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# Horse, Human, Hybrid:

INVESTIGATING CHEIRON THE CENTAUR'S SKILLS IN ANCIENT  
SOURCES AND HOW THESE HAVE BEEN ADOPTED IN MODERN  
CLASSICAL RECEPTION POST-1840

ANACTORIA CLARKE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements of the  
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Classics, Durham University

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## Abstract

This thesis utilises the mythological figure of Cheiron the centaur, and examines his skills and qualities as outlined in the ancient sources (both Greek and Roman). It outlines his skills and attributes in six different philosophical and thematic headings: time, to do with his longevity and immortality, and his subsequent catasterization; technology, his hybrid physical body as well as his ability to heal others; epistemology, his knowledge, wisdom, and prophetic skills; metaphysics, his utility in aspects of belief and religion; ethics, his role as both tutor and foster-father to heroes and demi-gods; and finally aesthetics, how his hybrid physical form can influence the form and artistic choices made in production of texts.

After establishing how these attributes are used within the ancient sources, and which are given greater emphasis, the thesis then addresses how these skills are received and privileged by later writers. By necessity, there have been some interesting and important early texts left out, and this work uses modern reception from 1840s onwards through to the twenty-first century. The texts selected have Cheiron often as a supplementary and supporting role, a character that is frequently important to the protagonist, and they give differing amounts of insight and agency to his figure. For some of the texts selected, Cheiron is a shadowy form, informing the portrayal of centaurs more widely, or specific centaurs but without using his name.

Each chapter looks in turn at the six philosophical and thematic headings, changing the order depending upon the particular aspects of Cheiron which are more visible than others for those texts. What is clear from this investigation is that Cheiron is a multi-faceted figure, one which holds fascination for writers and artists, and that he can be used to explore a range of aspects of the self.

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## Introduction

Cheiron is everywhere. Contemporary art, fiction, movies and computer games offer us Cheirons at every turn. Cheiron was already an important and frequently-referenced figure in mythology and ancient texts, being a tutor and foster father to many of the heroic figures, such as Jason and Achilles. There are, however, few texts which provide many details about him, and often the details provided are contradictory, as is so often the case in mythology. This multiplicity of representations, along with the array of qualities that are attributed to him, provide much for creators of artworks receiving his myth to select from to suit their purposes. The study of the rich reception of Cheiron therefore offers an opportunity to examine what qualities are privileged each time and which aspects the authors and artists connect with during their contingent chronological periods. Part of my study of some particularly influential receptions of Cheiron in literary culture (mostly Anglophone or influential texts translated into English) and visual culture will involve differentiating their respective intellectual environments. When were they produced, and why do they lend prominence to those specific traits of the centaur? There has been no such dedicated, extended study of the reception of Cheiron, although there have been some extremely instructive, focused works upon Cheiron and centaurs more generally, and these secondary sources have helped to shape the research and the argument it produced.

This thesis asks how Cheiron has been reconfigured across nearly two centuries and why, proposing that the richness of his reception is connected with his versatility in terms of the literary exploration of philosophical ideas first differentiated and defined by ancient thinkers, including Aristotle, whose father Nicomachus, a doctor, traced his line to the *Iliad*'s healer, Machaon, a pupil of Cheiron.<sup>1</sup> These include ethics (how should we live?),

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<sup>1</sup> Diogenes Laertius 5.1, trans. Hicks.

epistemology (how do we know things?), ontology/metaphysics (what is being?), aesthetics and temporality. It first addresses many facets of Cheiron in the ancient sources (Pindar, Hesiod, Homer, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius of Rhodes, Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Hyginus' *Fabulae*, Xenophon's *Cynegeticus*, and others), especially those most prominent in his reception, to determine which skills and qualities are attributed to him. He is a tutor to heroes across the generations, skilled in fighting, hunting, medicine, and prophecy, particularly as these spheres of activity relate to love and the begetting of heroes. After a succinct survey of the apposite ancient texts, the thesis then examines how the skills and qualities that are privileged in each of the ancient sources compare with the aspects of Cheiron's character foregrounded in reception texts and artworks. The receptions under sustained examination are all written in the English language, or in popular English translation, or are visual culture including paintings and sculpture, from the 1840 to the modern day. Attention is also paid to the way that the genre and audience of the reception texts inform their treatment of Cheiron.

While the secondary sources specific to each individual reception text or texts engage with different aspects of Cheiron's nature and ask how certain skills as portrayed in the ancient sources are utilised, a few specific aspects predominate in these receptions. To this end, each chapter that focuses upon a reception text or artwork will be structured around those skills and qualities, which in turn broadly correlate to a specific branch or branches of philosophy. Many of the texts are hybrid in form or structure, and thus the aesthetics of each text, and its relationship to the hybridity of Cheiron, will be considered. All the receptions focus upon ethics, insofar as Cheiron's role as a tutor and/or foster father makes him a moral exemplar, just as all equally are preoccupied with Technology, Cheiron's physical form and, sometimes, his skills as a healer of both humans and animals. Epistemology features in many receptions due to Cheiron's prophetic skills and innate knowledge of the will of the gods, as well as his

self-sacrificial relinquishing of his immortality to free Prometheus. Ontological and metaphysical questions are fundamental to the several texts that foreground the religious aspects of the myth, particularly when utilised as a Christian allegory. Underpinning all, and permitting all other aspects, is the concept of Time; Cheiron's longevity, and the anachronistic nature of what is often presented as the obsolescent centaur species,<sup>2</sup> permeate all the reception texts to a greater or lesser degree. Reception texts write back to mythological time, to Arcadian time, to time without linearity or boundaries, and they write back to earlier classical receptions. In spanning generations of heroes, and tutoring fathers and sons, Cheiron is transtemporal, anachronism personified.

### **Ancient sources and Modern Scholarship**

Despite the absence of any thoroughgoing study of the reception of Cheiron, important scholarly contributions have collected and/or analysed the ancient source material. The article by Gisler-Huweiler in *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (hereafter *LIMC*), in addition to collating visual representations, outlines his portrayals in ancient literary sources and how these relate to what is known about their mythological context. This *LIMC* entry is particularly helpful in outlining his ancestry,<sup>3</sup> although it does not clearly differentiate his parentage from that of the other centaurs, who originate from a different genealogical line (one which seems to doom them to immoral behaviour). It provides a summary of his qualities and how they were bestowed upon him, along with an outline of his life and achievements.<sup>4</sup> The essay refers to Pindar as a particularly useful ancient source in elaborating Cheiron's place in the myth of the upbringing of Achilles, and specifically details the role he plays in advising Peleus on the capture of Thetis.<sup>5</sup> It is his detailed and longstanding connection to Peleus,

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<sup>2</sup> Lawrence, 2004:63.

<sup>3</sup> Gisler-Huweiler, 1981:237.

<sup>4</sup> Gisler-Huweiler, 1981:237.

<sup>5</sup> Gisler-Huweiler, 1981:237.

through the Argonauts, which results in Achilles' education being entrusted to him. However, this *LIMC* article also outlines his role as tutor to numerous other heroes and important mythological figures, such as Asclepius; his healing powers through medicinal and herbal expertise; his sacrifice of his immortality to liberate Prometheus; and the cult of the healer reportedly situated in a cave on Mount Pelion in Thessaly.<sup>6</sup>

This *LIMC* article argues that the mythological context can often inform the portrayal of Cheiron, and that his deeds were well-known; a representation of a solitary centaur, however, may be more difficult to identify as Cheiron specifically.<sup>7</sup> Late antique sources conflate or confuse Cheiron with Pholus, who was frequently credited with similar characteristics; so symbolic signifiers, such as shrubs, equipment or instruments, do not necessarily permit a certain identification.<sup>8</sup> However, many 6<sup>th</sup>-century Attic vases privilege his human aspect, and the inclusion of clothing can play a decisive role in identification.<sup>9</sup> Much can be understood about Cheiron by considering him in contrast with the other centaurs.

My research has been specially assisted by Elizabeth Atwood Lawrence (2004), who distils into one short article a concise and informative summary of the history and meaning of the centaur, looking at both the species more generally and, intermittently, at Cheiron in particular. She suggests that centaurs can symbolise both a range of dichotomies as well as a celebration of unity between man and horse. The persistence of centaurs in contemporary popular culture is derived from their richness 'in symbolic meaning',<sup>10</sup> a conclusion borne out in the examination of receptions of Cheiron throughout this thesis. Cheiron himself represents a duality in being both physically like other centaurs and yet entirely their opposite in nature and temperament. It is, perhaps, this aspect—as well as the innate hybridity of his form—which

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<sup>6</sup> Gisler-Huweiler, 1981:237.

<sup>7</sup> Gisler-Huweiler, 1981:247.

<sup>8</sup> Gisler-Huweiler, 1981:247.

<sup>9</sup> Gisler-Huweiler, 1981:247.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence, 2004:61.

supports the view of him as a *liminal* being. He lives in a cave, outside human society, and there receives neophytes,<sup>11</sup> who are sent to him during their liminal adolescent years in order to become initiated as heroes. The centaur more generally is a Christian symbol for human conflict with evil, especially carnal evil—man’s ‘higher instincts being destroyed by animal appetites’,<sup>12</sup>—and yet, specifically in the case of Cheiron, the centaur can also be aligned with Jesus Christ. When Lawrence asserts that centaurs were the only monsters assigned any virtuous traits because they were admitted to the company of men,<sup>13</sup> it is known that this benevolence was only retained by Cheiron, and that he was the recipient of the company of men rather than being admitted regularly to human social gatherings, at least as far as the extant ancient sources record. The emphasis here is above all on Cheiron’s *ethical* qualities.

Page duBois highlights this quality of being an outsider, and the liminality of the centaurs more generally, in her comparison between centaurs and Amazons. She takes a more existential, ontological line in focussing on where such creatures sit in the ‘great chain of being’. She asserts that both ‘were creatures at the boundaries of difference’,<sup>14</sup> and that the ancient sources—particularly Pindar—subjected them to their concern with establishing links between gods and men.<sup>15</sup> Centaurs were incapable of respecting *xenia*, and Cheiron was the notable exception; he was also the only centaur to be immortal and married.<sup>16</sup> However, she also highlights the way he stands outside normal linear historical or mythical time, as do centaurs in general, representing a time before the separation of gods and men, and before ‘all the evils that culture brings’.<sup>17</sup> For duBois, centaurs represent archaic time, and their employment in art and archaeology from the fifth century BCE onwards, in differing guises,

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<sup>11</sup> Lawrence, 2004:65.

<sup>12</sup> Lawrence, 2004:65.

<sup>13</sup> Lawrence, 2004:66.

<sup>14</sup> duBois, 2010: 27.

<sup>15</sup> duBois, 2010: 26-27.

<sup>16</sup> duBois, 2010: 29.

<sup>17</sup> duBois, 2010: 30.

characterises Greek thoughts about existence during those periods.<sup>18</sup> The employment of centaurs, of hybrid creatures—or monsters, as they are frequently categorised—betray how the Greeks thought about barbarians and those outside of the *polis*, or the accepted limits of Greek culture. Cheiron, therefore, not only stands on an ontological boundary because of his species and nature, being neither wholly human or wholly animal, and being immortal but not a god, but he is also liminal because he is not representative even of his own species-type. He is neither ostracised nor accepted, and it is this indeterminate aspect which is attractive to later authors; he is a mutable character, sympathetic and nurturing and yet also ‘other’, able to convey ideas and skills that mere humans cannot. He is tutor *par excellence* to the Greek heroes precisely because they need to be able to negotiate things outside the limits of usual experience; Cheiron develops their skills to deal courageously with those things. In the ancient sources, his expertise is unquestioned, his innate ‘goodness’ is assumed, and it is demonstrated by his treatment of the humans under his care.

Edith Hall’s ‘Centaur as Initiatory Authorial Voice: Ancient Precedents’ also deals with the major ancient sources that discuss Cheiron—particularly the ‘Precepts of Cheiron’, an ancient poem attributed to Hesiod, of which we only now have fragments.<sup>19</sup> Addressed to Achilles, these verses outline important rules of behaviour and duties for the young hero to perform and are in keeping with Cheiron’s portrayal as a vital component in Achilles’ heroic education. More to the point, it is the only ancient text for which we have evidence which adopts the centaur as an authorial voice. The centaur’s didactic function has both ethical and epistemological functions; the precepts are about how to behave, but assume that Cheiron has access to a body of knowledge, in which he is an authority, and he is the vehicle for the transmission of this body of ideas, values and opinions. Sadly, there is only fragmentary

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<sup>18</sup> duBois, 2010: 32, 37.

<sup>19</sup> Hall, 2016.

evidence of those works. The sheer range of references to the ‘Precepts’ outlined here however demonstrates the popularity of that ancient poem for initiating discussion within the ancient sources regarding the education of children, and it also highlights the long lifespan of centaurs, with particular reference to Cheiron because he was able to tutor generations of heroes. It also shows that, even within the ancient sources, specific aspects of Cheiron’s mythological character were promoted as exemplary virtues for young males, which is precisely one focus of this thesis’ examination of more modern reception. Nevertheless, Cheiron, as the figure who provides education in specific skills and instruction in appropriate heroic behaviour—often to Achilles—is, perhaps, the most frequently encountered of all ‘mentor to heroes’ figures, and as such is the subject of the first part of Justina Gregory’s *Cheiron’s Way: Youthful Education in Homer and Tragedy*.<sup>20</sup>

Gregory uses Cheiron in her title and the first chapter in order to outline her premise: that heroic education is delivered primarily by fathers or surrogate fathers, and supplemented by contact with other male, heroic figures. It also, she proposes, involves directives, injunctions and exemplary tales, and is all too frequently misunderstood or ignored by the son in epic and tragedy. Her study of Cheiron as educator highlights his portrayal within the ancient sources as well as his near-omission from the *Iliad*, since he is replaced by Phoenix in the role of Achilles’ foster father and tutor.<sup>21</sup> Gregory highlights the relative importance, in the *Iliad*, of omitting magic and fantastic beasts or beings; apart from the presence of the gods, almost all action is ascribed to reading real-world signs rather than demonstrating acquisition of untestable knowledge, and certainly the *Iliad* downplays the non-Olympian supernatural.<sup>22</sup> In identifying further ancient sources in which Cheiron is presented, however, a ‘composite

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<sup>20</sup> Gregory, 2019.

<sup>21</sup> The discovery of the famous centaur from Lefkandi in Euboea, published by Desborough et al (1970) proved the familiarity of these mythical creatures even in Dark-Age Greece; this has made the omission of Cheiron from the *Iliad* look even more deliberate.

<sup>22</sup> Gregory, 2019: 28.

portrait' is established,<sup>23</sup> and despite occasions where Achilles' heroic education fails him and he behaves in a manner that would not be sanctioned by the centaur, the ancient sources remain insistent that Cheiron's education of Achilles has been superior to an education that could have been provided by men—Gregory points out that in Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis*, Agamemnon tells Clytemnestra that Achilles was raised by Cheiron specifically to keep him away from the wickedness of men.<sup>24</sup> Gregory concludes by reflecting that the education of Achilles was adapted in 5<sup>th</sup>-century Greek writing and vase-painting to reflect the political climate—in Pindar's case, for example, a belief in aristocratic rights and oligarchic structures.<sup>25</sup> This bending of the myth to suit a contemporary purpose has been continued henceforward. The following study of Cheiron's receptions will show how not only the intellectual/philosophical but also the political landscape of each period influence the selection of Cheiron's traits for deployment.

### **The Postclassical Reception of Cheiron**

The single most important resource in identifying appropriate reception texts to include has been Jane Davidson-Reid's *The Oxford Guide to Classical Mythology in the Arts 1300-1990*. She reveals the rich record of centaurs between the Renaissance and the early nineteenth century, including Macchiavelli and Hildebrand Jacob; but this thesis begins in the 1830s because there was a sea change in representations of Cheiron. (See further on Macchiavelli and Jacob in footnote).<sup>26</sup> While texts included in some chapters of this thesis examining more recent reception are not included in her work, or postdate it, her listing of literary and artistic sources

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<sup>23</sup> Gregory, 2019: 30.

<sup>24</sup> Gregory, 2019: 54; *IA*, 709.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory, 2019: 55.

<sup>26</sup> Macchiavelli used the figure of Cheiron in his instructive text on how to rule, *The Prince* (1532), by outlining that a ruler must be prepared to use brute force as well as justice and law, symbolised by Cheiron's dual form. Hildebrand Jacob's poem 'Cheiron to Achilles' (1732) utilises the voice of the centaur in giving advice to his charge, in a similar manner to the Hesiodic *Precepts of Cheiron*; however, this poem also has an answer from Achilles to his tutor.

has been extremely helpful in finding interesting links between different authors and works. This has been particularly useful for the chapter focusing upon Maurice de Guérin's *Le Centaure* and other nineteenth- and early twentieth-century texts taking Cheiron as their theme or protagonist, and has brought to light an aesthetic 'cult of the centaur', in which various symbolic meanings were employed in the ensuing artistic productions. In searching more widely, the *LIMC* article's finding that not all centaurs represented in ancient sources can be classified as Cheiron continues to ring true, since the centaurs are frequently referenced in authors from the Renaissance onwards, but are frequently not representative of the superior figure of Cheiron; rather, they are utilised either because they symbolise the traits of licentiousness and sexual rapaciousness, to which Cheiron is immune, or they symbolise a generalised mythical, fantastic beast.

While some of these texts may refer to Cheiron, employing his mythology within the narrative arc, many do not. Carl Woodring's study, 'Centaur Unnaturally Fabulous' (2007), identifies a range of key texts using 'misbegotten prodigies' including centaurs. Differences in whether it is Cheiron who is utilised, or all the centaurs as a race more widely, may be partially determined by whether the text has a religious dimension; Woodring asserts that '[i]n general, Christian accounts of centaurs got along without Cheiron'.<sup>27</sup> Yet centaurs, and Cheiron, both became key features within eighteenth- and nineteenth-century texts, along with a more sympathetic view of their hybridity. Nessus and Pholus also appear as 'superior' centaurs – perhaps contradicting their ancient reputations, certainly in the case of Nessus — but neither replaces Cheiron when texts are concerned with the education of Achilles. So crucial is his role in the upbringing of the hero, notwithstanding his replacement in Homeric epic, that no other tutor or centaur can replace him. Not only is this focus upon Cheiron as an

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<sup>27</sup> Woodring, 2007:6.

educator so influential as to dominate the ancient sources, both textual and visual, but it accounts for most elements of his reception in more modern texts.

### **Selection of Case-Studies**

In selecting the texts for inclusion in this thesis, the discovery of so many passing references to centaurs was surprising; indeed, a thesis on the late 19<sup>th</sup>- and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century references and representations alone would be a complete project. However, it is the figure of Cheiron in whom I am specifically interested, because he seems to offer an axis around which complex aesthetic, philosophical and even political questions can revolve, and this serves to narrow the field. Undoubtedly, in order to establish the traits that are highlighted by modern texts, the portrayals of the centaur in ancient texts need to be collected and analysed. The first chapter, therefore, collates texts and fragments which refer to him, focussing on the aspects, skills and qualities that are privileged in the later receptions I discuss. As these texts will in themselves cover a wide chronological period, there will be distinct discrepancies and evolutions in the way in which he is portrayed, particularly concerning his tutelage of Achilles. The texts will need to be situated contextually to reveal any particular purpose for such portrayals, in order that links to modern texts may subsequently be reinforced. Where appropriate, ancient visual sources and material culture will be used as illustration or supplement.

What follows this analysis of Cheiron in the ancient sources is a progression, roughly chronological, through significant texts that represent him, either written in English or with significant translations and publications in the English language which made him familiar in English/British culture. There is, to a degree, a subjective selection of texts included within this thesis, particularly in the children's literature chapter, and it is the relationship to the figure

of Cheiron himself, or a theme of the text speaking directly to his skills and qualities, which has influenced their inclusion. Matthew Arnold's seminal essay on Maurice de Guérin initiates a variety of responses to the French poet's work, and my thesis takes this poem as its starting point. Some Medieval, Renaissance and Enlightenment texts utilise the figure of the centaur generally, or Cheiron specifically, but there is a massive dramatic, revolutionary sea change with the appearance of Cheiron's psycho-sexual interiority in post-Romantic culture, beginning with Maurice de Guérin, whose subterranean impact can be seen in modern receptions; this results in a coherent literary epoch which I address.

Here ontology and psychology become paramount to the subjective exploration of centauric consciousness. Maurice de Guérin's *Le Centaure* (1840) played a major role in initiating this interest. The de Guérin chapter considers particularly the form of the text, and how its hybrid fusion of prose and poetry relates to Cheiron's portrayal in the ancient sources; however, de Guérin's religious sensibilities will also prompt the question of how the author's preoccupations influence the utility he perceived in the figure of the centaur, and of Cheiron in particular. The poem foreshadows the preoccupation with time that features so centrally in Updike's novel, the focus of the following chapter, and is sufficiently innovative to have initiated several translations into English and one into German by Rilke. One of the English translators – Thomas Sturge Moore – also provided illustrations in the form of woodcuts for the edition and was one of the contributors to an 'aesthetic cult of the centaur'.<sup>28</sup> A disciple of Charles de Sousy Ricketts, whose artistic output reveals a preoccupation with centaurs, Sturge Moore also wrote a monologue, 'The Song of Cheiron' (1932), and corresponded with Robert Calverly Trevelyan, the author of a theatrical text called *Cheiron* (1927). Ricketts also knew, and introduced Moore to the poet 'Michael Field', an aunt and niece who combined a same-sex relationship with an adopted masculine writing persona; while their output had limited

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<sup>28</sup> Woodring, 2007: 9.

references to centaurs and Cheiron, they are included because they instantiate the variety of complex ways the figure of Cheiron and the centaur were being utilised by artists at the time. This chapter therefore explores the links between the writers and artists preoccupied with centaurs; it will also examine their specific portrayals of Cheiron and how his qualities are utilised symbolically by different artists for differing purpose. Clearly, the intellectual environment of this period, which extends from post-Romanticism through Symbolism and Surrealism to Modernism, had a huge impact on the fascination with Cheiron. The chapter also illustrates the skill of de Guérin, who ‘shows what can be achieved, by an expert writer, by putting the mythical beast’s private experience at the heart of the tale’.<sup>29</sup>

This is also the case in John Updike’s *The Centaur* (1963), despite the Cheiron figure being represented in third-person narration ostensibly by two different narrators. This text moves the focus of the thesis into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and once again, form and structure are investigated in order to reveal programmatic aesthetic links with the figure of the centaur. The novel poses the question of what relevance both the figure of Cheiron specifically, and the mythological past more generally, can have for an inhabitant of 20<sup>th</sup>-century America. How Updike’s figure of Cheiron is portrayed directly answers the question of how those two periods relate to one another in terms of the major questions put by myth and philosophy: what is it to be a human animal, how can we live together in an ethical community, and how we can know things for certain. As a relatively modern reception within the chronological range of this thesis, this classical American novel demonstrates how mythology can be updated for a contemporary period. By examining which qualities of Cheiron are utilised, this chapter illustrates the preoccupations of the time (religion, or lack of it; alienation; sexuality), and the liminalities of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that the centaur informs. Updike’s novel is essential to bringing a ‘New World’ gaze upon the mythological past.

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<sup>29</sup> Hall, 2017: 21.

Using Cheiron within children's literature speaks directly to the role of the centaur in the education of young heroes, while eliding the element of adult mediator. In her paper, 'Cheiron as Youth Author: Ancient Example, Modern Responses', Edith Hall examines how centaurs have been portrayed in youth literature and films. She highlights that the representations of centaurs have been extremely limited so far but that there is much more scope within the ancient sources that modern authors could employ. However, for the topic of this thesis, Hall's assertion that Cheiron has 'dominated the reception of the ancient centaur since the mid-twentieth century' is a most useful observation.<sup>30</sup> Certainly, youth literature which employs centaurs as characters, even when not named after Cheiron – such as Firenze in the Harry Potter series, or Glenstorm in the C.S. Lewis Narnia collection – certainly portrays their principal centaurs as adhering to his character type by aiding the young heroes in their quest and character development. Hall records that this paternalistic representation of centaurs in literature for children has predominated since the mid-nineteenth century.<sup>31</sup>

Nathaniel Hawthorne helped to establish Cheiron's role within children's literature, albeit in a formal, didactic, authoritative tone, and this chapter compares the updating of the mentor/centaur motif in the Percy Jackson books, as well as a limited selection of less well-known children's texts, aimed for an audience across a range of ages. Lisa Maurice (2015) considers the figure of the centaur through reception, focusing primarily upon youth literature, approaching her findings through the prism of animal studies; she considers centaurs in the Harry Potter and Narnia series, which is why these are omitted from this thesis. Murnaghan (2011), however, considers the complex and contradictory messages surrounding the educational aspects of using classical figures and motifs in children's literature, particularly in

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<sup>30</sup> Hall, 2017: 1.

<sup>31</sup> Hall, 2017: 4.

Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series, and my study maps these metatextual aspects onto the intellectual environment, as well as considering the central figure.

It also considers whether there are any other aspects of the centaur portrayed, in addition to his role as tutor and mentor, and what this might mean for the text. As Hall suggests, Cheiron's benevolence towards humans makes him a perfect figure to adopt as narrator to assist children in preparation for life challenges,<sup>32</sup> as his current usage as mentor to child heroes suggests that he can be. Similarly, he has not yet been used as a mentor for a love-struck teenager to counsel how best to initiate a sexual relationship, as he was rendered in Pindar's *Pythian Ode* 9.18;<sup>33</sup> this chapter also considers some of the appropriate limitations imposed upon Cheiron's portrayal in youth texts.

The thesis subsequently addresses the mythological figure of the centaress, and how she is employed to explore female maturation of young women in the *Watersmeet* trilogy by Ellen Jensen Abbott, and the *Centuriad* duology by Kate Klimo. While Cheiron as a transplanted figure from Greek mythology is not present, both authors utilise the qualities attested to him in the ancient sources. This 'centaress' chapter also briefly considers the Manga series, *A Centaur's Life*, and how it depicts the female protagonist as an adolescent centaur growing up in a fantasy world with similar social expectations to contemporary Japan. Additionally, a fictionalised novel drawing from the biography of a sculptress is included, although this text is aimed at an adult audience. In this text, the figure of the centaress symbolises the dual gender of the sculptress, born intersex but raised female, and the challenges she faced.

Continuing the focus upon centaurs authored by women and relating to the female experience, the next chapter discusses the portrayal of Cheiron in two 21<sup>st</sup>-century, female

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<sup>32</sup> Hall, 2017: 15.

<sup>33</sup> Hall, 2017: 16-17.

authored novels. Elizabeth Cook's *Achilles* (2001) and Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* (2011) explore the relationship between Cheiron and his charges. Once again, the texts focus primarily (though not exclusively) on the ethical qualities of Cheiron, and I ask how a female-authored text might alter the other skills and attributes ascribed to his character. This chapter offers an opportunity to see Cheiron through female eyes, rather than portraying a homosocial or even androcentric view of him as a tutor to male heroes, and reflects 21<sup>st</sup>-century preoccupations with time, as well as experimentation with form.

The final reception chapter continues the focus of the previous two, which have covered bodily changes and physical difference. This chapter utilises Amanda Leduc's novel-length fairy tale, *The Centaur's Wife*, to explore both disability and physical difference in an apocalyptic setting. Leduc's personal experience of cerebral palsy informs the heroine's portrayal; in her connection with the centaurs, along with their joint survival, Leduc raises questions about who, if survival of the fittest is important, would be the most ideally suited to survive a different world. The novel further demonstrates that the figure of the centaur is good to think with for a range of preoccupations, being ubiquitous within modern culture and flexible in its application. This even extends to playful manipulation of the spelling of Cheiron's proper name, even in the most recent versions, although I have chosen to spell him 'Cheiron' when discussing him in my academic voice.

The concluding chapter draws together the aspects of Cheiron that have been showcased in the differing intellectual, political and cultural environments, as well as considering the reasons for gaps and omissions in how he is portrayed. There will, undoubtedly, be similarities in portrayals; after all, the receptions influence and cross-fertilise one another diachronically, and repeatedly return to the ancient source texts, as well. Yet, it is suggested that there will be sufficient differences in how Cheiron is represented to illustrate distinct intellectual shifts, and that there will be specific concerns and preoccupations addressed

through which qualities are privileged. One example is the prominence, presence or absence of the episode that is Cheiron's sacrifice of his immortality to save Prometheus – this also serves to end Cheiron's agony from his incurable wound. Some authors associate these metaphysically resonant motifs of sacrifice and agony with the passion of Jesus Christ; the two figures are conflated within a Christian allegory. This is particularly pertinent to Updike's *The Centaur*, in which George Caldwell/Cheiron sacrifices himself willingly for the future of his son, Peter/Prometheus.

Yet, despite differences, all the texts studied in this thesis show that the centaur offers an exceptionally liminal but mutable character, one who can shift focus in response to an author's wishes and can speak to different audience's desires. Cheiron in reception sits on the boundary between different worlds, the mythological and the modern. This boundary maps onto and interacts with a range of other boundaries, concerns and uncertainties: pagan and Christian, human and beast, human and divine, informed and ignorant, rational and superstitious, savage and civilised. These seeming oppositions find, in the figure of Cheiron, a helpful unity which in turn complicates the issues that the various narratives explore. For this reason, Cheiron – and perhaps centaurs more widely – have penetrated further into popular culture than most other hybrid creatures, excepting perhaps only the (equally liminal) satyrs and Medusa. As liminal and fantastic creatures, they can also be utilised in a variety of ways – as a different kind of educator to children in the Percy Jackson series of children's books; as an homage to the classical world, such as in de Guérin's poem; and as an exploratory line between different kinds of behaviour required in different situations, as explored by authors employing the centaress. Cheiron's utility comes precisely from his range of competencies and skills, and the fragmentary nature of the evidence in ancient sources. These leave his character unusually open to interpretation, allowing him to pose a fundamental challenge to all zoological, anthropological and existential taxonomies.

## The Different Forms of Cheiron:

### Prefiguring the Modern Presences of the Centaur in Antiquity

Georges-Maurice de Guérin's aesthetically and psychologically revolutionary *Le Centaure* was first published by George Sand in 1840. Although written in French, it was highly praised by Matthew Arnold in *Essays in Criticism* (1866) and translated into English in 1890s; it exerted a considerable influence over *fin-de-siècle* and early 20<sup>th</sup>-century aesthetics. The next chapter offers a detailed analysis of de Guérin's seminal text and its early impact. But, before we proceed to the receptions of Cheiron, it is crucial to explore one dimension of this enigmatic character's representations, namely, the ancient sources that have been available to the modern writers addressed in the remainder of the thesis.

Cheiron is so ubiquitous in ancient art and literature, from Homer to Nonnus, from archaic black-figured vase-painting to imperial Roman frescoes, that it would be impossible to do his Greek and Roman appearances justice within the scope of a doctoral thesis, let alone a single chapter in one, such as this. His presence within ancient narratives is not merely all-pervasive but complex. Although a hybrid creature (and such creatures are frequently considered by the Greeks to be monsters),<sup>34</sup> he is set apart from the rest of the race of centaurs by both his lineage and his behaviour. He represents an ideal and is therefore entrusted with the tutelage of youthful demigods, and sons of heroes, to teach them multiple skills and prepare them for their desired vocation, most often either medicine, heroic adventure, or warfare: '[c]hildren, νόμος, medicine, prophecy: all are part of Cheiron's province'.<sup>35</sup> He also sits on the boundary of divinity himself, being originally immortal and, as the son of Kronos, one of

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<sup>34</sup> Gloyn (2020: 3) discusses the characteristics of classical monsters and physical hybridity is numbered amongst them; Cheiron fits this aspect but not the others of being abnormally large, performing violent acts, being outside of human control, and challenging humans' understanding of the world.

<sup>35</sup> Robbins, 1978: 212.

the primordial, pre-Olympian deities; and yet his form is unchanging, and he sacrifices his immortality to escape eternal pain. He is a liminal, double-formed figure, joining the Amazons and other centaurs in being ‘creatures at the boundaries of difference,’<sup>36</sup> with relevance to a wide variety of other mythological figures and issues.

Despite often being included, or at least mentioned, in mythological narratives, he is almost never a main figure, even in the ancient sources.<sup>37</sup> Very few of these sources give him much narrative space, or a voice; only a couple of ancient sources, now lost or fragmentary, such as the Hesiodic *Precepts of Cheiron*,<sup>38</sup> utilise him as a principal figure or speaker. Yet he is central to the development of many of the heroes of Greek mythology, and often critical to the driving action of the narrative episode in some way. Despite some scholars suggesting that he is represented as overwhelmingly positive in the ancient sources,<sup>39</sup> he is not an unambiguously positive figure in all of them, or by modern standards, considering the predatory nature of his ‘romantic advice’ to Peleus.<sup>40</sup> However, he has an important role in narratives of generational heroes, and his portrayal in ancient sources, both textual and material, remains reasonably consistent.

There is no single specific source, ancient or modern, that captures the complexity of Cheiron. While many skills and characteristics are attributed to him, all the sources, both ancient and modern, choose to privilege a narrower aspect of his character and his storyline and deselect many other potential dimensions instantiated in his complicated cultural history. There is not only a plethora of ancient sources, but also, as we shall discover, extreme difficulty in identifying which modern author had accessed which of them, or indeed relied, rather, on previous postclassical receptions. I have therefore adopted a selective strategy. After deciding

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<sup>36</sup> duBois, 2010: 27.

<sup>37</sup> He has ‘left few traces in extant epic and tragedy’ (Gregory, 2019: 28).

<sup>38</sup> Trans. Most, *Hesiod*: 189; 207.

<sup>39</sup> Aston, 2017.

<sup>40</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.170, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

the functions which it seems to me Cheiron fulfils in my poets and novelists, I reappraised the ancient sources retrospectively to ask this question: from which ancient sources might these aspects of his character and activities in modern writers ultimately—even if indirectly—derive?

What this chapter seeks to establish is this: which of the ancient sources identify and highlight specific skills and qualities? The discussion is organised along the lines followed in the remainder of the thesis, by dividing up those qualities into discrete philosophical categories and discussing them under the appropriate headings, namely aesthetics, ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, ontology/technology, and conceptions of time. By using this organising principle, it will become clear which of Cheiron's skills are most frequently foregrounded in those sources we have from antiquity, and how these portrayals are then harvested and transformed by more recent writers and artists. The result will highlight Cheiron's most frequently manifested attributes, as well as illuminate those aspects of his portrayal that are less frequently recognised. This thesis, therefore, aims both to draw attention to Cheiron's multivalence as a mythological figure, as a symbol for modern writers, and to restore from his position as a figure standing at the periphery of myth to one nearer the centre of the ancient imaginary.

## **Ethics**

It is unsurprising that, within the ancient sources (something which will be shown to be mirrored in most of the reception texts), Cheiron's role as a teacher and foster-father of children,<sup>41</sup> and a pillar of morality, is the aspect of his identity given the greatest focus and attracting the preponderance of references across sources. This is to be expected simply because of the number of heroes, demigods, and divine beings that he raises or provides with

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<sup>41</sup> Gregory (2019: 6) asserts that '[r]egardless of biological connection, in the literary tradition the didactic relationship is often conflated with the parental one'. That the Greek verb *trephein*, which asserts a more all-encompassing role of care from biological parents, is used more frequently than the straightforward *didaskein*, 'teach' (Gregory, 2019: 39), demonstrates how Cheiron's role is greater than mere teacher.

advice. It is his role of tutor that cuts through the mythological narratives concerning many heroes, and numerous ancient writers make use of him in this role. He delivers training in three main areas: conflict and the taking of life; medicine and the restoration of life; and special skills, such as lyre-playing and astronomy.<sup>42</sup>

His most famous protégé is Achilles, through virtue of this tutee being the main protagonist in the most famous archaic Greek text. Their connection is attested in the *Iliad*, where it is said that Cheiron taught Achilles healing arts which he then taught to Patroclus.<sup>43</sup> This relationship is also attested in Pindar's odes, where Achilles is depicted hunting and returning to Cheiron with his prey,<sup>44</sup> signalling another skill that has been passed on; this is described in much fuller detail in the 1<sup>st</sup>-century CE Latin epic, Statius' *Achilleid*, where Cheiron has not only taught his pupil warfare and medicine, but he has also 'implanted', says Achilles, 'deep within my heart the precepts of divine justice'.<sup>45</sup> So important was this bond to Cheiron, as well as being reciprocated by Achilles, that the Alexandrian grammarian of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, Ptolemy Chennos, attests that Cheiron's teacher was also called Achilles, and that he gave his own pupil the name in commemoration; but it should be noted that he was a mythological prankster, and his *New History* was 'a completely irresponsible rewriting of many stories of the past'.<sup>46</sup> This report adds weight to Statius' suggestion that the relationship between centaur and pupil was of a more intense kind than that between natural child and father.<sup>47</sup>

That writers selectively chose the skills that Cheiron passed on is demonstrated through this choice, but is also illuminated by Ovid. In his distinctive style, focusing upon bold conceits and metaphors, as well as poetic practice, Ovid asserts that Cheiron taught Achilles the lyre,

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<sup>42</sup> Pichigina, 2022: 75.

<sup>43</sup> Hom. *Il.* 11: 832. trans. Wilson.

<sup>44</sup> Pindar, *Nemean* 3.48 trans. Race.

<sup>45</sup> Statius, *Achilleid* 2.96 trans. Shackleton Bailey.

<sup>46</sup> Ptolemy Chennos, book 63, in Photius *Bibliotheca* 190, trans. Freese; Bowersock, 1994: 23-7.

<sup>47</sup> Statius, *Silvae*, 2.1.88 trans. Shackleton Bailey.

which engaged Achilles' hands in an act that was contrary to Achilles' natural temperament.<sup>48</sup> This focus upon teaching Achilles' hands not only highlights the body part that Ovid wants his reader to imagine, but also then engages in word play, reminding his reader that the name 'Cheiron' shares its etymological root with the Greek for 'hand'. Together, however, these sources suggest a close, caring and reciprocal relationship between Achilles and his foster-father, in which Achilles is equipped with both a loving home, and the skills that he will require in adulthood.

One source gives a different perspective upon this tutor-student relationship, portraying it as much less harmonious, and it is perhaps surprising that it comes from a 1<sup>st</sup> century CE Greek writer rather than a later Latin or Byzantine author. Dio Chrysostom's *Discourse 58* contains a conversation between Achilles and Cheiron, in which Cheiron gives a lesson about using arrows, a weapon that Achilles considers unworthy of him.<sup>49</sup> Achilles is portrayed almost as a modern sulky teenager, and continues to complain about not liking riding a horse either, or even riding Cheiron himself, 'horsey creature that you are'.<sup>50</sup> The text relates that Cheiron is angry but does not hit him, perhaps in order to highlight Cheiron's restraint in the face of provocation; nevertheless, he does retort by calling Achilles a 'brat of a briny mother'.<sup>51</sup> As a writer whose humour and rewritings of canonical narratives are imbued by the wit and humour which attracted him to Cynicism,<sup>52</sup> Dio is clearly offering an amusing outlook on this kind of relationship, possibly offering a response to Xenophon's admonition to the young that 'should not despise hunting or the other training of your boyhood'.<sup>53</sup> However, Dio's subversive

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<sup>48</sup> Ovid, *Fasti* 5.386 trans. Frazer.

<sup>49</sup> Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 58, trans. Lamar Crosby.

<sup>50</sup> Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 58.4, trans. Lamar Crosby.

<sup>51</sup> Dio Chrysostom, *Discourses*, 58.4, trans. Lamar Crosby.

<sup>52</sup> Brancacci, 2000: 240-60; Trapp, 2019: 145-162.

<sup>53</sup> Xenophon, *On Hunting* 1, trans. Marchant.

perspective certainly contradicts the assertions in Pindar's *Pythian* 6 that Achilles should honour his parents.<sup>54</sup> Dio's particular version of Achilles seems unlikely to honour anyone.

While Achilles might be the most well-known of Cheiron's pupils, many others are indicated in the sources, and Jason is also frequently mentioned. Pindar attests to this connection,<sup>55</sup> as does Hesiod.<sup>56</sup> Pindar elaborates on this relationship and gives important but rare recognition to a non-isolated Cheiron and his wife and family: he has Jason report that he had been reared by Cheiron, his wife, Chariclo, his mother, Philyra, and 'the centaur's holy daughters',<sup>57</sup> signalling that the heroes were raised within a feminised, domestic family atmosphere.<sup>58</sup> Not only is this rare in the ancient textual sources (although Cheiron's family is attested in sources that do not discuss the raising of heroes),<sup>59</sup> but this impression of a solitary centaur persists into his modern reception, as will be explored in later chapters. As with many mythical narratives, different individuals are said to have given Jason to Cheiron to raise, but that he was raising other, additional boys simultaneously is clear from the suggestion that the centaur was able to offer multiple youths to the Argo for Jason's quest.<sup>60</sup> Cheiron is also said to have raised a son of Jason and Medea.<sup>61</sup>

A hero who connects both Achilles, by being his father, and Jason, by having been part of the quest for the Golden Fleece, is Peleus. The connections between Cheiron and Peleus that exist in the ancient sources do not really continue into modern reception, apart from Cheiron having taken Achilles to see Peleus leave on the Argo,<sup>62</sup> and giving advice to Peleus

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<sup>54</sup> Pindar *Pythian* 6.21-5, trans. Race.

<sup>55</sup> Pindar, *Nemean* 3.54, trans. Race.

<sup>56</sup> Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women* fr. 13, trans. Most, 2007.

<sup>57</sup> Pindar, *Pythian* 4.102-4, trans. Race.

<sup>58</sup> This relates to the suggestion that Cheiron's mother, Philyra, an Oceanid, has as her role the duty 'to bring up men to adulthood' (Hes. *Theog.* 346-48), and that Cheiron's most frequent appellation, the 'son of Philyra', highlights the continuation of such a kourotrophic vocation (Gregory, 2019: 40).

<sup>59</sup> Although note that artistic representations of Cheiron with his wife and daughters, and Peleus with a figure 'who must be Thetis', were popular with both black- and red-figure painters (Gantz, 1993: 231).

<sup>60</sup> Asclepiades fragments F14; F2a; F2b; *Brill's New Jacoby*: Asklepiades von Tragilos (12).

<sup>61</sup> Hes. *Theog.* 993, trans. Most.

<sup>62</sup> Valerius Flaccus, *Argonautica*, 1.255, trans. Mozley.

regarding his capture of Thetis.<sup>63</sup> However, the relationship between the two is far more involved in antiquity, often configured genealogically according to the ancient near-obsession with genealogical systematisation of the unruly forest of inherited mythical traditions,<sup>64</sup> an obsession not shared by most modern rewriters of ancient stories. Traditions include the assertion that Peleus was Cheiron's grandson, because Peleus' mother, Endeis, was the centaur's daughter.<sup>65</sup> Even when a potential familial relationship is not attested, Cheiron is said to have protected Peleus against the other centaurs,<sup>66</sup> and helped him to foil a murderous plot to kill him.<sup>67</sup> Not only do the two have a more longstanding connection than is frequently portrayed by modern authors, whose primary focus seems to be the tutelage of Achilles, but Cheiron also appears to have had a greater role in land-owning and governance, as it is said that he shared his country with Peleus, and thus Peleus became king of the city of the Iolkoi.<sup>68</sup>

Since this bears such a great similarity to Jason's claim to the throne of Iolcus, it is possible that these two mythical strands became conflated. Nevertheless, that many of the narratives suggest a close friendship or familial relationship between Cheiron and Peleus indicates that Cheiron's connections cross generations, and also that ancient writers have used this to suggest that Cheiron could also have been the tutor to friends of his foster-children; it is suggested, for example, that Menoitios, Patroclus' father, left his son with the centaur while he took part in the quest for the Golden Fleece.<sup>69</sup>

A similar expansion of role happens with another figure connected to Peleus, Thetis. Pindar suggests that Cheiron arranged the marriage of Peleus and Thetis,<sup>70</sup> perhaps advocating

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<sup>63</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.170, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>64</sup> Fowler, 1998: 1-19.

<sup>65</sup> Hyginus *Fabulae* 14, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>66</sup> Pindar *Nemean* 4.60, trans. Race.

<sup>67</sup> Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 3.167, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma; Antoninus Liberalis *Metamorphoses* 38, trans. Celoria; Gantz (1993: 226) outlines the story and its variations across the ancient texts.

<sup>68</sup> Diodorus Siculus 6 fr. 7, trans. Walton.

<sup>69</sup> Valerius Flaccus *Argonautica* 1.255, trans. Mozley.

<sup>70</sup> Pindar *Isthmian* 8.41-6, trans. Race.

for her because her father is bound to the sea and cannot be present for the nuptials. This is supported by the painting on a bell-krater by the Eupolis Painter,<sup>71</sup> which is interpreted to be Cheiron leading Thetis to her marriage to Peleus; while the figures are not named, it is unlikely to represent Cheiron's own wedding, because '[p]oets and painters were not much interested in exploring the love life or marital status of a centaur'.<sup>72</sup> Despite Thetis' reluctance to marry Peleus, evidence from vase painting may therefore suggest that there might have been 'a longer and more conciliatory sequence of events' than the accounts of the taking of Thetis in texts suggest.<sup>73</sup> This is also attested in another fragment, this time of Alcaeus, which indicates that she was taken from the halls of Nereus to the home of Cheiron,<sup>74</sup> although this could, of course, be Peleus taking her for marriage. In the first century BCE, one source suggests that Thetis was the centaur's daughter, although it is also said there that Cheiron was a wise man skilled in astronomy;<sup>75</sup> however, as this writer, Lysimachus of Alexandria (who is referencing Staphylos of Naukratis, who wrote about Thessaly), is thought by Josephus to 'surpass both [Manetho and Chaeremon] in the incredibility of his fictions',<sup>76</sup> this may well be a conflation of different relationships with Cheiron's subsequent catasterisation.

The genealogical connections between the heroes and demigods that Cheiron tutored demonstrate that his foster-children were frequently not just randomly selected, or placed with him by happenstance.<sup>77</sup> He is said in multiple sources to have raised Asclepius,<sup>78</sup> teaching him healing and hunting,<sup>79</sup> or just healing in most cases, and to have raised Aristaeus;<sup>80</sup> both these

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<sup>71</sup> Private collection; reproduced in Shapiro, 2018: 280.

<sup>72</sup> Shapiro, 2018: 283.

<sup>73</sup> Shapiro, 2018: 286.

<sup>74</sup> Alcaeus, fr. 42, trans. Campbell.

<sup>75</sup> Lysimachus of Alexandria 382, commentary on F8, *Brill's New Jacoby*; Staphylos BNJ 269F.

<sup>76</sup> Josephus, *Against Apion* 1.34, trans. Thackeray.

<sup>77</sup> Gregory highlights that this 'continuity is suggestive of the conservative character of the centaur's pedagogy' (2019: 27).

<sup>78</sup> Pindar *Pythian* 3.46; *Nemean* 3.55, trans. Race; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 3.118-122, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>79</sup> Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 118-122, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>80</sup> Apollonius Rhodius *Argonautica* 2.512, trans. Race.

figures are sons of Apollo. He was also tutor to Actaeon, the son of Aristaeus, and therefore grandson of Apollo.<sup>81</sup> A further connection between Apollo and Cheiron is that they are both frequently referred to by their matronymics, whereas no other male mythological figures routinely receive this kind of appellation.<sup>82</sup> While his longevity will be discussed later in this chapter, it is clear that his immortality allowed these trans-generational connections and permitted him to tutor successive heroes within these lineages. Despite Pindar suggesting that Cheiron was ‘a wild, untamed creature with a heart that loved men’,<sup>83</sup> Aston asserts that ‘mixanthropic’, or hybrid creatures, are ‘more human than humans’,<sup>84</sup> however paradoxical this may seem.<sup>85</sup> Cheiron provides a doubly-liminal space for his neophytes, both in time and geography – a cave on a mountain – to offer them a place for growth and reflection, while he also prepares them for the society in which they must participate; the society outside which he himself remains. This is their ‘rite of passage’.<sup>86</sup>

Within the sources, however, there are two more unusual additions to Cheiron’s list of tutees. Herakles is said to have been one of his pupils in scholia to Theokritos,<sup>87</sup> which is perhaps not so surprising given Herakles’ role in the episode of Cheiron’s injury,<sup>88</sup> and his freeing of Prometheus so that Cheiron’s death could be exchanged for the continued punishment of the Titan.<sup>89</sup> A more unexpected attestation comes from Diodorus, who suggests that Cheiron also taught the centaurs deposited by Nephele. This conflates the two different traditions, confusing the wild centaurs of the Herakles story with the account in which the

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<sup>81</sup> Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 3.30, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>82</sup> Robbins, 1978: 205.

<sup>83</sup> Pindar *Pythian* 3.5, trans. Race.

<sup>84</sup> Aston, 2017: Conclusion: 9.

<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Agamemnon tells Clytemnestra that Peleus took Achilles to Cheiron deliberately so that he would avoid learning the wicked habits of men (Euripides, *IA* 709, trans. Kovacs).

<sup>86</sup> Aston, 2017: Conclusion 10.

<sup>87</sup> Herodorus from Heraklion, *Scholia on Theokritos Idyllia* 13.7-9b, BNJ 31.

<sup>88</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.83-87; 1.119, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>89</sup> It is acknowledged that this aspect of myth is rather complicated, as Prometheus already had immortality, so had no need of Cheiron’s, and that Herakles was eventually granted immortality. The scholarly debate is outlined fully in Fowler, 2013: 21-3.

offspring of Ixion and Nephele was Centaurus, who then mated with mares to produce the race of centaurs.<sup>90</sup> In any case, while Cheiron clearly had knowledge of and connections to the other ‘wild’ centaurs, exemplified by the Herakles episode and his saving Peleus from them,<sup>91</sup> it would have been a very unsuccessful tutoring relationship, as these wild centaurs apparently failed to assimilate any of his morals or more refined qualities.<sup>92</sup>

For a mythological figure who underpins the narratives of so many heroes in epic, with Xenophon providing an exhaustive list along with the statement that they all proved themselves,<sup>93</sup> it is astonishing that he makes so few and so meagre appearances as a central figure. The remaining fragments of the Hesiodic *Precepts of Cheiron* give a sense of how subsequent authors imagined his voice, and the educational advice that he would provide, such as the ethical precepts that children under seven should not receive a literary education,<sup>94</sup> and that the first action a hero should take upon returning home is to sacrifice to the immortal gods.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, evidence from vase painting suggests that it was a crucial text, and central to classical Greek educational curriculum. He is ‘the only imaginary beast in all ancient mythology who was also imagined to be an author himself’,<sup>96</sup> and the two poems in antiquity

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<sup>90</sup> Soudias of Thessaly, *Scholia Argonautica* 2.1231-412, BNJ 602.

<sup>91</sup> Aston highlights that Cheiron and the ‘group centaurs ...continue to share a mountain environment’ (2017: Chapter 5, 58).

<sup>92</sup> Gregory (2019: 27) records that Pindar classifies Cheiron’s pupils as examples of either successful or unsuccessful teaching: Achilles and Jason represent the former, Asclepius the latter. Gregory discusses in detail Cheiron’s pupils through different ancient texts, assessing whether they have taken to heart the centaur’s teachings, and can be considered a ‘success’ in terms of the education provided; she concludes what the centaur cannot do is to teach either humility or self-control effectively where it is not already present, which is often the downfall of his pupils. However, ancient writers frequently use ‘*phēr*’, ‘beast’, to describe both Cheiron and the other centaurs, and when Cheiron is referred to as the ‘most just of the centaurs’ in the *Iliad* 11.332, there is not the differentiation that their separate lineage would suggest (Gantz, 1993: 144). Lawson (1910) further suggests that ‘centaur’ was a generic term to denote half-human half-animal hybrids, and that terminology such as ‘hippocentaur’ and ‘ichthyocentaur’ were used to provide further specificity. He makes further suggestions in relation to ancient metamorphic and magical qualities that are not supported in extant ancient sources.

<sup>93</sup> Xenophon, *On Hunting* 1, trans. Marchant.

<sup>94</sup> Fr. 4, Quintilian 1.15.

<sup>95</sup> Scholion on Pindar *Pythian* 6.19 fragment 1; Gantz (1993: 231) states that the poem was based on the situation of Cheiron keeping Achilles on Pelion rather than letting him join the other potential suitors of Helen.

<sup>96</sup> Hall, 2020: 307.

of which he was either author or main focus were particularly associated with the development of boys into young men, thus establishing a precedent for how Cheiron is portrayed in modern reception texts aimed at children and young adults. A fifth-century *kyathos* depicts a boy reading a poem, name-labelled as the *Cheironeia*, and attests to the importance of the text in creating a bond between child and tutor;<sup>97</sup> moreover, in illustrating a ladle-shaped cup used for wine, the painting is likely to remind the men attending a drinking party of their own education, as well as directly evoking the centaurs' notorious love of wine.<sup>98</sup> What remains unknown, however, is the relationship between the *Cheironeia* and *The Precepts*, and whether one was part of the other; the loss of these works limits our understanding of how ancient authors imagined Cheiron's voice in written discourse.<sup>99</sup> While ancient writers attest to literacy being a skill possessed by centaurs, because both Cheiron and Asbolos could write,<sup>100</sup> very little survives to show that ancient authors were eager to explore the kinds of text they might produce. It is to be expected, given Cheiron's central role in education, and that this is the most widely attested of his qualities, that the sole extant if fragmentary text he is supposed to have authored is one of didactic purpose.

## **Epistemology**

Connected to Cheiron's ability to tutor heroes and demi-gods is his wisdom. He is not just generally knowledgeable about a range of specialist subjects, such as medicine, warfare, and lyre-playing, but he is also prophetic. This attribute is more prevalent in ancient texts and often marginalised within modern reception.

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<sup>97</sup> Berlin 2322, cf. Fig. 4.

<sup>98</sup> Hall, 2020: 309.

<sup>99</sup> Hall, 2020: 309. It should be noted that this is the only visual reference to the supposed *Cheironeia*, and that there is no evidence that it was a narrative poem.

<sup>100</sup> Aristeas of Prokennesos BNJ 35 Commentary.

Pindar's *Odes* frequently allude to Cheiron ('the figure of Cheiron seems to have haunted his imagination'),<sup>101</sup> and his prophetic qualities; indeed, he tells Apollo what will unfold between the god and Cyrene, even though he acknowledges that he is giving prophecy to the god of prophecy, who already knows what he is going to foretell.<sup>102</sup> He also seems to act as tutor to Apollo here, with the god putting aside his own skills in deference to the centaur's knowledge and experience,<sup>103</sup> and genealogical connections are further supported by Pindar making Cyrene and Cheiron relatives through their descent from Oceanus, whereas this connection is merely geographical in epic.<sup>104</sup> This connection, however, is further underscored by utilising 'ἀγρότερος' in descriptions of them both.<sup>105</sup> Robbins asserts that this also takes inspiration from the Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, and considers whether the episode is superfluous within the ode, and therefore must have been 'lifted' from another source.<sup>106</sup>

Cheiron is so important to Pindar that he is present in an ode even when he is not the one giving the prophecy. Pindar recounts the episode when Themis predicted what will happen to Thetis—that she 'should bear a princely son, stronger than his father, who would wield another weapon in his hand more powerful than the thunderbolt or the irresistible trident';<sup>107</sup> Cheiron, however, plays an important part in taking Thetis in and caring for her until her marriage to Peleus, which has been ordained by Themis. Similar qualities of the centaur are outlined even in the *Iliad*; in describing Achilles' spear, it is related that it is his father's, given as a gift from Cheiron 'to be death for fighters in battle'.<sup>108</sup> While this might not explicitly imply that Cheiron can foresee the use of the spear in Achilles' hands, it could be interpreted

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<sup>101</sup> Robbins, 1978: 214.

<sup>102</sup> Pindar, *Pythian* 9.49-50, trans. Race.

<sup>103</sup> Robbins, 1978: 211.

<sup>104</sup> Robbins, 1978: 206.

<sup>105</sup> Robbins, 1978: 207.

<sup>106</sup> Robbins, 1978: 203.

<sup>107</sup> Pindar, *Isth.* 8 31-36, trans. Race.

<sup>108</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 19: 390, trans. Wilson.

so, and it is this line that leads directly to Elizabeth Cook's interpretation, which will be explored later in the thesis (chapter 8, page 252).

Cheiron's oracular skills are mostly portrayed in relation to his foster sons, and this continues in Bacchylides *Dithyramb* 27, where he is referred to as 'prophetic Cheiron' who, having touched the child Achilles, 'often declared Fate'.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, in Statius, Cheiron sees something of Achilles' future; while not so specific as that of Thetis, who 'feels his death on her body', he still foresees the future.<sup>110</sup> Even in artistic renditions of the centaur and his protégé, viewers imagine that he is making predictions, as Philostratus imagines him foretelling the boy's future.<sup>111</sup> Perhaps his most specific foresight involves telling Jason to take Orpheus with him on the Argo for the quest for the Golden Fleece;<sup>112</sup> Orpheus' embarkation is presented elsewhere as being crucial to preserving the Argonauts from the dangerous singing of the Sirens.<sup>113</sup> Cheiron's powers are directed towards protecting those whom he raises. One source also has him suffer for the actions of Asclepius, who went beyond the permitted scope of his medicinal skills, by relating that it was Asclepius and Cheiron who were struck by Zeus. But the more well-known version is that it was Asclepius and the person he had resurrected.<sup>114</sup> To punish Cheiron as well for this misdeed countermands the other mythological variations that conclude with his catasterization.

As we find with oracular and itinerant seers,<sup>115</sup> Cheiron's prophetic skills are passed down through the generations, and can also be linked to his mother Philyra, since flowers of the linden or lime (φιλύρα) were used in antiquity both as a restorative and in divination.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Bacchylides *Dithyrambs* 27, trans. Campbell.

<sup>110</sup> Statius *Achilleid* 1.630, trans. Shackleton Bailey.

<sup>111</sup> Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, 2.2, trans. Fairbanks.

<sup>112</sup> Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 1: 32, trans. Race.

<sup>113</sup> Herodorus of Heraklion, scholion on Apollonius of Rhodes' *Argonautica* 1.23, BNJ 31.

<sup>114</sup> Sokrates of Argos, scholia on Pindar *Pythian* 3.102b, BN 310.

<sup>115</sup> Johnston, 2008: 110.

<sup>116</sup> Lawrence, 1994: 59.

His daughter, Hippe – or, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Ocyrhoe – also sees the future.<sup>117</sup> Having foretold the fate of Asclepius, and the death of her father, she is punished by the gods for divulging too much of their plans,<sup>118</sup> a trope that is present in other narratives of prophecy, most notably and explicitly that of Phineus in the *Argonautica*.<sup>119</sup> Euripides saves her from this fate, and allows her a daughter, Melanippe. In the fragmentary *Melanippe Wise* and *Melanippe Captive*, Cheiron’s granddaughter has inherited her wisdom from Cheiron and also recounts information taught to her by her mother.<sup>120</sup> It is stated that she ‘argues philosophically’; nevertheless, in acknowledgement perhaps of Hippe’s fate as elsewhere stated, Euripides has his heroine declare that ‘Wise people should always heed the gods’ will and redirect their plans towards what is more beneficial’.<sup>121</sup>

Once again, the genealogical fascination is present, with the generational transmission of skills; yet Cheiron is notable for not overstepping his prophetic knowledge and skill set. He sees, and says, what Fate he is permitted, and even in his advice to Peleus on subduing Thetis, he is fulfilling the will of Zeus.<sup>122</sup>

## Metaphysics

Just as Cheiron’s prophetic knowledge signals a link to divinity, he is himself originally an immortal, his semi-divine status rendering him fixed in form: he is therefore unlike the other deities who are metamorphic, while sharing their immortality.<sup>123</sup> This is a different gift from

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<sup>117</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 2: 633-675, trans. McCarter.

<sup>118</sup> Hyginus, *Astronomy* trans. Smith and Trzaskoma; Ovid, *Met.* 2:655-675 trans. McCarter.

<sup>119</sup> Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 2.301-15 trans. Race – Phineus tells the Argonauts that it is not lawful for him to tell them everything that he can see, only what Zeus wants him to tell, and that prophecy is by necessity incomplete.

<sup>120</sup> Euripides *Mel. Wise* F484, trans. Collard and Cropp.

<sup>121</sup> Euripides *Mel. Cap.* F490, trans. Collard and Cropp.

<sup>122</sup> Woodring, 2007: 8.

<sup>123</sup> Bremmer suggests that Cheiron’s links to Kronos and Oceanus mean that he ‘belonged to a generation of gods that had to be removed from power before Zeus could institute the present world and the rule of the Olympian gods’ (2012: 32). However, this fixed physical form, as well as his just nature, might help to explain why Cheiron is permitted to retain his status, and is so beloved by the Olympians.

those of other demi-gods, such as Achilles, who are not innately immortal. This immortality and close kinship with the Olympian gods, such as Zeus and Poseidon, who share Kronos as their father, lead to him being a religious figure for some, and might also be connected with Indo-European mythology in which the metamorphosis of a god into a horse is a motif.<sup>124</sup> The religious dimension is evident in the ancient sources, not just in the wisdom of his advice to Achilles always ‘to offer good sacrifices to the eternal gods’ on his homecoming,<sup>125</sup> or the collaboration with the other gods to prepare the spear for Peleus – ‘Athena, it is said, polished it, and Hephaestus fitted it with a head’<sup>126</sup> – but also in the religious site situated on Mount Pelion,<sup>127</sup> centred around the worship of the absent centaur.<sup>128</sup>

The proposal that worship in Pella, Thessaly, offered to Peleus and Cheiron, included human sacrifice of an Achaean, results from the anti-pagan agenda of the zealous Clement of Alexandria’s *Exhortation of the Greeks*.<sup>129</sup> But given the near-universal rejection of human sacrifice by Greeks in antiquity, Clement’s suggestion is highly unlikely and possibly arising from Apollodorus’ attestation that centaurs were *ōmophagoi*, eaters of raw meat.<sup>130</sup> Yet there does seem to be evidence that there was cult offered to Peleus and Cheiron.<sup>131</sup> This might be supported by Cheiron’s semi-divine status, as well as highlighting the suitability of Cheiron as a cult hero,<sup>132</sup> along with Peleus, particularly if this hero is related genealogically to Cheiron.

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<sup>124</sup> Bremmer, 2012: 31.

<sup>125</sup> *Precepts of Cheiron* fragment 1 in scholiast on Pindar, *Pyth.* 6.19.

<sup>126</sup> *Cypria* fragment 5 from scholiast on the *Iliad* 17:140.

<sup>127</sup> Landscape in Greece is ‘marked by mythical heritage that matters for local identity’; Mount Pelion is linked to Leto, being a place that she visited while in labour, and in its provision of wood for the building of the Argo, it ‘is described as a benign landscape of divine protection’ (König, 2022: 34; 23; 149). Buxton highlights that mountains are defined in contrast, that they are not the plain, where food is grown and fighting takes place, nor is it the village where people live, but is ‘outside inhabited and cultivated space’ (1992: 2). It was the site of hunting, sometimes of warfare, and of resource gathering (3-4). Mountains were also an ‘initiatory space’, and ‘locations of the sanctuaries of gods’ (5). Primarily, however, they were ‘outside and wild’, they are for outsiders and represent a link to primitive time (7-8). They are places of metamorphosis, of reversals, and the human and the divine coming together (9).

<sup>128</sup> Aston, 2017, Chapter 5.23.

<sup>129</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation of the Greeks*, 3.36, trans. Butterworth.

<sup>130</sup> Bremmer, 2012: 28; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 2.5.4, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>131</sup> Aston, 2017, Chapter 5.23-27.

<sup>132</sup> Bremmer, 2012: 35.

Buxton makes reference to a ritual, outlined by Herakleides, which involves citizens climbing Pelion in fleeces; he suggests this might be related to the shrine of Zeus Aktaios. The purpose of the ritual as a whole, while remaining unknown, might be a marker of being an outsider.<sup>133</sup> But Cheiron educates his pupils ‘outside of the city but for the city’;<sup>134</sup> while his teaching and his cult might be outside, they are designed to serve the civic community.

There is testimony to Cheiron having particularly strong mythological connections to Asclepius, and this can be seen through the similarity in places of worship. Asclepius is an underground hero,<sup>135</sup> and Cheiron also had a cult role, centred around his cave on Mount Pelion. The subterranean and cavernous sites share a liminal aspect, as portals between the upper and lower worlds. Aston highlights the main difference: underground heroes have a presumed presence in their place of cult worship, whereas Cheiron has been removed from his cave due to his catasterization, the result of his relinquishing his divine status,<sup>136</sup> and ‘is completely void of representation in any form’.<sup>137</sup> However, the geophysical nature of caves permits ‘a meeting of the ways’, and the *possibility* of a meeting with the divine, albeit with no guarantee.<sup>138</sup> This makes the Cheironion on Mount Pelion ‘a highly unusual religious site’, both a cult location and a setting of myth,<sup>139</sup> particularly due to the notable permanent absence of its cult hero; it is ‘a cenotaph’.<sup>140</sup> His absence is permitted because he belongs to ‘past time’, which will be further explored later in this chapter (page 41).

Of course, as previously noted, Cheiron has close links to Apollo, as shown by his raising the god’s mortal children, and a further link is attested by Xenophon, who reports that

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<sup>133</sup> Buxton, 1992: 10.

<sup>134</sup> Pichugina, 2022: 102.

<sup>135</sup> Aston, 2006: 350.

<sup>136</sup> Aston, 2006: 352.

<sup>137</sup> Aston, 2011: 47.

<sup>138</sup> Aston, 2006: 354.

<sup>139</sup> Aston, 2011: 50.

<sup>140</sup> Aston, 2006: 362.

Cheiron was gifted hunting and hounds as a reward for his integrity.<sup>141</sup> Bremmer proposes pederastic relations with Herakles in honour of Pan.<sup>142</sup> He supports his assertion by alluding to the use of the word ‘centaur’ to signal both pederasts and the vagina in ancient comedy; however, this pederastic attribute is most infrequently attested. Much later texts also cite a connection to Dionysus: the god ‘was loved by Cheiron, from whom he learned chants and dances, the bacchic rites and initiations’,<sup>143</sup> and Cheiron joined the army of Dionysus in his war against the Indians.<sup>144</sup> Cheiron is widely said to teach hunting and fighting to his young heroes, but Nonnus offers the only example extant of him taking an active role in warfare.

As well as being linked to the Olympian gods, Cheiron’s metaphysical dimension is appropriated in Christian receptions. In the pagan tradition he surrenders his immortality to free Prometheus from the fate of having his liver devoured daily, or, in another version, to bestow on Herakles his immortality:<sup>145</sup> ‘Prometheus thereupon proposed Herakles to Zeus, to become immortal in place of Cheiron, and so Cheiron died’.<sup>146</sup> This self-sacrifice became linked in the Christian tradition with that of Jesus, crucified to alleviate the suffering of mankind. The similarity of the sound of the names also facilitated this correlation, which is often explored in reception, most notably in John Updike’s novel, analysed in chapter five, page 160; it is further developed by using Cheiron as a symbol to explore the duality of body and soul. Updike’s Cheiron/Christ conflation is more complex than the carvings of centaurs in Christian churches which stand for ‘man’s higher instincts being destroyed by his animal appetites’.<sup>147</sup> While Cheiron’s hybridity is dominant in ancient sources’ preoccupations with

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<sup>141</sup> Xenophon, *On Hunting*, 1:1-2, trans. Marchant.

<sup>142</sup> Bremmer, 2012: 34.

<sup>143</sup> Ptolemy Hephaestion, cited in Photius *Bibliotheca* 190, trans. Freese.

<sup>144</sup> Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 14:49, trans. Rouse.

<sup>145</sup> Gantz (1993: 147) outlines the ‘textual problems concerning who is exchanged for Cheiron but concludes that it is likely Herakles to receive immortality, because Prometheus as a Titan should not need any such favor’ [sic].

<sup>146</sup> Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.119, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>147</sup> Lawrence, 1994: 65.

him, the specific tension body/soul tension is scarcely present. This focus seems to be an innovation of texts written in times and spaces dominated by Christianity.

## Technology

Cheiron's hybridity is, however, central to his association with *technai* of various kinds. Horses were absolutely crucial to the ancient economy, in farming, haulage, transport and warfare: humans' close working relationship with horses must underlie their imaginary centaurs,<sup>148</sup> as it underpinned the significant contribution made to advances in technology more widely by innovations in equestrian tack, quadruped-drawn vehicles and the use of horsepower in, for example, mining, millwork and irrigation.<sup>149</sup> Other equine presences than centaurs lurk in archaic culture. Gantz highlights artistic representations of figures not normally associated with being horse hybrids, particularly Zeus and Medusa, and concludes that 'the combination of human and horse seems in the early Archaic period a device utilised to represent several different kinds of monsters, while we cannot even be absolutely certain that the earliest *Kentauroi* were conceived in this form'.<sup>150</sup> The Greeks had a 'specific tendency ...to define themselves in terms of difference':<sup>151</sup> the dichotomy of human versus beast, between *anthrōpos* and *thērion*,<sup>152</sup> testing the boundaries between the two;<sup>153</sup> a chief distinction was that humans have intelligence and *technai*, a trained intellect rather than an instinctual ability to interact with the natural world.

While Cheiron is distinguished from the other centaurs by his superior intellect, rationality and command of *technai*, when he is considered in contrast, rather, to man, Pindar

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<sup>148</sup> Lawrence, 1994: 587.

<sup>149</sup> Burford, 1960: 1-18.

<sup>150</sup> Gantz, 1993: 144.

<sup>151</sup> duBois, 2010: 49.

<sup>152</sup> duBois, 2010: 27.

<sup>153</sup> duBois, 2010: 32.

sees him as ‘the bridge between the two opposites’,<sup>154</sup> mediating between the two. No matter whichever extremes are considered, ‘Pindar’s Cheiron seems to look both ways’;<sup>155</sup> as Robbins asserts, ‘it is common in Greek for a single agent to be possessed of opposing functions’: the curse-perpetuating Erinyes are simultaneously the benevolent Eumenides.<sup>156</sup> Cheiron’s differences from the other centaurs, in particular his human moral and emotional agency and his cultural competence, highlight that their more brutal existence is a ‘lost past, before the necessity for a separation between gods and men, before work, cooking, death, all the evils culture brings’.<sup>157</sup>

The cultural and technological competencies of Cheiron are connected with his liminal status: heroes need to inhabit the marginal world to build skills that other *men* cannot teach them.<sup>158</sup> The technological spheres with which he is associated in antiquity include astrology, natural science/zoology and medicine. He is ubiquitously associated with change in ontological and material status, especially in the tradition of his catasterization, which brings him into the cultural sphere of astrological lore. Commentators on Eratosthenes considered the exact nature of the constellation Sagittarius, and whether it could be considered a centaur, whereas they believed that constellations of Centaurus and Lupus signal an opposition to a physical, earth-bound form.<sup>159</sup> Ovid draws attention to the duality in form when he wishes to portray Cheiron as Centaurus.<sup>160</sup> Cheiron is thus present in discussion of the types of existence that can be manifested on earth and in the heavens. In the sphere of dream-interpretation, the impossibility of hybrid monsters even came under quasi-scientific scrutiny. Artemidorus advised in his

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<sup>154</sup> Robbins, 1978: 208.

