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Cheiron the centaur is an important and frequently-referenced figure in mythology and ancient texts; however, few of those ancient texts provide many details about him, and often the details provided are contradictory. This multiplicity of representations, along with the array of qualities that are attributed to him, provide much for writers of reception texts to select from to suit their purposes. Therefore, the study of Cheiron in reception gives an opportunity to examine what qualities are privileged by the authors for that chronological period. John Updike’s *The Centaur* places Cheiron in small-town America, post-World War II, setting the action in 1947.

The mythological elements of John Updike’s *The Centaur* are relatively well-documented and discussed in scholarly articles, primarily from the 1960 - 80s. Cheiron’s role within the text is, naturally, given close scrutiny, amongst the wider theological and stylistic concerns of the surrealist techniques utilised, and melding of the mythological as befits Updike’s concern with ‘the American small town and middle-class materialism’, and his portrayals of ‘ordinary America ...[and] the daily rounds of life’ (Ulvydiene, 2018, p.101). There is continued uncertainty amongst critics on the mythic content of the novel (Vickery, 1974, p.29) but Updike’s fascination with old sagas, and the purpose they held for their original audiences, fulfils the roles of both history and catharsis (Vickery, 1974, p.31). What has not, however, been widely considered is how the portrayal of Cheiron here maps onto those features exemplified in the ancient sources, and the implications within the text of their inclusion. This article seeks to address that gap.

Cheiron in the ancient sources

The ancient sources allow us to paint a composite portrait of Cheiron. His ancestry is a different parentage from that of the other centaurs. Cheiron was born of Philyra and Cronos; discovered by Rhea, Cronos turned into a horse and thus Philyra became pregnant with Cheiron. Appalled at giving birth to such a hybrid creature, she turned into a linden tree (Hyginus, *Fabulae* 138). A summary of Cheiron’s qualities would include philanthropy, fairness, wisdom, as well as hunting, medicine and prophecy, bestowed by Apollo, his foster father, who raised him after Philyra’s

rejection (Xenophon, *Cynegeticus*, 1). Pindar grants Cheiron a place in the myth of the upbringing of Achilles (Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 3, 46-53) and Apollodorus specifically details the role he plays in advising Peleus on the capture of Thetis (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.13.5). It is Cheiron's longstanding connection to Peleus which results in Achilles' education being entrusted to him (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 3.13.5); however, he also tutored numerous other heroes and mythological figures, such as Asclepius and Jason (Pindar, *Nemean Odes* 3, 52-55). One other aspect frequently attributed to him – and foregrounded within Updike's novel – is his sacrificing his immortality to free Prometheus. This myth tells of Cheiron's accidental wounding by an arrow of Hercules that had been contaminated with the blood of Hydra. Being immortal, Cheiron is permanently wounded and in agony but unable to die. Variations of the myth conclude either with Cheiron offering up his immortality to free Prometheus from his eternal torment on the rock, or – as in Updike's concluding passage – following being freed from the rock by Hercules, Prometheus offering to become immortal for him to release him from his pain. This version rather complicates the myth as Prometheus is already immortal, and Hercules is the connection which allows this exchange to take place. This trade, sanctioned by Zeus who rewards Cheiron by placing him in the sky as a constellation, frees both Cheiron and Prometheus from their suffering.

Notably, Cheiron is not given voice frequently in the ancient texts – the *Precepts of Cheiron*, attributed to Hesiod and only surviving in fragments, is the only ancient evidence we have for the centaur being adopted as an authorial voice (Pausanias, *Descriptions of Greece*, 9.31.5). This poem, however, was instrumental in initiating discussions around aspects of education, and the desired qualities of the mythological character of Cheiron. He is of especial interest due to his dual nature – he is divine, immortal, but not a god. He is a man and a beast, and this liminality can be employed to explore a range of boundaries and concerns. The figure of Cheiron brings seemingly opposite traits into a helpful unity, which in turn can reflect the complicated issues that reception texts wish to explore. *The Centaur* exploits this liminality in such a way, whilst referencing Cheiron's notable qualities. It is interesting, however, that Updike chooses to keep narrative distance from Cheiron, especially as he employs first person narration for another character.

