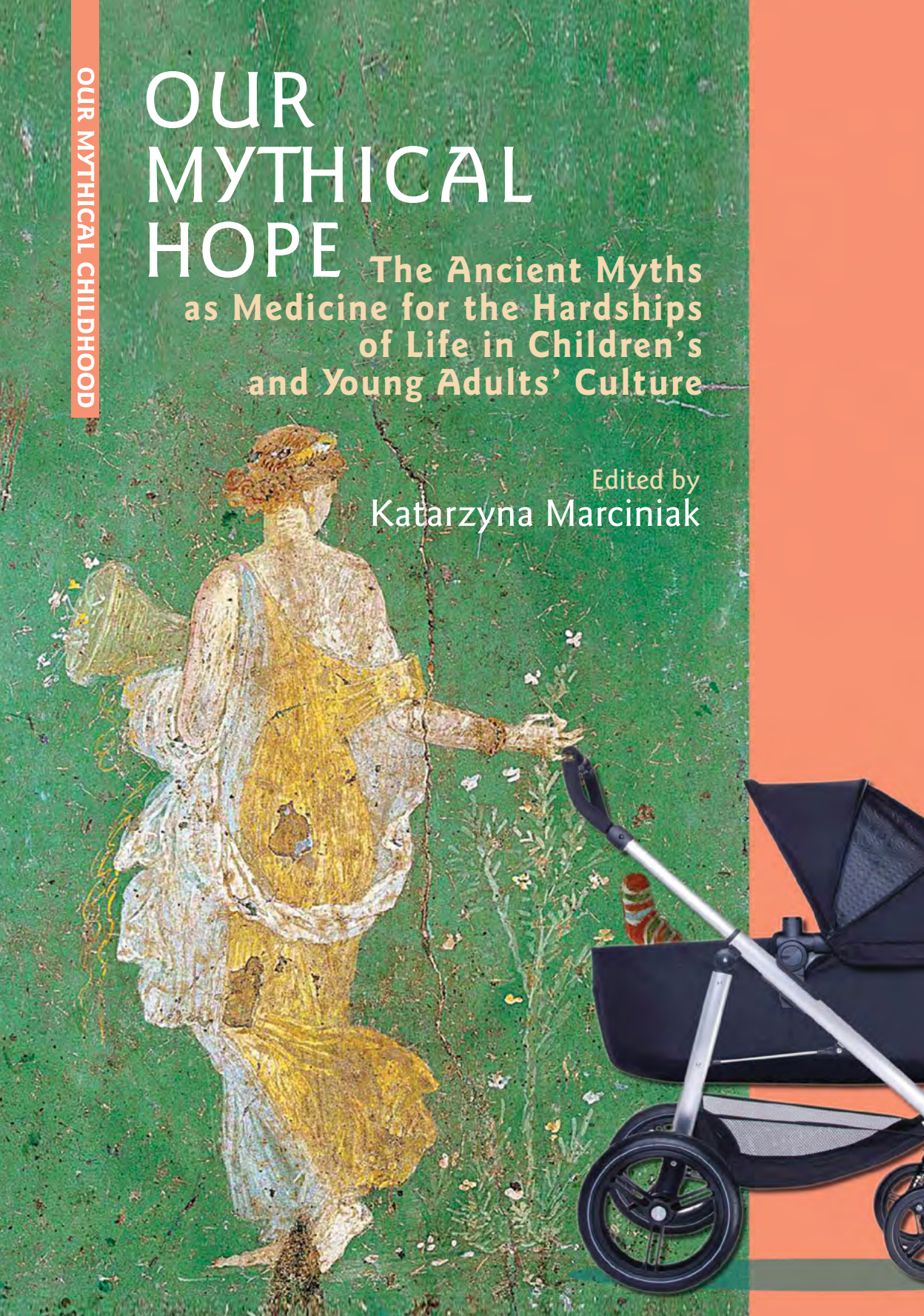
OUR MYTHICAL CHILDHOOD

OUR MYTHICAL HOPE

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

Edited by
Katarzyna Marciniak



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

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WYDAWNICTWA UNIWERSYTETU WARSZAWSKIEGO
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Holding Out for a Hero... and a Heroine

N.J. Lowe

HOW TO BECOME A HERO

> Children's novels, to me, spoke, and still speak, of hope. They say: look, this is what bravery looks like. This is what generosity looks like. They tell me, through the medium of wizards and lions and talking spiders, that this world we live in is a world of people who tell jokes and work and endure. Children's books say: the world is huge. They say: hope counts for something. They say: bravery will matter, wit will matter, empathy will matter, love will matter. These things may or may not be true. I do not know. I hope they are. I think it is urgently necessary to hear them and to speak them.
>
> Katherine Rundell, *Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise*, 2019[1]

Katherine Rundell's recent clarion-call on behalf of children's fiction places hope at the centre of the experience for adult and child readers alike, arguing that the didactic function of children's fiction has shifted away from its historic territory of schoolroom information and moral and religious programming towards a more sophisticated narrative enactment of what Angela Carter famously termed "heroic optimism".[2] Bravery, generosity, struggle, endurance, wit, empathy, love: for Rundell this list is not simply a catechism of universal virtues, but an inventory of values in which readers need to be able to continue to believe as adults in order to navigate the world for which fiction prepares them. That

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[1] London: Bloomsbury, 2019, 47–48.

