

MYTHS AND LEGENDS: A CRITICAL STUDY ON THE GODS AND HEROES OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY

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Abstract:

Ancient Greek and Roman tales, with their themes of love and loss, hardship and reward, adventure and transformation, were some of the major sculpture subjects in Europe. The Gods are immortal and have the ability to magically move from one location to another in the realm of Greek mythology. Both the animals and the tales were more than just stories; they were real creatures. In the classical era, which lasted from around the fifth century BC in ancient Greece to the later Roman Empire, mythological Gods and Goddesses were still actively worshipped. The myths themselves still played a significant role in religious rites. They were not only spoken aloud on specific solemn dates, but their lives also had many similarities to those of humans. Not least in romantic relationships, they appear and act like humans. The tight bond between humans and animals dates back to a time when the lines separating gods, mortals, and creatures were less well defined. Hence this paper tries to identify the unique characteristics of myths, legends and folklores and evaluate the significance of Classical Mythology.

Keywords: Ancient Greek, gods and goddesses, Greek mythology, classical era.

Introduction

The Gods themselves stand at the centre of a great body of myths, some of which have a beauty and archetypal resonance that has led writers and artists to re-use and reinterpret them century after century. There are also rather primitive stories of the creation of the world and the genealogies of the gods; while Uranus (the Heavens) is having intercourse with (the Earth), their son Cronus becomes supreme by cutting off Uranus's genitals and flinging them in the sea, later still, his son, Zeus, overthrows and imprisons him to become king of the gods. An even larger group of stories involves the Gods' quarrels and intrigues with one another, often displaying them in a ludicrous or discreditable light.

The Gods are immortal and have the ability to magically move from one location to another in the realm of Greek mythology. Both the animals and the tales were more than just stories; they were real creatures. During the classical period, which lasted from around the fifth century BC in ancient Greece to the later Roman Empire, the mythological gods and goddesses were still actively worshipped. The myths themselves still played a significant role in religious rites. They were not only recited in public on designated religious holidays, but they also seem and act like people, and their lives closely resemble

those of mortals, not the least in terms of romantic relationships. The offspring of these union demi-gods like Perseus becomes the Greek people's heroes and leaders. The tight bond between humans and animals, which dates back to a time when the lines separating gods, mortals, and creatures were less well defined, is reminiscent of the close link between gods and mankind. The Greek myths are populated by strange hybrid creatures: like the half-human and half-equine centaurs, which represent the baser side of man's nature: the half-human and half-goat satyrs, the spirits of the woods and mountains. Their female counterparts, the nymphs, were also closely associated with nature, and inhabited the seas, rivers, pools, and hills. The tales and the animals were much more than simply stories to the ancient Greeks and Romans who believed them to be real. The mythological deities were still actively worshipped during the classical era, which lasted from the later Roman Empire until around the fifth century BC in ancient Greece. The myths themselves still played a significant role in religious rites.

Background and Framework

Legend is derived from the Latin verb *Legenda*, which means to read, whereas myth is derived from the Greek *mythos*, which originally meant "word" or "story." The simplest and baldest definition of myths and legends is that they are age-appropriate traditional tales that have no clear author and have been passed down from one generation to the next. While myths represent a vastly different realm than tales, which typically portray true historical events or individuals like King Arthur or Christian saints. 'One field in which the gods persisted was theology. Even though they acknowledged the existence of the Pagan Gods, the early church fathers claimed that they had actually been real men and women who had been kings or leaders before they were deified. They were conversant with the old literature.

As Christianity spread throughout the Roman Empire, the ancient Gods had fallen out of favour. 80 years after the fourth century, when Christianity was made the official religion of the Roman Empire. People were forbidden from honouring the ancient Pagan deities under Emperor Theodosius (about AD 346-395). They did not, however, completely vanish throughout the years that followed. They continued to have an impact through the Middle Ages and beyond, evolving into various forms and meanings. This assertion was first stated by the Greek mythographer Euhemerus in the fourth century BC, but for the early Christians, it was a method to downplay the supernatural aura of the old Gods.

