

Classical Mythology

LLCU 316.010/080



Class 22

The Age of Heroes

The Mycenaean Cycle

Readings for Thursday

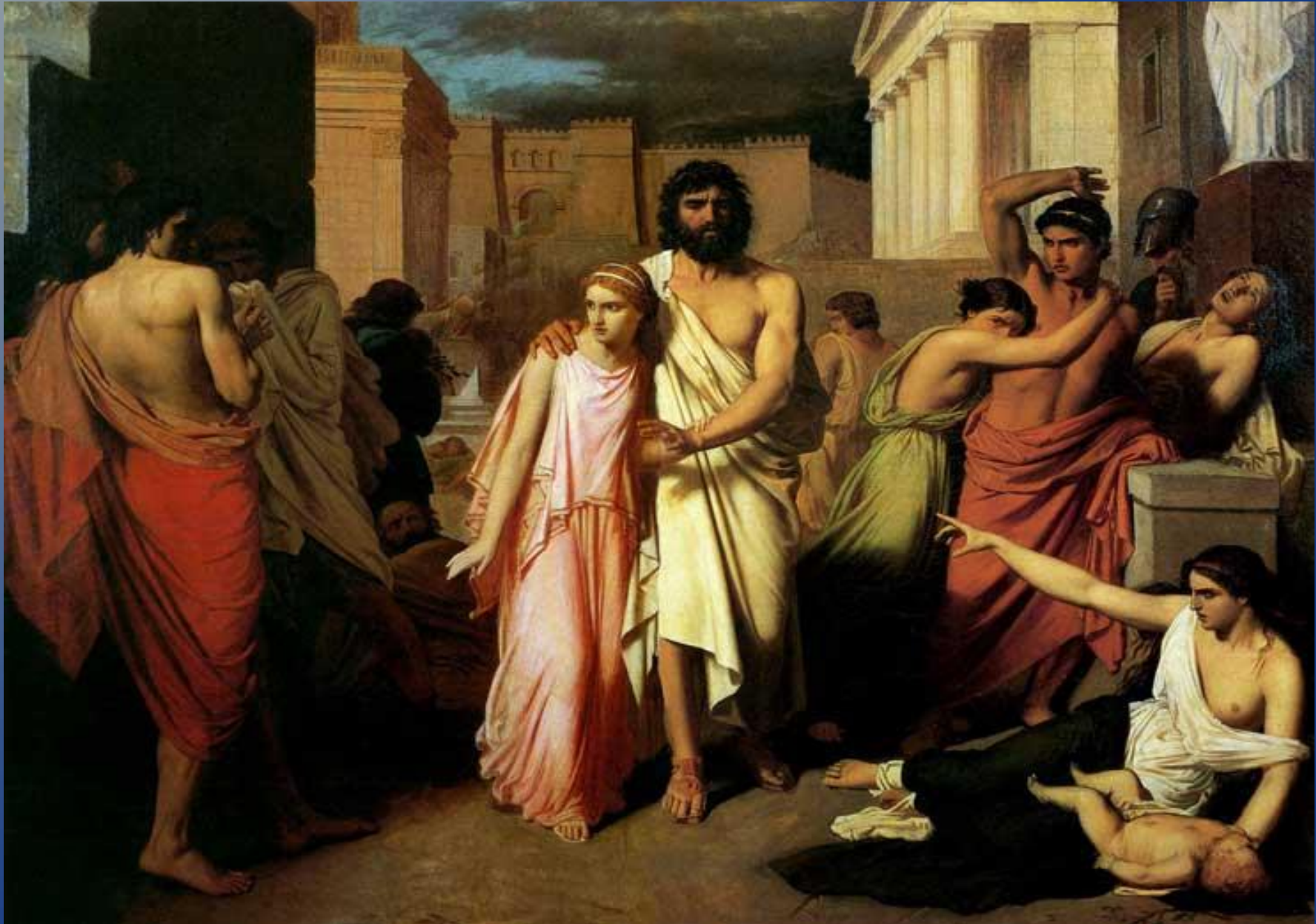
Classical Mythology
pages 445-474

In-class writing assignment:

Euripides (probably) put a very particular spin on the Jason and Medea tale. If you were composing a movie and had free reign of the storyline, how would you end it?

