

OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

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

Edited by
Katarzyna Marciniak



OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

“OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD” Series

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**The following volumes contain the research results of the first stages
of the Our Mythical Childhood Programme (est. 2011)**

Loeb Classical Library Foundation Grant (2012–2013):

Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, vol. 8 in the series "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity", Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 526 pp.

Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives (2014–2017) and ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2022):

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

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The image used: Zbigniew Karaszewski, *Flora and Our Mythical Hope* (2017), based on the fresco: *Primavera di Stabiae*, phot. Mentnafunangann, National Archaeological Museum of Naples (inv. no. 8834), Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Primavera_di_Stabiae.jpg (accessed 21 March 2021); user: Mentnafunangann / Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/deed.en>.

Typesetting

ALINEA

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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202 (2016–2022), *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant led by Katarzyna Marciniak.



This volume was also supported by the University of Warsaw (Internal Grant System of the "Excellence Initiative – Research University" and the Statutory Research of the Faculty of "Artes Liberales").

Project's Website: www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl

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ISBN (hardcopy) 978-83-235-5280-2 ISBN (pdf online) 978-83-235-5288-8

ISBN (e-pub) 978-83-235-5296-3 ISBN (mobi) 978-83-235-5304-5

University of Warsaw Press

00-838 Warszawa, Prosta 69

E-mail: wuw@uw.edu.pl

Publisher's website: www.wuw.pl

Printed and bound by POZKAL

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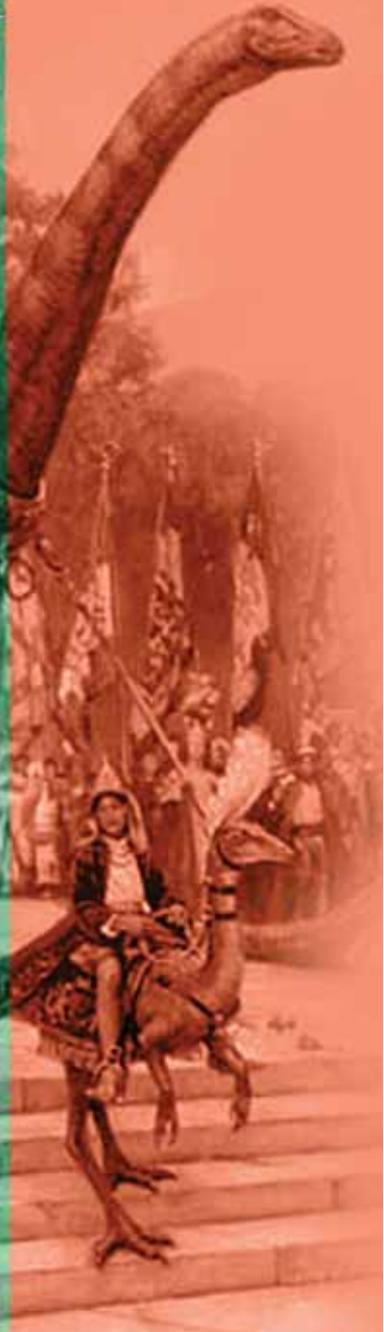
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PART V

Brand New Hope



GROWING UP MANGA STYLE: MYTHOLOGICAL RECEPTION IN YOSHIKAZU YASUHIKO'S ARION MANGA

This paper focuses on the Greek mythological elements as well as the coming-of-age narrative included in the mid-1980s Japanese manga (comics) and anime (animation) アリオン [Arion] by Yoshikazu Yasuhiko.¹ First, I shall explain how this manga fits into the category of youth literature. Next, the manga artist's employment of Greek mythology will be reviewed and analysed.

Manga and Anime in the Youth Culture of Japan

Manga and anime are popular media in Japan. As Peter Matanle, Kuniko Ishiguro, and Leo McCann note:

Manga is one of the most widely consumed media in Japan [...] and its presence within Japanese socio-cultural and political life is pervasive. Beyond entertainment, it is understood as social commentary, an information source and guide to behaviour, a teaching tool, a subversive critique and even a vehicle for government policy.²

¹ I am very grateful to Katarzyna Marciniak and Lisa Maurice for their comments and insights on earlier drafts of this chapter. For Japanese names, I follow the Western order of given name and family name. I use the Hepburn romanization system, but in the case of manga widely known by their English names, the Japanese titles are omitted.

² Peter Matanle, Kuniko Ishiguro, and Leo McCann, "Popular Culture and Workplace Gendering among Varieties of Capitalism: Working Women and Their Representation in Japanese Manga", *Gender, Work and Organization* 21.5 (2014), 476. John E. Ingulsrud and Kate Allen state in their *Reading Japan Cool: Patterns of Manga Literacy and Discourse Account*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2009, 3, that "manga publishing in Japan is a US\$4.5 billion market and accounts for nearly a fourth of the total publishing market". In a recent anime industry report from 2018, it is noted that the Japanese animation market kept growing for seven consecutive years from 2010, and

The manga medium also sits comfortably within the definition proposed by Katarzyna Marciniak for a classical work:

[A] classical work is embedded in the past, but oriented toward the future, addressing the recipient on both a personal and universal level and encouraging nonconformity and respect.³

Some manga are certainly considered Classics (if not classical), and they enjoy the same prominence as other classic works of literature.

As noted above, manga covers almost every aspect of life. It therefore clearly appeals to and represents different age groups.⁴ Daniel Flis notes that in Japan manga is divided into four main categories according to the readers' age groups: 少年漫画 (*shōnen*; boys), 少女漫画 (*shōjo*; girls), 青年漫画 (*seinen*; young men), and 女性漫画 (*josei*; women).⁵ Junko Ueno explains that "different *manga* magazines target specific genders and age groups, and the range of a particular *manga's* topics largely depend on the intended audience".⁶ Hence the content of manga is influenced by the type of magazine which publishes it.⁷ These categories, however, do not limit the readership of manga and mostly

also recorded a growth of 108.0% and the highest level of sales in 2017; see *Anime Industry Report 2018: Summary*, The Association of Japanese Animations, <https://aja.gr.jp/english/japan-anime-data> (accessed 6 August 2019). As reported by Anime News Network in April 2019, according to the *All Japan Magazine* and Book Publisher's and Editor's Association (AJPEA), Japan's manga market grew by 1.9% in 2018; see Jennifer Sherman, "Japan's Manga Market Grows 1.9% in 2018", Anime News Network, 8 April 2019, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2019-04-08/japan-manga-market-grows-1.9-percent-in-2018/.145512> (accessed 6 August 2019). On the popularity of manga, see also Frederik L. Schodt, *Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics*, New York, NY: Kodansha International, 2012, 12–68. On manga as Japan's soft power, see Casey Brienza, "Did Manga Conquer America? Implications for the Cultural Policy of 'Cool Japan'", *International Journal of Cultural Policy* 20.4 (2014), 383–398.

