

## ‘UNPROMISING’ HEROES AND HEROES AS HELPERS IN GREEK MYTH

Heroes *and* helpers, as two distinct categories within folk-tale, the former proffering aid to the latter at an early stage within their quest, have formed the subject matter of several recent articles by me<sup>1</sup>. The Old Man of the Sea in relation to Heracles, Menelaus or Aristaeus would be a case in point. But there are also cases where heroes have been taken to be themselves functioning *as* helpers in a somewhat different sense, and this is the area I wish to examine here. The mythical careers of Heracles and Philoctetes may fittingly open discussion: the first hero bequeaths his bow and arrows to the second; but the links between them supply a far more significant analogue, which has already been recognised by some scholars. So M. L. West has observed in passing<sup>2</sup> that the two figures exemplify “versions of the myth of the helper who must be fetched in order to win a long-drawn-out war”. The mythographer Apollodorus, it will be remembered, preserves a version of the Gigantomachy (1.6.1-2; cf. 2.7.1) whereby, in accordance with a pronouncement (λογίδιον) which the gods have received, Heracles must be fetched as their ally against the Giants, since only a mortal can subdue them. But one may reasonably question whether the relevant motif only has as context “a long-drawn-out war”.

As a matter of fact, writing before West, the French scholar François Vian had, in his study of *La Guerre des Géants*<sup>3</sup>, juxtaposed the two stories

<sup>1</sup> For instance, “CQ” 38, 1988, 277ff. and “BICS” 49, 2006, 105ff.

<sup>2</sup> In his commentary on Hesiod’s *Theogony* v. 147 (Oxford 1966, 209). The context of West’s remark is Zeus’ fetching of Briareus and the hundred handers to aid him against the Titans, but it may be doubted whether this story is really very close to that of Heracles or Philoctetes, since, as West himself says, in those narratives a single helper is involved. A closer analogy for the hundred handers, cited again by West (quoting Karl Meuli, *Odyssee und Argonautika* (Berlin 1921) 2f. = *Ges. Schr.* 2.595) are the helpers with supernatural powers exemplified by the folk-tale ‘Sechse kommen durch die Welt’ (see now H. Lox’s article s.v. in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* 12.470ff.) or ‘Six go through the world’ (see D. L. Ashliman, *A Guide to Folktales in the English Language based on the Aarne-Thompson Classification* (London 1987) 513A (p. 111). Cf. my remarks in “WS” 115, 2002, 6f.). The analogy becomes all the closer if we interpret Zeus in this stretch of the *Theogony* as the folk-tale hero in search of his siblings (see my remarks on the narrative in *Hesperos: Studies on Greek Poetry presented to M. L. West on his Seventieth Birthday* (Oxford 2007) 75-6), for such heroes idiomatically require such aid: see, for instance, the story of Ashlad (cf. n. 25 below) and the Good Helpers cited by Ashliman.

<sup>3</sup> Paris 1952, p. 193. For second thoughts by this scholar on this topic see his contributions to *Studi in onore di A. Barigazzi* (“Sileno” 11, 1984), 253ff. and *L’Univers Épique*

of Heracles and Philoctetes and distilled their common motif as an “adage de la sagesse populaire” which he summarised thus: “on a souvent besoin d’un plus petit que soi”. Put in this way, the motif is intriguingly reminiscent not only of Aesop’s fable of the lion and the mouse, but of the situation in folk-tales involving the figure termed “the unpromising hero”. This individual, in spite of, for instance, unprepossessing appearance, apparent stupidity, or extreme youth, succeeds against all expectations. As an expert on folk-tale has put it, “the Märchen delights in putting on the scene a man or woman in the most desperate plight, poor, destitute, and often even lacking in wit, and the whole action is concentrated on the one point, how he makes his fortune after all, marries a princess, and inherits a kingdom”<sup>4</sup>.

To exemplify this pattern and convey its widespread appeal and adaptability in art, I quote the plot of Richard Wagner’s last and greatest music drama *Parsifal*<sup>5</sup>. In this, a voice from heaven has announced that Amfortas,

(Rencontre avec l’Antiquité Classique) 2, 1992, 129ff., as well as to *LIMC* s.v. ‘Gigantes’ (IV.1, 191-270, in collaboration with M.B. Moore).

<sup>4</sup> For the “unpromising hero” see in particular Stith Thompson’s *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* L 100 (5.8ff.), esp. L 111.1 “exile returns and succeeds”, L 111.5 “Bastard hero”, L 112.2 “very small hero”, L 160 “success of the unpromising hero”. For a formulation closer to Vian’s see L 300-3999 “triumph of the weak”, esp. L 310 “weak overcomes strong in combat”. Another formulation, with a decidedly Christian tinge, occurs in Shakespeare’s *All’s Well that Ends Well* II. i. 135-6, whose heroine Helena declares at a key point in the drama: “He that of greatest works is finisher, / Oft does them by the weakest minister”. Cf. the King’s words to her at II.i 174-5 “Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak / His powerful sound within an organ weak”. The match is by no means accidental or casual, since this play makes central use of the motif of the Unpromising Hero(ine): see my remarks in *From rags to riches: Democedes of Croton and the reliability of Herodotus*, “BICS” 53.2, 2010, 29. For a New Testament analogue see I Corinthians 1.27 *God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty*. For Christ himself as unpromising hero see the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus (ed. C. von Tischendorf, *Evangelica Apocrypha* 2, Leipzig 1876<sup>3</sup>) ὁ μικρὸς ὁρώμενος καὶ μεγάλα δυνάμενος. Compare Jung’s essay on *The Phenomenology of the Spirit in Fairytales* 408 = 229: “that the greatest effects come from the smallest causes has become patently clear not only in physics but in the field of psychological research as well. How often in the crucial moments of life everything hangs on what appears to be a mere nothing!”. The quotation “the Märchen delights...” is from A.H. Krappe, *Balor with the Evil Eye: Studies in Celtic and French Literature* (New York 1929) 130. See further D. Ogden, *The Crooked Kings of Ancient Greece* (London 1997) on variously deformed or marginalized figures who win to power, especially as colonizers or tyrants.

<sup>5</sup> Wagner’s libretto was based on Wolfgang von Eschenbach’s *Parzival* from the start of the thirteenth century, which in turn displays analogies with the Welsh Romance *Peredur*, Chretien de Troyes’ work *Perceval* (1184) and the fourteenth century *Sir Perceval of Galles*. For a detailed analysis of these traits and the general indebtedness of these compositions to

the wounded king of Montsalvat, can only be healed by a holy fool ("der reine Tor")<sup>6</sup>. This transpires to be the titular hero, an innocent young man who has lived the whole of his life in a remote forest because his mother was determined to keep him away from chivalry and knights. The voice from heaven here is, of course, the equivalent of the *logidion* in the Apollodorean narrative<sup>7</sup>, and we shall note below several other similarities between the schema of Wagner's great drama and the narratives from the ancient world which we shall be discussing.

In order to confirm his already plausible thesis that Apollodorus as cited above preserves an ancient trait, Vian<sup>8</sup> assembled a number of more or less close parallels for this widely distributed folk-tale feature, and I intend to re-examine these now and add to them.

folk-tale see G. Goetinck, *Peredur A study of Welsh tradition in the Grail Legends* (Cardiff 1975).