[2] Angela Carter, ed., *The Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, London: Virago, 1990, xviii. The coinage, something of a casual throwaway in Carter's own usage, where it is tied specifically to gender norms and their wish-fulfilment transformations, owes its wider currency and application to its further championing by Marina Warner – initially in her introduction to Angela Carter, ed., *The Second Virago Book of Fairy Tales*, ill. Corinna Sargood, London: Virago, 1992, xii, and more recently in her *Once Upon a Time: A Short History of Fairy Tale*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014, xvi. On the poetics and ethics of hope in children's fiction, see especially M. Sarah Smedman, "Springs of Hope: Recovery of Primordial Time in 'Mythic' Novels for Young Readers", *Children's Literature* 16 (1988), 91–108; Perry Nodelman, *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature*, Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, 216–227.

adult world may indeed be full of darkness, disappointment, small-mindedness, dreams crushed and evil ascendant – but this, Rundell argues, is all the more reason to remember that the heroic optimism of myth and fairy tale is not only necessary to any resistance but potentially stronger than all of them: "Hope, in fairy tales, is sharper than teeth" (24).

The claim that hope can itself be heroic, and that the heroic potential comprises a set of situational competences and attitudes founded in a can-do, will-succeed mindset, has been fundamental to the modern grammar of fiction for pre-adult readers, which addresses a state of narrative consciousness specific to those whose selves are formed but whose lives have not yet been lived, in a world of experience that exists primarily as an as yet unrealized future, where identities are still plastic and the potential of the adult self waits to be unlocked. Carter's formulation coincided, unknowingly but not unconnectedly, with the modern emergence of hope and optimism studies as a field of social psychology and philosophy,[3] which have established a broader empirical as well as a theoretical foundation for the claims made on behalf of children's fiction as a social and therapeutic good. Though literature for young readers has always been viewed as having an educative function, the nature of that education – moral, informational, attitudinal – has shifted over the history of children's fiction as a distinct category. The earliest books for children foregrounded moral instruction; the nineteenth-century boom explored fiction as the honey rimming the cup of factual edification, especially historical and religious; while the twentieth century saw an expanded notion of the value of fictional experience as a way of encoding adult life skills and attitudes through vicarious identificational models of protagonistic and cooperative problem-solving, in which fiction offers its emerging reader a gallery of examples of how to become

[3] James R. Averill, George Catlin, and Kyum Koo Chon, *Rules of Hope*, New York, NY: Springer, 1990; Martin Seligman, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life*, New York, NY: Knopf, 1991; C.R. Snyder, *The Psychology of Hope: You Can Get Here from There*, New York, NY: The Free Press, 1994; Lionel Tiger, *Optimism: The Biology of Hope*, New York, NY: Kodansha, 1995; Jayne M. Waterworth, *A Philosophical Analysis of Hope*, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004; Adrienne Martin, *How We Hope: A Moral Psychology*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014; Oliver Bennett, *Cultures of Hope: The Institutional Promotion of Hope*, Basingstoke and New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015; and for a useful recent overview, see Nancy Snow, "Faces of Hope", in Rochelle M. Green, ed., *Theories of Hope: Exploring Alternative Affective Dimensions of Human Experience*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2019, 5–23. The implications of this work for classical emotion studies are discussed by Douglas Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", in Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds., *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 13–44, and by George Kazantzidis and Dimos Spatharas in their edited volume *Hope in Ancient Literature, History, and Art: Ancient Emotions I*, "Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes" 63, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018, 3–9.

an effective protagonist in one's own as yet unwritten story. Heroic optimism, leadership, resilience, initiative-taking and decision-making, emotional and moral intelligence, comfortableness in one's own identity, openness to adventure, a growth mindset, the ability to distinguish right from wrong with clarity and to act forcefully on the distinction: these have emerged as core values in a poetics of self-actualization for readers negotiating the transition between the constrained certainties of the pre-adult world and the challenges of adult independence.

The suggestion that classical myth might offer a model for such narratives of hopeful heroization entered the modern conversation with Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charles Kingsley, who harnessed the Victorian revolution in the construction of the child as narrative subject to the (re)invention of fairy tale as what was seen as a transportable mode of juvenile narrative accessible across boundaries of culture, religion, language, and class.[4] It is an idea that has proved impressively resilient through subsequent cultural receptions of myth across genres, media, and traditions, particularly in discourses which claim universal narrative archetypes underlying the structures of popular storytelling – where becoming a hero is not only the master plot of all current Hollywood cinema,[5] but it is often claimed to be specifically a *mythic* template, found not only in Greek myth but in the mythologies of all cultures.

The most influential gospel of this creed has been Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, whose belletristic fusion of Victorian armchair anthropology with popular Jungian psychology was obsolete on arrival in 1949, but which has become endemic in the cultural bloodstream thanks to a second wave of virality in the 1980s when George Lucas, wielding the elderly Campbell as an intellectual human shield with the tendentious retrospective claim that *Star Wars* had been written to the Campbell template, sponsored the television series *The Power of Myth* which led in its turn to Christopher Vogler's famous Disney memo on the Campbellian monomyth and in due course to that myth's canonization in screenwriting theory.[6] Campbell's own summary of the "hero's journey" does not, however, survive scrutiny well:

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[4] The fundamental treatment is Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018, 11–45.

[5] Alex Cox's film *Searchers 2.0* includes a satirical routine on the lines of Aristophanes' *Frogs*' *lekythion* in which a plot summary of any Hollywood film proves to be completable with the words "and becomes a hero".

