

WHAT IS MYTHICAL HOPE IN CHILDREN'S AND YOUNG ADULTS' CULTURE? – OR: SHARING THE LIGHT

To Professor Jerzy Axer
with gratitude for His faith in Childhood

L'enfance croit ce qu'on lui raconte et ne le met pas en doute.
[...] C'est un peu de cette naïveté que je vous demande et,
pour nous porter chance à tous,
laissez-moi vous dire quatre mots magiques,
véritable "Sésame ouvre-toi" de l'enfance:
Il était une fois...

Jean Cocteau, *La Belle et la Bête*, 1946

"Long, long ago, when this old world was in its tender infancy, there was a child..." – this is how Nathaniel Hawthorne's tale "The Paradise of Children" begins. It belongs to the collection *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys* (1851).¹ Its narrator, a young man bearing the telling name of Eustace Bright – with the Greek prefix εὖ, 'well' / 'good', and an allusion to light included – is staying with his little cousins at Tanglewood, a beautiful manor in Lenox, Massachusetts. They are cut off from the world by a strong winter snowstorm over which the children "rejoiced greatly", though Eustace not so much. Thus, cousin Primrose, both to make Eustace feel better and provide their group with some indoor entertainment, asks him for a story. The therapeutic function of storytelling in plain sight. The thoughts of Eustace go to warm weather, and he tells the children

¹ In the present chapter the following edition is used: Nathaniel Hawthorne, *A Wonder-Book for Girls and Boys*, Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin and Company, [1879], 89 (in the further quotations the page numbers from this edition will be given in parentheses). On Hawthorne and children's literature, see in the first place Sheila Murnaghan with Deborah H. Roberts, "A Kind of Minotaur: Literal and Spiritual Monstrosity in the Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 8, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020, 55–74; and Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts, *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

about the times when there was "but one season in the year, and that was the delightful summer; and but one age for mortals, and that was childhood" (88).

As this story of the Golden Age develops – with Eustace's charming descriptions of meals growing on trees, carefree fun, and the bright aura – it in fact reveals the sinister myth of Pandora, here a "playfellow" sent by the gods to the boy Epimetheus, in whose household "a great box" menacingly awaits. Even though in Hawthorne's version the girl is not responsible for bringing the box to Earth (it had been deposited by Mercury in person much earlier²), it is still hers to release the evils and, as a result, to put an end to this Paradise of Children, "who before had seemed immortal in their childhood, now grew older, day by day, and came soon to be youths and maidens, and men and women by and by, and then aged people, before they dreamed of such a thing" (104–105).

The horror that follows the opening of the box by Pandora is foreshadowed in the moment she lifts the lid – by a change in the weather: there was a heavy thunderclap, "the black cloud had now swept quite over the sun, and seemed to have buried it alive" (102); it was so dark that Pandora could hardly see a thing. But she heard. Hawthorne's emphasis on the sense of hearing enhances the dreadful atmosphere of the scene: the ears of Pandora were hit by "a disagreeable buzzing, as if a great many huge flies or gigantic mosquitoes [...] were darting about" (103). As her eyes grew accustomed to the darkness, she saw "a crowd of ugly little shapes, with bats' wings, looking abominably spiteful, and armed with terribly long stings in their tails" (103). They were "the whole family of earthly Troubles", including evil Passions, Cares, Sorrows, and Diseases. And they attacked and strung first Epimetheus and next Pandora. The girl, distressed, opened the windows and the doors to drive them out of their household, and thus they scattered and began tormenting people all over the world.

"L'enfance croit ce qu'on lui raconte et ne le met pas en doute" – childhood or, in fact, children believe in what they are told and do not question it. This is how Jean Cocteau, in 1946, begins his fairy-tale movie *La Belle et la Bête*. But do young people really accept everything uncritically? Well, in Hawthorne's myth of Pandora, in the section "Tanglewood Play-Room: After the Story", one of the cousins asks Eustace how big the box was and whether it truly contained all the troubles. The storyteller confirms it did, adding that the box included even the snowstorm and was "perhaps three feet long, [...] two feet wide, and two feet and a half high" (110). Such a precise answer, however, does not satisfy the boy:

² For Hawthorne, children embody innocence; Pandora's curiosity is "provoked" by the mysterious presence of the box (90).

"Ah," said the child, "you are making fun of me, Cousin Eustace! I know there is not trouble enough in the world to fill such a great box as that. As for the snowstorm, it is no trouble at all, but a pleasure; so it could not have been in the box." (110–111)

Pandora did her homework, too. She developed critical thinking (a side effect of her knowledge of good and evil), and when she heard a little tap from inside the box and a gentle voice asking her to open it again, she replied: "I have had enough of lifting the lid! [...] You need never think that I shall be so foolish as to let you out!" (106). This is not the end of her story, of course, but we need to learn more before returning to it.

In fact, Cocteau's Belle is not naive, either. She gains the ability to see beyond appearances and in the moment of ultimate trial she displays her own agency and manifests a sharp assessment of the situation and her feelings, thereby leading to the triumph of Good, which also entails her personal victory.

It is remarkable that Cocteau, who enjoyed the reputation of an avant-garde artist *par excellence*, in his movie *La Belle et la Bête* elaborates upon one of the oldest classical tales, and, as observed by critics, he makes his work a "rather faithful adaptation" of Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's version of the story (1756).³ The opening of the movie, with the director's request to watch it with a certain naivety, is accompanied by his evocation of childhood (*l'enfance*) and the fairy-tale tradition both of the Orient (*véritable "Sésame ouvre-toi"*) and European folklore (*Il était une fois...*): together they define the sources of Cocteau's "personal mythology".⁴ But mythology in the classical understanding of the term is present in the movie, too – not only via numerous details, like, for instance, the sculpture of Diana coming alive in the garden of the Beast,⁵ but above all in the whole narrative framework based on the Greek myth of Eros and Psyche, with the final scene of Belle and her Prince-not-Bête-anymore flying into the sky like Cupid and his beloved on the famous painting by the French academic William-Adolphe Bouguereau (see Fig. 1).

That Cocteau demands "un peu de cette naïveté" – a bit of this naivety – from his viewers when evoking the mythical and fairy-tale context is not a coincidence. Indeed, this naivety is the condition *sine qua non* for viewing such

³ See William Verrone, *Adaptation and the Avant-Garde: Alternative Perspectives on Adaptation*, London: Continuum, 2011, s.v. "Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast*".

⁴ Ibidem.

⁵ Diana plays the key role in the finale, when she shoots the antagonist and transforms him into a beast.



Figure 1: William-Adolphe Bouguereau, *The Abduction of Psyche* (ca. 1895), Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

paintings and movies and for reading and listening to such tales and myths, insofar as we wish to grasp their essence. We need to believe, at least for a moment, that a rose can cause a family drama or that all the world's evils originate from the intriguing box deposited by Mercury in Epimetheus' house. Only then can we enter the realm of primordial stories and learn our lessons. And owing to the particular reaction triggered by childlike innocence, these lessons take an unexpected turn, as we can see in the sceptical remark of Eustace's little cousin. In fact, it turns out that this kind of naivety is not at all contradictory vis-à-vis the protagonists' agency or the young audience's inquisitiveness. On the contrary, it inspires these features as if they were its precious side effects, while the lack of experience along with the feeling of joy at discovering the world with humility when facing its wonders arouses curiosity and leads to wisdom, even though there are some complications along the way.

Indeed, Psyche ruined her happiness while discovering her husband's identity; Belle boldly entered the forbidden room where the Beast kept the magic rose and nearly crushed the delicate flower; Pandora satisfied her curiosity, but in consequence she released a host of evils to torment humankind. With such protagonists, ones we typically do indeed meet in childhood, we learn to doubt – not the fantastic elements of the given story (these we believe, as per Cocteau's request), but our judgements of events, of the motivations of the heroes and heroines, and of our imaginary choices, had we been in their shoes. Thus, the myths and fairy tales help us achieve ever more agency in the coming-of-age process, and this is essential for us both to become able to make our own decisions in our own stories and to strive with hope for the (im)possible happy ending.

Sometimes these lessons need to be repeated, especially when disaster strikes, shattering our childhood ideals. This may explain why the visionary French director chose such an unexpected source – “the tale as old as time” of Beauty and the Beast – as the theme for his movie shortly after World War Two had utterly destroyed the dream of creating the Century of the Child and bringing the Golden Age back to Earth.⁶ Cocteau understood the artist's mission – the effort to rekindle this dream for the future of humankind.

⁶ In fact, the idealized concept of the Century of the Child by Ellen Key (ed. pr. in Swedish 1900) was shattered already by World War One; see Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Klassiker der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Ein internationales Lexikon*, vol. A–K, Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 1999, ix; Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, *Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Eine Einführung*, Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2012; Katarzyna Marciniak, “What Is a Classic... for Children and Young Adults?”, in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature*

After all, the myths and fairy tales we come to know with a sort of naive open-mindedness teach us to channel curiosity into the trust we consciously bestow upon someone. Psyche's terrible deed triggered her maturation and brought her to wise interactions with other creatures and, in the (happy) ending, to a full reunion with Eros on Mount Olympus. Belle violated the Beast's ban on moving around the castle, but this was how she learnt to notice what was invisible to the eye (quite literally, too, the enchanted servants included) and how she came to know the curse, which she later lifted owing to her courageous and independent actions. Pandora... well, she sentenced humankind to eternal suffering, but she also brought Hope into the world.

