

HOLDING HANDS “ACROSS THE DARK” – OR, A FOREWORD BY THE SERIES EDITOR

The moment when Sappho moved for the first time after twenty-six centuries of being frozen on the marvellous vase number 142333 from the collection of the National Museum in Warsaw (see Fig. 1) will remain in my memory forever.



Figure 1: Sappho begins to play her barbiton – a screenshot from the animation by Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons, *Sappho Fragment 44: Hector and Andromache – A Wedding at Troy*, prepared by the Authors and used with their permission.

It was May AD 2017. We were gathered on the twenty-fifth floor of the Palace of Culture and Science – the most recognizable skyscraper in the centre of Warsaw, once an infamous “gift” from Joseph Stalin intended to display Soviet domination over Poland. Now, it is the seventh tallest building in the European Union and a poignant witness to history – a monument showing that the wind of change takes unexpected directions and may help people fight for their freedom. The Palace, bearing many a decoration in socialist-realist style with classical inspirations in their background, is today a place of exhibitions, offices, tourist attractions (including a panoramic view platform on the thirtieth floor), and is illuminated to mark important events or initiatives that require support and more social awareness (see Figs. 2 and 3).



Figure 2: The Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw, view from Warsaw Financial Center. Photograph by VanWiel, Wikimedia Commons, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International.



Figure 3: The Palace of Culture and Science in Warsaw is illuminated in blue to mark Autism Day (each year on 2 April). Photograph by Paweł Jagiełło, used with his kind permission.

The Palace of Culture and Science is also a seat of the Polish Academy of Sciences. As a member of the Polish Young Academy at that time, I received permission to make use of the space on the twenty-fifth floor for the *Our Mythical Teaching Workshop* I was then organizing to discuss the possible contribution from the Our Mythical Childhood Community towards innovative educational approaches within the Classics.¹ And so it happened that, as a result of that conjunction of circumstances, the Palace hosted Sappho, who moved for the first time during that very workshop. *Habent sua fata non solum libelli...* – “not only books have their own destiny”...

¹ These workshops took place within the international conference *Our Mythical Hope in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture... The (In)efficacy of Ancient Myths in Overcoming the Hardships of Life*; for more information, see its website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/hope-materials> (this and all the subsequent websites cited in this foreword were accessed on 18 April 2023, unless stated otherwise). I wish to thank deeply the Polish Academy of Sciences for this opportunity and my great colleagues from the first term (2012–2017) of the Polish Young Academy for their kind support and excellent cooperation, esp. Jakub Fichna and Konrad Osajda, who also took part in the events I organized in 2016 and 2017, as well as our most helpful administrative inspector, Anna Bielec.

On that May day, it was only Sappho’s hand gently touching her stringed instrument (a barbiton), sending through the air the first tones of music composed nearly three millennia before – and reconstructed nearly three millennia thereafter. The people gathered in the room held their breath – and then gasped in delight. It was a unique experience – I would even call it mythical. After all, it is not every day that one has the chance to witness this kind of magic as displayed to us by Dr Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons, who brought Sappho to life with their art of animation. “There will be more” – they assured the public. And they kept their word. Sappho made her full appearance and utterly enchanted the public the very next year, in 2018 – the European Year of Cultural Heritage, during the workshops *The Present Meets the Past* at the Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw (see Fig. 4)² – the Host Institution of the European Research Council (ERC) Consolidator Grant *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* (2016–2022).³

Now, at the end of the ERC Grant, we are delighted to present not only the full-length *Sappho Fragment 44: Hector and Andromache – A Wedding at Troy* animation, but also four more: *Iris: Rainbow Goddess*, *Dionysus, Libation*, and *Heracles and the Erymanthian Boar*, accompanied by four documentaries and an absolutely brilliant vocal reconstruction of the Poetess’s song. All prepared by Sonya and Steve in cooperation with eminent experts in Ancient Greek music who saw the potential of the idea and offered their talent for the “Animating the Ancient World” task. And it needs to be emphasized also that each and every result of this task is freely available online, in Open Access.⁴

The origins of the “Animating the Ancient World” contribution go back to 2013, when I presented – via a mailing list managed by Prof. N.J. Lowe – some outcomes of the project *Our Mythical Childhood... The Classics and Children’s*

² For more information, see the workshops’ website: “The Present Meets the Past”, *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* [Project’s website], <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/present-past>.

