mass of people alive, be it worldwide or in our hometowns, has been identical, or at least very similar, to the mass of people alive at the previous moment.¹⁰ The single elements of a group's shared knowledge mostly stay the same from one moment to the next. Somehow, single persons learn new things sometimes and pass them on in conversations with their peer group so that the new information may or may not spread. Some pieces of information are spread regularly and therefore widely, others fall into oblivion quite soon. By passing on information orally, it is generally altered in some way; the small alteration may or may not be passed on further. Thus, time and knowledge develops from one point of time to the next. This process of transmission consisting of selecting information, passing it on, and rendering it anew in some detail is nothing but an evolutionary process applied not to genetic but to cultural information.¹¹ The first one to have transferred evolutionary theory to cultural processes was Charles Darwin himself, speaking about the evolution of languages, followed by his son George H. Darwin analyzing the 'Development in Dress'.¹² In 1976, Richard Dawkins coined the term 'meme' to define the cultural equivalent of a 'gene' that is transmitted by selection, imitation, and variation.¹³ Henry Plotkin, laying ground for the term 'univer-

10 See, e.g., Kallendorf (2007: 1): 'There is, of course, no one moment when antiquity can be said to have ended, and as institutions, values, and cultures moved gradually away from Greece and Rome, it took many years – centuries, actually – for people to see that they were living in a fundamentally different society'; further see Martindale (1990: 49): 'Consider the audience for French poetry on 1 January of, say, 1650: it consisted of a group of people varying in age, not of a cadre that could in any sense be considered as constituting a generation. Consider the same audience on 2 January 1650. Perhaps several members had died, but they had probably been replaced by several new members. The vast majority of the audience remained the same. Whatever habituation occurred for *them* on 1 January continued on 2 January. New members had either to catch up with or be dragged along by this process. They were in such a minority that they could not influence taste in the slightest. The same situation has existed on every day since 1 January of 1650 to today.'

11 See Campbell (1960), Dawkins (2016 [1976]: 245–260), Plotkin (1994: 59–101), Dennett (1995: 48–52), Blackmore (1999: 10–23).

12 See Ch. Darwin (1859: 126–127; 1874 [1871]: 90–92), G. H. Darwin (1872).

13 Dawkins (2016 [1976]: 249): 'We need a name for the new replicator, a noun that conveys the idea of a unit of cultural transmission, or a unit of *imitation*. "Mimeme" comes from a suitable Greek root, but I want a monosyllable that sounds a bit like "gene". I hope my classicist friends will forgive me if I abbreviate mimeme to meme. If it is any condolence, it

sal Darwinism’, went so far as to state that the evolutionary algorithm could have equally been discovered in any other discipline and then applied to biology as well.¹⁴ Susan Blackmore finally suspected memes to be not only a by-product of the evolution of the human brain, but the driving force behind its uncommon growth compared to its size in chimpanzees and other near relatives of ours.¹⁵ Nowadays, after the term ‘meme’ seems to have been forgotten for about a decade, it came to life anew denoting internet phenomena which are shared and altered, some more often than others – Dawkins himself is pretty content with the internet’s ‘hi-jacking’ of his term.¹⁶

Considering pieces of cultural information performing their own evolutionary process using humans as their vehicle, we can finally contend that ancient literature has preserved a very large treasure of stories and ideas that have proven to be very successful in their ‘struggle for existence’. Before 1960, no one associated Apollo with flying to the moon. However, due to a single person’s idea of naming the spaceflight program aimed to fly humans to the moon after Diana’s (the moon goddess’s) brother *Apollo*, it is now linked to the ancient god’s name forever. Even if people associate ‘Apollo’ to *Apollo 11*’s commander Neil Armstrong or to Tom Hanks, starring Jim Lovell in the movie *Apollo 13* (1995), this should not be considered an indicator of the decline in education – it is just another piece of information that has entered the ‘meme complex’ associated with ‘Apollo’. In a few years, *Artemis* will gain equal popularity as a NASA spaceflight program rather than as a Greek goddess.

It is not necessarily a whole mythological story or a whole historical account of an event that enters reception and thus receives a *Nachleben*, but it is always single elements that can be re-combined as any creator of cultural artifacts wants. This is what happened when Callimachus, Apollonius of Rhodes, and other Alexandrian authors created ‘prequels’ to the then standard versions of myths, this is equally what happened when several European courts legitimated their power by some ancestry from fictitious Trojan heroes; and lastly this is what is happening now when creators of novels, plays, songs, movies, comic books, video games and other media select what they consider worth a good story. In this sense, antiquity is still in progress. We are constantly surrounded by our history because we are part of it. We are, in some way, still cultural descendants of ancient Greeks: Pythagoras, Euclid, and Archimedes did lay the ground for *Apollo* flying to the moon, they just did not know it. In the same way, modern scientists need

could alternatively be thought of as being related to “memory”, or to the French word *même*. It should be pronounced to rhyme with “cream”.’

14 See Plotkin (1994: 73–78).

15 See Blackmore (1999: 74–81).

16 See Solon and Dawkins (2013).

not be aware of their ancient predecessors to do their work. They are surrounded by contemporary popular culture, just as ancient scientists have been.

Although none of the following chapters draws on this ‘memetic’ model of eclectic reception with variation, it can be regarded as a common basis that lies behind the several approaches taken by their authors.¹⁷

Abstracts of the book’s chapters

In his article on Marvel’s *Silver Surfer* CHRIS BISHOP (Chapter 2) suggests that in a culture saturated by a multitude of receptions, creators of new artworks are often unaware of their ancient predecessors and the mere presence of classical ideas can lead to ‘unconscious reception’. It is also common that, instead of the present being shaped by the past, the representation of ancient myth-historical events is adapted to modern day circumstances. This is what HANNA PAULOUSKAYA argues in her article (Chapter 3) where she shows how the myth of the Argonauts in Soviet cinema and TV is capable of successfully following the guidelines of Socialist Realism. She will argue that new pieces of information can be connected to elements of ancient culture to such an extent that a ‘new mythology’ arises which needs not to have any basis in ancient sources. FABIEN BIÈVRE-PERRIN, in his article on Nefertiti (Chapter 4), shows how this Egyptian Queen is now more and more preferred to the relatively trite figure of Cleopatra as an icon of women’s empowerment by popular culture, particularly African-American, who see in her an African ancestor. Like Cleopatra, one of the reasons for her success lies in her position at the crossroads of Mediterranean cultures: the Amarna style of her famous bust makes her more compatible with the codes of classical culture than traditional Egyptian art. ANNA MARIA CIMINO, in her article (Chapter 5), focuses on the re-reading of classical imagery by the Italian Resistance Movement, emphasizing how the *Aeneid* inspired not only the literary production of Postwar Italy but also its popular culture and the repertoires of familiar and private memory. In particular, she shows that the ninth book of the *Aeneid* – adopted as a literary model by famous authors, such as Beppe Fenoglio and Giorgio Caproni – also inspired Massimo Bubola’s 1993 rock ballad ‘Eurialo e Niso’, thus making possible a process of ‘re-semanticization’ of Classical Antiquity in opposition to the political uses of Vergil’s poetry pursued by the Fascist Regime. In her article on Conall Morrison’s version of Sophocle’s *Antigone*, NATASHA REMOUNDOU (Chapter 6) analyses how the play, set in the Middle East in 2003, can be read as a retelling of the Palestinian struggle and examines alternative critical trajectories of political resistance, ‘savage’ remembering, and the representation of the rightlessness of racialized or gendered others on the contemporary Western, especially

¹⁷ The following abstracts have been sketched by M. Stachon and A. Lipscomb, and approved or reworked by the chapters’ authors.

Irish, stage through the prism of Achille Mbembe's theory of necropower. AARON SEIDER's article (Chapter 7) focuses on two 21st century adaptations of Greco-Roman epic, Kae Tempest's *Brand New Ancients* and Tessa Hadley's 'Dido's Lament'. He argues that both *Brand New Ancients* and 'Dido's Lament' foreground their reimagination of the relationship between memory and gender and, in doing so, showcase the newfound agency with which the works' non-male characters and authors create memory and contest it. IRENE (RENA) FATSEA's article (chapter 8) focuses upon the contribution of famous Dane architect Theophil von Hansen to an important plan: to build his very professional agenda upon the idealized notion of *hellenism* conceived as an ecumenical project. By critically discussing and analyzing Hansen's exemplary building of the Athenian Academy as a *lieu de mémoire*, i.e. a product of history's self-conscious mechanism of generating new meaning, the article argues for the poetic qualities of this building which elevated it to the status of an international monument of romantic classicism. Furthermore, it presents it as a thick symbol of the new country's reconstitution in which memory, drawing on her antique inheritance, legitimized it as one of Greece's most prestigious and endeared national monuments. In her article on Picasso's illustrations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* SOPHIE EMILIA SEIDLER (Chapter 9) explores how the artist's re-reading of the canonized pretext represents a modernist mediation of classical myth as a living organism offering various ways of transferring antiquity to a different age, public and artistic medium. HELENA GONZÁLEZ-VAQUERIZO (Chapter 10) analyses how today's tourists' photographs of Greece are still reproducing typical motives from the early days of photography in the 19th century, when Ancient Greece has been idealized as the cradle of Western Culture. In her article she argues that such a continuity in representation makes it hard for contemporary Greek culture to get out of its history's shadow. On the other hand, Greek mythology is employed to bring an unusual landscape feature to life, as RICCARDO GINEVRA shows in his article on the Gurfa Caves near the town of Alia in Central Sicily (Chapter 11), where the modern adaptation of an ancient myth is linked with issues of touristic economy, environmentalism, and local identity. JOSÉ MANUEL LOSADA, in his theoretical essay (Chapter 12), proposes a coherent academic definition of 'myth', examines the impact of various contemporary factors that significantly affect the reception of myths, and describes the principal functions of mythological texts. Finally, he concludes by detailing the methodological criteria for Cultural Myth Criticism, ensuring a structured approach to the discipline.¹⁸

18 This project, much like a protean myth in progress, has evolved over the past few years, taking various paths until reaching its current form. The majority of the participants first came together in 2017 when Penelope Kolovou (Bonn) and Efstathia Athanasopoulou (Patras) initiated and organized the international *Classical Antiquity & Memory* Conference at the University of Bonn. Subsequently – upon invitation by Penelope Kolovou – Antonella Lips-

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Part I
Ancient Myth-History
in Pop-Cultural Discourses

Chapter 2

CHRIS BISHOP

An Unconscious Reception of Homer's *Odyssey* – Marvel's *Silver Surfer*

'The wayfaring man – tell me of him, O Muse – who, having plundered the sacred citadel of Troy, wandered so many ways, who saw the myriad cities of men and learned their minds, and who, upon an open sea, suffered in his soul so many pains to win life for himself and a homecoming for his companions. Yet he could not save them, hard as he tried, and through their own wickedness they were destroyed...'

Homer, *The Odyssey* (1.1–7)¹

The *Silver Surfer*² debuted as a last-minute addition to issue 48 of Marvel Comics' *Fantastic Four*, cover-dated March 1966. Two years later he had his own title, a series which quickly became a counter-culture icon characterised by its dark vision of a senseless world as experienced by a thoughtful and introspective outsider. Originally a creation of the artist Jack Kirby, the first *Silver Surfer* series was drawn, for the most part, by John Buscema (although Kirby drew the final issue of the first series) and scripted throughout by Marvel Comics' editor Stan Lee (in collaboration with the artists). Neither Lee nor Kirby were ever forthcoming in elucidating their inspiration for the *Silver Surfer*, but this chapter will argue that the character was modelled on that of Odysseus, and that the appearance of the comic book superhero coincided with a general shift in the reception history of Homer's ill-fated wanderer.

The first *Silver Surfer* series can be readily located within a greater context of American neoclassicism and its expression in the popular culture of the 1960s

1 Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον, ὃς μάλα πολλά / πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν: / πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω, / πολλὰ δ' ὃ γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν, / ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε ψυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων. / ἄλλ' οὐδ' ὧς ἐτάρους ἐρρύσατο, ἰέμενός περ: / αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρῃσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὄλοντο; text cited after Murray (1919), all translations in this paper, unless otherwise stated, are my own.

2 Throughout this chapter I will be using the non-italicised name (*Silver Surfer*) to refer to the comic book character and the italicised title (*Silver Surfer*) to refer to the comic book series.

specifically: the advent of the surfing lifestyle, the final stages of America's obsession with *Peplum* films, and public weariness with the war in Vietnam. This is not to say that the modelling of the comic book character was self-conscious, however, or even self-aware, but rather that the pre-eminence of Neoclassicism in both the high-culture and popular-culture of the United States during the 1960s engendered a climate in which classical reception happened unconsciously, almost spontaneously. This chapter, therefore, concerns itself with the ways in which such an *Unconscious Reception* might have occurred, together with the factors that precipitated it.

The Man with No Name

The epic that we have come to call the *Iliad* might just as aptly be referred to as the *Wrath of Achilles*. Certainly wrath (μῆνις) is the word with which the poet chose to begin the epic, and the name of the central hero is revealed in the very first line: 'Wrath. Sing (of that), oh Goddess – (the wrath) of Peleus' son, Achilles ...' (Homer, *Iliad* 1.1).³ But in the *Odyssey*, we are kept waiting for the name of our eponymous hero for more than 20 lines and, even then, we are given only *Odusei* (Ὀδυσῆι, Hom. *Od.* 1.21) – less a name than a descriptive verb: one who both causes pain and suffers.⁴ Thousands of lines later, in book 19, we learn that the hero's grandfather had chosen this name for him: 'let his name be Odysseus', Autolykos had said, 'just as I have come here, creating pain for many, both men and women, across the fruitful earth' (Hom. *Od.* 19.407–409).⁵

It was Herodotus (*Histories* 2.116) who first mentioned the title of the epic as the *Odyssey* and yet it is a stylistic feature of the poem that our hero's name remains perpetually (almost obsessively) obscure. Odysseus is shipwrecked on the Phaeacian shore at the end of book 5, but he manages to conceal his name from these people (despite their uncharacteristic hospitality) until book 9, the same book in which we learn that he had lied about his name to Polyphemus, claiming to be a man called Outis ('no-one'). Odysseus then goes on to lie a further four times about his name – to Eumaios, to the suitors in Ithaca, to his wife Penelope, and, finally, to his father Laertes. Indeed, the poet (or poets) of the *Odyssey* seem far happier to describe the hero in epithets, rather than name him, and so we know him as Polytropos ('much-travelled, much-wandering'), Polytlas ('much-enduring'), Megaletor ('great-hearted'), Poliporthios ('sacker of cities'), Polymetis

3 Μῆνιν ἄειδε θεὰ Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος; text cited after Murray (1924).

4 See Kanavou (2015: 95)

5 πολλοῖσιν γὰρ ἐγὼ γε ὀδυσσάμενος τόδ' ἰκάνω / ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναῖξιν ἀνὰ χθόνα βωτιάνειραν / τῶ δ' Ὀδυσσεὺς ὄνομ' ἔστω ἐπώνυμον. On the 'grammatical obscurity' of ὀδύσ(σ)ομαι see Kanavou (2015: 90, 93), who notes also that 'Odysseus is the only major Homeric hero whose name receives an explicit (and in fact quite elaborate) justification within the story'.

(‘clever, cunning’), or Odune (‘man of pain’). All of these epithets, I would argue, are equally applicable to the Silver Surfer.

The eponymous hero of the *Silver Surfer*, just like Odysseus, bears not a name, but a description. Fans of the series will know that the Surfer’s original name was Norrin Radd but, just like Odysseus, it took quite some time for that fact to be made known within the text itself. The character first appeared in issue 48 of the *Fantastic Four* (March 1966) and went on to feature in another fourteen issues without being named. He appeared, similarly unnamed, in the fifth *Fantastic Four Annual* (November 1967), and issues 92 and 93 of *Tales to Astonish* (June, July 1967). It was not until August 1968, more than two years after his initial appearance, that readers learnt the Silver Surfer’s name. By then, however, any of Odysseus’ many epithets might have served equally well to describe the ‘Sentinel of the Spaceways’ – the Silver Surfer had originally been a scientist (a ‘clever, cunning’ man), had sacked whole worlds for his master Galactus, had endured much, had travelled much and had suffered much on account of his own great heart: ‘Well do I remember those early days ... when only endless journeying could ease the bitter ache within my breast! ... I have seen the birth of planets ... and the death of worlds! I have seen galaxies crumble ... and new suns aborning!’ (*Silver Surfer*, 1.1.41). Homer’s Odysseus finally achieves an end to his ordeal, regaining his country and his family, but the presentation of the Silver Surfer’s journeys as literally endless brings his character into line with more modern receptions of the ancient king – Dante’s Odysseus, for example, never returns to Ithaca and never ceases his restless wandering (Dante, *Inferno* 26). Like the story of Odysseus, that of the Silver Surfer starts *in medias res*, when the cosmic ocean washes him onto Earth’s shores. After an initial confrontation with the Fantastic Four, he plunges through a skylight into the apartment of Alicia Masters, a blind sculptor. ‘Truly, the workings of Fate are strangely unfathomable’, the story’s narrator tells us, as Alicia goes to the help of the unconscious Surfer. This brief meditation on fortune continues once the hero awakens when, dismissing Alicia’s questions he responds that ‘understanding cannot alter the ways of Destiny!’ (*Fantastic Four*, 1.48.8). Alicia comments that the Silver Surfer is both strange and noble (both words again in bold, *Fantastic Four*, 1.48.8) before preparing him a meal. After eating the food prepared for him (along with the crockery on which it was served), the Silver Surfer praises Alicia for her ‘courage’ and her ‘beauty’ (*Fantastic Four*, 1.48.11).

Readers familiar with book 6 of the *Odyssey* will be aware of the parallels here with the first meeting of Odysseus and Nausicaa, princess of the Phaeacians. Nausicaa hails the shipwrecked hero as a ‘stranger’ (ξένος, *Od.* 6.187), and reminds him that it is fate, through the agency of Zeus, that has brought him to the land of the Phaeacians. She gives Odysseus food, which he devours voraciously,

and he praises her beauty and her courage. And just as Nausicaa serves as the means by which Odysseus is introduced to, and reconciled with, the famously xenophobic Phaeacians, so too Alicia serves to facilitate the eventual alliance between the Silver Surfer and the Fantastic Four (*Fantastic Four*, 1.48.20). It is also Alicia who first voices a description of the Silver Surfer that will, by the launch of the titular series in 1968, have come to dominate our understanding of this character: ‘Never have I sensed such unimaginable loneliness in a living being!’ (*Fantastic Four*, 1.49.8).

From the very first issue of the *Silver Surfer* series in mid-1968, this narrative of solitude and isolation defines our celestial hero, a narrative epitomised in the Silver Surfer’s early soliloquy: ‘Now here I stand alone and fore-saken upon this hostile world! I, who have crested the waves of infinity ... exiled forever upon this lonely sphere ... But, time is long and fate is fickle ... my destiny still lies before me ... and where it beckons ... there shall soar the Silver Surfer!’ (*Silver Surfer*, 1.1.44). It is a recurrent image. In the very next issue we witness the hero bewailing his isolation once again – ‘Not even the eagle is without a nest!’, he observes (*Silver Surfer*, 1.2.5), with the accompanying visual imagery reminiscent of the scene described in the second book of the *Odyssey*, where two eagles swoop down from the mountains (Hom. *Od.* 2.146ff.).

Other resonances with the *Odyssey* that appear in the Silver Surfer may appear superficial, but they are worth noting nonetheless. Just as Odysseus battles the Cyclops Polyphemus, so too, in issues 8 and 9, the Silver Surfer battles Joost Van Straaten, the ‘Flying Dutchman’. Joost stands condemned to an eternity of suffering because of his failure to protect his original ship’s crew. Mephisto, satanic ruler of the netherworld, arms the Dutchman with powerful prosthetic hands and a single ‘nether-blasting’ eye, but he fails to defeat the Silver Surfer whose compassion eventually frees the ghost from his cursed existence. Polyphemus is not the only primitive giant that Odysseus must fight – he recounts his battle with the savage Laestrygonian cannibals as well in book 10. So too, in the brief run of the Silver Surfer’s first series, we see him battle against similarly brutal foes – first the Yetis (*Silver Surfer*, 1.1) and then the giant troglodytes that serve the Overlord Rhakkal (*Silver Surfer*, 1.6). Odysseus’ sojourn among the witches finds a reflex in the Silver Surfer’s run-in with a coven of witches in issue 12 (a coven commanded by Sir Nigel Carruthers, a figure reminiscent of Alistair Crowley). There are also two separate occasions over the 18 issues in which we see our hero undertake a catabasis (issues 3 and 10), in order to confront Mephisto. Interestingly, the term ‘stygian’ is employed four times during these journeys to the underworld (*Silver Surfer*, 1.3.7, 1.3.33, 1.10.10, 1.10.15), but perhaps nowhere is the comparison between Odysseus and Norrin Radd easiest to draw than when we consider the roles of both as exiled lover.

While the allure of Odysseus as a hero seemed to pall with the Romans and the inheritors of their Latin tradition, the same was not true for Penelope, who became established in the Western canon as the epitome of marital fidelity. If there was anything positive to be salvaged from the Homeric epic in the medieval conception of it, it was a love story, mediated through the lens of Chivalric literature, in which Odysseus and his wife became star-crossed lovers and Penelope waited, forever, to be reunited with her one true love. When the origin of the Silver Surfer was revealed to readers in the first issue of his own series, this celestial Odysseus was found to have his own Penelope. Shalla Bal had been the lover of Norrin Radd on their home planet of Zenn-La before the coming of Galactus. Norrin had offered his life to the destroyer of worlds in order to save his planet and his love, and so his endless odyssey began. Eventually trapped on earth following his rebellion against Galactus, the Silver Surfer's one desire is to return to Shalla Bal, a desire voiced at least once in every comic of the first series. For her part, Shalla Bal never stops loving Norrin either, and never wavers in her efforts to be reunited with him: 'Though it takes a lifetime', she pines, 'or a thousand lifetimes ... I shall wait for him' (*Silver Surfer*, 1.6.3). Just as Penelope dreams of Odysseus in the ancient epic, so too Shalla Bal dreams of Norrin Radd. Awakening from one such dream, Shalla Bal cries out: 'No! It ... it was merely a dream! And yet ... it was so real ... so life-like ... I seemed to hear his heart beat!' (*Silver Surfer*, 1.8.16). Compare this to Penelope's recollection of a similar dream: 'This night again someone lay beside me, someone just like him, such as he was when he went forth with the host, and my heart was glad, for I thought it no dream, but the truth at last' (Hom. *Od.* 20.88–90).⁶ Even Penelope's famous refusal of the suitors finds resonance in the thwarted passion of Shalla Bal: 'How tragic it is', remarks one of the elders of Zenn-La, 'that she ... the fairest of the fair ... has renounced all others ... while waiting for one who can never return! She ... who might be the bride of kings ... has chosen instead ... the meager solace of a memory!' (*Silver Surfer*, 1.6.3). The next image is one of Shalla Bal, her dark hair covered beneath a head-scarf, walking away, as one of her would-be suitors muses: 'I have offered her riches ... fame ... the dazzling glories of empire ... if she would be my bride! But, she sees no face ... she hears no voice ... save that of Norrin Radd!' (*Silver Surfer*, 1.6.3). Moreover, just as Penelope is forced into deception to keep her suitors at bay, so too we eventually witness Shalla Bal deceiving a Zenn La scientist, Yarro Gort, so that he will fly her to earth to look for her lost love, even though, in her own words: 'Yarro Gort is all that I hate ... all that I despise in a man!' (*Silver Surfer*, 1.10.2).

6 τῆδε γὰρ αὖ μοι νυκτὶ παρέδραθεν εἵκελος αὐτῶ, / τοῖος ἐὼν οἷος ἦεν ἄμα στρατῶ: αὐτὰρ ἐμὸν κῆρ / χαῖρ', ἐπεὶ οὐκ ἐφάμην ὄναρ ἔμμενα, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ ἦδη.

I would argue also that the depiction of war, or rather of war-weariness, might invite yet another comparison between the epic of Odysseus and the comic book series of the Silver Surfer. It became more common during the 1960s for Homeric scholars to imagine an ontological distance between the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and to interpret the depiction of Achilles' ghost in the latter as critical of the heroic ideal.⁷ By the mid-1970s Douglas Stewart would write that the underworld meeting between Odysseus and Achilles turned 'the whole heroic image and premise over into the dust'.⁸ More recently, Jonathan Shay, former staff psychiatrist in the Department of Veterans Affairs Outpatient Clinic in Boston, utilised the character of Odysseus to illustrate the mindset of soldiers returning from deployment in modern conflict zones.⁹ Similarly, the Silver Surfer, who debuted just as US involvement in the Vietnam war was peaking, can be seen to question, contradict, and eventually denounce the war efforts of America. The participation of US personnel in the Vietnam war had been escalating steadily from 1961. In response to this, student protests – initially against American involvement in the war, but eventually against the war itself – had begun in earnest by 1964. By the following year, domestic press coverage of the war was largely negative, with commentators beginning to draw unfavourable parallels between the actions of the military overseas (against the Vietnamese) with those of the military at home (against Civil Rights protesters). In 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. was prompted to say that if 'America's soul becomes totally poisoned, part of the autopsy must read "Vietnam"'.¹⁰

It was inevitable, perhaps, that against such a climate of military escalation and general war-weariness the philosophical musings of the Silver Surfer would be interpreted as a comment on current affairs. In the letters section of issue 54 of the *Fantastic Four* (September 1966) Greg Jones of Houston interprets Galactus as the Viet Cong, the Fantastic Four as South Vietnam and the Silver Surfer as America – 'the moral', Jones writes, is that 'a freedom-loving people, no matter where in the galaxy they exist, will not hesitate to help their fellows. We Americans, as the Silver Surfer, should be glad to help our neighbors in Viet Nam' (*Fantastic Four*, 54.23). Stan Lee's response was positive, if somewhat equivocal: 'your allegorical references are clever as all get-out ... That's one of the most interesting things about creating these little imageries for such aware fans – we can't dot an *i* without someone reading some deep subliminal message into it" (*Fantastic Four*, 54.23).

By the time the Silver Surfer got his own title, however, there were few people publicly supporting the war in Vietnam or, indeed, any of the wars that America

7 See, for example, Fränkel (1962) and Beye (1966).

8 Stewart (1976: 60).

9 See Shay (2002).

10 See Johnson and Adelman (2008: 139).

had engaged in overseas. We would do well to remember that the public's attention was not entirely focused on the war in Vietnam alone, and that the anti-war movement of the late 1960s was just as active in decrying US involvement in conflicts much closer to home. By 1969 the Bay of Pigs incident (April 1961) was still a raw wound in the American psyche. US troops had died in 1964 during their deployment following the January 9 anti-American riots in Panama, and in March of that year, the US had supported a military coup in Brazil, overthrowing the left-wing president, João Goulart. From late April through to May of 1965, America deployed some 24,000 military personnel to intervene in the Dominican Civil War, and US troops and intelligence operatives were also active in suppressing the Bolivian insurgency (led by Che Guevara) from 1966 until 1967. The long story-arc in issues 10 and 11 of the first series ('A World He Never Made', November and December 1969), used a brutal insurgency in a fictitious South-American nation to demonstrate the pointlessness of such wars, and the ongoing alienation of the central hero in the face of such brutality.

The parallels, therefore, between the Silver Surfer and Odysseus are considerable and, it must be said, have not gone unnoticed in more recent commentary.¹¹ Larry Brody, who wrote the script for *Silver Surfer: The Animated Series*, wrote that: 'Like the gods of ancient Greece and Rome, Galactus is a bad loser. Just as those ancient gods kept the hero Ulysses from getting home to his wife, Penelope, after the Trojan War, so Galactus keeps the Silver Surfer from returning to Shalla Bal.'¹² Brody's project aired for a single season in 1998 on the Fox Kids Network and was co-produced by the Marvel Entertainment Group with Saban Entertainment. Interestingly, Saban had, by that time, acquired the rights to *Ulysses 31*, a French-Japanese animated television series from 1981 that had reimagined Odysseus' adventures as a space-opera. Unlike *Ulysses 31*, however, *The Silver Surfer* did not concede its debt to the epic that had informed it.

It may be that the creators of the comic book series were unwilling to acknowledge their Classical sources because they preferred to present their product as original, or because they wanted to avoid issues of copyright, or even because they simply saw no purpose in referencing the *Odyssey*. But it is just as likely that, despite the obvious correlations between the two, the staff at Marvel Comics were unaware how much they had taken from the original. Operating in a culture saturated by a multitude of Receptions, individuals are often unaware how deeply indebted their art is. What results is still, strictly speaking, Neoclassical, but the conscious acts of Reception (homage, pastiche, parody) are subsumed into the phenomenon of Unconscious Reception. In the *Silver Surfer* we see the product of this Unconscious Reception – a comic book unaware of its own Neoclassicism,

¹¹ See, for example, Hammontree (2010).

¹² Brody (n. d. [2019]).

an artefact generated almost spontaneously from the Homeric resonances that permeated the cultural medium in which it incubated. These resonances, as such, operated in multiple bandwidths, from the high-culture impulses of academia, through to popular-culture influences such as film and comic books, and analysis of all these inputs reveals some surprising facts about American Neoclassicism in the 1960s.

The Conscious Classicism of Academe

For modern Classicists, inured to a steady decrease in student numbers and university offerings, it can be difficult to imagine how pervasive the Classics were in post-World War Two America, but by the 1960s, vastly more students were studying the ancient world in the universities and high-schools of the United States than ever before. American universities had experienced unprecedented levels of enrolment in all subjects in the decades following the Second World War following passage of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 (commonly known as the 'G. I. Bill') which guaranteed college tuition to any veteran who had seen 90 days active service and who had not been dishonourably discharged. The opportunity presented by this Bill was utilised by some 2,232,000 veterans in the decade following its implementation. The result was a 75% increase in university enrolment across the country with some college-schools doubling their pre-war numbers. These numbers continued to climb during the 1950s. The Veterans Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952 extended the same rights of education to veterans of the Korean Conflict, and tertiary student numbers rose by a further 49% during the 1950s. A further 120% increase during the 1960s was the result of a combination of factors – post-war increases in population, an increase in American affluence and, most significantly, a culture of college aspiration that had been extended by the G. I. Bill to a far wider range of Americans.¹³ It was this change in the aspirational culture of America that produced one of the least expected outcomes for, although the legislators behind the Bill had intended to encourage veterans to retrain for 'practical' employment, many Americans had, in fact, gravitated towards liberal arts degrees. As a result, numbers had increased in unexpected areas, among them Classics.

Students who chose courses in Ancient History or Classical Archaeology are now largely invisible to us as a distinct group, their enrolment statistics being subsumed into the larger disciplines of History or Archaeology, and so it remains difficult to determine the exact numbers of students engaged in Classical studies during the 1960s. Nevertheless, we do know that by 1965 there were 40,000

¹³ For all this statistical data see Olson (1973: 608) and Snyder (1993: 66).

Americans studying Latin at a tertiary level.¹⁴ This post-World War Two increase of Classics students at a tertiary level also had a direct impact on other levels of the American education system – Classics graduates became Classics teachers (in 1962 over 700,000 high-school students in the US were enrolled in Latin)¹⁵ and while the demand for translations of Classical texts to service these classes rose steadily, so too did the supply of translators.

In 1946 Allen Lane and Emile Victor Rieu had begun publishing their new range of affordable, softcover versions of classic texts. This British innovation, the Penguin paperback, came into its own, servicing the needs of the burgeoning American colleges. For their first edition, Penguin chose Rieu's own translation of the *Odyssey* which, by 1964, had sold more than 2,000,000 copies.¹⁶ Rieu's translation was joined in 1961 by the work of Robert Fitzgerald, a prodigious scholar who would serve as the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory at Harvard from 1965 until 1981. Fitzgerald's translation of the *Odyssey*, initially released by Farrar, Straus and Giroux was the winner of the Bollingen Prize and, like Rieu, also sold more than 2,000,000 copies. Richmond Lattimore, whose 1951 translation of the *Iliad* had earned so much praise, released his own version of the *Odyssey* through Harper & Row in 1967. By 1968, the year that the first *Silver Surfer* series debuted, the renowned Classicist Donald Carne-Ross could boast of (or perhaps lament) more than 30 English versions of the *Odyssey* then available.¹⁷

University students were studying Classics in never-to-be-repeated numbers, and these students were going on to teach Classics at schools throughout the country. Americans were being exposed to Homeric epics in the classroom, in the library, and in the bookshop. But it was not only in the rarefied atmosphere of the Academy that they were meeting Homer. They met him in the cinema and on the television as well.

On-screen Odysseys

America's obsession with the so-called 'sword and sandal' epics prepared comic book audiences for a new Odysseus while simultaneously mediating against stereotypical representations of the Homeric hero. By the second half of the 1960s, these Hollywood epics had all but run their course, and muscle-bound henchmen in short skirts were beginning to seem comical. It was at this time that the 'sword and sandal' epic began to give way to the Peplum film. The same gener-

14 See Culham and Edmunds (1989: 23). These statistics were used to more theatrical effect by Hanson and Heath (1997 and 1998). For a more nuanced interpretation see Adler (2016).

15 See Culham and Edmunds (1989: xiv).

16 See Hall (2008: 23).

17 See Carne-Ross (2010 [1968]: 123).

ation that had embraced high-brow iterations of Classical learning, the students who swelled Latin classes at College, the reading public that turned the paperback *Odyssey* into a best seller, had also found that Hollywood was willing to cater to their tastes and, in the wake of the big studios, a plethora of smaller houses had continued even after the high-budget epics had run their course.

Cecil B. DeMille's *Samson and Delilah* (1949) was one of the first post-war blockbusters to feature the ancient world, but it was soon eclipsed by Sam Zimbalist's epic *Quo Vadis?* (1951) which, although failing to win any of the eight Academy Awards for which it was nominated, returned more than \$5,000,000 profit for MGM, making it the highest grossing film of 1951.¹⁸ Buoyed by this success, the major production houses began greenlighting a number of Classical-themed projects and over the next five years cinema audiences were to witness *The Robe* in 1953, *Demetrius and the Gladiators*, *Theodora Slave Empress*, *Attila* and *Ulysses* in 1954, *Helen of Troy* and *Land of the Pharaohs* in 1955, and *Alexander the Great* and *The Ten Commandments* in 1956. The success of these films came at a crucial time in the history of Hollywood which, by the early 1950s, was experiencing an unprecedented crisis.

The rise of the Peplum film coincided with the decline of the so-called 'studio system' that had operated in Hollywood since its beginning. The 'Paramount Case' of 1948 (*United States v. Paramount Pictures, Inc.*, 334 U.S. 131) was an antitrust ruling by the United States Supreme Court which made illegal the vertical integration of the industry (studios owning their own cinemas) and the practise of block-booking (which had forced cinemas to purchase unwanted films). The Paramount Case coincided with a change of focus for the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC), an investigative committee of the US House of Representatives originally created in 1938 to investigate individuals and organizations suspected of supporting Nazi Germany. Following the end of the Second World War, the Committee shifted its attention to the operation of suspected Communists in the United States and, from 1947, HUAC reserved a special level of scrutiny for Hollywood. Writers, directors and actors suspected of Communist sympathies could no longer be employed by the studios whose output was also being affected by increasing production costs and a general loss of audience – post-war intra-urban migration had seen the inner-cities, where cinemas were located, empty out as families moved to the newly-built suburbs, which had no cinemas. Beset by so many problems, the studios decided to off-shore the film industry.

The film industry in Europe was already well established by the 1950s – indeed many of the big names in Hollywood had fled Fascist Europe during the 1930s – but although rich in expertise, it was lacking capital. Nevertheless,

18 See Wrigley (2008: 52).

American audiences had demonstrated that they were happy to watch 'sword and sandal' epics from Europe. A dubbed version of Alessandro Blasetti's *Fabiola* (1949) was released in the United States in 1951 and grossed more than \$1,000,000,¹⁹ and a dubbed version of Riccardo Freda's *Sins of Rome* (1953) was released Stateside in 1954.

America's post-war European Recovery Program (the Marshall Plan) had in fact subsidized the rebuilding of the film industry in several European countries. This meant that production costs in Europe were low. Americans working overseas did not have to pay income tax at this time either, and the freeze on the movement of European hard-currency during post-war reconstruction did not apply to companies with offices in countries such as Italy. Moreover, films with a Classical theme could be shot on location with minimal sets. Producing films in Europe, therefore, was inexpensive, tax-incentivized, and allowed studios to use staff without HUAC oversight. The next wave of films to emerge from the Italian offices of the major Hollywood studios, however, was not of the same caliber as *Quo Vadis* or *Ulysses*.

Cinecittà studios, founded in 1937 by Benito Mussolini, was rebuilt by the Allies who had bombed it and pressed back into production, creating some 300 films between 1957 and 1965.²⁰ Although Peplum films accounted for only 4% of Cinecittà's output in 1958, by 1963 this percentage had almost quadrupled to 15%.²¹ American producer Joseph Levine acquired the international distribution rights to Pietro Francisci's *Le fatiche di Ercole* (1958) for \$120,000, dubbed it into English, and released it in the United States in 1959 as *Hercules*, where it grossed more than \$5,000,000.²² Francisci's sequel, *Ercole e la Regina di Lidia* (1959) was released internationally as *Hercules Unchained* (1959), enjoying similar ticket-sales in the US and becoming the biggest grossing film for the UK in 1959.²³ Buoyed by such success, the studios increased their levels of output significantly.

They continued to produce the worthier epics that had predated *Hercules* – *Ben Hur* and *The Last Days of Pompeii* were both released in 1959, Stanley Kubrick's *Spartacus* in 1960, and Rudolph Maté's *300 Spartans* in 1962 – but such offerings were swamped by the sheer numbers of B-grade Peplum films that flooded the US market. Between 1958 and 1965, no less than nineteen films were produced in the *Hercules* series. To this can be added nine films in the series dedicated to *Ursus*, *Son of Hercules*, five films in the *Samson* series, five in the *Goliath* series and twenty-five showcasing *Maciste*, a Herculean character created by

19 See *Variety* (1952).

20 See Günsberg (2004: 97).

21 See Günsberg (2004: 100).

22 See Frayling (2006: 73).

23 See Günsberg (2004: 99).

Gabriele d'Annunzio and Giovanni Pastrone during the earliest days of Italian cinema. All of these 63 films used the same sets, the same costumes and, quite often, the same actors. Nor were Americans restricted to viewing these films at the cinemas or at the, by now, ubiquitous drive-in theatres of the new suburbs, as fourteen of the most popular Peplum films were syndicated between 1961 and 1964 for US television as *The Sons of Hercules* series. Thus, American screens – cinemas, drive-ins and televisions – were swamped during the 1960s by these quickly-made Peplum films.

By this stage, more serious depictions of the Classical world on film were coming to an end. Fox studios claimed that Walter Wanger's *Cleopatra* (1963) had cost them \$44 million to produce, and although ticket sales eventually crawled into profit, it was far from the \$100 million Wanger had predicted.²⁴ The following year, Anthony Mann's *The Fall of the Roman Empire* grossed less than \$5,000,000 against a budget of \$18,400,000, bankrupting its producer Samuel Bronston and putting a final seal on the genre.

Marvel Comic's first response to the success of the Peplum craze was to produce a comic book version of Hercules, although they were in no way the first to think of this marketing strategy. William Moulton Marston's 1941 creation, Wonder Woman, was an Amazon princess and her contingent mythos exploited several aspects of classical Greek legends. When readers met Wonder Woman for the first time in issue 8 of *All-Star Comics* (1940), they met also the DC Comics incarnation of Hercules – a villain to be pitted against the Amazons. Following the release of the first Hercules film in the US, Dell Comics produced their own comic book adaptation of the Peplum hero and followed that up with a version of *Hercules Unchained* the following year. A low-budget animated series *The Mighty Hercules* debuted on American TV in 1963, running until 1966, and a comic book from Gold Key Comics based on that series appeared about the same time.

Like DC, Marvel's first portrayal of the Greek demi-god, in *Avengers* issue 10 (1964), cast him as villain. When he appeared again the following year in *Journey into Mystery* (Annual, issue 1) he was established as a rival to Marvel's other deity-cum-superhero, Thor – a much later storyline retconned the early *Avengers* Hercules as an impostor, so the official Marvel Hercules has never been evil.²⁵ Hercules became a regular guest character in *The Mighty Thor* and appeared in *Tales To Astonish*, before settling into a longer run in the *Avengers*, where he eventually became a 'full-fledged Avenger' in 1967, by which time he had competition from Charlton Comics' *Hercules: Adventures of the Man-God* (1967–1969).

24 See Hall and Neale (2010: 166).

25 See *Avengers Forever* #1–12 (Dec. 1997 – Nov. 1999).

With their own Hercules established and the 'sword and sandal' craze winding down, Marvel were interested in developing new ideas, new heroes and new storylines, and so their Odyssean Silver Surfer owes his origin to both the Peplum craze that had immediately preceded his invention, and to the science fiction craze that coincided with it. In fact, a parallel might be drawn between the genesis of the comic book character and the contemporaneous production of that great cinematic epic *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Arthur C. Clarke's 'The Sentinel', originally written in 1948, was published in 1951 (in *Ten Story Fantasy*) as 'Sentinel of Eternity'. The story piqued the interest of *Spartacus* director Stanley Kubrick who, by 1964, had begun working with Clarke on a project they were calling *Journey Beyond the Stars*. Eager to break out of what he perceived to be the science-fiction humdrum of 'monsters and sex', Kubrick's early interviews on the subject indicate a new direction: 'the best term we've been able to come up with is a space Odyssey ... It occurred to us that for the Greeks the vast stretches of the sea must have had the same sort of mystery and remoteness that space has for our generation'.²⁶ Released the same year as *The Silver Surfer* series began, *2001: A Space Odyssey* went on to become the highest-grossing North American film of 1968 and changed cinema forever.

Surfing with the Alien

If the *Silver Surfer* was part Homeric epic and part space-opera, the eponymous hero of the series was also (and most obviously) a surfer. This editorial decision is easy to contextualise within another genre of film that was experiencing its heyday at the time of the series' creation – the surf-movie.

Novelist and screenwriter Frederick (Friedrich) Kohner had fled Nazi Germany and immigrated to Hollywood in the mid-1930s. His daughter Kathy grew up under the California sun and, by the mid-1950s, was a regular at Malibu beach. Frederick Kohner turned his daughter's lifestyle into a successful novel in 1957, selling more than 500,000 copies of *Gidget: The Little Girl with Big Ideas*. Columbia Pictures bought the rights to Kohner's novel and brought it to the silver screen as *Gidget* in 1959. In 1961 they followed up on this success with *Gidget Goes Hawaiian* and in 1965, Sally Field (perhaps most famous of the actors to play the teen surf sensation) starred in the American Broadcasting Corporation television series *Gidget*.

By then American International Pictures (AIP) had cashed in on the new fashion, producing their genre-making *Beach Party* in 1963. Directed by William Asher, *Beach Party* was the highest-grossing film AIP had made to that date and the company went on to make another six films in the same genre between 1963

²⁶ See Bernstein (1970: 25).

and 1968. Nor were they the only company to cash in on the craze – even Elvis Presley was press-ganged into beach films at the time, performing in *Blue Hawaii* (1961), *Girls! Girls! Girls!* (1962) and *Paradise, Hawaiian Style* (1965). These movies also made use of a new style of popular music in their soundtracks, a style that came to be called ‘surf rock’. By 1961 Fender had developed a ‘wet’ spring-reverb effect that afforded a lush, wave-like wash to the electric guitar. Dick Dale (Richard Anthony Monsour) used this effect in combination with own rapid picking style and scales influenced by his Lebanese heritage to produce the seminal surf rock song *Let’s Go Trippin’* (1961). At about the same time the Wilson brothers (Brian, Dennis, and Carl) formed what was to become the quintessential surf-rock band, The Beach Boys, and soon released their debut album, *Surfin’ Safari* (1962). Both surf-rock music and beach-party movies proved to be passing whims – by 1964 the Beach Boys had moved on to far more ambitious compositions and beach-party movies ceased to be made after 1968 – but neither of these fads spoke for (or to) the surfers themselves. For the young enthusiasts who spent long hours off-shore waiting for a wave, for those who drove up and down the western beaches of America looking for surf, or, indeed, for those who chased the perfect break across the globe, this superficial engagement with so all-encompassing a passion must have seemed trite and belittling. Fortunately for the true believers, there were alternatives.

Bruce Brown had begun documenting his own obsession with surfing at about the same time Kathy Kohner was learning to catch a wave. He released a steady stream of low-budget high-intensity surf documentaries between 1958 and 1962 – *Slippery When Wet* (1958), *Surf Crazy* (1959), *Barefoot Adventure* (1960), *Surfing Hollow Days* (1961), and *Waterlogged* (1962). All of these were eventually eclipsed by his around-the-world surfing odyssey *The Endless Summer* (1964) which (after screening for a year in New York at Brown’s expense) found commercial release in 1966, just as surfing was transitioning from popular craze to alternative lifestyle. It can be no coincidence that the cosmic surfer drifted onto the pages of the *Fantastic Four* just as *The Endless Summer* was achieving its first taste of commercial success.

That Stan Lee was trying to connect with the surfing public through his Silver Surfer is obvious. The comic book emerges at the height of the craze and Lee himself used surfing terminology when referring to his creation. In response to reader’s letter in issues 5 and 6 of the first series, Lee refers to the Silver Surfer as a ‘hodaddy’ (*Silver Surfer*, 1.5.64 and 1.6.65). This term had originally been coined (probably from the Spanish *jodido*, meaning ‘tough’ or ‘tricky’) to describe ‘greasers’ who hung out near beaches, but didn’t actually surf, but by the mid-1960s the term had transformed into a slang designation for the surfers them-

selves – see, for example, Bob Denver's song 'Ho Daddy, Surf's Up' in United Artists' *For Those Who Think Young* (1964).

Unconscious Reception

Part pop-culture referent, part transcendent archetype, the Silver Surfer was an ephemeral fruit born of a tree whose roots extended deep into the Classical influences that had permeated American society in the wake of the post-war college boom. His ship replaced by a surfboard, this new Odysseus traded the terrors of the wine-dark sea for the wonders of an ever-changing cosmos and emerged into a world flooded with Homeric Reception. When the *Silver Surfer* series first launched, James Joyce's *Ulysses*, originally published in 1922, was speaking to a new audience through Joseph Strick's film adaptation. This controversial interpretation of a controversial novel went on to secure an Academy Award nomination for Best Adapted Screenplay in 1967. That same year the supergroup Cream released their *Tales of Brave Ulysses* as the B-side to *Strange Brew*, and in May 1968 the song achieved iconic status after the group was filmed performing it for *The Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour*.²⁷ The 1960s, it would seem, was the decade for Odysseus ... which brings us back to the issue of Unconscious Reception.

We cannot know if Stan Lee or Jack Kirby or John Buscema consciously modelled the Silver Surfer on the Odyssean proto-type. I have read nothing in the comic books themselves that might indicate such self-awareness – no veiled references, no humorous asides or nods to the reader. The letters pages are equally unenlightening, and interviews given by Stan Lee in the last decades of his life contain little beyond the self-referential myth-making that has come to be a hallmark of the Marvel universe. For Lee, it would seem, the comic book heroes that he created sprang extemporaneously from his own feverish imagination, and yet, for even the most casual observer, this is manifestly nonsense.

Lee did not invent Thor or Hercules. Captain America was a product of the ultra-nationalism that proliferated during the lead-up to the Second World War, while both the Fantastic Four and the X-Men owe much to the pulp-fiction that Lee read as a young man. The legacy of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is obvious in both the character and resultant storylines of *The Incredible Hulk*. But all this is not to say that the Silver Surfer has been plagiarised from Homer. It is entirely likely that neither Lee nor Kirby nor Buscema ever knew how great their debt to the Classical world was.

A letter from Michael Susko Jr. was published in issue 15 of the first series of *The Silver Surfer* asking Stan Lee if the title of issue 11, "O, Bitter Victory" was original. Susko wrote frequently to Marvel and was, himself, a comic book artist,

²⁷ See Schumacher (1993: 107).

and his letter constitutes that sub-genre so fascinating to those of us who study these publications – the insider repartee that populates much of the ‘letters’ pages of Silver Age comic books. ‘I would like to know if “O, Bitter Victory” is a quotation’, Susko asked Lee, ‘If it’s original, congratulations; it’s got a beautiful ring’ (*Silver Surfer*, 1.15.32). Lee claimed credit for the line, answering: ‘Thanks for the congrats, Mike; to the best of our knowledge “O, Bitter Victory” is a Smiley original.’ Susko’s question makes sense in the light of other *Silver Surfer* issue titles. Issue 3, ‘The Power and the Prize’, took its name from the 1956 drama film directed by Henry Koster. Issue 4, ‘The Good, the Bad, and the Uncanny’ was an obvious parody on Sergio Leone’s Spaghetti Western *The Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (1966), while issue 6, ‘Worlds Without End’, was derived from the Christian doxology. Edwin Benson’s short story ‘A World He Never Made’ appeared in issue 25 of *Amazing Stories* (1951) and the title was re-used by Lee for issue 10 of *The Silver Surfer*. So Susko had every reason to suspect that Lee had taken ‘O, Bitter Victory’ from some other source.

We know that Lee liked to reuse his titles as well. ‘A World He Never Made’ would be reused for issue one of *Howard the Duck* in 1976, and by the time that *Silver Surfer* eleven was in print, ‘O, Bitter Victory’ had already appeared as the title for *The Amazing Spider-Man* issue 60 (1968). Lee must have been quite enamoured of ‘O, Bitter Victory’, as it would go on to serve as the title for *Marvel Tales* issue 43 (1973), *Thor* issue 234 (1975), and *The Uncanny X-Men* issue 255 (1989), but, despite Lee’s claims, it is not original. ‘O, Bitter Victory’ comes from Longus’ novel *Daphnis and Chloe* (1.18), probably first published during the 2nd century CE. More specifically, Lee’s exact wording comes from the popular 1896 translation of *Daphnis and Chloe*, commissioned by the Athenian Society in Greece.

It is tempting to imagine Lee leafing through this popular translation of an early pot-boiler (possibly the oldest survivor of its genre) in search of plots for his comic book superheroes. It seems incredible that he could come up with exactly the same title through sheer coincidence. To complicate matters further, though, Lee’s correspondence with Susko finishes with one of those sly nods that seems hard to dismiss. Lee is evasive about the future for Shalla Bal and the *Silver Surfer* until, in a spirit of condolence, he finishes off his letter by writing: ‘but you know what they say – love conquers all!’ (*Silver Surfer*, 1.15.32). Does Lee know that he is quoting here from Vergil’s *Eclogues*, or is it simply that Vergil’s poetry has become so completely embedded in Western culture that the reference itself is disembodied from its source, an aphorism that needs no citation?

Conclusion

On the weight of it, I think it more likely that Lee had no idea of his debt to the Classical world. I think that the post-war drive to educate America had brought about a number of unexpected results, not least among them a renewed interest in the literature of ancient Greece and Rome. With tens of thousands of college students fuelling demand for new translations, and tens of thousands of college graduates transporting their new-found knowledge into not just the classrooms of America, but also the everyday workplaces, the theatres, cinemas, the bookstores, we should not be surprised to find Neoclassical referents abounding in popular culture.

The immediate impetus for *The Silver Surfer* lay in the pop-culture impulses of the 1960s – the waning of the Peplum film, the rise of the surf lifestyle, and the promise of interplanetary travel made manifest in the Apollo missions. And yet, like the Apollo missions, whose name evoked some Neoclassical memory barely understood in the minds of the general public, even the most ephemeral of these pop-culture impulses drew nourishment from the older, Classical foundations which lay at the heart of the United States. The Silver Surfer was an icon for his day, but he was also the latest in a long line of wayfarers who suffered in their souls, cast adrift upon an endless uncaring sea.

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Chapter 3

HANNA PAULOUSKAYA

Soviet Argonauts: Sailing to the Coasts of Colchis in Soviet Film

History is not pre-existent to the film,
it is produced by it.
Pierre Sorlin

This maxim is quoted by Evgeny Dobrenko in his study of Stalinist historical movies and their usage for the creation of culture, identity, and a shared sense of history.¹ Films on mythical topics are perhaps even more suited to this purpose as their subject allows for broader variation and the myth told may be used to create another myth, or a second-order semiological layer, as Roland Barthes would have put it.² In the Soviet case, it was the myth of ‘sovietness’ that was to be transferred by means of various media. Greek and Roman mythology, however, never played a prominent role in the Soviet feature film industry. It existed mainly in the form of animation (especially animation for children), and only in the later periods of the USSR. The topic was particularly popular in the 1970s and 80s. In the period following the revolutions, even the genre of the fairytale was called into question, and was officially permitted only after the intercession of Maxim Gorky at the First Congress of the Union of Soviet Writers in 1934.³ At this time, the description of ‘real’ events (historical or contemporary) was given

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- 1 Dobrenko (2008: 2).
- 2 See Barthes (1957: 202). I use the term ‘myth’ both in the meaning of a ‘mythical narration’ (especially of ancient Greeks and Romans) as well as a ‘secondary semiotic system’ following the definition of Roland Barthes.
- 3 See Iustus (2000: 70–72), Balina (2005: 107).

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pride of place, for Socialist Realism became the official style of art and literature.⁴ In such a context the presentation of myth on film and the ideologically influenced reception attracted even greater attention.

The controversy between Socialist Realism and mythology is, of course, delusional, as Soviet art specialized in making its own myth.⁵ The very guidelines of Soviet Realism reveal as much. Artworks were supposed to display: ‘ideological commitment’ (*ideinost*), ‘party-mindedness’ (*partiinnost*), ‘popular spirit’ (*narodnost*), ‘historicism’, and ‘typicality’.⁶ From this list only ‘historicism’ may be at variance with mythological narration, but the addition of ‘typicality’ may explain even this contradiction. As we shall see, ancient mythical stories were perfectly capable of successfully following the guidelines of Socialist Realism, and even be ‘class-oriented’.

From films on mythological topics made in the USSR, I have selected for analysis three films, all of which engage with the story of the Argonauts. This mythic cycle was naturally connected with the territory of the Soviet Union because the ancient mythical journey leads the Greek heroes to the shores of Colchis, modern-day Georgia, or the USSR when the films were made. Had this connection any importance for the filmmakers? Did it make the mythical story more ‘Socialist Realistic’? Was the Georgian location of the myth in any way emphasized in the movies? These questions are all the more important as Soviet policy towards nations changed constantly. Another problem was that it was difficult to find a ‘positive’ hero in the myth. This was another *sine qua non* for Socialist Realist aesthetics.⁷ Greek heroes, as a rule, are not unambiguously good, and this needed to change in film interpretations.⁸ Several of these films were made for children and young adult audiences, which resulted in even greater censorship and paring back of the plot.

The films I focus on were made in 1936, 1971 and 1986. The first two are animations made for the big screen, and the last two for televisual broadcast (the second animation was to be broadcast both ways). The first, entitled *Argonavtebi* (The Argonauts), or *Kolkhida* (Colchis), is an animation made in Georgia (‘Goskinprom Gruzii’ Ltd studio) in 1936 by Lado (Vladimer) Mujiri (1907–1953) with the assistance of a great Georgian painter Lado Gudiasvili (1896–1980). The second, also called *Argonavty* (The Argonauts), was made in 1971 in Moscow at the main Soviet animation studio ‘Soyuzmultfilm’. It was part of a series of animation films about Greek myths. The director of the series was Aleksandra

4 For more on Social Realism see Günter and Dobrenko (2000), Dobrenko (2011).

5 The aesthetics was often explicitly called ‘mythological’, for example by Günter (2000: 10) or Esaulov (2000: 49).

6 See Dobrenko (2011: 101).

7 See Clark (1981: 46–67), Clark (2000).

8 Compare my other analyses: Paulouskaya (2017), Paulouskaya (2020).

Snezhko-Blotskaia (1909–1980) and the screen-writer was Aleksei Simukov (1904–1995). The third film, entitled *Argonavtebi* (The Argonauts) or *Vesëlaia khronika opasnogo puteshestviia* (Merry Chronicle of a Dangerous Voyage) and filmed in 1986, was a TV musical made by Evgeny Ginzburg (1945–2012) with dances performed by Vocal-Music Instrumental-Ensemble (VIA) ‘Iveria’.⁹ The production was filmed in Georgia by the Moscow TV studio ‘Ekran’ (screen) in cooperation with the Georgian television.