By the middle centuries, individuals had begun to study the ancestry of the gods as if they were real people, and in some cases, they had even started claiming heritage from them. For instance, Aeneas, the son of Venus, came to be regarded as the mythical creator of Rome and the progenitor of all Romans. The paganism deities also survived in the writings of mediaeval scholars who read the old stories but rarely took them at face value. Instead, based on this tradition, they considered these tales as parables that might be used to demonstrate Christian truths. Daphne was seen as a virginal role model and so a precursor to the Virgin Mary because she rejected Apollo's attempts for sex. It was also thought that Jupiter's rape of Europa while pretending to be a bull symbolized the marriage of God and the soul (Europa). The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, two epic poems that originate from the ninth century BC and are thought to have been composed by the Greek poet Homer, are the first recorded accounts of Greek mythology. The *Odyssey* recounts the tale of Greek hero Ulysses' ten-year voyage home from Troy, which was full of numerous adventures and hardships, whereas the *Iliad* chronicles the final days of the Trojan War. These legends predate Homer; late nineteenth-century archaeological digs indicated that Troy was a city on the north coast of present-day Turkey and that the

Trojan War may have really taken place. The Homeric poems came to play an important part in the religious festivals of ancient Greece: they would be recited in public. For example, at Athens' great four-yearly festival, the Panathenaea. In ancient Rome too, the Trojan War continued to inspire poets. The Trojan hero Aeneas, who escaped the burning city and later founded Rome, is the subject of Virgil's (70–19 BC) epic poem *The Aeneid*.

The Renaissance which literally means 'rebirth' refers to the rediscovery of ancient civilization in the fifteenth. This had an impact on everything, including the translation of extinct writings, the rediscovery of defunct artefacts and the utilisation of mythology and history from antiquity as the bases for artistic creations. They accomplished this by mimicking antique sculptures, duplicating their clothes, body forms, and even moods. 'Astrology' is another discipline where the gods continued to exist. The planets and stars have been referred to by the names of ancient gods since before the classical era. During the reign of Emperor Augustus, the names of the planets were also used to denote the days of the week (63 BC-AD 14). Any language with a Latin basis will be able to tell you about this tradition because Tuesday, the day of Mars, is still called 'Mardi' in French, 'martes' in Spanish, and 'martedi' in Italian. However, the ancients believed that the heavenly bodies were like gods themselves and had the ability to change people's names as well as their fate. This idea, which originated in eastern faiths, gained widespread acceptance throughout the late antique period, when an entire philosophical system was built on astrology. It was employed to explain a wide range of events, including the humours a person's disposition or mental state as well as seasonal changes and the effects of the elements. The study of astrology was so widely accepted that it guaranteed the gods' enduring power. In this attempt the researcher has critically examined the Gods and Legends and also traced back the origin, development and utility of Greek Mythology.

Mythological Characters:

The classical era, which lasted from around the fifth century BC in ancient Greece to the later Roman Empire, mythological Gods and Goddesses were still actively worshipped. The myths themselves still played a significant role in religious rites. (Fig:1) Below the Gods in the hierarchy of myth come a group of heroes (human or superhuman) who were the objects of cults, notably Theseus, king of Athens and slayer of the Minotaur, and the mighty Heracles (called by the Romans Hercules), whose 12 Labours included cleaning the Augean stables. Myth shades off into history of a sort with the Trojan War, and perhaps with the Theban cycle of Oedipus and his children and the story of Jason, the Argonauts and the Golden Fleece. In addition to gods and heroes there are nymphs and satyrs; half-human, half-animal creatures such as centaurs; giants; and a whole gallery of monsters from the Furies (dog-headed women who plague and pursue the guilty) to the Sirens whose voices lure mariners on to the rocks. There are several probable reasons for this fascinating confusion. Greek religion had no Bible, no prophet or lawgiver, no dogmas, and no church in the institutional sense. Myths were at the mercy of popular imagination and those who could vary their details or invent or reinterpret them at will. Indeed, the earliest coherent information about gods and myths comes from Homer (written down in the late 8th century) and from Hesiod, a Boeotian poet whose *Theogony* of about 700 BC relates the genealogy of the gods.