<sup>6</sup> Though he is not the only version of the 'unpromising hero', the 'foolish hero' looms large in folk-tale. See e.g. D.A. Miller, *The Epic Hero* (Baltimore and London 2000) 87f. and 275f., citing "Rainouart of the Guillaume d'Orange Cycle, literally... a blackened hero in two senses, being a Saracen... and also serving as a kitchen churl 'blackened and soiled with the fire – shovel'... When he mounts a horse for the first time, he... faces the wrong way" etc. For the comparable figure of the *kastidhis* in modern Greek and Turkish folk-tales see W.R. Halliday *ap.* R.M. Dawkins, *Modern Greek in Asia Minor* (Cambridge 1916) 223: "sometimes he is a prince... deliberately masquerading as a bald man or scald-head": on this latter disguise cf. Stith Thompson (as in n. 4), K 1818.2. Halliday proceeds: "he often deliberately disguises his horse with the skin of some peasant's beast... He himself will exchange clothes with the peasant and pull a sheep's bladder over his locks". Poor horses and poor equipment frequently feature in this type of tale: see M. C. Lyons, *The Arabian Epic: Heroic and oral story telling* ii (Cambridge 1995) 402 (T67). For further examples of 'the adventures of the Great Fool' see, for instance, A. Bruford, *Gaelic Folk-Tales and Medieval Romances* (Dublin 1969) 147f. The Homeric Margites may have been in the same mould: cf. M. Forderer, *Zum Homerischen Margites* (Amsterdam 1960) 41 and Brutus in the story of the rape of Lucretia certainly was: cf. Shakespeare's *Lucrece* 1808-9 [Brutus] "began to clothe his wit in state and pride / Burying in Lucrece's wound his folly's show" etc.

<sup>7</sup> In a species of mirror- image, folk-tale also utilises the motif whereby a hero is exposed as a child because an oracle has declared he will wreak some sort of harm if he grows up. See Stith Thompson (as above n. 4) M 373 "expulsion to avoid fulfilment of prophecy" and my remarks in *Hesperos* (n. 2, above), 73-4. So we have the contrasting story-patterns of an initial oracle which precipitates either the hero's expulsion from, or his recall to, society.

<sup>8</sup> We are so used to the picture of Heracles as *the* hero par excellence that we may jib at bringing him under the rubric of 'unpromising hero'. But H.J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Mythology* (London 1933<sup>2</sup>) 293, discussing "Märchen in Greece and Italy" observes that "some of the most popular Greek heroes, as Heracles and Odysseus, are quite small"; and note this later comment from Vian (in *L'Univers Épique*, above n. 3) on the hero as he appears in the fragmentary *Meropis* (SH 903A): "Héraclès n'est plus le sauveur des dieux. Il est en fâcheuse posture que dans la tempête" (p. 134). Cf. nn. 28 and 31 below.

Not all stand the test of time. The argument that minor deities like Hermes or Pan who aid Zeus against Typhon in Apollod. 1.6.3, or the mortal Cadmus who performs the same service in Nonnus *Dionysiaca* 1.378ff.<sup>9</sup>, are in any way comparable to Heracles as helper or “unpromising hero” does not convince. But in citing two narratives that both happen to concern birds, Vian put his finger on something significant, more significant, perhaps, than he realised. Firstly, there is what Sir James Frazer, one of the commentators on Ovid *Fasti* 3.796ff. called, in a rare flash of humour, a “kite and bull” story<sup>10</sup>. Clarity will be served if I quote the entire tale, followed by Frazer’s own translation:

*Saturnus regnis a Iove pulsus erat;  
concitat iratus validos Titanas in arma  
quaeque fuit fatis debita temptat opem.  
Matre satus terra, monstrum mirabile, taurus,  
parte sui serpens posteriore fuit:  
hunc triplici muro lucis incluserat atris  
Parcarum monitu Styx violenta trium.  
viscera cui tauri flammis adolenda dedisset  
sors erat aeternos vincere posse deos.  
immolat hanc Briareus facta ex adamante securi,  
et iamiam flammis exta daturus erat.  
Iuppiter alitibus rapere imperat. attulit illis  
milvus.*

“Saturn had been dethroned by Jupiter. In his wrath he stirred up the strong Titans to take arms and sought the help the Fates allowed him. There was a bull born of its mother Earth, a wondrous monster, the hinder parts whereof was a serpent: him, at the warning of the three Fates, grim Styx had shut up in gloomy woods enclosed by a triple wall. There was an oracle that he who should burn the inwards of the bull in the flames would be able to conquer the eternal gods. Briareus sacrificed him with an axe made of adamant, and was just about to put the entrails on the fire; Jupiter commanded the birds to snatch them away; the kite brought them to him...”

Another scholar<sup>11</sup> detected a similarity with the Greek mythographer when he wrote that in this passage “it is the serpent bull, in Apollodorus’

<sup>9</sup> For further discussion of the sources behind this passage see Vian’s later Budé edition of Nonnus, vol. i (1976) 18ff. and 25ff.

<sup>10</sup> See his commentary (London 1929). I quote his translation from the Loeb text revised by G.P. Goold in 1989. For the oracle’s form compare the declaration that Troy could not fall once the horses of Rhesus had drunk at the river Scamander: see my remarks in “Prometheus” 31, 2005, 29ff.

<sup>11</sup> Fontenrose, *Python* (Los Angeles 1959) 245. He rightly identifies the locale of the bull as the Underworld. For a further narrative from the story of Cupid and Psyche indebted to

Titanomachy [1.2.1] it is Kampe, who must perish first to give victory to the gods”, but there seems to me to be a more impressive correspondence with the mythographer’s account of the *Gigantomachy* cited above, for there too we have the primeval motif of the oracle *vel sim.* delivered to the threatened group, which, as we shall shortly see, is so idiomatic a motif in tales involving the summoning of a helper. Ovid in the *Fasti* was certainly capable of preserving ancient folk-tale motifs, as I have shown elsewhere<sup>12</sup>. His version of the warning appears not to single out the kite’s helper role, but the bird certainly has the function of a helper, and in this respect resembles the other avian tale, cited by Vian from Eudoxus of Cnidus (fr. 284b Lasserre) and a number of paroemiographical sources<sup>13</sup>. It deals with Heracles – or, rather, Melqart, the Phoenician Heracles – and relates how, having been killed by Typhon, he was brought back to life when all other resorts had failed, by the odour emanating from a quail which had been burned and then held over his nostrils<sup>14</sup>. The central paradox of an unassuming entity that succeeds where all others have come to grief looks back to the stories of Parsifal and Heracles mentioned above, and forward to other passages from world literature which we shall be looking at very soon.

First, however, a survey of some Greek analogues that Vian seems to have overlooked. Bearing in mind that the unpromising hero is often apparently too young, one thinks more generally of the achievement of the Epigoni, who sacked Thebes where their fathers had failed; or of Neoptolemus, who performed a like feat with Troy, which his father had not managed to conquer. If one looks to the theme in its broadest manifestation, the paradoxical achievement, good or ill, one perhaps compares Deianeira, who destroys her own husband when numerous brigands and monsters have been unsuccessful; or Nausicaa, who has been described<sup>15</sup> as “the last and subtlest of the temptations” which Odysseus had to resist. In this last case, however, the motif may have been transferred to the princess from the hero himself, especially if those scholars are right who deduce an original version in which

folk-tale, which includes a bird’s visit to the Underworld to bring back a valuable object see Apuleius *Met.* 6.10.5f. with my remarks in “SCO” 48, 2002, 58 n. 30.

