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THE CHILDREN OF HEPHAESTUS Some Thoughts on the Female Power over Patriarchal Masculinity

MARIA PANAGIOTOPOULOU

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to shed light on the offspring of the divinity of fire, metals, arts and craft, Hephaestus, who has often been marginalized compared to his more attractive siblings. Working in silence his magnificent pieces of art, Hephaestus was the god of eternal labor and creative inspiration. His physical progeny, as well as his human-like artworks seem to allow a remarkable observation: the male and lame representative of creation fathered divine women that conquered, secured and at the same time determined or put at stake the patriarchal masculinity of Greek myth, while his sons were human beings that either had an ephemeral mighty power or were controlled and captured by the female spirit. We are given the impression that the god-protector of masculine action is actually fond of female and not interested in saving his male children's reputation. A notable paradox... Or maybe, not?

Keywords: Hephaestus – male – female – creation – Pandora – Talos – Erichthonius – Athena

Πάννης Ρίτσος, *Τα πρότυπα*¹

‘Ποτέ να μην ξεχάσουμε — είπε — τα καλά διδάγματα, εκείνα της τέχνης των Ελλήνων. Πάντοτε το ουράνιο δίπλα δίπλα με το καθημερινό. Δίπλα στον άνθρωπο: το ζώο και το πράγμα — ένα βραχιόλι στο βραχιόνα της γυμνής θεάς· ένα άνθρωπος

¹ Ρίτσος 1972.

πεσμένο στο δάπεδο. Θυμηθείτε τις ωραίες παραστάσεις στα πήλινά μας αγγεία — οι θεοί με τα πουλιά και με τα ζώα, μαζί κι η λύρα, ένα σφυρί, ένα μήλο, το κιβώτιο, η τανάλια· α, και το ποίημα εκείνο που ο θεός όταν τελειώνει τη δουλειά του βγάζει τα φουσερά του απ' τη φωτιά, μαζεύει ένα ένα τα εργαλεία μες στ' αργυρό σεντούκι του· μετά, μ' ένα σφουγγάρι σκουπίζει το πρόσωπο, τα χέρια, το νευρώδη του λαιμό, το δασύ στήθος. Έτσι, καθάριος, ταχτικός, βγαίνει το βράδυ, στηριγμένος στους ώμους των ολόχρυσων εφήβων — έργα των χεριών του που 'χουν και δύναμη και σκέψη και φωνή — βγαίνει στο δρόμο, πιο μεγαλόπρεπος απ' όλους, ο χωλός θεός, ο θεός εργάτης.'

Yannis Ritsos, *The prototypes*

'We must never forget the good lessons, he said – those of Greek art. The heavenly always side by side with the day-to-day. Next to man: the animal and the object a bracelet on the arm of the naked goddess, a flower fallen to the floor. Remember the fine representations on our clay pots: the gods alongside birds and animals, along with the lyre, a hammer, an apple, the box, the pliers; oh yes, and that poem where the god, when he finishes his work, removes the bellows from the fire, picks up his tools one by one and puts them in his silver chest; afterwards, he takes a sponge and wipes his face, his hands, his sinewy neck, his hairy chest. Clean like that, orderly, he goes out in the evening, leaning on the shoulders of golden young men – the work of his hands who have strength and thought and voice – he goes out into the street, grander than all, the lame god, the worker god.'

(Transl. Keeley 1990)

The classical Greek pantheon was a patriarchal community reigned over by Zeus, who was considered the father of both mortals and immortals. In a male-dominated hierarchy, Zeus had the leading role and all the rest divinities followed him in honor, each one of them incarnating several special qualities· of course we should keep in mind that almost every Greek city-state, apart from the