The plot and structure of *The Centaur*

The plot of *The Centaur* essentially covers a three-day period in 1947 in which high school science teacher, George Caldwell, and his adolescent son, Peter, are exiled from their rural homestead by weather and circumstance. The title of the novel refers to Cheiron, the most famous centaur in mythology and reception, and aligns this figure with the character of George Caldwell; his son, Peter, is linked to Prometheus, and the novel also liberally utilises other mythological figures, often inconsistently, with other contemporary characters. The novel follows their trials

and tribulations as they make repeated attempts to return home, only to be thwarted by difficulties outside of their control. The apparent simplicity of this plot channels elements of the *Odyssey* but is complicated by the melding of contemporary characters and settings with those from Greek mythology. A full exploration requires careful plotting of who is representing which mythological character, as the references are not always stable.

As the novel frequently switches between modern and mythological character names and settings, it might be helpful to outline more fully its structure and the broad content of each chapter. In brief, the novel unfolds with a first chapter which employs omniscient third person narration, introducing Caldwell and establishing the motif of combining characters with mythological referents. Caldwell presides over a rowdy class, who meld into their mythological representations, and he gets shot by a poisoned arrow. He leaves school briefly to get the arrow removed, and returns to find the headteacher, Zeus/Zimmerman, observing his class and licentiously fondling a student. The second chapter is narrated from the perspective of his teenage son, Peter, who is also conflated with Prometheus. Chapter three returns to third person narration, focusing upon Cheiron as a tutor and providing a calm contrast to Caldwell's chaotic lesson in chapter one. Chapter four returns to Peter's perspective and establishes concerns about his father's health, as well as narrating their first night stranded away from home. The fifth chapter is the centrepiece of the novel: Caldwell's obituary, written about him at the age he has reached in the novel, and thus foreshadowing the 'death' of Cheiron/Caldwell. Chapter six returns again to Peter but serves to combine his perspective with that of Prometheus, linking the death of Caldwell in the previous chapter firmly with the fate of Peter. The next chapter returns to an omniscient third person narration following Caldwell at first, and then Peter, until they meet up. This chapter further turns between the two when they separate again and tells of the second night exiled from their home. Chapter eight is narrated by the adult artist Peter, addressing his sleeping lover, and recollecting the homecoming of him and his father. The final short chapter nine concludes the novel with a return to Cheiron and a mythological setting, melding this perspective with that of Caldwell. The novel ends with the words, 'Chiron accepted death' (Updike, 1963, p.269).

It is the enduring nature of mythology and the themes with which it is concerned, exploring experience of humankind, that allows Updike to use the closer relationships of mortals to the divine to pose the theological question of what it means to have faith in contemporary post-war America. In focusing primarily upon Cheiron's role as a tutor, and his sacrifice for Prometheus, Updike transfers to Caldwell aspects of both the divine and the heroic in a contemporary, limited and unrewarding setting. However, just as the ancient sources portraying Cheiron are limited and fragmentary, permitting little insight from the centaur himself, so Updike's novel maintains a similar distance from its heroic figure. In melding mythological and modern characters, the novel could also be considered to offer a fragmentary perspective of the centaur, and one in which his true voice is suppressed, filtered through the voices of other narrators.

The novel explores a variety of different facets of Cheiron's role that appear in the ancient text, concentrating on his role of teacher, his hybridity, and his sacrifice of his immortality for Prometheus. The form in which the novel unfolds is also hybrid, characteristically liminal and centaur-like, with its alternating narrative perspectives. The winner of the 1964 National Book Award, it is also Updike's 'most puzzling work' (Keener, 2010, p.463), and one about which critics fail to reach agreement. Peter's narration, which is years later and takes place as he lies in bed with his sleeping lover, possibly in a dream-like state himself, questions whether the future he has come to embody was worth his father's sacrifice (Updike, 1963, p.244). He has escaped the rural backdrop that he and his father hated, and moved to the city; he has become an artist, although he wonders at the relative expense of the blank canvas, and the lessening of value once he has marked it; and he is mindful of his leisurely days in bed with his lover, and is frightened to consider that it was for this that Cheiron gave up his life. To express in more realist terms, Peter considers the sacrifice of his father as 'the incongruity of a great spirit caught in an ignoble job', (Walcutt, 1966, p.326) and it is possible that it is Peter who sees Caldwell's life as so full of anguish, as it is so different to the life to which he himself aspires. An interesting question to ask is what purpose the identification of Cheiron with Caldwell serves, and why the reader should be encouraged to explore his portrayal of and similarities to the mythical centaur. In considering those aspects of Cheiron's character identified in the ancient texts separately within Updike's novel, it will be possible to draw conclusions as to why a relatively unremarkable, bumbling, somewhat clumsy and occasionally embarrassing man is so strongly linked with the tutor of heroes and the centaur's self-sacrifice.