<sup>12</sup> See “Mnemosyne” 57, 2004, 693-4.

<sup>13</sup> The sources are all compendiously assembled by Winfried Bühler in *Zenobii Aethi Proverbia* vol. 5.424f. For Melqart / Heracles see “Prometheus” 18, 1992, 224f.

<sup>14</sup> The text is not perfectly secure (see Bühler’s commentary on Zenobius 5.84) but it certainly conveyed some such sense as that ‘many people had tried everything to revive Heracles’ before recourse was had to the quail.

<sup>15</sup> See Richmond Lattimore, *The suitors of Nausicaa*, ‘Perry Festschrift’ (1966) 94ff.

that hero<sup>16</sup>, having turned up unclothed and caked in brine, proceeded to win the girl's hand by triumphing in the athletic contests held to decide between her suitors<sup>17</sup>.

Ranging more widely, beyond the field of Greek mythology, Vian instanced the role of Rama, the hero who helps the gods against the demons known as Raksakas (*Ramayana* 5.45.17)<sup>18</sup>; and of the mortal helper in the story of Illuyankas who recovers from that being the heart and eyes of the Storm god which he has stolen<sup>19</sup>. More convincingly, he also cited (from the section of Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda* known as *Skaldskaparmal*, i.e. devoted to "Poetic Diction")<sup>20</sup> the tale of the duel between Thor and the Giant Hrungnir, where the god's young bondservant Thjalfi facilitates his task by persuading the stupid Giant to put his shield beneath his feet rather than in the usual position; and then the even younger three year old son of Thor raises from his father's prostrate body the leg of the killed giant which none of the gods had been able to lift. This last detail is rather reminiscent of Arthur's feat with Excalibur (not mentioned by Vian): as reported by Sir Thomas Malory in the First Book chapters 6-7 of his *Mort d'Arthur*<sup>21</sup>, the fifteen year old succeeds in drawing sword from stone when first his supposed father and brother, then all the barons, and finally "many moo grete lordes" fail. Malory's summary of the wrathful attitude of the second group here, who "saide it was grete shame unto them all [for] the reame to be over-

<sup>16</sup> See Lattimore as in previous n.

<sup>17</sup> Polyphemus' remark to Odysseus at *Od.* 9.508ff. ("A seer once told me that I should be blinded by someone called Odysseus, but I did not think he would be such a worthless and puny weakling") is perhaps inspired by the motif of the 'unpromising hero'. On Odysseus as 'unpromising hero' see further n. 8 above, and recall that he is by implication identified with Hephaestus, another 'unpromising hero' (see below), in his epic's song of Demodocus (see e.g. Burkert, "Rh. Mus." 103, 1960, 130ff. = *Kl. Schr.* 1.105ff. = *Homer: German Scholarship in Translation* 249ff. (esp. 134 = 108 n. 1 = 253 n. 9 on alleged links between that song's narrative and the story of Hephaestus' expulsion from and return to Olympus, ending in his marriage to Aphrodite).

<sup>18</sup> See now the Princeton translation and commentary by R. D. and S.J. Sutherland Goldman, vol. 5 (1996) 251.

<sup>19</sup> On Illuyankas see, for instance, Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual* (Los Angeles 1979) 7-10 and *Kl. Schr.* vol. 2 *Namenregister* s.v. Also M.L. West, *The East Face of Helicon* (Oxford 1997) Index s.v.

<sup>20</sup> For an English translation see A. Faulkes in the Everyman series *Edda* (1987) 78-9. (Vian erroneously says that Thor's son is three *days* ("trois jours") rather than three years old).

<sup>21</sup> Eugene Vinaver's edition in the *Oxford English Authors* series (rev. P.J.C. Field 1990) i. 15f. Note that, in a detail shared with the conception of Heracles, Arthur's real father is Uther Pendragon, who slept with the mother while disguised as her husband.

governyd with a boye of no hyghe blood borne”, economically conveys the unpromising hero’s idiomatic deficiencies in age and breeding, and brings us on to another relevant narrative.

For it is perhaps a trifle odd that Vian also failed to adduce what is presumably the best known instance of the unpromising hero, the tale of David and Goliath from the Old Testament (1 Samuel 14-18). Research<sup>22</sup> has since firmly established its conformity to folk-tale patterns, and in particular to the analysis propounded by Vladimir Propp<sup>23</sup> in his famous *Morphology of the Folk-Tale*. Indeed, no very great effort is required to summarise both Greek and Hebrew tales of David and Heracles defeating Giant(s) in terms that are profoundly Proppian. Thus an initial misfortune (Giant(s) threatening the *status quo*) is made known, a call for help is given, the hero is approached with a request for help, and the request is accompanied by promises (the hand of the King’s daughter in marriage). The hero is then dispatched directly. In Heracles’ case what Propp calls the “spatial transference” is achieved by Athena who brings him from the island of Cos (see Apollod. 2.7.1). As for David, let us first recall that he represents in archetypal form the hero who is unimpressive in outer appearance: excessively young and therefore small (too small to don proper armour: 17.38-9) and with small – and paradoxical – weapons too (pebbles from a brook). At the climax of the narrative, we are told that Goliath “disdained him, for he was but a youth” (17.42 ~ 17.33 “thou art but a youth”, uttered to David by Saul before letting him go forth). The implicit moral is rendered more explicit in what we might term the prelude to the story<sup>24</sup>, when Samuel visits David’s father Jesse to

<sup>22</sup> See Hedda Jason’s article in “Biblica” 60, 1979, 36-70, to which my own treatment is much indebted. For a generally positive critique see P. J. Milne, *Vladimir Propp and the Study of Structure in Hebrew Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield 1988) 154ff., which concludes (p. 159) that Jason’s contribution “must be regarded as the best example to date of how Propp’s model can be used to analyse biblical narrative”. Robert Alter’s recent translation and commentary, *The David Story* (London 1999) 104f., accepts that the narrative is based on folk-tale, though “the folktale materials have been historicised and even to an extent psychologised”. See further the entry by F. Hunger s.v. David and Goliath in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (3.365ff.). The main problem with Jason’s article is its failure to address “the theory generally held by Biblical scholars that the story of David and Goliath, as it is now in the Masoretic text, is a combination of two, originally separate texts” (Milne 159). On this see most recently S. L. Mc Kenzie, *King David: a biography* (Oxford 2000) 70ff., with bibliography in p.199 n. 1.

<sup>23</sup> See, e.g., the first article cited in n. 1, 278 n. 8.