Thus the films represent various genres and were made in separate studios and in completely different historical periods. At the same time the first two were made by contemporaries but with more than thirty years distance. All the films were produced in Russian, the first and the third have also Georgian versions. As they were approved by state authorities, we may assume that they represent an official attitude to ideological questions. Defining the films as belonging to Socialist Realism may seem problematic; however as all officially-accepted Soviet art tended to preserve the norms of Socialist Realism, in my opinion these productions also represent this aesthetic and ideology.¹⁰ I will try to present the films in their historical context and to analyse the construction and preservation of cultural memory about the heritage of antiquity in these products of popular culture (if we may use the term ‘popular culture’ for the Soviet context).¹¹

Soviet Nations vs. Soviet Nation

To start with, I would like to make a brief introduction into a problem of nationality in Soviet culture and explain what ‘Georgian’, ‘Russian’ or ‘Soviet’ meant in various periods.

The Soviet Union – organized on the base of the Russian empire – had conducted a careful policy to distinguish itself from the previous state entity from the very beginning and, at the same time, to preserve its huge territory. Tsarist attitude to non-Russian nations was condemned as imperialistic, and the ethnicities of the empire were understood as an object of liberation along with the oppressed classes. The nationalities were often in their infancy and people had very low level of national identity. Thus, giving nations the right to self-determination often meant bringing them into being. In the context of longing for the world revolution and class struggle, this emphasis on national aspects is not obvious.¹² Terry Martin calls the USSR ‘the world’s first Affirmative Action Empire’, referring to the underlying institutionalization of promoting the national consciousness

⁹ *Iveria* or *Iberia* was an ancient Greek name for the Eastern Georgian kingdom.

¹⁰ Cf. the understanding of late Soviet literature by Clark (1981: 234–250).

¹¹ See the interesting definition of Socialist Realism in comparison with Modernism and Post-modernism made by Groys (2000).

¹² Cf. Eley and Suny (1996), Slezkine (1996b).

of ethnicities in the 1920s and 30s.¹³ The territory of the country was divided into federal, union or autonomous republics and autonomous oblasts according to thirty-eight major nations (1923).¹⁴ However the number of the ethnicities recognized was changing.¹⁵ Attitudes to the nations and policies were also altered.

The nationalities policy of the 1920s was called *korenizatsiia* [‘rooting’ or ‘indigenization’] and paid attention to minor ethnicities and promoted cultural divergence and plurality. It aimed to promote indigenous languages and literatures as well as the formation of national elites, and to help to ‘culturally backward’ peoples. However, from the post-colonial perspective, the strategy of the Russian authorities was not so different from imperial politics – once again they perceived other nations as needing help and appropriated the right to judge about their cultural level.¹⁶ Georgians (together with Russians, Ukrainians, Armenians, Belarusians, Jews and Germans) were acknowledged as ‘advanced’ nations and called ‘western’.¹⁷ Georgia and Armenia were the only republics where the linguistic question was not an issue and *korenizatsiia* was fulfilled rapidly and successfully.¹⁸ However, we should remember that Georgia consisted of smaller ethnicities, and the territory of ancient Colchis alone was inhabited by the Megrelians, Imeretins, Gurians, Adjars, Abkhazians, Svans, and Rachians, speaking different languages or dialects. *Korenizatsiia* aimed to support also these smaller ethnicities. In the case of Caucasian languages, grammars and alphabets were prepared with the main impact of an orientalist and linguist Nicholas Marr and his disciples. Marr was notorious for his ‘Japhetic theory’ that had a great and disastrous influence on Soviet linguistic, ethnography and literature studies at least till the late 1930s.¹⁹ The ideology was even called ‘Marrism’ and was obligatory for the Soviet academia. Despite all the negative consequences this trend had promoted Georgian and Caucasian languages and culture, however at the same time it disparaged Indo-European languages, especially most established of them or ‘ruling’ in the terminology of Marr.²⁰

In the late 1920s and 30s Stalinist cultural revolution took place putting emphasis on strong centralization and unification. The role of the Russian nation was emphasized. Russian art and culture were understood as exemplary and ‘above-

13 Martin (2001: 1).

14 See Martin (2001: 31).

15 From about 200 peoples in the 1926 census list, 172 in the 1927 revised list to 60 national groups according to Stalin’s remark to the constitution of 1936. See Martin (2001: 409).

16 Compare the post-colonial interpretation of the history of the Caucasus by Jersild (2002) based on Edward Said’s theory. Decolonization theory in the post-Soviet context is extensively developed by Tlostanova (2017).

17 See Martin (2001: 23, 56).

18 See Martin (2001: 77).

19 For more on Marr and his theory see Slezkine (1996a).

20 See Slezkine (1996a: 833).

national', and Russian language had been promoted to be the common language of the country.²¹ *Korenizatsiia* was charged with local chauvinism and was downgraded. Relations between the Soviet nations were defined as 'the Friendship of the Peoples', a metaphor used by Stalin in December 1935.²² The friendship campaign promoted union against 'the enemies of the [Soviet] people'. The concept of nation had changed underlining 'the deep primordial roots'.²³ Folkloric and exotic presentation of nations had been promoted, and stereotypical images of peoples were developed.²⁴ At the same time the 'stateness' (*gosudarstvennost'*) and 'sovereignty' (*suverenost'*) of the republics were stressed, and new republics were created by the 1936 constitution, among them the Georgian Soviet Socialist Republic with Lavrenty Beria as its party leader.²⁵ Concurrently promotion of titular nations of the republics took place by downgrading smaller ethnicities. In the words of Ronald Grigor Suny, '[k]orenizatsiia had "grown over" into a Georgian chauvinism, parallel to the growth of Russian nationalism (often disguised as Soviet patriotism) on the all-union level.'²⁶

It may be worth mentioning that attention to the past resulted not only in promotion of Russian 'classics' in literature, art or history,²⁷ but also heeded European and world heritage. It was the 1930s when most of the translations of classical authors were printed by 'Academia' publishing house. Being a continuation of the *Vsemirnaia literatura* (World Literature) publishing company²⁸ organized in 1918 by Maxim Gorky, the 'Academia' (1921–1937) aimed at translation and printing the treasures of the world literature. Although the process of translation started in the 1920s, most of the works were published in the 1930s,²⁹ even though the translators were often exiled, arrested or death sentenced.³⁰ Including world classics into Soviet canon verged on appropriation of it:

21 In 1938 it was made a compulsory subject in all Soviet schools. See Suny (1988: 258, 268), Martin (2001: 361–362, 451–460).

22 See Martin (2001: 437–451).

23 See Martin (2001: 443).

24 For example, 'Georgia was invariably referred to as "sunny, socialist Georgia" and their fine weather was said to explain their "joyful" national art'. See Martin (2001: 443) on the base of newspapers published in Moscow in January 1937 during a festival of Georgian culture (the Georgian *dekada*). On the use of stereotypes as a tool of colonization, see the seminal essay by Bhabha (1994: 66–84).

25 See Martin (2001: 445–447).

26 Suny (1988: 282).

27 Compare the change of role of Alexandre Pushkin in the 1930s, see Platt (2016). For more on change of perspective in Stalinist culture, see Paperny (2007: 52–53). On promotion of historical figures in cinema see Dobrenko (2008).

28 See Khotimsky (2013), Lazzarin (2013).

29 Among which 30 of 35 titles of Greek and Roman authors. See Ratz (1980: 26–30).

30 See Budaragina (2013), Stead and Paulouskaya (2020).

By this time there could be only one classic – *our* classic, and if by chance an important part of this classic turned out to be *their*, it still was *our* classic. Similarly, the culture ³¹ has dealt with the philosophy of Marx: it was *our*, not German, philosophy, and at the same time classical philosophy of Hegel (whom Stalin once confused with Gogol) and even Kant became ours.³²

This contradiction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ was growing during World War 2 and the Cold War and became one of the main foundations for the ‘Soviet nation’ (*sovetsky narod*), the concept invented already in the 1920s. It was especially popularized after 1936 in the context of danger of war, and was always presented as ‘our multinational Soviet nation’.³³ Thus variety of ethnicities was emphasized, as well as their common – Soviet or socialist – nature. According to Stalin’s famous formula the individual national cultures were to be ‘national in form, socialist in content’.³⁴ During the Thaw as well as the *détente*, folklore of the Soviet nations of the USSR was popularized (also in cinema and animation for children). Chosen texts were included into the Soviet literary canon studied at schools.³⁵ Images of children in national costumes encircled maps of the USSR in school textbooks. Stereotypical images of representatives of various nations were spread in popular culture and film. The image of the Soviet nation consisting of many peoples, tolerant to others was popularized in the society. However, these imaginary ethnicities were usually sets of stereotypes. And the ‘Soviet man’ or the ‘Soviet nation’ had also got its distinctive characteristics.

The films about the Argonauts discussed here were produced in very different periods of Soviet history – during the rule of Stalin, Brezhnev and Gorbachev. Although the official ideology of the Soviet state had not changed to a large extent, in practice it had diverse interpretations. The films under discussion show the influence of Soviet ideas about ‘the Nation’ and ‘nations’ on cinema, and participate in creating an image of the ‘Soviet man’ and ‘producing the history’ (in the words of Sorlin) using material of ancient mythology. Let us look closer to the films and see what ideas were transferred through the films.

***The Argonauts*, dir. L. Mujiri (1936)**

The animation of Lado Mujiri is, to my knowledge, the first movie connected to antiquity made in the USSR. It was produced quite early, when cinematography was still developing. In fact, it was the first feature animation made in Georgia

31 Culture of the 1930s in terminology of Paperny (2007).

32 Paperny (2007: 53). Hereinafter the translation is mine if not otherwise stated.

33 See Martin (2001: 450).

34 Stalin (1937: 195).

35 See Pavlovets (2016), Dobrenko (1997).

ever.³⁶ Lado Mujiri studied economics at Tbilisi State University (1930) and painting at the Georgian Academy of Arts.³⁷ At the same time, he worked in the animation workshop of the Georgian Film Studio, making propaganda poster films. *The Argonauts* was the third feature animation he worked on, and the first one he managed to complete, overcoming institutional and political obstacles. In his memoirs, his son Jimsher Mujiri describes the difficulties of the early days of Georgian animation and the hard work of his father and his colleagues. He also notes the great success of *The Argonauts* in Georgia and beyond.³⁸ The critics emphasized the high level of the film and its ‘non-provincial’ character.

Lado Mujiri and his brother-in-law Lado Gugushvili (1897–?), a philologist and pedagogue, decided to work on *The Argonauts* in the summer of 1934. Since Lado Mujiri was a proponent of the creation of national animated films in the Soviet republics and the use of the folklore of various ethnic groups,³⁹ we can be sure of the importance of the subject for him. The images for the film were made by Lado Gudiashvili, a famous Georgian painter and a teacher of Mujiri, who started his career in Paris, being a part of ‘La Ruche’ circle. Being fond of Caucasian traditional art he returned to Georgia in 1925. The composer Shalva Azmaiparashvili (1903–1957), along with the sound operators Vasyl Dolenko (1902–1998), Davit Lomidze (1914–1990), and Lado Dolidze (1908–1989) should be mentioned for their exceptional work in voicing this film.

The Argonauts is a black and white film with music as a background. It has no dialogues. Similar to a silent movie it includes title cards that describe the events and constitute its meaning in great measure.⁴⁰ The plot has the structure of an adventure love story, where the main hero has to fulfil the wish of his lover and eventually save her, winning over the enemies. The main heroes are Jason and Medea. It is Medea who asks Jason to bring her the Golden Fleece. The enemies presented as mosquitoes and toads make war with Jason. This naturally evokes *Batrachomyomachia*, but the main theme of the film is presented as the draining of the Colchis valley.⁴¹ It was perceived as one of the major achievements of early Soviet Georgia, which similar to the whole USSR aimed on industrialization and

36 See Asenin (1974: 257).

37 See Kapkov (2006: 454), Asenin (1974: 256).

38 See Mujiri (1988: II 76–84). I would like to express my deep gratitude to Dzima Zhaunou, as well as to the National Parliamentary Library of Georgia, and especially to Maya Maisuradze, for their enormous help in gaining access to this memoir.

39 See Mujiri (1988: II 85–88).

40 The description below will be based on the Russian version of the movie preserved in Gosfilmofond of Russia in Moscow (length 280 m, ca 10 minutes). Both versions are available online: <https://archive.gov.ge/en/lado-gudiashvili-125-1> (Georgian version, at the bottom of the webpage [last accessed 16 June 2024]); <https://www.culture.ru/live/movies/19066/argo-navty-kolkhida> (Russian version [last accessed 16 June 2024]).

41 See Bakhtadze (1983: 46), Asenin (1974: 257).

agricultural reform. Draining marshy lowlands, growing tea and citrus were the main tasks as well as positive outcomes of Beria's rule in Georgia.⁴²

To confirm this idea, the very first title card of the film is a quotation from Beria: "Let's give lemons, tangerines, and oranges on the table of the worker of the Soviet country" (L. Beria).⁴³ This reference emphasizes the film's context as a work of propaganda. Indeed, at the end of the film Medea finds citrus under the Golden Fleece and gathers a harvest of the fruits. The last two title cards are: 'But under the skin of a ram the citrus is red with gold / And the new land of Colchis is crowned with the fruits.' Thus the Golden Fleece is interpreted in the film as the citrus or the product of Soviet amelioration of Georgia.

The film was made at Goskinprom Gruzii studio, which was aimed at propaganda. The topic of contemporary problems or/and achievements was natural for the studio, which often produced films praising progress and development of society, especially its industrialization and mechanization. *The Argonauts* also includes an image of contemporary machinery: at the most intense moment of the battle Jason receives help that gives him a victory, and the helper is an excavator (so 'deus' literally has come 'ex machina'). However, Jason and Medea have also another helper and companion – a donkey. This emphasizes the film's bucolic atmosphere and includes it in Georgian folk tradition, as well as makes connection with a famous novel of Apuleius. Thus the film shows different sides of Soviet Georgia – the delights of the country and tradition, alongside the power and excitement of technological progress and infrastructure.

An important part of the film involves the war with mosquitoes and toads. Despite the comic effect of the picture, the enemies are presented as organized, technically equipped forces. They march in rows and form combat vehicles or ammunition with their bodies (for example, a toad with two snakes create a 'tank'). The title cards are made in the style of military patriotic poetry:

Execute my orders strictly, and equip the troops right now.
The headquarters on radio had said: 'The enemy has burst in!'
There will be a battle to the death. All the troops came into motion...
Ranks of infantry, cannon vents, and machine guns are coming.
Terrible tanks are crawling on the enemy [...].⁴⁴

42 Cf. the speech of Beria during the 17th Congress of the All-Union Communist Party (Bolsheviks) (http://www.hrono.info/dokum/1934vkrb17/5_6.php [last accessed 16 Mar. 2024]).

43 This is a loose quotation of the mentioned above speech of Beria.

44 Мой приказ исполнить точно, – снарядить отряды срочно! / И по радио из штаба сообщали: "Враг ворвался!" / Предстоит на смерть сражение, все войска пришли в движение... / И идут ряды пехоты, пушек жерла, пулеметы; / Танки, страшные собою, на врага ползут гурьбою [...].

Jason fights fearlessly with the enemy troops and defeats all of them with help of the friend-excavator. Thus Jason is depicted as a brave hero, ready to fight and defeat countless enemies. In the context of the late 1930s the movie should also be read as a patriotic propaganda encouraging viewers to be ready to fight.⁴⁵ From the point of view of internal politics, it was a time of great repressions against the ‘enemies of the [Soviet] people’ and purges of the party members, which were especially vast in 1935–1938.⁴⁶ The atmosphere of fear, informing, condemnation, fight and death was pervasive, and the number of victims was no less than from military losses. So the toads and insects may also allude to the ‘internal enemies’, including those who fought against the Soviets during the Red Army’s invasion of Georgia in 1921.

At some point of the story Medea is abducted by mosquitoes. This episode resembles the plot of an adventure silent movie. The style of presentation of Medea (her makeup and movements) as well as the title cards emphasize similarity with this sort of films. Jason liberates the girl and gives her the Golden Fleece with the citrus inside.

Jason and Medea are depicted as a young Georgian couple. In the beginning of the film the young man is sitting cross-legged, wearing a Georgian national dress (*chokha*) with *gazyrs* (an implement to hold a rifle charge), playing a *panduri* (a traditional three-string plucked instrument). Lying nearby is Medea, a girl with expressive makeup, wearing a contemporary dress, holding a pretty umbrella. We may assume that Jason as well as Medea are Georgians. They are presented in a peaceful rural atmosphere, having a picnic. There is a donkey close by. Due to the wish of Medea they start their journey that brings them great adventures.

On the other hand, the enemies are also presented as Georgians. The first scene with the toads shows five of them drinking wine from horns, singing and dancing traditional dances, wearing Georgian national dresses. Thus the film does not contain an opposition based on national difference. The story is set in Georgian scenery. Characters from both sides are shown as belonging to the Caucasian traditional culture. The opposition present is that between nature and culture, or the animal and human worlds. And this explanation is emphasized in critical descriptions of the movie (‘a draining of the Colchis valley’).⁴⁷

We might, however, trace also other messages. Let us return to the title cards describing the wish of Medea to get the Golden Fleece in the beginning of the film:

45 The film had a long gestation period and was remade several times. I only had access to the latest version of the film. So I am not trying to interpret the motivations of the authors, but rather to look for the messages that may have been read by the audience.

46 See Martin (2001: 270–280).

47 See Bakhtadze (1983: 46), Asenin (1974: 257).

For a long time Colchis was rich with the Golden Fleece,
 We have an important task: to drain the whole of Colchis!
 Black-eyed Medea was seduced by the Golden Fleece
 And fervent Jason has promised to give her the whole Colchis.⁴⁸

While the first title card seems to be the most connected to the ancient myth, it does not explain what exactly ‘the Golden Fleece’ means in the film. The second presents the message of the film. The last two introduce the main heroes. In this interpretation Medea does not possess the Fleece. Jason, ‘fervent’ (most probably with love), promises ‘to give her the whole Colchis’. Thus Medea is not a daughter of the king of Colchis. And who is Jason? Does he not fight with ‘Colchis’ to conquer it and bring to the woman? As all the characters have similar uniforms, maybe a civil war is taking place in the movie? Is it possible that the toads were a metaphor for the locals who resisted melioration or sovietization of Georgia? We should stop here to avoid over-interpretation. In any case the film presents achievements of the communist government in Georgia (with Beria at its head) and its victory over the enemies that might be interpreted in various ways.

Such a usage of the myth that has undergone so many changes may imply that it was well known by the addressee, in this case – Georgian audience, and was a part of the traditional culture. However, it is also possible that it was the heroes who were popular, not the exact peculiarities of the story. In this case ‘Jason’ and ‘Medea’ would just mean ‘heroes connected with Georgian protohistory’ and may be used to denote various concepts. As the film was to promote deeds of the new Soviet state, we may assume that Jason symbolizes a new Georgian, Bolshevik, and Soviet man, who is strong and mighty, ready to help women and to conquer nature and all enemies. Medea represents a contemporary woman – beautiful, loving and being loved, as well as participating in historical events to some degree. It was her desire that sends Jason on his quest, but during the war she was kidnapped and was waiting for her rescuer. She is fully involved in rural activities in the time of peace. Little connects this Medea with her mythical prototype.

***The Argonauts*, dir. Al. Snezhko-Blotskaia (1971)**

A much more canonical representation of the myth is depicted in the animation made by Aleksandra Snezhko-Blotskaia and Aleksei Simukov.⁴⁹ It was one of five films in the series entitled *Legendy i mify drevnei Gretsii* (Legends and Myths of Ancient Greece). The first film in the series made in 1965–1969 is called *Voz-*

48 Золотым руном Колхида с давних пор была богата, / Важное у нас задание: всю Колхиду осушить! / Золотым руном прельстилась черноокая Медя. / И Ясон ей всю Колхиду обещал дать, пламеня.

49 There are memoirs of Simukov and a daughter of Snezhko-Blotskaia including a short description of making the movies: Bogdanova (2008), Simukov (2008).

vrashchenie s Olimpa (The Return from Olympus) and tells about Heracles returning to the Earth to help people.⁵⁰ Like the film made by Mujiri, this animation puts an ancient myth in contemporary context, and is extremely politicized. It contains clear anti-fascist, anti-militarist, and anti-racist messages. The Heracles film was the first animation about Greek mythology made in Moscow, which might be the reason for the abundance of propaganda elements in it. Making an ideologically dense film allowed to include ancient Greek narration into contemporary Soviet culture.

The third film in the series, *The Argonauts*, was prepared by the very same team in 1971.⁵¹ It depicts the myth quite classically and puts narration into a frame. In the beginning and the end of the film we see an old Jason, who tells his story to two young Greek boys playing near an old shipwreck. This is rooted in a description of the Argonauts' myth by Lev and Vsevolod Uspensky, who add a similar episode to the final part of the story.⁵² Jason tells the boys about building the ship 'Argo', the adventures on the way to Colchis and the tasks that he had to do to get the Golden Fleece. The story is partly told in hexametric verses, which makes it more elevated. In the first part Jason mentions parting the clashing rocks of the Symplegades, chasing away the Stymphalian birds, and his confrontation with the sirens. Only a few of the Argonauts are called by name: Theseus, the Dioscuri, the Boreads, Orpheus, and Heracles. In the second part the old man describes all the deeds in Colchis: putting a yoke upon fire-breathing oxen, plowing the field of Ares, sowing it with the dragon's teeth, defeating the new-born army, and getting the Golden Fleece – doing all this with help of Medea. The story ends with the escape of the heroes with the Fleece and Medea.

Colchis is depicted as a Caucasian country with snow-covered mountains and the sea shore. The king's castle has old Caucasian architecture and contains local furniture and objects – a Turkish style jug and a typical Georgian horn with vine. Palace guards are dressed in medieval coat of mail. Aeëtes and Medea have Georgian appearances and clothes in the style of Georgian aristocracy – they have original crowns and decorations on the clothes. Medea is the first to be shown in this part of the film. In the very first scene she is presented as a magician, however it seems that her magic is not a subject of fear and is close to wonderful magic of fairy tales. For example, Medea looks at a surface of water in a pot and sees Jason there – this motif is common for fairy tales of different nations. This is most likely connected with the fact that the film is aimed specifically at children – there are no cruel brutal scenes in any of the five films of the series. Snezhko-Blotskaia had made many animated fairy tales based on Russian and international motifs at

50 More on this film see in my articles, Paulouskaya (2017), Paulouskaya (2018c).

51 More on the film in my other articles, Paulouskaya (2020), Paulouskaya (2018a).

52 See Uspensky and Uspensky (1941: 98–102).

that date, thus such an approach seems to be natural for her, and fairy-tale conventions are also used to introduce ancient myths in other films of the series.⁵³ Thus, bringing Medea and her father into these familiar contexts makes them a part of the known culture – of fairy tales and of Soviet Georgia.

Jason and his companions are presented as strong, confident young men. They are sure of their mission and are not afraid of obstacles. In his first speech to Aeëtes, Jason says that the king owns the Golden Fleece not ‘according to the law’ and ‘it will be fair’ to give the Fleece to the Argonauts. In response Aeëtes laughs and says that ‘justice belongs to gods alone’ giving the man tasks to fulfil. Thus we see that the mission of Jason is ‘fair’, ‘lawful’ and ‘just’. Jason is ready for difficulties and is not seeking help. Medea helps him on her own initiative involving magic. In a dialogue with her, when Jason receives instructions on how to plow the field and sow the seed, he is worried about the shoots, that he can hurt them by throwing a stone. This shows Jason as a farmer caring for his land.

To conclude, Jason is presented as a righteous person. As the story is narrated by him, such an assessment seems plausible. However, old Jason looks sad and tells the story without undue emotion. In the mythology of Uspensky, Jason seeing the boys first takes them for his children with Medea. The film does not mention the later tragic events and finishes with the Argonauts returning home.⁵⁴ At a difficult moment of the journey Jason carries Medea in his arms. At home he shows her the country giving it to her by this gesture. Being asked by the boys what happened next, he answers: ‘There was no next for Jason.’ After telling the story, Jason dies during a prayer to Athena and the boys continue his prayer dreaming to become new Argonauts.

In my opinion, Soviet spectators of this film might identify themselves with the Greeks – the young boys in the animation to whom the story is told, or the Argonauts. The Argonauts are ‘the heroes’ of the story. They are righteous and courageous. They do honour, being exemplary Soviet heroes. Colchians are presented in medieval Caucasian appearance, where Georgian national identification is rooted. They are shown as enemies, however they always preserve honour. To some extent identification with Colchians is also possible, i. e. with Medea. She is the only female human creature in the film, and her role is not overly simplified. The young woman has to make the choice of acting against her father in the name of love, and she is both courageous and independent. The presence of people of different cultures, who share similar values, goes hand in hand with the multinational representation of the USSR. To my mind these various possibilities of identification make the film more interesting and, in a way, more Soviet.

53 See Paulouskaya (2020).

54 Cf. Lovatt (2009).

***Merry Chronicle of a Dangerous Voyage*, dir. E. Ginzburg (1986)**

‘Soviet’ Colchis and Greece are represented in even greater measure in the TV musical made in 1986 by Russian filmmaker Evgeny Ginzburg.⁵⁵ This movie was a response to the expedition of the British explorer Tim Severin, who in 1984 sought to reconstruct the journey of Jason. Tim Severin recreated ancient vessels and sailed according to the original ancient and medieval routes all over the world. In one of these trips he came to the shores of Georgia.⁵⁶ A response to this meeting was the production of the film under discussion. It begins with fragments of the documentaries of Severin’s journey and declares that it will present ‘our [Soviet] understanding’ of the myth.

The film is a full-length feature and contains many elements of the myth. To my mind, the main theme of the film is the image of young men travelling together and looking for adventures and fun. It is presented as a typical students’ trip to Georgia popular in Soviet culture. Travels could be aimed for tourism and recreation or have a higher purpose – to help the country. Such ‘work travels’ were promoted since the 1950s and were caused by huge Soviet building projects. In 1959 a first student construction brigade was organized in the Moscow State University. Afterwards it became one of the main Komsomol⁵⁷ and youth movements that included all the republics and all the universities and colleges. Students went to Caucasus, to Kazakhstan, to Siberia, wherever there was a need. It created special youth culture recognisable for its songs for guitar and ‘romantic’ spirit.

The film is full of songs that create the cheerful, relaxed atmosphere of youth. It contains most of the main elements of the classical myth presenting the story of Jason and Pelias, building the ‘Argo’ and gathering the team, as well as adventures on the sea and in Colchis. The following episodes are present: the island of the Bebrycians with king Amykos [Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* II 1–150], Lemnos as an island of the Amazons [Ap. Rh., *Arg.* I 607–912], meeting a prophet Phineus transformed into a harpy [*Arg.* II 178–533], meeting the sirens [*Arg.* IV 891–921]), sowing the field and getting the Golden Fleece. Each of the main elements of the myth have their ‘logical,’ non-magical interpretations. The fight with Bebrycians is a jam-session held by Heracles and Amykos. The dragon teeth sown in the field are interpreted as vineyard seeds, and the fight of the newborn army is shown as just the dream of a drunk young man. The Golden Fleece becomes a parchment that contains wisdom, and Aeëtes is happy to share it with every nation because it will bring only positive effects.

⁵⁵ More on this movie in my other article, Paulouskaya (2018b).

⁵⁶ See Severin (1985).

⁵⁷ Komsomol (All-Union Leninist Young Communist League) was an organization that gathered youth of the USSR preparing them to become communists.

There are also episodes in the film absent in the myth. The Argonauts have one more member: Shalom, a merchant from Colchis returning home. He is one of the protagonists and we often see the events from his perspective. In the beginning of the film Jason meets Diogenes, traditionally portrayed among barrels. On the first island of the journey the Argonauts meet boys on the shore, who want the heroes to move them to laughter, which is a typical motif in various folklores. In Colchis Jason participates in a contest of suitors for Medea and wins her favour.

Medea is presented as a kind, chaste young woman, well versed in popular wisdom and fairy tales of the country, 'not a witch, but a fairy [...], a saint'. She has a bright smile, long hair, linen clothes, and is often depicted in nature scenery alluding to hippy culture. One of the most important motifs in the film is Medea falling in love with a beautiful stranger. Contrary to the ancient myth, the king trusts his daughter and approves of her choice. There is consequently no fight between Aeëtes and Jason. There are also other love stories in the film, for example of Heracles and Lydia, the Amazon queen. The conflict between the Argonauts and the Amazons is presented as a stereotypical antagonism between men and women, which disappears as soon as they meet each other in real life. Jason is shown as a king's son longing for power and a hero yearning for great deeds. However, his words sound childish and unconvincing. He comes across more like a person dreaming of becoming a hero.

The whole film is presented as a joyful story, a kind of joke told to friends after their return from vacations. The songs of the film were well known in wider popular culture, beyond the reach of the film itself. A Vocal-Music Instrumental-Ensemble (VIA) called 'Iveria' performed them. The 1980s was a period in which Western rock music was extremely popular in the USSR.⁵⁸ Being a closed country, the Soviet Union produced their own versions of famous compositions. Many musicals were produced at that date, also in the form of animated movies. Vocal-Music Instrumental-Ensembles were a popular form of newly organized rock bands, which combined European rock motifs with folk elements of the different nations of the USSR. These were extremely popular for decades. The VIA 'Iveria' was one such band, based in Georgia.

Georgian elements are very important in this film. The musical was filmed in Georgia and Armenia, and it made heavy use of the natural environment for scenic decoration. For example, a Greek temple in which one of the episodes is shot, is the Ionic temple in Garni, Armenia, built probably in the 1st century AD and reconstructed in 1969–1975.⁵⁹ The main scenes were filmed in Poti, a small port city on the Black Sea coast. Celebrating the film's 30th anniversary, the actors tell how after arriving at Poti the crew could not start filming for two days be-

58 See Zhuk (2010).

59 It was a temple to the sun god Mihr.

cause of Georgian hospitality: 'Summer, sun and Georgian feasts ruined all plans.'⁶⁰ The scene of the Argonauts' arrival at Colchis contains documentary footage of people living in a town in the mountains. We see crowds of Georgians meeting the tourists with open arms. The song tells: 'To meet a guest is a matter of honour. If there is place for one, there is for two hundred. Prepare the tables [...].' Georgian hospitality was famous in the Soviet times and the film emphasizes this idea as one of the stereotypes.

This theme is explored in the moment of the Argonauts' arrival at Colchis. Shalom, the most peaceful member of the crew, tries to convince Jason to forget about the Fleece and enjoy the hospitality of the country: 'We will be welcome guests of the beautiful land. We will find shelter and warm reception in each shack. Let me be a human!' But Jason reminds him that the Golden Fleece is the only aim and he was born as a king. Thus Jason is portrayed as a negative character. He is selfish and limited to his class belonging. He is an intruder bringing war, who does not listen to the voice of reason. This call for peace is even more appealing in the context of the Soviet-Afghan war. In February 1986 Mikhail Gorbachev makes a first statement about the beginning of the withdrawal of troops. Depicting Medea as a young hippy alludes to the American protests against the Vietnam campaign.

The problem of nationality has another interesting aspect in the film. The film actors are partly Russians, partly Georgians, but Georgians often play the part of the Argonauts, and some Russians enact the Georgians. For example, Shalom is played by Aleksandr Abdulov, but Jason by Zurab Kipshidze, Heracles by Roman Rtskhalidze, Orfeus by Nugzar Kvashali etc. Thus, the Greek Argonauts speak with a Georgian accent and sing Georgian songs. Even more, in this film the bearers of the highest values are the Georgians. Medea and Aeëtes are full of peace, love and understanding. They neutralize the military intentions of the young intruders with their wisdom and calm. They seem to be on higher cultural level than their guests. The wisest member of the Greek crew, Shalom, is of Georgian or Jewish origin. In my opinion the filmmakers sought to minimize national (and any other) tensions and to put stress on common youth culture full of joy, love and music, and to highlight the good qualities of Georgian culture.

Maybe one of the reasons was that the authors of the film were young themselves. The *Merry Chronicle* was made by a young director, performed by young actors and scored by young musicians. When they reminisce about the production of the film today, they tell of how there was a good deal of improvisation involved. For example, Valentin Manokhin, the choreographer of the musical, says

60 See N. N. (2016).

that the main dance was prepared in just 5 minutes!⁶¹ This spontaneous, relaxed atmosphere is very much felt by the viewer.

The film traces the ideas of peace, kindness, love and mutual understanding. Rooting the myth of the Argonauts in the king's desire for the crown is condemned. The youth culture of joy and music, which knows no difference between a king and a vagabond, is celebrated. The wisdom written on the Golden Fleece is to be shared among all nations. Thus the film, similar to its predecessors, promotes communist ideals – in this case of peace, internationalism and of the classless society, as well as emphasizes values of one of the Soviet nations (Georgian), but there is neither didacticism nor open propaganda in the movie.

Conclusions

These films, made in different periods of Soviet history, show different approaches to the myth and to their audiences. The first one is a classic example of the propaganda cartoon, where a known myth is used to prove and promote contemporary ideology. The second, made in the 1970s and the period of *détente*, is highly didactical and used primarily to teach children about the plot of the myth. The authors assume that the viewer has very little knowledge about Greek mythology. In this case, however, the mythology is also transformed to match prevailing state ideology. The main values of the film are honesty, courage, and justice, as well as independence for women. The last film under discussion was produced in the final years of the Soviet Union. It anticipates a basic knowledge of the mythology from its audience, and has almost no didactical message. The film rather joyfully celebrates the life of the ancient Greeks and modern Soviet youth.

From the national point of view all the films emphasize the Georgian element of the myth. Two of them were made in Georgia itself. National ideas go hand in hand with the multinational Soviet culture, what is similar also for Ancient Greece, multinational a-priori. The films do not highlight Russian character of the Soviet culture. The Georgian people change from being the target of Soviet propaganda in the first case to the very object of description in the last. Its representation is highly stereotypical, based on traditional folk culture. However, it is important that in the last film it was Georgians who were depicted as the most positive heroes in the story. In the most didactic story addressed for children, the Argonauts are presented as good and fair heroes representing the Soviet values. Thus heritage of the ancient world was accepted as 'our [Soviet] own' and ancient Greece was acknowledged to be a good prototype for the USSR, because it not only had a huge impact on the ancient world, but its influence lasted for centuries as was the wish of the Soviet Union.

61 See N. N. (2016).

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Chapter 4

FABIEN BIÈVRE-PERRIN

Nefertiti, a Political Queen for XXIst Century's Pop

Nefertiti was made famous by her bust, discovered in 1912 in Thutmose's workshop in Amarna by the German team of Ludwig Borchardt, currently on display at the *Neues Museum* in Berlin.¹ She ruled Egypt alongside her husband, the Pharaoh Akhenaten, during the 18th dynasty (1550–1292 BC): their wealthy reign was marked by the relocation of the capital in Amarna and by a religious revolution centred around the worship of the sun god Aten.² Some historians think that the queen ruled briefly alone, as Neferneferuaten, when her husband died and before Tutankhamen was crowned.³ Nowadays, her world renown portrait is one of the most reproduced ancient Egyptian artworks: travel souvenirs, tattoos, photographs, drawings, fancy dress... It is everywhere, and with it, the image of the queen, frozen forever and condemned to wear the same headdress again and again. Over the last decade, Nefertiti has caught up with Cleopatra in the race for the title of supreme Queen of Egypt in popular culture, despite a delay of two millennia in Western imagination.⁴

The popularity of Nefertiti stems, of course, from the beauty of her bust, but also from its context of discovery, Amarna, and the alleged monotheism of Akhenaten. Her proximity to Tutankhamen, the pop pharaoh *par excellence*, has only increased her aura within the western imaginary. But the evolution of her role in pop culture seems to follow the controversy over Cleopatra's ethnicity and personality. Nefertiti is just as iconic as the Ptolemaic queen, but much less ambiguous on more than one level, and her politicization has taken very different paths. Being less glamorous and seductive, she may embody a more respectable and inclusive Egyptian queen than Cleopatra, also, debates about her skin colour are less passionate.

1 See Fletcher (2004).

2 See Freed, D'Auria, and Markowitz (1999).

3 See van de Perre (2014).

4 See de Callatay (2015).

A Short Popular History of the Bust and Egyptian Queens

Since its discovery, the bust and Nefertiti herself have been used in politics: it was a ‘treasure’ of Prussia, a ‘unique masterpiece’ of Hitler’s Germany and even an issue of national identity between East and West Germany after World War II. Later, she became a powerful symbol for the Black Power, a feminist and cosmopolitan icon for the Green political party in 1999. Egyptians tried to claim her back, asking for the return of the bust and putting her face on display in diverse occasions, for example on the Minya flag (one of the governorates of Upper Egypt) or on a roundabout, sparking local controversies.⁵ The bust also became a strong influence in popular culture. Movies, TV shows, songs, artworks, video-games and novels about Nefertiti have been published in large quantities all along the 20th century. Her iconic headdress inspired up to the Frankenstein’s fiancée’s hairstyle and has been echoed on the catwalks of the greatest fashion houses.⁶ All of these reinterpretations have made Nefertiti a unique and inevitable icon in today’s pop culture. Despite its origin and chronology, the bust differs from other Egyptian antiquities in popular reception. The characteristics of the Amarna Art seem to confer it a proximity with classical culture. Admired for its technique and compatibility with the Western canons of beauty and modes of representation, the bust lays at the crossroads of both Greco-Roman and Egyptian imaginary, a bit like Cleopatra. So that’s not a surprise when we find it in ‘classical’ settings, especially in the art of Awol Erizku who placed it on a Greek column, sometimes as a whitewashed plaster cast.⁷

The construction of the ‘Nefertiti icon’ is part of a broader panorama and of a kind of recent neo-Egyptomania. In the Egyptizing repertoire, the figure of the ‘Egyptian queen’ belongs to the most frequent representations. As a powerful female figure, she arouses the interest of creators, sensitive to the values they can confer, and which revolve around two opposing visions: a feminist incarnation / a sensual and exotic object. Since the discovery of her bust, Nefertiti has been popular among creators and joined a very selective trio. Indeed, only a few queens are usually explicitly mentioned in pop culture: Cleopatra, Nefertiti, and Hatshepsut. Despite her Greek identity, Cleopatra has almost completely ousted other Egyptian queens of popular culture for a long time.⁸ Nefertiti, Nefertari or Hatshepsut, though more or less known to the general public, played only a minor role in the creation of the archetype in which they found themselves trapped.

5 See N. N. *Enterprise* (2018).

6 See Young (1991).

7 See for example her work ‘Nefertiti With Tulips’ (2018), exposed during *Say Less, Awol Erizku*, 30 Apr.–3 June 2018 (<https://scotiabankcontactphoto.com/archive/2018/say-less> [last accessed 16 Mar. 2024]).

8 See Bièvre-Perrin (2016).

Cleopatra paradoxically, throughout the history of art, literature, and popular culture, gradually synthesized all the Egyptian sovereigns, or even all Egyptian women. More 'glamorous' and sulphurous than other known queens, because of her relationships with men, be it her lover Caesar, her husband Antony, her husband-brother, her children, or her enemy Octavian, she is also closer to the 'Western public' by her culture and her identity, Cleopatra is the current dominant archetype of the Egyptian queen. Any woman dressed near or far to the Egyptian, or even to the Antique, is identified as Cleopatra unless another name is clearly mentioned. Nefertiti stands out as the most serious contender to Cleopatra's throne over the last past years. She is the only competitor unequivocally identifiable thanks to her headdress. Hatshepsut is certainly the third contender but seems to be a bland fusion of the first two in the current imaginary. Other Egyptian queens of pop lay in a sad anonymity that says a lot about their role in contemporary productions.⁹ In this fantasy tinged with colonialism, Egyptian queens are the synthesis of four principles: Pharaonic Egypt (secondarily Greek); the beautiful woman (slightly exotic and lascivious); the cunning (and manipulative) woman; in fact, a fatal woman who dragged her Roman lovers down.¹⁰ These principles characterize any Egyptian queen worthy of the name in contemporary popular culture, whatever our historical knowledge.¹¹ Thus, although represented with a beard and a virile musculature during her lifetime, while dying obese, Queen Hatshepsut became in popular culture a beautiful and frail adventurous young girl learning how to be a strong chief of power.¹²

Queens of Egypt owe their success in recent western popular culture to the subtle cocktail they provide. Easily identifiable, they take the public back to an exotic and popular imaginary. Thus, while belonging to the same exaggerated portray of the Egyptian queen, these women embody divergent ideologies and are staged in very distinct and changing perspectives. To the machismo that conditioned their representation for centuries, respond feminist empowerment messages, going hand in hand with the feminization and diversification of the artists staging them.¹³ The symbolic dimension of these carnival queens is emphasized and amplified by the setting in which the creators make them move: a chimeric pharaonic Egypt, timeless and fantasized by the West, whose codes can easily be introduced into the contemporary world and eventually hijacked. The mystery and magic that surrounds everything related to Egypt¹⁴ end up giving the Eyp-

9 See Bièvre-Perrin (2022).

10 See Sartre (2018).

11 See Pucci (2011: 203–205).

12 See Inudoh (2014).

13 See Bièvre-Perrin (2017a), Wieber and Carlà-Uhink (2020).

14 The interest that Freemasons have brought to Egypt for a century plays an important role in the mystical and sulphurous Egyptian imaginary; see Fritze (2016) and Warmenbol (2013).

tian queens their inevitable appeal and assert their hegemony, sending Roman Empreses, Zenobia, Dido and other ancient female sovereigns into oblivion. Too well behaved and dominated to Scouse men and inspire women, or too anonymous and difficult to identify to capture the public, they do not give creators the same grip as Cleopatra, Nefertiti, Hatshepsut or even other Egyptian Queens whose exoticism compensates the anonymity.¹⁵

A Game of Thrones: A Queen of Colour Rising

Although usually generated and controlled by men, representations of Egyptian Queens are sometimes diverted by women. Since the nineteenth century, the negative clichés attached to Cleopatra and her ilk have been taken over by some member of the 'fairer sex'. Thus, 'man-eaters', living at the expense of wealthy gentlemen, or independent women with a sulphurous reputation such as Mata Hari were portrayed with humour and irony as Cleopatra.¹⁶ In her music video *Dark Horse*, Katy Perry replayed the entire history of Art and appropriated the criticisms made of her model in a cynical skit in which she destroyed one by one her Eastern suitors to strip them off their wealth.¹⁷ This image of a dangerous Egyptian woman also exists in popular culture, probably in connection with the fear of mummies: in Ann Rice's books, and their cinematographic adaptations, the first vampire woman, 'Akasha' is an Egyptian Queen (*Queen of the Damned*, 2002, Michael Rymer, with the singer Aaliyah in the main role). This dangerous and ambiguous figure has inspired various reinterpretations, notably by the singer FKA Twigs (video clip *Two Weeks*, 2014). At the same time, Queens of Egypt have freed themselves from men on many occasions and are more willing to be surrounded by felines than lovers: the feminine vision collides with the magical aura of Egypt, making them appear as mistresses of animals (*Potnia Theron*).

Beside this feminist reappropriation, another movement is to be analysed. Embodying an Egyptian queen today can also have a political meaning for a woman of colour wishing to claim a glorious African past. If Hollywood has almost always chosen white women to embody its Egyptian (and more largely ancient) Queens, other industries have followed polemics surrounding the carnation of the last sovereign of Egypt. Some wanted to see Cleopatra as a great African woman, Black, who preferred to die than to submit to the West.¹⁸ These debates issued from Pan-Africanism and led to the creation of very contradictory representations.¹⁹ In the field of animation films and entertainment, representations are particularly astonishing. In the series *Cleopatra* (1999), the Queen is mixed, but not African-European, as one might expect: the actress Leonor Varela is of Chilean,

15 See Schwentzel (2019).

16 See Loubier (2000).

17 See Bièvre-Perrin (2016).

Hungarian, Italian and Syrian descent. In the series *Rome* (2005–2007), the English Lyndsey Marshal plays the part: she is sometimes very tanned, and her make-up as well as her outfits are orientalizing, but she still looks Caucasian. As for cinema, in the movie *Asterix and Obelix: Mission Cleopatra* (2002) the queen is also Caucasian (Monica Bellucci is the archetype of the Italian woman, white with black hair), but surrounded by 'Oriental' actors whose skins are darker. In France, for a musical show (2009), Cleopatra has been embodied by Sofia Essaïdi, a Franco-Moroccan artist. It seems that producers find it more convincing to hire a white or Arab rather than a black Cleopatra, maybe because Egypt is today mostly Arab?²⁰ Finally, to see a black Egyptian Queen in Western video graphic productions, we must look at non-historical series or cartoons. During a costume ball in *Smallville* Lana Lang is disguised as Cleopatra and in *The Prince of Egypt* (Brenda Chapman, Steve Hickner, Simon Wells, 1998), it was decided to represent a black royal family. The toy industry is also interesting in its evolution. Two major brands have designed Cleopatra figurines: Lego and Playmobil. While the classic yellow colour of Lego figurines is kept, colour variations are introduced by Playmobil. Thus, the figurine is black in 2014, while it was white in 2006 and is again in 2016. As for Barbie dolls, they are white unambiguously, and refer to Liz Taylor more than to Cleopatra. It may also be noted that 'Queen of Egypt' carnival dresses are only marketed for young white girls: no black model is ever casted to promote them (which is the case for almost all costumes). The same observation applies to recent videogames, even if *Assassin's Creed: Origins* (2017) offered a very smooth and ambiguous version of the queen. On the comic side, the Ptolemies have very dark skin in *Alix* (Jacques Martin), but Théli-Chéri has a lighter skin than her friend Papyrus in the eponymous comic (Lucien De Gieter).²¹ Hatshepsut has surprisingly been the subject of several manga: in *Queen of Egypt* (Chie Inudō, 2014), she became nor Asian or black, but white with blue eyes; she's thin and muscular, which is unlikely given her Nubian ancestry and her probable obesity.²²

18 On Cleopatra's skin colour, debates are numerous. For a recent review, see de Callatay (2015: 28, 103–107) on Cleopatra's skin colour in contemporary culture, and Fritze (2016: 314, 331–332). The incessant search for Cleopatra's mummy is certainly linked in part to the 'need' to fasten her identity clearly (DNA research was conducted in this direction on the so-called mummy of Arsinoé, her sister) and provoked in itself a rich 'reception'; see Olivier (2019).

19 See Walker (2001), Mbodj (2000), Fritze (2016: 300–325).

20 The Netflix documentary *Cleopatra*, which caused a lot of controversy because of the casting of a black actress for the title role, was released in 2023, after this article was written.

21 Which seems faithful to colour representations in canonical Egyptian iconography; see Lalouette (1996: 55).

22 See Hawass (2007).

In connection with these diversions and this renewal of representations at the margin, the figure of Nefertiti also experienced a clear phenomenon of reappropriation. While white women were cast to play Nefertiti in the peplums *The Egyptian* (Michael Curtiz, 1954, with Anitra Stevens), *Nefertite, regina del Nilo* (Fernando Cerchio, 1961, with Jeanne Crain), *Toto vs. Maciste* (Fernando Cerchio, 1962, with Gabriella Andreini) and *Nefertiti, figlia del sole* (Guy Gilles, 1994, with Michela Rocco di Torrepadula), the case is very different in the rest of the popular reception. Here are some examples: the Queen is black in *The Sun Queen*, a French animated film (Philippe Leclerc, 2007, the hero is her daughter); Leila Bolukat, an Iranian actress played the Queen in *Prophet Joseph*, a 2008 Iranian television TV series;²³ the popular French television show *Secrets d'histoire* chose a black actress to impersonate her in August 2018; in most children's literature, her skin is dark;²⁴ souvenirs sold to tourists in Berlin or in Egypt include both whitewashed and colourful busts.²⁵ Besides this, black musical artists have been using the figure of Nefertiti in their songs and communication for a long time. Many jazz players paid tribute to the Queen (Cecil Taylor, Miles Davis, Andrew Hill, ...). In 1977, The Ritchie Family recorded *African Queens*. In 1992, Michael Jackson seduced Nefertiti in his *Remember the time* video.²⁶ These examples show the popularity of the Queen among Afro-Americans²⁷. But in this context, her global popularity was lesser than that of Cleopatra.

Nefertiti's Voguing

What is happening since 2012 is unprecedented as the situation is clearly reversing. To the western orientalism, Nefertiti tends to oppose a strong Egyptian identity in popular culture.²⁸ Recently, Cleopatra seems to be replaced by Nefertiti when an Egyptian queen is needed, but only a particular part of the creators is responsible for this evolution: black and Afro-American artists. This is not so much their skin colour as their key role in recent pop culture that matters here. If we

23 The series, directed by Farajollah Salahshoor, tells the story of Prophet Joseph from the Quran and Islamic traditions (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt3084150/> [last accessed 16 Mar. 2024]).

24 Within the *Quelle histoire* collection, Nefertiti has a darker skin than other Egyptian sovereigns, while Ramses and Cleopatra are white; see Baron, Wennagel, and Ferret (2016).

25 In a different domain, the brand Elenco sells 'Nefertiti Forensic Head Reconstruction Kits' with a dark modelling clay (<https://elenco.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/EDU567-2.pdf> [last accessed 16 Mar. 2024]). Despite its growing popularity and unlike Cleopatra, Nefertiti has not got yet her Barbie, Playmobil or Lego figurine, and rarely appears in games. Her mummy is an opponent in the 2018 videogame *Assassin's Creed Origins: The Curse of the Pharaohs*.

26 See Saura-Ziegelmeyer (2017).

27 See Soliman (2020).

28 Orientalism is still strong in ancient Egypt reception; see Blouin (2019).

focus on pop music, it is noticeable how Black singers are dominating the charts, all the while controlling their own image to an extent never reached before. Beyoncé and Rihanna represent a, still rare, new kind of non-white pop stars, who no longer depend on their producers as much as past black pop stars and make the important choices about their public representation, controlling it partly directly through social media.²⁹ The rise of Nefertiti in this context has to be analysed as a consequence, almost a culmination, not a corollary.

Beyoncé and Rihanna are the best-known actors of this movement, but let's not forget about Janelle Monae, Erika Baddu, Keke Palmer and many others. We must also notice that these pop stars are collaborating with well-known artists, who are not all black or Afro-American. Next to Awol Erizku, we can spot Reilly or Damien Hirst, for example. These three internationally recognized artists are often using Antiquity as a way to work on Western norms and representations. It seems like they all are very consciously and politically participating to a more inclusive history of art, by mixing old and new, including black people into a story they were excluded from by western and white standards. Popstars like Beyoncé give a wider audience to these approaches and contribute to their diffusion and trivialization. The video clip 'Apushit' (Beyoncé & Jay-Z, 2018) is probably one of the most successful and popular manifestations of this phenomenon, offering meaning and perspective to the appropriation of Nefertiti.³⁰

So, why are these artists and their pop-star sponsors so keen on using Nefertiti rather than Cleopatra? Beside a constant need for change in pop culture and the presence of the Queen in archaeological news,³¹ the response seems to be political as the identity of the actors tends to bring it out. After a century of controversies and a batch of publications, scientific or not, on Cleopatra's skin colour, the Ptolemaic Queen seems to have tired creators. Playing on her ethnicity is nothing subversive anymore, but rather seems to be a bad gimmick for attention seekers. Meanwhile, Nefertiti offers an alternative yet full of promise. While controversies on her skin colour also exist, they are way less violent and radical.³² Definitely Egyptian, unlike her Ptolemaic sister, Nefertiti can more clearly embody an African-Egyptian ancestor and participate to an identity discourse. Her presence in pharaonic settings and within ancient Egyptian narratives is more coherent. Recent pop culture reception, however, clearly shows that several readings coexist. When Rihanna posed as Nefertiti for *Vogue Arabia* (2017), it did not really raise the indignation of the defenders of a 'white Antiquity', but nevertheless caused

29 The situation remains difficult for most black singers; see King (2018) and Marr (2018).

30 See Bièvre-Perrin (2018b).

31 Nefertiti recently made the headlines when the hypothesis of the discovery of her tomb was published in the press; see N. N. *BBC* (2018).

32 See for example two different takes on the subject: Ciaccia (2018) and Shenje (2017). See also Specter (1990).

uproar. Being considered by nationalists as the ancestor of modern Egyptians, some said the Queen should have been represented not by a black woman, but by an Arab one, accusing Rihanna of cultural appropriation.³³

To highlight the coherence of this phenomenon, the case of Rihanna deserves a more in-depth analysis. After tattooing Nefertiti's bust on her flank in 2012, the singer used it as a central prop for her communication in the year 2017. The November issue of *Vogue Arabia* is only the main piece of a wider discourse. By the words of the editor-in-chief himself, Manuel Arnaut, putting Rihanna as Nefertiti on the cover of the magazine was a political decision: 'We are dedicating the issue to strong and dynamic women who are changing the world [...] Rihanna, our cover star, is one of them. Not only is she one of the most successful pop icons ever, shaping the entertainment industry with her powerful tunes and unique sense of style, she is also an advocate for diversity.'³⁴ The fashion journal chose to display the Queen in an anachronistic setting: the singer is posing in front of modern buildings. Beside the headdress, only some white fabrics alluding to mummy strips clearly refer to ancient Egypt. On one of the inside photography of the issue, the singer is seen side by side with a black bust of her as Nefertiti. This is one of the art pieces from Damien Hirst's exhibition *Treasures from the Wreck of the Unbelievable* (Venice, 2017). In the movie *Valerian and the City of a Thousand Planets* (Luc Besson, 2017), released three months before the *Vogue Arabia* cover, Rihanna plays Bubble, a polymorphic being. After a lifetime of exploitation, she chooses to die with the appearance of Nefertiti. The dying queen then turns into sand, running through Valerian's fingers.

With immaculate timing (*Valerian*, exhibition, *Vogue Arabia*), this coordinated manifestation of Rihanna-Nefertiti shows that nothing hazardous or postmodern is at takes here. The singer made a takeover on Nefertiti's figure. It's not clear whether she tried to take the Queen all for herself or to confirm and impose her as a new panafricanist pop queen. Indeed, as we've already mentioned it, the resurgence of Nefertiti these last years is consistent and perceptible among other Afro-American pop stars communication. Beyoncé is the successor of Rihanna in 2018, collaborating with Awol Erizku and Olivier Rousteing (Balmain) to transform her into a new Nefertiti.³⁵ First the bust was on her side, for the 'I have three hearts' photo shoot (2017), announcing her pregnancy to the world as a black Madonna. Then the two figures collided at Coachella (2018) when Beyoncé began her show, wearing a renewed version of Nefertiti's famous headgear, a dazzling cape and her name associated to a depiction of the bust itself. Surrounded by black dancers whose outfits are ornamented with Tutankhamen's mask, the singer

33 See N. N. *Arabnews* (2017).

34 Arnaut (2017).

35 Beside its collaboration with Beyoncé, Balmain proposed a new vision of ancient Egypt, way less orientalist and retro than usual reception in Fashion industry, see Renault (2018).

joins a pyramidal scene where, among other Egyptian symbols, she then appears with a widely commented 'coat of arms'. Separated into four areas, it refers to Nefertiti, the Black Panthers, the Bee (both Egyptian and reminiscent of her nickname, *Queen B*) and Alpha Phi Alpha, the first interuniversity fraternity created by African Americans in 1906. It is surrounded by a winged Udjat eye and the inscription '20 18 ΒΣΥΘΝCΣ'.³⁶ Without turning to a clear Afrocentric discourse, Beyoncé uses ancient Egypt as a semantic key. She inserts Egyptian heritage into that of African Americans, and especially black women, to whom her concert is dedicated.³⁷

Two Queens for One Throne

Beside her legendary beauty,³⁸ the recent success of Nefertiti is thus linked to her skin colour. Panafricanism is to consider in the rise of the Amarna Queen within pop culture these last ten years. Afro-Americans are claiming ancient Egyptian as ancestors for black peoples all over the world and Nefertiti offers a popular and available model. This isn't new, but in the current political and scientific context,³⁹ the pop culture version of this position offers a new perspective. It also seems relevant to identify a connection with the 'representation matters' movement, highlighted in 2016 by Michelle Obama who then said that her role and that of public women of colour was to serve as role models for young black girls, so that they can identify and emancipate themselves.⁴⁰ Nefertiti is supposed to show that great black female figures have existed in the past and can be an inspiration. Along with black impersonations of Medusa,⁴¹ Aphrodite or the Virgin Mary,⁴² she emphasizes that classical culture, fantasized as a universal and common good, actually belongs to who wants to seize it.⁴³

36 Which does not make sense, as it literally reads 'BSUTHNCS': it refers to the Greek letters of the interuniversity fraternity, not to the Greek alphabet itself.

37 Before this, Beyoncé already made echo to Nefertiti's headdress on several occasion, see Bièvre-Perrin (2018a).

38 In popular reception, her beauty is almost always mentioned, and for some is innovative or a consequence of her power, see Hess (2018).

39 The 'whitewashing' of classic and ancient Egyptian history is currently at the centre of numerous approaches, following Martin Bernal's *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (1987) and his historical and sociological reconstruction of the evolution of the idea of origins of Greek civilization in Europe, arousing passionate reactions, membership or denunciation. For a recent comment and a bibliography on the subject, see Jayesh (2013).

