Priest of Wisdom: A Historical Novel Studying Ancient Greek Culture through Creative Writing

A project completed in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors Program

by

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In my childhood I read Greek mythology alongside fairy tales. Witches and fairies were intermingled with furies and nymphs. With maturity my fascination for Greek Mythology only grew. It grew to such a scope that I tried to learn all that I could about the Ancient Greek culture that first told these stories. I learned the variations of these myths and their purpose in the lives of the Ancient Greeks, the different names the gods and goddesses took on, like Pallas Athene, and how the contemporary idea of this complex culture is wrong.

In recent years Ancient Greek culture has gained some recognition. Book series like *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* have reached a wide young adult audience and have been made into blockbuster films. However, I want to bring more than fun, recognizable mythological characters to light; I want to use the essence of the actual culture and accentuate the obscure or misunderstood. There are certain rules that the Ancient Greeks held themselves to in their religion and funeral rites that should be brought to peoples’ attention and that I applied to my characters. Instead of Anglicanizing everything I tried to use original Greek words whenever possible (for example, using *lekythos* instead of pot or vessel). Furthermore, I molded my characters’ minds to the Ancient Greek thought process, especially that of the futility of life and their search for immortality through glory.

The main models for my novel are *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad* by Homer and the *Lord of the Rings* series by J. R. R. Tolkien. How my writing aligns with Homer’s works is through the setting. The setting of my novel is homage to Homer as our works are set in the Heroic Age. It was during this fictional age that the Greeks thought fantastic creatures and heroes populated the world; it was when the gods
took part in the lives of men. My novel also takes important elements from the epic style that Homer essentially created. That is, a hero figure, a sorceress (like Circe or Calypso), and a journey to the Underworld, to name a few. To Tolkien I give the credit for inspiring my usage of Ancient Greek culture to form my novel. Tolkien is known to have based *Lord of the Rings* off of his studies of the Nordic culture and Norse mythology. In much the same way, I base my novel off of my studies of Ancient Greek culture and Greek mythology.

Even though I have these two influential writers as my inspiration, I do embark on my own to create a world that I find true to what I want to express about the culture and the time period. Human nature has changed little since that time period, though more so perhaps the social norms that surround humans have. Therefore, the characters should reflect this: that the people then have the same emotions and reactions as contemporary people do now. Another way in which I deviate from expectations is that my world’s history does not grow from the bottom up. That is, there was never a primitive state in my world. For example, instead of having a fertility goddess, there is an agriculture goddess. Instead of having a head god like Zeus, who is seen as a father figure and husband, the head god in my fiction’s religion is the god of government. It is because my world puts more value in sophistication and technology that my antagonist creates the problem that drives my whole plot.

As I was writing my novel I had certain expectations for myself. To be successful at writing fiction one must build off of a solid basis of facts, even if the facts are only true to one’s fantasy world. That was my first major realization when I
began writing my novel. I began my novel when I studied abroad in Greece. One day every week I would have one-on-one meetings with my creative writing professor and go over what progress I made over the week. As my creative writing was not improving, we finally came to the conclusion that I needed to create a structured world for my fiction. I outlined my characters and their strengths and weaknesses, the meaning of their names, and their connection to other characters. I sketched maps and costumes. I furiously scribbled down notes about what to add to my plot. I did all of this before I set about writing again to give my world the structure it needed.

My novel has focus and intention. I did not write anything arbitrarily. The best way to appreciate my novel and fiction in general is to see the intent behind the writing. Every scene I wrote supports a plot point, develops a character or aspect of the fantasy world, or explores an important topic from Ancient Greece. Therefore, fiction does not only provide enjoyment, but also knowledge and understanding.

I was happy to have the help of Dr. Glazier when I resumed working on my fiction. The research I undertook was relatively easy compared to putting my imagination down on paper, so I was grateful in his contribution to regulating my writing and formulating my voice. By the time I began working with him in the Fall semester of 2014 I had set up my fantasy world and all I had to do was flesh out my ideas through research. To designate my research and show the purpose of what I had written in the context of Ancient Greek culture I added footnotes. I am fascinated by the Ancient Greek culture of the 800s BC, so I wanted to write my
fiction using research about that period in order that other people could better understand and relate to that culture.

**Creation Story**

A creation story is important in understanding any culture as it is that culture’s way of explaining why the world is the way it is. This story begins much as the Ancient Greeks’ does: that the world started in chaos and out of chaos appeared fantastic beings that are deserving of respect and worship. However, this story differs from tradition because my world relies on sophistication more than random chance. That is why it is important that the world was formed by kind beings and was created with a purpose. This creation story also explains how good and evil came to be and sets up the problem of the plot: that there is a war between two planets, Apheleia (the good planet) and Akantha (the evil planet).

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[How Apheleia and Akantha Came To Be]

In the first tick, in the first pulse of time there was nothing. Pieces of matter swirled around randomly, when out of this chaos emerged the stars. These beings, who even live today, are solemn and grave, and wise above all, because they have the longest memories. The next to emerge from the chaos were the gods, Soterios, Sophia, Euthalia, Metrodora, Sostrate, Sophos, and Melanthios, but being younger, they were more lighthearted than the stars and more eager to see the universe. One day, these gods came across a space where no stars dwelled. Before, they could not
go very far without meeting another star, but all of a sudden there was emptiness.
The air of that place was uneasy; it was empty and quiet.

Soterios, the leader of the gods, spoke up, “No other place do we know that is as bleak as here. Brothers and sisters, what can we do about this place? This emptiness cannot remain.”

“We should ask more stars to move here, that would brighten it up and it wouldn’t be empty anymore,” Metrodora said.

“We should just leave well enough alone. What does a blank space matter to us? There are plenty of other, more lively places to go and one spot of emptiness doesn’t affect anything,” Melanthios said, but everyone ignored this.

However, everyone grew quiet when Sophia spoke. “I agree with Soterios, this place needs help. More even than the light it lacks, it needs life. We can give it that. We should do something that we have never done before: create a world of our own. This will be different than the stars that have no interest in anything outside of themselves, who look down on us because we are young, even though we are gods and goddesses and should be respected as such. This place will be populated by beings that grow in wisdom and we will be the ones to teach them.”

Once she had spoken all of the gods knew she was right. Excitement passed around the group as they discussed and debated, planning every detail of this world and its inhabitants.

Meanwhile though, Melanthios, who first voted to leave, sulked to himself, plotting his own devices.
And so Apheleia was born. Each of the gods found new talents that they could use to contribute to make this infant world. Whereas before they were children, now they had a purpose in their creation. Soterios gathered the tails of comets to press in his hands the orb of Apheleia’s sun. To create Apheleia herself, Sophia took discarded stardust to form the earth and her own tears and sweat for the ocean. Sophos carved out the single continent shaped like a five-pointed star and formed the land into a central peak that tapered down into the five points. He also formed many different types of beasts for different purposes, to provide their wool or silk for clothing, for companionship, and for necessary work. Euthalia spread flowers, plants, and greenery across the land. Each god took on a new persona as they contributed to Apheleia. However, in all of this each god or goddess helped the other, giving each other ideas for what to use, what shape something should take, or what quality it should provide. Everyone worked in harmony to create Apheleia.

In the ultimate culmination of their talents, they created humans together. Sophos formed them from what was left over from creating the earth, the animals, and the plants; Sophia gave them their curiosity; Euthalia gave them the knowledge of how to cultivate the land and tend to animals; Soterios gave them the power of speech; Metrodora and Sostrate gave them life. It is because of the qualities that each possess that we on Apheleia go to them for different things, they each preside over that aspect of our lives. Soterios presides over speech and government, Sophia over wisdom, education, and writing, Euthalia over agriculture, Metrodora over motherhood and childbirth, Sostrate over fatherhood and war, and Sophos over
Finally, together they founded their capital on the central mountain, naming it Eirene and established their home there.