<sup>24</sup> For the thematic link here presupposed in an Old Testament story between ‘prelude’ and main narrative, compare my remarks in “CQ” 53, 2003, 41f. on the relationship between Solomon’s dream visitation by God and the values therein established; and the consequent Judgement of Solomon, which gives concrete expression to those values.

anoint as king one of his sons. The prophet is initially impressed by Eliab, the eldest, but God warns him: 'look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeths not as a man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart' (16.6-7)<sup>25</sup>. In all, seven sons are similarly viewed and found wanting before David the youngest<sup>26</sup> is fetched from his shepherding. The youngest son motif (either involving seven as here, or three as at 17.13 ("The three eldest sons of Jesse went and followed Saul" to the place where Goliath was preening himself) is obviously derived from folk-tale, as is the statement that Jesse "went among men for an old man in the days of Saul" (17.12). The father in folk-tales involving three sons is often represented as particularly old<sup>27</sup>. No less idiomatic is the scorn which David finds directed at him from an elder sibling before he sets himself to the task: "And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men, and Eliab's anger was kindled against David" (17.28) etc.<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>25</sup> Stith Thompson observed (above n. 4) that the unpromising hero 'is usually but not always the youngest son', and the observation has been expanded by K. Horn in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* s.v. 'Jungste': "der jüngste Bruder ist der 'hoffnungslose Held' par excellence. Er ist jedoch anders, als er sich zeigt: in ihm verkörpert sich der Widerspruch zwischen Schein und Sein, dessen Darstellung ein zentrales Anliegen des Märchens ist" (7.806: cf. 807). One of the best known instances of the youngest son who emerges from literally filthy circumstances to win through is "the Ash Lad" or "male Cinderella" (Thompson's L 131 "hearth abode of unpromising hero": see J.H. Brunvand's article s.v. 'Askeladden' in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (1.873ff.), from whom some have derived Ibsen's Peer Gynt (Brunvand 876). Cf. the article of mine cited above, n. 4.

<sup>26</sup> A slightly more precise formulation is that of Th. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* (London 1969) Addenda 878: "David is here said to be the youngest of eight brothers; so also in 17.12,14. But in I Chron. 2.13-15, only seven sons of Jesse... are mentioned, and David is the seventh". Gaster goes on to suggest that "this variant may go back to the familiar folk-tale motif of the blessed seventh son", citing Stith Thompson (as above n. 4), L 10: cf. "CQ" 54, 2004, 608 n. 17, adding to the references M. C. Lyons, *The Arabian Epic: Heroic and oral story-telling* ii (Cambridge 1995) 464 and K. Pöge-Alder in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* s.v. 'Sieben' (12.646ff.). He then proceeds "Similarly in the Welsh Mabinogion, Peredur is the last and sole survivor of the seven sons of the Count of York, and Peredur has much in common with David". For some of their similarities see above, n. 5. Observe that Neoptolemus has some of the features of an 'unpromising hero', especially as regards his youth and the oracle to the effect that the Greeks can only win with his help. He is persuaded (not persuaded *back*) to the Greek camp, but it is striking that the lying story at Soph. *Phil.* 363ff. transfers to him the motif of angry withdrawal after insult.

<sup>27</sup> For an example see R. Th. Christiansen, *Norske Folkeeventyr~ Folktales of Norway* (tr. P.S. Iversen London 1964) no. 71.

<sup>28</sup> The hostility towards the youngest brother shown by his elder siblings manifests itself in a gamut of actions that ranges from jeering at him for daring to attempt a task that has



It may be mere coincidence that, just like Heracles at Nemea, David has slain a lion (17.35) before his climactic encounter with Goliath<sup>29</sup>. But from the position within Hesiod’s *Theogony* of the reference to the begetting of Heracles, it looks as if that hero is regarded as the last (as well as the greatest) hero fathered by Zeus, and therefore his youngest son<sup>30</sup>. And even more significant is the reward each hero receives for conquering the Giant(s): the hand in marriage of the king’s daughter. In the case of Heracles, of course, this means marriage to Zeus’ child Hebe<sup>31</sup>, a marriage, it would seem, occurring immediately after the Gigantomachy<sup>32</sup> has been brought to a successful conclusion. For David it represents a union with Micah, the daughter of Saul (“the man who kills [Goliath] the king will enrich him with great riches, and will give him his daughter”: compare from the Italian folk-tale *A boat for Land and Water*<sup>33</sup> the opening proclamation “The man who builds a boat /

defeated them to wholesale murder. In discussing an instance of the latter extreme from the Norse composition *Hamdismal*, Ursula Dronke (*The Poetic Edda*, vol. i *Heroic Poems* (Oxford 1969) 196) has pointed out that the relevant figure “combines several features of the ‘youngest brother’ of folk-tale. He is despised and segregated” [compare David’s position as shepherd]; “different from the brothers in appearance” [compare the Old Testament’s stress on David’s being “ruddy and withal of a beautiful countenance and goodly to look to” (16.12)]; and intelligence... we are told he is young (15/7)”. On encountering this individual (who combines the functions of youngest sibling and helper figure: see my remarks in “Prometheus” 28, 2002, 1ff. on the figure of Rumpelstiltskin) the brothers sneer (12.3-4) ‘How will this brown pigmy help us?’ and Dronke’s commentary ad loc. explains that they are ‘referring scornfully to the darker complexion of the bastard half- brother, born, perhaps, of a foreign concubine’ (p. 230). Heracles, of course, was regarded as her husband’s bastard by his hostile stepmother and is even said by Pindar to have been small in stature (*Isth.* 4.53): cf. nn. 8 and 17 above. For bastardy as a common feature of colonizers and tyrants see Ogden (above n. 4), Index s.v.

<sup>29</sup> Heracles’ killing of the Nemean lion just before the Gigantomachy is attested in the *Meropis* (SH 903A).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. n. 25 above.

<sup>31</sup> For those authors who associate Heracles’ triumph in the Gigantomachy with his deification (equivalent to his marrying Hebe, personification of perpetual youth) see West’s commentary on Hes. *Th.* 954.

<sup>32</sup> See Vian’s book (above, n. 3) 213f. for late sources suggestive of the notion that Heracles’ apotheosis originally occurred immediately after the Gigantomachy in which he rescued Hera from a lustful giant, thus annulling her hostility. The insertion of the Gigantomachy within his other labours will then be a later development (The Hesiodic Catalogue already reports both Heracles’ participation in the Gigantomachy and his death from the magic robe sent by Deianeira: see West’s book on that poem (Oxford 1985) General Index s.v. ‘Heracles... apotheosis’). The immediate winning of the princess’ hand after the hero’s triumph adheres more closely to the folk-tale pattern underlying the story.

<sup>33</sup> Italo Calvino, *Fiabe Italiane* No. 99 = *Italian Folktales* 362ff. For the propriety of using Calvino’s collection as a source see W. Anderson, “Fabula” 1, 1958, 283ff.

That glides o'er land and water / Will surely wed my daughter"). Admittedly, a complication obtrudes itself in the Old Testament sequel (18.25): "the king desireth not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies". This too, however, represents the genuine values of folk-tale, where the king often tries to renege on the promise of his daughter's hand or at least to add further tasks not stipulated in the original contract (compare from the Italian story just cited: "the king, who wasn't expecting this, was dismayed and regretted his decree. Now he would have to give his daughter to some pauper he'd never laid eyes on. «I'll give you my daughter», replied the king, «on condition you and your crew eat every mouthful of the banquet I shall offer you, without leaving so much as one chicken wing or raisin on your plates»..."). Instances of this renegeing occur in Greek literature too, as witness the tales connecting Heracles with Hesione, daughter of Priam and with Iole, daughter of Eurytus<sup>34</sup>.

