Zoia Barzakh, "Entry on: Diomedes, the Son of Tydeus. Book 1: I Won't Return [Диомед, сын Тидея. Книга I: Я не вернусь (Diomed, syn Tideia. Kniga I: Ia ne vernus')] by Andrei Valentinovich Shmal'ko [Andrei Valentinov] ", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/464. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Andrei Valentinovich Shmal'ko [Andrei Valentinov]

Diomedes, the Son of Tydeus. Book 1: I Won't Return [Диомед, сын Тидея. Книга I: Я не вернусь (Diomed, syn Tideia. Kniga I: Ia ne vernus')]

Russia (2000)

TAGS: Achilles Aegiale Agamemnon Alcmaeon Amphiaraus Amphitryon Athena Capaneus Chronos Diomedes (Son of Tydeus) Fate Hades Helen Hera Heracles Hercules Iolaus Menelaus Odysseus / Ulysses Palamedes Paris (Trojan Prince) Patroclus Priam Protesilaus Thersander Tydeus



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General information	
Title of the work	Diomedes, the Son of Tydeus. Book 1: I Won't Return [Диомед, сын Тидея. Книга I: Я не вернусь (Diomed, syn Tideia. Kniga I: Ia ne vernus')]
Country of the First Edition	Russia
Country/countries of popularity	Russia; Ukraine; Belarus; Moldova
Original Language	Russian
First Edition Date	2000
First Edition Details	Andrei Valentinov, *Диомед, сын Тидея. Книга I: Я не вернусь* [*Diomedes, the Son of Tydeus. Book 1: I Won't Return*]. Moscow: Eksmo-Press, 2000, 378 pp.
ISBN	5040053703
Genre	Fantasy fiction, Mythological fiction, Myths, Novels
Target Audience	Young adults (15–25)
Author of the Entry	Zoia Barzakh, Bar-Ilan University, zoia_barzakh@mail.ru
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This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Andrei Valentinovich Shmal'ko [Andrei Valentinov] , b. 1958 (Author)

Andrei Valentinov is a penname of Andrei Valentinovich Shmal'ko, a Ukrainian Russian-speaking writer for young adults, historian (Ancient Greece and Rome) and archeologist, PhD (History; thesis title *Roman Policy in the Southern Black Sea Region in the 1st Century BC*), Senior Lecturer of Kharkiv State University. For many years Valentinov participated in excavations of Chersonesus, an ancient Greek colony founded in the 7th century B.C. in the south-western part of the Crimean Peninsula. (This experience is reflected in his autobiographical novel *Canis Major* [*Созвездье пса*, 2002]).

Valentinov wrote several novels in co-authorship with Henry Lion Oldie (Oleg Gromov and Dmitry Ladyzhensky, for biographies see the entry *A Hero Must Be Alone*).

The main genre of Valentinov's novels is alternative history, specifically, fictional (alternative) versions of historical events with strong element of fantastic and supernatural. Examples are *The Eye of Power* ([*Око силы*, 1996–2011], fictional history of 20th century Russia), *The Angel of Spartacus* ([*Ангел Спартака*, 2006], fictional history of late Republican and early Imperial Rome), *A Cleric of Auvergne* ([*Овернский клирик*, 1997], France, the 12th century) and *Triumphant Heavens* ([*Небеса ликуют*, 2000], Italy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the 17th century).

All his novels are characterized by elaborate presentation of relevant historical background, including culture-specific elements of day-to-day reality. The idea of cultural relativity lies in the very structure of Valentinov's world. According to Valentinov's fantastic cosmology, adopted also by H. L. Oldie and fully explained in their coauthored novel *We Have No Other Place to Live* [*Нам здесь жить*, 1999], the Universe is discrete – it consists of mutually isolated *nomoi*, the inhabitants of each of which see the world in their own way. For example, for ancient Greeks centaurs were real, but we would see the same creatures as men riding their horses.

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The reading of Valentinov's novels can be considered both as entertainment and as educational activity for young adults. It is telling that in his fan-club in the Internet one can find discussions on serious historical problems, betraying rather broad and profound erudition of participants.

Sources:

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Additional information

Summary

This is a heroic fantasy fiction based on the myth of Diomedes, aimed at young adults, in novel format. The plot of the novel is reframing and reinterpretation of the myths of Seven against Thebes and Epigones, as well as other events from the life of Diomedes before the Trojan War.

Diomedes, the son of Tydeus the Unforgiven, was born in exile. His father owes his unfortunate nickname and his status of exile to kindred killing performed by him in the state of madness. Diomedes himself experiences the same kind of fits from the very young age. This plight, in the world of Oldie's *Achaean Cycle*, is inseparable from the status of hero. Nevertheless, the situation of Diomedes is even worse than that of his father: in Oldie's version of the myth, he is demigod, the son of the goddess Athena.