Pandora, indeed, transformed her original, vain, and empty naivety into the naivety as meant by Cocteau – wise, humble, and leading to trust. In spite of her very worst experiences and after many doubts, she took the decision to place confidence in the voice that promised not to be “those naughty creatures that have stings in their tails”. However, as if by an ironic twist of Fate, this time it was extremely difficult to lift the lid – it suddenly became very heavy and the girl needed Epimetheus' help. Only together, jointly did they succeed, whereupon they saw a “beautiful creature” (108), as Pandora exclaimed in awe. She was a sunny and smiling little fairy-like personage with “rainbow wings, throwing a light wherever she went” (107). Her gentle touch healed the inflamed wounds left by the evils on the children's bodies and “immediately the anguish of it was gone” (107). Hope – having presented herself with this name – explained that she had been “packed into the box to make amends to the human race for that swarm of ugly Troubles”, and then she made the following promise to Pandora and Epimetheus: “Never fear! We shall do pretty well in spite of them all” (108).

This promise is also conveyed both to Eustace's audience and to the little readers of Hawthorne's story, thereby further strengthening the agency of the children, who are encouraged to change the world for the better with Hope's help. And she is a very special helper, for she gives her cures and blessings to all in need (*pour nous porter chance à tous*), as if the Golden Age were still

for Children and Young Adults, “Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity” 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016, 6. However, the dream to revive it is still strong, with many great initiatives, like the establishment of the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY) in 1953 that within its first efforts promoted the pacifistic *Ferdinand the Bull* (1938) by Munro Leaf and Robert Lawson; see Katarzyna Marciniak, “*Et in Arcadia Ferdinand*: The Mythical Victory of an Extraordinary Bull”, in Jan Stanisław Ciechanowski and Cristina González Caizán, eds., *Spain-India-Russia: Centres, Borderlands, and Peripheries of Civilisations. Anniversary Book Dedicated to Professor Jan Kieniewicz on His 80th Birthday*, Warsaw: Faculty of “Artes Liberales” of the University of Warsaw and Wydawnictwo Naukowe Sub Lupa, 2018, 247–262.

on Earth. That is why, in case the evils manage to make Hope disappear from our horizon in certain circumstances, it is so crucial to travel back to the realm of childhood, via fairy tales and myths, to lift the lid and find her again.

A Sacred Word

In his version of the myth of Hope as a healer, Hawthorne overcomes the famous Hesiodic *crux*. In *Erga* the “beautiful creature” we know from “The Paradise of Children” is kept in the box (jar) by the will of Zeus, whose epithet νεφεληγερέτα (*nephelēgeréta*; cloud gatherer) brings to mind the storm and the dark cloud that seemed to have buried the sun alive, as described by the American writer. However, then the similarities are no more:

μόνη δ' αὐτόθι Ἑλπίς ἐν ἀρρήκτοισι δόμοισιν
ἔνδον ἔμιμνε πίθου ὑπὸ χεῖλεσιν, οὐδὲ θύραζε
ἔξέπτη: πρόσθεν γὰρ ἐπέλλαβε πῶμα πίθιοιο
αἰγιόχου βουλῆσι Διὸς νεφεληγερέταο.

(Hes., *Op.* 96–99)

Only Hope remained there in an unbreakable home within under the rim of the great jar, and did not fly out at the door; for ere that, the lid of the jar stopped her, by the will of Aegis-holding Zeus who gathers the clouds.⁷

The decision of Zeus and the function of Hope in this famous didactic epic leave room for discussions: did the king of the gods wish to preserve Hope for people and place her under their control?⁸ Or, on the contrary – was his intention

⁷ Trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White in Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press and William Heinemann, 1914, via Perseus Project. For a discussion on this issue, see Willem Jacob Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod: Works and Days*, vv. 1–382, Leiden: Brill, 1985, 66–71.

⁸ Verdenius calls Hope “the natural companion of man” (66). See also *ibidem*, 67: Verdenius refers to Babrius 58, where the jar contains only the good things: Ζεὺς ἐν πίθῳ τὰ χρηστὰ πάντα συλλέξας / ἔθηκεν αὐτὸν πωμάσας παρ' ἀνθρώπων. / ὁ δ' ἀκρατὴς ἄνθρωπος εἰδέναι σπεύδων / τί ποτ' ἦν ἐν αὐτῷ, καὶ τὸ πῶμα κινήσας, / διηκ' ἀπελθεῖν αὐτὰ πρὸς θεῶν οἴκους, / κάκει πέτεσθαι τῆς τε γῆς ἄνω φεύγειν. / μόνη δ' ἔμεινεν ἑλπίς, ἣν κατειλήφει / τεθὲν τὸ πῶμα, τοιγὰρ ἑλπίς ἀνθρώποις / μόνη σύνεστι, τῶν πεφευγόντων ἡμᾶς / ἀγαθῶν ἕκαστον ἐγγυωμένη δώσειν (Zeus gathered all the useful things together in a jar and put a lid on it. He then left the jar in human hands. But man had no self-control and he wanted to know what was in that jar, so he pushed the lid aside, letting those things go back to the abode of the gods. So all the good things flew away, soaring high above the earth, and Hope was the only thing left. When the lid was put back on the jar, Hope was kept

to hide her from humans? If to hide, then why? To punish them more harshly or to protect them from the worst?⁹ And if the latter cause, then what was that “worst” scenario?

Hope in Greek culture has an ambiguous meaning. That is why scholars usually leave it (her) untranslated in their analyses, as Ἐλπίς / *Elpis*. The most neutral versions, ‘expectation’ or ‘anticipation’, cover both denotations: “anticipation of bad as well as of good things”, to quote Glenn W. Most.¹⁰ The first denotation makes us realize why Zeus’s decision to keep Hope imprisoned in the jar might be interpreted as, in fact, an act of mercy: a life spent awaiting only terrible events would be torture. The second denotation is the one that corresponds best to our contemporary understanding of Hope in English as – let us quote Wikipedia for the most popular definition – “an optimistic state of mind that is based on an expectation of positive outcomes with respect to events and circumstances in one’s life or the world at large”.¹¹ What is interesting, this positive definition, attested by English etymological dictionaries as the principal meaning of “hope” (‘expectation of good’),¹² is found also in the Slavic languages (for example, *nadzieja* in Polish), despite the different roots of this noun. For instance, Wiesław Boryś’s *Słownik etymologiczny języka polskiego* [Etymological Dictionary of Polish]¹³ defines Hope as “oczekiwanie spełnienia czegoś pożądanego” (anticipating the fulfilment of something desirable). However, even such a positive meaning can lead to negative consequences: Hesiod warns his public against *κενεὴν ἐπὶ ἐλπίδα μίμνων* (*Op.* 498) – “the vain (empty) hope” that makes people lazy.¹⁴

inside. That is why Hope alone is still found among the people, promising that she will bestow on each of us the good things that have gone away; trans. Laura Gibbs, in *Aesop’s Fables*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). Of course in this version there is no blame of Pandora-the-woman. For the most recent retelling of the Pandora motif, see Natalie Haynes (who rejects the Erasmian “box” already in the title), *Pandora’s Jar: Women in the Greek Myths*, London: Picador, 2020.

⁹ Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod*, 66–71.

¹⁰ Glenn W. Most’s commentary in Hesiod, *Theogony; Works and Days; Testimonia*, ed. and trans. Glenn W. Most, Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 2006, 95, n. 7. See also the entry “Pandora’s Box” on Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pandora%27s_box-#cite_note-23 (accessed 20 December 2020); Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod*, 69–70. See also Martin L. West’s commentary in his edition of Hesiod, *Theogony*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978, 169; Noriko Yasumura, *Challenges to the Power of Zeus in Early Greek Poetry*, London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2011, 186.

¹¹ The entry “Pandora’s Box” (accessed 20 December 2020).

¹² See, e.g., William W. Smith, *A Condensed Etymology of the English Language for Common Schools*, New York, NY, and Chicago, IL: A.S. Barnes & Company, [1870], 69.

¹³ Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2005, 347.

¹⁴ See Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod*, 66.

