

HOW TO CHEAT DEATH:

Ancient and Modern Languages of Immortality

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*“... he would not belong
to our species, nothing about
his life would be like ours.
Not love or ambitions, or feelings,
or nostalgia; nothing...”*

To escape death, to find a way to break out once and for all from the necessity of one among the qualities which ontologically primarily marks and defines the human condition. In one of his letter to Verlaine, Mallarmé once wrote that «il existe un et un seul mythe, toujours le meme, qui émerge dans la poesie écrite tout avant que dans les traditions orales: c'est lui qui dicte les diverses inflexions de la tentative de response à la question “pourquoi l'homme doit-il mourir?”»¹, however in some of those myth we may even find something more than the question itself, along with his apparently unchangeable answer²: in some of them there is a fascinating struggle for a different outcome, a rebellion that some subjects, at a specific point of their life, undertake more or less consciously to avert the obligation of death from themselves or their beloved ones. But how? As we will see, all the lore and myths about immortality tell none but only the same story, proving that Verlaine was right more than he thought.

The recent movie ‘Troy’ renewed the image and the fame of one among the brightest heroes we may find in Greek mythology: Achilles mighty in battle, skilled in combat and winner over Hector, whose body is invulnerable to everything save for his the small spot of his talon. His strength and deeds are known as well as his story, but few know that, despite the excellence he earned in life, he is also a paradoxical and clearest emblem of a failure.

Here are the two main versions of his birth and first days of life, between the royal walls of king Peleus, in Ftia:

Apollodorus III, 13, 6

Apollonius Rhodius IV, vv. 869 – 876

¹ I've found this quotation, so suitable to my analysis, in the interesting article of Pierre Marandra, *Cendrillon: theories des graphes et des ensembles*, in CL. CHABROL *Semiotique narrative et textuelle*, Paris 1973, pp. 122 – 136, especially p. 122.

² Which is, as far as it may seem obvious and even tautological, that mankind is mortal. There is always been an interesting overlapping, throughout the Greek language since its first attestation in Homeric poetry, between the words *broto/s*, meaning exactly «mortal» (and therefore used to signify «man») and *bro/tos*, which is the «sang qui à coulé d'une blessure» (cfr. CHANTRAINE, *Dictionnaire etymologique de la langue greque*, Paris 1968 s.v. *broto/w* vs. *broto/w*), along with the concepts they are connected to. In our modern language, this overlap would be expressed by the syllogism that men is mortal because it could be wounded, as it could be wounded to death for he is mortal. The Greek perception of our human state is expressed by the chain forged trough this vicious circle.

When Thetis had got a babe by Peleus, she wished to make it immortal, and unknown to Peleus she used to hide it into the fire by night in order to destroy the mortal element which the child inherited from its father, and by day she anointed him with ambrosia. But Peleus watched her and, seeing the child writhing on the fire, he cried out; and Thetis, thus prevented from accomplishing her purpose, forsook her infant son and departed to the Nereids.

For she (Thetis) ever encompassed the child's mortal flesh in the night with the flame of fire; and by day she anointed with ambrosia his tender frame, so that he might become immortal and that she might keep off from his body loathsome old age. But Peleus leapt up from his bed and saw his dear son gasping in the flame; and at the sight he uttered a terrible cry, fool that he was. And she heard it, and catching up the child threw him screaming to the ground... ..then she left.

As we read those two accounts of the same story, the first information we gain is that, at the beginning of his life, Achilles was meant to be much more than (almost) invulnerable. His destiny was of a much higher quality than fortune and glory in battle, for his divine parent was trying to bestow over his body nothing less than an immortal and never ending youth, though he didn't belong to the race of gods³. But, as again a short reading of this myth may tells us, despite all her efforts she eventually failed the rite of immortality, sealing with this failure the fate of Achilles under the sign of death: unable to join the number of immortals, the hero decided to set himself on a life of battle, pursuing a lesser form of immortality earned through the fame that his deeds granted him. In a word, a second strategy of a more limited form of immortality, after that the first has ended up as a failure.