<sup>155</sup> Robbins, 1978: 209.

<sup>156</sup> Robbins, 1993: 70.

<sup>157</sup> duBois, 2010: 30.

<sup>158</sup> Artistic representations of Chariclo portray her as entirely human, and it is assumed that the children of her and Cheiron are human also, with Hippe only becoming a horse by divine intervention: ‘[t]hus Cheiron emerges as a one-time product of an unusual mating, unable to reproduce his own form’ (Gantz, 1993: 146).

<sup>159</sup> Eratosthenes and Hyginus, *15: Pegasus*, trans. Hard.

<sup>160</sup> Ovid, *Fasti*, 5.414, trans. Shackleton Bailey.

*Oneirocritica* that ‘all prodigies that cannot possibly exist such as a centaur and a Scylla signify...that one’s expectations will be false’.<sup>161</sup>

This unusual negativity towards Cheiron’s hybridity in Roman imperial dream-interpretation was pre-empted, however, as early as the natural scientist Empedocles, who asserted that hybrid creatures were made of wandering limbs influenced by Strife, and therefore cannot survive,<sup>162</sup> and that centaurs were ‘a remnant from pre-history’.<sup>163</sup> Shannon-Henderson details the ancient authors and their rationalised objections to centaurs on the grounds of their ontological impossibility, as physically embodied beings as opposed to mental ideations, at least according to humans’ empirical observation of the natural world.

Phlegon of Tralles, for example, combines natural science, paradoxography and medicine in his *On Marvels*, where he asserts that there is a preserved centaur body on display in Rome, in the emperor’s storehouse, originally found in Arabia; he also describes the centaur’s remains in detail, in a manner that responds to ancient authors’ objections to and arguments against their existence.<sup>164</sup> Shannon-Henderson also discusses the established view, in Phlegon’s time, that ‘centaurs were so outlandish that they could function as a rhetorical commonplace of the impossible’, and that Aristotle also expressed interest in the physiological issues presented by centaurs, using them to distinguish between being and non-being in his philosophy (*On Ideas*, 82.6–7).<sup>165</sup> This rationalisation of the mechanics of hybrid forms circumvents the customary suspension of disbelief afforded to mythological beings; Phlegon tries to advance the argument by considering a centaur not as a hybrid but as a singular and real-world creature. He makes a case that centaurs originated topographically on an Arabian mountain on which a particular drug can be found.

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<sup>161</sup> Artemidorus, *Oneirocritica* 4:47, trans. Hammond.

<sup>162</sup> Empedocles, Fragment 17, trans. Collis.

<sup>163</sup> duBois, 2010: 69.

<sup>164</sup> Shannon-Henderson, 2019: 153.

<sup>165</sup> Caston, 1998: 249-298. See also the fascinating passage in *Posterior Analytics* 2.1, where the physiological impossibility of the centaur helps Aristotle test the very nature of true knowledge.

The suspension of disbelief in how a centaur can physically function, which Phlegon's scientific rationalisation resisted, is present in those modern receptions that are preoccupied with embodiment. These often ask what Cheiron's physical form feels like, both to himself and to others. Within ancient sources, embodiment centres on the relationship of his name to 'cheir' 'hand', which provides the first element in the compound noun 'cheirougos', 'surgeon', clearly pointing towards Cheiron's teaching of skills which utilise this body part – warfare, medicine, and music.<sup>166</sup> Most ancient authors were not concerned much with how the centaur moves, nor the precise nature of the juncture between his horse half and his human half, although this was a feature of Philostratus' late antique musings upon centaresses in artistic representation.<sup>167</sup>

Philostratus saw great beauty and delicacy in the female form of the centaress, whose strength was augmented by its equine content.<sup>168</sup> He also considered centaresses to be more beautiful than wholly human females. The biological and reproductive mechanisms within the imagined female centaur remain mysterious and do not seem to have been discussed by zoologists or natural scientists. Philostratus seems to be unique in considering both centaresses and the development of baby centaurs.<sup>169</sup> Although there are a very few centaresses represented in the ancient visual arts, there is meagre writing about them.<sup>170</sup> Yet this dearth has not prevented rich uses of the centaress in modern receptions' explorations of gender dynamics, sexuality and sexual maturation, as well as somatic self-acceptance, as

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<sup>166</sup> Robbins signals that this focus upon hands signals hunting and healing as the skills on which Cheiron's 'primary reputation' rested, with the transmission of knowledge being a 'secondary development'; but he also highlights the inherent duality of his skills being present also in Achilles, whose hands 'do both restorative and destructive work' (1993, pp.66-70). The restorative aspect is attested in the *Iliad* (11: 832) with Machaon receiving knowledge from Patroclus, to whom Achilles transmitted it; Achilles, in turn, learned about healing from Cheiron (1975: 198).

<sup>167</sup> Greaves (2020: pp. 13-15) outlines how centaresses are also depicted in iconography in India, dating between the third century BCE and the sixth century CE, with corresponding references in texts of an early date.

<sup>168</sup> Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, 2.3, trans. Fairbanks.

<sup>169</sup> Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, 2.3, trans. Fairbanks.

<sup>170</sup> duBois, 2010: 31.

will be explored later in the thesis (page 223). A rare ancient prefiguration is Eratosthenes' observation, when considering the Pegasus constellation, that it relates to Hippe, Cheiron's daughter, wishing for her illicit pregnancy to remain undiscovered.<sup>171</sup>

Finally, Cheiron's medical skill is a frequent feature of his ancient portraits. Pindar records that Asclepius was given to Cheiron by Apollo to raise, a launchpad for the poet's avowed wish to persuade Cheiron to help his patron Hieron of Syracuse recover from illness.<sup>172</sup> In ancient mythography, he is the founding inventor of the art of healing,<sup>173</sup> and first used herbs in the medical art of surgery.<sup>174</sup> He is able to cure some significant injuries, such as when Phoinix had been blinded by his father, and was brought to Cheiron by Peleus.<sup>175</sup> In reflection of his dialectical status, he knows that the thing which can harm can also heal, as underlined by Achilles using the ash spear, given to him through Peleus by Cheiron, to wound Telephus, while also knowing that this can heal too.<sup>176</sup> He also passes on those skills to others, as he is said to have taught Cocytus who cared for Adonis when he was wounded by a wild boar.<sup>177</sup>

Cheiron's knowledge of the *iatrikē technē* and reputation in this area extend into the Trojan War narrative: he gave Asclepius a herb which was then passed to Machaon, the healer with the Greeks, which cured Philoctetes' suppurating wound.<sup>178</sup> In fact, his knowledge of herbs extends into a being named after him, and being described in detail:

Choose first the medicinal root of Cheiron; it bears the name of the Centaur, son of Cronos, and Cheiron once on a snow-covered col of Pelion found and took notice of it. Its waving leaves, like Sweet Marjoram, encompasses it about, and its blossoms are golden to view; its root, at the surface and not deep-set, is nature in the dell of Pelethronius. This when dry or white still green, after

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<sup>171</sup> Hyginus, *Astronomy* 2.18, trans. Hard.

<sup>172</sup> Pindar, *Pythian* 3 trans. Race.

<sup>173</sup> Hyginus, *Fabulae* 138, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>174</sup> Hyginus, *Fabulae* 274, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>175</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.175, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma; Propertius, *Elegies* 2.1, trans. Goold.

<sup>176</sup> Robbins, 1993: 63.

<sup>177</sup> Ptolemy Chennos, *New History* book 1, summary from Photius *Bibliotheca* 190, trans. Freese.

<sup>178</sup> Dionysios of Samos, BNJ2 15.

crushing in a mortar, mingle in a cotyle of pleasant wine, and drink. It is of service in every case; therefore men call it Panacea (all-healing).<sup>179</sup>

His deployment of herbs is even connected with Achilles' speed and immortality. One tradition reports that he exhumed the body of Damysos, the fastest of all the giants, who was buried at Pallene. He removed the 'astragale', or the ankle, of the giant and used 'ingredients' to embed it into Achilles' foot. When Achilles was pursued by Apollo the astragale fell, resulting in Achilles failing and being killed.<sup>180</sup> Although a later source, this demonstrates a continued interest in Cheiron's medicinal skills, utilised particularly to help his foster children or to educate them in healing practices. Just as a genealogical connection is shown between those he raises and teaches, and a transmission of prophetic skills, so too the healing arts pass from him through to a lineage of healers.

## **Time**

These genealogical connections are primarily afforded by Cheiron's longevity through his divinity. While the heroes he tutors are not all present at the same time, his immortality allows him to tutor them all.<sup>181</sup> This longevity is articulated through a comparison of the life span of different beings, including men, cows, stags, ravens, phoenixes, and nymphs.<sup>182</sup> His actions have long-lasting effects, illustrated by Pausanias, who records that the awful smell of the river Anigros is a result of either Cheiron, or Pylenor, washing wounds in the river and the Hydra's poison causing the lingering smell.<sup>183</sup> Pindar's use of Cheiron as a figure in his odes is a method by which he can portray immortality, a 'long, potentially endless continuum ... a god-

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<sup>179</sup> Nicander, *Theriaca* 500-505, trans. Gow and Scholfield.

<sup>180</sup> Ptolemy Chennos in Photius *Bibliotheca* 190, trans. Freese.

<sup>181</sup> Xenophon, *On Hunting* 1.3-4, trans. Marchant.

<sup>182</sup> *Precepts of Cheiron* fragment 3, trans. Most.

<sup>183</sup> Pausanias *Description of Greece* 5.5.9-10, trans. Jones.

like existence beyond the stream of time'.<sup>184</sup> Cheiron, as an immortal, stands outside the normal passage of time, able to see the coexistence of past, present and future, and this device is particularly employed in *Pythian* 9. In giving prophecy to Apollo, Sigelman suggests that Pindar 'juxtaposes the randomness of Apollo and Cyrene's encounter' with its also being predestined, therefore 'colliding' two opposing perceptions of time, random stream of linear chronological time and predetermined fate; this also serves as a cyclical answer to Apollo's questions to Cheiron, underscoring the cyclical nature of time.<sup>185</sup> Apollo and Cheiron 'share a synoptic vision of past, present and future coexisting within one another as unity, such that, in its heart, the most distant future contains its own primordial origins'.<sup>186</sup> Cheiron's immortality and divinity here serve to underpin his ability to know beyond the limits of the present time, and this aspect of his nature, in effect an additional *technē* to those discussed in the previous section, can only be fully illustrated if his interlocutor is assured of the truth of his vision.

For some rationalising ancient writers who discard mythical creatures from their mental worlds, however, Cheiron is an anachronism. Centaurs as a race may be considered as belonging to a time before humans, 'a vestigial race, anachronistically present at a historical stage which had superseded them';<sup>187</sup> euhemeristic thinkers wondered whether they were even 'the personification of tornadoes',<sup>188</sup> providing an important aspect to Greek mythological narratives through connections to Achilles and Herakles. Plutarch asserts that Cheiron was, in fact, Skeiron, rationalised to provide the parentage of Endeis through a wholly human line.<sup>189</sup> Perhaps the most enduring features of his longevity in reception are his immortality being painful because of his wound, his witnessing of heroes he has taught die, and his sheer melancholy, arising from 'over-living'. But this seems to be attested in only one ancient source,

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<sup>184</sup> Sigelman, 2016: 3.

<sup>185</sup> Sigelman, 2016: 35-6.

<sup>186</sup> Sigelman, 2016: 40.

<sup>187</sup> duBois, 2010: 69.

<sup>188</sup> Bremmer, 2012: 26.

<sup>189</sup> Plutarch, *Life of Theseus* 10, trans. Perrin; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 2.29.9, trans. Jones.

the mythographer Apollodorus, whose Cheiron asserts that he wishes for death because he tires of the repetitiveness of life.<sup>190</sup> While this may not be the most widely known ancient source for contemporary writers, its theme and melancholic tone widely persist in texts that imagine the centaur to be both sorrowful and solitary, perhaps originating from Apollodorus' note that after Herakles' fight against the centaurs, they fled in all directions.<sup>191</sup> Cheiron may have died in ancient narratives, but he has secured longevity if not another kind of immortality in his reputation and its rich reception.

### **Aesthetics**

The final aspect of Cheiron that persists from antiquity through to contemporary sources is the significance of his hybridity in artistic metaphors or principles. Chaeremon's lost poem, *Kentauros*, combined all poetic rhythms, creating 'a medley of all the metres',<sup>192</sup> and breaking 'wholly new ground',<sup>193</sup> albeit new ground of which Aristotle disapproved; as Hall observes, 'it married form to content by using a different mix of metres to portray the horse-human hybrid creature'.<sup>194</sup> This somatic hybridity, and Cheiron's allied admixture of skills, have often inspired blending of different forms or genres of style within single works.

Another aspect of the aesthetic dimension in the centaurs' modern reception is ancient representations of them in visual art. Centaurs in iconography seem to have been able to suggest both Persians and Amazons. This allegory sprang up around the time of the Persian Wars but is textually crystallised in Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*, in which the equestrian qualities of Persians – as well as their barbarism – make them as skilled as centaurs.<sup>195</sup> In this text,

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<sup>190</sup> Lucian of Samosata, *A Dialogue between Menippus and Cheiron* 8, trans. MacLeod.

<sup>191</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.4, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>192</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* 1447b, trans. Halliwell.

<sup>193</sup> Collard, 1970: 27.

<sup>194</sup> Hall, 2020: 301. Collard 1970: 27, who on very little evidence believes that the poem was a satyr play, suggests that the centaur of this title invokes an individual centaur, perhaps Pholus, as this would allow the incorporation of Herakles insisting upon opening the wine jar.

<sup>195</sup> duBois, 2010: 61.

Johnson suggests, Xenophon wished to remind his readers of this particular artistic convention.<sup>196</sup> After all, this difference is highlighted in Greek vase painting, where Cheiron has human front legs with the horse part appended onto a human male form; other centaurs are depicted as being all horse on their bottom halves.

Philostratus the Elder attests to the skill required to render a hybrid being like Cheiron, confirming that it needs an excellent painter.<sup>197</sup> Ancient authors, despite their lack of interest in the biological or physiological internal workings of the centaur, are particularly concerned with visual artists' representations of the seam between man and horse. Lucian describes a fifth-century BCE painting of centaurs by Zeuxis, and particularly praises the rendering of the join on the mother centaur,<sup>198</sup> possibly to highlight 'the absolute novelty of Zeuxis in thinking up something new and strange'.<sup>199</sup> Shapiro considers the depiction of Cheiron in vase painting to offer something physiognomically different facially than paintings of Greeks, aligning more with depictions of Thracians, and in doing so, is both a 'highly individualised figure' and potentially represents the influence of 'early experiments in individualistic, physiognomic portraiture'.<sup>200</sup>

This rich detail in ancient writers' descriptions of visual representations of centaurs, including Cheiron, is important in those receptions which describe his appearance in detail, as we shall see. In one fascinating ancient source, moreover, a mythographer tells us of Cheiron's own artistic skill, in making a likeness of Actaeon, after his death, in order to assuage the grief of his hounds.<sup>201</sup> This passage may have suggested, in modern reception, the sculpture of the centauress that the fictional representation of Fiore de Henriquez makes, modelled on artwork

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<sup>196</sup> Johnson, 2005: 178-9.

<sup>197</sup> Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, 2.2, trans. Fairbanks.

<sup>198</sup> Lucian, *Zeux.* 6, trans. Kilburn.

<sup>199</sup> Gantz, 1993: 146.

<sup>200</sup> Shapiro, 2018: 88-93.

<sup>201</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.30, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

by the sculptress herself, to express her own dual gender; in both examples of making a likeness, there is something that feels true to those who observe it.

In the chapters that follow, Cheiron's persistent skills and qualities in the reception texts will be documented and analysed. Just as avant-garde theatre directors turn time and again to Greek tragedies to make statements about their ground-breaking aesthetic agendas,<sup>202</sup> and novelists and film directors turn to the *Odyssey* for the same reason,<sup>203</sup> so it is testament to Cheiron's range of qualities and useful skills that so many are adapted by writers and artists seeking to introduce aesthetic advances, or depict something new and innovative, or explore an aspect of art or of themselves self-reflexively.

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<sup>202</sup> Fischer-Lichte, 2004: 329-360.

<sup>203</sup> Hall, 2008.

A Soul Divided between Action and Desire:  
Maurice de Guérin's *Le Centaure* (and *La Bacchante*)

Maurice de Guérin's *Le Centaure* was published posthumously in 1840 by George Sand in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, in the original French.<sup>204</sup> Other editions of his collected works followed, edited by those who knew him. His use of a centaur within his body of work spoke to his love of nature, and his pagan sensibilities, particularly following disillusionment with the Catholic church. This text was, however, a particularly pivotal one for initiating and inspiring an 'aesthetic cult of the centaur' which spanned the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>205</sup> This included European but most specifically British and Irish writers and artists. This trend did, however, follow an earlier German motif in the works of Goethe and Schiller, later picked up by Rainer Maria Rilke, who provided the 1911 German translation of Guérin's text.<sup>206</sup> There is much evidence to suggest that the dialogues existing between these artists all contributed to this aesthetic cult, and that the figure of the centaur could symbolise a range of aspects of humankind, and specifically masculinity.

While Cheiron is not always named within works of reception, which span poetry, prose, art, and sculpture, this chapter will establish that it is his complex qualities of division and duality that the writers and artists channel when they employ the figure of the centaur in their work. De Guérin is the first to portray Cheiron in this way, and an analysis of his text is critical. *Le Centaure* encapsulates a dialogue between Macareus, the only surviving centaur in the world, and Melampus, a seeker of knowledge from the elderly centaur. Macareus reflects upon his childhood, his life, and in particular, his connection to nature; he embodies the figure of the solitary, melancholy centaur utilized in many modern receptions. However, as de

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<sup>204</sup> Sand, 1840.

<sup>205</sup> Woodring, 2007.

<sup>206</sup> For German romantic centaurs see Borchardt, 1972, pp. 247-255. For de Guérin and Rilke see Vest, 1983, pp. 400-410.

Guérin's work is so tied to his life and his preoccupations, understanding something about his life is crucial. After briefly considering Guérin's life from the perspective of his family and especially his relationships with the Roman Catholic church, and with his sister, this chapter will discuss his preoccupation with the theme of time and sources of his classicism, combining these elements of his life and belief with the detailed analysis of *Le Centaure*.

## **Biography**

Guérin was born on 5 August 1810 and died on 19 July 1839, aged just twenty-eight years old. He was a son of an ancient and noble but relatively poor family. His mother died when he was six years old. His relationship with his father, a devout Roman Catholic, was coloured by paternal ambition; Joseph de Guérin, Maurice's father, is thought to have been extremely loving but controlling.<sup>207</sup> This appears most evident, through the correspondence of the family and memoirs about Maurice, in his interference with Maurice's education. He sent his eleven-year-old second son to a seminary in Toulouse, in order to train to enter the priesthood. Three years later, however, Maurice transferred to a seminary in Paris, the suggestion being that it was due to the ambition of Joseph, who wanted Maurice to be more than a simple country priest and have a national career in the church.<sup>208</sup>

Financial pressures meant that Maurice was pushed determinedly towards the priesthood by his father. As the family was not rich, it was crucial that Maurice, as the second son, be able to provide for himself and contribute towards the family. However, the continued pressure applied by his father, combined with distance from his family members and home for some years, along with a growing alienation from the idea of taking a religious vocation, led to a strained correspondence. Joseph's desire to control, and Maurice's reluctance to commit

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<sup>207</sup> Huet-Brichard, 2018: 20.

<sup>208</sup> Huet-Brichard, 2018:37.

himself to an ecclesiastical life, dominated the correspondence; the guilt of wanting something for himself that would dash the hopes of his family no doubt contributed to de Guérin's inner conflict and melancholic attitude.

He had several false starts at a career. He attempted to study the law but it failed to ignite his interest, and he sought to make a living from his writing. However, publications frequently did not pay their minor contributors, and his cousin's school – being a teacher at which had been his emergency plan – did not recruit sufficient students to need him. He vacillated between religious institutions, coming under the mentorship of Lamennais, a priest with a complicated relationship to the Catholic church, and tutoring, an occupation in which he was uninterested but by which he could eventually just about support himself. He believed that his marriage to Caroline de Guérin, a young woman whose family lived in India, would bring him funds to enjoy the leisure he had sought for years, presumably to spend his time writing, but his ill health and early death meant that this aim was never realised.

The two key things that characterise de Guérin's life and which had profound effects upon his writing are his complex thoughts around nature and religion, and his close relationship with his elder sister, Eugénie, who fully believed both in his commitment to the Catholic God and the brilliance of his writing. They had an interdependent relationship, although the dependence weighed more heavily on Eugénie's need for contact with her brother; she also wrote, and was a frustrated author, but was fully secure in her religious faith, unlike Maurice. He seems to register uncertainty in his relationship with the gods of any era, and their ability to be accessed through nature. Certainly in his prose poems, he poses differing views on the ancient religions and the proximity of the gods. His classical knowledge, fostered through learning ancient languages as part of his seminary training, provide him with ancient references, indulging in nostalgia for a mythic, heroic, and less complicated time to explore at a distance what form faith and vocation might take. In *Le Centaure* especially, he uniquely

employs Cheiron, seen and quoted from another centaur's perspective, to pose the idea that man is not superior to beast but that in combination is in the most superior state.

### *Le Centaure and La Bacchante*

In the translation of *Le Centaure* by Thomas Sturge Moore, which also contains woodcut engravings of key scenes, the work is also accompanied by a second prose poem, *La Bacchante*. As de Guérin was not responsible for any publishing decisions for his works, the combination of *Le Centaure* and *La Bacchante* could be attributed to Sturge Moore alone; however, the introduction to a collection of his poetic works, written by Remy de Gourmant, a French symbolist poet and published in French in 1909, attests that de Guérin would also have grouped them thus:

*S'il eût vécu, Maurice de Guérin n'aurait pas tardé à se dégager entièrement des impressions premières; son esprit se libérait: au Centaure il voulait ajouter La Bacchante (don't un admirable fragment s'est retrouvé), l'Hermaphrodite, et, plus long poème, Bacchus dans l'Inde.<sup>209</sup>*

(If he had lived, Maurice de Guérin would not have taken long to free himself entirely from first impressions; his mind was freed: to the Centaur he wanted to add *The Bacchante* (of which an admirable fragment was found), 'The Hermaphrodite', and a longer poem, 'Bacchus in India'.)

This suggests that de Guérin was acutely aware of the oppositions in his work, and particularly in placing together the Apollonian influence upon the Centaur – Cheiron is heavily referenced within the poem – and the Dionysian, through the focus upon Bacchus.<sup>210</sup> This opposition was maintained by Sturge Moore in combining these works for this edition, and reflects the combination of the gods evidenced at Delphi, and their joint responsibility for prophecy from

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<sup>209</sup> De Gourmant, 1909: 7.

<sup>210</sup> However, 'The Hermaphrodite' and 'Bacchus in India' remain elusive to this scholar's best efforts to track them down.

the oracle. As Melampus is mentioned in both poems, along with other prophetic imagery, this is not an accidental combination. De Guérin's own focus upon the duality of humans, and particularly of the soul, suggests that this intentional pairing - or grouping, if the quotation regarding other inclusions is considered – deliberately evokes a split, or alterity, within human behaviour which can be experienced under the influence of a god. It also suggests that humans are eternally seeking knowledge from, and a connection to, the divine, and are inherently split. This search for a connection is evident through analysing the poems through the lens of the analytical categories employed in the previous and subsequent chapters, but perhaps the most important of them in this case is time.

## **Time**

Maurice de Guérin's preoccupation with time is evident within *Le Centaure* and its portrayal in this poem will be examined within the forthcoming analysis. However, his journal entries and his letters demonstrate this fixation also, and this is equally evident in the correspondence and journal of Eugénie. For de Guérin embodies the same spirit as the Romantics, as Byron, whom he admired. He contemplates the fleetingness of time for mortal men, whose existence is so temporary and fragile, and he perhaps looks towards the mythic for an immortality that men can never experience. Perhaps divining his own early death, he seems to contemplate life outside of the finite; *Le Centaure* perhaps represents the other extreme of this scale, in which longevity in so large a dose is burdensome. Chinard asserts that de Guérin was 'haunted by the thought of death and found a *memento mori* in the most insignificant circumstances', and that he found it impossible to break from the cycle of self-hatred and weariness.<sup>211</sup> Gély posits that time was an obstacle to de Guérin that must be overcome to fulfil his creative potential. Certainly when he is teaching and working very long days, necessitating that he abandon his

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<sup>211</sup> Chinard, 1929:9.

literary aspirations temporarily,<sup>212</sup> it would explain the impatience with time and duration that are evident in his musings. de Guérin seems to see the imagination as requiring freedom from constraints, of which time seems to be the most pressing.

*Seul en effet l'espace du mythe permet d'abolir les contraintes du temps, et offer à l'imagination du poète l'accès à ces <<cotes impénétrables>> dont il n'a cessé de vouloir, comme le Centaure, traverser l'opacité.<sup>213</sup>*

(Indeed, only the space of myth allows the constraints of time to be abolished, and offers the poet's imagination access to these 'impenetrable coasts', the opacity of which he, like the Centaur, never ceased to want to cross.)

As much as de Guérin had a classical education and appropriate literary knowledge to utilise that literary heritage, it is perhaps still not sufficiently ancient for him; after all, the classical age is grounded within a specific historical and cultural period. Gély argues that de Guérin looked further back for inspiration:

*Mais ce n'est pas dans les <<âges classiques>> que Maurice de Guérin, poète, a arrêté sa remantée du temps. C'est, beaucoup plus en avant, dans le temps mythique et primordial, le temps des forms premières et dans premiers langages. Un temps où les paysages portent encore l'empreinte du sacré, l'empreinte des pas des dieux qui viennent de les fouler.<sup>214</sup>*

(But it was not in the 'classical ages' that Maurice de Guérin, poet, stopped his journey through time. It is much more as a lover, in mythical and primordial time, the time of first forms and first languages. A time when landscapes still bear the imprint of the sacred, the imprint of the footsteps of the gods who have just trodden them.)

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<sup>212</sup> Gely, 1998:185.

<sup>213</sup> Gely, 1998: 187.

<sup>214</sup> Gely, 1998:191.

In situating himself between the finite and the infinite, de Guérin embodies what his mentor, Lamennais, referred to as a suffering man, with a foot between two worlds.<sup>215</sup> However, he seems unable to follow his mentor's next piece of advice, which was to 'be like the clock; whatever is to happen, strike always your hour'.<sup>216</sup> The clock imagery, and the focus upon time, is particularly relevant to the period in which de Guérin was writing, and to France. 'Clock time' is, contrary to Lamennais's suggestion, socially constructed, and therefore subject to continuous change.<sup>217</sup> It is both unique and abstract, in contrast to 'concrete' time, which is registered depending on locality and social practice.<sup>218</sup> While it feels contradictory that measured and regulated universally applied time is 'abstract', this does highlight the artificiality of imposing systematic measures upon so subjective an experience. Yet this contrast, and the friction it creates, is discerned within de Guérin's work, which gives support to the notion that 'there are still forms of time and space which remain outside the capitalist spatio-temporal configuration which in itself may help to broaden the landscape of time'.<sup>219</sup>

Nevertheless, unique to France, and the environment in which de Guérin would have experienced discussion of time, was the adoption of the metrical system of spatial measurement and a political movement which aimed to reform the calendar into a more metrical temporal division.<sup>220</sup> While its champions were working out the integration of ten-day cycles into twelve months, the retention of which was necessary to fit the lunar cycle, war with Great Britain in 1793 and the Terror of Robespierre in 1795 delayed its implementation. It was made compulsory in 1798, yet the social reluctance to adopt it doomed the project to failure, and in 1806 Napoleon ordered the return to the Gregorian calendar.<sup>221</sup> While this happened before de

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<sup>215</sup> Parr, 1870: 62.

<sup>216</sup> Parr, 1870: 63.

<sup>217</sup> Karsten, 2012: 23.

<sup>218</sup> Karsten, 2012: 27.

<sup>219</sup> Karsten, 2012: 31.

<sup>220</sup> Karsten, 2012: 160.

<sup>221</sup> Karsten, 2012: 161,

Guérin's birth in 1810, it would have been a topic of discussion for many years after. A fundamental change in such an important structure as the calendar year, and particularly one which would have removed the religious importance of Sunday, would have had ramifications, particularly within the institutions in which de Guérin studied.

Concerns about the mechanisation of time, and its rigidity around 'working time' were also beginning to gather pace towards the end of de Guérin's life. This imposition of controlled time, and the power wielded by those who controlled and paid for it, increased its abstract quality and distanced it further from the more usual passing of time hitherto experienced:

The mechanical clock seeped deeply into the fabric of social life where abstract time became dissociated from planetary rhythms and seasons from change and aging, from experience and memory. It became an abstract concept of time, self-sufficient, empty of meaning, and remarkably neutral.<sup>222</sup>

This idea of being observed and governed by the clock is also expressed in Eugénie's writing. She focuses upon the clock, the house clock that punctuates the hour as she writes to Maurice. She meditates upon the fact that the clock has observed the family members live and die 'without ever stirring itself, like a sort of eternity!'<sup>223</sup> Nevertheless, she finds a comfort in this longevity extraneous to herself, although she considers that 'the pleasantest hours [were] when I was not listening to it'.<sup>224</sup> Perhaps in opposition to Maurice, she does not so much feel the fleetingness of time as the expanse of it. In considering that 'time amuses us at four years old',<sup>225</sup> Eugénie implies that it does not 'amuse' as an adult. She, perhaps, shares some of the views of Macareus in her brother's poem, that time itself stretches endlessly when one is separated from the divine.

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<sup>222</sup> Karsten, 2012: 190.

<sup>223</sup> Parr, 1870: 147.

<sup>224</sup> Parr, 1870: 147.

<sup>225</sup> Parr, 1870: 147.

The poems offer a united view of mythic time, albeit from speakers who are at opposite ends of their mortal existence. In *Le Centaure*, Macareus is old, ‘dwindling’, his feet are worn away and he is the oldest centaur.<sup>226</sup> Even his memories are dwindling and imperfect, as he admits to Melampus in sharing recollections of his early childhood. His similarity to Cheiron is reinforced when he mentions that he has followed the sage centaur in his old age, before his apotheosis into a constellation. Macareus’ view that the gods view mortals and centaurs as lesser than their immortal race feeds into contemporary notions of the inferiority of hybrid creatures, even while this pejorative perspective is not evident from Guérin himself. *Le Centaure* considers the experience of time for a long-living creature, and suggests that more time, almost endless spans of time, does not bring happiness. While we do not hear Cheiron directly, his views are reported by Macareus and evoke the idea of seeing generations pass, loving others only to watch them die. This is also a common trope in twenty-first century reception; de Guérin offers a foreshadowing here of what will become psychologically interesting to authors of the future. Macareus rules out the possibility of such longevity bringing knowledge of the divine and their plans, as he reports that Cheiron had told him the gods never disclose their knowledge of what will happen. Whatever wisdom is gained by life, even by more life than is allotted to humans, it is not now divine knowledge. The solemnity of Macareus intimates that such long life, without such knowledge, is burdensome.

The contrast between divine, expansive time and a mortal’s life span is also explored in *La Bacchante*. The unnamed narrator is a youth, at the opposite end of life to Macareus, and only just old enough to be admitted into the rites. In contrast, her mentor, Aëlle, is aging; while she is not described as being of old age, her worship of and intoxication by Bacchus have rendered physical changes that have aged her. Aëlle’s stories to her protégée lead back into mythic time and, along with the stillness of form in both poems – there is little forward action

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<sup>226</sup> *Le Centaure*: 7.

and much reflection – the sense of eternal, immortal nature, with the brief temporality of man, is repeatedly underscored. At the end of the poem, Aëlle journeys towards the shades, and to the west – to the end of the day but also towards death. The brevity of mortal life is reiterated here.

The young Bacchant may just be learning to appreciate the span of divine time and the length of immortality, but her days are guided by the Hours, sectioning off her day into smaller, measured chunks. In this way, the narrator of the poem is brought into the modern world, and the need to both measure and account for time; while the Hours are also a mythic trope, goddesses of the seasons, for the young Bacchant, time is less infinite and stretched. It should also be remembered that de Guérin, who had received a seminary education from the age of eleven, would also be accustomed to dividing his day into hours, particularly hours of worship, and having such regulation upon his communication with God. The complexities of modern time, with its abstract regulation, measurement, and commercialisation, are in stark contrast to the way time is portrayed in classical myths and in nature. Modern time measures ‘progress’, an ever-increasing drive towards greater productivity and accountability. What is evident from de Guérin’s journal is the friction between his peace when spending unproductive, restorative time in nature, and his need to fill his hours with practical work that will support him. *Le Centaure* is innovative partly because it attempts to show a more pessimistic view of unmeasured time, while also portraying a love of the eternal qualities of nature. The tension of the period in which de Guérin lived is recorded in his work.

## **Technology**

Tension between opposing forces characterises de Guérin’s work as it characterised his life. It is in his *Cahiers Vert*, his journal, that de Guérin outlined and berated the inconstancy of his personality and moods. This schism between religious belief and church approbation

highlighted the tension and dualities of faith to de Guérin. He spent his life caught between a desire to satisfy his family and realise his love of the Catholic church, and his hesitancy to fully commit to a religious order which, perhaps, did not account for those things in life he held most dear. *Le Centaure* expresses this tension in Macareus' assertion that the will of the gods cannot be known or disclosed, an innovation that in classical epic and theatre usually hold that the gods' will can be known. Even when classical reception omits prophets, humans are still often shown praying and sacrificing to the gods to attempt to secure their favour. *Le Centaure* dispels the myth that divine will can be known and that the gods will share their knowledge. It is distinctive in showing that pagan belief in the gods relied as much upon blind faith as Roman Catholicism.

De Guérin's later journal encapsulates his inner struggles and signals him as a soul divided between need and desire. His struggles seem to centre around three main themes, separate to the issue of religious belief. He was torn between action and imagination, the need to earn money and the desire to write, and between solitude and society. That his own feelings were often far from clear on these issues compounded the misery he expresses. While he enjoyed the indulgences of his imagination, he seemed to feel as though it had 'become exhausted',<sup>227</sup> and perhaps would not enable him to achieve anything, a concern he had not so much for himself, 'but for those who have a right to expect something from me'.<sup>228</sup> This leads him briefly to consider committing to 'embrace an active life and bid farewell to my beloved indifference';<sup>229</sup> yet his next entry extols the virtues of liberty, a free life and the freedom to spend his time surrounded by 'all the light, the clouds, the ravishing sounds, the universal rapture that encompass a man who spends whole days leaning against a tree and occupied solely

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<sup>227</sup> Journal: 167.

<sup>228</sup> Journal: 100.

<sup>229</sup> Journal: 151.

with watching Nature live'.<sup>230</sup> His love of nature feeds his imagination and soothes his soul, in no great part due to the solitude it affords him.

While he is reported to have gradually become more accustomed to Parisian society as he found like-minded companions,<sup>231</sup> his journal records the earlier horror he felt at the prospect of entering into society. He asserts that society was 'responsible for a large portion of ills',<sup>232</sup> and felt that leaving Nature for society 'has always been for me a terrible exchange, a return toward evil and misfortune'.<sup>233</sup> Society, he felt, destroyed the instincts within men's souls,<sup>234</sup> and being 'ex-communicated from Nature',<sup>235</sup> (a particularly interesting phrase given the religious vocabulary), created infirmity. Undoubtedly these inner struggles he experienced, all of which were interconnected, created within him an irresolvable schism; 'I elude my own self',<sup>236</sup> he sighs, on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1833. In November he rejoiced that he had found that he could toil and yet still keep his soul and imagination fresh, but by December he was again in despair that his imagination was failing him. Saint-Beuve claims that de Guérin 'had within him a genuine contradiction' – he felt able to commune passionately with nature and use his imagination to bring to life ancient demi-gods on the one hand, and yet on the other he felt humbled, withdrawn, and a 'Christian' need to repent and confess.<sup>237</sup>

De Guérin's journal reveals a kind of mysticism, later repeated in the work of Algernon Blackwood, and a belief in the imagination and 'the most beautiful faculties of the soul', which contemplate that which is invisible – a philosophy 'far removed from known psychologies'. Yet, he sensed that following such belief would free him from the fetters of normal society and

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<sup>230</sup> Journal: 152-3.

<sup>231</sup> Montégut, 1861: 26.

<sup>232</sup> Journal: 149.

<sup>233</sup> Journal: 155.

<sup>234</sup> Journal: 159.

<sup>235</sup> Journal: 161.

<sup>236</sup> Journal: 163.

<sup>237</sup> Saint-Beuve, 1891: 44-5.

permit him an individual existence.<sup>238</sup> He is able to experience a double rapture shortly before this theory is outlined, one arising from relaxation and the other from enjoyment of Nature,<sup>239</sup> and the two being enjoyed out of doors perhaps leads to the suggestion that '*la nature elle-même es tunc centauresse*' ('nature itself is a centaress').<sup>240</sup> He recognises within himself a duality occasioned from the need to live between two worlds, one modern and social, in which time is measured and important, and the other ancient, connected to the natural world, and cyclical in time. His journal repeatedly references a feeling of being either double, or neither; he felt 'suspended between two spheres, rejected by both',<sup>241</sup> but had previously found some consolation in this – 'happily there were two sides to my soul; only halfway did I plunge into wrong',<sup>242</sup> half perhaps drawn to '*un paganisme libérateur*' ('a liberal paganism') and the other half to Catholicism.<sup>243</sup>

Both prose poems focus upon the effects of nature or the gods upon the physical forms of the characters, in which they are shown to be sensitive. Macareus in *Le Centaure* begins his address to Melampus with the origins of his birth, within a 'secluded abode', a cavern, the likes of which the offspring of centaur mares are born and spend their early years, 'counting these days to be engrossed by the gods'.<sup>244</sup> He reports having been intrigued about the wider world from the scents carried back from his mother at the end of the day, after her walk, and the potentiality that these perfumes held to affect her mood: 'But what can that be, which is experienced there, of nature so contrarious that she returns every day diversely moved?'<sup>245</sup> Even at this young age, Macareus recollects, he was cognisant of the multiple effects of nature

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<sup>238</sup> Journal: 168.

<sup>239</sup> Journal: 157.

<sup>240</sup> Vieh, 1958:222.

<sup>241</sup> Journal: 104.

<sup>242</sup> Journal: 59.

<sup>243</sup> Didier, 1998: 94.

<sup>244</sup> *Le Centaure*: 5.

<sup>245</sup> *Le Centaure*: 6.

upon the spirit through the body, and the joy to be had in the physical sensations of movement, limited as his galloping within the cavern could be.

Later, he delights in physical exertion but acknowledges the difference of his physical form: ‘Thus while my flanks were still possessed by the intoxication of the race, higher up I indulged in pride and, turning my head, remained so for some time, in contemplation of my smoking crupper’.<sup>246</sup> While he is aware of his joy in movement, it is his man half that feels pride in it. He recounts to Melampus that he still receives the same joy in his ability to race about the hillsides and lift up the heavy items of the natural world, despite his old age and worn feet.<sup>247</sup> It is of particular interest that Macareus uses ‘feet’, rather than ‘hooves’, especially as he later reports a sense of superiority upon seeing a human male.

Even within his movement and spirit, Macareus recounts a duality of spirit to accompany that of his physical form – ‘[t]hose fits of turbulence would alternate with long periods of cessation from all unquiet movement’.<sup>248</sup> He suggests a connection to the gods, their ‘boon’ working through him as grew and aged, fostered by the darkness of the cavern. His first venture into daylight disquieted him, and he implies that this might partly be ascribed to contact with other centaurs. To Macareus is here attributed the solitary quality often gifted to Cheiron in reception. It is, Macareus asserts, ‘a long while [since he] ceased from all active share in their life’ and he is now ‘the oldest and saddest of them all’.<sup>249</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that this has not always been the case, and he has previously frequented areas occupied by centaurs. It is in such a location that, Macareus recalls seeing a man for the first time during his youth, and the hatred he felt at seeing ‘half of me’,<sup>250</sup> in the man’s inferior physicality. Macareus had ascribed this incompleteness to man’s being ‘degraded by the gods’.<sup>251</sup> This is certainly a more

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<sup>246</sup> *Le Centaure*: 11.

<sup>247</sup> *Le Centaure*: 7.

<sup>248</sup> *Le Centaure*: 7.

<sup>249</sup> *Le Centaure*: 8.

<sup>250</sup> *Le Centaure*: 9.

<sup>251</sup> *Le Centaure*: 9.

unusual modern reception of the centaur, in which the human half is usually privileged as being closer to divinity and understanding (organised) religion. Macareus' duality and complexity are portrayed through the poem, in his previous contact with other centaurs and sensual reaction to nature on one hand, signalling a more bestial side, and his following of Cheiron, and his conversation with Melampus, which is linked to his human qualities, on the other. De Guérin presents us with a centaur who does not manifest a clear division of bestial inferiority melded with human superiority, but is a complicated hybrid who has good and bad in both his halves.

The narrative highlights the centaur's connection to nature, and particularly to the rivers. Their powers seem to have been particularly beneficial to Macareus, and the motion of both the water, and of himself at a gallop, instilled within him a delight in the physical world, which he links with the deities; during a 'racing' he would suddenly stop 'as though a god stood upright before me'.<sup>252</sup> This heightened awareness of his physicality, and the freedom to enjoy nature which it brought, are highlighted further through the next few pages. Macareus contemplates the time spent in physical exertion during the days and in thoughtful, restorative repose in the evenings, when he apprehends the god Pan descending, and the general 'potency of the gods', with their disturbance of nature.

Disturbance is also a physical manifestation of the effects of Dionysus upon his most faithful celebrants within *La Bacchante*. Aëlle is both a nomadic celebrant, and one upon whom the touch of the god is rendered visible. Her maenad qualities are also reminiscent of Pentheus' mother in leading the worship of the god in Euripides' *Bacchae*, and are highlighted in the text. She is well-travelled, being 'on her way down from Scythia ... and was now going abroad all over Greece, everywhere setting the mysteries in motion',<sup>253</sup> which also refers back to Euripides when Dionysus asserts that the Bacchantes have followed him from Asia.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> *Le Centaure*: 10.

<sup>253</sup> *La Bacchante*: 22.

<sup>254</sup> Eur., *Bacchae*: 55-60, trans. Kovacs.

However, she is also portrayed as being past youth, and with somewhat ravaged looks. ‘Moreover the usage of the mysteries had blurred the order of her beauty’, and her hair – hair normally being made more luscious by the god in the morning sunrise – suffers ‘a blighting’, either from too frequent celebration in ‘hyperborean gales’ or because ‘within her head she underwent the travail of some secret destiny’.<sup>255</sup> The unnamed Bacchant also loosens her tresses to take on the morning sunshine, and reports similar physical qualities to Aëlle at the beginning of the poem: a staggering of her feet, and an ‘agitation’ in her ‘bosom’.<sup>256</sup> This is, however, suggested to be the removal of a barrier that would enable the god to enter: ‘Doubtless it was followed by such bewilderment that thou didst precipitate thyself into my bosom, O Bacchus!’<sup>257</sup> The young Bacchant could be considered to represent the other half of her mentor, before the full effects of such worship over time have taken effect.

Perhaps the clearest link between the two poems, however, is the nurturing and parentage offered by the mentors. Like Cheiron, Macareus is a centaur, and can therefore claim both human and divine parentage. Aëlle, it is disclosed, is a child of the elements, ‘daughter of Typho, the most turbulent of all the winds’; she has been raised in a cavern, ‘apart from all men’.<sup>258</sup> Like Chieron and Macareus, this separateness in upbringing and nurture within a cavern highlight the liminality of their beings. Caves are liminal spaces, and offer an opportunity to be apart from the world. The suggestion that these spaces are particularly used for maturation of the young – Cheiron raises the heroes he tutors in his cave on Mount Pelion, Macareus spends his early childhood in a cavern, and Aëlle also appears to have been raised in such a space – indicates a similarity between these characters, and a closeness to what is more divine than mortals would routinely experience. However, how Aëlle would classify herself is uncertain, as she mentions ‘mortals acceptable to the gods, or those who by reason of

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<sup>255</sup> *La Bacchante*: 22.

<sup>256</sup> *La Bacchante*: 21.

<sup>257</sup> *La Bacchante*: 21.

<sup>258</sup> *La Bacchante*: 21.

excessive woes have touched their hearts’, who have been raised to constellations;<sup>259</sup> here, ‘the great Chiron’ is named, perhaps linking his swapping of his immortality and Zeus’s sympathy for him with the sympathy given to some mortals. What connects Cheiron and Aëlleo is their closeness to nature, and their ability to engage with the divinity of the natural world.

### **Metaphysics**

De Guérin had a complicated relationship with the Catholic faith. It caused him to feel extreme guilt at his inability to commit to dedicating his life to it. This might have been, in some manner, influenced by the expectation that he would enter the priesthood as a means of employment, regardless of his own feelings on the matter, and in later years, by the treatments his mentor, Lamennais, received at the hands of the Church. His journal records an ongoing battle, or negotiation, between his desire to do his duty to God, and his enjoyment of a more simple existence within Nature, outside of manmade, ecclesiastical institutions. His reading also conveys this difficulty within his soul. His journal mentions his reading Dante’s *Inferno*, particularly referencing the first circle of hell, limbo, in which souls rush after a standard being borne along.<sup>260</sup> This particular region of the *Inferno* belongs to those who are ‘struck with grief from the lack of god’s presence’,<sup>261</sup> and is illustrative of de Guérin’s divided feelings when influenced more by nature than religiosity.

The difficulty in getting close to god, or the gods, is explored in both poems; they express an obsession with exploring how to live, and how to access knowledge of the gods in order to do so with the most preparation. However, in doing so, they also address the spectre of death. There is, certainly, some evidence to support the view that *Le Centaure* conveys the melancholy view of old age and decay due to de Guérin’s own extreme ill-health, despite his being a young man. He was aware of his depressive nature – ‘[t]oday, I cast only shadows

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<sup>259</sup> *La Bacchante*: 25.

<sup>260</sup> *Journal*: 169.

<sup>261</sup> *Inferno*, Limbo.

around me, every form is opaque and death-smitten’, and a distancing from his sister, initiated by him, caused him to consider ‘a monstrous trait in his nature... [a] moral deformity’, a recollection of cruelty to animals during his childhood. While critics have considered this to be a kind of false confession, ‘his morbid mind ...inventing imaginary crimes’,<sup>262</sup> they have suggested that it conveys the darkness of his mood before a gradual recovery of spirit and health. His friend, Barbey d’Aurevilly, attests to de Guérin being ‘admirable for the knowledge of his own self’.<sup>263</sup>

His letters convey detailed introspection regarding his character and his faith, although without detailed consideration of his literary work, so that how much the effects of the crisis of faith had upon his writing can only be speculated. Nevertheless, in writing upon the central figure of the centaur, such subjects intrinsically embody a motif of separation and division, as well as inviting the question of whether it is the centaur who is whole, as Macareus attests, and mortal men an inadequate half. The privileging of the beast portion and its connection to nature reverse both Christian and Romantic hierarchies which raise the intellectual life above all. Cheiron is evoked, it could be suggested, to portray the ideal balance of intellectual engagement with the natural world, but could also signify de Guérin’s own uncertainty regarding the primacy of a God whose presence could not be felt, in opposition to the ancient gods that could be invoked through the natural world to which they were aligned.

This linking of the ancient deities to the natural world is given full expression in *La Bacchante*. Bacchus is, Aëlle asserts, to be felt within all of nature; the cyclical expression of nature renews her purpose, and the god drives her, from within, to her journey through forests and up mountains, altering the terrain, because,

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<sup>262</sup> Chinard, 1929: 21.

<sup>263</sup> Chinard, 1929: 40.

for among the gods some it pleases to follow the high ranges holding their steadfast way along the undulating peaks, while others, from crags which dominate afar, consume hours in fathoming the depths of valleys or in considering how shadows and dreams gain entrance within the spirits of mortals.<sup>264</sup>

Here de Guérin displays the pantheism of which he is so often suspected, in asserting the presence of the gods within their preferred locations in the very topography of the world. Yet, to commune intensely with Bacchus is, Aëlle asserts, rare; while all can feel this ‘living breath’, ‘of mortals a few only, privileged by destiny, learn to take knowledge of its passage’.<sup>265</sup> Who will experience the intensity of the god’s expression is determined by fate, which is supported in de Guérin’s Catholic faith as well as being an intrinsic part of ancient Greek belief systems.

Aëlle records the effects of the gods upon mortals – turning them into dryads, enabling them to observe the movement of birds that would then form auguries, and all can be rendered stationary in nature.<sup>266</sup> In this manner, she asserts, she ‘received the life of the gods as it went by, without a sign of motion and with outstretched arms leant round towards the sun’,<sup>267</sup> a physical opening similar to Macareus’ feeling the flow of the river pass through his outstretched arms. Here, de Guérin implies, through Aëlle, that celebrating Bacchus entails much more than openness to ritual intoxication during the mysteries, but a deeper, more permanent and physical connection to the natural world. The young Bacchant commits herself to devotion to the god; she addresses Bacchus, ‘I betimes recognised thy tokens within me and concentrated my best pains that I might devote all to thy divinity’.<sup>268</sup> This full commitment to the god perhaps represents the dedication to the Catholic God that Guérin wished to feel.

Nevertheless, in both prose poems, proximity to the gods is the focus. In both, there is distance between the speaker and the god; perhaps it is less so in *La Bacchante*, but with that

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<sup>264</sup> *La Bacchante*: 26.

<sup>265</sup> *La Bacchante*: 27.

<sup>266</sup> *La Bacchante*: 28.

<sup>267</sup> *La Bacchante*: 29.

<sup>268</sup> *La Bacchante*: 20

comes madness, temporary in the case of the narrator. But Aëlle gives a preview of what effects extended exposure will have. Within the Apollonian tradition, the distinctions between gods and mortals are firmly upheld, even to the extent that the usually prophetic Cheiron asserts the secrecy of the gods. He might be a hybrid form in which the divine and the mortal are united but he also represents the turmoil of the move from polytheistic to monotheistic religion. This turmoil, which can induce a crisis of faith, can also be seen in later writers' work, such as Updike's *The Centaur*, explored later in this thesis.

It is not only the Greek pagan gods that de Guérin references in his writing, however. His journal mentions Harpocrates, the Hellenic-Egyptian god of silence, secrets and confidentiality in terms of certain men guarding the secrets of their souls and inner thoughts,<sup>269</sup> qualities that Macareus asserts in *Le Centaure* that all gods share in terms of disclosing their will. Not only is Harpocrates considered to be an infirm god, weak in his lower limbs, whose imperfections might link to de Guérin's own weakness and ill-health, but his reference also invites comparison with the brother-sister cult in Egyptian religion which offers support for de Guérin's extreme closeness to Eugénie. The key message regarding religion, however, that de Guérin expresses through these poems is the sadness at not being able to access knowledge of the gods' will. While the frenzy of closeness to god is occasionally possible, perhaps reflected in de Guérin's success at sermonising when young, this does not translate into practical knowledge that will help mortals determine how to live. The sadness of Macareus underscores this distance from the aspect of the divine that mortals concern themselves with most.

### **Epistemology**

The plot of de Guérin's first prose poem is simple. An elderly centaur, Macareus, addresses Melampus – probably intended to represent the famous seer – about his upbringing, his life,

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<sup>269</sup> Journal: 188.

and the knowledge that he has accrued. It is clear that Melampus has sought out Macareus to discover ‘knowledge of the life led by centaurs’.<sup>270</sup> Although prophetic knowledge is ascribed to both figures in myth, Melampus’ quest seeks specific knowledge of the gods’ plans. The centaur obliges, attributing his own knowledge and wisdom to Cheiron. The poem ends with Macareus contemplating his own dwindling life force and imminent death, described as a return to nature. Despite this inclusion of Cheiron, and the wisdom he has passed to Macareus, it could be argued that the poem argues for a more natural arrival at self-knowledge:

*La vision originale de Guérin le situe à contre-courant des mouvements néo-classiques contemporains. Loin de développer le thème du Centaure pédagogue, du maître d’Achille et des héros, il renverse la thématique et traite du proper roman de formation du vieux Centaure qui se remémore son enfance: précisément sans maître, seul, en contact avec sa mère exclusivement, soudain lâche dans la Nature ...<sup>271</sup>*

(De Guérin’s original vision places his against the grain of contemporary neo-classical movements. Far from developing the theme of the Centaur pedagogue, the master of Achilles and the heroes, it reverses the theme and deals with the proper tale of training, of the old Centaur who remembers his childhood: precisely, without a master, alone, in contact exclusively with his mother, suddenly loose in Nature.)

It is here that we see de Guérin’s personal poetics, less imitative than that of neo-classicists;<sup>272</sup> it is not so much to ancient sources that de Guérin turns as to his inner self. A line from Euripides’ *Bacchae*, ‘What men look for is not brought to pass, but a god finds a way to achieve the unexpected’ seems particularly apposite here.<sup>273</sup> De Guérin’s journal records the important connections between his soul and nature, and he seeks to find support for his theory in literature and philosophy. He appreciates the German philosophy which broadly brings together

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<sup>270</sup> Journal: 8.

<sup>271</sup> Rabee, in Gely, 1998:181.

<sup>272</sup> Gely, 1998:181.

<sup>273</sup> Eur, *Bacchae*: 1390-1391, trans. Kovacs. These lines of course originally appear in *Alcestis*, and in three other plays before the *Bacchae*.

literature and science,<sup>274</sup> and his varied reading seeks to do the same, to understand nature on a scientific basis as well as contemplating its diverse effects upon human emotion. As de Guérin's personal struggles record a division between duty and desire, the two things that seem to oppose one another, the centaur symbolises the ability to unite two very different natures within the one corporeal body. The poem records the effect of nature upon Macareus, and his search for knowledge through a more intuitive means than Cheiron's more focused and directed study of what the natural world can provide.

This, in turn, leads to a meditation on what men believe are the gifts of the gods, particularly the ability of the natural world to convey their secrets. However, as Cheiron advises Melampus, 'the wandering gods have rested their lyres upon stones, but none – none has ever forgotten his there'.<sup>275</sup> In mentioning both Apollo and Cybele, Macareus insinuates that Melampus is seeking wisdom about discerning prophecy from the natural world, only to be met with a negation: 'I have never made out more than sounds which dissolved in the breath of night or words inarticulate as the bubbling hum of rivers'.<sup>276</sup> This is Macareus' first assertion that the gods do not tell mortals of their plans.

Macareus clearly indicates that he is from the wider race of centaurs, the descendants of Ixius and Nephele – 'begotten by an insolent mortal in the womb of a cloud which had the semblance of a goddess'<sup>277</sup> – and yet he also indicates that these words were spoken to him by Cheiron, thus uniting the two centaurs not only in sensibilities but also in lineage. In de Guérin's poem, Cheiron's heritage is not superior to other centaurs, nor does it lead him to possess different qualities; he is merely older, wiser, and closer to the gods on account of Apollo's gifts.

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<sup>274</sup> Journal: 62.

<sup>275</sup> Journal: 14.

<sup>276</sup> Journal: 14.

<sup>277</sup> Journal: 15.

It is here that he recounts the conversation with the wise centaur in which Cheiron identified the differences between them – Cheiron sought knowledge of botany, whereas Macareus followed the frenzy induced by the natural world, a ‘relic of the god’.<sup>278</sup> Cheiron suggests that Macareus is searching for the gods to find the origins of life, and possibly prophecy; he references the secrets of the Ocean, which implies the prophetic elements of the sea and those who live within it. He asserts that any individuals escaping secrets are deliberately drowned by nymph song, and that mortals will receive nothing from the gods’ ‘inexorable lips’.<sup>279</sup> Although he has received knowledge and gifts from Apollo, Cheiron decries the degeneration that has seen the demise of heroes and the vulnerability of those from immortal lineage. He asserts the similarity of centaurs and men in being inferior to the gods, ‘subtractors from the privileges of immortals’.<sup>280</sup> Macareus attributes his wisdom to Cheiron, and affirms the myth that the centaur had received immortality from Apollo but had returned it.

Macareus asserts that the gods do not share their knowledge or their secrets with mortals, and this may hold true, for de Guérin’s work, when considering knowledge from Apollo, but in *La Bacchante*, Dionysus is shown to have gifted Aëlle with knowledge and experience that has significantly altered her physically and mentally. De Guérin gives an oppositional view of knowledge from that within *Le Centaure*. Aëlle, however, is perhaps tainted by that close contact. Not only is she aged in looks, but her eyes ‘made clear on the first encounter that they had received for empire the vastest prospects and the profoundest attitudes of sky’<sup>281</sup> – they see rather more than is simply before her in the world – and she also ‘betrayed ... some inconstancy as to the ordering of her steps,<sup>282</sup> indicating, perhaps, the loss

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<sup>278</sup> *Le Centaure*: 14.

<sup>279</sup> *La Bacchant*: 15.

<sup>280</sup> *La Bacchant*: 16.

<sup>281</sup> *La Bacchant*: 22.

<sup>282</sup> *La Bacchant*: 23.

of initial youthful divine energy from frequent close proximity to the god. Nevertheless, she is deeply connected to nature, at night ‘grew one with the universal calm’,<sup>283</sup> giving respite from Dionysiac frenzy.

While her knowledge is described as originating from Dionysus, this imagery blurs the boundaries between the two gods and the effects of their gifts: Bacchus also reveals the future in the source text, *Bacchae*, and induces frenzy, frequently a sign of a prophetic state. However, Aëlle shares her knowledge with the narrator, just as Cheiron did with Macareus in *Le Centaure*. Yet, rather than attesting to the secrecy of the gods, and their reticence to share their knowledge with mortals, Bacchus’ influence can be felt everywhere, ‘to be recognised by everything that breathes and even by the steadfast family of gods’.<sup>284</sup> It could, perhaps, be inferred that the two poems address de Guérin’s dilemma that organised religion seems to demand faith without disclosing its secret knowledge, whereas a more natural faith is more dangerously overpowering but open to being experienced by humans willing to engage with it fully. Nevertheless, in portraying the wisdom of Cheiron, he seems to assert that the measured approach of the hybrid creature is the most true, as it unites the opposing forces; however, the melancholic tone of the text suggests that there is sadness at not being fully in either belief.

## **Ethics**

While de Guérin took up tutoring to secure an income, and decided to study at night for a university Arts degree to improve his prospects, his aspirations and motivations to write fluctuated widely. For some time, he lost his ambition and focused upon his teaching, but his interest eventually returned; it is around this time, 1835-6, that he wrote *Le Centaure*. This experience of tutoring potentially feeds into his writing, as both poems convey a mentoring

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<sup>283</sup> *La Bacchant*: 23.

<sup>284</sup> *La Bacchant*: 24.

relationship, or a transmission of wisdom from one more experienced than the speaker. In *Le Centaure*, Macareus has recounted the sage advice he has mostly received from Cheiron and, in turn, he passes this on to Melampus, who seeks his knowledge of the gods. Macareus' narrative concludes with his contemplation of the constellations – once again, implying the presence of Cheiron – and his own imminent mortal end, with its inevitable return to nature. He thus reflects Cheiron even as he mentions the wisdom of the other centaur; he is wise, has grown wise, and is suspected to have secret knowledge that the seers would share. Cheiron's didactic qualities are being privileged here, as it is his knowledge that is being transmitted, albeit affirming the limitations of what mortals can know of divinity.

Throughout the narrative, the inherent duality of centaurs is reiterated through the proximity to nature and its intoxicating effects upon Macareus, but also through the intellectual contemplation of the night, and the seeking of wisdom. Although Macareus recalls his disgust at seeing the incomplete man, his links to his mortal half are evident through his quest for the secrets of the gods; he understands Melampus' desire to gain privileged knowledge.

While the young Bacchant does not experience Aëlle's cavern with her (although she does spend time in caverns while intoxicated by the god), the similarity between the roles of the mentor and Cheiron to Macareus are stark:

Aëlle absorbed me in her friendship and instructed me with all the care that gods expend upon mortals marked out for their favour, and whom they desire themselves to bring up.<sup>285</sup>

In a role similar to that of Cheiron raising his heroes, Aëlle displays knowledge of the dangers and benefits of the demi-gods, nymphs and Bacchus himself, and transmits this knowledge to

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<sup>285</sup> *La Bacchante*:: 31.

her ‘by recounting her fortunes’,<sup>286</sup> implying a prophetic knowledge. Aëlle highlights to her mentee the effects that such worship takes, and in doing so entices the unnamed narrator to follow a different path to the majority of celebrants: ‘Once afoot to follow the voice that called it on to knowledge of the gods, my spirit returned no more toward the crowd with whom at first it had made some sojourn; but distanced with its guide toward the least frequented mysteries’.<sup>287</sup> It is admitted that the path she and Aëlle take lies in ‘obscurity’,<sup>288</sup> and that the ‘discourse of the great Bacchant’ draws her further towards the gods,<sup>289</sup> and into an isolation that is necessary to participate fully in the rarest mysteries:

Each of us, having recognised within her signs given by the god, began thenceforth to keep apart; for mortals when divinities take hold upon them, wrap their goings in secrecy and are led of new inclinations.<sup>290</sup>

For de Guérin, this seems to reflect his need for seclusion, for select company within the countryside, to feel truly at peace with the world and himself. The unnamed narrator perhaps reflects de Guérin’s initiation into writing, and into the Romantic ideal within literature. The other celebrants are named at this point, along with the specific behaviour in which they will encounter the god. Aëlle is of particular interest, seeking the company of a serpent to give her the gift of prophecy, ‘like Melampus’.<sup>291</sup> snakes also feature in Dionysiac worship.<sup>292</sup> All seem to have a purpose in mind, whereas the narrator, ‘who as yet had no experience of the god ...ran disorderly about the countryside’,<sup>293</sup> seemingly enveloped by a serpent, and her

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<sup>286</sup> *La Bacchante*: 31.

<sup>287</sup> *La Bacchante*: 31.

<sup>288</sup> *La Bacchante*: 32.

<sup>289</sup> *La Bacchante*: 31.

<sup>290</sup> *La Bacchante*: 32.

<sup>291</sup> *La Bacchante*: 33

<sup>292</sup> Eur. *Bacchae* 101-2, trans. Kovacs.

<sup>293</sup> *La Bacchante*: 34.

intoxication culminates in the sensation of a ‘prolonged bite’,<sup>294</sup> albeit one lacking in venom. The narrator recovers her senses to participate within the mysteries, at which point the poem concludes as she follows Aëlle towards the west – presumably to continue her journey to further knowledge under the guidance of her mentor.

The open ending of the poem, with its ellipsis, signals incompleteness, a goal that is still being pursued, if the metaphor of de Guérin’s writing is to be linked further with the text; de Guérin could be interpreted as the young Bacchant, whose lack of experience leads him to roam in a disorganised fashion around the landscape of literary effort; those whom he admires (such as Victor Hugo), being more experienced and focused as writers, are able to plan how to channel the spirit of the god. This reading portrays de Guérin’s literary talent rather negatively, particularly in these prose poems, and the unity of his inspiration, manifested in how these two works speak to one another. This interpretation fails to account for the significant influence that his primary text, *Le Centaure*, had upon artists who encountered it, as it seemed to evoke within those artists a link to the symbol of the centaur and its liminal, contradictory qualities, as exemplified by Cheiron.

In both poems, nevertheless, de Guérin demonstrates the impossibility of fulfilment without the guidance of a more experienced sage. Whether one is following a ‘religion’ or simply one’s own personal quest within the natural world, it is vital to have guidance to understand how to achieve appropriate knowledge or understanding within the parameters of possibility. While he situates both alternatives in the ancient world, which lends an ambiguity to how to read both poems through a variety of interpretations, it is clear that de Guérin placed his own mentors in high regard, however disappointing their advice may have been to him personally.

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<sup>294</sup> *La Bacchante*: 34.

## Aesthetics

Both prose poems convey the beauty of nature, and the duality of what it can offer to their narrators. The form of the poems, and the influences upon de Guérin which contributed to their composition, also features hybridity reminiscent of the centaur figure and specifically Cheiron, who is understood to be noble, trustworthy, and yet different from those around him. The two poems offer, in some ways, an oppositional view of whether the knowledge of the ancient gods can be accessed and experienced by mortals. For the centaur, Cheiron, the suggestion is that the gods hold their knowledge close, and would not disclose their plans to any mortal; this is supported by Teiresias in *La Bacchante*, who asserts that '[n]o mortal mind can comprehend the gods';<sup>295</sup> yet Aëlle indicates to the unnamed Bacchant that knowledge of the god is possible to a few who have been properly initiated. However, she asserts that it is possible to feel the god everywhere in nature. It is likely that these poems tease out a particular distinction by which de Guérin was troubled, in that being able to feel god in nature did not necessarily mean having knowledge of him. The primacy of organised religion in intellectual thought is conveyed through de Guérin's journal; Catholic faith is of a higher order than that of feeling divinity through commune with nature. Yet Catholic faith also requires commitment to something that cannot always be experienced, and this separation of faith from senses appears to preoccupy his thoughts. He conveys a sense of being shut out from God, of having an inadequate spirit to channel his faith in the way that he would need to for an ecclesiastical career, and his distraction by nature causes him to berate himself. This is evident in *La Bacchante*, as in using Euripides' *Bacchae* as a source text, de Guérin perhaps reflects his concern that he, like Pentheus, is denying a vengeful god – albeit one belonging to an organised religion. Yet it is within nature that de Guérin feels most at peace and inspired. These poems express the contradiction of feeling a religious experience through the natural world, and yet

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<sup>295</sup> *La Bacchante*: 10.

also being separate from the religion that he truly wishes to embrace. As Dionysus tells Pentheus, ‘Since you are a godless man you do not see him’.<sup>296</sup> Yet in portraying female celebrants who do see, de Guérin perhaps reflects the divergence between his faith and that of Eugénie.

The composition of *Le Centaure* is placed between autumn 1835 and spring 1836;<sup>297</sup> these timings are important because in 1835, Gautier published *Mme de Maupin*, in which Hellenic sculpture is an important backdrop, and Ballache, ‘*du représentant le plus qualifié des harmonies païennes et chrétiennes*’, had a reception at the French Academy.<sup>298</sup> Undoubtedly, de Guérin was influenced by the literature of the time, as well as the gallery of Antiques at the Louvre.<sup>299</sup> Vier suggests that de Guérin encountered many masterpieces on his visits, and that some of these would have depicted centaurs. In questioning why they are depicted in literature, he asserts,

*Ces fauves ne sont pas monstres; ils ont un galbe qui leur est propre; ils arrivent à conquérir de splendides filles de roi; ils savent même leur parler. Ils sont les fils d’un homme d’une extrême audace, qui commit le plus bel exemple que l’on connaît du péché de démesure. ... Ils ont aussi en portage la science et la sagesse; Chiron fut le précepteur d’Achille.*<sup>300</sup>

(These wild animals are not monstrous; they have a curve that is proper to them; they manage to conquer splendid kings’ daughters; they even know how to talk to them. They are the sons of a man of extreme audacity, who committed the finest example of the sin of excess ... They also carry knowledge wisdom; Chiron was Achilles’ tutor.)

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<sup>296</sup> Eur., *Bacchae*: 503, trans, Kovacs.

<sup>297</sup> Vieh, 1958:211.

<sup>298</sup> Vieh, 1958:211.

<sup>299</sup> It is likely that de Guérin was influenced by ‘un texte de Lucienne Samosate qui présente, en <<ekphrasis>>, un tableau de peintre grec Zeuxis (Ve siècle) don’t le motif centrale – une centauresse allaitant ses petits – n’est peut-être pas sans rapport avec le début du poème du Guérin. (Gely, 1998: 179-180). A Roman-era copy of a bust of an aged centaur with a sorrowful face was at the Louvre in 1835.

<sup>300</sup> Vieh, 1958:212.

In reading writers who employ the figure of the centaur, and in visiting the galleries, de Guérin would have been familiar with the figure, and within himself, *‘il s’efforce de restaurer, tant bien que mal, une nature primitive à la mesure d’un Centaure’* (he strives to restore, as best he can, a primitive nature commensurate with a Centaur’).<sup>301</sup> In his desire to find the balance within his soul that he felt he lacked, he perhaps looked to the figure of the centaur as an example of how to combine his two natures, because *‘cette creature surhumaine contient sa propre régulation’* (this superhuman creature contains its own regulation).<sup>302</sup> De Guérin was dissatisfied with his human existence, and sought to lose himself in nature and myth: *‘Il arrive parfois que les poètes néo-païens font servir les mythes à l’expression fracassante des grandes énigmes de l’univers’* (It sometimes happens that neo-Pagan poets use myths as a shattering expression of the great enigmas of the universe).<sup>303</sup> The power of the myth of the centaur, however, is in its ambivalence and complexity: *‘Car le centaure est un monster: mi-homme, mi-cheval, il incarne la difficulté d’être de tout homme écartelé entre sa nature et sa culture, entre brutalité primitive, force, puissance et conscience, élévation spirituelle et raffinement’* (Because the centaur is a monster: half-man, half-horse, he embodies the difficulty of being torn between his nature and his culture, between primitive brutality, strength, power and consciousness, spiritual elevation and refinements),<sup>304</sup> stories of centaurs tell of *‘leur perpétuel combat contre eux-mêmes’* (their perpetual fight against themselves),<sup>305</sup> because of the violence of the human part and their possible resurrection to the gods.

This crucial centaur text can be interpreted through several different lenses, which do not have to be considered mutually exclusive. Other literature matters. In utilising the figure of the centaur, de Guérin continues the Romantic tradition of expressing the sublimity of nature

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<sup>301</sup> Vieh, 1958:213.

<sup>302</sup> Vieh, 1958:217.

<sup>303</sup> Vieh, 1958:220.