We could conclude that Hesiod is a rather pessimistic expert on Hope, if not for a single detail that changes everything. Despite all his dark thoughts, he wrote *The Works and Days* as a poignant appeal to his brother, with whom he wished to be reconciled. The choice of this kind of narrative framework for his message is the best testimony to the "hopeful side" of Hesiod's personality and his faith that positive change is possible – you only need to channel your agency in the right way, with humility and trust. Interestingly, the concept of agency is also a crucial component of Hope's etymology both in Greek and Latin: the origin of *elpis* is associated with the root meaning 'to want', 'to choose',¹⁵ while the Latin noun *spes* has among its cognates such verbs as 'to be capable', 'to succeed', and 'to prosper'.¹⁶

Great expectations, to evoke the title of Charles Dickens's famous novel (1860–1861) having Hope and Love as the engines of the young protagonist's life,¹⁷ require great efforts – a true quest *per aspera* (nota bene, an idiom linked by some scholars with the Hope semantic field: *ab-spe*¹⁸). Thus, Hope grows to the rank of an ally in our struggles with the evils set free by Pandora¹⁹ and is added by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe to the four sacred words (ἱεροὶ λόγοι; *hieroi logoi*) symbolizing the divinities who are supposed to accompany us from childhood: Daimon, Tyche, Eros, and Ananke.²⁰ The importance of Hope is also acknowledged in the Christian religion – it is one of the three theological virtues, next to Faith and Love. What is interesting, the connection between Hope and Faith is traceable already in Archaic Greek poetry. Douglas Cairns, in his fundamental study of Greek metaphors, shows this in a fragment by Semonides

¹⁵ M. Gnanavaram, "Preaching as a Language of Hope: An Indian Perspective", in Cas J.A. Vos, L. Lind Hogan, and Johan H. Cilliers, eds., *Preaching as a Language of Hope*, Pretoria: Protea Book House, 2007, 225.

¹⁶ Michiel Arnaud Cor de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary of Latin and the Other Italic Languages*, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2008, 580.

¹⁷ See Monika Peplińska, "Sposoby konceptualizacji nadziei w wypowiedziach młodzieży licealnej" [Methods of Conceptualizing the Term Hope in High School Students' Utterances], *Studia Językoznawcze* [Linguistic Studies] 4 (2005): *Synchroniczne i diachroniczne aspekty badań polszczyzny* [Synchronic and Diachronic Aspects of Research into the Polish Language], 258. The scholar observes that young people are more creative in their use of the term of "hope", far beyond its dictionary definitions.

¹⁸ See de Vaan, *Etymological Dictionary*, 58, 580; Sophia Papaioannou, "'A Historian Utterly Without Hope': Literary Artistry and Narratives of Decline in Tacitus' *Historiae* I", in George Kazantzidis and Dimos Spatharas, eds., *Hope in Ancient Literature, History and Art: Ancient Emotions I*, "Trends in Classics – Supplementary Volumes" 63, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2018, 214.

¹⁹ Papaioannou, *ibidem*, notices that *spes*-related words were used by Tacitus in Book 1 of his *Histories* twenty-six times.

²⁰ Davide Stimilli, *The Face of Immortality: Physiognomy and Criticism*, New York, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005, 105.

of Amorgos: ἔλπις δὲ πάντας κάπιπειθείη τρέφει / ἄπρηκτον ὄρμαίνοντας (1.6–7 West) – “Elpis and credulity nourish all as they strive for the impossible”.²¹ Hawthorne’s title of his tale, “The Paradise of Children”, may create a link between Christian tradition and the Graeco-Roman mythology with the aim of strengthening the positive interpretation of Hope (not so obvious for the Greeks) as a vital source of power for humans during the hardships of life. The full understanding of this message comes in adulthood, when we all become aware that striving for the impossible is an intrinsic part of human fate and that happy endings are an exception rather than something guaranteed.

In fact, childhood, even when not idealized to such a degree as in Hawthorne’s writing, is probably the period of our highest hopes, even in grim circumstances. And if one emotion should be indicated as characteristic of this time, hope would be the obvious choice (nota bene, in Polish “być przy nadziei”, literally ‘to be with hope’, means ‘to expect a child’).

Hope together with curiosity opens us up to the world. This process does bear some risks, as we have seen in the examples of Pandora, Psyche, and Belle, thus all the more so is Hope needed to make us ready to trust over and over again – to allow ourselves to be persuaded to lift the lid once more and set free the beautiful creature who can heal wounds and who dispels the darkness with her shining wings. No further explanation is necessary as to why we dared turn exactly to Hope as our patron for the opening phase of an enormous new endeavour within the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme.

Our Mythical Hope

The programme *Our Mythical Childhood* was born in 2011, indeed from a childhood dream I shared one day with Jerzy Axer and Elżbieta Olechowska at our Alma Mater – the University of Warsaw. We were at that moment in the middle of intense transformations: the Institute for Interdisciplinary Studies “Artes Liberales”, that arose from the Centre for Studies on the Classical Tradition (OBTA), was evolving into the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, with OBTA becoming one of its main units.²²

²¹ Douglas Cairns, “Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry”, in Ruth R. Caston and Robert A. Kaster, eds., *Hope, Joy, and Affection in the Classical World*, New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016, 32.

²² On these processes, see Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Antiquity and We*, Warsaw: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2013, also available online (http://al.uw.edu.pl/pliki/akt/Antiquity_and_We_eBook.pdf).

Constant transformation in response to ever new societal needs is also a characteristic feature of the reception of Classical Antiquity. The Classics, usually perceived as a petrified legacy of the past, indeed do build a steady foundation with their repository of cultural heritage, but at the same time the (re)interpretations of this heritage reveal ever novel meanings and offer an inexhaustible source of inspiration for the next generations all over the globe. As a result, for ages we have been communicating by using references to the ancient code – in art, science, politics, and at home, even if today we are often unaware of this phenomenon.

Thus, with our anchors forged in ancient times, we set off on a new journey, with a fantastic team of scholars from around the world, ones who answered our call for adventure: all of them filled with a childlike joy over research discoveries; all full of Hope and believing in the community spirit, citizen science, and the importance of the Classics for the present times.

In our first steps as toddlers on board, we focused on preliminary research into the reception of Classical Antiquity in children's literature in a comparative approach – namely, by taking into consideration the diverging experiences of Europe's Western countries and those once behind the Iron Curtain. It quickly turned out that we were sailing strange new seas, where no Google search had gone before. Indeed, already then the perspectives of other continents – Africa, Australia, and Asia – manifested themselves very clearly, showing the potential for the next stages of our research. In this "infancy" period, we were honoured to enjoy support from the Loeb Classical Library Foundation for the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Children's Literature between East and West* (2012–2013) and from the "Artes Liberales Institute" Foundation that has never ceased to assist us, especially in the organization of the societal ventures linked to the programme.²³

We made our next steps with help from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives. At that stage we took into consideration not only literature, but also culture for young people writ large, with its audiovisual genres, and we expanded the regional approach, owing to the amazing scholars joining our crew from the farthest-flung parts of the globe. We were also inspired by the evolving human–animal studies. Summing up all this, the choice of a theme came to us in a natural way: *Chasing Mythical Beasts... The Reception of Creatures from Graeco-Roman Mythology in Children's*

²³ For the results of this stage, see Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Literature for Children and Young Adults*, "Metaforms: Studies in the Reception of Classical Antiquity" 8, Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 2016.

and Young Adults' Culture as a Transformation Marker (2014–2017).²⁴ This was also when we together discovered Jim Henson's favourite song, "If Just One Person Believes in You",²⁵ that has become a kind of anthem for us, with the component of Hope strongly present in its lyrics, as there is no Hope without Faith in each other (Pandora, too, had to trust the creature hidden in the box). This is the idea we all share in our collaboration.

As joyful five-year-olds, in 2016 we embarked on a wonderful research journey with the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, supported by the European Research Council (ERC) within the framework of an ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2022), implemented at the University of Warsaw (Host Institution) and at Bar-Ilan University in Israel, the University of New England in Australia, the University of Roehampton in the United Kingdom, and the University of Yaoundé 1 in Cameroon, together with experts from all around the world.

In this project, we address a choice of demanding challenges, such as: the question of the role of the Classics in education – a task that resulted in a comparative study conceptualized and led by Lisa Maurice;²⁶ the multifarious aspects of the relationship between classical mythology and children's literature in regard to the coming-of-age process – an examination carried out by Elizabeth Hale in collaboration with Miriam Riverlea;²⁷ the intercultural dialogue with Greek and Roman mythology in the context of the preservation of native myths from Africa – a mission undertaken by Daniel A. Nkemele, Divine Che Neba, and Eleanor Anneh Dasi; the potential of mythotherapy in work with autistic children – pioneering research by Susan Deacy;²⁸ the innovative approach to artefacts

²⁴ See the project's website: <http://mythicalbeasts.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/> (accessed 15 July 2021). For the results of this stage, see Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Chasing Mythical Beasts: The Reception of Ancient Monsters in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*, "Studien zur europäischen Kinder- und Jugendliteratur / Studies in European Children's and Young Adult Literature" 8, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2020.

²⁵ See Laser Time, "Jim Henson Memorial Service – One Person" (May 1990), YouTube, 22 September 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yeEzQ4qwkgo> (accessed 15 July 2021).