Cheiron as teacher

So ubiquitous is the role of tutor within the ancient sources that most receptions, such as Machiavelli's *The Prince*, Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Tanglewood Tales*, and Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson series, portray this as Cheiron's foremost quality. Within Updike's novel, we are introduced to both Cheiron, the tutor of mythological heroes, and Caldwell, the high school science teacher to a class of undisciplined teenagers. The contrasts between settings and students underscores the sense of degeneration, and of imperfection of contemporary time and place, that pervades the novel. The nobility of Cheiron underscores this contrast. Both lessons described are on the same topic, the genesis of the earth, although their content differs wildly. Within Cheiron's mythological lesson, Love is asserted to have 'set the Universe in motion' (Updike, 1963, p.92), whereas Caldwell's lesson abbreviates the five-billion-year history of the universe into a three-day case study of chemical and biological life leading to the emergence of a 'flint-chipping, fire-kindling, death-foreseeing, ... tragic animal ... called man' (Updike, 1963, p.45). In terms of the students, Cheiron asserts that 'Achilles gave his teacher the most trouble yet seemed the most needful of his approval and loved him least bashfully', Jason is 'less favoured',

and Asclepius is ‘the best student’ (Updike, 1963, p.89). Caldwell has a grudging affection for his students but is aware of their flaws; poor Judy Lengel ‘didn’t have it upstairs’, Kegerise is ‘one of the bright ones’, and Iris Osgood is ‘dumb as pure white lead’ (Updike, 1963, p.35). Caldwell’s teaching career, however, has been ‘long enough to keep a step or two ahead of the bastards occasionally’ (Updike, 1963, p.37); an ironic comment given Cheiron’s longevity and tutoring of generations of heroes. In contrast to Cheiron’s experience of teaching – ‘his students completed the centaur. They fleshed his wisdom with expectation’ (Updike, 1963, p.37) – Peter sees that for Caldwell, ‘teaching was sapping him’ (Updike, 1963, p.96). For all that Caldwell sees himself as being no good at teaching through a lack of discipline (Updike, 1963, p.120), Peter understands that his father has a much greater effect upon his students than he realises. ‘Once a student had had my father, he did not forget it, and the memory seemed to seek shape in mockery’ (Updike, 1963, p.112). Peter himself becomes ‘the petty receptacle of a myth’, but he admits that being his father’s son gives him an identity and importance, makes him ‘exist in the eyes of these Titans’ (Updike, 1963, p.112), which further melds the real and the mythological. Caldwell’s obituary in Chapter Five is the pen portrait of a lively and dedicated tutor, although not a mentor to heroes, perhaps, due to his ‘inexhaustible sympathy for the scholastic underdog’ (Updike, 1963, p.158).

This is highlighted in Caldwell’s lesson. Caldwell’s lesson is all about trying to express the inconceivable (Vickery, 1974, p.36) that his students are unable to comprehend. This is the main problem for Caldwell as a teacher – his lessons have no practical, realistic dimensions for his unimaginative students and Updike turns on its head what the reader might consider to be ‘inconceivable’. It is not the heavens as religion paints them that cannot be understood but rather the scientific explanation for the genesis of the earth, and its immense, unimaginable numbers. What is crucial to the novel is Caldwell’s difficulty in communicating such big ideas within such a limited group; yet it is vital to his role as beleaguered teacher that he try to do so. As Vickery (1974, p.36) suggests, ‘when the inconceivable is narrated, it is myth’. In such a way, Updike melds the two figures of Cheiron and Caldwell. In highlighting the nobility of teaching the young, even when those children are not destined to be heroes or even grateful for the effort, Updike reminds the reader that performing duties that benefit others is a heroic act, and one which the ‘everyman’ performs every day.