[6] On this memo, its impact at Disney from *The Lion King* onwards, and the cultural history of Hollywood's intoxication with the Campbellian formula, see especially David Bordwell, *The Way Hollywood Tells It: Story and Style in Modern Movies*, Berkeley, CA, Los Angeles, CA, and London: University of California Press, 2006, 33–34.

> A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.
> Prometheus ascended to the heavens, stole fire from the gods, and descended. Jason sailed through the Clashing Rocks into a sea of marvels, circumvented the dragon that guarded the Golden fleece, and returned with the fleece and the power to wrest his rightful throne from a usurper. Aeneas went down into the underworld, crossed the dreadful river of the dead, threw a sop to the three-headed watchdog Cerberus, and conversed, at last, with the shade of his dead father. All things were unfolded to him: the destiny of souls, the destiny of Rome, which he was about to found, "and in what wise he might avoid or endure every burden". He returned through the ivory gate to his work in the world.[7]

Classicists' internal alarms will tintinnabulate at several points here: the forced recasting of the Prometheus narrative (itself only canonized as "heroic" by Percy and Mary Shelley's reading of the Aeschylean Prometheus) as one of ascent and descent; the tendentiously selective summaries of the *Argonautica* and *Aeneid*; and the conspicuous omission of the more palpably paradigmatic *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, neither of whose own heroes' journeys are at all well served by such a model. The awkward truth is that few if any Greek myths fit the monomyth template, which proves to be a distinctly modern metamyth born out of an uninterrogated combination of cultural forces specific to the post-war United States, and whose more recent and influential instantiations have since significantly overwritten Campbell's monomyth with a very un-Campbellian narrative of self-sacrifice that consciously or otherwise owes more to Georges Polti's *Trentes-six situations dramatiques*.[8] Caroline Lawrence, the most sophisticated contemporary author of classical fiction for young readers, has been a thoughtful and persuasive defender of template-based story models of heroization, Campbell's included;[9] but her own fiction has shrewdly resisted the trap of applying these templates to existing heroic myth, preferring instead to use these narrative

[7] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1949, 30–31.

[8] Georges Polti, *Les Trentes-six situations dramatiques*, Paris: Édition du *Mercure de France*, 1895; 3rd ed. 1924, translated by Lucille Ray as *The Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*, Boston, MA: The Writer, 1944. The film-maker Mike Figgis has revisited this work in his *The 36 Dramatic Situations*, London: Faber & Faber, 2017.

[9] Caroline Lawrence, *How to Write a Great Story*, ill. Linzie Hunter, London: Piccadilly Press, 2019.

blueprints as the armature for original stories whose mythicality is invisible to the reader at the conscious level.[10]

Greek myth itself presents a very different picture of its heroes' formative years when it presents it at all. As Markus Janka's chapter in this volume reminds us, there is a paradoxical silence at the heart of our mythical childhood: there are very few myths about the childhood exploits of Greek heroes at all, and those few are not notably child-friendly. Aside from his infant herpetoctony, the only ancient episode from Heracles' childhood and adolescence is his killing of his music teacher Linus in an extreme early example of negative student feedback. Other heroes have similarly unedifying backstories: a draft-dodging Achilles rapes a princess; Patroclus is a child-killer, and his posthumous narrative of this life-changing event in Book 23 of the *Iliad* specifically thematizes absence of agency as a defining feature of the child as moral and narrative subject. The most moving story of childhood in Greek epic is Eumaeus' story in *Odyssey* Book 15 of his abduction and enslavement; but the power of that episode lies in its protagonist's innocent passivity, and it is telling that Eumaeus never recovers the aristocratic status and autonomous heroic narrative that is lost with his abduction.

The largest cluster of heroic coming-of-age stories is the Euripidean recognition plays, exemplified by the surviving *Ion*, where fostered heroes such as Theseus in *Aegeus* or Paris in *Alexandros* are recognized by their birth families at a moment of crisis; but these are only tangentially stories of adulthood attained through active heroic choices and achievement. A case can be made for Sophocles' *Philoctetes* as a coming-of-age story for Neoptolemus, who discovers that being a hero and his father's son means following his own conscience rather than what men he has been raised to admire tell him he should do, and it is no coincidence that the *Philoctetes* plot is probably the single most widely used template from Antiquity in Hollywood narrative: the duplicitous hero who comes to care about the target of his deception, and finds himself torn between his conscience and the web of lies in which he has trapped himself. But even Neoptolemus is a very adult young adult, already a full-grown warrior on his way to war.

Telemachus' arc in the *Odyssey* is sometimes described as a coming-of-age story about the making of a hero, but it is significant that there are no ancient stories about the adult Telemachus as a hero in his own right, and Telemachus

[10] Lawrence's Virgilian novellas *The Night Raid* (2014) and *Queen of the Silver Arrow* (2016) depart from the historical settings of her major series to retell episodes from the *Aeneid*, but the treatment there could hardly be called Campbellian.

never does attain an independent adult narrative agency; he remains defined by his filiational relationship to an established hero, in a way that Achilles and Odysseus (who both also have a still-living father) are not. Even in the *Odyssey* itself, Telemachus is a largely passive figure until he reconnects with his father in person; his only active choices are (at Athena's prompting) to call the assembly and sail to the Peloponnese, and (on his own initiative) to bypass Pylos on the return trip and to take Theoclymenus under his protection. His initiatives in the second half of the poem are all tied to his supporting role in Odysseus' conspiracy; and though ancient tradition variously married him off to Circe, her daughter Cassiphone, Nausicaa, or Nestor's daughter Polycaste who bathes him in Book 3 of the *Odyssey*,[11] the only attested sequel outside his marginal role in the *Telegony* is a thoroughly unheroic tale known only (in different versions) to Lycophron and his scholia in which an angry Telemachus murders Circe and is killed in turn by his half-sister Cassiphone.[12] All this leaves Odysseus' boar hunt to stand alone in the epic canon as a teenage exploit tied positively to the early realization of heroic identity, and we shall see this episode gratefully adopted as a prototype in modern treatments of the theme in the absence of canonical alternatives.

