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

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PART V

Brand New Hope

Babette Puetz

WHEN IS A ROBOT A HUMAN? HOPE, MYTH, AND HUMANITY IN BERNARD BECKETT'S GENESIS

The ability to hope is a defining characteristic of humanity. Hope does not always become reality, but all the same, humans rely on it in order to deal with any hardships life may throw at them. Hope, moreover, allows humans to be creative and imaginative, finding new ways to try to shape their future. Robots cannot feel hope, which makes them fundamentally different from humans, no matter how well their programming imitates other human behaviours. This difference between humans and very advanced creatures of Artificial Intelligence (AI) is the central theme of Bernard Beckett's young adult novel *Genesis* (2006). The present chapter will discuss the role of hope in this book and how the author employs allusions to ancient myth and philosophy to place the topic in a wider context, in particular to shed light on the notion of false hope. Mainly, this chapter will focus on the novel's protagonist Anax's (false) hope, as expressed in her uncritical belief in her state's ideology. It will also look at the crucial part which myth plays in creating this false hope and how hope, in combination with myth, is employed by the author to give readers the misleading impression that Anax is human, rather than a robot.

The discussion will start with a short author's portrait and a plot summary, the presentation of the novel's main topics and its use of ancient references. This will be followed by a brief overview of ancient and modern attitudes towards hope. Next comes an analysis of *Genesis* in light of the theme of hope and the ways in which myth is used to deal with this theme, with a focus on foundation myths and a comparison of Anax to Oedipus. After a discussion of the protagonist's hopes and fears, the chapter will look at how Anax's hopes and fears change during the plot in a contrasting way to those of Adam Forde, a historical[1]

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[1] In the novel's setting. See Bernard Beckett, *Genesis*, Dunedin: Longacre Press, 2006. All subsequent quotations are from this edition.

figure and a rebel, who is the subject of Anax's examination. The last part of the chapter focuses on how hope is used in Beckett's novel as an emotion which defines humanity.

Genesis: Plot Summary

Genesis is a science-fiction young adults' novel about robots and their relationship with humans. It is written by Bernard Beckett, who is among the most popular current New Zealand young adults' fiction writers. *Genesis* won the Young Adult Fiction Award at the New Zealand Post Book Awards for Children and Young Adults and the Esther Glen Award at the LIANZA (Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa) Children's Book Awards (both in 2007), and the Prix Sorcières in France (2010). The novel was also listed as a 2007 Storylines Notable Young Adult Fiction Book.[2]

Genesis is set in a future Aotearoa New Zealand, in a state called "Plato's Republic" or for short the "Republic", which is inhabited by robots and led by an elite institution of philosopher-rulers named the "Academy". On a first level, it is the story of the robot Anax (a nickname for Anaximander), a female student undergoing a gruelling oral examination in the hope to enter the Academy. Her examination takes place against the background of a state in crisis, with the government desperate to keep the population under control. The Academy's task is, as we eventually find out, to eliminate rebels from their population, and Anax is under suspicion to be such a rebel. The special topic Anax has chosen for her examination is the rebellious young human border-guard Adam Forde who lived from 2058 to 2077 and defied strict orders to ensure the total isolation of his country by letting in a refugee. The account of his life is a story within a story in this novel.

Many years before Anax's time, after a global crisis involving war and a plague, the islands of Aotearoa (which at that time were still inhabited by humans) had shut themselves off from the rest of the world. No refugees were permitted to enter, until Adam Forde rescued the refugee girl Eve, who approached the Republic, half-dead, in a little boat. Adam was arrested and as punishment made to participate in an experiment. He had to live and interact with a robot called Art.

During this time, great advances had been made in AI technology, under the leadership of a scientist called Philosopher William. His earlier model of a robot,

however, harmed human children during an interactive experiment, and so William installed a programming in his latest creation, Art, which made it impossible for the robot to hurt anybody. Since the population had become mistrustful of the developing of AI since the earlier violent incident, William kept Art hidden for over four years. During this time, Art developed through his interactions with his creator, but then his advancement slowed drastically, as he needed more stimulation from other humans. So, when Adam was arrested, William suggested that the young man be offered the choice between the death sentence or to live with Art in order to help advance the robot's programming. Several of the conversations between captive Adam and the robot Art are retold and analysed or restaged as holograms in Anax's exam. They concentrate on the following issues: is human or artificial intelligence superior? What does it mean to be human? What are ideas?

Eventually, Adam and Art decide to escape. This escape attempt was agreed upon by both, but planned by Art alone. During their escape, the robot tricked Adam, killed him (despite his allegedly strictly anti-violent programming), and, via a central computer, managed to transfer his own information to all other AI units.[3] According to one of the examiners, Art's act of violence showed that he had developed the kind of aggression which is inherent in all humans. As the examiner puts it: "Art became Adam" (142). Hence, in the information transfer, also this characteristic is passed on to all future robots. The alleged peacefulness of the robots thus turns out to be a lie, which the Republic's robot leaders have been concealing from the citizens.

For in the course of the novel, readers learn from Anax's explanation about the origins of the Republic that creatures of AI have taken over the leadership of Aotearoa. According to these robot leaders, the robots occupied the islands in order to create a place on Earth which is perfectly peaceful. However, this pretext turns out to be untrue: together with Anax, we find out that the robots have violently overcome and murdered the entire indigenous human population of their islands and, moreover, mercilessly eliminate any of their own kind who do not conform to the strict social protocols of the Republic, such as Anax.[4] The Republic's foundation myth, as invented and propagated by the state's

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[3] This transfer of Art's information is reminiscent of Plato's Socrates' notion of the immortality of the soul, which gives him hope (ἐλπίς; *elpís*) when facing his death (Plato, *Ap.* 40c4; *Phd.* 105e–107a).