²⁶ See Lisa Maurice, ed., *Our Mythical Education: The Reception of Classical Myth Worldwide in Formal Education, 1900–2020*, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2021, also available online (<https://www.wuw.pl/product-eng-14887-Our-Mythical-Education-The-Reception-of-Classical-Myth-Worldwide-in-Formal-Education-1900-2020-PDF.html>).

²⁷ Elizabeth Hale and Miriam Riverlea, *Classical Mythology and Children's Literature... An Alphabetical Odyssey*, ill. Steve K. Simons, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, forthcoming.

²⁸ Susan Deacy, *What Would Hercules Do? Lessons for Autistic Children Using Classical Myth*, ill. Steve K. Simons, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, forthcoming.

via the animations of Greek vases by Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons, etc.²⁹ Moreover, together with eminent experts – their affiliations ranging from the United States, through many parts of Europe, to New Zealand³⁰ – we explore the reception of the Classics in children's and young adults' culture as a space where the development of human identity takes place, and as a marker of the social, political, and cultural transformations underway in global and regional settings. In the course of this, we also try to make use of the global appeal of the ancient tradition along with the natural connection that the educated public feels towards the theme of childhood, to encourage novel formats for citizen science. With *Our Mythical Hope* on the banner we truly hope to contribute to establishing a new holistic model for work in the humanities on the frontiers of research, education, and culture, beyond the borders of generations and countries – thus consolidating Our Mythical Community.

At the same time, our choice revealed the necessity to face certain research dilemmas that are an intrinsic part of the theme, even if the contemporary denotations of the "hopeful vocabulary" do not contain much of the ambiguity typical of the Greek Elpis. Today, the main questions regard the reliability of the sources of Hope. The first sources available to most of us from the earliest stage of life are the relationships with our near and dear that contribute to the memories of wonderful moments in the past. When the relationships are no more, these memories become the next source of Hope we can draw from in the hour of need, in the future, while we strive for the impossible. However, even if we leave aside the utopian view of childhood according to (*inter alia*) Hawthorne as a period uncontaminated by evil, we have to admit that it is often a time of both the most beautiful and the most terrible experiences – ones that are formative and provide or in fact deprive us of a supply of Hope for the years to come. Among such experiences we might indicate developing relationships with peers; learning to respect others and to love within and outside the family; dealing with loss and violence, bullying, and rejection; fighting against addiction; achieving agency and resilience; undergoing crisis in regard to identity-building, religious and other values; having to make crucial choices; discovering

²⁹ See "Animating the Ancient World", *Our Mythical Childhood...* [Project's website], <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/animating-the-ancient-world> (accessed 15 July 2021).

³⁰ In these sections I also make use of my reflections published in the *Our Mythical Hope* conference booklet; see Katarzyna Marciniak et al., *Our Mythical Hope in Children's and Young Adults' Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life: Conference Booklet*, Faculty of "Artes Liberales", University of Warsaw, 2017, http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/files/OMH_Conference_Booklet_9.5.2017.pdf (accessed 15 July 2021).

the limits of freedom under external forces and from one's own volition, etc. Positive feedback does not always flow from these experiences, especially if the burden is too heavy to bear at the given stage of our life or in the given circumstances, or if there is no wise and caring tutor nearby. Worse even: Hope can be crushed then and the young person left devastated...

But speaking of the ancient foundations: what about a source of Hope (nearly) as old as humankind and also available from the earliest childhood – that is: the contact with art through the works of culture?³¹ This source is as boundless as the artists' imagination, but we can try to examine at least part of it – via the methods of reception studies enriched with tools borrowed from other disciplines, and with maintaining due humility and focusing on the stream rooted in the Graeco-Roman heritage. Classical Antiquity is a particularly important field in terms of "Hope studies" not only because of the myth of Pandora and the birth of "the beautiful creature" who promised to help us in spite of all. For centuries, the ancient tradition, and classical mythology in particular, has been a common reference point for whole hosts of creators of culture, across many parts of the world, and with the new media and globalization only increasing its impact. Thus, in our research at this stage, we have decided to study how the authors of literary and audiovisual texts for youth make use of the ancient myths to support their young protagonists (and readers or viewers) in crucial moments of their existence, on their road into adulthood, and in those dark hours when it seems that life is about to shatter and fade away. However, if Hope is summoned in time, the crisis can be overcome and the protagonist grows stronger, with a powerful uplifting message for the public.

But again, is this really so? Are the Classics, or even more broadly – is human culture of any help in the hour of need? Our doubts were reflected in the title of the conference, at which we presented the first results of our research: *Our Mythical Hope in Children's and Young Adults' Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life*; the parentheses as a signal that we wished to refrain ourselves from easy judgements. And yet the answer came unexpectedly, in February 2020, with the coronavirus pandemic that disrupted our mundane rhythm in nearly all parts of the world and made people, both younger and older, face dilemmas and challenges they would have probably never expected to experience.

³¹ The role of nature is also crucial in this context. We study it in the third phase of the ERC project; see "Our Mythical Nature: The Classics and Environmental Issues in Children's and Young Adults' Culture", *Our Mythical Childhood...*, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-nature> (accessed 15 October 2021).

This situation raised up everyday heroes and heroines for all to see: medical personnel on the frontline, persons working in commerce, staffing courier companies, maintaining cities' infrastructure, etc.

When there are lives to save, everything else recedes into the background. The professional competences of certain groups of society are crucial to help its most fragile members. In the culminating moments of the pandemic's waves, this absolute focus on saving lives seems widely perceptible. The coronavirus, which is assumed to be the most dangerous to older people and those with coexisting diseases, exposes our hierarchy of values like no other experience known in recent times. The solidarity felt with those who are the weakest is poignant testimony to what is best in humans.

Hope is a common theme in such circumstances. The pandemic increased fears shared by children and young adults, like uncertainty as to what will happen tomorrow, in terms of both health and economy, and the feeling of helplessness enhanced by social distancing – a necessary condition, yet one so contradictory to our need for interactions. And here another important testimony to the best in humans manifested itself: special interactions did take place – of course in a form adjusted to the situation. Thus, many communities grew stronger owing to the hosts of volunteers going *per aspera* to assist those in need. This amazing solidarity (may it last also in the aftermath of the lockdowns!) was both an expression of Hope in the present and a source of Hope for the future.

Having set these priorities, we can focus on the "second row". In these grim times, the salvific power of culture is felt intensely, even though many artists experience great financial difficulties and their ability to act is limited. However, the cultural depository has much to offer and people all over the world look for entertainment and solace in works of literature, film, music, etc. Such immersion ensures temporary escape from problems and permits the reservoir of Hope to be restored through the cathartic emotions triggered by art. The Classics and the works inspired by Classical Antiquity as a result of the reception process are in this corpus, too.³²

³² In these circumstances, more educational materials would be useful. To this challenge we are trying to respond through the initiative *Find the Force!* (<http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/find-the-force>; see Fig. 2) – activities we prepare for use both at school and home, for regular lessons and as a family pastime. For now we have English, Italian, Belarusian, and Polish language versions, expanded on a voluntary basis and linked to our collaboration with students. I wish to invite all to contribute.



Figure 2: The poster of the *Find the Force!* initiative (2020). Artwork by Zbigniew Karaszewski.

The immersion in culture may also lead to artistic practices – they come the easiest to children who have not yet lost faith in the power of their creations. Nowadays, the young all around the globe have felt the need to express their fears and hopes by choosing the rainbow as the symbol of their message. Greek mythology features, of course, the rainbow goddess Iris (quite menacing sometimes³³), however, here the choice seems to have been influenced by the experience of children’s literature that has preserved the image of Hope as depicted with words by Hawthorne: the beautiful creature with “rainbow wings, throwing a light wherever she went” (107).

³³ See “Iris – the Rainbow Goddess”, *Our Mythical Childhood...*, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/iris> (accessed 15 July 2021), where Iris is the protagonist of Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons’s animation, which they present also accompanied by educational materials within the *Find the Force!* initiative. The users, young and old, share with us their artworks based on these materials (see Figs. 3 and 4), and we publish them on the webpage “Our Mythical Creations”, *Our Mythical Childhood...*, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-creations> (accessed 15 July 2021).