However, the gods were so busy at their tasks that no one missed Melanthios. Instead of joining in the creativity, working to develop his new found signature talent to share; he went off to the darkest part of the expanse. He had hatched an idea of his own, to form a world independent of any help from his siblings. He stole the light of Apheleia’s sun for his own so that the beauty and her misshapen twin revolved around the same sun. This misshapen world was so far removed in its orbit that the other gods and goddesses could not see it. Because of this, the world was cold and only the toughest life could survive there. He formed this world of his with the ground up bones of old stars and its ocean was filled with blood from a self-inflicted wound. Everything he made was crooked and deformed, a dark counterpart to the sweet Apheleia. This world he christened Akantha.

**Ancient Greek Funeral Practices**

In this section I felt that it was important to expose readers to this part of Ancient Greek culture because it is not as well known and it is one of the most important dilemmas in this culture. Studying funeral practices shows how the Greeks viewed life and the afterlife. They live life to the fullest because they viewed the Underworld as a place of either utter dullness or of cruel punishment. For those left behind they must prove themselves to others as giving proper respect for the dead and to keep the memories of those who passed away continuing on. That is why the problem of the funeral is so important to the character of Timotheos because as their son it is up to him to give his parents a proper burial no matter
what and because children were important to Ancient Greeks as a way for the memory of the deceased parents to continue on. It is also important to see the contrast of how his uncle behaves because he does not give proper respect to the dead.

[Timotheos, Orphaned and Grieving]

“Your cousin is here, Timotheos,” the priest told me.

Theron stood at the entrance to the temple. His skin pale, tears soaking his face.

“What’s wrong?” Timotheos asked.

Theron opened his mouth, tried to form words, but nothing came out. He gave a shuddery sniff and wiped his nose along his arm. “I’m so sorry, Timotheos,” Theron choked. “They’re gone, both your parents are gone.”

I swayed, my hand landed heavily on a nearby pillar. My palm stung from the roughness of the stone pillar. The priest appeared beside me, a solid, comforting presence.

“How?”

“Another monster from Melanthios. It made the ground shake and your house fell down. . . .” He didn’t need to tell me what came next. My parents had been crushed, lying in the rubble of the house.

Theron’s voice drifted off, but the words were still there, hanging unspoken.
In a low voice, the priest said, “Go, take care of your parents. We will conclude the lessons for as long as you need.”

I nodded mutely, unable to form words from my empty brain, and followed Theron to my aunt and uncle’s home.

Uncle Lysandros and Aunt Galene—my father’s sister—were waiting for me outside the house. My family had lived in the same house for generations and my uncle’s family had lived next to my family for just as long. That was how my aunt and uncle had met. There was a long tradition between the two houses as neighbors until they finally became connected with my aunt’s marriage to Uncle Lysandros.

My family’s house was destroyed to scattered rubble; there was only the sagging wall closest to my aunt and uncle’s house. Their house was still standing, but damaged. Thatching from the roof had fallen down and there was a crack running from the foundation to the roof.

Before we could begin preparations for the funeral I had to close my parents’ eyes and mouths. My parents’ bodies had to be extricated from the rubble, but couldn’t be taken into the house until we were sure the psyche had left the body.¹ Until then, my aunt and uncle had laid out the bodies in front of the rubble. I knelt down in front of my parents. Their bodies were scraped and bruised. Patches of hair were missing from my mother’s scalp because it was caught under a wall and had ripped out when she was lifted from the rubble. There was a gash over my father’s

¹ “Upon a person’s decease, the eyes and mouth were first closed . . . discharged by the next-of-kin. . . . the closing of the eyes was believed to secure the release of the psyche from the body” (Garland 23).
eye with blood crusted onto the eyelid. I could feel the bile rise in my throat. I had to choke it back down. I gently lowered their lids over their blank, brown eyes. Aunt Galene handed me the two strips of linen for the othonai. I tied the chinstraps around my parents’ heads, first my father, then my mother, to keep their jaws from hanging slack. Now my parents’ souls were safely gone, beginning their journey to the Underworld.

I couldn’t stand up. I was as still as the dead bodies before me, staring at their bloody faces. I couldn’t comprehend what had happened, there was no way to process what I felt to be a monumental shredding of my own soul. I still feel so, the loss of a loved one can only be dulled, it can never disappear. A wild scream left my body in an uncontrollable torrent, the rage poured out of me in bursts of shuddering sobs. All my safety was gone, the shards of stone left over from my house now no longer held meaning as a home or a place of protection and love and those people, my parents, who had fulfilled that protection and love were gone as well.

My aunt pulled me up and hugged me, nestling my head under her chin. She swayed slightly in rhythm. I could feel her tears on my forehead. “No, Timotheos, not now. I know it’s hard,” she said. “I’ve lost my brother just like you’ve lost your father. But I have to prepare them for burial, the grief will have to wait for the funeral.”

I released a deep sigh and gathered my scattered feelings. I couldn’t help but feel selfish at those words. There would be time to mourn fully at the prothesis, what I needed to focus on was giving my parents a proper burial. I helped my uncle

Garland, Kurtz, and Boardman agree that chinstraps (othonai) were used in this fashion (23, 144).
carry my father and mother inside so Aunt Galene could begin her preparations of the bodies.³

Aunt Galene went in the house to prepare the bodies while Theron was sent around town to tell friends of the family about the death of my parents. Meanwhile, I dully followed Uncle Lysandros to the local agora to purchase offerings for the burial. We separated to make our purchases. My uncle went to buy the offerings of birds, eggs, and nuts to burn so my parents would be fed in the Underworld⁴ and wine for the libations to the gods and to douse the funeral pyre.⁵ I was to buy the stelai and pottery offerings.

I had brought my own money and all that had been salvaged in the ruins of my house. My family was relatively well off, though modest, but funerals are expensive what with all the preparations, offerings, and the ekphora itself. I had relied on my family for support because I was still in training at the temple. I didn’t know how I would support myself on my own. But no, I told myself, I couldn’t be selfish. My family had cared for me and encouraged me. What was most important

³ It is generally agreed upon in historical research, and Garland, Kurtz, and Boardman agree, that only the women of the household would prepare the body for burial (23, 144).
⁴ Kurtz and Boardman have much to say about the significance of food as sacrificed during a funeral. There is a sacrifice of food at the gravesite to “sow the earth with the fruits of its bounty . . . assuring the dead a quiet repose, and, at the same time purifying the land, thereby returning it to the use of the living” (145). The authors discuss what types of food were used as follows, “Foodstuffs in burials are represented by the bones of small animals, birds and fish, sea shells, eggs and nuts. They are found in the pits or pyres in which offerings were burnt and occasionally in the grave itself” (215). Finally, to show that the food was to be eaten by the dead, “The food and some other offerings were regularly burnt (rather than cooked) and thus ‘killed’ so that they could accompany the dead” (215).
⁵ Garland says that there would be a libation of wine at the grave, in addition to quenching the funeral pyre (36).
was that my parents had died, and it was up to me to give them the most glorious funeral that I could.\textsuperscript{6} I decided to buy the most offerings and the best stelai for my parents that I could. I didn’t need the money; I was a priest and tended to a simple life anyway.

My first errand was to the stonemason’s to order stelai for my parents. I ordered a marble slab to stand on top of the funeral mound. On one side was to be my father’s name and on the other, my mother’s.\textsuperscript{7} The stelai was going to be ready after the prothesis in three days.

That taken care of, my next errand was to the pottery workshop. I looked through the cups on display. I did not want to buy just any cup; I wanted to buy pottery that suited my parents’ personalities in life. This would serve as a reminder of what my parents were like to anyone who saw my offerings. The one I selected for my father had a simple checkerboard design along its rim and painted on the body was a battle scene with warriors fighting giants. This reminded me of a story that my father had told me about how he and a group of men from the city had repelled giants that had migrated from the forest and had come too close to the city. Since my mother and I both were close to Sophia, I chose a cup with the scene of Sophia presenting the alphabet to man.

\textsuperscript{6} Garland writes of the importance of a sumptuous funeral, “In antiquity . . . a funeral presented unrivalled opportunities for the conspicuous display of wealth, kin-solidarity and family pride” (21). Kurtz and Boardman explain this further in Timotheos’ role as son of the deceased as follows, “It seems to have been a particular duty of the son to bury his parents, especially his father, in a fitting manner” (143).