indisputable divine power of Zeus, worshipped its primary protector or patron god (e.g. Athens honored Athena, Sparta had Ares and Artemis as city deities, Argos was dedicated to the worship of Hera, Apollo was the protector of Delphi and Delos etc.). Being a girl was a really difficult task in a world sometimes defined by misogynistic feelings, as they are expressed in literary texts such as Euripides' *Hippolytus* [vv. 616–668] (the hero of this play despised female creatures and wished for a society where women would not be necessary and men could give birth to their children on their own), and also Semonides fr. 7 West (about different types of women, all deceitful and manipulative, who derived from animals and portrayed the downfall of men). Heroines, like Helen of Troy, Clytemnestra, Pandora, Circe or Medea, females of divine origin and nature like Aphrodite, and monstrous female creatures like Medusa, Echidna, the Sphinx, the Gorgons, the Harpies and the Sirens, prove that the feminine portrayal in Greek mythology had established a perception that women represented a mischievous, underground and unavoidable authority, who, although necessary for the existence of men, should better be secluded from political affairs and remain limited to the bounds of their household and bedroom.² Leaving aside Zeus, the original defender of patriarchy, it would be interesting to wonder what was the conception of another male god, Hephaestus, usually working in the margin of the Olympian realm (just like Yannis Ritsos presents him in the poem cited above: Hephaestus is the most magnificent of all, because, despite his lameness, he is a working god, therefore he belongs to the working class, always valued in the historical period the poem was composed by the people who – like the poet – favored the left political ideology) and also a father of both sons and daughters, in the quarrel about the importance of females in human society.

Hephaestus is the Greek god of fire, craftsmen and artisans. In Homer he is the god that always works and sweats (*Il.* 18.371) creating magnificent objects, like the shield of Achilles (*Il.* 18.609–613). He is depicted as crippled and he is married to goddess of love and beauty Aphrodite, who cheated on him with his brother Ares, the god of war (*Od.* 8.267–366). Despite his bodily imperfection, that was probably caused because Hera conceived him without a male partner (*Hes. Theog.* 927) and then cast him out of Olympus (*Hom. Hymn Apoll.* 309–320), Hephaestus' professional work was greatly admired by all the Olympians.

² Cf. Meehan 2017, who discusses the matter offering examples about the 'misogynistic' and ruled by patriarchy portrayal of women in Greek mythology. See also Cantarella 1987, 26.

During his exile from Olympus he found a shelter close to Eurynome and Thetis who raised him like foster mothers and taught him how to work with metals in order to create artifacts of special grace (Hom. *Il.* 18.388–405). His workshop was located beneath active volcanoes, especially Aetna, and the Cyclopes were his workmen. Hephaestus' cult place was Lemnos and he was connected with the mysteries of the Cabiri of Thebes and Samothrace who were his children (Hdt. 3.37, Strabo 10.3.20, Pherecydes, *FGrHist* 3F48). In the Athenian cult he was closely attached to Athena, the goddess of cunning intelligence (cf. the festivals of *Hephaestia*, *Chalkeia* and *Apaturia* that were devoted to both divinities, cf. also Plato, *Critias* 109 c–d, and Hom. *Hymn Heph.* 1–7: these two deities are depicted as the founders of civilization). After all, Hephaestus' abortive attempt to rape Athena resulted in the birth of Erichthonius (Hellanicus on *FGrHist* 4F39 preserves the story), ancestor of autochthonous Athenians and one of the first kings of the city.³

Hephaestus was the father of many children, both male and female. Among his female offspring we can distinguish Euthenia, Eupheme, Eucleia and Philophrosyne, born from his legal affair with Aglaea, one of the Charites, as cited in an Orphic fragment preserved in Proclus (fr. 272(II) Bernabé). The nymph of flowering Thaleia is also said to be one of his daughters (according to Aeschylus' fr. 7 Radt from the *Aetneans*). As far as his male children are concerned, apart from the (already mentioned) Cabiri (Hdt. 3.37), who were mystic demonic divinities of nature, we should also note Cacus, a gigantic thief and fire-breathing monster who stole Geryon's cattle and was killed by Heracles (Plut. *Mor.* 762f, Verg. *Aen.* 8.190–279, Livy 1.7.3–15, Ov. *Fast.* 1. 543–586, Prop. 4.9), Cercyon (Hyg. *Fab.* 38) and Periphetes (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.16.1), two of the brigands killed by Theseus on his journey to claim his Athenian inheritance, Pylius, a Lemnian who cured the hero Philoctetes of his wound (Phot. *Bibl.* 190.152b), Ardalus, the Troezenian inventor of the flute (Paus. 2.31.3), the crippled Argonaut