Otherwise, however, children – even future heroes – simply do not have agency in myth. The discovery of the child as narrative subject is a post-pagan and largely modern phenomenon, which has left the heroes' own mythical childhoods an empty space in their myths that is available for colonization by migrant narrative tropes from our own cultural practices. Accordingly, while there is no shortage of modern retellings for children of the adult careers of the classical heroes, and many novels for adult and younger readers begin by dealing with the heroes' childhood and such canonical myths as are associated with them (such as Odysseus' boar hunt) en route to their adult careers, there are far fewer that focus specifically on the heroes' youth, and no counterpart in English to such a work as Jadwiga Żylińska's *Młodość Achillesa* [Achilles' Youth, 1974].[13] Hawthorne's Eustace Bright sidestepped the challenge entirely by the drastic move of reimagining some of the adult heroes and heroines of myth as children – but tellingly did not allow them to grow up.

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[11] In the *Telegony* (Proclus, *Chrestomathy*), the scholia to Lycophron (508), Hellanicus (4F156 Jacoby), and the Hesiodic *Catalogue* (fr. 221 Merkelbach–West) respectively.

[12] Lycoph., *Alex*. 807–811 with scholia.

[13] Robert A. Sucharski, "Jadwiga Zylinska's Fabulous Antiquity", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood… The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 120–126.

There are, however, a handful of exceptions which address the challenge head-on – and do so not just in a single text, but in an extended narrative corpus which demonstrates the transformational poetics of a deep-structural system of narrative values corresponding to the structuralist notion of a megatext.[14] I want to consider three such bodies of fiction from the turn of the millennium which offer perhaps the most sustained exploration of heroic adolescence as a mythological instrument of reflection on adult heroism: the television properties *Young Hercules* and *Hercules: The Animated Series* (both 1998–1999), and the *Young Heroes* quartet of novels (2001–2004) by Jane Yolen and Robert J. Harris.[15] The first two of these, though less remembered now than the franchised narratives from which they were spun off, are of unusual interest for the present volume not just for their simultaneous treatment of the same heroic figure's adolescence as an extended corpus of episodic adventures modelled on the modern school story whose synecdochic versatility has made it the dominant narrative model for fictional articulations of adolescent agency, but as probably the largest unitary corpora of modern narrative about the pre-adult career of classical heroes and the lessons they may have for their modern-day counterparts; while the Yolen–Harris novels in contrast explore a unified set of narrative values with a range of different protagonists to demonstrate the persistence of fundamental elpidological principles across boundaries of gender, status, and identity.

Young Hercules was the second spin-off from the Action Pack television series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (*HTLJ*, 1994–2000) following the impactful *Xena: Warrior Princess* (1995–2001).[16] The adult shows ran for six seasons

[14] This term has a complex history, bifurcating out of Paris in the early 1970s via influential writings by Charles Segal and Christine Brooke-Rose, the former dominant in classical scholarship and emphasizing the transformationality of story patterns within the mythic or genre corpus, the latter developed primarily within science-fiction and fantasy studies with a focus on the encoding of narrative devices as shorthand tropes of their genre. See Charles Segal, "Greek Myth as a Semiotic and Structural System and the Problem of Tragedy", *Arethusa* 16 (1983), 173–198, and Christine Brooke-Rose, *A Rhetoric of the Unreal: Studies in Narrative and Structure, Especially of the Fantastic*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, and for later mutations Damien Broderick, *Reading by Starlight: Postmodern Science Fiction*, London: Routledge, 2005; Brian Attebery, "Science Fictional Parabolas: Jazz, Geometry, and Generation Starships", in Brian Attebery and Veronica Hollinger, eds., *Parabolas of Science Fiction*, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2013, 3–23.

[15] Jane Yolen and Robert J. Harris, *Young Heroes* series (initially *Before They Were Heroes*, New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2001–2004): *Odysseus in the Serpent Maze* (2001); *Hippolyta and the Curse of the Amazons* (2002); *Atalanta and the Arcadian Beast* (2003); *Jason and the Gorgon's Blood* (2004).

[16] This productive franchise also included the five *Hercules* television movies (1994) originally produced as part of the Action Pack series. The busy 1998 season in which the *Young Hercules*

