

# Celebrating Hercules in the Modern World

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## Session 1: Inside and Outside the Church

### Eva Anagnostou-Laoutides (Monash University): Heracles in Byzantium

Taking my starting point from the work of Siniossoglou (2011), I will examine the Neoplatonic and Stoic profile(s) of Heracles in the Byzantine East. Notably, although some publications in the last fifteen years have tried to address Colish's urging to study Byzantine Stoicism, the field remains largely unexplored.<sup>1</sup> Equally, Heracles' philosophical investment in Byzantium has not been studied at all, although Heracles influenced the tradition of the mixed-race hero Digenis Akritas whose final exploit, his fight against death (Lord 1980), constitutes the pinnacle of Byzantine philosophy (Trizio 2007).

Thus, by reading closely the references to Heracles in the works of Michael Psellos, Plethon Gemistos, Demetrius Kydones, Maximus Planudes and Maximus the Confessor in relation to Heracles' descriptions by Plotinus and Proclus, I will argue that Stoicism was employed by Byzantine authors as a practical guide and even preparation for an ecstatic (= Platonic) union with God (appreciated as death or coinciding with physical death), which remained the preferred way of experiencing the divine in the East – especially in the case of asceticism (cf. Aune 1990). For example, Maximus Planudes' treatment of Hercules (*schol. ad Boeth.* c174) is very interesting given his conviction that the Platonic and Aristotelian ontologies are essentially in agreement and the fact that he translated a number of Latin works into Greek, including Augustine's *De Trinitate* and Boethius' *Consolatio Philosophiae* (Anagnostou-Laoutides 2017).

By revealing the pagan philosophical sources that shaped the reception of Heracles in the Byzantine East, this paper contributes significant insights to our understanding of early Christian ethics in the Byzantium and allows us to observe the reception of the hero in the East versus the West.

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<sup>1</sup> Colish 1985, 7; cf. Ierodiakonou 2002 (ed.) and 2010; Sellars 2016 (ed.); Triantari 2014.

## Katrien Levrie (Research Foundation Flanders / University of Leuven): The Herakles Myth in Byzantine Literature

From antiquity until modern times, the figure of the Greek hero Herakles has always been ubiquitous. Even with the rise of Christianity, the Herakles theme continued to fascinate writers, not in the least thanks to its manifest parallels with biblical figures like Samson and Jesus. Scholarly research has been focusing on the survival of the Herakles figure in post-classical writings, but there seems to be a gap in the Herakles research. While scholarly interest has clearly been directed to Latin authors from the Christian period, Greek Christian authors appear to be overlooked. This paper aims at contributing to our knowledge about the place of the Herakles figure in Greek Byzantine literature.

The relevance of the proposed research is clearly emphasized by the existence of two valuable specimens of Byzantine mythography devoted to the story of Herakles and his twelve labors: an essay of the Byzantine scholar John Pediasimos and an anonymous poem of 211 iambic trimeters. Furthermore, the pagan hero also pops up in other texts like Pseudo-Nonnus' commentaries on Gregory of Nazianzus. A case-study of the Herakles myth in Byzantine texts will provide an unique access to the general research topic at stake, i.e. the search for remnants of Greek mythography in Byzantium. Surprisingly enough, there seems to be a blatant lack of pure mythographic handbooks (e.g. Pseudo-Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*) in favor of a remarkable cross-fertilization between the genre of mythography and other genres, like scholia, commentaries and educational treatises.

This paper will try to gain insight in this radically changed position of Greek mythography in the Byzantine world (compared to its status in antiquity) by focusing on the Herakles myth.

## Ivana Čapeta Rakić (University of Split): The Constellation of Hercules and his struggle with the Nemean lion on two romanesque reliefs from Split Cathedral

Under the vault of the belfry, at the western entrance to the cathedral of Split, there is a romanesque arch with relief scenes depicting human figures devoid of any characteristics of holiness, and various animals, both real and imaginary. The reliefs were probably carved by the master Otto who signed his name on the reliefs of St. Domnius, St. Peter and St. Anastasius. In the mid-19th century Eitelberger defined the reliefs on the arch generally as hunting scenes and this interpretation prevails among contemporary art historians.

This paper provides an iconographic analysis of two reliefs at the endings of the arch. On the basis of a comparison with other European examples and in accordance with medieval polysemy, I will try to associate the scene on the left side of the arch with the Constellation of Hercules struggling with a dragon from the Garden of the Hesperides, and also to link the scene on the right to this classical hero and his struggle with the Nemean lion.