³ Katarzyna Marciniak, "What Is a Classic... for Children and Young Adults?", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 10.

⁴ Junko Ueno, "Shojo and Adult Women: A Linguistic Analysis of Gender Identity in Manga (Japanese Comics)", *Women and Language* 29.1 (2006), 16.

⁵ Daniel Flis, "Straddling the Line: How Female Authors Are Pushing the Boundaries of Gender Representation in Japanese Shōnen Manga", *New Voices in Japanese Studies* 10 (2018), 77. There are also further categories – e.g., regarding the age group of older men and women, as Sharon Kinsella explains in *Adult Manga: Culture & Power in Contemporary Japanese Society*, Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 2000, 44–49.

⁶ Ueno, "Shojo and Adult Women", 16.

⁷ Following serialized publication in magazines, popular manga are collected into printed, stand-alone volumes named 単行本 (*tankōbon* or *tankbon*).

refer to the publishing magazines. Readers of all genders and all ages may clearly enjoy various manga even if they are associated with different categories; for example, girls or adult readers in many cases enjoy reading *shōnen* manga. Amongst these categories, indeed, *shōnen* manga is the most popular, according to surveys of best-selling manga in Japan.⁸

Manga or anime that centre on adolescents share certain tropes. These stories display the exploits of middle- or high-school juveniles who are facing the difficulties of adolescence, and whose feelings are often amplified via the setting of imminent danger to world peace or of consecutive tournaments these heroes must face in order to strengthen their powers and abilities. For example, such a narrative is portrayed in a ground-breaking Japanese anime show from 1995. In *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, the creator, Hideaki Anno, sensitively portrays the coming-of-age journey of a group of teenagers who must confront their own emotional difficulties (and mainly emotional trauma), while at the same time having to master and pilot giant bio-machines in order to save the world from an invasion of ferocious aliens.⁹ The main narrative, aside from the action scenes, focuses on the individual journeys that each of the characters must make, and at the core of these journeys are self-discovery and acceptance of one's self and others. While the results or conclusion may not be happy and may even be confusing, this journey is nonetheless cathartic and its completion constitutes the emotional climax of the entire show.¹⁰

While coming-of-age stories are certainly not unique to manga, the popularity of the manga medium in Japan nevertheless creates a kind of shared experience between the fictional heroes and their respective readers. Manga

⁸ E.g., in May 2019 Anime News Network published a ranking of the most popular manga series in Japan in the first half of the year, of which the top nine places were occupied by *shōnen* manga series (and one *seinen* series); see Egan Loo, "Top-Selling Manga in Japan by Series: 2019 (First Half)", Anime News Network, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.com/news/2019-05-29/top-selling-manga-in-japan-by-series-2019/.147237> (accessed 6 August 2019). See also Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 17.

⁹ For a discussion of this show, see Susan J. Napier, "When the Machines Stop: Fantasy, Reality, and Terminal Identity in *Neon Genesis Evangelion* and *Serial Experiments Lain*", *Science Fiction Studies* 29.3 (2002), 418–435; Dennis Redmond, "Anime and East Asian Culture: *Neon Genesis Evangelion*", *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 24.2 (2007), 183–188; Christophe Thouny, "Waiting for the Messiah: The Becoming-Myth of *Evangelion* and *Densha otoko*", *Mechademia* 4 (2009), 111–129.

¹⁰ A similar premise is found in the highly popular *Attack on Titan* manga (2009–2021) by Hajime Isayama. Many popular *shōnen* manga focus on sports or various tournaments, such as the well-known *Dragon Ball* franchise by Akira Toriyama (the original manga was serialized from 1984 to 1995), the *Slam Dunk* basketball manga (1990–1996) by Takehiko Inoue, the *Naruto* manga (1999–2014) by Masashi Kishimoto, and many others.

offers the juvenile (or younger) readers opportunity to escape to an alternate universe in which ordinary youths similar to them must suddenly become heroes and save the world. On the other hand, some manga also deal with everyday problems and difficulties, such as first love, loss, and bullying. Hence, readers can understand the struggles the characters must overcome, and even relate to them based on their own personal experience. Perhaps reading about the heroes and heroines' challenges may give the readers comfort and encouragement in their own private challenges. As Kinko Ito and Paul A. Crutcher explain, "many boys and girls who read the same manga share the vicarious experience of the heroes and heroines: their rationale for existence, their values, struggles, romances, adventures, victories, and more".¹¹ Moreover, Ueno notes that the authors of printed media employ various strategies in order to "establish a rapport" between the fictional characters and the readers.¹² It is also worth quoting Flis's opinion that "the *shōnen* manga genre is so named because it is targeted at boys in their late teens; as such, its content is commonly intended to appeal to boys at an age where they typically undergo puberty and develop romantic and sexual interests".¹³ Thus, as Angela Drummond-Mathews observes, "the *shōnen* manga hero provides a mirror of the reader's life".¹⁴

The impact of the manga genre is even more complex. As Adam Schwartz and Eliane Rubinstein-Ávila argue:

[U]ltimately, like any cultural texts, manga provide a way for youths to negotiate alternative identities. By engaging with a wide range of manga characters, dynamic plots and storyboards, children and young adults make connections between these popular texts and their own life experiences.¹⁵

¹¹ Kinko Ito and Paul A. Crutcher, "Popular Mass Entertainment in Japan: Manga, Pachinko, and Cosplay", *Society* 51 (2014), 45.

¹² Ueno, "Shojo and Adult Women", 16.

¹³ Flis, "Straddling the Line", 77.

¹⁴ Angela Drummond-Mathews, "What Boys Will Be: A Study of Shōnen Manga", in Toni Johnson-Woods, ed., *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, New York, NY: Continuum, 2010, 74; she explains, following Joseph Campbell's heroic journey, that the manga focuses on the initiation phase of the hero and thus it is relatable to the young readers. On the initiation phase in manga, see also Frédéric Vincent, "La structure initiatique du manga. Une esquisse anthropologique du héros", *Sociétés* 106.4 (2009), 57–64.

¹⁵ Adam Schwartz and Eliane Rubinstein-Ávila, "Understanding the Manga Hype: Uncovering the Multimodality of Comic-Book Literacies", *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 50 (2006), 42. See also Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 138–162.

John Ingulsrud and Kate Allen accentuate the point that, according to research on reasons for manga reading, especially among juvenile or college students, “when reading their favourite stories, readers can distance themselves from actual problems and learn about possible solutions through a pleasurable, comfortable medium”.¹⁶ In the next section, I shall examine the boys’ manga genre and how it references coming-of-age stories.

