



# Death as a Beginning: The Transformation of Hades, Persephone, and Cleopatra in Children's and Youth Culture

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Who and what might be on the other side?<sup>1</sup> In ancient beliefs, the places allotted to mortals in the afterlife were determined in various ways. They were in the charge of Hades/Pluto (Dis Pater), according to Greek and Roman mythology; Osiris, according to the Egyptians; Velnias, the god of the dead, in Baltic myths; and Weles, the god of the underworld, among Slavic nations. The motif of ancient beliefs about the afterlife, the contemporary idea of them, appears increasingly in works dedicated to children and youngsters.<sup>2</sup>

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- 1 The research was conducted within the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* led by Katarzyna Marciniak at the Faculty of "Artes Liberales," University of Warsaw, with funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme – ERC Consolidator Grant (Grant Agreement No 681202).
- 2 Examples include a series of novels about Harry Potter by J. K. Rowling and novels about mythological gods and heroes by Rick Riordan. See Rowling, *Harry Potter*, books 1–7; Riordan, *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*, books 1–5; *The Heroes of Olympus*, books 1–5; *The Kane Chronicles*, books 1–3; *Magnus Chase and the Gods of Asgard*, books 1–3; *The Trials of Apollo*, books 1–4.

Reception studies are beginning to focus on this subject in pop culture, including ephemeral and audio-visual works like web-comics, animations, and films dedicated to the young audience. This can help the process of explaining cultural changes. While the thorny research issues of Greek and Roman mythologies and ancient religious concepts go beyond the scope of this paper, this article aims to present an introduction to these problems. Its scholarly perspective is framed by visual culture studies,<sup>3</sup> and the paper shows three cases of transformation of characters connected with ancient beliefs about the afterlife. Each case focuses on one character.

The first case examines Hades, whose image of the Greek god of death has been transformed into an image of a villain known from Disney movies, notably *Hercules*.<sup>4</sup> The image is present in costumes, figurines, videos, and accessories for children and the youth.

The second one deals with three webcomics: *Underworld Love Story*<sup>5</sup> and *Hades & Persephone Shorts*<sup>6</sup> by Gau Meo and *Hades' Holiday*<sup>7</sup> by Elvishness. In these works, one finds a new way of adapting myth for the contemporary young viewer, transforming the story of abduction and rape into a story of love.

The third case describes the way Cleopatra VII Philopator is portrayed in *Scooby-Doo! in Where's My Mummy?*<sup>8</sup> This is an extraordinary example of reception where the queen represents a model of an Egyptian motif interwoven with its echos in the pop culture. The Egyptian elements prevail over the Greek ones, even though Cleopatra was a member of the Hellenistic Ptolemaic dynasty.

- 3 Nicholas Mirzoeff points out that “visual culture is a tactic, not an academic discipline. It is a fluid interpretive structure, centered on understanding the response to visual media of both individuals and groups (...), it hopes to reach beyond the traditional confines of the university to interact with peoples’ everyday lives”; Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 4–5. About visual culture studies see Smith, *Visual Culture Studies*; Jenks, *Visual Culture*; Mirzoeff, “What is visual culture?”; Bal, “Visual Essentialism and the Object of Visual Culture”; Mitchell, “Showing Seeing: A Critique of Visual Culture.”
- 4 *Hercules*, directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, 1997.
- 5 Available online on the Tapas community website.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 *Scooby Doo! in Where's My Mummy?* directed by Joe Sichta, 2005.

## HADES: FROM THE GREEK GOD OF DEATH TO A DISNEY VILLAIN

Hades, Roman Dis, or Pluto, was the first of Cronus' sons,<sup>9</sup> the ruler of the underworld<sup>10</sup> with "a ruthless heart."<sup>11</sup> One can trace his image from ancient sources to medieval and modern works of art. Through intertextuality, it became present in various manifestations of popular culture.<sup>12</sup> A case in point is the blue-haired villain known from Disney's *Hercules*. In this case, pop culture<sup>13</sup> functions as a prism, which has transformed this mythological figure into a character in stories for youths. In this long-lasting process of continuous reception, pop culture has reduced features of Hades to an easily identifiable villain. The contemporary image of this god emerged from an amalgam of ancient beliefs, Christian perspectives of those beliefs,<sup>14</sup> literature, including educational works (for example, the retelling of classical myths for children), and, finally, popular series of books and movies and visual representations in global franchises like Disney.