[4] What the Academy does to mutants like Anax, who have inherited a strong human streak, is only hinted at (mostly through Anax's terror once she knows that she will not be allowed to leave the examination). Only in the last sentence of the novel we hear that Pericles quickly twists up her head, cracks her neck, reaches inside her, and "disconnect[s] her for the very last time" (144). Anax's deactivation is permanent.

leaders, depicts this elimination of an entire population of humans as a triumph of Good (the peaceful robots) over Evil (humans, who are, as a species, prone to aggressive behaviour and fighting). In this state-approved version of events, Adam forced Art to flee with him, and the robot killed the human in self-defence. Adam's death allegedly was an accident.

In the final part of Anax's examination, the examiners show her what really happened when Adam and Art escaped and that Adam's death was a premeditated murder by Art. Anax understands immediately that, after showing her the true events, the examiners will not let her leave the examination alive, so she will not be able to tell others the truth. And indeed, at the conclusion of the novel, her tutor, Pericles, enters the examination room and kills Anax.

Until the very end of the novel, the readers are made to believe that Anax, Pericles, and the examiners are human. So it comes as much as a surprise to us to find out at the very end of the novel that they are all robots with the appearance of orangutans (the look chosen by the robots in order to mock humans), as it comes as a surprise to Anax to find out that her government has been lying to her and the rest of the population all along.

Central Themes of *Genesis* and the Use of Classical References

Genesis deals with a number of topics which are the subject of current debates in contemporary New Zealand (and other Western countries), including science, education, politics, philosophy, history, and historical revisionism. The novel discusses questions about AI taking over from humans, individual freedom as opposed to state surveillance, refugees, war, colonialization and colonial guilt, and acceptance of "the Other".

All these topics are related to the themes of identity and humanity. Beckett uses classical references as foils to the contemporary themes. In particular, references to the Ancient Greek philosopher Plato's *Republic* enrich Beckett's description of *Genesis*' strictly class-based society with a historical-philosophical background. Citizens are divided into certain classes, which used to be determined, in the modern novel, by genetic testing of the earlier human population.[5] Only members of the philosopher class are allowed to enter the Academy, which is what Anax is hoping to achieve. In particular, Beckett uses allusions

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[5] Beckett, *Genesis*, 15.

to the foundation myth of Plato's *Republic*, the so-called Noble Lie. "Noble Lie" is the usual English translation of Plato's γενναῖόν τι ἓν ψευδομένους (*Resp.* 3.414b–415d; *gennaĩón ti hèn pseudoménous*). It refers to Socrates' plan to get the whole state, ideally all citizens and the leaders, but at least the citizens, to believe in their shared national identity and in the state's class system. The myth has two parts, the first part explains that all people were made of Earth and so should view all other citizens as their brothers and sisters (they are all autochthonous, literally born from the Earth) and live in peace together. This part of the myth focuses on national or civic identity. The second part of the myth says that God mixed different metals into the Earth he used to make humans. The metals determine the class of citizens which each person belongs to. This means that the class system is divinely determined and inherent in each individual. Socrates hopes that if people believe in this myth, they will care for their city and each other and accept their positions in the class system without questioning it.[6]

Furthermore, some of Beckett's characters can be compared to heroes from Greek mythology, in particular Odysseus, Oedipus, and Perseus, as foils to the science-fiction setting depicted in *Genesis*. This will be discussed in the second part of this chapter.

Characters' Names

All characters of Anax's generation have Ancient Greek names, mostly those of Greek philosophers, such as Anaximander, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Thales. Their names mark them as part of the class of philosopher-leaders.[7] Anax's tutor (and eventually her executor) is named Pericles, after the Greek

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[6] Plato, *Resp.* 414b–415d. Plato did invent this myth to put it in Socrates' mouth; however, in it, he combined and expanded elements from existing myths: Hesiod's Myth of the Ages (*Op.* 109–201) and the Cadmeian myth of autochthony (Apollod., *Bibl.* 3.4.1–2). At the place of his new city, Cadmus killed a dragon, sowed its teeth in the ground, from which armed men sprang up and killed each other until only five of them were left who were called the Spartoi ("Sown Men"), and became the ancestors of the principal Theban families. For a more in-depth discussion of the relation of Hesiod to the Noble Lie, see Helen Van Noorden, *Playing Hesiod: The "Myth of the Races" in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, 118, 129. On the use of the Noble Lie in *Genesis*, see also Babette Puetz, "Classical Influences in Bernard Beckett's *Genesis*, *August* and *Lullaby*", in Marguerite Johnson, ed., *Antipodean Antiquities: Classical Reception Down Under*, London: Bloomsbury, 2019, 162.