Theban Cycle

Sophocles: *Antigone*



Levi-Straus and Theban Cycle

Overvaluing Kinship	Undervaluing Kinship	Men Kill Monsters	Men Are Monsters
Cadmus seeks his sister Europa, ravished by Zeus.			
		Cadmus kills the dragon.	
	The Spartoi kill one another.		
			Labdacus (Laius' father) = lame
	Oedipus kills his father.		Laius (Oedipus' father) = left-sided
		Oedipus kills the Sphinx.	
			Oedipus = swollen-foot
Oedipus marries his mother, Jocasta.			
	Eteocles kills his brother, Polyneices.		
Antigone buries her brother, Polyneices, despite prohibition.			

Course Roadmap:

Nov. 29: The *Iliad*

Dec. 4: The *Odyssey*

Dec. 6:

Conclusions: Legacy of Myth, Exam outline

Timeline of Age of Heroes

Perseus

Heracles, Jason/Medea,
Theseus, Oedipus

Polynices, Eteocles,
Antigone

Agamemnon, Menelaus, Hector,
Achilles, Aeneas, Odysseus
(Trojan War - ca. 1100 BCE)

Orestes, Electra,
Neoptolemus

Greek History (750 BCE)

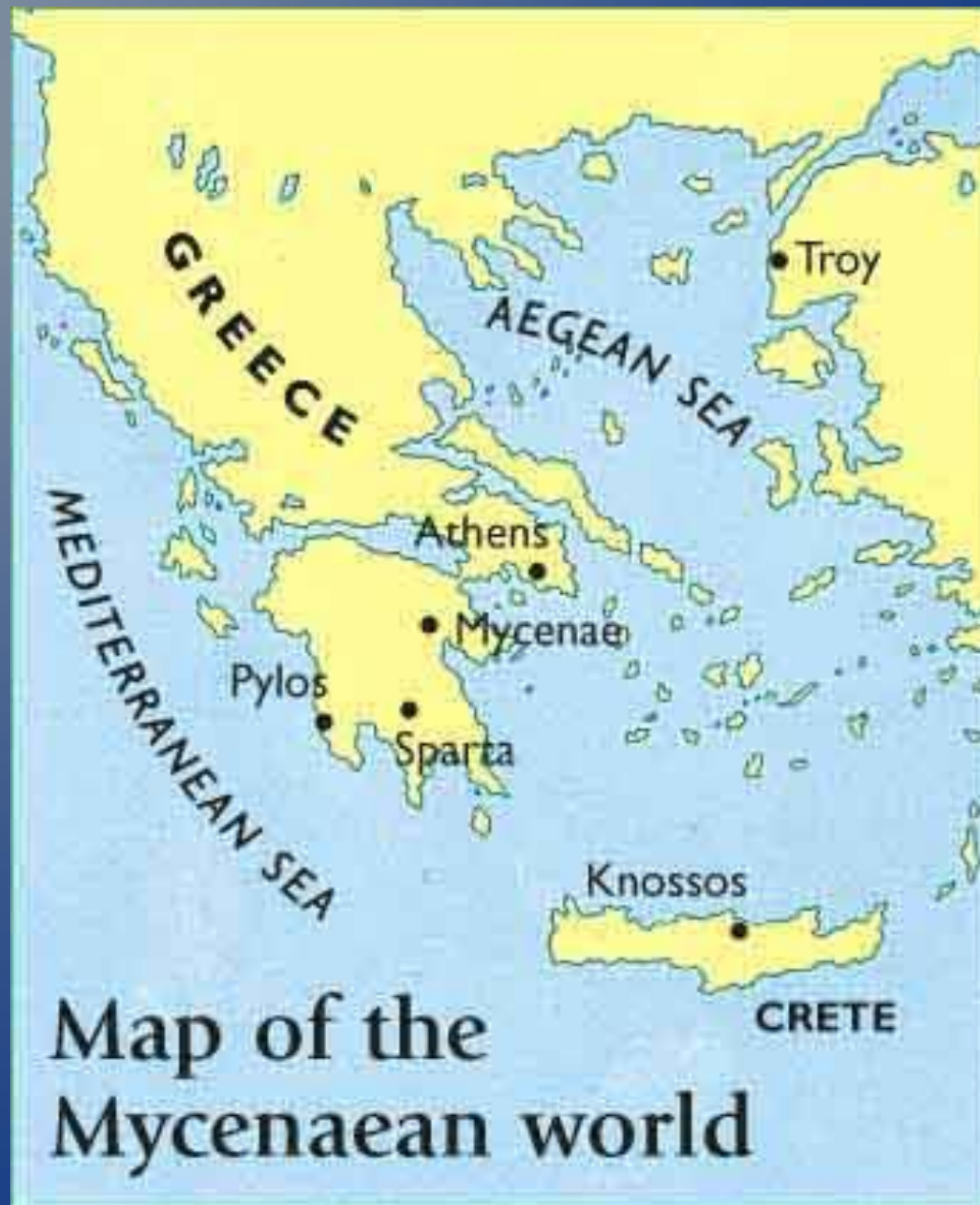
Roman History/Legend (ca. 750 BCE)

