CLASSICAL RECEPTION OF GREEK MYTHOLOGY IN POP

CULTURE, VIDEO GAMES, AND ENTERTAINMENT

An Undergraduate Research Scholars Thesis

by

HANNAH ECKENFELS

Submitted to the LAUNCH: Undergraduate Research office at
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of requirements for the designation as an

UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH SCHOLAR

Approved by
Faculty Research Advisor: Samuel Woodfin

May 2023

Major: Visualization

RESEARCH COMPLIANCE CERTIFICATION

Research activities involving the use of human subjects, vertebrate animals, and/or biohazards must be reviewed and approved by the appropriate Texas A&M University regulatory research committee (i.e., IRB, IACUC, IBC) before the activity can commence. This requirement applies to activities conducted at Texas A&M and to activities conducted at non-Texas A&M facilities or institutions. In both cases, students are responsible for working with the relevant Texas A&M research compliance program to ensure and document that all Texas A&M compliance obligations are met before the study begins.

I, Hannah Eckenfels, certify that all research compliance requirements related to this Undergraduate Research Scholars thesis have been addressed with my Faculty Research Advisor prior to the collection of any data used in this final thesis submission.

This project did not require approval from the Texas A&M University Research Compliance & Biosafety office.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Classical Reception of Greek Mythology in Pop Culture, Video Games, and Entertainment

Hannah Eckenfels
Department of Performance, Visualization, and Fine Arts
Texas A&M University

Research Faculty Advisor: Samuel Woodfin
Department of Performance, Visualization, and Fine Arts
Texas A&M University

Why is mythology such a popular thematic element in pop culture, particularly in video games, media, and entertainment? How have the stories of the classical world evolved to reflect the perspective of contemporary culture, especially in relation to the interpretation and representations of these stories by marginalized groups? This thesis highlights the study of classical reception as it relates to video games, novels, and media, explores how it can be used to understand the bias and belief of modern society, and examines the reasoning behind its popularity with creators to explain how mythology in these mediums appeal to a modern audience. Research from this thesis is represented in a creative artifact, which visually represents four mythological figures used as examples in the lens of their current reception, and compiles explanations from the thesis as a description for each illustration.

DEDICATION

To the friends, families, instructors, and peers who supported me throughout the research

process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1.   AESTHETIC MOTIVATION AND RESEARCH QUESTION

1.1   Introduction

Mythology is one of the most adaptive forms of storytelling, used by ancient civilizations as a means to define the origins of the natural world and human condition. A significant portion of classical culture has assimilated elements from and been influenced by the progression of Abrahamic religion, followed by the impact of contemporary society. Throughout history, the stories and practices of archaic religions have undergone significant transformations primarily through the prospects of religion as a dominant cultural force; these transformations resulted from a variety of factors, such as politics, cultural assimilation, and missionary activity. Thus, the complex relation between monotheistic religion and ancient polytheism has resulted in a mosaic of syncretic beliefs and practices, reflecting the dynamic and evolving nature of human spirituality.

The syncretic nature of Greek mythology gives it a malleable quality which promotes thinking about change. Explorations of ancient mythology's historical evolution have been extensively studied, earning this field of study the name Classical Reception. The dissemination of ancient Greek myths in contemporary society has led to a surge in pop culture, media, and entertainment centered around classical material. Familiarity with mythology creates a unique opportunity for creators to form adaptations and present their own perspectives or new endings to stories the public is already acquainted with. The lack of centrality or consensus of modern mythology, and the importance of understanding myth as multi-dimensional rather than one-dimensional, is significant.

The present-day media landscape has ushered in a new age of mythmaking, where mythology, once confined to the realm of ancient Greek plays and literature, has now taken a new form in video games, films, and other forms of entertainment. This phenomenon can be referred to as neomythology or myth-making, where traditional mythological elements are restored into a modern perspective. The deities, heroes, and prominent figures of antiquity that appear in neomythology have been reimagined to reflect the values and ideologies of contemporary society. They are adapted to serve as a vessel of the beliefs of the ever-changing lens of the society that creates them. Technology's advancements have given mythology the ability to reach a wider audience than ever before, transcending cultural and language barriers. As a result, mythology has become an integral part of our collective consciousness, shaping our understanding of the world and our place in it.

This thesis consolidates the modern retellings of myths and combines written as well as visual representations of these retellings into a creative artifact. The modern lens, or the western classical reception of select Greek myths, are represented to gain a deeper understanding of the bias, romanticization, and relatability of modern mythological characters and story elements.