9 Homer, *Iliad* 15.40–44.

10 Hades' domain is described, inter alia, in Homer's *Iliad* 15.191 and *Odyssey* 10–11, as well as in Vergil's *Aeneid* 6.

11 Hesiod, *Theogony* 455, 765–774, 820.

12 Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality is, according to Irit Rogoff, a fundamental competence for the reading of popular culture; see Rogoff, "Studying Visual Culture."

13 From the diverse definitions of this type of culture, one should point out those suggested by John Fiske and Marek Krajewski, a Polish sociologist from Adam Mickiewicz University. Fiske points out that the starting point for a researcher of pop culture is to focus on texts that are overlooked in conventional scholarly analysis. People create it at the junction of everyday life and the cultural resources provided by capitalism. Popular culture is not a collection of texts and audiences; it represents concrete practices in which text and audience interact; see Fiske, *Understanding Popular Culture*. Krajewski adds that "popular culture is therefore what we do with it – an enemy, a threat, a captivating force and tool, a means of emancipation and resistance, entertainment, instructions for the use of the world, a source of profit and pleasure"; see Krajewski, *Kultura kultury popularnej*, 11.

14 Homer, *Iliad* 9.158. For an example of Christian views of Hades see Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 591.

Hades appears in various myths, like the ones about his marriage with Persephone, Latin Proserpina,<sup>15</sup> Heracles,<sup>16</sup> and Orpheus and Eurydice,<sup>17</sup> as a sinister and strict god, who “was the most hated by mortals of all gods.”<sup>18</sup> His main attributes were Cerberus, a many-headed beast which protected the entrance to the domain,<sup>19</sup> a chariot with “terrible steeds,” and an invisible helmet, κνύνη.<sup>20</sup> The god could become invisible. He was the sovereign of death in a place inaccessible to most of the living. Moreover, his cult was not as popular as that of the Twelve Olympian gods, which is why there were only a few sanctuaries dedicated to Hades.<sup>21</sup> Hence it is remarkable that in pop culture, his images keep popping up – in different contexts. He is an ambitious and mean villain with enormous power like in Disney’s *Hercules*, *Clash of the Titans*,<sup>22</sup> and *Wrath of the Titans*.<sup>23</sup> In *Seinto Seiya*<sup>24</sup> he is a handsome god with the ability to become incarnate who wants to take over the world with the support of Thanatos and Hypnos. Furthermore, he is a wise, independent, honorable, yet bitter god in *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*,<sup>25</sup> where he can look like a devil. On the other hand, in one of the games from the *God of War* series, due to its curious plot, one can explore Hades’ kingdom to change the story known from myths, and, for example, kill that sarcastic and monstrous god to free the souls from the underworld.<sup>26</sup>

15 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 346–486.

16 Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.12ff.

17 Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 10.8ff.

18 Homer, *Illiad* 9.159.

19 Apollodorus 2.5.12.

20 Apollodorus 1.2.1.

21 Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 5.14.8; 6.25.2; Strabo, *Geography* 5.4.5 ff.; 8.3.14–15; 9.2.29; 14.1.44.

22 *Clash of the Titans*, directed by Louis Leterrier, 2010, is in itself a remake of film from 1981 (directed by Desmond Davies).

23 *Wrath of the Titans*, directed by Jonathan Liebesman, 2012.

24 *Seinto Seiya* (*Saint Seiya: Knights of the Zodiac*) by Masami Kurumada is a series of manga, in 28 volumes, published by Shueisha from 1986 to 1990; it was adapted to anime series by Toei Animation. The episode 114 of this series, known as *Saint Seiya* or *Knights of the Zodiac*, directed by Kōzō Morishita and then by Kazuhito Kikuchi, was screened between 1986 and 1989.

25 *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, directed by Chris Columbus, 2010; based on the book by Rick Riordan, *The Lightning Thief*.

26 *God of War 3*, video game by SIE Santa Monica Studio on PlayStation 3.