Mention of these two particular exploits of Heracles will serve as reminder that the hero as helper in the pattern under examination frequently turns up (like Odysseus on Scheria) as an 'outsider' from 'elsewhere'. And this consideration will take us on to the next stage of the argument. For, in fact, an aspect of the story involving Heracles' combat with the Giants which we have not yet considered may seem to run quite counter to the notion of the helper as an 'outsider'. On the contrary, – and this is a paradox utterly crucial to the story-pattern which I wish to analyse – he was once of the company of those he must help, but was cast out by them.

This basic element emerges much more clearly from the parallel story of Philoctetes, so let us begin with that. An idiomatically non-specific oracle seems to have opened the narrative presupposed in both the *Little Iliad* and Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*, the summaries of which two works refer only to the weapons of Heracles, not to Philoctetes by name<sup>35</sup> as essential if Troy is to be captured. The story as a whole can be shown to contain a twin paradox in its basic presupposition: (i) the helper's aid is essential but he himself is a seemingly strengthless cripple; (ii) the people who now require his assistance are the very same individuals who earlier cast out and alienated him. Thus expressed, the double paradox is irresistibly reminiscent of that found at the heart of another story, this time involving an alienated *deity*. I refer, of

<sup>34</sup> See my remarks in "SIFC" 1, 2003, 137ff. and "Maia" 56, 2004, 256ff. For another example of the folk-tale father's last minute imposing of a new task see the Brothers Grimm version of "Die beiden Wanderer", No 107 in Bolte-Polivka, *Anmerkungen zu den Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* ii (Leipzig 1913) 470.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Proclus' summary in *EGF* 52, Apollod. *epit.* 5.8.

course, to the narrative of Hephaestus' expulsion from and then return to Olympus as recounted in the now lost *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*<sup>36</sup>, where again the key helper has been driven from the company of his peers precisely because he is a cripple, and Hera, who was responsible for his expulsion, is now in direst need of his resources, thanks to the magic throne he sent her, to which she is now bound fast.

Philoctetes' prize for the help bestowed is, rather than marriage to the king's daughter, the opportunity to have his wound healed by the sons of Asclepius at Troy (rather oddly: why could it not have been arranged nine years before?). But the marriage motif does recur in the Hephaestus story. Among the many similarities between the two tales note in particular that Hephaestus, like Philoctetes, is a cripple, and therefore suited to his role as the unpromising helper. Both characters are separated from their peers by what one might call the process of exposure, though Philoctetes' exposure did not occur in his infancy. Hera's hurling of her new born son from Olympus should certainly be interpreted as a divine equivalent of the exposure of a mortal child, and is rightly thus taken by the author of the best and fullest account of this theme in antiquity<sup>37</sup>. And now is a timely moment to remind ourselves that, in an ill-attested but primitive-looking tradition, Heracles too was exposed as a child<sup>38</sup>. The motivation for the act will bear analysis: his mother Alcmena was afraid of Hera's hostility. So, in the story of Hephaestus, the real mother, Hera, acts like a traditional wicked stepmother, while in the case of Heracles, the baby's real mother is driven to her act by the attitude of the actual wicked stepmother. Hesiod's *Theogony* 927 gives the impression that Hephaestus was the last born, and therefore the youngest of Hera's offspring. Then again, Hephaestus' years of exile were probably, as those of Philoctetes were certainly, passed in a cave on the island of Lem-

<sup>36</sup> See in particular M.L. West, "ZPE" 134, 2001, 1ff. That only Hephaestus could release Hera must have been related to the gods by an oracle equivalent to that in Apollod. 1.1.8 regarding Heracles and the Gigantomachy.

<sup>37</sup> G. Binder, *Kyros und Romulus Aussetzung des Königskindes* ('Beitr. zur kl. Philol.' 10, 1964) p. 128f.

<sup>38</sup> Diod. Sic. 4.9.6: see my remarks in "BICS" 49, 2006, 123f. Heracles is, in a sense, doubly rejected, being exposed by his mother and then thrust away by Hera after he has sucked too ferociously at her breast. Another form that rejection and marginalisation of Heracles assumes is the ruse (again involving Hera) whereby he is cheated out of the rule over his neighbours which Zeus planned for him: *Il.* 19.101ff. (where it can be argued that the motif of expulsion from the company of the Olympians is transferred from Heracles to Ate). Note too that in Apollod. 2.7.1 Heracles' help against the Giants is required just at the moment when Hera has yet again harassed him, by forcing him off course with the storm near Cos.

nos: the god is associated with that island from the earliest times and has strong cultic links to it; perfect sense would ensue if he were envisaged as producing his miraculous artefacts in a workshop in one of the caves on this supposedly volcanic island – a fit locale for the worsting of Ares with fire-brands when that deity tries to fetch him back by force<sup>39</sup>. The piquant paradox underlying the tale is that Hephaestus must be forced or persuaded to help Hera, the individual who has most harmed him, just as Philoctetes must be made to help the Greeks who abandoned him. The inducement in Hephaestus' case, as implied above, is marriage to Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus (and of Hera)<sup>40</sup>.

We have so far identified in the narratives examined, the key themes of exposure, crippling disability, and the primal pattern of "the wounder shall heal"<sup>41</sup> (Hephaestus must release Hera from the magic throne to which he in effect bound her; Hera must welcome into the gods' company the very hero whom she has tried to exterminate, the Greeks must heal Philoctetes). All these themes recur in yet another tale to which I now turn. Telephus, another exposed hero, is, near the start of the Trojan war, a sort of doublet of Philoctetes near its end, and here too we encounter the paradox that the individual whom the Greeks have most wronged must be brought round to helping them.

None of the identifying themes from the stories thus far perused is obviously present in the final two narratives which I wish to adduce. But that the stories of Achilles and Prometheus do belong here can easily be shown. Each exhibits the by now familiar central paradox of an individual who has been marginalised and rendered hostile, thrust forth by the very peers who now urgently require his aid. Since both Prometheus and Hephaestus may be regarded as culture heroes, the identification of a folk-tale motif – "expulsion and return of culture hero"<sup>42</sup> – is particularly interesting, as is the barely

<sup>39</sup> For Hephaestus' close ties with Lemnos see, e.g., Vergil *Aen.* 8.454 *pater... Lemnius* with Eden's commentary ad loc., Burkert, "CQ" 20, 1970, 9 with n. 3, = *Savage Energies: Lessons of myth and ritual in ancient Greece* 82 n. 42, P.Y. Forsyth, "Échos du Monde Classique / Classical Views" 3, 1984, 3ff. For his forge as located in an island cave see *Aen.* 8.416ff. with Eden ad loc.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. my remarks in "Prometheus" 32, 2006, 200f.

<sup>41</sup> For this last theme see Kannicht, *TrGF* 5.ii (Euripides' *Telephus*) 681, and my remarks in "ZPE" 133, 2000, 9 n. 17.