<sup>304</sup> Nardone, 2013:5.

<sup>305</sup> Nardone, 2013:7.

but without the pejorative illustration of the hybrid creature that can be found in the work of the Romantic poets Keats, Byron and Coleridge.<sup>306</sup> In doing so, de Guérin has anticipated the concerns of the Symbolists, who moved away from the decadent loose moral values and focus upon relocating human creative activity back into the ‘sense impressions of inner life and experience’.<sup>307</sup> Symbolists conveyed the transcendental properties of nature,<sup>308</sup> and de Guérin’s employment of such techniques represents a ‘pagan sensibility’, whether or not this was combined with religious disillusionment.<sup>309</sup> In dying young, like Keats, and being aware of his illness – ‘haunted by the thought of death’<sup>310</sup> – as well as performing penetrating self-analysis upon his mental state, *Le Centaure* is often considered to be a melancholy consideration of de Guérin’s own mortality.

Almost regardless of content, *Le Centaure* and *La Bacchante* are exceptional in their use of form. Scott argues that de Guérin resists ‘the temptation of adapting established poetic forms’ and rather perfects the poetic prose style through formal unity, and ‘by converting the lyricism ...into an essential and dynamic part of the total fabric of the work’.<sup>311</sup> The content of the poem, on which most critics focus (*Le Centaure* describes frantic galloping contrasted with moments of stillness and deeper contemplation), is mirrored in its form – de Guérin ‘immobilises’ his paragraphs, ending them on a ‘central but static image’.<sup>312</sup> Therein lies the

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<sup>306</sup> Romantic poets had a tendency to consider centaurs as morally flawed beings, and ‘centaur’ was used as a metaphor for a hybrid piece of work which was not judged to be coherent or well-written.

<sup>307</sup> Baldick, 2008: 112. Romantic literature (from approximately 1790 to 1850) was a reaction against the Enlightenment and Neo-classicism; these previous movements had focused upon reason and intellect, whereas the Romantics privileged emotion, the interaction of humans with their environment, and the importance of the role of the imagination. Symbolists (from approximately 1857 onwards) made up the Gothic component of Romanticism and Impressionism, and wished to focus upon aspects of art that could only be described indirectly. They were considered to be hostile to plain meanings, and wanted to depict not the thing but the effect it produced. There was also a focus upon freeing up techniques of versification. Decadents, in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, revelled in excess and artificiality. The reputation of work in this movement entailed delight in perversion, full and sensual expression, and a focus upon pleasure.

<sup>308</sup> Scott, 1982: 57.

<sup>309</sup> Crossley, 2002: 252.

<sup>310</sup> Chinard, 1929: 9.

<sup>311</sup> Scott, 1982: 23.

<sup>312</sup> Scott, 1982 [2]4.

poetic paradox, which also conveys the conflicted and dual nature of the centaur itself, ‘the perfect myth in which to embody the process’.<sup>313</sup>

This process is further evinced in the second prose poem of Moore’s translation. *La Bacchante*, set in the region of Mount Cithaeron, the original setting of the Bacchanal as outlined in Euripides, where Pentheus is killed by intoxicated celebrants, demonstrates de Guérin’s classical knowledge and familiarity with Greek myth. The unnamed narrator references ‘the hours’ in a personification of the time taken for her to achieve sufficient maturity to engage with the ritual,<sup>314</sup> and the names of others of the Bacchantes also come from myth, or sound plausibly ancient Greek – Aëllō, originally one of the Harpies,<sup>315</sup> said here to be a daughter of Typho, a turbulent wind; Hippothea, who is given no genealogy other than a Greek name relating to horses and divinity; and Plexaura and Telesto, who are Oceanids,<sup>316</sup> and in the natural world, *octocorallia*, a marine species. De Guérin also utilises the Roman name for the wind Boreas, ‘Aquila’, in his nature imagery, which highlights the effects of the gods upon the world. While de Guérin does not use his naming conventions to embed specifically relevant myths in this poem, he demonstrates profound knowledge of both Greek mythology and the natural world in attributing appropriate names to his characters. Immediately this places the reader in expectation of the mythic, and even epic form. Yet de Guérin instead delivers prose poetry with repetition and stillness, highlighting his originality by denying the expected form.

The unnamed narrator addresses two different audiences during the poem; the reader or implied listener, and Bacchus himself: ‘...so the virtue of thy spirit, O Bacchus! had been exhaled from the bosom of the earth ...’.<sup>317</sup> The reader also receives the reported speech of the

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<sup>313</sup> Scott, 1982: [2]5.

<sup>314</sup> *La Bacchante*: 19,.

<sup>315</sup> Hesiod *Theog.* 265, tran., Most; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 1.10, trans. Smith and Tranzkoma.

<sup>316</sup> Hesiod, *Theog.* 349, trans, Most.

<sup>317</sup> *La Bacchante*: 21.

main Bacchant, Aëlle, who imparts her wisdom to the unnamed celebrant over nearly eight pages of text, reflecting the wisdom of Macareus and Cheiron as outlined in several pages of *Le Centaure*. These main figures, close to the gods and able to help direct their mentees on how to conduct their lives, are kept at a remove from the reader. They are reported, and the event is in the past. Their wisdom is privileged, passed on, a fable told to deliver an important message.

These two pioneering prose poems might better be defined as lyrical prose, depending upon the length that could be determined to be a short, independently-standing passage which determines a prose poem. The concept is French in origin, and often connected to Baudelaire and Rimbaud, whose works were produced significantly later than those of de Guérin. However, it is likely that de Guérin draws from the 18th-century form known as *poème en prose*.<sup>318</sup> The form is related to an attempt to capture a modern experience, is symbolic of ‘resistance to a dominant bourgeois aesthetic and ideology’, and emerges in response to a gradual change in aesthetics.<sup>319</sup> While de Guérin’s work, with its ancient subject matter, could be considered, perhaps, to be seeking precisely the opposite of a modern experience, it certainly aspires to the quality of emphasising ‘affect over form... the intensity of the response it elicits in the reader’,<sup>320</sup> this is evident in the focus upon descriptions of nature and the effects upon the soul that dominate both *Le Centaure* and *La Bacchante*.

Earlier nature poetry which uses this form could also be labelled as ‘preromanticism’; this formulation helps to establish the trajectory of de Guérin’s poetry within the Romantic tradition, as well as that of the *poème en prose*. Saint-Beuve, the critic who introduced de Guérin’s journal, might have moved away from using the term, which is why he does not employ it to de Guérin’s work, but it would seem to be appropriate to de Guérin’s texts because

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<sup>318</sup> Monte, 2000: 15.

<sup>319</sup> Monte, 2000: 16.

<sup>320</sup> Monte, 2000: 17.

it can ‘simultaneously carry connotations of a modern and an archaic form for mid-nineteenth century authors and readers’.<sup>321</sup> *Le Centaure* is the earliest modern work systematically to imagine what it felt like to be a centaur (presumably like Hesiod’s lost ‘Precepts of Cheiron’), yet its combination with a Romantic sensibility, a glorification of the past and nature, undoubtedly highlights the appropriateness of this form for its subject.

## Conclusion

While Cheiron is minimally referred to directly and only in his centaur prose poem, the nature of his being and his liminality underpin both works. De Guérin is hybrid, he is on the boundary; as will be explored in the chapter five (page 161), focusing upon John Updike’s *The Centaur*, a crisis of faith, or a realisation that modern religion requires a different kind of faith to that of the ancients, is at the heart of many works which utilise the figure of the wise centaur. Combined with the scientific revolutions of the late nineteenth century, which precipitated many questions surrounding Christianity and the Christian creation myths that did not marry with the scientific knowledge of the age of the world, it is understandable that such a hybrid creature, unifying apparently contradictory qualities, should have resonance for writers and artists. De Guérin’s portrayal and exploration of time, and the aesthetic form his portrayal of Cheiron takes, are particularly innovative in that he juxtaposes the ancient and the modern, inviting the reader to identify with the centaur. This is something which continues into more modern receptions.

That de Guérin’s influence continued to grow throughout the beginning of the twentieth century is supported by the range of artworks depicting centaurs within the artistic circle of Sturge Moore. The chapters following this one will consider in detail the relationships between de Guérin’s text and those that followed, as well as considering the many and intricate

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<sup>321</sup> Monte, 2000: 21.

connections between these writers and artists, which contributed to a wealth of both Cheiron and centaur-focused work being produced in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Connected Writers and Artists Exploring Dual Forms and Natures

This chapter opens by outlining the importance, during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in bringing to the forefront of the public imagination Nathaniel Hawthorne's books for children, and especially Mathew Arnold's widely disseminated discussion of de Guérin in his *Essays in Criticism*. This leads into an account of the interconnected creators in the Edwardian era of diverse poetic, novelistic and visual responses to the centaur's story, and an analysis of their works according to the key philosophical categories which shape the thesis overall. This was the great era of the aesthetic centaur, from which more recent receptions spring, and it requires detailed and intense interrogation.

Between de Guérin's *Le Centaure* and the creative outputs of the writers and artists analysed in this chapter, Greek mythology was given a new tenor and audience in the shape of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851) and *Tanglewood Tales* (1853). While Hawthorne's depiction of Cheiron will be analysed in relation to the genre of children's literature in chapter six (page 197), it is important to acknowledge the influence that these texts would have had upon other artists, and their impact within their historical context. Hawthorne himself was not creating in a void but was part 'of an age that exclaimed delightedly over Flaxman's mythological drawings'.<sup>323</sup> However, despite his reliance upon a classical dictionary as his primary source material, Hawthorne was not merely retelling the tales in language appropriate for children but was 'changing the entire emphasis of the myth', and making them reflective of, and responsive to, the age in which they are being told.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Woodring, 2007: 9.

<sup>323</sup> McPherson, 1969: 38.

<sup>324</sup> McPherson, 1969: 39.

Like the later artists and writers considered here, Hawthorne believed ‘that an artist must live for his own age’; part of this resulted in moral lessons being included in his versions, a feature of his religious thought.<sup>325</sup> In *Tanglewood Tales* in particular, his writing displays increased confidence, and a further commitment to the idea of myth representing ‘the basic conflicts in man’s experience’, and he uses it in his stories ‘as a vehicle for expressing a personal vision ... [of human actions such as] the discovery of self, the problem of evil, and the brotherhood of man’.<sup>326</sup> In relating them ‘to the self or to the imagination’, and featuring quests that are ‘in some sense spiritual or psychological’,<sup>327</sup> Hawthorne demonstrates the concerns of his contemporary period, as well as how he sees mythology as a tool to respond to the challenges of his time. He also presents the mythological material to a new audience, which would undoubtedly shape the stories that children would encounter and influence the interests that they might follow. His commitment also to the utility of myth to be made malleable in the hands of all writers and artists is likely to have established a precedent for his time.<sup>328</sup> This general approach to myth can be seen in the application of specific mythological figures to the needs and preoccupations of the historical period, and is entirely relevant to the ways in which writers respond to Cheiron and centaurs, as well as how they respond to previous artistic representations of the same.

Robin Osborne asserts that the centaur ‘came of age’ in fifth-century BCE Athens because decision-making on conflicts of scale meant that the hybrid being ‘came to be the appropriate mirror for human beings who found themselves having rationally to decide on matters in which they were passionately engaged’.<sup>329</sup> So too did centaurs, and Cheiron specifically, become emblematic for poets and artists towards the end of the nineteenth and

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<sup>325</sup> McPherson, 1969: 40.

<sup>326</sup> McPherson, 1969: 76; 108.

<sup>327</sup> McPherson, 1969: 118.

<sup>328</sup> Murnaghan, 2011: 343.

<sup>329</sup> Osborne, 1994: 84.

beginning of the twentieth centuries. The main source of initial inspiration for using centaurs originated from de Guérin, but was influentially refracted through Matthew Arnold's critical essays on the author and his sister. Despite Arnold writing a generation or two before the writers and artists analysed in this chapter, he was hugely influential, not just for his own poetry (his dramatic poem 'Empedocles on Etna' has a stanza which outlines Cheiron's tutelage of Achilles, and highlights the generational connection through Peleus),<sup>330</sup> but also for his poetic criticism, especially in the two series of *Essays in Criticism*. These were a publishing smash hit, on every university reading list in English literature. They were reissued in five revised editions and, staggeringly, reprinted in almost every single year, in both Britain and the USA, between the first publication in 1862 until 1930, and frequently thereafter.

Within the widely consulted *Essays in Criticism – First Series*, he explores a group of poets who are inward-looking, intense, and neglected, placing them 'within a central tradition'.<sup>331</sup> These poets, who include both Maurice and Eugénie de Guérin, having separate essays devoted to each, are poets of 'natural magic', those who take their inspiration from the natural world. The essay on Maurice draws extensively from his journal and biography, highlighting the 'devouring and restless' qualities of such a poet,<sup>332</sup> likened in tone and content with the poetry of Keats. In both, there is 'the paradox of the natural poet who combines great strength of character with fragility of physique',<sup>333</sup> and the poet of nature is established as one who renounces the trappings of fame, but falls victim to the passage of time. However, Ross argues that, while Arnold is constructing the essays in this first series, he is becoming preoccupied with the focus of the second, which is the tension between nature and morality.<sup>334</sup> This second series of essays actually rejects de Guérin's poetic approach, and establishes

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<sup>330</sup> Arnold, 1852: 15.

<sup>331</sup> Ross, 1979: 51.

<sup>332</sup> Ross, 1979: 60.

<sup>333</sup> Ross, 1979: 62.

<sup>334</sup> Ross, 1979: 52.

Arnold's theory of poetry, that it should be in contact with modern life, not just reflecting it but directing it. The poet, he suggests, must be a critic.<sup>335</sup>

Arnold lived in an 'age of transition',<sup>336</sup> which is also the case for all of the poets and artists considered in this chapter, whose lives and outputs are across the change from the Victorian to Edwardian eras, the birth of Modernism, and the disruption caused by the Boer War and the First World War. Arnold establishes this tension of hybridity and change that is so frequently expressed in the symbol of the centaur by encapsulating within himself oppositions, particularly the fusion of poetical sentiment and intellectual power that sets him apart from Tennyson and Browning. They represent those qualities individually, and Matthew felt that he needed 'to have my turn as they have had theirs'.<sup>337</sup>

His mind exhibited 'the strife ...between two powerful forces, mysticism and rationalism ... the prophet and the critic',<sup>338</sup> which can, perhaps, be traced back to his being caught between his father's faith and his own agnosticism. His own family disapproved of university study and the 'effeminate' study of poetry, praising instead the manly actions of his younger brother, Walter, who became a sailor.<sup>339</sup> Thus, Arnold is caught between conflicting desires, his own preoccupations and the desire to live up to his father's expectations. He also needed to exercise pragmatism throughout his career to support his family by working as a schools inspector, which brought him into contact with a large variety of people from different classes and backgrounds, and assisted in his mission to have poetry address social problems and moral issues, even if it did not assist in his experimentation in 'unusual and unsuccessful metres'.<sup>340</sup> He was, in his focus upon making poetry supply 'a moral interpretation from an

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<sup>335</sup> Knickerbocker, 1925: 445.

<sup>336</sup> Knickerbocker, 1925: 445.

<sup>337</sup> Knickerbocker, 1925: 445.

<sup>338</sup> Knickerbocker, 1925: 445.

<sup>339</sup> Ellis, 2008.

<sup>340</sup> Knickerbocker, 1925: 445.

independent point of view of man and the world',<sup>341</sup> ahead of his time, but he foregrounds the work of poets who come later and who wish to explore the societal changes they experience and their own tensions of being. These changes and tensions are frequently expressed through the use of centaurs as symbols, and Arnold's work on de Guérin's poem establishes a framework for the poets and artists to whom this chapter will now turn.

Although Arnold was undoubtedly the main conduit through which de Guérin's poetry entered the British literary consciousness, *Le Centaure* was not actually translated into English until 1899, nearly sixty years after it was first published; the publication was almost certainly prompted by the interest Arnold had stimulated. The translator, Thomas Sturge Moore, also made woodcuts for the illustrations of this edition, first published in *The Dial* before being published separately; these again altered the form of the text from how de Guérin had originally constructed it. However, another main contribution of Moore was as a participant in a vanguard of artists and writers in the early twentieth century who all utilised the figure of the centaur more generally, or named mythological centaurs more specifically. Cheiron is referenced frequently even when he is not the central protagonist or key figure in the work. These writers and artists were all interconnected: they collaborated on projects, were friends, or corresponded with one another, or were connected through Thomas Sturge Moore. This chapter and the next will explore not only the individual texts and sources that were produced within a thirty-year period but also the connections between their authors and artists. The predominant goal is to determine how those conscious experiments with utilising centaurs spoke to their own 'age of transition', and why the centaur was a useful figure to employ for a variety of emotions and behaviours of immediate concern at the time.

For most of the cluster of creative artists discussed in this chapter, if Cheiron is not central to their work, the analysis of his deployment is not extended. However, as an

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<sup>341</sup> *Celtic Literature*: 128 in Knickerbocker, 1925: 446.

emblematic figure of the type, Cheiron is ever-present, even in representations of other centaurs, since he embodies the more restrained example of his species. This is evidenced both implicitly and explicitly within the sources, which include original poetry by Thomas Sturge Moore, Robert Calverley Trevelyan's play *Cheiron*, four poems by Michael Field and sculpture by Charles de Sousy Ricketts.

### **Moore's friendship with Shannon and Ricketts**

While this chapter gives central place to Thomas Sturge Moore,<sup>342</sup> because it is his translation that brings de Guérin's text to the attention of this group of artists, the networks and relationships between them were equal and reciprocal. Shannon and Ricketts provided a central point of contact for most, and they had been tutors of Moore, who needed to earn money as he did not come from a particularly wealthy family. Although some of the writers did find themselves free from financial precarity, and with some independence in how they pursued their artistic interests, only Trevelyan could be considered a member of the elite. Yet despite varied backgrounds, they all shared a love of art and artistic endeavour, and supported one another in their creativity.

Indeed, an unnamed author, but probably Ricketts,<sup>343</sup> wrote a critical essay on de Guérin (1897), with translated excerpts from *Le Centaure*, which predated Moore's translation and edition (although this might well be Moore's translation; in *The Dial*, it is unattributed). As will be outlined later in the section on Michael Field, it seems that Ricketts often fed creative topics to his friends, and it is probable that he gave this one to Moore. Correspondence demonstrates the generosity of spirit towards one another; they acted as critical friends, connectors and supporters, in friendly relationships that spanned both professional and personal

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<sup>342</sup> This differs from Woodring's (2007: 9) perspective, who places Ricketts at the centre; however, the inclusion of Trevelyan, who was a friend of Moore rather than Ricketts, alters the centre point.

<sup>343</sup> Woodring, 2007: 9.

spheres. Moore met artists Charles de Sousy Ricketts and Charles Shannon, who were in a lifelong artistic and personal relationship, after attending Croydon Art School and Lambeth Art School. Ricketts and Shannon shared an artistic circle of friends who frequented their house at The Vale, Chelsea, and Moore joined this group, falling under their influence. He benefitted from their artistic instruction, in particular with regards to wood engraving.

What Moore brought to the group was ‘critical acuity’, which would help them in establishing and communicating their creative mission.<sup>344</sup> Ricketts and Shannon also had their own press, the Vale Press, which had published Arnold’s ‘Empedocles on Etna’ in 1896, with a border designed by Ricketts; Michael Field corresponded with Arnold; and Moore’s varied book collection includes multiple copies of Arnold’s work, so his influence upon individuals in the group is well established. Moore’s role might even be thought to mirror that of Arnold’s poet as a critic. They also collaborated artistically, most notably in Shannon’s and Rickett’s occasional magazine, *The Dial*. While this magazine was published irregularly and ran to a mere five issues, it firmly establishes shared artistic goals and the importance of the figure of the centaur to these three artists specifically, and to the artistic endeavours of the magazine and its collaborators more generally.

The contributors to *The Dial* formed a small, co-operative creative circle, which ‘sought to set the visual and verbal arts in dialogue with each other’; it has been suggested that the predominating interests were in ‘illumination, grotesque and liminal forms, the immortality of art, and the fiery chrysalis of creativity’.<sup>345</sup> Not only does its dual focus upon both art and literature speak to the hybridity of the centaur, but the ‘immortality of art’ is relevant to the figure of Cheiron, whose immortality is so varyingly imagined in reception. Indeed, the figure of the centaur is so crucial to the artistic aims of those involved in the magazine’s production

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<sup>344</sup> Van Mierlo, 2021.

<sup>345</sup> Kooistra, 2019a.

that it is included in either literary pieces or art works in three of the five volumes. Centaurs were one of the ‘principal motifs’ of these three issues.<sup>346</sup> In utilising centaurs along with other mythological and symbolic iconography, *The Dial* establishes the artist as both an isolated figure, and as ‘eroticised masculinity’.<sup>347</sup> Contents of the second edition explore the ‘transfigured life’,<sup>348</sup> and engaging with the hybridity of the centaur involves experimenting with artistic form, and of combining both Decadent and Modernist tendencies in writing, resulting in more ‘sensations and impressions’ than plot and character.<sup>349</sup> This speaks to the artists responding to their own ‘age of transition’.

All the writers and artists explored in this chapter are notable for working across different media; Thomas Sturge Moore had a successful career as artist and woodcut engraver, as well as being a poet, and Ricketts worked across different artistic media, including sculpture. The early 1900s, until approximately 1909, the very birth pangs of Modernism, saw a series of sculptures exhibited with centaurs as their focus. The figure of this hybrid creature clearly symbolised not only isolation and eroticism, borrowing from mythological portrayals of Cheiron and the race of centaurs, but also the scope of artistic production that all the contributors were focused upon.

These writers and artists were also all interested in and, to some degree, connected to the artistic *milieu* in which they found themselves, and centaurs were appearing in works by other artists, most notably Auguste Rodin – whose centaurs were conceived in the late 1880s, and whose technique of textured, naturalistic forms may well have influenced Ricketts – and Piero di Cosimo, whose 1902 painting *Battle of Centaurs and Lapiths* was championed by Ricketts as one that should be purchased for the nation.<sup>350</sup> This was at the same time that two

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<sup>346</sup> Kooistra, 2019b.

<sup>347</sup> Kooistra, 2019a.

<sup>348</sup> Kooistra, 2019b.

<sup>349</sup> Kooistra, 2019a.

<sup>350</sup> Elam, 2009: 609; 613.

of his own centaur paintings were on show. He and Shannon eventually bought the painting privately, and it was bequeathed to the National Gallery after Shannon's death. Centaur symbolism was also being used by other artists that they might have had contact with, either personally or through their work.

### **Michael Field**

A further contributor to *The Dial*, who became a lifelong friend of Moore to the extent that he was executor of their work following their death, was the poet Michael Field. This poet's moniker is a pen name shared by an aunt and niece, Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who were also lifelong companions and lovers. Their combined artistic and personal relationship mirrors that of Shannon and Ricketts, with the focus upon Aestheticism and mythology signalling 'their readiness to challenge traditional notions of gender and sexual propriety',<sup>351</sup> including legality, since avunculate sexual relationships were and are illegal in Britain. However, in such intertwined collaboration on the artistic outputs, they 'challenge the conventions of single authorship ...[as well as] revise fixed forms'.<sup>352</sup> Although the two poems written by Field in *The Dial* do not centre upon centaurs, four poems in their *oeuvre* do: 'Hipponoe', 'The Return to Apollo', 'Chariclo', and 'The Lament for Cheiron'.

Three of these four poems are either very or fairly short, with just 'Hipponoe' offering a longer narrative. 'The Lament for Cheiron' and 'The Return to Apollo' focus upon a dead Cheiron, and his – and the unnamed speaker's – connection to nature. 'Chariclo' similarly highlight's the nymph's love of nature, and her attraction to Cheiron. 'Hipponoe' tells a brief tale of a 'Centaur-girl' who is love with a centaur. They attend the Lapith wedding of the infamous Centauromachy, and she sees him become obsessed with the bride, Hippodamia.

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<sup>351</sup> Evangelista, 2015.

<sup>352</sup> Richardson, 2021: 1.

When the fighting erupts, Cyllarus, the centaur, is shot with an arrow, and she comforts him as he dies, taking the arrow and killing herself through love for him. The figure recalls Hylonome from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 12, but utilises the name given to a female centaur by Moore in his 'The Centaur's Booty'.

For this group of artistic friends and collaborators, the centaur was a multifaceted figure, symbolising hybridity, eroticism, difference, and a tension between nature and culture. It is worth exploring the poetic identity of Michael Field, and the two women behind it, a little more closely as it underpins the tensions and hybridity that the figure of the centaur, and specifically Cheiron, embodies. In presenting a specifically masculine writing identity, for both aesthetic and practical purposes, but embracing their femininity in their personal life, Bradley and Cooper 'formed what might now be termed gender-fluid identities'.<sup>353</sup> Their attraction to one another was solid and permanent, but it did not stop them being attracted – and attractive – to men, a complicating factor which speaks further to the blurring of boundaries across sexual identities, and which contributes to their being 'superbly contradictory'.<sup>354</sup>

A feature which perhaps explains the repeated image of Cheiron that appears in their work, is that 'the idea and ideal of sacrifice is central to their personal and poetic project';<sup>355</sup> this might also account for their conversion to Roman Catholicism later in life, following the death of their beloved dog, Whym Chow,<sup>356</sup> and reflects de Guérin's wrestling with faith throughout his life. Just as de Guérin never fully gave up either Catholicism or pagan love of nature, so too did Bradley and Cooper 'adorn their altar to Bacchus at the same time that they participated in Anglican rituals'.<sup>357</sup> However bound up they were in their shared poetic

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<sup>353</sup> Richardson, 2021: 3.

<sup>354</sup> Donoghue, 1998: 3.

<sup>355</sup> Richardson, 2021: 2.

<sup>356</sup> They had a second dog, Musico, who both predated and survived Whym Chow, but they did not seem to hold him in the same divine regard.

<sup>357</sup> Richardson, 2021: 9.

identity, they never lost their individual senses of identity,<sup>358</sup> writing separately and collaborating through redrafting, editing, or penning separate character parts of their verse dramas. They used Hellenism to explore their subversive sexualities, and in focusing upon sacrifice, they were able to consider this theme in relation to the nuances of writers, artists, love, religion, and the concepts of identity and freedom.<sup>359</sup> Cheiron and the figure of the centaur are ideal symbols of these tensions.

Bradley and Cooper, 'The Poets', were particularly close to Ricketts and Shannon, 'The Painters', having a lifelong friendship, despite occasional fallings out; they viewed their relationship and that between Shannon and Ricketts as parallel, and later viewed them as their 'male-doubles'.<sup>360</sup> Similarly they grew close to some of the writers and artists they met at The Vale.<sup>361</sup> They met Thomas Sturge Moore, and he came to be one of their dearest friends. Despite their underlying, occasional, friendly rivalry, Ricketts suggested to Michael Field that they write upon 'the rise and fall of Sabbatai', a seventeenth-century Turkish holy figure. Their diary records that they needed to confirm that they would write on the subject to Ricketts quickly, otherwise he would offer it to Moore, 'his usual threat'.<sup>362</sup> However, Moore remained a lifelong friend and correspondent, despite being married, which seems usually to have been an exclusionary criterion for The Poets and The Painters. He was also an excellent choice of executor: 'For the rest of his life, Sturge Moore preserved, annotated and published selections from the Michael Field papers, promoting them in every way',<sup>363</sup> no doubt reducing the time in which he could pursue his own writing.

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<sup>358</sup> Donoghue, 1998: 22.

<sup>359</sup> Richardson, 2021.: 17.

<sup>360</sup> Donoghue, 1998: 71; 88.

<sup>361</sup> Williams 2016, writes on connections between Michael Field and W. B. Yeats, one of the subjects of the next chapter in this thesis. While the subjects covered are not relevant for this specific focus upon Cheiron and centaurs, there is evidence for correlations between dramatic and poetic subjects and forms in the work of the artists.

<sup>362</sup> Donoghue, 1998: 96.

<sup>363</sup> Donoghue, 1998: 125.

## **Robert Calverley Trevelyan**

Moore's literary friendships extended beyond those he met through Shannon and Ricketts at The Vale. Robert Calverley Trevelyan and Thomas Sturge Moore were particularly frequent correspondents over many years, which assisted Moore's poetic development into a more modern style, away from the 'watery verse' and 'mooning in nature' of much nineteenth-century poetry.<sup>364</sup> They visited one another, they spent time with each other's families, and they talked about domestic matters such as furniture, probably concerning Trevelyan's wedding gift to Moore.<sup>365</sup> Their correspondence, however, overwhelmingly concerns literary matters. They send each other their work for critical reading and receive honest responses – with which they do not always agree, and to which sometimes react defensively. Trevelyan frequently takes pains to be self-effacing and acknowledge what he considered to be the superiority of Moore's poetry, despite being the better scholar; Moore finished school early, due to illness, and completed an artist's education, whereas Trevelyan went to Cambridge and excelled in ancient languages. They send each other books, discuss other writers – again, not always demonstrating the same perspective but clearly respecting one another's opinion – and collaborate, along with other writers, on an annual periodical of writing.<sup>366</sup> Although the correspondence examined is predominantly one-sided (the Sturge Moore archive contains mostly correspondence received, and my research in the Trevelyan archive focused upon notebooks, drafts and reviews), it illuminates the relationship between just two writers within the informal network explored here, demonstrating a supportive, collaborative and interconnected web that suggests that figures and themes explored by one writer or artists

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<sup>364</sup> Gwynn, 1951: 82, quoted in Van Mierlo, 2021.

<sup>365</sup> 16/224 May 1904 in MS978/1/4/11

<sup>366</sup> This published just one issue due to poor sales and the First World War making better sales for another issue unlikely.

would surely be inspiration for the others, and referenced or picked up in their own future work, either consciously or unconsciously.

This is evidenced in the letters of Trevelyan. He repeatedly mentions wanting to read Moore's "centaur" at the beginning of the 1900s – assumed to be Moore's poem 'The Centaur's Booty' (1903).<sup>367</sup> Trevelyan presents Cheiron in a play of the same name, published in 1927 by The Hogarth Press. The correspondence between both writers demonstrates that they worked on mythological figures and topics, Moore often taking his inspiration from broader traditions than just ancient Greece and Rome, but often asking Trevelyan for information or sources for research.<sup>368</sup> Trevelyan, as an accomplished translator, extensively engaged with Greek and Latin text through his Cambridge education, most frequently and understandably uses Greek mythology for his work. This expertise is demonstrated in his *Cheiron*. While there is a gap of more than twenty years between this initial poem by Moore and Trevelyan's play, their letters show a deep immersion in mythology; it is unsurprising that Trevelyan would wish to revisit this mythological figure on his own terms and in his own style. Moore follows this with his own poetic offering, 'The Song of Chiron', in the following year, 1928. All three of Moore's centaur poems considered in this chapter take a different approach, as well as differing in form to Trevelyan's play. A summary of each work follows, prior to the analysis of Cheiron's role in the texts.

#### 'The Centaur's Booty'

A combination of poem and dramatic exposition, perhaps reflecting the form of Arnold's 'Empedocles on Etna', this poem follows a conversation between the last two remaining centaurs on Earth: Pholus, an elderly centaur who is world-weary, and the recently bereaved

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<sup>367</sup> 5 Dec 1917 MS978/1/4/7

<sup>368</sup> 21 Oct 1898 MS978/1/4/1- this is a recurring theme through the corpus of letters in the Sturge Moore archive.

Medon, who still mourns the death of his pregnant wife, Hipponoë. She was murdered by humans while pregnant with their child.<sup>369</sup> By modern moral standards, and perhaps even standards contemporary to its publication, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’ is astonishing for its misogyny, its blasphemy (albeit directed towards the pagan gods), and complicity in the act of abducting a child because Medon judged his mother to be too dismissive of his needs. Also notable is the arrogance of both centaurs, who claim that the child will grow up – having been raised by them – to be superior to Cheiron’s young heroes, just as centaurs are superior to men.

This text clearly draws from Moore’s experience of translating de Guérin’s *Le Centaure* and, perhaps in acknowledgement of his debt to Ricketts for the project, is dedicated to him. Pholus begins the poem by bemoaning his old age and lonely status, echoing Macareus the centaur’s laments in de Guérin’s poem. It also demonstrates an appreciation of nature, and hints strongly at the lascivious reputation of the centaur male. Additionally, it draws upon the iconic figure of Cheiron as a measure of wisdom and didactic success. However, in soon abandoning its reflective and melancholy tone, and introducing a second centaur, a judgement on the weakness of men, and expounding an overtly superior status of the centaur, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’ instantiates the conservative and imperialistic morals of its time, as well as sanctioning a crime that would have horrified its readers and confirmed the relative inhumanity of its protagonists.

#### ‘From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli’

This poem is considerably shorter than the other two centaur poems, at merely fourteen lines long. A poetic response to Botticelli’s 1482 painting (in the Uffizi Gallery, Florence), as

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<sup>369</sup> The names used are often based upon mythological figures even if the narratives are changed – Pholus was a centaur who received Herakles as a guest and reluctantly opened wine for this occasion, which initiated the attack by the centaurs resulting in Cheiron’s wound and eventual death. He is also often considered to be a ‘good’ and ‘wise’ centaur, and is often conflated in myth with Cheiron, including in this episode. Hipponoe in myth is a Nereid but Moore might be utilising the figure of Hylonome, from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* 12.

indicated by the title, it considers Pallas Athene's thoughts and behaviour as she caresses the centaur.<sup>370</sup> The painting contains decoration that confirms it was made for the Medici family, and the mythological associations of both figures suggest that part of the painting's meaning relates to the submission of passion to reason, particularly given the centaur's submissive stance. Moore's poem, however, has Pallas addressing the centaur directly, seemingly entreating him to carry her. Pallas, portrayed as an innocent, 'finds things new' (line 4). However, the second half of the poem changes in tone to suggest that 'the haunted rocks' carry a less innocent history. Moore references three biblical Marys: Magdalen, Mary of Egypt, and Mary, mother of God. As two of these females were associated with prostitution, the poem seems to be specifically highlighting the restraint of sexual passion for greater spiritual rewards, and perhaps also signals a progression from pagan worship to Christian; it should not, however, be assumed that this progression is necessarily one that Moore viewed as positive, being 'a self-professed atheist from a fairly young age'.<sup>371</sup>

### 'The Song of Chiron'

This poem of forty-six lines appears to be written from the perspective of Cheiron, and also contains Christian imagery. However, these are melded with a love of nature and an appreciation of intellect, just as it seems to suggest that Cheiron's dual nature permits him to enjoy the aspects of his horse half. It is, to a degree, a poem which celebrates Cheiron's longevity, his dual nature, and his connection to the natural world. It does not convey the solemnity of Cheiron's state that Trevelyan portrays in his play.

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<sup>370</sup> While this female figure is usually identified as Pallas Athene in modern times, there have been suggestions that she might be Camilla, or even Florencia, the personification of the city of Florence. (Frotheringham, 1908: 438-444).

<sup>371</sup> Van Mierlo, 2021.

### 'Blind Thamyris'

'Blind Thamyris' is a hybrid piece, mostly prose but interspersed with poetry in the form of song. It captures a short period of time, approximately a day, during which Agenor is a pupil of Cheiron; he later becomes a Phoenician king of Tyre and the father of Europa, according to ancient Greek myth.<sup>372</sup> Told by Agenor, it recounts how Thamyris, the Thracian rhapsode blinded by the Muses in *Iliad* 2.594-600, and former pupil of Cheiron in this narrative, as he lay dying summoned Cheiron. Diodorus Siculus reports that Thamyris was a pupil of Linus rather than Cheiron;<sup>373</sup> Moore innovates in introducing Cheiron for his own poetic purposes. Moore also embraces poetic and mythological licence to explore different forms, and to construct a narrative to explore the nature of the centaur. In approaching the narrative from the pupil's perspective, he is also perhaps drawing upon his own artistic and learning experiences.

### Cheiron

Trevelyan's play, *Cheiron*, will, like the other works considered here, be analysed under the philosophical headings which form the organising principle of this thesis later in the chapter; a prefatory summary of the contents will aid this analysis. Cheiron is tutor to a chronologically implausible assemblage of young heroes – Achilles, Aias, Odysseus, and Thamyris are named, and supported by unidentified younger boys. They all live with Cheiron in his cave, and they are preparing to put on a play for the centaur on the occasion of Achilles and Odysseus preparing to leave. The pupils enact the dramatisation of the origins of mankind and Zeus's revenge upon Prometheus both for creating humans and for giving them life, as well as stealing fire for them. Pandora is given to Epimetheus and they release the contents of the jar. This

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<sup>372</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.1.1 trans. Smith and Trzaskoma, 2007.

<sup>373</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *The Library of History* 3.67.2, trans. Oldfather.

dramatic enactment is periodically interrupted by Cheiron musing on his longevity and his weariness at surviving his young heroes. The boys' drama suggests that Prometheus might be freed from his punishment by another immortal offering up their life for his release, and this gives Cheiron the idea that it could be him. Being poisoned by Herakles' arrow while defending Elatos persuades him further, and his second entreaty to Zeus is successful. The substitution is granted by thunderbolt. He departs the cave with a mournful Heracles, whom he has charged with freeing Prometheus from his chains, and leaves Thamyris with the responsibility for the remaining boys.

While the play charts the events leading to Cheiron's catasterization and his relinquishing of his immortality, it also serves to underscore the interchangeable qualities of Cheiron and Prometheus. Unlike in other texts, the fact that Cheiron is half-human is minimised, and his relationship to the gods, and to the immortal Titans, is privileged. That Cheiron claims to have been alive during the creation of men by Prometheus brings its own ontological challenges. However, this longevity, and the events of the play, also prophetically foreshadow the events that will free Prometheus. Thamyris' dramatic interpretation is responsible for suggesting to Cheiron the release from, at first, his psychological pain, and then his physical agony. In combining pagan figures and imagery with Christian litany and images, Trevelyan establishes Cheiron as a martyr, although not entirely altruistic, because he is primarily released from his suffering and the persuasive factor of Prometheus being released is secondary. Nevertheless, Cheiron is portrayed as self-sacrificing and paternalistic to the end.

### **The paintings and sculpture of Charles de Sousy Ricketts**

Ricketts's influence upon the majority of artists and writers considered in this chapter cannot be overstated, as he offered them artistic training, poetic inspiration, and also aesthetic values. In publishing high quality work in small numbers through the Vale Press, Ricketts was

embracing the principles of the Arts and Crafts movement. This speaks to an ‘age of transition’ in terms of moving back from mass production into a more thoughtful, traditional focus upon craftsmanship. But it can also be understood as being in competition with, and to have been displaced by Modernism, whose exponents wanted to reflect the industrial world and its new technologies; that they were both established within the same time period speaks to the schism running through not just art, but all of society – how to balance traditional values and qualities with those emerging with the advance of technology.<sup>374</sup> We could see this schism as represented by the figure of the centaur, since it might also represent the influence of the classical world upon these writers while they are also working in accordance with their own artistic temperaments and genres. Ricketts was ‘fighting a rearguard action against Impressionism, Post-Impressionism and subsequent manifestations of the modern movement’.<sup>375</sup>

A friend of and collaborator with Oscar Wilde, Ricketts was also working across different media, branching out from wood engraving and illustration into sculpture and theatre design, as well as writing books on art history. Despite his wide range of skills and popularity, and the esteem in which he was held as a connoisseur, he was ‘haunted ...by fears and anxiety’.<sup>376</sup> Hybrid creatures frequently found a place in his work (he shared a passion with Symbolists). Although he was most closely associated with the Sphinx,<sup>377</sup> there was a period in which his fascination with centaurs is obvious. His illustrations and paintings are difficult to date but his centaur sculptures – ‘Centaur and Child’, ‘Nymph and Centaur’, ‘Faust and Chiron’, ‘Nessus and Deianeira’ and ‘Centaur and Baby Faun’- were all exhibited between

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<sup>374</sup> Scholars suggest that *fin-de-siècle* literature fed into Modernism (Leighton, 1997, cited in Williams: 140), and that ‘[Michael Field] and Yeats occupy liminal positions between these epochs, to some degree neither Victorian nor Modernist’. The relationship between these two artistic modes could therefore be seen as ‘centaur-like’.

<sup>375</sup> [www.Christies.com](https://www.christies.com) (2005) <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-4618904> Live auction 7094 Lot 18.

<sup>376</sup> Delaney, 1990: 146.

<sup>377</sup> [www.Christies.com](https://www.christies.com) (2005) <https://www.christies.com/en/lot/lot-4618904> Live auction 7094 Lot 18.

1906 and 1909. These dates correlate to an ongoing dialogue with the figure of the centaur, initiated by Moore's translation of 'Le Centaure' by de Guérin, and the critical essay on de Guérin published in *The Dial*, possibly written by Ricketts himself, as well as Moore's original poem 'The Centaur's Booty' of 1903. The sculptures themselves will be considered in the next section, on aesthetics.

## **Aesthetics**

Cheiron inspires a range of forms, and formal hybridity, but he also inspires a reflection back to the past. Thomas Sturge Moore's poetry is often likened to Swinburne's,<sup>378</sup> identifying it as a late Victorian work, yet Moore's life and education straddles late Victorian and Modernist eras. His style changed through his writing career, with the influence of Trevelyan distancing him from the aesthetics of the 1890s.<sup>379</sup> His early work looks to earlier forms, and his fascination with classical and mythological subjects spans his whole career; while he might not be considered definitively 'Modernist', he 'worked to make the ancients new'.<sup>380</sup>

In terms of form, Moore's poetry offers a variety of lengths and structures, as well as inspiration. 'From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli' is based upon a visual artwork, and relates directly to another text, offering the reader an intertextual experience. This poem also combines a fascination with the Renaissance, as well as with classical mythology, and fuses Moore's artistic appreciation with his poetic skill. It also has a regular rhyme scheme, creating a rhythm and more light-hearted tone, although this does alter in the second half with increased caesura, slowing the pace and making the tone more serious.

'The Song of Chiron' also offers a regular rhyme scheme, within a clearly defined stanza structure, although there is also a variation within it to allow for light and shade. The

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<sup>378</sup> Van Mierlo, 2021.

<sup>379</sup> Van Mierlo, 2021.

<sup>380</sup> Van Mierlo, 2021.

stanzas are eight lines long for the first two, then one stanza of twelve lines, two of four lines each as Cheiron outlines how his human aspects enhance those of the horse, with a final stanza of ten lines. Primarily the rhyme scheme offers alternate rhymes for the first four lines, with rhyming couplets making up the remainder for both eight- and ten-line stanzas. The two four-line stanzas are comprised of rhyming couplets also. The variation occurs in the middle, twelve-line stanza, which has some features of the other stanzas, helping to tie it in to the general rhythm of the poem.

Regular rhyming occurs in ‘The Centaur’s Booty’, too, with variation, offering alternate rhymes, rhyming every third line, and rhyming couplets. This text combines a dramatic monologue with a more theatrical piece written for two centaur characters, a ‘verse drama’, perhaps, a formal melding which entirely befits its subject matter. There is also dependence upon the mythological knowledge of the reader, as both centaurs are different from how they are usually portrayed; for example, Pholus is often considered to be a wise and measured character, and in this poem he is given aspects more traditionally ascribed to the centaur race. In using named, mythological centaurs, rather than a name not utilised for centaurs in mythology, as de Guérin does in the text that Moore translated and was inspired by, Moore is relying upon the reader bringing knowledge and scholarship. This does, perhaps, contribute to its shocking effect.

As previously mentioned, ‘Blind Thamyris’ mixes its forms. Primarily prose, it is interspersed with songs, as sung by Cheiron but composed by Thamyris; all of which is recounted in first-person narrative by Agenor. It narrates a brief period of time – just a day, as was typical in Greek tragedy – and centres upon Cheiron’s absence, his return, and his lament of his former pupil. In tone, it captures the melancholy of de Guérin’s *Le Centaure*, although the centaur here does not live in solitude. Nevertheless, the prose style and the repeated focus upon the natural world are reminiscent of the French writer’s work, for example, the description

of Cheiron standing in the river reminds the reader familiar with both texts of Melampus also performing that action. The difference, however, is that here Cheiron is observed, and the reader learns about him through Agenor, either through what he sees or the speeches of Cheiron that he relates, rather than giving access directly to the centaur's perspective.

Relying upon knowledge of mythology to then alter portrayals and expectations is also evidenced in *Cheiron*. Trevelyan's primary output was translation, but he also wrote across different artistic genres, including poetry and drama, although he did not achieve great renown for these endeavours. Nevertheless, his detailed knowledge of classical texts underpins his artistic experimentation. Trevelyan's play follows a 'play within a play' structure, with some interruptions where the events or thoughts of a character in the first level of the dramatic interpretation has resonance with the scene they are watching. This device allows Trevelyan to highlight different qualities of Cheiron, such as his prophetic aspects. He is also, however, able to demonstrate connections between mythological events and, in the interruptions, allow Cheiron's immortality and longevity to be displayed. While anachronous and, in some cases, fictional, having those particular young heroes in his tutelage simultaneously reinforces the effects of his role to the reader. It emphasises his importance to and his influence on heroic behaviour.

Trevelyan demonstrates concern over the form of his work through all of its levels. Thamyris, the Thracian singer who challenged the Muses to a competition and lost, is a primary character, and the writer of the play that the boys perform. He does not, however, assert superior skills over the Muses here; Trevelyan channels his own humility and endows Thamyris with it, particularly when the pupil tells Cheiron, 'For in the Muses' art we are thy sons'.<sup>381</sup> Cheiron's students also playing roles within the play, reinforcing the duality of the eponymous character.

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<sup>381</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 7.

Thamyris adopts the persona of Hermes during the play, and bewitches Prometheus' clay men before they have been given life with a spell of rhyming couplets. Cheiron also adds a musical interruption in response to Prometheus bringing his men to life; however, these lines are unrhyming and irregular,<sup>382</sup> ending with the cry '*Ailnon! Ailinion!*', the refrain of Greek lamentation known widely from its position stanza-end in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (121, 139, 160), a primary text in the late Victorian performance revival of Greek tragedy.<sup>383</sup> It is, therefore, fitting that Cheiron's dirge be at a slower, more solemn pace and tone than Thamyris/Hermes' spell of mischief.

After Cheiron's interruption and a short conversation with Thamyris, the boys resume their play, and Trevelyan resumes his exposition of the mythological tale, in which he chooses to portray Epimetheus as initially more cautious than is frequently credited to him, possibly influenced by Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1862-3).<sup>384</sup> At the end, Cheiron distributes gifts to the boys, and Trevelyan incorporates ekphrasis when Cheiron recounts the decoration on the bowls he bestows on Achilles and Odysseus. In having a range of forms, incorporating the second play, the interruption to it, and the ekphrasis, Trevelyan is fusing forms and reflecting Cheiron's own musical talents and mixed nature.<sup>385</sup>

It has been suggested that Michael Field used classical references and Hellenism as a way 'through which they could subversively celebrate (same-sex) sexual pleasure',<sup>386</sup> although two poems employing Cheiron or another centaur seem to celebrate heterosexual desire. Three

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<sup>382</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 18-9.

<sup>383</sup> Frank Benson's production is discussed in Hall and Macintosh, 2005: 452-3.

<sup>384</sup> See further Edith Hall, 'Classics, Nature, Science and Race in Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies*', in K. Marciniak (ed.) *Our Mythical Nature* (Warsaw: Univ. Warsaw Press, forthcoming 2025).

<sup>385</sup> The play was never performed but the contract signed with the Hogarth Press outlined that 300 copies would be produced: the rarity of the text assumes that further press runs were not completed. Reviews of the play were generally positive, praising its 'simplicity' (*Glasgow Herald*, 29 March 1928), how 'fine in poise and choice' his writing is (*The Nation and The Athenaeum*, 31 March 1928), its 'graceful verse' (*Daily Telegraph*, 13 April 1928), its 'masterly construction' (*The Times*, 19 April 1928), and suggested that the play-within-a-play inclusion was 'engrossing' (*The London Mercury*, August 1928).

<sup>386</sup> Olverson, 2009: 760.

of the four poems originate from the collection *Wild Honey* (1908), which plays with the sonnet form, and ‘Hipponoe’ is an early work, a narrative with a change of metre through the poem. Of the three poems in the collection, however, none is a recognisable sonnet; all have shorter stanzas and two range well beyond fourteen lines. Both ‘Chariclo’ and ‘The Return to Apollo’ reference, or appeal to, Apollo, the god of lyric poetry, and thus symbolise an appeal to the aesthetic senses.

These examples illustrate how Field plays with poetic tradition, destabilising the tradition in which a masculine speaker addresses an absent and silent female, instead making the speaker either female or plural, and ‘the object of address is not only absent but also dead’.<sup>387</sup> Michael Field participated ‘in a culture-wide appropriation of old forms for new uses’.<sup>388</sup> That these poems consider and write about a hybrid creature speaks to the poets’ desire to write across form and genre, to embody and represent the boundaries that they were personally crossing.

Such desire might also be considered to feature in the sculptures of Ricketts.<sup>389</sup> While his and Shannon’s relationship is rarely spoken of in sexual terms, their living arrangements and certain of their friendships – with Wilde and with Michael Field – suggest a same-sex relationship.<sup>390</sup> The difficulties of navigating this socially and politically might have been inferred from some of the subjects; Faust occurs in one, and the viewer is reminded that Cheiron leads Faust into the Underworld to find Helen. Similarly, ‘Nessus and Deianeira’ might suggest an unfulfilling, poisoned love, although the sculpture suggests that Deianeira is

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<sup>387</sup> Richardson, 2021: 23

<sup>388</sup> Richardson, 2021: 17.

<sup>389</sup> Ricketts insisted to the Michael Fields that the centaurs ‘meant nothing’, and it is suggested that his inspiration came from classical and Renaissance depictions seen in the Louvre and the British Museum, and ‘possibly A Dead Poet and Centaur by Gustave Moreau, the dominant influence on his painting style ... [who] depicted repeatedly many of the themes to which Ricketts also returned again and again’ (Delaney, 1990: 149.).

<sup>390</sup> Although Shannon did have relationships with women for a period of time (Delaney, 1990: 149).

amenable; however the idea of a love that becomes poisoned turns out to be sadly prophetic when Shannon had an accident resulting in a brain injury, which turned him against Ricketts for the remaining two years of Ricketts's life. The other subjects all include either a suggestion of Cheiron's conception and Philyra's rape by Kronos, or might further expand upon Nessus' abduction of Deianeira. Other sculptures of the same name exist, one produced before that of Ricketts (Reinhod Begas in 1888, although the scene is rather more gentle) and one after, Josef Mullner in 1919. However, the centaur sculptures with both the child and baby faun demonstrate a softer side to the centaur, and depict a genuine care for the child. This may well reflect the influence of Moore's poem 'The Centaur's Booty', as the child and baby faun are too young to be trained as heroes; nevertheless, these depictions may well reference Cheiron's role as foster father to Achilles and the other neophytes he raises.

All these sculptures are in bronze, and textured, particularly around the base and the horse half of the centaur, rather than having the smooth finish of other classically-themed bronze statues, and in doing so offer a more realistic tactile experience for the consumer. Although sculpture was not an art form that Ricketts seemed to practise much after this series, in these works he was stretching his own skills, as well as permitting the multiplicity of forms under his control to speak directly to the content of his pieces. Not only can centaurs be rendered physically in different media but they can also symbolise different aspects of their natures, from the care of children to destructive passion. Ricketts understood the dichotomy suggested by the figure, and that it recurred so frequently in his work suggests that he also understood its symbolic value for those living in different kinds of relationships, and for those navigating different modes of art.

## **Ethics**

Moore's experience of being tutored, especially perhaps in his artistic skills by Shannon and Ricketts, would naturally lend itself to portraying Cheiron as a teacher or foster parent, and using the hybridity of the centaur to represent the two men and their complex personal relationship and artistic pursuits. However, Moore does deviate from this simplistic portrayal. 'From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli' does not overtly refer to Cheiron, nor to the role of parent or teacher; the painting itself depicts the centaur with a bow, and as Athena is directly speaking to the centaur, it seems to suggest a closer relationship between fellow immortals than there would be between Athena and any other centaur. It could be suggested that the poem overall has a didactic purpose in advocating submitting passion to reason.

Similarly, in 'The Song of Chiron', the centaur is not portrayed in his traditional role but is more aligned with nature. Cheiron, in this poem, demonstrates the intellectual space between centaur and horse, in that he appreciates '[T]he beauty of hooves is sound',<sup>391</sup> unlike the horse, who 'goes/ Unenraptured over the ground'.<sup>392</sup> Nevertheless, in this poem, Cheiron is not the source of wisdom, although he appreciates it. He seeks 'the wisest of men',<sup>393</sup> and while he pities humans for being physically inferior to himself, he is 'entranced to hear them speak',<sup>394</sup> indicating that men have a superiority of speech and ideas from which he can benefit.

'The Centaur's Booty' is focused entirely upon centaurs as foster-fathers, although the centaurs are Pholus and Medon, rather than Cheiron, and the situation is initiated by Medon kidnapping a human boy. So strong is Medon's fatherly instinct – perhaps as the poem presents him having been recently bereaved by the killing of his pregnant wife, Hipponoe – that he threatens to leave Pholus to raise the boy if Pholus will not agree to help him.<sup>395</sup> Medon outlines what he perceived to be the mother's lack of care for her child, and knows that he was

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<sup>391</sup> Moore, 'The Song of Cheiron': 30.

<sup>392</sup> Moore, 'The Song of Cheiron': 31.

<sup>393</sup> Moore, 'The Song of Cheiron': 33.

<sup>394</sup> Moore, 'The Song of Cheiron': 36.

<sup>395</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 421-4.

hunted because the mother missed him; Pholus' misogynistic views on female independence motivate him to help.<sup>396</sup> Despite the questionable manner in which the child was acquired, the fatherliness of both centaurs is highlighted towards the end of the poem. Pholus is entirely taken by the boy, and he and Medon pass him between them, the rhyming couplets in this section expressing the joy they both feel at the prospect of raising the child. They talk about his future, his potential future wife, and that he will 'avenge all our race'.<sup>397</sup> The implication is that Pholus and Medon will help train the boy, utilising their centaur's skill and knowledge, and they state that 'And none who were pupils of Chiron/ Were ever so strong or so wise'.<sup>398</sup> This suggests that they will be better tutors and foster fathers than the revered centaur, even making the boy feel so much like a centaur that he will develop hooves on his feet.<sup>399</sup>

The dramatic monologue 'Blind Thamyris', however, is almost entirely focused upon Cheiron in his role as tutor. Agenor here is his pupil, and has been sent to live in his cave. Cheiron is providing instruction in 'wisdom and valour',<sup>400</sup> and he relates stories of his former pupil, Thamyris, in whom Agenor sees similarities to himself and hopes for more. Other pupils of Cheiron are also mentioned – a young Achilles is present concurrently with Agenor, Jason is said to have sent a lyre obtained from Colchis to his old tutor, and Thamyris is ever-present through the focus upon music and lyrics. The skills taught to Agenor are also commensurate with those in Cheiron's specialisms: knowledge of sounds present in nature and which would aid hunting; a sprained foot requires Cheiron to demonstrate his healing skills. Thamyris does, however, also provide a case-study for Agenor; Cheiron attends his death, and recounts his life of blindness, solitude, and hubris to Agenor as a warning. Throughout this monologue, Cheiron is portrayed as authoritative, even to other centaurs, wise, and kind to his charges.

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<sup>396</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 479-80.

<sup>397</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 614.

<sup>398</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 628-9.

<sup>399</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 642-3.

<sup>400</sup> Moore, 'Blind Thamyris': 4.

Trevelyan's play prioritises Cheiron's role as foster father and teacher throughout. Thamyris refers to Achilles' and Odysseus' impending departure, and states that their time with Cheiron has resulted in their being 'schooled to mastery/ In all the skill and wisdom that is yours'.<sup>401</sup> Cheiron humbly denies his skill as a tutor, insisting that he has merely harnessed their innate qualities, and taught them 'the skilled art to express/ Their uninstructed nature's inborn wealth'.<sup>402</sup> Cheiron elevates his tutees and their heroic, often semi-divine natures, in emphasising that their skills were already there and merely needed to be brought out and honed.

Cheiron thus appears to be a less skilled tutor than Prometheus, with whom he shares many qualities in this text. Prometheus gives life to his men of clay but must help to provide for them. After stealing fire, the men ask, 'But how shall we praise him,<sup>403</sup> since they view the fire as a god. Prometheus teaches them to stoke the fire, and to be careful around it (although he does this by allowing the men to burn themselves), and elucidates what the fire will bring them – warmth and light.<sup>404</sup> However, when Zeus exacts his revenge upon Prometheus, he is required to leave them; he refers to the men as 'my children', and laments that his 'watchful loving-kindness' is being taken from them.<sup>405</sup> Although Prometheus tells the men that he had hoped to live amongst them as 'counsellor and friend',<sup>406</sup> his connection to them and feeling for them is more paternalistic and instructive.

Cheiron's role, however, for his students, seems to encompass both that of father and tutor. Achilles, who has grown to maturity in the cave, refers to Cheiron as 'dear father',<sup>407</sup> despite his own father still being alive. He also acknowledges the didactic element in Cheiron's influence, 'Schooled in all the noble arts and disciplined/ To knightly valiance in wise

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<sup>401</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 7.

<sup>402</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 7.

<sup>403</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 37.

<sup>404</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 32.

<sup>405</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 38.

<sup>406</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 37.

<sup>407</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 39.

Cheiron's cave',<sup>408</sup> He hopes to prove worthy to be named alongside other heroes. For those who are staying, however, it is Cheiron's fatherly qualities that seem of paramount importance; Thamyris begs Cheiron not to leave his children 'fatherless and forlorn'.<sup>409</sup>

### **Ontology/ Technology**

In reception, attention is frequently given to the dual physicality of Cheiron, and of how his body appears and influences him, as well as those around him. In 'From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli', apart from Pallas' request to ride upon the centaur, there is little acknowledgement of his mixed physique. The focus is, instead, upon the behavioural and spiritual aspects. The centaur is not named but has a bow, a feature often shown with Cheiron; and as Cheiron is the most renowned centaur, and the one who most truly bridges the gap between animal and human in not having the same lascivious urges as the race of centaurs more generally, the painted centaur can probably be identified as Cheiron.

'The Song of Chiron' focuses more specifically upon Cheiron. It also almost entirely considers the physical aspects of being a centaur, especially hooves and their sound when galloping. Cheiron's dual nature permits the intellectual appreciation of this movement and sound, and of being within the natural world, just as he is able to appreciate the ideas and speech of men. There is, nevertheless, the acknowledgement that the physical build of men is inferior. He takes men upon his back, 'pitying their steps so weak',<sup>410</sup> while this poem celebrates the harmonious relationship between his physical and intellectual aspects.

The inferiority of humans is strongly iterated in 'The Centaur's Booty'. Here, the lasciviousness of the centaur is highlighted in Medon's original purpose, to prey upon a woman, although he is humanised by the reference to his grief. While both Pholus and Medon

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<sup>408</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 39.

<sup>409</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 55.

<sup>410</sup> Moore, 'The Song of Cheiron': 35.

acknowledge their human aspects, their superiority as centaurs is stressed by the statement that they are ‘more and other’ than either the noblest man or the grandest horse.<sup>411</sup> They also wrestle with one another, ‘each one with his twofold brother’,<sup>412</sup> two brothers each consisting of two parts. Pholus and Medon are, however, confident in their ability to make the young boy they abduct a physically superior man because of their own innate exceptional qualities, and how they will teach him.

‘Blind Thamyris’ investigates physical aspects of characters, particularly Cheiron, although there is no judgement regarding his mixed physical form. Agenor is his pupil and, finding himself injured and in need of help, is concerned that the sound of centaurs’ hooves will drown out his cries; however, he recalls ‘all that Chiron had taught of the diverse tribes of sound’, and he is able to alert the centaur to his plight.<sup>413</sup> Cheiron is also able to administer practical medical assistance to Agenor, with detailed information about how he made splints for Agenor’s ankle using his own beard strands to secure them.

There is a description of Cheiron’s physical body as he bathes in a pool. Agenor observes that ‘the water rose above the horse and only the man remained’.<sup>414</sup> Agenor refers to Cheiron as a ‘magnificently weathered creature’;<sup>415</sup> this is a positive judgement, rather than suggesting that Cheiron’s non-human traits are problematic. Agenor further observes Cheiron drying off:

...he shook and wrung from hair and beard streams of diamond drops, quivering the while the glossy coat of his nether body to free its shaggy skirts, and whisking his tail against his hocks.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>411</sup> Moore, ‘The Song of Cheiron’: 26-7.

<sup>412</sup> Moore, ‘The Song of Cheiron’: 28.

<sup>413</sup> Moore, ‘Blind Thamyris’: 100.

<sup>414</sup> Moore, ‘Blind Thamyris’: 104.

<sup>415</sup> Moore, ‘Blind Thamyris’: 104-5.

<sup>416</sup> Moore, ‘Blind Thamyris’: 105.

Moore here fully imagines the centaur's physicality, highlighting its novelty but maintaining a factual tone. For this piece, Cheiron's physical difference is an identifying feature but is not the quality that makes him noteworthy: rather, his wisdom, longevity, and authority over the other centaurs to carry Thamyris' body are his most important features.

There is no such hierarchy evident in Trevelyan's *Cheiron*, which centres less on his hybrid body than on his divinity, much of which derives from the strong links between Cheiron and Prometheus that Trevelyan establishes. In addition, throughout the play, men are elevated as being made in god's image; it is assumed to be that of Zeus, but also suggests Christian iconography (which will be discussed later in the chapter under 'metaphysics').

Prometheus makes the first reference to physicality when he speaks of the clay statues he has crafted, which will become men. He asserts that he has imbued them with noble qualities, that 'surely in you I have created/ That which shall prove more godlike than myself'.<sup>417</sup> As a Titan, and an older deity than Zeus himself, his attempt to create an even more divine being would make these mortal men a greater force than the Olympian gods. This, therefore, creates a complexity for the beings he is creating – that they will be both mortal and yet supremely god-like. Cheiron notes this complexity, when he prophesies a 'twofold destiny', that they would be 'lords of earth, yet thralls to pitiless deities'.<sup>418</sup> Men are established as possessing a similar duality to the centaur. He later refers to himself as 'twofold' in nature: 'Not in form only but in mind: by birth/ Immortal and divine'.<sup>419</sup> But little attention is given to Cheiron's physical form in this text; there is just one question—does a cry he hears belong to a man or a centaur?<sup>420</sup> Rather, he has difficulties in thinking 'like thoughts / And passions [of] the perishing race of men 'when he is, in fact, immortal.<sup>421</sup> His sympathies are shared

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<sup>417</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 15.

<sup>418</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 19.

<sup>419</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 45.

<sup>420</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 46.

<sup>421</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 45.

with men. Time and the degeneration of the world make him ill-suited to eternal life, and he seeks to escape the burden.

This is not a sentiment that his mortal pupils appreciate, however. Thamyris considers mortal life to be ‘subject to death’s disgrace’, whereas Cheiron’s is ‘changeless and immortal like a God’s’,<sup>422</sup> elevating the centaur, through his longevity, to the status of divine entity—something is not fully acknowledged in most sources. However, Cheiron’s burden of immortality is further weighted by his injury. When Herakles shoots and misses his target, Elatos, mistakenly hitting Cheiron instead, the poisoned arrow inflicts on Cheiron the same agony that a mortal would feel. However, in being immortal, Cheiron has no prospect of delivery from the pain by death. His second appeal to Zeus, to permit him to exchange his immortality for Prometheus’ freedom, is granted, and he reassures Herakles that this is what he wants, ‘For all best things must a price be paid’.<sup>423</sup> His nature, he asserts, has become more like that of man due to his friendship with them, only he ‘cannot learn / By what art to forget nor outlive grief/ For friends by death endeared’.<sup>424</sup> Throughout the play, it is Cheiron’s similarity to men in nature that is emphasised, with references to his immortality – and therefore his divinity – being highlighted by mortals. There is no reference to Cheiron’s horse half, or elements of his nature that would align with an animal’s. Cheiron’s complexity is portrayed as entirely spiritual.

Michael Field’s poetry does not explore the full range of qualities attributed to Cheiron, but two of the poems examined here consider the physicality of him or Cyllarus. ‘Chariclo’, named after the nymph who married Cheiron, considers their meeting and lovemaking. While this poem does not explicitly outline his physical hybridity, some differences are noted: ‘Cheiron is shag’,<sup>425</sup> highlighting his matted, or rough wool-like coat, and has ‘A front like a

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<sup>422</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 50.

<sup>423</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 56.

<sup>424</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 56.

<sup>425</sup> Field, ‘Chariclo’: 11.

rock'.<sup>426</sup> This physical difference is attractive to Chariclo, who 'loves the shock',<sup>427</sup> and they are intimate: 'she feels his head/ Bent over her/ As a down-bent fir in the hollow'.<sup>428</sup> The nymph is unafraid of, and attracted to, the centaur and his physicality, inviting consideration of the hybrid nature of the poets themselves and their sexual activity.

'Hipponoe', similarly to 'The Centaur's Booty', contrasts the beauty of centaurs and humans. Hipponoe, 'the Centaur-girl',<sup>429</sup> is attending the Lapith wedding feast and is infatuated with Cyllarus, a centaur. He, however, despite complimenting her on their journey to the wedding, is entranced by the human bride, Hippodamia; Hipponoe reflects on the irony of the similarity of their names. Hipponoe considers the human men in attendance to be inferior to Cyllarus: 'I love thee more, beside the little race/ Of vale men, more, far more than yesterday'.<sup>430</sup> At the heart of her attraction are his flanks, his centaur physicality, and so great is her love that she kills herself when he is fatally injured. The use of 'vale men' is an interesting one, and could relate to the visitors to The Painters whom the poets met at their evenings; it reiterates, perhaps, their eternal love for one another, or perhaps the writer's eternal love for the other poet.

## **Epistemology**

Cheiron's knowledge and wisdom are often related to his quality as a tutor but can also manifest in his having wider knowledge of more ancient times, broader mythology, or even events that will come to pass. His intellectual superiority is generally acknowledged, although Moore's poetry does not always utilise this quality in his portrayals. 'From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli', being an ekphrastic poem, does not overly address knowledge of the

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<sup>426</sup> Field, 'Chariclo': 12.

<sup>427</sup> Field, 'Chariclo': 12.

<sup>428</sup> Field, 'Chariclo': 19-21.

<sup>429</sup> Field, 'Hipponoe': 13.

<sup>430</sup> Field, 'Hipponoe': 61-2.

centaur. Athena, however, had wisdom in her range of qualities, and in this poem is said to be ‘conscious-half of much forgotten’,<sup>431</sup> and of ‘ask[ing] sparkling questions’.<sup>432</sup> These lines might directly relate to both the topic of submitting passion to reason, as demonstrated by the submissiveness of the centaur, and the progression from the pagan gods to Christianity. The pagan gods are represented through the ‘much forgotten’, and Moore, a confirmed atheist, does not assume that Christianity entails greater, or superior, knowledge.

This is further evident in ‘The Song of Chiron’ where the centaur highlights the superior aspects of ‘the adventurous mind’,<sup>433</sup> which can then find ‘vast and divine abodes’.<sup>434</sup> This knowledge is gained through freedom, through nature, and through the ability of his mixed nature and physicality to fully experience the joys of both sides. The implication is that hybridity brings with it a lack of boundaries, and therefore a greater openness to different experiences and kinds of knowledge. This is earlier iterated in ‘The Centaur’s Booty’, and shows that Moore was considering different kinds of knowledge, or different ways in which it can be gained, early on his career. Medon believes that a centaur ‘colt’ – here highlighting the horse half of the hybridity – gains his knowledge through communing with nature,<sup>435</sup> and Pholus suggests that most of a centaur’s life is engaged in ‘contemplation of the mind’.<sup>436</sup> He also summarises that centaurs are wise in their judgement of gods, fate and their ability to maintain their physical strength.<sup>437</sup> Both centaurs, however, subscribe to the view that to know human women is to know weakness; they blame men’s weakness on women,<sup>438</sup> and suggest that women prevent men from reaching their potential as ‘the centaur’s brother’. Knowledge, however, has a negative aspect, according to Pholus. He suggests that centaurs perpetually

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<sup>431</sup> Moore, ‘From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli’: 5.

<sup>432</sup> Moore, ‘From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli’: 6.

<sup>433</sup> Moore, ‘The Song of Cheiron’: 37.

<sup>434</sup> Moore, ‘The Song of Cheiron’: 40.

<sup>435</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 289-309.

<sup>436</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 331.

<sup>437</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 345-50.

<sup>438</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 375-6.

seek ‘more of wisdom, more of knowledge’,<sup>439</sup> but that knowledge has the power to ruin moments of joy. This is carried through in their eventual decision to keep the child; Medon tells Pholus to ‘hug wisdom’.<sup>440</sup> He also suggests that the child’s mother ‘knew no more than all thy wisdom knows’,<sup>441</sup> which suggests that intellect is not always the most important of qualities, and that, in some regards, humans can be equal with centaurs. It seems that intellect is not all-important, nor is it a uniquely centaur trait or even one in which they have in superior abundance to humans. What does seem to be uniquely centaur, though, is the ability to gain joy from being in nature and speeding through it, enjoying the physical aspects of the horse halves of themselves.<sup>442</sup>

Towards the end of the poem, Pholus and Medon are contemplating the life that the boy will have after they raise him, the woman he will ‘bear off’,<sup>443</sup> and the children he will have.<sup>444</sup> There are correlations with the prophecies of love that Cheiron delivers to Apollo in *Pythian Ode 9*, although their thoughts are less prophetic than hopeful, expressions of their increasing joy at the prospect of bringing up the child. Nevertheless, they also address Apollo about the prophecies from his oracle, when they suggest that the boy will bring an end to old customs and the need for an oracle.<sup>445</sup> This again suggests that the pagan gods and rituals will be replaced; heralding the child as a bringer of that new knowledge suggests religious imagery, which will be discussed further under ‘metaphysics’. Finally, however, Pholus suggests that the boy will be superior to the pupils of Cheiron in wisdom,<sup>446</sup> presumably through his being raised by the two centaurs. They thus explicitly suggest that they are better tutors and

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<sup>439</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 408.

<sup>440</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 447.

<sup>441</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 447.

<sup>442</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 481-6.

<sup>443</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 562.

<sup>444</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 558; 571.

<sup>445</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 590-6.

<sup>446</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 629.

conveyors of knowledge than Cheiron, and that the boy will eradicate the need for oracles and prophecy to navigate life and the world.