From his early childhood he is able to communicate with his immortal mother and overhear her speaking to his father. These dialogues are filled with more and more disquieting apprehensions, since the goddess already knows that both her love and her child are doomed, since it is the will of Zeus to destroy the whole generation of heroes.

The death of Diomedes' father, Tydeus, is interpreted through the lenses of the specific position of a hero in Oldie-Valentinov's "Achaean" world. The worst fate for a hero is to get and receive human sacrifices and so to become a half-divine and half-bestial creature which has nothing human in it – like Giants in Oldie's novel *A Hero Must Be Alone*. So in the fatal battle under the walls of Thebes, Athena did not only refuse her dying favourite the eternal life she planned to give him, as the myth tells, but kills her lover herself, when she saw that, by drinking hot brains of the dead Melanippus, he sacrificed the latter to "the god Tydeus".

Tydeus, presented in the first chapters as a loving father and a responsible military leader, has nothing cruel or bestial about him. His fits of madness and his attempt of self-deification through the act of cannibalism are therefore represented not as consequences of his evil nature but as divinely imposed doom. Thus this novel, more than any of Oldie-Valentinov's other novels in the *Achaean Cycle*, is full of the characters' questioning divine justice. Not only Capaneus, a paradigmatic sacrilegious figure and blasphemer of Greek mythology,

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and Amphiaraus, who, in Valentinov's version, "loved all gods but for Zeus", but also Odysseus, rather pious in Homer's epic, and Diomedes himself often speak with bitter resentment of the gods' cruelty towards their own children. Nevertheless, Diomedes manages eventually to cope with his state and to avoid the fate of his father.

The first book is devoted to events of Diomedes' childhood and youth before the Trojan War. His military and political enterprises were a complete success – but by the end of the first book he is totally exhausted and devastated man. After he and his fellows in arms, the Epigones, acquitted themselves of an oath given by their fathers, seized Thebes and restored Thersander to his ancestors' throne, he unwittingly became first a pawn, and then one of the main players of "Atreus' fatal game of dice" – big-league Greek politics. Amphilochus, exiled from Argos by his brother Alkmaeon after the latter's killing of his mother, implores him, together with all the other Epigones, to avenge her, kill Alkmaeon and become the king of Argos. Diomedes hesitates, since, being a son of Caledonian exile, he feels that his ruling wouldn't be legitimate, but the aged Heracles encourages him, though both of them know both fatal consequences of having ichor in one's blood and the plan of the gods to provoke a series of Panhellenic wars in order to destroy the last generation of heroes:

"– You served both people and gods, and we have one goal – to survive! Just to survive.

– Not to survive – to win, Diomedes! You cannot hide all your life, and your friends cannot. You are the last, and the battle that is ahead of you is also the last one. So what? Even the gods are not eternal… Fate drags a weak on the rope, leads a stronger one by the hand, and the strongest becomes fate himself. Go, do not be afraid!"

Following this tragic encouragement of Hercules, Diomedes manages not only to seize Argos, but also to defend his new-gained kingdom from scheming of Atreus and Thyestes, the Mycenaean rulers, and his rivals for the hegemony over Hellas. He becomes wise and responsible king, the most powerful person in Greece. Though he is only twenty, the understanding of the true meaning of events lies hard on his

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shoulders. He gained it not only through contact with his divine mother, but also through lessons of Eumelus, his teacher, who explained to him the true nature of *nomoi*. He understands the dangers of any war at the East, since "the Eastern *nomos*" is totally alien to the Greek one. Therefore, he stands against the Trojan expedition, although for Agamemnon the abduction of Helen is only a pretext for a military expedition which should bring his dream for world supremacy to implementation. But Diomedes is able to see the big picture: gods provoke the war not only in order to destroy the last generation of heroes, but also to start the great migration towards the East. "They need not only our blood! They need the lives of thousands and thousands to pave the way to the East." But then Protesilaus – who in Oldie and Valentinov's version of the myth is none other than incarnation of Amphitryon, Hercules' father – reminds him the words of Hercules: heroes of Hellas, he says, should do everything in their power to win, though the situation is seemingly desperate and the war itself is a trap of the gods. Finally Diomedes agrees, even more so since a military expedition is a chance for him to forget his grief.

The price Diomedes paid for his power and wisdom was too high for him. As a teenager boy, he knew love of the goddess Aphrodite and couldn't love any mortal woman after that. Nevertheless, he met his goddess once more – now in the person of Amykla, a temple prostitute of Aphrodite. She became his mistress, and for a short time they were happy together. But first a forced dynastic marriage with the ugly, possessive and quarrelsome Aegiale, and then the busy life of a ruler estranged him from his love. Feeling this, she left him, returned to her temple and was sacrificed to Aphrodite, both at the goddess's and at her own will.

