LOVE IS A CUNNING WEAVER: MYTHS, SEXUALITY, AND THE MODERN WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

“Love is a cunning weaver of fantasies and fables,” is a saying popularly attributed to the Greek poet Sappho; although she never wrote this exact phrase, she did use weaving metaphors to describe both Socrates (fr 47 Campbell) and Aphrodite (fr 1 Campbell). Her contributions to poetry and, due to her association with female homosexual desire, queer theory act as the basis of several integral aspects of this thesis. Identifying love as a force which creates fantasies and fables is not only a striking metaphor, but an accurate one. Affection, relationships, sexuality and other aspects of life which fall under “love” are powerful forces which shape individuals and entire cultures. Love itself has transformed throughout time and between countries—from an anthropomorphic embodiment of sexual desire (Eros) to an ambiguous yet intimate relationship between people. Thus, a thesis which explores how two distinctly different time periods and cultures constructed sexuality and gender exemplifies the concept of love as a creative force.

Love is a Cunning Weaver: Myths, Sexuality, and the Modern World explores the relationship between the modern and ancient worlds by analyzing the depiction of queer and female characters in Greco-Roman mythology. That relationship is illuminated and defined by the modern individual’s tendency to apply contemporaneous narratives to myths of the ancient world in order to understand them. The aforementioned queer and female characters are introduced in their original contexts based on the most popular written traditions of the myths in which they appear. They are then broken down through a series of interviews with current (or recently graduated) college students. Finally, the
narrative established in the introduction of each chapter is subverted through a creative piece.

All of the mythological introductions are paraphrased specifically from or retold based on the plots of original texts, including Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and *Heroïdes*, Apollonius Rhodus’ *Argonautica*, Apollodorus’ *Bibliotheca*, amongst several other works. Specific citations are included within each chapter. In addition to the discussion of the original written texts of the myths, the introductions also include examples of the narratives from the modern world.

The questions I asked during the interviews were meant to encourage the interviewees to think critically about how and where they see the plotlines, characters and themes of specific myths within the modern world—in popular media, in the news, in politics, in the treatment of marginalized peoples, anywhere. Although I constructed the questions using proper oral history methodology, some of the questions unintentionally led the interviewees to frame a character in a way they would not naturally have done so. The interviews were all conducted online; the interviewees were assigned a myth, provided links to anthologized versions of their assigned myth, and then asked to answer the questions presented.

The individuals I interviewed were not experts in history, the classical world, or mythology, and I did not expect or want them to be experts. Regardless, many of the answers I received were unexpected. The interviewees viewed the characters in ways I had never thought they would. They recontextualized the characters, plotlines and themes of the original myths using modern schemas. I later realized that I had done the same in
the questions I asked. Both the interviewees and I assigned the label of “queer” to male characters who engaged in pederastic relationships despite “queerness” being a relatively recent academic and cultural category. The interviewees and I also applied the modern concept of rape and bodily autonomy to female characters in mythology; we saw current narratives regarding victims and survivors of sexual assault in the stories of characters created in a culture with very different concepts of sexual assault.

As important as the knowledge and wisdom brought by the people who were interviewed are the people themselves: Rachel Coury, George Curfman, Ashley Duchaine, Adilson Gonzalez, Jon Martin, Kolton Nay, Mads O’Brien, Michelle Olson, Kripa Shrestha, Emils Sietins, Cynthia Washabaugh, Cole Wojdacz.

Those interviewed represent four different countries: Latvia, Mexico, Nepal, and the United States. Of the twelve individuals interviewed, seven are women, three are men, and two are gender nonconforming; two are lesbians, three are bisexual, two are gay, two are queer, and three are heterosexual; their ages range from twenty to twenty eight.

Each interview was lightly edited for grammar and syntax. Where I have edited for clarity, I attempted to ensure that the meaning remained unchanged.

The interviews often inspired the creative pieces to follow. Each, in some way, subverts the original narrative in a way which reflects contemporary concerns and perspectives. The interviews consisted of direct comparisons while the creative pieces were generally more subtle in their execution, although some were particularly obvious. Several of the creative pieces were directly inspired by interviews—like the piece about
Hera and the interview by Rachel Coury—while other pieces centered on the general tone of the interview—such as Clytemnestra’s piece and the interview by Michelle Olson.

The creative pieces are each a different kind of poetry—sonnets, Sapphic, sentence poems, haiku, pantoum, free form, prose poetry—and each style was carefully selected to create a tone and rhythm for the piece. Some of the pieces, such as the one focusing on Scylla and Charybdis, were inspired by other poetic works. Each piece of poetry is accompanied by an explanation of the style and acknowledgments of important references or inspirations for the piece.

Through several modes of exploration—research, interviews, and the creation of new pieces—I have explored and hopefully illuminated the relationship between the ancient and modern worlds, a key aspect of which is the tendency of moderns to recontextualize ancient myth using familiar schemas and narrative patterns.
MORTAL WOMEN

Gender roles in the ancient world were strictly enforced. Individuals who did not follow societal norms—like Clytemnestra or Medea (who murdered her own children to obtain revenge against Jason, the father of those children)—were ostracized and demonized. Mortal women who obtained too much power in myths were used as examples to display what would happen to women in the “real” world should they attempt the same. Literature, folktales, myths and other forms of narrative traditions always have a purpose. I propose that many of the myths involving mortal women either caution women from seeking power by displaying how their lives could be ruined by doing so or establish and maintain a woman’s lack of power and agency in the ancient world.

Women in Athens inhabited the private sphere, the world of domesticity. They served primary functions in both the home and in religion—which could gain them public notice if they were a priestess—but their contribution to society was frequently overlooked because women were unable to participate in politics and political affairs (Martin, 172). Women’s most important contributions to the public sphere included bearing and raising legitimate heirs to important figures, acting as priestesses to gods in the pantheon, and managing land. Although they could own land, their ability to do with it what they wished was limited compared to a man’s freedom, and a woman had to go through several more steps to legally attain land than a man.

Women for the most part were segregated from unfamiliar men and from people of socioeconomic classes other than their own. Thus, spaces within homes were
designated specifically for women, and men were unable to gain access to those spaces (Martin, 174). In the modern world, homes typically do not have a “woman’s space.” Instead, there is an emphasis on a woman’s body as her place of domain. In contemporary culture, an invasion of a woman’s bodily autonomy—such as sexual or physical assault—violates social and cultural norms. Forced sexual attention, which appears in several of the myths explicated within the next three sections, was not nearly as stigmatized in the ancient world as it is now. Conversely, women are now able to interact with people of all social classes and genders more freely (at least in most Western societies).

The characters included within this section are Clytemnestra, Eurydice, and Daphne and Io. Although Daphne and Io are not mortal women, as they were nymphs, they have been included with the mortal female characters for some distinct reasons. Their narratives more closely match those of the mortals than those of the goddesses. Daphne and Io share a lack of autonomy and lack of control over their own situations similar to that of Clytemnestra and Eurydice. Clytemnestra has a significant amount of agency, but her life events are undoubtedly controlled by the men around her, even after she murders her husband, Agamemnon.
CLYTEMNESTRA

INTRODUCTION

Clytemnestra was born from an egg produced by her mother, Leda. Leda was yet another victim of Zeus’ sexual appetite. He swooped down as a swan and impregnated her. However, Clytemnestra was not the daughter of Zeus and Leda; she was the daughter of Leda and her husband, Tyndareus. For Leda produced two eggs, each of which contained two children. Clytemnestra was born from the egg fathered by Tyndareus.

Her life never became any less strange. Two different men are typically named as her first husband: either the King of Lydia or the King of Pisa. Either way, her first husband was murdered by Agamemnon, King of Mycenae, in order for him to make her his wife.

Part way through their marriage, Agamemnon was called away to lead the Greek army in a quest to regain the honor of his brother, Menelaus, whose wife was abducted (perhaps with her own consent) by Paris to Troy. Before Agamemnon left, a priest informed him that the only way to gain favorable winds for their travel to Troy was to sacrifice his and Clytemnestra’s daughter, Iphigenia. He did so and was granted smooth travel.

Aeschylus’ trilogy Oresteia, named for Clytemnestra and Agamemnon’s son Orestes, begins shortly before Agamemnon returns from the Trojan War, which lasted 10 years. While Agamemnon was off at war, Clytemnestra was left to rule. Some sources, all of which are far more recent than Oresteia (including the play Klytemnestra by Ilse Langner), subvert the original narrative by claiming that Clytemnestra turned Mycenae
into a land free of the burdens of the patriarchy and war. While Clytemnestra certainly did make some changes in *Oresteia*, most of her decisions were by no means depicted as positive. She took on a lover—Aegisthus—and together they planned to usurp Agamemnon’s power once he returned.

Agamemnon, however, returned with a lover of his own: Cassandra, a prophet from Troy. She foresaw her own death in addition to Agamemnon’s death, but because she was cursed by Apollo for denying his advances, not a single individual in the world believed her prophecies. Both she and Agamemnon were murdered by Clytemnestra and/or Aegisthus in some accounts. The two ruled Mycenae for years afterwards.

In the second play of the *Oresteia*, Clytemnestra and Agamemnon’s son Orestes sought revenge against her for killing his father. It was a son’s duty to avenge his father’s death. He succeeded in doing so and in the third play was tried for murdering his mother Clytemnestra’s weapon of choice when she murdered Agamemnon was either a sword or an axe, based on known written traditions of the myth and their contemporaneous iconography. One particular point of interest in the debate is the connection between Clytemnestra’s first husband and her weapon of choice (Prag, 244). If a scholar follows the tradition stating that her first husband was King of Lydia, then the axe would bring her character arc full circle; in Plutarch’s *Moralia: The Greek Questions* (Question 45), he describes how the rulers of Lydia come into possession of the axe of Hippolyte, the queen of the Amazons.

Although the discourse surrounding Clytemnestra’s weapon is fascinating, I prefer to imagine her using an axe. It seems to fit her typical characterization more
accurately—random spurts of violence, a thirst for vengeance, and an unrivaled pettiness. Using her dead first husband’s axe to kill her cheating murderer of a second husband not only makes sense for her as a character, but also makes Agamemnon’s death slightly more satisfying.

Of course, people in the ancient world would not have seen Clytemnestra as a hero in the same way modern person might when examining all of the evidence against Agamemnon. He murdered her first husband, sacrificed her daughter, left for 10 years to fight in a seemingly unnecessary war, returned out of the blue with a new enslaved lover thus taking away any power she had gained, and generally made her life miserable. People educated in distinguishing the signs of an abusive relationship could certainly classify Agamemnon’s behavior as abusive; Clytemnestra’s behavior could be interpreted as that of a victim snapping after years of torture.

In her interview, Ashley Duchaine states, “Clytemnestra is a woman that has a great deal of power and uses that power to get what she desires, in this case her husband’s death. Women in western cultures have a great amount of personal autonomy, much like Clytemnestra shows; they act and think without needing to consider what would please their husbands. [. . .] As time has passed, the way an audience views Clytemnestra has changed.” Duchaine explains how a modern individual recontextualizes an ancient myth using modern schemas; she sees Clytemnestra as a far more positive character overall than people in the ancient world. Both she and Michelle Olson see her as a character who “freaked out individuals in the ancient world,” but is “a badass” to those in the modern world because of her shunning of traditional gender roles.
How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?