\textsuperscript{7} “we have seen full evidence there for the use of an upright slab as marker, which is not embellished with an inscription or figure decoration until at least the mid-seventh century” (Kurtz and Boardman 219).
Then I chose the oil flasks I was supposed to offer to my parents. On my mother’s lekythos was painted a scene of maenads dancing through a grove, behind one of the trees a satyr was hiding, leering at the maenads. This made me smile a little because my mother had a slightly vulgar sense of humor when she was not in public. For my father I chose a lekythos showing a scene from the story of the hero, Paramonos, when he traveled to the Underworld to save his love. I thought this would do justice to my father’s sentimental nature, and he always liked heroic stories.

I moved on to the pottery that my parents would use in the Underworld. I picked out a krater for them to mix their wine, two kylixes to drink it with, and an oinokhoe to store it. Then I collected piles of the necessities of funerary offerings. You know, clay eggs, animal figurines, shoes, astragals, women in mourning with

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8 According to Osborne, the lekythos oil pot of my chosen time period of the 8th century BC would have been painted with black figures depicting either maenads and satyrs or death-related mythology. It would not be until later that there would be developed red-outline figures on a white background and the topics shown would change to represent non-mythological scenes (189).

9 For a thorough chart and description of these pieces of pottery, refer to pages 114-115 of Robin Osborne’s *Archaic and Classical Greek Art.*

10 Kurtz and Boardman state that there are three different types of offerings made at funerals, “probably personal possessions; objects of everyday use but in this context having a possible funerary significance; and objects made for the grave” (207). Oftentimes, the offerings are for the dead’s usage in the Underworld. Such things as clay eggs and animal figurines represent food for them to eat. The Greeks would also offer essentials such as shoes for the dead, thus the clay representations.

11 “Astragals—knuckle-bones—are far more commonly found [as funerary offerings]” (Kurtz and Boardman 208). There are many different usages for the astragals, but the authors point out that bodies are buried with more astragals than would usually be used, thus rendering them significant to burial. However, their true purpose is unknown.
streaks of red paint on their cheeks to tie onto the pottery,\textsuperscript{12} and clay tables with more of the same mourning women on them as the legs.\textsuperscript{13} My hardest choice was to pick hydriaei for my parents’ ashes to be stored in. For my father I chose a hydria that depicted a shade being taken over the river of the Underworld by the Dread Ferryman and my mother’s hydria showed a nymph leading a shade to the Pool of Forgetfulness to drink their past life from memory.\textsuperscript{14} Finally finished with my purchases from the pottery merchant, I carried the offerings to the cart where Uncle Lysandros was already waiting.

“What took you so long?” He snapped.

I was taken aback by his behavior, so I said, “There’s a lot of things to buy for a funeral, and I wanted to make sure that the offerings were perfect.”

“Let me look at what you’ve got.” My uncle pawed through the pottery carefully wrapped in old rags. “Did you really need to get all of these astragals? You got a krater and a kylix? AND an oionokhoe? You’re being awfully extravagant for a young man who doesn’t have any means anymore.”

\textsuperscript{12}“Clay mourners . . . were also attached to vases, to the rims or shoulders of jugs, tankards, ribbon-handled bowls, and [kraters] . . . Many of them have traces of red paint preserved on their faces and breasts” (Kurtz and Boardman 78).
\textsuperscript{13}“An offering place in the Kerameikos and one at Vari had clay ‘tables’ . . . Both were found with a small clay die and for this reason are thought to be ‘gaming tables’. But unlike other known gaming tables, these have [modeled] female mourners, their cheeks streaked with red paint for blood, at each corner. The effect is that of a prothesis bier with attendant mourners” (Kurtz and Boardman 77-78).
\textsuperscript{14}“For the ash urn itself a hydria was commonly but by no means exclusively chosen” (Kurtz and Boardman 210). Hydriaei are water jugs and a theory for their usage as an ash urn is that it may refer to how the dead were to drink from Lethe, the river of forgetfulness. This theory leads me in my choice of what is depicted on the hydriaei.
“What do you mean ‘any means?’ I thought I was going to live with you and Aunt Galene now.” I felt a sinking sensation. I should not have assumed anything about my uncle.

Uncle Lysandros growled, “I can’t take you in, Timotheos. I have enough troubles without you creating another burden on me. And now on top of that, I have to repair my house.”

I was getting angry, “Your house? What about my house? My house is completely destroyed! What am I going to do without a place to live?”

“I don’t care, you’re not going to live with me. Once the mourning period is over, you’re out.”

“But—” I tried to reason with him, but he would not allow me to speak.

“No.”

I knew that my uncle had changed. I grew up with my aunt and uncle taking care of me just as my parents would. Then Melanthios started sending more and more monsters to the city. The war had affected my uncle more than anyone expected. I remembered how cheerful Uncle Lysandros used to be, how loving he was to Aunt Galene. He used to take my cousins and I to the woods to play or held me up on his shoulders to see a festival procession pass by. Then his daughter, Phoibe, died from yet another of Melanthios’ monsters, and everyone in the family changed. Aunt Galene grew gentler, Theron grew quieter, when my other cousins grew up they moved far away to leave her memory behind, and Uncle Lysandros grew harder. I understood that Uncle Lysandros’ grief had hardened him, so I couldn’t argue now. He had developed a block to sympathy that nothing could pass
through. If I was told receive any help from him I would have to think of a better way to approach him later.

Still, I couldn't help but notice how little food and wine offerings Uncle Lysandros had bought, but I said nothing.

The next day began the prothesis. I rose early and came down to the courtyard to see my parents for the first time after their preparation. Both bodies were bathed, cleaned, and anointed with oil. Both were dressed in white robes. My mother wore her best jewelry and her hair had been arranged how she wore it when she was alive, with little tweaks to cover the areas that had accidentally been ripped out. Aunt Galene had sent Theron to the forest to gather boughs and they

\[15\] Garland, Kurtz, and Boardman all agree that the prothesis took place the day after death (26, 144). However, they disagree on the length of time the prothesis extended. According to Garland, “In Homer, the prothesis could apparently be extended indefinitely . . . determined either by the social standing of the deceased or by the grief felt by the survivors” (26). All that Kurtz and Boardman say is “The prothesis normally lasted one day” (144). The reason I am siding with Garland is that later he continues to say that the one day prothesis came about because of Solon’s law, which alludes to the fact that the prothesis probably extended further than only one day. This also leads me to believe that how Kurtz and Boardman reach their conclusion is through Solon’s law.

\[16\] “We cannot be sure exactly where the ceremony was held. . . . Boardman concludes that the law may have permitted the ceremony to be held in the courtyard within the house (oikia). . . however, much must have depended on the size of the house and the time of year” (Garland 27-28).

\[17\] “[The women of the family] bathed the body, anointed it with oil, dressed and adorned it with flowers, wreaths, ribbons and [jewelry] (Kurtz and Boardman 144).

\[18\] “The funeral garment worn by the deceased in Geometric prothesis is represented as a long ankle-length robe” (Garland 241). It is not until later that more coverings and a shroud are added.

\[19\] “Women’s hair was arranged as in life, and women are sometimes shown wearing earrings and a necklace” (Garland 26).
were arranged around the bodies on the kline, their sap adding fragrance to the air.

“Good, I hoped you would be up early, too.” Aunt Galene had entered the room so quietly that I hadn’t heard her. “I have one final touch that I want you to see.”

Aunt Galene held a small package in her hand, which she unfolded to show me. In the old rags was a golden diadem of gilt olive leaves. Carefully, Aunt Galene arranged the diadem on my mother’s head, smoothing down the hair around it. Now the bodies didn’t look recognizable as the corpses I had wept over yesterday. They looked serene. The white of the shrouds and the shine of the diadem reflected from the light of the oil lamps to cast an aura around my parents. They seemed so peaceful that I felt a bit better and almost forgot what they had looked like the day before.