each, whereas *Young Hercules* only lasted one – but a busy one comprising fifty "half-hour" episodes (in the sense conventional in US network television: actually twenty-one minutes each plus advertising breaks); there had also previously been a ninety-minute pilot setting up the series, and a quartet of flashback episodes in the fourth season of *Hercules*, which carried the young cast's adventures past graduation. Production on the series was bumpy from the outset. When original lead Ian Bohen, who had played the young version of Hercules in the *HTLJ* episodes and *Young Hercules* pilot, hesitated about moving to New Zealand (where all the series in the franchise were filmed), a hurried recasting settled on a tall, skinny, seventeen-year-old Canadian and former Disney Mouseketeer by the not-yet-household name of Ryan Gosling, who brought disarming charisma to the role but was so far from Herculean in physique as to need fake muscles painted on his scrawny arms by the resourceful make-up department. Another crisis struck early in filming when half the crew, including Peter Jackson's Weta Workshop who had been responsible for effects on all the franchise's series, were poached to work on *The Lord of the Rings* instead; and though ratings were good when the *Young Hercules* season aired, the parent *Hercules* series was by that point winding down following a combination of franchise fatigue, the serious illness of star Kevin Sorbo during the fourth season, and Sorbo's own dissatisfaction with the tone and writing of the series, with only a drastically shortened sixth and final season still to air, so that it was no great surprise that *Young Hercules* was not renewed for a second season. Despite these many obstacles, the *Young Hercules* series was very well put together, with beguiling performances from Gosling and local star Dean O'Gorman as the younger versions of Sorbo's adult Hercules and Michael Hurst's Iolaus; and while lacking the production budget and creative horsepower of the parent series (whose own very strong writing team had included such future Hollywood star names as Oscar-nominated screenwriter and showrunner Terence Winter and the blockbuster duo of Roberto Orci and Alex Kurtzman whose many subsequent credits would include the rebooted *Star Trek* film franchise), the writing team included a Classics graduate and continued the same sophisticated playfulness with canonical myth that characterized the adult *Hercules* and *Xena* shows.

Young Hercules' premise, which seems obvious in hindsight but had not previously been exploited in other media, was to develop the traditions of Chiron's

pilot feature aired also saw the animated feature *Hercules and Xena: The Battle for Mount Olympus* and an unaired pilot (filmed 1997) for a prospective series (*Amazon High*) starring Selma Blair as a time-slipping high-school student who finds herself involved in the foundation of the Amazon nation; this last concept was partly repurposed as the *Xena* season 5 episode "Lifeblood" (2000).

tutorship of Jason, Achilles, and Hercules into a full-blown Hogwarts for heroes, with a central trio of Hercules, Iolaus, and Jason getting themselves into high-school scrapes as boarders at Chiron's academy – to which Alcmena dispatches her teenage son in the pilot feature, and where he forges his previously established lifelong friendships with the teenage versions of his adult sidekick Iolaus and recurring guest star Jason. Though fantasy school stories had a long pedigree before this in cross-media franchises as different as Marvel's *X-Men* and Jill Murphy's *The Worst Witch*, both the live-action and animated Hercules series found themselves responding to a cultural moment in fiction, television, and film: the first *Harry Potter* novel appeared during pre-production, as did the first season of the enormously influential high-school supernatural series *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, while the year after *Young Hercules* aired, the first *X-Men* film (2000) would bring Professor Xavier's School for Gifted Youngsters to the cinema screen and launch the modern wave of superhero films which have established themselves as the template for becoming-a-hero narratives ever since. Like *Buffy*, *Young Hercules* tapped specifically into the US-led film and television subgenre of high-school soap opera whose modern grammar had been established in the teen films of John Hughes; but the target audience for *Young Hercules* was significantly younger, the tone sunnier, and the Bronze Age fantasy setting the space for a distinctive poetics of wry anachronism.

The established parameters of the school story – specifically, the *boarding*-school story, which remains paradigmatic for the genre – proved useful in a number of ways for *Young Hercules*' tales of heroes in the making. School stories allow the construction of an extensible body of narratives within the broader, though optionally invoked, frame of a narrative arc from new arrival to graduand, from being plunged from the parental embrace (or sometimes its chilly absence) into the bottom of the pecking order in a closed and inescapable environment populated by strangers ordered in a vast upward-extending hierarchy of status and power. The classic school-story cycles map the journey to realization of the adult self through power structures both horizontal (the friendship group versus the out-groups of bullies, outsiders, and the non-aligned) and vertical (senior- and junior-year students, and the non-negotiable final authority of teachers *in loco parentis*), as well as sequentially in the direction of the arrow of time. The ascent through the year structure from new girl or boy to graduand is available as an armature on which to hang the narrative of maturation and coming of age (often, as with the *Malory Towers* and *Harry Potter* series, at the rate of one novel per year of schooling), though is also frequently ignored in more open series which prefer to linger in a single

school year in which the characters exist in a condition of stasis and cyclicity, the same terms and birthdays coming round repeatedly in a closed time-loop. At the same time, boarding-school stories default to affirming the systemic power relationships in the bourgeois status quo, and their subversion is limited to comic fantasy. Outside the adult-gaze world of David Sherwin's *If…*, the authority and integrity of teachers as a class are not generally challenged, and though individual teachers may be antipathetic to the protagonists or even (particularly in the case of new or temporary staff) unfit for service, the school environment is nurturing and secure while allowing a greater distance between adults and adolescents than is possible in a family setting.

To impose this modern scenario on ancient heroic tutelage was in 1998 a fresh and original concept, which drew on the venerable established tropes of boarding-school fiction to solve many of the key challenges of teenage narrative. Parents could be kept at a narrative and thematic distance, their narrative functions rechanneled into adult authority figures *in loco parentum*; the relationships that matter are horizontal friendships and rivalries with peers, and some very mild and tentative stirring of romance; and the situations required to sustain fifty episodes are built out of the individual insecurities and conflicts of the leads. Thus *Young Hercules*' Iolaus is the pupil from an impoverished background who is constantly worrying about being able to keep up with his fees; the teenage Jason is the elite king-in-waiting who feels the simultaneous weight of expectation and unenviable responsibility with the inability of others to take seriously what they view as a posh boy's problems of privilege; while Hercules himself is the son abandoned to a single mother by a celebrity father he has never seen, and painfully seeking some kind of contact, acknowledgement, or reassurance that his father even cares about his existence. In the final episode he does at last meet a disguised Zeus who affirms his pride in his son – even this much the outcome of considerable negotiation between the writers and the franchise showrunners – but Hercules poignantly leaves without realizing the stranger's identity or what has just transpired, and throughout the series has learned to make his peace with the incompleteness of his adult heroic identity and place in the grown-up world. Instead, the series' cumulative life lesson has been that the qualities needed by a hero are the same qualities required of a well-adjusted, effective adult: a subordination of competitive to cooperative excellences; a sense of justice and injustice and a willingness to intervene actively in righting wrongs; sensitivity to the needs and vulnerabilities of others; and an appreciation of the enduring values of friendship and mutual trust.