40 See Jones (2016).

41 Like Azealia Banks, Rihanna posed as Medusa; see Bièvre-Perrin (2017c; 2017d, 2023).

42 See Bièvre-Perrin (2017b).

43 Photographer Advan Matthew chose the Singaporean Kelly Tandiano to depict the life of Nefertiti at various stages of her life (<https://www.anneofcarversville.com/style-photos/kelly-tan-advan-matthew-serenade-nefertiti.html> [last accessed 16 Mar. 2024]).

Nefertiti's popularity is also partly due to the idea that she can embody a 'decent' feminine historical model, as she escaped the 'bad reputation' complex that stained Cleopatra's image.⁴⁴ The monotheist aura surrounding her and her husband must have played a role in this picture of simplicity and honesty. This led to two options. While Cleopatra is seen as a white, pagan, manipulative and seductive queen, Nefertiti can personify a black, monotheist, wise and devout spouse.

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44 Mercier (2020); Nefertiti was preferred to Cleopatra by the street art collective Lediesis to join their 'SuperWomen' for a feminist project, see Nieri (2019).

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Part II

***Greco-Roman Myths
on Modern Stages***

Chapter 5

ANNA MARIA CIMINO

The Resistance of Memory, the Memory of Resistance: Stories of Italian Partisans through the Lens of the *Aeneid*

‘Sembra in effetti che Virgilio abbia posseduto lungamente, soprattutto attraverso il suo Enea, la facoltà insieme esaltante e provocatoria di generare delle “mitologie” virgiliane, di tipo positivo e negativo, nel mondo a lui di volta in volta contemporaneo.’

M. Barchiesi, *I moderni alla ricerca di Enea* (1981: 13)

By awarding the Nobel Prize for Literature to Bob Dylan, the members of the Swedish Academy made an exceptional decision. With this symbolic choice, they not only acknowledged the value of his art but also embraced the dynamics of mass and popular culture and to an extent they redefined the traditional meaning of literature.¹ This event has an importance on a global scale. It is also relevant

This paper is the written version of the talk that I presented at the International Conference on *Classical Antiquity & Memory, from the 19th–21st centuries* (University of Bonn, 30 September 2017). I want to thank the organizers, Penelope Kolovou and Efstathia Athanasopoulou, for giving me the chance to take part in this enriching and stimulating event. I thank the *Scuola Normale Superiore* and Professor Gianpiero Rosati for the support and Professor Alessandro Schiesaro as well, for his suggestions. I cannot forget all my friends and colleagues, who helped me with their precious feedback, in particular Stefano Cianciosi, Francesca D’Andrea, Giorgia Cafici and Elena Giusti. A special thank goes to Tijana Okić, for proofreading the text.

- 1 To conclude the speech he delivered during the ceremony (10 Dec. 2016) Horace Engdahl (2016) stated: ‘Recognising that revolution by awarding Bob Dylan the Nobel Prize was a decision that seemed daring only beforehand and already seems obvious. But does he get the prize for upsetting the system of literature? Not really. (...) Chamfort observed that when a master such as La Fontaine appears, the hierarchy of genres – the estimation of what is great and small, high and low in literature – is nullified. “What matter the rank of a work when its beauty is of the highest rank?” he wrote. That is the straight answer to the question of how Bob Dylan belongs in literature: as the beauty of his songs is of the highest rank. By means of his oeuvre, Bob Dylan has changed our idea of what poetry can be and how it can work. He is a singer worthy of a place beside the Greeks *αἰδοί*, beside Ovid, beside the Romantic

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for my discussion as well since my contribution will focus on the activity of songwriting to show how this kind of production can re-construct and re-canonize the memory of classical antiquity.²

Among Italian songs, the rock ballad *Eurialo e Niso* offers an excellent case for the re-enactment of styles and topics that are inherited from the Latin literary tradition. Written by Massimo Bubola and released in 1993 by the folk band *The Gang* on the album *Storie d'Italia*, the song uses the lenses of the *Aeneid* in order to re-read and re-tell an episode drawn from the Italian Resistance.³

As its title suggests, the reference text is one of the most famous sections of the ninth book of the *Aeneid* (9.176–503), where Virgil narrates the heroic deaths of Euryalus and Nisus. In the poem, two young men, who got out from their settlement to warn Aeneas about a siege, infiltrate the enemy ranks and start massacring the soldiers. However, the unexpected arrival of Volcens' armed contingent surprises them: despite their resistance and all the attempts to find a shelter in the dark, Euryalus and Nisus are captured and brutally slaughtered. Leaving aside all its problematic implications, the story became very famous and important in art and literature for its moral contents and high poetic qualities.⁴ Hence, only a comparison between the aforementioned song and the text of the *Aeneid* can reveal how the songwriter achieved his eccentric attempt of actualization.

One of the most remarkable phenomena of this modern re-construction of the poem is about transferring each detail from the ancient context to the historical reality of the Resistance. Changing the background, Euryalus and Nisus are transformed into a baker and a student respectively, who became partisans after the

visionaries, beside the kings and queens of the Blues, beside the forgotten masters of brilliant standards. If people in the literary world groan, one must remind them that the gods don't write, they dance and they sing.'

- 2 For a survey on the reception of Classics in the musical production of the 1900s, see Meloncelli (2002: 443–466). He concludes his survey, limited to the finest repertoires of the Opera and Chamber music, pinpointing: 'come il classico in musica, sin dalle prime esperienze melodrammatiche, abbia seguito un itinerario costante nella creatività dei compositori di ogni tendenza e formazione, soprattutto per la sua componente fantastica e i contenuti morali e psicologici che particolarmente nel mito greco trovano la sua più interessante e geniale interpretazione' (466). Such a point of view denotes a taste and an aesthetics completely different from those expressed by Massimo Bubola in his peculiar experiment of re-canonization of classical antiquity. In fact, he doesn't consider the fantastic elements, but prefers the realism of the scenes that are set in contexts of wars: they are transformed into new myths for the audience which they were addressed to.
- 3 Listen to Bubola (1993/1996). Several versions of the song, performed by Gang and by Bubola solo, can be found on Youtube or Spotify; as for the lyrics see Bubola's official website: <https://www.massimobubola.it/album/amore-e-guerra/> [accessed 16 Mar. 2024].
- 4 See Barchiesi (1981) for a general survey on the reception of Virgil and his work in the extra-academic world of literary production.

Armistice, that was signed between Italy and the Allies and announced on the 8th of September 1943.⁵

*Nisus erat portae custos, acerrimus armis,
Hyrtacides, comitem Aeneae quem miserat Ida
uenatrix iaculo celerem leuibusque sagittis,
et iuxta comes Euryalus, quo pulchrior alter
non fuit Aeneadam Troiana neque induit arma,
ora puer prima signans intonsa iuuenta.*

Nisus mounted guard at the gate, one of Hyrtacus' children,
Quick with a spear and light arrows, an expert in handling weapons.
Ida, that heaven for hunters, sent him as Aeneas's comrade.
Close by, his own special comrade, Euryalus, stood. In Aeneas'
Group, in the whole Trojan army, this boy had no rival in beauty.
Face still unshaven, he just now was showing the first signs of
manhood.

(Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.176–181)

Eurialo era un fornaio e Niso uno studente,
Scapparono in montagna all'otto di settembre.

Euryalus was a baker, and Nisus was a student
They had passed to the Partisans on the 8th of September
(Bubola, 'Eurialo e Niso', vv. 5–6)

Then, in the song, the Rutulians – who fought with the two warriors in the poem – are identified with the members of a roadblock and in general the whole scene recalls the Nazi-fascist retaliations.

I boschi già dormivano, ma un gufo li avvisava:
c'era un posto di blocco in fondo a quella strada.
Eurialo fece a Niso, asciugandosi la fronte:
'Ci sono due tedeschi di guardia sopra al ponte'.

The wood was sleeping but an owl warn'd them of danger,
There was an armed roadblock just at the road end.
Euryalus told Nisus drying up his forehead,
'Look at the German watches just on the bridge ahead.'

(Bubola, 'Eurialo e Niso', vv. 7–10)

In addition, the most intriguing transfer concerns the *galea*, stolen by Euryalus from Messapus, for its key role in the development of the dramatic plot. Indeed, the brightness of the object reveals the position of the man, who tries in vain to hide himself before the arrival of Volcens' soldiers. The song emphasizes the

5 The text of Vergil's *Aeneid* follows the edition by Mynors (1969); English translations are taken from Ahl (2007). The English version of Bubola's lyrics is by Venturi (2006).

shine of a helmet which finds its modern equivalence in a silver brooch depicting the Nazi eagle. So, the modern Euryalus imitates his Virgilian ancestor, putting the little booty of the enemy on his beret:

*tum galeam Messapi habilem cristisque decoram
induit.*

Adding the well-fitted helmet and elegant plumes of Messapus.
(Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.365–366)

*et galea Euryalum sublustri noctis in umbra
prodidit immemorem radiisque adversa refulsit.*

Then in the night shadows' low luminescence, Euryalus' helmet
Met and reflected a moonbeam, betraying its thoughtless possessor.
(Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.373–374)

Una di loro aveva una spilla sul mantello,
Eurialo la raccolse e se la mise sul cappello.
La spilla era d'argento, un'aquila imperiale,
brillava nella notte più di un'aurora boreale.

One of them had a silver pin on his soldier's greatcoat
Euryalus picked it up and attached it to his beret.
The pin with the imperial eagle shone so vivid and bright
like an aurora it glitter'd in the darkness of night.
(Bubola, 'Eurialo e Niso', vv. 15–18)

Beside the transpositions, we must consider the textual calques, namely the terms and the expressions slavishly drawn from the poem. For example, among the lexical parallels at the beginning of the song, we may identify the verb 'to go out', that produces the translation of the Virgilian *egredior*:

*Egressi superant fossas noctisque per umbram
castra inimica petunt, multis tamen ante futuri
exitio.*

Now they're outside, they are over the trenches, they're heading through ghostly
Night to a camp that's determined to kill them but where they will slaughter
Many before that occurs.

(Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.314–316)

La notte era chiara, la luna un grande lume
Eurialo e Niso uscirono dal campo verso il fiume.

The bright moon like a big lamp in the sky it did quiver,
Euryalus and Nisus went downhill to the river.
(Bubola, 'Eurialo e Niso', vv. 1–2)

However, we come across the most interesting case just at the end of the song, in the verses that describe the deranged reaction of Nisus who saw the torture of Euryalus. After observing the scene from his shelter, driven by terror and rage, the warrior throws himself at the enemy.

*tum uero exterritus, amens,
conclamat Nisus nec se celare tenebris
amplius aut tantum potuit perferre dolorem.*

Now Nisus is frantic,
Out of his mind, just shrieking in terror. For he can no longer
Hide in the safety of shadows, endure such personal anguish.

(Vergil, *Aeneid* 9.424–426)

Niso stava nascosto spiando di paura (...).
Niso dovette uscire ch e troppo era il furore.

Nisus kept well hidden for fear of being slain (...).
Nisus jumped out and rush'd to them with all his wrath...

(Bubola, 'Eurialo e Niso', v. 22, v. 27)

Furthermore, in their transmission from the original to the modern, the key elements are accurately preserved, as we can see in the allusion to the Virgilian concept of *furor*,⁶ expressed in the poetic dictation by the adjective *amens*. It is probably the most effective element that is adopted in the song for the psychological description of the characters.

Here I showed only some examples as evidences to the fact that the song actually reproduces and follows a classical model.⁷ So, in order to understand the motives of the song, we can refer to a testimony of Bubola himself in an interview:⁸

'I wrote (he says) the text of this ballad to keep a promise I made to my father, chief of the partisan brigade "Adige" of *Giustizia e Libert a* when he was only 22. Because of his love toward the classical culture and Virgil in particular, I have tried to relate this story of love and war – set in the 1943 – with the episode of the *Aeneid*, in which the two Trojan soldiers Euryalus and Nisus raid on the Latin camp during the night.'

Beside the description of the content, these words prove the crucial role that memory played in the composition of the song and in the construction of its message. Through this and through the father-son relationship it describes, we are able to establish connections between two historical moments, that of the Resistance, in which the story and its characters are placed, and the contemporary time,

6 On this issue, see Hershkowitz (1998: 68–124).

7 In the artistic *panorama* of the last decade, this song represents one of the rare examples of fortune of the *Aeneid* (as reference for quotations), in general terms. Such peculiarity makes the lyrics a unique case in the dimension of the authorial song and, in general, in the popular culture of contemporary Italy.

8 See <https://www.antiwarsongs.org/canzone.php?id=74&lang=it> [accessed 16 Mar. 2024].

in which the memory of the Resistance persists. In the dialectic between the one who dedicates the song and the one to whom the song is dedicated, it is precisely the music as a popular cultural experience that enables the opening of the individual memory to the collective dimension, transforming familial and private experience into testimonies capable of recovering historical phenomena in the present.

From this point of view, the song clearly offers many starting points for a fruitful discussion and paves the way for several possible interpretations. First of all, the life of Bubola's father among the Antifascists, which we follow in the song and in the brief interview, pursues an indirect testimony of the fortune of the *Aeneid*. From the singer's perspective, we can empirically describe a sort of *osmosis* between private and collective memory. Bubola, commemorating his father, creates a universal tale about the Resistance that mirrors the experiences of the partisans. Moreover, based on the analysis of the song, we can claim that the re-enactment of the Virgilian model is generated by a composition technique drawn upon the literary memory of the authors, namely the allusive procedure.⁹

Hence, the multiple implications of memory in our case study can be sketched out *vis-à-vis* the two formulations in the title. On the one hand, under the label of *the Resistance of Memory (of Virgil)*, we recognize the fortune of Virgil in a continuity of time, from the thirties to the present. On the other hand, we do observe that *the Memory of the Resistance* is re-mediated by the *Aeneid* in many literary works.¹⁰

According to the songwriter, his choice of the *Aeneid* as a reference text is inspired by the memory of his father, who was a great fan of Virgil. Such a biographical detail turns out to be useful in the historical analysis, especially if contextualized in the socio-cultural background of the fascist Italy.

Back then, Bubola's father went to school and received his knowledge of classical antiquity from the fascist institutions. Generally speaking, through these institutions, the *propaganda* of the Regime aimed to control the thoughts and actions of the members of society by imposing its cultural and ethical models.¹¹ The

9 Cf., in general, Pasquali (1942/1951) and Conte (1974). On the question of the imitation of the classics pursued by contemporary authors, Pedullà (2015: XXII-XXIII) has preferred expressing his thoughts in terms of "sensibilization (sensibilizzazione)".

10 According to Fo (2002: 181–182), Italian literature of the 1900s has been deeply influenced by Virgil's poetry. With his production, he has dictated forms and contents of those productions in poetry and narrative. In many cases, authors have addressed the figure of the poet reconstructing his biography, his character and his personality and cast a new and subjective light to them. Further, Fo (2002: 182) states: 'le connessioni a Virgilio e alla sua poesia avvengono per riflessioni e slittamenti simbolici sulla bellezza e sul dolore.'

11 Canfora (1976: 15–39) considers the ideological use of classics as part of this phenomenon. In particular, Cagnetta (1976: 139–167) underlines that the case of Augustus' model displays many peculiarities: it was a reference point for the Fascist Regime and its construction was a product of both the fascist propaganda and the cultural policy. As an inspiring model, it was recreated *ad hoc* and superimposed upon society through the systems of political communi-

Fascism had kept the legacy of the ancient world under its control and had adopted the myth of Rome as a means for its own legitimization and public image.¹²

Virgil himself fell victim to the fascist machine. The celebrations for his bi-millenary were held in Rome in 1930 and this event was used to enhance symmetries and similarities between the Augustan era and the fascist empire.¹³ In particular on this occasion, the regime presented a despotic image of the poet and an interpretation of his works in line with its political aims. Acclaimed as a forerunner of the Christian religion because of the messianic readings traditionally associated to his poems, the figure of Virgil was utilized to celebrate the treaties signed by the State and the Catholic Church in 1929. Furthermore, the re-interpretation of the *Bucolics* and the *Georgics* offered an ideological archetype for the Fascist ruralism,¹⁴ while the *Aeneid* was read as a poet of domination, in order to justify the imperialistic campaign in Africa.¹⁵

Nevertheless, in opposition to these ideological manipulations,¹⁶ the antifascists developed a counterculture, involving the heritage of classical antiquity as well. Actually, this counterculture embraced new values to express the discontent against the dictatorship.¹⁷ But later, it offered its literary models to the most important authors of the Italian Resistance. Hence we can see how traces of classical antiquity survived in these literary expressions, free from the superstructures of the fascist ideology.

In general, adverse usages of shared repertoire of symbols and knowledge that Italy inherited from its ancient past was subjected to a re-semantization¹⁸ in a situ-

cation.

12 Giardina (2000: 213–214, 227), Nelis (2007: 404).

13 Especially see Cagnetta (1976: 139–167) and Giardina (2000: 212–287): they showed that the efforts of the propaganda aimed at constructing a collective memory similar to the myth of Rome that could challenge eternity. On this issue, see also Belardelli (2002: 327) and Nelis (2007: 391–415).

14 On the contiguity between the fascist representation of Virgil and the public advertising related to the measures for the recovery of Italian agriculture enacted in 1929/1930, see Cagnetta (1976: 165–167) and Belardelli (2002: 325–358).

15 For further information about the representation of Rome under the fascist regime, see Giardina (2000: 212–287). I cite this work because it recollects the different shades of Virgil's image produced during the fascist era. As Canfora (1980: 104–132) observed, intellectuals and especially the classicists supported the regime and helped it to find a way in the appropriation of the heritage of the ancient world.

16 Already in the premise, Canfora (1976: 15–39) depicts the role of classics and its centrality among the cultural sources of the Fascism. In particular, he aims at defining the ways in which the regime has turned this repertoire of knowledge into a kind of mass ideology, owing to the contribution of intellectuals and the best classicists of the time.

17 Mignone (2014: 137–150) presented a brilliant example for this phenomenon, discussing the political act of the *Secessione dell'Aventino* (June 27, 1924), pursued by the opposition after the assassination of the deputy Giacomo Matteotti (June 10, 1924).

18 On the polysemy of the myth of Virgil and the *Aeneid*, see Barchiesi (1981).

ation in which the community expressed the need to re-appropriate its own cultural heritage and assigned new meanings to that; intellectuals fought their own Resistance, challenging the interpretative system superimposed upon classics by the fascist *propaganda* and offering new interpretations for those works that they, willingly or unwillingly, wanted to preserve as their models.

Perhaps, one of the most important examples of this process is provided by a partisan and a writer, Beppe Fenoglio.¹⁹ Among the most outstanding narratives of his literary production, we can highlight that of the young partisans, Set and Tarzan, who were captured during a fascist raid. Their brief story appears in *L'imboscata*, an incomplete novel, in the tale titled, *L'erba brilla al sole*,²⁰ and in the final chapters of *Il libro di Johnny*.²¹

Gabriele Pedullà, curator of the most recent edition of this work, argued that in all the re-narrations of this tale it is possible to notice some similarities with Euryalus and Nisus' episode in the *Aeneid*.²² To confirm this statement, we can recall a passage taken from the novel in which there is an allusion to their capture:

'E qualcosa doveva essere accaduto a Settimo, perché urlò e *dropped* la sua arma e con ambo le mani si sollevò la gamba destra e al coperto del camion Tarzan stava prendendosi a spalla e cautamente, con immensa fatica, lo ritirava oltre il fossato.' (Fenoglio, *Il libro di Johnny*, 2.41, p. 774)

In addition, Pedullà demonstrated that the greatness of this novel resides precisely in its genuine epic nature and Virgilian imprints in the definition of the narrative structures.²³ The two sections of *Il libro di Johnny*, 'Primavera di bellezza' and 'Il partigiano Johnny', imitate the inner partition of the *Aeneid*. As we can see in the poem, the first part, focused on the development of the main character, is fol-

19 Beppe Fenoglio [1922–1963], writer, translator, and playwright, served the Italian Resistance. This experience left a mark in his life and inspired his main work, *Il partigiano Johnny*, which was published posthumously in 1968.

20 *L'imboscata*, an unfinished novel, was published for the first time by Dante Isella in 1992. The tale *L'erba brilla al sole*, instead, appeared for the first time in 1961, in a miscellaneous volume titled *Secondo Risorgimento* and issued during the celebrations for the centenary of Italian Unification. Now it is part of the collection edited by Luca Bufano and published in 2007 (pp. 193-206, further details on the publication can be found at p. 584). Generally speaking, there are several parallels between the tale and the chapters thirteen and fourteen of the novel in which the two partisans, who incarnate the model of Euryalus and Nisus, are presented with the names of Gilera e Maté.

21 Pedullà (2015: LXXV).

22 *Il libro di Johnny* (2015) is the final result of Gabriele Pedullà's philological study on both *Primavera di bellezza* and *Il partigiano Johnny*, published respectively in 1959 and 1968. His efforts have demonstrated that these two novels were intended by Fenoglio as two sections of a single editorial project, inspired to the *Aeneid* (see the Introduction, pp. V–LXXXVII).

23 As discussed by Pedullà (2015: XXII), the adhesion to the Virgilian model allows Fenoglio to employ an epic composition in his novel.

lowed by a second one dealing with the adventures of the adult hero, who fights for the land promised him by the Fate. The break in the *Aeneid* that splits the Iliadic and the Odyssean units, corresponds in Fenoglio's novel to the events of the 8th of September, when Italy signed the Armistice and dissolved its army. Actually, Johnny, the protagonist of the novel, had served in the army himself, and after wandering all over fascist Italy, came back to his homeland, the city of Alba in Piemonte, to join the Resistance. This effort, embracing the experiences of all the partisans, has been linked by Pedullà to Aeneas' story:²⁴

‘Come dunque l’*Eneide* è la storia di una rifondazione dopo la perdita della patria (un tema del tutto assente in Omero, dove l’*Odissea* mette in scena un ben più lineare viaggio di ritorno verso casa), così *Il libro di Johnny* cova in sé il sogno di una rinascita che, all’indomani di un evento non meno traumatico quale il Fascismo, sappia traghettare nel mondo di domani una parte del mondo di ieri.’

This same interpretation of the Resistance,²⁵ understood as a tragic and heroic conflict aiming to re-discover and re-construct a lost identity, animates also the poetry of Giorgio Caproni,²⁶ who wrote the collection *Il passaggio di Enea*.²⁷ In an interview, published in the Italian journal *La fiera letteraria*, he defined the Virgilian hero as follows:

‘il simbolo unico di tutta l’umanità moderna, in questo tempo in cui l’uomo è veramente solo sopra la terra con sulle spalle il peso di una tradizione ch’egli tenta di sostenere mentre questa non lo sostiene più, e con per mano una speranza ancor troppo piccola e vacillante per potercisi appoggiare e che tuttavia egli deve portare a salvamento’.

The two authors, who witnessed the Fascism and the Resistance, made use of classical antiquity that is free from its authoritative connotations, in order to construct a new epopee for a country that had won its freedom.²⁸ In this new wording of the epic genre,²⁹ the partisan becomes the heir of the fugitive hero who must

24 Pedullà (2015: XXVII).

25 For a general description of the Italian literature about the Resistance, in particular in fiction, see Mei (1955: 209–214).

26 Giorgio Caproni [1912–1990] was an Italian poet, literary critic, and translator. He was called to arms in 1939 and sent to France. After the 8th of September, he supported the Resistance and did community services. For his biographical profile see Frabotta (1993: 63).

27 On Caproni's literary production, see Frabotta (1993: 76–85) and Dei (1992: 92).

28 Pedullà (2015: LXXV–LXXVI), who pinpointed the adaptation of the same model by both of the authors, suggested: ‘Quello che importa è che *Il libro di Johnny* ci consente finalmente di verificare come Fenoglio e Caproni, il massimo narratore in prosa e il massimo narratore in versi della Resistenza, abbiano trovato – più o meno in contemporanea – nello stesso mito di esilio e fondazione la chiave migliore per raccontare la storia della propria generazione dal tracollo dell’8 settembre alla riscossa della lotta partigiana e oltre.’

29 The revival of the epic genre characterized the whole *Novecento* and this style was shared by Caproni and Fenoglio. Frabotta (1993: 79–80) stated: ‘...la rettifica del passato archetipico ostinatamente vivo nella fantasia poetica può balenare tra i barlumi della quotidianità illumina-

reconstruct the destroyed land at the end of the war. The same Virgil, used by the Fascists to celebrate the glory of the empire, becomes the model of remembering in this counterculture to narrate the sufferings of the war³⁰ and to exalt, with the tools of the epic genre, the sacrifices of the Resistance. In short, while the Fascism adopted the classical antiquity as a status symbol of power – so as to invoke the greatness of the Roman past – postwar Italy employed the very same model to build the myth of its own liberation in the aftermath.

The re-semanticization has been rendered possible thousands of men, among which we can count the father of Massimo Bubola, mentioned earlier in this contribution. While the success of works like *Il libro di Johnny* and *Il passaggio di Enea* allowed the authors to share their interpretation and their ideas about the Antiquity on the wider canvas of social and collective memory, the efforts of Bubola's father were devoted to the private and individual sphere of his job and his family, with the father-son conveyance of the passion for Virgil. In the end, it was Massimo Bubola himself who was “assigned” with a task: to give back the community the value of those symbols and knowledge, rendering it even more public and immediate than novels of Fenoglio and poems of Caproni could have done, given the difference between the medium of music and literature.

In conclusion, I would like to re-consider some of the questions about the re-canonization of classical antiquity, in order to show how and why the song ‘Eurialo e Niso’ could represent one of the most effective cases in this phenomenon.

1) How is cultural memory constructed as a form of opposition or as a survival technique by making use of classical antiquity?

All the works that have been examined highlight the existence of a diverse memory of classical antiquity, thanks to which this repertoire is functioned to voice and narrate the opposition to the fascist regime and promote the values of the Resistance. Intellectuals, and writers in particular came up with new interpretations of the ancient world. Thus, they didn't demonize the past that the fascist regime glorified, but instead endowed it with new meanings and made it one of the cornerstones of the identity of new Italy, born with the Liberation.

2) What is the connection between personal literary canon and collective cultural memory, especially in times of crisis when there is a blatant lack of founding myths?

The ideas of personal literary canon, collective memory, and times of crisis are valid for Bubola and his father as well. For them (and for Caproni and Fenoglio) the reading of Virgil was a private activity, yet fundamental for the construction of a collective memory. The father and the son, thanks to their individual readings

nandola dei bagliori solari del mito o, viceversa, sconsfortarci con i falsi raggi di un'illuminazione artificiale che, per quanto indice di progresso, sarà pur sempre il segno di un'omologazione della realtà alla sua apparenza fenomenica'.

30 See Surdich (1990: 50–57).

of the literature, contributed to keeping the message of the *Aeneid* and the remembrance of its author alive. Thus, the poem itself, offering a narrative paradigm for all the stories of reconstruction and re-foundation after the crisis brought by the war became (thanks to these writers) a founding myth for the Italy of the Resistance.

3) How is the classical world (re)mediated – as a dead corpse or as a living organism – and what aspects make Antiquity relevant to our social, moral, artistic, and intellectual world?

Finally, in this play of people who remember other people, Virgil is a kind of *fil rouge*. Every story finds its place in his poetry and the episode of Euryalus and Nisus becomes a model for the tales of the young partisans killed during the Resistance. Therefore, Bubola makes a great favor to Virgil, fostering his memory in the present and securing a place for him in contemporary popular culture. He once again keeps the promise of Vergil, who, in the literary fiction, addresses Euryalus and Nisus and assures them that their memory will survive the time (*Aeneid* 9.446–449):

*Fortunati ambo! si quid mea carmina possunt,
nulla dies umquam memori uos eximet aeuo,
dum domus Aeneae Capitoli immobile saxum
accolet imperiumque pater Romanus habebit.*

Fortune has blessed you both! If there's magical charm in my verses,
No day will ever delete you from time's recollection, as long as
Sons of Aeneas shall live on the Capitol's motionless bedrock,
Long as the Father of Rome shall retain his command over peoples.

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Chapter 6

NATASHA REMOUNDOU

Savage Memory, Technologies of Necropower, Feminist Decolonial Resistance: A Palestinian *Antigone* in Ireland

Who entered my room when I was out / and moved the vase on the mantelpiece just a tad? / who skewed that print – a Crusader – on the far wall? / and those pages loose on my desk / they're a shade dishevelled aren't they?

of course someone's read them / and my pillow's never been dented this way / – not by any lovely head / that stray shirt I'd never leave on the floor / – some shit's dropped it

so who came into my room? who? / and who'll put the vase back exactly / as it was? who'll / straighten the mailed knight in his corner? / and who'll restore to my shirt and pillow / their full rights as citizens / of my single room?

(Walid Khazendar, 'Belongings', tr. Paulin [2012: 25])¹

Contemporary writing that engages with a critique of necropolitics through the lens of historical memory, endorses, at the same time, an expression of what Rosi Braidotti calls 'affirmative politics'.² In other words, it is a type of writing that has the potential to advocate social justice, reconciliation, tolerance, and even peacekeeping while laying bare structures of violence, annihilation, and death on a global scale between the past and the present. Echoing the complexities of such seemingly oppositional representational and discursive encounters in literary narrative archives that reflect the lived experiences of political and social oppression, disenfranchisement, confinement, and precarity, Gaza-born poet Walid Khazendar's lines above are formulated against the backdrop of an enduring recollection. The poem, thus, shows how memory lives on as the traumatic 'afterthought'³ of the absent witness who returns home to discover it has been raided. The sustained

1 Walid Khazendar (b. 1950) is a Palestinian poet born in the Gaza Strip.

2 Braidotti (2013: 122).

3 Kattago (2020: 7).

questioning and blurring of the space, materiality, temporality, and boundaries of belonging, freedom, ownership, citizenship, and agency are made manifest in the way the speaker remembers objects as they used to be before leaving the room, rendering visible the apparatus of necropower which defines the historical legacy of Palestinian dispossession, displacement, and abjection. In doing so, the poem is read as a repudiation of the necropolitical processes of cultural obliteration from official memory while the speaker's voice succinctly conjures and simultaneously resists the mnemotechnics of erasure. The traces of a ghostly, omnipotent, voiceless, sovereign intruder, self-entitled to violate, censor, and interrupt the speaker's life are imagined in that which remains. This spectral omniscience, permanence, and silencing of the masculine occupier/intruder who eradicates proof and, by extension, abuses the law by trespassing and vandalizing the room foregrounds a radical reversal of power roles from the perspective of the powerless. Here, it is the voice of the oppressed who urgently seeks answers.

Achille Mbembe compellingly analyzes the sovereign purview of necropower imposed on the Palestinian state of exception in his seminal *Necropolitics* (2019 [2016]), examining the 'ultimate expression of sovereignty' which 'largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die.'⁴ Similarly, by interrogating the necropolitical continuum of sovereignty's conscription as the power that erases both indigenous memory and the right to return, Khazendar's narrative ultimately disrupts the sovereign discourse that undergirds necropower by embodying rightlessness in mundane, everyday, uneven exchanges of power. The raided single room, thus, is turned into an expansive metaphor for the protracted Israeli apartheid occupation of Palestine. The political tenets of this type of poetics from below and from within are rooted in a resistance to forgetting. To borrow Firas Shehadeh's argument: 'settler-colonial state sovereignty is violence on the native's worlds. If sovereignty means law and order, resistance is a violation of that.'⁵ Khazendar's autobiographical exposure to necropolitical violence constitutes a palpable example that demonstrates the power to resist effacement (and death) by reclaiming a precarious memory archive that confronts its own forced *mnemocide*.⁶

4 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 66). The use of the term 'sovereignty' here is in line with Mbembe's (2019 [2016]: 197 n. 1) observation that it departs from conventional theories of sovereignty in political science and international relations (as in Jackson [1999]), and is rather aligned with Foucault's (2003 [1975–1976]) and Agamben's (1998) formulations of the term.

5 Shehadeh (2021: 233).

6 See Masalha (2012: 137–138), Solombrino (2016: 10–11), and Gould (2023). I am particularly interested here in Masalha's (2012: 137–138) argument regarding the term 'memoricide' that she coins to unveil the systematic eradication of Palestinian infrastructure in 1948 and the appropriation of the records, documentation, and cultural heritage of the Palestinians post-Nakba. Like the speaker's room in Khazendar's poem, the research institutions and

According to Mbembe,⁷ this model of settler colonies underwriting a systemic ethnic and racial cleansing of the Occupied Territories recalls and revives the apartheid enterprise that reaches paroxysmal levels in Palestine with the dialectic of proximity, distance, and surveillance. However, despite these arguably immediate references to the Palestinian experience that emerge at home and in Palestinian poetry, this essay is preoccupied with new cultural shifts and activist frameworks that evolve in contemporary writing and performance claiming to dismantle necropolitical hierarchies of erasure while exposing rightlessness on behalf of others in Western narratives across genre. How can trajectories of such legitimately framed mnemonic experiences be examined in broader, international intercultural⁸ exchanges, alliances, and geopolitical milieus that remain resistant to the pitfalls of what Anne Mulhall calls ‘systemic, institutional whiteness’⁹ or the pervasive East/West binary of privilege without suppressing political activism¹⁰ in the arts? What types of representational limits, disparities, or continuities spring up in imagining the rights of minority and ‘subaltern’ other(ed) voices as our own when Western classical texts, for example, are used to speak for and about Palestinian rights in Irish theatre and academia in order to challenge the universality of human rights discourse in the current context of late modernity and globalization for a better, more just world? Ultimately, who else has the right to enter that ‘room’ to tell, represent, and memorialize those stories in the absence of the resident storyteller?

Drawing from these critical, ethical, and aesthetic insights, this essay traces connections and ruptures in the work of performing memory, formations of necropower, technologies of death and possibilities of decolonial resistance in diverse cultural spaces in so far as these continue to shape, transform, and most importantly disrupt utopian imaginaries often ‘excavated from the recesses of colonial

archival documentation centres continued to be regularly raided and the documents confiscated by Israeli forces as documented in the cases of the Palestinian Research Centre in Beirut in 1982 and the Arab Studies Society archive in east Jerusalem in 2001. In addition, during the Israeli occupation of Palestinian cities in 2002, many Palestinian institutions across the West Bank, such as public libraries and public archives, were damaged and records and files were destroyed. A notable example is the vandalism of the Khalili Sakakini Cultural Centre in Ramallah, a famous foundation dedicated to the preservation of Palestinian cultural heritage, whose public archives and property records were eradicated.

7 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 44–45).

8 See McIvor (2019).

9 See Mulhall (2020).

10 I refer here to R. R. Gould’s positioning in her book *Erasing Palestine* (2023) regarding the erasure of Palestinian/pro-Palestinian free speech and rights as the effect of both physical and linguistic tools. For this, she critiques the language used in the IHRA (International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance) definition of anti-Semitism as a strategic means of employing the Zionist tactic of Palestinian identity erasure.

archives'¹¹ by representing otherness as rightlessness on the Irish stage. For the purposes of this analysis, I return to Conall Morrison's theatre work,¹² this time to explore how his post-9/11 translation and production of a quintessentially Palestinian *Antigone* (2003) for the Project Arts Centre in Dublin frames and provokes such contested contexts of representation in theatrical modalities of performance.

One of the earliest texts of the Western canon to deeply explore the dialectical tension between law and justice, Sophocles' *Antigone* (c. 441 BCE) revolves around a contested body: the forbidden burial of Polyneices by his sister Antigone. The contested corpse thus has stayed in memory as a powerful visual metaphor of dissent against the law of the state. Antigone flouts Creon's decree precisely by performing the burial rites of her slain brother Polyneices who has been declared a traitor to the state of Thebes. For respecting the unwritten word of the gods, she is sentenced to a live burial. Burying the corpse of Polyneices, however, represents her human right to dignity. By observing customary laws and by burying her dead brother against Creon's sovereign claim, Antigone enacts her rights to kinship and religious piety.

In his essay, Mbembe provides ample ground for reflecting on the Palestinian condition through the figure of states of exception, biopolitics, and the apartheid system. These necropolitical environments at work and in progress reminiscent of Antigone's ever singular abjection are constructed around the tropes of contingency, the burial of a slain brother, and the exposure of the enemy corpse. Antigone's performative transgression has been read by a genealogy of feminist and political thinkers as an 'appeal to a long-repressed feminine alterity'¹³ against patriarchy and oblivion that seems all too real still in the 21st century. In light of an Irish translation and production of *Antigone* by Conall Morrison for the Peacock Theatre as a retelling of the Palestinian case, I want to return to her act of resistance and examine it in the context of memorializing female grief, reminiscent of the Palestinian women freedom fighters who resisted and continue to resist Israeli apartheid necropolitics. Conversely, it is Creon's enforced avowal and capacity to dictate by law who shall live and who shall perish that becomes the ultimate expression of necropower: As such, anyone who buries the corpse of the traitor of the state, Polyneices, essentially anyone who grieves and performs burial rites will face death. In Maurice Blanchot's words, this might constitute an example of law as disaster¹⁴ in its extremity whereby writing resists forgetfulness. The tragic plot largely sums up what Achille Mbembe means when he discusses collateral violence, viscerality, and enmity in his seminal essay on necropolitics and the work of death. Creon's niece, Antigone, a teenage princess and orphaned

11 Looser (2011: 254).

12 See Remoundou (2021).

13 Colebrook (2021: 805).

14 Blanchot (1995 [1980]: 2, 85).

grieving sister becomes that criminalized other, a dissonant fly on the horse of the state of exception, a resistant feminine alterity whose transgressive perception of the personal inscribes a political – and simultaneously illegal – gesture overnight by activating the necropolitical means of her own death penalty. Her mourning becomes an overcoming of masculine sovereignty, the grand narrative of ‘man’ which dismantles the masters’ house.¹⁵ Performances of sovereign biopower are exclusively triggered, Mbembe writes, in states of exception from *apartheid* South Africa to Palestine (in ancient Thebes, no less). A nuanced re-reading of Franz Fanon, Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, and Giorgio Agamben, Mbembe’s postcolonial theorization on the perils of necropolitical sovereignty in states of exception brings into sharper focus that kind of neocolonial power and capacity self-entitled to ‘dictate who is able to live and who must die’,¹⁶ that is implemented by right:

But under what practical conditions is the power to kill, to let live, or to expose to death exercised? Who is the subject of this right? What does the implementation of such a right tell us about the one who is thus put to death and about the relation of enmity that sets such a person against his murderer? Can the notion of biopower account for the contemporary ways in which the political takes as its primary and absolute objective the enemy’s murder, doing so under the guise of war, resistance, or the war on terror? War is, after all, a means of achieving sovereignty as much as a way of exercising the right to kill. When politics is considered a form of war, the question needs to be asked about the place that is given to life, death, and the human body (in particular when it is wounded or slain). How are these aspects inscribed in the order of power?¹⁷

So, what has a Palestinian *Antigone* to say about current global regimes of biopower and necropower beyond the classical tradition and the insular concerns of Irish politics and the 21st century Irish stage? Through the binary spectrum of the living and the dead, this essay attends to the ways contemporary political Irish theatre exposes the uneven technologies of sovereign necropower that prevail in contemporary zones of enmity to discuss savage memory, feminist decolonial resistance, and technologies of necropower. Resisting the impulse to ‘stay shy of excessive engagement’,¹⁸ Morrison’s *Antigone* deliberately foregrounds an ethically engaged rethinking of current dramatic practices and aesthetic approaches of affirmative politics in political theatre representing those whose lives and deaths are deemed *less* liveable and grievable. For ‘if art is to be meaningful to people it must help to animate the problems that are very current’,¹⁹ in Morrison’s words.

15 See Lorde (2018 [1979]) and Colebrook (2021: 806). Audre Lorde delivered her address titled ‘The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house’ during a feminist conference in 1979 before it became a seminal book of Black Lesbian Feminism.

16 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 66).

17 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 66).

18 C. Morrison in Meany (2003).

19 C. Morrison in Meany (2003).

Visual Topographies of Cruelty: Staging Savage Memory

The pervasiveness of current critical debates on memory in theatre have dramatically shifted to open up new, provocative ways in which we talk about, practice, and perform remembering. With the proliferation of memory studies in cultural practices amidst a thriving globalized heritage memory industry, we nowadays frame transnational and transcultural memory as a recourse to mnemonic processes no longer limited to history alone. Memory now has come to encompass trans-disciplinary discourses of aesthetics, semiotics, race, gender, class, religion, art, and ideology. According to Andreas Huyssen, with the emergence of the so-called 'memory industry' during the end of the 20th and the turn of the 21st century in post-structuralism and postmodern philosophies of history (Klein [2000]), the memory paradigm revisits the past with a view to undermine inherited quasi-absolutist terms: Jean-François Lyotard's 'end of grand narratives', Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history', or Reinhart Koselleck's 'collective singular' view of history.²⁰

Seeking to examine the convergences between human rights advocacy and theatre activism²¹ and their relationship to what Maurice Halbwachs calls a 'social framework of memory',²² Morrison's adaptation solicits a mnemonic use of the figure of Antigone as an archetypal image that remediates a collective memory archive at the backdrop of contemporary Middle Eastern politics. Morrison's technique, hence, is structured by means of a multiplication of framing devices whereby the European, logocentric source text generates a series of intertextual mnemonic 'landscapes'.²³ That Morrison essentially rewrites an ancient *logocentric* text from the western canon perceptively reactivates the work of literary, historical, cultural, and political memory in broader, multifaceted and multidirectional ways. No less important is the fact that Morrison adapted the Sophoclean play in the aftermath of the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. As a critique of

20 In cultural theory, memory research encompasses an expanded field of formulations with references to a predominantly 'nonparadigmatic, transdisciplinary, centerless enterprise' (Olick and Robbins [1998: 106]). Indeed, since the 1920s the concept of 'memory' has been synonymous with terms and phrases such as 'mémoire collective', 'mnemosyne', 'storia e memoria', 'lieux de mémoire' / 'sites of memory', 'realms of memory', 'cultural memory vs. communicative memory', 'social memory', 'memory cultures', 'cultural remembrance', but also 'social forgetting', or the 'cultural brain', 'memory in the global age', and 'trans-cultural memory'. For an in depth analysis of such theorizations on memory in culture, see Klein (2000), Huyssen (2003), Erll (2011 [2005]), Erll and Nünning (2010). Especially, see Lyotard (1979), Fukuyama (1992), and Sebastián and Fuentes' (2006) interview with R. Koselleck.

21 For an in-depth analysis on representations of the Middle Eastern *Other* in contemporary Irish drama, see Remoundou (2021).

22 Halbwachs (1992 [1925]).

23 See Lehmann (1999: 59).

contemporary necropower, Morrison's version does something more than just scrutinize the crisis of representation in theatrical memory. Attuned to the impossibilities of representing the traumatic memory of world wars, genocide, colonial and postcolonial experiences, famine, global terror, and environmental disaster, Morrison's theatre work makes astute claims about the role of theatre in making these representational failures manifest.

Born and raised in post-conflict county Armagh in Northern Ireland at the height of the paramilitary violence between Unionists and Republicans, Morrison is familiar with the legacy of a history of catastrophes. His *Antigone* dramatizes the renegotiation of the political work of mourning blurring the line separating traitors and terrorists from heroes, martyrs, and patriots in the tradition of Tom Paulin (1985) and Seamus Heaney (2004) who also wrote versions of *Antigone* in an Irish postcolonial, post-conflict context in the aftermath of the 1960s civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. By rewriting *Antigone* 'as a work of fierce moral outrage'²⁴, Morrison's text seeks to energize the absolute claims of both sides of the Hegelian polarities, from the perspective of the savage, the enemy, the suicide bomber, the extreme dissident, like Brendan Kennelly's big Other and Aidan Mathews' worn-out, passive martyr. The experience of witnessing the displacement and depredation of the people of Palestine by working with them through theatre workshops in Ashtar Theatre in Ramallah in 2006, allowed Morrison to sustain the Middle Eastern setting through costume and stage design in his subsequent play following *Antigone*, *The Bacchae of Baghdad* (2006), based on Euripides' tragedy *The Bacchae*. In the staging of his *Antigone*, the atmosphere of exoticism and immediacy were dramatic features highlighted by the mournful music score composed by Conor Linehan, played on cello, saxophone, keyboards, and percussion, and performed by four of the actors based on eastern-influenced folk melodies.

Antigone read opposite Khazendar's lyric situates us in a critical reflection on how we are connected to the past and how we represent the past, but also on how we are connected and how we represent rightless others in Western narratives. Included in the poetry collection *Love's Bonfire* (2012) by the Northern Irish poet, academic, and critic Tom Paulin, to begin with, the poem forms part of a solidarity campaign taken up by Paulin who opened his 2004 general keynote address with these lines during the Resisting Israeli Apartheid Conference organized by SOAS London for the academic boycott of Israel. In his speech, Paulin, who also wrote a version of *Antigone* titled *The Riot Act* (1984), saw in the Palestinian struggle for freedom and independence a mirroring of the political legacies in Northern Ireland:

24 Causey (2003: 50).

Today the Palestinian flag flies over working-class nationalist estates in Belfast, and the Israeli flag flies over Protestant estates. Ian Paisley and his deputy Peter Robinson visited Israel and were photographed there – at an army post, as I recall. They were drawing an analogy for the benefit of their supporters – an analogy first drawn by a British civil servant in the 1920s, who protested against the creation of another Ulster in the Middle East.²⁵

Whilst Khazendar's poem recited in Paulin's speech invites (Western / European / White / English-speaking) listeners and readers to a communal act of collective remembering that is borderless and transnational, it nonetheless highlights the largely racialized class frontiers of the historical Palestinian record which resonate radically with minoritarian, oppressed, marginal, inferior, rightless, racialized (savage(d) / beastly / animalized) subjects and identities. This type of congruent semiology between race, gender, class, ethnicity, and religion and their intersection with the animal, non-human figure is conveyed in the expression of savage memory as a further key metaphor for the rightless Middle Eastern, Islamic, Arab, savage other. What is more, Paulin's trademark radical politicizing²⁶ is largely aligned with Morrison's depiction of Antigone as a suicide bomber, complicating the frontiers of representation through the lens of the work of savage memory reminiscent of the Northern Irish Troubles.

The use of the term, however, critically departs from Claude Lévi-Strauss's theorization²⁷ of the concept of human memory in primitive societies as an elaborate mnemonic system of transmitting and preserving social norms, myths, rituals, and cultural knowledge across generations through the art of storytelling in oral traditions. Instead of translating memory in racial terms, I am interested here in a more rigorous examination of the term as an intricate mnemonic repository of cultural preservation and transmission that is resistant to the problematic identification of 'savage memory' with the wild native and the beastly, non-human, therefore, inferior, illiterate, uncivilized, paradigmatic, savage Other of the colonial world embedded in White sovereign discourse. It is because of this fundamental distinction between native/savage and conqueror/civilized that, as Mbembe points out, the colony is a zone of lawlessness (and by extension rightlessness) where the right to kill becomes the ultimate expression of sovereign control:

25 Paulin (2004).

26 Paulin (2003) declared himself a 'philo-Semite' in an article in the *London Review of Books* in January 2003 with a response which included a 133-line poem called 'On Being Dealt the Anti-Semitic Card': 'the program though / of saying Israel's critics / are *tout court* anti-Semitic / is designed daily by some schmuck / to make you shut the fuck up'. On another occasion, Paulin (in Abdel-Latif [2002]) expressed his sympathy with suicide attackers, arguing: 'I can understand how suicide bombers feel [...]. It is an expression of deep injustice and tragedy.'

27 See Lévi-Strauss (1966 [1962]).

In the conqueror's eyes, *savage life* is just another form of *animal life*, a horrifying experience, something alien beyond imagination or comprehension. In fact, according to Arendt, what makes savages different from other human beings is less the color of their skin than the fear that they behave like a part of nature, that they treat nature as their undisputed master.²⁸

Nowhere is this confrontation between human and animal more pervasive than in the Ode to Man, the first choral interlude of *Antigone*, which Morrison renews within the play from a posthumanist (Eurocentric and masculinist) standpoint as a critique of human exceptionalism and the dominant Anthropos. And yet, whilst abstract Man is the master of thanatocracy evoked in the motif of man's inhumanity across the human and the non-human, planetary horizon, he is defeated only by death:

Ideas flow from him like water spreading.
 He knows how to snatch the bird in flight,
 Calm the wildest bear in his cave;
 The deepest fish cannot hide in the dark.
 Bulls with their horns and horses with their hooves
 All learn to take the halter, and obey.
 He owns his words and thoughts.
 They blow through him as fast as wind.
 He outwits the rain and ice
 That winter brings to freeze his bones.
 Sickness and the plague he tricks
 With herb and flower from the mountain-top.
 Only death defeats him.
 Man knows his match,
 His only master.²⁹

Besides decentring anthropocentrism, the critical shifts this mnemonic toolkit of savage memory proposes alongside *Antigone* breaks away from gendered and racist overtones whereby savage becomes now a synonym for the right of the oppressed and excluded minorities to remember their dead in necropolitical environments. Such representational constellations and methodological entanglements of race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, and disability in language renegotiate the ways we remember our dead in the context of necropolitical encounters and exchanges with necropower without losing sight of the structural exclusions that generated them in the first place. In this respect, savage memory is reconfigured as a mnemonic device that both archives and transmits the decolonial dispositive depriving Palestinians of their rights to remember and to mourn by reducing them to members of a surplus population,³⁰ racialized, dehumanized, and dangerous, animalized, savage others (Islam, the Muslim, the Arab). The Pal-

28 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 77–78).

29 Morrison (2003: 11–12).

30 Morrison (2003: 42).

estinian excess presence, absence, and indeed disappearance, casts their dehumanization and dispossession against what Mbembe calls the desire for apartheid, the fantasy of extermination, and the anxiety of annihilation.³¹ In the opening lines, Morrison's chorus expresses how this type of excess identity ascertains the capacity to salvage savage memory in the figure of the feared, monstrous, non-human:

CHORUS: [...] we came from dragon's teeth,
 sowed in the sand and dust,
 sprung up with nails and claws,
 and flayed them back
 from our seven gates
 in just six short days.
 They tried to burn us out,
 make all our towns a pyre;
 but they all forget
 we have come through flame before
 and we no longer fear the fire.³²

Morrison's understanding of the mechanisms of necropower on the one hand and the frames of transnational memory on the other, amplify the perplexities of representing both on stage in the context of human rights debates. By invoking claims on the 'how' of memory as a communal performative right that reiterates the ethical antinomies, polarities, and binaries inherent in the original Greek play, Morrison points to the double standards, inadequacies, and failures of both historical/national memory and the universality of human rights practices. The analogy his adaptation draws explores the ways through which a retelling of ancient western narratives gestures towards revisiting the complicated landscape of history and rights via a theatre of remembering *other* histories of systemic exclusion.

Driven by akin intersectional processes of framing racialized otherness in contemporary Irish performance, I anchor my analysis of Morrison's *Antigone* in the hybrid cultural dichotomies that derive from an intentional synergy between Greek tragedy, Irish performance, and necropower and the ways these interact with the politics of mourning,³³ memory, and race on behalf of the Palestinian cause. Henceforth, this new semiosis is articulated on overlapping memories of oppression and rightlessness. The case of *Antigone* is crucial for many reasons, no less because it is a play that foregrounds structures of necropower often negotiated in Irish drama (Tom Paulin, among others, for example, has written a version of the ancient tragedy titled *The Riot Act* (1985) as a postcolonial critique of the Troubles in Northern Ireland). I have written elsewhere and in detail about Morri-

31 Morrison (2003: 43).

32 Morrison (2003: 5).

33 See Butler (2000), Butler (2004), and Meaney (2011: 145).

son's theatre work that supersedes a social justice agenda, committing itself to a robust human rights' advocacy signified by the representation of the figure of the racialized, migrant, Muslim other in Irish drama.³⁴ It is not a single instantiation of Morrison's dramatic technique that he affords us a conflicted encounter between West and East in contemporary theatrical praxis as a denunciation of neo-liberal politics and the realities of violence and destruction.

The result is a sharp, immediate text written in a masculine vernacular that often disregards conventional politesse in favour of a raw language that approximates the brutal reality of an everyday anguish for survival in a post-war limbo. The sense of inevitable tragedy is articulated in a vocabulary structured around a spectacular self-destruction reflected in Antigone's violent, savage mind and fundamentalist body:

This pathetic, puny, shit out of you
will get what it deserves:
my hatred, my brother's hatred,
and the hatred of all the dead.
Leave me to my 'madness' then, sweet sister mine.
There is nothing that will rob me of my glorious death.³⁵

The foreboding sense of hostility, vulnerability, and mortality was taken up on stage with the use of specific aesthetic props that highlighted the technology of destruction in contemporary societies of enmity with Antigone reimagined as a young Palestinian freedom fighter and suicide bomber. Through a series of powerful visual effects reminiscent of the hegemony of visuality in modern warfare, sovereign control, and military surveillance, ancient Thebes was now transformed into modern-day Gaza, a contemporary war-torn death-world in a state of siege. The stage was dominated by a large digital screen that projected photographs of Israeli intrusions into Palestinian territory and Israeli casualties provoked by Palestinian suicide bombers illustrating the lethal confrontation between 'the logic of martyrdom' and the 'logic of survival'³⁶ epitomized by the central figure of the suicide bomber.³⁷ This visual archive of horror, resistance, terror, and sacrifice was amplified by an emphatic cacophony of military weapons of mass destruction whose deployment and use raised moral and ethical questions 'representative of the dramatic energy but ... also ... of the evanescent human spirit that is so easily crushed in times of unforgiving conflict.'³⁸ The protracted necropolitical conditions prevalent on Palestinian territory were transmitted on the Project

34 See Remoundou (2021).

35 Morrison (2003: 4).

36 Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 88).

37 On the figure of Antigone as a Palestinian suicide bomber, see Festic (2003).

38 C. Morrison in N. N. [CMcB] (2003).

Arts Centre stage as a metonymic sign system for the necrotechnology of war in the era of surveillance control and cyber warfare.

By relying on the synchronic use of the screen on the theatrical stage as a device transmitting jarring images of armed conflict, Morrison's aesthetic approach conveyed another 'species of rhetoric' that renders visible a necropolitical reality that the 'privileged and merely safe'³⁹ Western audiences might prefer to ignore and forget. The exposure to these parallel visual mementos while the actors were on stage, thus, reframed a history of *rightlessness* whereby the screen acts as a recorder and repository of *savage memory*. By unveiling this ethical binary, the production's specific visual/aesthetic references managed to raise fundamental questions regarding the representational tensions of the real when our own over-exposure to images of devastation is shaped by a camera-mediated knowledge of war.⁴⁰ The repetition and replacement of one image with another effectively built a nexus of *cadres sociaux* relevant not only to the Palestinian memory but also to Ireland's past as an act of resisting mnemonic erasure. In addition, the various visualizing strategies anchored in the use of both the theatrical stage and the media screen as vehicles of *mnemotechnics* highlighted the audience's complicity as viewers and consumers of these images.