Guests came in and out throughout the next three days. The prothesis wore me down emotionally. As next of kin Aunt Galene sat next to her brother, supporting his head and I sat next to my mother to support hers. I had to watch everyone’s

20 “Other objects connected with prothesis include branches, which were either placed under the bier or held over the feet or head of the corpse (Garland 26).
21 “It was a widespread custom in antiquity to place a crown on the head of the deceased” (Garland 26). On page 207 of their book, Greek Burial Customs, Kurtz and Boardman agree that golden diadems may have been worn.
22 “Mourners stand, kneel or sit on stools on either side of the bier as well as below it, some gesturing with their arms, others touching the bier or corpse. A special importance seems to have attached to the position at the head of the bier, which is usually occupied by women. They arrange the pillows, grasp the deceased by the shoulders, and occasionally hold something in front of him as if in the act of feeding. Rarely do they actually embrace the corpse. . . . Supporting the head of the deceased is an action performed by the nearest and dearest . . . ” (Garland 28-29).
display of grief, which would make me cry every time. Whenever there was a lull I would try to calm down, but then someone would trigger me again. I was on a pendulum swing, one side of vulnerability and the other trying to remain strong for everyone else’s sake.

Each night we held formal mourning ceremonies. These were strange to see because it allowed people I had come to know in everyday life to let loose their emotions. I was not prepared to see women I had formerly seen at the agora tearing at their hair and striking their chests. Men that had visited my parents for dinner and chatted with me about my training were holding or beating their heads in grief. The release of grief was also channeled through the dirge. My family had hired singers for this purpose. The singers led a procession around the bier, singing an eerie threnos that my family had commissioned. Then Aunt Galene joined in with her own song, and lastly the other women at the prothesis accompanied in chorus. The rhythm intertwined in a soulful melody. The song rose in a wail and ebbed to a groan, then lilted off into silence.

I remember the threnos to have been sung like this:

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23 I have not come across any research that states whether or not the mourning of the prothesis lasted the whole day or not. For the sake of my story, I opted that the mourning take place at night. This way there is a clearly marked ceremony.

24 “There are two main gestures of mourning on Geometric vases: the female attitude of holding both hands to the head and tearing the hair, and the male attitude of holding one hand to the head, apparently beating it but not actually tearing the hair” (Garland 29).

25 “The [principle] ceremony performed at the prothesis was the singing of the ritualized lament” (Garland 29-30).

26 According to Garland, “the singing of the lament often involved movement around the bier” (30).

27 The hired singers would start with their threnos and then the women of the family would join with the goos, both being accompanied by a chorus of women (Garland 30).
Rising horror and darts of mourning flow through veins
Bodies ebb, their merest ashes gray
Rivers of sorrow drowning all joy from our hearts
Peace from cares this world inflicts on them
Now rest their noble brows in flowers and sweet boughs
Find them as worthy to rest carefree through the ages
Dread ferryman, carry away their shades
Keep both their mem’ries fresh, alive, endless
They’ll greet us then, some day, open armed with love
Deities of Aphelia, bless them

When the official threnos had ended, a mourner would share their goos, the song of a cherished memory of the lost loved one. The mourners were carried off in their personal reveries of the lives of the deceased before them. The procession ended with the last goos. Releasing emotions through mourning and singing brought reconciliation. Each night I was able to see my parents from the different

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28 This poem is in the form of an elegy, which is comprised of elegiac couplets. These couplets are formed of one hexameter (six poetic feet) and one pentameter (five poetic feet), in that order. For inspiration of what style of themes the elegy would use, I referred to the book, *Greek Poets in English Verse*, with various translators and edited by William Hyde Appleton. Notable Ancient Greek poets who wrote elegies are Tyrtaeus, Archilochus, Sappho, and Erinna. Erinna’s “Epitaph on Her Friend, Baucis” was as especially helpful example to pattern my elegy after.

29 “Dirges took many forms, the most personal being the goos whose theme was ‘the memory of the lives the two shared and the bitterness of loss’ (Vermeule 1979, 15). The goos . . . was an improvised lament sung by relatives or close friends of the deceased. In style and content it is differed markedly from the threnos, a formal lament sung by professional mourners . . .” (Garland 30).
perspectives of the mourners’ memories and this led me nearer to closure, so the prothesis was a way for me to process my emotions.

After the third day of prothesis it was time to cremate and bury my parents. Mourners from the past few days and more crowded into the house. For a while there was a pandemonium of milling women and men accidentally clanking their weapons or shields against each other.\textsuperscript{30} The pallbearers ducked out of the room to change into their proper long himatia for the occasion.\textsuperscript{31} When everyone had arrived, the mourners arranged themselves into a procession, the men clattering to the front in their armor and the women jockeying for positions near their friends in the back.\textsuperscript{32} I tried to make my way to the top of the procession, but Uncle Lysandros stopped me.

“Where do you think you’re going? You can’t come to the ekphora,” he told me.


“You’re going to be a priest, you will bring miasma\textsuperscript{33} upon yourself if you come to the funeral. If you become unclean, then you cannot continue your priestly training.”

\textsuperscript{30}“Men carrying weapons lead the procession” (Garland 31). On page 145 of \textit{Greek Burial Customs} Kurtz and Boardman agree that men lead the procession.

\textsuperscript{31}Garland references an ekphora depicted on a cup, saying that the pallbearers are dressed in long himatia, or robes (31).

\textsuperscript{32}Kurtz, Boardman, and Garland agree that men led the procession and women bring up the rear (145, 31).

\textsuperscript{33}Miasma is the state of being unclean the Ancient Greeks associated with death (Kurtz and Boardman 146). Priesthoods had to prevent miasma from interfering with their duties.
This was a hard blow because I knew my uncle was right. As a priest in training, it would be an act against the priesthood to attend the ekphora, even as a guest. And now I realized that it also applied to my parents and me.

Aunt Galene covered my parents with epiblemae up to their heads, signaling the procession to begin. Uncle Lysandros and the other pallbearers picked up the biers and began walking to the cemetery outside the city gates. The people in the procession began the mourning ritual again, except even louder. They screamed their wails now to bring the city’s attention to the grief they were experiencing. I could only stand in the doorway, watching the procession until the last notes of the accompanying flautist died away in the distance.

**Kassandra: The Prophetess**

As can be seen through my other characters, I used authentic Ancient Greek names in my story. Kassandra is an especially important name because she specifically appeared in Greek mythology, unlike my other characters. Though the Kassandra of this story is tailored to my own design, she is similar to her precursor. Kassandra’s namesake in mythology was also a prophetess whose visions were not

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34 “So far as we know no priest was required to be present, and it may be that his office banned him from attendance at the graveside even in a private capacity” (Garland 36).

35 Kurtz, Boardman, and Garland all agree that in the procession the bodies are wrapped in an epiblema, or shroud, with the corpses’ heads uncovered (145, 32).

36 In the procession the bodies could either be transported in a horse drawn hearse or on a pall (Garland 31, Kurtz and Boardman 145). It is in keeping with Homer that the bodies are carried on a pall (Garland 32).

37 “The mourners did not proceed in silence to the cemetery, but would make frequent halts at street corners so as to attract the maximum amount of public attention” (Garland 33).

38 It is keeping with tradition to have a flute player accompany the procession (Garland 32).
believed, though each gained their powers in different ways. In mythology Apollo, who promised her the gift of prophecy, wooed Cassandra. However, when Cassandra refused to sleep with the god, Apollo took his revenge by making sure that no one would believe her prophecies. This is similar to Kassandra's experience when she does not fully follow a god's instructions.

Whereas the character of Kassandra harks back to Ancient Greek mythology, in this story she brings up themes that are important even today. She stands up for what she believes in despite those around her. Unlike the myths, Kassandra does not prophesy despite not being believed. Kassandra is clever and tries to take a cursed gift and use it for good.

[How Kassandra Got Her Powers]

As Timotheos and Ampelios were hunting together in the forest, they saw a thin trail of smoke spiraling above the trees.

"Hey, that’s coming from someone’s camp. It’s too small to be a forest fire,” Ampelios said, pointing.

