

# CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

UNTITLED

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## 1 Intro / Organization

### 1.1 Sample Question

“What did Agamemnon’s murder mean to 5th century Athenians”

- Agamemnon -> Mycenae
  - was killed
- many components to this question
  - contents of myth
  - history
  - culture
  - interpretation

### 1.2 What Do Lecture Numbers Mean?

- week.lecture
- e.g. 3.2
  - week 3, lecture 2

### 1.3 Grading and Assignments

- online quizzes
  - open for whole day
  - maximum 8 MC each
- midterm (Monday after the break?)
  - in class (but on cuLearn, during class time)
  - part MC
  - part written response (we will know the question a week beforehand)
- either final exam like midterm or final assignment where we re-write a story in a given style and justify it

## 2 What is Myth?

- story passed on
- folklore
  - what does folk mean here?
  - implicit opposition to writing
  - high culture vs low culture (folk is low) -> implies a register
- old wives' tales
  - who are old wives? -> metaphor for socio-demographic standing

### 2.1 Who is in mythological stories?

- gods and heroes
- e.g. Trojan War
  - Odysseus, Agamemnon, Zeus, Poseidon, etc.
- gods and heroes -> what contemporary stories might fit this definition?
  - maybe the Book of Mormon w/ Joseph Smith?

### 2.2 What happens in mythological stories?

- Cadmus and the Dragon
  - kills dragon, takes its teeth, sows its teeth
  - teeth grow into men
  - throws a rock, men fight each other for it and kill each other
  - 5 men left, become nobility, found city of Thebes with Cadmus
- Eleusinian mysteries (religious cult)
  - Heracles
  - Persephone
    - daughter of Demeter
  - a priest
  - Demeter (goddess of fertile Earth)
    - power of Earth bring forth life, plant life, animal life, human life
  - Triptolemus
  - Hecate (titan goddess of witchcraft, necromancy, ghosts, sorcery)
  - Iambe
  - Dionysus (god of wine and revelry)
- rituals
  - often explained by stories
  - myths help explain things
- time frame for myths?
  - the floating gap
  - sometime in the past
  - purposeful lack of specificity
  - consider:
    - Star Wars -> "a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away"

- ▷ George Lucas wanted his stories to have a mythological sense to them
- fairy tales -> “once upon a time”

## 2.3 Why did Greeks/Romans care about myths?

- relationship between past and present
- founding of things that are commonplace in present
  - ▷ Cadmus -> Thebes
  - ▷ Demeter goes to Eleusis -> founds Mysteries
- in general myths want to:
  - ▷ justify
  - ▷ explain (aetiological)
- key term: **aetiology**
  - ▷ causes, reasons, responsibility
  - ▷ provides explanation for something
- contemporary myths
  - ▷ American revolution (second amendment lovers, resist tyranny)
  - ▷ storks bringing babies

## 2.4 Myths, fictions, lies

- are myths true? do people believe their myths? yes and no

### 2.4.1 The NO

- no one true version
- compare monotheistic religions
  - ▷ book, word of god, orthodox, heretical
  - ▷ there can be variations between sects, but each sect thinks their version is absolutely true
- myths contain variations
- e.g., where was Zeus born?
  - ▷ some say Crete, some say Arcadia
- why was variation okay? mortals can never have certain knowledge about gods
- compare “revealed religion”

### 2.4.2 The YES

- myths worked -> they served their purposes
  - ▷ myth of Cadmus worked in giving a civic identity to Thebans

## 2.5 Why do we care about myths?

- content vs function
- content

- ▶ greek and roman myth are important for understanding references in history, later art and culture
- function
  - ▶ compare how greek and roman myth worked with myths that we see in our real lives
  - ▶ .e.g., what do these stories accomplish
    - Bill Gates = college dropout
    - the Resistance in Star Wars
    - visual myths in advertising (Marlboro man)

## 2.6 Provisional definition for myth

- myths are traditional stories embedded within a society that:
  - ▶ present or encode the way that a society organizes its way of thinking about the world
- a way of thinking about the world
- perception and experience about the world