Ashley Duchaine: In the ancient world, there was a strong opinion about what made a woman virtuous. It was often ideal that women stayed at home and busied themselves with work such as weaving. When women strayed from such ideals is when they were essentially demonized regardless of the motivations that led them to stray from the traditional values. Clytemnestra went completely against gender roles at the time. She connived to not simply go against her husband but to murder him and take his kingdom for herself. As such she is depicted as an evil character; a woman that goes against all virtues a “good” woman should follow.

Michelle Olson: Clytemnestra is exactly [the kind of woman who] freaked out individuals in the ancient world. She was a female, but took on so many “manly” gender stereotypes that she was criticized for. In the ancient world, they were not used to women acting or dressing in such ways.

How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?

Ashley Duchaine: Clytemnestra reflects how in the modern world women do steer away from traditional gender roles. Women can be the head of a household or a
company. Clytemnestra is a woman that has a great deal of power and uses that power to get what she desires, in this case her husband’s death. Women in western cultures have a great amount of personal autonomy, much like Clytemnestra shows; they act and think without needing to consider what would please their husbands.

**Michelle Olson:** Clytemnestra is a total badass [who shows] how I feel women or queers should have the complete right to feel, dress, and act in today’s age without being stigmatized. She strays away from the status quo of what is expected of women, and I believe in today’s world we are working harder and harder to be more accepting of those personalities.

**How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media?**

**Have you seen similar storylines in modern television shows? Music? Movies? Magazines? Literature?**

**Ashley Duchaine:** Women can be villains instead of damsels in distress in books and TV shows; Cersei from the *Game of Thrones* series is a prime example and very similar to Clytemnestra. Cersei goes to any length to protect her children from what she considered a threat as well as going after those that have harmed her children with a vengeance. What is different between modern media and Clytemnestra is that there is not a tone of all women who are not housewives are evil.

**Michelle Olson:** Media in today’s context tends to push away women/queers like Clytemnestra in all forms unless it is an alternative source of media that is known to support LGTBQ community members.
Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?

Ashley Duchaine: For Clytemnestra it remains relevant because of how women’s roles have evolved over time. As time has passed the way an audience views Clytemnestra has changed. This gives audiences a chance to look at the myths with a different perspective than the people from which it originated.

Michelle Olson: Because as much as we like to think that our modern day culture is different than those of our history- history will always repeat itself. This is not discounting that in today’s age we haven’t made huge steps and efforts to change these norms but they are in no way gone and not going away. People are generally afraid of change and something unfamiliar.

What else do you think is important to say regarding this myth and the way it connects the ancient and modern worlds?

Ashley Duchaine: I think it is important to say that we cannot continue to use old stereotypes to judge women or queer individuals with. We should use these myths to remind us that we need to continue progressing with the way we view women and queer individuals. Women are not necessarily dangerous if their husbands are away for too long and queer individuals are not all helpless and effeminate or sexual predators.
Michelle Olson:  POWER TO THE WOMEN THAT ARE DIFFERENT AND DON’T LET OTHERS PULL THEM DOWN. Be comfortable in your own skin. You are a true goddess, Clytemnestra.

(Optional) If you were assigned two myths, what connection do you see between the two? Why do you think I gave you both?

Ashley Duchaine: I feel like they were both given because in ancient times one was viewed as unacceptable (Clytemnestra’s gender roles) and the other was acceptable (Zeus’s homosexual desires) whereas now they have shifted which is acceptable and which is not. I think I was given both because they both have to do with stereotyping a group of people that at the time were considered to be less important than men and still struggle today with such prejudices.
CREATIVE PIECE

Slice
Inspired by “Cell Block Tango” from Chicago

He had it coming.

He only had himself to blame.

If you’d have been there,
If you’d have seen it,
I bet you you would have done the same...

So I married this rich guy,
Agamemnon,
who promised me the world--
they always do.

He killed my first husband
Who promised the same.
And after a short period
of relatively unhappy marriage,
he left me
to fight a war over his brother’s whore wife.

She ran off with another guy.

It was obviously Agamemnon’s job to get her back.

Because that makes sense.

But before leaving, he sacrificed our daughter.

Murdered her for luck.

Because that makes even more sense.

Anyway, he left me in charge
of his kingdom during
the ten years he was gone,
so of course I made some changes:

Dusted the pottery,
changed the pattern of the curtains,
adopted his cousin,
Aegisthus, as a lover.

Normal, mundane things.
I thought Agamemnon had died.
I hoped Agamemnon had died fighting. 
At least that would have been respectable. 
Instead he traipsed back into my kingdom, 
reneged my decisions, 
and dragged a lunatic slut around with him 
by the shackle around her neck. 
He was proud of capturing her. 
Proud of keeping her. 
But I could not let him 
undo all the good I had done 
for my people-- 
well, the good I had done for myself. 
I suppose his plaything knew 
what I was going to do, 
but my idiot husband 
had never trusted a woman’s intuition. 
What a tragic loss. 
If he were still alive 
I suppose I would have 
Taught him a lesson 
Not to get in my way. 

Too bad he lost his head. 
Slice.
CREATIVE PIECE COMMENTARY

“Slice” follows the pattern of the stories recollected within the body of “Cell Block Tango” from the musical Chicago. Throughout the song, several different women explain how and why they were sent to jail. Most of the women were arrested for murdering a man with whom they were in love. They establish the setting, list the man’s misdeeds, and then end with a quick description of his death. Clytemnestra does the same within the body of this piece. She explains how she ended up married to Agamemnon, lists his numerous crimes, then cheerfully admits to chopping off his head.

Although Clytemnestra has a comparatively large amount of agency throughout the plays surrounding her character, she is ultimately killed by her own son as revenge for killing her husband. In this piece, she is given the last laugh before the narrative ends. She is left with the last words and is thus able to end up on top. Clytemnestra was not viewed as someone whose actions were valid in the ancient world; she was scorned for her masculine wish for power and prestige. Using this format, however, her actions not only seem reasonable, but they seem almost necessary.
EURYDICE

INTRODUCTION

The tragic love story between Eurydice and Orpheus comes predominantly from two radically different ancient authors: Ovid and Virgil. While both have the same plot overall, several important plot points have different causations in each.

Orpheus, a native of Thrace, was famous among Greeks for his skill with the lyre. The only aspect of life Orpheus was equally as passionate about as music was his wife, Eurydice. The two quickly and devotedly fell in love, but as in all great romances, tragedy struck, and Eurydice greeted her death. Orpheus, because he loved Eurydice so ardently, embarked on a feat only successfully completed by an elite group of epic heroes—amongst them Hercules, Aeneas, and Odysseus: *katabasis*, or a descent into the underworld (Bowra, 116).

Orpheus traveled through the underworld and begged Hades and Persephone to bring Eurydice’s shade back into the earthly plane, thus restoring her life. When the king and queen of the underworld were unconvinced, Orpheus revealed his lyre and played the sweetest music the gods had ever heard. In response, he was allowed to escort his wife’s shade back to earth. However, he was given one significant stipulation: he could not turn around and look at her until they had both fully left the underworld. As one could predict, Orpheus turned and glanced at his wife’s shade before they had exited the underworld, so Eurydice’s shade returned to the underworld. Years later, Eurydice and Orpheus are reunited after Orpheus’ death.
Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (10. 1-73) describes a more quintessentially Hellenistic tradition of the myth, in which Eurydice is killed by a snake whilst wandering through the woods with Naiads shortly after her wedding to Orpheus. Virgil’s *Georgic* (4. 454-503), contrastingly, depicts Eurydice being killed by a snake whilst being chased by Aristaeus, who pursued her romantically and sexually. This is not the only difference between the two texts, but it is the difference which illuminates significant aspects of the ancient world.

Whereas Ovid’s tale reinforced the connection between marriage and death in ancient texts, Vergil’s followed an attempt at a different ancient trope: rape. The modern English word “rape” etymologically connects to Latin’s *rapio*, which means “I seize or carry off”. Rape and sexual assault in the ancient world, which was considered an act of *hubris*, was defined more by social class than consent. In the modern world, sexual assault and sex are differentiated by the presence of consent regardless of social class. Only rape committed by mortal men was punishable, however; abduction or rape by a god was considered an honor regardless of the willingness of the abducted party (Lefkowitz, 328). As Cynthia Washabaugh states in her interview, “a woman’s role is to be affable to the desires of the man who charms her, whether she would actually consent [. . .] or not.”

Aristaeus’ pursuit of a married woman, although taboo and punishable, was also not a rare occurrence in ancient texts. Homer’s *Iliad* includes perhaps the most widely-circulated example of this plot device in Paris’ capture of Helen despite her marriage to Menelaus. Although Eurydice’s attempted rape did not result in a 10-year war as Helen’s
did, Eurydice’s resulted in her death, according to Virgil. While a modern individual might find Eurydice’s attempted rape an assault on her autonomy, an individual in the ancient world would probably see the attempt as insulting to Orpheus. Stealing a wife was stealing an important possession.

Washabaugh perceives Eurydice’s role in the myth as “an object Orpheus desires.” The treatment of a person—especially a woman—as an object is the definition of a concept called objectification, which Jon Martin explains in his interview. Feminist theory currently focuses significant attention on the sexual objectification of women in various sources of media—advertisements, film, television, magazines—as well as the intentions with which men view women (Nussbaum, 249). In a study conducted by Nathan A. Heflick and Jamie L. Goldenberg, people who evaluated Sarah Palin based on her appearance were less likely to vote in favor of the McCain-Palin ticket in the United States’ 2008 presidential election. The same treatment which did not allow Eurydice agency over her own life events hurt a modern individual’s presidential campaign.
INTERVIEW

How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?

Cynthia Washabaugh: In this story Eurydice is depicted simply as something Orpheus wants back. In other words, Eurydice is an object Orpheus desires, and that is what makes her important. The myth matters because according to legend, Orpheus is famous. He has the most amazing musical talent in all the world and he could have won the affections of any person, animal, or thing but he chose Eurydice. He chose her, however, by charming her with his music, so it is not necessarily true that if given her own voice and desire she would have chosen him. In this myth, a woman’s role is to be affable to the desires of the man who charms her, whether she would actually consent in her right mind or not. It’s important to distinguish that she is compliant only to one man, though, because directly after she is married, [in one version of the myth] Eurydice denies a man so hard she doesn’t even see a poisonous snake until she steps on it and dies—which means she finds it important to literally run from other men’s advances because she is married to someone. She cannot just say no and walk away. She has to run. It’s interesting that she dies though. It’s almost like she was being punished for having another man chase after her rather than the man who was causing the problem being punished—like this woman is somehow to blame for some guy’s romantic advances.
Eurydice is also shown as something so profoundly beautiful and desirable that the most famous musician in all the world literally cannot live without her. He chose the woman he wants, and when he cannot have her, he becomes inconsolable. This could be because of the idea that men should be able to have whatever they want no matter what the circumstance, and when they cannot have what they want, they have the right to make everyone miserable. It could also be because women are seen as so valuable and amazing that to lose a woman so young and perfect is a true and deep tragedy. It is safe to assume that it is because the man does not get what he wants, though. The role of women in the world is clearly shown, and they are not very well respected or thought highly of except in the case of their perceived beauty.