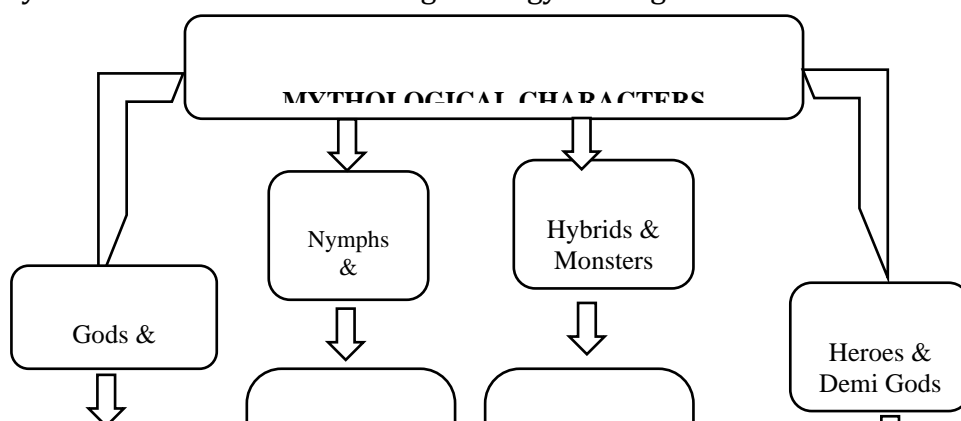


Fig 1: Mythological Characters

(Fig:2) The Gods themselves are at the centre of a large collection of mythology, and because of their relevance, writers and artists have continued to use and reinterpret them for centuries. The Greeks anticipated most of the moral and logical criticisms we can direct at their religious beliefs. Having no theologians to blame, critics like Xenophanes blamed Homer and Hesiod for portraying the gods as indulging themselves in all the pastimes that were condemned in men - theft, adultery and treacherous dealings. Xenocrates, an Ionian writing in the late 6th century, is already contemptuous of gods created in the image of man: not only do the Greeks make their gods resemble themselves, he observed, but Ethiopians worship black gods and red-haired Thracians worship red-haired ones. For Xenocrates there was only a single god, which he seems to have identified with the universe itself.

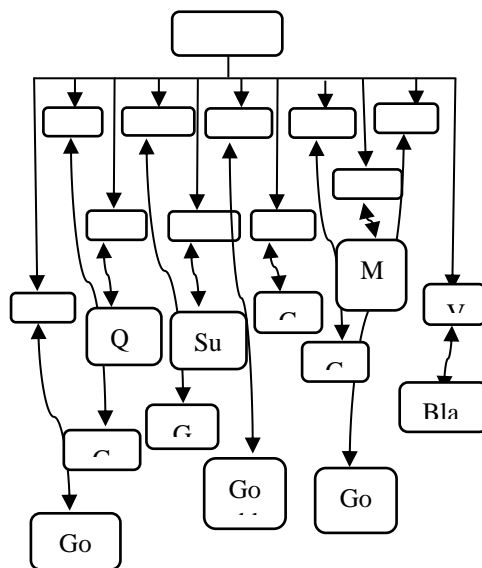


Fig 2: Gods and Goddesses

Many Greeks in fact spoke of experiencing the presence or inspiration of 'God' or 'the God', often without specifying further. By the 5th century some writers felt it necessary to apologise for the gods. The great lyric poet Pindar indignantly denies that the scandalous tales about them are true. Aeschylus, the father of tragedy, ignores the tales in his trilogy on the death of Agamemnon and Orestes' vengeance: in this, Apollo insists on righteous revenge, while Athena ensures that justice is done - significantly, against the opposition of older deities, the Furies (sprung from the blood of castrated Uranus), who represent superseded notions both of religion and of justice done by recourse to blood-feuds. (Table:1) The God of sun, Apollo is the son of Jupiter and Latona, and the twin brother of the huntress Diana. He was also patron of the Arts, and leader of the Muses, the goddesses of creative and intellectual inspiration. He often holds a lyre and wears a crown of laurel leaves, attributes of his skill in poetry and music. The god of wine, Bacchus, is usually portrayed wearing a crown of vine leaves or ivy.

The Nurture of Bacchus by Nicolas Poussin, shows him as a child, being reared on wine. Bacchus was another of Jupiter's sons. Although his mother Semele died before she could give birth to him, Jupiter nonetheless managed to take the child out of her womb and stitch him into Semele's thigh, where he was born. Bacchus is in the care of his adoptive parents - Semele's sister Ino and her husband Athamas. On the left is one of the satyrs, who always form part of Bacchus' entourage, usually shown drinking wine, dancing, and enjoying all kinds of revelries. The goats on the right remind us of Bacchus's origins as a fertility god who was worshipped in the form of a goat. Although Poussin was French, he spent most of his life in Rome, where he was able to study and copy ancient Roman sculptures. The Goddess of agriculture, Ceres was the sister of Jupiter, and reigned over the earth's fertility. The myth most associated with Ceres is the abduction of her beloved daughter. While picking flowers in the woods, Proserpine was dramatically seized by Pluto, the god of the Underworld, and carried off to his kingdom. Ceres was distraught when she realised that Proserpine was missing, leaving crops neglected and lands barren as she searched for her lost daughter. According to some interpretations of this myth, she did this deliberately to punish humans and the other gods for their role in Proserpine's disappearance. As the earth became desolate, Jupiter was forced to step in; he mandated that Proserpine be permitted to spend a portion of the year returning to Ceres, which, according to this myth, is the beginning of the seasonal cycle.