Similar to race, the question of gender in Morrison's Palestinian *Antigone* pays homage to a genealogy of Palestinian Antigones, the women freedom fighters, feminist revolutionaries, political activists, and martyrs, past and present, such as Ahd al-Tamimi, Leila Khaled, Moheba Khorsheed, Dalal Mughrabi, Wafa Idris, Ayat al-Akhras, Hanadi Tayseer Abdul Malek Jaradat, Andalib Suleyman, Fatima Mohammed Bernawi, Aisha Odeh, Rasmiyeh Odeh, Shadia Abu Ghazalah, Moheeba and Arabiya Khursheed. Antigone's act of defying Creon's word by burying her brother Polyneices is also reminiscent of the struggles of Palestinian women political prisoners and the Israeli feminist peace activists as symbols of feminist decolonial resistance whose acts aim(ed) at disrupting and dismantling necropolitical systems of colonial power and gender-based exclusions and inequalities. Morrison positions *Antigone* against such complex intersections of masculinist power represented by Creon's/Israel's sovereignty making at the same time wider claims about ethnic and cultural imaginings, supremacy, racism, patriarchy, and injustice. In this scheme, Creon's sovereign claim establishes the fundamental distinction between who must live and who must die:

Take them and chain them inside
And watch them:
they will be wheedling, conniving women

39 Sontag (2003: 3, 5).

40 Hutcheon (2006: 47).

who will try anything to escape
when they turn to face the fact of death.⁴¹

Mundus Inversus: The Ethics of the Passerby?⁴²

During the two-day symposium ‘The Theatre of War’ held at Dublin’s Abbey Theatre in January 2015, a diverse group of artists, writers, theatre practitioners, academics, and journalists from around the globe gathered on the Irish national stage to reflect on theatre in times of conflict. Following ‘The Theatre of Memory’ symposium that had taken place the previous year, participants had come to resume conversations regarding theatre’s cultural and political efficacy in responding to international warfare. The Abbey audience had the chance to listen to speakers from Ireland, U. K., Colombia, Rwanda, Burundi, Syria, and Palestine inviting them to ponder on the current challenges, cultural, political, and aesthetic, that artists face when staging drama in contemporary conflict zones. The specific call as regards contemporary drama directly dealing with unsettling historical events, past and current, examined material stages and spaces of contention across global war-zones where violence and death form integral aspects of peoples’ everyday lived experiences. In the context of ‘The Theatre of Conflict’ panel, Irish director and playwright Conall Morrison took to the podium to talk about his own experience translating his post-9/11 version of Sophocles’ *Antigone* for the Project Arts Centre stage in 2003 as a retelling of the protracted displacement of Palestinians.⁴³

Recounting his personal journey of exploring the multiple dynamics of the ancient tragedy in an attempt to shed light into the various ways classical drama can assist in providing clarity to our understanding of the intensities, intricacies, and tragedies of modern combat, Morrison began his talk with a quote from Brian Friel’s *Translations*. Citing the old schoolmaster Hugh’s declaration near the end of the play that ‘confusion is not an ignoble condition’, Morrison conveyed anew a durable resonance with transnational historical catastrophes. This confounding sense of perplexity, according to the artist, was now manifest in the struggle to represent two opposing sides against an ethics of doubt. *Antigone*’s perseverance to honour her traitor brother by burying him against Creon’s public edict forbidding the burial as unlawful, was replicating for Morrison – through Sophocles’ tragic plot – the traumatic memory of irreconcilable opposites enacted with the memory of the *Nakba* and the *Shoah* between Palestine and Israel. For the Armagh-born director whose early years coincided with the beginning of The Troubles in Northern Ireland, a period of sustained political upheavals and sectar-

41 Morrison (2003: 20).

42 See Mbembe (2019 [2016]: 184).

43 See Morrison (2015).

ian violence in Irish history, this sense of disorientation and turbulence had also been integral part of his own reality growing up in the north. In its literalism and aesthetic narrativization, the political, historical, and ethical analogy of *Antigone* as an uncanny metaphor for cultures and societies in abject turmoil – political, territorial, sectarian – seemed candidly apt. Similarly to other versions of *Antigone* by Northern Irish playwrights such as Tom Paulin, Seamus Heaney, Stacey Gregg,⁴⁴ and Owen McCafferty, Morrison's translation stands largely and unavoidably informed by the legacy of concrete political and historical traumas. Nonetheless, while Morrison's relationship with political theatre and historical memory is not unaffected by his cultural and geopolitical identity, the staging of his *Antigone* was now transferred from the Irish North to Gaza enacting in archetypal form the story of the Middle East.

Because, as James Elkins argues, 'there is no such thing as just looking',⁴⁵ this essay draws, in conclusion, on the notion of the theatrical apparatus as a vision and memory machine that is conditioned by historical reality. Inherently tied to visuality, theatre etymologically encompasses the act of seeing for it derives from the ancient Greek verb *theomai* ('to see'). Expanding its semiotic derivatives to include terms such as the 'spectacle' (*thema*) and 'theory', theatre employs the visual in action by being a site of performed memory and reality. Barbara Freedman explains this in terms of the theatrical ambiguity of representation when she distinguishes between theatre and 'the historical reality to which it belongs' from understanding theatre in terms of a representation of this reality. In her theorization, theatrical representation renders a steady position of spectatorship impossible for it is predicated upon a fractured reciprocity that positions and displaces viewers at the same time.⁴⁶ This is what Morrison means when he reflects on an ethics of ontological complexity and the contestability of a political ethics of doubt as a grey area of moral reasoning of right vs. right, when he recounts how the empirical mnemonic force of a real-life traumatic event did more than just compel him to question the role theatre can play in shaping our confusion into possible graspable narratives. This became a vital point of reference in Morrison's reminiscing of the story of *Antigone*.

When Morrison was commissioned by the Storytellers Theatre Company in Dublin to translate Sophocles' *Antigone*, his reading of Sophocles' dramatic structure of 'right vs. right' reminded him of the broader political context of 'today's Middle East conflict with its tragic cycle of action and reaction feeding into global conflict.'⁴⁷

44 For a comprehensive list of the Northern Irish versions of *Antigone* and an analysis of Stacey Gregg's play *Ismene*, see Remoundou (2011).

45 Elkins (1997: 31).

46 See Freedman (1991).

47 C. Morrison in N. N. [programme note] (2003).

And the more I studied it [i. e. *Antigone*] the more I felt I was reading, in archetypal form, the play of the Middle East, of opposed moralities, of contradictory narratives, of violent intensities, of natural justice and the assertion of human rights in conflict with the codified law, the interests and identity of the state [...] I felt that the dark complexities of the Middle Eastern conflict would help me access the voltage of Sophocles' play and I thought the play in turn might help me and maybe an audience contemplate those complexities, find a pattern in that Rubik's cube of competing moralities.⁴⁸

From distant war as it is reported and represented in the news to 'the enactment of its phantasmatic structure'⁴⁹ on the familiar proximity of the stage, Morrison's *Antigone* heavily relied on images of 'the invaders' army'⁵⁰ that unavoidably communicated a concrete ethicopolitical commentary. In so doing, the complex web of alliances that underpin the historical conflict between Jews and Muslims conflated with that between Catholics and Protestants was once more brought to memory: In Northern Ireland the star of David has been adopted by pro-British Loyalists while in Belfast Irish Republicans fly the Palestinian flag as a sign of solidarity and resistance against the British rule of Ireland. Likewise, the program note of the *Antigone* production featured Michael Longley's poem 'Ceasefire' which had been published in *The Irish Times* when the RIA announced their original ceasefire in the summer of 1994. The poem symbolically appropriates one of the last scenes in Homer's *The Iliad* bringing into sharp focus the return of the unburied enemy corpse of Hector.⁵¹

If Augusto Boal's argument that theatre is the art of looking at ourselves sounds relevant here, it is precisely because it brings to any discussion on theatre, inextricably linked as it is from its Aristotelean inception to looking and to ways of seeing, the notion of the image and of affect (Aristotle's *eleos/pity* and *phobos/fear*): In his *Rainbow of Desire*, Boal theorizes on a kind of theatre making, he coins 'Image theatre' that relies heavily on visual realism by applying the use of still images from everyday life in order to explore in depth emotions, culture, and society; employing photography as an affective tableau, 'Image theatre' actors' bodies act as media of decoding feelings and attitudes engaging at the same time the audience's interpretations who are called upon sharing their ways of looking at both the image and the performances.⁵² This is an example of how the theatrical space theorizes on the visual force of memory, of being reminded as actors, readers, or audience members of ourselves and of others, as in Conall Morrison's production of *Antigone* with the Middle East's others, Palestinians and Jews.

48 Morrison (2015: 11:45–12:15, 12:28–12:44).

49 Butler (1992: 3).

50 Morrison (2003: 1).

51 The poem can be found in Longley (1995: 39).

52 See Boal (1995).

Attending to more nuanced renegotiations of the memory work that surpass the complexities of time, space, as well as ‘terminological and conceptual differentiations’, this chapter has drawn on both the genealogy and the historiography of memory in contemporary Irish drama through the prism of necropower. This practice, establishes a framework that eschews an inward, individual, or collective confrontation with Ireland’s violent past giving way instead to an outward, far-reaching, collective gaze towards the political tribulations of the Middle East in recent history.

In May 2013 Sophocles’ *Antigone* was brought to Stormont, the Parliament Buildings in Belfast where the government in Northern Ireland seats. Inspired once more by the ancient Greek play and its astute dramatization of the clash between civic and natural law, this was not the first time *Antigone*’s myth was revisited in Ireland. On the one hand, the occasion marked the interdisciplinary colloquium titled ‘*Antigone: Law against Justice?*’ organized by Attorney General in Northern Ireland John Larkin and the School of Law at the University of Ulster. Attended by members of the judiciary, lawyers, academics, officials, artists, journalists, and writers, the event featured a keynote lecture by George Steiner whose emblematic critical study in *Antigones* (1984) traces, among other contexts, the play’s endurance within the normative frames of a ‘secular, legalistic humanism’⁵³ enacted against the body politic. The drama’s preoccupation with law, justice, and ethical action, thus, aptly reflected in the colloquium’s aim to create a public forum of debate, was followed by readings and performances from Morrison’s *Antigone*. In a post-Troubles environment, the gathering echoed the mnemonic practices mobilized in the synergy between theatre and affirmative politics as vehicles of justice, redress, and reconciliation.

There is an undeniably robust archive of writing and political activism in support of the Palestinian cause that is molded around various colonial histories of sovereign violence. Similarly, the connection between *Antigone* and the Palestinian struggle has often drawn attention to issues of rightlessness, feminist resistance, and human dignity that resonates with victims and experiences of oppressive regimes in the Middle East staged in refugee camps and theatres of the Arab world.⁵⁴ In Ireland, cultural platforms such as PalFest and academic events such as the 2007 panel discussion organized by the Irish Society for Theatre Research highlighted the challenges of producing a collaborative theatre project with Northern Irish, Jewish, and Palestinian theatre makers based on the 1972 *Bloody Sunday* massacre and the bombings in Palestine and Israel. Other examples of an engagement with Palestinian rightlessness in Irish drama include plays by Han-

53 Steiner (1984: 190).

54 For Arab circulations of *Antigone*, see Remoundou (2017), Selaiha (2011), and Ziter (2011).

nah Khalil and Rosemary Jenkinson.⁵⁵ In 2016, Mutaz Abu Saleh staged his play *New Middle East* at the Peacock Theatre in Dublin as part of the Abbey Theatre's 'Waking the Nation' repertoire commemorating the Centenary of Ireland's Easter Rising.

In 2002, *Antigone* was staged at the American University in Cairo directed by Frank Bradley and set in 21st Palestine while in 2007, the dramatic poem for three voices 'Antigone in Ramallah, Antigone in Beirut' called for peace and reconciliation. The German-Palestinian production 'Antigone 2010' by students at the Drama Academy in Ramallah and the Folkwang University of the Arts in Essen staged the play in Arabic and German in a joint initiative by Al-Kasaba Theatre in the West Bank and Folkwang University. A year later, French-Egyptian writer, director, and actor Adel Hakim staged his Arab *Antigone* with the National Palestinian Theatre, while philosophers Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek, and filmmaker Udi Aloni participated in the panel discussion titled 'If Antigone was a refugee' in New York organized by Jenin Freedom Theatre. Set in an Israeli prison cell, a 2013 production of Athol Fugard's anti-apartheid drama *The Island* (first staged in 1973 Cape Town) was staged in Jenin's Refugee Camp in the West Bank by Jenin Freedom Theatre and toured Brazil, USA, India, and Europe. In July 2021, the event 'Antigone for Palestine' presented during the NAF (Nur-archeofestival) Festival in Italy brought together theatre and the poetry of Najwan Darwish. Recent interventions in feminist criticism assess Antigone's ethical currency as a metaphor for the Palestinian struggle for freedom in works such as Anna di Giusto's *Antigone in Palestine: Luisa Morgantini and the Defense of the Oppressed* where she examines the Italian Women in Black Movement and the pro-Palestinian activism of Morgantini and in Chiara De Cesari's work on memory, populism and decolonial activism in Palestinian politics. In the poetic sequence 'Antigone 4', 'Antigone 11', and 'antigone. velocity. salt', queer Palestinian-American Fargo Tbakhi affirms the necropolitical noise gender violence affords for 'un-grievable' bodies and queer 'resisters' 'of linearity' across border fences and tunnels in Gaza: 'we'll make a earthquake when we fall. / they can kill us all, antigone, but then we'll be dirt dreams.' According to an article for *The Palestine Post* published on 13 January 1947, the earliest post-WWII production of *Antigone* in Tel Aviv a year before the Nakba was based on Jean Anouilh's adaptation of the tragedy translated in Hebrew.⁵⁶

Seeking to renegotiate the practice, embodiment, and performance of savage memory, technologies of necropower, and decolonial resistance, this analysis lays bare genealogies of *modi memorandi* across histories of necropolitical oppression and erasure that make Antigone a symbol of the Palestinian struggle. In this light,

55 Remoundou (2021: 246).

56 See N. N. [F. D.] (1947).

Morrison's *Antigone* examines alternative trajectories of resistance, remembering, writing, and righting in theatre as a fluid mnemonic apparatus of affirmative politics by recollecting narratives that are otherwise difficult to grasp, forget, and represent precisely because they reimagine *bios* and its precarity in *other* contemporary necropolitical landscapes.

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Chapter 7

AARON M. SEIDER

Epic Remembrances: Contesting the Gender of Memory in Kae Tempest’s *Brand New Ancients* and Tessa Hadley’s ‘Dido’s Lament’

In their recent works, Kae Tempest and Tessa Hadley aim for the center of classical antiquity, and when the former’s poem and the latter’s story strike home, they reorient both their target and themselves. Tempest’s *Brand New Ancients* and Hadley’s ‘Dido’s Lament’ invoke the three most influential literary works from Greco-Roman antiquity, the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Aeneid*, and their engagement with these epics shifts the significance of their modern pieces as well as Homer’s and Vergil’s ancient poems. Many of these links relate to memory, a topic at the core of epic. Through allusions and similes, Tempest and Hadley recall Homeric and Vergilian moments of remembrance or forgetting, with the result that their modern characters, who reside in early twenty-first century London, may also be viewed against the backdrop of the world of epic. Through foregrounding their reimagination of the relationship between memory and gender in this way, *Brand New Ancients* and ‘Dido’s Lament’ showcase the newfound agency with which the works’ female characters and authors create memory and contest it.

The characteristics of memory in ancient epic highlight how profound a shift in agency Tempest and Hadley effect. Memory was consistently gendered as masculine in Greco-Roman epic and its subsequent reception. As a few representative examples show, Homer’s and Vergil’s heroes strive to secure honor for themselves while bemoaning opportunities for commemoration that have been lost. When Achilles, for instance, sends Patroclus off to war without him, he tells him to return before reaching Troy’s walls not out of concern for his safety, but rather because of the worry that ‘You will make me less honored’ (ἀτιμότερον δέ με θήσεις, Homer, *Iliad* 16.90).¹ In a similar manner, Aeneas bemoans the location of

1 All translations are my own, unless otherwise noted.

his potential death when he is caught in a storm at sea. Rather than suffer the anonymity of such an ending, Aeneas wishes he could have been among those ‘whose lot it was to die before their fathers’ faces under Troy’s high walls!’ (*quis ante ora patrum Troiae sub moenibus altis / contigit oppetere!*, Vergil, *Aeneid* 1.95–96).

Not only, as these quotations show, is commemoration a singular aim for epic’s male characters, but the control of memory is likewise gendered masculine in the poems’ production and their subsequent reception. As Philip Hardie notes, ‘Memory is the ground and goal of the epic’,² and, just as characters like Achilles and Aeneas yearn to be remembered, Homer and Vergil foreground their privileged relationship with the Muses, the daughters of the goddess Memory. Homer’s epics showcase the poet’s access to the Muse in their opening lines: ‘Sing, goddess, of the wrath of Achilles, son of Peleus ...’ (Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεῶ, Πηληϊάδεω Ἀχιλῆος ..., *Iliad* 1.1) and ‘Tell me, Muse, of the man of many ways ...’ (Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μοῦσα, πολύτροπον ..., *Odyssey* 1.1). The *Aeneid* continues in this tradition, as Vergil commands ‘Muse, tell me the causes ...’ (*Musa, mihi causas memora* ..., *Aeneid* 1.8). Along with male poets enjoying special access to memory as they create their epics, later male artists assumed a similar position in their responses to these poems. The term generic memory elucidates how the reception of earlier writing likewise entails an act of memory, as subsequent authors remember Homer and Vergil’s works as they create their own art.³ Here as well control of memory is gendered masculine, since so high a proportion of these later artists were men.

Tempest and Hadley avail themselves of epic’s mnemonic power in order to destabilize the typical relationship between gender and memory in a work’s production, contents, and reception. Through invoking the epic canon and showcasing their departures from it, Tempest and Hadley offer a new epic landscape where they and their female characters produce and contest memory.⁴ Their female characters’ hopes to remember and forget look back to Homer’s and Vergil’s epic heroes, while their acts of generic memory foreground their own mnemonic control as active participants in classical reception. Tempest’s and Hadley’s simultaneous recall and subvention of epic norms prompt a reevaluation of their stories as well as of the earlier tales they recall, as these contemporary authors

2 Hardie (1990: 263).

3 Hardwick (2003), Martindale and Thomas (2006), Gloyn (2014), and Tatum (2014) offer discussions of reception and reception theory with bibliography.

4 Tempest’s and Hadley’s responses to antiquity are examples of a range of recent non-males’ writing that contributes to the classical tradition. For discussion of other non-male writers and the classical tradition, see Braund (2012), Theodorakopoulos (2012), and Cox and Theodorakopoulos (2013).

showcase how a boldly remembered Greco-Roman literary canon offers the chance to reframe conversations about the mnemonic value of antiquity today.

This chapter first investigates how *Brand New Ancients* and 'Dido's Lament' redistribute agency in the relationship between gender and memory, while its conclusion explores how Tempest's and Hadley's acts of reception prompt a re-imagining of moments of remembrance in those earlier poems. The chapter's first section focuses on *Brand New Ancients*, in which Tempest transforms the lives of modern Londoners into myth by describing everyday people as 'gods' (5) and using similes such as 'He feels like a Spartan in Troy' (23). With ancient epic recalled through these devices, Tempest projects their presence as a bard and fashions a plot that offers glory to a female character. The chapter next considers 'Dido's Lament', which likewise appropriates ancient epic's mnemonic power to reimagine how the control over memory might be complicated and contested. Connecting to scenes in Henry Purcell's 17th century opera *Dido and Aeneas* and Vergil's *Aeneid*, Hadley's story highlights how its main characters contrast with Dido and Aeneas. In 'Dido's Lament', a man, not a woman, destroys the commemorative markers of his former partner, while a woman, not a man, entertains the idea of memory as a palliative force. Building on this exploration of the disruptive potential of Tempest's and Hadley's writing, this chapter's conclusion considers how *Brand New Ancients* and 'Dido's Lament' might reframe endings in ancient epic. Tempest's poem offers its own commemorative values as a lens for viewing epic commemoration, while Hadley's story rethinks Dido and Aeneas' Underworld meeting in the *Aeneid*, literary interactions that showcase the potential for acts of generic memory to prompt the reevaluation of their target texts.

Brand New Ancients: Reimagining Epic Memory

In *Brand New Ancients*, Kae Tempest subverts epic's typical associations between memory and gender through their presence in the poem and their depiction of the character Gloria. As narrator, Tempest shapes the poem's relationship to antiquity and its significance for its present-day audience with similes and allusions in their story as well as with the forceful interruptions of their own voice. By projecting their presence, Tempest takes the mantle of mnemonic control most often associated with male poets in antiquity. With Gloria, meanwhile, Tempest transforms a character who enters as a background figure into the poem's heroine. Instead of existing as a figure shaped by men's actions, Gloria receives the renown lavished on Homer's and Vergil's male heroes. This section of the chapter first describes how Tempest projects their control over the poem's relationship between ancient and modern and then considers how their treatment of Gloria likewise genders mnemonic control as female.

Tempest foregrounds their poetic control over their bold reimagining of the present world. The title *Brand New Ancients* creates a tension between the most extreme elements of old and new. The perspective of modernity is privileged by the position of *Brand* and *New* as the title's first words and by the fact that these two words are counterbalanced by only one word signifying the past, *Ancients*. At the same time, though, this sole noun contains the same number of syllables as the adjectives preceding it, and it gains emphasis as the title's last word. Tempest elucidates the nature of their blend of myth and modernity through the poem's diction, similes, and narratival incursions. The poem's modernity is evoked by its locales (living rooms and bedrooms, bars and strip clubs, sidewalks and offices) and its characters' occupations (bartender, advertising illustrator, checkout clerk), while its argot, studded with phrases such as 'nicking dinner money' (13) and 'one of her majesty's henchmen' (45), conjures a specific socio-economic section of London life.⁵ Tempest characterizes these characters as examples worthy of epic commemoration through various similes and descriptions, wherein phrases such as a 'Brand New Pandora' (11) or 'a hero, knee deep in the desolate grind' (13) are interlaced with everyday actions. Moreover, the centrality of themes so redolent of antiquity, such as adultery, violence, and anger, likewise place Tempest's modern characters on a mythological level.⁶

Along with these devices within the narrative that blur the boundaries between ancient and modern, Tempest also proclaims to their audience that today's stories match the grandeur and emotion of ancient tales. Once at the poem's beginning, once near its end, and twice in its middle, Tempest's voice imbues their poem's everyday world with mythical power. Near the poem's start, Tempest claims (4–5):

The stories are here,
 the stories are you,
 and your fear
 and your hope
 is as old
 as the language of smoke,
 the language of blood,
 the language
 of languishing love.

The Gods are all here.
 Because the gods are in us.

5 Familiar with south London through living there herself, McConnell (2014: 203–204) remarks how the poem is both 'richly evocative of this area of London' while still leaving the possibility that the setting of *Brand New Ancients* could be 'any British metropolis.'

6 McConnell (2014: 198) comments on these and other 'epic' features of *Brand New Ancients*.

The gods are in the betting shops
 The gods are in the caff
 The gods are smoking fags out the back...

In this and other intrusions, Tempest links their characters to antiquity, implying that they live with the same intensity as the gods and heroes of mythical tales. In making this claim, Tempest foregrounds their own voice as the one shaping these stories and takes on a position almost exclusively gendered as masculine in antiquity.⁷

Just as Tempest assumes a mnemonic role associated with men in antiquity, their treatment of Gloria likewise reconfigures epic's typical dynamics of memory. After not entering the poem's foreground until it is about two-thirds complete, Gloria fends off an attempted sexual assault in its climactic scene, and the passage's details endow her with the renown typical of Homer's and Vergil's male heroes. The impact of this innovation is heightened by its place within the poem's narrative, which nowhere raises the possibility of Gloria's heroism and is in fact structured around the lives of two half-brothers, Clive and Tommy. Clive's parents are Brian and Mary, and they are neighbors of Kevin and Jane, the pair Tommy believes to be his mother and father. Yet, as only Brian and Jane know, Brian is Tommy's biological father. Anger and violence fill Brian and Mary's house, and the two divorce when Clive is still young. As Clive grows into a young adult, his world becomes one of violence and anger, marked not just by a lack of aspirations, but a robust antipathy toward them. Tommy, meanwhile, enjoys support and love in his childhood, and when he does sense a level of coldness at home, he moves out in the hope of a career as an author and illustrator.

Tempest's descriptions of Tommy at ages 19 and 25 raise the expectation that he will be the poem's hero. As Tempest describes Tommy's late teens, they hints at the potential for transformation both in his life and artistic work (20):

Walking round in a day dream
 trying to work out what to do with his life:
 he's a passionate painter,
 he draws all through the night,
 but he keeps it to himself,
 he doesn't show nobody else.
 He writes stories, comic book style, makes drawings,

7 As McConnell (2014: 198) notes, this opening to the poem highlights 'the performance poet as narrator.' This effect would have been even more pronounced during Tempest's oral performances of the poem, which included performances at the Battersea Arts Centre in London, England September 4–22, 2012, and at the North Wall, Oxford February 25–26, 2014. (For the Battersea performances, see Hunt [2012], and for the Oxford performances, see McConnell [2014].) Reflecting on her attendance of one of Tempest's performances, McConnell (2014: 205) remarks that Tempest 'brings us closer to the experience of an ancient bardic audience than many of us have been before.'

his hero is a young man, whose life might seem boring
 on the surface: by day
 he works in a factory packing dog food,
 but by night,
 he's a rebel with a devil to fight.

In these two sentences, which display the same length and the same contrast between day and night, Tempest establishes Tommy's liminal position. Sure of his passion but reluctant to share it, Tommy aspires to success, much like his story's hero whose nocturnal fighting contrasts with his mundane daytime activities. Six years later, after a publisher does not respond to Tommy's manuscript, Tempest focuses on his emotional despair: 'He feels like a Spartan in Troy. / He feels like his heart is destroyed' (23). Associating him with the *Iliad*, the first verse likens him to a soldier in an enemy city, whereas the second showcases the ruin of his professional hopes. For the reader familiar with Homer's tale, the simile conveys the heroic depth of Tommy's disappointment, even as it promises that he will one day succeed in his battles, just as the Spartans did after ten years of war.

While Tempest's depiction of Tommy makes his hopes central to the poem, Gloria's first appearances relegate her to a supporting role. In an episode several years before Tommy and Gloria meet, Clive encourages his friend Spider to approach a girl he likes. The object of Spider's interest is Jemma, and, when he does speak to her, 'She giggles' and then 'grips her best friend Gloria by the arm and they burst out laughing' (18). This incident portrays Gloria as a secondary character, a prop to emphasize the extent of Spider's humiliation. Tempest's next description of Gloria, even as it brings her closer to the center of *Brand New Ancients*' plot, still depicts her as a figure unlike the heroes of ancient epic. In a lengthy summary of Gloria's life, Tempest relates how she ran away from home and later escaped a relationship with an abusive boyfriend. While the extent of this section makes it clear that Gloria will become a significant figure in *Brand New Ancients*, she is associated with solidity and straightforwardness rather than bravery or glory. Tempest writes that 'if [Gloria] was a statue she'd be less marble, more cement' (22). Even when Gloria is imagined as an object that commemorates her for the future, she is associated with the utility and persistence of cement rather than the gleam and glamor of marble.

Once Tommy and Gloria's relationship begins, Tempest's description of Tommy's art and their play with the form of Gloria's name increase the expectation that Tommy will take on the hero's role. After meeting Gloria in a bar the night before, Tommy arises from bed to draw her: 'Overcome, he runs to his desk and sketches a scene, / the hero at peace with his queen' (24). Tommy depicts Gloria as a figure who enables him to play the hero within a domestic setting, and the rhyme between 'scene' and 'queen' emphasizes how Tommy wields commemora-

tive control over their relationship through his art. This link between art, Gloria, and Tommy's fame is furthered a year later, after Tommy learns his work will be published. When he tells Gloria, 'she makes him feel like a superhero in a way he's never known' (26). Just as when Tommy draws her, Gloria enables Tommy's heroism. Tempest's play with Gloria's name further establishes her position as a marker of his success. Through its Latin meaning of 'glory' and its closeness to that English word, 'Gloria' already carries with it the connotation of fame, but Tempest brings those implications to the surface by referring to her as 'Glory.' As Tommy weighs the demands of art and financial reality, he realizes that 'he could do graphics for adverts, / make enough cash to support him and Glory / while he wrote his big story' (29). Tempest's use of 'Glory' rather than 'Gloria' projects the character's supporting role in Tommy's success, and the rhyme between 'Glory' and 'story' connects Tommy's artwork and the renown it will bring him. Moreover, the proper noun 'Glory' invokes the use of that word as a verb, a play that erases the character Gloria and introduces the idea that Tommy already glories in his twin markers of success: the money that he makes and the big story that he writes. A subsequent play with Gloria's name reflects Tommy and Gloria's diverging perspectives. Tommy, after work would 'come home to Glory', while 'Gloria supported him / as best she could' (30). 'Glory' points to Gloria's status as a testament to Tommy's renown and to Tommy's rejoicing in his triumphs, while 'Gloria' leaves the character solely in a role of support, with no credit for herself.

Brand New Ancients' climax overturns the expectations of Tommy's shining success and Gloria's silent support. This lengthy section begins with Tommy celebrating at an upscale bar while Gloria works at a neighborhood pub, and the juxtaposition of these settings creates a tension between surface and substance. At Tommy's 'trendy bar' all the people are 'fake laughing and talking far too loud', a situation that prompts Tommy to think 'of the graphic novel that he's yet to write' (31). Although Tommy realizes that his relationship with Gloria 'had become mechanical, [and] he had to make it better' (32), he nonetheless proceeds with his coworkers to a strip bar, another venue that prizes appearance over reality. Tommy's realization of his personal failures increases as he looks at a dancer's 'face painted and monstrous, sexy by numbers', and 'at last' he leaves to go see Gloria (37). He moves through the city on a journey with heroic overtones: 'The tube becomes a chariot of fire, / and his heart is renewed with an honest desire, / his shoes become wings and he flies toward her side...' (37). The chariot simile and winged shoes allude to myth and epic; now, though, instead of portraying Tommy as a hero in search of his own fame, they showcase his efforts at repairing his relationship with Gloria.

At the same time as the fake nature of Tommy's settings prompts him to realize his flaws, Gloria's authenticity and heroism come to the fore when the

threat of violence is introduced. Attending to ‘the regulars’ at her bar (32), Gloria ‘serves them happily, / listens when they speak to her’ (33). When Clive and Spider enter this amicable setting, even though ‘they look out of their minds, / red eyes, on fire from what looks like a big binge’, Gloria ‘summons the energy to offer them empathy’ (34). The pair’s demeanor becomes increasingly threatening as the night continues. Once the pub is empty, Clive asks ‘*don’t you wanna have some fun?*’ and Spider stands at the bolted door ‘like a minotaur playing at a sheriff’ (36). Highlighting the monstrous authority Spider assumes, this jarring simile gives the scene the patina of antiquity and raises the expectation that if Gloria is to be saved, it will be by a man. When the attack begins, though, it is Gloria who saves herself, as she remembers earlier abuse she had suffered at the hands of men and even ‘Tommy’s silent stares / looking past her, looking through her’ (39). She smashes Clive with one bottle after another until she sticks him ‘and twisted till she felt him bleed’ (40). Subverting the expectations of ancient epic, Gloria is victorious in her physical combat as she assumes a role gendered masculine in antiquity.

Tommy’s entrance into the bar completes Gloria’s transformation into the poem’s hero and the recipient of its renown. Tommy sees the situation but cannot react: ‘Frozen to the spot, summoning the heroes he used to draw ...⁸ / But his supermen abandoned him’ (40). Tommy cannot become the heroic protagonist of his drawings, and his earlier sketch’s vision of himself as the hero to Gloria’s queen is an empty promise. Instead, the markers of heroism accrue to Gloria (40–41):

... Glory burned brighter than any one of Zeus’s daughters,
 the fight in her eyes was inspiring.
 He saw her, the quiet resolution, the timing,
 her steadfast compassion that kept her beside him
 and he saw her as if for the first time: fire in her eyes shining.

Recalling the glint of heroes’ armor in Homer’s epics, the words ‘burned brighter’ and ‘shining’ endow the aptly named ‘Glory’ with epic renown. In her relationship to antiquity, she is raised above *Brand New Ancients*’ male characters. While Tommy may be likened to a Spartan soldier or Spider to the Minotaur, Tempest’s comparison of Gloria with Zeus’ daughters figures her as divine. Moreover, just as these verses shift the gender of heroism from masculine to feminine, they transform the qualities deemed worthy of commemoration. Rather than strength or skill in weapons being valorized, it is Glory’s ‘resolution’, ‘timing’, and ‘steadfast compassion’ that lead to Tommy’s recognition of the fire in her eyes.

The poem’s last depiction of Gloria and Tommy emblemizes the paradox *Brand New Ancients* creates in its reformulation of the relationship between

8 This ellipsis is present in Tempest’s text.

gender and memory. Here the focus is again on Tommy's perspective as he thinks back to Gloria 'defending herself like a heroine, a god. / And with his eyes he apologized for every night / he hadn't kissed her right. / And he knew that he was understood 'cos he felt her hold him tight' (42). For Tommy, Gloria is no longer a testament to his success, but rather a heroine because of her own actions. Here, though, while Gloria shares these ancient heroes' ability for self-defense, the quality that is emphasized the most is her empathy. Already, Tempest marks this attribute when they describes the 'empathy' (34) Gloria summons when Clive and Spider enter the bar, and now, in this closing image, Gloria's understanding of Tommy binds their relationship. This focus on Gloria's ability to understand others furthers Tempest's reimagination of epic. By drawing on the ancient genre most deeply invested in memory's construction, Tempest reformulates the values that are worthy of commemoration and emphasize the brilliance not of destroying others, but of understanding them.

'Dido's Lament': A Specific Reorientation

Like *Brand New Ancients*, Tessa Hadley's 'Dido's Lament' interrogates epic's construction of the relationship between gender and memory, but it does so in a different manner and with different results. Whereas Tempest's poem invokes the milieu of Homeric epic and then engages with its general treatment of commemoration, Hadley's piece compares its own battles over memory with those portrayed in a very specific story from antiquity. Questions of remembering and forgetting dominate Hadley's story, and these issues are brought further to the fore through the invocation of Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas* and Vergil's *Aeneid*. By alluding to these works, Hadley juxtaposes the role of memory in her characters' interactions with its place in Purcell's and Vergil's renditions of Dido and Aeneas' relationship. In the encounter between Toby and Lynette, the main characters of Hadley's story, each member of this divorced couple assumes the actions and beliefs associated with the opposing gender in *Dido and Aeneas* and the *Aeneid*. This blurring destabilizes the association between masculinity and memory and raises questions about how literary reception may function as a form of memory. After exploring the centrality of memory in 'Dido's Lament', this chapter considers how Hadley's allusions to Purcell's and Vergil's works reimagine the value of memory and spotlight the possibilities for contemporary authors to draw on the potential of antiquity.

Lynette and Toby's encounter foregrounds the theme of memory, a focus that enriches the comparisons to Purcell and Vergil created by Hadley's allusion. Divorced for nine years, Lynette and Toby meet in London after he jostles her in a crowd. Only seeing the man who pushed her from behind, Lynette follows him to an Underground station and then reaches out to get his attention. Once Toby turns

around, Lynette realizes who he is and never confronts him about the push. Instead, the two chat first in the station and then on a train, before proceeding to Toby's house. After drinks and conversation there, Lynette departs and Toby remains, and the story ends with him at his house and her at a bar. Memory plays a central role throughout the story. From Lynette's perspective, the person who bumps her goes on 'oblivious of any trouble he'd left in his wake' (63), while when Lynette realizes that this man is Toby, she thinks 'naturally, he'd forgotten her' (64). This tension between remembering and forgetting persists at Toby's house: Toby, after cleaning mud from Lynette's coat, announces 'You can't see any trace of it' (67), while Lynette wonders 'Had Toby forgotten [her] so thoroughly...' (65), asks him 'Do you remember our car crash?' (66), and thinks back to their marriage's end. Moreover, after the pair separate, Toby erases the phone number Lynette wrote on his kitchen chalkboard and she sits in a bar, waiting to see if Toby will call about the package she forgot at his house.

Hadley's allusion to Purcell's and Vergil's works add new layers to the questions 'Dido's Lament' raises about remembering and forgetting. The story's title already recalls Dido, but an allusion makes the connection more specific. Near the story's end Toby asks Lynette about her singing, a question Lynette brushes off as she ponders her lack of success. Toby's follow-up question, though, occasions a more extensive reflection (66):

'And you have felt free? You told me that as long as we were together you weren't free to give yourself over to your work completely.' [said Toby]
 'Did I say that? How pretentious of me!' [said Lynette]
 She felt a spasm of exasperation that Toby had stored up all the nonsense she'd ever spoken and taken it so seriously. In fact, she was guesting in a student production of 'Dido and Aeneas', in which Aeneas was got up as the captain of an American football team and Dido as a cheerleader; it worked surprisingly well. Toby didn't know anything about music, anyway. Lynette hummed to herself the opening lines of Dido's lament, as she looked around at the beautiful room. How strange that Toby was so simple and yet his simplicity had had all these solid, complicated effects in the real world, these material accumulations and accretions – and children, too, the branching out and infinite complication of children. Whereas her own complexity seemed to have had no consequences. It was all wrapped up inside her – she had nothing to show for it. She didn't even own anything significant.

Along with revealing Lynette's feelings about her marriage with Toby and their current situations, these paragraphs foreground the story's treatment of memory and gender by situating it within a larger context.

The mention of the student production of 'Dido and Aeneas' invokes Purcell's opera as well as Dido's role in Vergil's *Aeneid*, while Lynette's humming of the opening of Dido's lament recalls a specific moment in Purcell's work. Near the opera's end, Dido resolves to commit suicide after she learns Aeneas has decided

to sail to Italy.⁹ The designation 'Dido's lament' refers to these final words Dido utters (Act III, Scene ii):¹⁰

When I am laid, am laid in earth,
 may my wrongs create
 No trouble, no trouble in thy breast.
 When I am laid, am laid in earth,
 may my wrongs create
 No trouble, no trouble in thy breast.
 Remember me, remember me, but ah! Forget my fate.
 Remember me, but ah! Forget my fate.
 Remember me, remember me, but ah! Forget my fate.
 Remember me, but ah! Forget my fate.

Scholars of opera have remarked on how these verses are one of Purcell's 'nob-lest lyric inspirations',¹¹ as he 'rises within narrow limits to monumental grandeur',¹² and the lines' details recall earlier musical phrases in the opera, thereby giving Dido's final utterance 'splendor from its sheer inevitability.'¹³ Through its musical force, Lynette's humming of this lament inserts ideas of loss and monumentality into her interchange with Toby while increasing its emotional significance.

This allusion's juxtaposition of Lynette and Toby's relationship with Dido and Aeneas' opens a series of questions about how Hadley's story relates to *Dido and Aeneas* and the *Aeneid*. The sentiments expressed in Dido's lament offer a lens for viewing Lynette's attitude toward Toby. The lament's first lines, in which Dido announces her death and asks that her earlier wrongs not trouble Aeneas, fashion Lynette and Toby's meeting as a terminal encounter and convey Lynette's hope that their divorce no longer disturbs Toby. Moreover, Lynette's realization about her and Toby's creations takes on a greater mnemonic significance. Lynette is struck by how the many monuments of Toby's simplicity contrast with the lack of material effects produced by her complexity. Dido's request that she, and not her fate, be remembered underscores Lynette's hope that Toby remember her rather than her lack of material monuments or musical accomplishments.

Along with highlighting Lynette's efforts to control her commemoration, the connection between Hadley's short story, Purcell's opera, and Vergil's epic poem reveals how 'Dido's Lament' destabilizes the gender roles typical of the Dido and

9 Harris (2018: 3–30) offers a synopsis of the opera as well as its relationship to earlier versions of this story. Orr (2016: 433–436) discusses the political context of the opera and questions about the date of its original performance.

10 Text is from Price (1986), who offers a complete score. The above quote may be found in Price (1986: 176–178).

11 Westrup (1937: 121).

12 Westrup (1937: 123).

13 Price (1986: 36).

Aeneas story. Already, shifts appear in the movement from *Aeneid* 4 to *Dido and Aeneas*.¹⁴ While in Vergil's telling, Aeneas nowhere professes his love to Dido and nowhere promises to stay, Purcell's Aeneas does both.¹⁵ And while rage and regret dominate Dido's reaction in the *Aeneid*, in Purcell's opera the queen's last words are conciliatory. Hadley changes the story further, as its plot associates Toby and Lynette with attributes from the characters whose gender opposes theirs. While Aeneas is the one who leaves in the *Aeneid* and *Dido and Aeneas*, it is Lynette, not Toby, who brought about their divorce, and it is Toby, not Lynette, who reacts with emotion to their separation. Almost immediately after Lynette catches up to Toby and realizes who he is, she thinks back to how 'the parting had been all her doing, he had just suffered it intensely, with a white, fixed, wronged stare and outbreaks of baffled protest' (63).

Building off these structural and emotional shifts, Hadley destabilizes the gender typically associated with remembering and forgetting in *Dido and Aeneas*' story. The theme of memory becomes most prominent in Hadley's story right before and after Lynette leaves Toby's house. As their conversation comes to a close, Toby cleans off the mud that had stained Lynette's coat when he pushed her. After he announces 'You can't see any trace of it', Lynette responds by saying 'Here's my number' and then writes it on his kitchen blackboard (67). The juxtaposition of these actions clarifies the aims of each. Toby desires to erase any traces of his and Lynette's meeting, while Lynette creates a mnemonic marker of her visit. Moreover, when Lynette does depart, she accidentally leaves behind her shopping bag, another monument to her presence. As soon as he is alone, Toby sets to work ensuring no traces of Lynette remain (67):

... he noticed Lynette's number written on the chalkboard. After a moment's hesitation, he erased the number with a wet cloth, wiped the whole board clean, then rewrote 'pasta, Calpol, kitchen towel, black olives.' He washed out the cloth and ran tap water in the sink, rinsing away the dried mud he'd brushed off her coat, sending it spinning down the plughole.

With these two markers of Lynette destroyed, Toby realizes that Lynette left behind her shopping bag. At first, he does not know what to do with the bag, as he can neither throw it away (lest Lynette return for it) nor keep it around the house (lest his wife and children notice). After thinking of how 'The item incriminated him, whatever he did' (67), Toby hides the bag in the back of his office cabinet.

14 Watson (2014) offers an overview of the opera, its relationship to the *Aeneid*, and its reception.

15 Orr (2016: 433) describes how Purcell's presentation of Dido fits into a version of Dido that comes to the fore in the late seventeenth century, which is focused on questions of morality and emphasizes Dido's responsibility both for her affair with Aeneas and its consequences.

A comparison with the *Aeneid* reveals that Hadley redistributes the genders previously associated with remembering and forgetting. Soon after Dido learns that Aeneas is set to depart in *Aeneid* 4, he tells her (4.333–336):

*ego te, quae plurima fando
enumerare vales, numquam, regina, negabo
promeritam, nec me meminisse pigebit Elissae
dum memor ipse mei, dum spiritus hos regit artus.*

I will never deny, queen, that you deserve the greatest number of things you can count out in speech, nor will I ever regret remembering Elissa [Dido], so long as I remember myself, so long as my spirit controls these limbs.

Aeneas' statement to Dido that he will remember her and her help is a promise that memory can offer honor and an emotional connection in the face of physical absence. Lynette's writing of her phone number is nowhere near as forward as Aeneas' promise, yet it too implies that her and Toby's past can be remembered without pain and that a connection between them is still possible.

Toby's destruction, meanwhile, of every item that Lynette leaves behind recalls Dido's attitude toward memory. In Vergil's *Aeneid*, once Dido understands that Aeneas is set to sail, she asks her sister to place his belongings on a pyre and claims that 'it helps to destroy all the monuments of that wicked man' (*abolere nefandi / cuncta viri monumenta iuvat, Aeneid* 4.497–498). Dido yearns to erase any traces of the Trojan, with the understanding that she can quell her emotional pain by no longer being reminded of his presence. In Hadley's story, though, it is Toby who erases the three traces of Lynette's presence: her phone number, the mud from her coat, and her shopping bag. Later, as Toby ponders his motivations, he thinks that 'it would be better if Jaz didn't know that Lynette had been here, in this house, printing her presence everywhere so that it haunted him wherever he looked. If Jaz didn't know, then he didn't have to think about what it meant' (67). For Dido, Aeneas' possessions remind her of his wickedness, while in Toby's mind any marker of Lynette would lead to his wife's knowledge of her presence, which in turn would prompt his emotional turmoil and purposeful ignorance of his thoughts. In fact, an earlier flashback in the story reveals that this was Toby's exact attitude during their divorce: "Take whatever you like," he'd said. "Everything you've touched is spoiled for me now" (67). Toby and Lynette's opposing actions foreground Hadley's reversal of the dynamics of memory from the *Aeneid*. In her story the female character seeks to create monuments and implies that memory can have a palliative effect, while the male character destroys remnants of earlier times, which can only bring him emotional and intellectual pain.

This portrait, though, is complicated by a coda to Toby's actions, which reveals that while he wishes to forestall the possibility that he will remember

Lynette, he desires that she have a specific recollection of him. Hadley reveals that Toby may have planned their meeting in order that Lynette would come away from it with a certain memory of him. The story's last description of Toby focuses on what he is *not* thinking after Lynette leaves his house (67):

He was deliberately not thinking something. He wasn't thinking that he'd put everything together – family and work and home – all so that Lynette could visit it someday and see that he'd managed to have a good life without her. He knew that if he held off from thinking that for long enough then at some point it could no longer possibly be true, and he'd forget that he'd ever thought it might be.

Toby's drive to forget is paired with a desire for Lynette to remember. The juxtaposition is striking: he may have planned the entire evening so that it would stand as a monument to his 'good life without her', but Toby wants to forget that he ever contemplated this idea. Even in his tension between wishing for Lynette to remember and for himself to forget, Toby mirrors Dido more than Aeneas. In some of her last words to the Trojan, Dido hopes that he will remember her at his death (4.382–384):

*spero equidem mediis, si quid pia numina possunt,
supplicia hausurum scopulis et nomine Dido
saepe vocaturum.*

Indeed I hope that, if the pious gods have any power, in the middle of the rocks you will drain your punishments and often call out the name Dido.

In this climactic prayer, Dido strives to ensure that Aeneas' relationship with her will be associated only with suffering. While Toby matches Dido in neither his rhetoric nor rage, he is similar to the Carthaginian queen in his desire to ensure that he has the ability to construct his own lasting image of the meaning of a previous relationship.

Just as Hadley's story invokes and destabilizes the links between gender and memory established in *Dido and Aeneas* and the *Aeneid*, so too does 'Dido's Lament' capitalize on the reception history of Vergil's epic in highlighting how new authors may remember and reimagine Aeneas and Dido's tale. On the most general level, Hadley claims her space as an author who leverages the emotional depth and complexity of Purcell's and Vergil's works in fashioning her own story of a divorced couple's meeting. While Hadley's authorial presence in 'Dido's Lament' is not as marked as Tempest's in *Brand New Ancients*, her inclusion of a pointed allusion to Purcell's opera, combined with her emphasis on this allusion in her story's title, highlights her role as an artist engaging with an earlier literary tradition. The allusion's context further underscores the range of possibilities for bringing aspects of an ancient text into the modern age. Lynette knows the start of Dido's lament because of her role 'in a student production of "Dido and Aeneas",

in which Aeneas was got up as the captain of an American football team and Dido as a cheerleader; it worked surprisingly well' (66). Through including this reimagining of the Dido and Aeneas tale within her story's fictional world, Hadley draws attention to how new artistic productions remember and reimagine earlier works. Lynette's 'Dido and Aeneas' is a student production, much like the original performance of Purcell's opera in 1689,¹⁶ and Lynette's declaration that 'it worked surprisingly well' underscores the potential for new acts of generic memory to join Purcell's work in drawing on Dido and Aeneas' story as they offer their own interpretation of its central values and questions.

Shaping Memory: Death, Reception, and Looking Backwards

This chapter's concluding paragraphs explore how *Brand New Ancients* and 'Dido's Lament', through shifting the evaluation of the endings of characters' lives and relationships, show the potential for reevaluating commemorative moments in Homer's and Vergil's epic poems as well. As argued above, Hadley's and Tempest's works recall ancient epic and capitalize on that genre's commemorative power to reimagine the dynamics of gender and memory. In 'Dido's Lament', the female character attempts to create a positive memory, while the male character works to destroy commemorations that might cause emotional trauma. *Brand New Ancients*, meanwhile, raises and then subverts the expectations that its modes of commemoration will mimic ancient epic: Gloria, not Tommy, assumes the role of the hero and gains the renown associated with that position, and she wins her commemoration as much from her physical self-defense as from her practice of empathy. Given that Tempest's and Hadley's engagement with epic centers on moments of memory, their poem and story raise the possibility for the projection of their reinterpretation of epic's values back onto the commemoration of lives and relationships in Homer's and Vergil's poems. The concluding description of Brian's death in *Brand New Ancients* brings to mind epic's typical commemorations of heroes, while 'Dido's Lament' recalls Aeneas and Dido's final encounter in the Underworld.

Tempest's focus on Brian's last years in their poem's conclusion has the potential to reorient the evaluation of similar commemorative passages in Greco-Roman epic. In old age Brian is haunted by memory. Looking back on his young loves, Brian realizes 'at the time he forgot 'em so easy; but now there was no forgetting them' (43), and now 'his memories teased him, he was lonely, miserable, / days into weeks, all alone feeling pitiful' (45). When Brian flees Britain for Thailand and a new love, Tempest terms this location a 'fair Olympus' (46), a mytho-

16 The opera was 'written for a fashionable boarding school in Chelsea ... where it was performed in spring 1689 by 'Young Gentlewomen'' (Price [1986: ix]). The indication of the performers comes from the opera's libretto (see Price [1986: 3]).

logical description that hints at Brian's ascension to a new plane of existence. Here, he shows compassion for those he has hurt. He thinks back to 'poor old Mary, poor sweet Jane, poor young Clive, / so big and strange, and poor quiet Kevin, and poor little Tommy' (47). In Brian's last moment, he declares '*I'm a man*', thinks of his paramour, and 'chuckled to himself and he quietly died' (47). Within the narrative of *Brand New Ancients*, this section directly follows Gloria's heroism, and the empathy that marked her actions likewise appears here in Brian, who finally expresses compassion for the ones he has harmed. Through first highlighting the heroism of Gloria's empathy and then revealing Brian's compassion as well, Tempest challenges the audience to entertain similar feelings toward this character. This challenge could even extend back to the evaluation of heroes in Greco-Roman epic; these passages typically privilege the commemoration of masculine honor and martial valor, and Tempest introduces the notion that empathy and compassion are values worthy of commemoration as well.

Just as Tempest's poem challenges the audience to rethink ancient epic's commemorations with a focus on empathy, Hadley's story likewise positions itself as a new perspective on the commemoration of epic characters. In Vergil's telling, Dido and Aeneas meet again in the Underworld after the queen's suicide. Journeying here to see his father in *Aeneid* 6, Aeneas spots Dido's shade wandering amongst others who died because of love. When Aeneas asks Dido to stay and speak, she listens in silent rage before returning to her erstwhile husband. Details from Hadley's story recall this Vergilian scene. Lynette catches up with Toby in an Underground station; Toby's expression upon seeing Lynette is likened to 'a flare against the underground light' (63); and, after Toby suggests they go somewhere else to talk, Lynette responds 'But it's hell up there, too' (64). The subterranean location for Lynette and Toby's encounter parallels the setting for Dido and Aeneas' meeting, while the addition of 'too' at the end of Lynette's remark underscores the similarities between the Underground and the Underworld. These connections figure 'Dido's Lament' as a response to Aeneas and Dido's meeting in the Underworld, a configuration with repercussions for the imagination of modern engagements with the *Aeneid*. The story's positioning of itself as another rendition of this moment creates a tension. Aeneas and Dido's Underworld meeting in *Aeneid* 6 was supposed to be the end to their relationship, but now Hadley's story presents itself as a new finale. Yet, just as Hadley's story may seem to take on a level of permanence, its very act of opening up Aeneas and Dido's seemingly closed story suggests that their tale may inspire more artistic responses in the future. Thus Hadley, like Tempest, finds that in epic deaths there is the possibility for new literary life.

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Part III

***Stories of Classical Antiquity
in Pictures and Places***

Chapter 8

IRENE (RENA) FATSEA

Reconstructing Memory from Ruins: The Athenian Academy by Theophil Hansen as a Modern ‘Lieu de Mémoire’

1. Introduction

The Athenian Academy, the opulent and probably most eye-catching of the three edifices comprising the monumental core of the modern Greek capital – the so-called ‘Athenian Trilogy’ on Panepistimiou Avenue – has obtained universal recognition as a representative specimen of Greek modernity (see fig. 8.1). In addition, its iconic similarities with the city’s honored ancient relics commonly place it in the broad stylistic category of (neo)classicism as one of their pre-eminent modern counterparts.¹ It is the purpose of this paper to problematize the specifics of the building’s stylistic definition and the fundamentals of its inception by its architect, Theophil Hansen, with a special eye to the role that memory in its manifold nature held in his related architectural agenda.



Fig. 8.1: T. Hansen, The Athenian Trilogy on Panepistimiou Avenue: National Library (left), University (center), Academy (right), watercolor on paper (excerpt), April 1859 (Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Hansen estate, inv. no. HZ 19786), reproduced with permission from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

1 See Förster (1879); N. N. (1884); von Lützow (1885: 106–107); Durm (1892: 184; 1910: 229); Ganz (1972); Fatsea (2014; 2020).

Fatsea, I. (R.) (2025), ‘Reconstructing Memory from Ruins: The Athenian Academy by Theophil Hansen as a Modern “Lieu de Mémoire”’, in *Antiquity in Progress: Intermedial Presences of Ancient Mediterranean Cultures in the Modern World*, ed. M. Stachon, A. Lipscomb, and P. Kolovou (Heidelberg: Propylaeum), 115–152.

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To that end the paper proceeds in three steps as follows. First, it introduces (neo)classicism as the leading aesthetic current of the Enlightenment and, therefore, as inevitably subjected to many of the latter's theoretical shortcomings, including the characteristic epistemic divide between matter and spirit, that is, a phenomenon akin to the dissolution of traditional forms of world inhabitation, both material and immaterial.² Symptomatic of the related socio-cultural transformations was that the architectural *milieux* of people's communities lost their former coherence, whereas all the associated memory, which had served for ages as their connecting tissue, became displaced. Here, Maurice Halbwachs's theoretical reflections are aptly relevant. That social memory is always in need of a solid spatial framework to survive is an idea that features prominently in the French sociologist's literature, large portion of which has been devoted to the analysis of these frameworks, architecture included.³ Such a generic inference, however, which sets social memory in direct dependence upon architecture – that is, a structural connection particularly endangered by modernity – calls for further scrutiny. Did (neo)classicism emerge in the vacuum of these traditional frameworks to make up for the lost meaning of communities? Was (neo)classical architecture indeed as soulless and artificial as it appears from our current perspective? Was it as sundering mind from emotion as thought of in echoing the spirit of the time? Did it stand in binary opposition to romanticism?⁴ In view of these questions, the paper takes a critical stand against the undifferentiated usage of the term 'neoclassicism' by modern historiography – the Greek, in particular – which, rather grossly, subsumes under one heading incomparable architectural phenomena on the sole criterion that they all allude to the same source, i.e., Greek antiquity.⁵ As a result, this literature fails to properly address the more constructive (or poetic) variations of classicism which oftentimes eschewed the norm of unreflective

2 See Olick and Robbins (1998: 115): 'Many authors describe an existential crisis arising out of the increased possibility for abstract thought [...], out of accelerating change resulting from increased industrialization and urbanization, as well as out of the resultant decline of religious world views and of traditional forms of political authority.'

3 Halbwachs (1950) referred to this kind of memory as 'collective', which featured most prominently in the title of his posthumous oeuvre *La Mémoire collective*. Halbwachs's notion of 'collective memory' has been variously criticized, first by his colleague historian Marc Bloch (2011 [1925]: 150–155), who found it too restrictive because it presupposed a firm identity for its subjects; also excessive in the way it projected an individual's psychological state upon the collective body.

4 The related literature is vast. Among the latest critical studies which challenge such divisive preoccupations between classicism and romanticism from as early as in the eighteenth century, is Townsend (2022). See also below footnotes 19, 40 and 41.

5 Only recently the related international literature has become more refined in its definitions. See, for example, the entry 'classicism' by Schlobach and Zelle (2001) in the *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, which pinpoints the 'conceptual ambivalences' of the notion from country to country, thus undermining the authoritative (i.e., normative) principle in the very definition of the term.

imitation of precedents and passive idealism. Theophil Hansen's architecture is a case in point.

Second, the paper – in inquiring into Hansen's formation – traces his line of influences in the German tradition of Karl Friedrich Schinkel, both in an architectural and a philosophical sense. It illuminates for that the close ties of the Prussian architect with the philosophical *milieu* of the Jena romantics, as filtered through the Weimar classicism of Goethe and Schiller. It pays closer attention to the centrality of memory in (Karl Wilhelm) Friedrich Schlegel as synecdochically embedded in the notion of *fragment* (or, *ruin*) serving as the material residue of man's constant return to an indistinct prototype, yet always delivered in an incomplete and novel form in self-evident distance from its source. It is through this special reference to the idea of memory by virtue of the fragment – that is, the ground upon which both sensory and mental faculties meet in a fruitful exchange – that the German romantics sought to restore the aforementioned divide of modernity. Schinkel's commitment to this philosophical tradition shimmers through the multi-layered spirit of his works which combine classicism and romanticism into a more complex idiom often referred to as 'romantic classicism'. Much of Hansen's architectural production, including the Athenian Academy, was set out within this intellectual framework.

Third, in considering that architecture established itself as an integral scientific discipline only in modernity, this paper proceeds to unravel the structural relationship between memory and building from within the domain of architectural epistemology. It is due to its essential interaction with the world and, even more so, to its contingency upon the socio-cultural *milieu*, that architecture develops as a temporally grounded discipline with a semi-autonomous status in this period. Here, the terms 'disciplinary' and 'social' memory become pertinent for defining architecture's referencing to memory on two levels, one internal, the other external to its epistemological core; that is, memory built *in* the discipline and memory preserved *through* actual building, respectively.⁶ In this dynamic domain, the academically trained architect serves as the catalyst between the two levels; or rather, as the agent who, by employing memory as a restitutive mechanism, ensures both cohesiveness and continuity to the fractured social *milieux* of modernity, while at the same time he/she feeds all this experience back to his/her own disciplinary base. It is under this light that Hansen's Athenian Academy is being analyzed, that is, as a significant bearer of both disciplinary and social memory, wherein architecture attests to its 'semi-autonomous' status for coming to terms with the antinomies of modernity.⁷

6 The terms 'disciplinary memory' and 'social' or 'societal memory' have been introduced and properly theorized by architecture historian Stanford Anderson (1995; 1999).