Boys’ Manga and *Arion*

Manga aimed at young boys or teens is named *shōnen* manga (*shōnen* – ‘boy’), but such stories have gained enormous popularity and are consequently read by every demographic.¹⁷ The genres featured in this type of boys’ manga are varied, from sports through horror to adventure, fantasy, and science fiction. According to Neil Cohn and Sean Ehly, “shōnen manga is perceived as the stereotypical genre of manga – and also the bestselling – both within and outside of Japan”.¹⁸ While girls’ manga (*shōjo* manga) naturally also deal with growing up, their emphasis is usually on romance, and the main characters vary from damsels in distress to strong female heroines.¹⁹ Many *shōnen* manga also share distinctive features. One type of manga is commonly referred to as “tournament shows”; in these works the hero constantly battles one rival after another, increasing his powers from match to match, while each challenge and increase in difficulty contributes to the hero’s resolve and ultimate strengthening. This gradual transformation is a combination of physical and mental strength.

As Ingulsrud and Allen note:

Frederik Schodt has described *shōnen* manga stories as possessing three main features – friendship, perseverance and winning [...]. Almost all *shōnen* manga consist of stories based on *Bildungsroman* narrative patterns,

¹⁶ Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 142.

¹⁷ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 13, 15–17; Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 267; Schwartz and Rubinstein-Ávila, “Understanding the Manga Hype”, 44–45.

¹⁸ Neil Cohn and Sean Ehly, “The Vocabulary of Manga: Visual Morphology in Dialects of Japanese Visual Language”, *Journal of Pragmatics* 92 (2016), 23.

¹⁹ On *shōjo* manga, see Mizuki Takahashi, “Opening the Closed World of Shōjo Manga”, in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed., *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2015, 114–136; Deborah Shmoon, “Situating the Shōjo in Shōjo Manga: Teenage Girls, Romance Comics and Contemporary Japanese Culture”, in Mark W. MacWilliams, ed., *Japanese Visual Culture: Explorations in the World of Manga and Anime*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2015, 137–154.

where a young man goes through multiple trials and setbacks as he ventures on to a bright and glorious future.²⁰

The above traits of *shōnen* manga are discerned in *Arion*, which is the focus of the analysis in the present chapter.

Arion was created in the years 1979–1985 by the noted manga artist Yoshiyuki Yasuhiko. Yasuhiko was born in 1947 in Hokkaido and in 1970 joined the celebrated manga artist Osamu Tezuka's Mushi Production company.²¹ The *Arion* manga was serialized in *Monthly Comic Ryū* and then released in five *tankōbon* (manga volumes) by Tokuma Shoten Publications. The manga was later republished in 1997 by Chuokoron-Shinsha and in 2004 by Shimanaka Shoten Publications.²² This was Yasuhiko's first foray into the art of manga. The manga was adapted into a full-length feature film in 1986, but neither of the two was released in the United States.²³ The film had French, Italian, and Spanish dubbing.²⁴ *Arion* is classified as a fantasy manga due to its Ancient Greek and mythological settings. As Mio Bryce and Jason Davis note, "the salient feature characterizing fantasy and legend manga are the rich milieus they (re-)create through adaptations of mythological, folkloric and literary sources".²⁵ Within this category they include works that feature, for instance, Chinese, Greek, Norse, and Japanese mythologies.

Arion is more specifically categorized as *seinen* manga (for an older male audience) and not *shōnen* manga; this division refers to some sexual violence

²⁰ Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 17–18.

²¹ Philip Brophy et al., *Manga Impact: The World of Japanese Animation*, London: Phaidon, 2010, 253; Emer O'Dwyer, "Heroes and Villains: Manchukuo in Yasuhiko Yoshiyuki's *Rainbow Trotsky*", in Roman Rosenbaum, ed., *Manga and the Representation of Japanese History*, London and New York, NY: Routledge, 2013, 122–125.

²² "Arion (Manga)", Anime News Network, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.cc/encyclopedia/manga.php?id=6903> (accessed 6 August 2019); Mio Bryce and Jason Davis, "An Overview of Manga Genres", in Toni Johnson-Woods, ed., *Manga: An Anthology of Global and Cultural Perspectives*, New York, NY: Continuum, 2010, 55.

²³ Since the manga was not officially published in the United States, I used an online translation of the manga from the mangakakalot.com website; see "Arion", MangaKakalot, <https://mangakakalot.com/manga/arion> (accessed 17 August 2019). On differing views regarding manga's scanlation (fan-made translation), see Hye-Kyung Lee, "Between Fan Culture and Copyright Infringement: Manga Scanlation", *Media, Culture & Society* 31 (2009), 1011–1022, and also Matteo Fabbretti, "Manga Scanlation for an International Readership: The Role of English as a Lingua Franca", *The Translator* 23.4 (2017), 456–473.

²⁴ "Arion (Movie)", Anime News Network, <https://www.animenewsnetwork.cc/encyclopedia/anime.php?id=807> (accessed 6 August 2019).

²⁵ Bryce and Davis, "An Overview of Manga Genres", 35.

in the story and is also influenced by the magazine which published the story. As Hideaki Fujiki remarks, "although *shōnen* manga, *seinen* manga, and *otona* manga are not rigid categories, they imply different modes of address with some degree of visual style and narrative differentiation".²⁶ *Arion*, as mentioned, was published in *Monthly Comic Ryū*, which was a *seinen* magazine, and therefore all the manga published in it are classified as *seinen* as well.²⁷ However, it needs to be stressed that this categorization does not necessarily mean that younger audiences did not read it. Since this manga specifically focuses on an adolescent hero, from his early childhood through his maturation, and also shares many features with *shōnen* manga, it can be examined in the context of young people's culture. The manga explores the individual journey of its young protagonist, and the reader follows his gradual development from a little boy into a mature young adult. Therefore, the journey of the manga's hero reflects the experiences of growing up. Moreover, it is interesting to examine how the mythological elements are incorporated into this story, which is clearly but loosely based upon Greek mythology. Lisa Maurice observes that "children's literature, often the first meeting point with the worlds of ancient Greece and Rome, is arguably one of the most important experiences in forming perceptions of that culture".²⁸ While *Arion*, as noted, is not classified as children's literature per se, it nonetheless mirrors the perception of ancient culture and ancient mythology through the eyes of a Japanese author in the 1980s. Furthermore, this manga may well also be the first encounter many Japanese readers had with Greek mythology.

***Arion* as an Example of Classical Reception in Japanese Manga**

As mentioned in the book *Manga Impact: The World of Japanese Animation*, "in *Arion* (1986) Yasuhiko looked again to Greek mythology for introspective

²⁶ Hideaki Fujiki, "Implicating Readers: Tezuka's Early Seinen Manga", *Mechademia* 8 (2013), 201.

