

Fred's Lecture on

Greek Mythology

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- **According to Barry Powell, “Studying the myths of the ancients primarily through the literary works in which they have been preserved, students are exposed to important classical authors, [such as Homer] as well as to stories and figures that have sustained interest and kindled imaginations throughout the history of Western culture.” (*Classical Myth*, xix)**

- + understanding the *values* of the people and the *social/political/economic history* of the time*

- **“Myths *reflect* the society that produces them. In turn, they determine the nature of that society. They cannot be separated from the physical, social, and spiritual worlds in which a people lives or from a people’s history.” (Powell, *Classical Myth*, p. 16)**

- **What is myth?**
- **“Originally, the Greek word *mythos* simply meant ‘authoritative speech,’ ‘story,’ or ‘plot,’ In myths, the characters may be gods, goddesses, or other supernatural beings, but they may also be human beings or even animals who speak and act in the manner of human beings.” (Powell, *Classical Myth*, pp. 2-3)**

- **Why does myth continue to fascinate us?**
- **Why has myth persisted for centuries?**
- **According to Bierlein, “Myth is many things operating at many levels. ... Myth is the first attempt to explain how things happen -- the ancestor of science. It is also the attempt to explain why things happen, the sphere of religion and philosophy. It is the history of prehistory, telling us what might have happened before written history. It is the earliest form of literature, often an oral literature. It told ancient people who they were and their way to live [and survive].” (*Parallel Myths*, p. 5)**

- **Types of Myth:**
- **Divine myths [cosmic and theistic, such as creation, flood, the 12 Olympians]**
- **Legends (or sagas) [of heroes, such as Achilles, Odysseus, Heracles]**
- **Folktales [place and object, such as Atlantis]**

- **Themes of myth:**
- **I. The “Creation” -- the birth of the universe/world, gods/goddesses, human beings; an epoch of warfare; and a victor, who establishes order, assumes command as chief deity, and creates man to serve the gods.**
- **II. The great “search” -- the mystic wandering of an individual on a quest, which invariably involves monsters, [or difficulties, such as flood], and some kind of experience with the world of the dead.**
- **III. Historical events -- the aggrandizing of the actual historical events.**

- **According to Leeming, (*The World of Myth; an Anthology*. Oxford: Oxford U. Press, 1990),
“The English word ‘myth’ is derived from the Greek ‘*mythos*’, meaning word or story. Human beings have traditionally used stories to describe or explain things they could not explain otherwise.”**
- **Ancient myths were stories by means of which our forebears were able to assimilate the mysteries that occurred around and within them.**

- **Myth is also a form of history, philosophy, theology, or science. [+ anthropology, linguistic, and *psychology*; (*Sigmund Freud*, Carl Jung, etc.)] Myths helped early society understand such phenomena as the movement of the sun across the sky and the changing of seasons [Demeter & Persephone],, and such mysteries as the creation and the nature of gods.**

- According to Dowden, (*The Uses of Greek Mythology*. London: Routledge, 1992), “If it is a myth, it’s untrue! That is what we mean today -- or part of what we mean.” [for example, *The Norman Myth* by R.H.C. Davis].
- This is the *paradox* of myths. They are not factually exact; they are false, not wholly true, or not true in that form. But they have a power, which transcends their inaccuracy, even depends on it.

- **Nevertheless, Greek mythology is fundamentally about ancient men and women. It is an “historical” mythology. For the most part, it is the participation of men and women -- the *heroes* and heroines, thus, the ancient Greek “*hero-cult*” .**

- **Myth & our languages:**
- ***Chaos* = the state of things before creation -- chaotic**
- ***Venus* = Roman goddess of love and beauty -- a planet of the solar system [Greek Aphrodite]**
- ***Mars* = Roman god of war -- a planet of the solar system, and the name of a month (March) of the calendar [*the first month of the year in ancient Roman calendar][Greek Ares](chocolate)**