[7] As opposed to her namesake, Anaximander of Miletus, who wrote a treatise which included his ideas about the origins of human life, Beckett's Anax finds out about the origins of robotic life and the elimination of human life in her country; see Puetz, "Classical Influences", 159.

statesman, presumably because of his reputation for considering the state's needs above those of the individual (Thuc. 2.65.4–8). We see this character trait in Beckett's Pericles when he kills Anax, his own student, for the alleged good of the state, in a business-like manner.[8]

Only one name which appears in the novel is related to ancient myth:[9] Helena, a name which also is conspicuous for being female. In contrast to Helena, all other female characters, like Anax/Anaximander, have male names, presumably because all known Ancient Greek philosophers were male. Helena is only mentioned once in the novel, in Anax's historical overview of the founding of the Republic.[10] We find out that she was the architect of the state's social structure and adviser to its creator, Plato.[11] We do not have enough information about Beckett's Helena to clearly determine the relationship of the modern novel's character to the eponymous figure from the *Iliad*.[12] The foundation of the Republic is justified by a manipulated myth and its social structure is based on that of ancient Plato's *Republic* which, in turn, is justified by yet another myth specifically invented for this purpose, the Noble Lie. So, the name Helena may quite possibly have been chosen to allude to Helen of Troy's manipulative powers.[13]

Hope as a Theme in Contemporary Children's and Young Adults' Literature: Its Positive and Negative Aspects

Because hope is so defining an emotion for humankind, it has been a central theme in literature dealing with human characters from Antiquity onwards. It

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[8] Beckett, *Genesis*, 143.

[9] The figures from Greek mythology (Perseus, Odysseus, and Oedipus) which characters in the contemporary novel have similarities with, neither directly appear in Beckett's text nor are their names mentioned in the novel. The comparisons are indirect.

[10] Beckett, *Genesis*, 15.

[11] Ibidem.

[12] For an in-depth discussion of the names used in *Genesis*, see Puetz "Classical Influences", 159.

[13] As, e.g., seen in the Attic red-figure krater which shows Menelaus in full armour advancing towards Helen, but dropping his sword when he sees her beauty (ca. 450–440 BC, Paris, Louvre G 424). See also Euripides' *Andromache* (627–631) and Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* (153). The name Helen might also be a joking allusion to Helen Clark who was Aotearoa New Zealand's Prime Minister from 1999 to 2008 and known for her focus on the country's stability. The name Clark is also mentioned referring to a female leader in the novel, when Anax tells about one-year-old Adam's routine genome testing which showed that his behaviour might be unpredictable. A memorandum by Clark suggested that termination should be considered, but when Clark died during the plague of 2059, the retesting order was destroyed, together with all her possessions, and the mistake (no second test for Adam) was not noticed until much later (Beckett, *Genesis*, 18–19).

still plays an important role, particularly in contemporary children's and young adults' literature. It has even been proposed that the "primary purpose of fantasy and fairy tale is to give children hope".[14] Children's literature is then seen as a form of "imaginative self-transcendence" which can help young readers deal better with their own circumstances and give them hope for the future.[15] This is true, even though a trend in young adults' literature for dark themes and a lack of hope has been noted and bemoaned, especially by literary critics with a Christian focus, who see fantasy literature as a replacement for the hope which religion used to offer young people.[16]

While in religious stories and fairy tales hope is expressed straightforwardly in the triumph of Good over Evil and the resulting happy endings, modern children's and young adults' literature tends to take a more subtle and critical approach to the ways in which texts present hope. Sometimes characters' hopes turn out to be false hopes. The trend to a darker, less hopeful atmosphere is especially obvious in young adults' science fiction with its many characters of AI, combined with technophobia.[17] *Genesis* is an example of this trend.

Attitudes towards the concept of hope changed over time. In contemporary Western cultures, hope is generally seen as a positive or sometimes value-neutral emotion.[18] This generally positive view of hope may have been influenced by Christian notions of hope: see, for example, Paul, Romans 15:13, about the "God of hope". This is what we see in *Genesis*, where an entire state is founded on its robot-citizens' hope for a peaceful life, after war and a plague have

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[14] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*, New York, NY: Random, 1976, 5–6, as quoted in Emily Griesinger, "Harry Potter and the 'Deeper Magic': Narrating Hope in Children's Literature", *Christianity and Literature* 51.3 (2002), 459.

[15] Ibidem.

[16] Kath Filmer, *Scepticism and Hope in Twentieth Century Fantasy Literature*, Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1992, iii; Kay Sambell, "Presenting the Case for Social Change: The Creative Dilemma of Dystopian Writing for Children", in Carrie Hintz and Elaine Ostry, eds., *Utopian and Dystopian Writing for Children and Young Adults*, New York, NY: Routledge, 2003, 163–178, discusses the ways in which children's authors include hope into dystopian fiction where adult dystopian fiction leaves no room for hope. The wish to have a hopeful ending in a dark dystopian scenario often presents a creative dilemma for authors of children's literature, undermining "the imaginative and ideological coherence" of their fictional worlds (164). Usually these endings tend to be ambiguous, veering between the hope and fear of the protagonist, or they entail "implausibly lucky escapes" (170–172).

[17] Jonathan Ball, "Young Adult Science Fiction as a Socially Conservative Genre", *Jeunesse: Young People, Texts, Cultures* 3.2 (2011), 170.

[18] Oxford English Dictionary Online, s.v. "hope", http://www.oed.com.helicon.vuw.ac.nz/view/Entry/88370?result=1&rskey=jHBz5z& (accessed 5 August 2019).

ravaged the world for decades. Beckett's Republic seems like a utopia,[19] in which all citizens live peacefully together. Anax calls it the "finest society the planet had ever seen" (113). She defines hope as follows:

> Human spirit is the ability to face uncertainty of the future with curiosity and optimism. It is the belief that problems can be solved, differences resolved. It is a type of confidence. And it is fragile. It can be blackened by fear, and superstition. (11)

Anax here does not use the term "hope", but this is what she has in mind – the expectation that things will turn out well. She points out how fear can interfere with hope but does not mention the danger associated with hope: it can be misleading and ultimately cause damage.