## Session 2: Political discourse

### Alexandra Eppinger (Mainz): Hercules the Younger? Heroic allusions in late eighteenth century British political cartoons

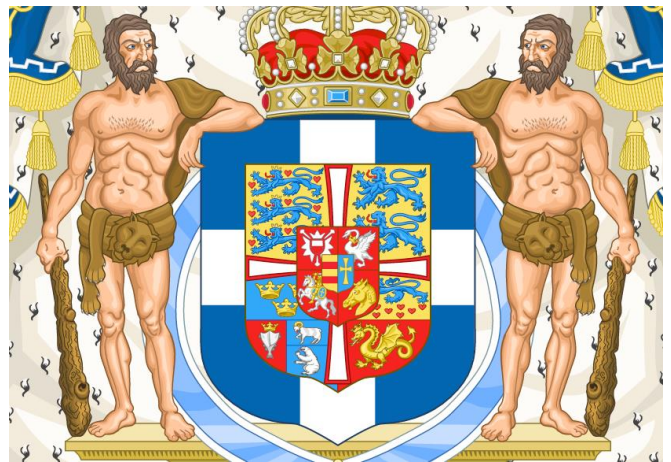
Allusions to Hercules feature in caricatures of the British Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, and some of his political contemporaries, at the turn of the 18th century. Imagery, such as Pitt the child strangling twin serpents topped by the human heads of his political rivals Charles James Fox

and Lord North in Thomas Rowlandson's 'The Infant Hercules' (1784), conveys an ambiguous message: Pitt dominates his enemies, but he is also inexperienced, and has attained his exalted political position prematurely. In some cases, Pitt assumes the guise of Hercules, and in others Pitt is a Labour, and therefore a problem to be vanquished, as in another cartoon by Rowlandson where he appears as an animal in the Augean Stables (1805).

This paper will examine the utilisation of elements of the Hercules myth in the late eighteenth century political context, and will question whether the caricatures were intended to convey a positive or negative image of a politician or political action. The reception of such imagery by their intended audience(s), as well as more general allusions to antiquity in political satire of the period, will also be considered. Finally, the position of these political cartoons in the long history of the use of Hercules as a motif in political discourse will be scrutinised, thereby connecting them with such ancient *topoi* as the comparison in late antique panegyric of Constantine with the snake-strangling infant Hercules (Pan. Lat. 4 (10) 16.6).

Maria Xanthou (Leeds) and Kleoniki Kyrkopoulou (AUth): The defenders of the crown (Οἱ Ἡρακλεῖς τοῦ στέμματος): the reception of Herakles in modern Greek political discourse and history

In 1863, the National Assembly of Greece approved the nomination of the Danish Prince Christian William (1845-1913) as the kingdom's new sovereign under the title 'King George I of the Hellenes'. Soon after his arrival in Greece, one of his primary acts was to modify the royal coat of arms. The most significant feature of the altered coat of arms was the escutcheon (fig. 1, right), resting on a golden pedestal and supported by two human figures depicting the Greek mythological hero Herakles (Hercules), holding a wooden club and wearing the skin of the Nemean lion. The paper will discuss the reception of Herakles in the heraldic emblem of the Greek monarchy, as it represents a case of cultural appropriation of antiquity in the long 19th c. along with the formation of the national identity. Our purpose is to investigate the elements of (dis-)continuity regarding the image of Herakles with the wooden club and the skin of the Nemean lion in the new coats of arm, as a case of cultural and ideological appropriation and as an outcome of post-revolutionary interplay between the modern identity of the newly founded state and the reception of its ancient cultural heritage in the 19th and 20th century. We will discuss the possible relation of the coats of arms with the "Map of Greece", proposed by Rigas Velestinlis, and his treatise "New Political Order of the Inhabitants of Roumeli, Asia Minor, the Mediterranean Islands, Wallachia and Moldavia" [Νέα πολιτικὴ διοίκησις τῶν κατοίκων τῆς Ρούμελης, τῆς Μικρᾶς Ἀσίας, τῶν Μεσογείων Νήσων καὶ τῆς Βλαχομπογδανίας], published in Vienna (1797), drawing heavily on the principles of the French Revolution.



The new coat of arms exemplified the political turmoil and the cultural dynamics surrounding the newly established state of Greece as a kingdom. The motto of the Royal coat of arms depicted on a golden ribbon below the pedestal reads: «Ἰσχύς μου ἡ ἀγάπη τοῦ λαοῦ» ("The people's love is my strength"). We will discuss the political and cultural dynamics underlying the choice of this mythological hero along with its religious overtones. We will pursue a series of questions intertwined with the establishment of Greek monarchy: why King George I chose Herakles as an emblematic symbol in the new coat of arms, how it underpinned the connections of the Greek

royal house with other European dynasties, and how these overtones relate to the new constitution of a crowned democracy in Greece, what imagery this particular coat of arms lent itself, and how it was used by critics of the Greek monarchy to negatively mark the monarch's interference into politics.

### Session 3: Hercules Performed

Lucia Degiovanni (Bergamo): Hercules' Death and Apotheosis in XVIII-XIXth Century Italian Theatre

The paper will examine two plays, *Ercole* by Luigi Riccoboni and *Deianira* by Francesco Benedetti, which are both excellent representatives of their ages and cultural contexts.

Riccoboni's *Ercole/Hercule* (first representation: Paris 1717; text in Italian with French translation on facing pages) is a so-called *monstrum*, that is a tragi-comedy with inserts *Comedia dell'Arte* (one of the characters is Harlequin), a genre which was typical of Baroque theatre but which, at this time, was going to be overtaken by the theatre reform carried on by Riccoboni himself and later by the more famous Goldoni. The play shows an original mixing of tragic themes – drawn mainly from Seneca's *Hercules furens* and (Ps.)Seneca's *Hercules Oetaeus* – which are systematically overturned by their farcical counterpart. It is also a good example of the interaction between theatrical genres, since it is much indebted to the contemporary lyric opera *Ercole in cielo* (music by C.F. Pollarolo, libretto by G. Frigimelica Roberti), first performed in Venice in 1696.

