Henry Lion Oldie [Dmitry Gromov and Oleg Ladyzhensky]

A Hero Must Be Alone [Герой должен быть один (Geroi dolzhen byt' odin)]

Russia (1996)

TAGS: Alcmene Amphitryon Antaeus / Antaios Chiron / Cheiron Cronus / Kronos Deianeira Eurystheus Eurytos Galanthis Giants Gigantomachia Hades Hera Heracles Hercules Hestia Hydra Iolaus Iole Iphicles Iphitos of Oechalia Medusa Megara Nessus Perseus Poseidon Salmoneus Thebes Theseus Tiresias Zeus



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General information	
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Author of the Entry	Zoia Barzakh, Bar-Ilan University, zoia_barzakh@mail.ru

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Creators



Henry Lion Oldie [Dmitry Gromov and Oleg Ladyzhensky] , b. 1990
(Author)

Henry Lion Oldie is the pen name of Ukrainian fantasy fiction writers Dmitry Gromov and Oleg Ladyzhensky. Both authors reside in Kharkiv, Ukraine, and write in Russian.

Dmitry Evgenievich Gromov was born on March 30, 1963 in Simferopol (Crimea, Ukrainian Republic, Soviet Union). In 1969 he moved to Sevastopol (Crimea), and in 1974 – to Kharkiv, where he lives until now. In 1980, after graduating from high school, he enrolled at the Kharkiv Polytechnic Institute. After the Institute he worked as a chemical engineer. He started writing fantasy in 1976, in the age of 13. By the beginning of the 1990th he almost completely left engineering for the sake of literary activity.

His hobbies are hard rock music (he is an author of the first and, to my knowledge, only Russian monograph on the history of “Deep Purple") and karate (II kyu, brown belt).

Gromov is married, has a son (born 1989).

Oleg Semenovich Ladyzhensky was born on March 23, 1963 in Kharkiv. In 1980, after graduating from high school, he enrolled at Kharkiv State Institute of Culture, where he acquired a profession of theater director. Since 1984 he has been working as a director of the Pelican Theater Studio, one of the actors of which is Dmitry Gromov.

Ladyzhensky has a black belt, II dan in karate, and a title of internationally certified referee in martial arts. He is a member of the International Association of National Contact Karate-Do Societies and the senior instructor of Gōjū-ryū school.

Ladyzhensky is married, has a daughter (born 1985).

“The birthday of sir Henry Lion Oldie” is November 13, 1990, when

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Gromov and Ladyzhensky subscribed the first story they wrote together, “Cinema unto death and…” ("Кино до гроба и..."), by this name. For the last name they took first two letters from each of their names (“Ol” from “Oleg” and “Di” from “Dima”, Russian pet name from “Dmitry”), and the name of Henry the Lion, medieval German prince, served as the first names.

At Eurocon 2006 in Kiev, the European Science Fiction Society named Gromov and Ladyzhansky Europe's best writers of 2006 (see here, accessed: April 23, 2018). Among other awards of Oldie are the Award of Dniestrian Moldovan Republic Writers Guild (1997, for the novel *A Hero Must Be Alone*), two «Golden caduceus» (award of Kharkiv International Festival of Fantasy “Star Bridge”) for 2000 and 2005 and “Golden Roskon” (award of International Conference on Fantasy and science fiction “Roscon”, held in Moscow) for 2006.

Sources:

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Azbuka,"Философы от фэнтези: жизнь и миры Генри Лайона Олди", dtf.ru (accessed 02.01.2022)

И. Солунский, "Меч против неба", http://www.fandom.ru/ (accessed 02.01.2022)

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Additional information

Translation

Polish: *Heros powinien być jeden*. Ks. 1. Andrzej Sawicki, trans. Lublin: Fabryka Słów, 2009.

Heros powinien być jeden. Ks. 2. Eugeniusz Dębski, trans. Lublin: Fabryka Słów, 2009.

Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs

Prequels:

The Grandson of Perseus. Book 1: My Grandfather is Exterminator [Внук Персея. Книга I: Мой дедушка – Истребитель (Vnuk Perseia. Kniga I: Moi dedushka – Istrebitel')]

The Grandson of Perseus. Book 2: The Son of the Lame Alcaeus [Внук Персея. Книга II: Сын хромого Алкея (Vnuk Perseia. Kniga II: Syn khromogo Alkeia)]

Summary

This is a heroic fantasy fiction based on the myth of Hercules, aimed at young adults, in novel format. The plot of the original myth is thoroughly transformed in order to emphasize topics and motives relevant to contemporary youth culture.