³ See *OCD*⁴ s. v. Hephaestus. Also see Burkert 1985, 168; *OCD*⁴ s. v.: Cabiri, Erichthonius, Pandora. Cf. Gantz 1993, 77; Hard 2004, 167; Hansen 2005, 183–186. For information on each one of the other here referred children of Hephaestus see Graves 1955, vol. 2, 136–137 (Cacus), vol. 1, 324 (Ardalus), vol. 1, 326 (Pylius), vol. 1, 172 (Cercyon), vol. 1, 327 (Periphetes) and vol.1, 312–317 (Talos). On the relationship of Hephaestus and Athena in general and their association in myth and cult cf. Lévêque 1992, 315–324, especially p. 319. For the daughters of Aglaea and Hephaestus see Grimal 1996, 99. On Thaleia and the Palici see Smith 1873 s. v. Thaleia. Cf. West 1983, 74. Especially on the Palici see Thatcher 2019, 67–82.

Palaimonius (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.202), and the Palici, the gods of the hot-springs of Sicily (Silenus, *FGrHist* 175 F3).⁴

Erichthonius⁵ (Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.6) deserves a special mention since he is the child conceived by Athena when Hephaestus attempted to seduce her, rape her and assault her virginity. The goddess repelled Hephaestus' erotic attack, fought him off, wiped away his semen that fell on her thigh with a scrap of wool and flung it to the earth. Erichthonius was born from the god's sperm that fell to the earth, as it can be assumed by the etymology of his name. Athena, acknowledging herself somehow as a step mother, decided to raise the child in secret and that's why she placed him in a basket and gave it to the three daughters of the Athenian King Cecrops, Herse, Aglaurus and Pandrosus, warning them never to look inside. According to the myth, Herse and Aglaurus opened the basket out of curiosity. When they saw that it contained a baby wrapped around by a snake or a creature that was half man and half serpent, they were terrified, went insane and threw themselves off the Acropolis (see also Hyg. *Poet. Astr.* 2.13).

Apart from the children born by Hephaestus, the god gave symbolic birth to the first two 'robots' of humanity, the first 'handmade' human beings, Pandora and Talos. Pandora was the first human female created by the art and the hands of Hephaestus and was given all gifts by each one of the gods (Hes. *Theog.* 560–612), while Athena put on her the final touches of beauty and skill. Pandora married Epimetheus, Prometheus' brother, but her curiosity made her open the forbidden box (or jar) that she was given by the gods and this way she released all evils upon humanity, only managing to secure hope in the bottom of the box (Hes. *Op.* 60–105). Talos, on the other hand, was a giant bronze automaton made by Hephaestus and given to Minos in order to protect the island of Crete by throwing rocks at any approaching ships. He was finally

⁴ ee Witczak – Zawiasa 2006, 13–27.

⁵ Cf. Fowler 1943, 28–32; Kovaleva 2004, 129–135. On the birth of Erichthonius see also Hard 2004, 184–185. For Erichthonius and his connection to Athens, Athena, Hephaestus and the cult of Panathenaea see Robertson 1985, 231–295 (especially pp. 254–269). See also Smith 1873 s. v. Erichthonius. The birth and nurture of Erichthonius is described in Eur. *Ion* 10–26, 267–274, 999–1005, 1427–1429. On Hephaestus, his progeny known as the Cabiri, the demons of metallurgy, and their connection with perpetual frustrated sexuality see Blakely 2006, 16–17, 81–82, 97, who concludes that in the case of all those deities and demonic figures technology results into creation through an allegorical process of penetration.