<sup>42</sup> For the expulsion and return of the culture hero see Thompson (n. 4 above), A 516. For Hephaestus as culture hero see Prometheus 21, 2001, 206, for Prometheus in the same role see *Hesperos* (above, n. 2 ) p. 81f.

attested tradition that Prometheus’ mother was Hera<sup>43</sup>. The corresponding paradox of the unpromising helper is more patent than with Achilles in the case of Prometheus, shackled helplessly to Mt. Caucasus, supposedly as impotent to aid as Hephaestus, Telephus or Philoctetes, yet possessed of a secret which could mean the overthrow of the gods of Olympus. The motif of an oracle concerning the security of the Olympian hegemony is shared with the stories of Heracles’ combat against the Giants, and approximately equivalent oracles feature in the tales of Hephaestus, Telephus, and Philoctetes, as we have seen. But in the case of Prometheus, the oracle does not reveal the hero’s essential role in supplying aid, but *is itself the aid which must be provided*<sup>44</sup>. Prometheus is an ‘outsider’ in his relations with the Olympians – this has long been recognised<sup>45</sup> and such a feature is an idiomatic aspect of the sort of helper we are investigating. “L’allié est à l’occasion un traître, un transfuge”, Vian remarked in this context<sup>46</sup>, and the generality fits Prometheus particularly well. It might be thought to fit only a little less well the Achilles of Aeschylus’ Trojan Trilogy, whom the Greek army has condemned to stoning to death because of his desertion (*TrGF* 3 F 132c)<sup>47</sup>. The desiderated idiomatic feature of his extreme youth, in contrast to the other leaders of the Greek expedition, is evidenced by his absence from the list of the suitors of Helen, and his similarity to the other helper heroes we have been examining cannot be denied. There may even be a vestige of the primeval ‘happy ending’ whereby the hero weds the king’s daughter in Agamemnon’s offer to Achilles of marriage to one of his three daughters (*Il.* 9.145 = 287). The initial motif of the oracle which reveals in non-specific terms the hero who will bring relief is absent, but this absence is very much in keeping with Homeric values (even the Doloneia avoids motivating its nocturnal excursion with the folk-tale motif of the prophecy concerning Rhesus’ horses)<sup>48</sup>. The need for Achilles’ return is brought home to the Greeks by bitter experience rather than by any external proclamation.

<sup>43</sup> So Σ ABT *Il.* 14.295f. (3.636 Erbse). For Hera as mother of other fire deities (Hephaestus, Typhon) see Fontenrose (above, n. 11), 242 n. 33.

<sup>44</sup> The difference between the two formulations is not very great.

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance, West (above n. 2) on Hes. *Th.* 510: “Prometheus and Epimetheus are more closely associated with men than with gods”.

<sup>46</sup> Vian’s book (above, n. 2), 193.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. “Prometheus” 31, 2005, 143, where I discuss the similarities with the career of Coriolanus, which again involves the paradox of the exiled hero whose help is required to save his former companions (though, in this case, with a further twist to the paradox, the threat to them is posed by the hero himself).

<sup>48</sup> See my remarks in “Prometheus” 31, 2005, 30.

The basic similarities in pattern of the relevant stories adduced so far and the occasional dissimilarities may most precisely be conveyed by the diagram printed on p. 127, and by the following summary.

An initial problem is described, and the individual who will resolve it announced, by an oracular utterance couched in non-specific terms (“only a mortal [= Heracles] can defeat the Giants”; “only the wounder [= Achilles] can heal Telephus”; “only Heracles’ weapons [*scil.* as possessed by Philoctetes] can ensure Troy’s sack”. Similarly, “only a/the son of Jesse [= David] can succeed against Goliath”; “only a holy fool [= Parsifal] can heal Amfortas’ wound”). The individual is fetched by one of those requiring his help (Heracles by Athena; Philoctetes by Odysseus; Hephaestus by Dionysus; Prometheus by Heracles) or, less frequently, turns up of his own accord (Telephus, Parsifal). Marriage with the King’s daughter is offered as an inducement (except in the cases of Philoctetes and the chaste Parsifal).

It may clarify matters further if I now adduce two more narratives, one from what may seem to be Greek history, the other from the Old Testament, and show how they largely conform to the pattern just established, but with a few significant divergences. In fact I am by no means the first to link these two tales. The story of the medical doctor Democedes of Croton (Herodotus 3.129) reveals its folk-tale origins by several features, not least the statement that Darius was plagued by a painful foot and consequent insomnia for seven days and nights. The entire tale has already been compared to the adventures of Joseph (Genesis) by classical scholars, and experts on the Bible have seen how the latter is based on a particular story pattern commonly exemplified in folk-tale. I discuss elsewhere in detail the similarities between these two tales<sup>49</sup>. In the present context suffice it to say that it is easy to extrapolate a more highly generalised schema that will not only accommodate both stories but which will also be virtually identical with the pattern deduced in the above portion of this article. Since that pattern applies to an individual to whom I have transferred folk-tale experts’ term ‘the unpromising hero’, this portion of my argument will appropriately commence with a vivid picture that firmly establishes Democedes as just such a hero. When the medic is fetched out of prison and set before the Great King, he is described as πένδας ἔλκοντα. In other words, he has been bound and fettered like Prometheus, one of the ‘unpromising heroes’ we encountered earlier, and he is clad in rags and finds it hard to walk normally, like the two heroes above listed,

<sup>49</sup> See the article of mine cited in n. 4 above. Compare in particular Milne (cited above, n. 22) 156: “the question of the limits of the text is especially important in the analysis of biblical narrative, where individual stories are part of larger contexts”.

Telephus and Philoctetes. Herodotus' point in adducing these two details must be to emphasise precisely the paradoxically unpromising nature of his hero. Like the trio just mentioned, he possesses the all-important secret of success, but seems the last person in the world likely to do so: here is the man supposed to cure Darius' foot, and he can barely move his own feet! This point emerges all the more clearly when we contrast the corresponding stage of Genesis' otherwise strikingly similar story of Joseph, for the hero of that narrative is carefully spruced up to meet Pharaoh (41.14): "they brought him hastily out of the dungeon: and he shaved himself and changed his raiment, and came in unto Pharaoh".

Thus prepared, let us see how closely the two relevant narratives can be assimilated to the schema for the 'unpromising' hero which we established above. The opening move in each case represents the hero's expulsion from society and the company of his peers. Like Achilles, Philoctetes and Prometheus, the heroes that are Democedes and Joseph endure this expulsion, though the individuals responsible differ: instead of a figure of supreme authority such as Agamemnon or Zeus, we find Democedes driven out by his father – in this respect he resembles more closely those victims of a mother or step-mother's enmity Hephaestus or Heracles – while Joseph is sold into slavery thanks to his brothers. For the specific detail that Demodocus withdrew from society in anger compare, of course, the case of Achilles.

Both narratives then introduce a complication which is quite lacking in the relevant analogues. The period of suffering which we would expect to follow, as in these analogues, instantly on the removal from society is in fact set off by a period of initial success. Democedes becomes an increasingly prosperous doctor, starting on Aegina and eventually enjoying a cosseted relationship with Polycrates of Samos, while Joseph correspondingly thrives in the service of Potiphar. From these heights, each hero is then dashed down and each ends identically in prison. We then encounter the crucial phase of the story now perfectly familiar from the earlier examples in this article: a crisis arises which the exiled hero alone is uniquely qualified to deal with. But here again our two narratives would seem to depart from the norm established above. From the stories there analysed we should expect the individual whom Democedes heals to be his father, and the dreamer whom Joseph enlightens to occupy the like position. And initially this seems not to be the case.