1.1.1 Classical and Queer Reception

Classical reception is the exploration and study of the transformation and interpretation of the classical world, especially relating to Greek literature and culture, and how it has been received by societies since antiquity. The area of this field which this thesis is centered around is the reception of mythological characters, which provides a rich insight into the difference between the ways in which women and queer people were portrayed in the past compared to how they are portrayed today.

This framework of studying the past is used as a tool to understand public perceptions and imaginations, a relatively new concept used to understand contemporary issues relating to marginalized groups. Queer reception polarizes classical studies, as some scholars view it as "a disturbing way of doing Classics: decidedly un-disciplined; obstructing historicism's compulsory othering of the past" (Butler 192). The failure to recognize queer reception and the subsequent 'otherizing' of its study offers only bias, an obstruction of the clear study of queerness throughout history.

Many point to queer reception as nothing more than source criticism and find that receiving creators make exclusions and alterations to an otherwise darker or more evil side of ancient text; a phenomenon of 'forgetting' or selectively omitting the true nature of classical texts. To properly understand the perspective of neomythology in respect to queerness, it is important to move past "much of its nineteenth- and twentieth-century reception" which villainized queerness to a certain degree, and to understand "that modern homosexuality and ancient pederasty … have nothing to do with one another" (Butler 33).

Reception by the modern world offers a rich glimpse into the cultural and intellectual beliefs of humanity which shapes society. This involves understanding the ways in which ancient Greek literature and culture have been reinterpreted and adapted to suit the needs and interests of different audiences, and how these adaptations have, in turn, influenced and shaped contemporary culture and thought. While the darker side of mythology may be excluded from modern adaptations, it is important to understand why this is occurring, and how ancient texts continue to speak to us today, enduring the shifting tides of trends and relevance in popular culture for thousands of years. Truly, classical figures of the past were considered to be paragons

of society; therefore, such figures are paragons of the writers which are inspired by them, interpret their emotions, and disperse their reception to a broader audience.

1.2   Research Question

Why is mythology such a popular thematic element in pop culture, particularly in video games, media, and entertainment? How have the stories of the classical world evolved to reflect the perspective of contemporary culture, and how does this relate to the interpretation and representations of marginalized groups in mythology?

The influences of mythology and mythological elements have been well documented and explored in contemporary research. However, how has the reception of famous classical figures in Greek mythology influenced the way that modern culture views and portrays them in video games, media, and entertainment? The reception of mythology in contemporary culture has resulted in the rewriting and adaptation of famous characters and heroes in antiquity to serve as a vessel of modern beliefs and values. How have the stories of antiquity changed to reflect the perspective of contemporary culture?

The study of classical reception is a valuable avenue to understanding the biases and beliefs of modern society and how mythological stories have been rewritten to reflect that, citing examples from video games, novels, and media that have been produced in the modern era. The reception of mythology in contemporary culture has resulted in the rewriting and adaptation of classical characters to serve as a vessel of contemporary ideas and morals. The visual representation of the mythological figures in each illustration borrows from their representations of the past and seeks to represent them as modern society depicts them.

2.   HISTORICAL CONTEXT, DISCIPLINARY PARADIGMS, AND AESTHETIC STANDARDS

2.1   Ancient Art and Literature

The appeal of ancient art and literature has persisted and continues to captivate modern aesthetics across a wide variety of mediums in pop culture. Accessibility of education, language, and the arts has resulted in the opening of the classical world to the masses, which was typically reserved for the social elite. Rick Riordan, author of the *Percy Jackson* series, views learning mythology as "part of being an educated member of society" (Riordan). Madeline Miller, author of popular adaptations *The Song of Achilles* and *Circe*, stated that the purpose of creative adaptations was not "to supplant Homer, but to engage and illuminate him" and serving the audience "a fresh look at the original" (Miller).

The inspiration that comes from mythology and mythological elements is seemingly inexhaustible, a testament to humanity's fascination with the classics. Understanding the ways in which the culture and literature of antiquity have been adapted to shape contemporary culture and thought is essential to understanding the full scope of their impact.

2.2   Impact on Literature and Novels

"Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships, and burnt the topless towers of Ilium--Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss." (Marlowe, Dr. Faustus). This famous quote was written only five hundred years ago in the play *Dr. Faustus*, while the Iliad was written over two thousand years ago. The presence of mythology in literature has been constant, yet unchanging – especially in the case of Helen of Troy, and the popularity of the Iliad as source material for countless mythological adaptations.