³ In partnership with four institutions: Bar-Ilan University (Israel), University of New England (Australia), University of Roehampton (UK), and University of Yaoundé 1 (Cameroon). Our Mythical Community comprises also our colleagues and experts from all over the world. For more information, see the project’s website: “About OMC”, *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children’s and Young Adults’ Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* [Project’s website], <http://www.omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/about>.

⁴ See the “Animating the Ancient World” section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/animating-the-ancient-world>, and the Panoply Vase Animation Project’s website: <https://www.panoply.org.uk/>.



Figure 4: Compilation of images from the international workshops *The Present Meets the Past*, May 2018, Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw. The photographs are by Krzysztof Korwin-Piotrowski, the Medusa poster by Zbigniew Karaszewski, and the label of the European Year of Cultural Heritage by the European Union – all used with the Owners’ kind permission.

Literature between East and West (2012–2013), supported by the Loeb Classical Library Foundation Grant.⁵ Prof. Susan Deacy took an interest in those outcomes and replied to my mail – and this led to our immediate cooperation, one flourishing until this day. She also shared with me Sonya and Steve’s previous works – very particular animations that, as she explained to me, were something I simply had to see. And indeed, I had to. It was enough to click the first one (it was *Medusa*, in my case⁶) to become fully mesmerized (or even petrified with awe) by this absolutely groundbreaking accomplishment. For Sonya and

⁵ See Katarzyna Marciniak, Elżbieta Olechowska, Joanna Kłos, Michał Kucharski, eds., *Polish Literature for Children & Young Adults Inspired by Classical Antiquity: A Catalogue*, Warsaw: Faculty of “Artes Liberales”, University of Warsaw, 2013, Open Access: https://obta.al.uw.edu.pl/omc_catalogue.

⁶ See “Medusa” (2013), Panoply Vase Animation Project, <https://www.panoply.org.uk/medusa>, made for the Ure Discovery project at the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology (see also below, n. 8).

Steve – operating together as the Panoply Vase Animation Project on the demanding intersection of Ancient Greek vase painting, artefacts reconstruction, and computer technology – give life to ancient heroes and mythical creatures, as well as to animals and ordinary people from Classical Antiquity. The vases’ images, formerly static in their splendour – the ones we know from museum exhibitions, art catalogues, and Internet resources – become animated, their splendour flourishes before our very eyes, and they invite us to interact on an unprecedented scale.

Of course, it is no news that the Ancient Greek vases talk to their viewers. It is enough to take a look at the inscriptions covering their lower portions, such as ΜΕΠΟΙΕΣΕΝ ΑΜΑΣΙΣ (*MEPOIESEN AMASIS*; ‘Amasis made me’; see Fig. 5).⁷ These are seals of pride from the vases’ authors (potters or decorators), who in this way also give voice to their creations.



Figure 5: Signature of Amasis, detail from a scene representing Herakles entering Olympus, Attic black-figure olpe (a kind of jug), 550–530 BC. Louvre F 30. Beazley 310456. Photograph by Jastrow, Wikimedia Commons, Public Domain.

Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons, like the ancient artists, make the vases speak to us again – this time via the gestures and movements of their protagonists. This unique approach opens up new horizons in museum exhibition policy.⁸

⁷ Dimitrios Yatromanolakis, ed., *Epigraphy of Art: Ancient Greek Vase-Inscriptions and Vase-Paintings*, Oxford: Archaeopress, 2016, Open Access: <https://www.archaeopress.com/Archaeopress/DMS/DDF6E08387A2425D87284999EFD2C5DE/9781784914868-sample.pdf>.