The animated and live-action works made by Disney since 1997 have created the contemporary image of Hades, especially for children and young adults, which dominates the contemporary narration about him. Hades in Disney's *Hercules* is probably the most influential animated representation of this god. In 1934, the company released an animation with references to the motif of the ancient underworld. In *The Goddess of Spring*,<sup>27</sup> one can see a red-devil character<sup>28</sup> who abducted the main protagonist, probably Persephone.<sup>29</sup> This was the first time Disney presented a character that refers to the devil and Hades. A similar depiction of the god of the underground world as a villain<sup>30</sup> is later adopted in *Hercules*.<sup>31</sup> The hero, Hercules, is portrayed as the son of Zeus and Hera. He becomes mortal because of the intrigues of the god of the underworld. When he turns 18 years old, he starts his journey to become a hero and to win back his way to Olympus. In this film, the depiction of Hades opposes the ancient description; he becomes the main antagonist of the Olympians, an evil god, who wants, with the help of his servants, Pain and Panic,<sup>32</sup> to eliminate Zeus and rule the world. The underworld is a dark and depressing place, and Hades' job seems to be the worst of the gods' activities. In this film, one can notice the Greek pantheon freely interpreted by filmmakers who have provided a synthesis of several myths in one story, for example, the twelve labors of Hercules; or monsters like Medusa or Minotaur, presented in the song "From Zero to Hero."<sup>33</sup> The character of Hades is a grey-skinned god with yellow eyes, canine teeth,

27 *The Goddess of Spring*, directed by Wilfred Jackson, 1934.

28 He's a black-haired man with a black goatee who wears a red costume consisting of red tights and a tunic finished with a white collar and a black cape. One can see two horns on his head. His servants look like little black devils, with horns, tails, and tridents in their hands.

29 In this animation figures of Persephone and her mother Demeter from the myth seem to be morphed in one character.

30 Anna Mik points out that "the reality is polarized between the feminine and the masculine power. The feminine is represented here by nature and life, the male element – by darkness, destruction and death." Mik, entry on "The Goddess of Spring."

31 *Hercules*, directed by Ron Clements and John Musker, 1997.

32 The appearance of Pain and Panic also seems to refer to the servants in the *Goddess of Spring*. Those little devils, red (Pain) and green (Panic), have horns, tails and tiny bat wings.

33 "From Zero to Hero" by Alan Menken and David Zippel was sung by Lillias White, LaChanze, Roz Ryan, Cheryl Freeman, and Vanéese Y. Thomas.

and blue hair, which turns into a fire when the god bursts into anger. He also wears a black robe, possibly inspired by the Greek tunic and the Roman toga, with a skull-shaped pin. The god has a terrifying bat-winged horse harnessed to his black chariot. On the one hand, he is a comical villain with a great sense of humor; on the other, Hades is a cold and irascible choleric nuisance with outbursts of anger. Some of his deeds, especially in terms of his relationships with Pain, Panic, and Megara, appear to be very cruel indeed. His domain is a place where he dwells abandoned by everybody, like a fallen immortal, the evil one as opposed to good Olympian gods.

Since 1997, this animated figure has appeared in different Disney works, for example, in *Hercules: Animated Series*<sup>34</sup> and in an interactive game *Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom* in Disney's theme park.<sup>35</sup> Disney also adopted this character in a live-action fantasy television series *Once Upon a Time*,<sup>36</sup> where he is played by Greg Germann, and in a TV film *Descendants 3*,<sup>37</sup> where he is played by Cheyenne Jackson. The last example is curious because Hades is the father of Mal (played by Dove Cameron), a daughter of Maleficent, whom he had abandoned when she was a little child.<sup>38</sup> He also acts and looks like a rockstar: he plays the guitar, wears distinctive make-up and a blue mohawk, and dresses in a black coat with studs and a flame-like pattern.

Disney's image of Hades has undergone a transformation evolving from ancient myths and intermingling with Christian beliefs, mostly with the popular perception of the devil, and then with the

34 *Disney's Hercules: The Animated Series*, directed by Phil Weinstein, animated TV series, 1998.