²⁷ Kinsella, *Adult Manga*, examines the intricate world of adult manga, from artist to publisher. From her research, it also appears that *Arion* correlates more to the tropes of boys' manga than of adult manga and while it does contain sexual violence, it is less explicit and not pornographic in nature as in the case of other adult manga.

²⁸ Lisa Maurice, "Children, Greece and Rome: Heroes and Eagles", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 6, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015, 3.

means of escape, and this failed to appeal to his fans' uninformed taste".²⁹ Although the manga was serialized for a few years before the film, it did not achieve widespread familiarity and as a result its cinematic adaptation did not prove a box-office hit. It is hard to determine whether the mythological subject matter was the main reason for this. Reference to the West was not uncommon in the manga and anime of the time. As Amy Shirong Lu explains, "since the 1960s, the 'internationalization' of anime can be seen in the background and context of its narratives and plots, character design, and narrative organization".³⁰ On the one hand, Greek mythology was quite rare in the manga and anime of the 1970s and 1980s, and therefore it is understandable that the Japanese audience was less enthusiastic about such works. However, on the other hand, stories with mythological elements did gain much popularity, the most noted being *Saint Seiya* by Masami Kurumada (known in the United States as *Knights of the Zodiac*), which was also adapted into an animated television series by Toei Animation, running from 1986 to 1989, thereby gaining a wide audience.³¹ Thus, the failure of *Arion* may not be attributed solely to the source material but to other causes as well.

It is difficult to pinpoint the nature of the relations between a work of literature and its Graeco-Roman influences, especially in countries which do not share a long classical tradition.³² That said, in Yasuhiko's work we can clearly detect his acquaintance with Greek mythology; perhaps he was not completely fluent in it, but he was certainly familiar with it (he does not, however, mention his sources). Furthermore, the plot of the entire manga takes place in a Greek mythological setting, and almost all of the characters are part of the myths, especially those of the Greek Pantheon. When Gideon Nisbet examined アップルシード [Appurushīdo; Appleseed, 1985–1989], a science-fiction manga by Masamune Shirow, which is abundant with Greek names and references to mythological stories, he noted that "Shirow's use of these mythic motifs may be all the more imaginative because he comes to Greek mythology as an interested general reader and

²⁹ Brophy et al., *Manga Impact*, 253. This critique refers to the film which followed the manga, and therefore the author looked again, after creating the comics, at Greek mythology with the purpose of using it in the cinematic production.

³⁰ Amy Shirong Lu, "The Many Faces of Internationalization in Japanese Anime", *Animation: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 3.2 (2008), 171.

³¹ Brophy et al., *Manga Impact*, 205.

³² See discussions in Nicholas A. Theisen, "Declassifying the Classical in Japanese Comics: Osamu Tezuka's *Apollo's Song*", in George Kovacs and C.W. Marshall, eds., *Classics and Comics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 59–71; Ayelet Peer, "Thermae Romae Manga: Plunging into the Gulf between Ancient Rome and Modern Japan", *New Voices in Classical Reception Studies* 12 (2018), 57–67; Ayelet Peer and Raz Greenberg, "The Japanese Trojan War: Tezuka Osamu's Envisioning of the Trojan Cycle", *Greece & Rome* 68.2 (2020), 151–176.

draws his information from a very limited range of sources".³³ Limited though they may be (Shirow does not disclose all of them in his work),³⁴ his manga carefully draws attention to more obscure characters from Greek mythology as well as to more familiar ones; he also includes less-known stories about the gods, as Nisbet observes. We can deduce from Nisbet's argument that Yasuhiko followed a similar path. *Appleseed* manga appeared in Japan in 1985, after *Arion*.³⁵ These two manga artists searched the classical tradition for creative inspiration. It is noteworthy that both of these works were not written for export, but for their native Japanese audience.

Nicholas Theisen in his 2011 paper argued that mythological references in manga are "the narratological equivalent of a stock photo: Its graphic and literal elements may be in play, but its narrative elements are not".³⁶ While this statement is truthful regarding some manga, it nevertheless behoves us to review the appearance of such mythological elements in the manga in which they appear, and to closely distinguish whether they are central to the narrative or merely used as superficial decorative elements. Yasuhiko had broad interests and his manga cover various themes, from robots and science fiction to world history. His manga にじいろのトロツキー [Niji-iro Torotsukii; Rainbow Trotsky], which was published in Japan in 1992–1997 and narrated the life of a half-Japanese, half-Mongolian man in Manchukuo in 1938–1939, gained him critical acclaim for its historical elements, and the appreciation for the manga continued even a decade after its initial release.³⁷ Yasuhiko also wrote about Japanese prehistory and even about Joan of Arc and Jesus. His works show a broad perspective and interest in different cultures. Therefore I argue that his foray into mythology was part of his deep affection for world cultures and history. The fact that he ventured to make *Arion* a full-length feature film (with a handsome budget) also hints at his belief in the themes of his work.

Monika Miazek-Męczyńska argues that "Greek mythology was not for children".³⁸ She claims that the acts of rape and violence in these stories are not

³³ Gideon Nisbet, "Mecha in Olympus: Masamune Shirow's 'Appleseed'", in George Kovacs and C.W. Marshall, eds., *Son of Classics and Comics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016, 74.

³⁴ Nisbet refers to some of Shirow's sources; see *ibidem*, 70, esp. n. 5.

³⁵ *Arion* was never published in the United States, while *Appleseed* was published in English between 1988 and 1992.

³⁶ Theisen, "Declassifying the Classical", 62.

³⁷ O'Dwyer, "Heroes and Villains", 122–123.

³⁸ Monika Miazek-Męczyńska, "Olympus Shown by Grzegorz Kasdepke and Katarzyna Marciniak, or, How We Should Present Mythology to the Youngest Audience", in Konrad Dominas, Elżbieta Wesołowska, and Bogdan Trocha, eds., *Antiquity in Popular Literature and Culture*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2016, 65.

suiting for young children (especially non-readers) and that myths are served to them after being heavily edited and made “safe” for children, or, as Marciniak calls them, “sugar-coated”.³⁹ They are right; most mythological stories are overwhelmingly violent, especially towards women, and thus they may offend our modern sensitivities. While *Arion* was intended mainly for an adult male audience, violence and realism in manga are nonetheless common features in works targeted at various age groups. As Frederik L. Schodt, one of the leading manga scholars, notes about Japanese children’s manga, “by 1974 most traditional taboos in children’s comics had been broken”.⁴⁰ The violence in children’s manga is very realistic and, in addition to violence, these works also include scenes of kissing and nudity, although no explicit sex scenes. Schodt argues that although there is no official censorship of manga (except occasional interventions of parents’ associations or minority groups),⁴¹ “certainly the most powerful restraint on comics is the marketplace itself.”⁴² Comics for men, women, and children tend to find the subject matter and level of violence and sex that readers and the general public will tolerate.⁴³ Therefore, manga artists do not shrink from the material depicted in Greek mythology. However, they use it with discretion. Marciniak proposes we should “treat literature for adults and that for youth as having equal status”.⁴⁴ This is very true in the case of the manga medium, where works supposedly aimed at younger boys are passionately read by other demographics, especially older audiences. It is also true that there is a division in the themes of the works aimed at young children and for mature men and women, as there should be. However, that does not mean that comics aimed at children are lacking depth or more sophisticated meaning. As mentioned, since manga is a visual medium, the sense of realism is apparent in most works, no matter their intended audience.