But despite this outcome, it is still interesting for us to decipher the lines of the immortality⁴ Thetis tried to earn him, and even more important the reasons why she eventually failed. In other words, through the study of this myth we might uncover the underlying language by which the inner structure of a man is meant to be dramatically altered, his specific mark of death removed, finally his destiny completely changed, and why this language, as far as in Greek mythology, always ends with a negation⁵.

But before our analysis may begin, there is one last premise to make, concerning the special nature of our protagonist, Achilles.

While it is right to say that he is not a god, it would be wrong to assert that he is 'just' a man.

³ Races were strictly defined in Greek theology since the very beginning of Greek thought, as we may read in Hesiodus's Theogony.

⁴ Due to my purpose, I decided not to include in this analysis all the strategies of immortality which may be found throughout Greek mythology. However, some words about this topic are due. There are two main kinds of immortality a Greek hero could aspire to, but so different that they shouldn't be even considered as synonymous. Among them, the one related to Sisyphus is a good example of what I'd call a 'fake' immortality. His tale is well known: when his final day arrived, he first escaped his fate imprisoning Thantalus (i.e. the death itself) in his dungeons and then, once finally sunk into the Hades, he devised a trick to brake off again and gain the light (cfr. HOM. *Od.* XI, 539 – 600; THEOGN. 702 – 712; *Scholia ad Plat. Res publ.* X, 611c). Nevertheless, his stratagems earns him nothing more than a delay, for the same myth tells us that he has finally to end his days, although as an old man. Along with Sisyphus there are other several cases of 'resurrection' from death (i.e. one version of the story concerning the same Sisyphus's son, Glaukos, whose life has been restored thanks to a special herb as we are told in APOLL. III, 1, 3), but still it is just a delay, a 'second chance' that will however lead to an end. Another case of 'fake' immortality is the one accorded only *sub condicione*, usually a special one by which the hero doesn't die until (and only if) he keeps on living in a certain place (i.e. the immortality offered to Ulysses by Calypsus bounded to her island, cfr. HOM. *Od.* V, 205 – 213 «... howbeit if in thy heart thou knewest all the measure of woe it is thy fate to fulfill before thou comest to thy native land thou wouldst abide here and keep this house with me, and wouldst be immortal...»). The term of comparison is the full immortality enjoyed by gods, without boundaries or conditions.

⁵ We may read a similar lore in HYG. *Fab.* 63; where we find the hero Triptolemus involved in the same process of immortality I am going to analyze. Due to the lack of space, I just point out that the structure of this myth as well as its result are identical. For a specific comparison between the two myths see my article *sulla natura degli eroi*, to be published in the next issue of *MEDITERRANEA*.

He is an hero and therefore he is, in Greek culture, the fruit of an union where a human being has joined through an act of love a divine one. As a direct consequence of this union, his particular nature earns him the right to partake of both the domains his parents belong to, divine and human, but at the same time it casts him into an ontological disorder⁶ which puzzles and challenges the established hierarchy of the *kosmos*. As a son of a god, he can rightly claim the immortal youth and bliss that define the divine nature and oppose it to the human one, but as a son of a man he should also have to experience a slow process of decay by which both soul and body fade, until drawing him into a necessary death⁷. To cut it short, the hero is a paradoxical and hybrid creature that narration configures as a semiotic *function* where two conditions everywhere else without points of contact in between and usually opposed are finally forced to join together and interact through the living flesh of a specific being, as long as his life lasts. But this is exactly the point we are discussing here, how long could an hero last. As we can see, what is on the stake is far more important than a personal immortality: in this myth we have the answer of how Greek mythology deals with the chance of an union between two categories of being, divine and human, that stand for notions, ideas, concepts, in a word realities we find accurately separated and opposed everywhere else in ancient culture, at times even enemies, but here eventually joined together through the difficult *mélange* of a being. So asking how long an hero could last and investigating about his possible immortality is also questioning how long those two conflicting natures suffer to find a compromise, and of what sort it is.