35 An interactive game in Magic Kingdom theme park since 2012; see "Villains Get Trickier: Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom 'Hard Level' Rules Change," published in 2013 by Disney Parks Blog, available online. The player receives a map of the park and special cards; the goal is to prevent Hades (and his team of villains from Disney animations) from turning the park into his new home.

36 The figure of Hades appears in the twelfth episode of fifth season, *Souls of the Departed*, directed by Ralph Hemecker, 2019. *Once Upon a Time*, the TV series, was broadcast between 2011 and 2018.

37 *Descendants 3*, directed by Kenny Ortega, 2019, is the third movie from the series based on novels by Melissa de la Cruz.

38 He also has a blue-haired son named Hadie, from an unknown mother. Hadie was first mentioned in *Return of the Isle of the Lord: A Descendants Novel* and does not appear in the movie; see de la Cruz, *Return of the Isle of the Lord: A Descendants Novel*.

conception of the villain in literature and movies for youths.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, Disney's idea of Hades has dominated products that employ the image of this god. Among them are toys and video games, for example, plastic figurines from McDonald's<sup>40</sup> and Lego Minifigures,<sup>41</sup> a plush doll from *Disney's Villains Cutesations* series,<sup>42</sup> even video games like *Hades Challenge*,<sup>43</sup> and *Sorcerers of the Magic Kingdom* in Disney's theme park. One can also become Hades by using costumes and wigs. Hades' fans can enjoy the collectible Funko pop figures,<sup>44</sup> makeup products,<sup>45</sup> clothes with his images as a character from the animation *Hercules* and the TV film *Descendants 3*, and a myriad of gadgets and accessories.<sup>46</sup> The manufacturers' imagination seems to have no limits concerning the use of this representation of Hades in their products.

## TRUE LOVE? HADES AND PERSEPHONE IN COMIC BOOKS

Hades' image in children's and youth culture also appears in the context of his relationship with Persephone. The myth of Persephone's abduction, the relationship between her and one of the most powerful Greek mythological gods, the suffering of a mother after the loss of her daughter have been inspiring artists for centuries. A case in point are three web-comics that focus on the trans-

39 Gerrie McCall gives a thought-provoking description of different monsters and villains in her colorful picture book, *Monsters and Villains of the Movies and Literature*.

40 As a toy included with a kids' meal, available, for example, on Amazon.

41 Hades in one of Lego's minifigures released on May 2019 in Disney Series 2; see "Hades (Disney)," *Lego fandom*, available online.

42 The series contains eight plush mini-dolls of Disney's villains, including Hades, available online.

43 Video adventure and puzzle game released in 1998 by Disney Interactive Studios, in which player's actions are antagonized by Hades and his two servants, Pain and Panic; see "Hades Challenge," *Disney Fandom*, available online.

44 Item number 29325, released on 2018, available online. There are two versions of the figure, blue and red, which glow in the dark (item number 29343).

45 Interesting sets of ColourPop cosmetics refer to the villains known from Disney animations. Limited edition *Hades Collection Set* contains lipstick *Hades* and lip gloss *Hot Headed* in coral-orange shades, as well as *Everybody's Got a Weakness* highlighter described as "peach hue with a hot pink flip and pearlized finish"; see "Hades Collection Kit," *ColourPop*, available online.

46 Amazon and eBay are inundated with related products, watches, wallets, pins, mugs, phone cases, bags, lunch bags, wall decors, and even toilet seat stickers.

formation of the relationship between mythological Persephone and Hades, showing it as true love. The genre of comics is a product of mass popular culture, and mythological motifs in the modern era were used as inspiration for comic book plots.<sup>47</sup> Different mythologies, presented as part of a fairy-tale world, now appear in productions for children. The comics from the web platform tapas.io seem to be aimed at young people; their style is pleasant, soft, and lightweight. The illustrations in these comics are colorful and vivid.

The first version of the story about Persephone, the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, is the oldest version of the myth about Persephone's abduction by the god of the underworld. The event also appears in other ancient poets' works, for example, in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 5.395–407 and Claudius Claudianus' *On the Kidnapping of Proserpine*.