**Jon Martin:** Being well-versed in Greek mythology, I can say Eurydice’s story follows the typical pattern of myths. [Myths are often] about pain and feature tragic plotlines. It is about the lengths people will go to to regain a lost love, which is a common plotline for myths. I was not too shocked by it, because I was expecting the emotional turmoil.

**How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?**

**Cynthia Washabaugh:** The role of the female characters above is very indicative of the role of women today. It is clear in modern society that women are supposed to be sexy, easy to get, and silent in their plight. However, that role is shifting as more and more women and men challenge that opinion. It is apparent that people today have
significantly more respect for women and their choices. That may be scary because women still have major hurdles to get over before they can be equal to men but it’s still true that women have come a long way.

**Jon Martin:** Women are still seen the way they were in the ancient world, but instead of being dangerous towards men, they are objectified by men instead. Almost, like, men are taking back the power they never lost. Men are the primary objective, whether it’s killing them or allowing themselves to be “taken advantage of” in modern media.

**How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media?**

**Have you seen similar storylines in modern television shows? Music? Movies? Magazines? Literature?**

**Cynthia Washabaugh:** Story lines like the myths above are still very prevalent. From the “Twilight” series to just about every country song on the radio, women are subject to exactly the kind of input that tells them they should sit down and wait for a man to save them from their independent, supposedly lonely lifestyles. Even in everyday life on social media. It’s rare to scroll through Facebook or Twitter without seeing some abrasive comment about how women should stop being so bitchy, so bossy, so loud. It’s apparent that people are uncomfortable with all of the positive, empowering media that’s out there and society seems to still be very much on the side of caution when it comes to women’s rights.
**Jon Martin:** Orpheus and Eurydice is a little more applicable to our modern world, a little more mainstream. Except in our modern narratives, the hero always gets the girl, always saves the damsel in distress—unless the director is very artsy and has the leeway to stray from such a predictable plotline. Disney’s Hercules is a modern example of this trope. Hercules travels to the underworld and ends up in the pool of death in an attempt to save Meg. He does so and even becomes a god in the process—like a Pokemon evolution.

*Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?*

**Cynthia Washabaugh:** It’s clear to me that these ideas are still relevant because the people in power want them to be, or aren’t educated enough on these issues to see that they are still so engrained in society. It’s also because many people, women and men alike, don’t think women’s rights are even an issue. Women who are empowered and independent live that way and don’t allow societies’ opinions to really bother them and women who aren’t necessarily empowered enjoy the comforts and traditions of having a man take care of them. Then there are the activist groups that are calling for change, calling for more, that are getting shot down on both sides because so many people think everything is already perfect and many more don’t think there’s a problem to begin with.

**Jon Martin:** There are so many things that were relevant back then that are still relevant now—especially how myths portrayed women in general. In the past, women were viewed as something to be feared by men—like as temptresses and witches—
whereas now men have taken extra steps in order to strengthen their power over women and objectify them as sexual beings. Women and the womanly body were feared in the ancient world for the inherent power they held, and in the modern world, that power is taken away and given to men. For instance, common tropes like the femme fatale—which was also present in the ancient world in characters like Medusa—are currently used for the male gaze. We have taken these myths and themes and catered them to our own society. We oversexualize everything. We separate masculine and feminine objectives, whereas in the past they were more intertwined—the way they should be.

What else do you think is important to say regarding this myth and the way it connects the ancient and modern worlds?

Cynthia Washabaugh: This myth is important to today’s society because it represents how far we have come and how far we still have to go. The world today can say that we have made huge advances since these myths were created. For example, it’s now illegal in many parts of the world to do any of the things the characters did in these stories. Including raping, kidnapping, seducing with mind control or drugs, and murdering people. However, the methods of controlling women have not lessened, only changed. It is still likely for women to be subjected to objectification in many assorted ways and although it’s illegal thousands of women are victims of rape each year. It is evident that society today still has a long way to go when it comes to rectifying the damaging attitudes of ancient societies, but we’re growing and changing each day.
**Jon Martin:** Everything borrows from something, and our modern world borrows a lot from ancient cultures—especially the Roman world. Greece and Rome were both patriarchal and militaristic societies. Everyone has exposure to these ideas and these stories at some point in their lives—even if they live without technology under a rock. They give us new perspectives. We can realize things like, “Oh, people were a lot more free back then,” and similar epiphanies. These stories have an effect, especially on those who study them, by showing people what they want in their lives and helping them understand other people.

*(Optional) If you were assigned two myths, what connection do you see between the two? Why do you think I gave you both?*

**Cynthia Washabaugh:** The myths you gave me [Eurydice and Persephone] were about women being taken against their will in one way or another. The first seemed significantly more consensual but I still don’t think it really was. I’m not sure why you gave them to me. Perhaps because you know how much I’m into women’s rights or because I’m passionate about people understanding the differences between rape and consensual sex. Especially when it comes to the “gray” areas of it.

**Jon Martin:** They [Eurydice and Heracles and Hylas] are both tragic stories of loss and the length people will go to get the loved one they lost back. They are both stories about grieving and I appreciate that. I think you gave me them because they were very similar and one was primarily about male homosexual lovers, which I could relate to.
CREATIVE PIECE

*Sonnets of Eurydice and Orpheus*

A Trapped Songbird  
*From Orpheus to Eurydice*
To my beloved trapped beneath the ground,  
In Hades suff’ring with all other souls.  
I play my lyre, but she can hear no sound  
From the dark world that made her pay its tolls.  
So though I long for her to hear my voice,  
And sing with me in perfect harmony,  
I sadly cannot go and change the choice  
My awful body made unconsciously.  
Missing my wife with bitter sorrow and  
A desperation formerly unknown  
By anyone but most of all by man,  
Is punishment as great as crushing stone.  
I only want to hear she loves me still  
Despite the awful acts of my free will.

A Dead Man  
*From Eurydice to Orpheus*
I may be all alone beneath the ground,  
But I know that I’ve done all that I could—  
Unlike my prideful partner sitting ‘round  
Refusing to do what he really should.  
To think I loved a man who acts like this,  
Who writes me love sonnets once I am dead,  
A shade, a spirit one could hardly miss,  
Yet all I want is to collect his head.  
So groveling for forgiveness shan’t work  
My mind is made and it cannot be swayed  
From what I know about the living jerk  
Who haunts my death as though he holds a blade.  
I really want him to forget ‘bout me,  
as only after death could I be free.
A Loose Cannon

_From Orpheus to Eurydice_

I must admit I have no clue why you
Are acting so amiss, my darling wife.  
Perhaps you feel I have betrayed you--who
Has only brought light into my dark life.
I certainly regret you feel that way,
But you must see how this is not my fault.
You should have done what you were asked that day
To avoid this emotional assault.
It’s clear I am absolved of any guilt
Regarding this sad situation, dear,
And you must realize this world’s not built
For women wand’ring out of a man’s sphere.
Because of you I cannot find my voice.
I only wish you made a better choice.

A Rebuttal

_From Eurydice to Orpheus_

You act as though I chose to leave you there
When ‘tis your fault I rot beneath the ground.
So now I wish I was without a care,
As your whole nature knows no selfish bounds.
Although a mortal woman’s tongue should hold,
Refrain from slander, tarnish, taint, and stain,
I cannot help but speak the truth so bold
And say it’s obvious you have no brain.
A woman’s place is not beside a man--
Despite your grand delusions saying so--
And though I know it’s hard to understand,
There are so many things you do not know.
I hope this letter finds you in good shape,
For should you join me here, I would escape.
A Placating Gesture

*From Orpheus to Eurydice*

Good Gods, my dear, you’ve given me a fright.
To hear you say such things is truly odd,
And not to mention none of it is right.
It seems you think of me as quite the sod.
I still believe you are my one true love,
The woman brought to me by all the Fates.
My heart flutters like the wings of a dove,
For only you does it appreciate.
There is no need to be upset with me;
I only say what I believe is true.
It’s true and right that you and I can be
As we once were. I trust you know this, too.
’Tis only fair you forgive and forget,
For this tension’s grossly making me sweat.

A Demand for War or Peace

*From Eurydice to Orpheus*

I hope the tension drives you straight to hell.
Join Sisyphus and roll the stone. Have all
Who hear your cries ignore your screams and yells.
Perhaps you should join those who all get mauled
By memories, the past, and former friends
Whose lives you once destroyed without regret.
It’s funny how perception tends to bend
What I once thought was nothing near a threat.
And yet the drastic change in lens has let
Me realize how trapped I was in you.
Now freedom is mine in captivity--
No oxymoron ever was so true--
To death it seems I have proclivity.
And now to thee I must admit my heart
Has grown and changed while we have been apart.
A Demand for Neither and Both

From Orpheus to Eurydice

I sense your hesitance to dismiss me
Fully. I know you can’t deny our once
Great love, and when reminded, you will see
How you’re acting makes you look like a dunce.
But that’s okay, my dear, for you are not
Expected to be smart--you’re beautiful,
And that’s enough. No need for your free thought.
You’ve always been diligent, dutiful,
Obedient--what happened to the girl
Who thought the sun both rose and fell by my
Command? Who’d dance beneath the stars and twirl
Inside my arms? Who’d kiss me and then sigh?
I know she’s in you somewhere deep inside.
I wish she would come out and cease to hide.

A Call to Arms

From Eurydice to Orpheus

You’re not Apollo, Orpheus, so stop
This egotistic, immature babble.
I never could have thought you’d live atop
A pedestal so high above rabble.
You do not even see the the irony
Of your behavior—how tasteless and vile
Your speech is, loaded with hypocrisy.
It makes my stomach churn with rancid bile.
You switch between two personas quickly—
The vengeful, ranting scorned ex-lover, and
The tearful, doting man, sweet and sickly—
Both used by your manipulative hand
To try to guilt me into coming back.
But you’re abusive, and my will’s not slack.
An Attempt at Closure

From Orpheus to Eurydice
I see I cannot change your mind at all.
Beware your pride--it goes before the fall.

A Conclusion

From Eurydice to Orpheus
I used to hear you play your lyre and love it,
But now I’ll tell you where you can shove it.
CREATIVE PIECE COMMENTARY

“Sonnets of Eurydice and Orpheus” is a series of sonnets written back and forth as letters between Eurydice and her husband Orpheus after her “second” death. Sonnets were chosen specifically because of their common function as love poetry; this piece corrupts the association between sonnets and love by depicting two people who have fallen out of love attempting to communicate with one another.

The individual pieces follow the standard Shakespearean sonnet rhyme scheme (ABAB CDCDEFE FGG), and the series ends with two sets of rhyming couplets. The piece is purposefully created to reverse the objectification present within the original narrative and give Eurydice voice and agency.

