

Reading Response 1

Roberto Calasso's literary depiction of Greek myth is very interesting in Chapter 1 of his book *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. In this chapter, the author focuses on the theme of rape, often referred to as abductions in Greek mythology. Calasso, in his interpretation, depicts abductors as very powerful men, often gods, heroes, or kings. Gods were often represented in the form of animals in these myths. For example, Calasso depicts the abductor, Zeus, as a majestic bull in the abduction of Europa and then Zeus, again, as an eagle in the abduction of Thalia (Calasso 1993, 3-4). Notice that Zeus took the form of a bull as well as an eagle. This is known as the power of metamorphosis. Almost all gods were known to wield the power of metamorphosis in Greek mythology (Anderson 2020) and it is very prevalent in chapter 1 of Calasso's book. The victims of these abductions were often queens or princesses depicted as goddesses. The author states that these mythological figures "lived many lives, died many deaths" (Calasso 1993, 22), which is why there are many different stories behind these figures. Although these stories differed, the themes that these figures represented remained consistent.

Roberto Calasso also offered an explanation of these stories of abductions in a historical context, suggesting that the myths told the stories of historical conflict between ancient societies, particularly between Europe and Asia. He interprets that these conflicts often began "with the abduction of a girl, or with the sacrifice of a girl" (Calasso 1993, 7) that, more often than not, resulted in reciprocation and ultimately set the foundation for the never ending conflict between Europe and Asia. The late Italian author portrayed the abduction of Io, a princess of Argos, as the Phoenician's

retaliation for the abduction of Europa, a Phoenician princess. These incidents are believed to be the beginning of the historical chain of events that includes: “the abduction of Helen, the Trojan War, and before that, the Argonauts’ expedition and the abduction of Medea” (Calasso 1993, 7-8).

The idea that mythological figures lived many lives and died many deaths was particularly interesting to me. Grasping this concept provided me with greater insight into the realm of Greek mythology. Understanding that mythologic figures represented more than just a single life and a single story is very important when devising or deconstructing mythology. It is also important to understand the concept metamorphosis when interpreting these stories. The concept of metamorphosis allowed the Greeks to recycle mythological figures in different stories when explaining different events and emotions, insinuating the figure’s importance and divinity. As humans, we often don’t know why certain things happen or why we feel emotions. Using divine mythological figures in alternate forms in different stories to explain events and represent emotion provided an avenue for articulable clarification of phenomena in Greek philosophy. This is extraordinarily important because we, as humans, naturally strive to unravel the mysteries of our existence. We want to know why things happen and using a divine figure’s manifestation was a logical way to explain the inexplicable for the Greeks. Although the explanations for these mysteries were not certain, they gave those who believed in them a bit of clarity in life. Clarity is very important as it is something that we all desire as humans, because having clarity eases our natural inclination to ponder and gives us peace of mind.

Bibliography

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Calasso, Roberto. *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*. United Kingdom: Knopf, 1993.