Such ambiguity towards hope can already be found in Antiquity. In fact, in Antiquity hope (ἐλπίς; *elpís*) was mostly seen in a negative light, as unrealistic expectations which were typically clung to by people who either did not fully understand the relevant situation or were unable to form a plan to solve an issue (see, for example, Solon 13.36–56). Hope misleads humans by obscuring the true dangers of situations, thus preventing them from making well-informed, rational decisions (see Thuc. 5.103).[20] This is particularly problematic when not only one individual is affected, but larger groups, such as cities or empires, for example, because of Croesus' false hope of destroying a large empire, as told by Herodotus (1.53). Even though in Antiquity hope was clearly

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[19] Geoffrey Miles, "Utopia", in Anna Jackson, Geoffrey Miles, Harry Ricketts, Tatjana Schaefer, and Kathryn Walls, *A Made-Up Place: New Zealand in Young Adult Fiction*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2011, 91–92, compares Anax's praise of the Republic to Pericles' praise of Athenian democracy in his funeral speech of 431 BC in Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War* (2.37–41). There are certainly similarities in the one-sided, uncritical praise of a state in both, but neither the Funeral Oration nor Thucydides are actually mentioned in the novel.

[20] See also 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, 22, 43; Laurel Fulkerson "'Torn between Hope and Despair': Narrative Foreshadowing and Suspense in the Greek Novel", in Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds., *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 76; Andreas Spira, "Angst und Hoffnung in der Antike", in Freyr Roland Varwig, ed., ΑΙΝΙΓΜΑ. *Festschrift für Helmut Rahn*, "Bibliothek der klassischen Altertumswissenschaften" 78, Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag, 1987, 140, 147; Katja Maria Vogt, "Imagining Good Future States: Hope and Truth in Plato's *Philebus*", in Richard Seaford, John Wilkins, and Matthew Wright, eds., *Selfhood and the Soul: Essays on Ancient Thought and Literature in Honour of Christopher Gill*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017, 33, 46. See also Beckett, *Genesis*, 140, where Art comments on humanity being doomed to repeat its mistakes.

seen as a possible factor in providing humans with motivation, it was not viewed as particularly helpful.[21]

Also in the best-known myth about hope, that of Pandora (Hes., *Op.* 90–105), *elpís* is depicted ambiguously. All evils fly out of Pandora's pithos to affect humankind, and only hope stays in the jar.[22] Whether hope, which stayed inside the pithos, is helpful for humans when dealing with the evils that have flown out of the jar, or whether it is in fact a further divine punishment – that is, false hope – remains unclear.[23]

This ambiguity is moreover strikingly evident in the metaphors associated with hope in early Greek poetry. They are less violent and disruptive than those used for other emotions,[24] yet still they describe *elpís* as lightness, flying, a fetter, wandering, slipping, falling, missing the target, a companion that leads us astray, and they point out a connection with ἄτη (*átē*; ruin).[25] All these metaphors and comparisons focus on the discrepancy of what hope presupposes and what is in fact achieved.

Aristotle, in his *Art of Rhetoric* (1389a8), writes that hope is characteristic of good people, especially the young who have either not yet had many bad experiences or only positive ones and so are still trustful. We can see this kind of hope in Beckett's Anax and Adam.[26] Anax's hope to join the Academy, however, turns out to be a false hope. At the end of her examination, the examiners reveal that they do not admit anyone into the Academy anymore, and the purpose of the examination, rather than an entry requirement, is the government's way of identifying potential internal threats to the state. The Republic looks inwards and backwards, following the motto "Forward to the past", striving for a "return to the glory of the great civilizations" (15). Change was seen as equivalent to decay. The Republic's leaders attempt to preserve the status quo of their ideologically crumbling state by trying to find mutants – that is, rebels with a strong streak of critical independent thinking, inherited from Adam Forde.

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[21] See Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 43.

[22] The hypothesis posed by Cairns (ibidem, 28) that Pandora's pithos contained not evils but goods cannot be proven.

[23] See Fulkerson, "'Torn between Hope and Despair'", 76; Spira, "Angst und Hoffnung in der Antike", 133–135, 139; Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 29.

[24] Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 14.

[25] Ibidem, 35–39, with examples. For the concept of *átē* (in the context of Hercules' myth), see Edoardo Pecchini's chapter, "Promoting Mental Health through the Classics: Hercules as Trainer in Today's Labours of Children and Young People", in this volume, 275–325.

[26] See Fulkerson, "'Torn between Hope and Despair'", 74, 90, on the positive depiction of hope in ancient novels.

The Academy uses hope and fear to rule the Republic's citizens. This reminds one strongly of the Ancient Greek statesman Pericles' systematic methods of keeping the people under control with the aim of preserving stability in the state, according to Plutarch (*Vit. Per*. 15.4):

> For whereas all sorts of distempers, as was to be expected, were rife in a rabble which possessed such a vast empire, he alone was so endowed by nature that he could manage each one of these cases suitably, and more than anything else he used the people's hopes and fears, like rudders, so to speak, giving timely check to their arrogance, and allaying and comforting their despair.[27]

Ancient rhetoric sees hope and fear as leading emotions of all political discourse (Isid., *Etym*. 2.4.4). We see this exemplified in the ways in which the leaders of Beckett's Republic instil false fear of the dangers of refugees entering the country and propagate a manipulated myth about the peaceful characters of their own kind. The Republic's central dogma is: "A society that fears knowledge is a society that fears itself" (116). However, the leaders of the Republic live in fear of giving their citizens knowledge of the true circumstances of the robots' take-over from the earlier human population, which would reveal the robots' own aggression and brutality. The state leaders' "creed", the "constant refrain" (139), the AI's "Genesis" (140) is that the robots are a perfectly peaceful society and so their occupation of Aotearoa was ethically justified as it eliminated human aggressive behaviour and enabled the creation of a harmonious state. The Academy justifies this lie by presenting it as historical truth. They manipulate the story of Adam's death at the hands of Art.[28] In the state-approved version of the story, Art did not trick and kill Adam on purpose nor according to his own plan, but Art allegedly killed Adam in self-defence and without premeditation. Anax summarizes this part of the official version of the story: "Adam grew violent and desperate. He attacked Art, and Art, in his attempt to restrain him, accidentally ended Adam's life" (140). The myth claims that Art, as all AI units, "was unable to harm another conscious being" (139).