By a curious synchrony, the production of *Young Hercules* coincided closely with a similarly premised television spin-off series about Hercules' schooldays in Disney's *Hercules: The Animated Series*, whose sixty-five episodes developed a still larger extended narrative corpus out of the characters and world of the studio's 1997 *Hercules* animated feature. The series' production quality was high and its narrative ingenuity extensively on display; regular cast and guest stars alike were voiced by actors with high name recognition, while the warmth and charm of *Young Hercules*' live-action cast is substituted by a pell-mell cartoon energy and comic fantasy. As in *Young Hercules*, the divine antagonist's darker qualities are diluted for the younger audience by mediation through the ineptitude of bungling cartoon-villain godlings (Strife and Discord in *Young Hercules*, here Hades' henchmen Pain and Panic from the *Hercules* feature film). Both series are adjuncts to an adult text corpus to which they serve as a combination of sequel, prequel, sidequel, and intraquel: a corpus of side-stories which Gérard Genette would classify as a combination of prolepsis, analepsis, paralepsis, and ellepsis.[17] The clips episode "Hercules and the Yearbook" is particularly elaborate, incorporating footage from past episodes of the high-school series alongside a graduation episode into a frame which takes place after the end of the original film and features Hercules and Megara as a young married couple. In another episode young versions of Hercules and Megara threaten the canonicity of the feature film by meeting and experiencing the spark of romance as teenagers, only for this first encounter to be obliviated from the memories of both.

Like the *Legendary Journeys* flashback episodes, the *Hercules* feature had also dealt with the hero's training – here not in flashback but as part of a linear narrative from infancy to adulthood – as a component of his education in heroism; and once again the school-story template was pressed into service as a model. Because the original film had transferred the Chiron role to the new character of the satyr Phil(octetes), the television series found itself obliged to invent a "Prometheus Academy" as an alternative – and, as the series unfolded, rival – to the canonical school of Chiron; but in other respects the series adopted many of the same school-story tropes and megatextual mash-ups

[17] Gérard Genette, *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, trans. Channa Newman and Claude Doubinsky, Lincoln, NB, and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1997 (ed. pr. in French: *Palimpsestes. La littérature au second degré*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1982), 177 (in relation to the epic cycle, where he classifies the *Cypria* as analeptic or what would now be called a prequel; the *Aithiopis* to *Iliupersis* as elleptic, inasmuch as they fill in the gap between the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*; the *Nostoi* as paraleptic, or what subsequent vernacular narratology has termed a sidequel; and *Telegony* as a regularly proleptic sequel).

as the live-action Action Pack franchise, with figures from other generations of Greek myth, later epochs of Greek and even Roman history, and other Eurasian mythologies (in one episode including Disney's own *Aladdin*) collapsed into a single omnicultural mythic dreamtime. Thus the teenage Hercules' closest schoolfriends are teenage versions of Icarus and Cassandra, while other classmates and rivals include Helen and Homer (who turns a homecoming prank into the Trojan War); Jason, Theseus, Bellerophon, Achilles, and Odysseus appear as adult heroes from an older generation; and alongside an extended family of Hesiodic gods, an enormous cast of guest players includes Memnon, Electra, Adonis, Atlas, Orpheus, Nestor, Meleager, Mentor, Circe, Paris, Orion, Minos, and even Hylas. Canonical Heraclean adventures included the Nemean Lion, Geryon, Atlas, Stymphalian Birds, Calydonian Boar Hunt, and Golden Fleece, but the episodic fecundity found additional space not only for versions of many other heroic-age narratives, but also (like the Action Pack's "Xenaverse", whose creative motto was "Anything B.C. is okay"[18]) for increasingly anachronistic historical figures from later epochs, including Salmoneus, Hippocrates, Pygmalion and Galatea, Pericles and Cleon, and Alexander, while at one point Cassandra is seen reading Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Unlike his live-action counterpart, the Disney version of young Hercules is not vexed by anxieties of paternal estrangement. A determinative establishing feature of the original feature film was that Hercules in this version is not the mixed-ancestry child of Zeus and Alcmena contending with the enmity of a jealous Hera, but the fully divine legitimate child of Zeus and Hera, whose divine nemesis in this version is Hades, and who finds himself fostered in earthly exile by Alcmena and Amphitryon before being recognized and reunited with his divine birth parents. The feature film had tracked Hercules' ascendancy "from zero to hero" by way of his training by Phil, his romance with Megara, and his climactic defeat of Hades and reclamation of his godhead; and *The Animated Series* is accordingly more explicit than *Young Hercules* about the process of becoming a hero and the lessons learned in its pursuit, both for Hercules himself and for his regular and guest-star peers. One such beneficiary is Telemachus, who features in the episode "Hercules and the Odyssey Experience", where Hercules helps Telemachus to escape from his father's shadow and discover himself as a hero in his own right.