The novel *A Thousand Ships* by Natalie Haynes is told through the perspective of Calliope, the muse of poetry, who wishes to speak of the impact of the Trojan War because she is dissatisfied with the way it has been told. Haynes retells the events of the Iliad to highlight often overlooked female characters, exposing the mistreatment they faced by both men and the gods in the ancient world. The gods in this story are shown in a ruthless light, indifferent to the plight of mortal women. Creative adaptations of mythology generally follow a similar format in that they depart from the commonly accepted myth by substituting knowledge with imagination, and by promising the audience their version of events is the one true version. Haynes, for example, accomplishes this by taking on the role of Calliope and promising the readers that the truth behind the Trojan War will be revealed, as the previous versions of the story are inadequate.

Adaptations have the power to rewrite memory and convince their audience to believe the new version of mythology that has been presented to them. They are crafted by their creators with the motivation of doing justice to characters who were otherwise unheard and tend to fill in the contextual void surrounding the emotional lives and struggles of classical figures. In all, many adaptations attempt to humanize classical figures and mold them into a reflection of the creator's perspective. Once again citing the Iliad and Helen of Troy as an example, Helen was seen as "a figure with ambiguous responsibility for the horrors of the Trojan War" who is quite different to the tragic figure she is in adaptation (Haywood 60).

Another example is Medusa, one of Athena's faithful priestesses who was punished for being raped by Posideon. Her punishment was matter of fact nor did it linger on the tragedy of the situation. Yet, in more modern texts, and in the plentiful research conducted on Medusa's reception since antiquity, she is seen as the embodiment of female rage; the protector of women; the tragic victim of assault which we did not see in classical poetry. Although she is still

portrayed as an evil gorgon in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, she still becomes a protector of women by the end of the book and punishes the protagonist's abusive stepfather by turning him into stone. Again we see modern reception in novels repeating the trend of justice.

Reimagining classical heroes and figures is a popular subject with novels. Modern authors writing about mythology frequently use ancient settings and figures to create works that convey timelessness and grandeur. Often the familiarity of mythology brings with it explanations that the author does not need to linger on; by removing worldbuilding elements, the author may focus on the characters, their thoughts, and their feelings and how it may captivate their audience into believing in this new mythology.

2.3   Impact on Video games

The popularization of drama began in classical Greece, which was renowned for their impressive theaters and the origins of dramatic elements. Video games share certain characteristics with Greek plays, although they have some notable differences. While audiences play a passive role in observing dramas, video games expect a more active role in shaping the story. The interactive nature of video games has changed the traditional perception of narrative and the typically passive role of a viewer. Rather than simply observing the story unfold, players engage with the game and affect the outcome, creating a unique and personalized experience. Video games, at the intersection between art and technology, has opened up an entire realm of possibility when viewed with the framework of classical reception.

There is a distinct challenge element in video games where players must strive to achieve specific goals and objectives to progress through the game, such as defeating a villain. *Hades Game* is a popular dungeon-crawler in which the player becomes Zagreus, the son of Hades, who must escape the underworld and reach Mount Olympus. The popular *God of War* franchise asks

the question – what if the gods are evil? The player takes on the identity of Kratos, a Spartan demigod, and must complete the challenge of defeating the gods and avenging his family's death. These games place a heavy emphasis on storytelling and action, providing players with thousands of customization options to make each playthrough feel unique.

As a form of reception, video games offer unparalleled versatility in delivering immersive storytelling and experiences to its audience. Narrative driven games which boast multiple paths, choices, and endings have become increasingly popular with consumers who now have autonomy over shaping the outcome of the story and become a key piece of the narrative themselves. In myth-centered video games, the creators offer up their role to the player as the one who is doing the myth-making. In this interactive paradigm, each decision made by the player is filtered through their own life experiences and perspectives, resulting in a personalized new myth that the player now has ownership over. The player becomes a creative force, a co-author, and a participant, making every playthrough an exclusive and irreplicable experience.

The popularity of mythology as a story element for video games relates to its association "with fantasy, religion and past civilisations" and allows players an escape from reality, especially in narrative or role-play game genres (Xidakis 5). In this vein, imagination becomes the driving force that propels neomythology beyond the boundaries of traditional storytelling, thereby allowing it to take on a new dimension that transcends the limits of its origins. Video games offer a personalized mythos to the player which enhances their connection to mythological narratives.