Cheiron’s duality

Updike’s portrayal of Cheiron and Caldwell speaks to the dual nature of Cheiron that is shown both in the ancient sources and reception. However, in Updike’s novel this duality of man and beast is not perceived to be a strength. The novel draws upon a quotation from Karl Barth: ‘Heaven is the creation inconceivable to man, earth the creation conceivable to him. He himself

is the creature on the boundary between heaven and earth' (Barth, 1949, p.63). Updike has stated that he was drawn to this quotation because 'we're all on a boundary and all are centaurs' (Farmer, 2015, p.340), and his novel highlights the differing status of Cheiron's halves as representative of the struggle of all men. The superiority of Cheiron's human half is highlighted from the beginning of the novel: 'His top half felt all afloat in the starry firmament of ideals and young voices singing; the rest of self was heavily sunk in a swamp where it must, eventually, drown' (Updike, 1963, p.8). Indeed, it is not even that his lower half – his horse, beast half – is inferior but rather that in being neither wholly one thing nor the other, he is unable to have the best of both natures. As he responds to Venus/Vera Hummel, '[a] combination ... often conceals the best of its elements' (Updike, 1963, 26). The main problem with the Cheiron/Caldwell beast is, as Doc Appleton – aligned to Apollo - tells George, that he has never come to terms with his own body (Updike, 1963, p.118). Hoag (1980, p.89) asserts that Caldwell and Cheiron 'both hate the body, revere the spirit' but there is no ancient evidence to support this assertion of Cheiron's distaste of the flesh, either his own or that of others; indeed, he utilises his physically unique nature in hunting, and is portrayed as having a family life with his wife and children (Pindar, *Pythian Odes* 4). Updike and his modern critics demonstrate a tendency to worry at the animal part of Cheiron's physical being, and how this would denigrate his nature. In representing humankind as a whole, as asserted in the quotation above, Updike suggests that animal traits drag humans down, and cause them to be unable to achieve closeness to divinity; a state which Updike seems to assume is the desire of all.

Not only does Caldwell himself struggle to reconcile his two natures and to see their inherent value and strengths but he also seems to be unable to communicate the worries of his human side to those around him. Caldwell's family clearly do not understand him and Peter frequently loses patience with his father. Whilst this 'beast' nature is a metaphor that Updike employs to signal humankind's baser nature, and Caldwell's 'man' nature signals a concern with the more existential aspects of religious thought, it manifests as a psychological schism which affects men in the modern world, who need to reconcile both the ephemeral and the material; as Farmer (2015, p.340) elaborates, the centaur is the Christian view of man, highlighting the division between body and soul. Caldwell portrays this difficulty, and the discomfort of trying to combine both parts, or to switch between the two: 'Monsters are most vulnerable in their transitions' (Updike, 1963, p.268). As Caldwell is in a liminal state of anticipating his own death, *The Centaur* 'consists of instructions about how to behave on such a boundary' (Farmer, 2015, p.341). Vickery (1974, p.34) suggests that the two states of man and beast are never reconciled but are 'destined to find them antinomies'. This appears to ignore the ancient sources that portray Cheiron as perfectly comfortable with his combined nature, and in viewing the man and beast as divided, Vickery speaks to modern preoccupations with wholeness and unity. Despite this division between man and beast, there is humour in the reversal that it is the centaur, the hybrid being, which makes Cheiron – and by extension, Caldwell – an effective tutor. Despite everything, Caldwell is a well-remembered and fondly thought of teacher.

Despite Peter's frustration with his father, there are glimpses of the affection he has for Caldwell, and an almost unconscious wish to be somewhat like him. Peter expresses the desire 'to have a dancer's quick and subtle hooves' (Updike, 1963, p.55); their shadow joins them as 'a prancing one-headed creature with four legs' (Updike, 1963, p.105), and on their return home after the three-day odyssey, George 'was the shape of the neck and head of the horse I was riding' (Updike, 1963, p.257). Hoag (1980, p.95) reads this part differently, and suggests that '[t]he centaur motif is used symbolically to represent a third major problem in the novel, the psychological thralldom of Caldwell and Peter to each other', which somewhat recognises the interdependence of Cheiron and Prometheus in the ancient texts. It also suggests that 'the centaur' of the novel could, at times, be a combination of George and Peter. As the novel does not have completely stable mythological referents, 'the centaur' could mean different things at different times. Arguably, if this line of interpretation is to be followed, Peter offers a different dimension to the idea of the centaur. His comfort with the modern world as he sees it and his ability to show his physical imperfection, his chronic psoriasis, to his girlfriend and have acceptance of it offers an interesting counterpoint to George's physical discomfort, distaste of touching, and sense of being out of time. Together, they represent the distinct schism between the Golden Age and the modern era. However, the most powerful mythological identification within the novel is between Caldwell and Cheiron; the relationship between Cheiron as portrayed in the ancient sources and Updike's rendering are more illustrative if stability in this reference is assumed. This lack of comfort with the modern world for Caldwell is shown by his seeing no strength or benefit in his combined natures – rather, combining both man and beast natures makes them inferior in both aspects.