The answer, as we will see, is under the dramatic sign of the tension, the unsolved contradiction, the clash between two orders of reality.

Let's finally analyze by this perspective the process of immortality by which Thetis tries to cure his son from the injury of death. As we may see, her cure consists of two actions that the narration stresses as both opposite and complementary, by placing them in a succession of day/night: during the night she «hide it (the child) into the fire... ..in order to destroy the mortal element which the child inherited from its father»⁸, as well as, during the day, she «anointed with ambrosia his tender frame»⁹.

So here is the fight I've just mentioned. The narration immediately identifies and distinguishes the two poles which embody the tension realized into the hero child by the two opposite natures he is made of: in the 'right corner' we have the human «mortal element» inherited from his earthly father, that we may find defined further in the Apollonius's version as «mortal flesh» (*thnetas sarkas*), while in the 'left corner' there is the «tender frame» (*teren demas*) Thetis is patently anointing with ambrosia, and that we may consider, thanks by the scheme of oppositions we may glimpse is underlying this myth, as the hero's divine counterpart received by his mother. To shrink our problem to the bone, the language used in the myth presents us a couple of words opposing each other: *sarkas* (the adjective «mortal» is just redundant) vs. *demas*. It is time to see what they stand for, and what relationship is bounding them here. *Sarkas* is easy enough to be defined, for its meaning doesn't present much of shades: it is just the flesh, in its utmost material and tangible reference, along with a diachronically coherence whose heir will be the language of the New Testament¹⁰. In the Homeric language are nothing more than *sarkas* the bleeding flesh which once were the Ulysses's companions, killed and eaten by the Cyclops in a crude and fearsome banquet, as it is *sarkas* the dead animal's flesh roasted over the fire for the feast¹¹, or finally what is just

⁶ As we may read, the philosopher and writer Lucian of Samotracia doesn't hesitate to often define the hero using the term *sunthetos*, which has a meaning ranging from a neutral *of a composed nature* to a more pejorative *spurious – ambiguous – hybrid* and finally *ontologically disordered*. Cfr. LUC. *Eun.* 6, 13; *Bis Acc.* 33, 37; *Dial. mort.* 11, 6.

⁷ For an analysis of the anthropological differences between gods and humans see J. P. VERNANT, *L'individue, la mort, l'amour*, Paris 1989 pg. 15 and followings.

⁸ The version of Apollonius Rhodius is less detailed, for it doesn't express what Thetis was aiming to, just saying that she «encompassed the child's mortal flesh... ..with the flame of fire», even if it defines better the «mortal element» by calling it *tas thnetas sarkas*; the deadly flesh.

⁹ This time I prefer to use the Apollonius's version, for it adds an important particular completely absent in Apollodorus. I am referring to that *frame* Thetis addresses her cares to.

¹⁰ Where it is used to convey the idea of 'sin', along with the ultimate death of the spirit in opposition to a spiritual and immortal pureness, which denies the dimension of this specific kind of flesh. Cfr. COOPER...

¹¹ Cfr. HOM. *Od.* IX, 293 – 297.