⁸ In this context check, e.g., the Panoply Vase Animation Project’s cooperation with Prof. Amy C. Smith – Curator of the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, University of Reading, UK; the collaboration with the Roman Museum in Vallon, in Switzerland; with the Faculty of Classics in Oxford,

In the face of this potential, it was my pleasure to arrange contact between the Panoply Vase Animation Project and the National Museum in Warsaw, directed then by Dr Agnieszka Morawińska, who has always shown kindness towards our ventures, with Dr Alfred Twardecki as the Curator of the Ancient Art Gallery, who was the *spiritus movens* of our cooperation on the Museum's part. Alfred, who also fell under the spell of Sonya and Steve's work, included the animation *Hoplites! Greeks at War* (originally prepared for the Ure Museum of Greek Archaeology, UK) in a small exhibition organized in 2016.⁹ The members of the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme could watch it *in situ* during the conference crowning the project *Chasing Mythical Beasts... The Reception of Creatures from Graeco-Roman Mythology in Children's and Young Adults' Culture as a Transformation Marker* (2014–2017), supported by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation Alumni Award for Innovative Networking Initiatives.¹⁰

The animations open up new horizons also in reconstruction of artefacts, in-depth studies on Ancient Greek music used by Sonya and Steve as their "soundtracks", and, last but not least, in education – the main subject of this volume. For the animations encourage us to look at the classical world from a new perspective – with attention to detail and to the mythical threads otherwise not rarely overlooked or even forgotten. As a result, they help both the teachers and the students working with these animations to develop empathy as they inspire discussions on themes so vital still today, such as heroism, love, and sacrifice.

Thus, in the process of the application for the aforementioned ERC Consolidator Grant, it was clear that Sonya and Steve's animations would be a crucial part of the project. This task received the title "Animating the Ancient World"¹¹

UK; and with the Winnipeg Art Gallery in Canada; as well as the ventures with the *Locus Ludi* ERC Advanced Grant by Prof. Véronique Dasen (see below, n. 16); and, via Dr Astrid Fendt, with the Antikensammlungen in Munich, Germany.

⁹ See "Hoplites! Greeks at War", Panoply Vase Animation Project, <https://www.panoply.org.uk/hoplites-greeks-at-war>, and the exhibition website of the National Museum in Warsaw, "Hoplici. O sztuce wojennej starożytnej Grecji" [Hoplites: On the Art of War of Ancient Greece], National Museum in Warsaw, <https://www.mnw.art.pl/edukacja/programy-do-wystaw-czasowych/rchium/hoplisci-o-sztuce-wojennej-starozytnej-grecji/>.

¹⁰ See the project's website: *Chasing Mythical Beasts... The Reception of Creatures from Graeco-Roman Mythology in Children's & Young Adults' Culture as a Transformation Marker*, <http://mythicalbeasts.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/>, and the joint publication resulting from the ERC and Humboldt projects in Open Access: 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: https://www.winter-verlag.de/en/detail/978-3-8253-7874-5/Marciniak_Ed_Chasing_Mythical_Beasts_PDF/.

¹¹ See, e.g., the project's website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/>.

and five vases were chosen from the National Museum in Warsaw's collection for the five new animations. That is how Sappho could tell her viewers the whole (even if preserved in fragments) story of the wedding of Hector and Andromache, as none other than this poem (*Fragment 44*, as it is labelled) had been taken by Sonya and Steve as the animation's content, with the protagonists resembling figurines in the geometric vase style – tiny and yet amazingly powerful in their minuteness. The text of the poem in English and Polish translations appears on the screen in the relevant sequences of the story,¹² and the Greek original is given in one of the final slides.

But this was not enough for Sonya and Steve. They took a bold step resulting in an absolutely groundbreaking achievement: they organized and registered the vocal version of the poem – a marvellous performance that came into being thanks to their collaboration with the Modern Greek artist Aliki Markantonatou, who lent Sappho her voice, and the eminent expert in Ancient Greek music Prof. Armand D'Angour, who kindly gave his exceptional knowledge to the endeavour. I wish to express my deep gratitude for their contributions, as well as to thank the composer Prof. Conrad Steinmann from the Ensemble Melpomen, who wrote music for *Iris: Rainbow Goddess*, *Dionysus*, and *Libation*, his collaborator Martin Lorenz (kymbala), and Yannis Chatzis, whose drums can be heard on *Heracles and the Erymanthian Boar*. I am also grateful to Dr Alfred Twardecki, who saw the potential of the "Animating the Ancient World" task and arranged for Sonya and Steve access to the vases, and offered his consultation on these precious artefacts during the ERC Grant's implementation.