Benedetti's *Deianira* (written in 1811 and published posthumous in 1822) is the product of a very different age. At the beginning of the XIXth century in Italy the literary debate was dominated by the contest between Classicists and Romantics and the political debate by the incipient struggle to gain national unity and independence. Benedetti took active and passionate part to both, and his ideals are mirrored in his works: he took side with the Classicists in the literary debate, while, regarding political matters, he was a patriot and a "Carbonaro" (he committed suicide not to be arrested by the police in 1821, during the repression of the 1820/21 revolutionary movements). Benedetti was well learned in Classics (he undertook, thought never completed, a translation of Sophocles' plays) and his *Deianira* shows a refined re-working of classical models, Sophocles, Ovid and (Ps.)Seneca, alongside with a greater attention for the psychology of Deianira's character and for the dynamics of family relations.

Deborah Chatr Aryamontri (Montclair): Hercules and the tragicomic in the epic theatre of Dürrenmatt

There is no doubt that Herakles/Hercules is in Greco-Roman mythology the most versatile hero, who encompasses a wide variety of human behaviors and personalities that make him a full rounded, but also controversial character. His special status as a hero is apparent from not only the extensive narrative that the Greeks and the Romans created on his deeds and life, but also from his consistent presence as iconographic motif in their art (e.g. in Athenian black and red-figure vase and marble sarcophagi), not to mention the popularity he continued to have in later times, from the Middle ages on, especially as an allegorical symbol of afterlife. Nonetheless, both in ancient and modern times, authors have often looked at only one aspect of Hercules' personality, either his dramatic or caricatural aspect, and only few have tried to reconcile this dichotomy.

In the wake of WWII, one Swiss play-writer, Friedrich Dürrenmatt, wittingly created a very ironic, but also pensive hero in his *Heracles and the Augean Stables*. This paper analyses the ways in which Dürrenmatt resolves the complexity of Hercules' nature and how he finds a resolution about

this conundrum, where modern issues are so well blend into ancient dilemmas that a new, re-energized, and refreshed Hercules arises from his play.

Owen Hodkinson (Leeds): Strategies of translation and transformation in Tony Harrison's *Labourers of Herakles*

This paper will examine Tony Harrison's ideas and strategies of translation and transposition of the story of Herakles into the alien political environment of the late 20th century, in his play the *Labourers of Herakles* (1995), partly based on the tragic fragments of Phrynichos, and treating modern genocide and ethnic cleansing in the Bosnian war.

The paper will focus primarily on the evidence from the Harrison Archive in the Brotherton Archives at Leeds, including two substantial Notebooks (also used by Harrison as scrapbooks) from the time of his composition of the play, and other related materials from the preparations for its first performance (Delphi) and afterwards. The Notebooks contain extracts from Greek texts and translations (the latter both of works directly transposed into Harrison's play and of other texts he evidently read alongside working on it), with alternative translations considered for particular words, drafts. He also pasted in scraps of assorted materials from his contemporary surroundings and clippings about current affairs that informed, or at least accompanied, his work. Harrison's process of translating Herakles and his story into a figure, both for very specific modern events and for universal human sufferings, can be recovered in vivid detail using the Archive material.

Sam Gartland (Oxford): Herakles in Space – spatial forms in modern versions of Euripides' *Herakles*

Euripides' use of space has, in many different ways, long been a focus of scholarship on his surviving plays. In recent years, the spatial elements of his *Herakles* have received some excellent treatments (particularly those of Rush Rehm and Brooke Holmes), that have been keen to emphasise the variety of spatial forms expressed in and around the city and the eponymous hero. The plural spaces of the play are expressed through the travels of Herakles and his dramatic and gruesome return to his family and to his city, with the communal and domestic spaces of Thebes playing a central role. Two of the most recent anglophone adaptations of the play, Archibald MacLeish's *Herakles* (1965) and Simon Armitage's *Mr Heracles* (2002), both enjoy playing with the spaces which Herakles inhabits and represents, but they have in common a deliberate programme of replacing or disguising the city, and a distinctive Theban space in some way.

This paper will examine the interplay of space across these three versions and ask what the focus on space in Euripides' *Herakles* in recent scholarship can add to the way in which we understand the modern adaptations. And when we have asked these questions, how can the use of space in these two modern adaptations allow us to more keenly appreciate the ways in which Euripides uses a variety of space within this, one of the most troubling and difficult presentations of Herakles in any genre.

## Session 4: Iberian Hercules

Adriana Nogueira (Algarve/Coimbra): When the Saints are Greek Heroes: Heracles and Saint Anthony of Lisbon Universidade do Algarve/ CECH – U. Coimbra

This paper will analyse the marks of classical Antiquity in two Portuguese hagiographic texts: *Hercules Divino Santo António Português*, a manuscript founded in Lisbon (ML), probably from the end of the 17th century, and *Hercules Divino António Português*, a manuscript founded in Coimbra (MC), dated from the 18th century. The texts were edited in 1997, as a masters degree dissertation (by Marina Correia), but otherwise never published. The main text is the manuscript from Lisbon, since the one from Coimbra is almost a copy of the previous. In fact, both are copies, since the writers don't seem to be the real authors.

