Les Études classiques 83 (2015), p. 51-68.

THESEUS, PEIRITHOOS, AND THE POETICS OF A FAILED *KATÁBASIS*

> Je ne retiendrai pas, non plus, cette réputation que l'on me fit d'être descendu aux Enfers et d'y avoir violé Perséphone d'après, sans doute, le pari que nous avions fait Pirithoüs et moi, d'accomplir nous ne savions quoi de téméraire et d'attentatoire.
>
> (André GIDE, *Thésée* [1].)

In his biography of Theseus, Plutarch states that, according to Hereas of Megara, *Odyssey*, XI, 631, the line spoken by Odysseus in the *Apologoi*, was an interpolation by Peisistratos for the purpose of "pleasing the Athenians" (χαριζόμενον Ἀθηναίοις, XX, 3, 6):

> Καί νύ κ' ἔτι προτέρους ἴδον ἀνέρας οὓς ἔθελόν περ,
> Θησέα Πειρίθοόν τε, θεῶν ἐρικυδέα τέκνα (*Od*., XI, 630-631).
>
> And I would have seen more heroes of times past, whom I longed to meet, Theseus and Peirithoos, the glorious sons of gods [2].

Hereas' opinion, shared by many scholars, ancient and modern [3], indicates that by the middle of the sixth century Theseus' and Peirithoos' *katábasis* had become, despite its failure, an emblematic piece of Athenian mythology [4]. My intention here is to discuss the *Problematik* of Peirithoos'

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1. A. GIDE (1946), p. 101-102.

2. All translations are my own. I would like to thank Alberto Bernabé, Pierre Bonnechère, Gabriela Cursaru and Fátima Díez-Platas for inviting me to the Colloquium, where I gave an earlier version of this paper and received many helpful comments. I am also grateful to Suzanne Lye, who read the manuscript and offered valuable suggestions, and to M. Manoledakis, who kindly provided me with a copy of his reconstruction of Polygnotos' *Nékyia* and gave me permission to publish it here.

3. *FGrH* 486 F 1. Hereas also mentions that Peisistratos removed from Hesiod a line pertaining to Theseus' desertion of Ariadne. Cf. A. HEUBECK, A. HOEKSTRA (1989) *ad Od*., XI, 630-631; T. GANTZ (1993), p. 291; Stamatia DOVA (2012), p. 34.

4. Even though Odysseus would have met them as shades, after their death, and not during their *katábasis;* cf. n. 55. On Theseus' growing popularity in late archaic and

role in this descent, identify the various layers of his katabatic persona, and examine how he and Theseus negotiate the polarities between katabatic hero and antihero.

As I have argued elsewhere, the part of the *Nékyia* (*Od*., XI, 566-631) that follows the encounters with the companions from Troy is poorly connected to its textual surroundings and would make for a plausible ending to the Aias episode, if rejected as an interpolation [5]. Equally poor is the suturing of lines 630-631, where Theseus and Peirithoos make a literary cameo appearance as ancient heroes and sons of gods (after all, Odysseus never meets them), while no mention is made of their *katábasis*. Regardless of its authenticity, *Odyssey*, XI, 630-631 evokes poetry competitions in sixth century Athens featuring catalogue poetry with *katábasis* as the central theme. In such a poem of collected *katabáseis*, Theseus and Peirithoos would still have a place, probably featured as the lesser example. They certainly had a place in a visual collection of katabatic narratives: Polygnotos' painting of the *Nékyia* in the Lesche of the Knidians at Delphi. According to Pausanias' description of the lost masterpiece (Paus., X, 29, 9), Theseus and Peirithoos are shown sitting on chairs, lower than Odysseus, who has just entered the Underworld; Theseus is holding in his hands two swords, Peirithoos' and his own, while Peirithoos is looking at them, presumably frustrated with their uselessness. Encompassing katabatic traditions far broader than those represented in the Homeric *Nékyia*, Polygnotos' painting makes an artistic statement by his choice of topic [6]; in his reconstruction of Polygnotos' painting, M. Manoledakis depicts Theseus and Peirithoos in a central, almost honorary position. In accordance with Pausanias' account, the two heroes are seated, but not bound to their chairs (**image 1**). I agree with M. Manoledakis that Theseus' and Peirithoos' representation near Odysseus and not as legendary sinners like Sisyphos, Tantalos, and Tityos indicates Polygnotos' intention to highlight Theseus' political and cultural significance for fifth century Athens [7].

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early classical Athenian art, see F. BROMMER (1982), p. 65-76; J. N. DAVIE (1982), p. 26ff.; J. H. OAKLEY (2013), p. 70-77; Jenifer NEILS (1987), p. 143-151; H. A. SHAPIRO (1992), p. 29-33.

5. Connecting line 565, where Odysseus claims that Aias would have engaged into conversation with him, to 632, where he explains why he has to depart urgently; Stamatia DOVA (2012), p. 30-34, 64 (n. 152), 74-75.

6. As M. MANOLEDAKIS (2003, p. 153ff.) points out, in the second quarter of the fifth century *katábasis* was not a popular theme in art, unlike the fall of Troy, depicted opposite the *Nékyia* painting at the Lesche.

7. M. MANOLEDAKIS (2003), image 40 and p. 182. Cf. M. D. STANSBURY-O'DONNELL (1990), p. 222-223; Erika SIMON (1963), p. 45-46.