left of the dead enemy by which crows and birds of prey feed themselves¹². Summarizing, the term *sarkas* is related to the semantic sphere of death and immobility, as the flesh of not a living but rather of a dead being, being not just the corpse itself in its whole structure, which in ancient Greek is meant by the word *soma*, but rather its dead first surface, the motionless pulp wrapped around the bones when life and movement have left the body. On the other hand, *demias* refers to a little more complex reality: in the Homeric language it denotes «la forme corporelle et la stature d'un homme vivant»¹³, that is the peculiar *forma* which organizes and orders the structure of a human being while it is still alive. We are not just talking about its bone or muscular structures, for their mere presence wouldn't prevent the corpse of a dead body to assume an unnatural position while lying on the ground. The word rather expresses some sort of dynamic force that belongs to a being when it is still alive, a changing and thus dynamic 'frame' operating within, shaped as a copy of the body itself and placed under the surface in order to preserve the body's harmony by dealing at every time with the correct and mutual relationships existing between its parts (limbs) while actions are performed. It's the *demias* that watch over the right motion of the body (or does it directly move it?) in order to make it walk, sit, wield a sword, jump, in a word to both live and interact with the world around through the dynamism of a motion. Summarizing, this term belongs to the semantic sphere of what expresses its reality and its own existence through its movement, which moves itself and therefore it is alive. At the same time, *demias* is also defined by its being thought as both an inner and better physical dimension, something placed under made of a better and immortal material.

In conclusion, by the analysis of the two terms involved we may draw a scheme of the oppositions by which the hero, due to his hybrid nature, seems to be made of. He expresses himself as an unresolved and ambiguous tension between the two conflicting poles of mortal vs. immortal, here described by a language where immobility stands in opposition to motion, the illusionary, mortal and frail nature of what is just surface to the legacy of the god the hero descends from, which is the immortal reality of what lies within him, under its first and visible layer. What Thetis is pursuing is then clear enough: she is trying to destroy with the fire what falls under the semantic dominion of mortality, and therefore ascribes Achilles's life to the necessity of death, while she nourishes and feeds with the ambrosia its opposite, that is bears the semantic emblem of life and would allow the hero to be completely redefined into the category of divine. In other words, the union of the human and divine nature which join together in the living reality of the hero creates an equation between their most distinctive qualities, mortality and immortality. The strategy of immortality operated by the god is therefore the action of unbalancing this equation in advantage of the divine term, to the extent that if Thetis hadn't been interrupted in her therapy she would have consumed the entire part of mortal *sarkas* wrapped around the immortal *demias* of Achilles, resolving his hybrid state in an ontological coherence under the sign of his divine nature, finally earning him the same immortality a god would enjoy. But here we are back exactly to our main point: Thetis is disturbed, the gift of immortality is lost. The mortal parent stumbles across the rite of immortality, sees his child nestled in flames and therefore fears for his life. Therefore he doesn't have much choice, his father's love forces him to react even if we may guess that he has not a clear understanding of what is going on (then Apollonius is right to remark that *fool/he was*) so he gasps in the air, utters a terrible cry and guided by his desire of saving his own child he paradoxically makes him lose his appointment with immortality. It's a good example of what is usually called tragic irony, however we shouldn't really reproach Peleus for what he did, for he is simply reacting according to the state of world he lives in and the information he could count on. It is, again, a matter of opposite languages and realities linked to them that necessary clash against each other, and draw once again a deep line of division between human and divine conditions. According to the encyclopedic knowledge of Peleus¹⁴, the fire consumes, burns, destroys, consequently a (mortal) flesh cannot suffer its contact without being devoured till death. Therefore, the child is in danger, the child must be saved before it finally dies. But here lies the cruel joke of an unnatural union between two opposite realities, the lesson ancient mythology is giving through this narration: even if forcedly joined together, divine and mortal dimension still remain strangers to each other, without a chance of understanding the they use languages. For what to Peleus, according to his earthly and

¹² Cfr. HOM. *Il.* VIII, 379 – 380.

¹³ Cfr. CHANTRAINE, *op. cit.* s.v. *demias*.

¹⁴ I am using here the linguistic concept of 'encyclopedic semantic' opposed to a 'dictionary semantic' as expressed by U. Eco *Filosofia e semiotica del linguaggio*, Torino 1997, pp. 106 – 127.

mortal tongue, is a word of death, when spoken by a divine being it becomes an instrument of immortality. Due to the language, the experience and the knowledge bounded to his mortal life, Peleus can't help but disturb the rite of immortality set by Thetis, as Achilles can't help but lose his never ending youth. He is still an hero, a being whose qualities gained through his divine nature take him on a path of excellence and glory, but he fails to escape the necessity of death.