However, on further investigation, reasons enough emerge for these deviations. The underlying thrust of Herodotus' narrative is its Greek hero's nostalgia for his native land, irrespective of the grand advantages ostensibly offered by Persia. Only when these latter have been fully established can the

plan of the story allow Democedes to return home to his father. The original folk-tale motifs have been ingeniously adapted to their new context. As for the tale in Genesis, the resolution of Pharaoh's problem does produce a sequel which contains the equivalent to the pattern we are missing. As consequence of his interpretation of Pharaoh's dream, Joseph is appropriately put in charge of the distribution of food during the seven years of famine. His father and brothers thus become as idiomatically dependent upon his undeserved good will as Hera, Agamemnon or Zeus in their respective stories are upon Hephaestus, Achilles or Prometheus. We should note too that the immediate reward for Joseph's proficiency in interpreting dreams is marriage not to Pharaoh's daughter, as the logic of the established schema might lead us to expect, but to the daughter of Potiphar, the man responsible for Joseph's original incarceration. The element of paradox is thereby restored. As for Democedes, his wedding of the daughter of the great Greek athlete Milon is thematically essential, as we have already seen,. But the further detail that Democedes brought home with him gifts for his father and family entails the crucial aspect of final reconciliation that we encounter at the end of the story of Joseph, which also has its equivalents in the tales of Heracles and Hera, Hephaestus and the same, Prometheus and Zeus, Telephus and Achilles, Achilles and Agamemnon.

What we have just learned about the relevance of the 'unpromising hero' motif to Herodotus' section on Demodocus has consequences for an understanding of that historian's art and, indeed, for the history of Greek medicine. When George Grote, writing c. 1850 claimed<sup>50</sup> that he saw "no reason for doubting" Herodotus' account "with a reasonable allowance for the dramatic amplification of" the historian, the naiveté is pardonable, given Grote's date. But as recently as 2004, the author of the entry s.v. 'Democedes' in *Oxford Classical Dictionary*<sup>3</sup> could still state that "the picturesque story of his escape back to Croton and marriage to the daughter of Milon the wrestler, may be a romanticised later folk-tale", for all the world as if the preceding part of the narrative was, by contrast, sober and unexceptional history. What needs to be stressed is the absolute and utter continuity of ethos between this part of Herodotus' narrative and what has gone before. There is simply no break, and Democedes' right to feature (as he still continues to do) as a crucial figure in serious histories of Greek Medicine has no firmer foundation in the curing of Darius' foot than in the healing of Atossa's breast.

<sup>50</sup> Grote, *History of Greece* 4.186.



We need finally to ask whether it is possible to establish the primacy of any of the myths proper considered above, while identifying others as derivative. François Vian, who operated with only two narratives, regarded that of Philoctetes as secondary ("le motif a été transposé dans le cycle Troyen")<sup>51</sup>, which may be right, especially given the identical role of Heracles' bow and arrows in each narrative. Like most of the remaining examples, it lacks the idiomatic finale of marriage to the king's daughter. So does the story of Telephus, which also, as seen above, reads like a symmetrical doublet of the tale of Philoctetes. Marriage to the princess is represented at the end of the story of Hephaestus from the *Homeric Hymn to Dionysus*, but there are other indications that this version may be a later derivative, not least its largely comic tone. The whole adventure looks like a near parody of a pre-existing story-pattern and it is striking that here alone is the unpromising hero a *god*. The relevant motif seems to have been combined with the slightly different pattern of the angry deity who leaves the divine company of his or her own volition and has to be appeased and coaxed back "to fulfil... normal functions". This formulation makes one think of Demeter: a link between that story and Achilles' angry withdrawal in the *Iliad* has already been detected<sup>52</sup>. The motif is certainly both widespread and primitive. Apart from Demeter (furious either at the abduction of her daughter Persephone by Hades or at her own rape by Poseidon)<sup>53</sup> and Hephaestus (who belongs here: even if he does not voluntarily withdraw in anger, he becomes angry soon enough) there is Aphrodite in a little known variant preserved in Lycophron<sup>54</sup>. Aristophanes adapted the pattern in his lost comedy *Poiesis* which related how that personified goddess angrily quit the company of men<sup>55</sup>. From outside Greece we can cite the Hittite god Telepinus<sup>56</sup> and the Egyptian tale of Tefnut, daughter of the sun god Re, who quarrels with her father and leaves her homeland of Egypt in a rage to dwell in the form of a

<sup>51</sup> Vian's book (above, n. 3) 194.

<sup>52</sup> See M.L. Lord, "Class. Journ." 62, 1967, 243 (cf. A.B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, Mass. 1960) 168f.).

<sup>53</sup> See Burkert *Structure and History* (as above, n. 19) 131.

<sup>54</sup> See my remarks in "Prometheus" 23, 2006, 201 (where for "Mt. Caucasus" read "Mt. Casium").

<sup>55</sup> See Lloyd-Jones, "ZPE" 42, 1981, 23-5 = *Academic Papers* [II] 4-6 on Arist. fr. 466 K.-A.

<sup>56</sup> For a recent translation see Harry A. Hoffner, *Hittite Myths* (Atalanta 1990). For comment, see Burkert, *Structure and History* (as above, n. 19), 123ff. with bibliography in p. 203 n. 1.

lioness in the Nubian desert<sup>57</sup>. Her father sends the deities Thoth and Shu to bring her back by means of magic and Thoth's eloquence.

The main difference would seem to be that the gods who withdraw in anger are utterly formidable in their wrath and thus lack (with the exception of Hephaestus, whose, narrative, we have seen, looks like derivative parody) that aspect which led to the coining of the term 'unpromising' for the equivalent hero considered above. And yet the narratives of divine withdrawal do contain other beings that appear to display very much the 'unpromising' aspect in question. For instance, in the search for Telepinus, the sun-god sends out the eagle in vain; the storm-god merely succeeds in breaking his hammer on Telepinus' door; and it is left to the humble bee (despatched by the mother goddess) to finally discover Telepinus in a meadow and sting him into activity<sup>58</sup>. By a pleasing symmetry, mention of this modest insect takes us back to the two unassuming birds, kite and quail<sup>59</sup>, which were mentioned near the start of this article. Similarly, in one version of the story of Demeter<sup>60</sup>, none of the gods can locate her until the lowly Pan sights her in her cave and reports back to Zeus. One further thinks of the way in which the seemingly impressive Ares ignominiously fails to fetch back Hephaestus and the apparently unprepossessing Dionysus, not yet even a member of the Olympian pantheon, succeeds against all expectations. Unpromising helpers, then, have their part to play in the scheme of things, as well as unpromising heroes.

The story of Prometheus also lacks marriage to the princess, but has other primeval features to it resembling the story of Heracles' defeat of the Giants, in that the survival of Zeus' rule is at stake. That leaves the story of Achilles, where the prize of marriage to the princess may be vestigially present, as

<sup>57</sup> See S. West, "JEA" 55, 1969, 161-2.