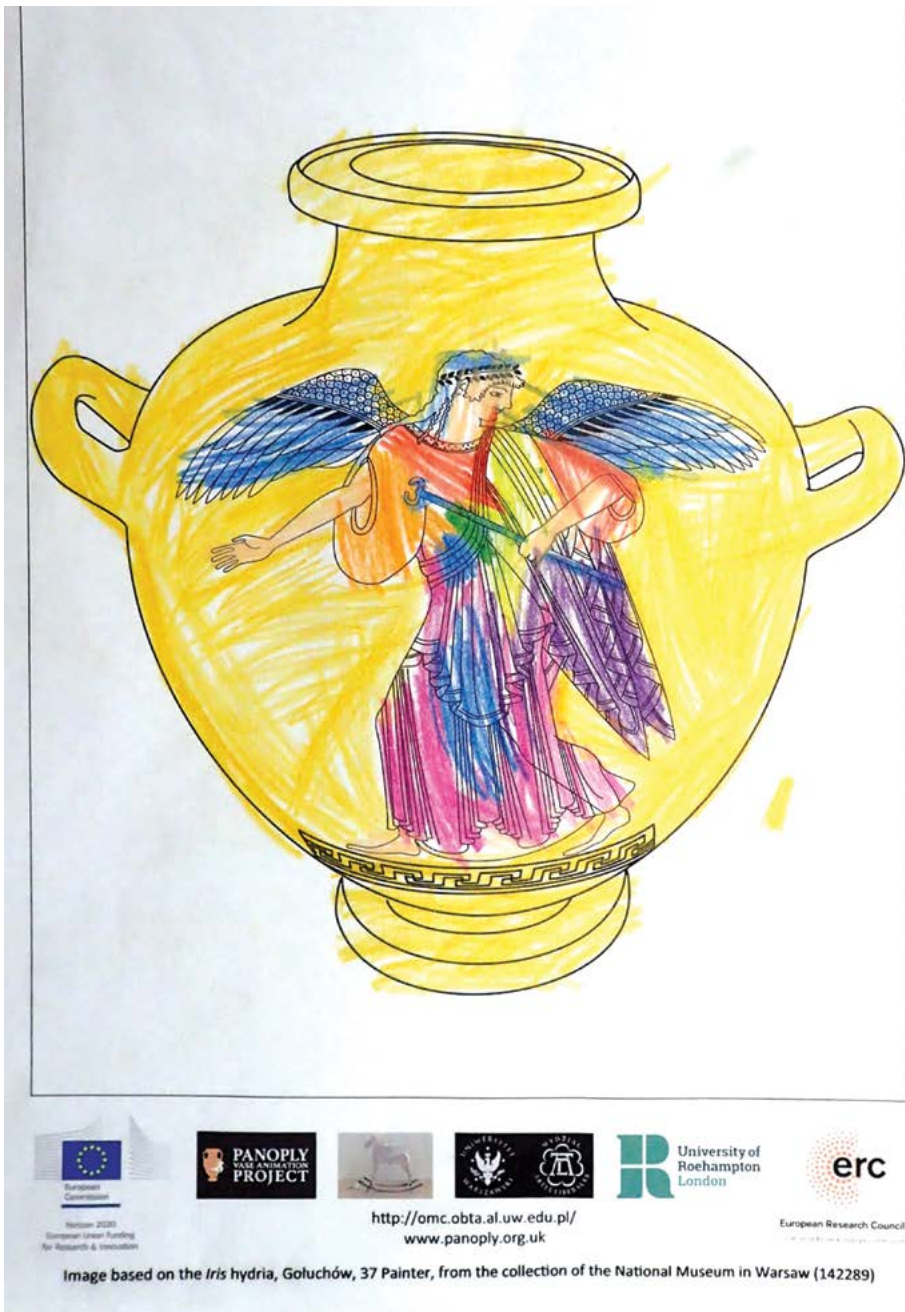


Figure 3: Example of artworks created by users of the educational materials prepared within the *Our Mythical Childhood* project: *Iris the Rainbow Goddess* by Oktawia, age 5, from Poland (2020). For more, see “Our Mythical Creations”, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-creations> (accessed 15 July 2021).



Figure 4: Example of artworks created by users of the educational materials prepared within the *Our Mythical Childhood* project: *Iris the Rainbow Goddess* by Temperance, age 7, from Ireland (2020). For more, see “Our Mythical Creations”, <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-creations> (accessed 15 July 2021).

When the pandemic broke out, our chapters had already been completed; nonetheless, the aggravating situation impacted the tone of the volume, our new view on the reception of the Classics, and our awareness of the importance to continue our studies on Hope and the healing function of culture in the future. At the same time, our reservations in regard to the efficacy of such a cure, as we expressed them via the parentheses in the title of the conference of May 2017, were replaced by the strong conviction, tested “in the field” by various experts,³⁴ that the realm of the Classics³⁵ indeed can serve as a healing place

³⁴ For example, on Natalie Haynes’s video series *Ovid Not Covid* see Rachel Cunliffe, “Natalie Haynes on How Classics Can Help Us Survive Lockdown”, *New Statesman*, 21 January 2021, <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2021/01/natalie-haynes-how-classics-can-help-us-survive-lockdown> (accessed 28 June 2021).

³⁵ This therapeutic potential is present in the heritage of many cultures – we keep to the Classics as our research field, however, we are always open to multifarious experiences, as some of the chapters in this volume will also demonstrate.

for the soul – ψυχῆς ἰατρεῖον (*psychēs iatreion*) – as the inscription in ancient libraries read.³⁶ Hence the final title of the volume, to reflect this change: *Our Mythical Hope: The Ancient Myths as Medicine for the Hardships of Life in Children's and Young Adults' Culture*. As will be shown in the subsequent chapters, this medicine is sometimes sweet and sometimes bitter, and its healing power is limited, but if we take it regularly, we will feel its effects.

The Daughter of the Night

While Hope, according to children (and Hawthorne), is a fairy-like personage on rainbow wings, adults may also meet her much different incarnation, as captured – for instance – by George Frederic Watts, who created his famous painting (1886; see Fig. 5) during a time when he was affected by both a global crisis – the Long Depression of the 1870s – and a personal tragedy – his granddaughter Isabel died from an illness.³⁷

In this symbolist painting, Hope (in classical robes that are supposed to imitate the Elgin Marbles³⁸) sits on a globe – possibly Earth – and she has bandages on her eyes and head. Obviously, she must have been wounded. She seems gravely afflicted, as she is bent in a strange, semi-fetal position that art critics link to Michelangelo's *Night* (1526–1531; see Fig. 6).³⁹

And indeed, there is darkness in the background of the painting. We also see heaven in suffocated colours and a cloud that is about to engulf the figure of Hope, yet it cannot. For even if a grim and threatening gloom spills over the painting, there is no doubt that its centre is dominated by Hope, with her shining face, despite the hidden injuries, and there is a bright star over her head. She cannot see it, of course, but she appears to feel the light coming and she does not surrender to despair. Instead, she plays a damaged lyre.

³⁶ See, e.g., Robert Glatter, "Theater of War: Using Greek Tragedy to Help Frontline Medical Workers Cope during Covid-19", *Forbes*, 4 August 2020, https://www.forbes.com/sites/robertglatter/2020/08/04/theater-of-war-using-greek-tragedy-to-help-frontline-medical-workers-cope-during-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR27vf9znsWBZ8aY_oGM_v-_iHV6RJGaiA8AQIC__R-vYLWDTjGR0tltSmo (accessed 15 July 2021).

³⁷ Isabel's mother, Blanche, was Watts's adopted daughter; see Mark Bills and Barbara Bryant, *G.F. Watts: Victorian Visionary. Highlights from the Watts Gallery Collection*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008, 220. For an original approach to the theme of hope, see also the painting *Hope in the Prison of Despair* (1887) by Evelyn de Morgan.

³⁸ See Nicholas Tromans, *Hope: The Life and Times of a Victorian Icon*, Compton: Watts Gallery, 2011.

³⁹ See Malcolm Warner, Anne Helmreich, and Charles Brock, *The Victorians: British Painting 1837–1901*, Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1996, 194.



Figure 5: George Frederic Watts, *Hope* (1886), Tate, London, photograph © by Tate, <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/watts-hope-n01640> (accessed 1 July 2021), Creative Commons Licence Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported.



Figure 6: Michelangelo, *Night* (1526–1531), sculpture from the New Sacristy, Basilica di San Lorenzo, Florence. Fragment of a photograph by Rabe! (2014), Wikimedia Commons.

Hope has only one string at her disposal, but she listens intently to the sound produced. Art therapy also in her case? Or maybe in this way she is recreating the music of the spheres and thereby is bringing the universe back to its hopeful order, in Greek – κόσμος (*kósmos*), so that we can repeat after Plato (and Louis Armstrong), “what a beautiful [καλός; *kalós*] world” (see *Timaeus* 29a).⁴⁰

Watts had either an overall very good knowledge of the reception of classical mythology or true artistic intuition – or both. For there is a link between the Greek Elpis (Roman Spes) and the darkness: Hope, a goddess of unknown parentage, sometimes is considered to be none other than a daughter of Nyx (Nox), as if to challenge the darkness and despair associated with the night.

⁴⁰ On the musical motifs in painting, see the interesting study by Charlotte Purkis, “Listening for the Sublime: Aural-Visual Improvisations in Nineteenth-Century Musical Art”, *Tate Papers* 14 (Autumn 2010), <https://www.tate.org.uk/research/publications/tate-papers/14/listening-for-the-sublime-aural-visual-improvisations-in-nineteenth-century-musical-art> (accessed 15 July 2021).