Briefly summarizing the results of this analysis, it has been shown that:

1. The chance of immortality is granted only to a particular being whose peculiarity is being a bridge cast between two different worlds, an unresolved tension derived from its status of hybrid and ambiguous creature.
2. Both divine and human natures are embodied by two specific parts of the hero's body (*sarkas* vs. *demias*), that exemplify their distinctive quality of mortality and immortality through a scheme of oppositions. They also draw an interesting anatomy of the hero's body, where there is a first layer, made of inert and human material, promised to death, and an inner structure nestled into the flesh itself, which bears the marks of the divine and the immortal.
3. Those parts, along with the natures they hold, are involved into a relationship under the sign of conflict and tension, by which at the destruction of the first corresponds a proportional flourishing of the second. The immortality would be gained through the complete suppression of the human part, along with the acquisition of its divine counterpart *demias* as the only physical reality of the body.
4. In Greek mythology, immortality could not be acquired because of an irredeemable diversity between human and divine conditions, embodied by the differences of meaning that same words carry in their own languages.

It is now time to move toward the second part of my study, and analyze the language of immortality used by the contemporary mythology.

Kyashan has been one of the first and most famous 70's Japanese hero. Released by Tatsunoko's studios¹⁵ in the early 1973, its plot is easy enough to be summarized in its main points, although its depth has to be here sacrificed due to the limited purpose of my study. In a distant future the earth is troubled by extreme pollution, to the extent that life has become almost impossible. To solve the problem a scientist creates three androids engineered to face the environmental contamination and cleanse the ambient. But during a thunderstorm, those three machines become self aware and the new enemy of mankind is therefore born. They immediately rebel against their creator and decide to lead a campaign of subjugation against the humans, using an army of droids they force the scientist to build. Realizing the threat, the scientist's son offers himself to be deeply altered in his body's structure¹⁶ in order to stand a chance against the new menace and finally persuades his father to turn him into a cyborg. The new hero is finally born. The popularity of this character has been recently renewed by the movie *Kyashan – Cashern*¹⁷, commissioned by the Miramax studios due to the actuality of the themes it deals with and the success encountered by the comic book when it had been released, but it critically missed its target because of some heavy changes the plot suffered, which disappointed the hard core of Kyashan's fans. Pertinent to my study, among the elements Kazuaki introduced or changed genetic science takes the place of cybernetic, and the three androids along with the hero Kyashan become powerful modified DNA creatures created thanks to the discovery of a new kind of cells (neo-cells). To be discussed here is to what extent the immortality gained by this modern hero could be compared with the one we saw our ancient Achilles has just missed. What is on the stake is the discovery of their structural similarities and differences, in order to explain a difference presented by modern and ancient mythology we may immediately glimpse at the first look. For it is just a plain evidence that, while in antiquity immortality could not be gained, although its loss didn't

¹⁵ See <http://www.tatsunoko.co.jp>

¹⁶ An interesting point we will soon discuss is that the Japanese name of the manga was also Kyashan, but with the subtitle *shinzo ningen*, that could be translated with 'the man with a new body'.

¹⁷ KAZUAKI KIRIYA, *Kyashan, Cashern*, Japan 2004. Actually, the word *Cashern* means 'savior', while it has been released in Europe and U.S.A. by the title *Kyashan, the rebirth*.

prevent a man to be recognized as a hero¹⁸, modern times offer us the image of a man that through the science frees himself from the limits of his death, and *therefore* he becomes an hero.