'Blind Thamyris' again places the wisdom of Cheiron at its centre, through his role as tutor to both Agenor and Thamyris. In recounting Thamyris' tragic history, Cheiron relates that he had considered the centaur a 'god-like beast', who has 'sought wisdom most easily wed to divine melodies',<sup>447</sup> showing that the knowledge that Cheiron has acquired goes beyond mortal powers and appreciation. This is reiterated later when Cheiron tells Agenor of the time he met the Muses, and thus weaves himself into the divine mythology and knowledge they represent.<sup>448</sup> In this piece, however, Cheiron's most notable knowledge and prophecy is around the human condition and the fate of Agenor himself. He shows awareness of the pain when one's talents are unappreciated, which Thamyris had experienced, and he suggests that Agenor will also have a career as a poet of great renown.<sup>449</sup> However, this prophecy does not come to pass; Agenor concludes his tale that, 'in spite of Cheiron's presentiment', he has not experienced the magnificent joys that would arise from such talent. He has, however, 'kept his two eyes',<sup>450</sup> unlike Thamyris, which indicates that Agenor is content to have less talent and knowledge while staying able-bodied and more content, and it indicates also that Cheiron can be wrong.

Throughout Trevelyan's play, Cheiron's wisdom is highlighted and his ability to prophesy is suggested to a small degree. His reputation for wisdom in his role as a tutor is present throughout the ancient sources, and reiterated here. In the preface to the play, it is recorded that 'he strove to teach some part of his slowly garnered knowledge and wisdom',<sup>451</sup> and the boys benefit from 'all the skill and wisdom' that belong to him.<sup>452</sup> Yet his ability to

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<sup>447</sup> Moore, 'Blind Thamyris': 108.

<sup>448</sup> Moore, 'Blind Thamyris': 112.

<sup>449</sup> Moore, 'Blind Thamyris': 95.

<sup>450</sup> Moore, 'Blind Thamyris': 115.

<sup>451</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 1.

<sup>452</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 7.

foresee, to have a ‘presentiment’ that ‘haunt[s]’ him about the fate of man,<sup>453</sup> that gave his heart ‘bodings of evil’ also serves to link him to Prometheus, in the name signalling ‘forethought’.<sup>454</sup> This prophetic skill is not only active around the fate of men but also of himself. After watching the boys’ play, he asks Thamyris if he thinks that Prometheus will ever be freed,<sup>455</sup> and the actions of Herakles put events in place which will enable Prometheus’ freedom to be granted.<sup>456</sup>

Prometheus, however, is a little outshone in the area of thought by his brother, Epimetheus ‘Afterthought’, who is frequently blamed for the evils that men suffer. Epimetheus tells Prometheus that there is danger in giving life to his clay figures, that they might wander away, and will in any case ‘perish one by one’.<sup>457</sup> Prometheus, however, refuses to cease with his plan, and commits to giving life to his men of clay repeatedly, if required. That we have the boys acting a play written about these figures, and that it becomes the motivating factor in Cheiron’s exchange, creates a circularity. The reader questions whether the play provides the inspiration, or whether Thamyris himself is performing prophecy by putting on these events for Cheiron. In using the ‘play within a play’ structure, Trevelyan is able to provide a meta-textual comment on the utility of the arts, that both artistic production and reception are able to produce profound effects upon those engaged with it, which enables them to consider the human condition. Ironically, although hybrid, Cheiron here represents an almost existential perspective on human life, and sacrifice; the recipients of his sacrifice might be immortal but they are in enduring pain, and he is metaphorically aligned with Christ.

### **Metaphysics**

While Cheiron does not, on the surface, appear as though he should symbolise religion, particularly not organised religion, in reception he is frequently aligned with the Christian god.

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<sup>453</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 2.

<sup>454</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 19.

<sup>455</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 43.

<sup>456</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 48.

<sup>457</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 12.

He embodies the quality of sacrifice, giving both his life and death to the service of others, and his hybridity symbolises the human struggle between intellect and nature, between passion and reason. In terms of pagan religion, he spans the boundary between the Titans and Olympians, between the gods and those who are immortal but not entirely divine. He stands for everything that is liminal and uncertain in life, death, and belief.

In Moore's poetry, there are frequent references to old pagan gods, religious (Christian) imagery, and the acknowledgement that time has brought a progression from pagan to Christian gods. However, as an atheist,<sup>458</sup> it can be assumed that Moore was not espousing the superiority of Christianity but merely highlighting changes in religious worship from the mythological world. 'From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli' suggests this movement through time and religious beliefs by referencing a Renaissance painting of a classical subject, and by introducing the three biblical Marys – Magdalen, Mary of Egypt, and Mary, mother of Jesus. This change from the divine Pallas to Christian figures happens 'beyond the haunted rocks',<sup>459</sup> after Pallas 'finds things new' being 'conscious ...of much forgotten'.<sup>460</sup> The suggestion is that this explores a transition, a period of time in which fascination with classical mythology is being blended with devout Christianity, and that referencing two ex-prostitutes as penitents is demonstrating a need to be inclusive in both imagery and attitudes.

In 'The Song of Chiron', Moore employs religious imagery in 'corridor, aisle and transept' but he also highlights the superior qualities that nature can bring – 'divine/ Music though unenjoyed'.<sup>461</sup> The centaur's worship here is 'mute',<sup>462</sup> not requiring speech, community, or other outward symbols of piety. Moore's commitment here to the religious experience that nature can bring is evident; and while written two decades after his translation

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<sup>458</sup> Van Mierlo, 2021.

<sup>459</sup> Moore, 'From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli': line 9.

<sup>460</sup> Moore, 'From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli': lines 4-5.

<sup>461</sup> Moore, 'The Song of Cheiron': line 13; lines 21-2.

<sup>462</sup> Moore, 'The Song of Cheiron': line 26.

of de Guérin's 'e *Centaure*, and his own 'The Centaur's Booty', the influence of communion with nature and the tension with organised religion are still evident through the figure of the centaur. As will be further developed in the chapter on John Updike's *The Centaur*, the hybrid being is a perfect vehicle to express the transition between the classical, pagan world and the modern, Christian world, and the tension between finding spirituality in nature and the expectation to find it in Christian worship. Moore's Cheiron believes that minds have 'vast and divine abodes/ In the central secret soul'.<sup>463</sup> The centaur's mind here uniquely represents a secret spirit, a sensibility that enjoys physical movement in nature in a spiritual way. Moore advocates finding religious experience outside the traditional church buildings and rituals of worship in Christianity.

The dichotomy between Christian worship and finding spirituality in nature is expressed with more hostility in 'The Centaur's Booty'. Pholus and Medon demonstrate a hatred of fully human men and women throughout the dramatic piece; the only human with redeeming elements is the boy that Medon abducts, who he describes as having 'a centaur nature'.<sup>464</sup> Nevertheless, while they demonstrate a hatred of men, despite men being 'a weakling foe' who rule by 'numbers and not worth ... and foul the earth',<sup>465</sup> they also suggest a loss of belief in the Greek gods and their ability to protect or intercede. Medon tells Pholus that he saw human women and wondered, 'Could I have dreamed Apollo might be kind/ Or Zeus think of me, or Fate hear my prayer?',<sup>466</sup> doubting that he would be given assistance by those who previously might have helped. This loss of influence of the pagan divinities seems to signal the growth in numbers of men, outnumbering centaurs – and perhaps also other mythological beings – and also brings about a degeneration of the species. Moreover, all females who are not centaresses have had a detrimental effect upon male centaurs. Medon

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<sup>463</sup> Moore, 'The Song of Cheiron': 40-1.

<sup>464</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 77.

<sup>465</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 48-50.

<sup>466</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 106-7.

suggests the fear that he and Pholus would be separated ‘If one of the last two became the slave/  
Of a slight blossom with a female voice’.<sup>467</sup> For these two centaurs, progression beyond the  
old ways has brought decline and a lack of a strong divine presence, perhaps evidenced through  
their lack of morality in abducting the child and not returning him at the end of the piece.  
However, the poem suggests that they view the child as a bringer of new knowledge, faith, and  
a new hybridity between men and centaurs, and therefore as a kind of Protean man, or Messiah.

‘Blind Thamyris’ returns entirely to mythological time, and to the central figure of  
Cheiron. Rather than the perpetual discord between men and centaurs portrayed in ‘The  
Centaur’s Booty’, this dramatic monologue determines rules in their interactions; Cheiron’s  
cave is ‘the only spot where men and centaurs foregather kindly’.<sup>468</sup> Cheiron here is a broker  
of peace, his different lineage to the other centaurs and his immortality providing him further  
hybridity which permits him to manage tensions between the races. He demonstrates command  
of the centaurs but also understanding of men, when he remonstrates against their treatment of  
Thamyris’ body. As he explains to Agenor, “Ghosts of the dead never haunt centaurs; so for  
them the lifeless body is no more than an empty smock”.<sup>469</sup> Moore here portrays the  
dichotomy between the races as partly due to fundamental differences in religious belief. In  
explaining to the centaur colts the reason for his dissatisfaction in their behaviour, his words  
are followed by silence ‘so consecrated to the gravity of the wise Cheiron’s sorrow’,<sup>470</sup>  
establishing Cheiron almost as a holy figure in himself. This is supported later in the text,  
when the centaur relates that Thamyris ‘used an address such as gods expect’.<sup>471</sup> Cheiron is a  
hybrid but also a transitional being, occupying a liminal space between men and other centaurs,  
and men and gods. His wisdom signals his links to divinity.

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<sup>467</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 134-5.

<sup>468</sup> Moore, ‘Blind Thamyris’: 101.

<sup>469</sup> Moore, ‘Blind Thamyris’: 103.

<sup>470</sup> Moore, ‘Blind Thamyris’: 104.

<sup>471</sup> Moore, ‘Blind Thamyris’: 108.

The religious climate of 'Blind Thamyris' is steeped in the mythological world. Thamyris is taken to a temple of Apollo following his blinding, and the binding of a snake across his eyes healed his wounds but could not return his sight. Snakes, in the mythological world, were frequently linked with prophecy or second sight; Cheiron tells Agenor that Thamyris was 'hearing voices but not one conversable',<sup>472</sup> and death warned him of its approach. As prophets were also frequently blind and interceded in religious matters, Moore firmly situates this drama within the mythological tradition of blindness being a punishment from the gods for too much knowledge or for having too much talent in a particular skill that challenges the skills of the divine. It also suggests that what Thamyris hears is one-way communication, without the opportunity to question what is said.

The Trevelyan play *Cheiron* highlights relationships between the gods, and men, but also signals Christian imagery at times in order to elevate Cheiron into a martyr figure. The preface suggests that Cheiron's mother prayed to Kronos to provide the gift of immortality, which was then later 'confirmed by Zeus'.<sup>473</sup> The play that the boys perform suggests a sacrifice that will give Prometheus freedom:

Until some deathless God appear to take  
Thy pains upon himself, and of his own  
Free will descend into the dark abyss  
Of Tartarus, to the sunless house of Death.<sup>474</sup>

While this quotation signals the difference between pagan and Christian imagery – death is not, here, considered to be a salvation and an elevation to heaven but rather a descent – there is, nonetheless, a sacrifice outlined, 'to take/ Thy pains upon himself', reflecting Christian ideals of self-sacrifice for another. It is difficult to know if this was a conscious decision by

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<sup>472</sup> Moore, 'Blind Thamyris': 108.

<sup>473</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 1.

<sup>474</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 37.

Trevelyan, either to mirror his own ideals or to find sympathy with the play's audience, but this is by no means the only example in the play.

Death is shown to be a more benign fate earlier in the play, within the boys' performance which was penned by Thamyris. A conversation takes place between Pandora and Epimetheus prior to the opening of the jar, and Pandora outlines the benefits of releasing its contents. Epimetheus questions if Death can be good and Pandora replies that Hope makes it so, that hope will 'whisper to your soul/ Such comfortable tales in praise of Death,/ That you shall learn to love him and his ministers'.<sup>475</sup> Pandora is portrayed as following Christian ideals of death as a release, and a movement towards the divine.

Further Christian imagery perhaps suggests that Thamyris is the character who prompts thoughts of Christian morality. He has Prometheus and Hermes discuss Zeus' commandments, which Prometheus rejects; he thus injects life into his clay men, hoping that 'the peace that [he has] longed for' will be their 'inheritance'.<sup>476</sup> Thus Prometheus is creating mankind with the hope that they will experience joy and wisdom rather than his loneliness.<sup>477</sup> He reflects the Christian god's ability to create life, forming men 'In the image of the Titans and the Gods'.<sup>478</sup> The men also reinforce this analogy by praising Prometheus for his gift of life,<sup>479</sup> and the repetition of 'to thee be praise' at the end of each of the four stanzas is reminiscent of refrains in the Christian prayer/hymn tradition.

## **Time**

Cheiron's longevity, his immortality and stellification invite viewing him both within and apart from time. His long life contributes to his wisdom, and to his world-weariness, as often

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<sup>475</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 27-8.

<sup>476</sup> Trevelyan, 1928 : 16.

<sup>477</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 16.

<sup>478</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 10.

<sup>479</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 17.

imagined in reception texts. Generally, however, viewing Cheiron or any other centaur in a text invites the audience to consider where he sits in time, and what that immortality would feel like.

‘From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli’ is an ekphrastic poem addressing a Renaissance artwork painted in past time, and the subject of the poem is time. The shift to Christian imagery signals not just a shift in metaphysical beliefs but also a shift through time, with a poet in the early twentieth century demonstrating an appreciation for two historical periods simultaneously, thousands of years apart. Pallas, as a figure within the painting and the poem, seems to recognise that time has shifted, as shown by ‘uncertain feet’ that ‘find things new’.<sup>480</sup> Moore uses the figure of the centaur to subvert the Renaissance distinction between the relationships with time of visual and verbal art.<sup>481</sup>

‘The Song of Chiron’ offers a different view of time. Written from the perspective of the immortal centaur, the sense of being in nature, however joyous, is that of being in eternity. This is particularly evident in the second stanza, which describes caverns explored by the centaur, secret places which have lakes that sleep and allow ‘The storage of old rains’.<sup>482</sup> Movement through nature here does not equal movement through time; the use of present tense makes these movements immediate and also repeated. The longevity of both nature and the centaur render time, as the poet and reader experience it, irrelevant.

Longevity also features in ‘The Centaur’s Booty’. Pholus is the older centaur, who ‘lived as the noble centaurs lived of old’.<sup>483</sup> Time has brought old age, a certain degeneration in nobility, and extinction to the species; Pholus and Medon are the last two of their kind. Yet time has also brought degeneration to the race of men, as Pholus asserts that ‘men were once/

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<sup>480</sup> Moore, ‘From Pallas and the Centaur by Sandro Botticelli’: 3-4.

<sup>481</sup> Cohen, 2014: 149-243.

<sup>482</sup> Moore, ‘The Song of Chiron’: 9-12.

<sup>483</sup> Moore, ‘The Centaur’s Booty’: 142.

Our equals and their wives wholesome as ours'.<sup>484</sup> Yet men have increased in number over time, and the number of centaurs has decreased, resulting in 'loss/ Of all significance'.<sup>485</sup> Here, Moore encapsulates popular Victorian belief that degeneration of species could happen over time,<sup>486</sup> and both the centaurs and men suffer this fate.

However, the need to enjoy the present moment is also expressed. Medon, the younger centaur, who is less worn down by the length of his life, encourages Pholus to enjoy the night, 'now all lovely with the moon', and to avoid thinking about tomorrow night 'drenched in rain'.<sup>487</sup> He suggests that they find purpose in raising the child, which will make the passage of time less oppressive.

The burdensomeness of longevity is often associated with Cheiron, particularly in more recent reception, as will be explored later in discussion of Madeline Miller and Elizabeth Cook. It is also evident in 'Blind Thamyris', in Agenor's observations on his tutor's face, 'worn with much living'. However, Cheiron, an immortal being, recounts meeting the Muses, and Agenor describes this immortality in terms of the cessation of time when Cheiron stands in the river:

Time seemed to have ceased, and necessities to be tempered in favour of this magnificently weathered creature, that he might become divinely amphibious and death stand disarmed before him.<sup>488</sup>

Cheiron's face and body carry evidence of the passage of time, but he also seems to sit outside time. His longevity, his immortality, and his wisdom transcend the usual experience of time, and here, where he is described in nature, the two combine to give Agenor the impression that time has stopped, particularly when Cheiron remains submerged. Cheiron is so central to Agenor's life, especially at this point, while he is a pupil, that it is as though the passage of

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<sup>484</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 246-7.

<sup>485</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 339-40.

<sup>486</sup> Kershner, 1986: 416-444.

<sup>487</sup> Moore, 'The Centaur's Booty': 391-2.

<sup>488</sup> Moore, 'Blind Thamyris': 105-6.

time is being measured through Cheiron, which serves for a complex and contradictory experience.

Throughout Trevelyan's drama, Cheiron's longevity and its burdensomeness are reiterated. The preface highlights that he outlives 'generation after generation of those he loved', and with each generation, men become more like strangers, 'whose mind and ways he did not know'.<sup>489</sup> He was present as men were given life, Cheiron talks of 'The new-born race of men with glad eyes/ Did I behold and welcome'.<sup>490</sup> Time both increases his usefulness to his pupils, through his wisdom, but also makes him feel his loneliness and sorrow; precisely qualities that Prometheus hopes his creations do not feel. Time, and immortality, are portrayed as a burden, and to be endured, particularly if the immortality is a gift rather than as a result of innate divinity. While wisdom and knowledge can be gained, there are multiple negative consequences of a long life.

## **Conclusion**

These writers and artists had both shared and separate visions, yet in all their portrayals, Cheiron symbolises an ideal; he is a zenith of either culture, knowledge, artistic excellence, or the self-sacrifice of love. It might be easier to comprehend why his hybrid physicality and intellectualism would appeal to same-sex couples, who are crossing personal and professional boundaries in their relationships and collaborations, but his equal appeal to heterosexual, married men who are inspired by classical mythology underpins his multivalency as a symbolic tool. He also represents an 'age of transition', in which societal and technological changes are destabilising and undercutting traditional values and beliefs; while this might be positive for these artists, it creates uncertainty, and has detrimental effects on how a career as a poet or

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<sup>489</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 2.

<sup>490</sup> Trevelyan, 1928: 19.

artist can be achieved. Cheiron's range of roles and qualities is utilised to full effect by these artists, as they navigate uncertain times and their own changing tastes.

The influence of membership of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn on Algernon Blackwood's *The Centaur*, the art of Edmund Dulac, and the poetry of W. B. Yeats

*Chiron!* The word, with its clue of explanation, flamed about him with a roar. Was this, then, the type of cosmic life to which his companions, and himself with them, inwardly approximated ...?<sup>491</sup>

### The Artists

The use of centaurs in literary and artistic works during the early twentieth century went beyond the works explored in the previous chapter. While they were deployed on single, isolated occasions by many different artists and writers, there is a particular resonance in their use by W.B. Yeats, Edmund Dulac and Algernon Blackwood, since these three were connected with one another and with the writers already discussed. Yeats was a particular correspondent of Moore; they corresponded about book covers and decorative pieces, as Moore designed many of the covers for Yeats's volumes of poetry, and about spiritual and intellectual matters. They also met in person and, like those artists explored in the previous chapter, Yeats had a deep and well-known interest in mythology, expressing itself most obviously in his interest in Irish mythology and his prominence in the Celtic Revival. The affinities with ancient Greek culture felt by Irish writers during the final years of British colonial rule made it inevitable that Greek mythology would also feature in his work.<sup>492</sup>

Algernon Blackwood was not connected to Moore, or to Ricketts's collective of artists and writers, as both Yeats and Dulac were, but he was connected to Yeats since they were both active participants in a late Victorian/Edwardian esoteric hybrid religion, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. The Golden Dawn was a *fin-de-siècle* religion established in 1888 and

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<sup>491</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 143.

<sup>492</sup> See MacIntosh, 1994; Hall, 2020.

had a number of artist and writers in its membership, the most famous of whom is W. B. Yeats, who rose to an extremely high position and took on a leadership role just before its demise.

This chapter will explore how membership of this group, and the beliefs it encompassed, influenced how both Yeats and Blackwood portrayed centaurs, particularly Cheiron. It will draw upon Blackwood's novel, *The Centaur* (1911), Dulac's artwork, and the Yeats poems 'A Thought from Propertius' (1917), 'Lines Written in Dejection' (1917), 'On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac' (1928), and his spiritual work *A Vision* (1925, revised 1937). It explores how these artists' spiritual beliefs were expressed in the symbolic use of centaurs, particularly as, in this period, '[c]lassics becomes a ghost-written discipline',<sup>493</sup> and asks which of Cheiron's traits are privileged in these depictions.

Yeats connects the artists discussed in the previous chapter with those considered here, via his correspondence and his longstanding involvement with esoteric mystical societies. He was a complicated poet, and a prolific writer. There has been considerable work on Yeats' own use of mythological narratives and figures, with some scholars focusing upon his use of horses, horsemen and centaurs in his works,<sup>494</sup> all of which seem to express his spiritual and artistic beliefs as a 'single, fluid unity of thought'.<sup>495</sup> That he was willing to 'intermingle seemingly disparate, even clashing ideas, and stir them together in any given work' makes it more difficult to analyse individual figures and symbols.<sup>496</sup> His interest in centaurs is in fact relatively well-documented and ties into his changing beliefs as he matured as both a poet and a man.<sup>497</sup> Yet there seems to have been scant consideration of the use of how his works shared individual images and symbols collectively with the body of and artists and writers associated with him.

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<sup>493</sup> Richardson, 2016: 222.

<sup>494</sup> Hobby, 1981: Leichliter, 1969.

<sup>495</sup> Serra, 2017: 1.

<sup>496</sup> Serra, 2017: 1.

<sup>497</sup> This is mentioned in Schuchard (2013) and Paul (2018) but more fully outlined in Leichliter (1969) and Merritt (1998).

Dulac resembled Thomas Sturge Moore, discussed in the previous chapter, in that he was a man of many and diverse skills. He is predominantly known for his illustrations of fairy tales, but during his career he also composed music for opera, painted portraits and landscapes, and designed postage stamps. He had ‘a capacity for the unconventional’,<sup>498</sup> exercising on gymnastic rings and, later in life, taking up flamenco dancing. Through his first wife he became interested in spiritualism; this interest in the occult became more serious later on, particularly during 1920 when he was in regular correspondence with Yeats, and he sought answers to his matrimonial and financial stresses through the Tarot. Unlike Blackwood and Yeats, however, he seemed to shy away from joining organised groups to explore this interest, and no records can be found to suggest he was a member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.<sup>499</sup>

Although French, Dulac became a naturalised Briton and made his home in England, mostly in London, except for during war times. One of his first residences was close to the home of Charles de Sousy Ricketts and Charles Shannon. He was invited to their Friday evening ‘At Homes’ with other artists and writers, and it was there where he met Yeats.<sup>500</sup> While he worked mostly independently from Yeats, they did collaborate on some artistic ventures, such as Noh plays, and Dulac undertook some commissions from Yeats, including drawings for Yeats’s spiritual manifesto *A Vision*. He was also, after Yeats’s death, asked to design a memorial stone to commemorate his first resting place. He designed a simple stone with an illustration of Pegasus, as a unicorn, ascending to the stars.<sup>501</sup> The unicorn was Yeats’s personal mythological symbol.

Blackwood, who was born in 1869 and died in 1951, was the son of a high-ranking evangelical Christian official at the Post Office with links to the aristocracy. From his teenage

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<sup>498</sup> White, 1975: 42.

<sup>499</sup> White, 1975.

<sup>500</sup> White, 1975: 53.

<sup>501</sup> White, 1975: 177.

years onwards, Blackwood read materials that were denounced by his father's connections.<sup>502</sup> Family money ensured that when he dropped out of the University of Edinburgh, he could afford to travel to North America and take up odd jobs, without the worry of forging a career, although his father did limit his funds.<sup>503</sup> He returned to London after a decade, and started publishing his writing in 1906, when he was in his mid-30s. However, he spent some time during the First World War as an intelligence agent, he had varied outputs, and he utilised radio and television to broadcast his stories, cultivating a charismatic presence to his audiences.<sup>504</sup> He is most well-known for his short stories, particularly his early ones, such as 'The Willows' (1907) and 'The Wendigo' (1910), which are terrifically spooky and unsettling without being obviously supernatural; the creepiness is evoked by the unknowability of nature, particularly nature on a grand scale. In these stories, Blackwood evokes his belief that there are immanent forces in nature, often invisible and unperceived but holding extraordinary power in specific locations, and for some particularly sensitive people – and that these forces are not always benign.

*The Centaur* (1911), a full-length novel – not his first but still written early in his writing career – has some similarities in themes with his short stories, particularly in that the supernatural aspects are 'balanced between the menacing and the deeply desired';<sup>505</sup> in his short stories, the characters are often drawn to nature or the power of the ancient past, being transformed by this surrender, even though they mostly return to 'their' world. They are acutely aware of the hitherto-unperceived essence of nature around them, and are frequently, if not always, portrayed as men of an exceptionally sensitively-tuned or intelligent nature. Dirda suggests that Blackwood's novels differ in that 'his protagonists deliberately seek to

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<sup>502</sup> Graf, 2015: 82.

<sup>503</sup> Ashley, 2019

<sup>504</sup> Ashley, 2019: 373.

<sup>505</sup> Dirda, 2016.

master the universe, to become gods'.<sup>506</sup> There are no sources that disclose directly how his beliefs were incorporated in his work. He deliberately left out references to mystical experiences from his autobiography of his early life, and his house being bombed during the Blitzkrieg resulted in the loss of all of his private papers.<sup>507</sup>

While it is risky to assume that personal beliefs are present in unmediated form within an author's work, it has been suggested that Yeats and Blackwood were friends, and that Yeats sponsored his admission into the Order.<sup>508</sup> Blackwood's membership of particular organisations therefore must have some correlations to his work in general, and to this novel in particular. It might not be entirely accurate to suggest that the protagonist of *The Centaur*, Terence O'Malley, wished to become a god, but this preoccupation with mastering knowledge and becoming more powerful was certainly present in Blackwood's personal religious practice.<sup>509</sup> The text is a 'fable about writing and the interlinked fates of poetry, Nature, and the past at the threshold of modernity'.<sup>510</sup> Before exploring this novel further, it will be useful to outline briefly the hybrid religion of which he was a member, and how it fitted into Victorian religious worship at this time.<sup>511</sup>

### **The Origins of the Golden Dawn**

The late Victorian period, particularly in the US and Western Europe, was a time of religious experimentation. While Franklin argues that all religions are syncretic, due to the reshaping of beliefs to align with the particular temporal, social and cultural conditions in which they are

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<sup>506</sup> Dirda, 2016.

<sup>507</sup> Graf, 2015: 79-80.

<sup>508</sup> Graf, 2015: 83.

<sup>509</sup> Ashley (2019), Blackwood's biographer and the predominant source of information around Blackwood's writing, identifies autobiographical details in his works, and identifies a number of short stories written around the time of this novel which share the same spiritual and metaphysical concerns.

<sup>510</sup> Payne, 2016: 239-40.

<sup>511</sup> As Richardson notes, legacies of spiritualism continued to create resonance in how scholars of classics have thought about their relationship to the past and their recovery of it (2016: 225). In this chapter, we see the direct effect of the practice of spiritualism on the work of those using classical subjects.

practised,<sup>512</sup> he suggests that 19<sup>th</sup>-century England was, in particular, a hotbed of religious change, particularly because of exposure to Buddhism. Theosophy,<sup>513</sup> one of the most famous hybrid religions, sought to bridge the gap between Christian beliefs, particularly the belief in spirituality of the human soul and ‘materialism’, a denial of spirituality; this was seen as having been brought about by scientific advancements and new knowledge which challenged the chronology of the earth and its inhabitants as espoused by the Bible. Theosophy did draw from Buddhism but it also melded those elements with other aspects from different religions and mythologies. While the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was ‘absolutely unique’ and distinct from Theosophy,<sup>514</sup> it did share some aspects – its membership, in many cases, including Blackwood, and their founders’ use of fictionalised ‘ancient’ texts to underpin its doctrines.

As Spiritualism had already had some popularity before Theosophy was invented, there was already an established acceptance for exploring elements beyond normal human perception, and outside Christian doctrine. Spiritualism provided the groundwork for those who were interested in exploring the occult, and in providing proof of its claims – that humans had souls, and that these souls existed beyond the expiration of the physical body. Together with the Darwinian revolution, the increase in the study of comparative religion laid the foundations for the ‘cultural imperative to try to resolve the ... conflict between ... science and religion’, to find a way to ‘both [join] ... and [separate] the soul and body’.<sup>515</sup> Theosophy came about as Madame Helene Blavatsky sought an alternative to Christianity, and proposed that ‘the self [be multiplied] far beyond the traditional dualism of body and soul ... [that it be

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<sup>512</sup> Franklin, 2011: 50.

<sup>513</sup> Franklin, 2011: 51; also discussed in Owen (2004: 51-84), Bogdan (2007: 121-144).

<sup>514</sup> Owen, 2004: 38.

<sup>515</sup> Franklin, 2011: 59.

viewed] as manifold and fragmented’;<sup>516</sup> but Theosophists also wanted to stop short of practising the occult magic and ancient wisdom that they believed was available.

Theosophy talked about the spirit being in a trinity with the body and the astral body,<sup>517</sup> and it expanded its doctrines as esoteric or secret, limited knowledge; it forbade its adherents from the implementation of those skills. It advocated the accumulation of knowledge in order to navigate the present life and have a more positive afterlife, whereas the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn proposed using that knowledge in practise and transcending the physical boundaries of the body during life.<sup>518</sup>

So, like Theosophy, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn was an esoteric religion – giving access to secret knowledge to a limited number of approved ‘adepts’ – and it built upon ancient Eastern religions, particularly borrowing from the Eleusinian Mysteries,<sup>519</sup> and ancient Egyptian beliefs, with Egyptian symbolism being popular in late Victorian occultism. It was, however, structured around Masonic grades, Rosicrucian religion and the Kabbalistic Tree of Life.<sup>520</sup> It was based upon a found text but very much constructed, with a heavily-fictionalised backstory – the exposure of which eventually led to its demise, although it did then separate and become two different, and distinct, hybrid religions, the Stella Matutina and the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross, as well as spawning other offshoots.

The Golden Dawn advocated that there were unseen dimensions, in which one could become youthful again, and immortal; these Otherworlds could be accessible under particular circumstances, particularly if one could cross the boundary dividing us from them.<sup>521</sup> It has been argued that neither Theosophy nor the Golden Dawn stepped entirely away from the Christian worldview in terms of belief in one all powerful deity; the Golden Dawn particularly

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<sup>516</sup> Franklin, 2011: 80; 82.

<sup>517</sup> Franklin, 2011: 68.

<sup>518</sup> Owen, 2004: 76.

<sup>519</sup> Bogdan, 2007: 128; 139.

<sup>520</sup> Drury, 2011; Owen, 2004: 58.

<sup>521</sup> Coulombe, 1996: 345.

sought a synthesis between having deep religious knowledge and the ability to explore alternative dimensions through clairvoyance and astral travel, or astral projection as might be a more familiar term.

What attracted Yeats to the Golden Dawn is likely to be similar to the attraction for Blackwood – the idea of a mystical life, of power and experience beyond the human and physical, and these could be conveyed in their writing. He had already explored occultism by the time he joined the Golden Dawn.<sup>522</sup> For Yeats, Coulombe argues that ‘Magic and Poetry were near synonymous’; <sup>523</sup> Yeats himself attested that the ‘constant’ study of magic made his writing possible. Writings about these other accessible worlds talk of shadowy companions of the Hermetic dictum ‘as above, so below’, and of making accessible ‘the subtler realities of the cosmos’.<sup>524</sup> It is this aspect, this Otherworld, larger and more ancient than can be usually perceived, that Blackwood has his protagonist explore in *The Centaur*.

### **Blackwood’s *The Centaur***

A brief summary of the plot of this lesser-known work will provide a basis for the further analysis through the philosophical *foci* utilised in previous chapters. The fictional protagonist Terence O’Malley is a freelance journalist, and he regales the anonymous narrator with his tales. At the time of writing, O’Malley has died and the narrator is in possession of his important papers – the narrative is a combination of what the narrator remembers of their conversations and his curation of the written records - a hybrid source. The narrator provides an introduction to O’Malley and his character in the second chapter. It is lengthy but suffused with reported stories and opinions of the man. Although O’Malley has a mixture of Irish, Scottish and English blood in his veins, it is suggested that the Irish manifested most, perhaps

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<sup>522</sup> Owen, 2004: 67.

<sup>523</sup> Coulombe, 1996: 349.

<sup>524</sup> Coulombe, 1996: 352.

an allusion to Yeats' interest in mysticism and presence in the Golden Dawn's temple. The narrator repetitiously tells us of the love O'Malley has for Nature, and the ability he has to be possessed by its forces.

Blackwood had need of a stronger editor, as Dirda suggests; 'in his longer works ... sometimes his philosophising usurps his storytelling, or he repeats and overexplains his ideas'.<sup>525</sup> However, in some ways, this over-explanation helps to reiterate to the reader, perhaps unfamiliar with Blackwood's world view, exactly how unusual his protagonist is, and the qualities he possesses that enable him to have the experiences he recounts. So when the unnamed narrator describes O'Malley as being 'sometimes ... rapt away, caught up to see the tail end of the great procession of the gods that had come near',<sup>526</sup> or identifies the diverse moods that different aspects of nature evoke within him, such as mountains inducing 'a splendid terror due to some want of comprehension in himself, caused probably by a spiritual remoteness from their mood',<sup>527</sup> the reader is prepared for the uniqueness of character that renders the following tale more credible.

The tale that O'Malley recounts in his journals and through discussion with the narrator is fairly simple in terms of action. As a roving journalist, he is on a ship to the Caucasus mountains to write travel pieces, reflecting a frequently-visited place of Blackwood himself. The Caucasus is also regarded as a geophysical gateway between Europe and Asia; here it is the gateway between the contemporary and the mythical. This is where the figure of the centaur comes in. On this ship he re-encounters Dr Stahl, a previous correspondent of his, in whom he recognises some of the curiosities that exist within him, and who acts as a cautionary figure throughout the tale. He also encounters that of which Stahl warns he should be cautious – a mysterious "Russian" and a boy, presumed to be his son, who seem curiously fluid in both size

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<sup>525</sup> Dirda, 2016.

<sup>526</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 9.

<sup>527</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 9.

and shape to O'Malley's eye. The man recognises within O'Malley what is, perhaps, the potential to become what he is, and offers him, in his first speech, an invitation:

'Some of us ... of *ours*...' he spoke very slowly, very brokenly, quarrying out the words with real labour, 'still survive ... out there ... we ... now go back. So very ... few ... remain ... And *you* ... come with us ...' <sup>528</sup>

O'Malley discusses the man with Dr Stahl, who believes that the "Russian" is actually a relic from ancient time, 'what should no longer be present in the present, as the leftover from some prior life would, but yes, as the uncanny persistence of what should no longer be here'.<sup>529</sup> This fragmentary being oscillates in form between that of a large man, and of an even larger centaur. His human form can barely contain his essence, but in offering his invitation to the seemingly entirely human O'Malley, he seems to see in him a connection to this ancient world. Indeed, that O'Malley and Stahl – who discloses that he has previously made a study of the hybrid being – can sense and perceive this implied, not quite visible shape, singles them out from the other passengers on the ship. The other passengers seem to sense an oddity about the man and the boy. They take pains to avoid interacting with them, but they do not seem to see the immense size barely contained by the human forms.

To summarise briefly the end of the novel – O'Malley disembarks at Batoum, modern day Batumi, in Georgia, on the Black Sea: the same place as the man.<sup>530</sup> The boy's physical body has died on board, although O'Malley and the "Russian" believe that his spirit has been called by the ancient guardians. After some travelling to fulfil his journalistic responsibilities, O'Malley encounters the man in a remote area. He follows, allowing his hold on his physical body to be released. He becomes one of the spirits, feels himself changing form, moving

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<sup>528</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 39-40.

<sup>529</sup> Payne, 2016: 240-1.

<sup>530</sup> Ashley (2019: 208) asserts that this was a trip that Blackwood himself took, and that his fascination with the Caucasus found its way into the portrayal of O'Malley.

strangely, and feeling differently about his being and purpose; the danger has always been about surrendering entirely to this Otherworld and relinquishing his hold and perception on the modern. However, when he thinks about the prospect of being able to take the message back to humanity, to civilisation, of what he has encountered, he is thrust out and back into his physical form. He returns to London, starts preaching, and has a slow demise until he is able – as is now believed by the previously cynical anonymous narrator – to rejoin the ancient spirits and cast off his mortal body for eternity.

Perhaps this novel is a wholehearted affirmation of Blackwood's spiritual belief in novelistic form, although he seems deliberately to avoid referencing Golden Dawn ritual or imagery, for the most part – possibly because he took the oath affirming secrecy of the Order seriously.<sup>531</sup> Throughout the early part of the novel, O'Malley and Dr Stahl – who is both self-interested in terms of the predilections of his own character, as well as being interested in terms of scientific observation – refer to O'Malley as having a 'Double'. This 'double' has a different kind of consciousness to the one of O'Malley that lives in the 'modern' world; it would be able 'to escape',<sup>532</sup> which might well 'involve catastrophe'.<sup>533</sup> That this is directly informed by Blackwood's spiritual beliefs and his membership of the Golden Dawn is underpinned by the form of the novel – many of the early chapters, and those relating to O'Malley's and Blackwood's philosophical ideas, are prefaced with quotations from a variety of philosophers, spiritual thinkers, and naturalists, such as Henry David Thoreau. These quotations directly relate to what O'Malley is telling the narrator, or writing, about his beliefs and experiences. The protagonist also refers to this Otherworld in which he could lose himself because the final release of his double would result in physical death as the Golden Age, and he proposes that it is open to all, and the antithesis to the 'horror of materialism'.<sup>534</sup>

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<sup>531</sup> Graf, 2015: 80.

<sup>532</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 95.

<sup>533</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 96.

<sup>534</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 111.

The acuity of his senses' response to this Otherworld improves as the ship reaches Greece; and when docked at the Piraeus, O'Malley particularly talks about truths, and the mysteries – perhaps the only direct link to the doctrine and source material of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, evoking ideas of the Eleusinian mysteries and Plato's ideal Republic, set in Piraeus. Finally, he repeatedly references the skills available to his double – that of astral projection,<sup>535</sup> of clairvoyance,<sup>536</sup> and of being able to be elsewhere while asleep.<sup>537</sup> Stahl outlines his theory of the 'superconscious reaching into the future'.<sup>538</sup> The narrative is underscored throughout with the theory that, in the modern world, one cannot live to full potential. For particularly sensitive souls, the normal world makes them feel divided,<sup>539</sup> and, for O'Malley, it makes him feel 'tiny, unreal, half-alive'.<sup>540</sup>

The title *The Centaur* points to this mythological figure's particular symbolic importance: 'Nature produces the centaurs as subjects of primordial experience that instantiate its own experience of itself'.<sup>541</sup> Cheiron is also specifically mentioned,<sup>542</sup> and the portrayal of centaurs more broadly map onto the positive traits attributed to Cheiron through the ancient sources. Although Cheiron's ancient renown in relation to technology is not a preoccupation of this group of artists, examining each of the other qualities will determine to what extent Blackwood, Yeats and Dulac privilege them in their understanding of the mythological figures, and their importance in relation to their spiritual beliefs.

### **Aesthetics**

Blackwood's novel is a prose narrative told by an unnamed first-person narrator, a friend and primarily-sceptical confidant of O'Malley. The narrative is split into forty-six chapters, in

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<sup>535</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 66-7.

<sup>536</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 68.

<sup>537</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 190.

<sup>538</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 153.

<sup>539</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 192.

<sup>540</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 70.

<sup>541</sup> Payne, 2016: 247.

<sup>542</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 142.

which the narrator combines written records from O'Malley's own hand with his own recollections of conversations with, and observations of, O'Malley. Payne asserts that O'Malley requires his friend to record his experiences in writing.<sup>543</sup> What differentiates chapters in this narrative, however, is that some, but not all, have a quotation as an epigraph to the chapters, as briefly mentioned above. Out of the forty-six chapters in the novel, twenty-six are prefaced with a quotation in this way, linking to a wider selection of works and ideas, inviting comparison or additional context to Blackwood's work. The quotations are from real life, published works; they are not invented by Blackwood, and therefore they engage with his ideas from his membership of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, further elaborated within the novel. These quotations from authors, psychologists, philosophers, and thinkers such as William James, Henry Thoreau, Walt Whitman and Herbert Spencer, cover ideas about civilization, our understanding or lack of comprehension of the universe, of consciousness, and of mythology; each 'foregrounds the place of Nature in the discourse network of 1800'.<sup>544</sup>

Some of these quotations speak more directly to concerns of the Golden Dawn, and therefore of Blackwood, than others. A quotation from Henri Bergson talks of thinking only with a small part of the past but having a desire to act with the entire past, which links to a quotation from Novalis about mythology comprehending the Past, Present and Future.<sup>545</sup> Both relate to the desire to transcend the boundaries and trappings of time as a linear, unstoppable force and a social construct. These ideas also touch upon a quotation from William James, advancing the possibility of a 'superior consciousness' in 'exceptional individuals':<sup>546</sup> able to access the preserved memories of people from the past, suggesting that knowledge of humanity and individual memories join the kind of collective memory that O'Malley experiences when he joins the ancient beings. These quotations, therefore, underscore the theory behind the

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<sup>543</sup> Payne, 2016: 240.

<sup>544</sup> Payne, 2016: 240.

<sup>545</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 34; Novalis, *Philosophical Writings*.

<sup>546</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 53; James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.

experiences of O'Malley that the narrator relates, often eliding his objectivity with omniscience, almost in a kind of case study. They also relate to Blackwood's ontological use of the centaur figure (see page 147 below).

Blackwood also uses a kind of ekphrasis in the novel, again signalling hybridity, in his employment of a painting of a centaur by Arnold Böcklin to demonstrate the Batoum inhabitants' beliefs around encountering the ancient beings;<sup>547</sup> perhaps picking up a reference to Zeuxis' famous ancient painting, described by Lucian (see above chapter 1). The painting allusion helps the reader to visualise the beings, and underscores the danger O'Malley is putting himself in, as well as highlighting how exceptional he is to have survived. If the locals believe that to see them is to die,<sup>548</sup> which is also what O'Malley's guide believes, then O'Malley, in not just seeing them but being one of them, existing with them and being ejected from their company, transcends the normal boundaries of mortality for a time. Nevertheless, this reference to the painting and its effects upon the locals, foreshadows O'Malley's eventual demise. That the centaur is represented in a painting to give an intertextual reference, and an artistic counterpoint, is a useful connection to the work of both Yeats and Dulac.

For Yeats, the centaur primarily represents an approach to art. In his biography, talking about his younger self, Yeats reported that he had thought "that all art should be a centaur finding in the popular lore its back and strong legs".<sup>549</sup> As this is a reflection back from a more mature poet, it is clear that his thoughts – on art, and perhaps centaurs themselves – had changed, but the mingling of art with 'popular lore', folktales and mythology, was important to his early outputs and inspiration. Here, mythology is being described as a frame, the aspect of the centaur that carries the weight of the body, head and neck – but it is, also, the most distinctly equine part of the centaur itself. If this carries through to the usual divisions ascribed

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<sup>547</sup> It is not specified exactly which centaur painting by Böcklin, but it is likely to be either his celebrated 'Battle of the Centaurs' (1873) or 'Centaur in the Village Blacksmith's Shop' (1888).

<sup>548</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 173.

<sup>549</sup> Yeats, cited in Davidson, 2012: 510.

to the centaur, of the human part as intellect and reason, the horse aspects as nature and instinct, then the metaphor implies the centrality of instinct to the production of art. Without this strong frame, the metaphor implies, the work of art cannot be supported. In an 1892 letter to John O’Leary, Yeats writes that the study of ‘magic’ has made his writing possible, that it is central to his study, and that he advocates ‘the revolt of the soul against the intellect’, which he believed was ‘now beginning in the world’.<sup>550</sup> The centaur, with its hybrid body, surely represents this dichotomy, and the apparent tension that others saw in his beliefs and his work.

The elder Yeats, however, in looking back at his thoughts on the unity of art and life, and the symbol of the centaur as its representation, reflects on his naivety: “I did not foresee not having the courage of my own thought: the growing murderousness of the world”.<sup>551</sup> This distancing of himself from the artistic ideal of the centaur is portrayed in two of his poems in particular, ‘Lines Written in Dejection’ and ‘On a Picture of a Black Centaur by Edmund Dulac’ (henceforth referred to as ‘Black Centaur’). Both are short poems, written just a few years apart, and they reference centaurs as a reflection on the perfection of art that is possible through the merging of art, life, and spiritualism.

‘Lines Written in Dejection’, the first of these poems, has as melancholic a tone as the title suggests. Published in 1919, it reflects the changing world in which the fifty-year-old Yeats found himself and, perhaps, his craft. The poem mourns the loss of figures associated with the night and the moon, the ‘dark leopards’ and the ‘wild witches’; it has been an unaccountable period of time since these aspects were visible to the poet. That these nocturnal figures are imbued with positive qualities is affirmed by the reference to the witches being ‘most noble ladies’. Just a couple of lines later, centaurs are linked to the poet and his purpose: ‘The holy centaurs of the hills are vanished / I have nothing but the embittered sun.’ Here, the

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<sup>550</sup> Wade, 1955, cited in Serra, 2017: 15.

<sup>551</sup> Davidson, 2012: 512.

centaurs are ‘holy’, and their vanishing further identifies the distance from the moonscape that the poet must endure. Although centaurs are not necessarily linked with a nocturnal landscape in the same way that the other symbols might be – certainly Cheiron’s training his young protégés would have been likely to take place primarily in daytime hours – they are opposed to the sun here, where the sun is either ‘embittered’ or ‘timid’, compared to the ‘heroic mother moon’. The centaurs, along with the other liminal, dangerous figures of the night, are gone and the poet finds himself living now under the transparency of sunlight. This perhaps suggests that work written under this glare of transparency and ordinariness lacks the magic and danger of earlier writing. This sun perhaps signifies criticism and analysis, a pinning down of the shadowy, fluid symbols which suffuse Yeats’s work.

‘Black Centaur’, published originally in 1922 as ‘Suggested by a Picture of a Black Centaur’ and again in 1928 under its new title as part of the collection *The Tower* (for which Thomas Sturge Moore designed the cover) has a kind of ekphrasis as its focal point. Yeats was inspired at first by a picture of a centaur by Cecil Selkeld, but by the time the poem was complete, its reference point was said to be a picture by Dulac (either his famous black centaur in ‘The Good Chiron Taught His Pupils How to Play upon the Harp’, an illustration to Hawthorne’s *Tanglewood Tales* or the design of a bedcover to be embroidered by Lily Yeats).<sup>552</sup> However, when writing, Yeats also saw a watercolour by Selkeld which clarified his thoughts, and that makes its way into the poem; therefore its inspiration was itself somewhat hybrid.<sup>553</sup>

The poem itself, Merritt suggests, ‘marks an important transition in Yeats’s poetic career, signalling a pivotal development in his poetic method’,<sup>554</sup> and looks both to earlier work as well as the future. Fuelled by the need for a tonsillectomy, and a tendency to bleed profusely,

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<sup>552</sup> Hawthorne, 1918.

<sup>553</sup> Loizeaux, 1986: 137-9.

<sup>554</sup> Merritt, 1988: 260.

meaning that surgery was fraught with significant and real danger, this facing up to mortality creates the 'proleptic and retrospective' aspect which also imbues the other poems in *The Tower*. The figure of the centaur here, representing artistic endeavour along with an incorporation of soul, is not as melancholic as in 'Lines Written in Dejection'; Merritt suggests that the central position of the poem in the collection signals 'an end to [a] psychological crisis'.<sup>555</sup> The dedication to Dulac, who became more closely linked with the figure, as will be discussed shortly, is potentially an important one; he featured centaurs in numerous paintings beside the *Tanglewood Tales* illustration, and designs for a bedspread to be embroidered by Lily Yeats,<sup>556</sup> before adopting it as his personal symbol. This indicates a passing of the baton from Yeats to the younger artist.

Throughout the poem, the painting is being described but the poet is inserting his own reflections into what he sees. The links between the centaur and the poet's artistic endeavours are highlighted through the repetition of 'stamped', and it is possible to interpret the centaur as having done the stamping of the works into the 'sultry mud', a not wholly pejorative location for the work, being suggestive of passion. However, the next line, in which Yeats refers to 'horse play' being 'murderous', suggests a destructiveness to the act, particularly if there was only play at being the centaur; as the quotation from his autobiography suggests, Yeats could not, perhaps, fully commit to his ideals. The centaur is the object and addressee of the poem; it is 'your hooves' that stamp,<sup>557</sup> and the poet is 'being driven half-insane' by the parrots and

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<sup>555</sup> Adams, 1990, cited in Merritt, 1998: 263,

<sup>556</sup> Yeats commissioned work from both Dulac and Sturge Moore, sometimes the same work: Hobby relates that this was the situation for the centaur bedspread: 'Yeats apparently asked Dulac to conceive a design for it, and also asked Sturge Moore, resulting in an embarrass de richesses, a situation which he repeated in commissioning the design for the Great Wheel in *A Vision*, and had to extricate himself from with great tact' (1981: 22).

<sup>557</sup> Hobby also outlines the importance of the unicorn as Yeats's personal symbol, as Dulac's was the centaur, and some of the discussion links in imagery to this poem. 'The unicorn takes part in the destruction of the universe in the Book of Revelation, tramples the earth in "The Unicorn From the Stars", as the command is heard, "Destroy, destroy, destruction is the life-giver," and in "The Player Queen" Yeats cites new eras which will succeed Christianity, the age of the unicorn ... the symbol of the unicorn embodies the idea of destruction through great beauty ...' (1981: 36).

the ‘mummy wheat’, grown on land enriched by, and entombing, the bodies of ancient Egyptians. Yeats asserts that the ‘wholesome sun’ can only produce ‘wholesome food’, the phrasing suggesting that the qualities of the sun bring goodness; however the imagery of the poem suggests that his might not give the poet all he needs. Instead, he gains sustenance from wine found near the Ephesian sleepers, from a secret source which must be connected with the biblical Ephesians 5:14, ‘Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you’. He rejects the ‘wholesome’ aspects of the sun, and the transparency it brings to his work – creating a direct link with his views on the sun in ‘Lines Written in Dejection’.

Schuchard, however, suggests that here Yeats is hailing a return of his own centaur,<sup>558</sup> through seeing Dulac’s illustration of Cheiron teaching the lyre to Jason, the picture from *Tanglewood Tales*. ‘Lines Written in Dejection’ records the loss of his creativity, and ‘Black Centaur’ celebrates its return, and demonstrates regret that he had lost faith in him. However, this interpretation overlooks the complication of the works being stamped down, and the ‘murderous’ ‘horse-play’. While the poem undoubtedly expresses a fondness for the centaur and a relief at its return – either to himself or through Dulac – Yeats is suggesting he has experienced a crisis of creativity, and that the centaur has been central to both that crisis and its resolution.

The centaur recurs repeatedly in Yeats’s discussion of his creative outputs, which is indivisible from his interest and involvement in the spiritual. When outlining that art needs to have the popular lore as the centaur’s back and legs, as previously quoted, critics such as Paul see this linking directly to ‘popular belief and its affirmation of spirits’.<sup>559</sup> To Yeats, they also have a religious element that can be linked to Christianity, suggesting that they are ‘without sin though mid way between men and angels’,<sup>560</sup> and his description of a meeting between Abbot

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<sup>558</sup> Schuchard, 2013.

<sup>559</sup> Paul, 2018.

<sup>560</sup> Yeats, cited in Paul, 2018.

Anthony and a centaur, in which directions are offered, since they are beings of knowledge and wisdom. Centaurs represent a hybridity within Yeats's work, just as they do within that of Dulac, and speak to the existence within mythology of such beings, more divine than man and yet not gods. This hybridity also speaks to the ability of such beings to signify art as emerging from the mystic realm. In utilising mythology and mythological beings from all systems, Yeats explores the duality between myth as used in religious beliefs and myth as a more routine story. The truth of myth does not need to lie its veracity but can be in the enduring message that is conveyed, and in Yeats's *A Vision* Book III he elides the 'poet' and the 'maker of myth', grafting two aspects together.<sup>561</sup>

This grafting of myth and history with his own poetic inspiration is evident in *The Tower*, the collection in which 'Black Centaur' appears. Schuchard posits that the Unity of Being was, for Yeats, to be found 'in the mask of the Antithetical Self ... arresting the journeying soul in works of art that embody and reflect the soul's magnificence'.<sup>562</sup> This 'antithetical self' is frequently reflected in his use of the centaur as a symbol. This idea was support in a talk that Dulac gave to the Irish Literary Society in London in 1948, entitled 'Yeats as I knew him'. In it, Dulac explained Yeats's belief that 'occult systems were essentially mnemonics to release from within a person a chain of subconscious associations';<sup>563</sup> the use of mythological figures, however, as utilised in the structure and systems of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, speak to a belief in a collective consciousness, ever-present from ancient times, and passed on, knowingly or not, through generations.<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>561</sup> Yeats, 1937: Book 3.

<sup>562</sup> Schuchard, 2013.

<sup>563</sup> White, 1975: 188.

<sup>564</sup> Comstock-Skipp details correlations between Dulac's and Yeats's spiritual outlooks, and also those in their artistic works on the Magi, that both artists seek to underscore the belief that Christianity is not the only authoritative religious system, and that as artists they 'erod[e] the barriers between religious and philosophical systems' (2013: 21).

Membership of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, and its two main continuation sects, identify both Blackwood and Yeats as seeking knowledge and experiences beyond their own contemporary time and environments. This search, and the resulting spiritual experiences permeate their works. For Yeats, this knowledge of otherness, of ‘magic’ as he called it, was at the core of his artistic endeavours and, as previously mentioned, was thought by him to make his writing possible. His approach is outlined in *A Vision*, a system which he said was revealed to him by spirit beings, daimons;<sup>565</sup> nevertheless, he expresses doubt in whether he believes the whole of it but considers it to be crucial to his work. ‘A single thought has expressed in itself as if it were a work of art, *whether man or Centaur*, and I have tested each detail of its relation to the whole, each completed movement, by its reflection of the whole’ (*my emphasis*).<sup>566</sup> This uncertainty of belief, of this ‘single thought’ is further underscored in his suggesting it might be either man or centaur, presumably evoking imagery of wildness and division, of civilisation or nature. Yet because Yeats saw the centaur as a symbol of the unity of art, to the bringing together of disparate elements to make a whole, it is not certain that this doubt needs to have a pejorative significance. Rather, Yeats seems to suggest that this thought has encompassed two distinctly different, yet related, types of approach, and it is that which has brought him to where he is now, both in his artistic outputs and his spiritual beliefs.

Although Dulac was himself not a member of the Golden Dawn, or the Theosophical Society, he and Yeats shared the belief in the ‘concept of universal knowledge across time and place that fused the artistic, the spiritual, and the intellectual into one’.<sup>567</sup> Both believed in the necessity of linking magic and art; although not part of an organised group, Dulac was also actively pursuing attempts to communicate with ‘other planes of existence [as] a means of

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<sup>565</sup> Paul, 2018.

<sup>566</sup> Yeats, cited in Paul, 2018.

<sup>567</sup> Comstock-Skipp, 2013: 18.

uncovering hidden truths of the universe and spiritual answers'.<sup>568</sup> Both were seeking to unite opposites.

As an artist, however, Dulac was generally considered to have a style that was 'evolutionary not revolutionary',<sup>569</sup> and this can be seen in the development of his work. In particular, his illustrations for a Christmas gift book of the *Arabian Nights* (1914) had evolved from previous work so that an observer could not view the entire scene from one position but instead had to move around within the picture to see the detail. He argued against the predominance of the Greek influence on the culture of the West, and was expert in Persian art. He believed that Western art was imitative, really little better than coloured photography, whereas subjective art suggests and allows 'the spectator to extract whatever he wishes of the *Now* from the *Eternal*'.<sup>570</sup> Similarly to Yeats, Dulac seems to suggest that art can convey multiple time periods all at once, although this view does not seem to be ascribed to any spiritualistic sensibility.

Dulac was also extremely pragmatic; as White records, '[h]e wished to paint to the best of his ability and to sell for as much money as possible'.<sup>571</sup> Nevertheless, his artistic skills gave him an affinity with the time and place of the stories he illustrated, particularly shown with the *Edmund Dulac Fairy Book*, also called the *Fairy Book of the Allied Nations*, published in support of the Allied forces during WW1 (1916). In it, Dulac collected lesser-known tales from the Allied nations and illustrated them, demonstrating his 'remarkable ability to assimilate the ethnic elements in a story and adopt his style to the country of origin and the time in which the action is taking place'.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>568</sup> Comstock-Skipp, 2013: 19.

<sup>569</sup> White, 1975: 60.

<sup>570</sup> White, 1975: 72.

<sup>571</sup> White, 1975: 90.

<sup>572</sup> White, 1975: 77.

Dulac was obsessed with centaurs for a number of years. They are evident even in his early work, in a drawing from his time at the *Ecole des Beaux Arts* as a young man, where the model's false leg is portrayed as ending in a hoof rather than a foot.<sup>573</sup> He illustrated Greek myths in which centaurs feature, in particular 'The Centaurs and the Lapith Women' (1937), 'Hercules and Deianira' (1931), as well as the famous illustration in *Tanglewood Tales*, previously mentioned. Centaurs featured in three book plates that he designed; one for the book society in 1936, one for Miss Harriet Borland, and one for himself, capturing his personal obsession with the mythological figure.<sup>574</sup> Along with Yeats, the centaur represented to him the wisdom of the man and the strength of the horse, the fusion of culture and nature, and 'echoes of a lost Eden'.<sup>575</sup> Furthermore, it was with Cheiron that Dulac particularly identified. White suggests that it was due to his own diversity of talents that he saw himself reflected in Cheiron's being skilled in all arts and crafts,<sup>576</sup> and that Cheiron in particular represented the cultural ideal. Through Yeats's poem, 'Black Centaur', we see how this figure is identified with Dulac through time. White, however, suggests that the poem was inspired by the centaur bedspread that Dulac designed, rather than the *Tanglewood Tales* illustration.<sup>577</sup> Such an association between the two existed that the original inspiration cannot be clearly identified.

## **Ontology**

In Blackwood's novel, it is difficult to discern a pattern behind the inclusion of an epigraph to a chapter or its omission, particularly when those without are isolated within a run of chapters with epigrams; yet there are two occasions in the novel that have a small run of chapters without them. Chapters twenty-one through to twenty-six, and thirty-eight through to forty-six, the end

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<sup>573</sup> White, 1975: 93.

<sup>574</sup> White, 1975: 97.

<sup>575</sup> White, 1975: 97.

<sup>576</sup> White, 1975: 97.

<sup>577</sup> White, 1975: 97.

of the novel, all omit an epigraph, allowing the narrative to flow seamlessly. These two sections immediately bookend O'Malley's time with the centaurs, his 'escape' and loss of himself. The chapters detailing his time as his Double – as one of the beings – do, paradoxically, contain an epigraph. While the narrative might signal a surrender to the elemental forces, the narrator or Blackwood still feels the need to underpin this time with ideological commentary. However, the entry into and exit out of that state carries its own momentum and certainly makes further comment unnecessary. This patterning, and distribution of chapters with and without epigraphs, make the text also a centaur, a hybrid thing.

Centaurhood, however, is more than a transitional state. Although discussion between O'Malley and Stahl refers to the centaurs as 'lesser ancient forms',<sup>578</sup> in comparison to the gods that O'Malley can feel go past in the Otherworld, it is the true form of both the "Russian" and the boy, as Stahl indicates,<sup>579</sup> which is supported by the boy seeming to 'canter' in his movements.<sup>580</sup> O'Malley himself feels the desire to move differently when deeply affected by the proximity of the *Urmenschen*,<sup>581</sup> to the extent that he is said to have 'reared',<sup>582</sup> and Stahl reiterates that he saw the "Russian" as a centaur 'as he saw himself to be'.<sup>583</sup> When O'Malley lets himself be subsumed into this Otherworld, he feels himself adopt this form – only rather than feeling himself as two different species, the narrator relates that 'he saw himself whole; he knew himself divine'.<sup>584</sup> Rather than the centaur reflecting the division of body and soul that other religious doctrines offer, or the line between animalistic and civilised that frequently portrays the combination of horse and man, the centaur here represents the unity of both of

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<sup>578</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 243.

<sup>579</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 131.

<sup>580</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 123.

<sup>581</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 135.

<sup>582</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 138.

<sup>583</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 290.

<sup>584</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 222.

these aspects in a mythological, immortal space in which, it is implied, one can be spiritually free.

### **Epistemology**

Leichliter proposes that the use of horses, not just centaurs, is central to understanding Yeats's poetry because of his theory of opposites.<sup>585</sup> As outlined, Yeats is searching for a way to fuse the opposites within his writing, of transcending the dichotomies of nature and culture, reason and passion. He believed that the material for poetry was not found in philosophy but in the sensible world, albeit that spiritualism informed his work and inspired him to find a reconciliation of such opposites.

The frequently recurring symbols of horses and horsemen in his work, particularly from 1919 onwards, often evoke a violence, as we see in 'Black Centaur'. While horses and horsemen occur in a variety of settings within his work, 'the combination of the horse and the supernatural is irresistible to him'.<sup>586</sup> There are particular correlations between the deployment of centaurs and Yeats's use of the Sidhe, the elemental powers of light, warmth, fruitfulness and goodness, linked with the wind, and "the great among them ...go on horseback". Yet the Sidhe, or the Tuatha de Danaan, can also be dangerous to those who show too much interest in 'faeries', abducting them so that they are unable to rejoin the mortal world. Yeats's involvement in the Celtic Revival and his interest in Irish mythology manifest itself here in his desire to return to the Sidhe some of their symbolic power.<sup>587</sup> Horses and horsemen can be dangerous, symbols of violence yet also of nobility. Leichliter reports an Irish idiom that 'horseman' comes with 'a note of respect, even awe: the rider has something of Hebraic strength and mystery', or has symbolic association of strength and wisdom, that which

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<sup>585</sup> Leichliter, 1969: 15.

<sup>586</sup> Leichliter, 1969: 15.

<sup>587</sup> Leichliter, 1969: 17.

produces centaurs.<sup>588</sup> The symbols of horses, horsemen and centaurs in Yeats are bound together with complexity, with a restraint or taming of the passions, and of reconciling two apparently oppositional forces.

Although Yeats's use of centaurs often arises with classical symbolism or reference, Leichliter asserts that Yeats's centaur is actually not a classical one but a combination of passion and disorder in the strength of the horse, with the culture, tradition and intellect of the man.<sup>589</sup> The centaur symbolises the Unity of Being and those who achieve it. However, as this thesis demonstrates, the centaur is a symbol frequently adopted by writers to illustrate the tension between these oppositional forces and the duality of humans. Yeats' spiritual searching results in his use of the centaur as a way of combining knowledge of the now and the eternal. That it is also a useful symbol for the artist is demonstrated by both his and Dulac's fascination with it. As Leichliter asserts, '[i]f the perfect man is centaur by virtue of a proper balance of passion and intellect, the artist, by virtue of a proper domination of the raw materials of art (life itself) by the shaping intellect, is also centaur'.<sup>590</sup>

This idea of intellect, and of having knowledge beyond the easily perceived, is also present in Blackwood's novel. In terms of knowledge and prophecy, both O'Malley and Stahl occupy a central position in having experience of what has happened previously (in the case of Stahl) and what could happen in the future (in the case of both); however, they seeking to extend their knowledge, albeit in different ways. The narrator outlines O'Malley's exceptionalism in gaining knowledge of a deeper variety than other men, stating that he 'saw the thing whole, from some kind of inner bird's eye view, while [others] saw only limited aspects of it from various angles'.<sup>591</sup> This, asserts the narrator, gained him the reputation of elaborating and fictionalising, whereas he had actually just observed more than others had.

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<sup>588</sup> Leichliter, 1969: 40.

<sup>589</sup> Leichliter, 1969: 43.

<sup>590</sup> Leichliter, 1969: 58.

<sup>591</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 12.

This is, perhaps, due to O'Malley's interests, in psychology and particularly in divided personalities, which could, of course, explain the centaur figure haunting him and the text, split between the knowledge of this modern, time-constrained world, and of the greater mythological time that the ancient beings inhabit in their true form. The narrator also states that O'Malley was 'able to feel and understand people through atmosphere, rather than words',<sup>592</sup> suggesting that this enhanced perception allows him the access to realms of knowledge otherwise closed off. This gap is demonstrated, perhaps, by Dr Stahl, whose 'experiences did not tally with beliefs'.<sup>593</sup> O'Malley is able to transcend the gap whereas Stahl is held back in some way, perhaps in courage. That these two men converse and share their knowledge, experiences and belief in what exists beyond the boundaries of usual perception allows Blackwood to elucidate his thoughts to the reader.

One of the main aspects of knowledge that Blackwood explores through the novel is of its limits. As outlined above, O'Malley is presented as unusually perceptive, able to understand without words. Stahl introduces the topic to O'Malley, his scientific knowledge offering that '[t]he speech-centre in the brain ...is ...a comparatively recent thing in evolution'.<sup>594</sup> In outlining his experiences in meeting the 'Russian', Stahl suggests that language had been forgotten.<sup>595</sup> Later Stahl describes the 'Russian' as *unheimlich*,<sup>596</sup> traditionally translated into English as 'uncanny', a rather slippery word in German that means almost the same as its apparent antonym, *heimlich* – something that is both familiar and not, a home that is somehow not home, and a not-home that is, somehow, homely. Nevertheless, Stahl suggests that communication with the man does not need language, and O'Malley suggests that communication might have happened instead through 'thought-transference'.<sup>597</sup> In their

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<sup>592</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 45.

<sup>593</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 27.

<sup>594</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 44.

<sup>595</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 47.

<sup>596</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 56.

<sup>597</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 47.

discussion of ‘unexpended mythological values’, both O’Malley and Stahl convey the thought that language cannot accurately convey this ancient knowledge,<sup>598</sup> that ‘these little modern words were all wrong and inadequate. Modern speech could only deal with modern smaller things’.<sup>599</sup> The narrator, too, struggles to write what O’Malley said of his experience, remembering just a ‘stream of language’; what he remembers more is that ‘he made apt reference to the rhythmical swaying of those who speak in trance, or know some strange, possessing gust of inspiration’,<sup>600</sup> perhaps proving the point that language is not the only method of effective communication, that it is grafted, centaur-like, onto other modes of expression and knowledge.

The invocation of one engaged in prophecy it is not the only occasion in the text in which the narrator makes reference to prophetic vision. In reporting O’Malley’s crossing towards Greece aboard the ship, he suggests that ‘out of the abyss of the subconscious there rose a gesture prophetic and immense’;<sup>601</sup> on reading a travel book entitled ‘After Civilization’, O’Malley refers to the author as ‘a seer’ who was looking ahead, ‘whereas he looked back. But they saw the same vision’.<sup>602</sup> In the ancient sources Cheiron’s wisdom extended into prophecy, and O’Malley understands that these beings are trapped imperfectly in human guise as being ‘hunted by humanity, seeking refuge’.<sup>603</sup> This picks up Moore’s idea (outlined in the previous chapter in discussion of ‘The Centaur’s Booty’), of those beings now having less power and wilderness in which to escape. In having the ability to see this, O’Malley positions himself almost like Cheiron. The narrator attests to this, calling him ‘this divining Celt’, and suggesting that he ‘possessed, like the Hebrew prophets of old, just that measure of judgement and

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<sup>598</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 61.

<sup>599</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 81.

<sup>600</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 195.

<sup>601</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 30.

<sup>602</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 177.

<sup>603</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 35.

divination which go into the making of a true clear-vision'.<sup>604</sup> In what is, perhaps, an homage to Yeats, another 'divining Celt', Blackwood outlines that 'reason and intellect cannot measure things of the soul'.<sup>605</sup> It is in this that the figure of Cheiron is most apparent. As the tutor of heroes he was responsible for developing both reason and intellect, but also in fostering *andreia*, that aspect of the soul which seeks manly heroic deeds and courageous action. As Cheiron's name is evoked by the boy, just before his physical death, there is also a role for him in this modern world of Blackwood's, in helping those with perception, will and courage to transcend boundaries and access that ancient knowledge and turn it to ethical ends.

### **Ethics**

In Blackwood's novel, Cheiron is not directly mentioned more than once; nevertheless, he has both an obvious and a more subtle employment within this work. To address, first, the more obvious employment – before the boy's physical form dies on board the ship, he speaks to the man and says 'Chiron calls',<sup>606</sup> suggesting that it is this figure, this tutor to human heroes, who particularly assists in calling forth the Double, just as in the ancient texts he provides a liminal space for the transformation of boys into adult heroic figures. O'Malley, rather obtusely, refers to the boy's utterance as being a 'clue of explanation',<sup>607</sup> yet does not offer his own, leaving the reader to utilise their own mythological knowledge. That at the time the ship is in view of Pelion, the wooded peninsula where Cheiron traditionally lived, is also a feature that classicists will appreciate but which might remain less relevant to those without that background.

The second, slightly less obvious, reference to Cheiron comes when the narrator refers a conversation with O'Malley in London, after his return, when they pass a statue of Achilles,<sup>608</sup>

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<sup>604</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 198-9.

<sup>605</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 13.

<sup>606</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 142.

<sup>607</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 143.

<sup>608</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 114.

intimating both the hand that Cheiron has played in O'Malley's experiences thus far, and O'Malley's role going forwards.

However, there are more subtle aspects of Cheiron in this text, and it is my suggestion that the attributes of Cheiron can be found particularly in the man, the "Russian" as he is called throughout the text, and O'Malley himself. The man particularly embodies the role of tutor, in some respects, that are attributed to Cheiron. He is referred to as acting as a channel and an interpreter to O'Malley,<sup>609</sup> later, the reader is told that he was 'guiding' him.<sup>610</sup> Additionally, he leads, he knows nature,<sup>611</sup> horses sense him nearby as kin,<sup>612</sup> and Stahl reports that, while his communication with humans in the hospital had been poor, he had been particularly attuned to animals, perhaps reflecting Cheiron's veterinary skills.