- ***Jupiter*** = Roman chief god [= Greek Zeus] -- a planet [the biggest] of the solar system
- ***Mercury*** = Roman messenger of the gods -- a planet of the solar system, and a kind of metal [flowing and quite unstable = mercurial][Greek Hermes (a famous French lady bag)]
- ***Nike*** = Greek goddess of victory [=Roman Victoria] -- a brand's name of sportswear
- ***Muses*** = Greek goddess of music/culture -- music, museum (*Clio = goddess of history*)

- ***Europa*** = a mortal woman who had a liaison with the Greek God Zeus -- Europe
- ***Titan*** = the giants in the Greek myths of creation – “Titanic” (the biggest Ocean Liner & movie)
- ***Eros*** = Greek god of sexual love -- erotic
- ***Cupid*** = Roman name of Eros, the Greek god of love
- ***Psyche*** = a Greek goddess who fell in love with and later married Eros/Cupid -- soul, butterfly, and of course, psychology

- ***Archilles' heel* (from Homer's *Iliad*) = the fatal point (and medical term)**
- **Troy (Homer)[movie]:**
- **<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hf4loxEUmHM>**
- **Pandora's box/jar -- instruction to Pandora [Pan = all; *dora* = gift], the lovely & innocent girl, was that she should not open the sealed box, BUT “curiosity” ! (All the diseases and miseries that would plague human beings forever after. Pandora [finally/fortunately] closed the box with only one creature left inside = “hope”)**

- **Juventus [Greek Hebe] (meaning “youth” now Italian Soccer/Football Team)**
- **Ajax (Dutch Football Team)**
- **Apollo [Helio = Sun] (US space project to the Moon in the 1960s) [an ice-cream brand]**

- **Tantalus = punished by Zeus in a pool -- tantalizing, tantalized, (a psychological term) (+ a medical device for diabetic patient by CUHK)[a toy: tantalizing duck]**
- **Oedipus Rex = King Oedipus (tragedy by Sophocles) – “Oedipal complex” (psychology)**
- **Narcissus/echo; Lesbos; etc.**

- **Clio** is of Greek origin, and the meaning of Clio is "glory". From Kleio (which derives from "kleos"), a name from mythology of the muse of historical poetry. There are nine muses, the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, and each represents an art or science, ***Clio is the goddess of history**, ***Xanadu** is the goddess of dancing and singing, Calliope (epic poetry), Terpsichore (choral song and dance), and Thalis (comedy) have survived as given names. Also used as a variant of Cleo, nickname of Cleopatra and short form of Cliona.

- **Xanadu (by Olivia Newton-John)**
- remix 2009:
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FszERDWeopM>
- **movie trailer:**
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WNcUv1q2JAs>
- **Also = capital of Kublai Khan (as described by Marco Polo in *Cathay*);**
- **= an idealistic and exotic place**

- **Diana = Goddess of Hunting (& forest)**
- **August 31, 1997 Princess *Diana* (“*The Goddess of Hunting*”) was *hunted to death*. Elton John’s “Candle in the Wind” dedicated to the **England’s Rose:****
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?hl=enGB&v=b1EyML0CyTg&gl=GB>
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7BrtCtv44Vg> (Funeral)
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Efz3s7QiM8

- **The Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Greek/
Roman Mythology**
- (compiled by Fred Cheung)

- **Greek** **Latin (Roman)**

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| • Aphrodite | Venus |
| • Apollo/Helios | Apollo |
| • Ares | Mars |
| • Artemis | Diana |
| • Athena | Minerva |

- **Cronos/Cronus**
- **Demeter**
- **Dionysus**
- **Eos**
- **Eros**
- **Gaea**
- **Hades**
- **Helios**

Saturn

Ceres

Bacchus

Aurora (Dawn)

Cupid

(Earth)

Pluto

Sol (the Sun)

- **Hera**
- **Hephaestus**
- **Heracles**
- **Hermes**
- **Hestia**
- **Nike***
- **Pan**