The path from the animations to the present volume was as much unexpected as natural. We had not planned it in the ERC Grant application. When the pandemic shattered the rhythmus of education the world over, we responded with the cycle *Find the Force!*, within which we started preparing educational materials based on our tasks.¹³ Among the first sets there was an activity involving the animation *Iris: Rainbow Goddess* that, by an unexpected twist of Fate, beautifully accented the then popular action by children in various places of the globe who in March 2020 painted rainbows, in whatever way they could,

¹² The Polish version is the Authors' special gesture towards the ERC Grant's Host Institution; however, they strive for a broad inclusivity and, via the YouTube modality, offer the subtitles in several languages (more in preparation). I wish to add that for the Polish version we used Prof. Jerzy Danielewicz's excellent translation with his kind permission – hereby I thank him deeply.

¹³ We are pleased to continue this initiative. For updates, please check our website: "Find the Force!", *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* [Project's website], <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/find-the-force>.

as it was not easy to access drawing supplies during the pandemic. Next, they showcased their rainbows in windows, they attached them to doors, and posted them on the Internet. It was fun, but it had a therapeutical function as well, spreading the message: *Hope is in the air!* among their peers under lockdown, their families, and whole societies trying to cope with circumstances unprecedented for our generations.

Sonya and Steve used their animation of Iris, the mythical messenger from Olympus, to build upon this some creative tasks (see Fig. 6). *What message do you think Iris might be carrying? What message would you send across the world? Why do you think the messengers carry a special stick?* – they invited young people to reflect on such issues and they also mentioned the ambiguous image of Iris in the ancient sources, and gave the scientific explanation of the physical phenomenon of the rainbow. While the language of the basic set was English as the contemporary *lingua franca*, with the passing of time, we published the Iris activities also in Ukrainian and Belarusian, for a message of hope is so much needed there.¹⁴



Figure 6: Example of artworks created by users of the educational materials prepared within the *Our Mythical Childhood* project: *Iris the Rainbow Goddess* by Oktawia, aged five, from Poland (2020). For more, see "Our Mythical Creations", <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-creations> (accessed 22 February 2023).

¹⁴ The Ukrainian translation is by Olha Kolesnyk, the Belarusian one by Angelina Gerus. More translations are (or will be) accessible via the flags on the Iris website: "Iris – the Rainbow Goddess", *Our Mythical Childhood... The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges* [Project's website], <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/iris>.

These activities also clearly show how the reception of Classical Antiquity works. The ancient myths are a living cultural experience, at the same time fixed and in the process of meaningful transformations in response to global and regional needs. Thus, as part of children’s and young adults’ culture, they can be a perfect tool for education that is rooted in the world’s heritage and helps young people prepare for the challenges of the present and the future. We could not let such potential be wasted.

So, we decided to share it widely, and this was possible only in collaboration with the passionate teachers who responded to Sonya’s invitation and prepared and tested with their students (at various more or less challenging stages of the pandemic) lesson scenarios based on the animations.¹⁵ We are deeply grateful for their engagement, and for the kind feedback from their wards, as well as for the openness of the headteachers, who had warmly welcomed this experimental endeavour.