Myths about Persephone always feature Hades or Demeter. Interestingly, whether in the story of Sisyphus or during Heracles' twelve labors, Persephone dwells in the underworld. It is quite suspicious that mortals and heroes meet her there as if she had never left her husband's palace. In the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, Persephone remains with her husband and listens to the young artist's requests. Similarly, in the myth of Adonis, when Aphrodite asks Persephone to hide him in some dark corner of her palace in order to save the mortal,<sup>48</sup> the goddess of the world of the dead stays in Hades. In various myths of Persephone, she remains in the underworld as a supporting heroine. Her presence can be perceived as a coincidence or as a deliberate mythological message, aiming to show the viewer that since the kidnapping of Kora by the Underground Zeus, she has been his wife only; her place has since then been in the underworld. Persephone appears in the myths of Demeter, but the action evolves until Hades abducts her. Ancient Greeks, in their creativity, thus placed her firmly next to the god of the dead. The sudden abduction of the goddess deprived her of everything she had known and enjoyed. In comic books, the chosen plot takes on a different color and becomes a charming story of true love.

Gau Meo's<sup>49</sup> *Underworld Love Story, Hades & Persephone Shorts* presents a mythological narrative in which Hades falls in love with a beautiful goddess and kidnaps her. The author also added other

47 Gomes and Peuckert, "Memento Mori: A Portuguese Style of Melancholy."

48 Graves, *Greek Myths*, 18.h.

49 Gau Meo was born in 1992 in Vietnam. She studied biology, decided to quit her job and started drawing. Classical myths and ancient cultures have surprised her with the richness of information on multiple aspects of life.

themes that have enriched the already interesting mythological story. She added scenes showing how Hades first meets Kora when she is about ten years old. The god saves her from a centaur. In Greek mythology, Hades fell in love with the young goddess – but one does not know how old the goddess is at that moment.<sup>50</sup> In the comic book, which tells the story of the first meeting of Hades and Kora, the god does not look at the goddess in terms of a future wife, but rather as a friend. However, when Persephone grows up, Hades falls in love with her. The plot does not reveal the exact age of the goddess; the only hint the audience gets is in the illustrations. Parts of the comic book contain intimate scenes. At the wedding of Hades and Persephone, the goddess is a young adult. In the comic book, the divine couple is married, and in due time, their offspring appears. The *Suda* provides some necessary information about the offspring of Hades and Persephone. The Byzantine lexicon states that Hades and Persephone had a daughter named Makaria, the goddess of gentle death.<sup>51</sup>

In her comic book, Gau Meo shows the goddess still living a blithe life with her husband, who takes care of her. Even though Persephone is a good-tempered and loving woman in the comic book, she can become a fearsome and dangerous queen of the underworld in a blink of an eye. *The Odyssey* describes the nature of the goddess more precisely. Ancient sources frequently depict Persephone negatively, and even as frightening.<sup>52</sup> Orphic plaques, referring to the teachings of Empedocles, indicate that Persephone was the one to decide about the fate of the deceased. Empedocles' works contain the doctrine of the immortality of souls and appreciate the idea of reincarnation. In *Religijność starożytnych Greków* [Religiousness of Ancient Greeks] by Włodzimierz Lengauer, the author assumes that such judicial vision represents the remnants of beliefs from the Mediterranean basin which originated from the cult of the chthonic female deity living inside the earth, the Mother Goddess – Gaia.<sup>53</sup> In these comic books, Persephone is affectionate and caring for the dead, who seem to appreciate her.

Gau Meo uses a well-known myth. Her comic book contains a plethora of emotions, revealed by stories about mythological gods of the underworld. Characters frequently have the same emotional code as they do in mythology (Demeter is a desperate mother se-

50 Graves, *Greek Myths*, 24c.

51 See *Suda*, s. v. Makaria.

52 Homer, *Odyssey* 10.576; 11.649; Hesiod, *Theogony* 768.

53 Lengauer, *Religijność starożytnych Greków*, 76–77.

eking help in search of her daughter, Hades is a kidnapper, and Persephone plays the part of a victim). The myth represents a starting point for adventures that Hades and Persephone could have encountered in a future designed by Meo.