These texts are meant to be a biography of Fernando Bulhões – born in Lisbon (Portugal) in the end of the 12th century, and died in Padua (Italy), in the 13th century – but not a scientific one: this biography confirms that he was a saint (he became the well-known Saint Anthony of Lisbon – later, of Padua). In it, he's compared with different characters of the classical Antiquity (gods, heroes, mythological and historical figures) as well as with characters of Christianity.

This paper will also compare the characteristics of Heracles/Hercules with the characters (from Antiquity and Christianity) presented in the texts, analysing their function in the larger purpose that is the praise of the saint.

Pamina Fernández Camacho (Almería): What Identity for Hercules Gaditanus? The Role of the Gaditanian Hercules in the Invention of National History in Late Medieval and Early Modern Spain

Hercules Gaditanus was a popular incarnation of the hero/god in Classical Antiquity. Widely recognized as a Hellenized, and then Romanized version of the Phoenician god Melqart, he was worshipped at the temple of Gades, Spain's most ancient known city. In the late medieval period, when the first attempts were made to write a national history of the Spanish peoples, he became a key figure, connecting Spanish ancestry with the prestige of Classical Antiquity, and acquiring the role of a prestigious founder. And still, there were a number of problems with this literary construct: the unsavoury idea of conquest by a foreigner, the inconvenient explicitness of some sources about the non-Greek ethnical background of the Hercules Gaditanus and the city of Gades itself, and the confusing insistence of those same sources on the coexistence of more than one Heracles as object of worship in the area. The solutions found for these problems show a remarkable amount of creativity on the part of Spanish historians, and a study of the sources, the chronology and the rationale behind those solutions is crucial to understanding how the Spanish past was re-created.

Maria Seijo Richart (Leeds): A Coruña, cidade herculina: Hercules as founder of cities

A Coruña (in Galicia, Northern Spain) is known as "cidade herculina", because of the legend which attributes the founding of the city to hero Hercules. The most iconic monument is the Tower of Hercules, the only Roman lighthouse still in use, which was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2009.

The foundation myth of A Coruña, popularised in the 13<sup>th</sup> century *Estoria de España* by King Alfonso X the Wise, incorporates elements from the Roman and Celtic traditions. It states that it was in this place where Hercules fought and defeated giant Geryon, later using his head as a foundation on which he erected the Tower (hence the tower on top of a skull in the city emblem).



He then founded a city, which he named after the first settler, a woman called Crunnia. The theme of Hercules as founder of cities (by no means exclusive to A Coruña) is indicative of his status as exemplary, an incarnation of virtue. His defeat of Geryon symbolizes the ending of tyranny and chaos, while the founding of the city implies the arrival of civilization and order.

I aim to explore the persistence of this foundation myth in the contemporary history and culture of A Coruña. The Tower of Hercules is considered the symbol of the city (the motto of the local university "hac luce" associates the lighthouse to the light of knowledge). It remains an important tourist attraction, whose mythical origins are commemorated by the recently built sculptural garden on the site.

## Session 5: Art and the Viewer

Anne-Sophie Laruelle (Liège): Hercules in the art of Renaissance Flemish tapestry

The exploits of Hercules, one of the most popular literary and artistic themes of the Renaissance, flourished particularly in tapestries, a major artistic genre of this period. Fine tapestries presenting this theme were produced by the best weaving workshops of the former Netherlands. The success of the theme in tapestry invites us to ponder on the special meaning given to it by the princes, the privileged recipients of these tapestries. There is no doubt that, more than any other hero, Hercules served as their model as he embodied the *virtus heroica*, i.e. "active virtue", which encompassed bravery, intrepid acts and erudition.

We will delve deeper in the matter by focusing on the period between the middle of the fifteenth century (when the theme first appears in tapestries) and the 1560s. In addition to the exceptional quantity of preserved tapestries (over a 100!), the numerous references to the Herculean theme in ancient inventories and descriptions confirms its importance at the time and reveals the complexity of its iconography.

Tomas Macostay (Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona): How Hercules lost his poise. Viewing inhibited and unleashed forcefulness in sculpture between Wickelmann and Emeric-David

As a result of the advent, in the late-mid eighteenth-century, of an art history of ancient statuary, Hercules' heroism underwent a process by which new figures began to compete for prominence in a fluctuating symbolic imaginary of virile rule, autonomy and self-rule. The new ways of accommodating the beholder to heroic force was heralded by accounts of Greek statuary in Winckelmann's *Geschichte der Kunst des Altertums* (1764). In his insistence on a poetic and aesthetic Greek mind-set, and in his portrayal of a society devoted to cultural displays of autonomy, truth-seeking and beauty, Winckelmann evacuated the political purchase of the active and triumphant Herculean warrior, and turned instead on a youthful male heroic ideal, one inseparable from the emblematic 'suppleness' and quiet solemnity of the actual adolescent body. This and later accounts turned on ancient statues of young male Gods as the new imaginary of the hero, their virility not yet distinct, and their bodies a renewable source of aesthetic interest in Greek liberty.