It is my pleasure to also thank the reviewers of this volume for their helpful remarks: Dr Bridget Martin from the School of Classics at University College Dublin – the Director of the Access Classics outreach initiative to widen students’ participation in the Classical Antiquity courses, and Prof. Martina Treu from the Greek Language, Literature and Drama, Department of Humanities at the IULM University in Milan – an expert on the use of the Classics in modern-day communication. My expression of thanks goes also to the Director of the Cambridge School Classics Project, Caroline Bristow, who has always showed us her kind support and in April 2021 organized a launch event presenting the animations at the University of Cambridge. Last but definitely not least, I wish to mention here with gratitude Prof. Véronique Dasen from the University of Fribourg – the Principal Investigator of the ERC Advanced Grant *Locus Ludi: The Cultural Fabric of Play and Games in Classical Antiquity* (No. 741520).¹⁶ In her project, Sonya and Steve’s animations, this time including a Herculaneum fresco (see Fig. 7), also have a prominent place, and I feel honoured and pleased that we can cooperate and exchange inspirations.

The present volume appears in Open Access, in the series “Our Mythical Childhood”, established within the ERC Consolidator Grant. I thank deeply the ERC Executive Agency staff and in particular our project officers: Ms Sandrine

¹⁵ You can watch also a reportage from the work of a Polish teachers’ group in the “Strumienie” High School in Józefów (near Warsaw): “Cum Heracle ad fontes properamus: ERC Our Mythical Childhood & Schools Endeavour (2022)”, YouTube of the project *Our Mythical Childhood*, 16 November 2022, https://youtu.be/ah_4ibJ4XUA.

¹⁶ See *Locus Ludi* website: <https://locusludi.ch/>.



Figure 7: Playing Eroses, a fresco from Casa dei Cervi, Herculaneum, ca. first century AD, 23 × 36 cm. MANN 9178, National Archaeological Museum of Naples. The image comes from the website of the *Locus Ludi* project, <https://locusludi.hypotheses.org/animating-antiquity> (accessed 2 July 2023), with the kind permission of Prof. Véronique Dasen.

Barreaux, who took great care of the grant at its first stage, and Ms Katia Menegon, who guided us with amazing dedication through the next stages, including the challenging period of the pandemic, Ms Séverine Viard, who helped us close the last grant phase, and, last but not least, Dr Aneta Barkley – our Scientific Officer – on whose expertise we could always count.

The series “Our Mythical Childhood” has a kind home at the University of Warsaw Press. I wish to thank for the excellent collaboration its Director, Ms Beata Jankowiak-Konik, the Acting Editor-in-Chief, Mr Szymon Morawski, and the outstanding Editorial Team: the commissioning editor, Mr Jakub Ozimek, the copy editor – Ms Ewa Balcerzyk-Atys, Mr Zbigniew Karaszewski – a graphic artist and the designer of the present series and its covers, and Mr Janusz Olech – a master of the art of layout. I am grateful to Ms Małgorzata Sudoł – an attorney-at-law who specializes in international cooperation and copyright and has offered her most precious expertise also in regard to our publications. I acknowledge with gratitude the help from the “*Artes Liberales* Institute” Foundation that supports path-breaking educational initiatives of the University of Warsaw. My special thanks goes, as always, to Prof. Jerzy Axer and Prof. Jan Kieniewicz from the Faculty of “*Artes Liberales*”, University of Warsaw, who believed in the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme ever since its very beginning. I thank also my Faculty colleagues who are part of the *Our Mythical Childhood* team for their help with this volume: Dr Elżbieta Olechowska, Ms Maria Makarewicz, Ms Magdalena Andersen, Ms Marta Pszczolińska, and Ms Olga Strycharczyk – *gratias ago!*

The ERC Consolidator Grant project has resulted in some unique tasks complementing each other, including the studies of Prof. Susan Deacy from the University of Roehampton on the use of classical myth in work with autistic children and neurodivergent people;¹⁷ Prof. Lisa Maurice's pioneering volume with the assessment of the use of classical mythology in education,¹⁸ as well as her and her Bar-Ilan University colleague Dr Ayelet Peer's experimental course for autistic children in Israel;¹⁹ a guide through the reception of the Classics in children's literature by Prof. Elizabeth Hale and Dr Miriam Riverlea from the University of New England in Australia;²⁰ and the studies on African traditions and Ancient Greek mythology in a comparative approach by Prof. Daniel A. Nkemleke, Prof. Divine Che Neba, and Prof. Eleanor Anneh Dasi from the University of Yaoundé 1 in Cameroon.²¹ I feel deeply grateful to all of them for this mythical journey, and I hope we have many adventures yet ahead. On board with such a great team it is not a coincidence that Steve's art – this time the art of illustration – enriched also other tasks – thus, you may find the results of his collaboration within the *Our Mythical Community* also in other volumes of the "Our Mythical Childhood" series.²²