Within the novel, this inferiority is also manifested in Cheiron's perception of his immortality. Despite Venus' acknowledgement of his fraternity with the gods, he does not feel as worthy of his life as the gods do. Venus plays on this and berates him for his dual nature that so horrified Philyra, who 'so loathed the monster she bore' (Updike, 1963, p.23). Nevertheless, despite Cheiron's feelings of inferiority, in his exchange with Venus, we see a nobility and pride not evidenced by Caldwell. Cheiron acknowledges that to reverse his horse and man halves would make him 'a freak', which the gods would 'forbid' (Updike, 1963, p.26); and still he is aware that his immortality does not make him a god, and his 'Olympian position' is 'precarious and ambiguous' (Updike, 1963, p.28). Yet he has a quality that Zeus cannot possess, in his knowledge of and friendship with men, and this makes him vulnerable: 'It was rumoured that Zeus thought centaurs a dangerous middle ground through which the gods might be transmuted into pure irrelevance' (Updike, 1963, p.28). It is here that we see the true value of Cheiron, as Updike perceives him – as a link between the divine and the mortal. This is demonstrated too in a mythological chapter, where plants are described as responding to Cheiron by 'hailing the passage of a hero' (Updike, 1963, p.87). The mythological Cheiron is, perhaps, the successful reconciliation of human and divine, the religious and the secular. Caldwell, however, shows the contemporary difficulty in navigating the boundary but the persisting desire to do so. The purpose of Cheiron's duality within Updike's novel is to show the necessity of continuing to strive for divinity, as the author's theological beliefs would support.

Cheiron's sacrifice

In beginning this novel with Cheiron's wounding by one of his students, Updike establishes his theme and the central aspect of the centaur's character that will dominate the narrative. The arrow itself is not thought to be poisoned – Hummel/Hephaistos cannot smell anything, and Cheiron/Caldwell cannot imagine his students – his heroic students in chapter three's mythological setting, such as Jason and Achilles – 'doing anything like that' (Updike, 1963, p.15); however, the wounding occurs within the modern setting, with students displaying the behaviour of lustful centaurs (Updike, 1963, p.44). Nevertheless, throughout the narrative, Caldwell feels himself to be poisoned, or to feel his imminent death like a poison on his life. Peter overhears his father ask Appleton if his ailment could be 'hydra venom' (Updike, 1963, p.116), a clear reference to the myth of Heracles and Cheiron's fatal wounding. The narrative is suffused with images of death, albeit mostly from Peter's retrospective – he sees his father's face whiten and skin sink (Updike, 1963, p.154), although he also hears Appleton's comforting rejoinder to George that 'without death... there could not be life' (Updike, 1963, p.124), which foreshadows Cheiron's sacrifice. Caldwell illustrates this maxim in his science lesson on the genesis of the earth, as well as foreshadowing his own fate, by his example of the co-operative green algae volvox which 'invented death' (Updike, 1963, p.41). Caldwell outlines to his class that those potentially immortal cells volunteer for death by performing 'a specialised function within an organised society of cells'; an environment which is 'compromised', and which means that the volvox – and each cell thereafter which follows its example – 'dies sacrificially, for the good of the whole' (Updike, 1963, p.41). Reflected in Caldwell's obituary, which details that he 'took up teaching duties ... he was never to put down' (Updike, 1963, p.158), the comparison of sacrifice, and of entering a compromised environment of a high school, cannot be ignored: '[h]is agonizing, unhealing wound is his life' (Walcutt, 1966, p.326).