This paper considers, first, the contested position occupied by Hercules in accounts of classical statuary from Winckelmann to Emeric-David's *Recherches sur l'art statuaire* (1805). Second, it examines how the gradual fracturing of Hercules's grip on virile rule and power, along with the aesthetic treatment given to Greece's warrior-youths, might go some way towards explaining the problematic image of Hercules in examples of statuary by Alexander Trippel, John Flaxman and

Antonio Canova around 1790-1800, as Hercules becomes the protagonist of negative images of dishevelled violence and senseless pain.

## Session 6: Literature and Popular Thought

Will Desmond (Maynooth): Hercules among the Germans

Stereotypes about the Germans based on the Nazi period, and earlier on Prussian militarism, might find in Heracles a possible exemplar of the will-to-power and the resolution to triumph over all through “blood and iron.” Such stereotypes have a certain, though definitely limited, resonance for the figure that I will focus on in this paper: Hegel. Hegel published only four main books (*Phenomenology of Spirit*, *Science of Logic*, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, *Philosophy of Right*) but his posthumously edited lecture series on art, religion, the history of philosophy, and the philosophy of history, are rich repositories of reflections on many concrete topics. Among them is the figure of Heracles, whom Hegel treats in relation to heroic state-founders, ancient republican “virtue” and the modern “police” (*Philosophy of Right*); to Greek sculptures like the Heracles Torso and tragedies like *Prometheus Bound* and *Philoctetes* (*Lectures on Fine Art*); to suffering, self-sacrifice, Christ and the necessity of God to appear in human form (*Lectures on Religion*); and to world-historical individuals (*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*). In these far-flung reflections, Hegel drew on his own thorough schooling in the classics (he had both graduated from and served as rector for 8 years of a gymnasium) as well as his own drive for a philosophical systematization of knowledge. In this ambitious system, Heracles is of less interest to Hegel than other Greek figures like Achilles and Socrates, but he does recognize that he was the premier hero of the Greek world, mythologized through many genres and media (from antiquity to Renaissance painting), and taken up by Socrates and Stoics as a philosophical paradigm. Hegel too assimilates Heracles to his own philosophical paradigm, making of Heracles a hero who exemplifies the history of humanity itself, as it rises through labour, suffering, and alienation—out of nature, and towards its own self-apotheosis in Spirit. Hegel would thus characteristically celebrate Heracles as a hero of the Spirit and the Idea, as he understands these terms: an interpretation, that in Hegel’s view at least, is definitively “modern,” i.e. at once Lutheran and objectively “scientific.”

This paper will aim to draw together Hegel’s scattered references into a more rounded whole. It will focus on Hegel because he is perhaps the pivotal figure for the period, with significant ties to the discourses of the Enlightenment, post-Kantian Idealism, Romanticism, as well as the emerging *Altertumswissenschaft*. To reflect this, I will also gesture towards material from contemporaries like Goethe, Schelling, Hölderlin, Creuzer, A. Schlegel, Schleiermacher, and Schopenhauer—to situate Hegel’s remarks in the rich intellectual and artistic world of his time in order to offer a more complete picture of the reception of Heracles among early nineteenth-century Germans.

Frances Foster (Cambridge): Demigod, god or monster? Rick Riordan’s Hercules

Rick Riordan’s Percy Jackson books incorporate an ever-increasing breadth of mythical characters, figures and places. Hercules appears only twice: indirectly in a dream in *The Titan’s Curse*, and directly in the later book *The Mark of Athena*. However, he is mentioned on several other occasions, particularly as the modern demigods follow quests and kill monsters, some of which resemble tasks which Hercules undertook, especially his twelve labours.

In keeping with his somewhat irreverent portrayal of the Olympian gods, Riordan’s Hercules is

caricatured for his violent behaviour, which also functions as entertainment for the other immortals. Hercules had his own television series, 'Hercules Busts Heads' (*Sea of Monsters*), and he 'had a good publicist' (*Demigod Diaries*). Riordan's characters largely fall into fixed categories of gods, demigod heroes and monsters. When the modern demigods encounter Hercules (either in dream or in person), he is revealed as monstrous rather than heroic: he lies, cheats and harbours grudges.

In this paper, I will examine how Riordan develops the figure of Hercules for a young audience of the twenty-first century, and how he uses Hercules to question the distinctions between gods, heroes and demigods in the various narratives.

#### Eleanor O'Kell (Leeds): Hercules in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Historical Fiction

This paper will examine two distinctly different examples of the historical novel: Kate Mosse's serious historical fiction *Citadel*, which is set in the Languedoc during the Second World War, and Stephanie Laurens' romantic historical fiction *The Truth About Love*, set in Cornwall during the Regency period.

Both these novels invoke Hercules by name and the hero provides contextualisation for the events and relationships therein. For example, in Mosse the myth of Hercules' relationship with Pyrene underpins the whole landscape (it is an origin myth for the Pyrenees) and in Laurens the Garden of Hercules forms a frequently referenced part of the landscape. In both novels the presentation of Herculean myth as a background prompts the reader to extrapolate from the legend of Hercules to the characters depicted and their struggles.

The similarities of and differences between the two authors' uses of Hercules suggests that 21<sup>st</sup> literature is open to exploring facets of the ancient hero's character which go beyond monster-slaying and into the realm of the romantic/erotic.