deceived by Medea into believing that he could become immortal by removing the bronze nail that shut his vein, which went from his neck to his ankle. When he removed the nail though, ichor (a fluid the divines had in their veins instead of common blood) ran out of him and Talos was extinguished by the Argonauts (Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.9.26, Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 4.1639–1693).⁶ Taking into account the creation of Pandora and Talos, it is important to note that Hephaestus may be counted as the mythological prototype of a ‘magician’ or ‘theurgist’, i.e. an expert on creating animated ‘theriomorphic’ statues (e.g. *Schol.* Hom. *Od.* 19.518 for the golden animated dog Hephaestus had made, which was stolen by Pandareus and given to Tantalus) used for protection from evil, or an artisan-wizard of human-figured automata.⁷

As Hurwit pointed out, Pandora, whose creation was depicted on the base of the colossal statue of Athena Parthenos in the famous temple of Acropolis, could be seen as an anti-Athena, since she personifies the evils that spread on human world and acts like a femme fatale opposing the great goddess of wisdom and craft. The goddess Athena was the pattern of the ideal sacred woman in antiquity and she stood taller than any other mortal or immortal female, being motherless, since she was born from the head of Zeus, eternally virgin, clearly on the side of men (cf. Aesch. *Eum.* 734–743) and never having experienced sexual intercourse, marital status or pregnancy and childbirth.⁸ Athena and Hephaestus were, in a sense, the foster parents of an artificial woman, Pandora, who resembles Erichthonius, also the product of an unusual collaboration of the two deities of artistry and technical culture.⁹

It is interesting to note that both Pandora and Erichthonius, the most famous ‘children’ of Hephaestus, fulfilled the goal of their creation thanks to the task taken over by Athena, who favored them with her final blessing touch. The myths of Pandora and Erichthonius convey that the patriarchal Greek society was set in motion by a female divinity, Athena, because without her contribution none of the two primitive creatures, progenitors of human beings, would be the same. Although Athena was the protector of a masculine patriarchy and had defused her female side, her gender cannot be ignored. Besides, we should not forget that

⁶ Cf. Cassidy 2018, 442–445; Robertson 1977, 158–160.

⁷ Cf. Faraone 1987, 257–280.

⁸ See Hurwit 1995, 171–186.

⁹ See Hurwit 1995, 183.

in those two mythological stories we can attest the presence of a box (chest, jar or basket in each case) where something secret, connected with the central hero or heroine, remained hidden. The violation of a forbidden box by inquisitive females is a common motif of both mythical allegories and it always ends up in catastrophe. Pandora is the woman that destroys men, an indisputable power over human world. Hephaestus is her creator but her dynamic and perspectives are motivated by the spirit of Athena. Female power is dominant. On the other hand, Erichthonius is the imperfect male child produced through an incomplete sexual union that manages to survive only with Athena's will to save, protect and educate him. One more time the female power rules everything. His mythical story shows that a male offspring, even the son of a god like Hephaestus, is not capable to live unless he is delivered to women, like Athena, Gaea and the daughters of Cecrops. After all, looking at the case of Talos, we could argue that a masculine artifice, despite his strength, is beaten by the magic and guile of a woman, the sorceress Medea. It is worth mentioning that, according to Graves, the goddess Athena was connected to Medea in Corinth (cf. Paus. 2.12: in this passage it is stated that in a temple of ancient Titane of Sicyon, there was a statue of Athena where a priest chanted spells of Medea in order to appease the force of the winds). If this is true, then – in a way – Athena, again, was responsible for the survival or extinction of a creature made by Hephaestus.¹⁰ Once more, the female power dominates, captivates and defines men.