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[27] Trans. Bernadotte Perrin in Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 3: *Pericles and Fabius Maximus; Nicias and Crassus*, "Loeb Classical Library" 65, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1916, ad loc.

[28] In this sense, it is more like a legend, but since Beckett refers to it as "myth", this chapter will also use the term.

Genesis and Plato's "Noble Lie"

The way in which the leaders of Beckett's Republic invent a foundation myth to justify their take-over from humans – falsely claiming that they uprooted human aggression and replaced it with the peaceful nature which the leaders insist is programmed into all robots – as well as Beckett's Republic's class system are based on the foundation myth of ancient Plato's fourth-century work *The Republic*, the Noble Lie (3.414b–415d), discussed above. Both, Beckett's Republic's myth of Adam and Art and Plato's *Republic*'s myth of the earth-born origin of all citizens and the god-given class distribution, are employed in order to manipulate citizens to accept a regime and a class structure with an elite ruling class. Both are foundation myths, and even though they are seen in very different settings (an ancient thought experiment and a science-fiction setting), both are used by state rulers in order to deceive and control their citizens. When we see how the same sort of manipulation through a foundation myth, in order to achieve civic unity and acceptance of a rigid class system, was already envisioned to work in Antiquity, it is easier to understand why Beckett's citizens, like Anax, are so loyal to their state and do not question the fairness of the social system or the dubious ethics of their elimination of the human population.

Beckett's *Genesis*, then, tells a creation myth, as we see them in ancient literature, such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1.5–88) or the Bible (Genesis 1:1–2:7),[29] but here it is not about the creation of humans, but about the creation of AI. The character names Adam and Eve link the novel to the biblical story of the Garden of Eden; however, it is not Beckett's Adam and Eve who enact a Creation story and the Fall. Instead, the Creation story depicted in this novel is that of robots, and the terrible crime the robots commit is equivalent to the Fall. In this, there are a number of parallels to the biblical Genesis: Art is created, but in order to function properly he needs a kind of divine breath of life, which here is given to him by the human Adam; the absolute prohibition of violence by robots reminds one of the biblical Adam and Eve not being allowed to eat from the Tree of Knowledge; Art murdering Adam represents the Fall; and when Anax, after learning the truth about the robots' creation story, looks at her own body and feels estranged from it (139), this is equivalent to the

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[29] Cf. the biblical names of all the human citizens of Aotearoa before the robots' take-over.

biblical Adam and Eve noticing that they are naked, after they have eaten from the Tree of Knowledge (Genesis 3:7).[30]

Like ancient creation myths explain to humans the structure and rules of their societies, the myth of Adam and Art is used to help the robots understand the world they live in. In comparison with the ancient creation myth by Plato and its purpose to manipulate, it becomes obvious how such *aitia* can be abused by governments: Beckett's ruling class uses historical revisionism in order to prop up an unfair system of a very controlling group of statesmen, an oligarchy. The novel thus follows and expands an ancient thought experiment, the state which Socrates describes in Plato's *Republic*. Anax's loyalty to her state exemplifies the effects of such a powerful manipulation through myth: even when Anax, at the end of her examination, is shown the historically accurate events which took place during Adam and Art's escape, and has understood that she has been deceived her entire life by her government and is about to be killed for this knowledge, she reiterates to the examiners (and the readers of the novel) her state's creed: "We are peace-loving creatures, unable to harm others, destined to live quietly, in comfort and peace" (140).

Adam's Rescue of Eve

Despite her loyalty to her state, Anax has a fierce interest in and feels a strong personal bond with the rebel Adam, the protagonist of her country's foundation myth, because he reminds her of herself, as a character who displays hope and empathy, and has an enquiring mind. Anax even says about Adam: "I think it is understandable that some would interpret his actions as heroic", referring to his rescue of Eve (37).[31] A male hero rescuing a female in danger at great risk to his own life is a typical scenario from folk tales or myth, such as that of Perseus rescuing Andromeda from a sea monster (see, for example, Ov., *Met*. 4.670–739). Mythical heroes helping a damsel in distress usually do not only act out of pity for the girl who needs rescuing, but also out of hope to win fame through their deed (and possibly to marry the princess and inherit the kingdom). Adam, in contrast, acted purely out of compassion, fitting the profile of the

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[30] See Tatjana Schaefer, "Religion", in Anna Jackson, Geoffrey Miles, Harry Ricketts, Tatjana Schaefer, and Kathryn Walls, *A Made-Up Place: New Zealand in Young Adult Fiction*, Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2011, 155–157.

[31] Cf. also: "They didn't anticipate people making a hero of him" (Beckett, *Genesis*, 52) and Adam's "heroic anger" (ibidem, 72).

young, hopeful idealist, which Aristotle describes (see above on *Art of Rhetoric* 1389a8). Adam explains to Art why he rescued Eve, speaking about the helplessness he saw in Eve's eyes, and also hope, or, as Adam phrases it: "I saw ambition, for a better life; a willingness to risk everything. [...] I saw intentions, and I saw choices. All the things I never see when I look at you" (132). In short, he saw her humanity, which is expressed in hope.