2.4   Impact on Pop Culture and Entertainment

After centuries of technological advancement and the rise and fall of civilizations, Greek influence has always remained a beloved presence in popular culture and entertainment. Pop

culture and entertainment are interchangeable in that they both encompass a wide range of

media, including television shows, films, music, fashion, and more. In general, such forms of

media are produced and shaped by consumerism and mass audiences. The familiarity of

mythology as a theme or genre allows audiences a means to connect with the material faster than

they would connect with an original story.

Literature, novels, and video games, all of which are a form of entertainment and pop

culture, have already been discussed in detail, yet there remains the discussion of how it has

impacted society as a whole. Classical reception reveals the disparity of "changing desires"

between the modern and classical world, which "give rise to moments of communion and of

forging community, both in and across time" (Butler 192). The story of Persephone and Hades

reflects these changing desires in society; while in the past Persephone was a tragic character, her

relationship with Hades is now largely romanticized. Rachel Smythe's *Lore Olympus* series has

recently popularized this narrative, exploring Persephone as a character who wishes to escape the

evil grasp of her overbearing mother, Demeter. The desire to express this story as a tragedy has

changed, and the romanticized relationship between the two has led to many modern adaptations.

Such comparisons can be drawn and studied as a method to understand changing desires

and beliefs in society, even if the medium does not expressly use a mythological theme. In

almost all forms of entertainment, especially the story lines of novels or films, "it is possible to

see the dominance of the mythical element," although not explicitly related to classical antiquity,

"[t]he plots employed in these products are of a mythical character" (Xidakis).

2.4.1 *Queer reception*

Popular culture, now more welcoming to queerness and marginalized groups, has resulted

in the rise of queer adaptations of mythology. There is difficulty in comparing queerness of the

past with queerness in contemporary culture, as it is far different today than it was in the past. In truth, many queer writers who contribute to pop culture "looked back as a way to look forward," motivated by the sense of justice to empower characters of classical mythology and rewrite them to harmonize with their own reception of mythology (Butler 38).

The relation between modern queer reception, classics, and classical reception is polarizing – the lack of consensus in interpretations of mythology has led to the tumultuous view of queer reception as a "disturbing way of doing Classics: decidedly un-disciplined" (Butler 192). An increasingly complex, diverse, and ever-expanding neomythology has resulted in a lack of consensus within scholarly fields. The view of queer studies and neomythology as 'other' or separate from "straight classics" creates a sort of one-dimensionality to characters of antiquity. Among critics of queer reception are those who seek to preserve the consolidated understandings of myth, rejecting modern reinterpretations and portrayals as "our own anachronistic acts of ventriloquizing and embodying the classical past" (Butler 193).

Perhaps the most famous and contested example of queer reception of mythology lies in the myth of Achilles and Patroclus. After Patroclus donned Achilles' armor and led the Myrmidons into battle all the way to the walls of Troy, he was mistaken for Achilles and died in the fight. Achilles swore revenge, asking that in death his ashes would share an urn with Patroclus' so that they may be one forever; "such spectacular expressions of love are difficult to match anywhere in literature" (Butler 25). Achilles and Patroclus can be seen in countless adaptations due to their rise in popularity within queer communities.

However, critics view this interpretation of the pair as lovers as an obstruction of Homer's true intentions, citing that there is no explicit proof of such a romance within the Iliad. Yet there is little room for study and research if one accepts poetry at surface-level value,

without understanding the contexts and views of the culture that existed when the Iliad was written; it can be said that such explicit proof, as stated by the Athenian orator Aeschines, would be superfluous to an educated audience (Butler 27).

Doubtlessly, connecting queerness of the past and queerness of history is a deliberate act of bending time, "and momentary or sustained transitions from temporal normativities into osmotic temporalities" which is common among modern adaptations (Butler 192). The desire of contemporary queer literature and entertainment to commit these acts of bending time reveals an important truth; the gods, heroes, and important classical figures serve as a vessel of the opinions and beliefs of the poets, authors, and artists which represent them, and will continue to grow and adapt to the lens of contemporary society – including that of queer communities.

2.5   Summary of Classical reception

Mythology serves as a vessel of truth and familiarity, as the stories are well-known and widespread. The purpose of this thesis was to explore the way that classical reception has adapted mythology to the perspective and bias of the storyteller. The modern interpretations of certain famous figures is represented in the creative artifact, which depicts characters from a contemporary perspective. The classical reception of mythology in the western world has resulted in receiving creators rewriting classical characters into relatable, romanticized figures. Adaptations seek to replace or substitute commonly understood myths with new perspectives and storylines, which creates a neomythology that modern societies, storytellers, authors, and artists can relate themselves to.