The God of love, Cupid was the mischievous son of Venus, who made both gods and mortals fall in love. He had two sets of arrows: golden arrows that made people fall in love, and lead arrows that made them feel aversion towards each other. Cupid often caused trouble, as in the story of Apollo and Daphne, and was punished as a result. From the Middle Ages onwards, he is sometimes shown wearing a blindfold: not only because love, as they say, is blind but also to symbolise the darkness of sin. Juno was the Queen of the Gods, and wife of Jupiter, she is identified by her attribute, the peacock. Jupiter swoops in holding Hercules, his son from a dalliance with a mortal woman called Alcmena and sets the child on Juno's breast, thereby making him immortal. Hercules sucks so hard that the goddess's milk spurts up into the sky, where it turns into a circle of stars - the Milky Way. It also sprays down to earth, and transforms into white lilies. The combination of stars and flowers was entirely appropriate because Rangone, a scholar and teacher of

medicine, was interested both in astrology and in the healing properties of plants. The supreme ruler of the gods, Jupiter was a tireless seducer. He transformed himself into all manner of guises in order to trap his unsuspecting victims: on different occasions, he turned himself into a swan, a bull, a shower of gold, and even his victim's husband. The compelling ingredients of these entertaining stories - love, jealousy, deceit, intrigue and scandal - made them a popular theme for artists and patrons alike.

Mars was the God of war, the son of Jupiter and Juno. Aggressive and violent, he was unpopular with all the gods apart from Venus, who became his lover. Mars usually wears a helmet and breastplate. and is depicted as a strong man, sometimes young and sometimes old. Disarmed, he lies in a deep sleep, exhausted and mellowed by love. The messenger of the gods, Mercury was a son of Jupiter and usually plays supporting roles, running errands for gods and ferrying from place to place. His attributes are his winged hat boots, which endowed him with speed, and caduceus, magical entwined with two snakes that ensured him a clear route on his journeys. Correggio's *Venus with Mercury and Cupid*, Mercury takes Centre stage as he teaches the infant Cupid, while Venus looks on. This mysterious painting does not depict a specific story (Mercury and Cupid were not related and Venus did not have wings); instead, it conveys an allegorical meaning, which is not fully understood, but is most likely to derive from astrology. The goddess of wisdom, Minerva presided over the arts and sciences. She was a daughter of Jupiter, and sprang fully formed and armed from his head. Accordingly, artists usually depicted her wearing a helmet and carrying a shield, as in Rubens's *Peace and War*. She appears again in another work by Rubens, *The Judgement of Paris*, where she has shed her armour. The head of the Gorgon Medusa, whom she assisted Perseus in killing, is emblazoned on her shield, and an owl, a symbol of knowledge, is perched on the tree just above it. The love goddess and beauty, Venus- the mother of Cupid, the wife of Vulcan and - according to Homer sources describe how she was born from the waves of a daughter of Jupiter. Other than the sea, this legend gave her one of her attributes, the pearl. Other symbols associated with Venus include the myrtle plant (which is evergreen, just as love is eternal), roses, doves and a golden apple awarded to her by Paris. Several of these are included in *An Allegory with Venus and Cupid*, by the fifteenth-century. Venus and Cupid are locked in an intimate embrace, and as they kiss, the goddess of love steals her son's arrow disarming him. The blacksmith of the gods, Vulcan lived inside the crater of a volcano where he forged arms and armour. The son of Juno and Jupiter, Vulcan was so ugly at birth that his mother threw him down from Mount Olympus, leaving him crippled. Later in life, he enjoyed better fortune when Jupiter gave him the beautiful Venus as his wife. However, Venus was constantly unfaithful and, in revenge. Vulcan made an iron net that was so fine it was invisible. He waited until Mars and Venus were in bed together, then trapped them in his net, and invited all the gods to come and witness their shame.