Mycenaean Cycle (The House of Atreus)

Not the Minneapolis Heavy Metal Band...



Mycenaean Cycle



Mycenaean Cycle

Story Groupings:

- Tantalus and Pelops
- Pelops and Hippodameia
- Atreus and Thyestes
- Agamemnon and Clytemnestra
- Orestes, Electra and Clytemnestra

Mycenaean Cycle: Ruins of Mycenae



Mycenaean Cycle

- .Legendary Greek story beginning with **Tantalus**
- .Attended a 'pot luck' banquet with the gods
- .Perhaps as a test of their omnipotence, he cut up his son **Pelops** in a stew and served it

Tantalus:

Cursed in Tartarus to be “tantalized” with food for all eternity

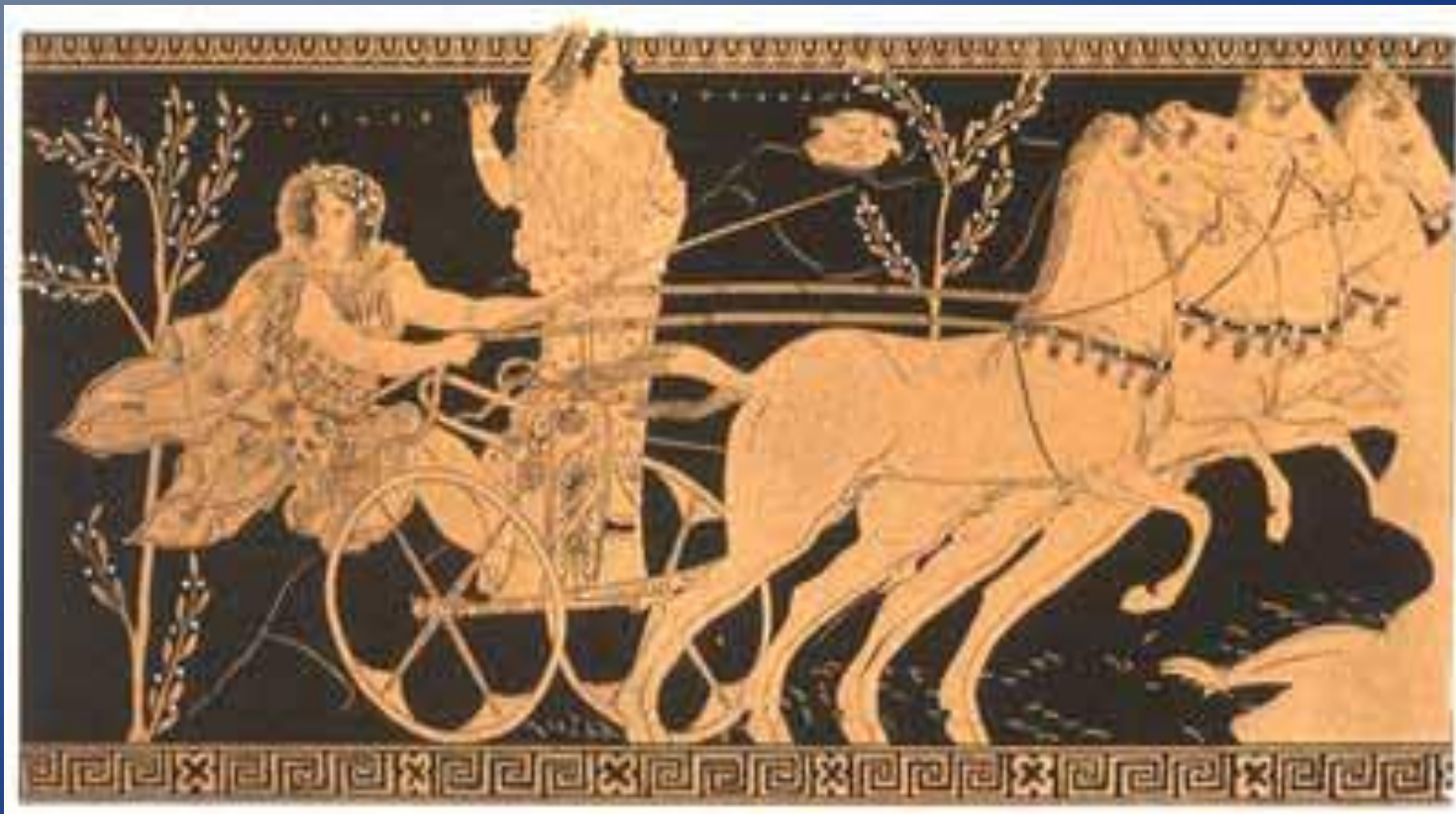


Mycenaean Cycle

- .Gods took pity on Pelops and restored him, replacing his missing shoulder with one of ivory
- .Not only restored, but reborn
- .Very handsome, Poseidon took a fancy to him and gifted him divine horses and taught him to chariot race

Another Foundation Myth

- Pelops races Oenomaëus (king of Elis) for Hippodameia's hand in marriage
 - cursed by the chariot assistant Myrtilus



Mycenaean Cycle

- .Pelops + Hippodameia = **Thyestes and Atreus**
- .Sons quarrelled over kingdom after death of father
- .Oracle: 'he who rules has the golden ram'
 - .Thyestes tricks brother Atreus out of the ram (seduces his wife)

Mycenaean Cycle

- Atreus kicked out of Mycenae by brother Thyestes
- Atreus eventually regains throne and Thyestes is sent into exile
- Atreus invites Thyestes back to “make up”
- Serves a delightful dinner...only to reveal to Thyestes that he had eaten his own sons!



Mycenaeae Cycle

- Atreus father of **Menelaus and Agamemnon**
- Thyestes father of **Aegisthus** (a baby at the time of his brothers' murders)

Mycenaean Cycle

Agamemnon and Iphigenia – before Trojan War

- Agamemnon sacrificed daughter Iphigenia to stir up favorable winds for expedition to Troy
- Iphigenia thought she was marrying Achilles
- Euripides tells the story that Iphigenia was rescued by Artemis before she was executed