Image 1: ***reconstruction of Polygnotos'*** **Nékyia**
by **M. MANOLEDAKIS (2003).** ***Printed here with author's permission.***

Here I would like to briefly discuss the potential link between the representation of Theseus and Peirithoos in Polygnotos' painting and visual accounts of their fellow warrior, Kaineus, the invulnerable Lapith who could fight with a sword in each hand [8]. As M. Robertson argues [9], Polygnotos was possibly inspired by images of Kaineus when he painted Theseus with a sword in each hand [10]. Kaineus engaged in acts of ὕβρις that caused Zeus to bring forth his demise by inciting the Centaurs to attack him with tree-trunks; in this confrontation Kaineus' swords proved useless, and he painfully sank to Tartarus. This visual commentary also reminds us that Peirithoos, like Kaineus and Ixion, is a Lapith who tried but failed to trespass into divine territory. Interestingly, this triad of irreverent Lapiths is subject to peculiar Underworld predicaments: in addition to Kaineus' violent translation to Tartarus, Peirithoos' mortal father Ixion was punished

8. *Il*., I, 264; *FGrH* 1a, 2, F 22; Pind., fr. 128f S.-M.; *A. R.,* I, 59ff.; Apoll., *Epit.*, I, 22; Ov., *Met*., XII, 170ff., 459ff. See also T. GANTZ (1993), p. 278, 280-281.

9. M. ROBERTSON (1952), p. 99 and *passim*; ID. (1965), *passim*.

10. M. ROBERTSON (1952) also explains that Theseus, returning the favor Peirithoos had given him during Helen's kidnapping, wished to free Peirithoos' hands, so that he could carry off Persephone. Cf. J. D. BEAZLEY, *ARV*^{2} 27, no. 4 (Munich 2309, amphora by Euthymides, A. LANE [1948], p. 47 and pl. 65 and 66b), where Peirithoos is holding Theseus' sword and spear, while Theseus is carrying off a young woman, Korone or Helen; see also F. BROMMER (1982), p. 93-97; T. GANTZ (1993), p. 290. J. D. BEAZLEY lists an olpe (*ABV*^{2} 153, no. 34, Berlin 1731) and a lekythos from Tanagra (*ABV*^{2} 155, no. 62, Athens 404) by the Amasis painter as well as a small-neck amphora attributed to the Edinburgh Painter (*ABV*^{2} 477, no. 1, Castle Ashby) depicting Theseus and Peirithoos carrying off Helen. Interestingly, two hydriae by the Leagros group (*ABV*^{2} 361, no. 12, London B 310, and *ABV*^{2} 363, no. 44, Cab. Méd. 256) depict Helen's abduction by Theseus only. A similar arrangement appears on *LIMC s.v.* Peirithoos, no. 59, where Theseus is carrying off Antiope, while Peirithoos, fully armed and holding two spears, is waiting for him with one foot on the chariot. Comparable is the case of *LIMC s.v.* Peirithoos, no. 66 (*ARV*^{2} 238, no. 1, Louvre G 197), Myson's amphora, also discussed in H. A. SHAPIRO (1988), p. 379-381: Theseus carries off Antiope, while Peirithoos follows him fully armed and carrying a shield (arguably Theseus'). See also F. BROMMER (1982), p. 110-115. Erika SIMON (1963, p. 45) posits that the two swords indicate the difference in fate between the two men: "Theseus was freed by Herakles and when he came to Hades for a second time, he came, not as an intruder, but legitimately as a dead man who had been buried with his weapons".

by Zeus for his attempted sexual assault against Hera to remain bound on a spinning fiery wheel [11], while Peirithoos himself was bound by snakes on a rock [12]. Moreover, as M. D. Stansbury-O'Donnell argues [13], Polygnotos' *Nékyia* painting depicts Theseus and Peirithoos as (fittingly punished) agents of ἀδικία (injustice, un-righteousness), contrasted with Odysseus, who is depicted right above them carrying out his *katábasis* as ordered by the gods.

Peirithoos, Kaineus, and Theseus are also part of the list of Lapiths mentioned by Nestor to Agamemnon and Achilles in *Iliad*, I, 263-265 as *exempla* of great men [14]. Pausanias quotes *Iliad*, I, 263-265 along with *Odyssey*, XI, 630-631 as part of his discussion of Polygnotos' painting in order to underscore Homer's acknowledgement of the legendary friendship between Theseus and Peirithoos (X, 29, 10) [15]. Pausanias' grouping of the two passages signifies their authorial intention; Athenian audiences would have easily recognized the oral traditions associated with Theseus' and Peirithoos' shared celebrity in the Centauromachy (and descent to the Underworld) [16], and Peisistratean political strategy would have endorsed such epic annotation. Apart from its omission of Heracles, Polygnotos' depiction of Theseus and Peirithoos is echoed in Apollodorus, who situates the two

11. *Il.*, XIV, 317; Pind., *Pyth.*, II, 21ff.; Schol. *ad* Pind., *Ol.*, I, 39, 97a; *Pyth.*, II, 40-57 and 71-113; Apoll., *Epit.*, I, 20; Diod. Sic., IV, 63, 69; Hyg., *Fab*., LXII; Virg., *Georg*., IV, 484.

12. Addressed by Heracles as "son of Ixion" in Eur.,**Pirith.* (*TGrF* 43 F 5), Peirithoos attributes his father's punishment to boastfulness about his sexual partner, possibly drawing an analogy between his father's and his own sufferings (12-20); cf. Sophie MILLS (1997), p. 258. On the genealogy of Peirithoos, including his family ties to the Centaurs, see C. BRILLANTE (1998), p. 46-50.

13. M. D. STANSBURY-O'DONNELL (1990), p. 222.

14. Cf. the brief accounts of the Centauromachy in *Il*., II, 742-744 and *Od.*, XXI, 295-304, from where any mention of Theseus, unlike *Il*., I, 265, is missing. On Theseus introduced in *Il*., I, 265 as a Lapith see H. J. WALKER (1995), p. 4ff.; H. HERTER (1973), p. 1046; ID. (1936), p. 223, 236-237; G. S. KIRK (1985) *ad Il*., I, 263-265. *Iliad*, I, 265 also occurs in the Hesiodic *Shield of Heracles* (182); on Peirithoos and Theseus in the *Shield* and its visual imagery see Sara CHIARINI (2012), p. 79-96.