#### Session 7: Hercules Drawn

Katherine Lu Hsu (SUNY), "Heroism" is a Madness: Transgressing Boundaries in Steve Moore's *Hercules: The Thracian Wars*

This paper presents a reading of Steve Moore and Admira Wijaya's innovative presentation of Hercules in their graphic novel, *Hercules: The Thracian Wars* (Radical Comics, 2008-2009). Hercules appears as early as the 1940s in American comic books, where his superhuman strength, warrior's skills, and occasional clownishness make him a popular figure, especially in the Marvel universe. In other forms of American popular culture, such as television's *Hercules: the Legendary Journeys* and Disney's *Hercules*, Hercules serves not only as a strongman, but also as a model of admirable moral qualities. These visions of heroism use Hercules as a representative of good against evil and even as a role model for children. In contrast, Moore's graphic novel features a non-idealized, far more ambivalent Hercules. This paper examines how Moore's tale interacts with inherited tradition, and how the visual medium of the graphic novel conveys a representation of Hercules that differs significantly from his previous incarnations in comics and other forms of popular culture.

Moore's Hercules is an outcast and mercenary, accompanied by a band of Greek mythological warriors, all misfits and each distinguished by some troubling character trait. The story, set in the Bronze Age, begins with their arrival in Thrace at the palace of King Cotys, who hires them to train his fighters with the goal of uniting Thrace's disparate tribes. The foreign setting would seem to

invite a comparison between the Greek self and the Thracian other. Indeed, the story establishes several strongly binary oppositions, including civilized vs. barbarian, divine vs. mortal, and sane vs. mad. Yet Moore resists assigning one characteristic to one group and the opposite characteristic to another. Rather, Hercules and his companions constantly transgress the divide between the binary oppositions, as do the Thracian allies and enemies who surround them. This paper also focuses on how Wijaya's visual contribution—the use of line and colour, consistent visual tropes, the overlaying of sessions to define foreground and background, the movement of the eye across the page—enhances and shapes the work's narrative effect (Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics*, 1993). Ultimately, the series frustrates the expectation fulfilled by many other superhero narratives, that the central figure(s) follow the hero's journey as defined by Joseph Campbell (Brett Rogers, "Heroes Unlimited: The Theory of the Hero's Journey and the Limitation of the Superhero Myth", in *Classics and Comics*, George Kovacs and C.W. Marshall (eds.), Oxford UP, 2011, 73-88). Instead, Moore and Wijaya reveal the moral ambiguity of violence and, in the limitations of the hero, the limitations of heroism itself.

Ted Gellar-Goad (Wake Forest): Sex and gender, race and Orientalism in Steve Moore's Hercules comics

#### Session 8 – Hercules Drawn

The Hercules comics written for Radical Comics by Steve Moore, *Hercules: The Thracian Wars* and *Hercules: The Knives of Kush*, narrate continuing adventures of the hero as the leader of a mercenary band of mythic heroes after the conclusion of his mythic Labors. The tone of the comics, particularly of *The Thracian Wars*, is "grim fatalism," according to the author (Vamvounis 2008). The violence and pessimism of the comics are of a piece with the "gritty" turn in 21st-century Anglo-American speculative fiction, in text and on screen. This paper explores Moore's troubling presentation of gender, sex, and race in the foreground of the comics' interaction with classical myth. Moore modifies the ancient source material in ways that inscribe his grim grit upon the bodies of the subaltern—women, people of colour, non-heterosexuals—in an uncritical replication of modern patterns of exploitation.

*The Thracian Wars* are informed in large part by the author's anger over the United States' military action in Iraq, reflected in his narrator Iolaus' description of Hercules' military campaign on behalf of the king of Thrace as "[a] holocaust of bloodshed, rape and burning villages." Sexual violence, here as in many other Western fictions, acts as shorthand for the state of the fictional world: women's damaged bodies are merely a medium for the thematic message, as when Hercules spears his former-lover-turned-antagonist Ergenia from behind and says, "[y]ou died the way you lived...impaled on a man's shaft." So also the characterization of Atalanta, whose primary personality trait is homoerotic desire, whose sexuality is linked causally to spousal rape, and whose secondary trait is suicidal ideation.

*The Knives of Kush* takes Hercules to Egypt, where the typical racist and Orientalist tropes of the Western tradition are on display. The titular Knives of Kush, a secret society of assassins from what Moore calls "the barbaric southern land of Kush" (Lamar 2009), are illustrated as dark-skinned (in contrast to the lighter-skinned northern Egyptians and the northern-European-like white Greeks and Thracians), are subjected to racist invective by a main character (the protagonist Meleager terms them "dark-haired vermin"), are called "cultists" by Hercules, are portrayed as embracing martyrdom and the "paradise that awaits" martyrs, and are tortured by the protagonists.

Given the author's comments in interviews about Iraq, the Knives are a cipher for Western ideas of Islamic extremism. The comics offer no window into the experience of, and no possibility of empathy for, the Knives themselves. Hercules and his cohorts thus play the part of American counterterrorism forces, whose use of immoral tactics make them protagonists in the vein of Jack Bauer or the new cinematic Batman. The Hercules of the world of Steve Moore is neither culture hero nor *alexikakos*—he is a latter-day antihero.