7 The notion of 'quasi-autonomy' (or 'semi-autonomy') comes also from Anderson; see, for example, Anderson (2002).

2. Neoclassicism and Memory: problems of definition

(Neo)classicism is the cultural-artistic movement that we normally associate with the Age of Reason, i.e., the eighteenth century. It is known for its aspiring to both the forms and ideas of classical antiquity in reaction to the excesses of the Baroque with its profuse religious connotations. (Neo)classicism advocated simplicity, restraint, moderation, measure, and not the least adherence to rules and to the ideal of *complete form*, all epitomized in J. J. Winckelmann's famous motto 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' (*edle Einfalt und stille Größe*).⁸ As (neo-)classical artists were exposed at the beginning only to a limited spectrum of archaeological evidence, they naturally held a limited view of antiquity, therefore a limited and rather idealized perception of works that they could use as models.⁹ Although the Greek so-called 'Golden Age' was the ultimate reference point for most (neo)classicists, Greece *per se* as a physical entity was still largely inaccessible; so was any assiduous or contextual knowledge of its monuments.¹⁰ Even the very few who dared and made the adventurous journey to Greece, in defiance of all obstacles, exhibited a 'complete blindness' in confronting the ancient ruins because they seemed 'to trust their books rather than their eyes', as Nikolaus Pevsner pointedly observed.¹¹ With reference to the most ambitious of these expeditions by the two British architects James Stuart and Nicholas Revett in the mid-1750s, Pevsner underlines that 'there was still a long way to go from archaeological interest to emotional understanding' (see fig. 8.2).¹² Interestingly though, even after this 'emotional understanding' had been presumably achieved following more rigorous *in situ* researches, Henri Labrousse's erroneous dating of the two major temples of Paestum (i.e., Hera I and Hera II) in the late 1820s – i.e., legendary as a study as it may have been for its romantic underpinnings – shows

8 Winckelmann (1756: 17, 19ff.).

9 Characteristically, art historian Nikolaus Pevsner (1968 [1948]: 197) notes: 'Few people realize that the Greek Doric column, fluted and without a base, which is to us the symbol of Greek greatness, was virtually unknown about 1750, and that by 1760, when it had become known to a few virtuosi [...] it was the object of a passionate controversy'.

10 In 1791 first, British connoisseur Richard Payne Knight suggested that some of the seminal pieces which Winckelmann had considered canonical of Greek art and whereupon he had founded his theory, that is, mainly papal acquisitions in the Vatican collection, were Roman copies of the 2nd century B.C.; see Siegel (2000: 58). By the 1770s already 'Winckelmann's friend Anton R. Mengs (1728–1779) had argued that the sculpture of the age of Phidias and Pericles, should we ever see it, would be superior to what had survived. When Phidian originals did turn up, in the form of the Parthenon marbles, Winckelmann's canon almost immediately fell from grace [...] Though some found [their] naturalism naïve, those who admired the marbles criticized the schematization and stylization of eighteenth-century taste' (Fitzgerald [2022: 34–35]).

11 Pevsner (1968 [1948]: 197).

12 Pevsner (1968 [1948]: 204). The reference is to the monumental five-volume oeuvre of the two architects *The Antiquities of Athens* (1762–1816).

that no trustworthy index of chronology was established early enough for figuring out material evidence, that is, whether classical or archaic, and that historical accuracy remained for long open to controversy.¹³ It is due to this debatable nature of its sources, that classical antiquity is hard to adhere to its early normative descriptions. Therefore, its correlative notion of '(neo)classicism' becomes both relative and negotiable.

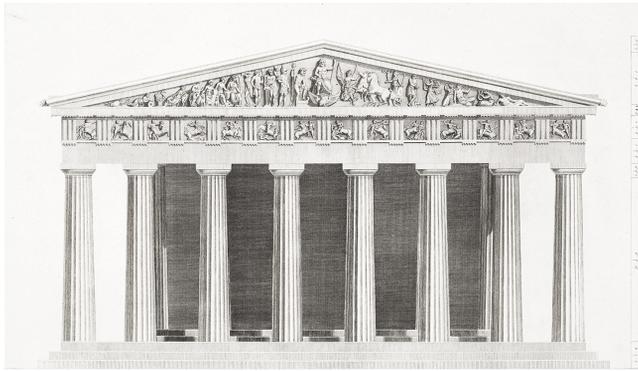


Fig. 8.2: Parthenon, E front (447–32 B.C.), precise measurements, drawn between 1751 and 1754, yet lacking optimal refinements, e.g. entasis, from Stuart and Revett (1787: ch. 1, pl. III).

The eighteenth century has also been seen as the age of the crisis of representation, in which the traditional means of understanding and portraying reality, either in writing or in art, fell short.¹⁴ A gap opened wide between the thing represented and its image in paper, stone, or other means. The rise of a secular consciousness, as reflected in both the gradual demise of traditional values and the waning trust in authority, greatly affected the sense of belonging of the individual to the community and, along with it, all the traditional forms of sense-making, starting with the open-endedness inherent in the very notion of sign. The effect of all this was the disruption of the traditional environments of memory – so-called ‘milieux de mémoire’ by Pierre Nora – and the rise, in their stead, of ‘lieux de mémoire’, that is, the rational, prosaic, and contested sites of modern memory whose purpose was to secure a base of coherence to the social body.¹⁵ (Neo)classicism flourished precisely in this context. In seeking legitimacy in the distant past as opposed to the worn out present, (neo)classicism produced works which either radically reshaped earlier spatial structures of memory or became them-

13 See Kruft (1994: 279), Bressani (2007: 89, 91–92).

14 See Pérez Gómez (1983), Vesely (2004).

15 See Nora (1989: 7ff.).

selves 'lieux de mémoire'. At the same time, history, formalized into a scientific discipline, sought to bring order and meaningful substance to the otherwise chaotic temporal universe of people's collective memory, that is, a work which until then was exclusively in the hands of traditional communities. History, in other words, created the grand-narratives of origin of modern societies by gradually displacing the folk tales, songs, and mythical heroes of the past. Spaces of memory (such as national monuments) and narratives of memory (such as documentary history), either side-by-side or poetically interweaved, became the symbolic *anchors* of many of the national states of the post-Enlightenment era. Ironically enough, the historian became the 'architect' – and reversely, the architect became the 'historian' – of this new historical circumstance by making what Walter Benjamin called the 'homogenous, empty time' of progress conform to the traditional model of 'messianic time' for modern nations, which turned to be the only coherent communities of modernity.¹⁶

(Neo)classicism came again to prominence in the nineteenth century, now as the catchword for all art and architecture of the reborn Greek state. Justifiably or not, this term (although an invention of the late 19th century)¹⁷ was broadly adopted by 20th-century Greek scholarship to denote the historical phenomenon associated with the belated entrance of the new country to the Enlightenment after the latter had run its full course in the West.¹⁸ And although the Enlightenment in Greece was very short-lived, (neo)classicism turned out not to be so. By the time that the formality and severity of its western correlate was being seriously mitigated by the radical aesthetics of romanticism – if that had not been the case from

16 See Benjamin (1968: 261). See also below, fn. 69.

17 The *Oxford English Dictionary* traces the earliest English usage of the term 'neo-classicism' in the American journal *Times*, 6 May 1893 (17/2) and the term 'neo-classic' in the British journal *Athenaeum*, 19 Feb. 1881 (270/2); see N. N. (1908: 922). However, the term 'neo-classicism' is encountered even earlier: 'A *neoclassicism* arose in France, which, in spite of many conflicts, has predominated in French literature until the successes of the romantic school in the present century' (N. N. [1863: 297]). Art historian Hugh Honour (1968: 14) frames its usage in the area of the arts thus: 'It was invented in the mid nineteenth century as a pejorative term for what was then thought to be a lifeless, chilly and impersonal 'antique revival' style expressed in stillborn imitations of Graeco-Roman sculpture: and these negative connotations still cling to it [...] Furthermore, the term Neo-classicism invites us to conceive the style as having been opposed to Romanticism [...].' In Greek literature, Koumanoudis (1900: 691) locates its use in the last decade of the 19th century.

18 As an example, some titles of historiographic monographs which feature 'neoclassicism' as a generic category for all 19th-century architecture and which apparently had a decisive influence on all later literature are: J. Travlos, *Neoklassike Arhitektonike sten Ellada* ['Neoclassical Architecture in Greece'] (1967), S. Skopelites, *Neoklassika spitia tes Athinas kai tou Peiraia* ['Neoclassical Houses of Athens and Piraeus'] (1975), and H. H. Russack, *Arhitektones tes Neoklassikes Athinas* ['Architects of Neoclassical Athens'] (c. 1991), which for no obvious reason mistranslates the title of the German original, i.e., *Deutsche bauen in Athen* (1942), and others.

the beginning¹⁹ – Greek historiography insisted on separating the two as incompatible opposites, the former as related to reason and classical moderation, the latter to unreason and exotic fancy.²⁰ A nationalist agenda seems to have endorsed this divide, that is, a meticulously constructed ideological scheme, whose sole aim was both the physical and the spiritual identification of modern Greece with its idealized past. There was a commonly shared belief that along with the country's physical recovery to the universally acclaimed standards of antiquity, the memory of its ancient glory would be restituted in spite of the immense time gap that separated the two periods. People's perennial 'milieux de mémoire' were suddenly torn to be replaced by the new 'lieux de mémoire' of the modern state. The War, with its lamentable physical destructions, may have not been the real cause; but it was certainly the facilitator of such a radical transformation process. Much ink has been shed on the various causes and the traumatic effects of this historical occurrence, even more so on the momentous physical reconstruction of the modern city-capital and its architecture. My contribution to this discourse comes mainly as a further scrutiny of the nature of '(neo)classicism' that the modern state produced as part of its nationalist agenda, starting with the unproblematized usage of the term by later scholars. I argue that Greek (Athenian) architecture in the 19th century has been neither the tail-end of western (neo)classicism, nor as uniform and compact as modern Greek historiography makes it appear. In this sense, it presents certain similarities with its western counterpart, that is, diverse for the most part.²¹ The so-called 'Athenian Trilogy', for example, which com-

19 For a certain branch of critical literature, classicism and romanticism were not consecutive movements but indistinguishably suffused from the beginning 'No absolute dividing line existed between Neoclassicism and Romanticism, and sometimes elements of the latter crossed over into the former, as in Romantic Classicism' (N. N. [1999: 161]). Further, eminent architecture historian James S. Ackermann (1993: 239) underscores the relevance of the term to architecture: 'Although some neo-classical architecture remained authentically ancient (Jefferson's Capitol at Richmond; the Madeleine, Paris), the finest architects (Soane, Ledoux, Schinkel) worked in a classical-geometrical spirit permitting unlimited invention. The term 'romantic classicism' has been coined for this tendency.' See this in connection with footnotes 40 and 41 below.

20 This phenomenon is thoroughly discussed and documented in Fatsea (2000).

21 This diversity was mainly due to the movement's absorption of romantic elements. See Rosenblum (1969): 'Far from tending toward an anonymous and repressive uniformity of style and expression, that art of late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries which offers allusions to Greco-Roman antiquity in terms of subject matter and of borrowed classical forms is fully as various and contradictory [...] In fact, after confronting the scope of a Neoclassicism that must, at different times, comprise forms and emotions as unlike as those found in Fuseli and David [...], Schinkel and Nash, one soon wonders whether Neoclassicism may properly be termed a style at all, or whether it should not be termed, to use Giedion's phrase, a "coloration"' (p. 4); 'Piquant modishness, Romantic nostalgia, Utopian purism, political propaganda, encyclopedic learning, the delights and terrors of the primitive – these were some of the potential ends sought out, singly and in combination, by that enormous and diverse body of architecture loosely known as Neoclassic' (p. 109).



Fig. 8.3: The Academy of Athens, a bird's eye view of the front.
© Academy of Athens.

monly features as the epitome of Athenian (neo)classicism, is architecturally more complex than a mere translation of the Periclean monuments under modern garment. The building of the Academy, in particular, embodies memory in multiple layers. This takes it beyond the narrow vision that (neo)classicism in its infancy exhibited – probably bound by a naive and formalistic interpretation of Winckelmann's aforementioned dictum – thus producing soulless, idealized imitations of antique structures.²² The Dane architect Theophil Hansen had a different plan for his architecture: to make his buildings inhabitable and friendly to their users, carriers of deeper meanings and, at the same time, exemplary propagators of his architectural profession (see fig. 8.3).

3. Theophil Hansen: his sources, his formation

3.1 The Philosophical Context and Karl F. Schinkel

Theophil Hansen studied architecture in the Academy of Fine Arts of his native city, Copenhagen. From an early age, and probably in reaction to the conservative academicism of some of his professors, he came to favor a more composite approach to design mixing classicism with romanticism. Seminal to his education was the German influence, mainly through the person of the leading Prussian architect Karl Friedrich Schinkel whom, although Hansen had never met him, he

²² See above footnote 17 (Honour [1968: 14]).

designated as his lifelong mentor.²³ Schinkel's particular interpretation of Greek classicism, as the happy adaptation of a singular idea to the physicality of the place, could be sensed in almost all of Hansen's buildings, too. Thus, each one of them turned into a memory token of its own *topos*, which would continue to function so even after its ruination. In the background of Schinkel's thought, from whom the Danish architect borrowed much of his theory, lies the long philosophical tradition of German Idealism which, after having passed through the Weimar classicism of Goethe and Schiller, fed into the Jena romantics, namely the Schlegel brothers, Novalis, and others.²⁴ In this tradition *memory* features prominently as the province where the tension between past and present reaches some provisional resolution. It is seen as the common ground of body and mind, where the sensory and the cognitive human faculties actively meet, not as in a passive storage box.²⁵ Memory draws its material from the past, which it constantly re-constructs in the present. Memory, therefore, undermines the linear, rational time of the Enlightenment, and replaces it with the cyclical and recurrent time of constant return to a generative beginning.²⁶ For Friedrich Schlegel, in particular, the material residue of every return can only be fragmentary – i.e., *an incomplete form* – for its being a mere reflection of a constantly reinterpreted and indistinct prototype. Schlegel thus saw the *fragment* as closely intertwined with the workings of memory and, because of that, as determining the future development of modern thought. The fragment is generally understood as the key metaphor of the human condition in modernity. For Schlegel, in particular, it stands for the irreversible loss of the past, the erosion and yet the persistence of meaning, and the split between subject and object as expressed in the above mentioned crisis of representation.²⁷ In a sense, it generates hope that art will persist as a healing power for mankind, even though fragmented – art which no longer uses classical imitation

23 See Wagner-Rieger and Reissberger (1980: 11), Fatsea (2014: 262–263; 2020: 335, 341).

24 Humboldt joined the group of the Jena Romantics – especially, the philosopher Fichte and the Schlegel brothers – during the peak of the movement and during his sojourn in Jena (1794–1797); see Paulin (2016: 65–220). Schinkel's strongest link to this tradition was the eminent scholar Wilhelm von Humboldt with whom the architect maintained a lifelong friendship; see Deicher (2005) and Kiefer (2002), who, in particular, splendidly demonstrates how Humboldt's preoccupation with the culture of the ruin was creatively interpreted by the architect, to whom he had commissioned his Tegel villa in the Brandenburg countryside, into a building program rich in poetic allusions which inventively connected past, present, and future (see fig. 8.4).

25 To the two variations of memory, the active (through the workings of imagination), and of which the former is more pertinent to this context, the passive one, Novalis associates the terms 'Erinnerung' and 'Gedächtnis', respectively; see Johnson (2002: 104–105).

26 This idea of cyclical time, which archetypally connected with the biological time of humans and the various cosmic phenomena, as incorporated by many ancient religious traditions and myths, becomes relevant again with critical value in modernity as its counter-example. This aspect has been theorized by Eliade (1949).

27 See Johnson (2002: 2).

as a tool for attaining the ideal past, but creatively re-constructs the past as always newer and authentic in the present. As Laurie R. Johnson writes, in interpreting Schlegel, ‘the praxis of memory inevitably takes place in the present.’²⁸



Fig. 8.4: K. F. Schinkel, Das Schlösschen Tegel (SAE 26), Main front (elevation) and Atrium (perspective), from Schinkel (1824: IV, pl. 26); where the fragment holds a leading role in Schinkel’s architecture.

No wonder then why the antique ruins gained so much attention in modernity. Far from models ready to imitate and reconstruct in their former unattainable perfection, ruins were now seen as the poetic embodiments of memory which simultaneously bore witness to the past and bespoke of its decay. They had more of a literary than ‘scientific’ import, whereby they were cherished by all, poets and artists alike, regardless of ideological orientation, whether classicist or romantic. In fact, the culture of ruins, which began in the Enlightenment and persisted with renewed force through the turn of the nineteenth century, created the *locus* in which

²⁸ See Johnson (2002: 4).

any such artificial divide was proven meaningless. Naturally all these ideas saturated Schinkel's architecture to then pass on to Hansen's.

3.2 The Archaeological Site

In the spring of 1838 the newly graduate of the Danish Academy, Theophil Hansen, sets off on a scholarship (*Reiersen Fund*) for a study trip to Berlin and Munich on his professor's (Gustav F. Hetsch's) assignment to collect specimens of the manufacturing industry toward a publication back in Copenhagen.²⁹ During this course Hansen had the opportunity to have his first hands-on encounter with Schinkel's architecture, which to that date he knew only through folio illustrations. For him this was a magical experience and a point of imaginary return for the rest of his career. Motivated and studious as Hansen was, he devised ways to convince Hetsch to extend him that scholarship to a mini Grand Tour through Austria and the Alps south to Italy. From there he took it on his own to move on to Greece and meet his brother Christian, who had been already settled in Athens for five years and was set on a splendid career path which combined independent design practice with systematic work on the antiquities, both study and restoration. For Hansen, to be in Greece at the moment of its highest popularity as the topmost excavation site, was like a dream come true, for this would enable him to study architecture at its source. For the next eight years he became passionately involved in a broad range of activities following in his brother's footsteps. Apart from his early design commissions,³⁰ Hansen became ardently occupied with archaeology. He studied and documented through measured drawings numerous Greek monuments, both in and outside of Athens.³¹ Further, he attended archaeological excavations and restoration works of many monuments, most prominently on the Athenian Acropolis in which Christian, in the company of his good friend

29 In his own words: 'to endeavour to acquaint myself with the progress in recent years in the various craftsmen's disciplines', as quoted by Villadsen (2014 [1979]: 222). Early accounts of Hansen's study-trip to Greece via western Europe may be also found in Pecht (1881: 114–119) or Niemann and Fellner von Feldegg (1893: 11–16). This section of the paper draws mainly on these sources in addition to Wagner-Rieger and Reissberger (1980: 12–18).

30 Including two still extant very important Athenian landmarks, the Demetriou-Limniou mansion (1842–1843) (totally reconstructed in the early 1960s) and the Athenian Observatory (1842–1846); see Niemann and Fellner von Feldegg (1893: 14–16), Wagner-Rieger and Reissberger (1980: 23–27).

31 Of Theophil Hansen's archaeological visits and work outside of Athens very little is known. Haugsted (1996: 247) mentions his surveys of Hosios Loukas (Boeotia) and the temple of Apollo Pythios in Sikinos. His related drawings of 1837 were published in Ross (1840: after p. 18). With Ulrich and Schaubert he re-excavated the monument trophy at Leuktra and the colossal Lion of Chaeronea (Boeotia) in 1841; see Haugsted (1996: 247). For more drawings from Hansen's archaeological researches see Bendtsen (1993: 308ff.), further Villadsen (1990).

Eduard Schaubert, had the lead.³² Of all the renowned ancient structures, the young architect developed a special interest in the Erechtheion and the Lysicrates Monument.³³ Both were highly atypical as compared with the rectangular configuration of classical temples. For that and for their superb architectural qualities both structures had attracted early expert-travellers' attention. Hansen produced exquisite drawings of both in terms of measured accuracy and rendered detail.³⁴ By using the world-famous drawings of James Stuart and Nicholas Revett for the same monuments as a yardstick, his expressed goal – as stated in a letter to Hetsch – was 'to discover certain things which had not been known with certainty before'.³⁵ Theophil found himself in Greece at a time when scientific curiosity for the Greek antiquities worldwide had brought waves of grecophiles to these sites. Groups of contesting researchers crossed paths particularly on the Erechtheion going for the latest discovery or the restoration privileges. And despite the fact that the French delegates of the *École des Beaux-Arts* finally took the project over, it was Hansen's restoration drawings which received the highest praise, that is, a clear proof not only of his technical expertise, but mainly of his ability to be in perfect tune with the latest turn regrading Greece and its monuments (see. fig. 8.5).³⁶

But what was that new turn and what was Hansen's share in it? 'Accuracy' as the sole pursuit of a survey drawing, i.e., an oft-repeated term in all testimonies of field archaeology in its early days, was proven a rather misleading criterion of quality. Older drawings – even though executed with elementary instruments – did not miss in accuracy, but in that special point of view which made the monument come fully 'alive' through the drawing because their authors happened to 'trust [more] their books [...] than their eyes', according to Pevsner's above-mentioned quote.³⁷ It was that special point of view which the newer generation of architects attained. Almost apologetically Dane architect Harald Conrad Stilling writes to Hetsch in a letter of 1853, in reference to some of his earlier drawings of the Acropolis: 'but how little idea I had then about their proper nature, situation, etc.'³⁸ Stilling, instead of 'accuracy', stresses the terms 'nature' and 'situation', that is, contextual elements which evidently altered his perception of the monu-

32 They undertook the full restoration of the Temple of Athena Nike (compl. 1839) and parts of the Erechtheion, e.g. the north porch (1837, 1844–1845); see Ross, Schaubert, and Hansen (1839) and Ross, Schaubert, and Hansen (1855: 336–348, pl. 723–728).

33 At the Acropolis foothills, in the modern neighborhood of Plaka.

34 His restoration proposal for the Lysicrates monument was first published by von Lützwil (1868).

35 Paraphrased by Haugsted (1996: 247).

36 The winning proposal under execution belonged to French architect Jacques-Martin Tétaz. The critical comment about the superiority of Hansen's project was made by Friedrich Stauffert, the editor of the highly reputable Austrian magazine *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* (= *ABZ*), who published the drawings of both men (*ABZ* 1851: 335ff., 339); cited in Haugsted (1996: 250).

37 See above footnote 12.

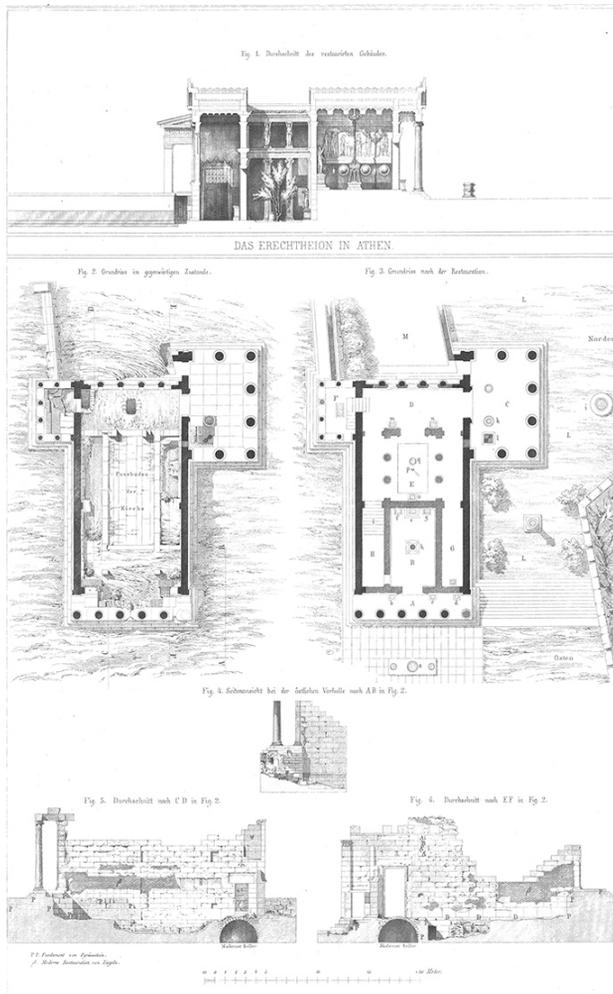


Fig. 8.5: T. Hansen, Erechtheion reconstruction drawings (c. 1845), published in *Allgemeine Bauzeitung* 16 (1851), pl. 430.

ments. The restoration of missing pieces and the recovery of a building's total silhouette were also conducive to this new perception, no doubt. However, it was the closer scrutiny on the empirical evidence – its physicality and materiality – in response to the environment, on the one hand, and to human sensibility, on the

38 As quoted in Haugsted (1996: 250). His reference is to drawings he produced for Hetsch on the most eminent buildings of the Acropolis, i.e., the Parthenon, the Erechtheion, the Propylaea, etc.

other, that guided the inquiry. Still a ruin, no matter how meticulously restored, the Parthenon, for instance, was no longer an abstract referent of its ideal state of perfection, but a vivid witness of its presence in time and through time, that is, a process engendering its continual re-constitution, similarly to the processes of memory.

In this intellectually prolific atmosphere, a series of cardinal discoveries on the 'nature' and the 'situation' of the ancient monuments came to light, the impact of which was proven decisive not only for archaeology *per se* and its restoration methods, but also for the future of new architecture, which now could not stay aloof to the developments made in this field. Most important among these discoveries were: the adaptation of the building to its site, the visual impact on the observer (theory of optical refinements), color applied as the building's outer skin (theory of polychromy), the artful expression of the building's materials and construction technology (theory of tectonics), and design based on the experience of the moving observer (theory of embodied perception).³⁹

All of these archaeological discoveries were particularly cherished by Hansen who missed no opportunity to incorporate them as *constitutive elements* in his architecture. In fact, these discoveries were well in line with all that his previous education, mixing classical and romantic influences, had prepared him for in his pursuit for the originating causes of architecture.

Far from the academic and convention-bound (neo)classicism, this new way of theorizing antiquity and its works (i.e., mainly through experience-based phenomena) was intertwined with the critical vein of romanticism according to which the longing for the bygone original was to be found in the real and the particular, the local and the indigenous. It is in this context that memory plays a key role in the way it articulates, and is articulated by, the intelligible content of perception.

All this brings up the question: does '(neo)classicism' as a stylistic attribute often applied to Hansen's architecture do justice to it? The answer is undeniably negative. The context within which the Dane architect developed both his practice and his theory had strong ties with romanticism. What is more, the borderline between the two currents, (neo)classicism and romanticism, remains to this date indistinct whereas serious doubts are raised in current literature as to whether any of the two ever existed in perfect purity. For example, in the *Grove Art Dictionary* we read: 'However rationally dictated, these fresh interpretations of the classical evoked powerful emotional responses to the past that require Neo-classicism to be understood within the broader movement of Romanticism, rather than as its

39 The bibliography of the pioneers of these discoveries, such as Hittorff, Semper, Cockerell, Hoffer, Bötticher, Penrose, Ross, Schaubert, Choisy, and others are pertinent sources of reference here. However, for a well-informed overview of the chronicle of these discoveries see Korres (1999).

opposite.⁴⁰ And further, in the *Grove Encyclopedia of American Art* the entry 'Romantic Classicism' is explained as 'The term [which] challenges the critical dichotomy of Romanticism and classicism as opposites and suggests an underlying unity between them as it recognizes the deep pleasures of the imagination that the classical past evoked for late 18th and early 19th c. viewers'.⁴¹ In general, the term 'romantic classicism' seems to have found more relevance to the parallel and inextricably connected advances of architecture and archaeology after Greek sites became the new 'golden mines' of new archaeological discoveries, that is, after the turn of the nineteenth century. In architectural historiography, on the other hand, the term has become almost synonymous with Schinkel's architecture.⁴² Only for the fact that both brothers Hansen received strong influence from Schinkel which they passed on to their buildings – especially, the Athenian ones – we can more certainly adopt this term for their architecture, instead of the highly ambiguous and unjustified '(neo)classicism'.⁴³

3.3 The Book – The Pattern Book and the Illustrated Folio

Hansen, from his early years of schooling in the Danish Royal Academy, was properly trained by his mentor Gustav F. Hetsch in the constructive unity of architecture, art, and handicraft, so that his buildings formed a 'Gesamtkunstwerk' (Total Work of Art)⁴⁴ – i.e., an idea which interestingly Friedrich Schlegel also had embraced by authoring a pioneering text on this matter.⁴⁵ In his teaching

40 Wilton-Ely (1996: 734). For the way in which the term 'romantic classicism' ties to '(neo-)classicism' see above footnote 19.

41 The term 'romantic classicism' (*Romantischer Klassizismus*) was first introduced in twentieth-century historiography to explain the complex phenomenon of classicism of the late 18th and well into the 19th century, first by Swiss historian and critic Sigfried Giedion [1922], in a rather derogatory manner, to be followed in a more positive direction by architecture historians Fiske Kimball [1944], Henry-Russell Hitchcock [1958], Vincent Scully [1961], Robin D. Middleton [1962], and others; see Simpson (2011: 301–302).

42 See, e.g., Hitchcock (⁴1977: 57–61 [¹1958: 28–35]), Samson (2016: 160), Halmi (2015: 794).

43 This is ascertained by Hitchcock (⁴1977: 68–69 [¹1958: 38–39]) in the first place.

44 See Wagner-Rieger (1978: 418, 428), Stalla (2013: 19, 20, 25), Zeese (2013: 74–75).

45 That is, his 'Athenaeum Fragment #116', in which F. Schlegel (1798: 204) presents romantic poetry as a means to a 'progressive, universal poetry' whose 'aim isn't merely to reunite all the separate genres of poetry [...] [but] make poetry lively and sociable, and life and society poetical'. Literary critic Finger (2006: 31–32) distinguishes Schlegel's notion of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, as identified with his 'Universalpoesie', from the meaning given to it by Richard Wagner, after whom it became better known. Although the social component of the notion was equally indispensable for both authors, for Schlegel the artwork had primarily an immanent content (i.e., 'transzendente(n)') that tied it genetically to its own genre, while being in inextricable union to all the other genres, whereas for Wagner its justification was mostly political (i.e., 'restaurativ-dialektisch[en]'), 'independent of the immanent context of the work', and hence, socialist and reformative in spirit. The author mainly draws on Rummenholler (1965: 164).



Fig. 8.6: Models for capitals from the temples of Athena Polias (Priene) and Apollo (Didyma), from Schinkel and Beuth (1821–37: I.1, pl. 9). Hansen later used these as characteristic motifs in the Athenian Academy

Hetsch devoted much of his time to training his students in the art of drawing and subsequently in learning through copying the greatest examples of history whose strengths, he believed, lay in the art of the *detail*. For that he used pattern books most popular at that time, and more specifically, folio collections of carefully selected and drawn to scale architectural examples, some of which he had authored himself assisted by talented students, including the brothers Hansen.⁴⁶ Equally popular in the School was a pattern book composed by K. F. Schinkel, a compendium of fine engravings (see fig. 8.6).⁴⁷ The latter became an additional virtual link between Schinkel and the young Theophil, who thus was later motivated to

⁴⁶ The most elaborate of them was entitled *Fortegninger for Haandværkere* (= 'Images in the Service of Craftsmen') of 1839–1842, and included 72 plates representing a variety of small-scale objects mainly of utilitarian function.

study the manufacturing industry of Berlin during his traveling scholarship of 1838. Certain patterns and motifs from this book often returned as leitmotifs in many of his buildings, such as the much celebrated proto-Ionic capital of a cradle-type, which he then used for all the square piers and pilasters of the Academy, i.e., a borrowing from the late-Classical temple of Athena Polias in Priene.

Evidently, drawing folios and pattern books were among the handiest tools for architects as it was through them that the latter became exposed to a much broader spectrum of examples than what their actual experience permitted. Archaeology, with its always newer finds, constantly expanded their contents, as well as their range of influences. Antiquity became thus readily available in the architect's fingertips much like an enormous depository of relics/fragments from which he could pick, choose, and inventively recombine in his aim to trigger memory and have the past be activated. English painter Sir Joshua Reynolds describes the works of the ancients as a 'magazine', a storehouse of 'common property, always open to the public, whence every man has the right to take what he pleases'.⁴⁸ The paradox of such an operation is that something ancient could appear new again with the change of context. The antique-turned-into-a-novelty was proven in fact the key desideratum of modernity. Depending on the artist's level of expertise, dissemination through copying might have led either to the dissolution (and, therefore, oblivion) of the original – often due to its excessive repetition – or to its judicious preservation as a memory token of the past. Its industrial diffusion by the capitalist market, on the other hand, raised an additional threat to its misuse. A few years later the important Czech-Austrian architect Adolf Loos, even though a combatant modernist and an arch-enemy of historicism, pointedly remarked:

'... whenever lesser architects tried to ignore tradition, whenever ornamentation became rampant, a master would appear to remind us of the Roman origins of our architecture and pick up the thread again. The last great master arose at the beginning of the 19th century: Schinkel. We have forgotten him. But the light of this great figure will fall on future generations of architects.'⁴⁹

3.4 The relevance of memory: Social vs. disciplinary memory

Theophil Hansen fell naturally in this succession and borrowed many of Schinkel's lessons, such as his *ars combinatoria*, drawing on ancient fragments and typological precedents. Schinkel's mix-and-match approach often seemed odd

47 *Vorbilder für Fabrikanten und Handwerker* [= 'Models for Manufacturers and Artisans'] (1821–1836) of 148 engraved drawings selected and composed by K. F. Schinkel in cooperation with his friend Peter Beuth, the renowned statesman and reformer of Prussia's industry.

48 J. Reynolds, *Discourse VI* (1774), as quoted in Coltman (2001: 1).

49 Loos (2002 [1910/1931]: 85), who, in fact, had placed the Romans in a position superior to the Greeks as based on a progressive scheme.

and unjustified as, for example, in his rotunda for the Altes Museum which, although modeled on the Pantheon, paradoxically featured a continuous, instead of a niched, wall; and further, his circular colonnade combined plain shafts (i.e. with no fluting) with Corinthian capitals – replicas of the Lysicrates Monument, but still missing the characteristic rosettes (see fig. 8.7).⁵⁰ To the sceptic, demanding allegiance to the original, Schinkel would reply that the paramount task of the intellectual architect is the generation of new meaning. This would inevitably require daring combinatorial decisions within whole new settings.⁵¹ But, first and

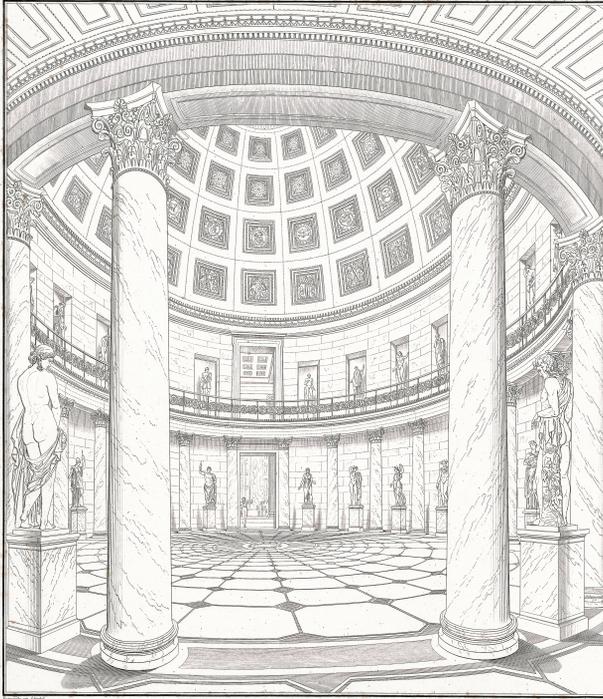


Fig. 8.7: K. F. Schinkel, Altes Museum (1825–30), rotunda perspective (SAE 44), from Schinkel (1831: XVII, pl. 104); ‘ars combinatoria’ as practiced by Schinkel: a modern interpretation of ancient replicas to awaken collective memory.

50 A variation first introduced by Hirt (1809: pl. XIII, fig. VIII); see Wittich (2004: 234), where also several other examples of Schinkel’s combinatorial solutions are presented and explained.

51 For classicists, like Schinkel, however, this happens within an overall framework of rules. Along similar lines the French A.-Ch. Quatremère de Quincy (1832: 25) states: ‘[...] every *invention* consists in a new combination of preexisting elements [... as long as these ...] already have among themselves a connection of kinship.’

foremost, it was the overall idea of building that had to be subject to rethinking, yet not at the expense of either precedent or memory. This task was left to the architect who, despite all the challenges of the time for a drastic reconsideration of all the traditional professions, never lost sight of his discipline as an indissoluble whole. In what follows I am explaining how this task was fulfilled on the basis of the complex binary scheme of 'social' and 'disciplinary' memory.

In modernity, when all the essential ties of people with their traditional communities were weakened, buildings ceased to function as the material repositories of social memory, that is, the unintentional monuments of their cultures. As architecture historian Stanford Anderson has noted, in premodern societies, 'disciplinary memory was little differentiated from social memory and had a limited range in the service of social memory'.⁵² And he continues: 'In its close association of patron and architect, this was not yet a time of severe separation of disciplinary memory from social memory'.⁵³ The close bond between the two principal agents of the task safeguarded not only the deeper knowledge of the profession but, most essentially, the common values and group identity of the community *through* building.⁵⁴ Memory was embedded in the anthropological framework of building production. The literate culture of modernity, in turn, transformed architecture into a technical profession largely divorced from the empirical realities of the social field. Further, insofar as memory had become 'voluntary and deliberate, experienced as a duty, no longer spontaneous',⁵⁵ 'a shift has occurred from a time in which societal and disciplinary memory were closely linked to one in which disciplinary memory seeks its autonomy'.⁵⁶ That was at the time when disciplinary autonomy emerged as a key prerequisite not only of architecture but of all scientific fields.⁵⁷ Recourse to abstraction and rational design methodologies became thenceforth the real 'tools' of architects who – now attached to their drafting-

52 Anderson (1995: 28).

53 Anderson (1995: 34). See also Anderson (1999: 21): 'vernacular architecture in its purest sense, in the hands of unself-conscious builders in indigenous cultures, may represent the fullest identification of social and disciplinary memory.'

54 At first phase, Anderson adopts the conventional distinction of cultures into literate and pre-literate, with the turning point historically situated in the Enlightenment, by following Halbwachs, Nora, Le Goff, but most importantly, Goody (1963). However, he soon refines this position.

55 Nora (1989: 13).

56 Anderson (1995: 36).

57 The notion of 'autonomy' is foundational to the Enlightenment thought and its system of values, along with freedom, equality, and human will, functioning as the basis of liberal democratic political theory. It was fully articulated by I. Kant who argued that it is the individual's responsibility to grow to maturity as a self-governing subject through the use of public reason, critical reflection, and moral judgment. The notion ultimately applied to social institutions and other areas of human culture including scientific disciplines and the arts, all assumed as collective agents partaking in the public sphere; see Kant (1784). For a general overview of the concept of 'autonomy' and its history, see Rosich (2019).

boards – indulged more and more in formal exercises based on historical precedents. But could architecture be only that? Here is where the memory of the discipline – i.e., ‘memory *in* architecture’ – entered the scene as the modern self-reflexive condition of the architect. Anderson makes a strong case, thus contesting Nora’s pessimistic and generalizing view that memory can no longer be ‘social, collective, or all encompassing’.⁵⁸ He writes:

Disciplinary memory can seek principles rather than formal precedent. Our relations to earth, sky, fire and water; the myriad ways of defining space and controlling light, of relating materials and structure to all these elements, of establishing systems of order (including disorder) – all this can be sought and lodged in the disciplinary memory *in* architecture. This legacy can then be employed imaginatively *in the service of society*. In modern times, this legacy has become increasing the property of the discipline but its continued effectiveness must rely on its ability to awaken responses in those who experience it [...] Learning and transmitting *these constitutive elements* is the central aspect of disciplinary memory.⁵⁹

Therefore, an architect’s resorting to socially relevant *constitutive elements* rather than to easily perishable *forms*⁶⁰ appears as the only reparative strategy against the social traumas of modernity. Anderson sees this notion of memory as developing within the exclusive domain of the profession and its literarily informed tools, i.e., ‘memory *in* architecture’. At the same time, an architect’s engaging the public in multiple ways – before, during, and after the construction event – puts a strong claim to a mitigated type of autonomy, that is, what Anderson calls ‘quasi-autonomy’ of the architectural profession. He specifies:

The exploration of [such] *principles* [...] is, in contrast, only a claim for the *quasi-autonomy* of the discipline – for the selection and use of these *principles* is guided by the social role of the work in progress. Any such asserted *principles* are endangered if they fail to maintain general social accessibility.⁶¹

And further:

It is in this quasi-autonomy that architecture discovers its own discipline, the development of forms and organizations that are not derived deterministically from social forces

⁵⁸ Nora (1989: 13).

⁵⁹ Anderson (1995: 35). The emphasis is mine.

⁶⁰ Certain architects – e.g., the so called ‘revolutionary’ – resorted even to archetypal (i.e., idealized) forms in the name of radical autonomy. Anderson (1995:35) deduces that ‘these architects assessed classical precedents elementally’ only by reading the purest geometries behind their forms, and he concludes: ‘This is an *invented memory* of, by, and for the independence of the discipline. [However] Searches backward in time [...] searches for what constitutes the discipline of architecture [...] *need not be only, or even primarily, searches for archetypal forms.*’ The emphasis is mine.

⁶¹ Anderson (1995: 36 [the emphasis is mine]); for further elaboration on this notion see Anderson (2002: 30–37) and Anderson (1987).

[...] [and in which] there is room for invention that is fundamentally architectural without sacrificing responsibility to social need.⁶²

This horizon of architecture's 'quasi-autonomy' – i.e., a dynamic two-way process – allows Anderson to recognize in different cultures varying degrees of compliance with the literate structures of modernity based on their attitudes to the past on the one hand, and on their ways of investing their built environments with memory, on the other. For example, many arts and crafts which are being sustained for long by tradition outlive the rise of new technologies.⁶³ So do people's attitudes toward the new in general, thus often putting modern novelties, including architectural ones, under scrutiny. This is certainly a more nuanced account than Nora's generalized, binary categorization of cultures into preliterate and literate, and similarly of buildings and sites into either embodiments or not of human action and collective memory, when he writes: 'Contrary to historical objects, [...] *lieux de mémoire* have no referent in reality; or, rather, they are their own referent: pure, exclusively self-referential signs.'⁶⁴

3.5 Monuments and memory – The instrumental role of history

No less importantly, Anderson's insistence on the critical dialectic between 'disciplinary' and 'social' memory, *in* and *through* architecture, respectively – as assisted by the instrumental intervention of the historical inquiry – is intended as warning against the various misuses, or even abuses, of memory for ideological purposes, as has often been the case in modernity. Whereas social memory *through* architecture is responsible for both the consolidation of group identity and the reinforcement of the sentimental links with one's origins, at the same time it is susceptible to manipulation, distortion, coercion, and control as memory is in general.⁶⁵ Within the literate post-Enlightenment contexts, ideologically motivated uses of memory – i.e., memory servicing political ends – has varied considerably, from 'the numerous, oppressive monuments of the repressive regimes [...], and their selective restoration or destruction of earlier monuments'⁶⁶ to splendid edifices intended as props to national and ethnic identity. In most cases, architecture served as the principal agent, while myth (e.g., of origins) as the essential ingredient of it. What is interesting though is that the more autocratic – if not totalitarian – a certain regime is, the more oppressive its monuments are, which trans-

62 Anderson (1999: 20).

63 Anderson (1999: 20). However, 'a truly preliterate society engaged in unmediated indigenous building' can hardly be found in such a context; see Anderson (1999: 21).

64 Nora (1989: 23).

65 Anderson (1995: 23–24). For an interesting case of distortion and manipulation of memory for political purposes see Whitling (2010).

66 Anderson (1995: 23–24).

lates into rigid architectural forms with an iconic presence so strong as to preclude any reflective engagement or interpretation. Here, the visible aspect of the work takes over and shuts off all other aspects of the building art. The monuments stand for the state – or, more literally, for the regime – in full affirmation of it as its truest icons. Hence, architecture loses completely its autonomy: that is, a domain of open-ended significations, resilient and responsive to different times and contexts. The most this architecture can produce is ‘vacuous inventions’.⁶⁷ The



Fig. 8.8: The Haus der Kunst in Munich as an example of totalitarian classicism with allusions to Schinkel’s Altes Museum. The founding stone was laid by A. Hitler in October 1933 according to plans by P. L. Troost; the Yiddish inscription on the entablature is a temporary installation. Picture by K. Golde, 2014, *Wikimedia Commons* (CC BY-SA 4.0).



Fig. 8.9: Façade of the Altes Museum, photo by the author (10 Jan. 2017). Schinkel’s classicism: Tectonics carried to perfection.

⁶⁷ Anderson (1999: 21).

building preempts its content since it itself becomes the message. In Nazi Germany, architecture ceded its inalienable right to its disciplinary memory over to the state, i.e., the one and only source of power (see fig. 8.8 and fig. 8.9). There the essential ideal of classical 'tectonics' was completely distorted as A. von Buttlar underscores :

The fact that one would not find classical capital forms in Nazi architecture was justified by Nazi chief ideologue Alfred Rosenberg in his 1939 'Myth of the 20th Century' on the grounds that the unmediated clash of pillar and entablature, instead of the harmonisation of forces in the capital zone demanded by Schinkel, was intended to represent the 'hard struggle' in the spirit of Nazi ideology. In monumental sculpture, the 'noble simplicity and quiet grandeur' of the classic nude figure was replaced by flexing muscles, lifeless will and action.⁶⁸

Anderson speaks no word about national monuments but does not seem to place them outright in the same category as the oppressive ones. Commonly classified by postmodern literature under the rubric of 'invented traditions', that is, ideological constructions with little or no base in historical reality, but only catered to the political programs of modern nation-states – i.e., so-called 'imagined communities'⁶⁹ – national monuments have generally been decried as the modern exemplars of inauthenticity. Anderson is very cautious in his related judgment. He finds such concepts as 'invented traditions' and 'manufacturing heritage' immediately problematic, but at the same time their material referents not as unworthy as to be heedlessly dismissed. National monuments are among those referents, and – as opposed to Nazi architecture – not devoid of architectural value. Closer attention is advised so that any *constitutive elements* in them, sanctioned by both culture and use, be set off against others which are only 'nostalgic and vacuous' or 'as corrupting as reactionary appeals to racial, class, or national identity'.⁷⁰ It is now the task of the architect to make the former relevant again in any new effort at re-contextualizing these monuments. These *constitutive elements* may include plan typologies, tectonic traditions, proportional systems, spatio-volumetric characteristics, and so forth. All of them are properly codified by disciplinary memory and are fully conspicuous to the architectural expert, yet less so to the lay public, who customarily relate to buildings through sensible appearance rather than intrinsic structure.⁷¹ The technical ingenuity, for example, which the architect in-

68 Von Buttlar (2012: 158), von Buttlar (2007: 289–291). Buttlar offers a very lucid account as to how nineteenth-century 'classicism' with all its humanistic implications (e.g., Schinkel's in particular) is different from the force evoking one under the Nazi ideology with all its racial implications.

69 The term 'invented tradition' comes from Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983), whereas 'imagined communities' appears in B. Anderson (1983).

70 Anderson (1999: 21).

71 For a standard reference on the iconic role of architecture in shaping national identity see Vale (1992, 2008). National heritage policies further promulgate this human disposition to-

vests to his/her design toward an integrated whole is what accounts for the building's value as an 'invention' and ultimately for its authenticity. This is something completely different from a so-called 'invented tradition', whose purpose is to forge social memory through artificial means. Best exemplified by the ancient Greek notion of 'technē', that is, the idea of a total philosophy of construction, the element of technical ingenuity in architecture persists to this day despite the overwhelming change of epochs, for it is not only as primordial as the architectural profession itself, but it also accounts for its long-standing 'internal' memory. The lay public however, in being captivated mainly by appearances, can hardly relate to this aspect of the work and – ironically – to its intricate ties to social memory.

National identity, on the other hand, is an undeniable component of social construction in modernity – hence, passionately pursued by the majority of nations – as much as it is fluid and negotiable over time.⁷² According to American historian J. R. Gillis, 'memories and identities are not fixed things [...] we are constantly revising our memories to suit our current identities'.⁷³ At the same time, national monuments, once met with approval, even enthusiasm, by their publics, may fall prey to social and political conflicts at a later date. This is because such monuments, by and large, did not stem naturally from a context of negotiation between the architect, the builder, and the social body as products of its collective memory. For this and other reasons, the social value of architecture in modernity has become highly unstable. This is precisely the gap which the expert-architect comes to fill. It is then his/her job to have these buildings imbued with tested and indisputable qualities, such that transcend the time of the nation and, at the same time, 'awaken responses in those who experience it'⁷⁴ by an appeal to architecture's enduring 'constitutive elements', on the one hand, and to the particularities of its expression (i.e., the 'charakteristisch'), on the other. The former have reference to what Anderson calls 'disciplinary memory', whereas the latter consolidate social memory as one of many other components.

3.6 The Aesthetics of Characterization

That buildings possess a characteristic expression for the arousal of human emotions, even more so, for conforming to a certain purpose or use, became a pervasive requisite in modernity and, on a second level, a point of differentiating

ward an iconic conceptualization of things as Lowenthal (1994: 43) observes: 'heritage distills the past into icons of identity.'

72 By now it is common knowledge that Western Europe and the U.S. have entered a new, post-nationalist phase since the 1960s, which is characterized by a severely critical attitude toward nationalism and its related culture; see Gillis (1994: 16–17).

73 Gillis (1994: 3)

74 Anderson (1995: 35).

French from German aesthetics. In both cases, however, this notion opened the door to the aesthetics of autonomy.

By contrast to the psychologically laden *caractère* of French theory, German theorists extended the idea on to all the various elements with form-giving potentials, including even the nature of the materials, referring to it as the 'charakteristisch' ('distinctive' or 'typical'). In either case,

aesthetic apprehension depended on the way the object was presented to the beholder, that is, a purely subjective criterion. Subjectivity then, and its aesthetic correlatives, marked a decisive shift to the way beauty was defined and understood under the spell of romanticism – that is, Hume's 'different beauty' – as opposed to the idealized beauty of all classical periods.⁷⁵

This is how the notion found its due place first in the German aesthetics of *Klassizismus* (neo-classicism). In that, famous art historian, pioneer of architectural aesthetics, and Schinkel's professor, Aloys Hirt, applied the notion of 'charakteristisch' to denote the special and undivided quality of its architectural forms.⁷⁶ He declared:

By characteristic I mean that certain individuality by which forms, movement and gesture, appearance and expression – local color, light and shadow, chiaroscuro and posture – differ, and that in such a way as the object presented demands.⁷⁷

Hegel, on the other hand, by sharing in the same discourse on the 'charakteristisch', perceptively defined it as the structural relationship between a certain content of a work (e.g., feeling, situation, action, etc.) and 'the mode and manner in which this content is presented'.⁷⁸ Moreover, he placed extra emphasis on this manner of presentation where 'everything particular in the mode of expression shall serve towards the specific designation of its content'.⁷⁹

Hegel thus returns to the ever-critical issue of 'beauty' in art (or architecture), yet now from a modern point of view, where the beautiful is coupled with what is characteristic. In this manner the aesthetic object is freed from all the earlier idealistic preconceptions of classical theory – e.g., the claim to mimetic representation – and is directed more toward the outward manifestation of the content within; more specifically, toward the means and methods of its representation. For example, more attention is now paid to the visible expression of structure (e.g., the gravitational thrusts), as well as to the various visual stimuli, which

75 Fatsea (2014: 261), Fatsea (2020: 339).

76 The term, however, did not originate with Hirt but with the anonymous author who published an essay in 1788 under the title *Untersuchungen über den Charakter der Gebäude* (N. N. [1788]), which seemed to have exerted great influence upon German aesthetics thereof.

77 See Hirt (1797: 34–35).

78 Hegel (1975 [1835]: 17).

79 Hegel (1975 [1835]: 18).

fragment-like are selectively placed on the building's surface and – either as copies of archaeological elements or as inventive new constructions – eloquently refer to historical contexts of meaningful engagement for the community at large. Far beyond superficial ornamentation, all these treatments of the surface with an eye to the 'charakteristisch' are both addressed to and aimed at the beholder's response. If seen more broadly, they seek to unite the community around a common sentiment caused by the characteristic imprints of immediate perception, at a time when collective memory has dramatically waned. Hegel, who built little faith in this kind of memory, assures that:

if the artistic subjects are drawn from the present, then their own special form, as it actually confronts us, is *firmly fixed in our minds in all its aspects* [...] The past, on the other hand, belongs only to memory, and memory automatically succeeds in clothing characters, events, and actions in the garment of universality, whereby the particular external and accidental details are obscured.⁸⁰

In essence, the artist (or architect), according to Hegel, manages to impart upon the work a certain individuality – and, consequently, a certain degree of autonomy – *vis-à-vis* the grips of convention or 'the garment of universality' – therefore, abstract idealization – and hence to deliver it as a token to future memory.

It took only the decisive intervention of an enlightened architect – Karl F. Schinkel – for architecture to find a way out of this idealizing deadlock of modernity by properly making use of the ideal of the 'charakteristisch'. The following long quote, by his both disciple and biographer, Franz Kugler, best demonstrates the architect's approach to his art:

But he is not under the command of his models. Without arbitrarily fragmenting the details of Greek architecture (as often happened in the declining period of ancient life and by less competent imitators of antiquity), without dissolving the inner coherence by which they are conditioned, he not only knows how to adapt their forms with taste to each external need, where such a need is compellingly determined, he also knows how to modify their mutual relationship to the intended impression on the viewer's mind, in this or that direction, in many ways; he also presents these forms to us in completely new and peculiar combinations; he lets completely new and peculiar compositions develop from the inner spirit of ancient art in perfect freedom.⁸¹

Kugler, here, pays homage to Schinkel's aptitude to draw on antiquity without imitating its models, to borrow from it 'fragments' without letting them show as fragments but as integral parts into a coherent whole under an overall new idea. In other words, he calls attention to his master's adherence to an organic principle of design,⁸² whereby he focuses on every current situation and interprets it through his drawing without trying to recapture the past by means of idealized ab-

80 Hegel (1975: 189). The emphasis is mine.

81 Kugler (1842: 22); my translation.

82 Kugler (1842: 22).

stractions. In many of his buildings (e.g., the Schauspielhaus, the Altes Museum, the Tegel Villa), Schinkel's fragmentary allusions to Greek precedents give grounding to both, the historical and the poetic, whereas they invest on the notion of the 'charakteristisch' for awakening the visitor to a more emotional experience (see fig. 8.4; fig. 8.7; fig. 8.9).⁸³ At the same time, by incorporating a multitude of *constitutive elements* into this experience – that is, 'the myriad ways of defining space and controlling light',⁸⁴ materials, movement, and so forth – Schinkel enhances this experience for the visitor by making it both pleasurable and memorable. Thus, his new 'lieux de mémoire' actively engaged their users, both intellectually and emotionally, rather than alienating them like many of modernity's 'invented traditions'.

Hansen, like Schinkel, subjugates surface elements to the whole as parts of its beauty by letting the detail function as a vehicle to the building's thorough comprehension by the visitor who, in effect, is moved both experientially and intellectually to a certain direction. In Christian Scholl's words, in Schinkel's work, the detail activates the function of 'normative visual clarity' (*Normative Anschaulichkeit*) out of which an easily perceptible architectural grammar emerges.⁸⁵ However – and as it will be shown in the next section – Hansen, unlike Schinkel, charges the detail with such semantic density as to turn it into a thick symbol of its cultural provenance. In this sense, Hansen's detail stands closer to Hirt's notion of the 'charakteristisch'; that is, other than a typical element of characterization of the building's function, the detail in its archaeological specificity acts as a bearer of objective knowledge. It refers directly to *its source*, while it is properly scaled and harmonized with all the other architectural elements in the building's overall fabric so that it does not strike as something pedantic or extraneous, that is, a fragment calling attention to itself (see fig. 8.10).⁸⁶

Furthermore, Hansen, in following Schinkel's example, evades identification with any single model (i.e., through imitation) by freely choosing, mixing and matching aspects of his Greek prototypes in an act of constructive synthesis. More importantly, on the level of the overall building massing, he does not replicate ideal forms or single building types (e.g., the temple, the stoa, the tholos, etc.), as Hirt would have wished, but combines them indistinctly in a novel synthesis with the sole purpose to activate the user's imagination and interest in the work. Hansen, in the *Athenian Academy*, follows Schinkel's lesson as best exemplified in the

83 According to architecture historian Mitchell Schwarzer (1993: 279), tectonics brings forth 'the unresolved conflict between an ontological urge to regard structure as an irreducible essence of architectural form and representational impulse to manifest built expressions through poetic commentary.'