Let's begin our analysis with noting that our starting point apparently shows a situation that, compared to what we found in Greek mythology, seems rather different. Before gaining his new status of hero along with immortality, Kyashan is anything more than a normal human being with no embarrassing or ambiguous blending of different planes of existence to spoil his unity. Son of both mortal parents, he is just an ordinary person with no exceeding qualities, leading a life which is normal under every perspective. This starting ontology suddenly suffers a dramatic shift as soon as he offers himself to be turned into an android by his father's science, but by the complete redefinition of his physical structure he also steps into a new dominion of existence characterized by the same state of hybridism we saw defining the hero in ancient mythology. In spite of the new mechanical body he receives, he doesn't experience a complete and definitive shift of status: not a human anymore, shards of his former human nature still play an important role in governing his behavior as well as the dynamics of his feelings, in a word both his personality and interaction with the world around. The relationship between his human and mechanical parts also becomes one of the main themes explored throughout the story by an iconographic language devoted to translate the hybrid and unresolved status he has been cast into by paradoxical images, as the one where, although made of steel, he is portrayed in tears. (Here a presentation begins, fig n.1, Kyashan crying).

Concluding this part of my analysis, although the starting point in modern mythology may seem opposite, a necessary prerequisite to be an hero is still the ambiguous quality of being the result of a mixture, an equation set between different orders of realities that are usually thought as opposite and even (and namely in Kyashan's case) enemies. As a consequence, both mythologies seem to be using the same word, *hybrid*, along with the concepts and notions attached to it, but while in Greek mythology this disorder is finally disciplined under the sign of humanity (and therefore mortality), here we have an opposite process and, along with a complete different outcome: what already has its own ontological and defined unity has to suffer a shift toward a state of promiscuity and confusion in order to be entitled to the new status of hero, therefore the equation derived by the coexistence of two natures is once more set in motion, along with the difficulties and the contradictions that come with.

The way Kyashan's structure is altered may enlighten another stage of the paths ancient and modern mythologies took. What redefines Kyashan as a hero is the mechanical body he acquires, but the alteration doesn't affect his body in its visible surface, it rather concerns what lies within, its inner structure which is now newly organized through its parts by a different cybernetic frame. The idea of an modification coming deeply from within and not affecting just an external and accessory dimension of the body is even more remarked by the different process of alteration Kyashan run through that we may see in the movie version. As said before, this time there is no cybernetic implant but rather a deep DNA redefinition of his structure: the visual narration used by Kazuaki (Presentation, Kyashan's baptism fig 1 – 3) stresses the concept of a definitive resurrection¹⁹ to a different life by linking the rebirth's scene with the iconography of the baptism. Concluding, the similarities with what has been addressed before with the term *demias* in Achilles's mythology are so striking that we may

¹⁸ In ancient Greece, heroes weren't just abstract mythology. We have several examples of men recognized as such (and not become heroes, as Nock pointed out several years ago: «a dead man can *became* a god: no one *became* a hero, except in the sense of being recognized as such» cfr. Nock 1944, p. 143) after their death because of the excellence they had reached in one discipline during their life, usually related to war/fighting. As we may read in Pausanias (cfr. *Perieg.* vi. 6, 7), hero's honors have been attributed the boxer Eutimus by the community of Temesa, due to his great personal strength and valor shown in freeing the city from an enemy. The citizens of Temesa didn't find embarrassing the plain evidence of the Eutimus's death, for they could recognize him as a hero only after his demise, but at the same time they felt the need of giving their hero a divine birth, therefore he became the son of the river flowing beside the city. All the requirements we have seen in Achilles's example are thus fulfilled: divine birth (and thus hybrid ontological state), a life of excellent deeds, but no necessity of immortality at all.

¹⁹ This is one of the several differences between anime and movie: while in the comic book Kyashan is alive and well, the movie presents him as a victim of war, whose dead body is placed by his father into the DNA modification pool.

even be tempted to take Kyashan's mechanical frame as a possible visual description of it²⁰: both of them belong to the semantic sphere of what lies within, of what is hidden and structural opposed to the category of the visible and the accessory, they both are made of a material which doesn't suffer death, finally they both grant immortality under the condition of completely replacing the «deadly flesh» Achilles and Kyashan are wrapped into with them, until they become the heroes's only physical realities.