<sup>58</sup> See Burkert's book (above, n. 19), 123ff. If S. West (as cited in previous n., p. 180) is right to deduce that Thoth, in the story of Tefnut, "evidently detects a certain similarity between the mouse's role [in the Aesopic fable of the mouse and the lion] and his own", we may have a further example of the seemingly insignificant being who succeeds in bringing back the angry hero *vel sim*.

<sup>59</sup> The story of Geriguiaguiatugo, told by the Bororo of Brazil, has become a sort of paradigm for the differences between the fantastic and non-rational myths recorded from 'primitive' peoples by modern anthropologists and the much more sober myths of the ancient Greeks: see, for instance, G.S. Kirk, *Myth its meaning and functions in ancient and other cultures* (Cambridge 1971) 64ff. and in *Edipo: il teatro Greco e la cultura europea* (1986) 13, and J. Griffin, *Homer on Life and Death* (Oxford 1980) 173ff. But the Brazilian tale features a humming bird who helps the hero in his quest which is very reminiscent of some of the ancient Greek stories we have been examining.

<sup>60</sup> See Burkert (above, n. 19) 125.

seen above, but other expected features are missing. I take it to be the invention of the poet of the *Iliad*, adopting as his model the general pattern exhibited by the stories itemised above, and perhaps more specifically inspired by the motif 'Peleus' son will be mightier than the father' from the Prometheus account.

Oxford, St. John's College

MALCOLM DAVIES

#### APPENDIX: Apollodorus and the φάρμακον ἀθανασίας

Though Propp himself in his *Morphology of the Folktale* candidly allowed that "one or another function is absent in all tales" (p. 108), scholarly walkers in his ways are often anxious about such absences from their reconstructions. Thus Hedda Jason<sup>61</sup> is nervous regarding the lack of a helper figure in the Old Testament tale of David and Goliath, and suggests, rather desperately, liquidating the lack by finding the implied helper in God. Perhaps a more satisfactory solution would be obtained if we followed through the implications of my argument (above, p. 113f.) that the story has a thematically relevant prelude in Samuel's anointing of David. An old prophet makes an idiomatic helper figure, and no less idiomatic is his rejecting of all elder siblings in favour of the youngest born<sup>62</sup>. If this holds true, may not the anointing process represent a vestige of the 'magical agent' which the helper or donor regularly bestows upon the hero?

This hypothesis will at any rate serve as reminder that, in the narrative at Apollod.1 6.1-2, there is another feature which may be a comparable vestige. In an odd narrative complication, after the gods have been told that they require a mortal's assistance against the Giants, we learn that Ge consequently searched for a *pharmakon* to make the Giants invulnerable against a mortal too, but that Zeus arranged a cosmic blackout until he had secured the specific himself<sup>63</sup>. Scholars<sup>64</sup> used to think that the detail of the herb of invulnerability was later than the rest of Apollodorus' narrative, an Hellenistic invention<sup>65</sup>. But as the mythographer's account stands, the motif is attached to

<sup>61</sup> Jason (above, n. 22), 44.

<sup>62</sup> The folk-tale helper figure generally rejects the elder siblings because of their rudeness to him: see, e.g., the Italian tale cited above n. 33 and cf. Dronke (n. 28) 197.

<sup>63</sup> On folk-tale's 'magical agent' see, e.g., my remarks in "WS" 115, 2002, 6.

<sup>64</sup> See in particular A. Söder, *Quellenuntersuchung zum 1. Buch der Apollodorischen Bibliothek* (Diss. Würzburg 1933) 59, following M. Meyer, *Die Giganten und Titanen in der ant. Sage und Kunst* (Berlin 1887) 244.

<sup>65</sup> Söder as cited in the previous note. The alleged Hellenistic character seems to rest upon the rather naïve and primitive pictures of Zeus being deprived of his sinews or extinguishing

Heracles' participation in the Gigantomachy (when Ge heard this was planned, she sought the herb), and we now know, as the scholars in question could not, that this participation featured at least as early as the *Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (fr. 43a.65 M.-W. = P.Oxy. 2495 published in 1961). Besides, the alleged Hellenistic character of the motif was based on a comparison with the following Apollodorean account of Typhon's combat with Zeus and excision of the god's sinews. Since Joseph Fontenrose's *Python* (published in 1959), few will be disposed to deny the early origins of that story. Finally, the comparative method was also called on by Vian<sup>66</sup>, in his analysis of the motif of the herb of invulnerability or immortality, and it is to this that we must now turn.

The narrative complication referred to above is slightly odd in its negative character (it is strongly implied that Zeus intends to keep it away from the Giants rather than give it to a mortal, such as Heracles), although this negative quality might be regarded as true to folk-tale values: Vian identified the herb in question with the φάρμακον ἄθανασίας so beloved of folk-tale, where it does indeed serve a negative function, being gained by Gilgamesh only to be lost again thanks to his carelessness, forfeited by Tydeus thanks to his bestiality, and so forth<sup>67</sup>. And one could further argue that the implications of this negative attitude are carried through in Apollodorus' tale, in which depriving the enemy of the drug might be thought reasonably equivalent to giving it to the hero. Now Propp (p. 44) states that "some tales end with the moment of reward. In these instances the gift amounts to something of a certain material value and is not a magical agent". But in a real sense, the tale of Heracles' battle against the Giants does end with the hero receiving the magical agent that is the *pharmakon*, since he marries Hebe, the personification of lasting youth and becomes immortal<sup>68</sup>.

M. D.

the light of the universe. For the dangers of such a subjective approach cf. K.J. Dover's commentary on Theocritus' *Idylls* (London 1971) p. lxxviii. The Nemean lion's skin functions like folk-tale's impenetrable cloak to protect Heracles (*SH* 903A), in other words is a further equivalent to the plant of immortality. For the proliferation of different forms or versions of immortality in a hero's career cf. my remarks in "G&R" 54, 2007, 154 on the parallel case of Achilles, variously regarded as invulnerable by virtue of physical isolation, protective armour, or corporeal integument

<sup>66</sup> As in n. 3, p. 195f.

<sup>67</sup> See "Mus. Helv." 44, 1987, p. 69 n. 19.

<sup>68</sup> See n. 32 above.

	Heracles	Philoctetes	Hephaestus	Telephus	Prometheus	Achilles
initial oracle	only mortal can kill Giants	only Heracles' bow can sack Troy	only H can release Hera	only wounder can heal	only P knows the oracle's contents (Peleus' son mightier than father)	
exposure	Alcmena's of H (for fear of Hera)	Odysseus' of Ph (snake bite)	Hera's of H (because of crippled state)	Auge's of T	Zeus' of P on Mt Caucasus	Scyros?
paradox	H must help gods, esp. Hera who has harried him	P must help Greeks, esp. Odysseus/ Agamemnon who exposed him	H must help Hera, who exposed him	T must help Greeks, esp. Achilles who wounded him	P must help gods, esp. Zeus who fettered him	A must help Greeks, esp. Agamemnon who insulted him
unpromising aspect	mortal bastard helping gods vs giants	crippled	crippled	crippled	fettered	
marriage to King's daughter as reward	Zeus' Hebe.		Zeus' Aphrodite			Agamemnon offers one of three daughters