84 Anderson (1995: 35).

85 Scholl (2009: 92), who notes that the term 'Anschaulichkeit' appears as a key idea in Schinkel's *Architektonisches Lehrbuch*, published posthumously and edited by Peschken (1979).

86 Fatsea (2014: 264); Fatsea (2020: 343).

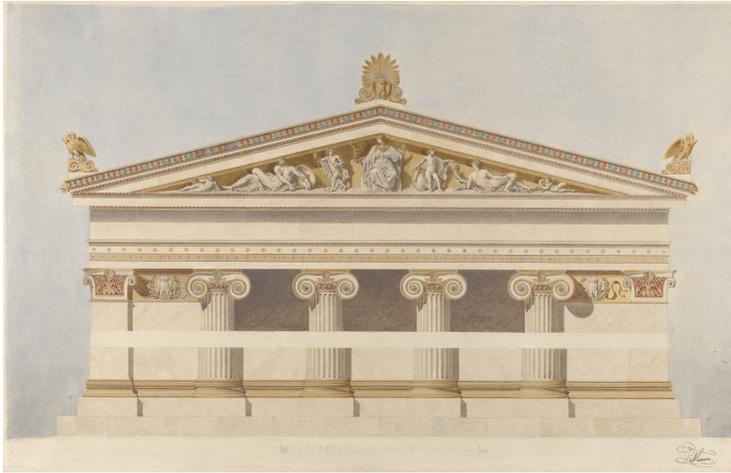


Fig. 8.10: T. Hansen, Academy of Athens, corner pavilion front, ink on paper, 1859 (Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Hansen estate, inv. no. HZ 20364), reproduced with permission from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

case of his *Altes Museum*,⁸⁷ in which the Prussian master managed to bring together in a happy and unprecedented union two ideal building types, the Roman Pantheon and the Greek stoa, as a response to his contemporary question: ‘What a modern museum ought to be?’

4. The Athenian Academy of Arts & Sciences (1859–1884)

Hansen’s Athenian Academy is a characteristic case in point which invests considerably on this new culture of the fragment. In fact, its immediately perceptible envelope brings together into an admirable synthesis fragments of two sorts: those that the architect ‘collected’ through his extensive hands-on experience of the classical monuments and a good selection of others, which he copied from some of the best-known illustrated anthologies of significant building details at the time.

Pattern books or illustrated anthologies of decorative details, such as those by Schinkel and Beuth, Hetsch, and other noted authors, were intended as valuable sources providing for both of these levels of architectural design (see fig. 8.6). They were addressed not only to artisans and craftsmen who were more habitually inclined to a mix-and-match design practice, but to professional architects, too,

⁸⁷ Hirt severely criticized this building for its spatial excesses, its extravagance and waste; see Spiero (1934: 66–68), Forssman (1981: 114–118).

to whom all those drawn-to-scale examples were not as commonly available through personal research. In addition, celebrated building typologies, fragmentarily composed and newly re-interpreted, provided the canvas for memory to be interweaved, that is, disciplinary memory engaging the social body as an active participant of architecture.

The Athenian Academy can be unmistakably described as a multi-layered 'lieu de mémoire'. For it, the architect drew upon the broader context to which the building belonged. Thus, he ensured that its ties to the cultural and the collective mentality of its audience was direct and undeniable. Beginning with its plan, Hansen combines the ideal type of the Greek Propylaeum for its overall articulation, the Greek amphiprostyle (tripartite) temple for its central unit and the Greek stoa for the two connecting branches on each side. Further, the entirely modular composition with the wide-open forecourt draws on the Palladian villa type of the Renaissance which continued through the Baroque and was particularly honored by authors of modernity, such as the French J.-N.-L. Durand (see fig. 8.11). All elements are orchestrated by way of a sophisticated system of classical proportions (i.e., a reflection of cosmic harmony) as in antiquity, which persisted even in Hansen's time after having been subjected to severe criticism by radical anti-classicists.⁸⁸ In other words, proportions survived as key constituents of the tradition of the architectural profession and, therefore, were incorporated in its disciplinary memory (see fig. 8.12). However, memory's part is not exhausted in this rather intellectual, and largely invisible substratum of the Academy, but also extends to the experiential one. According to many of the above-mentioned authors – including Anderson, Hirt, and Schinkel – it concerns *constituent elements* of architecture, such as space, light, shadow, atmosphere, and movement. The experience of walking through the main temple-like wing is one – the most important – among others in and around the building. After a linear and ascending path spanning through a semi-urban setting one enters a tripartite spatial sequence in which light diminishes as formality escalates: portico, hallway, assembly hall. Entering the latter through its enormously heavy double-doors marks a transition similar to that from a secular to a sacred space. Here, the experience is sensational as the scale expands to quasi-transcendental. Conducive to it is the nature of materials (i.e., white marble, wood, and leather) accentuated with gilded trimmings, and the majestic lighting entering through the single central lightwell in a mode reminiscent of hypaethral temples. The panoramically laid out Prometheus myth on all four sides, animated with scattered glows under dim light, enhances the sublimity of the experience by calling for a momentary pause (see fig. 8.13).

88 Such as the 17th-century French physician and amateur architect Claude Perrault with his radically modern realized proposal for the East façade of the Louvre (1667–1670), which instigated the notorious so-called 'Querelle des Anciens et des Modernes'; see Braham (1980: 25) and Mallgrave (2005: 6–9).



Fig. 8.11: Typological models and possible influences of the Athenian Academy as preserved in the disciplinary memory of the architectural profession. Center: The Academy of Athens, a bird's eye view. © The Academy of Athens. Upper left (a): The Propylaea, Athens, reconstruction view, from Le Roy (1758: II pl. XIII). Lower left (b): Diagram of the Parthenon with basic proportions in plan, composed by the author. Upper right (c): Restored elevation of the Royal Stoa in its first period, drawing by W. B. Dinsmoor, 1970 (ASCSA arch. no. 2012.58.0458). © American School of Classical Studies at Athens: Agora excavations. Lower right (d): Plan and façade of the Villa Saraceno, from Palladio (1570: II 56).

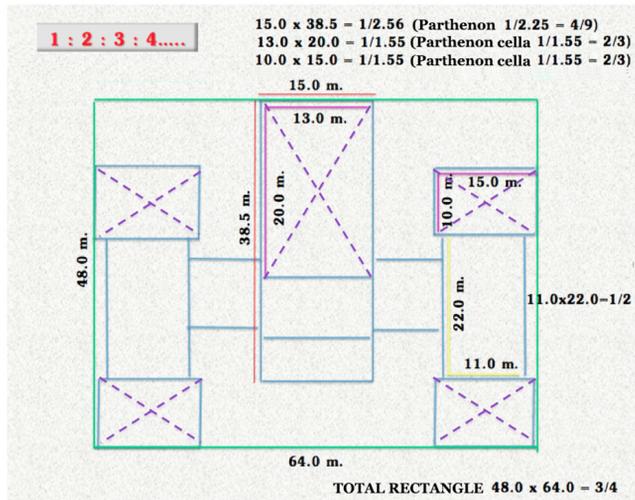


Fig. 8.12: The proportional system at work in the Academy as preserved by disciplinary memory and based on the first integers, originally studied by the Pythagoreans and applied in Greek architecture. Graphic diagram drawn by the author.

The linear course via the assembly hall continues and terminates at the visitor's exiting through the rear portico and a long staircase directly into the private garden of the building (originally planned as a miniature English orchard), thus completing a virtual propylaea-like through journey of a quasi-mystical significance. On the other hand, elements bearing prominent ornamental qualities aim at the immediate response of the beholder in both an emotional and a cognitive sense. They tend to awake memories, indistinct for the most part. Some of these are: the central hexastyle portico (doubled on the rear side), which copies the east portico



Fig. 8.13: T. Hansen, Academy of Athens, longitudinal section through the Assembly Hall, ink on cardboard, 1859 (Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Hansen estate, inv. no. HZ 20365), reproduced with permission from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

of the Erechtheion and the frontispieces of the corner pavilions (repeated eight times) which combine the west front of the Erechtheion with the tetrastyle portico of the temple of Athena Nike. All are in the Ionic style and originate in Hansen's *in situ* experience of the monuments (see fig. 8.14). In the scale of detail, we find the previously mentioned and repeated throughout proto-Ionic flat capital originating in fourth century Asia Minor, as well as the two gigantic (statue bearing) Ionic columns, freely interpreting those of the Temple of Apollo in Bassae. All these items stem from well-known collection books of ancient specimens; however, they have been reworked and inventively re-composed in a romantic spirit, thus becoming the characteristic (*charakteristisch*) elements of the Academy aimed to impart special character to it.⁸⁹ Further, polychromy,⁹⁰ another important

89 For the application of the term in Th. Hansen's work see Kugler (1842) and von Lützwow (1885).

90 Some of the earlier publications which inaugurated the polychromy debate were Hittorff and Zanth (1827), Semper (1834), Jones and Gouy (1836–1845), Müller, Oesterley, and Wieseler (1832). For a contemporary critical account of the controversy and its theoretical

discovery of romanticism and a strong statement of architecture's social and contextual derivation, is amply used by Hansen as another 'characteristic' and unifying component of the whole (see fig. 8.15). All of the above are elements which had been chosen mainly for their visual effect and their ability to trigger memories embedded in habituated environments of people's lived experience. They are rather contingent and fragmentary. They could have been easily replaced by others or recomposed with no major harm caused to the building's integrity. They belong to the thinner layer of its memory.

Lastly, the Academy features prominently the language of *tectonics* as an additional *charakteristisches Element*, which articulates the wall by bringing scale and rhythm to it and, consequently, to the entire structure. It employs consistently and celebratorily the post-and-lintel system of the ancients, who had used it first in a similarly double role: as structure and ornament. Rather tacitly, it connects



Fig. 8.14: Elements (*charakteristisch*) triggering social memory, drawn on familiar archaeological relics, all combined in new and inventive compositions in the Academy. Center: Front Facade of the Academy of Athens, photo by Giorgos Spiliotis, 2018, *Wikimedia Commons* (CC SA 4.0). Upper left (a): Erechtheion, East elevation, from Fletcher (1921: 98). Lower left (b): Erechtheion, West elevation, from Fletcher (1921: 98). Upper right (c): Temple of Nike Apteros, Western elevation, reconstruction, from Ross, Schaubert, and Hansen (1839: pl. III, fig. 1). Lower right (d): (left) The Ionic capital of the temple of Apollo Epicurius, Bassae, from Normand and Mauch (1832: T. IX, pl. LXXII); (right) Interpretation of the Bassae column by T. Hansen, ink on paper (excerpt), 1859 (Graphic Collection of the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, Hansen estate, inv. no. HZ 20375), repr. with permission from the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna.

the orderly geometry of the plan with the immediately perceivable features of the elevation, like the colonnade in an ancient temple. It is expressive of the deeper essence of the building while it alludes to the generative laws of architecture in time immemorial. In this sense, tectonics belongs equally to the disciplinary and

context see Van Zanten (1977). Regarding polychromy in Th. Hansen's architecture, in particular, see Franz (2013).



Fig. 8.15: Academy of Athens, the library wing, interior (photo repro). © Academy of Athens. Polychromy, as recently discovered and documented in Greek architecture (by Cockerell, Hittorff, Semper, Kugler, etc.) is applied by Hansen both in the interior and the exterior of the Academy to induce social memory through the public's emotive response.

to the social memory of architecture. It is the element that brings the two layers into a constant interplay. This is precisely why it was persistently thematized, analyzed, and extolled by romantic authors.⁹¹

91 See especially Bötticher (1843: xiv–xvi) and Semper (2003 [1860]: 71–72, 378–379, 249–250). Its significance for historicist architecture was also properly addressed by contemporary authors, such as Anderson, Buttlar, Mallgrave, Schwarzer, and many others.

5. Conclusion

In the case of the Athenian Academy and while working in the context of Romantic Classicism, Theophil Hansen fabricated a building out of fragments which he intended to perform as a virtual bridge between past and present by being antique and modern at once – therefore, being conducive to his vision for a more unified world based on the universal idea of *hellenism*. Thence comes his oft-quoted expression ‘Hellenische Renaissance’. Its beholders ever since projected on it various sentiments, nationalist and others, which ranged widely from adoration to contempt. Nevertheless, the building continues to speak to the most perceptive for what it really stands for, i.e., a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Total Work of Art) as it skillfully embraces the two layers of memory: the disciplinary and the social. A poetic *lieu de mémoire*.

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Chapter 9

SOPHIE EMILIA SEIDLER

Quid vertit Vertumnus? Picasso's Transformation of Ovid's Tale of Pomona and Vertumnus (Met. 14)

1. Picasso's illustrations of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

The influence of classical antiquity on Pablo Picasso does not only become apparent in his studies on archaic and classical technique and proportion theory:¹ sculptures, vase paintings, reliefs, and masks likewise find entrance into many of his works as inspiration and motifs, for instance into the heads in profile in the famous painting *Guernica*.² From the 1920s onwards, mythological subjects appear with increasing frequency in Picasso's works, and they do so in close analogy to a contemporary phenomenon in 1920s and 1930s France – one may compare Jean Cocteau's *Orpheus* (1925), Aristide Maillol's illustrations of Vergil's *Eclogues* (1926/27), or Émile Bernard's illustrations of the *Odyssey* (1930).³ Recurring motifs in Picasso's paintings are the minotaur, centaurs, Pan, gods, nymphs, and maenads.⁴ Between 1917 and 1924/25, a classicist period of creation can be observed; Picasso then returned to antiquity and classical styles from the 1930s onwards – it was at that time that he crafted illustrations for two ancient texts: Aristophanes' pacifist comedy *Lysistrata* (1934) and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1931).

Book illustrations play a crucial role in Pablo Picasso's complete oeuvre: he illustrated 156 books,⁵ in which he offered partly graphic interpretations of the text, partly illuminating book ornaments that seem to serve purely decorative means in

1 See Ferguson (1962: 185–186).

2 See Barasch (1992: 15).

3 See Müller (2002: 32).

4 See Ferguson (1962: 190–191), Alcalde Martín (2013: 286)

5 See Müller (2002: 29).

the first place.⁶ The ‘introduction of cubism to the world of books’⁷ can be attributed to Picasso as a milestone which inspired many modern illustrators. From 1905, the then 24-year-old artist created original prints which appeared as frontispieces or illustrations in books; the number of his illustrative works increased proportionally with his growing popularity as more and more publishers commis-

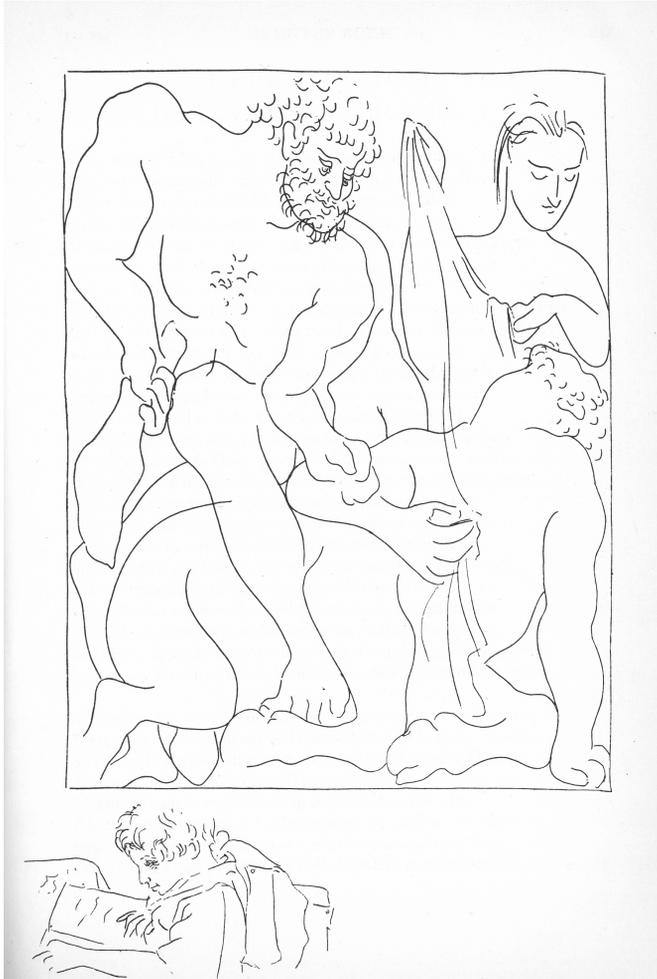


Fig. 9.1: P. Picasso, ‘Hercules, Nessus, and Deianira’ (1931)
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⁶ See Horodisch (1957: 60).

⁷ Horodisch (1957: 62). All translations of German quotations into English are mine.

sioned him with book illustrations.⁸ Picasso's reading habits, however, are difficult to discern: it is not known whether he actually liked reading at all, his interest in texts might have been aroused by close friendships with writers though.⁹

Inspired by the Swiss publisher Albert Skira, Picasso completed a series of etchings on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* between 1930 and 1931. On Picasso's 50th birthday, 25 October 1931, a bibliophilic quarto format edition with George Lafaye's prose translation under the title *Les Métamorphoses d'Ovide* was published in Lausanne.¹⁰ Skira originally proposed that Picasso should illustrate a text about Napoleon, which Picasso rejected categorically. However, he was interested in the *Metamorphoses* that his friend Pierre Matisse, son of the fauvist Henri brought to his attention.¹¹

Picasso made thirty etchings for the *Metamorphoses*. On the one hand, fifteen half-page depictions mark the beginning of each book.¹² The edition of 1931 also emphasizes the beginning of each new book with red initials in the text. Underneath these half-page etchings, there are so-called *remarques*, fine scribbles that partly go beyond the picture frame. At the bottom of the illustration of Hercules, Nessus and Deianira (*Met.* 9), for example, there is the *remarque* of a reading boy (see fig. 9.1). By assigning an artistic function to the marginal zone, Picasso stages a metagame: 'Here, the imaginative power of the illustrated text is displayed in the inner image; in the act of reading, as it were, the thought image of the antique material is created.'¹³

On the other hand, the books are interspersed with fifteen full-page depictions. The drawings are kept in an outline style – there are hardly any shaded areas and no modulation between light and shadow at all, but the contours appear softened throughout.¹⁴ Picasso's stylistic finesse can be traced, for example, in his ability 'to create a full illusion of the sculptural haptic reliefs on the paper, through the reduction of all drawing techniques to the purely graphic, almost immaterial line, as well as the illusion of exposed and shaded sides of the body and value-neutral spaces.'¹⁵ The 'linear reduction of depictions' as well as their 'graphic purism'

8 See Müller (2002: 29).

9 See Müller (2002: 30).

10 See Picasso (1931). For the present chapter I have copied Picasso's illustrations from the edition by Schmidt and Schmidt (1971); for further information see Schmidt (1971: 441).

11 See Newman (2002: 363).

12 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 43).

13 Müller (2002: 33): 'Innerbildlich wird hier die imaginative Kraft des illustrierten Textes thematisiert, im Akt des Lesens entsteht gleichsam das Gedankenbild des antiken Stoffes.'

14 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 44); Lichtenstern (1992: 114).

15 Schmidt (1971: 445): Picasso's refined mastery lies in his ability, 'durch die Reduktion aller zeichnerischen Mittel auf den rein graphischen, gleichsam substanzlosen Strich die volle Illusion der plastisch haptischen Reliefs im Blatt zu erzeugen, ebenso wie die Illusion belich-

represent an ‘adequate stylistic idiom’ for ancient texts, insofar as Picasso also seems to ‘paraphrase ancient vase art or Etruscan mirrors’.¹⁶ With his use of discreet lines, stylized profiles, and carefully employed cubist strategies – such as the simultaneous depiction of linear sequences or contradicting perspectives on bodies – Picasso captures vague impressions of his reading of the epic. An example for the graphic simultaneity of different temporal stages is the full-page illustration of *Met.* 9: The picture shows Hercules with his well-known attribute, the club (although, according to Ovid, bow and arrow would be his weapons in this scene).¹⁷ Behind the centaur Nessus’s animalistic lower abdomen, Deianira is ready with the cloth that will accidentally bring death to Hercules (*Met.* 9, 143–272).

The static depiction of diachronic events in the graphic medium seems to contradict a metamorphosis’s logic,¹⁸ which by definition extends itself over time; however, it represents the only possibility of conceptual imitation of a process of change, particularly since Picasso avoids the literal adoption of the narrative motif of transformation and does not show transformation scenes. Picasso’s style can nevertheless be called metamorphic, for instance when one line represents two figures’ contours, and the outlines and borders between individuals blur.¹⁹ Such is the case in the full-page illustration of the Philomela episode (*Met.* 6, 412–674; see fig. 9.2). Picasso shows Tereus lustfully bending over his sister-in-law Philomela, who tries in vain to defend herself. Her head is not visible, which may indicate her later mutilation (Tereus will cut out her tongue to prevent her from revealing his crime). In a dynamic jumble, Philomela’s legs follow the lines, which constitute her rapist Tereus’s body – her contours, symbolically her body, must follow his movements.²⁰ While Tereus’s body marks a diagonal movement from bottom left to top right, Philomela’s contrary diagonal indicates her counter-impulse. Picasso, thus, stages a transformation of the picture or the pictorial elements, a ‘metamorphosis of the line’.²¹

Concerning Picasso’s approach to the text, two positions can be established in research: On the one hand, Picasso’s adherence to the text and his attention to detail while working with Ovid’s epos are emphasized.²² On the other hand, his artistic freedom and abstraction of the illustrations are highlighted, which is only

teter und beschatteter Körperseiten und wertneutraler Räume.’

16 See Müller (2002; 33); cf. also Newman’s very similar observations (2003: 364).

17 See Aldalde Martín (2013: 297).

18 See Schmidt (1971: 444).

19 See Warncke (2002: 19).

20 See Alcalde Martín (2013: 294–295).

21 Warncke (2002: 20): ‘Metamorphose der Linie’.

22 See, for example, Horodisch (1957: 26).



Fig. 9.2: P. Picasso, 'Philomela and Tereus' (1931)
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loosely based on the text and could be labelled as 'archaeological vandalism'.²³ A possible compromise between these diametrically opposed opinions on Picasso's (un)faithfulness to the text can be found by applying Hansen-Löve's concept of a medial, constructive homology: Picasso does not pursue a merely illustrative relation or transposition of narrative motifs, but rather recreates Ovid's metamorphic ductus: the process of transformation, its consistent slippage and continuous change, is translated in the sense of a conceptual 'inter-mediality'.²⁴

Since Picasso worked on his illustrations of the *Metamorphoses* over a long period of time and, in some cases, produced up to six designs per sheet,²⁵ the il-

23 See Müller (2002: 33).

24 The term 'Intermedialität' was coined by Hansen-Löve (1983: 291-292) and has since been adopted into the comparative literature and inter-arts studies.

25 See Lichtenstern (1992: 114).

lustrations hardly show any internal unity; differences in the stroke are to be noticed.²⁶

Some episodes disclose themselves to the audience immediately, such as Phaethon's leap (*Met.* 1, 747–2,398); others, in fact the majority, do not allow for a direct connection with the text source, while instead reproducing the text's epic and lyric moments. In many cases, it is impossible to match the etching to a certain episode: the partial back view of a female nude torso at the beginning of Book 14, for instance, can almost be interpreted as a symbol for all of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.²⁷ It appears striking that Picasso frequently selects scenes from Ovid's work which do not draw upon iconographical predecessors.²⁸ But he does not plainly ignore the established post-antique repertoire, but renounces it deliberately.²⁹ Avoiding depictions of the transitioning process itself, probably the most inspiring plot element for any other creative artistic reception of Ovid's epic, correlates with this, the episode of Pomona and Vertumnus being the only exception.

Regarding the motifs, three categories can be recognized: meta-narrative scenes, the contrast between violence and love, and idyllic scenes and lovers' *loci amoeni*.³⁰ Picasso humanizes the mythological material in an almost atheist manner, constantly demystifying and breaking down the myth's supernatural elements to a rational, supertemporal core.³¹ The focus is on the human body, most commonly naked and stylized. This particular stance connects Picasso to Ovid: an iambic-satirical element inheres in both artists, as well as a playful approach to tragic and religious aspects; both like to frequently fail the audience's expectations and show a preference for the motif of the metamorphosis, the depiction of risqué-erotic scenes as well as crude, naked bodies.³² For both artists, 'metamorphosis is inevitably part of the erotic.'³³ Thus understood, Ovid's epic can be considered

not as a break with the earlier elegies, but as their natural outgrowth. More largely, Picasso's œuvre might help the Classical student to come to better and more commodious terms with the whole realm and dimensions of *eros*, so apparently, private and personal,

26 See Schmidt (1971: 443).

27 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 45).

28 See Schmidt (1971: 444). Müller (2002: 33), however, states the opposite by referring to the two drawings which do, in stark contrast to the other illustrations, show mythological scenes frequently and prominently depicted: Phaethon's leap, and Meleager's victory over the Calydonian boar. Although his arguments seem cogent and cohesive otherwise, his position concerning Picasso's reference to iconographic tradition does not appear entirely logical, since two examples out of thirty do not suffice to draw generalizations about the whole work.

29 See Warncke (2002: 19).

30 See Alcalde Martín (2013: 289).

31 See Schmidt (1971: 442).

32 See Newman (2002: 368–370).

33 Newman (2002: 370).

especially to moderns, and yet [...] always so determinedly pushing its contours into the public domain.³⁴

One episode of the *Metamorphoses* combines the topics eroticism and transformation in a particularly complex way and orchestrates them poetologically: the story of Pomona and Vertumnus in Book 14.

2. Ovid's tale of Pomona and Vertumnus

The middle of the third pentad,³⁵ the historic part of the *Metamorphoses*, is where Ovid inserts the erotic story about the garden nymph Pomona and the versatile Italic deity Vertumnus. The tale is already rendered noticeable by its mere position within the work: it is the last transformation of mythological figures – only apotheoses of historic rulers and kings are to follow. Moreover, Ovid modifies his scheme of depicting erotic tales of seduction severely.³⁶

Pomona's characterization isolates her from the other men-avoiding nymphs whom readers of the *Metamorphoses* have seen seduced, raped, and transformed in the first fourteen books. Unlike Daphne or Callisto, for instance, Pomona cares nothing for woods and rivers, but only for the fields and branches laden with delicious fruits (*Met.* 14, 626–627). The name Pomona is said to derive from her passion for the cultivation of *poma*, fruit (626), which made her a master of her trade (624–633). By employing the verse 'this is her love and desire, these are her ambitions: she does not feel any lust for Venus' (634: *hic amor, hoc studium; Ueneris quoque nulla cupido est*), Ovid skillfully leads over to Pomona's aversion to love and sexuality – since the care and refinement of her fruit claim all her passion (*amor*) and her ambitions (*studium*) in their entirety, the dedicated gardener does not feel any desire for Venus's areas of competence, although opportunities were provided: in order to avoid her many 'virile' (636) suitors, she carefully encloses her orchard, her *pomarium*. It does not require extra skillful reading techniques to see the sexual innuendos³⁷ and the 'sexualization of agriculture'.³⁸ She fears the peasantry's violence, specifically the satyrs, the Pans, Silvanus, the god of forests, and Priapus, the god of fertility, the epitome of phallic symbolism, 'who warns off evil-doers with his sickle or his genital'³⁹ (640: *quique deus fures uel falce uel inguine terret*). Against her wishes, however, Vertumnus's desire

34 Newman (2002: 370).

35 On structuring the *Metamorphoses* into pentads, see Holzberg (2002 [1998]: 115).

36 See Schmitzer (2001: 134).

37 See Myers (1994: 229), Gentilcore (1995: 111–114).

38 Jones (2001: 368).

39 Latin text quotations follow Tarrant's *OCT* (2004). For longer passages from Ovid, I use (unless otherwise specified) F. J. Miller's prose translation, revised by G. P. Goold (1977), with rare occasional changes.

outdoes Pomona – he does not have any luck with her, but he finds creative solutions to enter her garden. By means of travesty, Vertumnus subverts Pomona’s notion of fixed gender identities – she lets him, a man, enter her garden, and listens to him when he speaks of the necessity for an opening and implicitly of the permeability of gender-related borders; the walls around the *pomarium*, which are so important to Pomona, can allegorically represent her ‘wish for firm and unified gender identities’.⁴⁰ In various guises, he can catch a glimpse of his favored dryad (634–651):

*o quotiens habitu duri messoris aristas
corbe tulit uerique fuit messoris imago!
tempora saepe gerens faeno religata recenti
desectum poterat gramen uersasse uideri;
saepe manu stimulos rigida portabat, ut illum
iurares fessos modo disiunxisse iuuenos.
falce data frondator erat uitisque putator;
induerat scalas: lecturum poma putares;
miles erat gladio, piscator harundine sumpta.*

Oh, how often in the garb of a rough reaper did he bring her a basket of barley-ears! And he was the perfect image of a reaper, too. Often, he would come with his temples wreathed with fresh hay, and could easily seem to have been turning the new-mown grass. Again, he would appear carrying an ox-goad in his clumsy hand, so that you would swear that he had but now unyoked his weary cattle. He would be a leaf-gatherer and vine-pruner with hook in hand; he would come along with a ladder on his shoulder and you would think him about to gather apples.

His ability to change, which is inherent in his name (*uertere* = ‘to change, transform, alter’), permits him to utilize disguises which Pomona apparently accepts.⁴¹ His ‘identity consists of no more than the possibility of infinite, cross-gendered, public re-construction.’⁴² The question whether Vertumnus indeed shapeshifts in a *protean* way or merely dresses up in costumes is left unanswered by Ovid, the emphasis on the artificial-theatrical props, which is reminiscent of Roman comedy, however, suggests the latter.⁴³ His props, an ox goad (647: *stimulus*), a sickle (649: *falcis*), a sword (651: *gladius*), and a fishing rod (651: *harundo*), are weapons with phallic symbolism, in which a momentum of violence, castigation, hunting, and defloration is inherent.⁴⁴ The latter is likewise visible in Vertumnus’s alleged intention to harvest fruit (649: *lecturum poma*), which can easily be conceived as ambiguous.⁴⁵ Pomona nevertheless does not fear any masculine-phallic

40 Lindheim (2010: 177).

41 See Myers (1994: 226), Gentilcore (1995: 113).

42 Lindheim (2010: 181).

43 See Fantham (1993: 34–35).

44 Lindheim (2010: 180).

45 Gentilcore (1995: 111).

offence from his side – which he in fact does not commit, thus differentiating him from all the other deities which fell in love with nymphs and have so far been presented in the *Metamorphoses*; ‘by means of his many disguises, he obtained frequent admission to her presence and had much joy in looking on her beauty’ (652–653: *denique per multas aditum sibi saepe figuras / repperit, ut caperet spectatae gaudia formae*).

Vertumnus has obviously ‘learned from the examples set by his metamorphic predecessors and knows that he cannot court Pomona personally, but requires a match-maker, or conciliatrix, and his skills enable him to provide one.’⁴⁶ It is only through travesty that Vertumnus is enabled to do more than admire Pomona’s beauty from outside – in the guise of an old woman, he enters into a conversation with Pomona at first by praising her horticultural abilities, although, according to him, she herself exceeds her garden’s beauty. Vertumnus uses ‘the apples as a means of gaining access to the unsuspecting Pomona’⁴⁷ (654–659):

*ille etiam picta redimitus tempora mitra,
innitens baculo, positus per tempora canis,
adsimulavit anum: cultosque intrauit in hortos
pomaque mirata est ‘tanto’ que ‘potentior!’ inquit
paucaque laudatae dedit oscula, qualia numquam
uera dedisset anus.*

He also put on a wig of grey hair, bound his temples with a gaudy head-cloth, and, leaning on a staff, came in the disguise of an old woman, entered the well-kept garden and, after admiring the fruit, said: ‘But you are far more beautiful’, and he kissed her several times as no real old woman ever would have done.

While considering an elm entwined with grapevines, Vertumnus quotes an *exemplum* from Pomona’s everyday life and argues for the necessity of the ‘marital’ connection between tree and vine: ‘If this vine were not thus wedded, it would lie languishing, flat upon the ground. But you are not touched by the vine’s example and you shun wedlock and do not desire to be joined to another’ (666–668: *si non nupta foret, terrae acclinata iaceret; / tu tamen exemplo non tangeris arboris huius / concubitusque fugis nec te coniungere curas*). Subsequently, he praises his own assets in third person, applauding himself in the guise of a crone.

To the audience, Vertumnus’s playing around with his alternate identities seems ironic – Pomona, on the contrary, cannot understand why the old woman knows him exactly as well as he knows himself (679–680: *neque enim sibi notior ille est, / quam mihi*). In the same way Pomona had been adorned with specifics which differentiate her from other chaste dryads and nymphs, Vertumnus emphasizes the contrast to Pomona’s other suitors – and simultaneously to his intra-text-

46 Fantham (1993: 32).

47 Gentilcore (1995: 114).

ual predecessors. Ovid recalls the many comparable constellations which have caused a lovelorn god to court a reluctant girl, in most cases not driven by love, but by short-lived physical attraction – the plethora of Jupiter’s love adventures, for instance, indicates the women’s arbitrariness and exchangeability. By calling his affection for Pomona ‘his first and his last love and desire’ (682: *primus et ultimus [...] ardor*), and lifting it above other men’s superficial flirting, Vertumnus explicitly distances himself from these male figures. ‘Jupiter and Sol and Apollo are in lust, Vertumnus is in love [...]. The lustful immortals are not his comrades in lechery, they are his foils: in this context, they are what he is not, he is what they are not.’⁴⁸ As a further quality, he mentions similarities between Pomona and himself – both love fruit, nobody could appreciate her fruit more than him (687–688). In order to avert the possible accusation that he might be after nothing but her *poma*, he adds ‘But neither the fruit of your trees, nor the sweet, succulent herbs which your garden bears, nor anything at all does he desire save you alone’ (689–691: *sed neque iam fetus desiderat arbore demptos / nec, quas hortus alit, cum sucis mitibus herbas / nec quicquam nisi te*). The old woman even reveals herself as being Vertumnus’s mouth-piece ‘Pity him who burns with love, and believe that he himself in very presence through my lips is begging for what he wants’ (691–692: *miserere ardentis et ipsum, / quod petit ore meo, praesentem crede precari*).

Finally, Vertumnus warns Pomona of hard-hearted stubbornness that has often provoked divine anger (693–694), and for this purpose, he tells the story of Anaxarete and Iphis on an intradiegetic level of narration (698–758) – an attempt, perhaps, of persuading Pomona through ‘narrative as seduction’.⁴⁹ Iphis fell in love with Anaxarete and courted her, but she mocked him and rejected him harshly, whereupon he hanged himself from her door. When she learned of his death, she froze to stone, thus impersonating her stony hardness literally. As an internal narrator, Vertumnus proves his familiarity with elegiac standards, as he employs the classical topoi of Roman love in the style of Ovid’s earlier works.⁵⁰ Accordingly, the setting is – in contrast to the narrative frame – again urban and Greek.⁵¹ Iphis resembles an *exclusus amator* who begs for attention at the threshold of his beloved’s door – a situation also featured by the elegiac subgenus of *paraklausithyra* poems, poems sung in front of the closed door.⁵² Iphis would ask Anaxarete’s nurse for help, bring gifts, letters and wreaths all of which she despises. While the elegiac poet-lovers ‘only’ threaten with suicide to be heard,⁵³ Iphis does

48 Johnson (1997: 368–369).

49 Gentilcore (1995: 110).

50 See Jones (2001: 361).

51 See Jones (2001: 369).

52 See Myers (1994: 228), Gentilcore (1995: 116).

53 See Jones (2001: 370), Gentilcore (1995: 117).

indeed hang himself on Anaxarete's doorposts. The typical elegiac characterization of the girl as a *dura puella* is taken literally here.

According to Lindheim, the narrated legend contains several elements hinting at the questioning of allegedly stable gender roles – a gender travesty already staged through the narrative situation itself, as the male god Vertumnus appeared in the guise of an old woman with the aim of winning over a young woman. On the one hand, Vertumnus's Iphis chose a form of death that was perceived in antiquity as stereotypically feminine – hanging was regarded as unmanly.⁵⁴ On the other hand, the very name Iphis, already mentioned in *Met.* 9 (669–797), must catch a thorough reader's attention: A daughter who, for financial reasons and upon paternal order, could only survive as a boy receives the gender-neutral name Iphis from their mother and is raised as a son. Shortly before their wedding with the (second) girl Ianthe, Iphis and their mother – the only ones knowing Iphis's sex – pray for divine help: Iphis is transformed into a man, so that the traditional heterosexual wedding can take place. Apart from the name, the two Iphis-figures from Book 9 and Book 14 have little in common, but the echo alone suffices to evoke the topic of fluid gender identity, the arbitrariness of role attribution, and the relevance of interpretative contexts in the production of truth.⁵⁵ While Iphis in Book 9 stands for the fluidity of gender identities and the changeability of sex that leads to a happy wedding, Vertumnus, the personified changeability (*uertere*), here in feminine garb, seeks to use his Iphis-figure to bring about a wedding.

Neither this intradiegetic narration, nor elegiac tricks nor warnings about the wrath of the gods, and not even elaborate pleas in a juridical manner can convince Pomona to love Vertumnus. Therefore, the versatile god has to return to his original figure – for the first time, the depiction resembles a transformation process instead of a merely attributive costuming.⁵⁶ He appears 'resembling the brightest sun (768: *nitidissima solis imago*), breaking through the clouds and shining unhinderedly' (769: *euicit nubes nullaque obstante reluxit*). Gentilcore notices the comparison's phallic potency: 'the metaphor is one of seizing and wounding, not one of joyous love.'⁵⁷

54 See Lindheim (2010: 189), Gentilcore (1995: 117); both draw on Nicole Loraux's eminent study on 'feminine' modes of dying in Greek tragedy (1987 [1985]).

55 See Lindheim (2010: 186).

56 See Fantham (1993: 35).

57 Gentilcore (1995: 119). The author also interprets the end of the story as the sexist seduction of Pomona, silenced in the text, which can be equated with the passive landscape. I do not agree entirely with this reading, since it ignores the specifics that distinguish the episode from all the other erotic encounters of humans and deities in the *Metamorphoses*, but Gentilcore's alertness towards the fact that Ovidian seduction often serves as a euphemism for rape and non-consensual amorous coupling is definitely legitimate.

Vertumnus, who had been so concerned about refraining from any form of assault, entirely surprisingly prepares to rape Pomona, since his attempts at persuading her seem to be of no avail – far more surprising, however, is Pomona’s reaction: ‘He was all ready to force her will, but force was not necessary; and the nymph, smitten by the beauty of the god, felt mutual wounds of love’ (770–771: *uimque parat: sed vi non est opus, inque figura / capta dei nympha est et mutua uulnera sensit*). ‘Although the old woman’s description of her suitor did not persuade Pomona, and he in turn has so little faith in his charm that he prepares to rape her, violence, like eloquence, proves quite unnecessary.’⁵⁸ Vertumnus apparently succeeds in convincing her thanks to a combination of tricks: by invoking elegiac motives, by disguising as a female – that is, by a practice of cross-dressing and travesty, and finally by revealing his identity and his virility. She abandons her original intention of everlasting virginity and falls in love with him as soon as he reveals his true colors, despite her previous fear and abhorrence of masculinity. In this respect, Pomona can be considered to traverse an inner metamorphosis.⁵⁹

By means of this surprising finale, Ovid thwarts the audience’s expectations in different ways, which is why the episode’s end is discussed so frequently. Positively subversive readings emphasize that Pomona has seen through all of Vertumnus’s attempts to conceal himself from the start and has played along amusedly;⁶⁰ other interpretations, in contrast, discover allusions to sexual assault in the linguistic imagery.⁶¹ The tale’s position in the historic part of the *Metamorphoses* is examined with regard to historiography and the founding myths of Rome: Pomona and Vertumnus being of Italic origin while the Greek examples in the story within the story give rise to contrastive depictions of Greek and genuinely Roman mythology.⁶²

Regardless of how differently the episode’s ending is discussed in research, there is unity concerning the passage’s prominent positioning and its unique structural features. As ‘perhaps the only romantic comedy in the entire poem’⁶³, the narration marks the interface between mythical and historical time, between immanent deities and deified-abstracted humans, between amorous adventures

58 Fantham (1993: 35).

59 This is an optimistic reading that is closer to ‘third wave feminist’ subversion than to post-*MeToo* sentiments. I assume that Picasso and Ovid subscribe to Pomona’s willingness, as do many later commentators of the episode. It would, however, be equally if not more valid to analyze the scene as one of emotional blackmailing, coercive manipulation, and little choice on Pomona’s part.

60 See, e. g., Johnson (1997), Jones (2001).

61 See, e. g., Gentilcore (1995), Myers (1994).

62 See Littlefield (1965), Fantham (1993), Jones (2001), Wheeler (2000).

63 Johnson (1997: 372–373).

and the institution of matrimony, sanctified by Juno. Similarly, the love story symbolizes discontinuity in its narrative technique – in particular, concerning the text's metamorphic poetics, as has been remarked upon on various occasions:

Because the story of Pomona and Vertumnus is the last tale of romantic-sexual love in the *Metamorphoses*, the failure – or final irrelevance – of the modes and strategies of love characteristic of the poem's preceding tales of passion is doubly significant. A rhythm of expectation is broken, an attitude is overthrown. The poem's view of the nature of love is redefined.⁶⁴

Vertumnus' physical changes produce a psychological change in Pomona, inverting the poem's usual process of metamorphosis, in which change begins mentally before physical signs appear. In addition, females who find themselves the objects of unwelcome sexual advances generally undergo physical transformation rather than a change of mind. This new paradigm foreshadows the important role spiritual transformations, particularly the separation of soul from body after death, will play as Ovid's content moves toward the philosophical ideas and contemporary events with which the poem concludes.⁶⁵

At this point in the *Metamorphoses*, a god's transformation is no longer necessary to conquer a virgin nymph or to protect and hide a persecuted, seduced or raped woman – the scheme that characterizes the previous books can be taken *ad absurdum*, with Pomona subverting the expectations of both, Vertumnus and the reading public, by her sudden willingness. Pomona's internal metamorphosis substitutes, therefore, for Vertumnus's external transformation. At the same time, the text also undergoes a transformation⁶⁶ – regarding poetological and semantic characteristics, Ovid's narration passes through the transformation contained in Vertumnus's name.

Likewise, Picasso recognizes the text's metamorphic potential in his illustration, as becomes apparent in the course of closely viewing the image (fig. 9.3).

3. Picasso's illustration of Pomona and Vertumnus

Although little is known concerning Picasso's attitude toward literature, his attitude toward the topic of metamorphosis is indeed established: what fascinates him is what he repeatedly re-enacts in his career as a visual artist,⁶⁷ he juggles with the shapes' sense and lets himself consistently be represented as a transformative artist.⁶⁸ As with many of his works, he uses the Ovid-illustrations to reconstruct the inter-medial metamorphosis of script and word into a picture,⁶⁹ the

64 Littlefield (1965: 470).

65 Jones (2001: 375–376).

66 See Schmitzer (2001: 134).

67 See Newman (2003: 269–270).

68 See Warncke (2002: 20).

69 See Müller (2002: 30–31).

transition from concrete myth to abstract universality,⁷⁰ as well as the shift and development of artistic means of expression.⁷¹

The full-page illustration for the fourteenth book blends into Picasso's *Metamorphoses*-graphics in an apparently harmonic way. The illustration shows three stylized, naked bodies, drawn in a minimalistically reduced way; there is no shading apart from hair and beard. The lines which should confine the figures' contours cannot be determined distinctly, with the result that assigning the extremities, particularly the legs, to the figures is impeded, thus expressing Vertumnus's turnaround brilliantly.⁷²

Here, too, Picasso applies the cubist technique of simultaneously depicting linear-narrative processes – the figures appear dynamic, engaged in the transformation intended by Ovid; different phases are depicted simultaneously and in parallel. Although the non-chronological order of the simultaneous manner of representation disagrees with the concrete text source,⁷³ it corresponds, in fact, with the overall project of the *Metamorphoses*, which question a linear order and let the forward-oriented chronology appear fragile.⁷⁴ Moreover, Vertumnus's characteristic and onomastic versatility is symbolized by means of simultaneity.⁷⁵ Pomona, the middle one of the three figures, can be identified through the fruit in her hands; her body merges partly with Vertumnus's contours. He is depicted to her left and right, respectively – appropriately so, considering the story's linear course of events in two guises. The 'disposition of the woman between two male figures, more precisely the lover who turns to her from the right and the man coming to her from the left'⁷⁶, calls for a comparison with the famous three-figure relief Orpheus and Eurydice with Hermes in Naples, which Picasso probably knew.

The drawing can be ranked among the depictions of idyllic-harmonic scenes, although traces of violence can be found. Depending on the way one looks at the illustration, a different meaning arises. Read from left to right, Pomona seems to flee, the raised leg could be hers; considered from the opposite direction, the leg has to belong to Vertumnus, in whose direction Pomona is leaning willingly.⁷⁷

Compared to the other etchings in the cycle, this illustration's uniqueness is regarded as indisputable. The drawing for Pomona and Vertumnus is the only one

70 See Schmidt (1971: 442).

71 See Warncke (2002: 20).

72 See Lichtenstern (1992: 115).

73 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 46).

74 See Feichtinger (2008: 289–290).

75 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 46), Lichtenstern (1992: 114), Schmidt (1971: 444).

76 Lichtenstern (1992: 115): 'die Disposition der Frau zwischen zwei männlichen Figuren, genauer dem Geliebten, der sich ihr von rechts zuwendet, und dem von links kommenden Mann, der sie zu sich zieht'.

77 See Alcalde Martín (2013: 299).

that explicitly depicts a transformation process, whereas, in all the other drawings, Picasso builds on the text's peripheral motifs and does not stage the eponymic transformation process. Vertumnus's transformation is certainly not described as figuratively by Ovid as it is depicted by Picasso – the text hardly reveals whether Vertumnus merely disguises himself or actually changes his form.

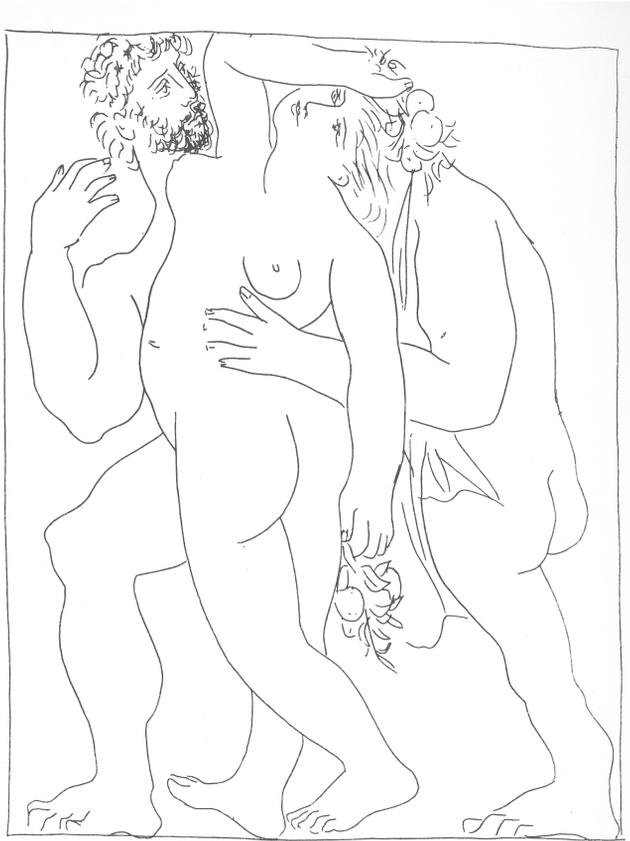


Fig. 9.3: P. Picasso, 'Vertumnus and Pomona' (1931)
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Picasso, however, shows the god in two momentums of his activity, engaged in the transition between the two figures which constitute the left and the right image margin; as their cause, Pomona's figure is in the center of the transition phases. Pomona's long hair, which hangs down next to her left arm, could also represent a scarf or a veil which Vertumnus uses to disguise himself in Ovid's tale; other than that, nothing reminds the viewer of Vertumnus's performance as

an old woman. The fact, however, that only one male head is visible, which could be growing out of both Vertumni, distinctly refers to the scene's metamorphic content. Picasso, therefore, depicts a transformation that does not happen explicitly in Ovid's text.⁷⁸ The illustrator makes Vertumnus undergo the metamorphosis that Ovid's narration, not its hero, experiences. The planned act of violence, which is contained in text and picture, changes into an amorous idyll.⁷⁹ The positive atmosphere of Ovid's final amorous tale seems, hence, to be graspable in Picasso's depiction, however differently the two artists treat the core motif of the metamorphosis.

The proximity is intensified by the fact that both, Ovid and Picasso, deviate from the narrative and graphic ductus that characterizes the preceding work in approaching the myth of Pomona and Vertumnus. Both artists change their work's technical scheme in the same scene – in the moment of Vertumnus's transformation, which causes the narration to convert.

4. Meta-Metamorphosis

The illustration of Book 14 of the *Metamorphoses* shows that Picasso assigns similar functions to the Pomona-Vertumnus episode as does his textual model – when confronting Vertumnus's onomastic *versatility*, Picasso alters his artistic-narrative concept. Unlike Ovid, however, this deviation from the established pattern remains an exception in Picasso's *Metamorphoses*-illustrations and does not lead to programmatic changes in the following proceedings. No other illustration shows a transformation in actu. In his etching for Book 1, for example, which, with the famous transformation tales of Apollo and Daphne, Jupiter and Io, as well as Pan and Syrinx, had entered the visual arts prominently, Picasso chooses to draw a mythological moment without any metamorphosis – he depicts the creation of a new human race by Deucalion and Pyrrha in a manner that it could as well be taken for a simple family idyll. Picasso avoids the 'beaten track' of Ovidian imagery in the fine arts and prefers general, vague scenes instead: crowds engrossed in conversation, bodies, and death scenes which do not end in a metamorphosis. One does not find depictions of the most renowned episodes such as that of Jupiter as a bull in the Europa-episode (*Met.* 2), Narcissus (*Met.* 3), Arachne's weaving (*Met.* 6), or a depiction of the Pygmalion-myth (*Met.* 10), all of which call for inter-medial adaptations and are frequently – some almost ad nauseam – subject to artistic depiction and creative re-interpretation.

As Picasso does not focus on the eponymic metamorphoses, he breaks away from the Ovidian model altogether. But when Ovid himself does not focus on bodily transformation, Picasso does, thus wittily replying to Ovid's narrative gap.

78 See Huber-Rebenich (1999: 46).

79 See Alcalde Martín (2013: 299).

Vertumnus's costumes do not serve the same purpose as transformations generally do in the textual world of the *Metamorphoses*; they do not need to, since the narrative has already changed, and the transformation has happened internally instead – in Pomona's figure and in the text's structure. Picasso emphasizes this momentum of the narrative ductus that is engaged in transformation on several levels: the dimorphous Vertumnus, who at the same time seems to draw Pomona to himself and to receive her as a willing bride in a surprised manner, replaces Ovid's approach to the transformation motif, breaks it down to a graphically depictable and readable form, and simultaneously stages the events which the text expresses in 150 verses. In concrete terms, Picasso shows his illustrations' mutability that encompasses all the facets of simply processing literature, from playfully alluding to and rejecting iconographic predecessors through to a structural analysis of the contents, regardless of medium.

The *uertere* inscribed into the myth's male protagonist seemingly inspired Picasso to change his artistic technique, which, like the god, can take on different aspects (cf. *Met.* 14,685). Thus, boundaries between text and illustration, which are often accompanied by a hierarchical placement of one art form above the other, are blurred, transcended, and undermined in the same way as the walls of Pomona's *pomarium*. Aiming for exploitation (649: *lecturum poma*), the transformative artist intrudes into a demarcated space, acquires the local techniques (disguised, Vertumnus praises Pomona's fruit and speaks to her in horticultural examples), utilizes a different medium (courtship as found in Augustan elegies), before he finally reveals his true, autonomous nature – with great success. In this sense, Picasso does not only re-enact the tale's plot but also reflects on it, within the metonymical relationship of the work and the artist. He enters into a fertile dialogue with Ovid's work, a dialogue, which – noticeably for once – does not feature violent rape or shrewd deception, but mutual respect and playful coquetry. Picasso's and Ovid's *Metamorphoses* draw upon one another like the grapevines and tendrils in Vertumnus's example, leading to mutual cross-fertilization. Thus, both media maintain their autonomy as well as their creative engagement with the same issue: metamorphosis, in every sense of the word.

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Chapter 10

HELENA GONZÁLEZ-VAQUERIZO

From Winckelmann to Flickr: The Picture that Took Greece's Soul

1. Introduction

Photography is the art of capturing reality and a means to keep memories alive. Some cultures, however, regard it as a threat, believing it can take one's soul away. This chapter analyzes how photography has metaphorically taken Greece's soul, depriving it of its identities while marking out one way of remembrance. From Winckelmann's aesthetics of Greek art, to Nelly's pictures of dictatorial Greece, and even most contemporary images of the country in the endless reproduction of mass tourism and social networks, there is an astonishing homogeneity based on an idealized image of the Classical past.

Although Winckelmann himself never traveled to Greece, his view on Greek art and beauty has become that of the millions of tourists that visit the country every year. Thus, a vision drawn from the academic elite shapes the experience of the masses. Many contemporary travelers to Greece, as though captive inside Plato's cave, interpret the landscape through that idealizing lens and capture its essence accordingly. By taking pictures of Classical antiquities, the tourists select what is to be remembered, and what will be forgotten, thus reinforcing the construction of a collective cultural memory – and a collective oblivion.

This process is far from innocent, for it connects with ideology and political propaganda. In the 19th and 20th centuries, the West imposed its vision of Classical times on Modern Greece in order to incorporate the country into the European identity, and it ended up encouraging a memory of the past that would suit that ideal. One may think that this image synthesizes everything Greek – Classical beauty, made of light and rationality – but, as I will argue, this is the very pic-

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ture that took Greece's soul, neglecting and even completely wiping out its many singularities and traits of foreign influences.

Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to invite us to consider what kind of memory is being constructed when dealing with Classical Antiquity. Ideal images of Classical Greece that go from Winckelmann to Flickr will serve as a tool to analyze how and if an inherited vision of the past shapes the memories of the present and, thus, contributes to the future meaning of the Classics.

2. Photography as a thief

If photography is about capturing reality, keeping memories and records of real events, how can it also be the thief of a country's soul? In the first part of this chapter, I will discuss these ideas in an attempt to provide a theoretical framework for the historical overview that will follow.

2.1 Capturing reality

Photography is about looking, seeing and experiencing as much as it is about capturing reality and remembering.¹ When we as photographers, either professional or amateur, open the lens of our cameras to a landscape, an ancient monument, or a human face, we are allowing what our eyes see to become a fixed memory. Moreover, in doing so, we are simultaneously creating an objectified reality and a deceiving counterfeit, a photographic image that is 'both the projection of our desires about the world and an accurate record of the world.'²

This double-sided potential of photography alone would be enough to render it an attractive object of study. Yet there is another quality of this technique that is essential for understanding the role played by photography when it comes to Antiquity. In this respect 'the term "capture" is telling'³, for the picture taken becomes a virtual possession and there are few things antiquarians love more than to be able to bring home all the beauties they have seen on their travels. Photography helped provide nonprofessionals with a means to bring 'home' archaeological treasures.⁴ As Susan Sontag noted in her seminal study *On Photography*, 'to collect photographs is to collect the world'⁵, and it is indeed a much easier, cheaper and safer way to do it than other means of capturing, such as hunting, an activity to which photography has often been compared.

1 See Bohrer (2015: 95).

2 Elkins (2011: 47).

3 Robinson and Picard (2009: 9).

4 See Hamilakis and Ifantidis (2015: 133).

5 Sontag (2005 [1977]: 1).

Yet, however innocent the gesture of a finger on a camera release may seem, photographic actions have consequences even if they do not get to kill what they take aim on. Perhaps this is why disturbing metaphors related to war – and eventually to death – are employed in the photographic discourse: ‘loading’ and ‘aiming’ a camera, ‘shooting’ a film;⁶ the person or thing photographed being the ‘target’, an *eidolum* or *spectrum*... the ‘return of the dead’ occurring in every picture, or the very photographers being ‘agents of Death’.⁷ In the same fashion, it has been said that photography includes something of necromancy, of communication with the ghosts of the past.⁸

In the domains of the living or, at least, of those who have lived, specifically, in the domains of Greece and its past, what does this all mean? What are the consequences of taking a picture of Greek antiquities? Despite the alleged objectivity of the process, by framing alone the photographer selects a partial vision of reality – and there are many more sophisticated ways to manipulate the figure: re-touching the negative, digital alterations, etc. Still, the act of framing ‘removes a sense of context and the resultant image is disconnected from the wider landscape or chronology of life events.’⁹ The specific angle adopted by the photographer may be the result of artistic or political preferences, personal or traditional taste. In the case of Greece, there is little doubt about the influence of tastes inherited from the Western Classical Tradition. In fact, as I will attempt to show, this very tradition has shaped the image and memory of Greece.