[18] *Xena* writer Steven L. Sears quoted in Robert Weisbrot, *The Official Guide to the Xenaverse*, London: Bantam, 1998, 38.

Ultimately, both these television series for young audiences find themselves restricted by the conservatism of the medium and its gatekeepers. The *Young Hercules* showrunners comment in their DVD featurette on the many ways in which production for an audience of six-to-eleven-year-olds on the Fox Kids network imposed significant constraints. Almost any kind of adult situation was in practice prohibited by the network: the writers were not allowed to kill anyone – something of a challenge in a sword-and-sandal franchise – and they were further constrained by continuity with six seasons of stories about the characters as adults, as well as by the fundamental narrative principle of episodic television (on which see Elżbieta Olechowska in this volume[19]) that there can never be any real closure and never any real change, since the end of every episode has to reset the state of the story and relationships to their factory defaults, and each season resists a final ending in the hope of being renewed for another episode order.

As it happened, however, at the same moment that the fantasy high-school template was gifting Hercules these two rival extended canons of untold youthful adventures, a still more momentous development in the landscape of print publishing was opening up even wider possibilities for an expanded inventory of mythological pre-heroics which would not be limited to a single cast of characters or confined by the narrative and ideological conservatism of network television. Among the many new commissions in the early wake of *Harry Potter*'s demonstration to print publishers of the enormous potential readership and profitability of franchised fantasy series for younger readers – itself a beneficiary of the emergence in the 1990s of the young adult label and market, and the displacement of the singleton novel by the commissioned series – the veteran fantasy writer Jane Yolen and her frequent collaborator Robert J. Harris[20] contracted a series of four books for HarperCollins in 2000 under the initial title *Before They Were Heroes*, subsequently streamlined simply to *Young Heroes*. Harris had read Classics at St Andrews in the 1970s under R.M. Ogilvie (to whose memory the third volume is dedicated), and as the series progressed he assembled a master chronology which threaded the novels into an elaborate fictionalized history of the Greek Bronze Age which was printed in full as a paratextual appendix to later reprints.

[19] "Between Hope and Destiny in the Young Adult Television Series *Once Upon a Time*, Season 5, Episodes 12–21 (2016)", 593–610.

[20] The initial serves to distinguish him from the homonymous author of thrillers and political novels, including the classically set *Pompeii* and the *Cicero* trilogy.

In common with the *Hercules* television franchises, the *Young Heroes* novels are fantasy stories rather than straight Bronze Age historical fiction, with gods and Ray Harryhausen monsters sharing the page with the mortal youths; and they inhabit a precanonical space in myth where their characters' adult careers and heroic qualities can be teasingly foreshadowed without confronting the darker aspects of their adult exploits. The template is uniform across the four volumes: each of the four nascent heroes is given an undocumented adventure at the age of thirteen which simultaneously prefigures elements of their later career while helping to shape them into the adult heroes they canonically become. In *Odysseus in the Serpent Maze*, Odysseus and his best friend, Mentor, rescue the kidnapped princesses Helen and Penelope from pirates, only for the four to find themselves whisked off to Crete by a Phaeacian-style self-navigating ship designed by Daedalus, whereupon Odysseus has to rescue Penelope from the Labyrinth and a new monster at its centre. *Hippolyta and the Curse of the Amazons* sets its heroine on a quest to lift Artemis' curse on the Amazon nation with the nine-year-old Tithonus in tow. In *Atalanta and the Arcadian Beast*, the young Atalanta joins up with the great hunter Orion to track down a monster that is terrorizing Arcadia, only to have to take over the hunt herself when Orion is killed. *Jason and the Gorgon's Blood* sees Jason lead his fellow Chiron pupils Acastus, Admetus, Idas, and Lynceus to recover the stolen blood of Medusa from the evil centaur Nessus, in the process turning the four privileged aristo-brats who most despise this teacher's-pet orphan into the nucleus of what the reader knows will become the fellowship of the Argo.

Some of these scenarios offer the authors more narrative opportunities than others. The Odysseus and Jason novels have much more abundant ancient source material to work with, and are cleverly patched together out of what a mythologically alert reader will recognize as prefigurations of their canonical adult adventures. In contrast, the two heroine novels have less to draw upon and are driven creatively back on new novelistic invention; *Hippolyta* bravely experiments with making the heroine deliberately unsympathetic for most of the novel until she redeems herself as part of her self-realization as a heroic role model. Nevertheless, all four are deftly constructed around an adolescent coming-of-age narrative that is careful to individualize the distinct personality and heroic attitude of its particular lead, and include much overt discussion of the paradoxes and lessons in authentic heroism encountered by their young protagonists, including its costs and illusions. "Those heroic days are over, Odysseus", Mentor warns his friend, born into what seems to be the fading of the heroic age. "The Argonauts are home. There's peace everywhere. The treasures are

all found, the monsters all slain. Be sensible" (34). At the climax of his exploit, Athena warns him that he "will take part in one final great adventure before the Heroic Age draws to a close", but that his adolescent conception of heroic achievement may not survive the reality of adult experience:

> "Glory is not won cheaply, Odysseus," she said. "If glory is truly what you seek."
> "What else is there?" His face was puzzled.
> "A prince can find joy in seeing his people safe and happy, in the love of a good wife, in watching his baby son grow to manhood," the goddess said.
> Odysseus shook his head. "Only glory lasts. The bards' songs give us that chance at immortality. Like the gods themselves."
> "Think carefully, Odysseus, what you lose by that choice," Athena said. (251)