At the beginning of the book, we learn that Zeus has a special plan for his newly-conceived child from Alcmene and that this plan is a matter of serious disagreement in the family of gods (or "the Family", as it is called throughout whole *Achaean Cycle* [*Ахейский цикл*]). Zeus – whom other gods call "the Youngest One" – took notice of the fact that demigods can kill monsters and decided to procreate the unique and extremely powerful Lonely Ashman, who will clean all monsters out of the world and eventually become a god after his death. Poseidon (whom other gods call "the Oldest One") and Hera (family nickname – "the Sister") oppose this plan from the outset. While Hera acts out of natural feminine jealousy towards Alcmene, the worries of Poseidon have more thorough grounds: he is afraid of the growing power of humans, who are already able to kill monsters, creatures that Poseidon describes as "those from our kind". Nevertheless, Hades, who has a nickname "the Middle", supports the plan of Zeus, since he knows, being a god of the reign close to Tartarus, that Titans (or "the

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Fallen Ones") can eventually break through from Tartarus to the living world. So Hades hopes that in this case, the great Lonely Ashman can be of some help. Hades' worries are supported by Hermes, the only god who regularly visits the world of men. He warns Hades, his uncle, with whom, of all gods, he has a rather intimate relationship, being his dispatch and messenger, that human sacrifices, the most effective way to support the Fallen Ones, become more and more frequent on the earth.

At the start of the book, the reader also learns that Titans – the Fallen Ones – weren't totally forgotten on the Earth either. Their secret worshippers form a community of the Obsessed by Tartarus and are eager to restore them to power. This community has its own plans concerning the son of Alcmene. They hope to use him as a bridge between the Earth and Tartarus, which can help the Fallen Ones to free themselves. The way to do this is to make a child a living deity by "feeding" his soul with human sacrifices.

This clash of different interests of more-than-human creatures is reflected dramatically in the life of Amphitryon's family. Already during Alcmene's pregnancy, there were several attempts to kill her, all prevented in the last moment either by Hermes or by Amphitryon. When Alcides, the son of Alcmene, was born, Galanthis, the priestess of Hecate and the member of Salmoneus Community, who gained Amphitryon's trust by pretending to pull "Hera's Eileithyia" from the bed of the labouring woman, was the first to learn about this fact. She immediately runs to the clandestine altar of Salmoneans and sacrifices a small girl to "the new-born god". "And in this very moment, little Alcydes issued a heart-rending shriek…"

Luckily enough, however, Galanthis runs from Amphitryon's house too early to learn that after the first boy, the second, Iphicles, was born. Therefore the second twin didn't feel the consequences of Salmoneans' bloody rituals. Alcides, on the other hand, bore the whole burden of them: every time human blood was shed in his secret altars erected by Salmoneans, "Tartarus knocked at the heart" of the boy, and he became a half-divine and half-bestial creature, dangerous for those around him. Neither the boy's human relatives nor the gods, except for Hermes, knew the cause of these fits of madness. Hermes, however, begins to understand everything and is worried that the Fallen Ones could erupt into the living world through the distorted mind of the child. He decides to make friends with the boys in order to learn how real the danger is and to kill Alcides or both brothers if it is

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real indeed. But he manages to fulfil only the first part of his plan, since, when the decisive moment comes, he realizes that he, a god, has become so attached to the mortal boys that he cannot do harm to them.