The majority of adaptations follow a noticeable trend of omitting certain aspects of mythology to replace them with alternate story lines or perspectives. Frequently, adaptations will either put a spotlight on or omit altogether the darker aspects of classics, which is reinforced by

the inclination of creators to selectively borrow from more positive aspects of mythos while dismissing those that are less palatable to their interests. This metamorphosis caused by the rewriting of mythology has created a new modern mythos, one which serves the modern imagination and reception. There is little centrality or unification to be found within neomythology, which feeds into an endless cycle of new mythological themes within entertainment to captivate the mass audience. Rather than serving as a center of culture, mythology is now central to storytelling, used as the basis for countless spin offs, adaptations, and ideas for various forms of entertainment. The use of and understanding of mythology is more widespread than ever before.

The trend of myth making and neomythology in modern society seeks to explain the events, elaborate the emotions, and enact justice for the mythology surrounding characters the creator wishes to depict. We are familiar with the famous quote of Achilles gazing at the wine dark sea before him; "wine dark", the color that the blind poet Homer inexplicably used to describe the sea in the Iliad after Achilles lost his dear friend Patroclus. Mythology has a wine-dark quality, which may explain its allure as a thematic element; myth offers authors and creators the ability to put into words what cannot be explained.

3.   EXPLANATION OF EXHIBIT

3.1   Development of the Creative Artifact

This thesis consolidates the modern retellings of myths and combines written as well as visual representations into a creative artifact. Motifs and imagery in each illustration are tailored to the modern interpretations of each myth, which will be elaborated in both the creative artifact while the figures represented are cited as examples of reception throughout the thesis. The modern lens, or the western classical reception of select Greek myths, is represented to gain a deeper understanding of modern mythological characters and story elements.

The general research process used throughout this project involved the analysis and interpretation of modern adaptations of mythology. While developing the creative artifact, questions arose: how are classical figures portrayed by modern society? How are women and marginalized groups depicted today, especially by members of such groups?

I decided to address these questions in my creative artifact. Certain contexts and motifs are communicated in my creative artifact that describe how modern figures have changed throughout antiquity, specifically in contemporary literature and video games. The artifact visually demonstrates the importance of the research done in this project, as classical reception of entertainment mediums is a valuable tool in understanding differences between modern and classical society. Analyzing the classical reception of mythology in modern culture highlights it as a tool to understand the biases, morals, and beliefs that are important to contemporary western culture.

Neomythology serves as a vessel of truths, a reflection of how we view and understand the world today. This project builds upon the importance of women, marginalized groups, and

their perspective in interpreting mythology. I used a variety of different art styles for the illustrations in my creative artifact as a method to include a diverse range of depictions, similarly to the way in which neomythology functions as a diverse, multi-dimensional form of classical mythology.

3.1.1 Exhibition Venue and Explanation

This creative artifact was displayed and exhibited at the URS Research Symposium. I decided to exhibit my research in the form of a poster presentation so that I could interact directly with the audience and engage them directly. The direct engagement with the audience, which consisted mostly of students and faculty with little knowledge of classical texts and mythology, allowed me to gain a unique understanding of how average people view mythology. As a result, my research became much more educational than originally anticipated, as the answers I gave to their questions seemed to have an impact on their understanding of mythology.

The opportunity to showcase my creative artifact and research in a poster presentation proved to be a valuable visual aid that effectively conveyed my research to a diverse audience. As I presented my work alongside primarily science and technology related research, the degree of interest and curiosity that my presentation drew was striking. The format of the presentation allowed for an engaging experience with those that approached, as it provided an opportunity for viewers to contemplate the artwork and descriptions of the research behind them. The creative artifact in a room filled with technology related research allowed me to form connections between my creative endeavors to a larger audience that is not necessarily familiar with mythology.

4.   REFLECTION

4.1   Future of Classical Reception

Contemporary society has created a sort of modern mythology, or neomythology, which is represented in the form of video games, movies, and entertainment, similarly to how plays and poetry were used to tell these storis since ancient times. Comparing the gods of antiquity to the gods of today reveals that myth is a reflection of the core values and beliefs of modernity. The evolving nature of human understanding has resulted in the famous classical characters, gods, goddesses, and heroes growing and adapting in direct correlation to society's beliefs and understanding of the world.