Interestingly enough, this relationship is also on display in the fairy-tale opera *Turandot* by Giacomo Puccini. Hope is the protagonist of the first enigma posed by the Princess to the candidates for her hand:

Nella cupa notte
vola un fantasma iridescente.
Sale e spiega l'ale
sulla nera infinita umanità.
Tutto il mondo l'invoca
e tutto il mondo l'implora.
Ma il fantasma sparisce con l'aurora
per rinascere nel cuore!
Ed ogni notte nasce
ed ogni giorno muore!

In the gloomy night
an iridescent phantom flies.
It spreads its wings and rises
over infinite, black humanity!
Everyone invokes it,
everyone implores it!
But the phantom disappears at dawn
to be reborn in the heart!
And every night it's born
and every day it dies!⁴¹

This portrayal of Hope is similar to Hawthorne's: a winged creature who dispels the darkness with her iridescent wings – a dear companion of the people. Indeed, brought to Earth by Pandora, Hope is the only deity that remained among us, while all the others, too terrified or disappointed with humans, had long left us for the secure asylum of Olympus, as Theognis writes in his elegy, pointing to the sunny brightness conveyed by this goddess to our lives:

Ἐλπίς ἐν ἀνθρώποισι μόνη θεὸς ἐσθλή ἔνεστιν,
ἄλλοι δ' Οὐλύμπων ἐκπρολιπόντες ἔβαν·
[...]

⁴¹ Trans. from The Metropolitan Opera, "Turandot's Riddles", in *The Met: HD Live in Schools 2015–16 Educator Guide*. Puccini, *Turandot*, 13, <https://www.metopera.org/globalassets/discover/education/educator-guides/turandot/turandot.15-16.guide.pdf> (accessed 15 July 2021). There also the Italian quote (39).

ἀλλ' ὄφρα τις ζῶει καὶ ὄρα φῶς ἡλείοιο,
εὐσεβέων περὶ θεοῦς Ἑλπίδα προσμενέτω
(1135–1144)

Elpis is the only good deity among human beings: the others have abandoned us and gone to Olympus. [...] But as long as a man lives and sees the light of the sun, let him be pious with regard to the gods and await Elpis.⁴²

Thus, it is not surprising that we have been clinging to “Sweet Hope”, as she is called by Pindar (Fr. 233, quoted in Pl., *Resp.* 330e), “while there is life”, to quote Cicero (*dum anima est, spes esse dicitur*, *Att.* 9.10.3). And not only in Antiquity, as references to those authors might suggest, but in all of human-kind’s epochs the world over, and even in galaxies far, far away – in all the acts of the Human Comedy across the ages. For life without Hope is impossible. Dante knew this. You abandon Hope and enter hell.

But what if Hope is not able to regenerate overnight, for the burdens of everyday tragedies are too heavy? What when we lose hope in Hope? Turandot, after Prince Calaf – against her expectations – solves her enigma correctly, cries in desperation: “La speranza che delude sempre!” (Hope which always deludes!) – thus we are back with Hesiod here. Indeed, even if much is in our hands, like in the case of Pandora, who gave Hope a chance and opened the lid for the second time, there are things beyond our power. And that is when the most crucial question arises.

Between July 1962 and March 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr., worked on his poignant sermon he entitled “Shattered Dreams”.⁴³ He dedicated it to “one of the most agonizing problems of human experience” – the fact that “[v]ery few, if any, of us are able to see all of our hopes fulfilled”. King’s approach stands out from that by other theoreticians focused on Hope due to his extraordinary broadness of thinking. Namely, he juxtaposes the greatest people – the

⁴² Trans. from Cairns, “Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry”, 27. There you will find also an in-depth interpretation of the passage. Moreover, see Verdenius, *A Commentary on Hesiod*, 67.

⁴³ Martin Luther King, Jr., “Draft of Chapter X, ‘Shattered Dreams’” (1 July 1962–31 March 1963?), in Clayborne Carson, Susan Carson, Susan Englander, Troy Jackson, and Gerald L. Smith, eds., *The Papers of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, vol. 6: *Advocate of the Social Gospel, September 1948–March 1963*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 2007, available online via The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute, Stanford University, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/draft-chapter-x-shattered-dreams> (all quotations are from this website, accessed 15 July 2021). It is worth adding that this sermon was vital also for Barack Obama.

founders of the world's culture – with each and every one of us in a way that takes us by surprise and thus necessitates a deeper reflection. "Each of us, like Schubert, begins composing a symphony that is never finished", states King, going on to evoke the Apostle Paul and his never completed journey to Spain, and Mahatma Gandhi and his then unfulfilled dream of peace in India. King also refers to Watts's portrayal of Hope, with her head "sadly bowed and her fingers [...] plucking one unbroken harp string". Then he asks: "Who has not had to face the agony of blasted hopes and shattered dreams?", and although this seems to be a rhetorical question, he does give an answer – one that sounds like the most depressing statement on the human condition ever: "Shattered dreams! Blasted hopes! This is life".

Or is it really? At this moment King voices the problem that probably takes shape in the minds of most of those listening to his sermon: "What does one do under such circumstances? This is a central question, for we must determine how to live in a world where our highest hopes are not fulfilled".

King ponders three main scenarios, all three sadly real – we may well have already encountered or even experienced them. First, the frustration arising from blasted hopes transforms into "bitterness and resentment of spirit. The persons who follow this path develop a hardness of attitude and a coldness of heart. They develop a bitter hatred for life itself. In fact, hate becomes the dominant force in their lives". This scenario, according to King, is the most terrible one, as it "poisons the soul and scars the personality" and above all harms "the person who harbours it". Second, disappointment over the failure of dreams leads people to introversion – they withdraw themselves from relationships with their near and dear and suffer in silence. Also here the pain affects all – the persons in crisis and their families and friends. Third and final, there is fatalism, in suffocated colours and with no star dispelling the darkness – only a sombre resignation, against which Hesiod had warned his brother, and whose traces may be found in the aforementioned elegy by Semonides:

ὦ παῖ, τέλος μὲν Ζεὺς ἔχει βαρύκτυπος
πάντων ὅσ' ἐστὶ καὶ τίθησ' ὄκη θέλει,
νοῦς δ' οὐκ ἐπ' ἀνθρώποισιν, ἀλλ' ἐπήμεροι
ἄδη βοτὰ ζοοῦσιν, οὐδὲν εἰδότες
ὄκως ἕκαστον ἐκτελευτήσει θεός.

(1.1–5 West)

My boy, Zeus the loud-thunderer holds the outcome of all that there is and arranges it as he wishes. There is no sense in human beings; rather they live from day to day like grazing beasts, knowing nothing of how the god will bring each thing to pass.⁴⁴

But this is the very same elegy that contains the message on "Elpis and credulity" that "nourish all as they strive for the impossible". It is amazing how close they were in their conclusions: the today little-known Greek poet from the seventh century BC and the African American non-violent Christian activist, murdered in 1968, whose legacy still inspires people in various parts of the world in the third millennium. King knew what "striving for the impossible" meant and, despite all the sufferings, he gave to his audience this simple counsel – a difficult one, yet the only valid one:

We must accept our unwanted and unfortunate circumstance and yet cling to a radiant hope. The answer lies in developing the capacity to accept the finite disappointment and yet cling to the infinite hope.

The Paradise of Children, even if not immune to evil, as already Pandora had found out, is a period when Hope is the strongest. With the coming-of-age and ever more frequent disillusionments, when childhood dreams are confronted and often crushed by adulthood's reality, there is a risk of losing Hope permanently, with all the terrible consequences enumerated by King. Of course, it must be extremely difficult to follow his counsel and cling to Hope in the midst of the most dire disappointments, but there is something that can help us in this respect.

Franz Schubert was not the only composer who did not finish his work. Neither did Puccini bring his *Turandot* to an end – he died from cancer, and the opera was completed by his disciple Franco Alfano. We do not know whether Puccini would be pleased with the happy ending, not quite typical for this genre. But maybe he would. After all, in his beautiful aria "Nessun dorma", written for Prince Calaf and taking place at night, under a starry sky, we can hear a string of Hope plucked that preannounces the ultimate triumph of Good: "le stelle che tremano / d'amore e di speranza!" – "the stars, that tremble / with love and with hope!" Needless to add that this aria, through a number of societal artistic initiatives, has offered an uplifting message to the people exhausted by the

⁴⁴ Trans. from Cairns, "Metaphors for Hope in Archaic and Classical Greek Poetry", 31–32. There you will find also an in-depth interpretation of the passage.

coronavirus pandemic.⁴⁵ “All’alba vincerò” – “I will win at dawn!”, Prince Calaf concludes. May these words prove prophetic also for our times.

But what does all this tell us about the help we can get to keep Hope intact, or to make her regenerate each night? Puccini never saw his work on stage and he never knew the incredible impact it had and still has on people all over the world. However, it is precisely this impact and Alfano’s continuation that testify to the existence of a Community – the same as the one evoked in King’s sermon through his references to Schubert, the Apostle Paul, Gandhi, Watts, and to each and every single person from his projected audience. The members of this Community – the greatest artists and their public – indeed do experience shattered dreams and blasted hopes, but where somebody’s mission ends, there another person can take it up and go on. Hope can be shared, and when shared, paradoxically, she grows stronger and she strengthens both the Community and its single members.