It turns out that only Iphicles is capable of controlling his twin brother in the moments of madness. Therefore, by his very existence, he destroys the plans of both Zeus and the Fallen Ones: Zeus needs Alcides the Lonely Ashman, as bestial as his monstrous victims, a would-be god (we should remember that in this world, as Poseidon hints in the very beginning of the book, monsters and gods are similar in nature), and the Fallen Ones need Alcides a Madman, a living bridge between earth and Tartarus. So Hermes, who now was looking for the way to save both the boys and the world, suggests the following role distribution among brothers: “Too many forces need a great hero Alcides, but no one but Alcides himself needs Iphicles. These are not two brothers, Chiron, not two different people – this is a single creature! Alcides and Iphicles – especially during the fits – are feelings and reason, horses and charioteer… Therefore, one should think about the fact that there are two; no one should compare Alcides with Iphicles. The son of Zeus should outshine the son of Amphitryon – in short, a hero must be alone. Let the Family (i. e. gods) forget about Iphicles, let the Fallen Ones never know about him. Let people call Iphicles simply a brother of a great hero. Boys are indistinguishable from each other – from now on, whoever of them wins in a competition or in single combat and whoever later performs a heroic deed – he should be called Alcides. Iphicles should go into the shadows. Yes, this will not be easy for real Iphicles, but he must agree for the sake of Alcides. Reason habitually suppresses feelings … And Iphicles is reason.” And both boys agree for this – now and forever.

The culmination of the novel is the Gigantomachia, the apocalyptic battle with the tribe of Giants, unassailable for the Olympians but assailable for human heroes. Giants were a successful attempt of the experiment of which Alcides was an unsuccessful one. Not only demigods could kill immortal creatures: Giants, the children of the Fallen Ones, could do this too. The Fallen Ones and the Obsessed, having learnt this fact from the “experiment” of gods who procreated mortal heroes, systematically “fed” children of Titans and mortals with human sacrifices. The abominable creatures resulting from this “diet” show what could have happened to Alcides without the aid of his brother: their mind is totally destroyed, they are depicted as monstrous children that see all other living creatures, including their

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own parents, as either toys or food. It is in the struggle with Titans that gods need their most important weapon, the Lonely Ashman – due to the trickery of the brothers suggested by Hermes, they don't know that he isn't lonely. But both heroes go to this battle not as weapons of gods, but on their own free will: Iphicles goes there in order to save the world from the impending reign of such creatures (he has already learned about their nature from Iphitus, who happens to be the father of one of them) and Alcides goes there to save his brother.

This opportunity to act from their own understanding, will and motives, to be neither victims nor weapon is what Amphitriads gained by their heroic deed for the whole humanity. After the Gigantomachia, Cronus says that earlier neither gods nor the Fallen Ones perceived humans as independent figures, as personalities, but now, Cronus goes on, he understands that "you people are the third force, a new race worthy to take its place on Gaia. The Family is on Olympus, the Fallen Ones are in Tartarus, and you live and die on the Earth, so you are its real masters." In this new world, with new state of the human on the Earth, there is already no place for human sacrifices, since the role of a human being is different from that of a silent victim of a blind weapon of the gods. And this can't be changed, though after Gigantomachia both heroes are doomed: now that gods had learned about the existence and the role of the second brother they decided that "a hero must be alone": the complex creature consisting of Alcides-"feelings" and Iphicles-"reason" is too powerful to exist. But after the inevitable death of both brothers, this complex creature parts in a different way: the divine part joins the gods in Olympus and forgets the real course of events, while the human one goes to Hades, but, unlike other humans, preserves his memory there and so gains true immortality, remaining human. At the end of the book, Hades in his dialogue with Hermes hints that this new status of Heracles is a hope for humanity to survive during the Dark Ages, when gods have left the earth, and to develop the new kind of connection with the immortal and the irrational.

Analysis

This book is the first one of Oldie's *Achaean Cycle* (*Ахейский цикл*). It raises problems of human freedom and human limitation and, more specifically, provokes contemplations on the nature of being a victim and/or a victimizer and the ways of overcoming these conditions. The family of Amphitryon the Exile, as he calls himself, was chosen by

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gods to be blind pawns in their complicated games, but eventually, the heroism of Amphitryon and his sons Alcides and Iphicles led, at the cost of their personal destruction, to a thorough change in the human condition in the living world.

The book is divided into episodia and stasima. Episodia are dedicated to events on the earth and stasima describes what is going on in the world of gods, either on Olympus or in Hades. This deliberate intertextual reference to the structure of Greek tragedy is telling: as in the tragedy, the situation of the characters has no "good" solution, but their inevitable destruction eventually leads to the victory in more profound level.