*Hades' Holiday* by Elvishness<sup>54</sup> tells the love story of Hades and Persephone. The action, however, is not set in the darkness of the dead, but in the world of the living. Hades organizes his holidays and makes an anabasis; he comes to Persephone to the world of the living. He does it secretly and away from the other gods because he is not allowed to leave his kingdom. During his absence, he entrusts the Egyptian god Anubis with the reign of Hades. The story adopted in the comic book has the Greek myths as its basis, but the artist modifies them – the action is relocated to the twenty-first-century world of the living. Transferring mythological stories to contemporary reality is not a new device. The combination can be found in *Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, in which Christian hell intermingles with elements of Hades. A similar type of creative procedure can also be found in youth novels by Rick Riordan and in the *Starcrossed* trilogy by Josephine Angelini.<sup>55</sup>

The god of the underworld in *Hades' Holiday* is a romantic hero who, although he understands the consequences of his actions, still wants to spend time with his beloved. Demeter, again, is portrayed in the way myths depict her – she wishes to get rid of Hades so that he would stay away from her daughter, Persephone. She is impulsive and does not hesitate to do whatever it takes to make sure that the feelings arousing between her daughter and her brother do not flou-rish. The relationship between Persephone and Hades seems warm, with all the signs of true love. Between them, there is no hatred that ancient myths tend to show, as testified by Ovid, *Met.* 5.403–405. It is also telling that in this comic book Persephone and Hades are not married; they seem to enjoy an earlier stage of their relationship, being a boyfriend and a girlfriend. Thus the story gains more of a contemporary character. The divine couple is depicted as a mortal one, blessed with a love that develops gradually. Such a relationship might explain Demeter's attitude and her constant attempts to separate the lovers.

The comics analyzed present Persephone and Hades as an example of true love that overcomes all obstacles. Greek mythology does not show the underworld couple in the same way as comic books do. Hades and Persephone's marriage is far from perfect, gi-

54 Elvishness is a freelance illustrator for the tapas.io website.

55 Angelini, *Starcrossed*; *Dreamless*; *Goddess*.

ven the circumstances of its very beginning. Ancient literary sources do not provide information about emotions that existed within this marriage. Persephone, as Hades' wife, usually appears as frightening among the living and the dead.

Hades and Persephone, as a pair of lovers in children's and youth culture, offer a representation of these characters, which is quite different from the one found in Greek mythology. However, there are even more curious reception cases of historical and mythological characters one can encounter in the underworld. One of these extraordinary representations is Cleopatra.

### CLEOPATRA REACTIVATED: THE CLASSIC IMAGE OF CLEOPATRA VII TRANSFORMED IN SCOOBY-DOO

Many characters from antiquity, both historical and mythological, undergo some transformation; so does the motif of death and the afterlife. A popular motif in modern animations is the character of Cleopatra VII Philopator, daughter of Ptolemy XII Auletes. One can encounter Cleopatra in animated films such as the *Hotel Transylvania*,<sup>56</sup> as well as in cartoon series, such as *Monster High*.<sup>57</sup> In the first animation, she is a mute character, hosted by count Dracula in his hotel. The filmmaker depicts her as a sovereign with perfect manners who knows everything about *savoir vivre*. In the cartoons, she is a young princess who attends the monster school. In both cases, directors prove how antiquity intermingles with modernity. Among numerous examples of such works, there is the animation *Scooby-Doo! in Where's My Mummy?*

In this animation, the queen appears in her post-mortal shape. In the *Hotel Transylvania* and *Monster High*, Auletes' daughter is portrayed as a mummy, while in *Scooby-Doo*, the authors decided to depict her as an evil and vengeful mummy-ghost. She has various features that one can attribute to a spirit, such as the ability to fly. Cleopatra, as a mummy-ghost, shows up in one of the final scenes. It is the moment when the archaeologist Amelia von Butch, her coworkers, and a group of friends called Mystery Inc. reach the main chamber in the queen's tomb where the treasures of Egypt are hidden. Cleopatra's mummy-ghost initially looks attractive to the spectator – she wears a mask and floats in the air. Her mask reminds the perceptive audience of ancient Egyptian funeral masks. She also

56 *Hotel Transylvania*, directed by Genndy Tartakovsky, 2012.