Puccini based his opera on a Persian fairy tale moved to a Chinese setting and this – along with King’s sermon, probably delivered in Atlanta, Georgia, and Semonides’ Ancient Greek elegy – is yet another testimony to the essential role of the cultural repository in building ties between people all around the globe, beyond time and space. Let the one among us who was never moved by a book or a movie scene, who never laughed with their friends during a comedy show, who never shed a tear at the sound of music, be the first to place Hope back into the jar.

The Classics are not the only stream of nourishing emotions, of course – each culture has its precious contribution here – but in fact they are of special importance in this context, as for millennia ancient culture has been offering a Community-building code of communication for a great part of the world. In particular, this is one of the functions of the ancient myths that since childhood have been guiding us like starry signposts (often quite literally, if we remember the names of the constellations) through the stormy night.

If Classical Antiquity can help us regain Hope through the tales we often remember from our reading, movies, or storytelling family “sessions” when we were small, and from the plethora of works nutritious to us in adulthood, let us use this medicine. For Hope is like a Classic *par excellence*, to recall the “classical”

⁴⁵ See, e.g., NowThis News, “Italian Opera Singer Serenades Quarantined Florence amidst Coronavirus Outbreak”, YouTube, 16 March 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhTjGS3QkYE>; see also Victor Mair, “Turandot and the Deep Indo-European Roots of ‘Daughter’”, *Language Log*, 16 March 2020, <https://languagelog.ldc.upenn.edu/nll/?p=46417>; also the Polish tenor Piotr Beczala registered this aria during the pandemic; see [Piotr Beczala] and Pentatone, “Vincerò! – Piotr Beczala”, YouTube, 7 May 2020, music video by Julia Wesely, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQ-e4bAtsz0> (all websites accessed 20 December 2020).

definition by T.S. Eliot.⁴⁶ Rooted in the past, sometimes even stuck in the darkest parts of the jar⁴⁷ or box in Pandora and Epimetheus' household, Hope comes to our aid in the hour of need and encourages us to make a step into the future, with a child's audacity, which is far beyond an adult's *hubris*. Owing to this, we get a chance to remain true to our ideas, to keep faith in our dreams, and, when the decisive moment comes, to choose not hatred but love, not darkness but light.

Overview of the Volume's Content

In children's and young adults' culture, Hope is a tiny but powerful creature on iridescent wings. Once we had set her free by together lifting the lid for our research, we were unable to control her flight. And this is good, because in this way we can better explore her nature. For Hope, *nota bene* like the ancient tradition as such, is on the move between mythical times and our age. She travels through various periods of human life, and thus unites generations. She is present in innumerable works of art (not only there, of course, but only in this field are we able to catch up with her for the sake of studies). We have chosen some examples – cultural texts from different genres and for various target audiences among youth, but we should remember that today, as in Ancient Greece and Rome, the younger and older publics often enjoy the same stories and some age divisions make no sense anymore. Our portrayal of Hope most certainly will not be completed, but at least we can try to capture and share her multicoloured brightness, with the hope that our endeavour shall be continued.

Again, we start "classically". In Part I of the volume, "Playing with the Past", we focus on one of the first childhood activities, still practised in our times: games and their unlimited supply of Hope, relaxation, and entertainment, but also precious lessons on the hardships of life. Véronique Dasen analyses a selection of scenes on Attic and southern Italian vases with images of maidens playing. Their seemingly innocent games, with references to Eros and Aphrodite, become a tool through which they learn, test, and push the limits of their agency in the prospect of marriage with all its hopes and challenges for a woman in Antiquity. Next, we get a chance to compare the ancient approach to games with the one developing in modern times: Rachel Bryant Davies takes us from

⁴⁶ See T.S. Eliot, *What Is a Classic? An Address Delivered before the Virgil Society on the 16th of October, 1944*, London: Faber & Faber, 1945. See also my introductory chapter "What Is a Classic... for Children and Young Adults?", 1–26.

⁴⁷ See Haynes, *Pandora's Jar*.

Homeric Troy, the cradle of the classical mythology, to nineteenth-century Britain, where modern children's culture was taking its first shapes. She traces the reception of the Trojan Horse as a vehicle for young people's amusement and education, in the context of the emerging consumerism that sometimes led even to a happy ending of the Troy story.

In Part II, "The Roots of Hope", we enter the twentieth century – the period for which many people had high hopes. As already mentioned, it was expected to be "the Century of the Child" – a kind of Golden Age restored after so many bloody conflicts.⁴⁸ The chapters in this section move between this dream and the hopes blasted by the failure of its implementation, with some glances also to our times. Katarzyna Jerzak explores the mythical chronotope of Oscar Wilde (*The House of Pomegranates*) and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (*The Little Prince*) to see it at work in the debut album of the contemporary audiovisual artist Woodkid, *The Golden Age* (2013). She demonstrates how mythical thinking encourages both the young and old to cope with suffering, loss, and death sometimes marking the passage from childhood into adulthood. Marguerite Johnson analyses the retellings of Greek myths in children's columns of the Australian newspapers during the Great War: the ancient tales, embedded in the modern context of global events, served as tools for moral and intellectual pedagogy, bordering on indoctrination, and were to provide young readers with hope in the moments difficult for the Australian Commonwealth. Jan Kieniewicz takes us to Central and Eastern Europe at the threshold of the twentieth century and offers a broader understanding of the notion of myth, namely, in reference to the Kresy – Poland's onetime eastern borderlands, incorporated into the USSR after World War Two. In this chapter, we gain the chance to expand our horizons in regard to the potential of mythology in studies which are not linked directly to the Classics and classical reception. The Kresy were treated as an Eden and mythologized in the metaphorical sense. The chapter touches the difficult problem of maintaining emotional balance by the youngest generation of this region in the circumstances of the traumatic loss of childhood as coupled with the destruction of the world they knew and hoped to enter as adults. Unexpectedly, a classic of children's literature came to the aid here, in the form of the concept of "Bandar-log", drawn from Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*. The families of the landed gentry and intelligentsia described in this way unruly children. Paradoxically, the right to vent their emotions taught the children to mature and face hardships with more hope than sometimes their parents were able

⁴⁸ See above, n. 6.

to muster. In the finale of this part, Simon J.G. Burton and Marilyn E. Burton analyse C.S. Lewis's use of myth to engage young and adult readers in the fundamental questions of life via the example of the novel he considered his most mature work – *Till We Have Faces: A Myth Retold*, based on the tale of Cupid and Psyche and published in the same year (1956) as *The Last Battle* from the *Chronicles of Narnia*. This chapter also offers a broader approach to mythology, according to Lewis's understanding of Christianity as the "New Myth". The authors discuss the disastrous consequences of renouncing the childlike capacity for delight and adopting a cynical attitude to the world, yet they also show a chance for redemption owing to Faith, Love, and Hope.

Part III of the volume, "Holding Out for a Hero... and a Heroine", contains chapters that deal with two creative approaches towards heroism. The first one consists in such a reception of the ancient heroes and heroines as to present them as paraenetic – and attractive – examples for the young people today. First, N.J. Lowe discusses the motif of becoming a hero as the master plot of modern popular culture, with the contemporary authors adjusting the concept of heroic growth to the challenges of our times. Next, Robert A. Sucharski explores the motif of the hero's journey; however, here the hero is not taken from the classical mythology, but he is created from scratch by Maciej Słomczyński (*nom de plume* Joe Alex) – an eccentric Polish writer of crime fiction, poet, and translator (*inter alia*, of the entirety of Shakespeare's corpus). He sends his protagonist – a Trojan boy – on a quest to the far North in search of amber. This narrative framework builds a subtle link between what was later Polish territory (on the Amber Route) and the Mediterranean, while the quest as such is an element of the coming-of-age process, with no happy ending for the boy, yet with all the more important message of hope. Subsequently, Michael Stierstorfer also focuses on works whose authors (Rick Riordan and Anna Banks) produce their own heroes and heroines after the ancient pattern. He analyses the cases where the classical mythological features are adjusted to the figure of the holy Redeemer known from the Christian tradition, with a hope for victory in the battle between Good and Evil. Then, Markus Janka studies the reception of the mythical hero *par excellence*, Hercules, by offering a comparative analysis of the ancient sources and contemporary popular culture (both literary and audiovisual). His chapter, highlighting the ambivalence of this hero, conveys us to the second kind of approach to heroism – from the therapeutic perspective. This section is opened by Susan Deacy, who for several years has been striving courageously for wide access to inclusive education for autistic children, with the ancient myths as a vital tool in this process. In the present volume she discusses the results of her research

into the concept of Hercules as the Bearer of Hope in the autistic context, and she offers a set of practical exercises that have the potential to be adapted to the needs of many other groups and in fact could be used widely in work with young people to stimulate their creative thinking and empathy. The therapeutic function of the figure of Hercules is explored further by Edoardo Pecchini, who approaches his myth from the perspective of paediatric neuropsychiatry. By choosing this “imperfect” hero, he proposes a preventative mental health programme for young people, both in clinical and educational terms, with a particular focus on disruptive behaviours and conduct problems. Last but not least, Krishni Burns takes us on a fascinating quest with the ancient heroines: Persephone, Ariadne, Andromache, and Cassandra, by means of the contemporary novelizations of their myths used as tools in modelling psychological resilience – a set of behavioural patterns a young person needs to develop to be able to face adverse events and overcome traumas. By relating to the mythical characters – affected by the most terrible experiences and limited in their freedom as women – young people can reflect on their own agency and coping strategies, at minimal risk of feeling retraumatized, owing to the paradoxical nature of the phenomenon of reception, within which the myths are perceived as at the same time both close to and removed from our reality.