Pop culture has developed rapidly over the past few decades, resulting in the mass production and consumption of mythologically themed forms of entertainment. As technology rapidly advances, so too will the expression and reception of mythology rapidly advance and transform. Neomythology will continue to be represented and adapted to serve as a vessel of the morals and beliefs of the society and medium in which they are represented.

4.2   Reflection

The general research process used throughout this project involved the analysis and interpretation of modern adaptations of mythology. While developing the creative artifact, questions arose: how are classical figures portrayed by modern society? What is the motivation for using mythology as a theme? How does this relate to the depiction of women and marginalized groups in mythology?

I decided to address these questions in my creative artifact. Certain contexts and motifs are communicated in my creative artifact that describe how modern figures have changed

throughout antiquity, specifically in contemporary literature and video games. The contrast is not always apparent, which is why the text portion of the creative artifact was added to supplement the illustrations. A detailed description of each illustration is written for accessibility purposes.

The artifact demonstrates the importance of the research done in this project. Analyzing the classical reception of mythology in modern culture highlights it as a tool to understand the biases, morals, and beliefs that are important to contemporary western culture. Neomythology and the act of myth making is an avenue to research the complex relationship between the views of society in antiquity and the views of society in the modern era. This project builds upon the importance of women, marginalized groups, and their perspective in interpreting mythology. Much can be understood from the study of this subject.

The public presentation was held at the Undergraduate Research Symposium as a poster presentation. Gaining the feedback and unique perspective of people who were not necessarily familiar with mythology was essential to the development of my creative artifact. Ensuring that the creative artifact is understandable to an audience unfamiliar with the concept of classical reception supplements the educational aspect of my work.

WORKS CITED

"An Interview with Rick: Rick Riordan." Rick Riordan | Welcome to the Online World of Rick
   Riordan, 7 Oct. 2022, https://rickriordan.com/about/an-interview-with-rick/.

Butler, Shane. Deep Classics: Rethinking Classical Reception. Bloomsbury Academic an Imprint
   of Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2016.

Clauss, James J. "A Course on Classical Mythology in Film." The Classical Journal, vol. 91, no.
   3, 1996, pp. 287–95. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/stable/3297607.

Hades Game. Version 1.04 for Windows PC, Supergiant Games, 2020.

Haynes, Natalie. A Thousand Ships: A Novel. Harper, an Imprint of HarperCollins Limited,
   2021.

Haywood, Jan, and Sweeney Mac Naoíse. Homer's Iliad and the Trojan War: Dialogues on
   Tradition. Bloomsbury Academic, 2020.

Marlowe, Christopher. Doctor Faustus. Dover Publications, 1995.

Miller, Madeline. The Song of Achilles. New York :Ecco, 2012.

Miller, Madeline. "Madeline Miller: An Epic Conclusion to My Homeric Odyssey." The
   Telegraph, Telegraph Media Group, 31 May 2012,
   https://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/9302769/ Madeline-Miller-an-epic-
   conclusion-to-my-Homeric-odyssey.html.

Ovid, and A. S. Hollis. Metamorphoses. Oxford University Press, 1970.

Poorman, James William, "From Mythology to Pop Culture: Myth, Representation, and the
   Historiography of the Amazon Warrior Woman in Ancient Art and Modern Media"
   (2021). Graduate Theses and Dissertations. https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/etd/8846

Riordan, Rick. Percy Jackson and the Olympians, Book One: The Lightning Thief. Hyperion,
   2006.

Smythe, Rachel. Lore Olympus. Del Rey, 2021.

Xidakis, Ioannis. 2022. Neomythology: A New Religious Mythology. Religions 13: 536. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13060536

APPENDIX: CREATIVE ARTIFACT

Figure A.1: Helen of Troy.

Helen of Troy (*Figure A.2*) is largely a romanticized figure throughout time. Perhaps the

most famous quote from *Dr. Faustus* is the most well-known one; "Was this the face that

launch'd a thousand ships, and burnt the topless towers of Ilium--Sweet Helen, make me

immortal with a kiss." (Marlowe, Dr. Faustus). In the sixteenth century, she was still as

romanticized a figure as ever – "a woman who is dangerously attractive, and whose desirability

has devastating consequences" (Haywood 66).

Modern representations and adaptions of Helen trend more towards the traditional rather than the feminist perspective, as reflected in movies where Helen is often portrayed as a tragic, romantic character, the terrible beauty described in Homer's Illiad. Indeed, from the western feminist perspective, she is seen as a tragic character who has suffered the consequences of a bloody war. Rarely had she been portrayed in a sympathetic light throughout history; until this point, Helen of Troy was a voiceless character.