“How can another person be here already? I thought we were the first on this continent,” Timotheos commented.

“Let’s check it out. It could be another giant.”

Timotheos snorted, "A giant? Wouldn't we want to go the other way then?"
“Would you like to wait for it to come and find us and put the rest of the group in danger too?” Ampelios asked. Timotheos shook his head ruefully at that. “Well then, we’re going to find out what this is.”

It was a young woman. She was roasting a hare on a spit, the juices dripping off its sides and into the fire, making little splutters and mixing its gamey scent with the smoke. Using the back of her hand to wipe the sweat from her forehead, she turned her head. At the sight of them the young woman screamed and toppled over. She tried to catch herself before she fell, but landed in the fire instead, burning her hand.

Timotheos leapt forward and dragged her away from the fire. He pulled out his water pouch and poured the cool liquid over her burnt palm. While he was doing this he noticed that she had two tiny parallel puncture wound scars on her wrist. She didn’t seem to notice that she was burnt. She looked him full in the face and whispered, “It’s you.”

Startled, Timotheos looked back at her sharply, assessing her. She had over-wide, dark brown eyes with an amber ring around her pupils. She was wearing an olive brown, one-shouldered khiton, which exposed one of her breasts, allowing for freedom of movement. The skirt was belted up over her knees with a strip of leather so that it wouldn’t get caught on the underbrush.39 Her skin was tanned and smooth and her body, muscled. Her thick, curly brown hair was pulled back with another strip of leather so it wouldn’t get caught in anything either. It struck Timotheos that

39 This is how women would dress in Ancient Greek in order to participate in footraces. For a visual representation of this, refer to page 156 of Stephen G. Miller’s Ancient Greek Athletics.
she was very pretty, but also that she was not familiar whatsoever. He would remember a woman like her. “I don’t remember you. Who are you?”

Flustered, she replied, “I’m sorry, I forgot myself for a minute. I’m Kassandra.”

Ampelios helped them up. Kassandra adjusted her khiton and Timotheos caught another momentary glimpse of her breast. Reddening, he looked away quickly and pretended to study the tree line.

“Are you here alone, Kassandra?” Ampelios asked her.

She nodded.

Ampelios and Timotheos exchanged a look.

“Would you like to join our camp?” Timotheos asked her.

She smiled widely at him, “I would love to.”

That night after she had been introduced to everyone in the group and the women had had their fill of fussing over her, she sat down beside Timotheos at the fire.

“I want to thank you for taking me into the group, Timotheos,” she said.

“It wasn’t only me, you have Ampelios to thank as well.”

“I know, but I wanted to thank you first. You were the one to help me when I burned myself.”

“Um. You’re welcome then.”

They sat in awkward silence for a minute until Ampelios plopped down between them.
“So, Kassandra, I’d like to get to know you better since you’re a part of the group now.”

Timotheos started, “Yes, you should. It’s become something of a tradition for the group that everyone shares their story. At first it was to pass the time, but it really ended up bringing us closer together.”

The woman on the other side of Timotheos overheard and chimed in until the whole group was involved in convincing Kassandra to tell her story. She looked around the group, abashed at all the attention she was getting.

“Oh no, you don’t really,” she stuttered.

Timotheos leaned past Ampelios to look her in the eye. “We really do want to get to know you better.”

She blushed, “I suppose I owe it to you after you’ve all taken me in like this.”

“Four years ago when I was fifteen, my father wanted me to get married. Even though I was of marriageable age, I didn’t feel ready to become a wife. So I pleaded with my father to put my marriage off. He was stubborn, but I take after him so I was stubborn too and didn’t give up.

One day after a particularly bad fight with my father I left my house, running as fast as I could. (Running has always calmed me down; it works the anger out of me.) I ran as far and as fast as I could, and when I was tired enough to collapse right then, I found that I was at the temple of Sostrate. In the region where I come from Sostrate is only worshipped by men since he is the god of fatherhood and war, so I technically wasn’t supposed to be there. But that rule always irritated me. Sostrate
is our father-protector, and women have fathers just as men do, so there's no reason
why women can't worship him. Plus, what better person to ask for help from my
father than another father? Anyway, that was the excuse I gave myself.

None of the priests were in the main part of the temple, so I went inside.

Sostrate’s statue was at the head of the room, right foot stepping forward, shield
raised in protection, spear at the ready, and his countenance fierce. In supplication
I knelt at the statue’s feet, wrapping one arm around his knees, and, gazing into his
face, touched my fingers to his chin.

“Oh Sostrate, I am at your knees,” I prayed. “I know you as my father-
protector, and since my earthly father will not listen to me, I pray that you will. I
don’t want my father to force me into marriage; I want to grow up at my own pace.

Please help me, father Sostrate.”

40 F.S. Naiden devotes an entire book to the subject of supplication when he writes
Ancient Supplication. The process of supplication begins when the suppliant decides
whether to approach an altar or a person for protection. Here Kassandra chooses an altar.
Then the suppliant says such a phrase as “I am at your knees” and does a suppliant
gesture. The next step is to ask a request or argue in defense. Finally, the supplicandus
(the one supplicated) judges the request and responds accordingly as to whether or not the
suppliant deserves his protection.

41 The particular gesture used can have a certain meaning to the suppliant. In the case of
clasping the knees, according to Naiden, “While letting the suppliant draw near, it also
lets him raise his face in order to speak and emote. No less important, this gesture makes
it impossible for the supplicandus to reject a suppliant without effort. More than any
other gesture, and far more than any word, the knee clasp lends urgency to an appeal”
(44). Thus, Kassandra is sincerely trying to show Sostrate her plight.

42 Touching the supplicandus’ chin can show a will that he be decisive and make up his
mind. Naiden uses the example of Thetis in the Iliad, saying, “Thetis is able to touch the
chin of Zeus when she supplicates him in Iliad 1. Since she clasps his knees, too, she is
expressing both urgency and a hint of just what his responsibility is: to honor a woman
who has helped him in the past but is too discreet to say so” (48-49). Here is can be seen
that Kassandra is acting similarly. Sostrate may not owe her anything personally, but he
does owe her as a god does to his follower.
An imposing voice boomed through the temple. “I have heard you child, and I will help. Tell your father that you will only marry the man who can best you in a footrace. This will give you time to be young.”

I was startled; it could only be Sostrate. Of course I had heard stories in my childhood of gods working in the lives of humans, but I didn’t think it would have happened to someone like me. After thanking him, I ran all the way home again, excited to tell my father. I went to him humbly, apologizing for the earlier arguments. He still loved me and hated that I thought he was hurting me by forcing me into marriage, so, softened by my apologies, he agreed to let me be won through a footrace. When my father agreed, I sent an anonymous sacrifice to the temple of Sostrate. I continued to send these anonymous sacrifices every time I won a race.

I strung out three years of footraces and disappointed suitors. My father couldn’t protest because the suitors knew their chances and he kept to his word. But as the months and then years passed, he began to worry. Now he was pleading with me, telling me that soon no man would want me past this age. I kept to my plan, because as I had grown older I realized that it was not just my youth that I would miss, but I would also risk marrying a stranger that I didn’t love. I resolved that if I liked a suitor, I would let him win. The chances of this happening were bleak though, as only men with weak minds that only cared for muscles, women, and riches competed against me.

While I was running footraces, my other friends were getting married. They had their sweethearts, but none of my friends were able to marry these sweethearts. They married the men that their fathers told them to. The men were all respectable
and well off, so my friends settled easily into married life, but I could not do that to
myself. I struggled with this. I felt guilty because I was not being the perfect
daughter my father wanted me to be. I felt selfish because I wanted more out of my
life than an arranged marriage. But I held on because I believed that Sostrate’s plan
would work to bring the right man for me to marry.

Then, when I was about to turn eighteen, my father betrayed me. He met
secretly with a recent winner of the footraces at the Sostrion, the athletic
competition dedicated to Sostrate. Though I didn’t know of this plan until later. The
man disgusted me when I met him. He was boorish and prideful. He was the type of
man I mentioned earlier. He won the Sostrion by trusting his strength, not by his
dedication to Sostrate. This was also the way he bested me in my footrace.

