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Greek and Roman Myth

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28 April, 2021

### Mythic Reincarnations Journal

- "The Cult of Dionysus" by The Orion Experience, "Starman" by David Bowie, "Emasculate" by Dorian Electra, and "The Phoenix" by Fall Out Boy
  - Each of these songs draws on Classical mythology to various degrees, with the most overt being "The Cult of Dionysus," which extols "wine and women and wonderful vices" and instructs the listener to "get mischeivous and polyamorous." Other lyrics include references to gods, nymphs, and cultic religions. The song is even by a band named after the hero Orion. This seems to be a case of conscious, direct borrowing, as the song is explicitly about the mythology.
  - "Starman" includes the line "[The Starman] would like to come and meet us, but he thinks he'd blow our mind," which I see as a reference to the story of Zeus and Semele, wherein Semele, a human lover of Zeus and Dionysus' mother, begs his to show her his true form, but when he does so, she is overwhelmed and dies. I would guess that this is a conscious but indirect reincarnation, as the connection is not made explicit but seems genuine. The effect is that the listener associates the Starman with power and divinity.
  - "Emasculate" does not contain any specific references to Classical mythology, but it is about the experience of being literally and figuratively emasculated, which is a theme that appears in the story of Kronos and Ouranos, *The Odyssey*, and others. It is unlikely that this reference is direct, intentional, or conscious, especially because the concept of emasculation is not unique to the Classical tradition. However, the theme of emasculation, particularly in conjunction with the animal imagery in the opening lines "I got the strength of an ox / I got the speed of a fox," gives the song a mythic feeling.

- The only aspect of "The Phoenix" that draws on Classical mythology is the phoenix itself, which is referenced in the chorus with the repeated line "I'll raise you like a phoenix." I doubt that this is a direct reference, as the idea of the phoenix has drifted into mainstream American public consciousness, but I believe that the phoenix originated in, or is at least referenced in classical mythology. I could see it being intentional or not. The song as a whole is not as deep or nuanced as I think the band and their listeners think it is, and the phoenix reference heightens the extent to which listeners could see it as deep and nuanced.
- *Iphigénie en Aulide* by CW Gluck; *The Planets Suite* by Gustav Holst
  - *Iphigénie en Aulide* is an opera about the sacrifice of Iphigenia in Aulis by her father Agamemnon to appease Artemis as the Greeks travel to Troy to fight the Trojan War. This is obviously a case of direct, conscious borrowing, as it concerns the original characters and story themselves, as opposed to motifs or themes. The opera is an example of Western enlightenment-era art drawing heavily on Classical thought and stories and places the origin of the opera firmly in Europe.
  - *The Planets* is an orchestral suite wherein each movement represents a planet and the character of the Roman god it was named after. For instance, the movement "Mars, Bringer of War" is chaotic and menacing. This is a conscious borrowing, as the name of each movement directly references the domain of the god it is associated with. However, I think that this could be a case of both direct and indirect borrowing, as it is unclear if the practice of astrology, which borrows directly from classical mythology, is an influence beyond the names of the planets. The variety of gods in the pantheon and therefore within the suite has the effect of making each movement noticeably different, which is exciting but somewhat incoherent.

- Minecraft's Nether

- The Nether, a dimension in the video game Minecraft comparable to Hell contains a number of elements that have parallels to Hades, if not direct influence. Among them are deadly rivers of lava; an abundance of mineral resources such as gold, netherite, and quartz; presence of the dead in the form of zombified piglins and hoglins, skeletons, etc; a general feeling of apathy from the residents (most animals leave the player alone until the player attacks); and the use of fire to open a portal to the dimension. I think that some of these elements are conscious and some are not, and that some are direct and some are not. For instance, I think that the abundance of minerals is direct and conscious because it is so prevalent in understandings of Hades but absent in other common understandings of Hell or the Underworld in contemporary Western thought (as far as I know). However, because much of Christian thought conceptualizes Hell as firey, I would guess that the lava rivers and use of fire in opening the portal are indirect and unconscious. Minecraft is a light fantasy game that draws on many folkloric traditions as well as supernatural elements of its own invention, and the references to Classical mythology in the Nether reinforce this.

- *The Truman Show*

- I watched *The Truman Show* for the first time last week and I was struck by similarities between it and *Oedipus the King*, particularly in the heavy use of dramatic irony in the first act. In both shows the audience and other characters are aware of a fundamental fact of the protagonist's life that the protagonist is not aware of and goes through a process of discovery to find out. I see this as a direct, conscious reference because this use of dramatic irony is relatively uncommon in contemporary American culture. However, I would not have recognized this as a reference to Classical mythology at all if I had not read *Oedipus the King* because it has less to do with content than the structure of the

story, so I think it was not intended to be overt, and the effect for most viewers is probably just a new way of telling a story than a flavor of Classical mythology.