The Helen of Harper Haynes' novel, *A Thousand Ships*, is far different than that of the Iliad. The emphasis on female suffering, as "men lost their lives (but) the women lost everything else" (Haynes 33). In this illustration, the combination of perspectives of Helen as a beautiful woman, lounging in fine clothes, and of Helen as a victim of war, with a sad expression while a thousand ships approach on the horizon is illuminated (Figure A.1). Yet similarly to the portrayal of Helen in the past, she appears to be retrospectively "immersed in her own interior life" while failing to meet the viewer's gaze (Haywood 63).

Figure A.2: Medusa.

The classical reception and study of Medusa (*Figure A.2*) is complex. Medusa, for quite some time, had been nothing more than Athena's priestess punished for infidelity. Yet, in more modern texts, and in more research of the subject, she is seen as the embodiment of female rage; the protector of women; the victim of assault. In some modern sources, she is described as an evil gorgon as in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series; yet, in the end of this book, she still punishes the male gaze by turning his abusive stepfather into stone. Feminist scholars have equated Medusa's stare turning men into stone allowed the gorgon to protect herself from tragedy and punish the male gaze. Never again could Medusa be assaulted, and the gaze of stone had been interpreted as a gift given to her by the goddess Athena.

The *Iliad* mentioned the head of Medusa was used on shields to scare enemies during war. Originally, Medusa was no woman, only a gorgon – destined to be slayed by the hero

Perseus. However, in *Metamorphoses* by Ovid, the origins of Medusa as a beautiful priestess were presented which is where the story of Medusa's status as a priestess of Athena originated.

This illustration represents Medusa as a powerful figure, reclining in her garden of statues, completely unfazed and seemingly indifferent to the dead men behind her as she gazes upon the viewer. A primarily black and red color palette brings in both the horrifying and powerful aspects of Medusa that is commonly seen in modern media.
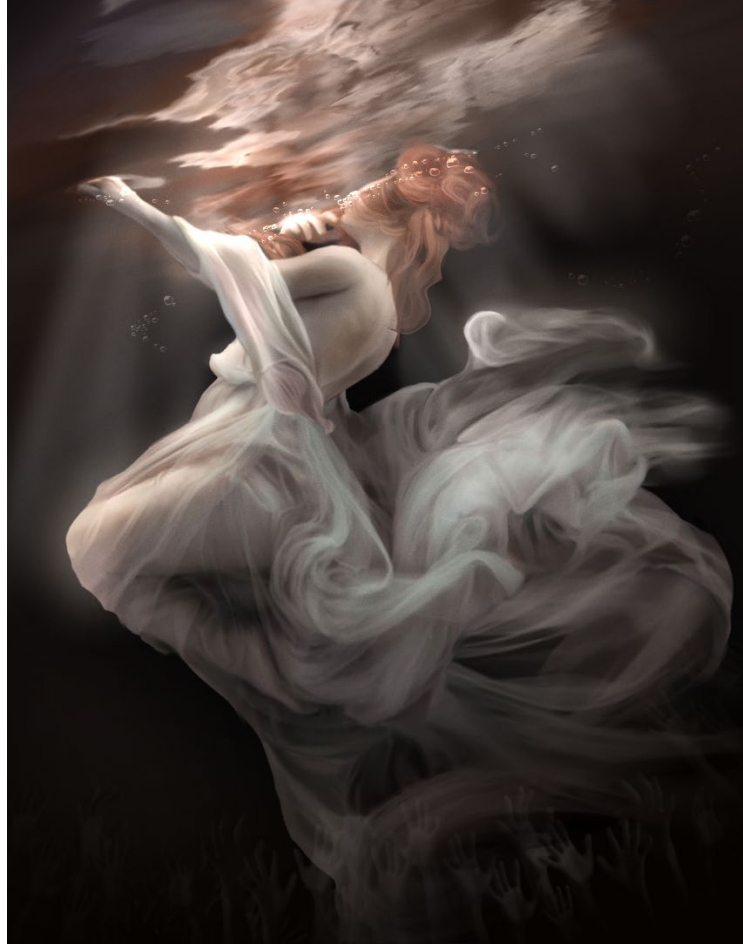
Figure A.3: Persephone.