Juno
Vulcan
Hercules
Mercury
Vesta
Victoria*
Pan

- **Persephone**
- **Poseidon**
- **Rhea**
- **Selene**
- **Uranus**
- **Zeus**

Proserpine

Neptune

Cybele

Luna (the Moon)

Uranus

Jupiter

- *“Ancient Greek Mythology and the Olympic Games”*

- **by Fred Cheung, PhD**

- **Department of History**

- **The Chinese University of Hong Kong**

- **I. Introduction;**
- **II. The Mythological Origins of the Olympic Games in Ancient Greece;**
- **III. Zeus, Heracles, Pelops, and others;**
- **IV. The “*Religio*” Elements in the Ancient Olympic Games;**
- **V. The Architecture (Temples and Altars of Zeus and Hera, etc.) of Ancient Olympia;**
- **VI. Conclusion (The Olympic Motto, the Olympic Creed, and others).**

- **Games for the gods**
- The ancient Olympic Games were of major religious (*religio*) significance. Each of the Games was celebrated in honor of the god(s), especially Zeus, the king of the Greek gods, at Olympia.
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- For over one thousand years, the Greeks, and later the Romans, met at Olympia to celebrate the festival in honor of Zeus, the King of the Greek Gods.
- Heracles (or Hercules in Roman mythology; illegitimate son of Zeus)
- Pelops (son of Tantalus, grandson of Zeus)

- In A.D. 393, Theodosius, the Christian Emperor of the Roman Empire, banned the celebration of pagan cults, including the Olympic Games.
- **Nike**
- The Ancient Greeks considered that it was the gods who decided to grant victory to an athlete. Victory was often represented in the form of a winged Goddess named Nike, which means “victory” (in fact, she was called “Victoria” in Roman mythology).

- **The sacred truce**
- During the Olympic Games in ancient Greece, a sacred truce was proclaimed. Messengers went from city to city announcing the date of the Games, and called for wars to be ceased before, during, and after the Games in order to enable the athletes, as well as the spectators, to travel to and from the Games sites in safety.

- **Fire in Olympia**
- In the sanctuary of Olympia, where the Ancient Olympic Games took place, a flame burned permanently on the altar of the goddess Hestia. This fire was used to light the other fires of the sanctuary. Such fires were lit on the altars of Zeus and Hera, situated in front of their temples, to honor these gods. The present ceremony for the lighting of the Olympic flame in front of the temple of Hera acts as a reminder of these events.

- **Symbolism of fire**
- Fire has always played a very significant role in the history of mankind. The mastery and use of fire is among the most vital achievements of humanity. The Ancient Greeks explained the presence of fire on earth through the myth of Prometheus, who stole fire from Apollo to human beings on earth.

- The **gymnasium** in ancient Greece functioned as a training facility for competitors in games. **The name comes from the Greek term *gymnos* meaning naked**. Athletes competed naked, a practice said to encourage aesthetic appreciation of the body and a tribute to the Gods. *Gymnasia* was under the protection and patronage of Heracles and Hermes.
- Etymology of gymnasium: *Gymnasium* is a Latin and English derivative of the original Greek noun *gymnasion*, which is derived from the common Greek adjective ***gymnos*, meaning "naked"**.

- The Olympic Motto is
- "***Citius, Altius, Fortius***",
 - (a Latin phrase meaning "**Swifter, Higher, Stronger**").

- The Olympic Creed:

- (by Baron Pierre de Coubertin of France, who founded the International Olympic Committee in 1894, and revived the modern Olympic Games in 1896 at Athens)
- *"The most important thing in the Olympic Games*
 - *is not to win but to take part,*
 - *just as the most important thing in life*
 - *is not the triumph but the struggle.*
 - *The essential thing*
- *is not to have conquered but to have fought well."*

- Singing conclusion:
- Cupid and Psyche
- (“Fairy Tale”) – Myth
- (Prince on white horse) – Cupid
- *Angel/Cupid with wings to protect you*
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABenWi0DIU>
- *Fairy Tale/Myths (karaoke web link):
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k0x3OGBC0_U