Anax and Oedipus: Characters Entertaining False Hopes

Like Eve, Anax is driven by hope, which turns out to be her tragic flaw. The way she digs her own grave during her examination reminds one strongly of Oedipus in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus Rex*, in which the ruler of Thebes refuses to heed any pleas from other characters to stop enquiring further into his past, the knowledge of which finally causes his tragic fall. Both protagonists are subject to false hope, which in Ancient Greek tragedy is expressed through tragic irony. Like Oedipus, Anax is strong-willed, thirsty of knowledge, empathetic, and hopeful. In Oedipus these character traits can be seen when he insists on finding out who murdered Laios, even against the warnings from the seer Tiresias (Soph., *OT* 314–333) and his wife (and mother), Jocasta (Soph., *OT* 975), when he pities his plague-stricken people at the beginning of the novel and promises to do anything he can to help them (Soph., *OT* 58–67), and when he hopes against increasing evidence that he cannot be the man who brought pollution on the city (for example, Soph., *OT* 962).

Both, Oedipus and Anax, are attempting to find out about others: Oedipus is trying to find the one responsible for the plague which is afflicting his people, while Anax is intensely curious about Adam Forde's life, character, and his motivations for his rebellious actions. Both instead find out unpleasant things about themselves: Oedipus that he killed his father and married his mother and so brought misfortune on his city; Anax that she, even though she always thought of herself as a robot with the same peaceful programming as the other robots in the Republic, has inherited a strong streak of rebelliousness from Adam, which makes the government view her as an enemy of the state.

Both stories follow Aristotle's tragic principles of the unity of place and time. The entire tragedy *Oedipus Rex* takes place at Oedipus' palace in Thebes, and all on the day on which he discovers his true identity and suffers a terrible tragic fall. The plot of *Genesis* unfolds on the day and at the place of Anax's examination and her death. Both heroes are isolated: Oedipus through his special

position of king with all the associated responsibilities and because he believes he is so much cleverer than all others that he refuses to listen to any of them. He also has a scar on his foot, which marks him as physically different; hence his name, Oedipus – "Swollen Foot". Anax talks about how she has been feeling different from her peers:

> It was during those final school years that Anax first began to realise she wasn't like the others. She didn't understand the careful nonchalance which one day appeared without warning, spreading through her classmates like a plague. It was as if a whole stage of development had passed her by. (57)

She is also, in a sense, isolated for the entire duration of the novel, as the only student in an examination with three frightening examiners (though at the end Pericles, whom Anax feels close to, joins them briefly). Only at one point Anax gets the chance to speak briefly with another candidate for the examination (a robot named Socrates) during one of her breaks.[32]

In terms of the two characters' social position, Anax, even though she is part of the highest class of citizens of the Republic, in the examination is powerless against three malevolent examiners. Oedipus is king of Thebes, but even he is powerless against the truth about himself. Both protagonists suffer a terrible tragic fall: Oedipus from very popular and well-respected king to a broken man who blinds himself and goes into exile; Anax from a hopeful candidate for entry into the elite institution of her state to being viewed as an enemy of the state who is killed for being different. Both characters' misfortunes evoke pity and fear.

Fear and Hope

When the examiners tell Anax the truth about the purpose of her examination and Adam and Art's escape, Anax realizes that she will not leave this examination alive, as the examiners need to ensure that she will be unable to reveal her new knowledge. Now Anax's fear overshadows any feeling of hope:

> *And if I should fail this test?* Anax wanted to ask. *How then could it be safe, to release me, knowing what it is I know?* The answer though was

[32] Moreover, both Oedipus and Anax live in places which have, in the past, been characterized by a period of isolation from the outside world: Thebes by a deadly Sphinx which only lets travellers pass who can answer her riddles; Anax's Republic through a heavily guarded sea-wall.

plain, and had about it the dank stench of a truth deprived of sunlight. The room darkened further, Anax was gripped by fear. She turned towards the hologram, fascinated, horrified, understanding at last how high the stakes were. (116–117)

Already a little earlier, when she returned to the examination room from her last break, she had noticed the threatening expressions of the (previously totally impassive) examiners: "[T]heir features had turned rigid and threatening in the darkened room" (115). Later on, when one examiner raises his voice at her, she feels a "quiet fear, as if she could never be quite sure how she would respond" (128) in a conflict situation like this, that is, involving figures of authority – a hint at her rebellious streak. Just before the examiners showed her the final part of Adam's story, "fear swept over her again" (130)

It is striking that this part of the novel, which so vividly describes the mortal fear that Anax experiences, reveals the hologram which shows Adam in a state of elevated hope, as he finally sees a chance to escape his imprisonment. Anax's feelings of hope and fear during the examination run contrary to Adam's feelings, as she herself, during the different stages of the examination, presents and discusses Adam's psychology.

Adam is initially hopeful, when he rescues the refugee Eve, though he quickly starts fearing that they will be discovered ("a frightened man", 43). When Anax discusses this part of Adam's life, she is still trying to calm her own nerves. Adam's long imprisonment with a robot makes him, while not entirely hopeless, feel dejected (124). As Anax discusses these aspects of his life, she herself is recovering from her initial nervousness, and while never feeling entirely fearless during the examination, she is hopeful to be able to pass ("in better spirits", 57). At the point when Adam is shown to have new hope to escape his imprisonment, Anax, in contrast, realizes that there is no escape for her and loses hope.