The goddess Persephone (*Figure A.3*) was a tragic character throughout antiquity, who was the main character of the origin of the seasons. Persephone, the goddess of the spring, was kidnapped by Hades after Zeus gave him permission to take her as his wife. After kidnapping her and bringing her to the underworld, Persephone ate pomegranate seeds which sealed her fate. After working out a deal, Persephone would be allowed to return to the surface for six months but would have to return to Hades for the other half of the year. So great was Demeter's grief at losing her daughter that the bountiful harvest of the summer soured into fall, then into winter.

Modern adaptations seem to follow the same thread of romanticizing the relationship between Hades and Persephone. Had Persephone been stolen by Hades, or was the goddess

willingly escaping her overbearing mother? The romanticized relationship between the goddess of the Spring and her kidnapper, Hades, has led to many modern spin-offs of the myth.

Her popularity as a character has made her story one of the most well-known myths. Western versions of this myth represent Persephone in two aspects: the goddess of the spring, and the queen of Hades. The juxtaposition of these two aspects is portrayed in this illustration. Persephone, the goddess of the spring, falls from the warm and inviting earth and is slowly falling into the black depths of the underworld. Her hesitation can be interpreted in two different ways; is she hesitating to return to Hades, and filled with grief of leaving her mother Demeter? Or is she simply saying goodbye to the surface world, ready to cast aside her title as the goddess of spring and become the queen of the underworld?
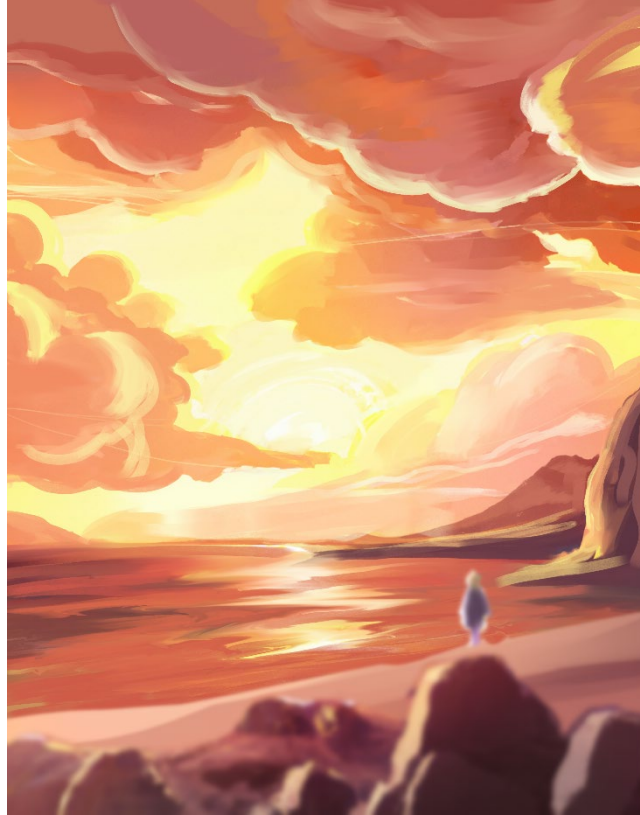
Figure A.4: Achilles.

Perhaps the most famous example of queer reception of mythology lies in the myth of Achilles and Patroclus. After Patroclus donned Achilles' armor and led the Myrmidons into battle all the way to the walls of Troy, he was mistaken for Achilles and died in the fight. "Such spectacular expressions of love are difficult to match anywhere in literature" (Butler 25).

Although this story is beloved by romantics, it has many critics. There are some who view the interpretation of the pair as lovers as an obstruction of the true intentions behind Homer's words; some believe that, with no explicit mentions of love or sexuality in the Iliad, they were nothing more than close friends. The assumption that sex and sexuality is what equates people to lovers is a surface-level understanding, an understanding that Homer should be read literally.

Queerness in the past and queerness of modern time is entirely different. It is difficult to compare the Achilles and Patroclus of the Iliad, knowing their historical context, with the modern Achilles and Patroclus of today. Aligning the lens of classical reception studies with that of queer history reveals "the proper study of Greek sexuality must begin by rejecting much of its nineteenth- and twentieth-century reception and recognizing that modern homosexuality and ancient pederasty … have nothing to do with one another" (Butler 33). In truth, many queer writers who contribute to pop culture "looked back as a way to look forward" and apply characters of classical mythology to their own beliefs and emotions (Butler 38).

Why is mythology such a popular theme? In this illustration, Achilles gazes at the wine dark sea before him; "wine dark", the color that the blind poet saw – the color that all the authors that became Homer saw – the word that inexplicably described the color of the red or desaturated or dark ocean. Mythology explains the unexplainable, what we cannot put into words.