2.2 Keeping memories

‘Photographs are material memories of the things, persons and events experienced’¹⁰ and they are involved in the process of remembering and forgetting. If we consider, for instance, a summer trip we did ten years ago, we are much more likely to remember places, people and events if we kept a photographic record of them. Pictures will have become repositories of memory; we will have revisited them repeatedly. Just as their imprint on our memory will have deepened, so the traces will have vanished of those other aspects of our journey that we did not capture. Together with ‘its capacity to trigger and shape emotions and memories’¹¹, a photograph can actually block memory, quickly becoming a counter-memory, a fixed memory in which ‘nothing can be refused or transformed’.¹²

6 Sontag (2005 [1977]: 10).

7 Barthes (1981 [1980]: 9, 92).

8 See Hamilakis and Ifantidis (2015: 138).

9 Robinson and Picard (2009: 13).

10 Hamilakis and Ifantidis (2015: 139).

11 Jordanova (2015: 361).

12 Barthes (1981 [1980]: 91).

Pictures of that summer trip will have been used as instruments of storytelling, mnemonic aids to help our personal narratives develop when sharing with others the evidence that something existed and that we were there. Thus, pictures will have become memory itself. As Theodoros Chiotis puts it, ‘photography (and, by implication, the photographer’s subjectivity) creates a narrative supplement while simultaneously modifying not only actual memories but also the very concept of memory.’¹³ Photographs cannot, therefore, be considered mere instruments of memory, but ‘an invention of it and a replacement’.¹⁴

Moreover, we do not only create our personal memories, but also our collective narratives with the mnemonic aid provided by photography: we are in need of building a memory for ourselves as individuals, but also as part of nations and civilizations. Since the West has focused on its inheritance from Classical Antiquity in order to build this kind of identity memory, it is no wonder that much of what we call our past is made out of the fragmented remains of an era that was lost long ago.

The sense of loss is fundamental here, for when we think about photography, there is often a feeling of nostalgia involved.¹⁵ The same applies to Greece, since nostalgia is a key element of Greek identity, and that is one of the reasons for the country’s strong bonds with photography. Since the 19th century photographers of and from Greece have tried to preserve in their pictures the essence of an ideal past: ‘the travelers’ desire to preserve an indelible memory of the lands they visited corresponded perfectly with the ability of accurate recording offered by photography.’¹⁶ Nostalgia accompanied their focus on Greece, and still does, because by visiting the ruins, one more clearly experiences what once was.¹⁷

However, how could the memory of the past be preserved if the past itself was already gone when we began missing it? In other words, how could a picture bring to life the ghosts of the past? Perhaps the trick worked, and does work, because photography can show the passage of time and convey much of what we experience when we are aware of its effects, namely, nostalgia, a sense of loss and the futile illusion that we can prevent beauty from disappearing. Perhaps because photography seems to freeze time, and by fixing a moment of the past, it convinces us that it can also bring it into the present, and keep it for the future. Perhaps because even in the digital era we still feel that there is something of the object itself preserved in the picture, a form of sentimentalism that compels us to print those pictures we care about most.

13 Chiotis (2015: 169).

14 Sontag (2005 [1977]: 128).

15 See Sontag (2015: 12).

16 Mamoulaki (2015: 295).

17 Even in Roman times, ‘there were sentimental journeys to Greece’ (Constantine [1984: 4], see also Alock, Cherry, and Elsner [2001]).

As Carabott, Hamilakis, and Papargyriou explain in *Camera Graeca*, pictures 'are traces, not in the sense of an imprint, but in the sense of a material remnant, of a relic.'¹⁸ This implies that there is something of the materiality of the object preserved in the picture, which of course relates to the idea of photography as acquisition. It also explains why some cultures believe that pictures can take someone's soul and, what matters to us, the soul of Greece.

2.3 Stealing one's soul

'As everyone knows, primitive people fear that the camera will rob them of some part of their being', so Sontag says.¹⁹ She is not alone in making such statements: 'Many indigenous people claim that picture-taking steals one's soul and see the photograph itself as suspect' is a similar assertion by Chong.²⁰ Yet it is difficult to identify any reliable source of this actually happening. Many speak vaguely about Native Americans or Australian Aborigines, but I have failed to find an anthropological study about the issue. However, Ricardo Moraes, a photographer from Reuters writing about his experience photographing the Brazilian tribe of the Kapayos, tells that in their language, *akaron kaba* not only means 'to take a photo' but also 'to steal a soul.'²¹ In addition, other professional photographers, such as John Rosenthal, reflect on this idea that seems to be as widespread as only compelling metaphors can be.²²

On the other hand, there seems indeed to be a magical quality in pictures, as if they could establish a link between the viewer and whatever is represented in them.²³ As Robinson and Picard argue, 'people in all epochs and times have used specific objects or materials to encapsulate the power and mystical energies associated with places, people or presences and to transport them from one place to another. Specific objects have been used to "capture" spirits and make or help them travel to different places. [...] Something similar seems to happen when tourists take photographs and display them.'²⁴ This ability to both retain something from the object and to bring it into the present is precisely what appeals to the photographer-collector.

18 Carabott, Hamilakis, and Papargyriou (2015: 10). Some of the abundant studies on Greek photography or the photography of Greece will be quoted in this chapter. An updated state of the art and bibliography can also be found in Carabott, Hamilakis, and Papargyriou (2015: 17–22).

19 Sontag (2005 [1977]: 123).

20 Chong (2009: 128).

21 Moraes (2011).

22 See Rosenthal (1983).

23 Sontag (2005 [1977]: 120–121) on the talismanic uses of photograph and its magical powers.

24 Robinson and Picard (2009: 21).

Yet, where does the force of photographic images come from? According to Sontag, it ‘comes from their being material realities in their own right, richly informative deposits left in the wake of whatever emitted them, potent means for turning the tables on reality—for turning *it* into a shadow.’²⁵ And this force can be said to originate in the very physical way in which photography develops, i.e., in light.

Photography is named after it, combining the Greek word for light, *phos*, *photo-*, and that for writing, *graphie*: a Greek word, a Greek light and a Greek script, which together become a rich symbol indeed. Moreover, light is where all the magic of photography comes from: ‘In both analogous and digital photography, the physical contact between the recording device (the film or chip) and the photographed realm is established through light’ and so ‘light continues to be conceived as a possible medium to transport specific qualities attributed to specific realms; as a cause for contagion bringing separated worlds in physical contact.’²⁶ Thus, the photograph is considered an emanation of the referent and a means to connect with the past.²⁷ Moreover, the Greek *graphein* means not only ‘write’ but also ‘paint’, so photography is the art of ‘painting with light’.

Light being the agent, photography was born as an art of reality, which could not but capture what was already in nature. In his book of photographs, *The Pencil of Nature* (1844–1846), William Fox Talbot claimed that his were natural images, obtained ‘by the agency of Light alone, without any aid whatever from the artist’s pencil.’²⁸ However, no picture can be an exact copy of reality and this is even truer for early photography: the first pictures were necessarily rendered in black and white.

What could have been a handicap proved to be an advantage in the case of Greece. The whiteness of the ancient remains under the Greek light was indeed very convenient, for it was easily captured and represented by the camera.²⁹ In addition, black and white are the colors of concepts, of ideas, of words written inside books; a world in black and white is a mental image, a fading memory, and a good representation of a distant past. That is one reason why this texture suited the Western outlook on Greece,³⁰ even if it is no secret that temples and sculptures used to have a colorful pigmentation.³¹ Today, however, temples are captured in absolute white against a blue sky, ancient sculptures as pale cold marbles, and Greek islands as an extemporal Mediterranean paradise with their whitewashed houses.

25 Sontag (2005 [1977]: 141).

26 Robinson and Picard (2009: 11).

27 See Barthes (1981 [1980]: 81).

28 Fox Talbot (2018 [1844]: 5), quoted in Sontag (2005 [1977]: 65).

29 See Hamilakis and Ifantidis (2015: 134).

30 See Carabott, Hamilakis, and Papargyriou (2015: 4).

Summarizing the previous points, if we admit to the magical qualities of photography, we must also admit that Greece's soul might have been taken by pictures. But even if we don't believe in those qualities, we can safely say that the photography of Greece has contributed to depriving the country of some of its singularities. By selecting and framing, by following an aesthetic canon that originated in Classical scholarship, the preferred identity for Greece is that of the 'cradle of the Western civilization'; and each picture a tourist takes home from the Parthenon enhances that stereotyped way of remembrance.

The next section seeks to explain the process by means of which the public has inherited this way of seeing, capturing and remembering Greece. Tourists in Greece carry with them a learned image of the country that does not necessarily account for its variety, and they reflect it accordingly in their pictures: they select what to remember and what to forget according to a pre-established aesthetic canon.

3. From Winckelmann to Flickr

Just as a family keeps a photographic album in order to record and to construct a personal narrative,³² so do countries when it comes to national identity. Moreover, just as a family may pose in front of the camera in order to look happier, wealthier and handsomer, so nations may pose, metaphorically speaking, in order to convey an idealized image of themselves. In the specific case of Greece, the construction of a national identity is entangled with the very foundations of European identity; hence, Europe has not only claimed to be in that picture, but it has modeled it to match her wishes. The modern country has been in many ways encouraged to bear witness of its connectedness to its glorious past; images of its landscapes, people and ancient sites have been part of that national effort.

This section focuses on four different stages in order to show how an idealized image of the Classical past ended up modelling the experiences of many. These stages involve German art historian Johann Joachim Winckelmann, 19th century photographers and travelers to Greece, the Greek female photographer Nelly and her vision of Greece in the 20th century, and, finally, contemporary tourism and online photography repositories such as Flickr.

In the process extending from Classical scholarship to social networks, the ideology of Western colonialism of Greece can easily be traced. On the one hand,

31 For many decades art historians have proven that polychromy was the norm in classical sculpture and architecture (See Emerson 1892 or Richter/Hall 1944). The fear of color, *chromophobia*, however, persist in Western culture and the issue of whiteness in the Ancient world is still controversial (See Batchelor 2000, Talbot 2018).

32 Tourist pictures used as mnemonic devices for storytelling usually embellish that narrative; see Robinson and Picard (2009: 20).

the Renaissance led to great undertakings of travel and exploration in search of art, culture and the roots of Western civilization. In those enterprises ‘discovery, conquest and encounter were not only based upon the physical acts of travel, battle and trade but significantly upon the representations and circulations of these acts to the vast majority of populations who essentially remained “at home”.’³³ This means that those who could actually carry out the Grand Tour would try to ‘bring’ the world home or, at least, to record, capture and order it whilst it was being discovered.

Nowadays, tourists may be unconscious of their colonialist point of view, yet they perpetuate it; by taking pictures they seem to acquire a visual knowledge of the object and thus they seem, in part, ‘to have power even if only momentarily, over it’.³⁴ As we have already seen, due to the physical (yet almost magical) process of photography, light imprints the negative, the image imprints the memory and creates a new materiality that contains something of the object itself. That is probably why almost everyone prefers to take his or her own picture rather than buying one – postcards are normally reserved for sending to others³⁵ – and that is why the camera becomes an extension of the travelling self.

On the other hand, discovery of Classical art, mainly sculpture and architecture, in the Renaissance was also embedded into the imperialist narrative of the Western nations. Examining the essentialist attitudes of that narrative, one can be tempted to believe that Art history is ‘little more than a scholarly elaboration of myths’³⁶ and a means of cultural colonization. In that sense, high culture becomes the private property of a privileged group, and ‘all cultural production is actually determined and measured by the yardstick of the dominant Western civilization.’³⁷ Nevertheless, even if that were true, this traditional narrative has shaped a beautiful image of Greece that today can be relished by the educated traveler as well as by the *turistas vulgaris*.³⁸ We are probably after an idealized country, yet, paraphrasing one of the founders of Classical Reception, ‘should we give up all this richness – in exchange for little or nothing?’³⁹

33 Robinson and Picard (2009: 2).

34 Urry (2002: 138).

35 See Robinson and Picard (2009: 11).

36 Coutts-Smith (2002: 3).

37 Panayotopoulos (2009: 181).

38 Warning against the risk of treating them scornfully as foreign species, Franklin and Crang (2001: 5) use the term *turistas vulgaris* to refer to those ‘only found in herds, droves, swarms and flocks’.

39 Martindale (2006: 12).

3.1 The Hellenist that never set foot on Greece

Classical Reception owes much to the influence of visionaries like Winckelmann, whose work had an impact beyond the discipline of Art history itself, going ‘ineradicably into the European consciousness’⁴⁰ and becoming responsible for the ‘invention of Antiquity’.⁴¹ I will first concentrate on a small part of his heritage in order to highlight how his individual, scholarly and idealized vision of ancient Greece has shaped the taste of many. Then I will deal with the paradox that he never actually went to Greece and examine how this affected attitudes towards the country.

According to Goethe, Winckelmann ‘was able to discover in the real world *antwortende Gegenbilder* (“corresponding images”) of his imagination’s ideals’⁴² and with that vision he taught people to look upon Greek art. His reflections on Greek art began by examining the collection of antiquities in Dresden. It was there that he developed his ideas about Greek beauty.

In his writings, Winckelmann claimed that natural beauty was a characteristic of Greek people both in modern and ancient times. Even in his day and ‘although mixed with the blood of many foreign races’, their outstanding charms permitted ‘a reasonable conjecture as to the beauty of both sexes among their ancestors’: a physical beauty that, in all probability, ‘excelled ours by far’.⁴³ The most prominent feature of that beauty was, of course, the straight line formed by the forehead and the nose that we still recognize as a Greek profile. Large eyes were also widespread.

Winckelmann admitted that what we see in the sculptures of gods and men, or in Greek coins, are shapes modeled after idealized concepts.⁴⁴ He therefore concluded that the highest law recognized by Greek artists was ‘to create a just resemblance and at the same time a more handsome one’, i.e., to produce a more beautiful and more perfect nature.⁴⁵ Following this law, artists and scholars of Greek art alike paved the way to the ideal vision of Greek beauty. Anyone searching today for a Greek profile in the streets of Athens is also in search of the ideal beauty that Winckelmann envisioned.⁴⁶

Such a vision, however, came from afar. Even though the great German thinker considered that good taste had its origins ‘under the skies of Greece’ and ad-

40 Constantine (1984: 104).

41 See Harloe (2013).

42 Goethe (1969 [1805]: 209), quoted by Constantine (1984: 100).

43 Winckelmann (1987 [1756]: 9–11).

44 See Winckelmann (1987 [1756]: 15).

45 Winckelmann (1987 [1756]: 17).

46 Yet Winckelmann (2006 [1764]: 351; quoted in Billings [2016: 56]) admitted that when we search for this ideal beauty of the past ‘we often act like people who want to meet ghosts, and believe they see them where there is nothing.’

mitting that a search for the man of taste would mean going to Athens, still he was satisfied enough with Dresden antiquities as a substitute.⁴⁷ Even later, while living in Rome, he planned several times to visit Greece, but never actually did it. At the end of the day, Rome resembled Greece enough and the works of art available there were more than sufficient. As Constantine points out in his study on early Greek travelers, ‘it was exceptional in his day, and until long after his day, to think a journey to Greece essential for a Hellenist.’⁴⁸ Even today, there is a significant number of classicists and scholars of Antiquity that rarely visit the country. This attitude can be explained both by the *argumentum auctoritatis* that Winckelmann personifies and by the disappointment that some sectors of the West experience when they confront the ‘degradation of the “real” Greece as compared to its classical ideal.’⁴⁹ In this sense, there is a remarkable parallelism between the claim made by a 19th century traveler that Athens was ‘the dirtiest little town in Christendom’⁵⁰, and that of a 2008 *Tripadvisor* reviewer, referring to the Greek capital as the ‘dirtiest ugliest city in the world’, followed by the advice ‘Don’t go there!!!’⁵¹

The consequence, in any case, was that such leading Hellenists as Winckelmann, or the German poet Friedrich Hölderlin, never made the physical journey to Greece, but only the ideal, intellectual one. Winckelmann, who believed he had the best vision and experience to undertake that journey, criticized travel writers for repeating what others had said.⁵² And the fact is that travelers were often influenced by the vision of writers who never visited the country. Winckelmann’s writings, his aesthetic and cultural ideas, were received by travelers themselves and contributed a great deal to form the image of Greece that would prevail.

In 1767, he was for the last time about to set out on a journey to Greece, but he decided to postpone it and went to Munich and Vienna instead. On his way back to Italy, he was murdered. The ironic tragedy of Winckelmann’s destiny is that visiting Greece would have saved his life. Perhaps it would have also altered the course of Art history and rendered a more comprehensive image of Greek Antiquity.

47 See Winckelmann (1987 [1756]: 3–4).

48 Constantine (1984: 104).

49 Harlan (2009: 423). Additional reasons prevented Germans from going to Greece; see Constantine (1984: 1–2).

50 Osborne (1840: 49) quoted by Tsigialou (2015: 84).

51 See N. N. (2008), https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/ShowUserReviews-g189400-r21041157-Athens_Atica.html [last accessed 16 Mar. 2024].

52 See Constantine (1984: 118).

3.2 Travelers and photographers in the 19th century

According to Artemis Leontis, the *topos* of Hellas is a construct of neo-Hellenic Western thought which developed gradually as more and more Western travelers visited the newly founded Greek state in the 19th century.⁵³ Travel writing, painting and photography produced by those early visitors to Greece promoted a 'stereotyped perception of Greece focusing on antiquities and historical sites'⁵⁴ that still prevails. Thus, 'Greece has been more an imagined *topos* than an actual place for prosperous foreigners since the birth of Classicism.'⁵⁵

It is worth noting how circumstances in this period favored the construction of the ideal *topos*. The modern state of Greece and the technique of photography developed simultaneously and indeed 'the photographic coverage of ancient Greek material culture was the primary reason for European and North American photographers' to visit the country in the late 1830s.⁵⁶ There is also the fact that the invention of photography coincided with both the golden age of travel,⁵⁷ and the burgeoning of archaeology.⁵⁸

Simultaneously, in the 19th century mass tourism began to develop: there already were tour operators and travel guides, both highlighting the continuity of ancient Greek culture. Thomas Cook and Son began conducting tours to Athens and Constantinople in 1868,⁵⁹ whereas 1884's *Handbook for Travellers in Greece* by John Murray III, written for and in the spirit of educated Europeans, became one of those texts that helped the vision of ideal Greece be transferred from the elite to the public. Because of all this, 'long before disembarking, European travelers knew what had to be seen and how it was to be interpreted'⁶⁰, but this was, and is today, done 'at a cost to travelers' perception of modern Greece'.⁶¹

Travel photographs in the late 19th century show that the views were predominantly stereotyped iconographic scenes, as 'excursions' itineraries and standardized, formulaic guides – particularly Murray's handbooks – indicated what ought, not what might be seen, directing the traveler's attention to specific places to be viewed in specific ways.⁶² This topic has been widely studied in recent literature: Tsirgialou deals with the 19th century photographic depictions of Greece and

53 See Leontis (1995).

54 Panayotopoulos (2009: 184).

55 Tzanelli (2003: 21) quoted by Crang and Travlou (2009: 76).

56 See Carabott, Hamilakis, and Papargyriou (2015: 3), Stathatos (2015: 25–26)

57 See Tsirgialou (2015: 78).

58 See Grossman (2015: 116), Hamilakis (2001), Hamilakis and Ifantidis (2015: 136), Papadopoulos (2005).

59 See Harlan (2009: 423).

60 Osbourne (2000: 24).

61 Grossman (2015: 116).

62 Harlan (2009: 426).

notices that they uniformly focus on archaeological sites and ancient ruins. She highlights how those early travelers followed pre-established routes suggested by travel guides in what became a journey of ‘rediscovery’.⁶³ Also, Szegedy-Maszak gives a detailed account of the photographs of the Parthenon in that period and reaches similar conclusions.⁶⁴ Finally, Harlan focusses on clergyman and scientist Thomas R. R. Stebbing’s pictures and his own ‘particular construction of classical antiquity, which in turn is indebted to the 19th-century tradition of travel guide-books.’⁶⁵

The canonization of the Greek past by those early travelers and photographers began in October 1839, when Frenchman Pierre-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière took the first picture of the Acropolis. He was shortly followed by Joseph-Phillibert Girault de Prangey, also from France, who photographed the Propylaea and the Parthenon in 1842. A mosque could be seen on the inside of the first daguerreotype by Joly de Lotbinière, whereas Girault de Prangey’s picture showed nothing but ancient remains.⁶⁶ According to Bohrer (2015), it was the latter’s vision that inaugurated the Western conception of the buildings on the Acropolis, clearing the monument of ‘foreign’ traits.⁶⁷ Nevertheless, the preferred angle remained that of Joly de Lotbinière and, in fact, it has been argued that his picture established the paradigm for most subsequent views of the temple.⁶⁸

A decade later, photographs began to include local population as ‘decoration’ that would show the continuity of the Hellenic spirit.⁶⁹ However, most pictures generally excluded human presence. Szegedy-Maszak believes that the photographers’ intention was ‘to remove from their pictures any unseemly intrusion from the present day that might disrupt the viewer’s contemplation of the ancient world.’⁷⁰

Around 1851, Frenchman Alfred-Nicolas Normand’s pictures portrayed the same subjects, although from a more innovative and artistic perspective. Yet his attitude toward Modern and Ancient Greece was the same as that of his contemporaries: Athens was small, wretched, and arid, but the beauty of the Acropolis was a generous compensation for it.⁷¹ In 1853 Scotsman James Robertson departed from the conventionalisms by including figures of men wearing traditional

63 See Tsirgialou (2015: 78).

64 See Szegedy-Maszak (2005a), (2005b).

65 Harlan (2009: 422).

66 See Bohrer (2015: 97–99), Szegedy-Maszak (2005b: 335).

67 See Bohrer (2015: 98).

68 See Szegedy-Maszak (2005b: 336).

69 See Stathatos (2015: 28).

70 Szegedy-Maszak (2005a: 14), see also Szegedy-Maszak (2005b: 337).

71 See Szegedy-Maszak (2005b: 341).

clothes and admitting into his pictures the essence of Athens 'as a living member in the larger community of the eastern Mediterranean.'⁷²

However, Robertson did not set a trend. By the end of 1860, traditionally rendered ancient sites were the main subject of the *Grande collection photographique* by Greek photographer Petros Moraites,⁷³ whereas American William James Stillman confirmed the Western ideal, imposing it on the monuments, in his celebrated *The Acropolis of Athens, illustrated picturesquely and architecturally in photography* in 1870.⁷⁴ Also around that year, Turkish photographer Pascal Sébah was capturing the ancient and medieval sites of Athens. His pictures also transmitted a 'romanticised notion of a bygone Classical Greece'⁷⁵ and indicated the 'must see' places for the tourist.

In sum, 19th century travelers helped in shaping a photographic canon that was ultimately rooted in Antiquity, for even Pausanias' *Description of Greece* determined 'what was significant to see and how to see it.'⁷⁶ And the same practice went on in the 20th century, reinforcing a stereotyped image of Greece and 'taking' its soul.

3.3 Nelly's vision in the 20th century

If we look into early 20th century photography in Greece, we soon meet with orchestrated efforts to promote an image of Greece based on Classical Antiquity. First came the Boissonas family of Geneva, then, Nelly's vision.

The Boissonas were responsible for the record of the Greek military campaign in Asia Minor, and thus an instrument of the government's propaganda. Frédéric Boissonas, in particular, was among the first to understand that political, commercial and tourism publicity could be generated by photography.⁷⁷ Also, the 1919 exhibition *Visions of Greece* in Paris was part of the efforts of philhellenic supporters to raise awareness of the Greek struggle. According to them, Europe had the moral imperative to save the cradle of civilization from the barbaric East. Pictures of ancient sites served as an argument.

From 1929 onwards, official Greek organizations took charge of promoting tourism seriously. Photography was, of course, an extremely relevant task. And it comes as no surprise that among the first posters issued by the Office of Greek Tourism⁷⁸ is a photograph of the Parthenon by a Greek female photographer who

72 Szegedy-Maszak (2005b: 343).

73 See Tsirgialou (2015: 81).

74 See Bohrer (2015).

75 Grossman (2015: 113).

76 Harlan (2009: 436).

77 See Stathatos (2015: 37).

received the assignment to photograph ‘the country’s treasures and beauty spots’.⁷⁹

Her real name was Elli Sougioultzoglou-Seraidari, but she became famous under the artistic pseudonym of Nelly. Her work has been widely acclaimed and studied; it is acknowledged as reflecting the desired identity of the Modern Greek state in relation to its past, and the very image that the West had constructed for the country. According to Panayotopoulos, Nelly’s photographs of dancer Nina Nickolska at the Parthenon, for instance, would represent ‘the ancient Hellenic spirit, the harmony, the eroticism, the beauty, the grace and moves of the ancient maidens’ and are ‘illustrative and symbolic stereotypes of the West with regard to the Orient.’⁸⁰ Moreover, Nelly served the political and ideological ideals of the Metaxas regime and therefore she has been compared to the German Leni Riefenstahl.⁸¹

In her study on the matter, Katerina Zacharia (2015) reveals that Nelly’s iconography of Greece contributed to the myth of continuity between ancient and modern Greece: Nelly photographed the Delphic Festival in 1927, the nude dancers at the Parthenon in 1925 and 1930,⁸² and promoted the State’s early tourism activities through the Under-Secretariat of Press and Tourism. There were official posters with her pictures of the Parthenon, photographs featured in *La Grèce actuelle* (a publication by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), the magazine *Neolaia*, or the tourist periodicals *In Greece (En Grèce / In Griechenland)*, as well as the fashion magazine *La Mode Grecque*. Finally, her collages were protagonists at the New York 1939 World’s Fair Greek pavilion.

In those collages, Nelly established a series of parallelisms between the physiognomy of ancient Greeks and contemporary ones. As Panayotopoulos and Zacharia explain, in her portraits comparing shepherds and village maidens with ancient Kouros and Kores, she was subconsciously searching for ‘Aryan’ features and herself becoming something of a Riefenstahl director.⁸³ As Zacharia puts it: ‘The official discourse of the Metaxas regime constructed and promoted a national image of contemporary Greeks as descendants of the ancient Greeks, and as perpetrators and preservers of their ancient Greek heritage.’⁸⁴ These endeavors to

78 Somewhere else, I have studied the use of Classical Antiquity by the Greek National Tourism Organization in their posters and campaigns; see González-Vaquerizo (2017).

79 Stathatos (2015: 41).

80 Panayotopoulos (2009: 191).

81 See Zacharia (2015: 233–234).

82 In August 1920, Edward Steichen had photographed American dancer and choreographer Isadora Duncan at the Parthenon (cf. Steichen 1981) *The Early Years Portfolio 1901-1927*.

83 See Panayotopoulos (2009: 194), Zacharia (2014: 196).

84 Zacharia (2014: 188).

evidence the physiognomic continuity of the race⁸⁵ were drawn straight from Winckelmann's aesthetics of Greek art and his belief that traits such as the Greek profile survived among the Mediterranean population.⁸⁶

Thus, Nelly found in Greece everything she could hope for: 'When I met Greece and saw its many beauties, almost on every step I saw yet another painting in front of me. Wherever I turned, I would encounter pictures ready to be shot.'⁸⁷ Those 'paintings' and 'ready pictures' of Nelly's were visions of Greece that had been promoted by Neoclassicism and served a political agenda.

Nowhere is this agenda more evident than in the official campaigns and posters issued by the Greek National Tourist Organization. During the 20th century, renowned Greek artist and photographers, including Nelly, but also Yorgos Varkitizis and Michalis Katzourakis among many others, served the Greek state's narrative in relation to its past: Greece was the cradle of Western civilization and its modern identity was drawn straight from Antiquity.⁸⁸

In addition, foreign photographers such as Alison Frantz and Lucy Talcott, members of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens and authors of the illustrated book *This is Greece* (1941), helped promote a standardized image of the country as not so far away from its idealized past.⁸⁹ Such an image persists even today in the mainstream tourist guides, and in the snapshots of most visitors.

3.4 21st Century and Flickr

This last section briefly focuses on 21st century tourism and contemporary photographic practices, in particular photo sharing via Flickr and Instagram. Its aim is to evaluate if tourists and photographers of today still reproduce learned ways of seeing and capturing Greece by following the standardized photographic canon in place since the 19th century.⁹⁰ The visual aspect of contemporary tourism ('sight-seeing') establishes the equation 'tourism is photography.'⁹¹

As already discussed, the photographic canon not only suggests to the public what is worth capturing, but defines what is worth seeing and appreciating in a country.⁹² By doing so, it ignores the possibility of discordant notes in that very same reality and creates a fixed memory and a fixed narrative, resulting in an astonishing homogeneity and an idealized vision. In much the same way, it has been

85 Cf. Zacharia (2015: 238).

86 Cf. Winckelmann (1952 [1742–1759]: 315), quoted in Constantine (1984: 99).

87 Nelly's autobiography (1989: 79), quoted by Zacharia (2015: 238).

88 See González-Vaquerizo (2017).

89 See Moschovi (2015: 53–54).

90 See Szegedy-Maszak (2005b: 342).

91 Gordon (1999: 111).

92 See Panayotopoulos (2009: 190).

argued that tourism ‘spectacularizes’ destinations or creates ‘myths’ about them:⁹³ the so called ‘tourist gaze’⁹⁴ has the capacity to shape, if not the landscape itself, at least its perception. Marketing, and the film and tourism industries create desirable images, which tourists then seek out and reproduce. By visiting a country and taking pictures of it, they confirm their expectations about the place, its people and landscape.

Nevertheless, we will see that despite the ‘comforting continuity’ that holiday pictures display and the persistence of ‘historical patterns inscribed within the contemporary circulations of tourism and tourist’,⁹⁵ there is room to innovate and to challenge the ideal vision of Greece. The Internet is, of course, largely responsible for this.

If ones enters the word ‘Athens’ in a search engine like Google, most of the images retrieved are of Classical antiquities, especially the Acropolis. The Parthenon in particular soon stands out. Pictures of this emblematic monument, whether by professional photographers and agencies or tourists on holiday, seem to mirror those first, 19th century pictures of the site: most of them take the same angle, and reproduce the monument in the same isolation, removing contemporary Athens from frame.

However, what about specialized photography websites and apps? Flickr⁹⁶, where virtual web-based photo albums are accessible to a public audience, is a meeting place for amateur and professional photographers. It is probably the largest online photo management and sharing website in the world, with more than 100 million registered photographers, over 60 million users per month and an average of 1 million of photos shared daily.⁹⁷ Although there is no filter as to the aesthetic quality of the pictures that members can upload, the fact remains that Flickr stands out for its high photographic standards.

Research using such a large, ever-changing repository is a difficult task that can only be carried out by means of algorithms,⁹⁸ or in an impressionistic way. My approach belongs to the latter, and is based on a simple search for key terms such as Athens, Acropolis and Parthenon.

When typing ‘Athens’, Flickr displays a variety of pictures where antiquities coexist with graffiti and taverns, among many other topics. Classical Athens would probably win in numbers (if numbers were available), yet the overall impression is that of a multicultural modern European capital.

93 See Crang and Travlou (2009: 78).

94 See Urry (2002).

95 Cf. Robinson and Picard (2009: 12, 24).

96 <https://www.flickr.com>

97 Data from DMR Business Statistics: <https://expandedramblings.com/index.php/flickr-stats/> (last update 6 Jan. 2024 [last accessed 16 Mar. 2024]).

98 Cf. Kennedy et al. (2007).

Moving on to the Acropolis, and the Parthenon in particular, the Classical ideal regains strength. Most pictures seem predominantly focused on the monumentality of the site and reproduce standardized views, angles and frames. Despite the fact that there are many innovative visions of the site on Flickr, Hamilakis and Ifantidis are right to complain that 'far too many photographs of the Acropolis follow the established photographic canon.'⁹⁹ This is why they have developed 'The Other Acropolis Project', which aims to show alternative perspectives of the site, arguing that its photographic and archaeological monumentalisation since the 19th century has caused 'forgetting and remembering at the same time.'¹⁰⁰

If we turn to Instagram, the primary mobile photo-sharing network worldwide,¹⁰¹ we find a large number of posts under the hashtags Athens, Acropolis and Parthenon. Even though the monuments still receive standardized treatment and are taken from selective view-points, in a considerable number of cases, a new concept seems to emerge: people and their experiences, not ruins, are the main subject for *instagramers*.

Such a change has been possible because 21st century technology has provided every tourist with a camera and the possibility to share his or her views worldwide. Thus, there has been a 'transfer of "power" from the preserve of relatively few early photographers'¹⁰² to the people. The effects of this on our image of the past can be studied within the context of democratization of the Classics,¹⁰³ a trend to make them available to and approachable from popular culture. Now that tourists' snapshots are public, the social impact of their visions of Greece may be expected to rise. Yet, it is too soon to know whether they will bring a conventional or a new outlook on Greece.

4. Conclusions

After reviewing some of the stages in the creation of the photographic canon of Greece and a substantial number of studies on the matter, there seems to be evidence to demonstrate that the image of Greece is the result of an iconographic program and a tradition derived from the limited views of a few. Moreover, the Western Classical Tradition has had an enormous impact not just on the image of Greece held by leading figures such as Winckelmann, the first 19th century trav-

⁹⁹ Hamilakis and Ifantidis (2015: 143).

¹⁰⁰ Hamilakis and Ifantidis (2015: 153). For 'The Other Acropolis Project' visit <https://theotheracropolis.com/> [last accessed 16 Mar. 2024]

¹⁰¹ Data from DMR Business Statistics show that Instagram has 1.3 billion monthly users [last update 16 Oct. 2021] and an average of 500 million active users per day [last update 23 Mar. 2019]: see <https://expandedramblings.com/index.php/important-instagram-stats/> (last update 12 Jan. 2024 [last accessed 9 Nov. 2024]).

¹⁰² Robinson and Picard (2009: 6).

¹⁰³ See Hardwick and Harrison (2014)

elers and photographers, and Nelly, but also on the expectations, experiences and representations of the country in contemporary photography and tourism.

Most of the pictures of the country's landscape, ancient sites and people, are projections of our desires, indeed the desires of Western Tradition, about how the cradle of civilization should look. Such a selective photographic canon leads to the neglect of other Greek singularities, which do not conform to the ideal. As the authors of *Camera Graeca* emphasize, instead of depicting what is there, the lens actually produces it, and when it comes to Greece, what the lens tends to portray is continuity with the ancient world.¹⁰⁴

As a conclusion, it is safe to say that mass tourism has inherited a way of seeing, capturing and remembering Greece. This learned image does not account for the country's plural soul, because by 'favoring the glorious past over the discordant or diverse present'¹⁰⁵, a substantial part of Greece's identity is discarded.

The picture that took the Greek soul is not a single picture, but an idea of white marble that has fascinated Western minds for centuries. This narrative has shaped a beautiful image of the country that today can be relished by the educated traveler as well as by the common visitor. And it is precisely in the views of such visitors that the future image of Classical Greece is to be created. Time will tell if interaction with the past through modern media will result in a new image of the country or in further canonization of the idealized one. In any case, to paraphrase Martindale again, Greece can be nothing other than what visitors have made of it over the centuries.¹⁰⁶

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104 See Carabott, Hamilakis, and Papargyriou (2015: 12).

105 Panayotopoulos (2009: 188).

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Chapter 11

RICCARDO GINEVRA

There's a Town in Sicily Where Greek Heroes Go to Die: The 'Tomb of Minos' at the Gurfa Caves and Alia's Need for a Mythical Past

§1. There's a town in Sicily: introduction.

When I was still a little kid growing up in Central Sicily, I felt some sort of jealousy towards the inhabitants of those cities on the coast whose richly documented history began with their foundation as Ancient Greek colonies: unlike Agrigento, Gela, or Siracusa, which could boast to have witnessed Peloponnesian and Punic wars, or the Fall of the Roman Empire and the Barbarian Invasions, my hometown, Caltanissetta, was founded by either Byzantine or North-African settlers during the Early Middle Ages. Even though I have since developed a keen interest in this time period as well, I would have probably felt some relief back then, if only someone had shared with me the main topic of this paper: there is a group of Sicilians who regard the territory of Alia, a small town not so far away from my childhood home, to be the place of burial of an Ancient Greek mythical king, Minos.¹

1 This contribution was originally written between September 2019 and March 2020. For valuable criticism, discussion, or help with several aspects of this article, it is my pleasure to thank Alessandro Belgiojoso, Giuseppe Castelli, Andrea Lorenzo Covini, Guglielmo Ginevra, Pippo Oddo, Luciano Schimmenti, Maria Zielenbach, and, especially, Penelope Kolovou. I have also been able to enjoy the kindness and helpfulness of Carmelo Montagna, father of the Gurfa Myth, and of several citizens of Alia, among others: Elisa Chimento, Tania Di Marco, Damiano Drago, Gioacchino Ganci, Nino Gancitano, Calogera Gattuso, Vincenzo Rinchiuso, and Salvatore Ventimiglia, as well as then mayor Felice Guglielmo and former mayors Gaetano D'Andrea and Francesco Todaro. I am indebted to Ganci, Guglielmo, Todaro, and especially Chimento and Montagna for providing me with various materials and for agreeing to the interviews quoted in this article, which were carried out, filmed, and recorded on 24 April (Chimento, Ganci, Guglielmo, Todaro) and 28 Apr. (Montagna) 2019 by Maja Tschumi, whose help and inspiration I gladly acknowledge, and me; I am also indebted

Alia is a small municipality (*comune*) of roughly 3,500 inhabitants which lies on the south-eastern side of the former Province of Palermo (currently known as *Area metropolitana di Palermo*) and borders the northern side of the former Province of Caltanissetta (currently known as *Libero consorzio comunale di Caltanissetta*). The town's official foundation may be traced back to the 17th century, when the agricultural fiefdom of *Lalia* was populated thanks to a royal decree of King Philip III of Spain (then ruler of Sicily as well); ever since, agriculture has remained the prevalent sector of Alia's economy, with the population of the town steadily increasing through the centuries, until reaching its peak in the 50s. In the past decades, however, like most (both smaller and bigger) towns located in the innermost part of Sicily, Alia has been subject to a constant demographic decline, caused by a struggling economy which has particularly suffered from the impact of the 2008 crisis and which has been unable to enjoy the advantages which the global growth of tourism has offered to other Sicilian localities.

According to some, however, the situation may be changing for the better, as in the past years the territory of Alia has been attracting a small but constant flow of tourists visiting a nearby complex of artificial caves, the so-called Gurfa Caves (*Grotte della Gurfa*). Their fame is due not only to their undisputable beauty, but also to the theories of various non-academic scholars, who have drawn comparisons between the Caves and a number of underground structures built by ancient Mediterranean civilizations, going so far as to propose identifying the complex with the 'Tomb of Minos', the mythical king of Crete in Ancient Greek literature. The archeologists of Palermo's Superintendency (*Soprintendenza*, the local divisions of the Regional Department of Cultural Heritage),² however, have harshly criticized these interpretations, labeling them as non-scientific; in contrast, the town government has encouraged them in an attempt to promote Alia as a tourist destination.

The present contribution will not engage in the discussion on the actual origin of the Gurfa Caves, which lies outside the scope of this collective volume, and will rather focus on how the Caves have come to be interpreted as the 'Tomb of Minos' and on how the cultural production revolving around the town of Alia has

to D'Andrea for agreeing to a telephone interview on 20 October 2019. I also wish to thank Robert Tegethoff for improving my English version. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my parents Claudio Ginevra and Maria Lombardo, as well as to my aunt Francesca Lombardo, for letting me know about the Gurfa Myth in the first place, for providing essential support to this research, and for constantly reminding me of the material beauty and the intangible wealth of Central Sicily. The usual disclaimers apply. The translations of Ancient Greek passages are adapted from Frazer (1921, Apollodorus), Godley (1922, Herodotus), and Oldfather (1939, Diodorus Siculus); all sources and interviews in Italian are translated by me.

2 As Sicily is one of Italy's five autonomous regions with special statute, Sicilian superintendencies are divisions of the regional and local governments, rather than of Italy's Ministry of Cultural Heritage (as they are in other regions).

been consequently influenced by the myth, allowing modern audiences to vividly encounter an ancient narrative. In order to do so, we shall firstly identify those elements of the myth (as attested in the Classical sources) which are most relevant to this investigation (§2). Secondly, an attempt will be made to outline a sketch of the history of the rediscovery of the Gurfa Caves during the last decades of the 20th century and of the path which has led to their association with the myth of Minos during the first decades of the 21st century (§3). Then, an account will be provided of the intermedial way in which the cultural memory of this classical myth has been promoted in the territory of Alia, as well as on how it has been incorporated into, e.g., artworks, plays, and school activities (§4). Finally, we will draw some conclusions, attempting to identify some motives which may have inspired a group of citizens of a small Sicilian town to adopt a millennia-old Ancient Greek myth as an important part of their everyday life (§5).

§2. Daedalus's Sicilian residence and the tomb of Minos: the myth.

The saga of Minos, legendary king of Crete and undisputed ruler of the Aegean Sea, has been influencing European culture ever since Ancient Greek (mostly Alexandrine) and Roman authors drew inspiration from it to compose their poetry. This thread connects the six brief mentions of Minos in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (1st millennium BCE) with the masterful account of Ariadne's ill-fated passion for Theseus in Catullus's *Carmen* 64 (1st century BCE), or Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna* (1607–1608 AD) with Picasso's *Guernica* (1937 AD), one of several works reflecting the famous painter's obsession with the Minotaur.³

Within this contribution, however, we shall focus on a definitely less known episode of the saga, namely Minos's expedition to Sicily in search of Daedalus, which led to the Cretan king's gruesome killing by his Sicilian hosts. This mythical tradition, possibly already attested in a Sicilian terracotta relief from the 6th century BCE (Basel BS 318),⁴ was treated in the 5th century BCE by Herodotus in his *Histories* (7.170) and by Sophocles in his lost play *Kamikioi* (FF 323–327 Radt), and is later attested, inter alia, in Apollodorus's *Library* (Ep. 1.14–15) and in Diodorus Siculus's *Historical Library* (4.77–79). The latter provides the most detailed account of this narrative and will thus serve, in what follows, as our primary source for the identification of the six elements (a–f) which are most relevant to our investigation.

3 On Minos's mythical saga in general, cf. Gantz (1993: 259–275). On the construction of Minos's character in Ancient Greek literature, cf. Caldesi Valeri (2009). On the fortune of Minoan myth in later periods, see e.g. Ziolkowski (2008).

4 Cf. Gantz (1993: 275).

(a) The wings of wax and Daedalus's escape from Crete

According to Diodorus, some ancient authors (including perhaps Sophocles)⁵ explicitly connected the myth of Daedalus's residence in Sicily and of Minos's death to the renowned story of Daedalus's escape from Crete: after he was imprisoned by Minos together with his son Icarus for helping Theseus kill the Minotaur and survive the Labyrinth (having been asked to do so by Minos's daughter, Ariadne, who had fallen in love with the youth), the famous architect escaped by means of cunningly devised wings made of feathers and wax, a ruse which, however, also led to his son's death.

'As for Icarus, because of the ignorance of youth, he made his flight too far aloft and fell into the sea when the wax which held the wings together was melted by the sun, whereas Daedalus, by flying close to the sea and repeatedly wetting the wings, made his way in safety, marvellous to relate, to Sicily.' (Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 4.77)⁶

(b) Daedalus's residence and work among the Sicans

After Daedalus landed in Sicily, he was welcomed by the Sicans, an indigenous people which inhabited the island before the Greek colonization. There, he was honored as a personal guest by their king Cocalus, for whom he designed several wonderful constructions, among which was the unconquerable fortress of Camicus, which became the royal seat.

'Daedalus, however, [...] landed in Sicily near the territory over which Cocalus reigned as king, who courteously received Daedalus and because of his genius and his renown made him his close friend. [...] Daedalus spent a considerable time with Cocalus and the Sicani, being greatly admired for his very great skill in his art. And on this island he constructed certain works which stand even to this day. [...] Also in the present territory of Acragas on the Camicus river, as it is called, he built a city which lay upon a rock and was the strongest of any in Sicily and altogether impregnable to any attack by force; for the ascent to it he made narrow and winding, building it in so ingenious a manner that it would be defended by three or four men. Consequently Cocalus built in this city the royal residence, and storing his treasures there he had them in a city which the inventiveness of its designer had made impregnable.' (Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 4.77–78)

(c) Minos's expedition to Sicily in search for Daedalus

Daedalus's achievements did not escape the attention of Minos, who had been searching for him: as soon as he heard of them, the king readily embarked on an expedition to request the architect from Cocalus.

'Minos, the king of the Cretans, who was at that time the master of the seas, when he learned that Daedalus had fled to Sicily, decided to make a campaign against that island.

5 Cf. F 327 Radt.

6 Cf. also Apollodorus, *Epitome* 13: 'But Daedalus made his way safely to Camicus in Sicily.'

After preparing a notable naval force he sailed forth from Crete and landed at a place in the territory of Acragas which was called after him Minoa. Here he disembarked his troops and sending messengers to King Cocalus he demanded Daedalus of him for punishment.' (Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 4.79)

Apollodorus's *Library* provides us with a more detailed description of the ingenious way in which Minos found out where Daedalus was hiding (in all probability attested by Sophocles's *Kamikioi* as well).⁷

'And Minos pursued Daedalus, and in every country that he searched he carried a spiral shell and promised to give a great reward to him who should pass a thread through the shell, believing that by that means he should discover Daedalus. And having come to Camicus in Sicily, to the court of Cocalus, with whom Daedalus was concealed, he showed the spiral shell. Cocalus took it, and promised to thread it, and gave it to Daedalus; and Daedalus fastened a thread to an ant, and, having bored a hole in the spiral shell, allowed the ant to pass through it. But when Minos found the thread passed through the shell, he perceived that Daedalus was with Cocalus, and at once demanded his surrender.' (Apollodorus, *Epitome* 15)

(d) Minos's violent death

There followed what Herodotus calls Minos's 'violent death' (βίαιος θάνατος),⁸ which took place after the Cretan king had entered the palace of Cocalus as a guest, thus under the unbreakable protection granted by the sacred right of hospitality.

'But Cocalus invited Minos to a conference, and after promising to meet all his demands he brought him to his home as his guest. And when Minos was bathing Cocalus kept him too long in the hot water and thus slew him; the body he gave back to the Cretans, explaining his death on the ground that he had slipped in the bath and by falling into the hot water had met his end.' (Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 4.79)

According to another tradition attested by Apollodorus's *Library* and Pausanias's *Description of Greece* (as well as by Callimachus's *Aetia*),⁹ Minos was actually killed by Cocalus's daughters, who had grown fond of Daedalus out of admiration for his art.

'Cocalus promised to surrender him, and made an entertainment for Minos; but after his bath Minos was undone by the daughters of Cocalus; some say, however, that he died through being drenched with boiling water.' (Apollodorus, *Epitome* 15)

'He was so much admired by the daughters of Cocalus for his artistic skill that to please him these women actually plotted against Minos to put him to death.' (Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 7.4.6)

7 Cf. F 324 Radt.

8 Cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 7.170: 'For Minos (it is said), having gone to Sicania, which is now called Sicily, in search for Daedalus, there perished by a violent death.'

9 Cf. F 43 Pfeiffer.

(e) The underground tomb of Minos

At this point, Diodorus's narrative attests a detail which is not found anywhere else: the construction by the hands of Minos's soldiers of a monumental underground tomb for the king surmounted by a sanctuary of Aphrodite.

'Thereupon the comrades of Minos buried the body of the king with magnificent ceremonies, and constructing a tomb of two storeys, in the part of it which was hidden underground they placed the bones, and in that which lay open to gaze they made a shrine of Aphrodite. Here Minos received honours over many generations, the inhabitants of the region offering sacrifices there in the belief that the shrine was Aphrodite's; but in more recent times, after the city of the Acragantini had been founded and it became known that the bones had been placed there, it came to pass that the tomb was dismantled and the bones were given back to the Cretans, this being done when Theron was lord over the people of Acragas.' (Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 4.79)

(f) The settlement of Cretan soldiers in Sicily

Finally, the narrative ends with the 'Cretans of Sicily' (οἱ κατὰ τὴν Σικελίαν Κρηῖτες) settling down in the island, founding two towns, Minoa and Engyum.

'However, the Cretans of Sicily, after the death of Minos, fell into factious strife, since they had no ruler, and, since their ships had been burned by the Sicani serving under Cocalus, they gave up any hope they had had of returning to their native land; and deciding to make their home in Sicily, a part of them established on that island a city to which they gave the name Minoa after their king, and others, after wandering about through the interior of the island, seized a place which was naturally strong and founded a city to which they gave the name Engyum after the spring which flowed forth within the city.' (Diodorus Siculus, *Historical Library* 4.79)

The narrative's ending points to its origin as a Greek colonial myth aimed at providing a 'precedent of presence'¹⁰ to the 'Rhodian-Cretan colonial enterprise in a Si[c]anian territory'.¹¹ It may be noted, however, that Herodotus and Strabo have the Cretans rather leave Sicily by sea and found various towns in Southern Italy.¹²

After Classical Antiquity, the episode of Minos's death in Sicily seems to have fallen into oblivion, being apparently not particularly beloved by later authors. Even though characters from Minos's saga occur in medieval literature,¹³ the myths surrounding the Cretan king were largely ignored by Winckelmann and the Neoclassical movement,¹⁴ and it was only after Arthur Evans's discovery of the so-called 'Palace of Minos' in Knossos in 1900 that interest in these stories

10 Malkin (1994: 47).

11 Caldesi Valeri (2009: 128).

12 Cf. also Herodotus, *Histories* 7.170; Strabo, *Geography* 6.2.

13 Cf. e.g. Minos's and the Minotaur's portrayals in Dante's *Inferno*, 5.4–24 and 12.1–27 respectively.

14 Cf. Ziolkowski (2008: 118).

arose.¹⁵ The Sicilian episode of Minos's saga thus re-surfaces during the 20th century in novels such as Ernst Schnabel's *Ich und die Könige* (1958) and Michael Ayrton's *The Maze Maker* (1967), as well as in poems like *Daedalus in Sicily* by Nobel laureate Joseph Brodsky (1993).¹⁶

In an attempt to relocate Minos and his kingdom from the realm of myth to that of history (prompting the suggestion that the scholar 'had created, not discovered, the Minoans'),¹⁷ Evans even went so far as claiming that the palatial complex of Knossos had been 'executed for Minos by the craftsman Daedalus'.¹⁸ Evans's activity of 'historicization' of Minos's kingdom was apparently successful, given that its influence may still be observed in contemporary Sicily, where the interpretation of Minos and his 'mythical entourage' as historical personalities was essential in the development of the identification of the Gurfa Caves of Alia as the 'Tomb of Minos', as we shall see in the following section.

§3. North-African settlers, Teutonic knights, and Ancient Greek heroes: the Caves.

The Gurfa Caves are an abandoned artificial cave complex, consisting of several spaces cut into a hill of sandstone (fig. 11.1 and fig. 11.2).

The greatest of these chambers, mostly referred to as the 'Bell-shaped Chamber' (Italian *vano campaniforme*) or as the 'Tholos Chamber' (fig. 11.3), is a highly remarkable artefact both for its noteworthy dimensions (12,50m in diameter and more than 16m in height) and for its 'oculus', a circular opening in the center of the roof, which scarcely lets light in from above, creating a suggestive atmosphere which is often described as 'mystic' or 'spiritual' by visitors.

The toponym *Gurfa* is first attested in an official document from the Middle Ages, where it occurs as the name of a farmstead, part of a donation to the Church of San Giovanni dei Lebbrosi by King of Sicily Roger II of Hauteville (first half of the 12th century). The farmstead, however, had probably already been established during Islamic rule (10th–11th centuries), as its name must clearly be traced back to Arabic *ghurfa*, 'room, chamber, compartment', a term which is still used today in some North-African countries to refer to a type of structure employed for the storage of grain.¹⁹ In 1219, King Roger's grandson, Holy Roman Emperor Frederick II of Hohenstaufen, entrusted the Gurfa farmstead to the Teutonic Knights; as the decline of the German dynasty of Hohenstaufen (following the death of Frederick II in 1250) also led to the decline of the

15 Cf. Ziolkowski (2008: 9–11).

16 Cf. Ziolkowski (2008: 131–134), Schnabel (1958), Ayrton (1967), Brodsky (2000: 144).

17 MacGillivray (2000: 353).

18 Evans, apud Ziolkowski (2008: 12).

19 On the parallels between the Gurfa Caves and these North-African structures, cf. Pellitteri (1997).

Teutonic Order's power in Sicily, however, the Gurfa Caves came into the possession of various, less known owners.²⁰ In 1943, the upper half of the great 'Tholos Chamber' was still being used by farmers for the storage of grain, whereas the lower levels and the smaller chambers on the side housed sheep and other domestic animals, a situation which apparently went on until the late 70s.²¹

In a sense, the current interest of the wider public in the Gurfa Caves may be traced back to a topic which has never been more relevant than today, namely environmentalism, or, more specifically, landscape conservation and promotion. After serving as a farmstead for centuries, the Gurfa complex came into the possession of Filippo Chimento (also known as *Scarpuni*, 'Big Shoe') and of his family, who were, however, fated to be the Caves' last private owners, as between the 70s and the 80s the town authorities of Alia began a process of expropriation of the complex, which ultimately led to the institution of a 'Suburban Park of the Gurfa Caves' (*Parco suburbano Grotte della Gurfa*) in 1999. Roughly at the same time, the year 1981 marked the organization of the first so-called 'Long Walk' (*Marcialonga*) or 'Way of the Bread' (*Via del Pane*), a secular, joyful procession in which the people of Alia departed from the town center and walked all the way to the Caves (younger participants apparently took part in a cross country race), where they spent the day listening to live music shows, tasting local food products, and even attending a celebration of Mass; in the evening, the participants would walk back to Alia carrying torches. The 'Long Walk' was organized by a prominent local non-profit association (the *Associazione Sportiva Alia*) with the aid of the local authorities and of several volunteers; a number of photos (kept at the association's offices) and videos (available on YouTube) document this practice, which went on until the first half of the 90s.²² Both these initiatives of members of Alia's community, namely the expropriation of the Caves and their use as the ultimate goal of the 'Long Walk', can hardly be kept apart from the significant rise in concern about environmental and landscape-related issues of the Italian public opinion during the 1980s,²³ which saw, among other things, the foundation of major environmentalist NGOs like *Legambiente* (1980, as *Lega per l'Ambien-*

20 On the Gurfa farmstead during the Middle Ages, cf. the literature in Brunazzi et al (2017: 7 fn. 16).

21 Witnesses of this phase include, among others, Giovanni Mannino, who was a refugee in Alia during the 1940s (Mannino [2016: 3, 8, 14]), as well as Francesco Todaro (interview), who first visited the Caves in the 70s as a child.

22 Cf., inter alia, the series of videos 'La Marcialonga - La Via del Pane - 1988 Alia (Pa)' on YouTube: see, for instance, part 1 for the start of the 'Long Walk', including youths running cross country (<https://youtu.be/uMDWpQEzkwI>; last accessed 16 Mar. 2024), and part 5/5 for live music shows and tastings of local food (<https://youtu.be/j-ZEY2tKCIU>; last accessed 16 Mar. 2024).

23 Cf. e.g. Biorcio and Lodi (1988), who show how approximately 25% and 60% of environmental activists in Italy got involved after the years 1975 and 1980, respectively.

te), as well as the institution of Italy’s Ministry of the Environment (1981, as *Ministero dell’Ambiente*).²⁴ Sicilian activists played a central role in this phenomenon: for instance, on 18 May 1980, two thousand protesters gathered for the so-called ‘Walk of the Zingaro’ (*Marcia dello Zingaro*) organised by *Legambiente* and other NGOs, which successfully prevented the construction of a road in the Province of Trapani and led to the establishment of the Zingaro Natural Reserve and of various further natural parks by the Sicilian regional government a year later, in 1981.²⁵ During Alia’s ‘Long Walk’ to the Gurfa Caves, the organizers would indeed encourage the participants to ‘celebrate the encounter with nature and with our culture’ and they would speak explicitly about ‘the hope that this world may change and become more respectful towards nature, which is essential to human life’; at least once, in 1988, a member of the WWF was even invited to address the crowd at the Gurfa Caves.²⁶

All these details thus seem to support a connection between, on the one hand, the rise of environmentalism in Italy and Sicily in the 80s and, on the other hand, the expropriation and re-discovery of this monument by Alia’s community, which ultimately led to its ‘mythical’ interpretation as the Tomb of Minos. In fact, the town authorities soon funded restoration activities of the Gurfa Caves and assigned them to an architect from Palermo, Silvana Braidà Santamaura, who, in a 1984 publication, first suggested a comparison with the Neolithic Ħal Saflieni Hypogeum in Malta and with the Bronze Age tholos tombs of Mycenae;²⁷ already in 1981, the architect had attempted to involve a prominent scholar in the field of Maltese prehistoric archaeology, John Davies Evans, in her research.²⁸ It is probably due to Braidà Santamaura’s activity that, in the 90s, the town’s authorities, led by then mayor Gaetano ‘Tanino’ D’Andrea, began to organise a series of conferences on the historical and archaeological interpretation of the Gurfa Caves. The first conference took place in 1995 and featured, among others, a study by Father Benedetto Rocco, who suggested the identification of a Phoenician inscription inside the Caves and attempted to further explore the supposed similarities with the ‘Treasury of Atreus’, arguably the most famous Mycenaean tholos tomb (fig. 11.4). In that same year, the Gurfa complex was also (albeit briefly) featured in the film ‘The Star Maker’ (*L’uomo delle stelle*) by Sicilian Academy Award-winning director Giuseppe Tornatore. The second conference, organized by Antonino Pillitteri in 1997, included a photo exhibition and focused on the parallels with North-African *ghurfa* structures (on which see above).

