

Lec 2 Nature of Myth 0111

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The word "Myth", and its origin

- The word "*Mythos*" (in ancient times)
 - Has 2 meanings
 - A strong statement/ strong speech that enhances persuasion, argument/public speech
 - Story, as part of public speech
 - Earliest use = the Iliad
 - Eg **Iliad 1:25**, "*Displeased, Agamemnon dismissed Chryses roughly*" (Agamemnon forced upon the priest a **strong mythos**), as the priest Chryses attempts to ransom his daughter, Chryseis, from Agamemnon.
 - Eg **Iliad 6:206** Glaukos' story about his grandfather Bellerophon, the killer of Chimaera, as story telling
- The word "*Mythos*" LATER in ancient Greece changed ~ ~ Platos
 - *Logos* - a true story, connected with reason, a truthful account
 - *Mythos* - a false story, but with some connection to reality
- A dictionary definition of the word "myth"
 - 1. An untrue story
 - 2. A traditional story
- A definition of Greek Myth
 - A traditional story about the divine and the heroic, with an importance in the community
 - Greek myths are important to the community. Recall that the myths are based off of Greek culture and country
 - They are retold from generation to generation

Folktalk/Fairytales vs Greek Myths

Folktales/Fairy tales	Greek Myths
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Folk/Fairy tales are about folk lore, etc. Not real connections• Characteristics of characters<ul style="list-style-type: none">◦ Tend to have no name, instead they have a title eg Puss in Boots◦ Common folk, or poor people, anonymous◦ Animals, anthro, Extraordinary talking animals◦ Witches, other magic beings• Occur in a "far away" land. Never close	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• REAL connections, and more specific.• Main characters:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Divinities• Humans of elevated status• Setting :<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Specific real places, connection to a specific community, genealogies• Eg: Herakles with the help of goddess Athena and his nephew Iolaos, defeats the Hydra at the lake of Lerna

- Fairytale motifs are found in Greek myths
 - Eg. Perseus - he is helped by supernatural beings, and is given magical objects to achieve his quest
 - Talking animal in the Iliad, **19 404-418** = Unlike fairytales, it is NOT comedic. The horses lament the death of Patroclus, and know that Achilles will die young

The nature of Myth

- Characteristics
 - Plot
 - Characters
 - Settings
 - Traditional - they are passed from generation to generation
 - Versions - there could be different versions of the same myth

Some functions of myths

- **Myths try to explain.**
 - Explain aspects of natural/social environment
 - Analogous to how science explains things
 - During the time period, technological advances were very few
 - Etiology/Aetiology - they explain the causes of things
 - Aetion = cause
 - Etiology and metamorphosis=change
- Eg. Myth of the abduction of Demeter's daughter Persephone by Hades and her return as an aetiology ~ 4 seasons
 - Demeter = Goddess of abundance.
 - When she's sad due to Persephone's disappearance, the earth becomes cold like Winter
 - The other 9 months when her daughter is back, she's happy and the earth is abundant
 - This is an Aetiology, and is used to explain the 4 seasons
- Eg The myth of the metamorphosis of Daphne as an aetiology ~ why laurels are evergreen
 - Daphne metamorphosis into a laurel tree to escape the loss of her virginity from the god Apollo
 - Laurel trees are evergreen and are 'fruitless' in appearance,
 - This relates to how a virgin is always fresh (evergreen) and no babies (fruitless)
 - Also/Or, Apollo loves laurel wreaths since he can't have Daphne as a wife, so he loves her tree
- **Myths justify and Connect (LEGENDS)**
 - They narrate past events
 - Builds bonds between communities (involved in the myth) and thru common ancestry
 - Justifies political authority
 - Analogous to history!
- Eg - The legend of the Trojan Horse ~ many communities participated
 - Iliad has a page dedicated to some statistics – like lots of communities participated in the Trojan horse
 - Greek pride to have their trick succeed
 - Eventually, Greeks believe in the horse. Having an ancestor related to the war = bonding
- Eg. The Autochthony "You belong to the land" therefore "You were born from the land"
 - The legendary Kadmos, the founder of Thebes: Justification of the autochthon inhabitants of Thebes
 - Story: Foreigner Kadmos claimed the city of thieves, but how could he belong there if he was not born there?
 - Dragon teeth "seeds" grew into people of this land, who were called autochthons
 - So, people who belonged to the lands are called autochthons
- **Myths entertain**
- They were performed in public at festivals

- Epic poetry
- Choral poetry
- Drama
- **Myths educated, used as examples**
- Taught in schools
 - To learn poems, you recite and retell them by memory. 700+ lines
- Used as guidance - tells of proper/improper behaviour
 - Eg Niobe being punished after she committed hubris.
 - She offended Goddess since they exceed their limits as a mortal.
 - She boasted about having more children than a divine (parent of A and A)
 - Gods are very wrathful. Apollo and Artemis killed all of her children