The children of Hephaestus representing male gender are either chthonic figures like Erichthonius and the Cabiri, or fiery creatures with criminal and destructive instincts like Talos, the Palici, the robbers Periphetes and Cercyon, and the gigantic thief Cacus. Ardalus and Pylus are the only male personages that serve good to humanity since the first one is the inventor of a music instrument and the other one a healer. On the contrary, all of Hephaestus' female progeny were the personification of beneficial powers on human lives, such as prosperity (Euthenia), good repute and glory (Eucleia), good omen, praise and applause (Eupheme), friendliness and kindness (Philophrosyne), plant life and shoots (Thaleia). This is one more indication that the god of fire, artwork and technology crafted his best and most complete products when he contributed in the formation of female figures. His male offspring are strong, dynamic but also incomplete and ephemeral. His female offspring are great, powerful and

¹⁰ See Graves 1955, vol. 1, 312–317.

timeless. Even if we consider Pandora as a representative of the evil,¹¹ given all her beauty, skills and grace, we presume that her monstrous nature is elaborately hidden behind her attractive appearance. In the case of Hephaestus' sons though, their monstrous look is obvious, terrifying and repulsive. From the aspect of Greek myth and patriarchal ideology, women can act evil in an insidious way, while men cannot hide their criminal disposition under a charming sight.

As Woodiel claims, since Hesiod's opinion in the *Theogony* is that a woman, despite her ambiguous nature and her function as a 'beautiful evil', is a necessity for a man to have around in his old age and she is also required to produce a child or children who would assist in their father's care as well, the vital source of children cannot actually be connected with evil, but with 'the unknown potential which a child symbolizes and the hope with which each child is associated by its parents from the moment of its birth. *Elpis* is generally defined as a neutral "expectation", neither good nor bad, perhaps a combination of "hope" in a conventional sense combined with fear.¹² Froma Zeitlin suggests that, "the *Elpis* that is left in the jar most closely corresponds to the child (or the hope of the child) residing in its mother's womb".¹³

It is also interesting to notice that, according to the story of Hypsipyle and the Lemnian women who hosted Jason and the Argonauts (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.849–860), the island of Lemnos, the most sacred place for Hephaestus and the homeland of the god, became for a while a matriarchal society. This happened since Lemnian women were driven mad by the rage of Aphrodite, as they had failed to render the accustomed sacrifices to the goddess of sexuality, and killed all Lemnian men who despised them (due to the foul odor their body emitted) and used to sleep with Thracian captives instead (Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 1.609–615, Asclepiades *FGrHist* 12F14).¹⁴ This ancient version of Hypsipyle's myth demonstrates that the lame god-protector of fire, sculpture, blacksmiths and

¹¹ See Brown 1997, 26–47. In p. 27 Brown says that, according to Hesiod's warning (*Op.* 375), women have a thieving and deceitful nature and whoever believes them believes in lies. For the symbolism of the Pandora myth see Harrison 1900, 99–114; Frazer 1972, 235–238; Cantarella 1987, 28; Lévêque 1988, 49–62; Beall 1989, 227–230; Eisenberg 1995, 28–41; Lauriola 2000, 9–18; Guillaume 2001, 131–139; Wolkow 2007, 247–262; Francis 2009, 1–23; Fraser 2011, 9–28.

¹² See Woodiel 1996, 136–140. Cf. King 1983, 110.

¹³ Zeitlin 1995, 53. See also Smith 2015, 11–12.

¹⁴ See Robertson 1985, 231–295. For Hephaestus and the Lemnian cult of women see pp. 278–279.

metallurgy, although representing clearly male activity is actually and closely related to feminine superiority. Hephaestus' nascence is the outcome of Hera's parthenogenesis, he is a fatherless divine child and it is natural for him to favor the female sex. After all, the process of his birth could be examined as an exact allegorical reference to a primitive matriarchal society, where the Great Mother and Goddess of Nature was worshipped, his cult on Lemnos was also founded on the ground of a female-dominated state that resembled an archetypical society of Amazons, while his sperm was vanished into the earth when he attempted to violate the virgin divinity of spiritual strength. Those aspects of the mythical 'biography' of Hephaestus subject him to the dominance of women and provide an explanation about the fact that the majority of his sons were inferior to his daughters. The female children of Hephaestus, belonging to a father who was exclusively born by an all powerful divine mother, personify beauty, grace, high ideals and eternal glory. On the contrary, his boys have only inherited the repulsive physical appearance of a disabled father, that's why most of them are short-lived, crippled, monster-like, beasts, or criminal figures. Only the least famous of his male progeny, Ardalus and Pylius, were blessed with the capacity to create, invent or heal.