The Dangerous Side of Hope

Adam in his own time became a symbol of hope for the country's human rebels who were in support of him and against the further development of AI (127). Adam's own hope during his imprisonment is exclusively focused on escape. He describes his life in captivity as "this lonely, pointless existence" (124) and says that "life [is] slowly bleeding out of [him]" (125). But he never entirely gives up hope, as he explains to Art:

> You know the very first thought I think, every morning when I wake? I think, I have to get out of here. Every spare moment, when I am not distracted from the task by your noises and experiments, I ask myself how. How will I change this? How will I escape these walls? (124)

The strength of Adam's hope in a seemingly hopeless situation reminds one of the characters from ancient myths on quests, especially of Odysseus, who even in the ten years in which the gods again and again thwart his νόστος (*nóstos*), never gives up his hope to return home. Admitting the intensity of his hope makes Adam vulnerable to Art's deception. When the robot pretends to confide in Adam that he also wishes to be free, Adam at first cannot believe it: "'I hoped it might be true,' Adam admitted. 'But now, I can not [*sic*] believe it'" (125). However, Adam's feelings of hope quickly block out any suspicions he might have, as soon as Art mentions that he has a plan, which, he claims, he had not revealed to Adam, as he first needed to ensure that he could trust him: "Adam considered this for a moment, then nodded. The first tremors of hope played about his eyes" (126).

Here, the way in which humans display their emotions in their facial expressions (as opposed to robots) is emphasized. Also, the imagery of earthquake tremors (fitting the New Zealand setting of the novel) is striking, as it shows the intensity and the uncontrollability of Adam's feeling of hope, which makes him abandon caution. This is exactly the kind of danger which Ancient Greeks saw in (false) hope, and nothing could prove better Adam's own claim that his thoughts and feelings make him so different from a robot, like Art. As Adam says to Art, arguing that he (Art) is not conscious:

> You're just a complicated set of electronic switches. I make a sound, it enters your data banks, it's matched with a recorded word, your programme chooses an automated response. So what? I talk to you, you make a sound. I kick this wall, it makes a sound. What's the difference? Perhaps you're going to tell me the wall is conscious too? (70)

Before Art and Adam execute the robot's escape plan, they shake hands and the AI unit wishes the human good luck. Adam answers with sarcasm: "I am hoping it doesn't come to that" (132). The fact that he uses the expression "hoping" indicates how risky the whole undertaking is. He cannot be sure that the escape will be risk-free and succeed, but his hope is stronger than his fear.

When Anax has been shown the real events related to Adam and Art's escape, the examiners notice her shock, but ask her to explain how this new

information changes her interpretation of the event. Anax cannot think of another way, but to speak the truth – risky as it may be – because she still has hope:

> Good or bad, she had no choice. Just like Adam, she had no choice. She could only hope the panel would understand her confusion. That they would make allowances. (126)

Her situation here is likened to Adam's: both have no choice but can only hope for the best. It has been pointed out that hope is an emotion which one feels in particular in adverse circumstances in which one cannot see any rational way of improving one's situation.[33] The same is true for the refugee Eve, who risked death on her journey by sea in a tiny boat, driven by her hope to enter the Republic.

Humanity and Emotions

Anax's wavering between fear and hope helps make the situation of her examination feel psychologically accurate and evokes the readers' sympathy for the protagonist.[34] Furthermore, throughout the novel, Anax's strong emotions are depicted in contrast to the examiners' impassiveness. When Anax tries to ease the tension in the room with a joke at the start of her examination, the examiners do not understand it: "Not so much as a flicker of acknowledgement from any of them" (8). When she is worried about a possible trick question, Anax searches the examiners' faces for clues, but they sit "impassive as a stone, offering her nothing" (9). We also hear how the examiners carefully modulate their voices by "control, pure and simple" (10–11). At the end of the novel, Anax believes that she sees sadness in the examiners' faces: "Their huge eyes were set in resignation. Anax could even believe she saw sadness, written across their orang-utan [*sic*] faces" (138). This may tell us more about Anax herself, though, than about the examiners. It is never confirmed that the examiners in fact become sad. Rather Anax, believing she is seeing their sadness, may be projecting her own emotions onto the examiners. A sudden feeling of sadness would, actually, contradict the examiners' display of excitement whenever Anax reveals hints of her rebellious streak (see below, with *Genesis* 37 and 130).

Anax may also be projecting her own feelings onto Pericles, when he enters the examination room at the very end of the novel. Anax describes him as approaching

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[33] Fulkerson, "'Torn between Hope and Despair'", 91.

[34] Beckett, as a high school teacher, would be very familiar with the psychological aspects of exam situations.

with his eyes "cast down in sadness, the fiery red hair of his body somehow sub-dued" (142). When he speaks to her, she notices "a crack in Pericles' façade" (143). Anax is too upset to at first even look at him at all, and when she finally does, she sees him distorted through her tears, so it is doubtful how well she can really see his sad demeanour. We hear about "the pain she knew this [that is, the decision to kill her] caused him" (143), once more with his alleged feelings reported from Anax's view point, not his own. In contrast, immediately after this, his expression when he is about to disconnect Anax is described as "calm, business-like. He had a job to do" (143), which would contradict his alleged display of sadness.