15. In addition to *Od*., XI, 631, Peirithoos is mentioned two more times in the *Odyssey*, XXI, 296 and 298, as the victim of Eurytion's offenses that eventually caused the Centauromachy. In addition to I, 263, Peirithoos is mentioned five times in the *Iliad:* II, 741 and 742, where he is referred to as son of Zeus and father of Polypoetes, the leader of the Lapith contingent in Troy; XII, 129 and 182 also refer to him as Polypoetes' father. *Iliad*, XIV, 318 confirms Peirithoos' divine parentage, when Zeus himself acknowledges that he fathered "Peirithoos, equal to the gods in counsel", as a result of his great love for Ixion's wife. Peirithoos' father is Zeus also in Hellanikos (*FGrH* 4 F 134) and Plato (*Rep.* 391c-d), while in Ephoros (*FGrH* 70 F 23), Diodorus (IV, 63, 1; IV, 69, 3), Ovid (VIII, 403ff., 567, 613; XII, 210, 338) and Apollodorus (I, 68) his father is Ixion. Cf. T. GANTZ (1993), p. 277-282; L. KÄPPEL (2006), *passim*; H. J. METTE (1983), *passim*.

men near the gates of Hades, where Heracles finds them during his *katábasis* [17]:

> Πλησίον δὲ τῶν Ἅιδου πυλῶν γενόμενος Θησέα εὗρε καὶ Πειρίθουν τὸν Περσεφόνης μνηστευόμενον γάμον καὶ διὰ τοῦτο δεθέντα (Apoll., II, 124).
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> Near the gates of Hades he found Theseus and Peirithoos, who was in fetters on account of the marriage he pursued with Persephone.

Here Apollodorus may lead us to believe that Theseus, though sharing his friend's predicament, is not fettered; the singular δεθέντα, "who was bound", applies to Peirithoos only, who is also the subject of the participle μνηστευόμενον, "who was courting for himself". Although it may be argued that Apollodorus' encyclopedic narrative allows for such a compression, I find it interesting that Peirithoos' crime and punishment sets him apart from Theseus, preparing the ground for the latter's eventual release:

> Θεασάμενοι δὲ Ἡρακλέα τὰς χεῖρας ὤρεγον ὡς ἀναστησόμενοι διὰ τῆς ἐκείνου βίας. Ὁ δὲ Θησέα μὲν λαβόμενος τῆς χειρὸς ἤγειρε, Πειρίθουν δὲ ἀναστῆσαι βουλόμενος τῆς γῆς κινουμένης ἀφῆκεν (Apoll., II, 124).
>
> And when they saw Heracles, they stretched out their hands as if they would be raised from the dead thanks to his strength. And he did take Theseus by the hand and raised him; however, when he was about to raise Peirithoos, there was an earthquake, and he let go of him.

Despite his clear intention to free both men, Heracles manages to bring back from the dead only Theseus. As J. N. Bremmer writes, "[t]his liberation is most likely another testimony for an Athenian connection of the *katábasis* of Heracles, as Theseus was Athens' national hero" [18]. The intensity of their entreaty to Heracles is evident in a bronze shield-band relief dating from 575-550 BCE, now at the Museum of Olympia in Greece [19]. In this depiction the two men raise their hands towards the hero while seated next to each other in a seat markedly reminiscent of the chair of

16. On Theseus' participation in the Centauromachy see T. GANTZ (1993), p. 277-282; C. CALAME (1996), p. 262-264; J. N. DAVIE (1982), p. 26ff.; H. HERTER (1939), p. 295ff.

17. Like Odysseus, Heracles can accomplish his task without wondering deep into Hades, cf. J. BOARDMAN (1975), p. 8-10; H. LLOYD-JONES (1967), p. 224-225; O. TSAGARAKIS (2000), p. 102.

18. J. N. BREMMER (2014), p. 192-193; see also M. P. NILSSON (1951), p. 51ff.; H. A. SHAPIRO (1992), p. 33ff.; H. J. WALKER (1995), p. 14ff. and n. 24 below.

19. *LIMC s.v.* Heracles, no. 3519; cf. also F. BROMMER (1982), p. 97-101; T. GANTZ (1993), p. 292. Salvation by Heracles is also the theme of a 460 BCE lekythos now in Berlin (*LIMC s.v.* Theseus, no. 294). In it, Heracles, standing, offers his right hand in firm handshake to a seated, bearded man wearing a petasos and holding a spear. The problem with this representation is that Heracles' gesture indicates that the seated man is Theseus, while the fact that the latter is bearded calls for identification with Peirithoos.

forgetfulness mentioned in Apoll., *Epit*., I, 24, 3: they were invited to sit on it by Hades under pretense that they were going to be offered hospitality, became affixed to it, and held fast by coils of serpents [20]. Peirithoos and Theseus are also shown seated on a rock in the calyx-krater of **image 2** (*LIMC s.v.* Peirithoos, no. 72). Perhaps hinting at their different fates, the vase painting has Heracles next to Theseus and Hades behind Peirithoos [21].

Image 2: ***Attic terracotta calyx-krater,* ca*. 450-440 BCE. Attributed to the* Nékyia *Painter. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 08.258.21. On the upper zone, from left to right, Hades, Peirithoos, Theseus, Heracles, and Hermes.***

20. Or the rock grew into their flesh, cf. Paus., X, 29, 9; Panyassis, fr.14 *PEG*; T. GANTZ (1993), p. 292; M. D. STANSBURY-O'DONNELL (1990), p. 222, n. 32.