Gods and Goddesses	
APOLLO	Sun god, huntress Diana's twin brother, and the offspring of Jupiter and Latona.
BACCHUS	God of wine
CERES	Goddess of agriculture, sister of Jupiter,

CUPID	God of love and the cheeky child of Venus
DIANA	virgin goddess of hunting
JUNO	Gods' Queen, Jupiter's sister, and wife
JUPITER	chief deity of the gods
MARS	The son of Jupiter and Juno, the god of war
MERCURY	Messenger of the Gods and Jupiter's son
VENUS	Mother of Cupid and wife of Vulcan, the goddess of love and beauty

Table:1 Gods and Goddesses

The primary meaning of mythos is 'story', and Greek mythology is outstanding for its many compelling narratives. Unlike the myths of most other cultures, a large proportion of the Greek stories are about human beings and their passions, are set against a recognizable landscape, and, for all their magical and fabulous elements, deal in adventures and intrigues that have a timeless appeal. Although nymphs, satyrs, naiads, centaurs and other unearthly beings pass through the landscape, the principal actors in the stories are most often heroes - that is, the children of gods and goddesses who have mated with men and women; they are stronger or more beautiful than ordinary mortals, but share their passions and are doomed to die unless some special favour or achievement moves the gods to grant them immortality.

Nymphs & Maidens	
DAPHNE	wood nymph
ECHO	Oread who resided on Mount Cithaeron
EUROPA	The mother of King Minos of Crete was a Phoenician princess of Argive Greek descent
EURYDICE	Orpheus's Auloniad wife
PSYCHE	Greek goddess of the soul with butterfly wings

Table:2.Nymphs & Maidens







(Table: 2) A wood nymph, Daphne whose tale revolved around an unsuitable romance. In a troubled mood, Apollo fell in love with Daphne after receiving an arrow from Cupid, and Daphne received an arrow from Cupid that ended any romantic sentiments. Daphne was pursued by the passionate Apollo until she was unable to continue. She was so worn out that when she appealed to her father, the river deity Peneus, for assistance, she was magically transformed into a tree. The Arno valley serves as the backdrop for the pair, who are dressed in modern styles, which would have given this ancient narrative more relevance for viewers in the fifteenth century. The myth of Echo and Narcissus tells of the devastating results of unrequited love Echo liked to gossip and would divert Juno with her idle chatter, while Jupiter cavorted with other nymphs. When Juno learned of this ploy, she condemned Echo to being only able to repeat the last

words spoken to her. The muted nymph eventually fell in love with a handsome youth called Narcissus, but when he spoke to her, all she could do was repeat his words, He eventually spurned her, leaving the heartbroken Echo to fade away until all that remained of her was her voice. She prayed to Nemesis, goddess of revenge, and Narcissus was condemned to fall in love with his own image. Each time Narcissus tried to touch the water, the handsome reflection disappeared into the ripples, and the miserable Narcissus faded away to nothing, until only a flower remained in his place: a white and yellow bloom that still bears his name today. Claude included a group of narcissi growing at the side of the pool, a hint of the tragic outcome of Echo and Narcissus' tale. As a landscape painter, Claude was as interested in the setting of this scene- the shadowy forest glade in the foreground and the sun-drenched view beyond - as he was in the characters. Many of the ancient myths have at their core the theme of unreciprocated love and fate suffered by the young princess Europa. When Europa caught Jupiter's eye, he disguised himself as a bull. and approached her as she played by the seashore. Taken in by the beast's apparent gentleness, she put a garland of flowers around its horns, and sat on its back. Jupiter seized the moment, and carried her out to sea, all the way to the island of Crete where he shed his disguise, and raped her.