³⁹ Marciniak, “What Is a Classic”, 5.

⁴⁰ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 123.

⁴¹ Ingulsrud and Allen, *Reading Japan Cool*, 32.

⁴² Regarding the content of *shōnen* manga, Lesley-Anne Gallacher, “(Fullmetal) Alchemy: The Monstrosity of Reading Words and Pictures in *Shōnen* Manga”, *Cultural Geographies* 18.4 (2011), 458, notes that “the worlds of and in *shōnen* manga Japanese comics (Japanese comics intended primarily for an audience of teenage boys) can prove similarly hospitable to monsters. In particular, fantasy action/adventure *shōnen* manga series are often densely populated with monsters”. Some *shōnen* manga relate to an even younger demographic than teenagers.

⁴³ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 130.

⁴⁴ Marciniak, “What Is a Classic”, 10.

The Plot of *Arion*

While the setting of *Arion* is a fantastic, Greek mythology-inspired world, the themes the manga covers are universal, concerning growing up, family ties, friendship, discovering one's inner strength, and overcoming obstacles. The manga (and subsequent film) centres on the adolescent eponymous boy.⁴⁵ Arion is the son of Demeter and Poseidon, and the product of his father having raped his mother. He lives in Thrace with his mother, who became blind while giving birth. He is later taken by Hades through trickery into the Underworld, where he is mercilessly trained to fight monsters in order to one day gain enough power and vanquish King Zeus of Olympus, who has gone mad. Hades promises him that in exchange for defeating Zeus, he will give Arion the cure for his mother's blindness.

The background to this plot is a power struggle in Olympus. Olympus in the story is an earthly kingdom, ruled by the Titan Zeus and threatened by the other gods, mainly the Titans Poseidon and Hades (there is no clear distinction in the story between the terms "Titan" and "god"). Athena, Ares, and Apollo are seemingly on the side of Zeus, with whom they lead the armies of Olympus.

The katabasis theme also appears in this work. As a young child, Arion is forced to fight in the Underworld under the supervision of Hades. Only when he becomes strong enough, is he freed by Hades so that Arion can kill Zeus. The Underground training signifies the death of the hero, or the symbolic death of his childhood naivety.⁴⁶ Arion's emergence or resurrection from the Underworld as an adolescent is his first step in his own coming-of-age journey.

Arion finds out from Hades that his father is actually the Titan Poseidon and that his mother was blinded when she gave birth to Arion (hence intensifying the boy's sense of guilt). Hades tricks Arion into going with him to the Underworld since he wishes for Arion to kill Zeus, his Titan brother, because he had killed their father, Cronus, and kept all the power to himself, slowly deteriorating to become a ruthless despot, even to his siblings. Zeus is afraid that his elimination of his father will happen to him as well – by Demeter's son. Therefore, according to Hades' version, when Demeter gave birth she was forced to leave Olympus due to Zeus' fear. Hades trains Arion hard in the Underworld for six years and even gives him a sword that can kill a god so he can defeat Zeus. In the end,

⁴⁵ There are some variations between the manga and the film. I focus on the former as the primary text of Arion's story.

⁴⁶ On the symbolic death and resurrection of the manga hero, see Vincent, "La structure initiatique du manga", 62–64.

Arion understands that his mother's eyesight cannot be cured, but he decides to track down Zeus nonetheless as revenge for banishing his mother. Arion is accompanied by a three-eyed giant named Geedo as his guardian on his journey to Olympus to find Zeus.

After leaving the Underworld, Arion is on a quest to find his father, Poseidon, in an attempt to discover more about his own identity. Arion kills Hades, who continuously tries to manipulate him, and later, when encountering Poseidon, Arion mistakenly kills him, being still under the influence of Hades' machinations and hallucinations. During his time of crisis, and his deep regret over killing his true father (Poseidon), Arion is confronted and comforted by a mysterious figure with a lion's head. Later he discovers that this guardian lion is none other than Prometheus, who was Demeter's old friend and saviour. According to the facts that Arion learns from Prometheus, Zeus killed his own mother, Gaia, and framed Demeter. Prometheus saves Demeter before the execution, but she is later raped by Poseidon. When she finally gives birth to twins, a boy and a girl (Arion and Lesfeena/Lesphina), losing her sight in the process, Zeus tries to take the children. When Prometheus attempts to save Demeter and the babies, he is hurt while rescuing the baby boy. Eventually Prometheus manages to reunite Demeter with Arion and to hide them, but Lesfeena remains under Zeus' control and is maltreated by Athena and Apollo. Prometheus is later tortured by Zeus and supposedly dies, but in fact he turns into the Black Lion who protects Arion and saves him from a Fury who haunts him.

Prometheus, in the guise of the Black Lion, and Arion then join forces to stop Zeus. Arion's final confrontation is with the god Apollo, who secretly plans to ruin the world and establish a new one in which he would be the only god. In this fight, Arion is saved by the powerful Lesfeena, who was held captive by Apollo. In the end Arion and Lesfeena return to Thrace together.

Throughout the story, Arion is on a quest to fight Zeus. At the same time, he is on a journey of self-discovery, trying to understand his origin and meet his father. As part of his adventures, Arion encounters several would-be father figures, some benevolent and others selfish and cruel, until he breaks away from living under his father's shadow and is able to function independently as a young man and protect those he loves. This breaking away is achieved mainly through three violent acts: the killing of father figures (Arion kills both Hades and Poseidon, his real father) and the death of the surrogate father (Prometheus dies while protecting Arion). The story is only superficially connected to the Greek myths; it refers to the names of the heroes and their identity as gods. There is no reference to any of the mythological narrations known from Classical Antiquity.

It seems that Yasuhiko endeavoured to create his own version of Greek mythology, using the existing arsenal of characters, and seemingly throwing them into a kind of parallel mythical universe of his own creation.