21. P. JACOBSTHAL (1934), p. 123-132.

Entrapped in a reverse, grotesque *thronosis* [22], the two men perform a deplorably short *katábasis* that ends at the very entrance of Hades. Clearly uninitiated to the wonders of crossing the Acheron, they suffer eternal liminality until discovered and rescued by a true initiate, Heracles. As H. Lloyd-Jones has shown, Heracles' initiation is an integral part of his *katábasis* [23]. J. Boardman connects this initiation with Peisistratean political imaging and Athens' control of the Eleusinian Mysteries [24]. Heracles enters Hades fully prepared, and the (lost to us) poem recording his successful descent, Ἡρακλέους κατάβασις, is echoed in Pindar, Bacchylides, Apollodorus, and other authors, including Virgil [25]. To my mind, there is no doubt that the lost epic cross-pollinated other katabatic narratives such as the Homeric *Nékyia* as well as the Hesiodic *Minyas* and "Peirithoos' *katábasis*", which may not be two different poems [26].

Placing Theseus and Peirithoos at a time before Odysseus (III, 24, 11), Pausanias lists among the topics of Hesiod's works a poem on "how Theseus went down to Hades together with Peirithoos" (καὶ ὡς Θησεὺς ἐς τὸν Ἅιδην ὁμοῦ Πειρίθῳ καταβαίη, IX, 31, 5); Pausanias is also aware of the lost epic *Minyas* (to which fr. 280 M.-W. may belong) and deduces that Polygnotos followed the *Minyas* in his depiction of Charon as distinctly elderly (X, 28, 2) [27]. The poem, of which only one or possibly two fragments survive (fr. 280 and 147 M.-W.) [28], was centered on Peirithoos' Underworld bride abduction and featured an encounter with the shade of Meleager. In fr. 280 we have part of the dialogue between Theseus and Meleager, a typical

22. Cf. R. G. EDMONDS III (2006), p. 347-352 and *passim*. Although I don't mean to suggest that Theseus' and Peirithoos' sitting entrapment is a parody of any mysteries, I cannot help pointing out the analogies between their sedentary confinement, taking place at the entrance of Hades, and the *thronosis* ritual, a part of Eleusinian or, as R. G. Edmonds III shows, Korybantic initiation rituals.

23. H. LLOYD-JONES (1967), p. 217ff.

24. J. BOARDMAN (1975), p. 1-5 and *passim*.

25. H. LLOYD-JONES (1967, p. 216-29) dates this poem *ca*. 550 BCE and attributes its authorship to a poet affiliated with Athens. Cf. also J. N. BREMMER (2014), p. 192-193; D. L. CAIRNS (2010), p. 83-86; R. J. CLARK (1970), p. 244-247 and *passim*; Stamatia DOVA (2012), p. 77-84; T. GANTZ (1993), p. 291-292, 413-416; E. NORDEN (1927), p. 43ff.; O. TSAGARAKIS (2000), p. 30-31.

26. See also R. MERKELBACH (1950), *passim*; H. J. METTE (1983), p. 14-15; G. W. MOST (2007), I: lx-lxi; II: p. 292-294.

27. Cf. T. GANTZ (1993), p. 291-292. Cf. Virg., *Aen.*, VI, 388-397, where Charon mentions to Aeneas and the Sibyl that he had suffered for having ferried Heracles, Theseus, and Peirithoos across the lake of Acheron; also, *Aen.*, VI, 122 and 601, 617-618 present Theseus from two completely different angles, classifying him with Heracles as a (presumably) successful katabatic hero, or with Phlegyas as a paradigmatically punished sinner. On the last passage see J. N. BREMMER (2014), p. 192-193; cf. also E. NORDEN (1927) *ad* 119ff., 601, 617.

28. Fr. 147 M.-W. is a list of Theseus' wives.

katabatic exchange containing part of the answer to the question "Who killed you?" as well as answers to the questions "Why have you come here alive?" and "Why has Peirithoos come with you?"; the questions suggest that the encounter has just occurred, and the choice of interlocutors (Theseus and Meleager, even though this is "Peirithoos' *katábasis*") indicates that Theseus is the dominant figure of the two as elsewhere in the tradition. In this conversation, Theseus is cast in Heracles' part in Bacchylides, V, 86-89, and his inquiry after Meleager's cause of death (if not identity) receives a reply as gracious as Heracles did in Bacchylides, V, 94-154 and, possibly, in the lost Ἡρακλέους κατάβασις [29]. In fr. 280 Theseus hurries to speak first [30], addressing the shade of Meleager by name and patronymic (διογενὲς Μελέαγρε, δαΐφρονος Οἰνέος υἱέ, "noble Meleager, son of wise Oeneus", 10) [31]; we don't know if he has recognized Meleager or if he is using information provided by the shade [32]. What is significant is that Peirithoos remains silent throughout the part of the conversation contained in the fragment. This *mise-en-scène* enables the narrative to include Theseus' criticism of Peirithoos' decision:

> Πειρίθοον μεγάλ' ἄσε θεὰ διασπλῆτις Ἐρινύς·
>].ε̣ν̣ωε̣υ̣δ̣ε̣[ ]ἀγαυὴν Φερσεφόνειαν
>]....ας φὰς ν̣[εῦσ]αι Δ[ία] τερπικέραυνον
> [ἀθανά]των τε νόμ̣οις, ἵνα ἐδνώσειε̣ν̣ ἄκ̣[ο]ιτιν (fr. 280 M.-W. 9, 12-14).
>
> The grim goddess Erinys has greatly misguided Peirithoos; he has come here to seek and take noble Persephone as his wife, and says that thunder-wielding Zeus has nodded approval for this endeavor, which is being undertaken in accordance with the customs of the immortals.