In Eurydice's, wife of the Thracian poet- Orpheus who was known for his ability to charm wild beasts with the sweet music of his lyre. She appears twice: firstly, unwittingly treading on a poisonous snake as she flees from the advances of the shepherd Aristaeus; and secondly lying dead on the ground. The next part of the story continues elsewhere in the painting. In the distant right, Aristaeus appears again, in conversation with his mother from whom he sought advice after his bees mysteriously died. She tells him that this is punishment for pursuing Eurydice. In the left background Orpheus, grief stricken at his wife's death, plays mournfully to a group of attentive animals. Unwilling to accept his devastating loss, he descended to the Underworld in search of Eurydice. Once there, he used his sweet music to persuade Pluto, God of the Underworld, to allow Eurydice to return to the land of the living. Pluto told Orpheus that if he played his lyre, Eurydice would follow its familiar sound, on condition that Orpheus did not look back until he returned to earth. As they moved through the darkness, Orpheus, eager to see his wife, simply could not stop himself from glancing back; as he did so. Eurydice immediately disappeared forever into the depths of the Underworld. Having lost her for a second time Orpheus was inconsolable with grief. Although Niccolò dell' Abate did not depict this final tragic outcome, he showed the various episodes that led up to it unfolding gradually against the backdrop of this vast fantastical landscape. Psyche's story was written by Lucius Apuleius (born about AD 23), and possibly based on an earlier myth. Psyche, a young princess, was so beautiful that the jealous Venus plotted against her. She sent Cupid to cause Psyche heartache and misery with his arrows, but instead Cupid fell in love with her Palace of C himself, and swept her off to a magical palace. When Psyche entered, she found a magnificent interior with gold columns, jewelled floors, and invisible servants to attend to her every need. Cupid, however, remained hidden, visiting only under the cover of darkness; his one condition to Psyche was that his identity should be a secret.

The sheer antiquity of the gods and myths must have increased the likelihood of changes and accretions: many of the gods' names occur on the Linear B tablets of the Mycenaean age, at least five hundred years before Hesiod. Writers - especially French dramatists from Giraudoux to Sartre reworked Greek myths to cast light on the dilemmas of their own age. From one point of view, the whole effort of Greek philosophy was to

make natural and ethical sense of a world that was inadequately explained by the existing gods, myths and rituals.

Hybrids & Monsters		
CENTAURS	the lower body and legs of a horse and the upper body of a human.	 <p style="text-align: right;">Fig. 1</p>
DRAGONS	a massive, fire-breathing, scaly, snake or lizard with bat wings and a barbed tail	 <p style="text-align: right;">Fig. 2</p>
GORGONS	serpentine-haired, fang-adorned female monsters with bronze claws	 <p style="text-align: right;">Fig. 3</p>
HARPIES	birds with maiden-like heads, ravenous expressions, and long claws on their hands	 <p style="text-align: right;">Fig. 4</p>
PEGASUS	a winged horse that emerged from the Gorgon Medusa's blood	 <p style="text-align: right;">Fig. 5</p>
SATYRS	spirits of nature with the ears and tails of horses and manly human characteristics.	 <p style="text-align: right;">Fig. 6</p>


SPHINX	the lion's body, a bird's wings, and the face and breasts of a woman	
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Table:3.Hybrids & Monsters Fig. 1 Centaurs, Fig. 2 Dragons, Fig.3 Harpies, Fig. 4 Haarpies, Fig. 5 Pegasus, Fig. 6 Satyrs, Fig. 7 Sphinx

Hybrids and Monsters are represented in Greek mythology as fantastic creatures with interchange of divine, human and animal bodies. (Table: 3) Centaurs had the body of a horse and the from a union between Ixion, king of the Lapiths and a cloud, which Jupiter had transformed into the form of Juno. Known for their rough and aggressive character, they represent the base level of man's nature. Piero di Cosimo's *The Fight between the Lapiths and the Centaurs* shows the disastrous wedding feast of the Lapith king, Pirithous, and his bride Hippodamia. Pirithous had made the mistake of inviting his distant relatives, the centaurs, and as the celebrations started, they became drunk and rowdy. This painting corresponds closely to Ovid's graphic description of this scene: one centaur tries to carry off lay their hands on: goblets, jugs, candlesticks and table legs. The centaurs were eventually banished, but only after terrible bloodshed. In the foreground. a female centaur cradles the body of her dead lover, Cyllarus, a poignant detail proving that these wild creatures also suffered grief. This story was usually understood as symbolising the triumph of civilization over barbarism, but in the context of this painting, which was made for a domestic setting, its sensational details would also have been a source of great amusement and entertainment.

Combining the features of a bird, reptile and mammal, it sinks its hungry teeth and claws into the fleshy bodies of two followers of Cadmus, the legendary founder of Thebes. Cadmus had been advised by the oracle of Delphi to follow a heifer, and to found his city on the spot where the weary beast sat down. When he finally arrived at this place, Cadmus sent his men to fetch water and in their search for a spring, they entered a cave unaware that it was home to a fierce dragon. It devoured them but Cadmus in turn slew the beast [64] and afterwards buried its teeth in the ground, where they magically transformed into soldiers, who helped him found the city of Thebes. The three terrifying sisters, Gorgons possessed snakes for hair, and anyone who glanced at them was turned to stone by their deadly glare. Perseus, the most well-known demi-god, was helped by Minerva and Mercury. Mercury lent him his winged boots, which ensured him a speedy escape and Minerva lent him her shield, the shining surface of which he used to look at Medusa's reflection, thereby avoiding being turned into stone. In gratitude to Minerva.