However, *Arion* cannot simply be dismissed as having used the mythological figures purely for ornamentation. Yasuhiko was acquainted with Greek mythology, as is shown in the specifically crafted personae of his characters; some echo their mythological representations and others undergo interesting alterations that suggest a conscious use of the Greek myths. For example, Prometheus, the creator as well as defender of humanity in Greek mythology, reprises this role in the manga, as Arion's mentor, as well as the champion of the simple people who are trampled by the gods. Apollo, the god of music, prophecy, and light, is the darkest and most sinister god of them all, and he secretly conspires to be the only god. His evil personality strikingly contradicts his bright and beautiful appearance depicted in Antiquity. Athena, the goddess of war, is revealed to be a jealous and cruel woman who tortures an innocent girl because of her obsession with Apollo; this is a significant change from the virgin goddess of myth; however, it is reminiscent of the vengeful Athena of the Arachne story and others.⁴⁷ Finally, Zeus, the mighty lord of Olympus, has become, in Yasuhiko's rendering, a weak and crazed individual. He lacks true courage and even power, and his mind is tormented due to the machination of his mother, Gaia, and his killing of his own father, Cronus.

Thus it seems as if Yasuhiko deliberately tried to alter the well-known traits of the Olympian gods in order to reveal their flaws, to parade them as false gods who do not care for humans at all and are constantly preoccupied with fighting amongst themselves. Humanity's sole chance for survival is to estrange itself from them. The series carries a strong message about the power of belief, of faith, and of gods versus men. As noted above, the focus of *shōnen* manga (or *seinen*) is on the individual and his inner strength. If certain divinities are presented in such stories, they can either help the hero or impede his efforts, depending on the whim of the author. There is no general tone in manga regarding gods or supernatural beings; they can be benevolent or evil.

⁴⁷ I thank Lisa Maurice for this insight.

The Representation of the Main Characters

The graphic aspect of the manga is crucial in the presentation of the different characters. If we examine the key personae, their appearance either reveals their true form or cleverly hides and contradicts it. Manga also emphasizes the visual depiction of emotions.⁴⁸ As Schodt explains, “like Japanese poetry, Japanese comics tend to value the unstated; in many cases the picture alone carries the story”.⁴⁹ The anthropomorphic nature of the Greek Pantheon, in contrast with the various depictions of divine deities in the Japanese folklore and religion, also contributes significantly to the visual confrontation of man and god. We are used to seeing the Olympian gods as representatives of eternal physical beauty, especially in ancient art.

Yet this manga explores the ugliness which hides behind the beautiful exterior, as when gods become monsters. A prime example of this is the representation of Apollo in the manga. The god becomes Arion’s true rival by the end of the story and the mastermind behind many of the narrated events. Apollo is drawn as a beautiful, slightly feminine man, alluding to ancient representations of his eternal, youthful beauty, with bright, thick hair and a clean-shaved face.⁵⁰ He wears a long, belted tunic with short sleeves, showing his muscular figure. Apollo is cunning, ambitious, wise, and ruthless. He kills his sister Athena, who is in love with him, and then he kills Zeus, in a rendition of the myth of Zeus killing his own father, Cronus. Apollo, as mentioned above, strives to be the only god in a new world he will create. In his final confrontation with Arion, he claims that the weak people need a god to believe in, while Arion argues that the people just want to live peacefully and happily. Apollo’s monstrosity and inner cruelty (and ugliness) are highlighted via their contradiction with his bright and beautiful appearance.

In some cases the manga also uses the external appearance of a deity to reflect its character (and not hide it); two examples will suffice to illustrate this point. Hades, lord of the Underworld and Arion’s supposed uncle, is depicted as an ugly, hunched character, almost caveman-like in his scruffy appearance.

⁴⁸ On this, see Yi-Shan Tsai, “Close-Ups: An Emotive Language in Manga”, *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics* 9.5 (2018), 473–489.

⁴⁹ Schodt, *Manga! Manga!*, 21.

⁵⁰ The most noted being the Apollo Belvedere. Apollo is depicted with lengthy curls on vase-painting as well – e.g., on an Athenian red-figure bell krater from around the fourth century BCE showing Apollo riding on a swan, currently at the British Museum (Museum no. 1917,0725.2), or on an Athenian red-figure amphora from the sixth century BCE, which depicts Apollo fighting with Heracles, also at the British Museum (Museum no. 1843,1103.41).

His eyes at times appear big, like a madman's, especially when he reveals his true plans for Arion. His hair and beard are dark and cover much of his face, and when Arion first meets him he wears a brown, rugged tunic. His dark depiction is magnified by the use of black colours in the portrayal of his character. The author creates a sharp contrast by employing a game of light and dark colours when depicting Hades and Arion (in both the manga and anime). The contrast is thus made very explicit, even without using any dialogue. In the black-and-white manga Arion is running towards the reader on a white, clear background, while Hades appears as an obscure dark character from afar. In the next panel, Hades is drawn with his back to the reader. The initial meeting of the protagonists is portrayed with Arion's frightened face appearing in the light (the bright, white background); facing him, with his back to the readers, is the dark, black, and grey back of Hades. When we finally see Hades' face in the next frame, he has an alarming expression, with frightening, narrow, small eyes that contrast starkly with Arion's big, round, innocent eyes. As Yi-Shan Tsai notes, "by presenting a character's facial expressions or imminent actions at a particular moment through close shots, manga artists add visual impact to the content within the frame, thereby intensifying the portrayed feelings, mood or tension".⁵¹

Japanese artists also use a variety of facial expressions well known to the readers. This is a significant part of manga's "visual language", to use the term coined by researchers.⁵² Thus Hades' expression immediately suggests threat and danger, causing Arion to run back home, where he feels protected by his mother. With no dialogue at all, there is a sense that an ominous event is about to take place between the young boy and the menacing older figure. When Hades later goes into Arion's home, his figure standing in the doorway is dark, while even in the black background of the house, Arion and Demeter are drawn as very white and clear figures.

Zeus is the only character who is portrayed very differently as a young man and as an older king. In the first case, he appears thin and frail, almost sickly, usually wearing a long tunic. He was not completely evil at that stage, but nonetheless mentally disturbed. His condition was probably worsened by the machinations of his mother, Gaia, who is fittingly depicted as ugly, both internally and externally. Zeus' wide-eyed facial expressions appear cunning and deranged. In his younger days, Zeus understood well that his family was not a loving one, and that there was no real sense of family and friendship between himself and

⁵¹ Tsai, "Close-Ups", 476.