The figure of Galanthis exemplifies Oldie's skilful intertextual play with rare versions of myths. According to Antonius Liberalis, rather a late grammarian and mythographer (*Metamorphoses*, 29), Galanthis, a daughter of Proetus, was not an ugly old woman, as she is depicted by Oldie, but a fair maiden, playmate and companion of Alcmene. When Alcmene was giving birth to Heracles, Galanthis deluded Eileithyia and Moirae, who, in order to please Hera, kept Alcmene in continuous birth pangs. Moirae took revenge on Galanthis by turning her into a weasel, but Hecate pitied the maiden and appointed her a sacred animal for herself. Later Heracles, out of gratitude to one who helped him to see the light of the sun, placed her image in his home and offered her sacrifices. So the story of Antonius Liberalis runs. Oldie, by recombining its significant details – Eileithyia, Hecate, birth pangs of Alcmene, sacrifice – creates the new ominous image. Even a form of a weasel reappears in it: old and ugly Galanthis is said to have "a pointed snout of a weasel".

We see that Oldie divided a single image of Heracles into two persons – and did it in the manner of Plato's anthropology with its bipartite division of a soul into two parts – the rational and the irrational one. The image of charioteer and horses is, too, taken directly from the Plato's *Republic*. Later this image reappears in another novel of Oldie, *The Almshouse* (*Богадельня*, 1991).

It was predestined for all members of the Amphitryon's family to be pawns of the alien game and victims of the alien will: not only Alcides who would, in accordance with gods' or Tartarus' will, eventually lose everything that made him a human being, but also Amphitryon, whose family life was distorted by ignorance of his boys' parentage and Iphicles, who has to stay in the shadow of his heroic brother and

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watch passively his destruction. But all three in a sense overcome their fate by accepting it. Amphitryon, without questioning his fatherhood, loves both boys as his sons and supports them in the most dramatic moments (even after his own death: in this version, he regains life in the body of his own grandson, Iolaus, the son of Iphicles). Iphicles agrees willingly to stay forever in the shadow of his brother and to be next to him in order to control him during his fits of madness. And Alcides, being what he is, nevertheless acts not as a weapon of gods (or the Fallen Ones), but out of his own motives – to defend mortals and stop any form of human sacrifice, the destructive consequences of which he feels in his own tortured mind.

This novel in particular – and the *Achaean Cycle*, of which it is the first book, in general – shows how the classical material can be used for creating both fascinating and thought-provoking prose for young adults. The genre specification invented by Oldie for their novels – "philosophical thriller" – reflects perfectly the combination of dynamics of plot and profoundness of thought they achieved. The authors' shared interest to theatre and martial arts can partly explain the choice of motives and problems characteristic to their joined creative work. Theatrical experience can be viewed as a source of repeated reflections on the problem of identity vs. otherness, and Japanese martial arts with their inherent complicated spirituality give the special perspective to their interpretation of the mind-body problem and special colours for their frequent descriptions of single fights.

Greek myths provide abundant material for both topics. The problem of identity is known to be the central one for many of them. The motive of the divine obsession, also frequently reappearing in many Greek myths, contributes to it either. The dependence of human behaviour of divine intervention is well known as a characteristic of "the Homeric man" at least from the time of publishing of the ground-breaking book of Eric R. Dodds *The Greeks and the Irrationa*l*. Needless to say, the motive of identity and "feeling of otherness", of various forms of obsession and ways to overcome it is among the most popular ones in the literature for young adults, since, according to Erik H. Erikson, identity formation is the critical "developmental task" of adolescence**. To mention only the best-known examples, this motive is among the central ones in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (the irresistible power of the Ring felt by all who possess it and destroying their personality) and Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (the mysterious connection between Harry and Voldemort, at times, felt by

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the former as a kind of obsession and explained only in the last book; the motive of overcoming "Imperius" spell, which is central for the fifth book). As for creative production of Oldie themselves, the same motive reappears, for instance, in such their books as *Noperapon* (1998; the hero turned into a creature unintentionally and unpredictably copying the others' features) and *Code-Bound Magu*s ([Маг в законе] 1999; the system of magical "education" leading to loss of one's personality limits). As can be seen from the analysis above, the Greek myths can serve a fitting framework for the reflections on this topic.