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29. Hes., fr. 280 does not contain the beginning of the encounter between Theseus and Meleager. I would argue for an encore to Heracles' theatrical entrance in Bacch., V, 68-76 and Apoll., II, 123, where Theseus would wield his sword (or his two swords, Paus., X, 29, 9) to the shade of Meleager.

30. Hes., fr. 280, 8-9: τὸν δ' αὖτε προσέφη π]ρ̣ότερό[ς] τ̣' ἀ̣π̣[ὸ] μ̣ῦ̣θ̣ον/ ἔειπε[ν/ Θησεὺς Αἰγείδης |]ας ἐς ποιμένα λ̣αῶν ("Theseus the son of Aegeus spoke first and answered him [...] at the shepherd of peoples"). In line 26, Theseus again steals the show, as Meleager addresses him with great deference, emphasizing his rank among his brave fellow-Athenians: Θησεῦ, Ἀθηναίων βουληφόρε θωρηκτάων ("Theseus, counselor of the well-armed Athenians"). The title βουληφόρος occurs fifteen times in the *Iliad* and twice in the *Odyssey* in similar contexts, usually as an attribute to a leader or king.

31. D. L. CAIRNS (2010) *ad* Bacch., V, 122 sees a connection between fr. 280, 10 and B.5 through the adjective δαΐφρων.

32. Here Theseus seems unaware of Meleager's death, contrary to late archaic and early classical Athenian traditions that represented the two men as fellow-participants in the Argonautic expedition and the hunt of the Calydonian boar; cf. H. HERTER (1939), p. 302.

Theseus elaborates on these customs, namely the habit of male gods "to woo and even make love to their sisters in the absence of their parents", concluding with a note on his friend's rationale: Peirithoos claims to be Persephone's half-brother, and as such a closer relative than her current husband, her paternal uncle Hades [33]. Theseus' closing line exposes Peirithoos' ill-conceived determination, holding him accountable for their injudicious venture (23):

> [Τοῦ δ' ἕν]ε̣κεν̣ φά̣το βῆμεν ὑπὸ ζόφον ἠερόε̣ντ̣α̣.
>
> For this reason he said that we were going down to the misty darkness.

Meleager's reaction encapsulates his self-controlled horror (Οἰνε̣ί̣δ̣η̣ς̣ δ̣ὲ κατέστυγε μῦθον ἀκού̣σ̣α̣ς̣, "the son of Oeneus was horror-struck at the tale he heard", 24), an emotion he expresses politely (μειλιχίοισιν, "with soothing words", 25) by asking whether or not Peirithoos is still married to Hippodamia: ἦ ῥ' οὐχ Ἱππο]δάμεια περίφρων ἣν παρ̣ά̣[κοι]τ̣ι̣ς̣/ [μ]εγαθύμου Πειριθόοιο; ("Wasn't wise Hippodamia the wife of [...] great-hearted Peirithoos?", 27-28).

It would not be an overstatement to say that Peirithoos' is the only descent to the Underworld in Greek mythology that is undertaken willingly and without reservations. Both Heracles and Odysseus lament the fact that they are forced to perform a *katábasis*, the former as part of his servitude to a lesser man (*Od*., XI, 620-624), the latter as part of a mandatory exercise in epic enrichment (*Od*., X, 488-498). Featuring a petition to the nether gods, Orpheus' *katábasis* tries, albeit unsuccessfully [34], to bypass the divisions between life and death from a perspective of exemplary conjugal affection. Peirithoos' *katábasis* fails to meet any of the above criteria, as it revolves around the hubristic plan of kidnapping the queen of the Underworld from her husband's kingdom [35]. The sanity of such an objective (or lack thereof) may point to the obvious narrative intention to diminish or even obliterate Peirithoos' heroic profile in order to promote Theseus' superiority of character and nobility of conduct. From this point of view, the fact that Peirithoos

33. C. BRILLANTE (1998, p. 67) considers incest to be one of the reasons for Peirithoos' failure to marry Persephone: *rivendicando Persefone in quanto propria sorella, viola i principi stessi che regolano il matrimonio: propone come legittima un'unione incestuosa; e l'incesto, come è noto, esclude in particolare qualsiasi relazione basata sullo scambio.*

34. J. HEATH (1994), p. 163-167, 180-186 and *passim*; F. GRAF (1987), p. 80-82 and *passim;* Stamatia DOVA (2012), p. 184-185. Cf. also Phaedrus' account of Alcestis' *katábasis* (Plat., *Symp.*, 179b4-180b6) and Apollodorus' version of Protesilaos' temporary ἄνοδος (III, 30a-b).

35. Cf. C. CALAME (1996, p. 263), who emphasizes that Helen's and Persephone's abductions were "*deux actes d'*hubris" committed by the two heroes after their victory over the Centaurs.

insists on taking Persephone as his wife is particularly convenient: not only does it transfer the action automatically to Hades, where Theseus accompanies Peirithoos as a reluctant yet even more famous katabatic partner, but also forges a natural connection with Heracles, whose seal of approval is a source of prestige for any Greek hero. While in the making (or sixth century re-making), the myth of Theseus sought affiliation with Heracles on many levels [36], despite the inherent differences in their heroic profiles [37]. Theseus' rescue from Hades by Heracles enhanced his heroic status and provided an explanation for the preponderance of Heracles' shrines in Attica: to express his gratitude to his Doric counterpart, Theseus named after Heracles most of his own shrines [38].

