

IN THE CIRCLE OF CHIRON'S PUPILS, OR: A FOREWORD BY THE SERIES EDITOR

If you had been at the seaside that day, you would have seen a strange group in the morning light cast by the rosy-fingered Eos. A huge, majestic half-man, half-horse, waving with his broad hand. Next to him a beautiful, ethereal woman – a nymph, no doubt. In her upraised arms a baby boy. High above her head, as if she were trying to show the child to somebody far out at sea. And indeed, growing smaller by the minute, soon destined to disappear beyond the horizon, was a ship with the tiny figure of a man waving back from the barely visible deck. Had you arrived earlier, you would have been able to see the impressive stature of the man (not tiny at all) and to note the ship's name – Argo. You would also have heard voices, muffled by the wind and the sea. And then the identity of the group and the reason for their presence there, so early in the morning, would have become clear: the centaur Chiron had come to the seaside with his wife, the nymph Chariclo, who carried little Achilles, to bid farewell to the boy's father, Peleus, one of the Argonauts, at the dawn of the famous expedition.

This touching scene, a gem of surprising tenderness in the midst of the austerity of the mythical battles and monster-slaying, has passed to us owing to Apollonius of Rhodes and his Hellenistic epic *Argonautica* (1.553–558). But what I wish to bring into the focus is not the artistic mastery of the Greek poet, obvious as it is (if we are allowed to use the adjective "obvious" to speak about poetry). Let us concentrate on the strange trio we have now identified: the human boy, the nymph, and the human-animal hybrid, the latter being then the most famous of the group. Achilles has to grow up to gain his timeless fame. And he grows up with Chiron and thanks to Chiron – his teacher. The boy was placed in the care of the Centaur by Peleus, Chiron's former pupil himself, who did not know whether he would return alive from the Expedition of the Argonauts, but he was sure that Chiron was the best tutor in the whole universe and that he could trust the Centaur with

his beloved son. Indeed, Chiron was the mythological first teacher of a whole host of heroes, to mention only Theseus, Jason, Asclepius, Actaeon, and the mighty Heracles. Each of them went on to choose slightly different paths in life, but all received a thorough education. They had been brought into the human world by the wise human-animal being who practised holistic teaching: not only fighting and (of course!) horse-riding, but also medicine (quite useful if you needed to tend to battle wounds), astronomy, music, and even the art of courtship.

The lives of Chiron's pupils took various turns *per aspera ad astra*, often also quite literal ones, like in the case of Asclepius, and even the Centaur himself, who in the end were both placed in the heavens as constellations. Be that as it may, the holistic lessons with Chiron did not give his students easy answers as to how to conduct themselves – no school is able to do that. Instead, the future heroes were equipped by their teacher with the ability to think independently and to choose consciously. And this is precisely what good education should provide students with.

The heritage of ancient culture, with its focus on basic values, dilemmas, and fundamental questions, has much to offer in this respect. Thus, as the Centaur in the wilderness of Thessaly was preparing the heroes for a life in the midst of the human world, so Classical Antiquity – the cultural repository of the past transmitted at school – can prepare young people for the challenges of the contemporary world. This is not a paradox, if you take a good look. And of course we have been doing just that, within our great team, fantastic friends and colleagues, ever since the establishment of the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme in 2011 at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies "Artes Liberales" – now the Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw. In all the applications I presented for its development, practical educational ventures played a vital part, mainly within the Loeb Classical Library Foundation Grant for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Children's Literature between East and West* (2012–2013), the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives for the project *Chasing Mythical Beasts... The Reception of Creatures from Graeco-Roman Mythology in Children's and Young Adults' Culture as a Transformation Marker* (2014–2017), and, finally, the support that permitted us to develop our mythical activities in a truly holistic scope – a European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global*

Challenges (2016–2021). Along with our research work, in recognition of the potential of a broader presence of the Classics, we have been fostering close collaboration with schools by means of Classical Antiquity-related efforts and activities involving students, teachers, and scholars. Here and now, however, it is time for a different approach.

The present volume, prepared by Prof. Lisa Maurice, gathers the results of a vital component of the ERC project. Namely, this component is focused on an analysis of the presence of classical mythology in formal school education worldwide, both in experimental ventures and in typical, systematic teaching. This is a task of paramount importance, as educational processes have a lasting influence on us – all the more so as we are exposed to them already in childhood, when the capacity for critical thinking is being formed by none other than school curricula shaped and developed in specific circumstances. This volume makes us aware of these complex processes, their implications, and the opportunities they create for the future of Classical Antiquity.