#### Ayelet Peer (Tel Aviv): The labours of Hercules-Sama

As the world is becoming a global village, it seems that the figure of Herakles (or Hercules) is one of the most successful emissaries of cultural globalization. From the biblical Samson to the Japanese golden-boy Kintaro, almost every civilization shares its own version of a Hercules, a hero with unimaginable powers. This resonance is what makes Hercules' character so familiar and easily identified or related with, even in countries which do not have an extensive classical tradition. The influence of Greco-Buddhist art which slowly penetrated East Asia also contributed to the sense of familiarity with the muscular, burly character.

In this paper, I will examine the representations of the Greek hero in a very modern and foreign setting: the Japanese popular mediums of manga and anime.

Since the image of Hercules is relatively known and one does not need former knowledge, Japanese children can relate to the character and its various forms. The main feature of Hercules which is mostly emphasized is his superhuman strength. This element is enhanced in shows like *Fate/Say night* (based on a game by Type-Moon) or even in *Dragon Ball Z* when the character Mr. Satan was renamed in the dubbing Hercule. Another anime based on Greek mythology and Hercules' labours is *Heroic Age* from 2007. These examples show that Greek mythology can be reworked into other mediums and still appeal to an audience with relatively no prior knowledge of the myths. If the character exhibits familiar and fantastic features, it can captivate people around the world.

## Session 8: Hercules On Screens

#### Jon Solomon (Illinois): The Convergence of Family Values, Computer-Generated Monsters, and Cleavage in *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*

Following the dearth of 1970s and 1980s films set in antiquity, *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys* (hereafter *HTLJ*) emerged as one of the most successful television productions of the mid-1990s. Originally part of MCA's Universal Action Pack, *HTLJ* was packaged as only one component of an American (New Zealand) production splurge to fill newly available syndicated and cable timeslots. The marketing emphasized the protagonist's strength "surpassed by only the the power of his heart." In an early interview the actor cast as Hercules, Kevin Sorbo, clarified that he only used his strength to defend "threatened villages" and the like, and that "I never throw the first punch." Co-producer Robert Tapert added that "a certain amount of campiness [is] inbred in the material."

As the show garnered an unprecedentedly large international audience, however, its success was attributed to a variety of different factors, including the first intense use of computer-generated animations on television—popularized first in such films as *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) and *Jurassic Park* (1993)—as well as a suggestive sexuality visible in skimpy costumes for men and women, including Sorbo dressed as "a hunk." Thematically the kind heart implied in

Hercules's character—given lines like “You're lucky to have her in your life”—struck a chord with an American (and Americanized) viewership that had embraced contemporary commercialized “family values” in films like *Honey, I Shrank the Kids* (1989) and *Home Alone* (1990), rendering the sex and violence that characterized contemporary American cinema more palatable for early evening viewing at home.

### Sam Summers (Sunderland) A Real American Hero: The Superhero-ification of Disney's Hercules

Today's superhero narratives are often referred to as the modern equivalents of classical mythology, tales of larger-than-life characters engrained in the public consciousness and reinterpreted by generation after generation. In recent decades, however, as common awareness of superheroes surpasses that of their ancient forebears, adaptations of classical legends are now filtered through the lens of DC and Marvel's comic book canon. An extreme example is Disney's *Hercules* (1997), a film which places the mythical Herakles into a plot which discards its source narrative entirely in favour of a storyline indebted to a text as ubiquitously American as DC's Superman.

Like Superman, Disney's Hercules is sent to earth from a supernatural world where he is adopted by a human couple and raised on their farm. As an adult, the mild-mannered hero moves to the big city and has to protect it from his devious archenemy. In imposing upon the Greek myth both the origin story and personality of Clark Kent, Disney also infuses it with the quintessentially American values which he represents. The result is a clash between classical European and contemporary American culture, played out through the merging of their respective monomythical narratives and the archetypal heroes at their centre.

My paper will address in detail the deviations from the plot of the source myth which bring Herakles' story further in line with that of Superman. These elements each provide a useful starting point from which to identify the aspects of American ideology which emerge in the film as a result.

### Jean Alvares and Patricia Salzman-Mitchell (Montclair): Hercules' self-fashioning on screen: Millennial concerns and political dimensions

Our paper concerns self-fashioning, an important component of life with social and political dimensions, as found in three movie versions of Hercules: the sanitized, Disney 1997 *Hercules* and two more traditional productions, Hallmark's 2005 TV miniseries and the 2014 Dwayne Johnson “The Rock” *Hercules* (Blanshard & Shahabudin 2011, Salzman-Mitchell & Alvares 2017). Their presentations of self-fashioning contrast with the Classical Hercules myth and each other. The Classical Heracles' self-construction is tied to atonement for his innate brutality and inevitable societal conflicts (Padilla 1998). Reflecting modern perspectives, our hero's self-making centrally involves gaining knowledge and new perspectives while confronting evils symbolic of our culture's inherited flaws, benefiting the wider society. In all three movies re-fashioning connects with socio-political change.

Disney's Hercules, through self-fashioning, overcomes a conflict of brothers (Hades vs. Zeus) he was victimized by, and eliminates the Titan's primal threat. His self-making, as in today's commercial media, allows merchandizing opportunities; consider connections to the body-builder/muscleman ideal (Wyke 1997). In keeping with Disneyesque moralizing, his final act of reformation remains self-sacrifice for love. Hallmark's Christianized version subverts the standard Hercules myth (Safran 2005); the evolving Hercules rejects a compromised culture, causing the

(metaphorically significant) deaths of his parents. He disavows all faith in the brutal classical gods to be 'born again', perspectives familiar in fundamentalist Christianity. The 2014 Hercules, thinking himself a murderer and mercenary, allows himself to be rebranded as Zeus' son hated by Hera. In this tragic context Hercules must transform himself and embrace his innocence, true heroism, innate individual potential and community.