⁵² Cohn and Ehly, "The Vocabulary of Manga", *passim*.

his siblings. The only true friend he had was Prometheus, who appeared to be a lot stronger than Zeus, both physically and mentally. Regarding the depiction of the older Zeus, although he has the features of a respectable old king (the white long beard and the regal outfit), his eyes and face give away his madness. In the end, he appears as a crazed old man and not the king of Olympus.

As for the female characters, usually their role in male-oriented manga is peripheral. As Flis explains, "*shōnen* manga appeals to its male readership through narratives rooted in hegemonic masculinity".⁵³ While there are strong female characters in the plot, they are not as significant as the male ones.

The Main Themes of the Manga: Between Loneliness and Bonding

The manga centres on several main themes. One of the key elements that feature in most coming-of-age stories is the loneliness of the hero, whose parents are often missing, either busy, working, absent, or even deceased. As a result, the hero may be filled with anger, angst, and yearning for revenge. Yet although he is alone, our hero is also defined by his relations with others, a necessary step on his path towards adulthood. No real hero would ever be presented without any connection with others – friends, foes, or random people he helps along the way. Arion also learns to develop a strong friendship with Seneca (see below) and the people he meets throughout his journey. This bonding and interaction with others are fundamental in the maturity of the hero.⁵⁴ As a functioning member of society, the hero must learn to trust and be trusted. This is of course in contrast with the villains of the story, who are forever lonely and bitter. Only after he completes his own odyssey can the hero find and claim his rightful place in the world, armed with his new powers and self-confidence. As Drummond-Mathews argues, "the manga hero will have grown, matured, and learned something that not only enriches herself but also the world around

⁵³ Flis, "Straddling the Line", 78. See also Kinko Ito, "Images of Women in Weekly Male Comic Magazines in Japan", *Journal of Popular Culture* 27.4 (1994), 81–95; Giancarla Unser-Schutz, "What Text Can Tell Us about Male and Female Characters in Shōjo- and Shōnen-Manga", *East Asian Journal of Popular Culture* 1.1 (2015), 133–153.

⁵⁴ On the importance of friendships in childhood and adolescence from a psycho-sociologist perspective, see Robert Crosnoe, "Friendships in Childhood and Adolescence: The Life Course and New Directions", *Social Psychology Quarterly* 63.4 (2006), 377–391.

her".⁵⁵ Our hero, Arion, discovers that humans can live fulfilling lives without the control of the gods and Olympus, if only they trust in their own strengths. They are not as weak as Apollo, who belittles them, believes.

Hope in Family

Another theme closely examined in the manga is family relations. Families are not necessarily related by blood ties, as strong friendship can replace such relations. As noted above, Arion's encounters with his surrogate fathers contributed to the shaping of his personality. Hades taught him about deceit, revenge, and power (especially the power to kill). Poseidon did not have much to teach him, but he tested his powers. For a long time Arion is alone, lacking a proper father figure and distanced from his mother, Demeter. The only solace Arion finds is with his two close friends, the young boy Seneca (certainly a strange and perhaps ironic name for a character of a young child in a Greek mythological setting) and a giant monster named Geedo. Arion met Geedo during his training in the Underworld as a child. The giant therefore becomes another father figure for Arion and provides him with comfort and unconditional support. In one of the manga panels, we see a perfect depiction of this closeness, as Arion is cradled in Geedo's arms, like a child, while the menacing image of Zeus looms above them. There is a strong comparison in this picture between the evil father of mankind, Zeus, and the real father figure who may appear to be a monster but is actually kind-hearted and compassionate (as the gods should have been).

Dysfunctional family ties are emphasized in the description of the Titan family. In the original Greek myths, the cycle of killing between father and son repeats itself, from Uranus to Zeus. Yet there is no mention of any psychological scars these actions may have caused. Yasuhiko, however, explores the emotional trauma and deep psychological effects instigated by the cycle of bloodshed. His Zeus is a troubled character who was forced to survive on his own as a child. This is a very different version of Zeus' childhood. He was not looked after by anyone, and as a result he grew up resentful and bitter, incapable of loving anyone, and in the end he murders his own abusive father. Arion, who was loved by Demeter, at least until he was taken away by Hades, is a stronger character, who is capable of caring for others.

⁵⁵ Drummond-Mathews, "What Boys Will Be", 74.

The twisted sense of familial relations within the Titan family is exemplified in a flashback to the past, when young Zeus converses with his then good friend Prometheus about Zeus' family. The king of Olympus claims that they are not a family at all, since all they do is use each other. We almost feel sorry for the mentally broken Zeus who could not escape the curse of his family. Zeus, it seems, was bound to repeat the mistakes and crimes of his father, since he is unable (and perhaps even unwilling) to change. His actions do not bring him any peace of mind or cathartic conclusion; they just make him more crazed and more lonely.

The confrontation between Zeus and Prometheus correlates to their relations in some of the ancient myths, especially those presented in *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. While I do not suggest that the manga follows the Ancient Greek tragedy, it was certainly influenced, to some degree, by the play's characterizations of Zeus and Prometheus, the friends who became bitter foes. In the tragedy, Prometheus is the defender of humans, who is punished by Zeus for assisting them and stealing fire for them. Zeus is described more as a petty god who only cares about himself, while Prometheus protects all of humanity. In other versions of Prometheus' myth – for example, in Hesiod's *Theogony* – Prometheus tries to outwit Zeus and trick him.⁵⁶ In the manga, however, Prometheus is a straightforward and honest leader, a paragon of justice. His moral posture is intensified especially via a comparison with the morally flawed and scheming Zeus. The devious Prometheus from the *Theogony* does not exist in the manga. Yet Zeus' character in the manga is also not one-dimensional. Yasuhiko adds Zeus' own emotional troubles to this comparison between the two, making him more complex. Zeus is not simply the "bad guy", as his characterization goes deeper than that. The message presented is that he could have been a better person had he grown up in a different environment.

The family motif is also rendered via a series of delusions. Throughout the manga, Arion suffers from hallucinations and misconceptions, most of which are caused by the machinations of Hades, as a form of mind control. Thus the manga questions reality, what and who can be trusted, what is true and what is false. This device also echoes difficulties youngsters face while growing up, as adolescence can give rise to doubts, self-questioning, and fear. This is a long process in which the young individual tries to develop their own identity, independent

⁵⁶ On Hesiod's accounts of Prometheus, see E. F. Beall, "Hesiod's Prometheus and Development in Myth", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 52.3 (1991), 355–371.

from their parents. Since Arion is unsure of his father, he tries to establish his own personality via his encounters with the other adult characters in the story.