This Community, bound by the power of the Classics, exceeds far beyond our project. This is a kind of experience all people all over the world can share if they open up to the potential of this remarkable heritage. A vital stage of discovering

¹⁷ For all the stages of Prof. Deacy's research, see her blog *Autism and Classical Myth*, established as early as 2009: <https://myth-autism.blogspot.com/>. See also her volume *What Would Hercules Do? Lessons for Autistic Children Using Classical Myth*, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, 2023, Open Access, <https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.9788323558804>.

¹⁸ See, e.g., the "Our Mythical Education" section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/our-mythical-education>, and the volume edited by Lisa Maurice: *Our Mythical Education: The Reception of Classical Myth Worldwide in Formal Education, 1900–2020*, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: Warsaw University Press, 2021, Open Access, <https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.9788323546245>.

¹⁹ See, e.g., Lisa Maurice's talk *Mythology in the Israeli Autistic Classroom* at the Israel Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies 2021: IsraelClassicStudies, "ISPCS 2021 Session 2 Lisa Maurice", YouTube, 7 June 2021, <https://youtu.be/w98T4ifofTA>.

²⁰ Elizabeth Hale and Miriam Riverlea, illustrations by Steve K. Simons, *Classical Mythology and Children's Literature... An Alphabetical Odyssey*, "Our Mythical Childhood", Warsaw: University of Warsaw Press, 2022, Open Access, <https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.9788323557296>.

²¹ See, e.g., the "Myths from Cameroon" section of the *Our Mythical Childhood* website: <http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myths-from-cameroon>.

²² Dr Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons are also the Jury members in the video competition "Antiquity-Camera-Action!" for high schoolers in Poland; see *Antyk-Kamera-Akcja!* [Antiquity-Camera-Action!], website of the video competition within the *Our Mythical Childhood* programme, <https://antykkameraakcja.wordpress.com/>.

it takes place through education. May this volume support the efforts of amazing teachers whom we owe so much in building our cultural capital, that is – to paraphrase Thucydides – our κτήμα ἐς αἰεί (*ktêma es aei*), our possession for ever.

* * *

The animations prepared by Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons tell various stories, and they encourage viewers to reflect on these stories, to develop them, and to carry them further – much as in ancient times, when the art of storytelling grew through sharing. One of the most beautiful tales to share is indeed Sappho's *Fragment 44* – a poem about Troy. About the most famous war of the ancient world – one would expect. But no. As Sonya makes us realize through her set of activities linked to this animation, Sappho is really awesome in her poetic choices. Instead of taking the beaten path and singing a song of war, she focuses on a pre-war episode: the aforementioned wedding of Hector and Andromache. The Poetess's gem immortalizes the brief moment of happiness of the hero and the heroine. Soon, they will suffer an unthinkable tragedy, and our awareness of that fate endows Sappho's poem with even greater impact on our emotions. But for now the City of Troy rejoices in celebrating the true love of the newly-weds.