We can conclude that Hephaestus' semen, since that god was produced by Hera with no semen at all, seems to generate magnificent and admirable females (resembling his mother), but only superficially mighty males threatened with extinction. The salvation of the latter becomes possible only if a divine woman decides to give her blessing or protection, as it happened in the case of Erichthonius. Hephaestus' 'female side' was probably stronger than his male. This maybe has to do with the fact that his sexual impulse was weak and subordinate to his creative spirit. Above all, Hephaestus is not simply a male god (favorably attached to his gender) but a superior deity of creation,¹⁵ that's why masculine beings with destructive forces are not worthy of his paternity and doomed to

¹⁵ Cf. Smith 2015, 9–10: 'Hephaestus is intricately tied to the mother, to creation, to reproduction... He is deeply fixed in Magna Mater, in Gaea'. Of course most modern theories call into question the unilinear historical evolution that resulted in a primitive matriarchal society dominated by the cult of a Great Mother and Goddess of Nature. Scholars argue of a feministic archetype transcending all eras and marking several female figures of great importance as representations of sexuality, fertility and nutrition in different civilizations. Those symbols of feminine assure masculine power but probably do not serve as survivals of an early mode of a matriarchal religious cult. Cf. Georgoudi 1991, 477–491; Georgoudi 2002, 113–134; Goodison – Morris 1998; Testart 2010.

failure. The women born by the divine creator though, closely attached to the mystery of creation and Mother-nature, springs of life and symbols of generation and renaissance, seem to be the most remarkable of his 'branches.' Moreover, in the *Iliad* (18.416–419) Hephaestus is described to have fabricated golden maidens, which means woman-shaped automatons as attendants for his palace, who were self-moving, taught by the gods and provided with intelligence, strength and the capacity of speech. This ancient story of creating artificial intelligence¹⁶ indicates that once more Hephaestus, who had also constructed Pandora and Talos, gave his preference to women 'robots', since it was only female androids he kept with him offering them the superior spiritual abilities of thinking and expressing themselves in words.

After all, as Yannis Ritsos pointed out in the poem quoted in the opening of this article, Hephaestus is the most majestic of all, since he is the worker god, the one gifted with the power of creation. We had better not forget his contribution in the birth of Athena, as he is the one who opened Zeus' forehead and the goddess of wisdom emerged. Hephaestus is always creative, hard working and a protector of the female force even in a patriarchal society like Olympus. Reading about the children of Hephaestus, with a special reference to the myths of Erichthonius, Pandora and Talos and taking under consideration the beneficial and eternal presence of his daughters opposed to the malevolent and fatal destinies of his sons, we can draw the conclusion that in the case of creation (as well as in the lack of it) women always play the decisive role. Females prove to be the truly legitimate and most capable children of their generator and divine creator.

This conception seems awkward, keeping in mind Hephaestus' problematic and perverse relationship with his rejectful mother Hera and his treacherous wife Aphrodite. The most important women of his life wound his male pride by discarding him and refusing to surround him with their love or honor. Hephaestus though took his revenge against them, as we are told by the

¹⁶ See Mayor 2018 on artificial intelligence of the ancient times and the mythical 'robots' made by Hephaestus: the golden maidens, Pandora and Talos. Mayor also examines the moral boundaries of technology and scientific achievements as well as the interaction of artificial intelligence with human beings and its use for the benefit of human society. Cf. also Smith 2015, 10 who notes that Hephaestus finds feminine companionship in the handmaidens, the automatons he created infusing them with traditionally masculine qualities: voice and strength, sense and reason. He removes the wily power of a woman out of his own creations and keeps these golden robotic women around him because they cannot hurt him like real divine females did.