Devastated, that night I ran to the temple of Sostrate just as I had three years
previously. This time, a young priest was there.

“You can’t come in here,” he protested.

“Leave her,” Sostrate’s voice resonated through the temple. “She is the one
who has been sending me the sacrifices you think are so mysterious.”

The young priest stared at me agape and backed out of the temple area, no
doubt to tell the other priests what had happened.

I was angry, I wanted to speak my mind to Sostrate, and so before he could
begin again in that voice that struck me with awe, I yelled, "Why? Why did this
happen? You were supposed to protect me and all it took was my father convincing
a hero from the Sostrion, your athletic competition, to compete against me. I trusted
you and a mere man thwarted your plan." I knelt on the ground and wrapped my
arms around my knees while I sobbed. I was scared, I felt as if everyone had
betrayed me and I couldn’t trust anyone. I was caught in a conflict of loyalty to
Sostrate and anger that even he could not protect me. Out of nowhere I felt an arm
around my shoulder.

“I’m sorry, my child, I could not prevent your father’s scheme,” Sostrate
rumbled. “We gods have agreed to give you humans free will. I cannot stop your
father from exercising that, and I am sure you would not want me to take away your
free will either.”

I tentatively drew my arm around his side, too, worried that he would see
this as presumptuous. He adjusted his position so that my head rested on his
shoulder. He didn’t mind, then. That gesture of fatherly love made me cry even
more. I hated being mad at Sostrate, but I couldn’t help wondering what the point
was of being a god if he couldn’t fix this one little thing.

“What am I going to do now? He’s worse than anyone else that I’ve raced
against. I can’t marry him.”

“Run away,” he replied.

This idea startled me, “Leave my home? Where am I supposed to go?”

“Don’t worry, I have a plan for you, I will lead you to an undiscovered land
and there I will give you a new start,” he explained. “First you must go on a quest
and I will give a power to help you.”

All I could do was trust him. I nodded in agreement.
“I’m sorry that this had to happen, my child. Be as strong as I know you are.”

With his thumb he wiped away the tears from my cheeks, and with a kiss on my forehead, he disappeared.

Even though I trusted Sophos, I still wanted to say goodbye to my parents. I snuck back into my home and was about to leave a note at their bedside when my father awoke.

“Kassandra! What are you doing up so late at night?” Then he saw the slip of parchment I held in my hand. He took it from me and read it. As he read my words and realized that I was running away, his face grew somber.

“Please stay, you have an obligation to get married. The winner of the Sostrion will be a good husband to you. He is strong and will provide for you.”

“That’s not all I want in life, Father,” I clasped his hand in mine. “I want to be able to love my husband, not just be the bearer of his children.”

“You are being foolish, child,” he reproved. “This is the way it is done, you will have your whole life to learn to love your husband. Just as your mother and I have done.”

“I’m not you. I can’t take chances that I feel are wrong. Goodbye, I hope someday you will understand why I’m doing this.” I kissed him on the cheek and left. Thankfully he was too stunned to pursue me, so I left the town and slipped into the dense shadows of the forest.

That night after I had exhausted myself in my trek, I dreamed of Sostrate.

“I know what you have done, Kassandra. You risked your escape by returning home to bid farewell to your parents. Because it is good that you respect your
parents, I will still give you my gift at the end of your quest. However, because you did not obey me, it will not be the perfect gift I intended for you.” And so he continued to tell me his plans for my quest. “You must continue traveling toward the sun until you come to two trees that have grown twisted around each other. There will be a hollow in this tree where you will find a light blue snake. The next part especially will require you to trust me: you must allow the snake to bite you. This will give you the power of prophecy, but since you did not obey me implicitly, there must be a penalty. You will have the ability to see the future, but if you tell anyone of what you see, they will not believe you. Your ability to see the future will be your guide. You have great things in store for you, Kassandra.”

The next morning I awoke supernaturally refreshed compared to the turmoil I had undergone the previous day. I also awoke perplexed over my dream. I obediently continued journeying east as Sostrate had told me, but I pondered what I would do. I had plenty of time to think things over. It took me a month of walking, running, and helpful people's wagons to arrive at the twisted trees.

I found the snake in the twisted tree. It was a dingy blue and oily looking, curled up in the hollow of the trees, asleep. I was repulsed and realized how foolish I was being. I was so concerned about the power the snake would give me and it didn’t occur to me how painful the bite might be. Meanwhile, the snake opened its eyes. I immediately became mesmerized and reached out my hand to it. Even though the snake looked repulsive and oily, it felt like the smooth, cool water of a stream or the finest fabric ever woven. When it felt my hand it began to uncurl. As it moved its scales shifted and oscillated to reveal its true color. It was indeed a light blue as
Sostrate had described. More than that, it was the blue that is seen in mother of pearl or in the iridescence of an opal. Gracefully, sinuously, it wound around my arm to shoulder height.

The snake spoke to me without any mode of speech that I could find, as if it spoke directly into my mind. “Kassandra, I have been waiting for you. I have seen you in my visions. I know you fear the power, so I will teach you the ways of prophecy. The snake licked my eyes and the world shifted, now there was that mother of pearl, iridescent blue in the corners of my vision.

“You must accept this gift willingly. To help you decide I have given you a little of my power temporarily so that you will understand what is expected of you. I know that you are clever and you will learn much on your own. Focus on the blue, what do you see?”

As I focused the world around me blurred and was replaced by another view.

“I see a mountain. I don't know where it is.”

“Very good, now focus where you like on the mountain, I want to see how good your instincts are.”

Intuitively, I focused on the base of the mountain. The scene zoomed in and I saw a group of hounds herding two men. “I see a pack of hounds surrounding two men, they’re leading the men to the mountain. I don’t know who the two men are though, their backs are to me.”

“Your instincts are impressive. You focused on the important element of the scene well, the details will come in time.” The snake glided back down my arm,
speaking into my mind as it went, “Sostrate was right, you will do great things with this power. Are you ready to decide?”

“Yes, I will accept the gift.”

“I will not lie to you, this will be painful, but you must master the pain.”

The snake revealed her milky fangs and drove them into my wrist. The venom felt like icy fire burning up my arm into my chest, then seared its way to my eyes and brain. I fell to the ground, eyes clenched shut against the pain, writhing in agony, clutching my head. I barely noticed the snake unwind from my arm and return to the tree, though its words pierced through the blazing pain in my mind and rang out, “Have strength, child of Sostrate, you will conquer this. Take hold and possess it.”

I open my eyes to vision completely enveloped in red. I focused on the red and tried to see through it. When I was so focused on this that I forgot my pain, my vision changed to orange, now I could see the outline of the world around me. I knew how I could possess it. I focused on the outlines until they switched to yellow, then to green, and finally settled to blue. I was utterly exhausted by this, so I decided to stay and rest by the trees for the night.

That night I dreamed of the next steps in my journey. I was supposed to continue east until I came to the shoreline. Each night would reveal the next step and show me how to avoid danger along the way. It was through my power that I knew how to go around savage animals and find the easiest way to my destination. When I came to the shore it was through my power that I knew how to build a boat. Since the power was still new to me and I still had to learn how to use it, I could not
see far in advance. So even though I knew that I had to make a boat, I had no idea where the boat would take me. It was not until I was out to sea that I even knew there would be a new continent. It was at this point that I really came into my own with my powers. I had ample time to focus on my skills since there was nothing else to do on the boat. I would continually focus on the blue at the edge of my vision. However, the snake was right, I learned quickly how to handle the downfalls of my gift. At first I grew too bold in the exploration in my powers and I would go deeper and deeper in my visions until I almost lost sight of reality. That was how I learned that I should use my power sparingly.

When I arrived on this continent my dreams stopped. I speculated that Sostrate was helping my power along by sending me those dreams and now was releasing me to take the power for my own. At this point I only knew that someone would find me. I didn’t know who it would be; I only knew that I was supposed to stay in the clearing where I had my camp and to wait for the destined men to find me. So now you know the extent of my story. Because of my visions I believe that you are the people I am destined to be with.