Heracles' dynamic entrance into Theseus' life renders his friendship with Peirithoos all the more static; even in the event of a double rescue, the two friends' heroic saga is not to be continued. Its beginning, however, had been spectacular: wishing to put Theseus' reputation to the test and see for himself, Peirithoos stole his cattle from Marathon and waited for him to come (Plut., *Thes.*, XXX, 1). As the two men looked at each other, they admired each other's beauty, marveled at each other's bravery, and held off battle (ὡς δ' εἶδεν ἄτερος τὸν ἕτερον καὶ τὸ κάλλος ἐθαύμασε καὶ τὴν τόλμαν ἠγάσθη, μάχης μὲν ἔσχοντο). Like Diomedes and Glaukos in *Iliad*, VI, or Heracles and Meleager in Bacchylides, V, Theseus and Peirithoos in Plutarch restrain their fighting spirit, turning their potential duel into legendary camaraderie [39]. Plutarch maps out the emotional blueprint of their friendship with remarkable perspicacity, defining Peirithoos' greatness in relation to Theseus' superior status: it was Peirithoos, who, wishing to verify Theseus' great reputation for strength and bravery, sought an encounter with him; it was Peirithoos, Plutarch continues, who first offered his right hand in reconciliation to Theseus, agreeing to accept any punishment for the cattle-lifting the latter would decide upon [40]. Instead of penalty, Theseus

36. For example, Theseus' capturing of the bull of Marathon was presented as a continuation of Heracles' seventh labour; see also Jenifer NEILS (1987), p. 144ff.; H. A. SHAPIRO (1988), p. 373-375.

37. Isoc., *Hel.*, XXIV, 1: "Heracles' labours were greater and more famous, while Theseus' were more useful and suitable to the Greeks." Cf. M. P. NILSSON (1961), p. 57; ID. (1972), p. 51-56.

38. Plut., *Thes.*, XXXV; Philoch., *FGrH* 328 F 18a; see also M. P. NILSSON (1972), p. 53.

39. Stamatia DOVA (2012), p. 85-88.

40. On the heroic, initiatory, and katabatic dimensions of the theme of cattle-raid see J. MCINERNET (2010), p. 96-112; J. N. DAVIES (1988a), p. 286-289. As J. MCINERNET (2010, p. 112) postulates, "[t]he cattle raid encapsulates agonism. Its complements are those myths that substitute women for cattle, the other commodity

offered Peirithoos his friendship and accepted his invitation to visit Thessaly, thus generating the most important episode in their joined myth, the Centauromachy; in turn, the story of their friendship is concluded with their *katábasis*.

The chronological order of these events is problematic, as Meleager observes in the Hesiodic passage above [41]; widowed, Theseus and Peirithoos set out to win daughters of Zeus as brides [42], thus becoming prospective brothers-in-law. We may also recognize in this account a variation of the motif of wooing by pairs of brothers, which, as D. Frame has shown, is associated with the myth of Indo-European twin brothers [43]. I argue that Theseus' and Peirithoos' desired kinship echoes Heracles' betrothal to Deianeira in Hades [44], as it fulfills a similar requirement for male bonding. To ratify their reciprocal commitment, Theseus and Peirithoos swear solemn oaths, commemorated in a hollow on the rock at the grove of Colonus (Soph., *Oed. Col.*, 1593-1594); this was the very location from where Persephone had been abducted by Hades, and possibly the route Theseus and Peirithoos took to Hades [45], near the ἀγέλαστος πέτρα, "gloomy stone", where Theseus sat before entering Hades [46]. Moreover, Pausanias speaks of a location not far from the sanctuary of Sarapis Southeast of the acropolis, from where, according to legend [47], Theseus and Peirithoos set out for expeditions to Lacedaemon and Thesprotia. W. M. Leake suggests that the

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that causes endless disputes". The fact that Theseus and Peirithoos are spared this agonism indicates that they constitute an inherently unbreakable entity.

41. Inevitably, the two abductions should be placed after the two marriages; cf. T. GANTZ (1993), p. 288.

42. Apoll., I, 23; Hellan. *FGrH* 4 F 134, 168; after they kidnapped Helen, a girl of twelve, they embarked on their *katábasis* to carry off Persephone. The Dioscuri punished Theseus for their sister's abduction by taking captive his mother Aithra, who is Helen's attendant in *Il.*, III, 144.

43. D. FRAME (2009), p. 72ff., 229, 23; interestingly, the Indo-European male twins have a common wife who is also their sister, a motif evoking the myth of Dioscuri and their sister Helen, the victim of Theseus abduction. Similar is the motif of assisted wooing (Poseidon - Pelops, Apollo - Admetus) or wooing on behalf of a brother (Agamemnon - Menelaos, Melampous - Bias).

44. Bacch., V, 165-169. Heracles, overwhelmed by admiration for Meleager's shade, inquires if he has any unmarried sister whom he could make "his splendid bride". The stipulation is that the young woman must resemble Meleager (168). Cf. the myth of Heracles' rescue of Alcestis from death as a gift to her husband in return for his hospitality (Eur., *Alc*., 1144-1148), where successful confrontation with death results to ἄνοδος and reinstitution of marriage; see also Stamatia DOVA (2012), p. 88, 128 (n. 89), 181-187.

45. R. C. JEBB (1907), vol. II, p. 245-246; Schol. *ad Oed. Col.*, 1590 and 1593; Erika SIMON (1963), p. 47.

46. Schol. *ad* Ar., *Eq.*, 785.

47. Λέγουσι, "they say", I, 18, 5.

ἀγέλαστος πέτρα served as a landmark for the location described above by Pausanias, but R. C. Jebb objects that the expeditions to Lacedaemon and Thesprotia were not connected to the descent to Hades [48]. If, however, we consider Pausanias' account of Theseus' death, the two expeditions correspond to the two bride abductions, Helen's from Sparta and Persephone's, no longer from Hades, but from Kichyros in Thesprotia, where Pausanias places their failed "*katábasis*" (I, 17, 4).