In Shakespeare’s plays, the intelligent characters and protagonists frequently referenced classical characters and events. The antagonists or particularly dim characters would either fail to cite classics or cite them incorrectly. That same device is present with the “Sonnets of Eurydice and Orpheus,” although it functions differently because the myths being referenced are contemporaneous. Nevertheless, Eurydice references several other mythological characters or events—most notably Apollo and Sisyphus.

Apollo, mentioned in line 100, is one of the gods in the Greek pantheon. He is the god of several aspects of life, including prophecy and music. He is conflated in some traditions with Helios, the god who allows the sun to rise and fall (Fontenrose, 429). Eurydice thus insults not only Orpheus’ musical talent because of Apollo’s association with music, but also his ego by suggesting that he believes the sun rises and falls at his whim.
Sisyphus, mentioned in line 72, was a man who convinced Persephone to let him out of Hades and into the earthly realm in order to admonish his wife for not giving him a proper burial. However, he had asked her not to give him a proper burial so that he could come back and reinhabit his body—which he did. When he refused to return to the underworld, he was sent to Tartarus, the Greek version of the modern Christian hell. There he was forced to roll a huge boulder up a hill which then rolled back down the hill for eternity (Raffalovich, 87). Eurydice could very well not only be wishing Orpheus be condemned to Tartarus for eternity, but could also be expressing the exhausting and repetitive nature of their disagreements.
DAPHNE AND IO

INTRODUCTION

Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* details the transformations of hundreds of mythological figures—including those of Daphne and Io. Their stories are quite similar, for they are both pursued by gods, but there are some key differences.

Daphne’s story, or the part of her story which made her notable compared to other nymphs, began not with her but with Apollo and Eros (Greek)—or Phoebus and Cupid (Roman). Whilst Cupid was working with his bow, Phoebus, a proficient archer, approached and insulted Cupid’s prowess. In reply, Cupid took two arrows, shot one into Phoebus, and shot the other into Daphne. The sharp golden arrow shot into Phoebus inspired intense love and sexual attraction. The blunt lead arrow shot at Daphne dispelled love.

Thus, despite Daphne’s vow to remain a virgin forever, Phoebus pursued her relentlessly:

“‘O Nymph! O Daphne! I entreat thee stay, it is no enemy that follows thee—why, so the lamb leaps from the raging wolf, and from the lion runs the timid faun, and from the eagle flies the trembling dove, all hasten from their natural enemy but I alone pursue for my dear love.’ (Ovid *Met.* 1.504-510, More)

Just as Phoebus caught up to her, she prayed to her father Peneus, a river god. She asked that he transform her so that she might escape her attacker’s affections. Her prayer was answered, and she changed into an olive tree. Because his love for her had not faded even after her metamorphosis, Phoebus swore to wear the leaves of the tree in his hair, use the
wood in his quiver and lyre, and to make the Roman troops wear crowns of laurel after victory. Daphne’s tree became his symbol.

Io endured an even more pitiable fate, for she had to live with the consequences of Jupiter’s affections. After seeing Io visit her father Inachus, the god of a stream, Jupiter immediately began chasing the nymph. In order to hide his behavior from his jealous wife, Juno, he covered the area with fog.

Juno, “suspicious now, from oft detected amours of her spouse,” noticed her husband’s absence and correctly assumed just what—or who—he was doing (Ovid Met. 1.603, More). Before she could dispel the fog and reveal Jupiter raping Io, Jupiter changed Io into a beautiful cow. Although Jupiter claimed he had simply found the cow, Juno remained suspicious, and forced Argus, a 100-eyed creature, to watch over Io.

When Io realized what had happened to her, she became desolate. During the day, when Argus left her unchained, Io sought comfort from her father, who did not initially recognize her. To convince him of her identity, she wrote the story of her transformation in the sand with her hooves. After some time, Jupiter sent Mercury to the earth to defeat Argus. Mercury fought Argus and released her, and after wandering the earth followed by a Fury sent from Juno, she was eventually changed back into a human.

Emils Seitins, an interviewee, once again identifies the way in which a woman is treated by a god as objectification: “Women in ancient Greek mythology are used (sometimes literally) as objects to reflect and accent the wishes and inclinations of men, [shown by] Daphne [being] turned into a tree [and] Io [being] turned into a cow.” In Daphne and Io’s particular situations—unlike that of Eurydice—they are, as Seitins
points out, transformed into non-human things. “And of course in the end, the man
(Apollo in [Daphne’s] case) still ends up possessing her no matter her efforts to get
away,” Michelle Olson states. Daphne’s transformation from an objectified human into
an actual object changed the form of Apollo’s possession, but still allowed him to ‘come
out on top’.

Both Seitins and Olson also compare the relationships between Daphne, Io and
their respective suitors as abusive in nature. Olson states that, “So many women are in
unhealthy relationships that they tried to get out of but end up stuck in forever today. [. .
.] Io reminds me of that friend that lets a man rule their world.” Seitins compares the
relationships to those depicted within modern music, “where over-controlling men seem
to dominate lives of women.” The abusive partner in unhealthy relationships often uses
love as an excuse for their barbaric behavior. Rapists often use their victim’s level of
attractiveness or sexuality as an excuse for their behavior. In reality, neither crime is born
of affection for the other individual, but a desire for power similar to the insatiable desire
and lust inspired by Eros.

Seitin and Olson’s view of the pursuits of Daphne and Io is quite different from
how individuals in the ancient world perceived the situations; abduction of a mortal by a
god was typically welcomed (Lefkowitz, 327). Perhaps Daphne and Io’s situations were
perceived differently, as they were not mortal women, but the ultimate divine power of
those pursuing them remains.
INTERVIEW

*How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?*

**Michelle Olson:** Similar to today’s culture, Daphne was a great example of [women] having to hide themselves due to obsessive men in the ancient world. It shows that women were not expected to stick up for themselves when men were overbearing, but rather change themselves or hide. And of course in the end, the man (Apollo in her case) still ends up possessing her no matter her efforts to get away.

Io’s secret affair with Zeus shows how women tended to treat other women in the ancient times. She was so completely infatuated with Zeus that she didn’t take the time to think about how Zeus’s wife Hera would feel. She eventually figured out how Hera felt about it… but not in a nice, “sisterly” way.

**Emils Seities:** Concerning women – ancient Greece feels very much centered around men. Women in ancient Greek mythology are used (sometimes literally) as objects to reflect and accent the wishes and inclinations of men, [shown by] Daphne [being] turned into a tree [and] Io [being] turned into a cow.

*How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?*
Michelle Olson: So, so, so many women are in unhealthy relationships that they tried to get out of but end up stuck in forever today. That’s how I feel Daphne felt but she’s a tree, and women today just become a commodity to look at, similarly.

Io reminds me of that friend that lets a man rule their world, even if it means hurting another fellow woman along the way. This happens all the time in our modern world today.

Emils Seitins: In the modern world, we can still see every day how women’s bodies are being objectified - mostly in media and advertising. Women’s bodies are used as props to address heterosexual male desires in most of today’s advertising, TV shows, movies and songs.

How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media? Have you seen similar storylines in modern television shows? Music? Movies? Magazines? Literature?

Michelle Olson: The way Daphne’s life turned out is shown/recreated in almost all of the movies and TV shows I watch today that have to do with a man and woman in relationship. Seriously it’s sad and everyone knows it.

You see it on the cover of almost every gossip Hollywood magazine, “so and so cheated on so and so and so and so is pissed!” Not much has changed since the ancient Greek times.

Emils Seitins: Daphne and Io end up with over-controlling men – I hear this theme in many pop songs these days. E.g. Selena Gomez “Good for you”, Tove Lo
“Perfect disaster”. Movies – “Twilight”, etc. Where over-controlling men seem to dominate lives of women. Often our modern culture portrays women accepting and even inviting these men to dominate them.

**Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?**

**Michelle Olson:** Because as much as we like to think that our modern day culture is different than those of our history- history will always repeat itself. This is not discounting that in today’s age we haven’t made huge steps and efforts to change these norms but they are in no way gone and not going away. People are generally afraid of change and something unfamiliar.

**Emils Seitins:** I believe that there are just some themes in our human history that are immortal to age. This is the reason why we, in 21st century, find ancient Greek plays/myths still interesting. Queer relationships have existed in our world since day 1, maybe the wording of these kind of relationships have changed, however the human nature to be with someone and enjoy another person (be it the opposite sex or same sex) has been there all along.

**What else do you think is important to say regarding this myth and the way it connects the ancient and modern worlds?**
**Michelle Olson:** Women like Daphne have the purest intentions it seems, they just need a little more confidence of which I believe can be found in friendships, especially female friendships that empower each other.

We need to start learning from the old and the new that regardless of how madly in love you are with a man, you need to take it into context of whom you may be hurting behind the scenes.

*(Optional) If you were assigned two myths, what connection do you see between the two? Why do you think I gave you both?*

**Michelle Olson:** I feel like Daphne and lo are similar because they don’t stick up for themselves as much as they want too, and it’s hard for them and others to understand why. They both are in need of some serious woman empowerment to help them realize they shouldn’t be hidden or a trophy prize, they should feel healthy and happy in their relationships with the men in their lives.

**Emils Seitins:** As said before, the lives of the women in both of these stories are crucially affected by men, where both women, in the end are turned into un-human things (a tree and a cow). In both of these stories, women do not gain any victory – their story lines further establish the male characters.
CREATIVE PIECE

Her Legacy Prevails

Things begin as they always do for a woman
Pursued by a man she does not desire
Her legacy prevails as her body succumbs
Through the voice of the very man who destroyed her

Pursued by a man she did not desire
Daphne runs amongst the undergrowth
She heard the voice of the very man destined to destroy her
Jumping over logs, branches biting into her flesh
Wiping moisture off her face, trying to see

Daphne ran amongst the undergrowth
Praying to the Gods to be relieved
Jumped over logs, branches bit into her flesh
Hoping and knowing two different things

Prayed to the Gods to be relieved
How could she have foreseen this
Hoped and knew two different things
There is no way to prevent it

How could she foresee this
But she trips and tumbles to the ground
There was no way to prevent it
She lands on a bed of moss in a clearing

She tripped and tumbled to the ground
Chills cautiously pricks up her vertebrae
She landed on a bed of moss in a clearing
She is anything but in the clear

Chills cautiously pricked up her vertebrae
Footsteps crunching in the leaves behind her
She was anything but in the clear
The scent of dirt invades her nostrils

Footsteps crunched in the leaves behind her
Dread settles, solidifying in her stomach
The scent of dirt invaded her nostrils
Dry heaving, she wished could accept the inevitable

Io pushed through the oppressive fog
Desperate to escape what she knew was coming
Wiped moisture off her face, tried to see
But not able to notice how close he was getting

Desperate to escape what she knew was coming
Dread heavies her heart and clogs her throat
She chokes on the feeling

Dread heavied her heart and clogged her throat
Breath escapes her and she must stop
She choked on the feeling