The terrifying creatures, Harpies sallow female faces, winged bird-like bodies, and sharp claws, which they used to steal food. As soon as food was set down in front of him, they would either defile it with their rancid breath or steal it for themselves. The winged men banishing the fearful harpies are the sons of Boreas, god of the wind, who came to Phineus' rescue. The elegant winged horse, Pegasus born from the severed head of Medusa, who went on to help Perseus rescue Andromeda, his future wife. As well as performing such heroic acts, he was also associated with the Muses, the goddesses of creative and intellectual inspiration who governed music, art, history, poetry, dance and

astronomy. Pegasus stamps his hooves on the ground, thereby creating the spring of Hippocrene, which was sacred to the Muses.

Satyrs were spirits of the woodlands and fields. They depict the animal part of man's nature by having the legs, hooves, and horns of a goat and a man's face and body. Another hybrid creature, Sphinx, had a female face and breasts, a lion's body, and bird's wings. What has four legs in the morning, two in the afternoon, and three in the evening? she would ask passersby as she guarded the city gates of Thebes. Anyone who didn't respond was dropped into a pit. When Oedipus arrives at Thebes' gates, he informs the Sphinx of the truth, explaining that an adult human has two legs when walking and three when they are elderly and leaning on a stick. The Sphinx killed herself after being shocked that the mystery had finally been solved. The inhabitants of Thebes gave Oedipus a hero's welcome and made Jocasta, their queen, his wife. With Jocasta as his mother and the man he had killed on his travels as his father, this fulfilled the Delphic prophecy that Oedipus would kill his father and marry his mother.

In Greek mythology, the principal actors in the stories are most often heroes - that is, the children of gods and goddesses who have mated with men and women; they are stronger or more beautiful than ordinary mortals, but share their passions and are doomed to die unless some special favour or achievement moves the gods to grant them immortality. Most of the hero-stories consist of cycles or series of adventures or family histories, often relating to dynasties supposed to have ruled Greek cities in some earlier time. The Greeks themselves had a rough idea of when that time was, since the cycles interlocked and most of the events in them could be 'dated' to just before, during, or just after the Trojan War. The traditional Greek date for the end of the war was 1184 BC; so that in the mind of the 5th-century Athenian the age of semi-divine heroes lay in the not so distant past.

Heroes & DemiGods	
JASON	Son of Aeson, King of Lolcos
AENEAS	Trojan hero and demi-god, the son of a shepherd called Anchises and Venus
PARIS	the son of King Priam of Troy
ULYSSES	the Greek hero

Table:4 Heroes & DemiGods

There is no true chronology of the hero stories that can be compiled, if only because they are fictional, exist in many variations, and do not interlock consistently. But the links between the stories are interesting nonetheless, and a kind of historical overview helps to bring out the sweep and complexity of the heroic myths. References in Homer confirm that the tale of Jason and the Argonauts is particularly old. Peleus, king of Lolcos in Thessaly, had seized the throne from his half-brother Aeson. When Aeson's son, Jason, arrived to assert his claim, he was tricked by Peleus into undertaking a voyage to recover the golden fleece, which hung in a dragon-protected grove at Colchis, a city at the furthest point of the Greek world on the Black Sea. A ship of 50 oars, the Argo, was built for Jason, whose invitation to accompany him was answered by many of the great Greek heroes; they became known as Argonauts (sailors of the Argo). Aided by the goddess Athena, they survived a series of perilous encounters and arrived safely at Colchis, where

the king agreed to give Jason the golden fleece if the hero could perform a number of superhuman feats: he must harness two fire-breathing oxen, sow the ground with dragons' teeth, and defeat the warriors who sprang from the ground as a result.