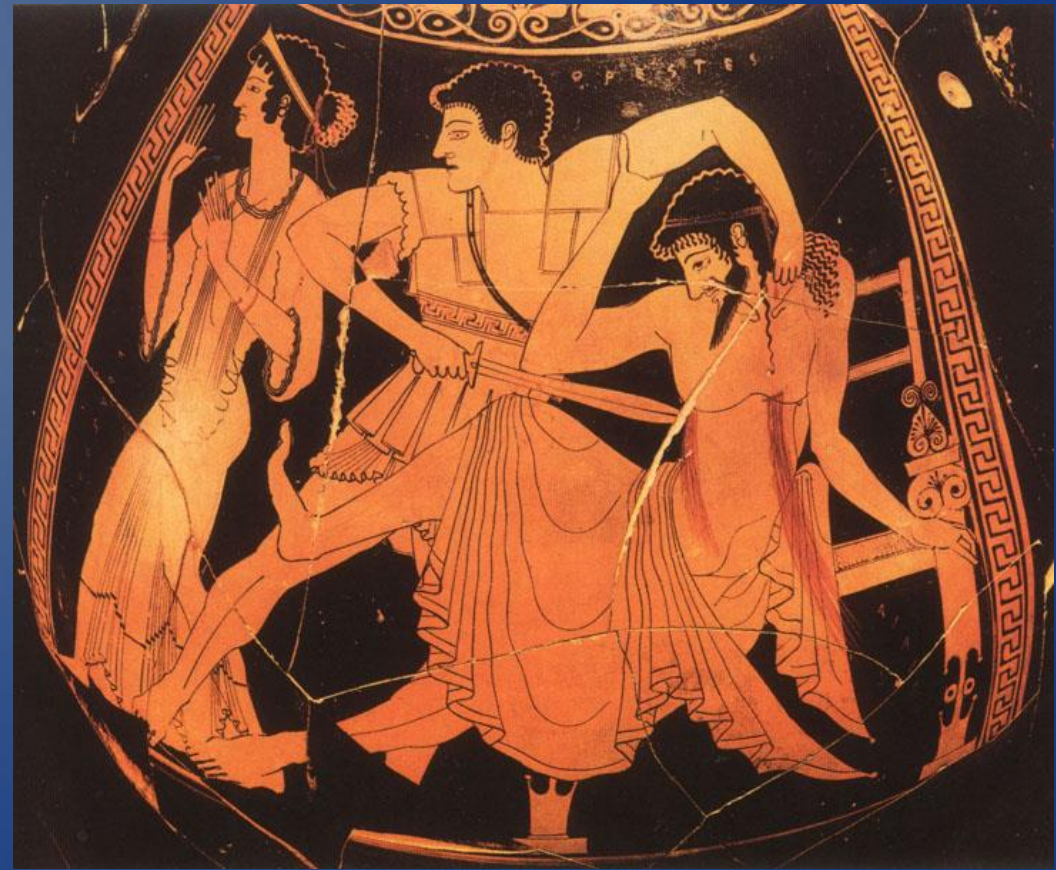
Mycenaean Cycle

- .House of Atreus death count (so far)
- .Tantalus kills son Pelops (restored) – cursed by gods
- .Pelops kills Myrtilus – cursed by Myrtilus
- .Atreus kills Thyestes' sons – cursed by Thyestes
- .Agamemnon kills Iphigeneia

Mycenaean Cycle

Clytemnestra and Aegisthus (Agamemnon)

- While husband Agamemnon was away at Troy (10 years!) , his wife Clytemnestra started a relationship with Aegisthus (Agamemnon's cousin)
- When Agamemnon returned, Clytemnestra and Aegisthus killed Agamemnon



Mycenaean Cycle

Orestes (son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra) returns – and seeks revenge

- Orestes (son of Agamemnon) was away when his father was killed
- When grown up, returned to Mycenae to avenge father's murder (ordered by Apollo)
- He and his sister **Electra** kill mother and Aegisthus



