

Beginning from the seminal story at *Odyssey* 11.467-540, which chronicles Odysseus' journey to Hades and his encounters with Achilles and Heracles, the table is set for a richly nuanced, methodologically diverse study of the hero in transition to and from the underworld (katabasis). The study then radiates outward to embrace other stories of other mythical heroes and heroines, to challenge previous understandings of these texts and Ancient Greek ideas about death and heroism. The result is a feat of erudition, whose curious juxtapositioning of hero/heroine and underworld fate/adventure discloses many innovative insights not only about the texts in question, but about timeless human questions regarding the meanings of life and death.

Dova's study is launched with the recounting of the *Odyssey* passage that stages the reunion between Odysseus, the temporary visitor to Hades who enters the dark underworld in the full knowledge that he will return home and resume his life adventures, and Achilles, the self-sacrificing warrior-hero of the *Iliad* who shows up in the *Odyssey* in the form of an insubstantial shade, regretting his choice of an early death that promised eternal glory in the memories of men. Odysseus' meeting with Achilles, informed by his encounter with Heracles, permits Dova to bring into deep conversation the two classic Homeric works, weaving their many thematic threads into a common tapestry that, like Achilles' shield, depicts the vast landscape of human life and its deeply conflicted values: mortality, self-sacrifice, prophecy, death, heroic character, glory, shame, aretaic reciprocity, and ignoble deception. The reader gets to appreciate that all the bravery and glory in the world are useless after life is said and done; that identity involves a plethora of paradoxes; and that poor life choices and unfinished duels are not resolved in death.

One of the highlights of the book is Dova's complex recasting of the hero Odysseus from his traditional framing as "the champion of mortality and the embodiment of resilience and cunning" (36) to the immature warrior, responsible for the sack of Troy, but riddled with personal flaws: he abandoned his young wife, infant son, and aging parents to go to Troy, he was "not particularly distinguished in warfare," and he was particularly brave—"not in a hurry to die on the battlefield, at sea, or even in the underworld" (37). Dova sees the Odysseus of the *Iliad* as "curious and inquisitive, risk-taking and gift-loving, reckless, promiscuous, and proud" (37), and in need of much moral education. She reads his many adventures in the *Odyssey* as providing a number of "emotional stops" along the way home that afford experiences of love and hate, worry, regret, and joy, which permit Odysseus' character to

grow and mature.

Another innovative triumph of *Greek Heroes in and out of Hades* comes with Dova's re-examination of the myth of Alcestis, through the dual lenses of Plato's *Symposium* and Euripides' tragic play. The contrasting recountings of the tale permit a comparison of male and female heroic experience that issues in surprising results. Alcestis chooses self-sacrifice to save her husband, without promise of glory or fame, and though the heroine's self-sacrifice is thwarted in the end by Heracles, her ready willingness to die for love reveals a finer aspect of the death well-chosen than Achilles' glorious choice, regretted once in Hades. The fact that Alcestis returns from death, yet receives the praise of the lover Phaedrus in his eulogy on love in the *Symposium*, reveals another, more selfless, aspect of heroic courage.

Dova's *Greek Heroes in and out of Hades* is a rich work that will satisfy many a classical scholar's palette. It is not for the faint of heart, nor for the beginning scholar, unlearned in the Ancient Greek language. But philosophers and classicists at a distinguished level of preparation are in for a rare treat.