24 See the “Legge 8 luglio 1986, n. 349”.

25 See the “Legge Regionale 6 maggio 1981, n. 98”.

26 See the YouTube videos quoted above, fn. 22.

27 Cf. Braidà Santamaura (1984: esp. pp. 40–41).

28 Cf. Montagna (2005: 145–151).



Fig. 11.1: External view of the Gurfa Caves (photograph: Alessandro Belgiojoso, 2009; printed with permission by the creator)

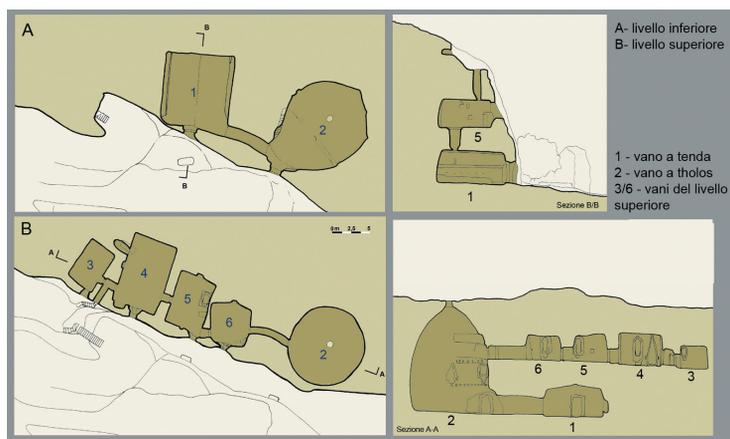


Fig. 11.2: Planimetry of the Caves (from Brunazzi et al. [2017: 13])



Fig. 11.3: The 'Bell-shaped Chamber' or 'Tholos Chamber' (photograph: Alessandro Belgiojoso, 2009; printed with permission by the creator)

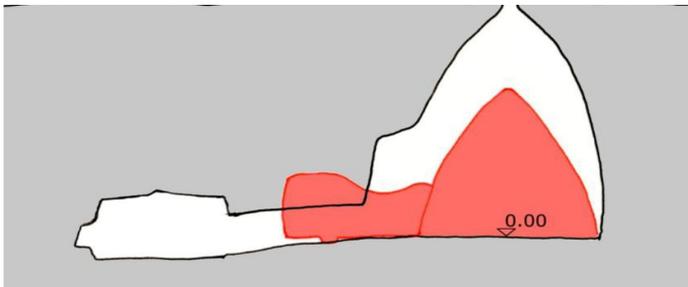


Fig. 11.4: Rocco's comparison between the Gurfa Caves and the Treasury of Atreus (the latter in red; from Mannino [2016: 9])

Braida Santamaura and Rocco's comparison of the Gurfa Caves with architectures from the Aegean Sea and, particularly, with the Treasury of Atreus were influential in the development of the theories of architect and art historian Carmelo Montagna, who organized a third conference in 2004 with the main title 'In the footprints of Minos' (*Sulle Tracce di Minosse*). In the conference's proceedings, as well as in various later talks and publications, Montagna has been advocating for an interpretation of the Gurfa Caves as the 'Tomb of Minos' or the 'Treasury of Minos', a megalithic artefact to be dated to the first half of the 2nd millennium BCE. Presuppositions of his analysis, which aims to identify precise matches between features of the Caves and elements of the myth of Minos's death, are the belief that myth must always be based on some kind of truth (either historical or not) and the observation that Ancient Greek authors Herodotus and Diodorus Siculus did not express any doubts about the historicity of the narrative about Minos's death. Some of the main correspondences according to Montagna's account may be summarized as follows:²⁹

(1) The Gurfa Caves are located in the valley of the Platani river in the western half of Sicily, which, according to ancient sources, was inhabited by the indigenous Sicans before the Greek colonisation, matching elements (c–d) of the myth (cf. *supra*, section §2), i. e. Minos's expedition to the Sican kingdom in search for Daedalus and his death in their territory.

(2) The remarkable dimensions and shape of the 'Tholos Chamber' allow for the assumption that it had once been the burial site of a high-ranking chief with an Aegean cultural milieu, matching element (e) of the myth, i.e. the magnificent burial of Minos, king of Crete, in a monumental building comprising an underground chamber.

(3) The mastery of construction techniques required for the design and realisation of the Gurfa complex, together with its Aegean features, would fit the identification of the author as a 'Daedalic' architect, i.e. the member of a school of architects which may have been mythically traced back to Daedalus, matching the element (b) of the myth, namely Daedalus's residence and work among the Sicans.

In Montagna's view, the Gurfa complex may thus be traced back to a flourishing period in the history of Minoan civilization, before the Thera eruption (17th–16th century BCE), and thus several centuries earlier than the construction of the Treasury of Atreus in Mycenae (14th–13th century BCE); any remains of the temple of Aphrodite associated with the tomb of Minos, as well as any inscriptions bearing the name of Minos, would have been destroyed when the tomb was dismantled during the reign of Theron of Acragas, as told by Diodorus (see above §2 [e]).

29 Cf., e.g., Montagna (2005: 90–93, *passim*), Montagna (2009).

As we shall see in the next section, this reconstruction was soon adopted and spread by means of various media by the local authorities of Alia, as well as by individuals and non-profit associations; Montagna’s hopes that his theories would inspire specialists in the prehistory and protohistory of Sicily to further investigate the Gurfa Caves and the surrounding areas from an archaeological perspective, however, were not met warmly. In 2009, during a conference on the Caves organised by Massimo Cultraro and Francesca Spatafora at the National Research Council (*Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche*) in Palermo (in conjunction with the exhibition treated below, §4 [1]), specialists and archaeologists of the local Superintendency rejected the interpretations of Montagna (who was among the speakers as well) and rather spoke in support of an origin of the ‘Tholos Chamber’ during the Early Middle Ages as a pit for the storage of grain, which would have originally been much smaller, only reaching its present-day dimensions after centuries of continuous use and modifications; the upper lateral chambers may have been excavated much later, when the site was under the control of the Teutonic Knights (13th century, see above), whereas the lower levels may have not even been there before the second half of the 19th century (as they are not mentioned by a visitor in 1873). The analysis of the Gurfa ‘Tholos’ as a grain pit had already been advanced by Henri Bresc in 1979 and has been extensively discussed in more recent publications by Giovanni Mannino, Valeria Brunazzi, Monica Chiovaro, and Stefano Vassallo.³⁰

To sum up briefly, after centuries in which the Gurfa complex had been exploited by North-African settlers, by the Teutonic Knights, and by, of course, Sicilian farmers and shepherds, the expropriation and re-discovery of the Caves by the Aliese community (in conjunction with the rise of environmentalist concerns in Italy and Sicily) during the 80s led to the gradual development of an ‘Aegean Theory’ of the origin of the complex, which culminated in their interpretation as the ‘Tomb of Minos’, first advanced by Carmelo Montagna and later rejected by Palermo’s Superintendency. Our summary deals, of course, only with a selection of the publications and initiatives on the Gurfa complex: a thorough account of the scholarship on the Caves and of the on-going debate on their origin would clearly exceed the scope of this contribution.

§4. King Minos is dead, long live King Minos: promotion of the ‘Gurfa Myth’ in Alia.

Even though it was soon rejected by the Superintendency’s specialists, the idea that the Gurfa Caves should be identified as the ‘Tomb of Minos’ proved to be particularly appealing to (at least some) members of Alia’s community, as well as to the town’s authorities, who established a particularly fruitful collaboration with

30 Cf., e.g., Mannino (2016); Brunazzi et al. (2017).

Montagna during the administration of former mayor Francesco Todaro, between 2007 and 2017. This period saw the birth of various Aliese associations, such as *Rabat*, *La Fucina*, and the local branch of regional association *BCSicilia* (actually established in January 2018), which have engaged in the promotion of not only Alia's cultural heritage in general, but also of the Caves, more or less explicitly presented as the 'Tomb of Minos'. In August 2009, a group with the specific aim of promoting the Gurfa complex was formed by 17 volunteers, led by Gaetana 'Tania' Di Marco, who in 2019 became head of the town's Department of Touristic Promotion within mayor Felice Guglielmo's administration. The group's activities, which included the supervision of guided tours, the sale of tickets (3€ at full price, plus various reductions), as well as standard maintenance works, stopped in 2013, leaving the complex almost 'undefended'; by 2015, however, one of the volunteers, Gioacchino Ganci, had become the unofficial caretaker of the Caves, spending most of his time there on a daily basis and acting as a guide for the tourists who wanted to visit the area, access to which had become free of charge.

This synergy between father of the 'Gurfa Myth' Montagna, the town administration, and local associations and volunteers has resulted in the manifold promotion of Alia and the Gurfa Caves as the location of the myth of Minos's death and in the organisation of a number of related activities. The following is a selection of notable events, which may serve as examples of this intermedial appropriation of the myth:

(1) Starting on 6 July 2009, in conjunction with the opening of the international documentary film festival 'Sole Luna', the Modern Art Gallery Sant'Anna in Palermo hosted a 2-month exhibition (until the first week of September) with the title 'Terra e luce. Dalla Gurfa al Roden Crater di James Turrell / Land and Light. From Gurfa Caves to James Turrell's Roden Crater', in which photographs and small-scale models of American land artist Turrell's ongoing project (an installation located in Arizona's Painted Desert) were displayed in juxtaposition with a photographic project on the Gurfa complex by Italian photographer Alessandro Belgiojoso (see, e.g., fig. 11.1 and fig. 11.3), a comparison which was largely based on Montagna's theories on the function of the Caves and on their origin as the work of a protohistoric 'Daedalic' architect; a bilingual Italian-English exhibition catalogue was published in the same year, featuring texts on the Gurfa complex by, among others, Belgiojoso and Montagna.³¹ The exhibition was later transformed into a permanent display at Alia's Museum of Photography, established for the occasion in 2010.

(2) In December 2009, the Caves were officially included as one of the locations of the myth of Daedalus and Minos within the section 'Locations of the heroes and of the heroic legends' (*Luoghi degli eroi e delle leggende eroiche*) of

31 Cf. Belgiojoso, De Rosa, et al. (2009).

the ‘Regional Charter of the Locations of the Identity and of the Memory’ (*Carta Regionale dei Luoghi dell’Identità e della Memoria*) issued by Sicily’s Regional Department of Cultural and Environmental Heritage and of Public Education;³² the inclusion has been criticised by Palermo’s Superintendency functionary Giovanni Mannino.³³

(3) In March 2015, after a public competition was held in 2014 within the (mostly EU-funded) project for the renewal of Alia’s Belvedere,³⁴ the town administration commissioned five panels on themes related to the Gurfa complex,

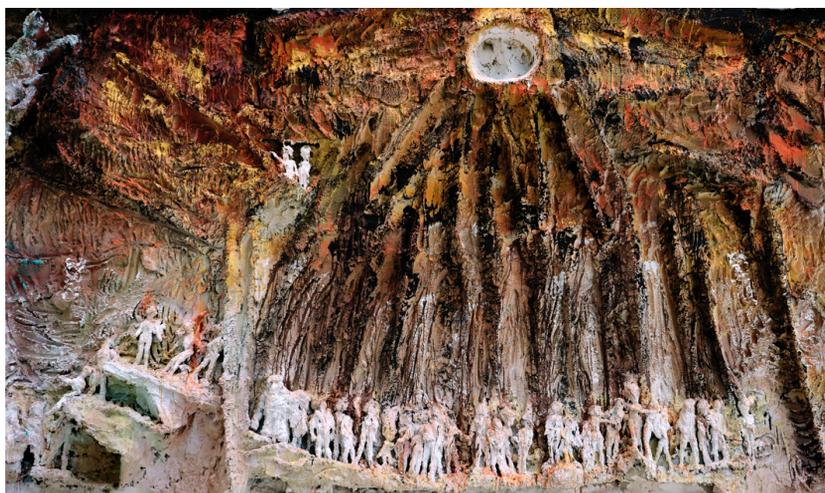


Fig. 11.5: A detail of Croce Taravella’s ‘Gurfa Myth’ mural (photograph: Luciano Schimmenti, 2016; printed with permission by the creator)

as well as to the four seasons, from Palermo-based artist Croce Taravella.³⁵ The mural, entitled ‘The Gurfa Myth at Alia’s Belvedere’ (*Il Mito della Gurfa al Belvedere di Alia*), was inaugurated by then mayor Todaro in an official ceremony held on 11 November 2016; a catalogue of photographs of the mural by Luciano Schimmenti (see, e.g., fig. 11.5), featuring texts by, among others, Todaro and Montagna, was published for the occasion.³⁶ As may be guessed already from its title and as stated by the author in various interviews, Taravella’s artwork has

32 See the ‘Decreto assessoriale n. 8410 del 03/12/2009’.

33 Mannino (2016: 2).

34 Project identification number (CUP): F92L10000230006; competition identification number (CIG): 5975348528.

35 See the ‘Determinazione n. 2 del 20-03-2015 del registro settoriale, n. 201 del registro generale’.

36 Cf. Schimmenti (2016).

been heavily influenced by his conversations with Montagna on the original function of the Gurfa complex as the ‘Tomb of Minos’ and a proto-historic sanctuary: the mural features depictions of rituals which, according to Montagna’s interpretations, would have taken place inside the complex, such as a celebration of the spring equinox (cf. below, [6]) by a crowd gathered inside the ‘Tholos Chamber’ (fig. 11.5; note the ‘oculus’ in the center of the roof spreading light on the people below), or a ritual descent through a hole into a burial chamber which, according to Montagna, had to be performed by aspiring kings (matching descents of heroes into the Realm of the Dead attested within Greek mythology and beyond).³⁷

According to then mayor Todaro, the renewal of Alia’s Belvedere and, more specifically, the commission of an artwork on the ‘Gurfa Myth’ from a renowned contemporary artist were only a part, though an essential one, of a larger project aimed at making Alia a touristic destination by intercepting the flux of visitors to the ‘Tomb of Minos’: given that the Gurfa Caves are ca. 5 km from the town, it should not be taken for granted that tourists interested in the complex come to Alia as well. The intended function of Taravella’s ‘mythological’ mural at Alia’s Belvedere was thus to act as a thematic link between a visit to the Caves and a stop in town, where tourists would have ideally been invited to taste local food and wine products as well, making sure that the local shops and restaurants benefit from the promotion of the Gurfa complex as a touristic attraction. The projected increase of visitors to Alia, however, has not met expectations, probably due to the difficult situation of the roads leading to Alia and the Gurfa complex (see below §5); furthermore, Todaro has complained about the (in his opinion) insufficient efforts that have been later made to promote and explain the artwork both to tourists and to the local community.

(4) On the night of 9 August 2017, an experimental play (with no dialogues) was performed at the Gurfa complex by members of the association *Generazione Sicilia*, bearing the same title as Montagna’s 2004 publication, namely ‘In the footprints of Minos’ (*Sulle Tracce di Minosse*). Several Aliese citizens took part in the performance, not only as actors, but also in directing and in the preparation of the scenography; the action took place both inside the chambers and in front of the entrance of the Caves. Attendance by the community was high and the event was apparently well appreciated by the public.³⁸ A video of the play is available on YouTube,³⁹ attesting, on the one hand, the authors’ faithful adoption of Mon-

³⁷ See e.g. the video interview with Taravella published online by Palermo’s edition of national newspaper *La Repubblica* on 1 Dec. 2015 (‘Alia, ultimato il murales di Croce Taravella che racconta i miti della Gurfa’; <https://video.repubblica.it/edizione/palermo/alia-ultimato-il-murales-di-croce-taravella-che-racconta-i-miti-della-gurfa/220461/219660>; last accessed 16 Mar. 2024).

³⁸ According to Gioacchino Ganci (interview).

³⁹ See ‘Alia Grotte della Gulfa. Sulle tracce di Minosse’ (<https://youtu.be/ewOHZFbnoDQ>; last accessed 16 Mar. 2024).

tagna's mythological interpretation of the Gurfa complex (as already clear from the title), and, on the other hand, their fairly accurate enactment of the myth of Minos's death in Sicily as told by Diodorus Siculus, matching most of the elements identified above (§2): for instance, it may be noted that among the elements (a–e) of the myth which were dramatized in the play, only (b–e) have a role in Montagna's theories, whereas element (a), namely Daedalus's escape from Crete, does not; it must have thus been included in an effort to provide the audience with a more complete picture of the myth, as well as with an immediate link to a more famous myth (Daedalus and his son Icarus's flight with wings of wax).

The enactment of the myth was one in a series of summer entertainment events in 2017, referred to as 'Summer of Alia' (*Estate Aliese*); according to former mayor Todaro, however, the play grew out of a project to create a Minos-themed production with larger funds (sufficient to, e.g., hire a nationally well-known director) to be performed at the Gurfa complex (possibly on a detachable stage, that would have been disassembled after the event). The aim would have been to promote the Caves as a location for the performance of Greek drama after the model of other archaeological sites such as the ancient theaters of Segesta (in the former Province of Trapani) and Siracusa. These sites are indeed very successfully employed for such events, but they are also relatively harder to reach for tourists visiting the Northern Sicilian coast. These may have thus been, in Todaro's view, intercepted by Alia and the 'Gurfa theater', creating (at least some) job opportunities for the Aliese community; at a later time, the Minos-themed play may have also been performed in local schools as part of the town's cultural heritage. This larger project was, however, never actually carried out, and the relatively small 2017 event may possibly remain the only enactment of the myth of Minos's death at Alia, and perhaps even world-wide, given that this less-known myth is not actually related in any major Ancient Greek poetic work, and thus unlikely to be performed in a contemporary setting.

(5) From March to June 2017, sixty schoolchildren from Alia, aged 5 to 12, took part in a series of educational workshops entitled 'The shape of the landscape' (*La forma del paesaggio*), organised with the sponsorship of the town administration by Elisa Chimento and Calogera Gattuso, president and vice-president of Aliese association *Rabat*, respectively. The workshops took place at Alia's Museum of Photography (see above, [1]) on Thursdays and Fridays, from 3 pm to 7 pm, totaling twenty-five meetings and a hundred hours; only fifteen meetings had originally been planned, but ten additional ones were organised due to high participation. According to Chimento, the general aim of the initiative was to increase the kids' level of awareness concerning the value of Alia's cultural and environmental heritage, as some, e.g., had never heard about the Gurfa complex before. During the first two meetings, the young participants were instructed at

length about Minos's mythical saga, using Diodorus Siculus (the only author who attests the 'Tomb of Minos' myth) as a primary source; after hearing for the first time about Minos, Ariadne, Theseus, the Minotaur, the Labyrinth, as well as Daedalus and Icarus, the kids were invited to make drawings inspired by episodes of the saga (fig. 11.6), e.g. Ariadne's rescuing of Theseus from the Labyrinth by means of the famous thread (fig. 11.6, upper left), Daedalus's and Icarus's escape by means of wings made of wax from the Labyrinth (fig. 11.6, upper right), and Minos's death in boiling water after being invited to a bath by Cocalus's daughters (fig. 11.6, lower left). During the second two meetings, the children visited the Gurfa complex, accompanied by the organisers, by unofficial Gurfa caretaker Gioacchino Ganci, and by photographer Giuseppe Centanni; after being invited to narrate what they could still recall of the Minos myth (impressively much, according to Chimento), they were told about the Caves' mythical associations (as per Montagna's theories); the kids were later asked to make drawings inspired by their visit, which attest how closely the young artists have come to associate an extremely ancient myth with a place they have been able to experience first-hand (see, e.g., a smiling King Minos at the Gurfa complex in fig. 11.6, lower right). A small exhibition was organised at the end of the series of workshops, in which the

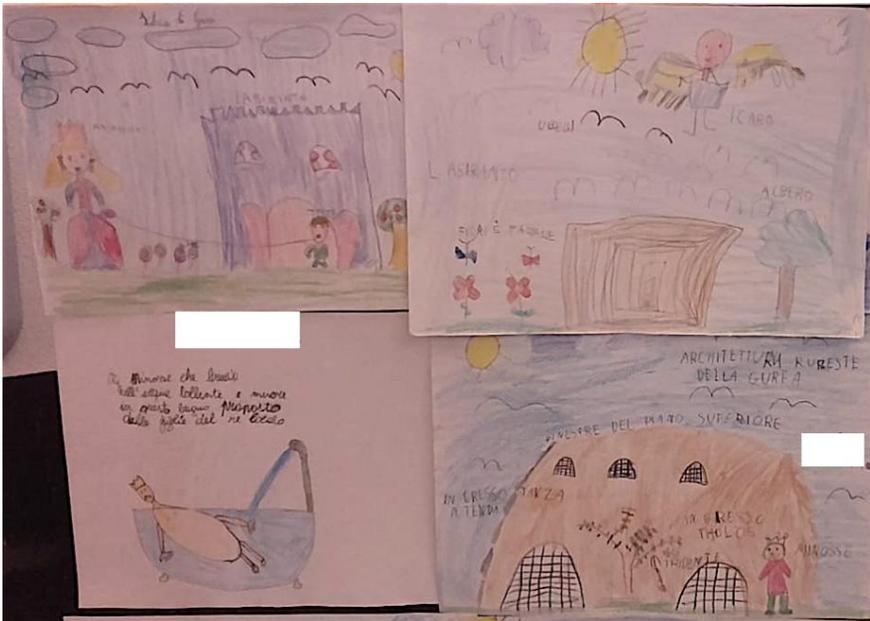


Fig. 11.6: Some drawings of the Minos saga by Aliese kids who took part in the 2017 workshops 'The shape of the landscape' (names have been deleted; pictures printed with permission by Rabat)

drawings were displayed together with small-scale clay models of the 'Tholos Chamber' which had been made by the kids during later meetings.

(6) Further (usually free of charge) 'mythological' activities have been organised with regularity at the Gurfa complex: some of them implicitly dealt with the Caves' interpretation as 'Tomb of Minos', whereas others were explicitly linked to it.

To the former type may be ascribed, e.g., regular group observations of the spring equinox inside the Gurfa 'Tholos Chamber': for instance, on 23 March 2019, after a guided tour of the Caves by Montagna, participants were to witness a specific lighting phenomenon occurring at noon, before being invited to taste local food products around 13; then mayor Felice Guglielmo attended the event as well.

As for the activities explicitly associated with the myth, one may mention, e.g., a public reading of (Pseudo-) Plato's dialogue *Minos*, which was organised on the evening of 22 June 2019 at the Caves by the associations *BCSicilia* and *Paideia* with the support of the local administrations of Alia and of nearby town Valledolmo.

Before passing on to our conclusion, we may briefly note that the way in which the myth of the adventures of Daedalus and Minos in Sicily has been re-interpreted and newly constructed in Alia is impressively manifold: ranging from more formal photograph exhibitions and public artworks to amateur plays and educational workshops with children, the public outreach of the Gurfa Myth has been characterised by creativity and diversification, to a degree which rarely finds matches in the activities of scholars working in more academic environments.

§5. Where Greek heroes go to die (and be reborn): conclusions.

Let us thus come back to the last of our research questions, namely: Why does a small, but dynamic troop of present-day Sicilians believe that an Ancient Greek myth may help provide a better future to Alia's children? Our sketch of the history of the Gurfa Caves' re-discovery by the Aliese community and by various scholars (§3), as well as of their intermedial promotion as the 'Tomb of Minos' (§4), allows us to identify three main thematic areas.

(1) Economy, or, more specifically, tourism: already in 1995 – well before the development of the Minos theory (cf. §3) – then mayor Tanino D'Andrea spoke of a long-term project of development of a Gurfa-centered touristic economy for Alia, 'grounded on the re-discovery, promotion and fruition of cultural heritage, as well as on culture seen as an economic resource';⁴⁰ similar views were often voiced by the Gurfa Myth's enthusiasts. Former mayor Francesco Todaro repeatedly pointed to the need for the economic growth and work opportunities which

⁴⁰ Cf. Cumbo et al. (1995: 6).

an increase of tourism may provide as the main reason for his administration's promotion of the Minos theory (see above §4, [3] and [4]); even though Todaro expressed his willingness to accept any convincing theory on the origin of the Gurfa complex, he also stated his belief that, 'as this one [i. e., the mythological interpretation, *R. G.*] is very suggestive, it may intrigue and attract more people'. Father of the Minos-theory Carmelo Montagna argued that 'among all these rocks [i. e., that make up the landscape of Central Sicily, *R. G.*], one of them actually tells a story: let us invest in it', advancing a parallel with '2019 European Capital of Culture' Matera, a city in Basilicata (Southern Italy) known for the ancient cave dwellings which make up its historical center (referred to as the *Sassi*, 'Rocks'). Though committed to his theory, the scholar admitted that, even if his 'Daedalic' attribution of the Caves proved to be wrong, the designation 'Tomb of Minos' should be employed nevertheless for 'marketing purposes', in the same way as Heinrich Schliemann's clearly mythological designations of the tholos tomb of an unknown Mycenaean chief as the 'Treasury of Atreus' or the 'Tomb of Agamemnon' may still legitimately be used today for its suggestive power, without being regarded as historically inaccurate; a thematically even closer parallel may be Arthur Evans's mythological identification of the Palace of Knossos in Crete as the Minotaur's Labyrinth (see the end of section §2). The association with an ancient myth thus seems to be regarded by our interviewees as the best chance to promote the Gurfa complex (and thus Alia) as a touristic destination; in the words of unofficial caretaker (and leading authority on Gurfa tourism) Gioacchino Ganci (interview):

'[...] if you reach a place, and you've been told it's just a grain pit, you look at it, you leave, and you never come back; if they tell you it's the tomb of Minos, [...] then maybe it's not, but in that moment you get a different feeling, a different energy from the visit [...], it makes you come back [later] [...]'.

(2) Environmentalism, or, more specifically, landscape conservation and promotion: as argued above (cf. §3), the time of the expropriation and re-discovery of the Caves by the Aliese community closely matches the rise of concern about environmentalist issues of the Sicilian (and Italian in general) public opinion during the 80s, issues which are indeed explicitly mentioned, e.g., in videos of the 'Long Walk' from Alia to the Gurfa Caves. Ironically, however, the Gurfa complex itself may have actually suffered permanent damage from the 80s onwards as a consequence of its uncontrolled fruition, as lamented by Superintendency functionary Giovanni Mannino;⁴¹ in any case, Alia's landscape has remained generally intact, as the pollution found in other areas of Italy has been prevented by the delay in the development of an industrial sector. The promotion of the 'Tomb of Minos' as one of the most remarkable landscape features of Alia's territory was

41 Cf. Mannino (2016: 4, 7, 27).

clearly essential in the organisation of, e.g., the series of educational workshops ‘The shape of the landscape’ (cf. above §4, [1] and [5]). The Minos myth thus seems to have been adopted by the Aliese community as a sort of ‘geomyth’ (a term coined by geologist Dorothy Vitaliano) in respect to the Gurfa Caves, i. e. as a narrative whose main function is to explain the origin of a certain unusual feature of the landscape: countless examples of such narratives are attested all over the world, ranging from Native American myths seeking to explain (by invoking the claws of a giant bear) the origin of a very steep hill in North America (‘Devil’s Tower’ in Wyoming)⁴² to the Kenyan myth about the outstanding vegetation of ‘Ndega’s Grove’ (involving a tragic love story between two mythical characters);⁴³ an even more relevant parallel may actually be that with various Ancient Greek local traditions attempting to make sense of remarkable landscape features of Sicilian localities, such as those mentioned by Pindar in his so-called ‘Sicilian *Odes*’.⁴⁴ There can be no doubt that the Caves may be perceived as a strikingly unusual feature of Alia’s landscape: the wonder felt by anyone admiring for the first time the Gurfa complex and, particularly, the inner part of the ‘Tholos Chamber’ (as e.g. the young participants of the educational workshops, according to Chimento) was repeatedly mentioned by all interviewees and, for what it’s worth, even personally experienced by the author of this contribution. From this perspective, the official interpretation of the ‘Tholos Chamber’ as a medieval pit for the storage of grain has apparently been regarded as not satisfying by some, i. e. as an insufficient match to the awe caused by a visit to the Caves; this function seems instead to be better fulfilled by the Minos myth, perhaps paralleling the processes that gave rise to local myths in Antiquity and beyond.

(3) Local identity and cultural heritage: already in 1995, then mayor D’Andrea claimed that ‘our interest in the studies that we are inaugurating today [i. e., with the first conference on the Gurfa complex, *R. G.*] is thus no pure curiosity, no desire of erudition, but a fundamental life need, an anthropological interest’;⁴⁵ indeed, the Gurfa Myth seems to have served a function which transcends both the economic and the environmental levels: as admitted by Montagna himself, local pride was an essential factor for his theory’s success in Alia. The interpretation of the Caves as the ‘Tomb of Minos’ seems to have (at least partially) fulfilled the community’s need for a high-profile cultural identity, catapulting the town and its citizens from one of Italy’s most socio-economically depressed areas

42 Cf. Vitaliano (2007: 1–2). In Vitaliano’s terminology, ‘geomyth’ can also refer to myths narrating geological events which have actually happened (such as historically ascertained volcanic eruptions or earthquakes).

43 Cf. Chesaina (1997: 60–62).

44 Cf. Lewis (2019: *passim*).

45 Cf. Cumbo et al. (1995: 6).

directly into the millennia-old stage of a mythical adventure, an ancestral kingdom where ingenious architects arrive by flying and build architectural wonders, and where powerful kings struggle for prestige and kill each other by means of cunning tricks. The Gurfa Myth enthusiasts have transformed the territory of Alia from an area which had apparently been ignored by Greek colonists during Antiquity, into the first place of encounter between the indigenous Sicans, here understood as the most ancient (Central) Sicilians and thus ideal ancestors of the Aliese community, and the Minoans, one of the most advanced civilisations of the ancient Mediterranean, here also serving as ideal ancestors of the fathers of European civilisation *par excellence*, the Greeks. Furthermore, rather than being regarded as ‘uncivilised savages’, the indigenous people of Central Sicily (and proxies of the Aliese) are here assigned both advanced technological achievements (see element [b] of the myth, i. e. Daedalus’s residence and work among the Sicans) and victory against the most powerful sea-king of the time (element [d], i. e. Minos’s death), even indirectly causing the arrival of the first ‘Greeks’ in Sicily (element [f], i. e. the settlement of Cretan soldiers in the island). In Montagna’s words, the Tomb of Minos at the Gurfa Caves ‘was already archaeology’ by the time the first Greek colonies were founded on the coast of Sicily: rather than a depressed area which has been struggling to reach the development levels of the coast, the territory of Alia is thus constructed as the now-ruined heart of a once-rich kingdom, a sort of Sicilian Atlantis which is only waiting to be discovered again.

For reasons related to Alia’s economic, environmental, and socio-political situation, some members of its community have thus embraced the mythological interpretation of the Gurfa Caves, hoping that it may help the area reach a new resurgence; at the moment of writing, however, the development promised by the myth has yet to come. One of the major issues faced by Alia and the Gurfa complex is the very poor state of local roads, the importance of which has been stressed by former mayors Guglielmo and Todaro, as well as by Minos-theorist Montagna (interviews). Another major issue which has often been mentioned by the Gurfa Myth’s enthusiasts is a perceived indifference of the Superintendency towards the Caves (probably due to the non-academic status of the ‘Tomb of Minos’ theory), which has, in their opinion, hindered their promotion, leaving volunteers and local associations alone; at any rate, it is desirable that future town administrations improve the collaboration with the Superintendency in the research and promotion of the Gurfa complex.

As is often the case within mythological narratives, the (supposed) location of Minos’s death has also come to be the place where the Cretan king has been brought back to life, together with Daedalus, Cocalus, Ariadne, and the other characters of his saga, resuscitated by the efforts of a group of Sicilians who still

believe in the power of myth; whether King Minos will reward Alia and its citizens with renewed prosperity, however, is a question which must remain open.

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Part IV
Afterthought

Chapter 12

JOSÉ MANUEL LOSADA

Cultural Myth Criticism: Theory and Methodology

1 Introduction

For decades, literary critics have sought to imbue their research with a degree of empirical certainty akin to that achieved by linguistics. Likewise, myth criticism researchers have sought the endorsement of anthropology. In recent years, myth criticism researchers have leaned towards fashionable fields of study: gender studies, environmental studies, migration studies, and, in general, all those related to markedly political issues.

Of course, the myth criticism researcher must always integrate social and human disciplines, but without subordinating myth to them. They must also seek social and environmental justice, but without relegating myth to a secondary position. And never, under any circumstances, should they twist the text to make it say what they want it to say. Only when myth criticism overcomes its supposedly ancillary role and the tendency to pursue myths for tangential or dubious reasons will it evolve into a fully matured science.

In response to sociological conditions, a new methodological proposal – which I term Cultural Myth Criticism – seeks to provide a robust definition of myth and evaluate how contemporary factors influence it, thereby pinpointing its key functions. This innovative approach facilitates a thorough understanding of myth's complexity and its manifestations within the contemporary cultural framework.

Currently, there is no universally accepted definition of myth. Whilst there is consensus on the existence of ancient (e.g., Antigone), medieval (e.g., The Grail), and modern mythologies (e.g., Faust), agreement on what constitutes a myth remains elusive. The debate over the fundamental elements of myth – such as image, archetype, symbol, motif, theme, mytheme, character, figure, hero, and type – underscores this issue. Compounded by ambiguities, critical impressionism, and ideological biases, forging a consensus on the definition of myth seems almost utopian. Yet, the pursuit of such a definition is crucial and unavoidable.

Losada, J. M. (2025), 'Cultural Myth Criticism: Theory and Methodology', in *Antiquity in Progress: Intermedial Presences of Ancient Mediterranean Cultures in the Modern World*, ed. M. Stachon, A. Lipscomb, and P. Kolovou (Heidelberg: Propylaeum), 217–228.
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I offer a definition of myth that is the culmination of extensive research, collaborative efforts, and a deep engagement with numerous mythological narratives. This definition aims to solidify the theoretical base from which Cultural Myth Criticism can continue to evolve and impact the academic discourse on myths:

Myth is a narrative characterised by its functionality, symbolism, and thematic depth, recounting extraordinary events connected to transcendent, supernatural, and sacred references, typically devoid of direct historical documentation and always alluding to either an individual or a collective cosmogony or eschatology, yet always in an absolute sense.¹

This definition incorporates all the elements essential for the genesis of a myth, with a special emphasis on transcendence as the primary element influencing all others. It's important to clarify that I do not insist on researchers accepting the concept of transcendence uncritically, as that would be inappropriate and contrary to my role as a scholar. Instead, I assert that understanding mythological transcendence – its meaning and its manifestations in mythological narratives – is crucial for any thorough analysis of myths. Without sacred, supernatural transcendence, a narrative does not qualify as a myth. I am not referring to existential, social, ontological, gnoseological, fantastical, or esoteric transcendence, but specifically to mythological transcendence.

In myth, transcendence is invariably sacred. Derived from the Latin *sacrātum*, meaning 'dedicated to the gods', sacred stands in contrast to the profane, which relates solely to the human, temporal, and earthly realms (from Latin *profānus* versus *fānum*, meaning 'temple'). Within our Western tradition, the transcendences in mythologies – be they Hellenic, Roman, Judeo-Christian, Celtic, Slavic, Nordic, or Iberian – are consistently sacred. Although transcendence in myth allows for the presence of immanence, parody, and indifference, the fundamental starting point for any myth is always its sacred transcendence.

2 Traditional Myth Criticism and Cultural Myth Criticism

Cultural Myth Criticism studies mythological narratives with particular attention to the original transcendence of myth and its exponential disappearance throughout literary history. As a result, it includes amongst its main tasks the study of the processes of mythification and demystification in literary texts and their artistic manifestations.

Myth criticism is the discipline dedicated to studying myths. Established as an interdisciplinary field, it intersects with various humanities and social sciences such as sociology, ethnology, anthropology, religious studies, philosophy, literary theory, and literary history.

1 Losada (2022: 193) [translation by myself].

Influential thinkers such as James George Frazer, Ernst Cassirer, Joseph Campbell, and Gilbert Durand, along with psychologists like Carl Jung and sociologists like Roger Caillois, have deepened our understanding of symbolic thought, the unconscious, and the collective imaginary. However, the contributions from related disciplines – ethnography, philosophy, history, psychoanalysis, semiotics, and literary criticism – often suffer from an excessive emphasis on peripheral aspects of the myth, as if it only deserved study from their disciplinary perspectives.

To these scientifically valid approaches (although clearly biased towards disciplines adjacent to myth criticism), others have been added that only hunt in foreign territory. The emergence of these surreptitious, poacher pseudo-myth criticisms – as seen in the works of Simone de Beauvoir, Roland Barthes, and Donna Haraway – illustrates a further deviation from genuine mythological inquiry. These approaches often disregard true myths, either reducing them to mere themes, motifs, symbols, or conflating them with psychological sublimations, social obsessions, and urban beliefs. We are far from the terrain and interests of myth.

Similarly, scholars in religious studies like Mircea Eliade and literary theorists such as Northrop Frye and Robert Segal have further explored the interconnections of religious beliefs and their literary expressions. Traditional myth critics like Georges Dumézil, Hans Blumenberg, Kurt Hübner, and Pierre Brunel have contributed significantly by establishing paradigmatic systems and clarifying the meanings of mythic narratives within their original sources, evolution, and contexts. This traditional approach to myth criticism proves effective when examining myths in pre-modern literature, identifying literary sources, tracing linguistic evolution, exploring intertextual relationships, and understanding social, psychological, and anthropological dimensions. However, again, its utility primarily benefits the auxiliary disciplines rather than myth criticism itself. Traditional myth criticism often fails to adequately analyse the authentically mythical elements within narratives.

Whilst it is important to acknowledge the valuable insights of traditional myth criticism, it has become partly inoperative for two reasons: it often subordinates mythological study to other scientific disciplines, and it overlooks the contemporary societal factors that influence the reception of myths.

A new, autonomous, and contemporary form of myth criticism is essential – one that effectively addresses the challenges of understanding and interpreting myths within the complex framework of modern cultural contexts. This innovative approach seeks to revitalise the study of myths by focusing on their intrinsic elements and contemporary relevance.

3 Methodology

Cultural Myth Criticism aims to synthesise the evolution of myths within the complex contemporary context – tracking their origins, development, and processes of demystification and remythification. This approach is bidirectional: on one hand, it examines myths from a contemporary perspective; on the other, it studies our own era through these same myths. This dual examination deepens our understanding of both the myths themselves and our current cultural realities.

To achieve this, Cultural Myth Criticism adopts a tripartite analytical methodology: it examines the factors that condition the study of the myth itself, explores the various functions of the myth, and outlines the essential criteria for working with myths.

3.1 Factors in a New Era for the Study of Myth

The first analysis focuses on the conditions affecting the understanding of mythological narratives today. This involves considering a series of high-impact socio-cultural factors: globalisation, relativism, and immanence. These three factors shape our contemporary Western society and profoundly affect the representation and effectiveness of traditional myths.

Many researchers, influenced by these factors, struggle to comprehend the significance of myths. Consequently, the cultural, ideological, and economic conditions of our society have led to three fundamental changes in the analysis of mythology:

- They have significantly altered the concept, reception, and dissemination of myths.
- They have fostered the creation of a new mythology, often spurious, that frequently conflicts with authentic myths.
- They have blurred the boundaries between the notion of myth and other concepts of different origins.

With the ensured interaction of disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, a new myth criticism must adapt to our time's new ways of thinking. These factors or phenomena factually impact all members of contemporary society. They are considered logics because they establish a new way of thinking about the world beyond material considerations. They are trends because they depend on the course of general events and chart the paths humanity will follow for an indeterminate time.

Rethinking myth in light of these factors will undoubtedly help redefine the new directions of myth criticism. This involves establishing some necessary conditions for the epistemology of Cultural Myth Criticism: a methodology adapted

to new times must explain how exogenous influences, relativist character, and the postponement of transcendence affect the reception of mythological narratives.

3.1.1 The Phenomenon of Globalisation

Globalisation, a multifaceted process involving cultural, social, political, economic, and technological aspects, has led to a world where national boundaries blur, cultures intermingle, and societies become more interconnected. This trend, which took off in the late 20th century with the end of the Cold War and the rise of the internet, has integrated local cultures into a global narrative where diverse cultural practices and products circulate freely across continents.

While globalisation has facilitated the spread of cultural products and ideas, it has also sparked debates about its impact on local identities and traditions. Historically distinct identities and their unique cultural practices are now under pressure from a homogenizing global culture that favors uniformity over diversity. This has led to the rise of anti-globalisation movements that resist this trend, championing local and community identities against the overarching influence of global forces. These movements argue against the loss of cultural specificity and fight for the preservation of marginalised cultures, which are often overshadowed in a globalised world.

The clash between globalisation and myth is particularly poignant. Myths, which are deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts and histories, face challenges in a globalised world where they risk becoming homogenised or trivialised. The traditional narratives and the rich diversity of myths catering to specific cultural or ethnic contexts struggle to maintain their relevance and integrity against a global narrative that tends to prioritise economic and technological efficiency over cultural depth.

Despite the efforts of anti-globalisation advocates, the relentless advance of globalisation seems inevitable due to the technological interconnectedness and economic interdependencies it fosters. The spread of the internet and the integration of global markets make reversing this trend difficult, if not impossible. Myths, in this context, are not just relics of the past but serve as a testament to the diversity of human experience and belief systems. They offer a counter-narrative to the global push towards uniformity, advocating for a world where diversity is not just tolerated but celebrated as essential to the human experience.

In summary, globalisation presents a formidable challenge to the preservation of mythological traditions. While it promotes an interconnected world, it also poses the risk of diluting the rich tapestry of myths that define and enrich various cultures. The ongoing tension between global uniformity and the preservation of diverse cultural narratives like myths is a central theme in understanding the broader implications of globalisation.

3.1.2 The Doxa of Relativism

Rooted in the ideological shifts of the late 18th and 19th centuries, relativism advocates for the idea that all truths are relative and subject to the individual's perspective and cultural background. This view challenges the traditional and absolute frameworks of myth, which often postulate universal truths and principles that transcend individual and cultural variations.

At the heart of relativism lies a significant tension between objectivism and subjectivism, influencing how myths are interpreted and understood. Relativism questions the existence of any universal or absolute truths beyond personal or cultural interpretations, promoting a view that all understanding is inherently subjective. This stance fundamentally opposes the mythic structure, which typically asserts fixed and unchanging truths about the world and human nature, such as the superiority of gods or the inevitability of fate.

Furthermore, the rise of relativism has led to a reinterpretation of myths within contemporary contexts, often aligning them with modern values and perspectives that may stray significantly from their original meanings. This modern recontextualization can dilute the profound, intended messages of myths, reducing their rich narratives to mere subjects of personal or cultural reinterpretation.

Relativism challenges the stability and authority of mythological narratives, creating an ongoing intellectual struggle to balance contemporary ideological perspectives with the traditional values encapsulated in myths. This tension between viewpoints exemplifies broader cultural debates about the nature of truth, knowledge, and the potential universality of certain human experiences.

3.1.3 The Logic of Immanence

In relation to the 'factors' shaping our contemporary society, I have previously suggested that we could also call them 'logics', as they reveal a new way of thinking about the world. Clearly, I do not refer to logic as a formal discipline or the art of correct reasoning, but rather to the dynamic accumulation of concepts and practical judgments made by our thought about beings that phenomenologically circumscribe our experiential perception of the world.

Indeed, our reflection and experience shape in our consciousness a phenomenological framework that almost inevitably conditions each of our approaches to each new experience. One cannot tell how much this affects the way we understand ancient, medieval, and modern mythology today.

Broadly and generally, postmodern individuals can only perceive everything around them in a globalised, relativistic, and immanent way. Among these logics, two are of particular interest for Cultural Myth Criticism: the logic of immanence and the logic of transcendence.

The concept of immanence can be considered from gnoseological, ontological, and epistemological perspectives. Here, it is used as an index of an existence correlative to our sensible world in relation to another external or transcendent one, both equally entitative and necessary for the mythical event. In the literary and artistic realm of myth, there are two possible worlds: one similar to ours in every way, with its earthly sphere and countless galaxies, and another, also similar to ours but not in every way, where beings of a divine, supernatural nature dwell. The primary world is immanent with respect to the ‘other’, secondary or transcendent world. Every mythological narrative tells of the extraordinary event in which two dimensions, immanent and transcendent, collide.

All of a sudden, in the diegesis of the story, a sacred character from the transcendent world bursts in and interacts with one or more characters from the immanent world: two vital and physical entities from different worlds, irreducible, meet temporally and fictionally. Then, in that clash, myth takes place.

Much of modern thought has confined reality to our sensible universe, thereby adopting an immanentism that denies any form of transcendence. This shift reflects the psychological fixation of modernity on autonomy.² Transcendence greatly expands the spectrum of realities, bringing with it ungraspable uncertainties and even laws that human nature must adhere to.

Given the progressive disbelief in the West – attributable to both past exegetical errors and the heightened positivism of modernity – combined with our innate aversion to heteronomy, people today often adopt what might be called the ‘ostrich tactic’: either denying the existence of other worlds or overlooking the pervasive influence of immanentism, whether consciously or unconsciously.

Herein lie, to a great extent, the difficulties many researchers encounter in fully understanding myths: the practical denial of transcendence can unconsciously lead to rejecting its possibility of existence even in a fictional world. The interpretation of mythical narratives becomes arduous, if not unfeasible, when severed from their transcendent dimension, as transcendence and myth are inseparably intertwined.

Ancient extinct religions such as those of the Celts, Iberians, Greeks, Romans, Scandinavians, Germans, and Slavs – as well as current polytheistic religions like Hinduism and Jainism, and monotheistic ones including Judaism, Christianity,

2 Critics identify Pico della Mirandola’s *Oration on the Dignity of Man* (*Oratio de hominis dignitate*, 1486) as the starting gun for the race towards absolute appropriation of free will. In this Renaissance manifesto, the author explains that, unlike other creatures, whose traits are set by specific rules, Adam is uniquely granted the freedom to choose his own nature. This free will, bestowed by a higher power, allows him to shape his identity as he sees fit. This marked the beginning of an exponential progression of autonomy in Western thought, particularly across three fundamental realms: epistemological (R. Descartes), political (J.-J. Rousseau), and moral (I. Kant); see Losada (2022: 88–89).

and Islam – enrich literary and artistic works with a wealth of myths that engage with transcendence. This is also true for some ancient and contemporary spiritual currents like Gnosticism, esotericism, and New Age.

In their study of artistic manifestations, proponents of Cultural Myth Criticism must combine academic rigour with an exquisite respect for all sensible ethical and religious perspectives, integrating methods open to understanding the transcendence inherent in all mythical production. This approach remains valid even for interpretations that dispense with, or even parody, this intertwining. Cultural Myth Criticism does not presuppose any religious stance; it achieves scientific status only through preserving its analytical methods, synthetic experiments, and the subsequent universal verification of its results, within the bounds required by the humanities.

Just as the primarily individual Western religious phenomenon does not contradict its collective dimension, so too does the mythical one: both exhibit characteristics that are simultaneously individual and collective. They shape a culture, endorse historical realities, influence economic conditions, explain social behaviours, legitimise political statuses, and establish ethical values.³

3.2 Referential Functions of Myth

The concept of function provides a useful analogy for understanding myths. A function establishes a systematic relationship between elements of two sets, where the output from set Y depends on inputs from set X. Unlike the mathematical function, the literary function always presents a wide range of possibilities due to the contingent nature of the writer, the medium, and the recipient. This is explained by formalist, structuralist, and semiological studies. Scholars like Vladimir Propp, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Claude Bremond have highlighted narrative functions and their order, showing how these functions manifest consistently across different stories and cultural artifacts. These narrative functions, whether denoting the actions of characters or the symbolic significance of events, are crucial in literary analysis and interpretation.

There is a realm where function presents an even greater range of possibilities: myth, where the relationship between literature and religion expands into the supernatural world. While it is true that forms, structures, and signs expand the immense range of traditional functions of myths, it must never be forgotten that every function should be subordinate to the general framework of transcendent referentiality, without which there is no myth.

Deep in the forest, Actaeon unexpectedly observes the naked beauty of the goddess Artemis taking a bath. To be discovered or not adds literary suspense to

3 For an extended discussion on this topic, see Losada (2022: 355–370).

the voyeurism. However, the hunter could never have imagined that his recklessness would lead to his metamorphosis. In the mythological narrative, the literary function is not only formal, structural, and semiological: it is also categorical and transcendental.

3.2.1 The Referential Framework of the Myth

Three types of references are crucial within myth: textual, chronological, and categorical. Textual references involve direct narrative components and their intertextual connections. Chronological references position myths within absolute time frameworks rather than historical timelines. Categorical references navigate the dichotomy between immanence and transcendence, essential for differentiating narrative and symbolic layers in myths.

This transcendence becomes apparent in mythic texts when referencing realities beyond mere possibility. In the TV series *American Gods* (First Season), Laura Moon, initially a sceptic of the afterlife, changes her beliefs after a near-death experience that reveals a transcendent reality. This narrative synthesis of immanent and transcendent realities demonstrates how myths blend natural and supernatural dimensions, affirming their existence.

3.2.2 The Hermeneutic Circle of Myth

The hermeneutic approach emphasises the interdependence of textual elements and their functions. Myths, rich with functions guiding interpretations, convey transcendent messages. It is crucial to respect the text's integrity while using interpretative tools to uncover its deeper meanings. Myths feature etiological (causal) and teleological (purpose-oriented) functions. Etiological functions explain the origins of phenomena, while teleological functions relate to the objectives that myths articulate. Key teleological functions include the didactic and subversive functions. The didactic function aids in explaining the origins and purposes of the world, while the subversive function challenges these narratives, offering alternative truths and stimulating critical reflection.

For example, philosophers like Plato used myth-related narratives to articulate complex concepts accessibly, as seen in *Phaedrus* where he describes the soul's nature through myth. Historical adaptations, such as Calderón's interpretation of the Daphne myth in *The Laurel of Apollo*, demonstrate how myths have been used to impart moral lessons and reflect cultural values. Myths, thus, serve to educate and challenge societal norms, maintaining their relevance and potency across different cultures and epochs.

Despite the shift towards modern scientific reasoning, myths continue to provide a unique lens through which to view the world, offering insights into human

nature, societal structures, and the interplay between immanent and transcendent realities. Through their referential functions, myths remain a fundamental element in cultural discourse, capable of conveying complex truths and facilitating a deeper understanding of our world and existence.⁴

3.3 Methodological Criteria

Next, for the sake of clarity, I will succinctly present the main criteria of Cultural Myth Criticism. First are the Transcendental Criteria (3.3.1), outlined in detail in the preceding pages. From these, the remaining criteria related to the structuring and imaginary of myth (3.3.2), its reception and classification (3.3.3), and the epistemological foundation of the discipline (3.3.4) are deduced.

3.3.1 Transcendental Criteria

Starting with a Definition: It is crucial to begin with an academic definition. Researchers should always adopt a coherent definition of myth and work ‘inside’ the myth and ‘for’ the myth. Their focus should be directed towards a primary and irreplaceable objective of the mythological narrative: ‘Where is myth?’ Other elements such as motifs, themes, types, figures, archetypes, and symbols are systemic and essential, but should never be conflated with secondary elements.

Awareness of Contemporary Influences: Researchers should exercise caution regarding factors that shape the imagination of our society, which is openly resistant to integrating transcendence. By acknowledging the distorting effects of the phenomenon of globalisation, the doxa of relativism, and the logic of immanence, researchers will be better equipped to analyze the reception of myths in literary texts and artistic works appropriately.

Exploring Deeper Dimensions: Research should delve into the ontological and onomasiological dimensions of myth. Beyond the semiotic and semiological references, the myth unfolds both metaphorically and metonymically at the paradigmatic and syntactic levels, always open to transcendence.

3.3.2 Structural and Imaginary Criteria

Identifying Mythemes: The task is to identify the mythemes that shape each myth. ‘A mytheme is the minimal thematic and mythological unit whose indispensable transcendent or supernatural dimension enables it to interact with other mythemes in the formation of a myth.’⁵ Unlike themes, mythemes carry a unique mythical valence that distinguishes them (e.g., metamorphosis or fortune-telling

4 For a more in-depth discussion on this topic, see Losada (2022: 271–299 and 2024).

5 Losada (2022: 536) [translation by myself].

are themes; they become mythical only when marked by a transcendent, mythical valence). The organisation of mythemes differentiates one myth from another, and the disappearance or integration of a mytheme can explain changes or declines in a myth's influence.

Relationship with Supernatural Narratives: This criterion addresses the myth's relationship with other narratives that also incorporate elements of the supernatural imaginary, primarily found in esotericism and fantasy (science fiction is always anti-mythical⁶). Cultural Myth Criticism places special emphasis on distinguishing these different imaginaries, each characterised by its own form of transcendence.

The Role of Magic: Researchers should consider that magic does not belong to any specific imaginary; instead, it is a tool that manifests the eternal human ambition to transform the world through supernatural means. Characters use magic to bypass the determinism of the world through whimsical, deterministic procedures.

3.3.3 Reception-related Criteria

Studying Myth Reception: The reception of myths requires an analysis of both the diachronic and synchronic dimensions, focusing on how myths are received and accepted. Myths are susceptible to momentary or prolonged crises, known as demystification processes, which are sometimes followed by remythification.

Developing a Myth Typology: Researchers should undertake various classifications of myths based on different criteria: periodic relative chronology (ancient, medieval, modern, contemporary); absolute chronology (cosmological, eschatological); and linguistic-geographic parameters (Greco-Roman, Old Testament, Celtic, Slavic, Finno-Ugric myths).

This also includes developing a typology of pseudo-myths, encompassing historical figures (Napoleon, Marilyn Monroe), pharmacological inventions (Prozac, Viagra), ideologies (Nazism, Communism), and societal intentions (everlasting progress).

3.3.4 Epistemological Criteria

Ensuring Discipline Autonomy: Myth criticism must be regarded as an autonomous discipline, avoiding any subordinate use by other disciplines such as sociology (myth as obsession) or psychoanalysis (myth as sublimation). However, collaboration with these disciplines in the study of myths is encouraged.

Interdisciplinary Approaches: A multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary approach is crucial. Highlighting the analysis of the symbolic imaginary, mytho-

6 On this topic of pressing relevance, see Losada (2021).

logical studies should permeate all cultural expressions, including literature, visual arts, music, and performing arts.

These are the main criteria of Cultural Myth Criticism.⁷ The aim of this new theory and methodology is to deepen understanding of the current, diverse, and complex world through the lens of myths. Grasping myth in contemporary contexts is crucial for researchers to first engage with their own awareness and then with the external world. This process allows the translation of knowledge from mythological narratives into a greater ability to communicate their enriching messages in today's society.

This hermeneutic process, characteristic of all coherent human sciences, is particularly suited for studying myth, one of the most evocative narratives of the mysterious condition of human beings. If the heuristic operability of my definition of myth is confirmed, and the outlined factors and functions are suitably combined, Cultural Myth Criticism aspires to become a valid interpretative key for the new individual and collective consciousness.

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7 Since 2007, a group of researchers from the Universidad Complutense and various universities in ten countries across Europe and America have spearheaded several initiatives focused on mythological studies, particularly emphasising their contemporary reception. These initiatives include *ACIS, Research Group in Myth Criticism, Asteria, International Association of Myth Criticism*, and *Amaltea, Journal of Myth Criticism*. Additionally, they have organised eight International Conferences on Myth Criticism and conducted five Research Projects in this field. This collaborative effort has culminated in the development of a new branch of myth criticism, which aims to clearly define myth, establish a coherent methodological approach, and lay down the epistemological groundwork for the discipline. To know more about the emergence of this theory, see Losada (2023).

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We are constantly surrounded by our history because we are part of it.
We are, in some ways, still cultural descendants of ancient Greeks:
Pythagoras, Euclid, and Archimedes did lay ground
for 'Apollo' flying to the moon, they just did not know it.



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