Breath escaped her and she had to stop
Her lungs have no chance to recover
She collapsed to the ground and waited

She doesn’t have to wait long
Her lungs had no chance to recover
She rolled to her stomach

She rolled to her stomach
Tears burn tracks down her skin
Her body curled in on itself

She can sense his approach
Tears burned tracks down Io’s skin                Dread settled, solidified in Daphne’s stomach
The fog begins to fade                                       A bright light starts to shine
She could sense his approach  She wished she could accept the inevitable
                          It is him
The fog faded                                           The bright light became blinding
A sense of calm floods through her  A sense of urgency floods through her
She unfurls her body and waits             She forces her body to stand
                        It was him
A sense of calm flooded her                  A sense of urgency flooded her
This feels like the end                  This cannot be the end
She unfurled her body and waited         She forced her body to stand
                                      She is ready
This felt like the end                          This could not be the end
Her breathing slows, her muscles relax                  She braces herself, ready for impact
                                                She was ready
He comes to her and pulls her in an embrace         He comes to her, intending to hold her
Her breath slowed, her muscles relaxed                       She braced herself, ready for impact
She almost looks forward to what will happen          She looks forward to what will happen
He came to her and pulled her in an embrace            He came to her, intending to hold her
She surrenders to his kiss                         She kisses his face with her fist
                                      She almost looked forward to what would happen
She almost looked forward to what would happen          She looked forward to what would happen
His hand slides down her lower back                         He tries to encompass her
She surrendered to his kiss                                  She kissed his face with her fist
And from Olympus there comes a mighty roar                  And the chase begins anew
                                      He tried to encompass her
His hand slid down her lower back                          She does not let him have her
She whimpered loudly, her fear renewed                              And the chase began anew
And from Olympus came a mighty roar                          She runs faster than before, dodging trees
He uncaringly continues his ministrations                     She sends a prayer to any God who will listen
She whimpered loudly, her fear renewed                                      He pursued Daphne relentlessly
The fog returns, dense and claustrophobic                                The fog returned, dense and claustrophobic
He uncaringly continued his ministrations                             She did not let him have her
                                      She runs faster than before, dodging trees
She sends a prayer to any God who would listen
                                      A God listens

The Gods listen
Io ended up once again on the ground
As his wife swoops in from above
A God listened

Daphne ended up once again in a clearing
As her feet root into the ground
The Gods listened

She begins to change

As her feet rooted into the ground
Her arms lengthening and facing the sky

As his wife swooped in from above
Her feet changing to hooves and a tail sprouting

She began to change

He stands in shock and vows to love her form

He stands in shock and vows he did nothing

Her feet changed to hooves and a tail sprouted
Her arms lengthened and faced the sky

There she stands, forever transformed

He stood in shock and vowed he did nothing
He stood in shock and vowed to love her form

Pursued by man and destroyed by man

There she stood, forever transformed
Things end as they always do for a woman
Pursued and destroyed by man
Her legacy prevails as her body succumbs
CREATIVE PIECE COMMENTARY

Daphne and Io’s piece, “Her Legacy Prevails,” is a pantoum. The second and fourth line of each stanza is repeated as the first and third line of the following stanza, and the final stanza of the pantoum repeats the lines of the very first stanza. The repetition of lines reflects the anxiety each character feels as she is unwillingly pursued by a god as well as the cyclical nature of victimhood and abuse.

On the first page of the piece, Io’s narrative is on the left, and Daphne’s is on the right. Their narratives switch sides on the second page, switch back on the third, and then continue switching until the end. The side-switching was used to demonstrate both the similarities and differences between the tales. While Io seems to submit to the affection (although she still does not consent to the affection), Daphne remains unyielding until she is transformed into the tree.

The lines written in the middle apply to both characters’ stories. Those on the sides apply specifically to one character. For example, in the second last stanzas, Daphne is transformed into a tree and Io is transformed into a cow. Zeus claims he had nothing to do with the cow, and Apollo claims he will love the tree as he loved Daphne. The lines reflecting those events lie on opposite sides of the power. The lines describing the permanency of their changes and who exactly forced the change are in the middle, as they apply to both characters.
GODDESSES

Goddesses in Greco-Roman mythology subverted traditional gender narratives for mortals in certain respects, and in others, they further solidified gender roles. For instance, goddesses who actively pursued sexual relationships with mortal men were not an oddity; Aphrodite, Calypso, Circe, Medea, Eos, Thetis, and Demeter all initiated dalliances with human beings, and despite exhibiting characteristically predatory behavior, they were not considered to be violating gendered rules (Lefkowitz, 326). As celestial beings, these goddesses were given a sort of leeway in their behavior due to the inexorable power of the divine. Goddesses were immortal, eternal, formidable, and for the most part, they had autonomy not granted to mortal women.

Comparatively, the mortal women who acted as the active or pursuing partner in a sexual or romantic relationship in various myths were unsuccessful and punished for their actions. Clytemnestra, discussed on page 7, was ultimately killed by her own son after murdering her husband and seeking a new lover. She was clearly the dominant partner in the relationship, and she suffered for that position.

Goddesses did support some aspects of traditional femininity, however; one simply has to observe the aspects of life over which goddesses ruled to see their implicit acceptance of gender roles. The purposes of gods and goddesses are distinctly divided based on gender. Zeus, Poseidon and Hades are given huge swaths of land and power as the king of the divine, guardian of the sea, and ruler of the underworld, respectively. Other gods, such as Ares and Hephaistos, also inhabited traditionally masculine roles as the god of war and god of fire and metalwork, respectively.
Compare the purposes of gods to those of the goddesses: Hera, goddess of marriage; Aphrodite, goddess of love and sexuality; Hestia, goddess of the hearth. While the gods either owned or guarded domains as kings or acted as the patrons of pursuits involving physicality, fighting or aggression, the goddesses were patrons of more personal and relationship-based aspects of life.

Of course, some goddesses were patrons of more masculine pursuits—such as Athena, goddess of wisdom and war—and some gods were patrons of (what a modern audience might consider) more feminine pursuits—Apollo, god of music, prophecy, and poetry. Despite the overlap, each divine being remained clearly within their specific gender. Athena’s role in war was far different than Ares’ in that she represented the less bloody, less antagonistic and more logical aspects of war. Apollo’s affinity for music and poetry did not make those around him perceive him as effeminate in any way, for neither of those talents were necessarily associated with femininity in the ancient world.

Goddesses, although they had more autonomy and agency in myths than their mortal counterparts, were ultimately still at the mercy of male characters—the gods. In addition to the social pressure of fellow gods within myths themselves, goddesses’ portrayals were also affected heavily by the lens through which they were represented. The personal opinions of the author by whom the myth was being written had the potential to drastically change the characterization of the goddess. Homer, for instance, wrote Hera as a far pettier and irrational goddess than other authors—which is discussed further on page 59. The perspective of the author writing the myth could thus change whether the goddess had autonomy or faced oppression, whether a goddess was truly
distinguishable from a mortal woman, and to what extent a goddess is susceptible to the power of the gods around her.
PERSEPHONE

INTRODUCTION

Persephone’s abduction by Hades—frequently referred to as the Rape of Persephone due to a famous sculpture of the same name by Gian Lorenzo Bernini—has inspired significant discourse in modern scholarship based on how the events are recontextualized to fit modern schemas.

The abduction itself is told in great length in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, which was written about and for Persephone’s mother, Demeter. The hymn begins by explaining Persephone’s abduction by Hades, and how Zeus specifically gave his brother permission to take the young goddess. She had been walking through a field of flowers when the ground opened up and Hades snatched her.

Her mother, Demeter, who had been otherwise occupied frantically searched for her missing daughter and asked several gods if they knew her whereabouts. After being repeatedly denied answers and teaming up with Hekate, Helios finally told her of her daughter’s abduction and how Zeus had allowed it. In response, Demeter wrought havoc on the earth. She, the goddess of the harvest, refused to allow plants to grow. Life on earth was likened to existence in Hades—barren and aimless. The gods who resided in Olympus begged her to stop and offered her all the luxuries a goddess could want, but Demeter abstained not just from luxuries, but from basic necessities as well. She starved the mortals around her as well as herself so that she could get a glimpse of her daughter and assure her safety.
Hermes explained Demeter’s demands to Hades, but instead of following her requests exactly, Hades made it so that Persephone could not leave the underworld permanently. After telling her to go to her mother, he gave her the seeds of a pomegranate, which tied a part of her to the underworld forever.

When Persephone arrived on the earth to the joy and delight of Demeter, the plants which had previously dried out and the crops which had failed began to grow and bloom. Zeus proclaimed that she would spend one-third of the year—the winter months—in the underworld as queen, and the other two-thirds of the year with her mother. This is how Persephone and Demeter became associated with the seasons and as the bringers of the harvest.

Demeter was worshipped by the people of Eleusis, the Eleusinians, because of events which supposedly took place during Demeter and Persephone’s separation. Demeter fell in matronly love with the infant son of the queen, so she tried to immortalize the child by burning him in the flame of the hearth. However, the queen discovered and assumed Demeter, who was in disguise as a wet nurse, was trying to kill the prince. In her anger at having the child taken away from her, Demeter revealed herself to be a goddess and demanded the town build her a sanctuary. Those initiated into the cult dedicated to Demeter and Persephone believed they would face a better fate in the afterlife. They did not want to or try to evade death; they simply wished to exist in a state other than suffering after death.

According to some modern scholars, the rape of Persephone is—to oversimplify the matter—a “coming of age” myth, which depicts a girl transitioning into womanhood
through marriage and sexual intercourse (Lincoln, 227). She reached the age of fertility and physical maturity which denoted the ability for a girl to be married. Each of her parents has a drastically different perspective on how her life should continue; while Demeter wants to give her freedom—at least from Hades—Zeus plans her abduction and subsequent marriage to his brother. The father of a child was the parent who oversaw the socialization of children, including the arrangement of marriages to people of the proper social class. As Cynthia Washabaugh points out, “There is never a point where Persephone’s wants or needs are even acknowledged.” George Curfman agrees: “Persephone is treated like a tradeable commodity by Zeus and Hades. [. . .] Persephone is practically controlled by the men in her life: first her father; then her husband.”

While the aforementioned form of male domination is less common in modern Western culture, it still appears elsewhere in the world. Male domination of women does occur in other forms in Western culture, however; it appears mainly in the form of rape and sexual assault, which are further explicated in my discussion of Eurydice (page 17). Curfman notes that, “rather than being punished in the myth, Hades is humored by Zeus with a compromise. This seems unacceptable, but crimes against women, especially sexual assault, are still minimally punished by law on a regular basis. The crisis of sexual assault on college campuses is just one example of this issue.”
INTERVIEW

How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?

Cynthia Washabaugh: In the story of Persephone, Hades, the God of the Underworld, decides he is in love with this girl he never met. He is actually in lust with her, though, so he kidnaps her and “makes her is wife”. In other words, he forces her to marry him and rapes her. Although the order of the marriage and rape could be flipped, because in ancient times if a woman was raped, she had to marry her rapist.