What is reiterated, however, is his leadership and power.<sup>613</sup> When Stahl tells O'Malley that the "Russian" never left Batoum, but was taken to a hospital where he (or at least his physical body) died, it is commented that 'the secret of that complete and absolute leadership was out'.<sup>614</sup> The release from the physical body, it is implied, enabled the man to further embody the role of leader and tutor to O'Malley. For his part, O'Malley then starts to reflect aspects of Cheiron upon his return from the Otherworld. He reports that he wants to 'share his knowledge, heal and save and rescue',<sup>615</sup> and to bring this message to humanity more widely – perhaps, in this final, rather evangelical aspect, diverging from Cheiron's role, whose wisdom and protection was offered to a more select grouping.

Yet, surrender to the centaur also brings danger. Stahl expresses his concern that O'Malley's surrender to this other side of himself will bring insanity,<sup>616</sup> which he has had

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<sup>609</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 80

<sup>610</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 118.

<sup>611</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 219.

<sup>612</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 203.

<sup>613</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 228.

<sup>614</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 286.

<sup>615</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 255.

<sup>616</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 62.

personal experience of, as he discloses towards the end; he had felt, through exposure to the “Russian” during his time working in a hospital, that his personality was threatened and that he would have had suicidal mania had he not discharged the man.<sup>617</sup> He also noticed dangerous alterations in other patients. O’Malley also expresses fear, particularly of freedom,<sup>618</sup> and of his double ‘escaping’<sup>619</sup> – sleep being a particularly dangerous time, when perhaps the boundaries of personality are weaker.<sup>620</sup> This is reiterated in something that Stahl relates to O’Malley, about hearing Batoum locals on a previous visit, looking at Böcklin’s centaur painting, and that seeing such creatures represents the greatest danger.<sup>621</sup> This is reiterated by O’Malley’s guide, who runs in terror when the “Russian” appears in the wilderness to O’Malley. To see them is to die, is the local belief.

### **Metaphysics**

These mythological aspects are, again, underscored throughout the novel. O’Malley outlines the belief that the Earth, Gaia, projects gods and mythological creatures as part of her consciousness.<sup>622</sup> Mythic cartography seems important to Blackwood: he might be drawing upon ancient texts in his belief, as in *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus had been told by his mother Themis, who in the play is identified with Gaia (Earth), about his future liberation.<sup>623</sup> The proximity to Greece, and the Argonauts’ destination in Black Sea, evoke the idea of Jason and his tutor, Cheiron, giving access to this ‘Golden Age’.<sup>624</sup> The less developed, less Westernised aspects of civilisation in these locations (as described by O’Malley and Stahl) make for a more permeable boundary between the two worlds. O’Malley hears music that

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<sup>617</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 286-9.

<sup>618</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 87-8.

<sup>619</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 96.

<sup>620</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 189; 288.

<sup>621</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 173.

<sup>622</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 76.

<sup>623</sup> Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*: 208-213.

<sup>624</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 84.

sounds, to him as resembling that in a Greek temple,<sup>625</sup> and his guide feels the uncanny being that passes by him.<sup>626</sup> In these locations, the collective consciousness of mythology permits O'Malley to more easily tap into this Otherworld. He calls 'Lapithae!' to his fellow beings once he has crossed over, noticing that his utterance came automatically from him, and that it still holds meaning for his companions.<sup>627</sup> The centaur figure symbolises this connection to nature, to the divinity in nature,<sup>628</sup> and is a 'cosmic being',<sup>629</sup> bringing forward connections that are in no need of spoken language or modern rules of communication.<sup>630</sup> The primitive aspects of centaurs that mythological tales highlight – their frequent drunkenness, their lasciviousness – are glossed over here in order to highlight their utility in offering a way into feeling whole within this Golden Age.

So the figure of the centaur is problematic, bringing both freedom but also death, even though, in Blackwood's narrative, the death of the physical form would bring ultimate spiritual freedom. That he uses Stahl to express disbelief of that final result acknowledges that, in this text, the centaur is paradoxical. It signals both the division of body and soul, but is also, ultimately, the symbol of unity, syncretism with the earth, and is the tool to bring together the individual with the ancient collective.

## **Time**

Yeats's short, 8-line poem 'A Thought from Propertius' has time at its core. Alluding to the Roman elegiac poet in its title and Greek mythology in its content, it reflects on the anonymous female subject of the poem and her beauty. The poet considers her appropriately formed to

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<sup>625</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 75.

<sup>626</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 201.

<sup>627</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 234. This reference to the Lapiths, and perhaps offering a warning to the fellow centaurs, taps into mythological knowledge and signals the immortality of these references in the search for spiritual enlightenment.

<sup>628</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 103.

<sup>629</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 64.

<sup>630</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 45-7.

accompany Athena in ritual, to ‘have walked to the altar’, and to have been ‘fit spoil for a centaur / Drunk with the unmixed wine’. Again, Cheiron himself is not named or directly evoked in this poem; rather Yeats seems to be suggesting the more lascivious of his race, with the reputation of drunkenness and abduction of women. Nevertheless, the allusion highlights the timelessness and longevity, both of the centaur and of mythology itself. That this figure is passed through Greek mythology, through Roman poets, and then utilised by Yeats underpins the immortality of the centaur. This is also supported by his individual philosophical theories expounded in *A Vision* IV:XI in which Yeats explains a diagram, ‘The Historical Cones’, which outlines how ‘four periods of time [are] externally co-existent, four co-existent acts; as seen in time we explain their effect by saying that the spirits of the three periods that seem to us past are present amongst us, though unseen’.<sup>631</sup> The example given below the diagram correlates a date in future of the writing, 1927, with the years 250 AD, 900 AD, and 1180 AD.

While Yeats employs a more scientific-seeming approach to the overlap of past and present time than Blackwood (although Yeats asserted that these philosophies had been unveiled to him by spirits), this is an aspect of his work that they share—the acknowledgement that the ancient past can be, and is, relevant to the present and is particularly to artistic inspiration. This is also something that preoccupied Dulac towards the end of his life. White records that he left many notes exploring artistic sensibility, ‘past and present, western and eastern, and to assess its place in the Universal Order’.<sup>632</sup>

In Blackwood’s novel, there is the sense of the immortality of the beings, and Stahl refers to both the ‘Russian’ and the boy as ‘*Urmensch*’, a being from a more primitive age; O’Malley adopts this word, and that or ‘*Urwelt*’, to describe his yearnings for his ‘Golden Age’ which sits in mythological rather than clock time.<sup>633</sup> Blackwood’s entire narrative is

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<sup>631</sup> Yeats, *A Vision*: 440.

<sup>632</sup> White, 1975: 178.

<sup>633</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 57; 130. (Just to acknowledge here that these terms, and the setting of O’Malley’s travels, are particularly laden with notions of Aryan supremacy, particularly in times shortly following the publication

underpinned by the belief that time is, if not cyclical, then overlapping; the immortal elements render time as humans experience it fleeting. However, his character illustrates the tension between knowing that it is possible to step out of chronological time, and the dangers of actually doing so.

## **Conclusion**

In Blackwood's novel, O'Malley's persuasiveness certainly influences the narrator, who shows himself becoming less cynical through the course of the novel, referring to seeing O'Malley shortly before he dies as 'almost a disembodied spirit'.<sup>634</sup> The narrative at the end further intensifies its reflection of Golden Dawn doctrine, in stating that O'Malley wanted 'to change the world's activities from the transient outer to the eternal inner', with his death signalling him leave 'outer fury for the inner peace'.<sup>635</sup> While this moves away from overt roles that can be attributed to Cheiron, it does again reinforce this sense of a boundary that can be crossed, and that it is the normal world that is, perhaps, the liminal space for men like O'Malley.

While centaurs are not an iconographic element in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, I suggest that Blackwood has utilised them to represent a rather paradoxical state of division and unity within the human body and soul. That being a centaur is portrayed as achieving a higher state than being entirely human, and that it is a symbol of gaining access to ancient mythological knowledge and skills, offer a different interpretation of the centaur from the one that dominates modern receptions. However, in evoking the idea of Cheiron –the most familiar centaur – he also evokes the sense that to be centaur is to be wiser, more powerful, and

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of this novel. Blackwood's attitudes towards these issues are not known, but this novel does not seem to contain any overt racism. While the location is described as less developed, using the unfortunate term of 'civilisation', the protagonist does not view it in a pejorative way – quite the opposite).

<sup>634</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 306.

<sup>635</sup> Blackwood, 1911: 310.

more immortal than a human could ever hope to be. This certainly is a role that Cheiron embodies in the ancient texts.

Yeats' work also demonstrates this paradox, and the search for Unity of Being. The centaur embodies, for him, that that instinct and intellect, reason and passion, can co-exist, if one but seeks it. All of this is underpinned by his spiritual associations, and particularly to the practices of the Golden Dawn. While Dulac was not a part of this particular association, certainly his spiritual beliefs and practices demonstrated alignment with those of Yeats. However, there is still a difference in how Blackwood utilises his centaurs, compared to Yeats and Dulac. For Yeats and Dulac, the centaur was a symbol of the artist, and of melding poetic inspiration with the reality of the world. For Blackwood, the centaur instead represented the perfection of being able to transcend oneself and one's own time. The centaur was not an artistic motif for Blackwood but rather the symbol of an alternative life that could be accessed if one could separate oneself from the concerns of the modern. However, for all of them, it was an important symbol to signify the bringing together of disparate elements in perfect unity with the eternal.

In the collisions between Classics and spiritualism, we can see ...  
resistance at work: both hope and fragility, longing and despair,  
the presence of the past and its irreparable absence, the space  
between nothing's lost forever, and forever lost.<sup>636</sup>

The use of classical figures such as Cheiron speaks particularly to the fascination Yeats, Dulac and Blackwood had with exploring Otherworlds.

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<sup>636</sup> Richardson, 2016: 235.

## Cheiron as American post-war Christ:

### John Updike's *The Centaur*

‘[W]e’re all on a boundary and all are centaurs’.<sup>637</sup>

#### Introduction

The mythological elements of John Updike's *The Centaur* (1963) are relatively well-documented and discussed in terms of how the names of characters relate to mythological figures, particularly the use of the same first letter, Appleton for Apollo and Zimmerman for Zeus, and their function within the plot, such as Hummel the limping mechanic as Hephaestus, married to the beautiful but promiscuous Vera/Venus. They have been analysed in a range of articles discussing the novel and how it fits with Updike's *oeuvre*.<sup>638</sup> Cheiron's role within the text is, naturally, given close scrutiny, amongst the wider stylistic and theological concerns of Updike's surrealism and melding of the mythological with the small-town American backdrop—his concern with ‘the American small town and middle-class materialism’, and his portrayals of ‘ordinary America ...[and] the daily rounds of life’.<sup>639</sup> Vickery rightly asserts that critics offer a wide range of interpretations of the novel and remain uncertain and divided on its mythic content,<sup>640</sup> while largely agreeing on Updike's fascination with old sagas, and the functions they fulfilled for their original audiences, in terms of both understanding history and experiencing ‘catharsis’.<sup>641</sup> What has not, however, been specifically considered is how the portrayal of Cheiron maps onto those features exemplified in the ancient sources, and the implications within Updike's text of their inclusion. This chapter seeks to address that gap.

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<sup>637</sup> Updike, in Farmer, 2015: 340.

<sup>638</sup> Vargo, 1973; Stehíkovaá, 1979; Mellard, 1979.

<sup>639</sup> Ulvydiene, 2018: 101.

<sup>640</sup> Vickery, 1974: 29.

<sup>641</sup> Vickery, 1974: 31.

The novel explores a variety of facets of Cheiron's role that appear in the ancient text; his immortality, his prophecy, his role of teacher, his dual nature, and his sacrifice of his immortality for Prometheus. The form in which the novel unfolds is also hybrid and centaur-like, in being a double narrative from Peter Caldwell's two perspectives (adolescent mixed with adult) and an omniscient third-person narrator. These aspects of both the novel and the figure of Cheiron can be represented by the branches of philosophy used in all the chapters of this thesis, and they are used as organising principles to examine how Updike writes the mythological figure of Cheiron into the character of George Caldwell, and to what effect.

Yet the structure of my argument is more complex than this, since the aesthetic form of the novel and the theme of time are inextricable from its philosophical bent. The chapter therefore also considers aesthetics, and how the form of the novel contributes to supporting views on the hybrid nature of the centaur, taking its lead from Aristotle's famous reference to Chaeremon's rhapsodic poem *The Centaur*, which reflected its subject-matter in its form by combining all Greek metres (*Poetics* 1447b). This involves an examination of the novel's presentation of time, which is equally difficult to regulate and experience uniformly, both in ancient sources and in this novel; the form of the novel contributes to the focus upon time. Knowledge, however, is accumulated over time and through experience, so epistemology follows, and then ethics, in which the wisdom of Cheiron influences his teaching and is passed onto his students. The differences between the mythological Cheiron and the contemporary Caldwell in their tutoring will also be contrasted. The next section, technology, will consider the ancient *technai* ascribed to Cheiron, such as healing; this leads into his ontology—his own hybridity in that his being combines man and beast. The final section, drawing together all that precedes it, is that of metaphysics, the question of the unseen principles that govern the universe and human existence. In putting the question of faith and sacrifice at the heart of the novel, Updike highlights the importance of considering the origins of culture and narrative, and the

enduring need for those who will sacrifice for others. He foregrounds a minor episode in the myth of Cheiron, his sacrifice of his immortality for Prometheus, while acknowledging a range of other skills and qualities attributed to him.

The plot of *The Centaur* essentially covers a three-day period in 1947 in which high school science teacher, George Caldwell, and his adolescent son, Peter, are exiled from their rural homestead by weather and circumstance. The novel follows their tribulations as they make repeated attempts to return home after long days of school and extra-curricular responsibilities, only to be thwarted by difficulties outside their control. The apparent simplicity of this plot, channelling elements of the *Odyssey*, is complicated by the melding of contemporary characters and settings with those from Greek mythology. The title refers to Cheiron, the most famous centaur in ancient myth and its reception, aligning this figure with the character of George Caldwell; the novel also liberally utilises other mythological figures, often inconsistently, with other contemporary characters. It is the epic nature of mythology, and the themes with which it is concerned, that allow Updike to pose the theological question of what it means to have religious faith in contemporary post-war America. In focusing primarily upon Cheiron's role as a tutor, and his sacrifice for Prometheus – aligned here with Caldwell's son, Peter – Updike transfers to Caldwell aspects of both the divine and the heroic in a contemporary, limited and unrewarding setting. Both Cheiron and Prometheus stand on the cusp between mythical and scientific approaches to the cosmos, which is a feature explored through the lessons Cheiron/Caldwell teaches. However, just as the ancient sources portraying Cheiron are fragmentary, permitting little insight from the centaur himself, so Updike's novel maintains a similar distance from its heroic figure. The reader is never permitted to access the first-person narration of George Caldwell, perhaps because we cannot know the gods.

*The Centaur*, the winner of the 1964 National Book Award, is also Updike's 'most puzzling work',<sup>642</sup> and one about which critics fail to reach agreement. A companion text to his second novel, *Rabbit, Run* (1960), Updike suggests that together they portray 'two contrasting approaches to life: the dutiful horse and the feckless rabbit'.<sup>643</sup> George Caldwell embodies the former psychologically, spiritually and mythologically, by being the exemplary combination of man and horse – Cheiron the centaur. Caldwell not only is unaware of his greatness, but also does not overtly self-identify as Cheiron; it is Peter, by acknowledging his father's self-sacrifice, and the omniscient narrator who present him as such. Peter's narration, which takes place years later, as he lies in bed with his sleeping lover, possibly in a dream-like state himself, questions whether the future he has come to embody was worth his father's sacrifice.<sup>644</sup> He has escaped the rural backdrop that he and his father hated, and moved to the city; he has become an artist, although he wonders at the relative expense of the blank canvas, and the lessening of value once he has marked it; mindful of his leisure-rich days in bed with his lover, he fears to face that it was for this that Cheiron/Caldwell gave up his life. He believes the sacrifice of his father revealed 'the incongruity of a great spirit caught in an ignoble job', yet it feels likely that it is Peter's narration that presents his father's life as so full of anguish.<sup>645</sup> The reader can question whether this anguish is heightened with hindsight, and doubt that the teenage Peter was actually so aware that his father was in spiritual crisis.

The omniscient narrator seemingly supports Cheiron's identification with Caldwell, and it is in these chapters we see the interwoven mythical aspects foregrounded. What purpose does the identification of Cheiron with Caldwell serve, and why should the reader be encouraged to explore Updike's portrayal of his similarities to the mythical centaur? It may well be that Updike chose his protagonist's surname because at the time when he wrote the

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<sup>642</sup> Keener, 2010: 463.

<sup>643</sup> Keener, 2010: 463.

<sup>644</sup> Updike, 1963: 244.

<sup>645</sup> Walcutt, 1966: 326.

novel, the self-sacrificial death in the Spanish Civil War of the influential British Communist classicist and literary critic Christopher Caudwell, who had rejected Roman Catholic mysticism in favour of revolutionary Marxist action, was prominent in the consciousness of intellectuals as the Cold War solidified.<sup>646</sup> But in considering individually within Updike's novel those aspects of Cheiron's character that we have identified in the ancient texts, it will become possible to draw more concrete conclusions as to why a relatively unremarkable, bumbling, somewhat clumsy and occasionally embarrassing man is so strongly linked with the tutor of heroes and the greatest act of self-sacrifice described in Greek mythology.

### **Aesthetics**

Updike has suggested that his style is planned but not every detail in advance. However, he remembers what he has written so that 'things echo, things happen again, things come around',<sup>647</sup> which fits with his usage of mythological characters and themes. They are even reused within Updike's own *oeuvre*, in the re-use of names such as 'Kegerise' in different novels,<sup>648</sup> and the reference to centaurs in his first novel, *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959),<sup>649</sup> which then becomes a major motif for this novel.

The use of myth is 'the beginning of a process that moves from theology to science to aesthetics',<sup>650</sup> and this echoes the movement of this chapter through the philosophical branches that represent the different qualities of Cheiron; however, in suggesting a sort of hybrid structure, this statement is also illustrative of *The Centaur*. The novel is structured into nine chapters and a short epilogue, and through this narration Updike surrealistically fuses the

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<sup>646</sup> See Hall, 2015; 197-215.

<sup>647</sup> Singh, 1996: 79.

<sup>648</sup> *The Centaur* (1963), *The Poorhouse Fair* (1959) and *Rabbit, Run* (1960) all use the name 'Kegerise' in some form; as a character in the two former novels, although not the same character transposed across novels. In *Rabbit, Run*, 'Kegerise Street' is referenced as a place. This re-use of the same name gives a particular repetition and echo across works, even when used in different ways and for different fictional characters.

<sup>649</sup> Updike, 1959: 106.

<sup>650</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 73.

characters with figures from Greek mythology. The novel is primarily narrated by Cheiron/Caldwell's son, Peter/Prometheus, interspersed with omniscient third-person narration which gives us Caldwell's perspective. Chapters one, three and nine are omniscient third-person narration, with three and nine containing wholly mythological content; Peter narrates chapters two, four, six and eight, with chapter five – the centre point of the novel – being George Caldwell's obituary. To a degree within chapter one, we can see through George's eyes, have access to his thoughts, and sympathise with his trials and tribulations; yet there is a necessary distance between character and reader that the omniscient narrator maintains.

Vickery suggests that the novel employs several different narrative styles which serve to highlight the 'fictiveness of the narrative' and the manipulation of the story-teller,<sup>651</sup> who can act as a kind of prophet by foreshadowing events. Arguably, by placing Caldwell's obituary in the centre of the novel, the author plays the role of prophet by informing the reader of what will happen; the narrative tension arises not from the factual events but the way they unfold towards its culmination, and from the different interpretations available. In using myth as a feature within *The Centaur*, Updike's narrative method has been compared with James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922),<sup>652</sup> although often not in flattering terms. Where critics see Joyce's method as containing structure and wit, Updike's use of myth has been accused of undue novelty, containing not 'ideal forms' but 'simply flawed and provisional replicas'.<sup>653</sup> Updike acknowledges textual echoes from both T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) and Joyce's *Ulysses* in his novel,<sup>654</sup> but he suggests that Joyce was the greater influence on account of his use of parallels with Homeric epic; *The Centaur*, he suggests, is 'one step beyond Ulysses', a

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<sup>651</sup> Vickery, 1974: 33.

<sup>652</sup> Vargo, 1973: 452.

<sup>653</sup> Miller, 1963.

<sup>654</sup> Singh suggests that *The Waste Land* is a comparative text to *The Centaur* because of the narrative's central figures – Teiresias and Peter respectively – who 'both assume diverse roles and speak in different voices while surveying the chaotic panorama of their respective cultures' and because Updike places the golden age of mythic Arcadia next to degenerate contemporary America. (2005: 61-2)

comic strip of Olympian gods,<sup>655</sup> reflected in modern American equivalents. Updike has stated that the use of myth was intended comically, but that this should not undermine the more serious themes that the novel explores, which Wyatt suggests are time and death, the family along with its complexity and ‘destructive influences’, and self-identity and personal realisation.<sup>656</sup>

Updike’s detailed prose style might alienate some readers and critics but, nevertheless, this reaction is not unilateral and some critics see it as a success. It is particularly prevalent in *The Centaur* and, combined with the lack of a linear narrative, elicited criticism. This range of reaction to the novel perhaps reflects the confusion that Updike’s narrative style created, and his ‘poetic lavishness’.<sup>657</sup> His style is one of ‘restless, exhaustive exploration of the minute physical detail’.<sup>658</sup> It is suggested that the reader remembers only types of characters, not individuals by name, because their outsides are more rendered in more detail than the inside, creating a void in his characters. Updike’s tendency to name some of his works after a species in order to highlight the protagonist’s foremost traits, rather than giving the novel the name of the character, is supported in *The Centaur* because there can be no other reference than Cheiron, the foremost example of his kind. This relationship to Caldwell is clearly demarcated throughout the novel. Admittedly, the same cannot be said of the other characters represented by mythical beings in the fluid way that Updike references them; his wife pressed for an index of mythological characters to be included,<sup>659</sup> which suggests that it was recognised that even a reader knowledgeable in Greek myth might need some help with navigation.

Ulvdyiene suggests that Updike is ‘maintain[ing] ...the sense of incongruity in applying old structures to present context’,<sup>660</sup> although this perspective is debatable, given the

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<sup>655</sup> Singh, 1996: 83.

<sup>656</sup> Wyatt, 1967: 89.

<sup>657</sup> Wyatt, 1967: 89.

<sup>658</sup> Rupp, 1967: 693.

<sup>659</sup> Miller, 1963.

<sup>660</sup> Ulvdyiene, 2018: 107.

continuing relevance of old myths in contemporary settings. Detweiler maintains that whatever the novel is, it is not allegory, ‘for both dimensions of narrative ...are literally present: the modern fictive creation and the ancient legend that it approximates; thus there is nothing to allegorize’.<sup>661</sup> It could be suggested, however, that Updike is drawing upon the Arcadian tradition within American landscape painting and literary tradition to explore the borders of space which Americans navigate. Influenced heavily by Henry Thoreau’s genre-crossing *Walden* (1854) – for which he wrote an introduction on its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary – he notes that the work has ‘contributed most to America’s present sense of self’.<sup>662</sup> Although this introduction is written much later in Updike’s career than *The Centaur*,<sup>663</sup> *Walden* is an enduring influence upon American literary greats.

Likening Thoreau and his contemporaries to the English Metaphysical poets, Updike suggests that their writing conveys ‘their belief in correspondences between the little and the large, the inner world of the self and the outer world of Nature’.<sup>664</sup> He comments upon the mechanisation of the lives of most men, and the soul-crushing pursuits of the farmer that Thoreau laments, and which is reflected in *The Centaur* by Caldwell’s existential angst and hatred of the farm to which his family have moved.<sup>665</sup> Indeed, Thoreau’s slippage of faith from Unitarianism, ‘almost creedless’,<sup>666</sup> to Updike’s religious mind, through to Transcendentalism, mirrors the passage of decline of religious sentiment from George’s faith through to Peter’s atheism. It could be said that both *Walden* and *The Centaur* share a similar aim, albeit executed through different subjects – to recall men to larger concerns ‘after centuries of hazy anthropocentricity’.<sup>667</sup> Both texts recognise the artifice of ‘reality’ and suggest that reality can

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<sup>661</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 64.

<sup>662</sup> Updike, 2003: ix.

<sup>663</sup> Updike, 2003: ix-xxiv.

<sup>664</sup> Updike, 2003: xiv.

<sup>665</sup> Updike, 2003: 69, 76, 137-8, 180.

<sup>666</sup> Updike, 2003: xviii.

<sup>667</sup> Updike, 2003: xx.

only be experienced at the brink of death. In combining the aestheticism of nature writing with personal memoir and empirical experimentation, *Walden* serves as an exemplar in the blurring of boundaries of form which, it could be suggested, *The Centaur* follows.

This aesthetic self-consciousness is emphasised by portraying Peter as a painter, both budding and actual. Updike also hints at the Arcadian tradition within painting. Opposing, to a degree, the notion of ‘exceptionalism’, that Americans are ‘a chosen people who have escaped from the terror of historical change to live in timeless harmony with nature’,<sup>668</sup> Arcadia appears in American painting as a recognition of the European tradition, and influence of European travel, upon American painters.<sup>669</sup> This shared common cultural memory helps to shape the American national identity. However, within American landscape painting, it is also a hybrid form. It is mythical – ‘a static and timeless place’,<sup>670</sup> which accounts for its presence within the third chapter in *The Centaur*, in which Cheiron is portrayed – and a place of innocence and happiness. Yet, in being a pastoral landscape, it has limited ability to reflect the increasingly agricultural landscape of America, and so must gloss over those features and link to the ‘simple pioneer frontier life’.<sup>671</sup> Neset asserts that farming is not an important topic in American painting;<sup>672</sup> thus, in the novel, Peter must be freed from that fate in order to achieve his dreams. However, Arcadia, to Americans, in being ‘an academic construction, a literary theme...not an actual recognisable place in their own country’, reminds the reader of *The Centaur* of the artificiality of this construction. It is also defined as ‘a state of mind and therefore eternal and capable of endless adaptations’,<sup>673</sup> just as the mythical qualities of *The Centaur* are utilised to represent Caldwell’s struggle to accept his fate, and the multiplicity of interpretations possible from the novel’s ending.

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<sup>668</sup> Noble, in Neset, 2002: 5.

<sup>669</sup> Neset, 2002: 8.

<sup>670</sup> Neset, 2002: 14.

<sup>671</sup> Neset, 2002: 16.

<sup>672</sup> Neset, 2002: 16.

<sup>673</sup> Neset, 2002 : 22.

In channelling the concept of Arcadia, Updike evokes a golden age, just as by exploring the echoes of *Walden* he evokes the themes of ‘American individualism, assuring the New World, traditional reassurances failing, of the value, power, and beauty of the unfettered self’.<sup>674</sup> Caldwell/Cheiron together exemplify this boundary, this transition, and this loss of freedom that modern life and loss of faith have brought, by invoking the mythic, the eternal archetype to represent the idealised past. Mythology does, to an extent, represent a collective memory, and Detweiler suggests that memory is ‘the dominating fictive device’,<sup>675</sup> and it is the structure given to these recollections that orders – or disorders – the reader’s sense of the action of the novel. While the overall sense of the days Caldwell and Peter are away from home run in a linear fashion, this is complicated by the mythological elements. Mythic, stylized memory meets Peter’s personal memory, and this creates ‘a unified, total artistic experience’.<sup>676</sup>

The minute attention to visual detail suggests that the novel can be aligned to Surrealist painting, due to the double narrative having the intention ‘to expand literal reality through distortion’,<sup>677</sup> and the absence of sequence to establish cause and effect. One such episode to illustrate this effectively is chapter six, narrated by Peter in Prometheus’ guise from the rock to which he is chained. It is, Detweiler, suggests, impossible to decode the story systematically as there is no key; rather, the reader must gain the whole impression of the scene with its many possible and interrelated meanings.<sup>678</sup> Furthermore, Updike also draws on the visual arts through the Cubist style, ‘in the dependence upon camouflage and counterfeit’ and its double, simultaneous perspective.<sup>679</sup> While Updike’s conscious employment of such obvious artistic devices through his narrative choices has not been proven, their applicability to his style affirms the overt focus upon the form of the novel and mythical elements incorporated into it, as well

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<sup>674</sup> Updike, 2003: xxiv.

<sup>675</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 70.

<sup>676</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 71.

<sup>677</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 64.

<sup>678</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 66.

<sup>679</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 67.

as its ‘sustained artistry’.<sup>680</sup> It also chimes with Peter’s vocation as an artist and reflects ‘the double consciousness of modern man’.<sup>681</sup>

## Time

The artistic effects evident within the novel also contribute to the portrayal of time within it. Detweiler exemplifies this by examining a scene from chapter one, when Cheiron goes to Hummel/Hephaestus’ workshop to have the arrow removed, and he suggests that Cheiron, a mythical beast, is also aligned to the Buick needing attention in the garage. He suggests that the use of aspects aligned to Surrealism, the ‘mingling of animal and mechanical qualities’,<sup>682</sup> but also with man and animal, serves to render conventional understanding of time useless. As previously asserted, time is a thematic concern within Updike’s fiction; while the critical reflection of ‘[i]t is the *fact* of time itself, in the abstract, which counts’,<sup>683</sup> refers to *Rabbit, Run*, Updike’s second novel, this observation is also relevant to *The Centaur*.

Throughout Updike’s novel, the reader cannot escape the fixation upon time, felt by both George and Peter. The repetition of ‘time and tide for no man wait’ punctuate the relentlessness of time;<sup>684</sup> despite Caldwell’s railing against both time and tide being given mastery over God’s chosen creatures, men,<sup>685</sup> he accepts that its passage is permanent, unwavering, and potentially destructive. He is floored by Judy Lengel’s naïve suggestion of ‘time’,<sup>686</sup> when asked to name an erosional agent, because of its ultimate truth. However, the novel deliberately refuses to portray time as finite and linear, not only through the surreal melding of Cheiron with Caldwell – ‘embodying the golden past, expounded into

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<sup>680</sup> Wyatt, 1967: 93.

<sup>681</sup> Detweiler, 1984: .68.

<sup>682</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 65.

<sup>683</sup> Wyatt, 1967: 92.

<sup>684</sup> Updike, 1963: 59, 140, 252.

<sup>685</sup> Updike, 1963: 59.

<sup>686</sup> Updike, 1963: 99.

timelessness’<sup>687</sup> but also through the persistence of its effects. The poem Caldwell remembers and recites to Hester Appleton records the mystery and power of time: ‘We read the record of the past/ while time withholds the future cost’,<sup>688</sup> and this memory surprises him. However, to the reader, it is reminiscent of the chorus his mythological pupils chant and with which he joins in—so the reader sees the repeating echoes that Updike asserted were a feature of his fiction.<sup>689</sup> Time is also present in the workings of the school, in that the coal that fires the boiler is ‘pure compressed time’,<sup>690</sup> perhaps reflecting the hard nature of the hours he spends teaching, only for his effort to burn away to nothing. Time is so ubiquitous, and yet so unknowable, that Caldwell cannot seem to wrestle any sense from it, and he particularly berates Pop Kramer – Cronos – for its slipperiness. Of course, within Cronos lives ‘a savage darkness none of the rest of us had ever known’,<sup>691</sup> as Peter intuits, and it is perhaps this control over time that Caldwell particularly resents, his knowledge of the primordial origins – as well as his divine longevity that is certain to outlast him.

Peter’s relationship with time, however, seems to be more fluid, and therefore it seems to give him less concern. Vargo suggests that he is more determined than Caldwell ‘to discover an answer to the tyranny of time and the inevitability of death’,<sup>692</sup> which is exactly what happens to Prometheus because of Cheiron’s sacrifice. He reflects on visiting museums with his mother, when ‘Arcadian time would envelop us’;<sup>693</sup> he sees himself as if ‘viewed from the future’,<sup>694</sup> and Vera Hummel is able to evoke ‘a curious sense of past time’ within him.<sup>695</sup>

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<sup>687</sup> Wyatt, 1967: 93.

<sup>688</sup> Updike, 1963: 177.

<sup>689</sup> Singh, 1996:79.

<sup>690</sup> Updike, 1963: 199.

<sup>691</sup> Updike, 1963: 63.

<sup>692</sup> Vargo, 1973: 456.

<sup>693</sup> Updike, 1963: 240.

<sup>694</sup> Updike, 1963: 124.

<sup>695</sup> Updike, 1963: 247.

Vargo argues that both Caldwell and Peter refuse to live purely in the present, and that they use rites to live within a 'mythical present' which contains 'reversible and recoverable time';<sup>696</sup> but Vargo's view does not explain why Peter's experience of time is more positive than that of his father, unless the reader is to keep as their primary focus the mythical relationship between Cheiron and Prometheus. Peter transcends the fixed and rigid nature of time that George experiences, which gives him more potential to make the most of his opportunities. The adult Peter, narrating, reflects that his age was then one 'haunted by the suspicion' of different worlds in existence, and just out of sight.<sup>697</sup> Adolescent Peter believes in the future, and it 'becomes his dimension'.<sup>698</sup> Peter's sense of cyclical, simultaneous time – of ancient time - frees him from his father's dread of its relentless passage. Only at one point, when going to meet his father, does he fear that he is late,<sup>699</sup> and he experiences George's pressure; it is, perhaps, at this point that he realises his father is not immortal. It might also suggest his transition towards adulthood.<sup>700</sup>

This obsession with time reflects Caldwell's frustration at the lack of meaningful activity in his life; the passage of linear time brings a psychological pressure to feel as though one is moving forward and making progress, which Caldwell does not feel. In highlighting the lack of action within the novel, and the lack of possible action available to Caldwell, Walcutt suggests that the action 'has slowed down until it is not a movement but a tense balance of forces in which the actions make no linear progress but only vibrate at constant, tormented wave lengths'.<sup>701</sup> The mythical Cheiron, in existing within mythological and cyclical time, does not have such pressure; indeed, his cross-generational role seems to require him to remain static within his life in order adequately to prepare his heroic students for action. As Walcutt

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<sup>696</sup> Vargo, 1973: .456.

<sup>697</sup> Updike, 1963: 108.

<sup>698</sup> Mellard, 2002: 118.

<sup>699</sup> Updike, 1963: 128.

<sup>700</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 72.

<sup>701</sup> Walcutt, 1966: 330.

notes, however, contemporary time does not afford that perspective. The pressure to move forward creates a ‘dislocated modern environment’,<sup>702</sup> which in turn causes society to add to that pressure. Yet, as shown by the explanation of Caldwell’s entry into teaching, it offers limited opportunities for progress and fulfilment.

Detweiler suggests that the ‘saturation’ of time within the novel is reflective of ancient Greek concepts of time,<sup>703</sup> and that the difficulty in describing them is because they do not correspond to modern Western culture’s understanding of time, which has been established as linear and progressive. The novel is categorised according to the ancient notions it draws upon, Detweiler outlines; *aeon* for the early part of the novel, the immensity of the age of the earth and Cheiron’s immortality, which illustrate the ‘terrible limitlessness of time’; *chronos* refers to measurable and sequential time, and is represented by Caldwell’s repeated anxiety about being late; *telos* represents much of the novel’s significance in its ‘elements of integrity and consummation’ and movement towards a meaningful life purpose; whereas *kairos*, with its ‘experiential intensity’, drives the ‘narrative climaxes’ of the novel, illustrated through Caldwell’s decision to carry on and Peter’s reminiscences.<sup>704</sup> *Kairos* can also refer to the opportune or critical moment, which aligns with this intensity. In *kairos* time, one is outside of time’s linearity, the person is wholly present and focused upon that moment. Certainly, the mythological elements point the reader towards this dichotomy, between linear time and intense, mythical time. The modern world is governed by *chronos* while the infinite world of myth recognises *kairos*. It is *kairos* which influences Cheiron’s sacrifice for Prometheus, and Caldwell’s acceptance of his fate.

In aligning Caldwell with Cheiron, Updike utilises the work of Carl Jung in establishing the link between myths and archetypes – a recurring pattern of images, symbols and situations,

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<sup>702</sup> Walcutt, 1966: 332.

<sup>703</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 68.

<sup>704</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 69-70.

which also mirrors Updike's focus upon repetitions and echoes.<sup>705</sup> For Jung, the archetypes influence how a person relates to the world around them and helps them to make sense of what they encounter. Updike suggests that the novel is his exploration of the sense that 'the people we meet are *guises*, do conceal something mythic, perhaps prototypes or longings of our minds'.<sup>706</sup> This suggests that there is some similarity in how people behave, in how they see the world, and a repetition of human life across time to develop this perception. Undoubtedly, Updike portrays Caldwell as experiencing 'repeating human experiences',<sup>707</sup> and it is this cyclical nature of his experience versus the linear experience of time and society's expectation of progress which causes his anguish. Cheiron serves as an exemplar because he understands this circularity, and the repetition of experience. Here his longevity is a strength, as it permits him to live beyond the normal span and experience those repetitious patterns for himself. This experience gives him a 'perennial civilising role among mankind'.<sup>708</sup> It is modern writers who see this as a curse and create anguish for Cheiron, as shown by de Guérin in the nineteenth century, and other twentieth and twenty-first century writers, as illustrated in the chapters that precede and succeed this one.

## **Epistemology**

The cyclical nature of time, bringing with it a repetition of experience, leads – certainly for Cheiron – to increased wisdom and knowledge. This can also bring elements of foresight and prophecy, which may be little more than accumulated experience indicating the likelihood of

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<sup>705</sup> Hunt (1986) asserts that there are three predominating factors recurring through Updike's fiction: sex, religion and art. He argues that the use of metaphor, such as myth, signals 'the holding together of opposites' (p.6), and that Updike's writing predominantly explores the unifying of the human 'mixed' condition (p.5). This fits into Jungian psychology of becoming a "whole man ... [relatively!] free from the domination of ... parental archetypes" (p.87), and Updike's characters are in search of "individuation" (p.92), the Jungian process of becoming whole in an interior way. Updike's return to this theme, particularly through his early fiction, results in repeated names, symbols, and themes.

<sup>706</sup> Paris Review, 1968: 106.

<sup>707</sup> Ulvydiene, 2018: 103.

<sup>708</sup> Vickery, 1974: 38.

a particular result. Within *The Centaur*, knowledge of all kinds is portrayed and questioned, and Caldwell's pain comes from having knowledge that he does not want, and fearing its consequences, much like ancient prophets who were party to the will of the gods. Caldwell does not know what the future holds, however: he can only dread.

While George and Peter are finding out both about themselves and each other through the novel, knowledge is also more generally a theme throughout. Caldwell's lack of self-knowledge of his own talents as a teacher, and his value to his family are evident throughout much of the narrative and only fulfilled at the end; he is 'a prophet in a godless age'.<sup>709</sup> In the guise of Cheiron, however, his prophetic abilities are restored. The mythological chapter three contains a chorus by the children he teaches, beseeching Zeus for a sign of benevolence. Cheiron is able to read the sign of the eagle, including the mixed meaning it contains:

Cheiron feared for a moment, then realised that though it was on his left,  
it was on the children's right. On their right, and ascending: doubly propitious.  
(But on *his* left).<sup>710</sup>

This seems to contain a link with Caldwell, through the suggestion of being out of favour with Zeus/Zimmerman – who is said to be unknowable, displayed in a scene where Peter cannot picture his mind.<sup>711</sup> This filters through to Caldwell not knowing how Zimmerman will react to his seeing evidence of sexual dalliances, and highlights the inconsistency of reaction associated with Zeus. Within the mythological chapter three, Updike shows the prophetic ability of Ocyrhoe, Cheiron's child, who is thus aligned with Peter/Prometheus. This ability, 'more keenly than her father, Ocyrhoe was tormented by prescience',<sup>712</sup> shows not only the relative danger of knowledge – she was turned into a horse in the ancient sources for telling

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<sup>709</sup> Myers, 1971: 81.

<sup>710</sup> Updike, 1963: 91.

<sup>711</sup> Updike, 1963: 103.

<sup>712</sup> Updike, 1963: 89.

the fates of both Asclepius and her father<sup>713</sup> - but also links to Peter/Prometheus, who ‘foresaw’ that one of George’s students, Deifendorf, would also become a teacher.<sup>714</sup> This is a more benign prophecy, but a vision of the future, nonetheless. Indeed, as ‘Prometheus’ translates as ‘fore thought’, and links to prophetic knowledge,<sup>715</sup> it is perhaps unsurprising that Peter is granted some sense of what may happen, although the reflective element within the narration could also account for this apparent insight. Nevertheless, unlike in the ancient sources, Cheiron’s ability to prophesy, along with the skill of his children, is portrayed as a curse, rather than a blessing. Paradoxically, in an age that seems to sell knowing yourself and having knowledge as necessities of life, its acquisition brings no joy.

Towards the end of the novel, as Caldwell is tormenting his wife with his imagined imminent sacking for knowing too much about Zimmerman’s sex life, the possession of knowledge is described as such.

‘It must be *terrible* to know so much.’

A pause.

‘It is,’ my father said. ‘It’s hell’.<sup>716</sup>

While the ancient sources do not suggest that Cheiron was perturbed by his prophetic skills (he is portrayed mostly as advising on love to Apollo,<sup>717</sup> and the capture of Thetis to Peleus),<sup>718</sup> the ancient texts do portray prophecy in an ambivalent manner, and there are prophets for whom knowledge brings punishment or disbelief. Updike here utilises that liminality, and it is particularly effective because of contemporary secular disdain for prophet figures. ‘Knowing’ the unknowable is a suspect quality, and most frequently elicits one of two reactions:

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<sup>713</sup> Ovid, *Met.*, 2.635-78, trans. McCarter.

<sup>714</sup> Updike, 1963: 95.

<sup>715</sup> Prometheus’ gift of prophetic knowledge to humankind is expounded in some detail within Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*; no other extant ancient source suggests that prophecy was his gift.

<sup>716</sup> Updike, 1963: 262.

<sup>717</sup> Pindar, *Pythian Odes IX*, trans. Race.

<sup>718</sup> Pindar, *Nemean Odes III*, trans. Race.

scepticism, or faith that it is the truth. These two stances speak to the underlying theme of the text, the tension between having faith and not having faith, between Christianity and secularism, and the difficulty that having faith entails, particularly in the face of seemingly unjust, unfair or impossible circumstances. For Caldwell, who has this limited knowledge but strong belief that he is right, it is painful to maintain. Cassie's observation, albeit sarcastically intended, causes Caldwell to reflect on his condition of knowing precisely because it hits the mark. His existential pain is there because 'knowledge can not reconcile this tragic animal to the death he foresees'.<sup>719</sup> The pain of the prophet is in knowing something that cannot be altered. Updike portrays Caldwell deliberately as not knowing – not even about the aspects of love and courtship that Cheiron advises on within Pindar's *Odes*. When he realises that Peter and Penny are courting, he can track back the clues but does not have prior access to this knowledge. However, for him, the effect is that '[t]he sadness of the abandoned wells up'.<sup>720</sup> He realises that Peter will outgrow him, just as the young heroes outgrew Cheiron and left him to follow their fates.

It is not just about others that Caldwell appears ignorant but also about himself. The maxim of 'know thyself' – stated by Doc Appleton to Caldwell, and which will be further examined later in the chapter - also resonates with the modern focus upon psychology as a means of unveiling the secrets of humankind, and the pressure for individuals to be self-aware of their own character, including their talents and failings. Updike suggests that his narrative is not primarily about psychological insights into his characters, although they will be there.<sup>721</sup> Neary suggests that Updike's novels are concerned with 'the phenomenon of human selfhood' and that this novel in particular plays upon the dualistic epistemology of self and other;<sup>722</sup> 'other', perhaps, being parts of one's self that are difficult to acknowledge. This would support

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<sup>719</sup> Mellard, 2002: 120.

<sup>720</sup> Updike, 1963: 229.

<sup>721</sup> Paris Review, 1968: 116.

<sup>722</sup> Neary, 2000: 229.

Caldwell and Peter's similarities and seeming oppositions; yet who is 'self' and who is 'other' is difficult to establish. For Neary, as it is around Caldwell that myth and reality operate fluidly,<sup>723</sup> it is he who is 'other', an 'absent presence' within the text, which speaks to the fragmentary nature of Cheiron's portrayal within ancient sources. While he is the source of much knowledge, he is difficult to know, even to himself.

## **Ethics**

In reference to the quotation at the head of this chapter, Updike explores and reflects on the boundaries upon which Cheiron, as centaur, is placed through the concerns and situations of Caldwell. The use of myth produces in Caldwell an unstable reference, who is 'other', and it is this quality that enables him to teach, to inculcate moral as well as arcane knowledge,<sup>724</sup> perhaps both to the characters within the novel and its reader.<sup>725</sup>

As a teacher, however, the possession of knowledge and the effective imparting of it to children is Cheiron/Caldwell's primary function. It is an act 'that creates a world of autonomous entities', or moral agents.<sup>726</sup> So ubiquitous is this role within the ancient sources for the centaur that most receptions also provide this aspect as the foremost quality of the character they portray. Within Updike's novel, we are introduced to both Cheiron, the tutor of mythological heroes (albeit represented within his lesson together all at once, anachronistically eliding the generational aspects of Cheiron's tutoring that the ancient sources highlight), and Caldwell, the high school science teacher to a class of unruly, undisciplined and relatively uninterested teenagers. The contrasts between settings and students underscores the sense of

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<sup>723</sup> Neary, 2000: 229.

<sup>724</sup> Neary, 2000: 235.

<sup>725</sup> Justina Gregory suggests that a teacher who belongs to a different category of 'being' to their students was a feature of later literary traditions but that Cheiron sets the pattern for other teachers. She does, however, also suggest that in Greek and Roman literature, the bestial is downplayed (Gregory, 2019: 29), so Updike is also reacting to receptions of Cheiron from sources such as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales*.

<sup>726</sup> Neary, 2000: 237.

degeneration, and of the imperfection of contemporary time and place, that pervades the novel. However, both lessons described are on the same topic, the genesis of the earth, although their content differs wildly, and Cheiron/Caldwell's assessment of his students is present in both passages.

Within the mythological lesson, Love is asserted to have 'set the Universe in motion',<sup>727</sup> whereas Caldwell's lesson abbreviates the five-billion-year history of the universe into a three-day case study of chemical and biological life leading to the emergence of a 'flint-chipping, fire-kindling, death-foreseeing, ... tragic animal ... called man'.<sup>728</sup> In terms of the students, Cheiron asserts that 'Achilles gave his teacher the most trouble yet seemed the most needful of his approval and loved him least bashfully', Jason is 'less favoured', and Asclepios is 'the best student'.<sup>729</sup> Caldwell has a grumpy and grudging affection for his students but is seemingly aware of their flaws; poor Judy Lengel 'didn't have it upstairs', Kegerise is 'one of the bright ones', and Iris Osgood is 'dumb as pure white lead'.<sup>730</sup> Caldwell's teaching career, however, has been 'long enough to keep a step or two ahead of the bastards occasionally'.<sup>731</sup> In contrast to Cheiron's experience of teaching – 'his students completed the centaur. They fleshed his wisdom with expectation',<sup>732</sup> Peter sees that for his father, 'teaching was sapping him'.<sup>733</sup> For all that Caldwell sees himself as being no good at teaching through a lack of discipline,<sup>734</sup> and ascribes the pain of his tooth extraction to his failure as a teacher, particularly in his effect upon the dentist, an ex-student,<sup>735</sup> Peter understands that his father has a much greater effect upon his students, as a moral exemplar, than he realises. 'Once a student had had my father, he did

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<sup>727</sup> Updike, 1963: 92.

<sup>728</sup> Updike, 1963: 45.

<sup>729</sup> Updike, 1963: 89.

<sup>730</sup> Updike, 1963: 35.

<sup>731</sup> Updike, 1963: 37.

<sup>732</sup> Updike, 1963: 92.

<sup>733</sup> Updike, 1963: 96.

<sup>734</sup> Updike, 1963: 120.

<sup>735</sup> Updike, 1963: 197.

not forget it, and the memory seemed to seek shape in mockery'.<sup>736</sup> Peter himself becomes 'the petty receptacle of a myth', but he admits that being his father's son gives him an identity and importance, makes him 'exist in the eyes of these Titans',<sup>737</sup> recalling the importance of Cheiron to Prometheus' fate. Despite Caldwell's lack of discipline, and lack of harmony with his students in the classroom, his teaching is the stuff of myth, and he is remembered fondly by his students. Caldwell's obituary in chapter five – perhaps just as biased as Peter's recollections - is the pen portrait of a lively and dedicated tutor, although not a mentor to heroes, perhaps, due to an ethical virtue, his 'inexhaustible sympathy for the scholastic underdog'.<sup>738</sup>

What Cheiron and Caldwell are trying to teach in the illustrated lessons is the same but the ability of the students to comprehend could not be more different. The novel draws upon a quote from Karl Barth: 'Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself is the creature on the boundary between heaven and earth'.<sup>739</sup> While the terms 'heaven' and 'hell' are not used within the novel, what is portrayed is the gap between the 'conceivable' and the 'inconceivable'. Caldwell's lesson is all about trying to express the inconceivable,<sup>740</sup> but his students are unable to comprehend – even with the surrealistic physical renderings of the subject of his lesson appearing in the classroom.<sup>741</sup> This is the main problem for Caldwell as a teacher – his lessons have no practical, realistic dimensions for his unimaginative students and in moving away from mythological expressions of the origins of things, couched in conceivable terms albeit as abstract concepts, such as 'love', Updike turns on its head what the reader might consider to be 'inconceivable'. It is not the heavens as religion paints them that cannot be understood but rather the scientific explanation for the genesis of the earth, and its infinitesimal, unimaginable numbers. What is crucial to the

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<sup>736</sup> Updike, 1963: 112.

<sup>737</sup> Updike, 1963: 112.

<sup>738</sup> Updike, 1963: 158.

<sup>739</sup> Barth, 1949: 63.

<sup>740</sup> Vickery, 1974: 34.

<sup>741</sup> Updike, 1963: 34-45.

novel is Caldwell's difficulty in communicating such big ideas within such a limited group; yet is vital to his role as beleaguered teacher that he try to do so. As Vickery suggests, 'when the inconceivable is narrated, it is myth'.<sup>742</sup> Nevertheless, Updike's novel, through its contrasts between the heroic tutor, Cheiron, and the high school teacher, Caldwell, with his 'compulsion to teach',<sup>743</sup> reinforces the importance of the centaur's role as tutor to his reputation in myth, and his portrayal within reception. It also, perhaps, highlights the limited success of the celebrated centaur's teaching methods. While he is acknowledged as the foremost tutor of heroes, his students do not always take his lessons to heart – the heroes are often morally deficient—they show a lack of self-control and respect of boundaries, or they share divine will without permission.<sup>744</sup>

## **Technology**

Updike's portrayal of Caldwell as Cheiron, as man but also beast, speaks to the dual nature of Cheiron that is shown in the ancient sources and frequently foregrounded in reception, as outlined in this thesis. In Updike's novel this duality of man and beast is not perceived to be a strength; it 'represents the disunity in unity of human nature'.<sup>745</sup> Updike uses the metaphor of the centaur to explore what is both 'humanly attainable and ...humanly transcendent',<sup>746</sup> but it is important that this centaur is Cheiron, the most admirable of all the centaurs, who is able to combat any negativity implied by his dual nature by being an ethical exemplar. However, unlike Machiavelli, Updike's novel highlights the differing status of Cheiron's halves. The superiority of his human half is highlighted from the beginning of the novel: 'His top half felt all afloat in the starry firmament of ideals and young voices singing; the rest of self was heavily

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<sup>742</sup> Vickery, 1974: 36.

<sup>743</sup> Rupp, 1967: 704.

<sup>744</sup> Gregory, 2019: 43-53.

<sup>745</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 71.

<sup>746</sup> Vargo, 1973: 404.

sunk in a swamp where it must, eventually, drown'.<sup>747</sup> Detweiler suggests that Cheiron represents eternity and timelessness, such as men have aspired to, and Caldwell the limitations placed upon men by time and space,<sup>748</sup> which seems to take an opposite view to that of Updike. However, it is not even that his lower half – his horse, beast half – is inferior but rather, that in being neither wholly one thing nor the other, he is unable to have the best of both natures. As he responds to Venus/Vera Hummel, '[a] combination ...often conceals the best of its elements'.<sup>749</sup> The main problem with the Cheiron/Caldwell beast is, as Doc Appleton tells George, that he has never come to terms with his own body.<sup>750</sup>

Hoag asserts that Caldwell and Cheiron 'both hate the body, revere the spirit',<sup>751</sup> but there is no ancient evidence to support this assertion of Cheiron's distaste of the flesh, either his own or that of others; indeed, he utilises his physically unique nature in hunting, and is portrayed as having a family life with his wife and children, as we have seen in the earlier chapter. Modern texts demonstrate a tendency to worry at the animal part of Cheiron's physical being, and how that then maps onto his nature; doubting, perhaps, that a half-beast can truly do what is best for humans, or considering that there must be a void of loneliness within him because of his combined nature, since they almost always portray him as living alone but for his charges. Updike represents Chariclo and Ocyrhoe through Cassie and Peter, keeping that parental aspect of ancient portrayals of Cheiron, but embraces the more modern reception aspect of expressing mixed feelings about his bestiality.

Although Peter's narration does not overtly identify his father with Cheiron, there are clues within Updike's narration. Despite Peter's desire to look beyond the wholly real, and the fact that he sees himself as different both from those around him and from his father, there are

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<sup>747</sup> Updike, 1963: 8.

<sup>748</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 71-2.

<sup>749</sup> Updike, 1963: 26.

<sup>750</sup> Updike, 1963: 118.

<sup>751</sup> Hoag, 1980: .89.

glimpses of the affection he has for Caldwell, and an almost unconscious wish to be somewhat like him. Peter expresses the desire ‘to have a dancer’s quick and subtle hooves’,<sup>752</sup> and the choice of vocabulary displays the link to Cheiron. Similarly, at times the narration reveals more of a bond with George than he otherwise admits; the shadow joins them as ‘a prancing one-headed creature with four legs’,<sup>753</sup> and on their return home after the three-day odyssey, George ‘was the shape of the neck and head of the horse I was riding’.<sup>754</sup> Again, Hoag reads this part differently, and suggests that ‘[t]he centaur motif is used symbolically to represent a third major problem in the novel, the psychological thralldom of Caldwell and Peter to each other’.<sup>755</sup> While this again offers up a rather pessimistic reading which seems to ignore the relationship between fathers and sons, and of discovering one’s parents as flawed individuals rather than all-powerful deities, it also fails to recognise the interdependence of Cheiron and Prometheus in the ancient texts from which the novel draws.

It does, however, suggest an alternative interpretation, that ‘the centaur’ of the novel could, at times, be a combination of George and Peter. As the novel does not have completely stable mythological referents, ‘the centaur’ could mean different things at different times and Detweiler’s suggestion that Prometheus is ‘a primordial deity, neither god nor man, yet with traces of both’ places Peter/Prometheus on a boundary alongside Cheiron/Caldwell.<sup>756</sup> Indeed, even Peter is rendered dual in the novel, appearing across time first as a schoolboy and then as an adult,<sup>757</sup> depending upon the narrative perspective. Arguably, Peter offers a different dimension to the idea of the centaur if this line of interpretation is to be followed. His comfort with the modern world as he sees it and his ability to show his physical imperfections to his girlfriend and have acceptance of them offer an interesting counterpoint to George’s physical

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<sup>752</sup> Updike, 1963: 55.

<sup>753</sup> Updike, 1963: 105.

<sup>754</sup> Updike, 1963: 257.

<sup>755</sup> Hoag, 1980: 95.

<sup>756</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 72.

<sup>757</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 72.

discomfort, distaste of touching, and sense of being out of time, and reflect the lack of self-consciousness of the Cheiron of the ancient sources. However, the most powerful mythological identification within the novel is between Caldwell and Cheiron; the relationship between Cheiron as portrayed in the ancient sources and Updike's rendering are more illustrative if stability in this reference is assumed, not least because Peter himself perceives his father to be a complicated and divided soul, to which he can only partially relate throughout most of the novel. Peter seems most able to accept the animal part of his father, perhaps because he is avowedly atheist; it is, maybe, the part of his father he best understands, because it is uncomplicated and irreligious. This is in keeping with the suggestion that Updike 'juxtapose[s] the sacred and the profane'.<sup>758</sup> The part that he is unable to comprehend, however, is his father's faith and his preparation for death.<sup>759</sup> For Caldwell/Cheiron, however, there is no strength or benefit in his combined natures – rather, it makes them inferior to both aspects.

Cheiron's dual nature within the ancient sources also makes him an expert healer, not just of humans – he was gifted those skills by his foster father, Apollo – but also of animals. He is suggested to be a founder of veterinary medicine. Yet none of this healing knowledge is ascribed to Caldwell. In removing the medical knowledge of Cheiron from the figure of Caldwell, Updike complicates the neat correlations between the two characters. At almost all points, Caldwell's relative inferiority to the mythical figure he embodies is underscored; he is imperfect in comparison, and his abilities are dulled. Hoag reads Caldwell as an ultimately selfish man who is detrimentally affected by his links to the centaur.<sup>760</sup> But this view takes a more oppositional stance to the mythological chapters portraying the nobility of Cheiron, which is in contrast to Caldwell's imperfections. Caldwell is not as overtly heroic as Cheiron, and his narrower scope of talents would support this, but it is more likely that Updike is leading the

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<sup>758</sup> Singh, 1996: 82.

<sup>759</sup> Farmer, 2015: 338.

<sup>760</sup> Hoag, 1980.

reader to consider what constitutes heroic behaviour in the contemporary world. Such is the example of healing – Caldwell seems to have no knowledge himself of how to heal. Instead, Caldwell needs to seek the expertise of his mythological foster father, who also transcends basic medicinal knowledge by his prophetic utterances, delivering the Delphic maxim ‘know thyself’.<sup>761</sup>

Cheiron’s wound is beyond his healing powers, beyond Apollo/Appleton’s, and instead he is given the warning provided to Prometheus in Aeschylus’ *Prometheus Bound*, which counsels against overstepping one’s place in the order of things.<sup>762</sup> Not only does this merge Caldwell again with the Prometheus figure but it suggests self-knowledge, and knowing one’s limitations, are the secret to a healthy life. It also suggests to the modern reader the need for psychological self-actualisation in order to have mental health and a happy life. Hoag suggests that Caldwell suffers because of his ‘inability to recognise his sphere of influence’.<sup>763</sup> To combine this with Caldwell/Cheiron’s inability to heal himself, it could be that Updike is underscoring the relative degeneration that modern humans represent compared with beings in the mythological past. This is reiterated by Peter/Prometheus later in the novel, considering the occupations of the Caldwell line: ‘Priest, teacher, artist – the classic degeneration’.<sup>764</sup> This trajectory centralises the boundary which Caldwell/Cheiron occupies, placing him between faith and doubt, divinity and mortality. It suggests that Caldwell is an imperfect Cheiron, unable to embody all the mythological qualities that made the centaur so celebrated. However, it also denies that Caldwell is acutely aware of his heroic potential but constrained so much by modern expectations that he is unable to fulfil his own desires in life. The problem might not be in knowing himself but in having the freedom to be himself; something which he desperately wants for Peter and is represented by the ‘artist’ at the end point of that degeneration. It might

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<sup>761</sup> Updike, 1963: 120.

<sup>762</sup> Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*: 1-12, trans. Sommerstein.

<sup>763</sup> Hoag, 1980: 88.

<sup>764</sup> Updike, 1963: 243.

suggest that freedom can only be achieved by abandoning religious faith but ‘degeneration’ implies an ultimate lack of fulfilment.

### **Metaphysics**

The most important aspect of Updike’s usage of Cheiron within his novel is to explore the nature of being, the nature of faith, and the foundation of all that there is. Updike’s own religious views – Christian but with an acknowledgement of its weakness – looks back to the mythological, pagan world to see a less complicated version of Christian sacrifice, and to examine the difference between that golden age and the dissatisfactions of 1940s post-war America.

In beginning this novel with Cheiron’s wounding by one of his students, Updike establishes his theme and the central aspect of the centaur’s character that will dominate the narrative – that of sacrifice - as Cheiron represents the manacled spirit of Caldwell. The arrow itself is not thought to be poisoned – Hummel/Hephaistos asserts that he cannot smell anything, and Caldwell cannot imagine his students – his mythological students – ‘doing anything like that’.<sup>765</sup> Nevertheless, throughout the narrative, Caldwell feels himself to be poisoned, or to feel his imminent death like a poison on his life, despite Cassie’s denial that such things can be felt.<sup>766</sup> Peter overhears his father ask Appleton if his ailment could be ‘hydra venom’,<sup>767</sup> a clear reference to the myth of Herakles, and the arrows that poisoned both Nessus and Cheiron, with Nessus’ wound providing the cause of Herakles’ own death.<sup>768</sup> The narrative is suffused with images of death, again mostly from Peter’s retrospective – he sees his father’s face whiten and skin sink,<sup>769</sup> although he also hears Appleton’s comforting rejoinder to George that ‘without

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<sup>765</sup> Updike, 1963: 15.

<sup>766</sup> Updike, 1963: 47.

<sup>767</sup> Updike, 1963: 116.

<sup>768</sup> Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, trans. Lloyd-Jones.

<sup>769</sup> Updike, 1963: 154.

death... there could not be life',<sup>770</sup> which has resonance with the saving of Prometheus by Cheiron's sacrifice, as well as echoing the crucifixion of Jesus.

Caldwell himself illustrates this maxim in his science lesson on the genesis of the earth, as well as foreshadowing his own fate, by his example of the volvox who 'invented death'.<sup>771</sup> Caldwell outlines to his class that potentially immortal cells volunteer for death by performing 'a specialised function within an organised society of cells'; an environment which is 'compromised', and which means that the volvox – and each cell thereafter which follows its example – 'dies sacrificially, for the good of the whole'.<sup>772</sup> Reflected in Caldwell's obituary, which details that he 'took up teaching duties ... he was never to put down',<sup>773</sup> the comparison of Caldwell to Cheiron, of sacrifice and of entering a compromised environment of a high school, cannot be ignored: '[h]is agonizing, unhealing wound is his life'.<sup>774</sup> Yet it is not that Caldwell necessarily feels that he should be employed elsewhere; he considers himself fortunate to have been given the teaching role when he needed work, asserting to Cassie that he cannot give it up because it is all that he is good at, and he fears losing it, albeit because he feels the weight of responsibility for his family upon him. The strain of entering the environment every day is his ultimate sacrifice, and as much as Caldwell protests that he is not ready for death, he is ill-equipped for life. The moment of sacrifice at the novel's end – his acceptance of his role, and his responsibilities, despite the 'infinite of possibilities' that could have occurred and that he could have been – is that he must carry on and teach,<sup>775</sup> thus exchanging the physical death of Cheiron 'for a series of smaller, spiritual, daily deaths';<sup>776</sup> this freedom comes to him through the realisation that his gift to others is himself.<sup>777</sup> In

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<sup>770</sup> Updike, 1963: 124.

<sup>771</sup> Updike, 1963: 41.

<sup>772</sup> Updike, 1963: 41.

<sup>773</sup> Updike, 1963: 158.

<sup>774</sup> Walcutt, 1966: 326.

<sup>775</sup> Updike, 1963: 268.

<sup>776</sup> Farmer, 2015: 335.

<sup>777</sup> Vargo, 1973: 458.

continuing, Caldwell is Updike's vehicle for exploring 'the significance of the saint in the modern world'.<sup>778</sup> In accepting life as Caldwell, he grants Cheiron a noble death, and an end to his suffering. Here, the divine within Caldwell prevails.

Farmer suggests that Updike is attempting a twentieth-century *Ars Moriendi*,<sup>779</sup> in which Caldwell is playing out a Christian attitude towards death and sacrifice, and moreover that Caldwell does not literally die at the end of the novel but performs a living sacrifice of signing up to countless more small deaths in continuing his teaching.<sup>780</sup> This somewhat complicates the obituary placed at the centre of the novel, and it is little wonder that critics such as Walcutt have considered Caldwell's death an actual one;<sup>781</sup> the details suggest that Caldwell's death cannot happen very far outside of the novel's scope. However, it could be viewed metaphorically, as Farmer has done, as an acceptance that this is all life has to offer, and that it is the death of any hope or impetus to make a radical change in his life. Hoag suggests that Caldwell kills off Cheiron to 'emerge – healthful and joyful – as his own man',<sup>782</sup> but this reading ignores the mythology of Cheiron, his nobility and wisdom, and his reputation as a tutor of heroes. In keeping with Cheiron's sacrifice in the ancient sources, Cheiron's sacrifice is resignation to the effects of an incurable wound, which in this novel, for Caldwell, is his life and his job. Updike here potentially suggests that this sacrifice, this death for the benefit of his family, is not just within reach of all men but is something routine. As Walcutt suggests:

The myth of the centaur expresses with the beautiful Greek lucidity what twentieth-century man is reduced to bandaging in sanitary psychological abstractions: unconsciously, both heroes "want out".<sup>783</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> Vickery, 1974: 29.

<sup>779</sup> Farmer, 2015: 335.

<sup>780</sup> Farmer, 2015: 344.

<sup>781</sup> Walcutt, 1966: 328.

<sup>782</sup> Hoag, 1980: 88.

<sup>783</sup> Walcutt, 1966: 330.

The divided nature of Cheiron is employed as a metaphor for the divided nature of man, particularly between faith and its lack, which are oppositional stances represented by Caldwell and Peter, and within Caldwell himself. Given the reader's lack of insight to Caldwell's inner thoughts, it falls to Peter, primarily, to illustrate his father's relationship to his life and faith. It is frequently through Peter's narration that the reader glimpses the horse part of Cheiron – he describes his father as beginning 'to rear and toss' in their booth in the diner,<sup>784</sup> and when telling his sleeping lover that his father puzzled him, he asserts that he 'knew best his legs'.<sup>785</sup> Not only does Caldwell himself struggle to reconcile his two natures and to see their inherent value and strengths, but he also seems to be unable to communicate his human side to those around him, and thus also his faith.

Caldwell's family clearly do not understand him – they cannot perceive why he thinks the way he does, and Peter frequently loses patience with his father. While this 'beast' nature is obviously a metaphor that Updike employs to signal humankind's baser nature, and Caldwell's man nature to signal a concern with the more existential aspects of religious thought, it manifests as a psychological schism which affects men in the modern world, who need to reconcile both the ephemeral and the material; as Farmer elaborates, the centaur is the Christian view of man, highlighting the division between body and soul.<sup>786</sup> Caldwell distinctly portrays this difficulty, and the discomfort of trying to combine both parts, or to switch between the two: 'Monsters are most vulnerable in their transitions'.<sup>787</sup> Being in a liminal state of anticipating his own death, and in offering up an examination of how to die well, *The Centaur* 'consists of instructions about how to behave on such a boundary'.<sup>788</sup> Vickery suggests that

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<sup>784</sup> Updike, 1963: 139.

<sup>785</sup> Updike, 1963: 243.

<sup>786</sup> Farmer, 2015: 340.

<sup>787</sup> Updike, 1963: 268.

<sup>788</sup> Farmer, 2015: 341.

these two states are never reconciled but are ‘destined to find them antinomies’,<sup>789</sup> which somewhat ignores the ancient sources who portray Cheiron as being perfectly comfortable with his combined, rather than divided nature, and rather speaks to modern preoccupations with wholeness and unity.

This inferiority is also manifested in Cheiron’s perception of his immortality within the novel. Despite Venus’ acknowledgement of his fraternity with the gods, and her accusation that he is too proud to admit it, he does not feel as worthy of his life as the gods do. Venus plays on this and berates him for his dual nature that so horrified Philyra, who ‘so loathed the monster she bore’ and turned into a tree – an ontological metaphor that repeats through time and texts, originating in the myth of Apollo and Daphne.<sup>790</sup> Philyra is metamorphosed into a tree,<sup>791</sup> and Peter’s narration records a dream in which his girlfriend, Penny, also metamorphoses into a tree.<sup>792</sup> However, this reimagining is altered in a more positive way by his sense of her protecting him by not telling him, and by her transformation, showing that physical difference does not always have to mean horror, an aspect that will be examined in the final chapter of this thesis. In all cases, however, this myth symbolises the opposition of chastity to lust, and Penny’s reaction in Peter’s dream indicates, to him, that she is protecting him from his lust, rather than protecting herself. This is reversed to the Apollo myth, and to the situation of his father, whose rejection by his mother still smarts.

Nevertheless, despite Cheiron’s feelings of inferiority, in his exchange with Venus, we see a nobility and pride not evidenced by Caldwell. Cheiron acknowledges that to reverse his horse and man halves would make him ‘a freak’, which the gods would ‘forbid’;<sup>793</sup> so he accepts of his current ontological configuration while acknowledges that there is inherent risk

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<sup>789</sup> Vickery, 1974: 34.

<sup>790</sup> Ovid, *Met.*, 1:451-567, trans. McCarter.

<sup>791</sup> Updike, 1963: 23.

<sup>792</sup> Updike, 1963: 49-50.

<sup>793</sup> Updike, 1963: 26.

in a different combination. Still, he is aware that his immortality does not make him a god, and his 'Olympian position' is 'precarious and ambiguous'.<sup>794</sup> This reflects Updike's theological position, paraphrased from Karl Barth but in his words, 'that there's no way man can get to God, only God can come to man';<sup>795</sup> Cheiron's horse part cannot raise itself to the divine. Yet he has a quality that Zeus cannot possess, in his humanity, through the knowledge of and friendship with men, and this makes him vulnerable: 'It was rumoured that Zeus thought centaurs a dangerous middle ground through which the gods might be transmuted into pure irrelevance'.<sup>796</sup> It is here that we see the true value of Cheiron, as Updike perceives him – as a link between the divine and the mortal, a combination of both elements that finds satisfaction in a noble and wise creature who can lead and tutor mortals to achieve fame and their destinies. This is demonstrated too in the mythological chapter, where plants are described as responding to Cheiron by 'hailing the passage of a hero'.<sup>797</sup> The mythological Cheiron is, perhaps, the successful reconciliation of human and divine, the religious and the modern. Caldwell, however, shows the contemporary difficulty in understanding the value that both can bring. As Vargo suggests, 'man is not merely a victim of his existential situation. Every man is also a mediator between heaven and earth, a bridge builder, priest'.<sup>798</sup> It is this role and realisation that Caldwell struggles to come to terms with through the novel.