When the examiners have shown the unreleased records of Adam and Art planning their escape and are forcing Anax to speculate about the scene she has just seen, Anax suggests that Art is making his own choices, independently from his creator, Philosopher William. At this point, the examiners finally show a re-action: "For the first time the examiners' expressions were easily read. Smiles crept across all three faces; small knowing smiles, sinister" (130). They now have their first evidence for Anax's rebellious streak. Moreover, when Anax de-fends Adam's empathy for the refugee girl Eve and proposes that a society needs empathy in order to function properly, "[f]or the first time the change in all three examiners was perceptible. They all straightened, in the way of predators alerted to the approach of their prey. The leader loomed taller, his cronies' eyes burned more intensely" (37). This change in the examiners' demeanour is vividly explained through the animal metaphor of predator and prey.

Anax: A Robot with Human Emotions

At this point in the novel, readers still assume that all characters are human. Only at the end of the novel, we find out that the examiners and Anax do have animal-like bodies: they look like orangutans, so designed on purpose to ac-centuate the robots' difference from humans also in their physical appearance: "It was a collective joke, a deliberate sign of disrespect to the human species" (138–139). However, orangutans are known for their gentle natures,[35] as op-posed to the predator-like behaviour of the examiners. There is a robot body hidden under the orangutan fur, and the appearance of the AI creatures' peace-fulness is only a pretence.

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[35] See, e.g., "Orangutan Facts", Orangutan Conservancy, http://www.orangutan.com/orangu-tans/orangutan-facts/ (accessed 30 April 2020).

The revelations that Anax, like her examiners and her tutor, is not human but a robot is the final clue that had been missing throughout the novel and comes as a shock to its readers. Sarah Giffney has examined the question of why the readers do not notice earlier that Anax is a creature of AI. She rightly comes to the conclusion that it is Beckett's narrative structure which deceives us. In particular, the author cleverly employs the omniscient third-person narrator and deliberately leaves gaps in the information he provides. Beckett plays with his readers' expectations and makes them fill any informative gaps with their own assumptions and biases.[36] One could add to these observations that the repeated emphasis on Anax's strong feelings, including those of hope, are crucial for Beckett being able to mislead readers into thinking that Anax is human. How human her emotions are, is spelled out at the end of the novel, when Anax faces her own death. When Pericles is about to disconnect her, she feels overwhelming "terror":

> So new and intense was the feeling that it could only have come from one place. The last dubious gift from a fading past, the expression on the face of a dying man. (144)

This impression is further underscored through the direct and indirect allusions to ancient myths used in the novel. As these myths all deal with humans, we (wrongly) assume that the characters of the novel, which these myths allude to, must also be human.

Conclusion

The analysis has shown how important hope is in *Genesis* when it comes to determine a character's human identity. The novel revolves around the question of what it is which makes us humans different from robots. Adam rescues the refugee Eve because he sees hope in her eyes and, when he is imprisoned, he never gives up hope to escape. Anax hopes to enter the Academy and please her tutor by passing the examination. Even though she is extremely loyal to her state, she feels herself drawn to the rebel Adam. Both are similar in their intense emotions, critical minds, and great sense of compassion. Most importantly, both have hopes for the future against all odds. Anax, a robot, is only able to feel

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[36] Sarah Giffney, "The Impossibilities of Fiction: Narrative Power in Beckett's 'Genesis'", *English in Aotearoa* 74 (2011), 65–67.

hope because she has a strong human streak in her, inherited from Adam Forde himself.[37] Except for Anax, only human characters are shown to feel hope.[38] This becomes obvious when one compares the mostly impassive examiners with Anax or the human characters: the examiners show no compassion, humour, or hope.

Just like most ancient literary sources, *Genesis* displays a very ambiguous attitude towards hope: both Anax and Adam are subjects to false hopes, which eventually lead to their violent deaths. Anax resembles a Greek tragic hero, like Oedipus. The allusion to a tragic hero fits the fact that much of the examination consists of rehearsed answers and a number of dialogues are brought to life in holographic depictions, which make the examination itself feel in large parts like a staged performance. Anax's hopes turn out to be her tragic flaw. They are the catalyst for her downfall, when she is not cautious enough to hide her real feelings about Adam Forde in her examination. Similarly, Art, by pretending to entertain the same hope as Adam, easily makes him a willing and trusting follower in his alleged escape. However, the fact itself that Anax's hopes mislead her, is proof of her humanity. So it is not surprising that the novels' readers are misled, until the very end of the text, to assume that Anax is a human character. It comes as a surprise to the readers that Anax is a robot, just as it comes as a shock to Anax that the myth about the peacefulness of the robots she had believed all her life has been manipulated.

The allusions to ancient myths help us place Anax's and Adam's views and actions into a wider context and understand how hope, as an emotion which is central to our humanity, has always been a decisive motivator for human decision-making (both on the personal and on the state level) and for cultural progress, and will still be in the future.

Can stories like *Genesis*, which are framed around the theme of false hope, still help young readers transcend difficult situations in their own lives, then? In Beckett's novel, like in ancient texts, hope is not shown to solve any problems, and the danger of false hope is foregrounded. However, *Genesis* depicts how hope can help sustain people in very difficult situations and how it can serve as a defining mark of one's humanity.

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[37] It remains unclear why this human streak develops more strongly in some robots, like Anax, than in others. Pericles refers to such robots as "mutant[s]" (143).

[38] The only other robot under suspicion of a human streak, who appears in the novel, is Socrates (the other candidate Anax meets during her exam break; 41–42). The short interchange between the two characters does not show whether Socrates feels hopeful or not. He certainly seems more suspicious of the examiners than Anax when he says to her: "Be careful [...]. They know more than you think" (42).

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 trans-formations around the world.

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 involve-ment 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 con-tinued 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.

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 sup-port 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.