Yet it is not that Caldwell necessarily feels that he should be employed elsewhere; he considers himself fortunate to have been given the teaching role when he needed work, asserts that he cannot give it up because it is all that he is good at, and he fears losing it, albeit because he feels the weight of responsibility for his family upon him. The strain of entering the environment every day is his ultimate sacrifice. The moment of sacrifice at the novel's end – his acceptance of his role, and his responsibilities, despite the 'infinite of possibilities' (Updike, 1963, p.268) that could have occurred and that he could have been – is that he must carry on and teach, thus exchanging the physical death of Cheiron 'for a series of smaller, spiritual, daily deaths' (Farmer, 2015, p.335). In doing so, Caldwell is Updike's vehicle for exploring 'the significance of the saint in the modern world' (Vickery, 1974, p.35). In accepting life as Caldwell, which requires a continuation of his everyday psychological suffering in order to provide opportunities for Peter/Prometheus by his having a stable income, he portrays a reversal of Cheiron's noble death. Here, the divine within Caldwell wins out. Farmer (2015, p.335) suggests that Updike is attempting a twentieth-century *Ars Moriendi*, in which Caldwell is playing out a Christian attitude

towards death and sacrifice, and moreover that Caldwell does not literally die at the end of the novel but performs a living sacrifice of signing up to countless more small deaths in continuing his teaching. This somewhat complicates the obituary placed at the centre of the novel, and it is little wonder that some critics have considered Caldwell's death an actual one; the details suggest that Caldwell's death cannot happen very far outside of the novel's scope. However, viewed metaphorically, it is an acceptance that this is all life has to offer, and that it is the death of any hope or impetus to make a radical change in his life. Updike here potentially suggests that this sacrifice, this death for the benefit of his family, is not just within reach of all men but is something routine. As Walcutt (1966 p.330) suggests:

The myth of the centaur expresses with the beautiful Greek lucidity what twentieth-century man is reduced to bandaging in sanitary psychological abstractions: unconsciously, both heroes "want out".

Both Cheiron and Caldwell desire death as an end to their respective pain, and twentieth-century man is psychologically tortured by his everyday necessities. Caldwell, after much soul searching, finds faith and value in his everyday duties and the sacrifice of carrying on, and this provides a role model for others similarly dissatisfied with their lives.

Some of the final lines of the novel complicate the relationship between George and Peter, and run counter to the epigraph at the beginning of the novel from Josephine Preston Peabody's 1897 version of Greek myths. The translation from Apollodorus' *Bibliotheca* (2.5.4) suggests that Cheiron was unable to die because he was immortal, and Prometheus offered himself to become immortal for him. This moves the agency away from Cheiron offering to atone for Prometheus' theft of fire, and towards Prometheus offering to alleviate Cheiron's suffering. It is later, however (2.5.11), recorded that it was Cheiron's offer, made through Heracles' offices (because it was his arrow that had caused Cheiron's wound); and that because Prometheus was already immortal, and freed from the rock, this was no simple exchange. Cheiron had to be willing to descend into Hades and into suffering for Prometheus. This alternative view underpins the complications that Updike has woven throughout the novel and seemingly contradicts his assertion that it is Cheiron/Caldwell who is sacrificing himself. This alternative version also highlights the difficulties in firmly identifying characters with the mythological backstory or their mythological 'other half'; indeed, the mythological index warns that '[n]ot all characters have a stable referent' (Updike, 1963, p.270). This fluidity allows the reader to draw multiple, often conflicting meanings from the novel, reflecting the difficulties of maintaining a faith or position.

'Time and tide for no man wait'

Throughout Updike's novel, the reader cannot escape the fixation upon time, felt by both George and Peter. The repetition of 'time and tide for no man wait' (Updike, 1963, p.59, p.140, p.252) punctuate the relentlessness of time. Caldwell is floored by Judy Lengel's naïve suggestion of 'time' (Updike, 1963, p.99), when asked to name an erosional agent because of its ultimate truth. The novel deliberately refuses to portray time as finite and linear, not only through the surreal melding of Cheiron with Caldwell but also through the persistence of its effects. Time is so ubiquitous, and yet so unknowable, that Caldwell cannot seem to wrestle any sense from it, and he particularly berates Pop Kramer – Cronos – for its slipperiness. Of course, within Cronos lives 'a savage darkness none of the rest of us had ever known' (Updike, 1963, p.63), as Peter intuits; however, as Peter is also Prometheus, he would know about the pattern of overthrowing one's father that has been established within the Titan race, and the horror of Cronos devouring his children in myth. However, Cronos also presided over a Golden Age, in which there were no laws, rules or difficulties, and which did not require a focus upon linear time. It is perhaps this control over time that Caldwell particularly resents, his knowledge of the primordial origins of the races of gods and men. In mythology, Cronos is the father of Cheiron but in Updike, he is Cheiron/Caldwell's father-in-law, perhaps enabling the reader to more easily identify with their fractious relationship.