#### Alix Beaumont (York): Through a Glass Partly: Reflections of Hercules in Cinema, Television and Video Games

Hercules is not a consistently 'heroic' figure (by today's standards), but one that is flawed and woven through with a dark side. In his mythology, he commits numerous sins which are as much a part of his character as the heroic labours. Modern depictions are also not consistent. Television, video games and films have all cast Hercules in different moulds, from perfect hero to flawed hero, even villain. These depictions draw upon aspects of the mythical figure, and intertextually upon other depictions, but are also narratively independent of each other – forming something that I term a mythodiegesis. Each is also heavily influenced by the requirements of each text, and medium, in which the figure of Hercules is being depicted.

Through examples of portrayals of Hercules in video games (particularly Kevin Sorbo's reprise of his Hercules role for *God of War 3* and the depiction of Hercules in *Rise of the Argonauts* for X-Box360) as compared with film and television, I will demonstrate what I argue to be the mythodiegetic (that is, the millennia-spanning, mythically-sourced, intertextually and medium/text contextually altered, and yet narratively independent) nature of Hercules depictions.

The paper will consider how each depiction draws upon an element of the mythical character, selected because it fits the requirements of the text, and then shapes it through a combination of factors, including other depictions of the character. However, through all of this, I argue that the various incarnations of Hercules are kept narratively disconnected from each other, even when there are other direct connections- such as using the same actor to portray different versions of Hercules in different texts. I will thus propose a mythodiegetic model for considering Hercules, with each depiction being simply another specially crafted surface upon which a different reflection of the character can be seen.

#### Elena d'Amelio (San Marino): The myth of Hercules in 1950s and 1960s peplum films (virtual paper available online after the conference)

Peplum usually refers to a low-budget Italian movie set in Ancient Greece or Rome, with a professional body builder in the principal role. The peplum genre was a popular segment of Italy's movie industry from 1958-1964, after the success of two Italian productions from 1957 and 1959, which were *Hercules* and *Hercules Unchained*, starring American bodybuilder Steve Reeves.

The Hercules of Ancient Greece is a controversial myth: he is Greece's main hero, fearless and generous, the founder of new *poleis* and the Earth's liberator from evil creatures; however, depending on different versions of the myth he is also a violent rapist and murderer, who killed his entire family in a fit of sudden madness caused by Hera. During Medieval times Hercules was reinvented as a clone of Christ, purifying these problematic characteristics. This new model of Hercules' myth becomes Prodicos of Keos' anecdote, as told by Xenophon, which pictured

Hercules choosing Virtue over Vice. This tradition was influential in the construction of Hercules as the “right and might” virtuous hero of the Italian peplum films, fighting for a higher purpose by saving the masses and eliminating an evil dictator or unruly king after surviving terrible torture. Moreover, an American bodybuilder, who represented a type of masculinity very different from the Italian one was often the preferred casting choice for the role of Hercules.

My paper explores the production of Hercules films in post-war Italy and their reception in both the Italian and American film market. My claim is that the serialised production of popular films centred on the character of Hercules fostered the construction of a transnational idea of white, European masculinity that helped negotiate the transition from the Italian “uomo forte” (strong man) of fascist memory to the global, US inspired, strong hero of the Marshall Plan era.

Joel Gordon (Otago): “I am Hercules!”: Rebooting, rationalization and heroism in 2014 (virtual paper available online after the conference)

2014 proved to be an exceptional year for Hercules with three new movies starring the hero: two blockbusters, *The Legend of Hercules* (dir. R. Harlin) and *Hercules* (dir. B. Ratner), and a B-grade film, *Hercules Reborn* (dir. N. Lyon). Not only do these films signal a return to form for the popular mythic figure but they also indicate a change in the manner in which modern films depict his character.

In this paper I will demonstrate how these films offer a ‘rebooting’ of Hercules’ filmic-persona. While scholarship has already explored these films’ continuity with past renditions, primarily regarding their similarities with *pepla* through the exposition of the male body – e.g. O’Brien (2014); Rushing (2016) – I will focus instead on how they break from tradition via their rationalization of Hercules as ‘ordinary’. These three films display an inherent interest in questioning Hercules’ identity. While each film arrives at a different conclusion regarding this ‘true’ identity – e.g. *The Legend of Hercules* begins with Hercules ‘the man’ and concludes with the revelation of Hercules ‘the god’, while *Hercules* and *Hercules Reborn* do the opposite, moving from god to man – they all maintain the conviction that their version presents audiences with the ‘real’ Hercules.

Underpinning these rationalistic perspectives are additional contextual demands: these films seek to conform the Hercules of myth to contemporary standards of filmic heroism. This style of hero – the ‘ordinary’ man who rises to the occasion, following Raucci (2015) – is a remarkably different Hercules compared to previous filmic versions. This change in presentation reflects broader shifts within popular culture responding to changes in the concept of heroic identity.