Ancient way of viewing myths

- Greeks (some) may believed in myths e.g. Farmer vs philosopher
 - Different ways to believe in myths... eg. not for history, but for moral reasons
- Natural philosophers related them to natural sciences instead
- Xenophanes (500 BC) rejected the **anthropomorphism** of gods
 - They didn't like how gods resembled humans
 - They thought that gods were greater than humans, so they had to have less humanistic faults
 - "If cows were to make gods, then cows would be greater than gods"
- Plato questioned the educational value of myths. He, however, creates his own myths. (i.e. the myth of Atlantis)
 - Platos – thought about myths that "Children learn about Gods, but not morals"
 - Gods aren't good role
- They thought about allegories in myths
 - The physical allegory (hidden meaning, symbolism)
 - Eg. Zeus < zein < zoe : the life giving element
 - Thought that Zeus actually meant life b/c he made so many children. Instead of him committing adultery, he is giving life
 - The historical allegory (something that explains why we call something)
 - Eg Centaurs. "Cen"=to prick, "Taur"=bull
 - Matadors, those who chase bulls on horses, would be centaurs. They may look like centaurs at a distance, but they are actually matadors.
 - Eg. Think that gods are people with great achievements

The study of Myth and Interpretations in recent times

- From mythology, we get:
 - Collection of different myths and comparisons (with other regions)
 - Methodological analysis of myths in their form, purpose, function
 - Two broad categories of theories
 - **External** basis: Myths as products of the environment (**like how nature happens**)
 - Explanations of natural phenomena, justifications for social, religious or political customs and institutions
 - **Internal** basis: Myths as products of the mind/**psychology**
 - Spontaneous expressions of the human mind. Theories that link myths and mental/psychological processes
 - **A narration and analysis of a myth :Narkissos and Echo**
 - Characters
 - Narkissos
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ORIGIN	Born in Boeotia at Thespieae
HERITAGE	Son of the Nymph Liriope and the River god Cephissus
CENTRAL THEME	At birth, he was a beautiful baby
PROPHECY	Liriope asked the prophet Tiresias about his future. "If he fails to recognize himself, a long life he may have" Ovid <i>Metamorphoses</i> 3:345-46

o Echo

ORIGIN	/
HERITAGE	/
CENTRAL THEME	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a nymph punished by Hera • since she tried to support Zeus' philandery (She distracted Hera by talking to her) • Hera took away her ability to communicate – Echo can only repeat words
PROPHECY	

- Events between Narkissos and Echo:
 1. Narc is tired and sweaty so he goes to a pool to refresh
 - He hears a voice and responds by asking where it is, but it is Echo, so she can only repeat his words
 - Echo sees and falls in love with Narc
 - Narc sees her and rejects her
 - Echo is sad so she dies and turns to bones. She changes into (????)a stone and only her voice remains
 2. Narc doesn't want anything to do with love, yet attracts many men and women.
- The myth of Narkissos - shows the hubris of not fulfilling duty of having a relationship and procreating
 - o Narkissos is cursed by a rejected male lover who prayed to Goddess Nemesis for punishment:
 - o "If he should love, deny him what he loves"
–Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 3, 404
 - o Again, Narc needs to go to a pool. By the curse/riddle/ he sees his reflection and falls in love w/ himself
 - o He cannot possess what he loves, so he wastes away.
- The myth of Narkissos and Echo (see above) - Is a metamorphoses, as a character is transformed into something. Explains the cause of said item.
 - o Narcissus falls in love with his reflection and is wasted away...
 - o (Echo is incorporated)
 - o He bashes his chest where his heart is
 - o only a flower remains, with a reddish center.
- Comments and meanings on the myths of Narkissos and Echo
 - o Spelling: Narkissos, Narcissus
 - o The combination in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of Narc x Echo
 - Ovid takes Greek stories and combines them
 - o Specific information unlike fairy tales:
 - At Thespieae, Boeotia
 - COMPARE w/ OTHER LORE :
 - ◆ 700 Thespians fought along with the 300 Spartans at the battle of Thermopylae at 480 BC.
 - ◆ Evidence of the worship of Eros, the most worshipped deity there

- Pausanias' (traveler) view of the myth = STUPID
 - "How could a man this old and able to fall in love be incapable of distinguishing a man from a man's reflection?"
 - He rationalizes it as Narcissus' invoking the image of his deceased twin sister, who looked like him.
 - He also rationalizes it as reflection of a scrying ritual
 - Scrying = heteromancy = looking at reflective surface to read future, or contact/invoke dead
 - Need a youthful and pure boy, and clear H₂O
 - Therefore, Narc's myth has him invoking a scrying ritual
- Motifs
 - The prophecy
 - Narc had his prophecy (see above)
 - The divine punishment
 - By Hera (related to philandering Zeus)
 - She can't go against Zeus directly, so she goes against those who've made contact with him.
 - Nemesis (related to **hubris**)
 - Narc's hubris was Not fulfilling duty to procreate : not marrying and having children
 - Punished by rejecting the feelings of those he loves, without reciprocating their feelings
 - The transformations (metamorphoses): In this myth, they serve as aetiologies of nature
 - Echo → echo (voice)
 - Narc → flower (a kind of daffodil, with a red center and a short lifespan)
- A common structure between the myths of Echo and Narcissos
 - Not effective communication
 - Reflection of sound (echo) and image (mirror)
- Comparison with Echoes of Oedipus' myth
 - Tragic Boeotia
 - Oedipus of Thebes
 - When Oedipus and Narcissos "themselves acquire insight into their delusions" they are devastated.
 - Utopic, dystopic eros
 - Narc can't have himself, and Oedipus is sad because he did all that incest stuff with his mum
- The myth of Narc led to a psychoanalytic view
 - Excessive selfishness, arrogance (hubris)
 - Sigmund Freud on narcissism (self love)
 - Narcissistic personality disorder