Over the course of the quartet, a number of patterns emerge. Three of the four novels open with a hunt: an episode already canonized in Book 19 of the *Odyssey* as a model of teenage exploit associated with the moment of pivoting to adulthood and staking adult identity through heroic excellence in action. Similarly, while parents do not play much of a part in the characters' lives, three of the four novels include a recognition plot where the existing tradition allows space for one, with Hippolyta discovering her paternal family and Atalanta and Jason their royal heritage: a classical story pattern especially associated with not-yet-adult heroes at the moment of emergence of their adult heroic identity. All but the Hippolyta novel feature budding versions of canonical romance: between Odysseus and Penelope, Atalanta and Milanion, and (Medea of course being still far in Jason's future) Admetus and Alcestis after the princess is caught up in the proto-Argonauts' mission. But some of the commonalities are the authors' own, and respond to more contemporary conceptions of heroic excellence. All four protagonists make allies of enemies: Odysseus wins the respect of the Cretan prince Idomeneus; Hippolyta comes to value and protect the child she spends most of the novel plotting to betray to his death; Atalanta builds a team from former foes; Jason forges a quartet of pampered bullies who despise him into a loyal unit who would die for him. As in *Young Hercules*, the gods are sometimes helpful but often austere, remote, and cruel, and the young heroes have to learn to disobey them when their human conscience tells them. In contrast, the key resource for all four is the friendship group, the human peers you trust and who trust you in return. Above all, each of the heroes learns to take responsibility and to become a leader of others – particularly Jason, who begins

as the orphan outsider despised by Chiron's other, aristocratic pupils, but who gradually welds his petulant and unruly band of egos into a tight-knit and unbreakably loyal heroic team.

This standout volume, the capstone of the quartet, is also the most thoughtful and explicit about what it means to become a hero. A compelling novel of adolescent growth, *Jason and the Gorgon's Blood* plays deftly on the reader's awareness that the underdog Jason is somehow going to come from behind to become not only the acknowledged leader but the best friend of all four of these characters who all at the start of the quest detest him (with one actively plotting his death); and he achieves this not by a single heroic action, but by a whole series of small but cumulatively compelling demonstrations of the kind of leadership that builds trust, cements respect, and makes others wish to follow ("'Any man can shout orders and enforce his will by fear,' Chiron had said. 'A true leader is one others follow because they choose to'"; 71–72). It is a narrative that resonates strongly with the critical heritage of Apollonius' *Argonautica*, which has been dominated by a longstanding and somewhat exhausted debate over the figure of Jason as a modernizing Ptolemaic response to the Homeric model of heroism, often viewed as a *primus inter pares* relationship of effective leadership within a cooperative team to forge a collective heroism of all the talents. Yolen and Harris connect this to a more internalized notion of heroic value: "Now, for the first time, Jason could see that Admetus was truly a prince and a hero. It had little to do with where or to whom he had been born. It had to do with taking responsibility" (194). Throughout the series, female voices offer a trenchant gender critique of their male peers' aspirations to heroic status through bluster and blood – "You're just boys", Alcestis reminds the fellowship, "Not men. Not heroes" (165) – and demonstrate through their own actions that heroic excellence is more readily achieved by resisting violence than it is by perpetuating it.

* * *

All three of these franchises use the opportunities presented by the corpus-level megatextuality of classical myth to thematize – quite often with on-the-nose explicitness – what it takes and means to become a hero, by populating the unnarrated spaces of the childhoods of canonical heroes and heroines with systemic variations on modern fictional constructions of adolescence as a state of adulthood in the making with its own distinctive narrative, ethical, and elpidological values. These values can be found in any number of stories for this readership, but it is striking nevertheless how closely they correspond to Rundell's

catechism, and framing them as untold stories from the adolescence of future heroes enables them to capture one of the most vital and thrilling things about adolescence: the sense of possibility, of a world where you are already you but your story is still waiting to begin. These modern myths of heroic becoming speak deeply to the experience of adolescence as a training for the fulfilment of selfhood and identity that will come with adult attainment, and of the need to distinguish false hopes of unearned celebrity from true heroic accomplishment, which can only be won by subordinating the individualistic values of fame and glory to the collective truths of fellowship and self-sacrifice for others. In a key study of ancient elpidology, Douglas Cairns has shown that the largely unexamined modern assumption that hope is an unalloyed positive stands notably at odds with the more nuanced and ambivalent constructions of hope in Greek myth-making culture;[21] and these modern myth cycles of heroic juvenile pre-heroism acknowledge the tension between their teenage heroes' expectations of adulthood and the darker aspects canonized in their later adventures. These are stories pointedly pregnant with heroic futurity, but though we read them knowing that our mythical hindsight tells us they are lighter, child-friendly prequels to stormier adult labours, they are nevertheless stories which replace the brutality and silence of ancient heroic childhoods with a seductive and compelling narrative vision of hope.

[21] "Hope's motivational force is recognized, but often regarded as inadequate. This probably reflects a greater sense that important aspects of human existence and of human action depend upon factors beyond the control of the individual and a corresponding skepticism about the power of positive thinking in itself to ameliorate one's lot" (Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 43).

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

David Movrin, University of Ljubljana
From the editorial review

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

Mark O'Connor, Boston College
From the editorial review

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

Katarzyna Marciniak, University of Warsaw
From the introductory chapter

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