Peter's relationship with time is more fluid, and therefore it seems to give him less concern. He reflects on visiting museums with his mother, when 'Arcadian time would envelop us' (Updike, 1963, p.240); he sees himself as if 'viewed from the future' (Updike, 1963, p.124); and Vera Hummel is able to evoke 'a curious sense of past time' (Updike, 1963, p.247) within him. He is able to transcend the fixed and rigid nature of time that George experiences. Peter's sense of cyclical, simultaneous time frees him from his father's dread of its relentless passage. Only at one point, when going to meet his father, does he fear that he is late (Updike, 1963, p.128), and he experiences George's pressure; it is, perhaps, at this point that he realises his father is not immortal.

This obsession with time reflects Caldwell's frustration at the lack of action in his life; the passage of linear time brings a psychological pressure to feel as though one is moving forward and making progress. In highlighting the lack of action within the novel, and the lack of possible action available to Caldwell, Walcutt (1966, p.330) suggests that the action 'has slowed down until it is not a movement but a tense balance of forces in which the actions make no linear progress but only vibrate at constant, tormented wave lengths'. The mythical Cheiron, in existing within mythological and cyclical time, does not have such pressure; indeed, his cross-generational role seems to require him to remain static within his life in order to adequately prepare his heroic students for action. As Walcutt (1966, p.332) notes, however, contemporary time does not afford that perspective. The pressure to move forward creates a 'dislocated modern environment'. Yet,

as shown by the explanation of Caldwell's entry into teaching, it offers limited opportunities for progress and fulfilment.

In joining Caldwell with Cheiron, Updike seems to reflect the ideas of Jung in establishing the link between myths and archetypes – a recurring pattern of images, symbols and situations. For Jung, the archetypes influence how a person relates to the world around them and helps them to make sense of what they encounter. Updike suggests that the novel is his exploration of the sense that 'the people we meet are *guises*, do conceal something mythic, perhaps prototypes or longings of our minds' (Updike, 1966, p.499-500), which suggests that there is some similarity in how people behave, in how they see the world, and a repetition of life across time to develop this sensation. Undoubtedly, Updike portrays Caldwell as experiencing 'repeating human experiences' (Ulvydiene, 2018, p.103), and it is this cyclical nature of his experience versus the linear experience of time and society's expectation of progress which causes his anguish. Cheiron serves as an exemplar because he understands this circularity, and the repetition of experience. In being combined with Caldwell, who is subject to the pressures of modern life and linear time, he can see both the repeating nature of life as well as its differences upon mortals. Here his longevity is a strength, as it permits him to live beyond the normal span and experience those repetitious patterns for himself. This experience gives him a 'perennial civilising role among mankind' (Vickery, 1974, p.38). It is modern writers, such as Elizabeth Cook in her 2001 prose poem novella *Achilles*, who see this as a curse and create anguish for Cheiron. For Updike, the passage of linear and accountable time is crushing. The degeneration of modern life is particularly illustrated by this mechanisation of time to the clock, and Caldwell epitomises the constant struggle to work within this inflexible, authoritarian system.

Conclusion

This article has concentrated upon highlighting the qualities of Cheiron from the ancient sources employed by Updike, focusing upon the aspects of his role as a tutor and his sacrifice of his life to free Prometheus. The attention given to time within the novel draws the reader's attention to the differences in perceiving linear and mythic time, and the difficulties that linear time creates for modern society. However, the primary message of the novel is that humans are innately mixed, living on boundaries between animal and human, mortal and divine, and that they must learn to accept their liminality in order to live peacefully. Updike uses the mythological to contrast an ideal with the actual, and reinforces the view that living and working within the constraints of the modern world was the greatest sacrifice a man could make. The use of Cheiron within Updike's novel and the relationships between the characters and their counterparts, as indicated in the 'Mythological Index' at the end of the book, invites the reader to see living in the modern world, fulfilling responsibilities and caring for family, as heroic deeds. Updike redraws the expectations of the hero, and places centrally those who teach and those who sacrifice themselves for the benefit of others as the truly heroic.

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