This phenomenon carries us directly to the ancient tragedies. Created from the crumbs from Homer’s table (to quote Aeschylus), the masterpieces by the Athenian tragedians have been nourishing one generation after another, for over two and a half millennia. Their ancient cure for the souls was enhanced by numerous authors in the subsequent epochs who – inspired by Aeschylus’, Sophocles’, and Euripides’ oeuvres – sometimes wrote precisely with children and young adults in mind (by changing also the genre, for example into a novelization – more appealing to youth than the ancient drama). The reception of Greek tragedy in youth culture constitutes a fascinating theme for a separate project we intend to undertake in the future. In Part IV of the present volume, “Hope after Tragedy”, we wish to share but our first research results in this field. In each chapter two works are discussed in a comparative approach. Interestingly, such a rigorous structure had not been planned, but its “natural” application seems to be more than a coincidence – rather, this is testimony to the complex character of the issue and to its need for contextual analysis. Thus, first, Sheila Murnaghan and Deborah H. Roberts examine two books from the “Save the Story” series – the twenty-first-century retelling of crucial works from the library of human civilization. The two scholars focus on Yiyun Li’s *The Story of Gilgamesh*, which recasts an ancient epic with tragic themes as an account

of maturation from childhood to adulthood, and a version of *Antigone* by Ali Smith, who presents Sophocles' drama from a surprising animal perspective. Both works contain troubling subjects, such as conflict, death, divided loyalties, and the demarcation of friends and enemies, yet they are also full of hope – not only for, but also in the youngest as the ones who will keep these indispensable stories alive. Next, Edith Hall discusses two contemporary novels for older youth (and for adults of course, too) that were – and justly – cultural events in the United Kingdom and in other English-speaking countries: Natalie Haynes's *The Children of Jocasta* and Colm Tóibín's *House of Names*, both inspired by the ancient tragedians: respectively, Sophocles (again) and Aeschylus. The novels are focused on the theme of family violence, with a special look at the situation of girls on the threshold of adulthood – victims of social rules and eternal conflicts over power, who, nonetheless, hope for a happier future and get up the courage to shape it. Then, Hanna Paulouskaya studies two movies from the Soviet 1980s: *Chuchelo* [Scarecrow] by Rolan Bykov and *Dorogaia Elena Sergeevna* [Dear Miss Elena] by Eldar Riazanov. They were broadcast in the countries behind the Iron Curtain during the periods when censorship was relaxed, and if you watched them, especially in childhood, you would not be able to forget them, such powerful messages did they convey. Despite there being no direct connections to Antiquity, both movies echo Greek tragedies and they use elements of this genre to help children voice and resolve their problems. The last chapter in this part again expands our mythological horizons – this time we move to Africa with Daniel A. Nkemleke and Divine Che Neba's analysis of two seminal novels by the Ghanaian author Ayi Kwei Armah: *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* deemed Pan-African epics. The archetypal motif of a journey and references to Egyptian mythology serve here as tools for settling accounts with slavery and colonialism, and responding to the needs of the youngest African generations in the process of building their own identity.

Part V, "Brand New Hope", comprises chapters that explore the theme of Hope in works that fuse the ancient tradition with fantasy, sci-fi, magical realism, and other similar tropes so willingly followed by young readers and viewers. Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer examines the reception of the myth of Atlantis in James Gurney's *Dinotopia* novels, with the author's enchanting illustrations that complement his literary vision of an ideal community where humans and dinosaurs coexist in peace. Elizabeth Hale discusses Ursula Dubosarsky's novel *The Golden Day*, blending the everyday Australian reality of the 1960s with the supernatural. The vivid narration with evocations of Aboriginal beliefs and the famous *Picnic at Hanging Rock* by Joan Lindsay build an amazing setting for a group of girls

to complete their rite of passage from childhood to maturity – between hope and pain, as they experience (or believe they experience) the impossible. Babette Puetz investigates the theme of Hope in the confrontation between humans and creatures of Artificial Intelligence, as presented against a mythical and biblical background in the New Zealand bestseller for youth – *Genesis* by Bernard Beckett. This novel poses a number of surprisingly timely questions. Set after a pandemic – with a border closure of New Zealand that is never lifted – *Genesis* shows the consequences of how a country tries to protect itself from a widespread plague and never goes back to normal. Helen Lovatt analyses the novel *The Girl with All the Gifts* by Mike Carey and his related short stories. Unexpectedly, also this choice has gained resonance with the current circumstances, as the setting of Carey’s dystopia is a world affected by a terrible pandemic that puts the limits of humanity to the test, with a protagonist who has to decide whether she will be a new Iphigenia or a new Pandora – whether she will sacrifice herself or push humankind on a completely different track. Lisa Maurice searches for Hope among the Israeli youth who write fan fiction embedded in Rick Riordan’s *Percy Jackson* universe. This amateur yet inspirational recasting of the series enables the young author-readers to engage better with their contemporary Israeli society. Katerina Volioti takes us to the cradle of classical mythology – Greece – and she presents a choice of Modern Greek books for small children who are offered a message of Hope from the Olympian Gods, well aware of the crisis in their homeland. Ayelet Peer changes the perspective, by moving to Japan and studying the motif of Hope in the context of a dysfunctional (Olympic) family in a type of manga aimed at young boys (*shōnen* manga); again, a hero’s journey, this time – from a corrupt Olympus in search of salvation. Next, Anna Mik investigates traces of racism and social tensions in the 1940 *Fantasia* by Walt Disney Productions, and how they were dealt with in the subsequent re-editions of the movie to restore Hope and promote a vision of a world free from discrimination. In conclusion of this part, Elżbieta Olechowska focuses on the uplifting sense of Hope in relation to Fatum and a plethora of mythological references in one of the most popular young-adult television series of the twenty-first century – *Once Upon a Time*. This chapter, with a section on Hades as the main villain of the fifth season and the protagonists’ adventurous katabasis to his realm, introduces us into the final set of reflections.

Part VI of the volume, “Behold Hope All Ye Who Enter Here...”, contains chapters dedicated to the ultimate mystery – an inseparable part of human life, yet one of the most difficult to handle, not only for children, but for adults too: death. Like a shadow, it has been following the protagonists of nearly all the works hitherto analysed, and, finally, here it comes to the fore. How to present

this theme to a young audience without truisms and false solace, but with true Hope? The authors of the texts of culture chosen for this part treat their public with respect, even blunt honesty. The katabasis of their protagonists, even if successful, comes at great cost. Hope must be learnt and earned. Nonetheless, it is worth all the efforts, as the alternative known from Dante's *Inferno* is simply not an option. Thus, first, Jerzy Axer takes us on an exceptional hero's journey with Rudyard Kipling's Kotick the White Seal from *The Jungle Book*. This journey leads to the discovery of a place where Kotick and his near and dear can live safe and in peace – truly a Paradise of Seals, in essence not much different from Hawthorne's Paradise of Children. Next, Krzysztof Rybak discusses the contemporary Polish novel *Bezsenność Jutki* [Jutka's Insomnia] by Dorota Combrzyńska-Nogala. Its protagonist lives in the Łódź Ghetto during World War Two with her aunt and grandfather who tells her Greek myths – not only to distract the girl, but also to strengthen her in the face of the horrors of the Holocaust. Then, Owen Hodgkinson focuses on the critically acclaimed novel for young readers *A Song for Ella Grey* (Guardian Children's Fiction Prize and the Hans Christian Andersen Award) by the bestselling British author David Almond. The writer explores the themes of love and loss within a group of teenagers by setting their problems, including their first experience of death and its irreversibility, on the background of the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice. Finally, I have the pleasure of returning to my own precious childhood memory – the CBS series *Beauty and the Beast* (1987–1990) by Ron Koslow. This urban fantasy production, rooted in the ancient myth of Eros and Psyche and in the folklore fairy tale, acquaints the audience with classical culture – in the broadest meaning of the term – through numerous references to the masterpieces of literature and music. Above all, however, it uplifts contemporary dramas that can happen to anybody into the realm of myth. In my chapter, using an example from this series (namely, an episode based on the story of Orpheus and Eurydice), I attempt to show how a seemingly ruinous descent into the Underworld can turn into a quest for Hope.