It is, however, his sacrifice that takes centre stage, and that which preoccupies much of the scholarly attention surrounding the novel. It could be suggested that all his qualities contribute towards this all-consuming preoccupation that Cheiron/Caldwell has with his own death, and that they are all in some manner responsible for the portrayal of Cheiron as a Christ-figure that is predominant in Updike's novel. Updike himself reported that he was attracted to

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<sup>794</sup> Updike, 1963: 28.

<sup>795</sup> Singh, 1996: 87.

<sup>796</sup> Updike, 1963: 28.

<sup>797</sup> Updike, 1963: 87.

<sup>798</sup> Vargo, 1973: 457.

the myth both by the aspect of self-sacrifice and also the similarity of Cheiron's name to that of Christ.<sup>799</sup> Walcutt suggests that Caldwell 'acts himself into a compelling image of Cheiron',<sup>800</sup> but it is more likely that Caldwell is the only character who is unaware of his heroic greatness, and that he never knowingly embodies anything other than his own conflicted self. In portraying him so, the novel is 'a celebration of man'.<sup>801</sup> It is Peter and the third-person narrator who convey the similarities.

For Caldwell, however, the end of the novel seems to signify a spiritual moment of revelation, in which his divine purpose is revealed. The experience is different for Peter, however. Upon reading *Reader's Digest* magazine articles in Vera Hummel's house, his realisation that there is no proof of god nor no miracle cure for cancer,<sup>802</sup> despite the apparent promises of the headlines, brings the disappointment of adulthood and modern life to him. There is no divinity, and his avowed atheism - about which he feels guilty because his father has faith - is seemingly confirmed.<sup>803</sup> The novel, however, acts as a 'ritual action of Peter' through his reminiscences and narration of those three days in his adolescence,<sup>804</sup> and it is this ritual which brings renewed purpose for Peter, underpinning the need for religious ritual in the life of man. It is this avowal of the need for faith, or at least its rituals and practices, which underpins Updike's early fiction and particularly this novel. The use of Greek mythology is an apt narrative device because of the ritualistic dependencies of the ancient world, in which the real, the material, and the mythic and metaphysical happily co-exist.

The novel suggests a battle between the material and the ephemeral, the known and the unknown. Caldwell, after much soul-searching, allows the ephemeral to perish but this paradoxically does not cause his faith to diminish; rather, he finds faith and value in his

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<sup>799</sup> Paris Review, 1968: 105.

<sup>800</sup> Walcutt, 1966: 327.

<sup>801</sup> Rupp, 1967: 703.

<sup>802</sup> Updike, 1963: 250.

<sup>803</sup> Updike, 1963: 46.

<sup>804</sup> Vargo, 1973: 453.

everyday duties and the sacrifice of carrying on. This death ‘is symbolic of Caldwell’s existential resignation’.<sup>805</sup> To revisit Walcutt’s assertion that Caldwell is an ‘idea man’ rather than a figure of action, Caldwell’s very sacrifice underscores that there can be no significant action for him;<sup>806</sup> it is necessary that there is no change to his life. This is, however, the ultimate ‘meaning’ of the event – without there being an event to speak of – which highlights the teleological impetus of Updike’s writing, that it is the purpose served by the phenomena that is important, rather than the causes of those phenomena.<sup>807</sup> Farmer suggests that ‘the centaur structure of the novel condemns Peter’ because his atheism does not allow him to see for himself the boundary between heaven and earth;<sup>808</sup> but this reading does not acknowledge Peter’s fear that he has not lived up to his father’s sacrifice. Neary’s suggestion that ‘Peter often remains in the shadow of his father’ not only looks back to the shadow figures that Peter remembers on their return home but also signals Peter’s sense of self in relation to his father,<sup>809</sup> and can be extrapolated to Prometheus’ life, after being freed from his imprisonment, remaining overshadowed by Cheiron’s sacrifice to free him. Caldwell’s ‘death’, perhaps, not only signals his own acceptance of what must be done but also Peter’s realisation of what it costs his father to continue every day. The complication, for Peter, is that he recognised the need for sacrifice but, through his atheism, it no longer had ‘religious or cultural relevance’.<sup>810</sup>

In denying himself the comfort of imminent death, Caldwell accepts more suffering, and this is something which Peter understands because he believed it was necessary to men,<sup>811</sup> which Updike refers to as ‘the pain of Christianity’.<sup>812</sup> Rather, Peter’s awe at his father’s sacrifice acknowledges that boundary, and the sacrifice. Peter does not share George’s faith

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<sup>805</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 66.

<sup>806</sup> Walcutt, 1966: 330.

<sup>807</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 75.

<sup>808</sup> Farmer, 2015: 345.

<sup>809</sup> Neary, 2000: 232.

<sup>810</sup> Detweiler, 1984: 75.

<sup>811</sup> Updike, 1963: 51.

<sup>812</sup> Singh, 1996: 88.

but the novel demonstrates an awareness of the part it played in allowing Peter to follow his dreams. In sharing unease that he has proved unworthy, and he has failed to succeed in his goals, Peter becomes a sympathetic character to the reader.

Some of the final lines of the novel again complicate the relationship between George and Peter, as Cheiron and Prometheus. The translation from Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* 2.5.4 suggests that Cheiron was unable to die because he was immortal and Prometheus offered himself to become immortal for him. This moves the agency away from Cheiron offering to alleviate Prometheus' suffering on the rock, and towards Prometheus offering to alleviate Cheiron's. It is later recorded, however, in 2.5.11, that it was Cheiron's offer, made through Heracles' offices, and that because Prometheus was already immortal, this was no simple exchange. Cheiron had to be willing to descend into Hades and suffer for Prometheus. This alternative view underpins the complications that Updike has woven throughout the novel, and the difficulties in firmly identifying characters with the mythological backstory or their mythological 'other half'; indeed, the mythological index warns that '[n]ot all characters have a stable referent'.<sup>813</sup> This fluidity allows the reader to draw multiple, often conflicting meanings from the novel, reflecting the difficulties of maintaining a faith or position.

## **Conclusion**

Through the *Rabbit* series, and in combination with *The Centaur*, Updike provides 'a social history of the United States' through five decades.<sup>814</sup> The novel transcends all the critics' 'categorisations' and 'turns out to be an epic of the postwar America';<sup>815</sup> within *The Centaur*, the figure of Cheiron is utilised to explore what it means to be heroic within contemporary post-war America. The novel sits at the heart of Updike's literary concerns, which are to show

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<sup>813</sup> Updike, 1963: 270.

<sup>814</sup> Keenan, 2010: 463.

<sup>815</sup> Singh, 2005: 64.

the effects of faith, or lack of it, upon the lives of Americans. Indeed, this has continued throughout his literary career; *Terrorist*, with its setting in a gritty inner-city high school and quotations from the Qur'an instead of passages from Greek mythology, updates *The Centaur*.<sup>816</sup> In this novel, however, the use of Greek mythology and the figure of Cheiron explore the boundaries upon which men sit, between the divine and the material, faith and disbelief. The focus upon the sacrifice of Cheiron for Prometheus, and its indeterminate result upon Caldwell, allows the reader to explore what sacrifices are made to allow those the characters love to inhabit a more liberal future.

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<sup>816</sup> Keenan, 2010: 466.

## Rewritten on the Body:

### Form and Flippancy in Cheiron's Portrayal in Children's Literature

Analysing the portrayal of centaurs, and Cheiron in particular, in children's literature necessitates some alternative considerations to those of the literature examined in this thesis so far. The authors are entirely different from the intended audience; it is mostly adults who write literature for children and young adults; their audience is children of a mostly defined age group, or adults who are reading to them. This might be different with some series of children's fiction, such as the Harry Potter books by J.K. Rowling (1997-2007), Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series (2005-2024), or C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956), but many texts within this genre assume an exclusively younger audience, and thus make assumptions about what those children will enjoy. This pertains especially to children's books that utilise classical material. At a conference panel on classical reception in children's literature held in Nottingham in 2014, Edith Hall suggested that Aesop's fables were 'often used as stultifying moral education, a vivid illustration of the way that adult opinions determine what children read'.<sup>817</sup> It was also remarked that the English writer, artist, musician and poet, Edward Lear, known especially for nonsense verse and limericks, 'expected children to find eventually the same joy in classical learning that he himself had', and asked, whether adults, when reworking myths, made choices based on what they think a child should read, especially since it is largely adults who purchase children's books.<sup>818</sup> It is difficult to evaluate whether centaurs, and Cheiron, are perceived as adults by younger readers, or genuinely communicate with their subjective concerns.

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<sup>817</sup> Lovatt, 2009: 510.

<sup>818</sup> Lovatt, 2009: 510.

Scholars have theorised a variety of reasons and purposes around literature for children, either as a genre or through the inclusion of animals and/or fantastic beasts.<sup>819</sup> Literature provides a space to organise and structure events, and practice what we would say in situations in which we feel threatened, or to ‘dialogue with ourselves about something so frightening we cannot face it directly’.<sup>820</sup> Introducing animals gives further intellectual and psychological distance to explore things we do not feel comfortable with, and giving them anthropomorphic qualities softens ‘the didactic tone’ of such literature, especially when it explores socially controversial topics.<sup>821</sup> While Cheiron is not a talking animal, given that he is only half horse, exploring children’s literature that utilises animals with human-like qualities might provide insights into what the authors are hoping that their readers will explore, and issues that are important to children and young adults.

This genre of literature allows the exploration of ‘life problems and life choices’, and the use of animals in the roles of talking, decision-making characters enables critical reflection.<sup>822</sup> Animals are frequently also portrayed in heroic roles because ‘in them we can find the virtues most admired in man’,<sup>823</sup> and the horse is particularly heroic through having knowledge that humans do not have in order to ‘save the day’, and because they use their abilities to serve and benefit humans.<sup>824</sup> While this is most certainly not the case for centaurs more generally – and even in children’s literature, their mythologically-based licentious or inhospitable reputations frequently survive – this potentially offers an insight into the portrayal of Cheiron, who is traditionally portrayed as tutor to human or semi-divine male heroes, and of benevolent disposition.

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<sup>819</sup> See e.g. with further bibliography: Butler, C. (eds) 2006, *Teaching Children’s Fiction. Teaching the New English*. London: Palgrave Macmillan; The Oxford Handbook of Children’s Literature Lynne Vallone (ed.), Julia Mickenberg (ed.) 2011. Oxford: OUP.

<sup>820</sup> Burke, et al, 2004: 207.

<sup>821</sup> Burke, et al, 2004: 210.

<sup>822</sup> Burke, et al, 2004: 212.

<sup>823</sup> Oswald, 1995: 135.

<sup>824</sup> Oswald, 1995: 136.

Some texts examined in this chapter are more suited to young adult / pre-teen audiences and as such explore tensions and issues specific to adolescents. The inclusion of animals perhaps speaks to the ‘bestly bestiality of adolescent desire’ and enables authors to use the ‘ambivalence’ to express ‘a more nuanced view of carnal desire’.<sup>825</sup> Animals can, Kokkola asserts, represent queerness of both desire and adolescent sexuality more generally; situating the adolescent on a permeable boundary with a beast suggests fluidity, as well as being specific to their sexuality. These ideas have some resonance for texts analysed in this chapter, and the mythological representations of centaurs give an interesting dimension to this theory. On the one hand, centaurs in general are portrayed as licentious, while Cheiron, on the other, is the patriarch of a traditional family structure as well as operating *in loco parentis* for the demigods he trains. This duality even amongst hybrid beings offers a range of responses for the adolescent, or for the adult writing his or her outcomes; and while Cheiron offers a more traditional option, it should also be remembered that he was instrumental in advising Peleus on the rape of Thetis, and that he gave his advice on love – albeit offering a more restrained course of action – to Apollo in *Pythian* 4. However, it is as well to be wary regarding any reading and perception of value and relevance of myths for children, especially in assuming a correspondence of moral lessons between ancient and modern worlds. Certainly how centaurs, and specifically Cheiron, were perceived in the ancient world, or in reception texts directed at adults, is likely to differ greatly from the way in which modern children perceive the inclusion of such hybrid creatures within the literature which targets them.

This chapter will examine a range of texts for children and young adults, and evaluate the portrayal of either Cheiron or a Cheiron-like figure through the philosophical headings employed in previous chapters. The texts cover a variety of intended age groups and purposes, although most are presented as prose fiction. They include the aforementioned series by

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<sup>825</sup> Kokkola, 2013:137.

Riordan; Jane Yolen's *Centaur Rising* (2015); Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* (1979); Eoin Colfer's Artemis Fowl series, in particular *The Time Paradox* (2011); *Beasts of Olympus: Centaur School* by Lucy Coats (2016); *Albert the Dragon and the Centaur* (1968) by Rosemary Weir; *The Last of the Centaurs* (1979) by Brian Robb; *The Mythic Warrior's Handbook* (2010), and short stories by Charles Kingsley and Nathaniel Hawthorne, who were amongst the first to present Greek mythology in a manner solely intended for the readership of the young. To a great extent, these latter two establish the qualities of Cheiron most frequently portrayed in modern children's literature. Ellen Jensen Abbott's *Watersmeet* trilogy; Kate Klimo's *Centauriad* duology are discussed separately in the next chapter, on centaresses.

It is worth explaining here the omission of the Harry Potter series by J. K. Rowling and Narnia series by C. S. Lewis. Primarily, it is because they and the centaurs within them have previously been examined, in particular in the extended recent analysis by Lisa Maurice.<sup>826</sup> Maurice's excellent survey briefly features some of the texts included in this thesis, such as the Percy Jackson series by Rick Riordan, and the *Watersmeet* trilogy by Ellen Jensen Abbott. However, for the Rowling and Lewis series, Maurice analyses them in detail, concluding that the centaurs of Narnia are aloof and prone to terrible outbursts of anger, unlike the centaurs of classical mythology; yet they are also clearly portrayed as healers, with their most predominant skill being prophecy.<sup>827</sup> Rowling's primary focus is on Firenze, who is eventually set apart from the other centaurs (who are implicated in a gang rape, Maurice asserts, of a female teacher) by his kindness to humans; he is also respected for his prophetic knowledge, and becomes the teacher of divination at Hogwarts.<sup>828</sup> Both of these series privilege centaurs as prophets above other skills; however, in doing so, they encompass fewer other qualities that relate to Cheiron. Maurice unpacks all that these series can contribute to such an analysis.

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<sup>826</sup> Maurice, 2015.

<sup>827</sup> Maurice, 2015: 11.

<sup>828</sup> Maurice, 2015: 12-17.

## Ethics

The role of teacher and/or foster father is the portrayal of Cheiron from the ancient texts most frequently presented in children's literature. Nathaniel Hawthorne and Charles Kingsley, who followed Charles and Mary Lamb in rewriting mythology in a manner directed at children,<sup>829</sup> foreground this quality most in their short stories about Jason and the Golden Fleece. Hawthorne's 'The Golden Fleece' from *Tanglewood Tales* (1853) describes Cheiron as a 'schoolmaster', albeit 'the queerest ...that you ever heard of'.<sup>830</sup> He is further described as a 'very excellent teacher', and Hawthorne lists some of the heroes under his care and skills that he taught: 'harp, how to cure diseases, how to use sword and shield, and other branches of (appropriate) education'.<sup>831</sup> Although Hawthorne acknowledges that Cheiron's tuition covers subjects not traditionally taught in a schoolroom, he repeatedly refers to 'Cheiron the schoolmaster',<sup>832</sup> and this presents a particular image of Cheiron at odds with his physical form, which will be explored later in the chapter. Moral education also seems to have been a feature, with Jason having been taught 'how to behave with propriety, whether to kings or beggars',<sup>833</sup> indicating that Cheiron himself has expert knowledge in both areas of appropriate communication, further underlining his psychosocial hybridity.

Kingsley's portrayal in 'Story II: The Argonauts' from *The Heroes* (1855) presents a more mythological backdrop, while still foregrounding the centaur's teacherly aspect, although this intersects with his status as foster father: the heroes-in-training 'refer to him as Father Cheiron'.<sup>834</sup> Kingsley narrows Cheiron's sphere of influence with three references to harp or lyre playing and teaching, one to his healing knowledge, and a reference to his teaching Jason

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<sup>829</sup> Hall, 2008.

<sup>830</sup> Hawthorne, 1853: 340.

<sup>831</sup> Hawthorne, 1853: 340.

<sup>832</sup> Hawthorne, 1853: 349.

<sup>833</sup> Hawthorne, 1853: 363.

<sup>834</sup> Kingsley, 1855.

to ride by placing him upon his back. While Cheiron is here a tutor, he is also given the more benevolent aspect in keeping with a substitute father.

Being a foster, or adoptive, father is also explored in Rosemary Weir's *Albert the Dragon and the Centaur*, although here it is not the centaur who is given the role of foster father; rather, he is the foster child. Albert the Dragon is portrayed with the kindness that frequently accompanies receptions of Cheiron, but without the wisdom or knowledge of the mythological figure. As will be further explored, the foster father role in this children's book is a failure until Albert can adopt dragons; the centaur boy's difficult nature and hybridity are barriers to him fully accepting him as a foster child.

Cheiron as tutor is the focus given in Lucy Coats's *Beasts of Olympus: Centaur School* (2016), written for children aged approximately seven to ten years old. The title refers to a school being run by the centaur Cheiron, rather than a school for centaurs; despite the tuition being outside a traditional classroom, the vocabulary is reminiscent of educational establishments with which the book's readers will be familiar. Little is seen of Cheiron directly; he is absent for most of the duration of the action of the book, but his influence looms large over his tutee, Demon, who is training to be a healer. Cheiron teaches mixing medicines and 'proper animal doctoring',<sup>835</sup> but the reader is told that he lives in a cave, and much of Demon's work and learning takes him to stables and animals' dwellings, rendering the term 'school' inappropriate. Cheiron is portrayed by the narrator as an authoritarian tutor – he is described as being obviously Zeus' brother because he shares the shouty voice, and he is able to stop other centaurs from making a lot of noise by his teacher-like behaviour.<sup>836</sup> Demon also recounts that Cheiron had delivered an injunction against the use of Demon's magic medicine box,<sup>837</sup> presumably to foster Demon's learning rather than fixing things through magic. While

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<sup>835</sup> Coats, 2016: 1.

<sup>836</sup> Coats, 2016: 18.

<sup>837</sup> Coats, 2016: 18.

Cheiron is Demon's named tutor, and an authoritative figure in the text, Demon receives help – and instructions – from other gods and demigods, establishing a more modern collaborative and cooperative approach to learning and problem solving. Demon is also portrayed as a pupil who overcomes difficulties in his academic learning; he is dyslexic, and Hephaestus fashions a coloured overlay to assist him in his reading.<sup>838</sup>

Experiencing difficulties in schooling is a recurring theme in children's literature utilising Greek mythology; it suggests to children who may also be experiencing difficulties that there are tools to help, or a niche for them and their skills. Percy Jackson, the titular character in Rick Riordan's series, is also dyslexic, as well as having ADHD, and his conditions are explained by his being hardwired to read ancient Greek rather than English, and his chemical composition as a demigod, which makes him more attuned for fighting. A schoolroom is, therefore, an insufficiently active environment for him. The suitability of some children to traditional school education, which centres on book learning, is thus questioned, especially the inflexibility of different educational establishments to support students who have different needs. Percy is expelled, or asked to leave, by multiple institutions; although Riordan, an educator at heart, does ensure that the expulsions are precipitated by unfortunate events that happen around Percy, as a result of him being a demigod.

Cheiron is the teacher who saves Percy, and helps him to embark upon his training to become a hero. Initially posing as a Latin teacher called Mr Brunner, Cheiron is revealed to Percy at 'Camp Half-Blood', when he has to spend the summer there with other demigods.<sup>839</sup> His role is to prepare Percy for quests, and for his fate. Here, Cheiron is kindly and approachable, demonstrating care for his charges – 'I should have trained you better, Percy ... Hercules, Jason – they all got more training'-<sup>840</sup> although, as Grover the satyr reports, he is

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<sup>838</sup> Coats, 2016: 7.

<sup>839</sup> Riordan, 2005: 62.

<sup>840</sup> Riordan, 2005: 152.

capable of delivering ‘strict orders’.<sup>841</sup> Percy reiterates this at the beginning of the second book in the series: ‘...I was under strict orders from Chiron never to take my anger out on regular mortals, no matter how obnoxious they were’.<sup>842</sup> Cheiron here is portrayed as not just having responsibility for training his pre-teen and adolescent charges ‘to fight monsters for over three thousand years’,<sup>843</sup> but also for moral education in how to navigate the human world. Annabeth seeks a connection to him for wisdom,<sup>844</sup> and he organises the camp to provide guard duty,<sup>845</sup> wielding authority and responsibility for his students. He is not represented as a foster father, although his choice of music inflicts the embarrassment of an adult’s taste – sufficiently ‘repulsive’ to scare away the Stymphalian birds.<sup>846</sup>

Jane Yolen’s *Centaur Rising* also utilises the absent father trope, although this void is not filled by Cheiron but by a veterinarian character; Cheiron is, however, a returning father in the final chapter. The lead character and narrator, a female teenager, Arianne, has a disabled brother, Robbie, and a father who abandoned the family after Robbie’s birth. The non-nuclear family includes Arianne’s mother, an employee, Martha, and the veterinarian, Gerry, and they live and operate around the family’s horse ranch. The family’s financial hardships are mainly due to their abandonment by Arianne’s father, a poor parent in his treatment of his ex-wife and his son in particular. In using a kindly veterinarian as a replacement father, and one who officially becomes part of the family upon marrying Arianne’s mother during the course of the novel, Yolen utilises aspects of Cheiron’s characteristics, even if he does not appear as a foster father of human teenagers. He does, however, appear at the end of the book as the father of the centaur child, Kai.

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<sup>841</sup> Riordan, 2005: 248.

<sup>842</sup> Riordan, 2006: 13.

<sup>843</sup> Riordan, 2006: 44.

<sup>844</sup> Riordan, 2006: 129.

<sup>845</sup> Riordan, 2006: 243.

<sup>846</sup> Riordan, 2006: 79.

The teaching aspect of Cheiron's myth is attributed to Kai, his namesake, although the proposal comes from Arianne. Her proposal is that Kai will learn to carry disabled children like Robbie, and this will enable the children to become stronger, and the family to train other horses to perform this work. This teaching aspect becomes more critical when it is clear that Kai is needed by his own species and can only spend a further year with the family after Cheiron's visit. The didactic element of this tale is evident within the final chapter and Yolen's end notes; she offers explanations about centaurs in Greek mythology, riding for the disabled, and thalidomide, the reason for Robbie's disability. Yolen's immersion in Quaker philosophy also supplies a didactic element, discussed later in the chapter.

Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* features a centaur figure called Cairon, calling upon the mythical figure in purpose and role. This 500-page book explores the division between the human world and the storyworld for an unhappy child, Bastian Balthazar Bux. Bastian has lost his mother, his father is drowning in grief and no longer paying attention, he is rather ordinary and chubby in looks, and isolated from his peers at school; he finds escape in the storyworld, Fantastica, accessed through a book he steals from a book shop. Cairon is a character within the storyworld, and sends one of the characters, Atreyu, on a quest, which will eventually cause Bastian to cross over into the story to follow his own quest.

Cairon's role is brief, and positioned towards the beginning of the book. His purpose is to seek out Atreyu, a pre-teen hunter, and to prepare him, as well as he can, for his quest. When Atreyu accepts the quest, Cairon takes an amulet from around his neck and passes it on – thus transmitting power and guidance from the storyworld's Childlike Empress, the benign ruler of Fantastica. Cairon can only prepare Atreyu to a minimal extent, with what limited knowledge he has; in his way, he is similar to Cheiron in being unable to follow his charges to the source of their challenge or development. Cairon tells him "From now on you will be on your own, with no one to advise you. And that's how it will be until the end of the Great Quest

– however it may end”’.<sup>847</sup> Like Cheiron, the centaur can only hope that the skills the hero has, and the preparation he has been given, is sufficient for success.

Eoin Colfer’s Foaly in the *Artemis Fowl* series bears little resemblance to the mythological centaur; he does not teach, or ‘father’ anyone, but is rather part of a cooperative team working with the fairies to uphold laws across a fantastical rendering of the human world. He cooperates with Artemis, who has been on the other side of the law, now that they have shared goals; while he is knowledgeable, and implements a code of ethics for upholding the laws, he is not permitted the most influential role within the narrative, or to prepare the protagonist for action. He does, however, offer advice from a distance during some of the action, and provides solutions for the characters sometimes when they are in trouble.

### **Technology**

Colfer does, however, focus on Foaly’s abilities with technology. Perhaps in replacement of Cheiron’s healing arts, Foaly can ‘fix’ most situations by his gadgets and technological abilities. He is in the control centre of the operations in the novel, but his physical form – despite repeated references to his being a centaur – never really features as a part of the book, or has an impact upon the role he plays. His hybridity merely makes him another fantastic creature in the collection of otherworldly beings – including fairies and demons – that populate the books. There are only tenuous connections to attributes that might be associated with Cheiron, and they are suggested tentatively. Colfer’s text could be termed a ‘symbolic incorporation’, in that the bare element used from the mythological tradition is implemented in a completely invented fictional world.

In Ende’s book, the figure of Cheiron is utilised more as ‘enactment’, suggesting more of the qualities of a mythological character but incorporating invention. Cheiron the centaur is

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<sup>847</sup> Ende, 1979: 51.

introduced as ‘the far-famed master of the healer’s art’,<sup>848</sup> maintaining a connection to the mythological centaur as a healer. However, his role within the book, albeit pivotal, is short. Apart from his role in preparing Atreyu for his quest, his main portrayal is through a description of physical appearance, presumably to add to the retinue of fantastic characters that have been and will be introduced to the reader, and to convey the immortality of story characters, a point that will be addressed later in this chapter. He is described as ‘what in older times had been called a centaur’;<sup>849</sup> he is then given a description that matches the usual portrayal of centaurs with a human form from the waist up and horse from the waist down. His black human skin is noted (he is from the remote south); the horse-half of him is ‘striped like a zebra’,<sup>850</sup> suggestive of an African origin. His age, and white hair and beard add to his *gravitas* in undertaking the role of finding Fantastica’s hero; however, few of his skills are further utilised, and his healing not at all, despite the introduction privileging this quality.

Bodily difference as a serious metaphor is also present in Yolen’s *Centaur Rising*. Unusually for the texts examined in this chapter, Kai is the only mythical or fantastic character within the story; apart from the appearance of Cheiron at the end, all of the other characters are human. The boundaries are blurred, as the horse ranch assistant, Martha, has such a strong connection to the animals she looks after that Arianne states that she ‘sometimes think[s] Martha is part horse’.<sup>851</sup> However, Kai – and in the final chapter, Cheiron – are the only centaurs. Kai is born from a mare rather than having a human mother, which reverses the myth of Cheiron being born to the Oceanid, Philyra. As Yolen is keen to extol the virtues of people working together within a community, Kai also feels a connection to Arianne’s mother, so he receives human emotional development through his foster family. He experiences accelerated

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<sup>848</sup> Ende, 1979: 41.

<sup>849</sup> Ende, 1979: 41.

<sup>850</sup> Ende, 1979: 42.

<sup>851</sup> Yolen, 2014: 15.

growth, however, in a combination that Gerry the vet calls ‘nature, nurture, and myth combining’.<sup>852</sup> Yet he is ‘still part foal and occasionally goofy’.<sup>853</sup>

Yolen makes an interesting correlation between Kai’s hybrid nature and Robbie’s disabilities. Robbie is homeschooled, having been teased and called ‘seal boy’ by other children, due to his unformed limbs. Kai’s hybridity instils more confidence in Robbie, which stresses to the family and wider community the benefits that can attend one who is different to the norm. Kai and Robbie have special skills which mark them out – Robbie’s singing voice, inherited from his rock star father, being his predominant quality – and Yolen’s correlations invite the reader to see beyond the physical differences through to character attributes.

In Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* series, the physicality of Cheiron is addressed in a relatively flippant way. As a centaur, he is tall and has the lower half of a white stallion, and Percy expresses distrust of his horse’s bodily functions in the first book, in an attempt to get an easy laugh from the reader. Cheiron can hide his unusual form to fit into the human world by using magic:

He was sitting near the foot of my bed in human form, which is why I hadn’t noticed him yet. His lower half was magically compacted into the wheelchair, his upper half dressed in a coat and tie.<sup>854</sup>

Just as Percy is educationally disadvantaged in the purely human world, Cheiron is physically disadvantaged by the need to hide his horse half. However, given the use of magic, and the physical changes that other Gods and monsters can render, it is a rather clumsy adjustment to make. It is of little surprise that ‘if the ceilings are high enough, he prefers hanging out in full centaur form’.<sup>855</sup> However, Cheiron’s healing qualities are adopted from ancient myth (as they are highlighted in the Hawthorne and Kingsley tales). Kingsley particularly mentions that, under Cheiron’s tutelage, Jason ‘learnt the virtues of all the herbs and how to cure all wounds’,

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<sup>852</sup> Yolen, 2014: 74.

<sup>853</sup> Yolen, 2014: 185.

<sup>854</sup> Riordan, 2005: 370.

<sup>855</sup> Riordan, 2006: 48.

so successfully that Cheiron called him ‘Jason the healer’. In both of the first two books of Riordan’s series, Cheiron tends to Percy’s injuries; in *The Lightning Thief*, Annabeth – daughter of Athena and Percy’s friend – asserts that, “”You were green and turning grey when we found you. If it weren’t for Chiron’s healing ...””,<sup>856</sup> and in the second book, he bandages Percy’s leg.<sup>857</sup> While it does not seem to be a primary feature of Riordan’s Cheiron, his medicinal knowledge does benefit his heroes-in-training.

In Coats’s book, Cheiron’s skill at healing is his primary function, as his entire tutelage of Demon centres around healing. Coats has Asclepius as Cheiron’s assistant, rather than the exceptional healer that he was, drawing perhaps on Cheiron’s tutelage of Asclepius in the healing arts (Pindar, *Nemean* 3.54-55). In this children’s text, Cheiron also leaves his divine charges – both human and animal – in order to tend to mortal patients. He further absents himself at the end of the book to attend the birth of Asclepius’ baby, and leaves instructions that he will be gone for a week and must not be disturbed.<sup>858</sup> Rather than welcoming his students to Mount Pelion and making that his home and permanent residence, Coats’s Cheiron is much more peripatetic, leaving Demon to use what he has learned to solve problems. Coats’s message, perhaps, is that her audience knows more than it realises, and they should apply what they have learned without constant supervision. The trainees are given space and independence to develop their skills, based on the learning provided or the skills that they have; whether accidentally necessitated by Cheiron’s benign neglect, as portrayed by Coats, or by his calculated wisdom and trust in his pupil/foster child.

Also aimed at younger children, Robb’s *The Last of the Centaurs* features a centaur called Achilles, less directly connected to the myth of Cheiron. This children’s picture book, concentrates primarily upon the physical aspects of the centaur, and the absurdity of claiming

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<sup>856</sup> Riordan, 2005: 370.

<sup>857</sup> Riordan, 2006: 238.

<sup>858</sup> Coats, 2016: 70.

to meet one on the Yorkshire moors. The narrator is a child whose uncle works for a Yorkshire tailoring firm, and offers a warning to the proprietor's desire to run an advertisement suggesting that clothing can be made for any figure. Achilles the centaur sees the advertisement in Greece, and becomes an 'awkwardly shaped customer', desiring a suit of clothing to be made. The story follows this pursuit of appropriately fitting clothing. Customs suffer consternation trying to decide if Achilles' horse half should be placed in quarantine, inserting humour into the knowingly unlikely situation. It is, indeed, Achilles' horse half that eventually solves the problems that befall the uncle trying to help with the clothing dilemma. The story thus hinges upon the hybridity of his figure, along with the benefits and difficulties it brings in today's modern and practical world.

The issue of hybridity is also covered in another children's book with occasional pictures, *Albert the Dragon and the Centaur* by Rosemary Weir and illustrations by Quentin Blake. Their Cheiron is a centaur, but that remains his only connection to the mythological Cheiron; he is a small boy centaur, and portrayed as a spoiled and selfish, albeit with endearing qualities and homesick longing for his little sister. Despite Albert also being a 'Fabulous Beast',<sup>859</sup> he feels that he has little in common with the centaur:

I'm sure centaurs are very nice if you're used to them, Tony, but I must confess that I find it difficult to take to a creature, however charming, which is half-and-half. One thing or the other, that's what I really like.<sup>860</sup>

Of course, Weir's text antedates the increased awareness of how children might relate fantastic creatures and their attributes to those of real-world humans, but this intolerance of form reads quite distastefully to a modern reader. Further into the story, the human character Tony reflects

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<sup>859</sup> Weir, 1968: 39.

<sup>860</sup> Weir, 1968: 64.

that ‘a centaur is not the right sort of creature at all’,<sup>861</sup> and that ‘centaurs are too much for me’; only one character, Mary Ann, reflects that he was ‘rather sweet sometimes’.<sup>862</sup> Albert expresses the wish to ‘adopt a dear, good little baby dragon instead of this queer, foreign creature’,<sup>863</sup> in an unfortunate correlation that links difference to bad qualities. Nevertheless, the story ends successfully with Cheiron willingly repatriated to Greece and his family, from whom he had been kidnapped, and Albert adopts two baby dragons as they hatch out of their eggs; he is on firm ground with a species he understands. Weir’s 1968 message demonstrates the distance travelled in morality in books for children and young adults, especially when contrasted with a story such as *Watersmeet*, in which accepting difference and working with those who are other than you is portrayed as important, and the right thing to do.

### **Epistemology**

Cheiron’s knowledge, wisdom, and sometimes knowledge of prophecy, feature in most of the texts in this chapter. Hawthorne and Kingsley both acknowledge his wisdom. Hawthorne’s narrator tells the reader that Jason going off without seeking Cheiron’s advice was ‘very unwise’;<sup>864</sup> Kingsley states that Cheiron was ‘the wises of all things beneath the sky’ and that he sang ‘of prophecy, and of hidden things to come’, echoing Pindar’s *Pythian* 9.65, in which Cheiron demonstrates his prophetic skills.<sup>865</sup> Sometimes in these more recent texts, his knowledge is narrow and specific, such as the medical knowledge in Coats’s *Centaur School*, or practical maxims as presented in *The Mythic Warrior’s Handbook*, in which he reveals the Mysteries of Women, relationship advice such as that given in Pindar, and advice on marriage for young female heroines – reflecting the female authorship of this text, the advice runs

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<sup>861</sup> Weir, 1968: 90.

<sup>862</sup> Weir, 1968: 118.

<sup>863</sup> Weir, 1968: 109.

<sup>864</sup> Hawthorne, 1853: 34.

<sup>865</sup> Kingsley, 1855.

counter to what might be expected in enjoining the readers, ‘don’t do it!’.<sup>866</sup> In the Percy Jackson texts, Cheiron’s role is frequently to explain the mythological background and implications of actions to Percy, such as the argument between Zeus and Poseidon.<sup>867</sup> His knowledge of prophecy, however, does not seem to have come direct to him, but rather via the mummy of the Pythia of Delphi, resident in the attic of the camp’s Big House.<sup>868</sup> Cheiron receives prophecies from the oracle,<sup>869</sup> including information about Percy’s quest;<sup>870</sup> it appears that Riordan knows of Cheiron’s connection to prophecy, but he either does not wish to show it as a quality of his character, or is eager to utilise the exoticism of the Pythia of Delphi instead. Here, Cheiron seeks knowledge on behalf of his young heroes, but cannot receive it directly himself. He can, however, interpret it; he asserts, ‘the prophecy is clear to me now. You are the one’.<sup>871</sup> Riordan has retained the reputation of vagueness in the Pythia’s utterings, as well as the injunctions against disclosing too much knowledge of the future – Zeus thunders and rattles the windows to warn Cheiron not to tell Percy too much.<sup>872</sup>

Yolen’s *Centaur Rising* explores other areas of wisdom, the primary marker being knowledge of horses. Arianne’s mother knows horses ‘inside and out’, whereas Martha is a ‘horse whisperer’, and Arianne asserts that ‘horses talk to her’.<sup>873</sup> This is necessary towards the end, when Cheiron appears and ‘prefers to speak horse’.<sup>874</sup> In this book, however, there is no prophecy, although Kai is engendered by supernatural means, the Perseid meteor shower being responsible for the mare’s pregnancy. Wisdom, knowledge, is frequently self-accessed; Arianne reads a book of Greek myths to find out about centaurs and discover their names.<sup>875</sup>

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<sup>866</sup> Carson and Day, 2010: 145.

<sup>867</sup> Riordan, 2005: 134-5.

<sup>868</sup> Riordan, 2005: 140.

<sup>869</sup> Riordan, 2005: 102

<sup>870</sup> Riordan, 2005: 146.

<sup>871</sup> Riordan, 2005: 153.

<sup>872</sup> Riordan, 2005: 37.

<sup>873</sup> Yolen, 2014: 11-12.

<sup>874</sup> Yolen, 2014: 11-12.

<sup>875</sup> Yolen, 2014: 68-69.

She also finds the word ‘liminal’ and applies it to herself, as well as to Kai. Kai also educates himself when he is able to read, and loves books.<sup>876</sup> Yolen thus makes knowledge and wisdom accessible to all those who are willing to seek out the answers to their questions, rather than putting it in the hands of gatekeepers. Similarly, Ende’s *The Neverending Story* has Cairon question the source of knowledge. In trying to save the Childlike Empress from whatever illness afflicts her, and thus the geography of Fantastica, a delegation of the wise and the good have amassed at the Ivory Tower. Cairon has been entrusted to wear her emblem of power, AURYN, and has to reassure those others that he is ‘merely a go-between’, who will ‘pass the Gem on to one worthier’.<sup>877</sup> In outlining his role to those gathered, he suggests that ‘it is possible that we, we who are gathered here, do not possess *all* knowledge, *all* wisdom’,<sup>878</sup> supporting the view that he is both wise and humble, a frequent portrayal of Cheiron in reception.

*The Last of the Centaurs*, being a short picture book, contains little in-depth exploration of the wisdom and knowledge of Cheiron, upon whom the titular character is based. However, one page asserts that Achilles was raised by ‘a Greek family of normal physique but exceptional culture’, and reports Achilles’ skills in language and practical mythology.<sup>879</sup> Similarly, Weir’s *Albert the Dragon and the Centaur* lacks engagement with the idea of wisdom and knowledge, but does explore the problems that can come from agreeing to a situation for which you are inadequately skilled. Weir posits the main character as one lacking in worldly knowledge, who takes on the role of foster father of a hybrid creature, albeit one who is rather spoiled and difficult. Albert relies upon the humans to help guide him and repatriate the centaur boy to Greece. This is a book about applying common sense to problems rather than about sagacious mentorship.

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<sup>876</sup> Yolen, 2014: 186.

<sup>877</sup> Ende, 1979: 42.

<sup>878</sup> Ende, 1979: 43.

<sup>879</sup> Robb, 1979.

## Metaphysics

Self-knowledge and wisdom are not portrayed as correlating to religion, as is frequently the case in texts written for adults, but in the texts studied here, what is explored is the difference in how centaurs – and, by extrapolation, people – can choose to live their lives. Lucy Coats caters for her younger readers by making other centaurs angry and loud,<sup>880</sup> and highlights Cheiron's difference to them by enabling him to stop their 'racket' by taking an authoritative and didactic tone.<sup>881</sup>

This divergence between animal, raucous behaviour, and that which is more controlled and 'human' is echoed in the Percy Jackson series. Riordan's Percy Jackson books again deal with this difference in a light-hearted way. Cheiron reports 'my kinsmen are a wild and barbaric folk' in the first book,<sup>882</sup> but this does not prevent him from spending time with his relatives, the 'party ponies', in the second book, when he is dismissed from Camp Half-Blood. However even here Cheiron stands out – 'his relatives were almost nothing like him'.<sup>883</sup> Yet the 'party ponies' come to the aid of Percy on his quest, and take him and Annabeth to their next destination. Riordan blurs the lines between acceptable and unacceptable, and ensures that many mythological creatures frequently considered to be immoral or problematic have redeeming features. This is a message also explored in *The Neverending Story*, although not through the figure of the centaur. The text proposes that Fantastica, the storyworld, is reliant upon both good and evil figures, and that the Childlike Empress does not distinguish between them in terms of necessity. For Bastian, and presumably for the young readers identifying with this little lost boy caught up in a world of fantastic figures and tales, the message is about self-

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<sup>880</sup> Coats, 2016: 9.

<sup>881</sup> Coats, 2016: 12.

<sup>882</sup> Riordan, 2005: 82.

<sup>883</sup> Riordan, 2006: 233.

acceptance and about morality. Lies are ascribed to be the enemy of Fantastica, responsible for the destruction of parts of the storyworld, and Bastian reflects on this:

With horror and shame Bastian thought of his own lies. He didn't count the stories he made up. That was something entirely different. But now and then he had told deliberate lies – sometimes out of fear, sometimes as a way of getting something he wanted, sometimes just to puff himself up. What inhabitants of Fantastica might he have maimed and destroyed with his lies?<sup>884</sup>

In becoming friends with Atreyu, Bastian discovers the good and the evil within himself and has to go on a quest for self-knowledge and self-acceptance, leave Fantastica and repair the damage that he has done. While the text does not offer an overtly religious message, it contains a morality typically espoused within children's literature. This is mirrored in Robb's *The Last of the Centaurs*, in which Achilles the centaur stays with the narrator's uncle after the uncle loses his job 'partly, too, because he had grown fond of my aunt and uncle and wanted to ease their financial plight by continuing to contribute the modest sum he paid them for his board and lodging'.<sup>885</sup> Achilles also takes a job, and is portrayed as having an unselfish and helpful attitude towards those who have helped him. *Albert the Dragon and the Centaur* also has a message about morality and behaving in the right way, although it incorporates an unintended message that is currently out of step with what children's books seek to do. In portraying Cheiron the centaur as a little boy, with a spoiled and demanding nature, Weir outlines the kind of behaviour which is not deemed acceptable by those around him: they are merely trying to help. However, in Albert's desire to no longer be responsible for him, and deciding that the centaur's hybridity is an issue, the book conveys an unintended message of intolerance that feels uncomfortable to read now.

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<sup>884</sup> Ende, 1979: 175.

<sup>885</sup> Robb, 1979.

Yolen's *Centaur Rising* differs in that one of its primary purposes seems to be to forward a religious agenda. Yolen's own Quaker faith is apparent and is mentioned repeatedly by Arianne, the narrator. Rather than making a distinct prayer to a metaphysical god, Arianne highlights the Quaker belief that 'each of us had God inside of us, and we had to listen to that still, small voice of love'.<sup>886</sup> The focus on pledging to do something for others rather than praying for a special gift, on pacifism, and looking for the good in people, are also presented as traits of good Quakers, as is the persuasive process by which a whole group is brought to consensus rather than going with the majority vote.<sup>887</sup> In using Arianne, the first-person narrator, to highlight these aspects as integral to the morality and belief of the family, there is little space to explore alternative views - not that the Quaker views are represented as being inappropriate or unacceptable. They are, however, unnecessary to the action of the novel and, for a young adult book, could be misconstrued as evangelical.

The conclusion presents Arianne's Quaker faith integral to the outcome, in that she makes a bargain with Cheiron to leave Kai with the family for another year to establish their charity. This Quaker bargain appears to solve the problem for the family; however, Cheiron as portrayed here is distinctly not Quaker, nor is he particularly fluent in human languages, so it is unlikely that the religious aspect of this proposal is relevant to the plot's requirement that it be accepted. Nevertheless, it is another utilitarian hook upon which Yolen can teach the readers about her adopted Quaker faith.

## **Time**

It might be expected that the relationship between mythology and time would be treated differently in literature for children and young people, as it is less likely to be a poignant topic,

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<sup>886</sup> Yolen, 2014: 6.

<sup>887</sup> Yolen, 2014: 82, 164, 124, 119.

difficult for them to apprehend. Cheiron's immortality adds a more fluid, potentially less defined quality to time within the texts examined here, and was established, to some degree, in Kingsley's short story. The narrator tells that Cheiron sings of 'the birth of time', suggesting that it is a more recent history for him than for the heroes he entertains, and the narrator describes 'all of the sons of heroes coming in together – Aeneas, Heracles, Peleus' – which, even in fluid, mythological time, is anachronistic.

Some of the more modern texts examined do not particularly focus on time, or Cheiron's longevity; *The Mythic Warrior's Handbook* states that Cheiron's textbook has been unearthed 'thousands of years later', intimating that the authors had knowledge of the existence of the *Precepts of Cheiron* in ancient times. Yolen's *Centaur Rising* barely considers time, save to mention that a Latin genus name playfully given to Kai to sound like a disease and allow quarantine at the horse farm is then undermined by its originator, Gerry: "'Pony boy would be more accurate ... This isn't ancient Greece, after all'".<sup>888</sup>

Riordan's series deals more practically with time and how it impacts upon the protagonist. Percy asks Cheiron about the time before the gods, to which he receives the reply, 'Even I am not old enough to remember that, child, but I know it was a time of darkness and savagery for mortals'.<sup>889</sup> Here, Riordan is underlining that, even in mythology, there is a chronology to be aware of, and that it influences what each character can know. Cheiron's immortality is tied to his role of teacher to the heroes, and it is described as being conditional on his performing this function: Annabeth worries about his being dismissed from camp for this reason.<sup>890</sup> Riordan ensures that his characters have a consistency with their mythological counterparts by making time and space function differently; for example, centaurs can travel fast and cover a great distance in a short space of time. Cheiron tells Percy and Annabeth,

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<sup>888</sup> Yolen, 2014: 198.

<sup>889</sup> Riordan, 2005: 155.

<sup>890</sup> Riordan, 2006: 51.

‘Distance for us is not the same as distance for humans’.<sup>891</sup> Despite the children being semi-divine, they do not experience mythological time in the same way. This is underscored when Cheiron talks to Percy about the Titan, Kronos, wanting the Golden Fleece and to control the prophecy. Percy has forgotten his family tree, and that Kronos is Cheiron’s father; Cheiron reminds Percy, ‘I *do* know him’.<sup>892</sup>

Ende’s *The Neverending Story* deals more directly with the issue of mythical, fictional time and human, measured time. The ability of stories and characters to cross wider spans of time than humans is encapsulated by the description of Cairon as being what used to be called a centaur, indicating that there would now be a new term, and that his longevity within the storyworld is legendary. The reader is repeatedly invited to consider the difference in how time passes when you are doing activities you enjoy against those you are not, especially when Bastian reads and realises that time is passing differently for him: ‘Bastian was amazed at how quickly the time had passed. In class, every hour seemed to drag on for an eternity’.<sup>893</sup> However, even in the storyworld, there are differences in longevity between the characters and the need for remaking things afresh is reinforced by the need to give the Childlike Empress a new name.<sup>894</sup> The text explores the immortality of stories, and the subjective experience of the passage of time.

## **Aesthetics**

Most of the texts examined here are prose narratives. Hawthorne and Kingsley’s short stories draw directly from mythological episodes, with an expectation that children will need to absorb the correct information but will need it presented in a child-friendly, digestible format. Kingsley’s tale of 1855 situates the action from the perspective of the young Jason, and

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<sup>891</sup> Riordan, 2006: 236.

<sup>892</sup> Riordan, 2006: 240.

<sup>893</sup> Ende, 1979: 43.

<sup>894</sup> Ende, 1979: 71.

highlights features that would be of interest to his young audience, such as Cheiron playing the lyre late into the night and the boys joining hands, and Cheiron being pleased to see his charges return at the end of the day, ‘his hoofs [sic] made the cave resound’.<sup>895</sup> While Kingsley makes Cheiron fatherly and highlights his animality, the tone of his storytelling is gentle but serious. This is not the case for Hawthorne, whose narrative tone highlights the implausibility of Cheiron’s physical form. The narrator refers to him as the ‘queerest’ schoolmaster, reminds later on that page of his ‘odd appearance’,<sup>896</sup> and doubts that ‘Master Cheiron’ was a centaur – the author suspects that he ‘make believed he was a horse for the entertainment of his pupils’,<sup>897</sup> diminishing the hybrid nature of the centaur by prefacing the horse part of his physical form. Nevertheless, Hawthorne’s narrator suggests the longevity of this myth of the horse schoolmaster, although he calls into question its veracity and Cheiron’s form throughout the tale.<sup>898</sup>

This humorous tone is picked up in a modern tale by Riordan. Both this series and the Watersmeet trilogy do not narrate Greek mythology *per se*, but utilise elements of it in their original narratives. Percy Jackson deploys a first-person narrator, relating from Percy’s perspective, which accounts for the flippant tone equivalent to a pre-teen telling a story. Cheiron’s hybridity is outlined by the adjustments made for the human-oriented world. In terms of form, the series intends for readers to read the books in sequence but recaps previous events and information that has been provided; and Cheiron’s physical appearance as both centaur and human is such repeated information.<sup>899</sup> The texts can thus stand alone for new readers, and also remind readers of previous books of the most important information to facilitate their understanding of the book they are reading now.

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<sup>895</sup> Kingsley, 1855: 60.

<sup>896</sup> Hawthorne, 1853: 340.

<sup>897</sup> Hawthorne, 1853: 341.

<sup>898</sup> Hawthorne, 1853: 344, 355.

<sup>899</sup> Riordan, 2006: 48.

Yolen's book is a straightforward, linear narrative. The form is not innovative but does contain a final chapter, which reads like a rather rushed postscript in which Cheiron's visit to the family via the Perseid meteor shower highlights the need for Kai 'to return to his world'.<sup>900</sup> Here, Yolen seems to blend a modern narrative with a mythological premise with vague elements of science fiction; those with mythological knowledge will undoubtedly be familiar with Cheiron's apotheosis to the constellations but this is not explained in the text. Rather, this reference to another world gives a confusing genre twist; the purpose being given as the continuation of the centaur's line raises more questions than answers. This suggests that Yolen had written herself into a corner. Having made Kai such an accepted part of human society, she needed to find a way to explain his disappearance and the lack of centaurs within the realist storyworld she had established to mimic the real world.

Ende's novel also remains strictly chronological, although aspects of different narration highlight an alteration from a more straightforward form. Established initially as a story-within-a-story, as Bastian begins to read the book, the reader is at intervals reminded of his real-life situation. Italic font is utilised to signal this shift back to the schoolroom attic in which Bastian is sat, and until he fully enters the world of Fantastica, the reader navigates this dual perspective. As the Childlike Empress goes in search of wisdom to cure the blight affecting Fantastica, and she meets the Old Man of Wandering Mountain, the novel – that exists for the reader, and the story that exists for Bastian - is portrayed as being written as she watches. This dual perspective is further presented to the reader to make them think about existence in the storyworld, and the relationship between author and characters, as the Childlike Empress suggests that the Old Man writes down everything that happens; he counter-move is that everything he writes down, happens.<sup>901</sup> Signalling out to the story world, and to other

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<sup>900</sup> Yolen, 2014: 170.

<sup>901</sup> Ende, 1979: 221.

narratives, continues. Once Bastian enters Fantastica, and the characters are introduced, the omniscient third-person narrator stays on track with this tale but, signals out to other, potential tales with the repeated variations on the refrain, ‘but that’s the beginning of another story that shall be told another time’.<sup>902</sup>

Like other children’s books, *The Neverending Story* contains end-matter that is aimed at children improving their knowledge, containing some short quizzes and fact boxes about the text. This is unlikely to be an inclusion from the original text, given that there is also autobiographical information about the author in these endnotes. Rather, it signals a more recent desire for children’s books to direct children’s knowledge in an overly didactic manner, possibly with the intention of furthering engagement with the text and with the ideas behind it; however, like most didactic material, it expresses a lack of belief that children can perform their own research and engage with the text on their own terms.

The most innovative use of form, however, is in *The Mythic Warrior’s Handbook*, purporting to be written by ‘Chiron the Centaur’, and thus harking back to the ancient *Precepts of Cheiron*. The back-matter describes the book as ‘Chiron’s textbook’, and despite its claim to be an unearthed ancient text, the introduction offers the reader a welcome from ‘Chiron Enterprises’, a modern business twist that sits anachronistically and uncomfortably with its other claims. Similarly, the rest of the content fails to deliver the moral and practical education that the ‘Precepts of Cheiron’ would have offered to Achilles. The tone is informal, using slang, but does address its readership as heroes in training, as well as addressing Cheiron’s famous pupils, and it highlights their faults.<sup>903</sup> An assumption is made of previous mythological knowledge, such as in the description of Theseus,<sup>904</sup> and the tone is frequently

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<sup>902</sup> Ende, 1979: 433.

<sup>903</sup> Carlson and Day, 2010: 4.

<sup>904</sup> Carlson and Day, 2010: 7.

flippant. As in Riordan's case, this adult writing for children seems to classical material needs to be made more approachable by making it less serious.

The *Handbook* does not present a prose, or even a connected, narrative but instead is divided into many different sections, containing disclaimers, quizzes, tips, hints and mind maps to present information in a variety of ways. The language contains key phrase repetition, such as 'lesson learned', and 'Chiron Enterprises takes no responsibility for ...'. The content covers geography, mythology, and terminology which is correct and formal in contrast to the conversational, pre-teenage tone of the text, and contains many details on 'monsters', appealing to an attraction to goriness and sensationalism that is assumed to characterise the interests of this target age group. The content posits the reader as a would-be hero, wishing to prepare to undertake a heroic quest, and provides background information and case studies both throughout the text and in the appendix. The verisimilitude of the implied authorship frequently slips, not just in modern affectations and tone, but also in connection to the information being presented: for instance, the background on the Trojan War fails to give any personal reflection on Achilles' involvement in it,<sup>905</sup> although there is a slight nod to the close teacher-student relationship in Appendix B, the 'Hero Hall of Fame'.

## **Conclusion**

Children's literature is authored by adults, and so the portrayals of centaurs generally, or Cheiron specifically, are serving a need that an adult perceives for supplying to a juvenile audience. Following the lead of Hawthorne and Kingsley, who foregrounded Cheiron's role as tutor, other authors of children's literature also fashion him as such. Undoubtedly, his didactic aspects are utilised by Riordan for the Percy Jackson series, and by Lucy Coats for *Centaur School*. The centaur is also a trainer, or problem solver, in *The Neverending Story*,

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<sup>905</sup> Carlson and Day, 2010: 125.

and in the *Artemis Fowl* series; he sets preparatory quizzes in *The Mythic Warrior's Handbook*; all these portrayals speak to his enduring reputation as teacher of demi-gods and heroes. It is only in texts accompanied by pictures for younger readers, such as *Albert the Dragon and the Centaur* and *The Last of the Centaurs*, in which the depictions extend far beyond a pedagogical context. Even when the centaur is very young, such as Yolen's *Centaur Rising*, the story itself is given an evangelical aspect, in which particular ways of behaving are encouraged, even if not directly by the centaur.

The second notable aspect about many of these children's texts is the humorous tone that is employed, being most obvious in the *Percy Jackson* series and *The Mythic Warrior's Handbook*. Adults implanting a didactic function in their writing assume that children will consider reading to be 'learning', and therefore hard or boring, rather than an enjoyable leisure activity; they feel that humour will be required to make 'difficult' subjects (those arising from disciplines considered to be elitist) palatable to their young readers. Authors make the assumption that the fantastical elements of mythological worlds need to be decoded, since young readers will not find them enjoyable as they stand. The centaur's portrayal, and Cheiron's in particular, in children's literature therefore tell us that adults are preoccupied with his role of instruction; it tells us nothing of their juvenile audience's interpretation and engagement with the centaur.

The Female of the Species:  
Maturation, Sexuality and the Centauress

Down from the waist they are centaurs,  
Though women all above.  
(*King Lear*, Act 4 Scene 6)

### **Introduction**

The previous chapter examined centaurs within a range of children's and young adult's fiction, exploring how, as well as to what degree, the qualities of Cheiron were employed within the portrayals. This chapter could be considered a continuation of that discussion but with a different, and more specific focus. The texts considered here are primarily texts situated within a series, containing at least two connected volumes, and have female teenage protagonists who are either centaurs or have close contact with centaurs, as well as an affinity with horses; they thus differ from the texts in the previous chapters, which primarily present centaurs as secondary characters, in some way helping to establish the reader's interpretation of the hero. In considering these characters as 'centaureesses', or '*Kentaurides*' in the Greek, the authors are utilising their hybrid nature to establish 'boundaries between the human and the non-human, to facilitate a dialog [sic] as to how those very borders might become more fluid',<sup>906</sup> so to explore specific issues around female maturation, both social and sexual. In considering the development of these characters, the qualities of Cheiron and his reputation as a tutor of young heroes, frequently informs the narrative and characterisation.

The epigraph to this chapter, the quotation from *King Lear*, gives a particular, derogatory view of the female centaur, that of a sexually licentious being who potentially conceals her desires beneath a more 'respectable' surface. It is, of course, an outmoded and

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<sup>906</sup> Jaques, cited in Pyrz, 2016: 268.

misogynistic viewpoint about women's sexuality, drawing upon the bestial nature of horses, and the uncontrolled desires of mythic centaurs, to express distaste of women's desire.

However, in portraying teenage girls as centaurs, or centauresque characters, the authors of these modern texts are evoking a sense of that discomfort in order to explore the girls' own views and concerns about their changing bodies and emerging desires. The centaress is not a modern invention. She is not prevalent within ancient texts. It seems that the category of centaress was only mentioned by Philostratus the Elder, while Ovid is unique in referring to Hylonome, the centaur Cyllarus' wife.<sup>907</sup>

But ancient visual art more frequently depicts centaresses, and even portrays a Gorgon as a centaress,<sup>908</sup> mixing two aspects of hybridity for what must have been truly the monstrous regiment of women. Strong suggests that Medusa 'was probably related to the centaurs', but does not provide documentation supporting this assertion.<sup>909</sup> Nevertheless, artistic examples of centaresses did exist in the ancient world, by famous artists like Zeuxis, discussed by Lucian.<sup>910</sup> They appeared on ancient mosaics and bone plaques, although sometimes less than skilfully wrought.<sup>911</sup> These ancient examples of centaresses in art, and the transformation into a horse of Cheiron's daughter, Ocyrhoe, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* establish an ancient precedent for the female of the species,<sup>912</sup> as outlined in my chapter on ancient sources on page 19. Yet their textual absence, the lacuna where ancient descriptions of their characteristics might have been, allows them to be inscribed today with established centaur qualities, either the morality and excellence of Cheiron or the unbridled licentiousness of the centaur race descended from Ixion. This chapter will address each of the six areas in which Cheiron has

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<sup>907</sup> Philostratus the Elder, *Imagines*, 2.2; Ovid, *Met.* 12.390-428.

<sup>908</sup> Musee du Louvre, Paris: catalogue number Louvre Ca 795.

<sup>909</sup> Strong, 1965: 37.

<sup>910</sup> Lucian, *Zeux*. 6 trans. Kilburn. In the modern world they have been portrayed by sculptors such as Rodin and Ricketts, as discussed in the previous chapter.

<sup>911</sup> Strong, 1965: 38.

<sup>912</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 2:633-675, trans. McCarter.

particular skills or influence, as utilised throughout this thesis, and map how these novelistic series utilise these aspects in their portrayals of centaurs and teenage girls.

The two series that are the main focus of this chapter are Ellen Jensen Abbott's *Watersmeet* trilogy (*Watersmeet* (2009), *The Centaur's Daughter* (2011), and *The Keeper* (2013)), and Kate Klimo's *Centauriad* duology (*Daughter of the Centaurs* (2012) and *The Gathering of Wings* (2013)). Abbott's teenage heroine is Abisina, a human girl who discovers she can shapeshift into a centaur like her father, Rueshlan. Rueshlan is the leader of *Watersmeet* and has been unaware of Abisina's existence until she seeks him out after the murder of her mother. *Watersmeet* is a peaceful community and home to a variety of difference species – including centaurs, who terrify Abisina after an encounter with a wild herd of them in which the leader bites off one of her toes. The trilogy covers Abisina's personal development and self-acceptance, as a centaur, as a shapeshifter, and as a uniter and leader of the *Watersmeet* species, following Rueshlan's death at the end of the first book. Her attraction to a human male, Findlay, causes her added anguish, and while Abbott does not overtly consider a sexual aspect to their relationship, Abisina's physical insecurities in centaur form stem in part from a fear of what Findlay will think. The undercurrent of Abisina's fear consists of both fear of what her character may become, given the trauma inflicted on her by Icksyon's tribe of centaurs, and anxiety about how the dramatic physical changes will impact on how she lives. While establishing a main character as a shapeshifting centaur might be an extreme way of exploring the fears of female bodily changes and sexual development, it is an effective method of conveying the seismic and frightening alterations that occur in the physical constitution of teenage girls.

Superficially, Klimo's series also presents a teenage female protagonist who is orphaned and responsible for others – in this case, a herd of horses – and needs to adjust to other species and ways of living. However, this duology has a lighter tone than the *Watersmeet*

series. Malora, the heroine, has moments of fear and hardship before she meets the centaurs, but, despite being the final surviving human on earth, is not portrayed as being completely traumatised by these events as Abbott's Abisina. Malora adapts to life with the centaurs, and recovers her horse, Sky, who was lost when the centaurs trapped her and her herd. She also falls in love with Lume, human in appearance but actually a Wonder; he has wings, and is able to fly, so is reminiscent of an angel. The duology ends with Malora and Lume comfortably together in Lume's home in the clouds, without any further concern about what may happen to her or her friends. This ending is more overtly reminiscent of a romance genre than *Watersmeet*.

For both series, Cheiron is evoked, his name used – albeit with hybrid spelling – and his qualities distilled into the characters in the series, even if the mythic centaur is not used as a character in his own right: in *Watersmeet*, Kyron is a friend of the protagonist's father, a centaur, and a foster father to the heroine once her father dies, whereas in the *Centauriad* world, Kheiron is an ancestral leader of centaurs, and provides moral compass.

### **Technology/ Ontology**

This section will consider both the aspect of healing that is attributed to both female protagonists in the *Watersmeet* and *Centauriad* series, and the focus upon physical embodiment that is such a preoccupation with texts that utilise centaresses. This consideration of the ontology of the female centaur will take in some other illustrative texts beyond the two series, to support the assertion that it is this category which is of primary importance in this chapter.

Both heroines are healers, and that knowledge has descended through the maternal line; Malora in the *Centauriad* series is the daughter of Thora, a healer, and she utilises her pragmatic plant knowledge throughout the story to assist her horses and the centaurs. This pragmatism is signalled by her names for the plants, and denotes not only her lack of formal education before

she meets the centaurs but invites the reader to question the proper, but less descriptive, titles given to them. Malora's simplicity proves no detriment to the efficacy of the natural remedies that the plants offer, and it highlights a different kind of skill, one which evokes the natural healing of the ancients, particularly that of Cheiron, as demonstrated in the ancient sources. A more sophisticated aspect of the use of natural sources, offering a different, more homeopathic remedy, is the use of plants to concoct scents. Orion, the centaur who first communicates with and befriends Malora, and who is surely named to prompt thoughts of Cheiron's catasterization, is an 'alchemist'. He makes individual fragrances for those who commission them, and blends a unique scent for Malora, 'Breath of the Bush', to evoke the more natural surroundings of her childhood. This perfume has a more profound effect upon Malora than scents have upon centaurs, and gives her a visionary, prophetic experience, in which she is reunited with Sky in a kind of dreamworld, which then encourages her to search for Sky in the real world. The alchemical processes of perfumery are elevated to an instigator of change, as Malora recounts to Orion:

That is the purpose of alchemy, as I understood it from you: to alter moods, to set tones, to bring about transformations. Breath of the Bush has transformed me to a radical degree.<sup>913</sup>

While for Cheiron it is medical knowledge that is at the forefront of his experience, for Orion and Malora, a more indirect usage of natural healing plants provides an opportunity for a more sensory, psychological remedy. In finding Sky, Malora fulfils her outstanding task which has been a barrier to the complete immersion in her new life, and the help offered by the scent enhances her motivation and focus. The healing aspects within the *Centauriad* encompass both physical and mental wellbeing.

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<sup>913</sup> Klimo, 2012: 342.

While Malora's healing knowledge is portrayed as informal and entirely pragmatic, Abisina's status as daughter of a healer and healer-in-training is formalised in her society,<sup>914</sup> and is based upon her physical colouring. As a human, Abisina is dark, with green eyes – the physical 'tell' of someone whose birthright is that of a healer – and those green eyes are the sole reason that she is permitted to exist among the Vranians, who have the Aryan colouring of fair skin, blonde hair and blue eyes.<sup>915</sup> Healing for Abisina goes beyond medical knowledge and is entirely inscribed into her being, although through her human aspect here, as it predates her ability to transform into a centaress.

However, being a centaur is also integral, and commences at a time which the reader assumes to be commensurate with either the onset of puberty, or with a more sexual awakening signalling young adulthood. It is different for Malora in the *Centauriad* duology, as it is not her physical being that alters. But her encounter with the centaurs does coincide with the mid-teen period of sexual maturation, a growing sense of responsibility, and increasing awareness of the adult world and of consequences of actions.

There is another text and another series that help to illuminate both the relationship of centaresses to Cheiron but, more importantly, why the figure of the female centaur is so crucial to a discussion of physical hybridity. The series is the long-running Japanese manga series, translated into English, *A Centaur's Life* (2011- present) – which, due to its form, will be discussed also under 'aesthetics' – and the novel is *The Centaress* (2014), by biographer and poet Kathleen Jones. This novel aids understanding of the conflicted sexuality and particular physical difficulties of literary centaresses, and while it outlines an extreme

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<sup>914</sup> Abbott asserts that having her heroine and mother as healers gives a historical nod to female healers (Interview with Abbott: Appendix A).

<sup>915</sup> Abbott confirms that she knowingly wanted a heroine that did not conform to the physical stereotypes of heroines, and that the subtext of racism was present in her mind at the time of writing (Interview with Abbott, Appendix A).

perspective, it is useful for understanding how such hybridity would be experienced as a teenage girl, an aspect also picked up in the manga.

*The Centauress* narrates the story of a biographer who goes to Croatia in order to write the life story of a famous artist, Zenobia ('Xenia') de Braganza, who is based upon the real life sculptress Fiore de Henriquez. While Alex, the biographer, investigates Xenia's life through intermittent interviews – Xenia is old, and ill – and documentation, she also unravels the complicated relationships Xenia has with her family and the small community of fellow artists and hangers-on at the Kastela she owns, based on Henriquez's Peralta in Italy. Alex's own history includes a tragedy which makes her receptive to uncovering Xenia's story, with the third-person narration underpinning the diplomatic but tentative role that Alex plays in discovering and presenting Xenia's secrets.

While Xenia might be considered Cheironesque in keeping her band of acolytes together in her remote and dedicated space, and giving them assistance in their careers where possible, it is in her physical being that the figure of the centaur is most appropriate. Xenia is intersex, born with the sexual organs of both man and woman, although when her mother became aware that Xenia's "little imperfection" had not disappeared but was,<sup>916</sup> with adolescence, becoming more prominent, she was taken to a Nazi clinic in Vienna to be castrated and undergo radiation to kill the male hormones:<sup>917</sup> it was easier to render her physically female than male, and she had been raised as a girl.

However, the centaur is so hyperbolically male, and is so 'hyper-testosteroned' in the ancient sources, that the figure of the centauress is, to Xenia, one that encapsulates her divided self, in which she is neither a complete man nor a complete woman,<sup>918</sup> just as the centaur is

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<sup>916</sup> Jones, 2014: 240.

<sup>917</sup> Jones, 2014: 241.

<sup>918</sup> Jones, 2014: 324.

neither wholly man nor wholly horse. Indeed, the title of the novel comes from a painting of Xenia's so described:

The figure was half-human, half four-legged beast. The human part had breasts and long hair and carried a bow and arrow, strung ready to shoot something just out of the frame. The animal part was rearing up on its hind legs as if to wheel around and gallop off as soon as the arrow had been shot. The pose seemed deliberately staged to reveal the male genitalia painted in full view of anyone who stood in front of the canvas. The face of this androgynous beast was drawn in an expression somewhere between grief, savagery and anger.<sup>919</sup>

Xenia's intersexuality is hinted at earlier in the novel through the description of another painting detailing a man and a woman, figures identical 'except for their sex', called 'The Divided Self'.<sup>920</sup> Yet it is 'The Centauress' which highlights the duality, if not near-impossibility, of both Xenia's state and that of the centaur, even though the doctors in the novel describe gender anomalies as being more common than perhaps thought, while genuine hermaphrodites as quite rare.<sup>921</sup> In choosing to represent a character through such hybrid symbolism, Jones illustrates both the rarity of the condition she describes as well as the lack of social understanding that arises from being less easily categorised. Being both male and female is akin to being both human and beast, just as female adolescent transitions are well illustrated through the hybridity of the centaur.

The series *A Centaur's Life* also explores the hybridity of female adolescence through the figure of a centaur, as well as incorporating other types of beings, such as demons and snake people. Set in Japan, or at least an alternate universe structured in the same social and hierarchical manner as Japan, Hime, the centaur, navigates school, friendships, attraction, and her own physical being: the first volume is centred around a fear of how her genitalia looks and

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<sup>919</sup> Jones, 2014: 115.

<sup>920</sup> Jones, 2014: 46.

<sup>921</sup> Jones, 2014: 168.

whether it would be attractive or look ‘like livestock’, as had been suggested to Hime on a field trip some time before.<sup>922</sup> This series differs from the novels analysed in this chapter not only through form but also because the series is authored by a man, who imagines adolescent girls’ worries. Whether this is the reason that Hime is drawn as especially ‘busty’ is uncertain, but in the first volume much is made of Hime’s size relative to her classmates and her need to keep physically fit to avoid weight gain.

It is, perhaps, unimportant that Hime is drawn as a centaur rather than as another hybrid, mythological creature; while there is a long tradition of adopting western classical heritage as ‘a shared cultural background’ in Japan,<sup>923</sup> there is also a more random approach to using a classical figure in an otherwise completely normal environment, such as a school or office.<sup>924</sup> There is often a specific meaning inscribed by the symbolism of such characters; references to classical figures act as a kind of shorthand indicating a meaning shared between the *mangaka* and the audience.<sup>925</sup>

However, it has been suggested that the use of centaurs in several recent manga series both draws upon the popularity of the Narnia films and the Harry Potter series, as well as ‘their characterisation as long-living, wise and chivalrous creatures’; that they are utilised in works appealing to almost all manga audiences speaks to a widespread appeal and a more universal metaphor for ‘otherness striving to be accepted into society’, living amongst humans but ‘struggling for more complete integration’.<sup>926</sup> It could be argued that this is not the case for Hime in *A Centaur’s Life*: she has a firm group of friends, is portrayed as pretty and quite popular, and centaurs – as well as other beings – are an accepted and integral part of the series’ assumed universe. Rather, Hime being a centaress indicates physical difference in

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<sup>922</sup> Murayama, 2011.