So, having lost both his love and trust to the gods and to his friends (he survived several assassination attempts and knows that those behind them must belong to his close cycle), Diomedes leaves Hellas for the expedition which he believes to be suicidal, quite sure that he will never come back.

Analysis

In terms of plot the novel is connected with *Odysseus the Son of Laertus* and *A Hero Must Be Alone* by Henry Lion Oldie. These novels together form a shared universe, based on the world of original Greek myths, but remarkable for complex relationship between the world of

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divine and human universe. Two novels – *Odysseus the Son of Laertus* and *Diomedes the Son of Tydeus* by Valentinov, both in two books – were deliberately published in the same year by the same publishing house. These novels are related to each other as two points of view on the same events by two characters, who, being close friends both in myth and in novels, have nevertheless completely opposite positions with respect of the main problems of the cycle. While Odysseus of Oldie's novel goes off to the Trojan War with the only thought "I will return", which became a refrain of the first book, Diomedes, going to take part in the same enterprise, knows for sure that he won't return. Unlike Odysseus, he has no home to which he would aspire to return: he was burn as a son of a cursed exile, his only love was lost for him forever due to dynastic marriage with Aegiale he was forced to contract, and his power as Argive king gives him nothing but envy and hatred by his former friends and constant fear of hired assassin attacks.

Thus, Odysseus and Diomedes in these novels embody opposite notions of masculinity: a man as a protector of his family (Odysseus) and a man as a political and military leader (Diomedes). These positions are shown to complement one another, both having their advantages and shortcomings: Diomedes, with all his authority and Pan-Hellenic political influence, is deprived of private life and happiness, while Odysseus, with his devoted love to his home, wife and child, becomes an easy prey for blackmailing and manipulations.

The other important topic revealed by the comparison of two friends is that of trauma. While the childhood of Odysseus is depicted as almost cloudless, that of Diomedes was marked by the series of tragic events: the first fits of his temporary madness, the death of his father and his comrades at the expedition of Seven against Thebes, the suicide of his aunt Euadne, who threw herself into the funeral pure of her husband Capaneus before the boy's eyes. Early experience of loss and loneliness had fatal influence over Diomedes' personality, poisoning forever his relationships with others, himself and the gods. His warlike temper leads him to the Theban expedition, though his teacher Eumelus tries to stop him, warning him by the words of Homer: "A clanless, lawless, hearthless man is he that loveth dread strife". The inherited status of the outcast and the warlike temper is hereby tied, forming the cycle of violence.

The motive of trauma is repeated in the person of 12-years-old Theban

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girl, raped by Diomedes upon the capture of Thebes by Epigoni. He accomplishes this act of sexual violence as a revenge for the deaths of his father and his uncle Aegialeus, who has been killed in the war of Epigoni. But the girl seeks the revenge in turn – first by the hand of her brother, who attempted to kill Diomedes already in the first book, and then, in the second book, by her own hands.

Sexuality and love in general are presented in the novel in rather tragic light. The first erotic experience the teenager Diomedes has with the goddess Aphrodite herself, and this experience can never be surpassed by any pleasure given by an intercourse with a mortal woman. The motive of supernatural erotic experience that eventually ruins a person's ability for normal human love is frequent motive in young adult literature. But in Valentinov's novel this motive is further complicated by more down-to-earth development: having found the mortal counterpart of his immortal love in Amykla, Diomedes loses it once more because of incompatibility of high political ambition with private life. The picture is further completed by images of war rapes, political uses and abuses of love and sex and, finally, politically interested marriage.

Detailed account of complex relationships of the families of Adrastus and Oeneus (the hero belongs to both), as well as multiple subplots and frequent retrospections make the novel to resemble fantasy family sagas, such as, to mention only the best known example, *The Game of Thrones*.

All these features make the novel a fascinating reading for modern young adults, while raising ethical problems inherent to classical Greek myth and literature.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aegiale Agamemnon Alcmaeon Amphiaraus Amphitryon Athena Capaneus Chronos Diomedes (Son of Tydeus) Fate Hades Helen Hera Heracles Hercules Iolaus Menelaus Odysseus / Ulysses Palamedes Paris (Trojan Prince) Patroclus Priam Protesilaus Thersander Tydeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant	Adolescence Child, children Coming of age Conflict Death Family Gaining understanding Heroism Identity Justice Love Masculinity Memory Morality Multiculturalism Nation Parents (and children)

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for Children and Youth Culture	Psychology Relationships Sexuality Tricksters
Addenda	The second book of *Diomedes, the Son of Tydeus* is described here.

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