The group sat in stunned silence, still processing the story. Then the woman beside Timotheos reached around him and grasped Kassandra’s hand.

She said, “I think you are a very brave young woman to leave everything you knew behind, and at such a young age, too.”

Kassandra looked relieved and glassy-eyed with emotion. Up until then Timotheos had seen her as a mature and self-possessed young woman, but now that
she had bared all and the women were surrounding her, showering her with hugs and smoothing her rumpled hair, he saw her relax into a girl again. Just for a little bit she allowed the women to mother her and he realized that she was just as much an orphan as he was. He was separated from his parents by death, that was true, but a continent separated her from her parents, a continent that no one on the other side of the world even knew existed. It was unlikely that she would ever see them again. Looking over the group he realized for the first time how well they had all bonded. They were no longer refugees—they were bonded as family. They were bonded as sister and brother, as father as son, as every family connection imaginable.

Kassandra broke away from the group and returned to Timotheos’ side.

“I didn’t want to tell the whole group this, but I’ve seen you in my visions, Timotheos.”

He remembered her first words to him: “It’s you.”

“So that’s why you reacted like you knew me when we met earlier today. I figured it was too much of a coincidence that we already knew each other and met again half a world away,” he joked.

“I kept going back to the first vision I saw with the snake, the one of the mountain. As I practiced my gift I was able to make out who those two men were. They were, or are, or I suppose will be—the grammar of prophecy is terrible—they are you and Ampelios.”

“And? What happens?”

“Something terrible. The hounds will take you to something truly evil and it will end in death.”
Timotheos patted her shoulder reassuringly. “I think we’ll be fine. We’ve learned a lot on this journey, and with Sophia’s help we can risk the dangers.”

Kassandra bit her lip uneasily. It was beginning. People didn’t believe her about her visions. Hopefully there would be time for her to plan something to protect them or deflect the danger before it came. The group prepared themselves for the night. They laid their sleeping furs close to each other for warmth. Lying on her borrowed furs, Kassandra went over the day’s events. She hadn’t told Timotheos everything about her visions. She had not just had the vision of Timotheos at the mountain. There were more visions surrounding him. She saw her and Timotheos embracing. She saw them walking hand in hand. She saw their romance laid out ahead of her. The problem was that her visions were still too vague. They weren’t set in time, so she didn’t know if their romance came first and Timotheos would die at the mountain or if he survived and their romance continued on later in life. It had been terrible to know that someone would die at the mountain. It troubled her even more after she made the connection of the man at the mountain to the man in her visions of romance. Would Timotheos die there, or would he survive? Exhausted from excitement of that day, she drifted off to sleep and dreamed of her and Timotheos’ first kiss.

**Journey to the Underworld**

If one is to write about Ancient Greek culture, then it is necessary to include a journey to the Underworld. This type of story is a common addition to epics as it is seen in *The Odyssey, The Aeneid*, and in a way can even be seen in *Beowulf.* It is also seen many times in myths, such as that of Orpheus and Eurydice, which also
influences my writing; specifically in the way that the hero cannot look behind him when leaving the Underworld.

However, since in my fantasy world they are more sophisticated and because I want to bring in current issues, the journey to the Underworld is approached in a different way. In *The Odyssey* Odysseus had to offer a sacrifice and the shades had to drink blood before they could speak. In my story, the tunnel leading to the Underworld causes travelers to experience the five stages of grief. This shows the sophistication of the characters compared to offering a sacrifice and I hope that readers who have experienced loss can relate to what is happening.

[Facing Death for Resurrection]

The cave in the mountain was small and unassuming to the untrained eye, but those who had a purpose in being there find that the longer they look, the wider it gapes before them. Instead of being surrounded by overgrowth, the area around the cave entrance is barren and rocky, not even a wind disturbs this place and animals avoid it. But Timotheos and Kassandra came to it willingly.

“I will tell you of each step before we come to it so that you will be prepared,” Kassandra told Timotheos. “The first step that you must overcome is denial and isolation. I don’t know how this will be manifested though. I will help you any way I know how. I will be there for you.”

Kassandra and Timotheos stepped inside. Immediately, their surroundings went black, even the entrance they just went through was dark, as if covered by a
veil. Timotheos was overwhelmed by loneliness. The air around him felt empty and he did not know where Kassandra was anymore. He felt that this whole cave was empty and even his soul was no longer there. Everything had left him. Timotheos tried walking forward. When he turned a corner he saw Ampelios off at a distance with his back to Timotheos. Overjoyed, Timotheos ran to him, only for Ampelios to disappear. This happened again and again until Timotheos was trembling all over and crying. Then he felt a hand clasp his.

“It’s okay, I told you I would be here for you. You are not alone, Timotheos,” Kassandra said.

Timotheos’ breathing slowed down to its regular pace and he wiped the tears from his face hurriedly. He didn’t know if Kassandra could tell that he had been crying.

“Now you have come to the second step. This step is anger. Allow yourself to be angry, but do not hold on to your anger, for it will only make you bitter.”

“Why would I be angry at you?” Timotheos asked her.

“I can’t say, but this cave has the power to bring the anger to the surface.”

Timotheos kept walking forward, thinking how he would not get angry; he was not the angry type. He was a priest, priests don’t get angry. His thoughts eventually slipped to what would make him angry if he actually became angry. The more he thought of this, the more he realized how true it was and his anger burst out of him in torrents.
“It’s not fair! From the beginning everything has been against me, and now Ampelios has died, leaving me alone? It’s Sophia’s fault, she was supposed to protect our group!”

“No, Timotheos, remember what you learned as a priest? The gods and goddesses chose to give us free will and they cannot interfere. They can guide us, but we would not have free will if the gods and goddesses manipulated those around us for our protection.”

“Okay, so maybe it’s not Sophia’s fault, maybe it’s yours! You have this prophecy power, why didn’t you force us not to go? Why didn’t you think of a plan for us to save him?”

There was silence for a while. Then Timotheos heard a hard gulp and realized Kassandra was crying. He felt terrible. He stopped walking and held her tight.

“I’m so sorry I said that,” he apologized.

“You don’t know what a burden it is to have this knowledge,” she gasped out through her tears. “To know that someone is going to die. And I didn’t know who it would be, I was afraid it would be you, but I didn’t know.”

“Wait, wha—?”

“I did try to think of a plan to save whoever died, but nothing I thought of would work. It takes a lot of strategy to turn the purpose of a vision. I couldn’t do it. . .” she trailed off, struggling to stop from hiccupping as she cried.

“Don’t cry, Kassandra. If anything, it’s my fault. I was there; I could have been the one protecting him instead of Ampelios sacrificing his life for me. If only I had
thrown my spear before the manticore attacked.” Timotheos continued holding her until she calmed down, wondering meanwhile what she meant by being afraid he would die.

When he thought she had calmed down, he asked, “What's the next step?”

“You already passed it when you blamed yourself. You wanted to bargain with the circumstances to gain a different result. The power of the cave wants you to feel guilty, but you shouldn't. It was Ampelios’ choice to die, he cared for you so much that he wanted to protect you. The next step you may find the hardest. It is the grief of depression. There is no easy way to pass this step. All I can say is that it will end.”

Timotheos and Kassandra continued walking down the passage. Timotheos wondered how long the passage was and if they would reach the end before the next step. Maybe he could avoid this one. It only took him a few steps more to find that he couldn’t.

He now began to fear what it would be like to see Ampelios again. What did a soul look like? What if it didn't work and he would never see Ampelios ever again? What if they couldn't return and they were left to decompose in this very passage?

He halted, frozen in fear. Kassandra looked at him in concern.

“You need to keep moving forward. Walking will make you feel better.”

Timotheos took small, dragging steps. He felt weighted down by his invisible burden of grief. The sadness and loneliness returned, stronger than before. Even though Kassandra was walking beside him and he knew she was there, he felt terribly isolated.
“Don’t lose hope, we’re almost there,” Kassandra said.