Plutarch provides his audience with an equally rationalized account that exonerates Theseus as much as possible. Although he acknowledges that Theseus got involved with Helen's abduction when he was fifty years of age, while she was not yet of marriageable age (XXXI, 1), he also gives two more versions of the story. In these versions, Theseus is Helen's keeper on behalf of her abductors, Idas and Lynceus, or even at the request of her own father, Tyndareos. In the end, Plutarch yields to rationalizing the most popular version (XXXI, 4), according to which Peirithoos' disappearance and Theseus' detention were the results of their attempt to carry off the daughter of the king of the Molossians, the neighbors of the Thesprotians to the North. Conveniently, her name is Kore, her mother's name Persephone, and her father's Aidoneus; last but not least, the family dog is called Cerberus. Aidoneus secures the disappearance of the prospective abductor through the dog (ἠφάνισε διὰ τοῦ κυνός, XXXI, 5), but puts Theseus in custody, only to release him later, at Heracles' entreaties [49]. Thus, despite a deliberate deviation from the *katábasis* frame, both Pausanias' and Plutarch's versions retain powerful connections with an area thought to be located at the boundaries of the upper world [50].

There is no doubt that the hallmark of Theseus' and Peirithoos' *katábasis* is its failure. The two friends not only fail to get what they came for, but also end up imprisoned in Hades. An invisible bond of loyalty keeps them together until Heracles liberates Theseus [51], depriving Peirithoos of

48. W. M. LEAKE (1841), p. 635-636, addendum to p. 492; R. C. JEBB (1907), *ad* 1594; H. HERTER (1939), p. 295, n. 258.

49. Noting the unusual choice of wording in ἠφάνισε, a term "used of more sinister and mysterious disappearances", C. PELLING (2002, p. 175) illustrates how, in cases like this, Plutarch's narrative "would not make sense except to someone who knew the alternative version". The fact that Plutarch, for his own reasons, prefers the rationalized version does not undermine the predominance of the "mythical" version as the original and authoritative narrative. See also Greta HAWES (2014, p. 164-165), who points out the similarities between Plutarch's and Tzetzes' (*Chil*., II, 51, 756; IV, 8, 911) accounts – Peirithoos is eaten by the dog in both.

50. On Thesprotia's connections to the Underworld see J. L. CASKEY, S. I. DAKARIS (1962), *passim*; É. JANSSENS (1961), p. 383-393; E. D. PHILLIPS (1953), p. 64.

51. Ἀίδηλος δεσμός, Ap. Rhod., I, 102; in fr. 595 N. Peirithoos seems to be saying that Theseus is joined to him with the unforged bonds of a sense of honor (αἰδοῦς

any hope for ascent (ἄνοδος); this is what the small-bodied, sad- and cantankerous-looking Peirithoos of **image 3**, seated on a *klismos* and wearing an oversize *petasos*, seems to brood about (*LIMC s.v.* Peirithoos, no. 70). Theseus has left Hades, leaving his friend alone. This single rescue also marks their separation, generated by the powerful agency of a (much more) desirable associate, Heracles.

Image 3: ***interior view of Attic red-figure kylix attributed to the Xenotimos Painter,* ca. *430-425 BCE; name inscribed on right:* ΠΕΡΙΘΟΣ. *Museum of Fine Arts Boston, 99.539.***

In Euripides' (or Kritias') lost tragedy *Peirithoos*, Heracles rescues not only Theseus, but also "those around him" (τοὺς περὶ Θησέα), namely

ἀχαλκεύτοισιν ἔζευκται πέδαις). In addition to Apoll., II, 124 discussed above, Peirithoos is left behind in Diod. Sic., IV, 26; IV, 63, 4, where neither of them is saved; Hor., *C.*, IV, 7, 28, where Theseus' inability to free Peirithoos is presented as an example of mortality; Aristid., XL, 7; Schol. *ad* Ar., *Ran.*, 142.

Peirithoos [52], as Giovanna Alvoni has demonstrated [53]. *Peirithoos*' hypothesis adds the moralistic comment that Peirithoos got what he deserved (τιμωρίας ἔτυχε τῆς πρεπούσης, fr. 595 N 8), stressing that Theseus chose life in Hades over abandoning his friend for the sake of ἄνοδος (Θησεὺς δὲ τὸν φίλον ἐγκαταλιπεῖν αἰσχρὸν ἡγούμενος βίου εἵλετο τὴν ἐν Ἅιδου ζωήν, 9-10). Despite its exiguity, the extant part of the play indicates the poet's intention to highlight Theseus' ethos as friend and ally; like imperial Athens, Theseus does not forsake his comrades even in the direst of circumstances [54]. In addition to that, Theseus somehow shares Heracles' good will with Peirithoos. Does this make their *katábasis* less of a failure?

Perhaps here we need to reconsider the bulk of the evidence. Two young men meet at a cattle-raid, become friends, and decide to marry two sisters. They try but fail to carry off the girls, and get punished by the girls' male relatives. So far we have the themes of friendship, cattle-lifting, and bride abduction; all three fit the frame of adolescent initiation of (a pair of) Greek heroes. The same themes occur in the antagonism between the Dioscuri and the Apharetidae [55], during which, as we saw, Helen is given to Theseus to safeguard (Plut., *Thes.*, XXXI, 1). This eliminates the first abduction, leaving only Peirithoos' quest for a bride. Interestingly, she happens to be the queen of the Underworld, and his Athenian friend is his sole aid in the ordeal [56]. At this point a new theme enters the scene, that of *katá-*

52. Also in Diod. Sic., IV, 26; in Diod. Sic., IV, 63, 4, both or neither of them is saved; in Hyg., *Fab.*, 79 both.

53. As Giovanna ALVONI (2006, p. 295) concludes, *[d]a der* ἀίδηλος δεσμός*, mit dem Theseus an Peirithoos gefesselt war, im 'Peirithoos' auf die Bühne gebracht wurde, ist wahrscheinlich unter der Wendung* τοὺς περὶ Θησέα *eher Theseus und Peirithoos zu verstehen als Theseus und andere unbekannte Gefährten oder Theseus allein*. See also H. J. METTE (1983), p. 15-19; Sophie MILLS (1997), p. 10-12, 257-262.