Orestes and Electra

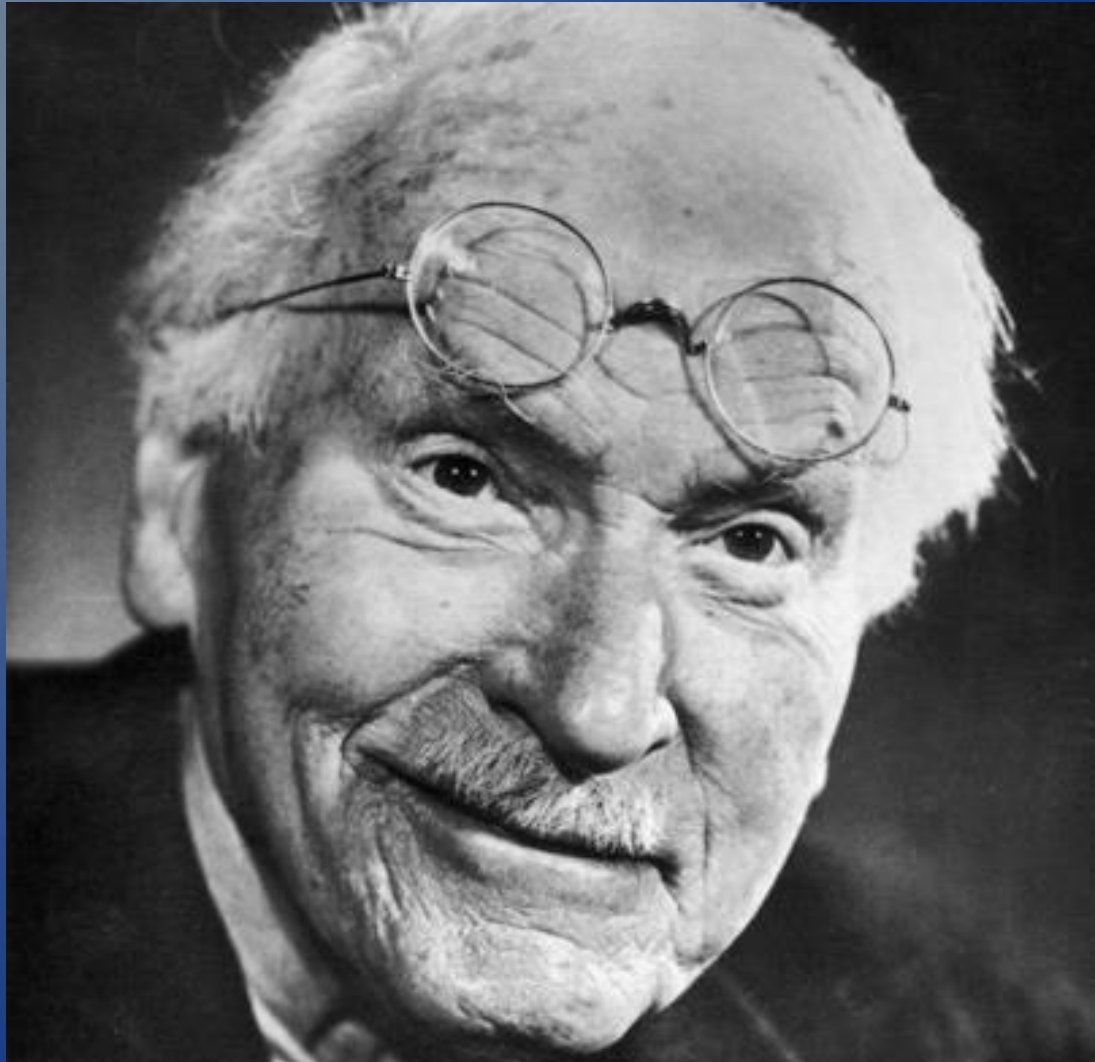
Basic outline (must happen)

- 1) Orestes is away from home during the murder of his father Agamemnon
- 2) Orestes returns (prophecy of Apollo that he must avenge his father's death)
- 3) Orestes and Electra are reunited
- 4) They kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus

Mycenaean Cycle

Electra Complex (psychoanalysis)

- Carl Jung



Mycenaean Cycle

Orestes' Torment by the Furies – Orestes' choice?



Mycenaean Cycle

Areopagus of Athens – Aeschylus *Eumenides*

- Orestes acquitted for the charge of murder by jury of Athenians
- The jury was hung, but Athena broke the tie
- The Furies were thus compelled to release their hold on the prince



Mycenaean Cycle

House of Atreus:

- .A cycle of curses beginning with Tantalus
- .Question of free will
- .Question of divine law over human law
 - .sub-question – are the gods always right?
- .Question of value of kinship