Finally, it is worthy to dedicate few lines to the iconography by which the process of integration between human and mechanical natures in Kyashan is narrated by, for we may catch another reference to a category of thought used in a famous Greek myth. (powepoint) As we see, what we may still address as 'Kyashan' within the mechanical frame, what still bears the personal mark of the hero's identity and his previous unspoiled human condition is claimed by his living sight, unaltered during the process of immortality he is running through. On the other hand, the machine comes to life thanks to the eyes themselves it was missing and now receives, by which it gains the faculty of seeing what is around it and therefore the chance of interacting with it. For that reason, as the *primo piano* stresses, the eyes are the ideal place where the two natures Kyashan will be made of finally join, through a process by which both of them will gain something from each other.

It is astounding to find the same process described two thousand years before, by an elegant imperial Latin poet who particularly enjoyed in writing about mutations, transformations, metamorphoses. The story is well known: Pygmalion, prized artisan and sculptor, creates for himself a marble image of the perfect feminine beauty and desperately falls in love with it. By his prayers, Venus breathes life into the statue, turning it into a living maid who may answer to his love. Although the transformation is described as a slow process, however the apex Ovid decide to set for the coming to life of the statue is exactly the point when the new being opens her eyes, meets the eyes of her lover with the bright light of the sky, and therefore she completely becomes a human being.

Ovidius, MET. X, 243 – 276

...yes, it was real flesh! The veins were pulsing beneath his testing fingers.again pressed with his lips real lips at last. The maiden felt the kisses, blushed and, lifting her timid eyes up to the light, she saw the sky and her lover at the same time...

Back to our quest for immortality, we have the second requirement previously set by Greek mythology also fulfilled, even if a crucial difference occurs between the two languages. Everlasting life seems to be pursued in the same way by both our ancient and modern heroes, that is by making their divine/mechanical frame/*demas* their unique physical reality, but while the former loses his prize because of an interruption, the latter goes through all the process, finally gaining it. Therefore, we have once again the same word used in both languages, but displayed in such a different order that structures and sentences build with it could hardly be considered analogous. While in ancient Greece the mythology expresses its deny to a never lasting life bestowed upon a human, we now apparently have an opposite outcome, a success by which modern mythology seems to change under the sign of an assertion the answer her ancient counterpart gave us through Achilles. So yes, it seems that man can finally gain his immortality, and yet something among the consequences of his gift casts thick shadows on this outcome. Kyashan is now immortal, but there is a quite obvious question we may ask him, along with all the other heroes who gained immortality: if a man is primarily defined by his condition of mortality, by his bleeding to death, will someone who gained immortality be still considered human? Of course he won't²¹, therefore he might face

²⁰ As we have seen, Chantraine defines the *demas* as the “standing structure” of a living man, what grants him the harmonic movements of his body, and the new body of Kyashan is exactly presented in a standing position.

²¹ There is an interesting passage on this subject from Kundera's Ignorance novel, worthy to be quoted in its length: «A human lifetime is 80 years long on average. A person imagines and organizes his life

the risk of a complete separation from the social group he belonged to before his alteration²². Other examples tells us that in modern mythology isolation becomes a necessary counterpart of immortality to the extent that they can't be divided, therefore being scattered trough two different realities becomes a relevant linguistic mark which is always present when modern mythology composes its sentences over immortality²³.

However, it's paradoxically right here, exactly where we might have had the peak of division between the two mythologies we are analyzing, that Greek legacy strongly reappears as the main thread modern mythology uses to wave its pictures over immortality.

There is another story Greek mythology offers us, that we may read from several sources²⁴, about a lucky fellow that by chance did actually succeed right where the mighty Achilles, helped by a goodness, did fail.