The manga, using its quality as a visual medium, portrays this process as a series of hallucinations that haunt Arion. Obsessed by one such illusion, he mistakenly kills Poseidon. Arion by this act allegedly continues the murderous path of the gods, following in the footsteps of Zeus. However, this is where the gap and contrast between the characters is emphasized, due to the help of the Black Lion – Prometheus, who intervenes in order to save the suffering Arion from falling into the chasm of guilt and torment from which Zeus could not escape. Through the love and support of Prometheus and his friends, Arion is able to come to terms with his actions and make amends. This horrible experience makes him stronger, instead of breaking him, like Zeus, and he is able to face Apollo in the final chapter. This is a strong message in favour of preserving familial relations.

(No) Hope in the Gods

The final motif explored in the story and, fittingly, ending it, is that of the gods and their existence. When people do not believe in them, do the gods carry any meaning? The gods exist as long as people wish for them to exist, but they are busy fighting amongst themselves and care nothing for humanity. As Maurice observes, “for mankind, however, it is with relation to themselves that a divinity has most importance, and it is godly interaction with mortals that is most influential”.⁵⁷ Arion also has the special features of an ancient epic hero in his ability to communicate with the gods. As Maurice notes, “according to the classical tradition, it is generally heroes who have personal contact with the gods”.⁵⁸ Arion is initially believed to be the son of a god (Poseidon), which enables him to assume the heroic status of the ancient age of heroes. Yet in the end, he turns his power against the gods and remains the hero of mankind alone. There is no reconciliation between Arion and the gods (as, for example, in the case of Odysseus). The end of Arion’s quest poses a clear dichotomy: it is either men or gods who can remain in the world.

The gods in the manga *Arion* are the ones who cause chaos and bring pain to the world. Humans suffer as a result of the mighty gods’ inner conflicts and

⁵⁷ Lisa Maurice, *Screening Divinity*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019, 148.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, 155.

fighting, as they are caught in the middle and only serve as pawns. This is a very thought-provoking observation on human history as well as mythology; the only way for humans to break free from the control of the gods is by actively killing them. Arion is able to kill the gods using a special sword he was given by Hades (who was later killed by this same sword). In a narrative which illuminates the disastrous effect of murder, the killing of the gods, in the end, is shown as the only possible means for achieving liberty. This is a provocative suggestion, and it is difficult to prove that this was Yasuhiko's intention. Yet this notion exists in modern cinematic adaptations of classical myths and, as Maurice notes, it stems "from an underlying belief in the superiority of mankind to these deities".⁵⁹ When humankind feels superior to the gods, it no longer honours them with prayers, and thus the ancient gods grow weaker. However, in *Arion*, the gods certainly exist and are known to all people, yet since they try to harm the humans and since mankind is caught in the gods' internal war, the only salvation for humanity, as mentioned above, is to actively kill the gods – that is, the gods who were left alive after many had killed each other. In the end, Apollo is the one remaining god, after he had killed his siblings, and now his very existence threatens humanity.⁶⁰ In their final confrontation, Arion tells Apollo that he is not a real god since he does not wish to protect the world but rather to destroy it. He confronts Apollo and tells him that the people do not wish to be manipulated by some "god" (the apostrophes are part of the translation). In so stating, Arion belittles the divinity of the gods and their superiority to humans. All humankind wants is to live in peace; the gods, however, disturb this peace.

Arion here displays a belief system resembling more the Judeo-Christian worldview, rather than the ancient one. Polytheistic religion featured various gods, some benevolent, some destructive. Japanese religion, which will not be discussed here, also offers a myriad of divinities with different relations to humankind and the world of men. In the manga, Apollo wishes to usher in a new age and rule by himself, yet humankind has no specific function in his new world, except to worship him. He is eventually killed by the power of Lesfeena, who is a Titan herself (she is Demeter and Poseidon's daughter as well, and apparently she had inherited greater powers than her brother). Yet Lesfeena does not wish divinity, she only exercises her power in defence of Arion and the values for which he stands. The two siblings do not desire to lead humankind; all they wish is to live peacefully with Demeter.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, 193; on deicides in modern cinema, see 193–199.

⁶⁰ The Titans or gods in the manga are liable to death, as Apollo admits. They are not human, but they can also die; this differentiates them from the immortal mythological gods.

A Happy Ending?

The destruction of Olympus is a real and metaphorical *tour de force*. The gods cease to exist and their offspring choose to side with mankind (Arion and Lesfeena) and to lead a new generation. The ending scene portrays the dark collapse of Olympus destroyed by the light of Lesfeena's power. After Olympus falls, the panels are filled with white background and light. The dark rule of the gods has ended. Humans are free to live and die as they wish. Will peace last forever? It is certainly doubtful, yet this time it is up to the humans.

As I have shown, in *Arion*, the mythology is solidly connected with the themes of growing up and its hardships, families, and finding one's identity and inner strength. These issues are amplified via the fantastical setting, since the young hero must fight actual demons and gods in his maturation process. In contrast to the dysfunctional and distorted Titan family, the affectionate relations and friendships between humans (for example, Prometheus and Arion or Arion and his friend Seneca) are accentuated. Furthermore, the warm relationship and strong bond which formed between Arion and Lesfeena (who displays divine powers in contrast to her brother) proves that a peaceful coexistence between humans and gods is possible and benefits both sides, thereby offering hope to the protagonists, or rather – to the readers.

The book is to be recommended for academics as well as graduate and post-graduate students working on the reception of Classical Antiquity and its transformations around the world.

David Movrin, University of Ljubljana
From the editorial review

Our Mythical Hope is the latest collection of articles by scholars participating in an ongoing collaboration to ensure that the beauty and profundity of Classical myth remain known, and (hopefully) remain part of our modern culture. The size of this compendium, the sweep of subjects considered, the involvement of leading experts from around the world, all testify to how important and extensive this initiative has become over the last decade. The project's continued commitment to engage all ages, especially the young, and to extend its outreach beyond the Academy merely, makes it a leading model for how research retains its relevance.

Mark O'Connor, Boston College
From the editorial review



Classical Antiquity is a particularly important field in terms of "Hope studies" [...]. For centuries, the ancient tradition, and classical mythology in particular, has been a common reference point for whole hosts of creators of culture, across many parts of the world, and with the new media and globalization only increasing its impact. Thus, in our research at this stage, we have decided to study how the authors of literary and audiovisual texts for youth make use of the ancient myths to support their young protagonists (and readers or viewers) in crucial moments of their existence, on their road into adulthood, and in those dark hours when it seems that life is about to shatter and fade away. However, if Hope is summoned in time, the crisis can be overcome and the protagonist grows stronger, with a powerful uplifting message for the public. [...] Owing to this, we get a chance to remain true to our ideas, to keep faith in our dreams, and, when the decisive moment comes, to choose not hatred but love, not darkness but light.

Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw
From the introductory chapter