The role of women in this myth is very clear: If a man wants to claim a woman for himself, all he has to do is devise a plan to steal her from her friends/family/world and force her to comply with his wishes. In this case Hades kidnaps Persephone, “makes her his wife” (rapes her), and then finds out his trick wasn’t really beneficial to his older brother so he lets her go. Before he lets her go he makes sure to still have the upper hand though. He makes it so she has to come back at least some of the time by making her eat food from the underworld. There is never a point where Persephone’s wants or needs are even acknowledged. It’s all about Hades and Zeus making plans and bargains with one another that benefit themselves and their respective realms of power.

Zeus needs Persephone to be on Earth because she and her mother make the Earth grow. Hades wants Persephone in the Underworld because she is his wife now. So they agree that Zeus gets her for 8 months and Hades gets her for 4 months. Persephone’s role
is to give her husband pleasure and to give Zeus spring and summer. Some versions of the myth do indicate that at first Persephone was very unhappy but after time went by she learned to love Hades (her captor). This indicates to people (men) that if you are persistent enough women will eventually give in to your advances and learn to love you. Again, this myth makes it clear that women exist to give men pleasure and company. Their physical appearance is literally all that is important in terms of giving men what they want.

George Curfman: In this myth, Persephone is treated like a tradeable commodity by Zeus and Hades. Zeus promises Persephone to Hades without consulting her, and Hades simply appears one day and abducts her. As a young woman, Persephone is practically controlled by the men in her life: first her father; then her husband. This form of male domination was common in the ancient world.

Additionally, the other female character of this myth, Demeter, is treated as a stereotype. In abandoning her duties as a goddess in order to search for her daughter, Demeter causes death and destruction among mortals. It is only the intervention of male gods that ends her search. This myth conforms to the attitudes that woman are overly emotional and not suited to action other than their assigned roles.

How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?

Cynthia Washabaugh: The role of the female characters above is very indicative of the role of women today. It is clear in modern society that women are supposed to be
sexy, easy to get, and silent in their plight. However, that role is shifting as more and more women and men challenge that opinion. It is apparent that people today have significantly more respect for women and their choices. That may be scary because women still have major hurdles to get over before they can be equal to men but it’s still true that women have come a long way.

**George Curfman:** The idea that women are subordinate to men and only suited to certain tasks still exists. However, a modern reading of the myth is likely to cast Demeter in a positive light. In searching for Persephone, she is the only character who takes decisive action. The motif of the parent who is willing to sacrifice anything for the safety of the child is a common heroic role in modern media.

_How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media?_


**Cynthia Washabaugh:** Story lines like the myths above are still very prevalent. From the “Twilight” series to just about every country song on the radio, women are subject to exactly the kind of input that tells them they should sit down and wait for a man to save them from their independent, supposedly lonely lifestyles. Even in everyday life on social media. It’s rare to scroll through Facebook or Twitter without seeing some abrasive comment about how women should stop being so bitchy, so bossy, so loud. It’s apparent that people are uncomfortable with all of the positive, empowering media that’s
out there and society seems to still be very much on the side of caution when it comes to women’s rights.

**George Curfman:** As stated above, the story of the parent searching for a disappeared child is fairly common in modern media. Often, however, the searcher is the father, rather than the mother (the films *Taken* and *Finding Nemo* are two examples on opposite sides of the spectrum of accessibility). Abductions of women are also all-too-common in real life, and by extension media that deal in facts.

*Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?*

**Cynthia Washabaugh:** It’s clear to me that these ideas are still relevant because the people in power want them to be, or aren’t educated enough on these issues to see that they are still so engrained in society. It’s also because many people, women and men alike, don’t think women’s rights are even an issue. Women who are empowered and independent live that way and don’t allow societies’ opinions to really bother them and women who aren’t necessarily empowered enjoy the comforts and traditions of having a man take care of them. Then there are the activist groups that are calling for change, calling for more, that are getting shot down on both sides because so many people think everything is already perfect and many more don’t think there’s a problem to begin with.

**George Curfman:** This myth has remained relevant because, despite the passage of a long time, the domination of women by men has remained a serious problem.
What else do you think is important to say regarding this myth and the way it connects the ancient and modern worlds?

Cynthia Washabaugh: This myth is important to today’s society because it represents how far we have come and how far we still have to go. The world today can say that we have made huge advances since these myths were created. For example, it’s now illegal in many parts of the world to do any of the things the characters did in these stories. Including raping, kidnapping, seducing with mind control or drugs, and murdering people. However, the methods of controlling women have not lessened, only changed. It is still likely for women to be subjected to objectification in many assorted ways and although it’s illegal thousands of women are victims of rape each year. It is evident that society today still has a long way to go when it comes to rectifying the damaging attitudes of ancient societies, but we’re growing and changing each day.

George Curfman: I think it is important to note that, rather than being punished in the myth, Hades is humored by Zeus with a compromise. This seems unacceptable, but crimes against women, especially sexual assault, are still minimally punished by law on a regular basis. The crisis of sexual assault on college campuses is just one example of this issue.

(Optional) If you were assigned two myths, what connection do you see between the two? Why do you think I gave you both?

Cynthia Washabaugh: The myths you gave me [Eurydice and Persephone] were about women being taken against their will in one way or another. The first seemed
significantly more consensual but I still don’t think it really was. I’m not sure why you gave them to me. Perhaps because you know how much I’m into women’s rights or because I’m passionate about people understanding the differences between rape and consensual sex. Especially when it comes to the “gray” areas of it.
CREATIVE PIECE

Come Springtime

Come Springtime
Darkness
Fades to
Light

She is returned
To the Earth
Where she belongs
From the underworld

As flowers bloom
The sky
Weeps, and so too does
The world she left behind
CREATIVE PIECE COMMENTARY

“Come Springtime” is meant to be read both forwards and backwards. Both the establishment of binaries like “darkness” and “light” in the first stanza and the “earth” and “underworld” in the second stanza as well as the possibility of reading the poem from either direction signifies the duality of Persephone as a goddess who brings spring and a goddess who watches over the dead.

Read from top to bottom, the poem discusses how the earth transitions into spring from winter when Persephone returns from the underworld. Read from bottom to top, the poem states how the underworld—perhaps more so Hades as an individual—misses Persephone when she leaves the underworld for spring. Each plane of existence—the underworld and the mortal realm—claims her as its own in line 7; each claims to be “where she belongs,” when she truly belongs in both places. She is strong enough of a goddess to rule fairly and effectively in two drastically different places.
HERA

INTRODUCTION

Hera is almost always characterized as jealous, irrational and overly sensitive. As the goddess of marriage and queen of the gods, she is inherently feminine and womanly—which is perhaps the main reason her characterization is rarely positive in nature. Whereas Zeus’ sexual appetite and constant dalliances are seen as befitting a god of such power, Hera’s wish to control him and reel in his behavior is viewed as unacceptable.

Despite being an incredibly powerful goddess, her power and competence are often trivialized in favor of presenting her more “womanly” [read: emotional and unnecessarily dramatic] nature.

During the wedding of Thetis and Peleus (recounted in Apollodorus’ *Biblotheca* (E3.2) and Ovid’s *Heroides* (16.51)), the goddess of discord, Eris, threw a golden apple into the crowd in order to get vengeance for not being invited. The apple declared it was meant “for the fairest one.” Three goddesses claimed the apple as their own: Hera, Aphrodite, and Athena. Zeus was asked to mediate, but instead of doing so, he recruited Paris, prince of Troy, to judge between them. Each goddess offered Paris a different bribe. Hera offered him power, land, and a position as a king. Athena offered him wisdom and enhanced skills in the ways of war. Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world: Helen, wife of Menelaus (previously mentioned in my discussion of Clytemnestra page 7). He chose Aphrodite because of his immediate infatuation with Helen.
Paris’ capture of Helen is what leads to the Trojan War. The myth of the Judgment of Paris seems to be a convenient way of blaming the Trojan War on the actions of three vain and squabbling goddesses instead of on the nonsensical and prideful behavior of mortal men. Reducing the goddesses, and Hera specifically, seem to be a deliberate attempt to undermine their immense power and undeniable competency. Conversely, the truly problematic behaviors of gods like Zeus are reframed as an acceptable—perhaps even heroic—aspect of masculinity.

One particularly dark example of Hera’s jealousy is her behavior towards Heracles throughout his life. Heracles was the result of yet another one of Zeus’ affairs, with a woman named Alcmene. When Heracles was just a child, Hera sent two snakes to kill him and his half-brother, fathered by Alcmene’s husband. Herakles quickly disposed of them with his incredible strength, but Hera did not give up.

During his adult life, Hera drove him into a fit of madness, during which he murdered his children and his wife, Megara. He had to complete twelve intense labors in order to be forgiven for his sins. Throughout his life, Hera sent him into several more fits of madness during which he killed friends and lovers. After years of adventures and several wives, Heracles was killed due to his third wife’s suspicion of infidelity—something Hera, ironically, hated more than anything.

The Judgment of Paris and Hera’s treatment of Heracles are just two examples of how Hera is utilized as a scapegoat or demonized in some way in order to make male characters more heroic.
An individual in the modern world is most likely going to be far more empathetic toward Hera’s plight than an individual from the ancient world. The constant criticism Hera received from ancient authors, paired with Zeus’ sexual deviancy, allow modern people to view her as a victim of oppression by men. Rachel Coury states, “I think Hera is in somewhat of a transitional stage between oppression and autonomy. She is oppressed because she is essentially in an abusive relationship with Zeus, to put it in simple terms. He uses her as a sex object, and betrays her by having affairs with multiple women. However, this does not take away from Hera’s strength and assertiveness in difficult situations. She lets her wrath be known when Zeus betrays her by punishing him and his lovers.” In that way, Hera is not only a character with which an individual can sympathize, but also becomes a kind of hero in her own right. She stands up against the power which attempts to hold her down (regardless of how ineffective her fighting tends to be).
INTERVIEW

How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?

Rachel Coury: In the ancient world I believe women were treated very differently than their male counterparts. Depending on the culture, they usually had very limited rights and were completely dependent on their husbands and/or their families because they were not able to own property or hold certain jobs that would enable them to make an adequate living. Men held all the power and control, and they held dominion over women. The character of Hera adheres to these norms in some aspects, and defies them other times. She holds a position of great power, Queen of the Gods, which is unlike any woman in ancient times. However, she is not respected by her husband, who tricks her by transforming into a cuckoo so she will hold him, leading him to transform back to original form to rape her. Zeus engages in sexual activities with other women such as Alcmene, Leto, Semele, and Lamia in order to assert his dominance and superiority over Hera. When she tricks or overpowers him and his other lovers, he becomes enraged that he has let his wife, a woman, embarrass him.

Cole Wojdacz: I thought that the depictions of Hera you provided me with mirrored the perception and role of women in a very interesting way. She was revered as a powerful and important goddess, a queen of the gods, but at the same time was portrayed as vengeful and vindictive.
How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?