I wish to thank the ERC Executive Agency team and in particular Ms Sandrine Barreaux, who took care of the Grant Agreement and a good start of the endeavour, and Ms Katia Menegon – our Project Officer – for their admirable support. I am most grateful to the reviewers of the volume – Prof. Bernd Seidensticker from the Free University of Berlin and Prof. Ermanno Malaspina from the University of Turin – for the time they dedicated to our studies and for all their most precious remarks. And to Prof. Yasunari Takada from the University of Tokyo for his valuable comments. My deepest feeling of gratitude goes, as always, to Prof. Jerzy Axer and Prof. Jan Kieniewicz from the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, for their rock-solid support at all the stages of the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme, ever since its very beginning. I also wish to thank Ms Beata Jankowiak-Konik – the Director of Warsaw University Press, and her team of excellent collaborators – the commissioning editor, Mr Szymon Morawski, and the copy editor, Ms Ewa Balcerzyk, Mr Zbigniew Karaszewski – a graphic artist and the designer of the present series and its covers, and Mr Janusz Olech, who prepared the layout of the volume. I am also grateful to Ms Małgorzata Sudoł – an attorney-at-law and specialist in international projects and copyright – for all her most helpful expertise. At various stages of the work we also received help from some colleagues from the University of Warsaw part of the *Our Mythical Childhood* team: Dr Elżbieta Olechowska – my closest collaborator and the first scholar ready to embark on this adventure as early

as in 2011, when it was only a seemingly impossible dream, Dr Hanna Paulouskaya, Ms Magdalena Andersen, Ms Maria Makarewicz, and Ms Olga Strycharczyk – *gratias ago!*

I am also immensely grateful to all the amazing team members and collaborators from all over the world. Developing a Community together, and watching it grow with each further stage of the programme – this has been my honour and pleasure. In particular, in the context of the project's educational components, I wish to thank Prof. Susan Deacy from the University of Roehampton in the UK, who makes use of the Classics to build bridges – *pontes facere* – for inclusive education with her groundbreaking study *What Would Hercules Do? Classical Myth as a Learning Opportunity for Autistic Children* (in preparation for print); Dr Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons from this same University of Roehampton and the Panoply Vase Animation Project, who create marvellous animations for both scholarly and educational use; Prof. Daniel A. Nkemleke, Prof. Divine Che Neba, and Dr Eleanor Anneh Dasi from the University of Yaoundé 1 in Cameroon, who are involved in research, but at the same time they educate future teachers for the big centres and small villages in Africa – a mission of critical societal significance; and last but not least, Prof. Elizabeth Hale from the University of New England in Australia, who is working, with Miriam Riverlea, on the exceptional guide through the Classics for scholars, teachers, and the general public, *Classical Mythology and Children's Literature: An Alphabetical Odyssey*, soon to be published in the "Our Mythical Childhood" series.

My special expression of appreciation is reserved for Prof. Lisa Maurice from Bar-Ilan University in Israel. As the author of the concept of this volume and its tireless editor, she managed the impossible. For the first time ever, she gathered contributors from Australia, Belarus, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, Denmark, Greece, Germany, Israel, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, the Republic of South Africa, Russia, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and she invited them to reflect together on the place and role of classical mythology in education. What I find particularly important is the fact that she gave voice not only to scholars, but to teachers and graduates as well, thereby building a platform for a truly vibrant intergenerational and international dialogue. Thus, the reader of this volume is embarking on a very particular adventure. The chapters are not meant to instruct anybody. Instruction was far from Chiron's way of teaching. Lisa

knows this well. After all, among her numerous publications there is a study on the centaurs in youth culture.¹

Instead, the chapters are to inspire a deeper reflection, also on the “invisible agenda” – that is, on specific factors that condition attitudes towards classical education in various regions of the world, including the historical backgrounds of the given countries, from regimes to democracies, from colonization to independence, with many current cultural and ideological issues not to be dismissed, too. These factors can be traced and brought into focus via the chapters presented in this volume – a collection whose editor and authors are not afraid of diversity. On the contrary, diversity is the strength of our endeavour, as we try to show many aspects of the phenomenon of classical mythology as part of formal education, showing at the same time that despite our different approaches, backgrounds, and experiences, we speak *una voce* on behalf of ancient heritage. In our troubled times, this can be a key to holistic learning in the spirit of *artes liberales*, with respect towards other people, animals, and nature, as if we had the chance to be(come) Chiron’s pupils ever again. To pass this chance onto the next generations is the most beautiful gift we can make to them, to our mythical ancestors, and to ourselves.

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¹ See Lisa Maurice, “From Chiron to Foaly: The Centaur in Classical Mythology and Fantasy Literature”, in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children’s Literature: Heroes and Eagles*, Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity 6, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2015, 139–168. For more on the centaurs’ role in youth culture, see Edith Hall, “Cheiron as Youth Author: Ancient Example, Modern Responses” and Elena Ermolaeva, “Centaur in Russian Fairy Tales: From the Half-Dog Pulicane to the Centaur Polkan”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture*, Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children’s and Young Adult Literature 8, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020, respectively 301–326 and 327–337.