54. Theseus' ethos is also demonstrated by his disapproval of the undertaking; as Diodorus (IV, 63, 4) states, Theseus, at Peirithoos' insistence and on account of the oaths he had sworn, became implicated in an act of impiety for which he had given his friend fair warning.

55. The Dioscuri are also responsible for the abduction of the daughters of Leukippus, who, having no sons, calls upon his nephews Idas and Lynceus for help. The two pairs of brothers fight to death, as the Apharetidae try, but fail, to retrieve their female cousins (Apoll., III, 10, 3; XI, 2) or their cattle (Pind., *Nem.*, X, 54-78). Shortly before Castor's death, Polydeukes obtains from his father Zeus permission to share his immortality with his mortal twin, thus establishing the pair as a paradigm of brotherly love capable of tampering with the limits of mortality. As in the Theseus-Peirithoos myth, we witness here the exemplary bond between two young men who, having engaged in cattle-raids and bride abductions, mitigate the effects of death thanks to a privilege available to the dominant figure of the two.

56. As M. P. NILSSON (1972, p. 174) suggests, "the friendship of Theseus and Peirithous serves as a means to harmonize two parallel myths which else would seem to

basis. The only connection between bride abduction and *katábasis* is Peirithoos' choice of future wife. Why should Peirithoos choose a bride from the Underworld?

I argue that he does so in order to help his friend become the hero of both a bride abduction and a *katábasis*. As we saw, Theseus is associated with the abduction of Helen, a mythological figure also identified as a pre-Greek vegetation goddess [57]. Moreover, he is associated with the abduction of Ariadne, and his attempt to steal the queen of the dead connects him with the daughter of Demeter. In Greek myth, however, Kore, the vegetation goddess abducted by Pluto, is identified with Persephone, the wife of Hades, placing Theseus in the impossible position of having to defeat the king of the dead; thus, to share the burden of failure, Theseus acquires a companion on whose behalf he undertakes and fails the *katábasis*. This companion, though worthy in his own right, seeks and honors his friendship in an almost feudal manner; he comes from up north, and his neighbors are half-beasts who attempt to steal his bride Hippodamia. Theseus helps him defeat them, but, inevitably, the Helen-Persephone bride abduction project is postponed until later, when a closure to their friendship is needed. Needless to mention, both bride abductions fail miserably, but Peirithoos' considerably more so, given its hubristic nature – only to be expected from Ixion's son [58]. Theseus is exonerated by denouncing the deed without betraying his friend, and by employing his connections with Heracles, the epitome of katabatic success, to save both himself and Peirithoos. These connections work occasionally, but, when they don't, Theseus is not to blame.

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be incompatible". These two parallel myths are Helen's handover to Theseus and Peirithoos' abduction of Persephone, in which Theseus was obliged to assist him.

57. M. P. NILSSON (1972), p. 173. Cf. also *LIMC s.v.* Leda, no. 34, a fragment from a crater dating from the last quarter of the fifth century depicting the wedding of Theseus and Helen in the presence of Leda holding a crown, Peirithoos holding a basket, and possibly Poseidon and the Dioscuri, one of whom is holding two spears (could this be an echo from an abduction scene?). Both bride and groom are crowned by winged *erotes*. The ambiance of this vase-painting points to Helen as vegetation goddess and willing partner of Theseus, who does not have to carry her off or face retaliation by her brothers. Pausanias (I, 41, 5) and Pindar (fr. 258 S.-M.) mention that Theseus carried off Helen because he wished to be related to the Dioscuri, who nevertheless retrieved their sister during his absence; according to Stesichorus, Theseus and Helen were the parents of Iphigeneia, whom Helen entrusted to her sister Clytemnestra (Paus., II, 22, 6-7; *PMG* 191). See also Sophie MILLS (1997), p. 7ff. and n. 41 above.

58. See also n. 15. M. P. NILSSON (1972, p. 173-174) argues that a successful attempt to carry off the queen of the Underworld "would have been the crowning end" of Theseus' heroic career, similar to Heracles' abduction of Cerberus, if it were not contrary "to current Greek ideas concerning the all-conquering and irresistible power of Death".

In conclusion, I argue that Peirithoos is a valuable asset in the myth of Theseus and in the katabatic tradition. He provides the reason for Theseus' *katábasis*, serves as foil and *altera persona* for Theseus during the endeavor, and exemplifies the negative potential of their shared undertaking. As the companion left behind, he is, like Elpenor, offered as a sacrifice in transition [59]. As a Lapith, he is enveloped in an aura of otherness, also confirmed by his choice of Persephone as his bride; as a friend and ally of Theseus, he is inseparable from him; as an imaging aid for Theseus, he elevates his friend's status by lowering his own to the point of perpetual abandonment in Hades.

We may assume that by the time of their near encounter with Odysseus, both men had failed in their *katábasis*, Theseus was granted a complimentary ἄνοδος, and eventually returned to Hades. In and out of Hades, their friendship survived grave obstacles, including a painful separation. Yet in *Odyssey*, XI, 631 they are together again, leaving us to wonder what happened in the process [60].

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59. Stamatia DOVA (2012), p. 3-8.

60. Regarding the dramatic time of *Od*., XI, 630-631, T. GANTZ (1993, p. 290) notes: "[s]trictly speaking, too, if by anyone's reckoning they are still in the Underworld in Odysseus' time (i.e. after Herakles' death), then they must be supposed to sit there forever; perhaps that is to push a casual reference (or interpolation) too far, perhaps not." Cf. n. 10 above.

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