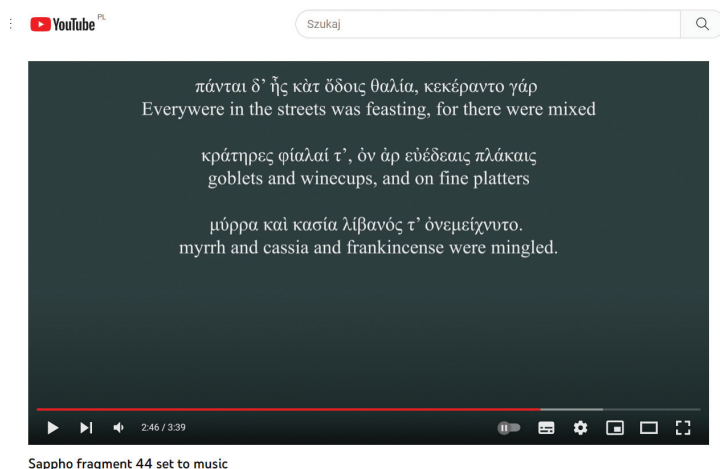
Why such a choice for a Trojan poem's content? This is one of the questions Sonya poses to users of the educational materials based on this animation. The answer is something each student (and probably each teacher, too) has to find for themselves. To me, the scenes from the animation brought to mind the poem "To Marcus Aurelius" by the Polish classicist Zbigniew Herbert (1924–1998), who reflects there on the imminent fall of the Roman Empire. The emperor hears how "Terror continuous dark terror / against the fragile human land / begins to beat It's winning..." (to lęk odwieczny ciemny lęk / o kruchy ludzki ład zaczyna / bić i zwycięży...). The advice given to Marcus Aurelius by his friend from beyond time in far-away Poland refers to the sense of community I have already mentioned – to this bit of comfort flowing in the most direful moments from the closeness to another person. In the translation by the Nobel Prize winner in literature Czesław Miłosz (1911–2004) and the Canadian poet Peter Dale Scott (b. 1929), Herbert continues:

więc lepiej Marku spokój zdejm
i ponad ciemność podaj rękę
niech drży gdy bije w zmysłów pięć
jak w wątłą lirę ślepy wszechświat...

Well Marcus better hang up your peace
give me your hand across the dark
Let it tremble when the blind world beats
on senses five like a failing lyre...²³

Such works as the animations by Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons make the failing lyre sing again. They introduce young people into the complex, never easy, but always fascinating world of myths that are our world, as well. They compel us to face such questions as why Sappho went off the beaten path to show us – as we discover in awe – love and life instead of hate and death.

Like the joyful celebration of the Trojan people, so the animations with their accompanying materials, in parallel to many a serious reflection, offer us a large dose of carefree play, too. You can draw, make computer gifs, or even sing with Sappho (see Fig. 8) – such an ancient “karaoke” can be fun, and fun is important not only in the classroom.



Sappho fragment 44 set to music

Figure 8: A screenshot from *Sappho Fragment 44 Set to Music* at the YouTube channel of the Panoply Vase Animation Project, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFkcmrH4XAq> (accessed 22 February 2023). The screenshot was prepared by Katarzyna Marciniak and used with the Authors' permission.

²³ This fragment and the one cited above were published in English in Zbigniew Herbert, “To Marcus Aurelius”, in Zbigniew Herbert, *Selected Poems*, trans. Czesław Miłosz and Peter Dale Scott, Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1985, 22. The Polish original can be found in Zbigniew Herbert, *Wiersze zebrane* [Collected Poems], ed. Ryszard Krynicki, Kraków: Wydawnictwo a5, 2008, 26 (also available online: Zbigniew Herbert, “Do Marka Aurelego” [To Marcus Aurelius], Fundacja im. Zbigniewa Herberta, <https://fundacjaherberta.com/biblioteka-herberta/wiersze/do-marka-aurelego/>).

One of the most beautiful scenes of *Sappho Fragment 44* – a scene that I cherish in my memory right beside the moment when Sappho moved for the first time – takes place on the Trojan ship on which Hector is carrying Andromache to Troy. We can easily imagine their happiness – however, Andromache especially may be a little anxious about such a change to her life. In a natural way Hector extends his arm towards her, she does the same and their hands meet (see Fig. 9). The geometric style of the animation enhances the simple, but for this reason also natural and deeply moving, gesture.



Figure 9: Hector and Andromache holding hands – a screenshot from the animation by Sonya Nevin and Steve K. Simons, *Sappho Fragment 44: Hector and Andromache – A Wedding at Troy*, prepared by the Authors and used with their permission.

As the world falls down, holding hands across the dark (as beyond time) may give us and the next generations the force to rebuild it. In its deeper layer, the present volume contains quite a number of inspirational scenarios for such a (re)building. And I am sure more will be created by You – Our Mythical Reader.