Off in the distance there was a prick of golden light. Timotheos was flooded with relief, the journey had reached its end, Ampelios had died, but that was not the end of it. He, Timotheos, would save him. Timotheos broke into a flat out run. Kassandra kept a hold of his hand and ran alongside him. The golden dot grew, turning eventually into a wide opening into the Underworld.

The cavern of the Underworld spread out endlessly. The arching ceiling overhead was the source of the golden light. There flew golden crested birds and from their crests and wingtips exuded a golden glow that lit the Underworld.

A familiar voice spoke, “It’s because of the pomegranates.”

Timotheos’ head snapped down from staring at the birds, it was his mother that had spoken. There beside him stood his parents. He leapt to embrace them.

“I’m sorry, son, you can’t touch us,” his father rumbled. “As souls we have no substance. It grieves me that I cannot hold you, but it is great joy to see you once more.”

Kassandra queried, “What about the pomegranates?”

Timotheos’ mother laughed, “Let’s walk and we’ll show you. See? Golden pomegranate trees grow here. The birds eat the fruit and that gives them their glow.”

Timotheos’ parents led them through the Underworld, showing them all of the wonders held there. Flowing up from even deeper underground there came five

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streams. They issue from five different points in the cave wall and come together into a central chasm and pour there to disappear again. Timotheos’ parents explained to him that each river had a different purpose, and each had their patron nymph that judged the dead who came to their stream, all except the Akheron, which was overseen by the Dread Ferryman. Rather than through the cave entrance, the souls of the dead were drawn to Akheron, the river of pain, where they resurface into the Underworld. To the right of this river is the river of hatred, Styx, where those who had not led proper lives were taken to purge themselves. The clean spirits could pass over the river safely, but those who had committed a great sin would fall into the Styx and be carried down into the central chasm where they were set to work on their wrongdoings. When they had passed sufficient time there they return again on the currents of either Kokytos or Pyriphlegethon. Those who have murdered are taken up again through Kokytos, the river of wailing, where they bemoan what they have done, truly wretched about their sin. Those who have wronged their parents are taken up through Pyriphlegethon, the flaming river. The flames purge the sin from them as metal is also purified. Finally, there is Lethe, the river of forgetfulness.\textsuperscript{44,45} This river is not used to purge the soul. It is only used

\textsuperscript{44} This description of the rivers of the Underworld is taken from Plato’s \textit{Phaedo}. Socrates says, “Now when the dead have come to the place where each is led by his genius, first they are judged and sentenced . . . those who are to have lived neither well nor ill, go to the Acheron . . . But those who appear to be incurable . . . are cast by their fitting destiny into Tartaus, whence they never emerge. Those, however, who are curable, but are found to have committed great sins [in a moment of passion] . . . these must needs be thrown into Tartarus, and when they have been there a year the wave casts them out, the homicides by way of Cocytus, those who have outraged their parents by way of Pyriphlegethon. And when they have been brought by the current to the Acherusian lake,
when a soul is in too much pain over his or her prior life. That soul can choose to
drink from Lethe and forget. Interspersed among the rivers are various meadows
and fruit trees for the souls to rest there in comfort. There were numerous souls
walking to and fro, laughing and talking.

“What happens to those who have been irredeemably evil?” Timotheos
asked.

“We don’t know personally, we did not pass through the central chasm,” his
father said. “We only know of the central chasm because of those who have been
purged there. They say that those who have been taken there for all of time are kept
separated from each other. They are left in complete solitude. Every once in a while
the strain of utter loneliness overcomes them and they wail. They say it is the most
heartbreaking sound because there is nothing they can do to help, and those people
in solitude have not changed their hearts to want to get better. They still want to
blame others for what they have done of their own free will.”

“That sounds terrible,” Kassandra said in sympathy. “Feeling alone is just
about the worst emotion ever.”

“Wait a minute!” Something had just occurred to Timotheos, “What happened
to all of those offerings that we bought you for your funeral? Did you eat the food?
Do you still use the pottery I got you?”

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they shout and cry out, calling to those whom they have slain or outraged, begging and
beseeching them to be gracious and to let them come out into the lake” (389).
45 Of course the description I have written does not fully follow the Underworld of the
Ancient Greeks, but since various descriptions differ and are hard to visualize, I took my
own creative liberty with my description to suit my world how I deemed fit.
His mother burst out laughing and had to be hushed by his father. When she subsided enough for conversation to be possible again, his mother answered Timotheos. “There is no need for food or pottery in the Underworld. Think about it, we have no substance to use any of the things you gave us and you would have to burn food at every meal to sustain us as in life.”

Timotheos’ face fell. “But there’s such a long tradition of doing this. Why do we do this?”

His father replied, “Before the afterlife no one knows what the Underworld is like. You’re the first to come here alive. So humans have to fill in the void somehow, they have to form their own ways of saying goodbye. Any ritual for the dead is not useless. Just as you had a hard time adjusting to our deaths, so we had a difficult time as well. Whenever someone mourned at the prothesis, we could feel it. It was as if there was a glowing inside of us, an essence of the love you felt for us.”

His mother added, “Even now if anyone on Apheleia thinks of us, we can feel their love. If you would like to tell people about this when you return, you can, but we still feel the effect of those offerings.”

“So to what purpose did you come here, my dears?” his father asked.

“We came to seek our friend, Ampelios, who just died to a beast of Melanthios’,“ Timotheos answered.

“We did notice a young man that came in just before you did,” his father replied. “We know where he is, we can take you to him.”
Ampelios was sitting beside the waters of Lethe, taking in how calmly the water flowed by. He leaned forward, reached his hand into the water and brought up a mouthful in his cupped hand.

“Ampelios, don’t drink that!” Timotheos yelled as he ran to his friend’s side. Ampelios threw the water aside and leaped to his feet.

“Timotheos! How did you get here?” Ampelios sized Timotheos up and down as the parents and Kassandra caught up. “You’re not dead. How did you come to the Underworld if you’re not dead?”

“It was Kassandra. She knew how to save you through her vision.”

“Thank you,” Ampelios said, looking at Kassandra. “Now I know that your visions are true and I’m sorry that none of us believed you.”

Kassandra smiled in reply, “I accept your apology, but it’s okay. That’s part of the curse of my powers and I can’t really blame you. I’m sorry that my visions couldn’t help you with the manticore, but we can fix it now.”

“How? How can I escape death?”

“All that must be done is to lead you up through the passage and back to Apheleia. However, we must not look back to check to see if you are there or you will have to return here forever. One good thing about going back up again is that the cave does not have the same powers as it does coming down.”

Ampelios nodded, “I trust you and Timotheos to do this. That’s all I can do and I will do it willingly.”

Timotheos was exhilarated, “That’s all we have to do? That’s easy!”
“It is not as easy as you think, but I have a way of helping. First, say your goodbyes.”

Timotheos, Kassandra, and Ampelios bid the parents farewell beside the waters of Lethe and made their way to the cave entrance.

“Here is how I will help you,” Kassandra said as she pulled off a length of linen that she was using as a headscarf and tied it over Timotheos’ eyes.

“What’s this for?” Timotheos asked, adjusting it more comfortably around his head.

“Even doing this, you must trust me,” Kassandra said. “Depriving you of sense of sight, even more so than the dark cave where your eyes can adjust, will help in the temptation to turn around and look for Ampelios. Even if you want to turn around you can’t see him. I will lead you there and I can see the end result if I don’t turn around, so I know I won’t.”

“But why can’t Ampelios talk to me?”

“Once Ampelios enters the passage he will lose his voice, that’s another effect of the cave.”

“Before we enter and I lose my voice, then,” Ampelios said. “I would like to thank you two, I’m not sure that I would have done what you two are doing for me.”

Timotheos was astounded, “But you’re a hero!”

“Yes, but I was still afraid of death, in a way. I can easily fight creatures because it is a physical way of confronting death. But coming down a passage in a cavern is so intangible and so foreign to me that I can’t imagine how you did it.
Because you came down here already and faced death, I know you can lead us back up again.”

“Let’s go then, Euthalia is waiting for you,” Timotheos grinned.
Bibliography