Scholia. ad Plato. Rep. x, 611c

...they say that Glaukos was son of Sisiphus and Merops, and that he became a demon of the sea. Having found by chance the spring of immortality and having stepped into it, he gained immortality. But in order to not let him point the spring to anyone, he was dragged to the sea... ...the demon is invisible to their (fishers) eyes, and mourning its immortality he drives the ships to wreckage with its words...

Here we have something that may seem contradictory with the statement we made before, that Greek mythology doesn't allow any man to become immortal. There can't be any doubt about the complete humanity of Glaukos, since the source stresses out that both of his parents are mortals. Not a divine progeny and thus being entirely a human, he is at peace with his own nature since there is not even a glimpse of the ontological disorder we have seen defining Achilles's status. In addition, he is not even willingly setting himself on a path of immortality supported by a supernatural being who knows the secrets of the process, he just stumbles across this wonderful spring by sheer chance, not even earning the right of it by performing some extraordinary deeds. Finally, the source we take this story from doesn't even suggest that he is really aware of what is happening. However, and in spite of all those negative premises, he alone earns the precious gift of immortality without proving himself worthy of it, without even desiring it. A true stroke of luck, we may say, but here is exactly the point we should discuss: can we say that this immortality is a gift, that it was really chance that drove Glaukos to that spring, and that there is at least one man who Greek mythology had immortal? We will begin with our last question. While on one hand the statement "Glaukos earned immortality" is obviously true, on the other one saying that in this myth "a man earned immortality" would prove itself to be false, as soon as we notice that the price Glaukos has to pay for this 'gift' is his own condition of human being, along with his right to be

with that span in mind. What I have just said everyone knows, but only rarely do we realize that the number of years granted us is not merely a quantitative fact, an external feature like nose length or eye color, but is part of the very definition of the human. A person who might live, with all his faculties, twice as long, say 160 years, would not belong to our species.. Nothing about his life would be like ours – not love, not ambitions, feelings, nostalgia; nothing» M. KUNDERA, *Ignorance*, Kent 2003, pp. 122 – 123.

²² Namely, one of the main themes developed in Kyashan's original comic book, as well as in the movie, is exactly the price he has to paid for such a gift of immortality. He remains caged in his condition of half-breed, rejected by both machines and humans.

²³ This mark could be developed to its highest degree by presenting the hero not only banished but even hunted down by the race or group he came for, or he is defending. A bright example of this extreme degree might be found in the comic book "Blade: the vampire hunter", where the hybrid nature of the protagonist (half human-half vampire) is feared and fought by the same humans he stands for.

²⁴ For Glaukos's story see PLIN. *Nat. Hist.* XXV, 451 – 552; APOLL. *Bibl.* III, 1, 3; SERV. *Ad Georg.* III, 268; *Schol. ad Plato Rep.* x, 611c.

part of the society he was from. The alteration he suffers is radical, he becomes a «demon of the sea» whose isolation from the human world is stressed by the category of the invisible he now belongs to. In a world where to have a sight, to come to light in order to see as well as being seen by the others are features that usually describe and oppose the living vs. the deads, the eye contact with other living men, as well as the interaction with them that it stands for, is a necessary mark to distinguish the two different planes of reality. If Glaucos couldn't establish this eye contact with another living man, because one of the two terms involved into the relationship fails to see the other, then he is now ascribed to the category of the unseen, and by this the narration is just pointing out that the steps he took entering into that pool of spring's water were nothing less than his journey through a portal which lead him into a new and different dimension of being.

At the end of this study, both modern and ancient strategies of immortality do look similar, as well as their results. The answer to the question 'can a man become immortal' is always negative, for when we find something similar to a success, it is something else than a human which gains immortality. Also, those immortals do look like the repetition of the same formula: bounded to the new dimension of life they have received by giving up their former natures of human being, they find themselves trapped into an unexpected isolation from the others, where what has been bestowed as a gift turns to be a never ending course.