<sup>923</sup> Scilabra, 2019: 294.

<sup>924</sup> Scilabra, 2019: 296.

<sup>925</sup> Scilabra, 2019: 298.

<sup>926</sup> Scilabra, 2019: 299-300.

adolescence, bringing different physical challenges to those facing her less developed, flat-chested friends.

The normalisation of centaurs as part of the known world distinguishes *A Centaur's Life* from the two series that are the primary focus of this chapter. The physical aspects of centaurs, the hybridity of humans and horses within the same body, or the sharing of close physical space, are undoubtedly the primary focus in both *Watersmeet* and the *Centauriad* series, although they initiate different emotions in each protagonist. In *Watersmeet*, the centaur form is terrifying to the heroine, despite it being inherent to her. Abisina discovers her father's true nature while she is still traumatised from her experience at the hands of the southern land's centaurs. When trying to process that her father Rueshlan can transform into, what is for her, a hated shape, 'she almost fainted'.<sup>927</sup> However, she has also been maligned for her physical looks in her village – her skin and hair are dark, and her eyes are green, very different from the Aryan blond haired and blue-eyed look of the Vranians, the tribe she comes from. She notes that nothing about his human top half changes, but from beneath the torso he becomes a black horse, and his physical movements reflect that: 'He took a few prancing steps backward on his impossibly slender ankles. His tail swished from side to side'.<sup>928</sup> Rueshlan's explanation of this shift is that 'there are certain situations when I am more myself as a centaur, while in other situations I am more myself as a man';<sup>929</sup> he has no difficulty in switching between those two mindsets, as might be expected when he retains his human half. Yet centaurs communicate with other hooved animals in the *Watersmeet* world, and therefore there is also a psychological shift that takes place to alter their communication strategies. Abbott thus highlights that the difference that the bestiality of the centaur brings is more than physical.

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<sup>927</sup> Abbott, 2009: 250.

<sup>928</sup> Abbott, 2009: 262.

<sup>929</sup> Abbott, 2009: 262.

Abisina becomes a shapeshifter after her father's death, perhaps roughly commensurate with her physical maturation and sexual awakening, and this compounds the intrusion of a hated physical form with the lack of guidance on how to navigate and control the physical changes she is experiencing. It is a traumatic experience, in which Abbott channels the story of Ocyrhoe, Cheiron's daughter from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*,<sup>930</sup> who is transformed into a horse for disclosing too much information gained from her prophetic skills. The main difference here is that Ocyrhoe's physical change is a punishment for revealing too much of her prophetic knowledge; she changes entirely into a horse, despite protesting that 'my father is still half human'.<sup>931</sup> For Abisina, the punishment is in being hybrid, and the challenge is in learning how her new form can help her to become a leader and fulfil her destiny. As these are two rare examples of female-horse transformation, it seems clear that Abbott draws from Ovid in offering a transformation for her heroine. In stating that 'She *was* her father's daughter', Abbott stresses the transmission or adoption of bestial qualities, made more problematic for the adolescent Abisina.

Abbott's trilogy explores the bestiality of the teenager and the difficulties in coming to terms with physical changes, even though rendering Abisina a centaur lacks subtlety. This does, however, allow explorations of how Abisina feels about her divided self. She considers her human self to be 'her *real* self, and her centaur self to be 'other'.<sup>932</sup> She had a premonition about the change through dreams, and finds a physical freedom in her new form, even while she psychologically struggles to come to terms with it. What does help is mastering control of her transitions:

Hooves! – centaur – Toes! – human – Speed! – centaur – Findlay! – human ... she learned what worked and what didn't. She pictured two halves of herself: the human-

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<sup>930</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 2:633-675, trans. McCarter.

<sup>931</sup> Ovid, *Met.* 2:633-675, trans. McCarter.

<sup>932</sup> Abbott, 2011: 77.

self and the centaur self. Her two selves stood on either side of a wall. Each trigger secured the wall. Stray thoughts weakened it.<sup>933</sup>

Abbott chooses to complicate further the human/animal dichotomy of the centaur figure by writing Rueshlan and Abisina as shapeshifters, but predominantly human: even in their centaur state they are half-human, distinctly different to Cheiron's immortal but unchanging form. Yet there are distinct differences between the centaurs from the southern lands and those from Watersmeet, which will be explored shortly. It is because she is a shapeshifter, like her father, that many of Watersmeet's residents trust Abisina, and why she eventually trusts herself and gains the confidence to lead. Learning to manage her transitions and come to terms with her own bestiality brings Abisina to maturity. It provides the final confirmation that she should not judge personality and intentions on physical form alone, since there are two distinctly different groups of centaurs in the trilogy with entirely different ways of living.

The first she meets are the centaurs of the southern lands, Icksyon's tribe – a play on 'Ixion', father of the Centaurus who fathered a race of centaurs in Greek mythology.<sup>934</sup> Abisina's village has learnt to fear these centaurs because they terrorise humans they catch; Icksyon bites off Abisina's toe to hang from his necklace. Abbott renders these centaurs as frightening predators:

Their foreheads were heavy, their eyes deep set. They didn't speak but there was a menace about them, their heads swinging from side to side, searching for signs of prey.<sup>935</sup>

They are physically terrifying, unrestrained and threatening. This division between them and the Watersmeet centaurs is maintained throughout the trilogy; even in the final book, when the

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<sup>933</sup> Abbott, 2011: 85.

<sup>934</sup> Pindar, *Pythian 2*: 41-50, trans. Race.

<sup>935</sup> Abbott, 2009: 106.

threat is against all of the folk of both southern and northern lands, the distinction is drawn clearly:

Watersmeet's centaurs smelled of clean sweat, river water, and fresh breezes. These centaurs stank of drunkenness, filth and blood. Abisina faltered. Icksyon's herd killed indiscriminately ...<sup>936</sup>

Some Watersmeet centaurs are further individuated. Like her father, Abisina as a centaur is midnight black;<sup>937</sup> Kyron is a roan, with a full red beard.<sup>938</sup> Although Abisina learns self-acceptance as a centaur from Kyron, she does not learn her most important skill, that of healing, from him, but from her completely human mother. In Abisina's childhood, physical qualities determined fate, and it is this which is opposed throughout. Physical difference is a serious matter, and Abbott addresses prejudice and inequality, which are not overtly present in the ancient sources, which seem to accept hybrid creatures and transformations as routine outcomes from divine involvement in human affairs. Perhaps, in taking the overtly godlike out of children's fiction – although there are founders to Watersmeet who are revered in a prophet-like way – hybridity and difference become a threat, and different beings need to be taught how to respect one another. In having physically identical but discrete groups of centaurs behave quite differently, Abbott encompasses a crucial aspect of the mythic centaur through her portrayal of Abisina's fear: 'Chiron's fatal flaw is that he is not sufficiently different from the non-divine monster whose form he shares. He is not a monster, but he resembles one'.<sup>939</sup>

Abbott's series is about recognising that not everyone you have met who looks like a monster is also a monster, as well as perhaps becoming comfortable with the monstrosity that you may find within. Resembling a monster, or being partly monstrous, does not have to characterise your whole being; there are advantages to being hybrid.

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<sup>936</sup> Abbott, 2013: 2.

<sup>937</sup> Abbott, 2013: 2.

<sup>938</sup> Abbott, 2011: 7.

<sup>939</sup> Aston, 2006: 362.

Hybridity is less of a problem in Kate Klimo's *Centauriad* duology, as every being – apart from Malora – is hybrid, originally created, spliced together, by the ancestral Scientists. In the past, however, there was conflict between these hybrid beings – the 'hibes' – and the People, Malora's ancestors, which led to the near-extinction of humans.<sup>940</sup> Malora's tribe were the final survivors, and as the only human to escape the attack of the Leatherwings – a hybrid horror which preys on others – Malora is a reminder to the centaurs of the damage they inflicted at the Massacre of Kamaria, which exterminated most of the People, and which draws from the mythical battle of the centaurs and the Lapiths.

Yet Malora does not harbour the same hatred of centaurs that Abisina does in the *Watersmeet* trilogy. Coming from an upbringing centred around horses and having survived for years alone in the bush with just her herd of horses for company, Malora feels close to and akin with horses; she communicates with them and understands them.<sup>941</sup> Therefore, to Malora, the seamless combination of horse and human is not to be feared but instead makes centaurs 'Perfect Beings'.<sup>942</sup> This is not the case for the centaurs themselves who, she is told, "'prefer to overlook their horse halves'".<sup>943</sup> The portrayal of centaurs within Klimo's storyworld offers literal centaurs and the metaphorical centaress—Malora riding her horses. Orion, Malora's sponsor and first centaur friend, notices this quality: 'how like the most graceful centaur the combination of Malora and Lightning are, as natural together as he is in his own skin – perhaps even more so'.<sup>944</sup> The basis for this analogy is established at the beginning of volume one, when Malora's father, Jayke, is portrayed as being the leader of his herd; Malora herself confuses the issue when she tells her new friends that her father had been a 'master horseman',

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<sup>940</sup> Klimo, 2013: 53.

<sup>941</sup> Klimo, 2012: 81.

<sup>942</sup> Klimo, 2012: 124.

<sup>943</sup> Klimo, 2012: 78.

<sup>944</sup> Klimo, 2012: 102.

<sup>945</sup> which is briefly misconstrued as a centaur.<sup>946</sup> She describes her relationship with Sky, the foremost horse of the herd, for whom she searches when they are split up: ‘ “When we were together, we understood each other without words. We were that close.” She smiles to herself. “I now see ... like a centaur separated into two”’.<sup>947</sup>

Despite their physical differences, Malora and the centaurs find common ground and enjoy a productive, trusting relationship through most of the story. While Klimo draws upon myth to establish class differentiation within centaur groups, which will be explored later in the chapter, the centaurs Malora first encounters and lives amongst are civilised, and ‘carry themselves with...pride and grace’.<sup>948</sup> Malora admits that she had been wild when she first encountered them but that they have had a civilising effect upon her.<sup>949</sup> Positive change can also be seen as a product of crisis. Sky, Malora’s horse, changes at several points in the second half of the tale, always in times of crisis. He grows wings, due to his exposure to the dangerous Leatherwings, thus borrowing from mythical aspects in evoking images of Pegasus; this transformation, physical as opposed to Malora’s intellectual and spiritual growth, is accepted as easily as Malora accepted the centaurs.

In having such relative acceptance of physical difference within her books, Klimo keeps the transformation and hybridity as more of a psychological and social aspect. Malora might be fully human but she both looks and feels more like herself on a horse, and finds herself navigating change in behaviour and habits.<sup>950</sup> In Klimo’s tale, Malora is more of a hybrid being than the centaurs.

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<sup>945</sup> Klimo, 2012: 4.

<sup>946</sup> Klimo, 2012: 167.

<sup>947</sup> Klimo, 2013: 79.

<sup>948</sup> Klimo, 2012: 20.

<sup>949</sup> Klimo, 2012: 298.

<sup>950</sup> Klimo, 2012: 271.

## Aesthetics

Both the *Watersmeet* and *Centauriad* series are straightforward prose narratives, written in modern language, and with an appropriate amount of foreignizing vocabulary within them to fit within their settings of alternative realities or worlds, seamlessly woven into the narrative. It is notable that in both cases the story is spread over multiple volumes. Each subsequent book of each series involves a small amount of recapitulation of the plot for the reader, assuming that they may have omitted a volume. As both series involves third-person narration, it is easier to invoke this reflective account and to refer back to episodes than it might be if the main character needed to rationalise a summary of what has gone before.

Since both series feature teenage girls as their main characters, there is by necessity a development plot, a *Bildungsroman* awakening into more adult concerns. Both characters make difficult decisions, acting independently for the good of others and themselves, and both involve a romance subplot. This romance is given greater focus in *Watersmeet* by Abisina's relationship with Findlay, especially her concern about how he will react to her shapeshifting and her centaur half, but greater privilege at the end by Klimo; Malora is seen at the end of the book with her romantic partner, the Wonder, Lume. Abisina is more concerned with living up to her own legacy and self-worth, accepting herself as she is, whereas Malora, the only human still alive, pairs off with the only compatible being on the planet who is not a hybrid but belongs to another species entirely and, like her, is the final survivor of that species. In concluding her story in this way, Klimo rather undervalues the growth that Malora has accomplished; having worked hard to be accepted into centaur society, and to be comfortable in her own learning and development, she then becomes further removed from it. This is perhaps prefigured by the centaurs and Honus (a satyr tutor figure discussed further under 'ethics') becoming braver and more capable in their battles against the hybrids of the Sphinx, Chimera and Minotaur, and therefore not requiring Malora's intervention as much as they would have previously. This

signals that a teenage girl's pinnacle of achievement is to be whisked away by a male Wonder, which is rather anti-climactic; not to mention, in this scholar's experience, entirely unrealistic.

Klimo's books are more overtly didactic in layout; like other children's literature series considered in the previous chapter, they contain additional material to help explain the other world that has been created. The first volume contains a list of the Edicts of Kheiron, a cast of characters, a glossary of terms and places, and a short interview with the author, which superficially explains the origin of the tale. *Watersmeet* does not offer this additional material, instead relying on the reader to become absorbed within the storyworld and to make sense of the characters there, perhaps speaking to Abbott's many years of experience as a schoolteacher. The inclusion of additional information in Klimo's book suggests that readers will be unfamiliar with the background to these characters, or unable to keep focused on the plot without having relationships explained to them – yet this material comes after the story, and requires the reader to continue turning the pages after completing the tale, perhaps enticed by the inclusion of the first chapter of the next volume. Nevertheless, additional material (which was also seen in some of the texts in the previous chapter) suggests that publishers are keen to offer an additional layer of erudition. It is difficult to know how many readers accessed this information and found it necessary to their enjoyment of the story.

*The Centauress* borrows heavily from biography and real places. Jones admits that it is based upon Fiore de Henriquez, the hermaphrodite sculptress, and the writing of her biography by Jones's friend, Jan Marsh. Jones has melded the events from her own visit to Peralta, when she bumped into Marsh unexpectedly; this resulted in her being whisked into friendship with Fiore, and in a fictionalised range of characters in order to explore the aspects that could not be included within Marsh's biography because they were too controversial or hurtful to those who remained after Fiore's death.<sup>951</sup> The novel was titled *The Centauress*

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<sup>951</sup> Conversation with Kathleen Jones.

because that was how Fiore viewed herself, a mythological, hybrid creature, sitting upon a boundary between genders and ways of being (Fiore's sculpture of the being remains at Peralta today).<sup>952</sup> As Jones's own writing moves between poetry and biography, the combination of both fact and fiction is a fitting testimony to the novel's title and subject.

*A Centaur's Life* is unusual in terms of form, as a manga consisting of both pictures and words. While the comic or graphic novel format seems familiar, there are also alienating aspects to manga, in that it is read from right to left, and the text itself starts at the place Western readers would normally consider to be the back of the book. As in all illustrated texts, the reader concentrates not only on the words but also the illustrations, and the aspects of characters and actions demonstrated through these pictures. The volumes are subdivided into chapters, which do not necessarily link directly to the previous but might facilitate the start of another storyline or scene, as these episodes were originally serialised, and these chapters are also separated by extra material, geared towards immersing the reader in the alternate universe that the characters inhabit. Volume 1, for example, has 'How Angelfolk Undress', 'Centaur Footwear', 'Undergarments for People with Tails', and 'A Centaur's Undergarments' as one-page inserts between chapters, primarily consisting of illustration and few words. The chapters are also sandwiched, at the front and back of the physical book, with information about the fictional city and its history, which enables a deeper knowledge of this fictional universe to be built over the course of the volumes. The melding of classical references and Japanese culture is hybrid, but this also is a cultural product in translation, the form of the crossover between the graphic novel and the comic, and the different genres of text within the volume itself. *A Centaur's Life* represents the hybridity of its titular character through every aspect of physical/material existence.

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<sup>952</sup> Conversation with Kathleen Jones.

## Ethics

Tutoring and fostering are not prominent in either *The Centauress* or *A Centaur's Life*, as these texts are less interested in Cheiron than the centaur species more generally. Nevertheless, there are instances of a more parental role for both Xenia and Hime. In *The Centauress*, Xenia's Kastela is home to a collection of displaced artists, actual or aspiring, to whom she offers differing levels of assistance; she is, however, portrayed as being fairly capricious with her favours. Hime, on the other hand, acts as a 'big sister' frequently throughout the series, a sort of honorific title given to an older girl, sometimes a cousin but often no blood relation at all, who will assist in the care and supervision of younger children entrusted to one of their adolescent relatives. While there is no formal teaching aspect to these relationships, the older girls act *in loco parentis*, and help to explain some of the occurrences that are beyond the experience and knowledge of the younger children, including relating to different species, making friends, and sometimes practical skills such as swimming.

There are more direct links, both to Cheiron's teacherly qualities and extra-familial parental figures, in *Watersmeet* and the *Centauroiad*. However, the portrayal of Cheiron in *Watersmeet* is more complicated in that Cheiron's role is divided between two characters – Rueshlan (a shapeshifter of human-centaur mix and Abisina's father, leader of Watersmeet), and Kyron (leader of the Watersmeet centaurs). While 'Kyron' would appear to be an alternative spelling of 'Cheiron', Rueshlan's wisdom, longevity, and closeness to Kyron (they even share accommodation),<sup>953</sup> point towards a shared role. However, when Rueshlan is killed as he battles the White Worm, Kyron takes over the role of foster father to Abisina—a crucial role when Abisina discovers that she is a shapeshifter like her father, and must learn to accept her centaur form.

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<sup>953</sup> Abbott, 2009:206.

Kyron teaches not directly but by example. As Abisina has previously been tortured and mutilated by an unruly band of centaurs, Kyron demonstrates the differences between them and the Watersmeet centaurs. He advocates for Abisina, sacrifices himself for her ('He would do anything for her'),<sup>954</sup> and wants to protect her.<sup>955</sup> He is not, however, the source of all wisdom, and Abbott hints at his flaws: 'he wasn't the best source of advice on diplomacy',<sup>956</sup> and 'in the end he had to satisfy himself with keeping Abisina up far too late to give her every bit of advice she might need before they saw each other again'.<sup>957</sup> Abisina views him as a father figure, transforming into a centaur to go for a gallop with him because 'Kyron seemed lonely',<sup>958</sup> reflecting in the final book that the character Jorno had killed him 'who had been like a father to her'.<sup>959</sup> Abisina loses her foster father in the second part of the trilogy, as she has sufficiently evolved to take her father's place. Kyron's dying words, "'Your father would be so proud of you. I'm so proud of you,'" further underpins the link between himself and Rueshlan,<sup>960</sup> and the original qualities of Cheiron that Abbott divides between the two characters. She has been terrified of centaurs herself, and then afraid of how her friends, and particularly her boyfriend, Findlay, would receive her in centaur form; Kyron teaches her to accept her divided self, albeit a different division than for a typical centaur.

This Cheironesque feature may result from Abbott's experiences as a teacher of the age group for whom these texts are written; she writes that she knows this age range well from her teaching, but also that she remembers being most immersed in stories at that age. Yet in conversation, it becomes clear that Abbott's portrayals are subconsciously advocating self-

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<sup>954</sup> Abbott, 2011: 34.

<sup>955</sup> Abbott, 2011: 248.

<sup>956</sup> Abbott, 2011: 34.

<sup>957</sup> Abbott, 2011: 151.

<sup>958</sup> Abbott, 2011: 248.

<sup>959</sup> Abbott, 2013: 283.

<sup>960</sup> Abbott, 2011: 312.

acceptance of one's developing and changing self, and her outlying knowledge of mythology and who Cheiron was influenced the portrayal of the fatherly centaur figures within her texts.<sup>961</sup>

The tutoring and fatherly encouragement within the *Centauriad* series is not offered by a Cheiron-like character, and not by Orion's father, the Apex, as might be expected, even though Malora refers to him as 'a god',<sup>962</sup> and the Apex's wife refers to her in the second book as 'Daughter'.<sup>963</sup> The parental role is instead taken by a character who seems to embody many of the imagined aspects of the mythical centaur but is another species. Honus is a goat hybrid, perhaps implying Pan or a satyr; he is "'the vault containing most of the knowledge and intelligence in Mount Kheiron";<sup>964</sup> he has acted as tutor to the younger centaurs. He teaches Malora to read and write, and engages her in discussions that awaken in her a questioning sense of morality. Honus reflects that his purpose has been to be with the centaurs specifically for Malora's arrival.<sup>965</sup> This implies that his worldview accommodates an idea of predestination, but also suggests that the tutoring arrangement with Malora will not be entirely one-way: "'But I suspect it is *we* who have much to learn from *her*'".<sup>966</sup>

Nevertheless, Honus undertakes to 'civilise' Malora, setting her writing tasks which also embody a moral code – she copies the teachings of Epictetus as part of her scrivening. This enables her to reflect upon her actions, whether she is consciously breaking an Edict, killing a Capricornia hybrid who poses danger to her and considering if this now makes her a murderer,<sup>967</sup> or exploiting the grey area between truth and falsehood when conversing with the Sphinx and planning to rescue herself and her friends.<sup>968</sup> Klimo allows her readers to share in Malora's deliberations, and reasons for doing things about which she is not proud. Malora

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<sup>961</sup> Interview with Ellen Jensen Abbott, Appendix A.

<sup>962</sup> Klimo, 2012: 151.

<sup>963</sup> Klimo, 2013: 359.

<sup>964</sup> Klimo, 2012: 40.

<sup>965</sup> Klimo, 2012: 194.

<sup>966</sup> Klimo, 2012: 145.

<sup>967</sup> Klimo, 2013: 163.

<sup>968</sup> Klimo, 2013: 300.

does not commit bad actions because they are bad, or because she simply feels like doing them, but because they are rationalised as sometimes necessary means to achieve a higher end. Despite the ‘teaching’ that she experiences, and the ‘edicts of Kheiron’ that she lives under with the centaurs, she maintains an independence of spirit that serves her and her friends well in terms of survival; Klimo outlines that not all ‘teaching’ can cover every eventuality, and that sometimes rules need to be broken, although this should not be without careful consideration and maybe a little guilt.

### **Epistemology**

Unsurprisingly, for a children’s author, Klimo presents books and writing as necessary routes to knowledge. Honus answers a question and all his tutees know that he has ‘read it in a book’;<sup>969</sup> books are a source of important information, and Orion can answer a question based upon reading that Honus has suggested. Teaching is given high status through the figure of Honus and, like Cheiron’s, his tutees develop courage and knowledgeability in turn. His prediction, however, is also borne out in that Malora’s bravery and fighting skills seem to have been passed on to her friends. In the clash with the monster hybrids at the end of volume two, Malora finds herself watching rather than doing until she is required to kill the Minotaur,<sup>970</sup> becoming a ‘modern-day Theseus’.<sup>971</sup> Although she has not formally taught her friends, her qualities have transferred to them, and her self-sufficiency has been attractive enough for the centaurs to wish to emulate it.

In the *Watersmeet* trilogy, knowledge and wisdom are portrayed more as like-mindedness and self-knowledge. Cheiron’s animal qualities and proximity to nature are represented by Kyron’s ability to communicate with hooved creatures, which Abisina in

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<sup>969</sup> Klimo, 2013: 309.

<sup>970</sup> Klimo, 2013: 318.

<sup>971</sup> Klimo, 2013: 323.

centaur form also possesses. Kyron and Rueshlan's shared Cheironic aspect is evinced when Rueshlan's eyes showed 'depth of wisdom', and he and Kyron silently communicate with one another,<sup>972</sup> potentially through the link to all hooved animals. Despite being the leader of Watersmeet, Rueshlan also follows Kyron, and Kyron becomes more authoritative and integral to Abisina's plans and personal development after his death. The real wisdom in the *Watersmeet* trilogy, however, is Abisina's increasing *self*-knowledge. Learning to like and trust those who are different to her and what she has known is Abisina's major challenge in the process of maturation. The innovation in the use of the Cheiron figure in this trilogy is in the acknowledgement of acceptance of physical difference; in the ancient texts, Cheiron's duality is never reported negatively but is a positive quality that enables him to fulfil his role. While this is also the case in nearly all the children's literature explored in this thesis, the *Watersmeet* trilogy also makes it the key to wisdom.

The mythical Cheiron's knowledge and wisdom is also split between characters in the *Centauriad* books. Within the storyworld, he is frequently called 'Kheiron the Wise',<sup>973</sup> or 'our Wise Patron',<sup>974</sup> and this fictional Kheiron is a mythic figure himself, belonging to past time, as indeed did Cheiron, who was, for his young heroes 'largely a figure from their past, someone who contributed ingredients to their later greatness and then tended to slip from the story'.<sup>975</sup> However, Kheiron's wisdom and teachings are never doubted by the centaurs, although Malora does act against some and is proved right in doing so. Kheiron's wisdom is more moral than to do with *technai*; the Edicts that the Highlanders and Flatlanders live by read as commandments, and even the wild centaurs have a moral code, albeit one that privileges their horse parts. Within Klimo's books, knowledge is broadly equivalent to wisdom, and in taking up a 'Hand', a skill (yet another play on the Greek word *kheir*'), the centaurs are

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<sup>972</sup> Abbott, 2009: 229.

<sup>973</sup> Klimo, 2012: 117.

<sup>974</sup> Klimo, 2012: 126.

<sup>975</sup> Aston, 2006: 362.

provided with a purpose and occupation. The centaurs are set “’apart from the beasts’” because they have physical hands with which to perform their ‘Hand’, which could be fashioning objects, or undertaking study in law, religion or philosophy.<sup>976</sup>

Some characters are endowed with Cheironic skills that are *not* attributed to the fictional Founder of Mount Kheiron, such as hunting, which Kheiron has outlawed, along with eating meat, and even the possession of weapons: ‘ “He believed the eating of red meat incited bloodlust in the centaurs, causing them to go on the rampage and be a public menace’”.<sup>977</sup> Yet Malora is good at hunting, and frequently sneaks out of Mount Kheiron with Neal Featherhoof, a Flatlander, in order to hunt in the bush and eat meat; she takes up blacksmithing as her ‘Hand’, which enables her to make herself a weapon. Malora is excused these transgressions by readers of the book because she has needed to eat what was available to survive in the past, and because she tries to be discreet in her unlawful behaviour. The reader is reminded that Malora is living on the generosity of the centaurs, and needs to be respectful of their beliefs, even if she cannot live by them entirely herself. Malora’s skills have previously saved the centaurs from danger; her horsemanship won the Apex an important horse race, so Klimo allows the reader to feel that Malora is justified in keeping her own way of life, to a degree. An indication of Klimo’s eclectic approach to representing her own knowledge comes from an interview with her at the end of book one, in which she asserts that her interest in centaurs originated from reading C.S. Lewis but only began to inform her writing when she learned horsemanship herself in adulthood.<sup>978</sup>

The mythical Cheiron’s prophetic skills are not shared by his fictional counterpart. Medon, the current Apex and upholder of the Edicts, does not subscribe to “’metaphysical methodologies of reckoning with the world’”.<sup>979</sup> Yet Shrouk, an old female Dromadi (human-

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<sup>976</sup> Klimo, 2012: 97.

<sup>977</sup> Klimo, 2012: 117.

<sup>978</sup> Klimo, 2012: 371.

<sup>979</sup> Klimo, 2013: 44.

camel hybrid) is described as one ‘who knows all and sees all’.<sup>980</sup> Her prophecy is debated but does, in the end, turn out to be accurate, to a degree; she is reminiscent of the Pythia at Delphi, in that she drinks and sells a beverage called ‘gaffey’ which can induce visions. Neal Featherhoof, the book’s most frequent imbiber of gaffey, does not experience a vision from it, “because I’m a sensible, rational, thinking individual who doesn’t subscribe to supernatural theories”.<sup>981</sup> But Malora does. She is much more sensitive to sensory stimulation than the centaurs. The scent Gaffey and Orion make for Malora allow her to access visions and her deploy her intuition. The pursuit of knowledge is embodied by the most Cheironesque character, the goat-hybrid, Honus, the tutor who reads widely, especially on the ancient world; *Lives of the Caesars* is his bedtime reading.<sup>982</sup> He is a fictional counterpart to the author, Klimo, who often displays classical knowledge in a gently didactic way: she alludes to such mythical hybrids as the Sphinx, the Chimaera and the Minotaur, and adopts political titles such as ‘Archon’.<sup>983</sup>

## Metaphysics

The two series approach aspects of religion in different ways. There is no portrayal of organised religion in Abbott’s series; it instead explores secular morality through the different groups of centaurs and humans. In *Watersmeet*, Icksyon’s centaurs are morally reprehensible: they torture and deform victims of any species they capture).<sup>984</sup> They are unkempt – grimy, fat, and with scars and matted tails.<sup>985</sup> Their behaviour is antisocial (they sing raucously). In *Watersmeet* itself, the reader is told that the centaurs are different – ‘civil’.<sup>986</sup> Rueshlan values

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<sup>980</sup> Klimo, 2013:43.

<sup>981</sup> Klimo, 2013: 170.

<sup>982</sup> Klimo, 2012: 192-3.

<sup>983</sup> Klimo, 2013: 194.

<sup>984</sup> Abbott, 2009: 92.

<sup>985</sup> Abbott, 2009: 121-2.

<sup>986</sup> Abbott, 2009: 185.

Kyron and those who follow him, and these centaurs are united behind their leaders. Kyron demonstrates the morality and soteriological self-sacrifice of his mythological namesake by choosing exile rather than abandoning Abisina.<sup>987</sup> Faith in Icksyon's leadership is however broken in the final book, when his centaurs become disaffected with him and stand 'with their heads down, staring into the flames'.<sup>988</sup> The centaurs do not follow the doctrines of the first leaders of Watersmeet, and therefore lack the underpinning beliefs of those who dwell in harmony and community.

The moral code in Klimo's *Centauriad* duology, however, is supplemented by a complex and structured religion. Cheiron is here represented as Kheiron, a 'more secular god' than the Scienticians,<sup>989</sup> who are worshipped by most of the hybrid species in the Church of the Latter Day Scienticians, the name of which fuses Scientology with the Mormons' Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The centaurs honour their own set of Edicts (partly inspired by Lycurgus' code at Sparta), laid down by Kheiron, the first centaur to bring morality and civilisation to the species: "Kheiron preached tolerance and forgiveness and kindness".<sup>990</sup> These fourteen Edicts are listed at the end of the first volume, although they are mentioned at regular intervals and reflect the Commandments of monotheistic religions. The reader witnesses Malora breaking several of these rules, although a rationale for why she feels this to be necessary is always provided, and a sense of unease: 'Malora fears being turned out as much as any centaur – that's how powerful the claim civilisation has made on her'.<sup>991</sup> Klimo is making the claim for the 'civilising' aspects of a religious system that brings a moral code, and perhaps alludes to the move to a more organised system of justice and retribution seen in the Greek tragedians, particularly Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Nevertheless, she familiarises the

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<sup>987</sup> Abbott, 2011: 123.

<sup>988</sup> Abbott, 2013: 242.

<sup>989</sup> Klimo, 2012: 54.

<sup>990</sup> Klimo, 2012: 361.

<sup>991</sup> Klimo, 2013: 93.

religious imagery for her readers – there are temples in which offerings can be made to the spirit of Kheiron, priests, the sound of bells, and pungent smells evocative of incense;<sup>992</sup> the main figures of the church of the Scienticians are Doctor Adam and Doctor Eve.<sup>993</sup>

The Edicts, however, shape an order more political than metaphysical. There are essentially three social classes of centaur – Highlander, Flatlander, and, as in the *Watersmeet* trilogy, Ixion’s band of wild centaurs who live beyond the perimeter of Mount Kheiron and terrify those who spend time in the bush on their way to the trading city of Kahiro. At the end of the first book, the Apex, who upholds the Edicts, seeks to unify the Highlanders and the Flatlanders, and bring a greater equality to those who live within the limits of Mount Kheiron. The second book brings encounters with the wild centaurs of Ixion, led by the Apex’s eldest son, long thought dead, who has renamed himself ‘Archon’.<sup>994</sup> Malora and her travelling companions, mostly Highlanders – the elite class of centaur – discover that the wild centaurs are partially made up of those who have been extradited from Mount Kheiron for breaking the Edicts. These wild centaurs are proved to have as much civilisation as their peers – they live by the Principles of Freedom of the Natural Centaur,<sup>995</sup> which holds their horse half higher in esteem than the Mount Kheiron centaurs do. The end of the book, and the duology, brings acceptance; Orion expresses his comfort with the wild centaurs, “[i]t is disturbingly like being back home”.<sup>996</sup> His sister, Zephele, also accepts them. In asking Malora, “Isn’t that what Kheiron would want me to do?”,<sup>997</sup> she both reinforces the moral codes that Klimo has reiterated through her tale and underlines the acceptance of his fellow centaurs that those familiar with Greek myths would ascribe to Cheiron.

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<sup>992</sup> Klimo, 2012: 206.

<sup>993</sup> Klimo, 2013: 120.

<sup>994</sup> Klimo, 2013: 193.

<sup>995</sup> Klimo, 2013: 194.

<sup>996</sup> Klimo, 2013: 333.

<sup>997</sup> Klimo, 2013: 340.

## Time

Klimo's *Centauriad* world assumes a dystopian fantasy setting. The story is set in the future, in Africa, where humans have reverted to a more basic, survivalist way of life. Klimo's self-sufficient teenage heroine builds a routine based around practical survival. Time is not measured by Malora until she encounters the centaurs, and it is at this point she is given comparatives – that the Twani, the feline hybrids who serve the centaurs, do not live as long, “A single centaur can go through at least three Twani before he or she dies”.<sup>998</sup> This evokes both human relationships with pets but also the mythic longevity of Cheiron. In the second book, Honus mentions animals that were previously near to extinction but now exist in abundance; he also outlines with realism Earth's successive ages and their geographical features, introducing an optimistic perspective on how the world might recover from its current levels of damage, albeit requiring the almost total massacre of humankind. Klimo has a message about the way in which humans live. This is made clear in her comments about Malora's perception of time within the land of the centaurs:

Here in Mount Kheiron, there never seems to be enough time to do everything she wants to do, and no time at all to lie in the grass and stare at the clouds. Civilization, she often thinks, is a greedy monster that gorges itself on time.<sup>999</sup>

Klimo here addresses a dichotomy between mythic time and industrialised, organised time-- something evident in most of the texts examined within this thesis. Mythic time is cyclical, repetitive, unmeasured; it permits actions of necessity, including recuperation and relaxation. Civilisation, however, incorporates activities, requirements to perform social actions at specific times, and therefore needs to be measured and ‘usefully’ filled. There is no such dichotomy in Abbott's series, which is set in a time and place that is not secured to the world with which the

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<sup>998</sup> Klimo, 2012: 88.

<sup>999</sup> Klimo, 2013: 10.

reader is familiar but entirely fictional and constructed. The relatively primitive technological aids might render this a narrative set in the past but the progression through the novel is entirely chronological, following in some ways the pattern of a *Bildungsroman*; the trilogy concerns the development of Abisina, and her maturation into an adult and a leader, shouldering responsibility and fulfilling her destiny. In separating this world from the reader's world, Abbott enables the reader to consider the story's development on its own merits but also enables them to situate it alongside other fantasy series, such as those of C.S. Lewis and Tolkien. While the story unfolds chronologically, the time period could be considered mythic and universal, much like the figure of Cheiron as evoked through these texts.

## **Conclusion**

Undoubtedly it is more difficult to ascribe the qualities of Cheiron to a centauress. Gender difference adds complexity to the mythical and literary relationships. The primary reason that the centauress is such a fruitful symbol for writers, especially of young adult fiction aimed at adolescent girls, is that it signifies the physical changes girls undergo in their sexual and physical maturation. These texts portray them to be fundamental to the identity of that adolescent and the young woman that she becomes. While Cheiron as a mythical individual is not always present in the text, his presence as patron of neophytes and a hybrid creature who has respect and status is a useful role model to the teenage girl seeking to become comfortable with herself.

### **Women Rewriting Cheiron**

Elizabeth Cook's *Achilles* (2001) and Madeline Miller's *The Song of Achilles* (2011) both use the figure of the eponymous hero as their focalising point; enacted, however, in different ways and at different distances to the hero. This chapter explores these differences, along with the novels' forms, while investigating their portrayals of Cheiron and how his hybridity impacts his role as tutor to Achilles. In neither text does the reader hear firsthand from the hero himself, although there are narrative passages from his perspective, particularly in Cook's text. In both there is always a certain distance from Achilles, with more emphasis placed on those around him, including Cheiron; both texts use the centaur as a character to shed crucial light upon his foster son.

Cheiron has consistently represented a being upon a boundary, straddling two different perspectives, or ways of being, in a way which then makes him liminal; in being wholly neither one thing nor another, he exists on the edges of everything. Since both of this chapter's reception texts were authored in the twenty-first century by women, this chapter will question how they use myth to explore recent concerns, which aspects of the wider world they use Cheiron to engage with, and how the gender of the authors affects their approach to the subject matter.

It has been suggested that there are clearly identifiable features of 'specifically feminist engagements with texts' and that mythical characters 'provide ...a potent resource for women'.<sup>1000</sup> This approach brings into the interrogative space aspects of readership and embodiment, particularly in terms of classical reception; mythological subjects have been

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<sup>1000</sup> Zajko, 2008: 46.

retold, reimagined, and reinvented for thousands of years for differing audiences, but these will most frequently have been by men, and most probably for many of those receptions, for men. Questions have been asked about how women can engage and react with such androcentric texts when there is no female tradition, or ‘lineage’, within that mythology, and an absence of female role models, which ‘has long been recognised as central to both feminist theory and practice’.<sup>1001</sup> In response, twentieth- and twenty-first century women writers have been self-consciously engaging with a mythological tradition that, to a great extent, overlooks the female characters. Their aim is to lay claim to aspects of the ancient world and the classical tradition which have excluded the female experience.

Zajko argues that identification is a crucial concept in this engagement with the classical tradition, not just in terms of gender but concomitantly in terms of how writers blur the boundaries between the ‘real’ world and their imagined one.<sup>1002</sup> The question that Zajko asks – ‘Who are we when we read?’ – is particularly pertinent to Cook’s text, especially the final section. Identification is further complicated in classical reception, however, as readers engage not just with the ancient sources, but also with the rich history of previous receptions, and the differing reinterpretations that have gone before. Indeed, for some readers, the ancient sources might not be familiar at all, but they may have engaged previously with other receptions and have a different perspective on the ‘new text’ based upon that experience. For female writers navigating the relatively uncharted waters of establishing a female perspective on the classical tradition, pre-existing, alternative receptions perhaps provide a problematic heritage of diverse interpretations to be ‘written back to’; they provide a wider transhistorical context in which to locate the female perspective on the mythology. What remains in contention, however, is how female authors – and readers – identify with masculine protagonists from the

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<sup>1001</sup> Zajko, 2008: 47.

<sup>1002</sup> Zajko, 2008: 48.

ancient epics, and which dimensions of these old stories they foreground in their new readings. But in the case of the two novels addressed in this chapter, equal significance attaches to their identification with some of the minor characters, particularly Cheiron, who is both hybrid and hugely influential. It is fascinating that Cheiron is ‘rewritten’ by twenty-first century women, because they are themselves performing a hybrid activity, as women reacting to an ancient tradition whose producers and consumers were and have long been primarily masculine. Just as Cheiron exists on a margin, so too do they.

Zajko utilises Hélène Cixous’s theory of *écriture féminine*, developed in her *Le Rire de la Méduse* (1975) in discussing ‘hierarchical oppositions that currently organise our thought’;<sup>1003</sup> she considers Cixous’s own identification with Achilles, the permeable boundary between the literary and the non-literary worlds,<sup>1004</sup> and the highly significant psychological effect that myth and dream have upon the formation of the self.<sup>1005</sup> What links this to Cheiron is the idea of boundaries, of oppositions, and the negotiation between two separate aspects in one unified space. Women writers are writing back to a classical tradition in which they have a shared ancestry but from which are also somewhat ostracised. A journalist’s suggestion that Cook ‘seems to see with a man’s eyes’ rather misses the point of a key episode within *Achilles*: the rape of Helen of Troy by Theseus.<sup>1006</sup> Something more subtle and complex is going on. Cook uses Keats, who engaged enthusiastically with Chapman’s translation of the *Iliad*, to look at Achilles, therefore refracting the reader’s vision of the epic hero through another’s gaze;<sup>1007</sup> she also uses ‘Keats’s historical anxiety about gender and genre’ to uncover both the eroticising tradition of reading Homer, and to remove the overtly masculine aspects of the epic.<sup>1008</sup> Both Cook and Miller ‘do not follow the path of giving a voice to female characters suppressed in

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<sup>1003</sup> Zajko, 2008: 61; Cixous, 1976.

<sup>1004</sup> Zajko, 2008: 53.

<sup>1005</sup> Zajko, 2008: 57.

<sup>1006</sup> Kellaway, 2001.

<sup>1007</sup> Stoker, 2019: 40.

<sup>1008</sup> Stoker, 2019: 55.

the tradition so far',<sup>1009</sup> or at least not exclusively, and both focus upon Achilles rather than putting a female character centre-stage in the manner of many popular feminist mythological retellings. In exploring the character and relationships of a mythological hero *par excellence*, Cook and Miller are doing something entirely different in contemplating and critiquing male force and violence,<sup>1010</sup> thus challenging the notion that women's writing or women's criticism can be reduced to a single homogeneous voice or approach.<sup>1011</sup> However, the suggestion that women's writing is frequently concerned with the senses and with embodiment is more difficult to challenge.<sup>1012</sup> From this perspective, Cheiron's role within both texts is suggestive.

Miller's *The Song of Achilles* is given its shape by Achilles' life story. In adopting Patroclus' first-person narrative perspective, however, she imposes limits on the scope of her content. For example, Patroclus can only really start his narrative about the hero from the point at which he is himself exiled to Phthia and meets Achilles; relevant historic details must be filled in as connected but coherent parts of the narrative, which is ostensibly about 'men's private inner and intimate lives'.<sup>1013</sup> Miller manages to include narrative following Patroclus' death by having him as a restless spirit, unable to enter Hades until his name is also inscribed upon Achilles' tomb, where their ashes are interred together. The novel is thus enabled to encompass Achilles' fighting at Troy, his death, and the aftermath, all of which would otherwise remain untold.

Miller's text incorporates information from a variety of ancient sources, including the *Iliad*, Statius' *Achilleid*, and Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica*, but offers an unusual perspective by primarily focusing upon the romantic relationship between Achilles and Patroclus. Despite the seeming modernity of normalising a homosexual relationship making

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<sup>1009</sup> Toney, 2011: 1.

<sup>1010</sup> Bibby, 2023: 489.

<sup>1011</sup> Toney, 2011: 15.

<sup>1012</sup> Zajko, 2008: 48; Bibby, 2023: 493.

<sup>1013</sup> Bibby, 2023: 503.

this an identifiably twenty-first century reception, there is a substantial scholarly tradition on the ancient and post-antique reception of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus.<sup>1014</sup> Nevertheless, it is suggested that it was particularly timely, given ‘the ongoing debate over gay marriage’.<sup>1015</sup> While Miller’s text may not seem particularly ‘feminist’ in its failure to address neglected female characters from ancient epics, or react to a male hero in a surprising or unusual way, it is an unusual reception (given the ancient precedents), of the ancient hero by focalising through Patroclus. As Miller admits, he is a ‘minor character ...[who] really has no stage time at all until this moment’.<sup>1016</sup> In portraying a marginalised character participating in an unusual relationship – they are told that homosexual relationships are normal in adolescence but inappropriate in adulthood– Miller’s text reclaims aspects of the ancient world.<sup>1017</sup> Cheiron’s influence is pervasive throughout the novel, even in terms of ‘normalising’ normality for the relationship between Patroclus and Achilles.

Cook’s *Achilles* deals primarily, although not exclusively, with episodes from the hero’s life. These episodes are not narrated in wholly chronological order; the narrative starts when he meets Odysseus in Hades, and then it progresses through his conception, his life, and the aftermath of his death. This is only part of the narrative, however; there is additional material in subsequent sections, focusing upon Helen of Troy, Cheiron, and the Romantic poet, Keats. Further discussion will appear in this chapter’s next section, on aesthetics, as the form of the work greatly influences its interpretation and the audience/reader’s engagement with the text. All episodes directly connect with the figure of Achilles, however, as their linking principle. For example, at the start of ‘Fire’, Helen’s narrative section, Achilles is referenced at the beginning, as a focal point for Helen’s relations with men. Cheiron’s section, ‘Vulnerary’, focuses on his emotional response to Achilles’ death; and the final section,

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<sup>1014</sup> As discussed in Beitenfeld, 2023: 3-21; Delbar, 2023: 22-40; and King and Kozak, 2023: 41-57.

<sup>1015</sup> Pols 2012.

<sup>1016</sup> Alter, 2012.

<sup>1017</sup> Miller, 2011: 165.

‘Relay’, considers Achilles as an inspirational figure to Keats. Even if Achilles does not remain the primary focus of these episodes, he is the springboard from which they launch.

### **Aesthetics**

In terms of form, *The Song of Achilles* is, on the surface, a straightforward novel, narrated from a single character’s perspective in first person narration and mostly in past tense. There are, nevertheless, subtle aspects that make this text more hybrid, sharing an indeterminate nature with Cheiron, whose influence recurs throughout the novel. First, the tense of the narration changes after Patroclus’ death from past tense to present. Patroclus stays close to Achilles until his death, and around the Greeks until their departure, finally sharing his last conscious, upper-world moments with Thetis. This subtle shift passes almost unnoticed by the reader but indicates where Miller is diverging from the influence of the ancient epics in style, albeit remaining true to content, to some extent, most notably in relation to Achilles’ death. The effect is to bring urgency to the action of the novel; the brutality of Pyrrhus is not romanticised by Patroclus, as it could be argued Achilles’ brutality was; the lack of acceptance of the relationship between Patroclus and his Achilles, highlighted by Neoptolemus’ refusal to inscribe both names upon the tomb, which leaves Patroclus in limbo, serves, along with the use of the present tense, to bring those same struggles to be accepted into the modern world. The present tense allows Patroclus to be relatively all-seeing within that location, but it adds pressure to his need to have his and Achilles’ relationship officially recorded. Although not a requirement for souls to descend to the Underworld in the ancient sources – and Patroclus was given the appropriate rites – this need to have a written testimonial to their relationship speaks to a modern need to counter the previous invisibility, or lack of acknowledgement, of homosexual relationships by society.

Secondly, the novel could be more directed towards younger readers than adults. Despite being enjoyed by adult readers in their thousands, and winning the Orange prize for fiction in 2012, in spending much of the narrative on the childhood and adolescence of both Patroclus and Achilles, and in championing a less traditional romantic relationship, the novel has much that would appeal to a young adult reader: Miller herself seems to support this appeal to a younger audience in stating, ‘I wanted the book to be accessible. I didn’t want it to be didactic’.<sup>1018</sup> This implies that her audience would be open to being taught, and would potentially be new to the subject matter; Miller’s language – particularly in her euphemistic approach to sex and the body – would support this view.

Finally, an aspect that makes the text more hybrid, even without the consideration that as a classical reception text it is *already* hybrid, is the intentional slippage between the ancient sources, particularly the *Iliad*, and this novel. Miller uses some Greek, particularly giving Achilles his title *Aristos Achaion*, and has Neoptolemus adopt this title at the end of the text. There are also some direct references to the *Iliad*, such as Achilles telling Hector ‘there are no bargains between lions and men’.<sup>1019</sup> Such inclusions point to the research involved in the genesis of the text, signalling a hybridity between scholarly and creative activity, which is also present in Cook’s *Achilles*.

*Achilles* sits on a boundary between genres. It is loosely categorised by its publisher as a novel, but at only one hundred and seven pages, and by employing poetic language, it is both less and more than this. It is ‘a work of fiction with a performance life’;<sup>1020</sup> it is ‘not a novel ...[n]or is it a play ...but *Achilles* is not a poem either’, although its brevity does not diminish its purpose, it is ‘epic in its scope’.<sup>1021</sup> It is ‘more lush prose poem’,<sup>1022</sup> a ‘poetic

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<sup>1018</sup> Goldenburg, 2011.

<sup>1019</sup> Miller, 2011: 328; Homer, // 22.232.

<sup>1020</sup> Worpel Press, 2019.

<sup>1021</sup> Kellaway, 2001.

<sup>1022</sup> Goldenburg, 2011.

masterpiece',<sup>1023</sup> and yet it has also been (partially) performed as a monologue.<sup>1024</sup> This performance, however – performed twice, once by Cook herself and once by Greg Hicks - contains only the narrative directly concerning Achilles' life,<sup>1025</sup> the rest of the work is 'solely literary'.<sup>1026</sup> For most who will encounter the text, it will be experienced as a wholly, purely literary one, although the language and layout might suggest that it is not a straightforward novella.

*Achilles* is ostensibly divided into three parts, albeit with subsections in each. 'Two Rivers' deals with the life of Achilles, although it begins with him in the Underworld in the subsection of the same name. 'Quicken' is his conception, Peleus' seizure of Thetis, and her unsuccessful attempt to burn immortality into her children – here, Achilles is the seventh child but the only one to survive. 'His Girlhood' covers time on Scyros, placed there by Thetis to avoid Troy, and 'The Choice' picks up from the beginning of the action of the *Iliad* through to Hector's death. 'Father' portrays Priam's visit and the restoration of Hector's corpse to him, and 'Cut Off' conveys scenes familiar to the classicist via Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomeria*, the deaths of both Penthesilea and Achilles.

The second section, 'Gone', begins with 'Urn', the aftermath of Achilles' death and his funeral. 'Fire', as previously mentioned, is narrated from the perspective of Helen of Troy, initially reflecting that Thetis wanted her for Achilles, but it then moves on to highlight Helen's loneliness, and reflects back on Theseus' abduction and rape of her as a child. The final subsection, 'Vulnerable', told from Cheiron's perspective, contrasts his pain at losing the heroes he has nurtured and the sense of cessation of life he feels at Achilles' death. Both these characters, Helen and Cheiron, involve Achilles in their reflections, but Cook's vision extends wider, giving a broader sense of their characterisations and their concerns.

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<sup>1023</sup> *The Atlantic*, 2002.

<sup>1024</sup> Toney, 2011: 2.

<sup>1025</sup> Kellaway, 2001.

<sup>1026</sup> Toney, 2011: 2.

The third and final section of the text, 'Relay', moves beyond the classical world and addresses John Keats's preoccupation with Achilles. Cook utilises works by Keats here, which further complicates any attempt to categorise this text; it is research, literary collage, as well as unique creative endeavour. The structure alone reads like poetry, albeit extended poetic narrative within each section. In using Achilles in the final two main sections as a framing device rather than a central character, Cook employs poetic technique to both unify the disparate parts, but also to highlight her wider aims.

Those wider aims include highlighting the longevity and the afterlife of Achilles, and of classical literature in general. As a scholar of Keats and an editor of his work, Cook fuses the two, utilising Keats's poem 'On First Looking at Chapman's Homer' (1816). The title of this section, 'Relay', implies the imagery of baton-passing, of handing on through time and generations 'the *Iliad*'s inspirational reach'.<sup>1027</sup> Achilles' influence goes beyond Homer, beyond fifth-century CE Quintus Smyrnaeus, and beyond even Keats, to reach a contemporary woman writer; in presenting a text which defies neat generic classifications, Cook reflects the different forms that translations and reworkings of the epic have taken and the people they can influence. This final section questions 'how readers in different historical periods make connections across time when they read'.<sup>1028</sup>

This trope is reinforced by the further intertextuality within this final section. Cook explicitly references not only Keats's life and poetry, but also his letters, in which he ascribes his lack of loneliness to his ability to live within his imagination: 'I do not live in this world alone but in a thousand worlds'.<sup>1029</sup> This is reflected later by Cixous, who claimed that she identified with Achilles as a young woman, and that this 'fortified her against isolation and provided her with an ally'.<sup>1030</sup> Cixous's identification with the Greek hero, along with Cook's

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<sup>1027</sup> *The Atlantic*, 2002.

<sup>1028</sup> Graziosi & Greenwood, 2007: 13.

<sup>1029</sup> Cook, 2001: 95.

<sup>1030</sup> Zajko, 2008: 50.

portrayal of Keats, suggests that readers of any era can imaginatively utilise Greek mythology to self-identify with aspects of their characters. Cook also shows Keats being inspired by Shakespeare, inserting lines from *Troilus and Cressida* into her narrative, along with *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Coriolanus*. This intertextuality highlights the acts of translation and reading, and the function of imagination; it also evokes the dependency of all literary texts on what has come before. Like Cheiron, each text is hybrid, borrowing from different traditions and styles; this text explicitly demonstrates his and its multifaceted nature through the different sections and focal characters. While Achilles is the primary connector throughout the whole text, Cheiron's influence permeates the first two sections. Just as the *Iliad's* influence shapes texts that follow it, Cheiron's nurturing of heroes through the generations is shown to affect those within his sphere directly. This Cheiron underpins the notion of straddling boundaries, space and time, explored in the remainder of this chapter.

The figure of Keats, even while the focus is Achilles, also reflects the dual nature of Cheiron. Cook depicts a Keats 'who worries away at the question of how he is both like and unlike himself'.<sup>1031</sup> His identification with Achilles is through their corporeal similarity: despite the differences between their statures, their physical constituents – bones, tendons, muscles – are present in them both, and the physical aspects of all 'men' perform 'the same function as his own'.<sup>1032</sup> Keats's musings on identification and differences between individuals (although he does not consider Cheiron – only Achilles) are further heightened by the Rembrandt painting which his friends say looks like him, although it is not of him. 'It looked like a self-portrait though not, to him, a portrait of himself'.<sup>1033</sup> Coupled with comments that, at certain moments, he seemed 'like a tall man',<sup>1034</sup> [my emphasis] Cook's Keats shows a focus upon the physical nature of human beings, the various ways in which they 'grapple with their

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<sup>1031</sup> Zajko, 2008: 61.

<sup>1032</sup> Cook, 2001: 98.

<sup>1033</sup> Cook, 2001: 98.

<sup>1034</sup> Cook, 2001: 99.

fluctuating sense of who and what they are'.<sup>1035</sup> This is unlike the portrayal of Cheiron in this work – whose dissatisfaction with his physicality is ascribed mostly to its ageing and inability to metamorphose like a real immortal.<sup>1036</sup> Despite his form on the margin between man and beast, Cheiron does not have to 'grapple' ontologically. As he has no anxiety around his form in combination, merely its fixed nature, so this text displays none around its lack of conventional genre identification. The deployment of Keats also symbolises that it is enough to be 'like' something else, to share the general features, or purpose, and that occupying identical space is unnecessary to achieve the desired function.

## **Time**

One aspect of formal boundary transgression in *Achilles* is temporal: it makes frequent use of the present tense. The text moves between past and present, both in action and in grammar: not only does this make 'the reader feel that it exists in the present tense',<sup>1037</sup> but also reminds us of the myth's 'long and complicated itinerary to reach us as modern readers'.<sup>1038</sup> That long history involves many retellings, translations, reworkings and inspired works that contribute to the receptions of the Greek myths, and the *Iliad* specifically, which Cook illustrates in the final section employing Keats. Time is also featured in Cheiron's longevity; it creates 'the ellipsis of time' which,<sup>1039</sup> along with the use of the present tense, brings the past into the present. Even when it appears that he is preparing himself for death, he recovers interest in healing. Ancient cyclical time is embodied by Cheiron, and portrayed through the changing of tenses.

Time is not so cyclical or indefinite within Miller's *The Song of Achilles* in terms of the narrative. It is a predominantly chronological account from the perspective of Patroclus,

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<sup>1035</sup> Zajko, 2008: 62.

<sup>1036</sup> Cook, 2001.: 89.

<sup>1037</sup> Kellaway, 2001.

<sup>1038</sup> Graziosi and Greenwood, 2007: 13.

<sup>1039</sup> Graziosi and Greenwood, 2007: 12.

concerning his and Achilles' boyhood, adolescence, and maturation during the Trojan war, concluding with their deaths and eventual reunion in the Underworld. As with most chronological narratives, it is necessary for the narrator to fill in the gaps with recounted histories and memories, where contextually relevant. Miller, at times, invents these histories, placing Patroclus at the contest for the hand of Helen of Troy, for example, to make him more directly connected with the summons to the Greek army.<sup>1040</sup> At times she also romanticises more brutal historical aspects, referring to Thetis' 'ravishment' by Peleus, and reiterates that it was advised by the gods.<sup>1041</sup> While this may have been the case, in the ancient sources it was Cheiron who directly coached Peleus, an aspect unacknowledged here. This could perhaps be explained by the relative distance in both perspective and time for Patroclus, as it preceded his living memory. It might also have been to avoid complicating the character of the centaur who is otherwise throughout the novel referred to in wholly positive terms, particularly as the text is accessible to younger readers.

If his distance from the events is to blame, then Patroclus' narrative rarely highlights such temporal distances, however, unless he mentions Cheiron. All other historical events that need to be added to the narrative are without remark, whereas a comment from Cheiron causes a different reaction: 'I felt a momentary unreality. He knew Heracles and Theseus. Had known them as children'.<sup>1042</sup> This gives a sense of present, despite the use of past tense, of Heracles and Theseus, as adult heroes, and not consigned to the distant past pluperfect of 'had known' but the more immediate past, suggesting their continued life or, at least, fame. However, Cheiron's experience of them as children – consigned to the more distant past – surprises Patroclus in his musings. This confusion of time amongst heroes serves to underpin Cheiron's longevity, and his effect upon his students. Although Cheiron's involvement in the lives of

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<sup>1040</sup> Miller, 2011: 12.

<sup>1041</sup> Miller, 2011: 18.

<sup>1042</sup> Miller, 2011: 72.

both Patroclus and Achilles ends when they sail for Troy, he is ever-present in Patroclus' thoughts and actions, as we shall see.

*Achilles* is a text that is 'changing in perspective and time'.<sup>1043</sup> Different characters from the *Iliad*, and from the wider myth of Achilles, are represented, and Cook utilises different extant texts spanning at least twelve hundred years between the *Iliad* and *Posthomerica*. Cook illustrates the quality of myth that transcends time. Cheiron's influence, and his narrative, are crucial here; his longevity keeps the memories of those mythic heroes in the present, while also underpinning the brief and transient nature of mortality. This is demonstrated most obviously by his making the spear for Peleus, nurturing the ash that will make it from a sapling, and foreseeing it in the future belong to his son for use at Troy:

When Chiron who made the ash spear gave it to Peleus on his wedding day  
he saw beyond Peleus to the son. And to the son's son and what he would  
do with it. He saw the blade gleam in the flames of the burning city.<sup>1044</sup>

Cheiron's foresight extends from this point, twenty-two years before Peleus and Thetis were joined, until after Achilles' death and the end of the Trojan war. In 'Vulnerable', the subsection narrated from his perspective, the reader is given a longer span, back to the voyage of the Argo, and to the raising of the heroes to undertake that journey. Cheiron's longevity, his far-sight back into the past, highlights against his own immortality the brevity of mortal life. It has been suggested that the text implies 'that life is precious because it is not permanent',<sup>1045</sup> and Cheiron's own narrative, displaying *ennui* with his life and the physical world after Achilles' death, supports this reading. He reflects on 'the curse of immortality to see those you care for die',<sup>1046</sup> but his longevity has wider implications. He represents 'the trans-historical power of

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<sup>1043</sup> Ciuraru, 2002.

<sup>1044</sup> Cook, 2001: 83. See *Iliad* 16.141-4 and 19.388-91, trans. Wilson.

<sup>1045</sup> Kellaway, 2001.

<sup>1046</sup> Cook, 2001: 87.

myth' by himself spanning different generations and mythical periods,<sup>1047</sup> with the myth of the Argo's voyage situated chronologically earlier than that of Troy, and at a time supposed to precede it, his relations with Apollo (as outlined in Pindar's *Pythian Odes* 9) and his fostering of Asclepius. Unlike Updike's novel, which conflated the heroes into one generation, one class, to show the circularity of mythological time in contrast to the advancing linearity of modern time, Cook enunciates the length of those mythological periods through Cheiron.

### **Epistemology**

Cook also illustrates the accumulated wealth of knowledge that results from longevity. Cheiron's prophetic knowledge is repeatedly evoked, picking up Pindar's portrayal of Cheiron advising Peleus on how to mate with Thetis in 'Quicken'. Peleus' taking of Thetis here is outlined as a requirement of Zeus; indeed, the ancient sources tell us that Zeus wanted Thetis, but Themis, and sometimes Prometheus, had prophesied that her son would be greater than his father.<sup>1048</sup> However, rarely is this 'mating' so directly connected to a directive from Zeus in reception, although in the ancient sources, Hesiod does record this.<sup>1049</sup> Cheiron has the knowledge of how to accomplish the task, and advises – foresees, perhaps – what Peleus must withstand to be successful. Here his anciently ascribed prophetic skills are brought to the fore.

The ancient sources acknowledge the obvious lack of consent; for her multiple metamorphoses surely signal a desire to escape the clutches of Peleus. Apollodorus suggests that Thetis resented being paired with a mortal,<sup>1050</sup> since she retreated to the sea once Achilles was placed with Cheiron. Cook's text also records that perspective, recording that Thetis has not been shown 'one good reason why she should let some mortal enter her'.<sup>1051</sup> Given the

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<sup>1047</sup> Zajko, 2008: 46.

<sup>1048</sup> Pindar *Isthmian Odes*; Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 168; Apollodorus *Bibliotheca* 3.168.

<sup>1049</sup> Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women*, Fragment 57, trans. Most.

<sup>1050</sup> Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.13, trans. Smith and Trzaskoma.

<sup>1051</sup> Cook, 2001: 14.

female authorship of this text, and the feminist ways in which female authors are responding ‘to the domination of the male voice in the classical canon’,<sup>1052</sup> Cook challenges the usual erasure of the issue of consent. At one point, the unnamed narrator suggests that Thetis is a willing participant inasmuch as ‘she could slip away if she chose’, and that she meets his desire with an orgasm;<sup>1053</sup> this does not, however, suggest more than submission,<sup>1054</sup> which is not the same as consensual participation. This section of narrative, primarily from Peleus’ perspective, demonstrates stalking, obsession and violence. Thetis’ resistance is considered by both Peleus and Cheiron to be a part of this task for Peleus, and it is suggested that it will, in fact, increase Peleus’ desire; a classic rape fantasy.<sup>1055</sup> Yet Cheiron’s anticipation of this and advice to Peleus on how to counter her resistance and changes of form suggest a complicity ‘in a complicated game of courtship to which Chiron knows the rules’,<sup>1056</sup> which is certainly exemplified in his demonstrations of prophetic skills in Pindar. His advice to Apollo on the courtship of Cyrene, however, suggests that persuasion is preferable to violence.<sup>1057</sup> Cook’s narrative highlights the inconsistency of Pindar on the centaur’s approach to advice about physical intercourse.

Cheiron is generally considered to be opposite in character and temperament to other centaurs, who have sexual licentiousness as part of their essential traits,<sup>1058</sup> but Cook’s portrayal here blurs that distinct boundary. Not only does he advise on how to conquer Thetis sexually, but he also desires her: ‘He too would like to pin her under his hooves’.<sup>1059</sup> Perhaps it is this knowledge, or maybe his prophetic skills, that render his character so liminal; although acknowledged to be the best of the centaurs and superior in character even to most men, which

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<sup>1052</sup> Toney, 2011: 86.

<sup>1053</sup> Cook, 2001: 18-19.

<sup>1054</sup> Toney, 2011: 73.

<sup>1055</sup> Toney, 2011: 72.

<sup>1056</sup> Toney, 2011: 79.

<sup>1057</sup> Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 9.39.

<sup>1058</sup> As demonstrated by the Centauromachy and Nessus’ attempted rape of Deianira in Sophocles *Trachiniae* 565.

<sup>1059</sup> Cook, 2001: 13.

is why he is trusted to raise heroes,<sup>1060</sup> he must still know the darker side of character in order to be able to anticipate and prevent it.

Cheiron's prophetic skills, in Cook's text, go beyond those of advising on matters of love or sexual conquest. 'Vulnerary' demonstrates their pervasiveness; Cheiron sees the potential of the ash that becomes Peleus' famous spear, gifted to Achilles; he helps it to grow straight and unimpaired to fulfil its destiny.<sup>1061</sup> He sees 'the ghost of the spear' in the sapling,<sup>1062</sup> and also sees the potential of other trees, and what they may be made into.<sup>1063</sup> He is not, however, omniscient. He does not know his end, nor his immortality as a constellation: '(He cannot know that Zeus will one day make stars out of him...)'.<sup>1064</sup> Cook chooses here to be selective about Cheiron's knowledge, and the extent of his prophecy. Although it is not suggested that Cheiron foresees his own fate, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* records his daughter, Ocyrhoe, as foretelling both the fate of Asclepius and Cheiron's death, a transgression for which she is transformed into a horse to remove her ability to communicate, a punishment which she also does not foresee.<sup>1065</sup> This omission on Cook's part feeds into her role as an editor, as well as author, and reflects her instrumentality in this artistic endeavour. Readers of classical reception, if familiar with the ancient texts, find it almost impossible not to compare the modern rendering with the ancient, as perhaps intended by this author, given that she also writes about Keats (her area of expertise), and is offering reception of his work as well. Readers are bringing the knowledge that these ancient texts are themselves often retellings, receptions, of more ancient, lost versions of the epics.<sup>1066</sup>

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<sup>1060</sup> Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, 709-710.

<sup>1061</sup> Cook, 2001: 84.

<sup>1062</sup> Cook, 2001: 84.

<sup>1063</sup> Cook, 2001: 90.

<sup>1064</sup> Cook, 2001:89.

<sup>1065</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.636-675, trans. McCarter.

<sup>1066</sup> Quintus Smyrnaeus' *Posthomerica* is a particularly relevant example, providing most of what is known from the lost texts of the Trojan epic cycle, although this fifth century AD text is much later.

By using material from outside the *Iliad*, weaving it into a coherent narrative, '[i]t could be argued that Cook is working within the tradition of "filling in the gaps" in Homer, a tradition which originates in the ancient world'.<sup>1067</sup> As editor of the poetry of Keats, Cook uses her seemingly prophetic knowledge of the impact the figure of Achilles will have on later writers and the persisting 'authority of Homer as author function' to influence the earlier sections of her narrative.<sup>1068</sup> Just as an omniscient third-person narrator can provide future information about textual characters, such as the Cheiron's elevation to a constellation, so can an author combine their skills with editing in order to offer a 'prediction' of the reach of their subject. The final section of the text, 'Relay', portrays 'the ways in which the story of Achilles has demonstrated a power across centuries and cultures',<sup>1069</sup> but also allows Cook to make different points and connections through time. It is a 'densely mediated ...process' and raises a question: since Cook is reading Keats reading Chapman reading Homer's Achilles, is her figure of Achilles also Homer's?<sup>1070</sup> One purpose of reception texts is to show characters from a different perspective, although there may be many familiar features. These characters, such as Achilles, maintain resonance for the reception's contemporary audience precisely through their adaptation for that audience and period, although there needs to be discernible tracings back to the ancient, often through the history of reception.

*The Song of Achilles* includes references to prophecy, as well as the narrator's assumed knowledge of the mythological past; Miller's portrayal of such knowledge thus sometimes differs markedly from Cook's. Perhaps this results from the identity of her narrator, who is Patroclus throughout rather than an omniscient third person, or from the rough following of the *Iliad* as the main structuring principle of her text. As in Homer, Achilles' early upbringing is

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<sup>1067</sup> Zajko, 2008: 66.

<sup>1068</sup> Graziosi and Greenwood, 2007: 8.

<sup>1069</sup> Zajko, 2008:49.

<sup>1070</sup> Zajko, 2008: 66.

ascribed to Phoinix,<sup>1071</sup> at the expense of including Cheiron; another example is the view asserted by Patroclus that sleeping with slaves was not always rape,<sup>1072</sup> overlooking the power dynamics of such a relationship, even if the sex was apparently ‘consensual’. Nevertheless, for Patroclus, as Miller portrays him, that may well be the truth. Contemporary readers perhaps also need to consider that the verisimilitude of the text might require antiquated or distasteful points of view.

Miller reflects Cook in making Cheiron the recurring source of knowledge throughout the novel, and this is frequently mentioned either through recollections of what he has taught Achilles and Patroclus (to be discussed further under ‘ethics’), or by his innate wisdom and potential foresight. That Cheiron has prophetic knowledge is unquestioned, although Patroclus describes these as mere magic tricks: ‘Sometimes, I reminded myself, Chiron did small magics, tricks of divinity, like warming water, or calming animals’;<sup>1073</sup> these are elements which do not require divine knowledge, and which are not ascribed to him in the ancient sources. This example that might indicate Miller’s target audience as being younger and needing a more obvious demonstration of unusual skills. There are, however, examples in the text where Cheiron’s knowledge – or, more often, his questions to the boys – indicates foresight of what will occur. Cheiron poses a question to Achilles when the hero talks of Herakles’ killing his wife and children, and when Achilles states that the gods were unfair because they punished Herakles’ wife more by her death.

‘There is no law that the gods must be fair, Achilles,’ Chiron said. ‘And perhaps it is the greater grief, after all, to be left on earth, when another is gone. Do you think?’<sup>1074</sup>

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<sup>1071</sup> Miller, 2011: 19.

<sup>1072</sup> Miller, 2011: 56.

<sup>1073</sup> Miller, 2011: 56.

<sup>1074</sup> Miller, 2011: 79.

For any reader who knows the *Iliad*, and Achilles' grief at the death of Patroclus, this foreshadows that event, making both Cheiron and the reader complicit in the pain that Achilles will feel. Another such example is the question posed by Cheiron regarding what Achilles would do when men wanted him to fight; he reiterates this to Achilles when he is summoned back to Phthia.<sup>1075</sup> Again, the reader knows that Achilles will be asked to fight, and will agree; in this text, because of his nature, and because he swears on oath to Patroclus, but also through knowledge of the ancient epics. While these examples do not show the centaur prophesying certainties, his teaching technique of asking questions indicate enough of what will happen for the reader to anticipate the plot.