A Trojan hero and demi-god, Aeneas- the son of a shepherd called Anchises and Venus, goddess of love, who was destined to live as a mortal Venus on earth. Venus is passing him down from the domain of the gods into the hands of Old Father Time, who will take him to live a mortal existence on earth. Above, the Three Graces scatter rose petals, while below, Cupid clambers onto a cloud. This vertiginous setting was perfectly suited for the intended location of this painting: the ceiling of the Contarini Palace in Venice. The Contarini family may have commissioned the work to celebrate the birth of a new heir and their choice of subject was perhaps influenced by the fact that the family were said to have claimed to be descendants of Aeneas. Aeneas left the burning city of Troy at the end of the Trojan War, and set off on a long journey in search of a new homeland. Aeneas, his father and son have landed on Delos, an island sacred to Apollo, and are welcomed by its king, Anius. He shows them the important landmarks of his island: the hybrid palm and olive tree to which Latona clung as she gave birth to Apollo and Diana and the temple of Apollo, of which he was the priest. As Aeneas made his offerings to the sun god, he was told to seek his new home in a place that was known to his ancestors, which he first took to mean Crete and then understood to be Italy. Aeneas' final destinations suggested by the architecture of the temple of Apollo on the right. It is based on the Pantheon, which still stands in Rome today and provides a visual clue of Aeneas' final destination. The father of Paris was King Priam of Troy. Hecuba believed her unborn child would bring about the fall of Troy, so she abandoned her unborn kid on the slopes of Mount Ida, where he was rescued and raised by shepherds. Later, at a wedding feast when all the gods and goddesses had been invited with the exception of Eris, the goddess of conflict, Paris was picked to judge a beauty contest between three goddesses. Mercury transported Venus, Juno, and Minerva, three goddesses who believed themselves deserving of Mount Ida so that Paris would judge them. *The Judgement of Paris* by Rubens is about this, and the goddesses are recognized by their respective attributes: Minerva's owl and armour, Venus' son Cupid, and Juno's peacock. The three goddesses each bought Paris because they were equally as attractive as one another. *The Judgement of Paris* was a subject that appealed to Rubens throughout the course of his long career because it allowed him to paint three nude women from various perspectives.

The Greek hero, Ulysses (Odysseus in Greek) is one of the principal figures of the Trojan War and known for his shrewdness, he devised a cunning Trojan scheme that brought an end to the Trojan War. This is about the subject of two paintings by the eighteenth-century Venetian artist, Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo. Ulysses oversees the construction of a gigantic wooden horse, which is inscribed with a dedication to Minerva. The horse was filled with troops and left outside the gates of Troy while the other Greek soldiers pretended to sail away. Ulysses and his men had cast an anchor at the island depicted on the left, where fearsome Polyphemus captured them. In order to escape Ulysses encouraged Polyphemus to drink wine, and once he fell into drunken slumber. He and his men then hid in the fleece of Polyphemus' sheep, and as they went out to graze, carried the prisoners out to freedom. In Turner's painting, Polyphemus throws a stone down into the bay to try to prevent their departure, but Ulysses stands victorious on his ship, which is led to safety by a cohort of sea nymphs.

The foreground depicts Ulysses' safe return to Ithaca, where his patient wife Penelope sits at her loom. She had waited ten long years for her husband to return, and invented a ruse to keep all suitors at bay. She said that she would only remarry after

finishing the shroud she was weaving for Ulysses' father, but every night she unraveled her day's work, and started afresh the next day. She was eventually found out, and so agreed to marry anyone who could string Ulysses' bow-on the loom behind her, and use it to shoot an arrow through twelve axes. Ulysses. returned, disguised as a beggar, and was the only one able to complete Penelope's task. The story ends with Ulysses killing his rivals, and reclaiming both his wife and his palace.

Conclusion

Myths were subject to public imagination, and anyone may change, fabricate, or reinterpret them as they pleased. Although the ancient myths are perhaps less familiar to us nowadays than they were to people in the past, they continue to exert their influence on contemporary artists. The allusion to nature recalls the way myths were understood in the ancient world, that is, as stories that explained natural phenomena by ascribing them to human origins. like Narcissus becoming a flower, or Daphne being transforming into a laurel tree. So not only does the tale of Marsyas live on in this sculpture, it also retains something of the meaning it held in earlier times such as the lasting power of myths. Just as Orpheus' music captivated animals and birds, classical myths enchanted generations of listeners and readers, and inspired artists to translate the written word into vivid and enthralling works of art. Indeed, as the ancient storytellers gave these stories their own personal rendition, so too have visual artists, past and present, breathing new life into these tales, and making them relevant to their own age.

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