famous Demodocus' song about Aphrodite (Hom. *Od.* 8.267–366) who was captured in a net along with her lover, causing the ironic laughter of other gods witnessing her infidelity, and by Pausanias in the case of Hera who was captivated on her golden throne with invisible fetters (Paus. 1.20.3).¹⁷ This also proves that the god, after managing to escape humiliation and wreak his vengeance against the evil females of his life, an unfaithful consort and a cruel and egoistic mother, concentrated all his efforts into creating loving and charming females with a desire to offer their gifts to men (cf. Thaleia, Eucleia, Eupheme, Euthenia, Philophrosyne and even Pandora). This way he balanced his ugly look and the lack of affection that he had experienced by the goddesses he cherished the most (Hera, Aphrodite and even Athena), by bringing into life women with beneficial power that dignify and sanctify their parentage.

In conclusion, Hephaestus' children seem to serve as an archetype of the fairytale of "Beauty and the Beast", as most of his sons have inherited his feeble and not charming appearance while his daughters embodied true pulchritude and fairness. The deity of creativity has inspired Greek culture and literal tradition in a way of giving all his spirit to the heavenly women he produced in order to make amends for his rejection by the divine females of his life. We can observe that although it is the touch of the father which activates the patriarchal society, it is in fact the male's will to define the limits of his domain and restrict the abusive, arrogant and deceitful women that strengthens the community and contributes to the evolution of mankind. The children of Hephaestus incarnate the struggle of patriarchy to evince its superiority over women, who lie hidden in the background of the social union and enforce men either with their tenderness or with their rejection. By making Hephaestus the father of male villains and female beauties, ancient Greek myth depicted man's severity

¹⁷ See a very interesting article by Ebenstein 2006, where, on the basis of the 'collective unconscious', the divine smith is examined as a mythical archetype of the crippled artisan and a stereotype of the rejected male due to his aesthetic monstrosity. Cf. Deris 2013, 13–18, who claims that the myths connected to Hephaestus imported into literature the image of the 'super cripple' who manages to overcome the mocking of his disability by using intelligence and humor and this way the disabled, otherwise marginalized, male makes his entrance into society. According to Rinon 2006, 19, Hephaestus' depiction in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* 'serves as a means to represent a tragic perception of the human condition which is marked by pain and suffering'. This exceptional god is the most humanized version of a deity, because he has a tragic depth marked by his lonely experience of the human lot and the agonies of the mortals. All these absolutely human feelings of pain, inability, devaluation and rejection were unavailable to the 'lofty levity' of the Olympians.

(cf. Cacus, Periphetes, Cercyon, Talos, the Cabiri, the Palici, Erichthonius) but also his capacity to captivate eternal values such as good luck, glory or prosperity (Euthenia, Eupheme, Eucleia, Thalia, Philophrosyne, Pandora), exactly like the lame god had captured his mother and his wife with invisible chains and nets, trying to show off and attract attention through his creativeness.

Hephaestus' children must be seen as progeny of a lonely male child who works to prove himself and gain approval despite his rejection by women. The established patriarchy risks its status if women are not restricted and at the same time owes its existence to inspiration given by women. Men become capable to produce good works as women urge their mind, hand and whole body. The man's craving for satisfaction by a woman or for revenge because of her disapproval (and that is the story of Hephaestus and Athena, Hera or Aphrodite) makes him the architect of marvels. Like an early "Quasimodo" of the ancient myth, abandoned by his mother and mocked by his surroundings, he cares only to save his beautiful "Esmeraldas". Hephaestus hates the lame male he is. And that is why he gives a beastly and non-flattering figure to the children he shares the same gender with, while he saves the best for his girls. This way he proves his wish to be liked by the opposite sex and impose his superiority on it. In a way, if anybody wants to examine the nature and symbolisms of the children of Hephaestus, and along with it the motivations of masculine patriarchy, the key is one: *cherchez la femme...*

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