Another common motive of many of Oldie's novels is the formation of the character, the experience of teaching and being taught. Here, ironically, the almost total absence of mythical material can serve the best for the purpose of a writer. The myth itself shows rather little interest to the child psychology and education: it can only provide some details of childhood and youth of a hero which usually sound rather improbable and serve for stressing a hero's over-than-human prowess. At the same time, the great number of details on the hero's family can usually be derived from various versions of a myth. This gives the author a great deal of room for imagination and creativity, given the fact that later classical texts, unlike early ones, are abundant with reflections about education and character formation.

This leads us to two other features of classical myth skillfully used by Oldie in creating the fantasy series for young adults: the great number of characters with their complicated relationships and the plurality of myth versions.

The first feature provided the authors with various options of creating subplots, so common in fantasy series. For instance, the figure of Oechalian king Eurytus and the fate of himself and his family served as material for one of such subplots. The most persistent feature of Eurytus in all versions of myth is his prominent skill of an archer: in *Odyssey* (VIII, 226) he was killed by Apollo whom he presumed to rival in using the bow and in Apollodorus instructed Hercules in this art (II, 4, 9) and was conquered by the latter in a bow shooting competition, the price for which was Iole, his daughter. Oldie skillfully combined these versions, creating a refined subplot, which involves also the fates of Eurytus' children, Iphitus and Iole, also connected by the myth with that of Hercules. Eurytus' bow reappears later in Oldie's *Achaean Cycle*: in *Odysseus the Son of Laertus* (*Одиссей, сын Лаэрта*; 2000–2001) we learn that the bow given to the child Odysseus by the

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testament of his grandfather Autolycus, which he later used to kill the suitors, had had formerly been Eurytus bow, the present of the god Apollo, his teacher and enemy. Here we can see how fantasy writers' and readers' passion for magical artefacts passing from one book of a series to another finds ample material in Greek mythology with its love to mythological objects.

The plurality of myth's versions, together with a well-established tradition of euhemerical explanations of myth's most improbable versions, provides Oldie with an opportunity to explore another topic relevant to youth culture and literature, namely that of truth and memory. Needless to say, that fantasy for young readers is full of flashbacks, recollections and contemplations about the past, as well as reflections on the nature of fame, memory and history. In this novel, as well as in the other parts of *Achaean Cycle*, Oldie shows the process of the birth of the myth out of fame and rumours. For example, the first appearance of the wicked Galanthis, who pretended to pull Eileithyia from the bed of the labouring Alcmene is followed by the dialogue of leisured Thebans:

"– Moirae!

– No, I'm telling you – Eileithyia!"

– No, Moira!

– Pfft, what a fool! Why on earth will Moirae sit on the doorstep of some Alcmene!

– They will – by order of Hera!

– Yeah, right – Moirae following Hera's orders! Both of you are stupid! They were neither Eileithyia nor Moirae – they were Pharmacidae!

The third voice ... the thirty third ... the three hundred and thirty-third voice ... Thebes are rustling with rumors... "

All these versions appear in one or another ancient source, and here the young reader is shown the supposed common origin of all of them. In the same manner, the tradition according to which Linus was killed

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by Apollo, because he had ventured upon a musical contest with the god (Paus. 9.29.3; Eustath. *ad Hom.* p. 1163) was, according to Oldie, invented by Kastor, one of Alcydes' teachers, to protect the young hero from prosecutions that awaited him after the involuntary killing of Linus in one of his fits of madness (cf. Aelian, *Varia Historia*, 3.32).

All in all, the novel, both exciting and thought-provoking, fulfils its aim of introducing young adults to the world of ancient Greek mythology, at the same time rising problems relevant to youth culture and traditional to fantasy series for young readers.

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* Eric R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951.

** Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, New York: Norton, 1968.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Alcmene Amphitryon Antaeus / Antaios Chiron / Cheiron Cronus / Kronos Deianeira Eurystheus Eurytos Galanthis Giants Gigantomachia Hades Hera Heracles Hercules Hestia Hydra Iolaus Iole Iphicles Iphitos of Oechalia Medusa Megara Nessus Perseus Poseidon Salmoneus Thebes Theseus Tiresias Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Child, children Conflict Death Family Friendship Gaining understanding Heroism Identity Justice Love Memory Morality Parents (and children) Past Relationships Tricksters Violence
Further Reading	Dodds, Eric R., *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951. Erikson, Erik H., *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, New York: Norton, 1968.

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