57 *Monster High*, directed by Audu Paden, 2010–2018.

sports a glowing aura. The queen is merciless to Amelia von Butch. Initially, she listens to her but then punishes her coworkers for trespassing and intention of theft by turning them into stone.

When she performs the same action on Amelia, her eyes, and indeed her whole figure, start to glow stronger. This kind of representation reminds the discerning viewer of Horace. In his *Ode* 1.37.21, he describes her as a *fatale monstrum, quae... expavit ensem*. His Cleopatra is a hybrid (*monstrum* is neuter, and *quae* is feminine). Similarly, the queen in the animation becomes a mighty and scary monster, with the features of a mummy and a ghost combined. Other Romans mention the queen as powerful and capable of enchanting and seducing men effortlessly.<sup>58</sup> It is hardly surprising that Cleopatra's motif as an archetype of a strong and independent woman appears in modern cinematography.

In further scenes, her appearance changes. Her physical shell resembles an ancient sarcophagus, and her funeral mask cracks and reveals the evil spirit. The queen is different than in later examples of the animations in which Cleopatra is a mummy with flesh and bandages untouched by time. In *Scooby-Doo*, the queen's skin is desiccated, perhaps evoking the ritual of embalming.<sup>59</sup> Cleopatra's skin has a green hue, and her body is skin and bones. Cleopatra as a mummy-ghost is dressed in a costume evoking the queen's clothes before her transformation, as well as the queen's representation from the beginning of the animation, in which the Egyptian queen is still alive, running away from Roman soldiers to her tomb where she wanted to hide her treasure. In those scenes, one can see the stereotypical image of Cleopatra. The authors thus use the features from historical images immortalized in pop culture.<sup>60</sup> At the beginning of the movie, she wears oriental makeup (cat-eye), a particular ha-

58 Most of the texts were written by Romans who did not have much sympathy for Cleopatra – like Virgil (*Aeneid* 8) and Lucan (*Bellum Civile* 10).

59 Mummification and embalming are surprisingly popular in youth culture; for a detailed description see Wallis Budge, *The Mummy: A Handbook of Egyptian Funerary Archaeology*; and Day, *The Mummy's Curse: Mummymania in the English-speaking World*.

60 This image relates to Cleopatra created by Elisabeth Taylor in the 1963 movie. This movie defined the modern reception of the queen. "Since the visual tradition that depicts Egypt and Cleopatra has been racially ambiguous, Cleopatra films have had to take special steps to secure her white image. Cleopatra's racial ambiguity is closely tied to two fundamental elements of her power as an image: her sometimes tyrannical style of rule and her exceptional beauty and sexual power/domination/ persuasion over others." Royster, *Becoming Cleopatra: The Shifting Image of an Icon*, 91–92.

irstyle with a fringe, and her clothes relate to the image of goddess Isis.<sup>61</sup> The queen, known to the viewers from the beginning of the story, becomes a priestess of Isis and casts a deadly spell. From that moment on, her appearance undergoes a remarkable transformation, with her clothes destroyed, her hair in disarray, her makeup gone. Cleopatra, as a mummy-ghost in the animation, is a scary and vengeful character. Above all, she wants to punish Amelia von Butch. When Daphne disguised as Cleopatra reaches the tomb, the Egyptian queen chases her. In one of the scenes, the young girl attempts to use her skills and gives the queen advice on beauty and makeup. The cunning plot twist refers to legends related to Cleopatra's beauty and her beauty rituals.

The example we have analyzed shows how Cleopatra remains present in popular and youth culture. Although death could seem an inappropriate and stressful theme for children, the animation's authors created a new image of the Egyptian queen, showcasing her character as an evil mummy-ghost. *Scooby-Doo* uses the image of the queen to teach the young about role models, both the ones that are positive and the ones that are the opposite of that.

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For children and young adults, the characters that originate from ancient beliefs about the afterlife are not merely a part of Greek or Roman heritage, but also and maybe even primarily protagonists or villains from animations, films, and comic books. This paper presents an analysis of only three characters known from ancient history and mythology, featured in a selected handful of works addressed to children and adolescents. Plenty of others remain.