Rachel Coury: In modern society women are still seen as inferior to men by many people. Equality has not been fully achieved. However, we are much more progressive than the past, and women have important rights that they did not have before such as suffrage and the right to own land. Unfortunately, women are objectified and sexualized very often in today’s society. This correlates to Hera’s misfortune when she is raped by Zeus. He continually sees her as an object, not thinking or caring about the consequences of his adulterous actions with other women. He uses her solely for his own benefits, primarily sexual pleasure.

In the modern world we see more women speaking out against male superiority and fighting for equality. I would equate Hera to a modern activist because she rebels against Zeus many times—drugging him in preparation for the gods to bind him to a couch, for example. She does not feel the need to adhere to societal norms; instead she asserts herself by engaging in devious acts against Zeus and his lovers when he betrays her. In modern society women are expected to have a certain calm demeanor. For example, Hillary Clinton has been criticized for appearing “angry” because women supposedly should not display that emotion. While researching Hera, I noticed she was referenced negatively when her personality was being discussed because she was outspoken, vengeful, and assertive. These qualities are not seen as being suitable for a female.
Cole Wojdacz: Hera was justified in her vengeful and vindictive personality since her husband raped [other women] and cheated on her. This mirrors the outcomes and implications of victim blaming I see in modern society.

*How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media?*


Rachel Coury: Again, I will use the example relating to Hillary Clinton. Hera is criticized and portrayed in a negative light. It is said that her anger, wrath, and violence make her less physically attractive, as if personality traits have the ability to physically alter one’s appearance. This is similar to criticisms of Hillary Clinton for yelling and being angry during presidential debates. However, when her male counterparts, particularly Donald Trump, are even more angry and verbally violent there is no criticism because it is “more natural” for men to be dominant and vehement.

Cole Wojdacz: Hera is present in many modern forms of media because so many modern forms of media depict mythological stories. Hera is significant in most of those mythological stories, so she is frequently depicted in modern media.

*Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?*

Rachel Coury: Regarding Hera, I think her character has remained relevant over the years because she possesses qualities from both ancient and modern times. She is an
example of a woman ahead of her time, shown through the power she has exerted multiple times over Zeus. She did not have a submissive bone in her body, which is what women “should” have according to ancient times and even modern times depending on who you ask. She did not let Zeus’s hurtful actions go unanswered. On the other hand, she did continue to stay with Zeus and be faithful to him no matter what. In modern times we might label the relationship between Zeus and Hera as manipulative, but Hera was desperate for Zeus’s love and support, so she never left him. This could also be because there was really no such thing as divorce or separation.

Cole Wojdacz: I think that they have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time because they have always been held in high reverence. They’ve been passed down from generation to generation with high regard. They are also easily adaptable into relevant modern stories to continue the passage [of the myth].

What else do you think is important to say regarding this myth and the way it connects the ancient and modern worlds?

Rachel Coury: I think Hera’s character is very important in serving as a connection between the ancient and modern worlds. As discussed earlier, women have been oppressed in the past, and today we still are, but not to the same degree in most cases. I think Hera is in somewhat of a transitional stage between oppression and autonomy. She is oppressed because she is essentially in an abusive relationship with Zeus, to put it in simple terms. He uses her as a sex object, and betrays her by having affairs with multiple women. However, this does not take away from Hera’s strength and
assertiveness in difficult situations. She lets her wrath be known when Zeus betrays her by punishing him and his lovers. She ties Alcimene’s legs together so she will not be able to have her baby, she uses her power to forbid Leto from having her baby on the mainland, and she turned Lamia into a monster, leading her to murder her own children. Hera asserts her dominance through revenge, and she is ahead of her time in this respect.
CREATIVE PIECE

_The Lost Campaign_

People do not like me—I know they do not—people can judge me for what I have done¹, no need to tell me, I am fully comfortable with who I am, what I stand for, and what I have always stood for², but people talk, and people believe fallacies, people believe me to be too emotional, too wrathful, too irrational, too spiteful, quarrelsome, and untrustworthy, but I do believe those pejoratives, instead of applying to me, actually apply to my dearest husband—although no one would ever compose a declamation regarding his faults, I still believe this to be true, and I will defend this position with concrete evidence of situations in which my love has acted a fool and perpetuated the characteristics associated with the wrong one of us, including a long list of timely affairs with individuals so unsuited for his status—both as a ruler and as a husband—as well as statements he has made both about me and in front of me to others of similar social status but never higher, as there is no higher status amongst immortals or mortals, for that matter, but nonetheless could characterize a defamation of a sort if I were someone likely to engage in libel or slander, which, contrary to public opinion, I am not liable to engage in, although I suppose I may dabble when I am particularly invested in a situation, for probably my worst quality is that I get very passionate about what I think is right³, and when I think something is right, I will fight until the end of my existence in order to rectify the wrong, and in the case I have previously presented, what is wrong are the actions of my great husband, and what is right is that I may assume his place, though I hope he never hears these words, for you do not walk away if you love someone, you help the person⁴, which is something few beings ever grow to understand, and in this instance, the best way to help is to take over, because my husband will never stop playing games, and although he will never recognize it, there’s a difference between fair game and playing games⁵, and you should all know, as I know, that I am undaunted in my quest⁶ to gain the loyalty of the gods and of the people in order to eliminate the disparity within my sweet husband’s misguided reign, and should I succeed, we will finally have the kind of stability and prosperity that is possible⁷, though many people reading this declaration of mine will doubt its sincerity, doubt my leadership as a goddess, doubt my stability, doubt my stamina and temperament, doubt my qualifications, consider my qualifications more damning than supportive, or see my loveable oaf of a husband’s infidelity as indicative of my ability to lead, for if I cannot keep a man, how could I keep a people, they demonize me and show me to be petty at best and cruel at worst, they depict me as unintelligent and unmoved by anything except that which directly affects me, they see me as quick tempered, a loose cannon, but too emotional to act upon it in ways beyond the trivial and pedestrian, they see me as someone who believes she has the power to create change but has no actual potential to do so, they believe I am the lowest of the
low, but such slander will never take me down, for *when they go low, we go high*, and though those words do hurt, they will never make me stop, they will never halt progress, they will never impede on the goodness and the kindness of the world, and though it *hurts*, *I will never stop believing that fighting for what is right is worth it—it is, it is worth it*—and I will continue to fight, continue to show up and come out, continue to mobilize, continue to do what my well-meaning husband has failed to do, and continue to remember that *it is often when night looks darkest, it is often before the fever breaks that one senses the gathering momentum for change, when one feels that resurrection of hope in the midst of despair and apathy*. 
CREATIVE PIECE ANALYSIS

“The Lost Campaign” is a sentence poem written as a stream of consciousness using elevated vocabulary and complicated (though ultimately incorrect) syntax. In it, Hera explains why she would make a greater ruler than her husband. She explicates his long list of faults, reveals her own humanity, and yet still proves her strong affection for Zeus.

The italicized sections are quotes from Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton:

1 on PBS NewsHour in 2014 (Willstein)
2 on PBS NewsHour in 2014 (Willstein)
3 during an episode of On the Record with Bob Costas in 2003 (Flaherty)
4 “Hillary Clinton Explains Why She Stayed” for LA Times (Miller)
5 “Hillary Clinton: The Fresh Air interview” (Fresh Air)
6 “Short Talk Shortcuts” (Behrens)
7 “The Hillary Doctrine” (Lemmon)
8 quoting First Lady Michelle Obama during second presidential debate (Dann)
9 during Hillary Clinton’s concession speech (Golshan)
10 during a speech for the NAACP in Minneapolis in 1995 (Purdum)

Using quotes from Clinton to establish Hera’s character was inspired by Rachel Coury’s interview; she compares the two brilliantly: “Hera is criticized and portrayed in a negative light. It is said that her anger, wrath, and violence make her less physically attractive, as if personality traits have the ability to physically alter one’s appearance."
This is similar to criticisms of Hillary Clinton for yelling and being angry during presidential debates. However, when her male counterparts, particularly Donald Trump, are even more angry and verbally violent there is no criticism because it is “more natural” for men to be dominant and vehement.”
ATHENA AND APHRODITE

INTRODUCTION

Aphrodite (Venus) and Athena are often presented as direct opposites, and in some ways, they are. Aphrodite is the goddess of love and sexual desire. She is feminine, alluring, sexually promiscuous, and emotional. Athena is the goddess of wisdom and war. She is an avowed virgin who focuses on tactics and logic.

Despite these fundamental differences, they shared notable similarities in that each goddess’ power was undermined by those around her—specifically by ancient authors like Homer (as previously explicated regarding Hera on page 59). Each goddess also acted as the saving grace for a mortal man; Venus guided Aeneas, hero of Virgil’s Aeneid and whose descendants founded Rome, and Athena guided Odysseus, the famed creator of the Trojan horse and hero of Homer’s Odyssey. Without Athena and Venus, neither epic hero would have survived their plights.

The way in which Aphrodite and Athena’s agency and autonomy is perceived has changed throughout time. In antiquity, each goddess was seen simply to be doing her duty—Venus as a mother and Athena as the goddess of wisdom. Early feminist scholars viewed the goddesses’ attachment to mortal men as a deficit to their character at worst and a way in which each was subservient to the patriarchy at best. Venus’ depiction in the Aeneid was particularly damning in the eyes of feminist scholars: “the patroness of wanton desire has changed into a colorless paragon of matronly respectability, shining only with reflected light as Aeneas’ mother and as the instrument of a benevolent destiny” (Anderson, 233). Venus and Athena’s love for mortal men was considered a weakness in
their character; the goddesses were not ‘strong female characters,’ and thus chess pieces of the patriarchy.

Modern scholarship—not focused on mythology itself but the depiction of female characters in all media sources—abandons the idea of ‘strong female characters’ (because of its implication that female characters are only useful if they are strong) and moves to push the idea of real, true female characters with complex backstories. Carina Chocano, in an Opinion Editorial for New York Times Magazine, argues that women do not “relate to [female characters] despite the fact that [they are] weak, we relate to [them] because [they are] weak.” Thus, Venus and Athena’s attachment to male mortal characters is actually a positive attribute of each; their love for Aeneas and Odysseus, respectively, gives their characters more dimension. They become more relatable, more likeable, perhaps even more attainable.

The complexity of Athena and Aphrodite as characters allows them to be perceived differently by individuals of different backgrounds; they lend themselves perfectly to being understood through drastically different lenses.

Kolton Nay, in his interview, states that, “Athena is a perfect example of a queer woman in ancient Greece, who repeatedly beats men off of her, [and] desires only to maintain the respect of her peers and to follow her own path. . .” Perceiving Athena as queer is a clear example of an individual applying a modern schema to a character from mythology. While no ancient peoples would have interpreted her as queer, it is easy to see why an individual in the modern world—like Nay—would view her as such. She could very well be a closeted queer woman who found it easier to abstain from sexual
intercourse all together instead of attempting to change or modify her culture’s views of women who have sex with women.

Her depictions as a goddess with similar attributes to those of a male—intellect and military prowess—could also be indicative of queerness. Athena could thus fit the modern stereotype of a “butch lesbian,” who denies femininity in favor of a more masculine appearance and countenance. Her masculinity is even more evident when compared to the almost hyper-femininity of Aphrodite, embodies the ideal of male heterosexual desire.