Cheiron's skills are demonstrated occasionally, mostly in his absence, through the echoes he leaves in Patroclus' mind, although these do not clearly indicate foresight as such. The sole example when he is present at the point in the narrative is his prediction of when the ice on the lake near to the cave will crack, which may not be prophecy, rather just close knowledge of nature and the seasons. The other, recollected examples seem to be more secure, and highlight Patroclus' faith in Cheiron's wisdom across all manner of things. He trusts Cheiron's assertion that Thetis will not hurt him;<sup>1076</sup> he recounts Cheiron's prophecy that the news they return to Phthia for will be war;<sup>1077</sup> and he reflects that Cheiron made the ash spear – here made specifically for Achilles, rather than for Peleus to then gift – because he had intuited that it would be needed.<sup>1078</sup> Patroclus considers the weeks that would have been required for such craft: 'As he lay alone in his rose-coloured cave, had some glimmer of prophecy come to him?'<sup>1079</sup> Miller's text removes prophecy as a fundamental skill belonging to Cheiron, placing it rather into the realm of narrative foreshadowing, lucky guess, or

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<sup>1075</sup> Miller, 2011: 101.

<sup>1076</sup> Miller, 2011: 103.

<sup>1077</sup> Miller, 2011: 105.

<sup>1078</sup> Miller, 2011: 209.

<sup>1079</sup> Miller, 2011: 177.

experience: ‘Perhaps he had simply assumed: a bitterness of habit, of boy after boy trained for music and medicine, and unleashed for murder’.<sup>1080</sup>

The only explicit reference to Cheiron’s prophetic skills implies an ability to read signs. Patroclus drops some pebbles on the ground, and muses ‘where they lie, haphazard or purposeful, an augury or an accident. If Cheiron were here, he could read them or tell us our fortunes’.<sup>1081</sup> This instance does not build on a strong line of Cheiron’s prophetic skills in this text, in which they are omitted. Occurring towards the end of the novel, it reflects Patroclus’ reliance upon the tutoring received by the centaur to guide him through his young adult life. Whether Cheiron’s knowledge is gained through prophecy or experience is irrelevant to Patroclus; Cheiron’s wisdom, upon which he relies, is simply assumed.

## **Technology**

In *The Song of Achilles*, upon first meeting, Patroclus notes Cheiron’s physical difference. His first sight of the centaur registers ‘the legs of the man’s horse’;<sup>1082</sup> he refuses at first to acknowledge the hybrid being. Patroclus’ further response, to stare ‘at that impossible suture of horse and human, where smooth skin became a gleaming brown coat’ articulates, perhaps, the modern reader’s reaction to a fantastical creature.<sup>1083</sup> Miller does not permit Patroclus to accept the centaur’s hybridity unquestioningly because, it is assumed, the reader would not be able to do so. Nevertheless, following this acceptance, Cheiron’s hybridity – specifically his horse part – is highlighted to underpin Cheiron’s particular humanity, to distance his horse part from horsiness, *per se*. In allowing Achilles and Patroclus to ride him, he insists that this is not something he normally allows, but also tells them to ‘forget what you learned’ of riding.<sup>1084</sup>

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<sup>1080</sup> Miller, 2011: 177-178.

<sup>1081</sup> Miller, 2011: 283.

<sup>1082</sup> Miller, 2011: 66.

<sup>1083</sup> Miller, 2011: 67.

<sup>1084</sup> Miller, 2011: 68.

More humour is permitted after the boys have been with him for some time: Achilles' sixteenth birthday presents from his father's palace include an elaborate horse coat. "I hope that is not for me," Chiron said, lifting an eyebrow'.<sup>1085</sup>

Cheiron's skill as a healer particularly permeates Miller's text, through Patroclus' interest and then his skills on Troy's battlefield. Patroclus notes the surgical instruments upon the cave walls and Cheiron's disdain of 'the barbarities of the low countries' that will not sacrifice a limb to save a whole.<sup>1086</sup> Patroclus serves to be a good student, remembering Cheiron's instruments and skilled hands; Miller here clearly relates to the Greek, linking Cheiron to 'hand'. His tutelage means immediate acceptance by Machaon, a student of Asclepius in the ancient sources but not mentioned here,<sup>1087</sup> and Patroclus puts his lessons to immediate use by mixing a painkilling draught that Cheiron had taught him.<sup>1088</sup> These skills are particularly tested during the outbreak of plague, when he and Achilles are working hard to help the Greeks, relying on their knowledge from the centaur: 'we heard nothing except our voices repeating the remedies Chiron had taught us like murmured prayers'.<sup>1089</sup> Cheiron's knowledge of the body, and how to heal it, are portrayed almost as religious, sacred, knowledge here, intoned as mantras to keep themselves and others safe. It is the skill, moreover, which lends Patroclus status in the Greek camp. He knows more of the men than Achilles and is respected by them. When Thetis delivers the prophecy that the best of the Myrmidons will die but that it will not be Achilles,<sup>1090</sup> the reader sees that this will be Patroclus because of all his good work and kind heart, even before Briseis provides the more obvious foreshadowing.<sup>1091</sup>

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<sup>1085</sup> Miller, 2011: 86.

<sup>1086</sup> Miller, 2011: 71.

<sup>1087</sup> Homer *Il.* 2.730; Quintus Smyrnaeus 9.462; Pausanias 2.26.1 & 3.24.10 & 3.24.10; Diodorus Siculus 4.71.3.

<sup>1088</sup> Miller, 2011: 236.

<sup>1089</sup> Miller, 2011: 260.

<sup>1090</sup> Miller, 2011: 250.

<sup>1091</sup> Miller, 2011: 298.

Cheiron has been intended as Achilles' tutor, but through passing on his knowledge as a healer, he has served to be an even more effective tutor to Patroclus.

In support of the assertions that 'the feminist "edge" of Cook's *Achilles* arises at least in part from the sensual focus on concerns of embodiment',<sup>1092</sup> and that 'metamorphosis is a common trope' in feminist receptions of the classics,<sup>1093</sup> Cheiron's section of the narrative, 'Vulnerary', focuses upon the body, and more specifically his wound. Cook also describes Cheiron's lack of ability to metamorphose, which means '[h]e is not even a proper immortal'.<sup>1094</sup> It is the wound around which the central part of the narrative is focused, however, and his skills as a healer are honed by the wound: '...it is suffering – his own – which makes him the best'.<sup>1095</sup> Cheiron's wound taints his entire world, every experience, because he feels that the arrow is still within his wound and it catches 'every shift of wind ...causing the point to stir in his heart and release more gusts of pain'.<sup>1096</sup> Cheiron has practised his medicine, his *technē*, on others and on himself, and his wound allows him to experiment with all the different herbs and plants available: '[t]he wound has become his laboratory'.<sup>1097</sup>

This section of the text, written wholly from Cheiron's perspective, highlights two key qualities of the centaur in the ancient sources, that of foster father/tutor – which will be explored later in the section on ethics – and that of healer. However, one thing to note in his relationship with Achilles is the focus upon physical contact and knowledge; Cheiron's body comforts Achilles. The most that is shown about Achilles' time with Cheiron is his physical closeness and intimacy with the centaur's body. Achilles knows Cheiron's body better than either his father's or his mother's: '[t]his body taught him itself and nearly all else'.<sup>1098</sup> As Cheiron

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<sup>1092</sup> Zajko, 2008: 48.

<sup>1093</sup> Graziosi and Greenwood, 2007: 12.

<sup>1094</sup> Cook, 2001: 89.

<sup>1095</sup> Cook, 2001: 86.

<sup>1096</sup> Cook, 2001: 84-85.

<sup>1097</sup> Cook, 2001:85.

<sup>1098</sup> Cook, 2001: 23.

instructed Peleus on how to mate with Thetis, taught Peleus healing skills that would later be used on Achilles and foresaw that the spear he would make out of the ash sapling would become Achilles' weapon in Troy, Cheiron's influence upon Achilles has been pervasive. Not only was Cheiron his tutor but also his foster-father, and so physically close when Achilles slept next to his belly that 'Chiron felt himself a mother to the boy'.<sup>1099</sup>

His abilities as a healer bring him closest to his human companions, but they also bring responsibility: 'He knows who to treat, when to treat, and when to stop'.<sup>1100</sup> With these skills, his prophetic knowledge, and his wound, he has a fully embodied and sensory experience of what is happening in Troy. He knows the war has started, and it is likened to a herd of terrified cattle embedding their hooves in his breast; there is no release, 'the hooves continue their lacerations for ten years'.<sup>1101</sup> However, when Achilles dies, the pain stops and his heart feels 'emptied'.<sup>1102</sup> The physical agony of his wound, and his corporeal discomfort that the Trojan war manifests within him – implied because of his connection to and fondness for Achilles – are then contrasted with the desolation of the soul that his long life and fruitless immortality bring. Here, then, is the painful boundary Cheiron experiences. It is not his mixed nature as man and beast that causes his discomfort, nor his role as healer contrasted with his providing Achilles with both weapon and skill to cause death to hundreds, but rather the contradictory situation of being immortal while caring for those who are not. Yet his own fixed physicality makes him less than immortal. He is liminal as much as '[h]e obeys the mortals' laws of time and unfolding';<sup>1103</sup> a curious word to use, although relevant to Cheiron in having aeons to see events be revealed. Yet in linking it to the laws of mortality, it implies that the significance of unfolding events can, paradoxically, only be perceived if there is limited time to appreciate or

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<sup>1099</sup> Cook, 2001: 88.

<sup>1100</sup> Cook, 2001: 86.

<sup>1101</sup> Cook, 2001: 86.

<sup>1102</sup> Cook, 2001: 87.

<sup>1103</sup> Cook, 2001: 89.

act upon them. This would be supported by the further, also paradoxical, assertion that Cheiron is ‘simply a mortal unable to die’.<sup>1104</sup>

The title of the section dedicated to Cheiron, ‘Vulnerable’, casts the shadow of the healing of wounds over the whole narrative, along with evoking the sense of ‘vulnerability’ of all of those portrayed. Cheiron’s condition, both physical and emotional, is a wound requiring healing. The end of the section implies recovery; Cheiron is once again interested in herbs and teaching, his interest ‘inextinguishable’.<sup>1105</sup> However, in considering the best material for a bow, the narrative returns to ash wood – ‘[a] good choice for a spear’ – and ‘the calcaneal tendon of any wild animal. Later called the Achilles’.<sup>1106</sup> Cheiron’s longevity circles back around to his preoccupations, his incurable wounds, and the evidence of his liminality.

### **Metaphysics**

In Cook’s *Achilles*, the narrative focuses upon the boundaries between life and death. Cheiron is himself situated on this boundary, fatally wounded if only he could die, just as his immortality and divinity leave him on the boundary between man and not-man, as much as his horse parts do. The text invites the reader to consider Cheiron’s imperfect immortality next to Thetis’ failed attempt to make Achilles immortal in line with her divinity, and to contemplate their bond through being neither one thing nor the other. Indeed, for both, their types of mortality are what causes their pain or death; Cheiron’s true nature cannot transform his body, as other immortals can, and Achilles’ mortality is assured by Peleus’ painstaking healing of his burnt body. Additionally, Cook attests that Peleus’ healing skills come from his tutelage under Cheiron; the transmission of that knowledge has doomed Achilles to being mortal.

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<sup>1104</sup> Cook, 2001: 89.

<sup>1105</sup> Cook, 2001: 89.

<sup>1106</sup> Cook, 2001: 91.

Cheiron's narrative is followed by 'Relay', narrated in the third-person but from Keats's point of view. Keats is also on the boundary, being both medical student and poet, alive but destined to die young; it is of little wonder that he was preoccupied with Achilles, and in juxtaposing the immortal-and-suffering Cheiron with the mortal Keats, Cook 'ingeniously extends her meditation on mortality'.<sup>1107</sup> This juxtaposition combines with the interweaving of the two – Achilles and Keats – to emphasise to the reader the immortality of literature over the short-lived physicality of humans. Both continue to live on in reputation, and in yoking the mythological hero with the real-life poet, Cook highlights the insecure division between the real and the mythological. She does this by 'imbu[ing] this antiquated material with a post-Freudian emotional sensibility, focusing more on the nuances of individual motivation than on the grandeur of the action'.<sup>1108</sup> This is certainly the case in Cheiron's narrative; while he is, in the ancient sources, relatively static in his being tutor and foster-father to heroes rather than a hero himself, this internal meditation focuses upon his relationships with his pupils, rather than regaling their triumphs. This thesis shows that is rarely Cheiron given voice, either in ancient texts that survive or in modern texts, and almost never given narrative perspective. To some extent, Cook removes the structure of standard form and epic tradition, and in using psychology of the characters to develop the narrative arc, the reader makes their own connections through this text and out into those others – Keats's poetry, the *Iliad* – that are familiar.

Keats's section thus exemplifies the point that Cook is making, that 'readers may sometimes experience themselves as being transformed by their intimacy with a literary text'.<sup>1109</sup> The reader is shown that Keats considers in what ways he is connected to Achilles – they share the same body parts, howsoever they may differ in size and strength. Keats's imagination forges these links and populates his inner life with characters from epic with whom

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<sup>1107</sup> Kellaway, 2001.

<sup>1108</sup> *The Atlantic*, 2002.

<sup>1109</sup> Zajko, 2008: 46.

he can commune, and Cook here juxtaposes the physical with the mental, linking imagination and the body.<sup>1110</sup> The reader has been prepared for such duality by the previous narration of Cheiron, and is, perhaps, better disposed to view them in a less oppositional manner.

It might be said that *The Song of Achilles* has less of a metaphysical philosophy than Cook's *Achilles*, particularly in terms of how Cheiron is used. Certainly, Cheiron's age is attested on several occasions – he is older than Thetis, and states 'I ...flatter myself that I can read a man more clearly'.<sup>1111</sup> He is unconcerned by Thetis' displeasure – she accuses him of having 'lived too long with mortals',<sup>1112</sup> but he has 'weathered the anger of gods before'.<sup>1113</sup> Unlike in Cook's text, Cheiron is not troubled by his imperfect immortality. However, just as his lack of similarity to horses is reiterated at several points, Miller also includes a rebuttal of his likeness to other centaurs. Patroclus reflects on Cheiron's possible loneliness when they leave and on Cheiron's statement that other centaurs were 'barbarians'.<sup>1114</sup> In terms of other centaurs, and Cheiron's hybridity, there is no more said than that.

In terms of considering ontology, though, while Cook's text makes the reader think about how Keats is connected to Achilles, Cheiron in Miller's novel makes his pupils consider their connections to one another. He engages Achilles in philosophical thought about whether any man is worth more than another. Achilles questions whether a friend or brother is worth more, and Cheiron points out that a stranger to you is someone else's friend or brother.<sup>1115</sup> If a lesson on the equal worth of all men, this ends up being lost on Achilles, *Aristos Achaiōn*, who imposes double standards on himself and Patroclus throughout the novel. Here, Cheiron's duality is reflected in Achilles' attitude, despite Cheiron's teaching of unity; Cheiron's duality is only physical, whereas for mortals, their duality is often intellectual or emotional.

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<sup>1110</sup> Zajko, 2008: 49.

<sup>1111</sup> Miller, 2011: 75, 83.

<sup>1112</sup> Miller, 2011: 82.

<sup>1113</sup> Miller, 2011: 75.

<sup>1114</sup> Miller, 2011: 100-1.

<sup>1115</sup> Miller, 2011: 283-4.

## Ethics

Considering the importance of Cheiron's role as tutor to heroes, particularly within these two texts as tutor to Achilles specifically, it may seem odd to place this section of the chapter towards the end. However, for Cook's text in particular, Cheiron's tutelage underpins the whole text, yet little is shown of that time with his pupils. Instead, the text is suffused with its effects, and his history with Peleus, Thetis and Achilles, reflecting the generational connections present in the ancient sources that are mostly absent in reception. Yet Cheiron's tuition is not quite all that is needed; during Achilles' time at Scyros, 'these days of girlhood complete the education Cheiron began. Refine it; soften his burning impatience'.<sup>1116</sup> Cheiron's lessons are not enumerated in the text but are implied to be the opposite of leisure and beauty, perhaps intimating the sheer masculinity that a hybrid man and beast, preparing a hero for war, would provide. Yet Peleus learnt his healing arts from Cheiron; Achilles also loved botany and biology;<sup>1117</sup> and Cheiron, above all, exercises patience, perhaps easier for an immortal with no fear of death to master. Cook's text, however, shows a tutor who oversteps the boundary of that role as considered by the modern reader. His lessons are immersive, his commitment to his charges total. Cheiron's difference to men, often referred in the ancient sources as making him a superior tutor and raiser of heroes, being separate from the evil natures of men,<sup>1118</sup> is one which enables the reader to see that the unlikeliest of teachers can be the most effective.

Cheiron's effectiveness as a tutor also permeates Miller's novel but in a different way. He tutors both Achilles and Patroclus – Achilles as intended, and as the ancient sources attest, Patroclus as a kind of 'stowaway'. Miller posits the notion that Achilles being taken to Cheiron by Thetis is in direct response to Patroclus kissing Achilles;<sup>1119</sup> that is, a blocking attempt to

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<sup>1116</sup> Cook, 2011: 25.

<sup>1117</sup> Miller, 2011: 88.

<sup>1118</sup> Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, 709-710, trans. Kovacs.

<sup>1119</sup> Miller, 2011: 61.

their developing homosexual love. Nevertheless, Cheiron accepts Patroclus too, and despite Thetis's attempt to bar Patroclus from Achilles' company,<sup>1120</sup> he sees their friendship and allows him to stay. Cheiron's prophetic skills in the ancient sources, concerning aspects of love and sex, are represented here not as prophetic but as accepting of the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus, unequal though they are in status. It is, perhaps, Cheiron's own duality which is reflected through his tutoring of them together, as they have opposite but complementary skills. Achilles is an accomplished fighter, so accomplished in Miller's text that Cheiron cannot teach him anything else; Patroclus has the potential to be 'a competent soldier' but does not wish to be,<sup>1121</sup> so lessons in soldiery are not part of their curriculum. Most of Cheiron's skills are represented in what he teaches the boys – plants, carpentry, food, anatomy and surgery (along with where to injure a body), and constellations.<sup>1122</sup> It is noted that 'Chiron liked to teach, not in set lessons, but in opportunities',<sup>1123</sup> reflecting the distinctive nature of his teaching methods.<sup>1124</sup>

Miller's reiteration of Cheiron's influence through her novel may result from her own focus upon teaching. In describing it as 'the most rewarding thing' she has done,<sup>1125</sup> it is clear that her preoccupation with her job influenced her writing, supported by her assertion that both teaching and writing used the same part of her brain, and thus she could only write in her holidays from teaching.<sup>1126</sup> However, because of her focus upon instruction, her novel is able to differentiate between the pupil-tutor relationship Cheiron has with Achilles, and the one he has with Patroclus. Despite Achilles being the intended pupil, arguably it is Miller's Patroclus who learns more from his time on Pelion. Achilles fulfils his destiny of being *Aristos Achaiōn*–

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<sup>1120</sup> Miller, 2011: 74.

<sup>1121</sup> Miller, 2011: 85.

<sup>1122</sup> Miller, 2011: 78.

<sup>1123</sup> Miller, 2011: 77.

<sup>1124</sup> Gregory, 2019: 43.

<sup>1125</sup> Bloom, 2012: 32.

<sup>1126</sup> Bloom, 2012: 32.

a skill which Cheiron admitted he could not add to. The only evidence of Achilles having absorbed any of Cheiron's teaching is when he saves Patroclus from a water snake – 'Cheiron had made us memorise their homes and colours'<sup>1127</sup> – and his assistance with healing during the plague. For Patroclus, however, Cheiron's lessons continue to resonate throughout his time at Troy. Not only does healing give him a purpose, which balances his lack of skill in fighting, but it also makes him braver in his love for Achilles, and his determination to do what he sees as morally right: 'It was only my pricking memory of Cheiron that finally drove me forth. *You do not give up so easily as you once did*'.<sup>1128</sup> Such is the effect that Cheiron has upon him that he employs his methods to soothe Briseis,<sup>1129</sup> and sees Cheiron's skills in Briseis' knowledge of the woods and herbs.<sup>1130</sup> Patroclus styled himself at Scyros as 'Chironides';<sup>1131</sup> Cheiron's greatest effect in this novel is upon Achilles' lover. Thetis believes that Cheiron's humanity ruined Achilles,<sup>1132</sup> but in combining Achilles and Patroclus under Cheiron's tuition, Miller demonstrates that the duality of the centaur elicits very different aspects in the two of them, and that they, in combination, represent his skills and his hybridity.

## Conclusion

When written by female writers in the twenty-first century, Cheiron becomes a more developed figure than is depicted within ancient sources, where he frequently plays an exemplary role. Pindar gives Cheiron voice to advise on matters of romantic and physical love, and fragments of the *Precepts of Cheiron*, attributed to Hesiod, give a small flavour of his educational maxims, but very little space is dedicated to him as a fully drawn character. Cook and Miller,

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<sup>1127</sup> Miller, 2011: 199.

<sup>1128</sup> Miller, 2011: 115.

<sup>1129</sup> Miller, 2011: 217.

<sup>1130</sup> Miller, 2011: 231.

<sup>1131</sup> Miller, 2011: 119.

<sup>1132</sup> Miller, 2011: 349.

however, give him not only voice but thoughts, personality and opinion. They reiterate his importance to his foster-children, and the lasting effect that his lessons would have upon them.

Cook, in particular, imagines a rich inner mental life for the centaur, and allows the reader psychological proximity to his hybridity, including his moral ambiguity regarding the rape of Thetis. Miller writes him as almost any other mentor, once his physical difference is acknowledged, and it her portrayal of Cheiron has much in common with those of the texts aimed particularly at younger readers. Yet both texts imagine him alone, other than when accompanied by his students, and they worry at his solitariness. Cook's focus upon the weight of his immortality signals the twenty-first century preoccupations of loneliness and longevity. As female writers, Cook and Miller allow the reader further into the imagined mind of the centaur and, like Updike's *The Centaur*, highlight that despite Cheiron's physical difference to the reader, emotionally and psychologically, there is little difference. To repeat the quotation from Updike's novel, 'we are all centaurs'.

## Centaurs as Magic in a Broken World: Ecocriticism, Disability and Apocalypse

Amanda Leduc's novel *The Centaur's Wife* (2021) has so far been published only in Canada, the home country of the author. Set in an unnamed place, it explores what happens to the cast of characters after an apocalyptic meteor strike has destroyed cities and killed the majority of people across the planet. Although written before the Coronavirus pandemic, it was published in its midst, and the author has reflected on the correlations between the novel and the world at the time, with the idea of living within civilisation feeling very different from previously, and how individuals respond to that: 'The book is about the process of learning to live again after grief, and the family you find in the wake of that and the coping mechanisms you have to have'.<sup>1133</sup> One candidate for the centaur of the title ends up serving as the family of the main protagonist, Heather, after a further catastrophic event; it is the magic associated with his liminal state that both enables him to survive, and provides a purpose for Heather to continue.

Like the centaur, Heather views herself as somewhat on the periphery of society; while her alienation is not wholly attributed to her disability, the novel explores how she has always felt different. Heather has cerebral palsy, as does Leduc herself, and it the physical differences and traits distinguishing her from her peers that sets her connection to the centaur in motion. They share the trait of being physically different, and of this difference creating problems for them through their lives. This aspect of the centaurs will be explored further later in this chapter, but it is useful to be aware of the author's own investment in exploring bodily difference.

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<sup>1133</sup> Leduc in Laing, 2021.

As this novel currently has very limited availability, a general outline of the main plot will aid further exploration of details later in the chapter. At the beginning of the novel, Heather has just given birth to twins and is accompanied by her husband, B. As the meteors hit, they take shelter in the hospital basement with other patients and visitors. When they think that the destruction is over, they emerge to find almost complete devastation and loss of life. As the survivors wander around, contemplating what they should do next, they are joined by survivors from elsewhere, Tasha and Annie, a doctor and nurse as well as being a married couple. Tasha and Annie help to organise the survivors, ensuring they all have living space in the remaining undamaged houses, and rounding up and rationing supplies from the local area. The survivors discover that the meteors have fallen across the world, destroying satellites and digital communications. Analogue communication informs them of how few survivors in different locations are left, and their vulnerability to disease and anger. There are many further deaths resulting from the conditions that the catastrophe inflicts.

The survivors of this town co-exist for some months, albeit without much hope for long-term survival, as the gardens of the houses will not grown further food, and green vines are rapidly taking over the urban space. Heather, always a bit of a social outsider but particularly so since the death of her father when she was in her teens, becomes further dissociated from the social group, especially her husband. She walks to soothe her twins, venturing away from the town and close to the nearby mountain, which has been considered ‘off-limits’ to residents for many years. Here, Heather remembers her father, as his old greenhouse is situated here – in which tropical flowers continue to thrive – and the time that they ventured up the mountain. This was when they met the centaur, Estajfan, and his father and sister; the journey culminated in the death of Heather’s father as penance for his intrusion.

The centaur of the novel’s title could be either Estajfan or his father, as the main plot is supported by a connected subplot, which takes first place in the novel’s opening. Estajfan’s

father was a stallion who wished to be a human because he had fallen in love with a woman. He had buried himself under soil on the mountain (which throughout the novel has magical but unpredictable properties), and emerges a man. He goes down to the village by the mountain, and marries the woman. However, his secret is discovered when she gives birth to baby centaurs, and the travelling female doctor in attendance, a presence throughout the novel, advises the father to take the children and return to the mountain, since their presence is already attracting horror and fear from the villagers. He does so, and this creates within him – and also within his children – a fear of the humans, although Estajfan also inherits his fascination with them.

However, when Heather and her father see the centaurs on the mountain, the father centaur reacts angrily, particularly when Heather's father asks for their help in healing Heather, grabbing the arm of Estajfan's sister, Aura. Incensed, their father throws Heather's father off the mountain to his certain death. Heather – who has struggled to climb the mountain because her cerebral palsy gives her a limp and weakness in her legs – is traumatised, both through her father's death but also his betrayal in asking for her to be healed, as he had always told her that she was adequate as she was. Estajfan rushes to pick her up and take her back down the mountain. From there, a bond between them forms, only interrupted when Heather decides to try and live wholly in the human world with her husband. However, following the apocalypse, their bond is re-established, with Estajfan and his brother, Petrolio, going further afield than the humans are able, to find supplies to keep the town's survivors alive.

A further catastrophe precipitates the conclusion of the novel. At odds with Tasha, Annie, and her husband, and with the vines taking over the town, Heather, who is pregnant again, goes to find Estajfan to warn him that he has been seen by the others. As she is away from the town, a madness takes over most of the inhabitants – they kill loved ones and then themselves, and this includes Heather's husband, B, who kills their twin daughters. The only

survivors are those who have learnt to deal with trauma, including Tasha and Annie. They see the mountain as their only means of survival, and, after meeting the three centaur siblings, they ascend the mountain. There is, however, another group of centaurs, mountain centaurs, who are incurious about humans and entirely separatist, and they confront the siblings about bringing the humans. This confrontation culminates in one of them throwing Heather down the mountain, causing injury and early labour. Estajfan follows, also becoming injured, the others following more cautiously. This main plot finishes on a note of hope; Heather's son is born by Caesarean section, and the band of survivors, with the centaur siblings, are poised to prepare to move on and find their means of sustenance and survival elsewhere. Heather and Estajfan's bond has brought them together, uniting the different species in a shared aim.

Leduc's novel is a rich and multi-layered one, and some aspects will be further unpacked in the sections that follow. What should be noted here, however, is that nowhere in the novel is there a centaur called Cheiron, and nor is he referenced. However, this chapter argues that the traits and qualities of Cheiron in the ancient sources are present within this text, particularly within the centaur father and siblings, and that Leduc has also utilised more recent interpretations of the liminality of centaurs, and the melancholy often ascribed to Cheiron, in modern texts. She has also employed the mythological trope of having centaurs from different lineages, and these lineages resulting in very different behaviour, particularly concerning humans. Therefore, while Cheiron is not overtly present in this text, his influence upon previous writers who have portrayed centaurs leaves traces throughout, and this will be explored further through the discussion of his skills and qualities.

## Aesthetics

The plot of *The Centaur's Wife* originates from a short story of the same name, published online in 2014.<sup>1134</sup> While the short story shares some similarities with the novel, being situated after an apocalyptic event, there are many differences. For example, urbanised society has we currently know it has returned to a degree, with offices being utilised again, and a semblance of working and industrial life has returned. The apocalyptic event appears not as totally catastrophic, as more humans survive and urbanisation has taken over almost entirely: indeed, the story opens with the statement, '[t]here is no wilderness to speak of anymore, save for the mountains where the wolves and centaurs live'.<sup>1135</sup> While this situates the centaurs as dwelling outside of the urbanised society, they are a prized commodity within it, the narrator hinting that they even control it, being better suited to these post-apocalyptic environmental conditions: 'Everyone works to pay the centaurs now, one way or another'.<sup>1136</sup> While the narrator suggests that the centaurs unnerve many people, they have also filled a gap, not only in practical ways, but in showing that 'magic still exists'.<sup>1137</sup>

Leduc adopts an unusual narrative voice in this short story. She has an unnamed omniscient narrator who addresses the protagonist of the story, a wife who has returned to work and who fantasises about the centaur who delivers the flowers to her that her husband sends. While he is one of many delivery centaurs, throughout the text he is referred to as 'your centaur';<sup>1138</sup> the history of the protagonist is shared with Heather, in that her father was thrown from the mountain by a centaur, but no special historical connection is attributed to this specific centaur in the short story. This centaur represents to her the freedom, magic, wildness and

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<sup>1134</sup> <http://necessaryfiction.com/stories/AmandaLeducThecentaursWife/>

<sup>1135</sup> Leduc, 2014.

<sup>1136</sup> Leduc, 2014.

<sup>1137</sup> Leduc, 2014.

<sup>1138</sup> Leduc, 2014.

love, an escape from the restrained and constricted society in which she lives and has always lived. By situating the centaur as both outside and within such society, and utilising the unnamed narrator, Leduc channels the qualities of Cheiron, who was both feted and celebrated by humans while also living apart on Mount Pelion.

Unusual narrative features are also an integral part of Leduc's novel, making it a hybrid kind of text. The narrative thread is interspersed with fairy tales of Leduc's authorship, which connect with the protagonists and the centaurs. Some of these tales are historical within the novel's storyworld, connected with the past of the protagonists, an example being the doctor who delivers the centaur babies being an ancestor of Tasha's, when Heather relates the tale. As the idea of magic, and the relationship of humans to magic runs right through the novel, it can be difficult to separate out what is an inserted fairy story from what will feed into the subplot and main plot.

The novel has been described as a 'genre-defying book',<sup>1139</sup> one that 'looks at the fairy tale tradition, rips it apart and audaciously reassembles it'.<sup>1140</sup> It does this precisely because Leduc is playing with the form. However, what she is trying to do is far from light-hearted. As a disabled woman, she has focused on the narratives of fairy tales, superhero stories, and enchantment in texts that portray disability as a loss, both physically and morally. Many narratives have 'the magic of the compensation theory of disability',<sup>1141</sup> a character gaining some extraordinary ability that somehow makes up for their other losses or difficulties, or else is portrayed as a disfigured villain, creating unhelpful stereotypes of disability that proliferate from the disabled individual's young age. What Leduc advocates for in general, and in her novel specifically, is this:

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<sup>1139</sup> Laing, 2021.

<sup>1140</sup> Portman, 2021

<sup>1141</sup> Leduc, 2020: 198.

To envision a fairy tale and a world where the environment isn't hostile – where the protagonist with the different body and the different way of being in the world can triumph not because of the obstacles they overcome on their own but because of the community that helps to pull them through.<sup>1142</sup>

So Leduc is rewriting the fairy tale genre. The fairy tales have a purpose that 'will become clear in the end' within this 'survival thriller'.<sup>1143</sup> Leduc herself calls the genre '“fabulism” ...[due to] that sense of things that can be real and not real at the same time'.<sup>1144</sup> It is a liminal text, a hybrid one that utilises the generic characteristics required to tell the stories it needs to tell, including much shorter chapters towards the climax of the novel, bringing the storylines together while also heightening the dramatic tension.

### **Technology**

The hybridity of the form of the novel is reflected in the main theme explored within it – physical differences, and of liminality, sitting on boundaries and being neither one thing nor another. This aspect is highlighted right at the start of the text, when the stallion buries himself in the ground and wishes to become a man. His successful transformation allows him to follow his heart's desire and live within the village with the woman he fell in love with. However, the combination of his true physical form and that of his wife's are exposed in their babies being centaurs, and their difference incites fear and fury within the villagers. The midwives call the babies 'monsters';<sup>1145</sup> they have two hearts, underpinning their dual nature. Yet the villagers do not want to accept what they see as a deformity, as difference, and it is for this reason, and the safety of the couple and their children, that the doctor advises their exile.

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<sup>1142</sup> Leduc, 2020: 225.

<sup>1143</sup> Portman, 2021.

<sup>1144</sup> Leduc, in Laing, 2021.

<sup>1145</sup> Leduc, 2021: 3.

However, through this aspect of the tale, Leduc demonstrates that the villagers are missing the point. The man has been transformed through natural magic, channelled through the ground. Indeed, when he returns to the mountain and buries himself again with the babies, the mountain's magic turns him into a centaur, to match his children. Leduc writes that '[l]ike the babies, he belonged neither to one world nor the other, but somewhere in between';<sup>1146</sup> and while the worlds of human society and the mountain with its magic are different, it is not the centaurs who are unnatural. Leduc's tale demonstrates that they originate in nature, and nature does not seek to exterminate them, like it does the humans who have colonised the globe and imposed man-made and artificial aspects upon it. In utilising this symbol of the centaur almost as a perfect being, in its combination of human and horse, Leduc argues for the in-between aspect as being the more natural. This is further supported by the way that, upon the father's death and his burial on the mountain, the ground produces more centaurs—the mountain centaurs; therefore, the cyclical nature of regeneration supports the notion that hybridity is an entirely natural product. In this aspect, Leduc's novel mirrors Greek mythology that does not pose ontological questions about how Cheiron's existence came about—Kronos changing into horse form to beget his hybrid child is reflected in Leduc's narrative, simply accepting that hybridity can occur, and when it does, it is divinely ordained, or part of the natural world. It suggests that these composite beings should be accepted for their behaviours and their qualities.

Leduc's text also captures the more modern interpretation of Cheiron's hybridity troubling him, of him feeling less than humans and less than the other immortal divinities. She portrays this through the centaur father, as well as through his children. The centaur father cannot relinquish his longing to be fully human again, despite how he was treated by the villagers. His children are fully aware of this; his daughter, Aura, sees her mother and knows that her father still loves her: '[h]e would be human again in an instant. He would rather be

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<sup>1146</sup> Leduc, 2021: 6.

that than be all that they have'.<sup>1147</sup> He has passed on this discomfort with his form to two of his children, Aura and Estajfan; 'they're torn between being half human and half animal',<sup>1148</sup> and 'they feel they don't belong in our world because of their differences'.<sup>1149</sup> When Aura accompanies her father to the village, albeit in a dream, she is suddenly self-conscious: 'it's the first time in her life that she's been ashamed of her body, of how large it is and the noise it makes'.<sup>1150</sup> Similarly, Estajfan highlights his hybridity to Heather, and how he is at home on the mountain because it is 'an in-between place ... for an in-between thing'.<sup>1151</sup> Rather, he sees the humans as magic, as he tells the fox they are 'a different kind of magic from the mountain. Raw and selfish and angry, yes, but magic all the same'.<sup>1152</sup> While the centaurs of Leduc's short story are confident in their magical appearance, utilising it to their benefit, the centaur and his children in the novel feel inferior in their hybridity. Estajfan's body does not feel magic to him; when he is running he feels both its strength and its vulnerability.<sup>1153</sup>

Yet to the doctor, who originally delivered the centaur babies, centaurs come to symbolise the perfect form. Upon meeting up with the centaur on the mountain – they have a period of exchange in which the doctor brings gifts from the human world – she thinks, '[y]ou are the best and most beautiful of creatures' ... The nobility of a horse and the sharp mind of a human, the strength of the mountain beating in each of his hearts'.<sup>1154</sup> Indeed, the centaurs' hybridity leads them to function as almost perfect technology in the environment, in both the short story and the novel. In the short story, the centaurs are preferred to bicycle messengers, and in the novel, Estajfan carries Heather down the mountain, and Aura carries Elyse, a character in need of a lung transplant, up it. Leduc talks of this latter example as showing 'the

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<sup>1147</sup> Leduc, 2021: 198.

<sup>1148</sup> Leduc in Read, 2021.

<sup>1149</sup> Leduc in Portman, 2021.

<sup>1150</sup> Leduc, 2021: 197.

<sup>1151</sup> Leduc, 2021: 66.

<sup>1152</sup> Leduc, 2021: 67.

<sup>1153</sup> Leduc, 2021: 63.

<sup>1154</sup> Leduc, 2021: 307.

disabled body as surviving and thriving in new societies'.<sup>1155</sup> Heather also recognises the physical perfection in the centaur, the magic that the mountain has performed, and buries herself in the soil, hoping to be transformed.<sup>1156</sup> She vacillates between wanting to believe that her body is perfect as it is, as Estajfan believes, as her father had always told her, before betraying her by appealing to the centaurs to heal her,<sup>1157</sup> and being aware of its limitations, "My body has always betrayed me".<sup>1158</sup> Leduc speaks of wanting to go against the grain of how dystopian, particularly apocalyptic narratives 'have treated the body in very particular, time-worn ways'.<sup>1159</sup> In this mirroring of desire to be other, of dissatisfaction with one's own form, the text echoes preoccupations of other authors who have utilised centaurs, and especially Cheiron, whose awareness is heightened by his wisdom. Leduc reports noticing, as she was writing the novel, 'how well centaurs worked as a metaphor for disability', through their perceived monstrosity, and because 'of how they exist in two spaces and nowhere at the same time'.<sup>1160</sup> It is this not knowing where they belong, of being perhaps in an in-between place at an in-between time, that other modern authors explore in their portrayals of Cheiron.

However, the text is further layered in its portrayal of the qualities of Cheiron by the doctor's passing on of her knowledge. She teaches the centaur father healing so that he can take care of his children, and Aura then takes up the mantle of healer, having been taught by her father.<sup>1161</sup> A further complication is the portrayal of Tasha, a doctor, as a descendent of this doctor,<sup>1162</sup> perhaps representing descendants of Asclepius in the ancient sources.<sup>1163</sup> While

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<sup>1155</sup> Leduc, in Read, 2021.

<sup>1156</sup> Leduc, 2021: 221

<sup>1157</sup> Leduc, 2021: 118; 230; 297.

<sup>1158</sup> Leduc, 2021: 170.

<sup>1159</sup> Leduc, in Read, 2021.

<sup>1160</sup> Leduc, in Laing, 2021..

<sup>1161</sup> Leduc, 2021: 269-71; 286.

<sup>1162</sup> Leduc, 2021: 284.

<sup>1163</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History* 4.71.3, trans. Oldfather); Homer, *Iliad* 4.193, trans. Wilson.

the links are not wholly stable, the qualities of hybridity, uncertainty in form, and of healing, suffuse the text.

Even the horrific imagery of those killed in the meteor storm, a woman who has been burned beyond recognition on her bottom half but appears perfectly serene on her top half, receives a magical description: 'She is a halfway creature, a mermaid of the ash and fire'.<sup>1164</sup> Heather's babies also represent two extremes, in being 'angry red-haired monsters filled with colic and rage' but also 'sweet, improbable fairies'; however, because they are 'always one or the other, never anything in between',<sup>1165</sup> it is perhaps unsurprising that they cannot live in this in-between world. Heather's son perhaps may survive because when she sees him, she thinks she sees 'four dark legs until the light shifts';<sup>1166</sup> a symbol, perhaps, of the unity she shares with Estajfan.

### **Metaphysics**

While much attention has been given so far to the centaur and his children, the mountain centaurs, produced by his buried corpse and the mountain's magic, have only briefly been mentioned. They do, in many ways, represent the centaurs from a different lineage in Greek mythology, the offspring of Ixion and Nephele. They are not portrayed as having particular intellectual or moral contradictions or concerns; they are emotionless, comfortable in their own bodies, with no real interest in humans and openly hostile to human transgression onto the mountain. In this manner, the ways in which the two sets of centaurs relate to and conceptualise humans constitutes a difference in belief system.

In their eventual acceptance of Heather and the other survivors, Aura and Petrolio join Estajfan in believing in their ability to co-exist. Heather's husband asks about Heather's faith,

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<sup>1164</sup> Leduc, 2021: 35.

<sup>1165</sup> Leduc, 2021: 44-5.

<sup>1166</sup> Leduc, 2021: 305.

whether it is ‘easier to believe in magic or despair’;<sup>1167</sup> the surviving humans and centaur siblings demonstrate a reciprocal belief in each other’s magic. The mountain centaurs have never understood Estajfan; they believe that the mountain will protect only the purity of nature and that any alliance with the humans will lead to their exile from it.<sup>1168</sup> The mountain’s magic had previously demonstrated what could be understood as vengefulness for the centaur wanting to be different, in rendering him centaur and hybrid rather than either of his previous pure forms. However, it demonstrates its preference for human and centaur co-existence by permitting the buried body of Heather’s father to send out vines that claim the mountain centaurs.<sup>1169</sup>

There is here no magical catasterization of a centaur which could be directly linked to Cheiron, but what is shown is what the figure of Cheiron has been utilised for in texts considered in previous chapters – a division of belief. Despite being wholly of nature and magic, born from the mountain, the mountain allows the mountain centaurs to be overcome in favour of a more adaptable, tolerant and unified approach which the human and centaur survivors reach at the end of the text, and which is necessary for survival in the in-between world.

## **Ethics**

The advantage that the centaur siblings have is, in many ways, the teaching that their father has provided. Despite forbidding them to go to the village,<sup>1170</sup> which all but Estajfan honour, their father demonstrated his desire for ‘an in-between life’ by bringing them human things.<sup>1171</sup> Estajfan continues his father’s collecting of human objects, despite their frequently being

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<sup>1167</sup> Leduc, 2021: 173; 186.

<sup>1168</sup> Leduc, 2021: 246.

<sup>1169</sup> Leduc, 2021: 296; 300.

<sup>1170</sup> Leduc, 2021: 64.

<sup>1171</sup> Leduc, 2021: 63.

redundant in their mountain setting. Yet he had also been keen to teach them what human children would learn, accepting the doctor's gifts of 'things that I can use to teach the children', including books, which he had loved.<sup>1172</sup> He teaches the children to read and write, which enables Estajfan to tell Heather stories, deepening their bond. Here, Leduc embraces Cheiron's role as both father and tutor, demonstrating the centaur's concern to give his children an upbringing that is both practical (healing) and intellectual (literacy).

However, perhaps also like Cheiron's influence, the teaching only goes so far to prepare his children for what they will need. Just as Gregory argues that Cheiron's teaching of the young hero frequently fails as they forget what they have been taught, or do not perform as they have been trained,<sup>1173</sup> the centaur's guidance does not always take permanent effect. Aura appeals to her dead father for guidance, yet '[h]e does not answer. He never does'.<sup>1174</sup> The mountain centaurs, progeny of his corpse, also fail to be sufficiently knowledgeable to navigate the post-apocalyptic world. Leduc's message here appears to be that, no matter how well-meaning your parent or teacher, they cannot fully support through life; at some stage, ethical autonomy must be achieved and independent decisions must be made.

### **Epistemology**

Having knowledge and being able to know things is crucial to the plot of this novel. The mountain is at the heart of this knowledge, and both Heather and the centaurs have the ability to see things that are not right in front of them. Heather's knowledge comes from her childhood exposure to the mountain and her connection to Estajfan. What she has seen, she tells; she is not entirely believed by the town, which is another thing, along with her bodily difference, that marks her as an outsider, a liminal person. Heather is able to see things about Estajfan when

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<sup>1172</sup> Leduc, 2021: 205; 234.

<sup>1173</sup> Gregory, 2019: 48; 51-2.

<sup>1174</sup> Leduc, 2021: 294.

he is captured and injured, and a physical touch from Tasha enables her to see Tasha's past, and her trauma.

Estajfan has a similar connection to Heather, forged at her father's death. He can still feel Heather's grief in the town below the mountain, and this event has also enabled him to dream – previously, of the centaurs only Aura was able to dream. However, his dream is a recurring one, of Heather's father falling; it is traumatic, and entirely centred around his initial connection with Heather. Aura's knowledge, her ability to dream and see other things, is less boundaried, yet she is unable to see Estajfan when he has been injured. She reports that the mountain will not let her see anything other than him being in trouble.<sup>1175</sup> While the wisdom and prophetic knowledge of Cheiron is not incorporated into one specific character in the novel, that there is shared knowledge, and the prophetic knowledge of the final end of the humans shown to Heather represents a clear link to the qualities of Cheiron.<sup>1176</sup>

## **Time**

The contrasts between the humans and centaur siblings, particularly in their experience of the passage of time, mirror to a great degree the ways in which Cheiron is imagined to experience time in many of the other texts examined in this thesis. The text does not confirm if the centaur siblings are immortal, but they certainly have long lives, and Leduc demonstrates their longevity. Estajfan reflects that every time he goes to the village, it feels 'like a jump into the future',<sup>1177</sup> whereas Aura dreams of her mother and the successive generations of women down the line.<sup>1178</sup> Estajfan knows that it is different for humans, as he tells Heather that they "are like the stars that fall in the sky ...Everything about you is so quick, and then gone".<sup>1179</sup> This is an interesting image to use, given the catasterization of Cheiron, to give him an immortal

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<sup>1175</sup> Leduc, 2021: 245.

<sup>1176</sup> Leduc, 2021: 188.

<sup>1177</sup> Leduc, 2021: 65.

<sup>1178</sup> Leduc, 2021: 194-5.

<sup>1179</sup> Leduc, 2021: 73.

presence in the sky in the ancient sources; here Estajfan focuses upon short-lived shooting stars as a simile for the human lifespan. Even stars have different life spans, the longevity of fixed stars contrasted with those that are falling, and therefore dying.

It is, however, the return to the wilderness, to nature, which truly drives the separation of experience from measurable time. Nayar reports that a post-apocalyptic landscape is a “spectral landscape” ...which exemplif[ies] the “architectural uncanny” ... because “[t]he boundary between human civilization, the contemporary and the ancient wilderness ... is accidental, and could be reversed at any time”.<sup>1180</sup> As Garrard asserts, “[t]he linear/cyclical distinction indicates that time and temporality are crucial to apocalyptic fiction”,<sup>1181</sup> and Leduc shows this in her novel. Not only are the social structures which underpin society dissolved, and the fabric of contemporary, urbanised life ripped away from the survivors, but the ability to measure and orientate themselves in time is also removed. The longevity of the centaurs, as well as the eternal aspect and memory of the mountain, returns the survivors to ancient time. They need to experience life without a sense of linear chronological progression; instead, they will need to embrace the cyclical rhythms of survival.

Knowing that time is different for humans is not the same as fully understanding the experience of it, however; Heather outlines to Estajfan that “Humans don’t live in the *now*”,<sup>1182</sup> highlighting the preoccupation humans have with remembering the past and planning for the future. In expressing that this would be difficult for him, Estajfan’s attitude is portrayed as opposite to those in modern receptions of Cheiron, which portray him as nostalgic for the past and grieving the dead heroes he raised to adulthood. Leduc’s message throughout the novel is that the experience of those who have plenty of a quality – life and health, particularly – is necessarily different to those who are guarding their lesser allowance.

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<sup>1180</sup> Nayar, 2013, in Garrard, 2023: 99.

<sup>1181</sup> Garrard, 2023: 97.

<sup>1182</sup> Leduc, 2021: 129.

However, nature and society are also shown to be able to influence the experience of time. The mountain carries shadows of the past,<sup>1183</sup> remnants of all it has seen, and the post-apocalyptic natural world very quickly reclaims the previously urbanised ground. The lack of social structures also changes the experience of time for Heather, as she considers that ‘[t]he days seem twice as long as she remembers days to be’.<sup>1184</sup> Again, chronological linear time is demonstrated as a social construct; natural unmeasured time is shown to be less rigid, freer, and more focused on the present moment. The fairytale, magical aspects of the novel highlight the cyclical nature of time, as the fairy stories are shown to have significance in the present, and fiction is portrayed as past reality. Here, Leduc has captured the more open qualities of mythological time.

## **Conclusion**

As the final work of reception discussed in this thesis, it seems apposite that it should be one which features centaurs and catastrophic environmental events, given the climate crises that are challenging countries around the world. By also highlighting disability, and the ways in which society fails to accommodate, or adopt for, difference, Leduc makes her centaurs advocate for a change in perspective in how society should treat the liminal, people in bodies who do not conform to societal norms. The centaurs signify – in the same way that Cheiron is made to in other texts – a straddling of the nature-culture divide, and one of the ways in which humans could survive such catastrophe: by being adaptable, and by using their strengths, no matter what they are.

Leduc’s narrative does not assume that apocalypse would result in merely survival of the fittest, because her novel promotes a questioning of who ‘the fittest’ actually are. Rigby refers to Junot Diaz’s reflection after the Haitian earthquake of 2010, that the Greek

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<sup>1183</sup> Leduc, 2021: 292.

<sup>1184</sup> Leduc, 2021: 52.

*apokalypsis* refers not simply to catastrophe, but to “a disruptive event that provokes revelation”<sup>1185</sup> Garrard agrees with this: ‘[g]iven that environmentalism is characterised by ambivalence, if not hostility, towards the modern world, it is not surprising that apocalyptic environmentalism is increasingly open to the notion that a *catastrophe* could be a turning point, not an ending’.<sup>1186</sup> Leduc’s novel offers this too; centaurs symbolise the most perfect beings to survive, not in spite of their hybridity but because of it. They embody, in varying degrees, the qualities and skills of Cheiron, and as such, have the perfect combination for their own survival, as well as the means to help others—just as Cheiron provided to his neophytes. This novel’s preoccupations are not so clear-cut as the exploration of the decline of Catholic belief, and the looking back to pagan gods of de Guérin, or the embracing of secularisation in society as explored in Updike’s novel, but Leduc breaks new centauric ground in demonstrating, rather, the danger of intractability of intolerance.

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<sup>1185</sup> Rigby, 2011: 215.

<sup>1186</sup> Garrard, 2023: 102.

## Conclusion

This investigation of Cheiron in ancient sources and his portrayals in modern reception texts (from 1840 onwards) has revealed his quintessential liminality. He is so ubiquitous within the narratives of Achilles, and of Jason and the Golden Fleece, that modern authors cannot leave him out without leaving a lacuna in the maturation and training of these heroes; yet, at the same time, he is frequently just a functional figure, pressed into service to illuminate either the narratives of those heroes he raises, or preoccupations of the authors and the times. What the texts and artworks explored here in this thesis demonstrate, however, is that he is a crucially important mythological figure in providing authors with scope and flexibility in the treatment of their subject-matter, and a visual language in which to explore ideas and issues. The ideas and themes that attach themselves to centaurs generally, and Cheiron specifically, are often of disproportionate magnitude in comparison with the slighter burdens of meaning he was obliged to bear in ancient literature; they change radically through time, according to what the authors and artists are wanting to explore.

His is a pioneering role in cultural history, in that aesthetically he anchors how reception texts can position their ideas, construct their oppositions and combine their generic elements. We have found considerable enlightenment in the particularity of the threads that weave through from the ancient sources to modern reception, and those that get overlooked. Quite often, it is the omissions that help to reveal most clearly which sources modern authors and artists are working from, and which have been obscured.

Researching Cheiron, even in the ancient sources, has involved scrapping around in fragments, as well as looking at larger, more complete texts. Even in the more well-known sources, he often lurks in the shadows, known best for his influence rather than his physical

presence in the narrative. His own story is a jigsaw from which many pieces are still missing, even when multifarious ancient sources are consulted, collated and compared.

The thesis has refracted its literary readings through the conceptual prisms of six analytical categories—technology (body issues), ethics (teaching and foster parent), metaphysics (religion, existential issues and organised thought), epistemology (wisdom and prophecy), aesthetics (the form of both Cheiron and of the texts themselves), and time (Cheiron's longevity and its experience). This has provided a structure making possible the comparison of the ways in which modern authors have selectively drawn upon his skills and qualities for their own purposes.

It has become increasingly obvious as the centaur has moved through time within the reception texts that the idea of his longevity, his immortality, is of far greater significance to modern writers than to the ancients. Temporality has become one of the strongest threads around his narrative in reception, and yet it is much less pronounced in antiquity. For modern authors, raised in societies focusing upon linear, chronological, mechanised and monetised time, this excess of time is almost as much of a wound as that which causes Cheiron to give up his immortality. Authors consider the centaur to be feeling old, outdated, solitary and melancholic, seeing generation after generation of the heroes he has raised go to battle or go on a quest, and then die. This perspective reflects the speed of technology and progress, the pace of life that requires people to be productive and accountable; from the time of de Guérin's *Le Centaure*, authors have worried about all that extent of time becoming a burden; they cannot consider becoming accustomed to having that length of life. Within the ancient sources, which are also dealing with the immortal gods and other hybrid creatures, longevity of life is much less noteworthy.

In both ancient and modern textual sources, Cheiron's role as a teacher predominates. It is his largest role in the mythological narratives, and understandably this has been adopted

by the modern authors. Cheiron's persona comes to life when teaching; while Cheiron is rarely an authorial voice himself, he is sufficiently focalised through modern sources for the authors, and readers, to flesh out his contribution to the instruction of heroes. Updike's *The Centaur* particularly highlights this aspect of his persona, fluidly comparing the teaching of mythological heroes to the students of 1950s small town USA, to the detriment of the modern students: Cheiron's teaching here, filtered through the figure of George Caldwell, demonstrates the sacrifice of one's own life and desires that is necessitated by having a family and a job that requires one to train the young.

Texts that place Cheiron more firmly back into his mythological setting, such as Miller's *The Song of Achilles*, view the role of instructing heroes more positively, and considering the effect upon the heroes of his instruction; these works highlight also that it is the less 'showy' skills, such as healing, that are as crucial in battle as physical fighting. Texts portraying him as a tutor often highlight his flexibility in matching his teaching to the student, although this is not necessarily present in the ancient sources; there, he has a coterie of skills that are passed onto his young charges, and these skills often transpire to be the heroes' individual specialisms, such as Achilles' strength in battle, and Asclepius' skills in healing. It is reflective of the greater psychological focus of modern texts that they recast this individuality into a variety of approaches to teaching; it is perhaps also a response to how education now focuses upon finding the things that children are good at (as well as equipping them to be as functioning as possible with the things that are necessary).

Cheiron's physical hybridity has been at the forefront of his portrayal in modern reception, right through all of the texts considered here. His hybridity is noted in the ancient sources, although often in considering how he has been rendered in a visual artwork, or in discussing the impossibility of his real-world existence. But in reception this combination of two different physical forms has been of great interest and utility to the authors and artists. For

de Guérin, it can represent a schism in religious worship, and a divided soul, torn between duty and desire; for the artists and writers connected to Thomas Sturge Moore, he is a more complicated symbol, signalling a difference from socially accepted models of sexual desire, or a challenge in form and function posed by the particular piece of work. For Updike, again, the reader is invited to consider religion, and how there is a decline of Christianity in the face of a rise of secularism, harking back to a world where the gods are different, and often ambivalent about humanity.

Children's literature authors see Cheiron as a vehicle for humour, or for exploring what happens to bodies when they change, and how it might feel to be in a body that is not yet what it will be, and perhaps sits between childhood and adulthood. Certainly, embodiment is more of a focus for female authors, who consider what his body feels like, both to himself and to those who interact with him. This takes a different turn from the ancient sources, which seemed to merely consider the practical aspects that make such a hybrid body function, and therefore ontologically impossible; that he is possible is assumed within the narratives of modern authors, and instead there is the opportunity for writers to explore the textures, smells, and challenges that living in and around that body, and living with that wound, would bring. The final text examined, *The Centaur's Wife*, uses the centaur as a figure to explore difference and disability. The author, Amanda Leduc, raises questions about how such bodies function, and how others perceive them, challenging the notion that apocalypse survival would be open to only the physically strongest of humanity. With her work, the thesis ends on a note that uses Cheiron to consider politically relevant topics and issues, and demonstrates how his dual form has something to say for all the ages.

Cheiron's liminality has thus been revealed as crucial. Were he to have been too clearly defined a figure in the ancient sources, with too much of his own voice to be heard too loudly across the ages, then modern authors would not, perhaps, have enjoyed the flexibility to

consider how he might be recruited to their own concerns and perspectives. While he is eternal in his influence, and emerges with a clear identity from his contributions to Greek mythological narratives, it is this malleability, resulting from his range of skills and bodily difference, that enables him to be an immortal narrative presence, even after his catasterization.

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AC: Thank you for this, I do really appreciate it.

EA: Oh sure, yeah, happy to do it.

AC: So were you teaching when you wrote the books as well?

EA: I was teaching part-time, I was, I've been teaching for my whole career, and I think what happened was that I had little kids at home and I was really part-time and looking for some outlet for my brain and thinking about the story, starting to do the writing, and was easing back into teaching. Now I'm back into teaching full-time so I'm not actually writing very much any more.

AC: I was going to ask you if you had anything else on the go at the minute.

EA: Yeah, I have a novel in a drawer that needs a lot of work and I'm actually teaching a mythology class right now and that's new to me so I was doing a lot of research on that. I find I need more chunks of time than I have right now so ...

AC: It's pretty full on, teaching, isn't it, you've always got marking and everything as well so ...

EA: Yeah, exactly. I'm a teacher, also I'm an administrator, I divide my time between the two so ...especially with this COVID stuff, it's crazy, we've been hybrid learning, it's been very challenging figuring it out. I work in a boarding school so we have to be there doing, so...

AC: Yes, as an aside, I was going to ask you how things are over there with the pandemic because over here we've locked down and no schools ...

EA: I think you're doing a better job than we are. We're sort of doing ... some people are disputing that it's even real so parts of the country aren't wearing face masks so we have in our boarding school about 70 kids who are boarding, it's usually about 250. Lots of kids are going remote, doing it that way, it's kind of a mess. We have kids in Asia who are trying to do remote classes with 13 hours' time difference.

AC: That's really tough.

EA: Yeah, it's very challenging. I think we need to lock down for a few weeks and try to get a handle on things, it's really out of control.

But we've discovered the benefits of Zoom, so ...

AC: Yeah, everyone's discovered how much you can do over video conferencing.

The benefit is that we've had loads more conferences that otherwise you'd have to travel to and pay a fortune to get to, and you'd think, 'well, I can't really afford 3 days and staying in Denmark overnight' or whatever, and now it's 'ok, well I can just drop in for an hour'.

EA: Yeah.

AC: OK, I'll get onto the questions so I don't keep you from your Sunday. I was wondering, as a teacher, were you influenced by the children you were teaching for your characters or content in the Watersmeet trilogy?

EA: Did I use it to inspire them?

AC: Yeah.

EA: Yeah, I think I definitely was aware ... I think that's why I wrote for this age group because ... well, for two reasons. One is because I've spent my life with them, I've been in school since I've been alive basically, so I knew the age group. When I think about the times when I've been most excited as a reader was at this age, when you just sucked in the stories versus... I mean, I love reading now but I read more analytically and more intellectually rather than just sort of inhaling them. So I think that was the reason for being a young adult writer rather than writing for adults. Also I really love story and I think that story is more in the foreground in young adult literature and I also think – and this may not even really be what you're asking – I also think that some adult literature is so depressing, so at least you can have some hope in young adult.

AC: No, absolutely.

Were you consciously addressing any specific needs that you thought that age group had?

EA: Yeah, and I think that's where the centaur really plays an important role. I remember talking to a friend of mine who's gay, and he mentioned his – and he had just come out to me – and he was talking about his internal homophobia, and it was the first time I'd ever thought about holding prejudices of identifiers that you yourself hold. It had never occurred to me that you could both be gay and homophobic. And of course it's, why did I think about that – well, we have learned a lot about that but at the time I was fairly young and just hadn't put that together, and so that's what interested me, the idea that you could have part of yourself that you feel prejudice, racism, against. So I really liked the idea that first of all, Abisina having a father who she loved and then having him be the thing that she most feared, I really liked that tension. And then in the next book, when she becomes a centaur herself and has to make peace with that which she fears in herself, I just think that's a lot about growing up.

AC: Yeah. So I've actually popped your trilogy and I don't know if you know Kate Klimo's duology (shows books) she wrote, her character isn't a centaur but her character meets centaurs ...

EA: Oh ok (laughs)

AC: ...and her character has a real affinity with horses so it seemed like I was writing a chapter on children's and young adult's literature that uses centaurs and Cheiron in various guises but there was such a powerful thing about centaresses, or about that age group of girls, either being different themselves or relating to something that's different that it's become a really powerful chapter.

EA: Oh good, that's wonderful.

AC: So you were wanting to offer a kind of reassurance, maybe, about that sort of maturation process, both physical and mental?

EA: Yeah. And coming to love yourself in all your manifestations too, I think, all different aspects of yourself.

AC: That's great, because I remember growing up and thinking 'what's happening? What are these?' (laughs) ...

EA: (laughs)

AC: ... and that whole thing where you're anxious to get your period to prove that you're growing up but three months later you're so over it, 'I've got this for how many more years?'

EA: Amazed, you're like 'woo hoo', why are we excited about this?

AC: yeah, and it's like another thirty years (laughs)

I just wanted to ask, if that's alright, if you were influenced by any specific texts in terms of the species you wrote about in *Watersmeet*?

EA: Yeah, I was definitely influenced by CS Lewis, I'm a big Narnia person, and I know a little bit about his discussions with Tolkein and about how Narnia wasn't as pure as Middle Earth in its mythology and everything, and I totally just dove into that, so I think that mishmash of different creatures and things was very much influenced by that. And I think, you know, I was a bit reader so I would say the *Odyssey* and things were also influences but the main one is CS Lewis.

AC: Yeah. And obviously you have a character called Kyron...

EA: And that was obviously deliberate ... I mean, I figured that most of my readers wouldn't pick it up but now and then someone would and it would be a good thing, to give a nod to that history and mythology. As I say, most people weren't going to pick that up except you.

AC: (laughs) Yeah, sorry!

EA: No, it's not your fault (laughs)

AC: Did you do any kind of ancient source delving for Cheiron at all?

EA: Just the most superficial just to ... I'm actually teaching *The Song of Achilles*, I don't know if you know it ...

AC: Yeah, she's in another chapter with Elizabeth Cook, *Achilles*, I don't know if you know that one?

EA: No, I don't know that one.

AC: It's a little sort of, it's almost like a prose poem novella? It's beautiful, beautiful book. But yeah.

EA: So yeah, I knew the gist of who Cheiron was so that was enough for me to go forward with what I was envisioning which was rather than Kyron being an individual representative of a group of centaurs

AC: I thought you actually did a really nice job of splitting a lot of his qualities between Kyron and Rueshlan, there seemed to be a good representation of him across both of them.

So in ancient texts it's much more usual to have male centaurs, so we have, but very rare to have the Kentaurides, the centaresses, and I just wondered if there was a particular reason you picked for her to shapeshift into a centaur rather than into another species?

EA: It's interesting that you bring that up because at one point I did have her shapeshifting, I had a whole scene where she became a bird, and I also was like – duh, it's so obvious, why I am introducing this whole other concept and complicating things when in fact, I mean, I was definitely going for that image of growing up and being sort of out of touch with your body, with that maturation was what I was going for. But then I thought how much more profound for her to be what she fears, to have to confront that aspect of herself. And also I liked the idea that she had thought she had made peace with it when she had accepted and understood her father but then when it's you, that experience, and also being like the parent, and having to work out your relationship with the parent, that was a piece of it too. So it just felt so much stronger to have her be a centaur. And I also liked the idea – I mean, I have female dwarves too, which you don't really see in all texts – but it's the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and so we need more women! So I thought, why not, just go for it?

AC: I really liked the fact actually, I mean, if she'd been a bird it would have been an entire shift, I like the fact that she's still half her and she's got to deal with a bit of her changing, that hybridity.

EA: I mean, I liked the scene, I thought it was good writing, which is one of the things I learned as a writer, which is 'oh this is good, and now it's in the trash can' (laughs)

AC: (laughs) Yeah, kill your darlings.

EA: Yeah, exactly. Exactly.

AC: So I was really intrigued by the two different tribes or groupings of centaurs in the trilogy so Icksyon's centaurs, so again, nice nod to the mythology (laughs) and I just wanted to ask you if there were any specific interests or differences that you wanted to portray through the different tribes?

EA: Let me think. Well, I think I was playing with that, also that idea that kind of all of us have in us different aspects, and that different ones get laid out in different ways, and I liked – it's been a long time since I've written this so I can't really remember everybody's name – but I liked the character that was in Icksyon's band, that was, I tried to create one of them that you had some sympathy for, he was a follower, and so I was trying to give a nod to the recognition that even in this horrible band there were a few individuals that had their own needs and wants and desires, and things like that.

But I think I was playing with the elements that live in each of us, so that the same group can have different expressions, if that makes sense?

AC: Yes, absolutely. I mean, of course, in the mythology, you have the different lineage but it entirely makes sense that as humans we're going to recognise that, that some people will go off to that side, and ....

EA: Yeah, I was talking about the hero's journey with my students and using Star Wars as my illustration because I figured it would give them, they would be pretty familiar with it, and I keep wanting to say 'well, the dark side of the force', to go from the ancient to the modern very quickly.

AC: But it's a really useful metaphor, isn't it? That everybody can latch onto.

EA: Yeah.

AC: Thank you. I just wanted to ask if there was any particular influence or source that you were drawing on to make Abisina and her mother healers?

EA: I think I was going with that sort of image of female power, the ancient female power, that women were witches, were often not witches but healers. So I was trying to empower them and make them strong, in a way that gave a nod to women historically. And I really enjoyed, I had a lot of fun doing the research on the different herbs and things that they used, and I had these different organic books that I was scrolling through, and then I'd get something like – it wasn't St John's Wort but it was something – I mean, I couldn't use St John's Wort because St John would invite a whole world that I couldn't use so I had to change the name of certain herbs, and it was really fun.

AC: Yeah. And selfishly it works really well because Cheiron was a healer as well (laughs) so thank you for putting that in.

EA: I'm glad, I'm glad I helped.

AC: I mean, you mentioned St John's Wort and not being able to use St John and I was really intrigued by the lineage of saviour or perhaps prophet figures, the destined leaders of Watersmeet, and I just wondered if you could tell me more about if you were drawing on any particular religious set up there, or trying to move away from that, perhaps?

EA: Yeah, that's a good question, I was definitely aware of the spiritual element without wanting it to be, ironically because I was so influenced by Lewis, I wanted it to be – I didn't want it to be a godless world but I didn't want it to be Christian, certainly, in any sort of way. So I am kind of influenced by – I think it's just a quote I read recently by Joseph Campbell that sums it up, I think it's from Hindu religion, though, that there are lots of truths and the sages find many different paths to the truth. That's not a correct recap of what he said but something to that effect. So I was in fact, in one of my earlier drafts I had a god figure that was called 'The One of All Names', and the idea being that we could all find our way to something that is spiritual but we have different names for it – I don't know if this is making any sense – but I wanted it to be, to have lots of access points to the spiritual side of things. So there's not a lot

of discussion of – certainly Rueshlan is a god-like figure, and he’s ancient, and all of those things, but you get the feeling that he’s not the only one.

AC: I really liked that, and again, thinking about ancient prophets they all had this familial lineage that they harked back to, so it was a really nice nod to the ancient world, that had those spiritual aspects but without pinning it on one god.

EA: Well, and I think I did a lot of this by instinct, you know, like I have just read a lot and a lot of these stories, like a lot of us, and I think that’s what makes this kind of writing and these stories powerful, in that these stories live in us. When I was reading the hero’s journey, and I realised how much I was following the hero’s journey, without being deliberate about it, just doing it naturally, that’s what comes out, because these stories live in us.

AC: That’s brilliant, thank you. Nearly there, just three more if you’ll bear with me.

EA: No worries, no worries, just take your time.

AC: Oh no, actually, only two. So I was fascinated actually with the centaur’s ability to communicate with other hooved creatures, and I just wondered what the inspiration was for that, and where that came from?

EA: Yeah, I think that was just – I needed some communication and it made some logical sense. It was pretty plot driven ... and I’m thinking about, it also fit with the sense of the connection with nature, I mean it made logical sense as well as being a good plot device. I wish I had some really deep thing to say but I think it was mostly plot-driven (laughs)

AC: (laughs) No, I mean, that’s great. It just made me think about in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Ocyrhoe where she turns entirely into a horse, and it made me think well yeah, if Cheiron also speaks horse? (laughs) but that’s wonderful.

But one of the big things I’m grappling with in looking at the literature for children and young adults is whether or to what extent there is a pedagogical purpose behind writing the texts? So for some authors like Rick Riordan, he’s got an entire website dedicated to additional material, and how to teach it in the classroom kind of thing, but for authors who publish their work to stand on their own merits ... Not to particularly diss Rick Riordan but it seems a little bit kind of prescriptive for me, and takes maybe that exploration and enjoyment out of the hands of kids and kind of puts it back into adults ... but I just wondered if there was any desire on your part, I know we’ve talked about wanting to show to kids that it’s ok to be these things as you’re growing up, but was there a more direct morality being aimed at or anything?

EA: Well, yeah. Certainly some kids have said to me that it makes them think about Holocaust, or the issue of her being darker complected and coloured in her hair, and sort of questioning white images of beauty and things like that. I think there’s a subtext of racism and things like that and I was certainly aware that, I wanted to have a heroine that wasn’t white, and blonde, and blue-eyed – not that there’s anything wrong with that! – (laughs) ...

- AC: (laughs) It's alright, I pass in Scandinavian countries, it's very embarrassing, I went to Finland and they all spoke Finnish to me, I was like 'I have one word' (laughs)
- EA: (laughs) ...I was definitely trying to mess around with those kinds of questions and thoughts as well as the more basic and more generalised growing up questions and things like that. Because that's part of her journey too, not only does she have to learn to love herself as a centaur, but she has to learn to love herself as a person first and she doesn't have that because she's so rejected in her early years. The only person who loves her is her mother.
- AC: I loved that, before she did shapeshift, that there was such an Aryan overtone from the Vranians.
- EA: I wasn't going for the Holocaust *per se* but that issue was present.
- AC: No, that whole trope of having to look a particular way ... No, I love that, thank you. Those are all of my questions, is there anything that you want to tell me about how you used the centaurs?
- EA: No, I'm just really flattered that you even found my books never mind that they are useful to you and interesting to you, I mean, that means a lot. And if other questions come up, I'm happy to hear from you, no problems with that.

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