The contemporary image of Hades has emerged from an amalgam of ancient beliefs, the Christian perspective of those beliefs intermingled with stereotypical representations of the devil, literature fragments, educational works, and contemporary audio-visual texts, especially those created by franchises like

61 Golden clothes described in ancient texts like in *Parallel Lives* by Plutarch: "Cleopatra, indeed, both then and at other times when she appeared in public, assumed a robe sacred to Isis, and was addressed as the New Isis." Plutarch, *Parallel Lives*, *Antony* 9. Connection to the Isis costumes can be seen in the earlier cases addressed mainly to the adults; in the 1963 movie *Cleopatra* (directed by Joseph L. Mankiewicz) or in the TV series *Cleopatra* from 1999 (directed by Franc Roddam).

Disney. Hence the image of this god consists of mythological and historical frames built on ancient sources, and its canvas is adorned with multiple layers of pop-culture notions.

Contemporary pop culture, adopting a Greek myth that can be considered as terrifying, has given the stories of Persephone's abduction new colors. Two comic book authors, inspired by this myth and employing ancient sources, created a delightful story about two gods in love, providing them with features typical of relationships of contemporary couples. It may seem that, according to the comic book authors, gods like Hades and Persephone could serve as a perfect example of true love.

The transformation of Cleopatra created by the director of *Scooby-Doo* is extraordinary and unique. The animations subvert her image of a beautiful and self-confident woman. Different motifs connected with the queen's mythical story transfer the most important pieces of information about her and combine it with a unique image. This Cleopatra is an evil, vengeful, and envious monster. Thanks to such a versatile approach, young audiences learn about the significant moments of Cleopatra's life; surprisingly, the animation also helps the viewers memorize the central features of the queen's image.

The combination of mythology and history from ancient sources and popular culture works is increasingly vital and indeed imperative for reception studies. The motif of ancient beliefs about the afterlife appears progressively more in contemporary works, including those directed to young audiences. One could argue that it is these works, more than ancient authors and their books, that now define the perception of antiquity for future generations. This article hopes to encourage much-needed further research on this topic.

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## ABSTRACT

The motif of ancient beliefs about the afterlife and their present-day understanding appears increasingly in contemporary works directed to young audiences. The combination of mythology and history from ancient sources and popular culture works is fundamental for reception studies. The paper presents three cases of transformation of characters connected with ancient beliefs about the afterlife as protagonists in works directed to the youth: Hades as a villain from Disney's works, especially *Hercules*; Persephone and Hades's love story in three webcomics: *Underworld Love Story* and *Hades & Persephone Shorts* by Gau Meo and *Hades' Holiday* by Elvishness; and the way Cleopatra VII Philopator's image in *Scooby-Doo! in Where's My Mummy?* differs from the usual representations of the queen.

KEYWORDS: children's and young adult culture, reception studies, ancient underworld, Hades and Persephone, Hercules, Cleopatra VII

SMRT KOT ZAČETEK: PREOBRAZBE HADA, PERZEFONE  
IN KLEOPATRE V OTROŠKI IN MLADINSKI KULTURI

## IZVLEČEK

Motivi starodavnih verovanj o posmrtnem življenju se v novih poustvaritvah vse pogosteje pojavljajo v sodobnih delih za mlado občinstvo. Vzporejanje mitologije in zgodovine iz klasičnih virov z deli sodobne kulture je temeljnega pomena za študij recepcije. V prispevku so predstavljeni trije primeri preobrazbe, povezani s starodavnimi verovanji o posmrtnem življenju, pri glavnih junakih v delih za mladino. To so Had kot zlikovec iz Disneyjevih del, zlasti iz animiranega filma *Hercules*; Perzefonina in Hadova ljubezenska zgodba v spletnih stripih *Underworld Love Story* in *Hades & Persephone Shorts*, ki ju je napisala Gau Meo, ter *Hades' Holiday* izpod peresa Elvishness; in podoba Kleopatre VII. Filopator v filmu *Scooby-Doo! in Where's My Mummy?* ter njeno odstopanje od običajnih predstav o tej kraljici.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: otroška in mladinska kultura, recepcija, mitično podzemlje v antiki, Had in Perzefona, Herakles, Kleopatra VII.