Kripa Shrestha’s perception of Athena and Aphrodite is unlike that of Nay’s. Shrestha, a Nepal native who prescribes to Hinduism, relates the Greco-Roman goddesses to those of her religion: “The depiction of Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty and desire, [ . . .] is a shapeless or abstract concept to me as those qualities are not personified by any one female figure in Hindu mythology, but is rather an implicit expectation for women. [ . . .] Similar to Athene, there is a Hindu goddess for wisdom, Saraswati, and every goddess is fierce and quick to expel her fury when angered and often depicted as participating and offering counsel in war. However, these qualities are particular only to goddesses and are rarely depicted of mortal women.” While Nay perceived Athena’s qualities to be similar to that of a modern queer individual, Shrestha viewed her characteristics as reminiscent of goddesses in the Hindu faith. Both Nay and Shrestha utilized the narratives and conventions with which they are familiar in order to better understand Athena and Aphrodite as characters.
INTERVIEW

How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?

Kolton Nay: Aphrodite seems to me like a perfect depiction of the male gaze on the women of ancient Greece. She is what men want women to be, in this society, and therefore the object of their desires. She is the goddess of love, desire, beauty, and fertility. A good woman was a fertile woman, a woman with a body deemed pleasurable to male eyes. Zeus may be a good stand-in for the male gaze in some ways, such as when he judges Athena, Aphrodite, and Hera to determine which is most deserving of the Golden Apple. However, Zeus ultimately gave this decision over to Prince Paris, another representative of the male gaze, to judge the women on their “fairness.” While Hera offers power, and Athena offers wisdom, it is Aphrodite whose attributes are desired most and valued most by Prince Paris and the society at large. Aphrodite was literally born of another god’s desire, as Uranus’s genitals were thrown into an ocean. We can see in ancient Greek architecture, literature, and art how the female body was seen as the ultimate portrait of beauty and objectivity. Aphrodite seems to me the illustration of this sentiment through her birth and life.

Athena is a fierce goddess who favors justice and battle, and who had no male lovers, but one female lover. It shows much of the ancient culture that Athena is depicted to be sexually assaulted by a god, yet he (Hephaistos) receives no punishment. Instead,
his seed is allowed to be born into a child, which Athena must raise in secret. The element of secrecy in her myths seem apt to how it must have been to be a queer person in the ancient world, especially then to desire a child. Despite Athena’s well-known commitment to remaining “a virgin,” she is often pursued by men, much like queer women must have been in that time due to the culture’s inability to comprehend their sexuality. As I understand it, lesbian relationships were probably quite common in ancient Greece because of the homosocial culture they were in. Homosexual relationships between adult men and young boys seemed to be openly accepted and understood, while lesbian sexual relations would have happened mostly in secret, behind closed doors. Athena is a perfect example of a queer woman in ancient Greece, who repeatedly beats men off of her, desires only to maintain the respect of her peers and to follow her own path, who desires a child but must keep him in secret, and who pursues love with another woman, but is ultimately let down by the relationship and lacks public approval and adequate options to find a new or suitable lover.

**Kripa Shrestha:** My belief about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world is largely influenced by my cultural background, which is Asiatic, specifically South Asian/Hindu. The “ancient world” to me is the Indian subcontinent. The depiction of Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty and desire, while not entirely alien to me given my exposure to Greek mythology, is a shapeless or abstract concept to me as those qualities are not personified by any one female figure in Hindu mythology, but is rather an implicit expectation for women. Women, in general, are expected to be kindly,
loving, beautiful and desirable in the ancient world but such qualities have never defined any single mortal woman or goddess.

The depiction of Aphrodite reflects what I hold true about the role of women in the ancient world, both mortals and goddesses, while that of Athene holds strictly only for goddesses.

The qualities of Athene, goddess of wisdom and war, are rather more on the forefront in Hindu mythology. Similar to Athene, there is a Hindu goddess for wisdom, Saraswati, and every goddess is fierce and quick to expel her fury when angered and often depicted as participating and offering counsel in war. However, these qualities are particular only to goddesses and are rarely depicted of mortal women. The qualities of Aphrodite seem to suffice of mortal women. Therefore, the depiction of Aphrodite reflects what I hold true about the role of women in the ancient world, both mortals and goddesses, while that of Athene holds strictly only for goddesses. As for queer individuals, the only quality of either Aphrodite or Athene that I associate in the ancient world, given their depiction in Hindu mythology, is wisdom.

How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?

Kolton Nay: The male gaze continues to perpetuate throughout history and firmly into the present. The trope of Aphrodite as a goddess of male desire and pleasure is now seen not only in modern art and literature, but is also spread throughout popular culture, intertwined in modern capitalism, and fetishized in democratic systems. Aphrodite is the
expectation that all women want children. She is the model on Axe’s billboards. She is in the mind of bulimic teen girls and their horny lovers. Aphrodite is why Donald Trump owned Miss Universe and fat-shamed one of its contestants. Aphrodite has gone from a womanly figure desired, revered, and artistically valued by men, to a set standard of value for all women.

Queer women in the modern world are often depicted as strong, stubborn, fierce individuals who take on more masculine characteristics than their straight counterparts, and Athena fits this stereotype all too well. As the goddess of war, counsel, defense, and heroic endeavors, she falls into a male-dominated realm of violence that she however thrives in. She approaches Hephaistos to better equip herself for battle, but instead receives sexual pursuit and eventually sexual assault. She is depicted as a stately goddess, who wears armor and plain cloth rather than the elegant and draped wardrobes of other beloved goddesses such as Aphrodite.

There is much truth in Athena’s representation of the queer woman’s experience; however, she fits only the most basic and underdeveloped narrative of queerness, the one which takes on almost fully the attributes of the opposite gender. To be queer in modern times allows room for full development in all aspects of personality and demeanor, which may represent characteristics historically attributed to both men and women. It may be that to be a queer woman in ancient Greece meant the forgoing of traditional femininity in most ways, for this is what it may have taken to be sexually understood, if even a little, by their peers in that culture. However, today, a far greater understanding of queer sexuality is available to the educated populace, and it is increasingly unnecessary for
queer individuals to align themselves with the attributes of one gender or another to be accepted in their sexual and relational truths.

**Kripa Shrestha:** The qualities of Aphrodite [blatant sexuality, impeccable appearance] are more aggressively solidified in the modern world where such qualities often define women and are used to determine their superficial worth, and are therefore idealized and the value of such qualities exaggerated and exploited in industrial practice. The qualities of Athene [unlike those of Aphrodite] are ungendered in the modern world; any person, regardless of their gender, may cultivate and strive for such qualities, although such a promising setting may be confined to less patriarchal societies.

*How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media?*


**Kolton Nay:** I have. Media lags behind social progress quite significantly. So despite modern culture evolving beyond basic narratives of the woman as either precisely feminine or masculine in nature, modern media still follows these two dominant narratives quite rigidly. Only recently were strong female characters like Athena considered sellable in mass media, so the development of female characters in media into complex mismatching personalities such as Korra (The Legend of Korra) or Jessica Jones (Marvel’s Jessica Jones) is just budding to the surface. Katniss Everdeen (The Hunger Games) is a great example of an Athena-like character, who largely rejects desire,
attractiveness, and traditional femininity for the wisdom, power, and strength necessary to accomplish her goals.

Examples of Aphrodite’s character can be found nearly everywhere in mainstream media, as the woman as a subject of male desire is (arguably) the oldest and most lasting narrative for women in storytelling, and it doesn’t seem to be moving on very quickly. Miss Universe and Miss USA are classic examples of women being literally judged on their attractiveness, as well as the unholy beauty pageants many young girls go through via their parents’ misguided desires to fill their need for attention with the byproducts of the male gaze. Mary Jane in Spiderman. Mikaela Banes in Transformers.

Music is just another extension of the same narratives, for the most part. While greater diversity can be found in how women and queer women are depicted (Mary Lambert), most mainstream music focuses on women as an Aphrodite-esque model, and are almost always bound in some way to the male gaze, if it is not the entirety of its subject matter.

The greatest example I have seen in popular media of a complex representation of a queer woman was in The Legend of Korra, where Avatar Korra is revealed to be bisexual in the finale of the series. Korra is shown throughout the series as both being valued for and valuing her own sexuality, attractiveness, and femininity, as well as her abilities as the literal protector of the world and her skills as a warrior, advisor, and spiritual leader. Her emotions and attributes are complex enough to embody the desirous Aphrodite and the wise Athena as well as many other complex and seemingly contradictory aspects. The presence of a female lead character in an ongoing television
series may be at this point the only feasible venue for full character development, as movies like to create narrow characters for plot progression, and female supporting roles in television can be stereotyped easily for easy script-writing.

**Kripa Shrestha:** Aphrodite’s affair with her brother Ares reminds me of Cersei’s affair with Jamie in *Game of Thrones*, and Aphrodite’s magic girdle of the love potion [is] so often romanticized in modern media such as Harry Potter and other fantastical works. I couldn’t help but draw a parallel between the Judgment of Paris and beauty contests in the modern world where women compete for “Miss ___” just as Aphrodite, Athene and Hera competed for the title of the Fairest.

Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?

**Kolton Nay:** It’s obvious to me that Aphrodite and Athena emerged out of the human perceptions of women as they understood them, or, as men understood them. Humans have always looked for ways to represent what they see and feel around them, and to make those perceptions are concrete and simple as possible. By creating these mythical gods and goddesses, humans are able to represent their own complex realities in more easily-understood generic narratives. It is obvious, then, that two of the most basic examples of women as goddesses have maintained their relevance into the modern era. Our desire to paint women as objects of desire, filled with beauty, awaiting male judgement, is all too present still. And the narrative of a rather masculine woman, a queer woman who often plays the role of the man, is also still preferred by much of straight
humanity because of the ease in which this narrative fits into the binary they already carry in their minds. Athena and Aphrodite will always be part of the human culture as long as our desires for understanding outweigh our tolerance for complexity. In other words, a damn long time.

**Kripa Shrestha:** I think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin because these have provided a basis for Western literature and really solidified in the modern world that is largely Western-dominated.

*What else do you think is important to say regarding this myth and the way it connects the ancient and modern worlds?*

**Kolton Nay:** I’ve focused on parts of Aphrodite and Athena that I understood and was able to research in a short amount of time. In my analysis of both goddesses as simplified representations of ancient and modern women, I myself have simplified what they stand for and what their narratives contain. It is important to note that binaries are part of life and essential to communication. All language is based on arbitrary binary understandings that something exists only as it is separate from all other things, thus owning its own symbol, its own name. Thus, the more complex a subject we wish to portray, the more difficult it becomes to use language to portray it. I myself have tried to find a balance between complexity and brevity that I hope will lend some value to the overall project.
Kripa Shrestha: Picking a particular aspect of this myth, it is interesting to me how Aphrodite’s depiction of love, beauty and desire has really solidified and persisted in the modern world, which I attribute to a largely Western-dominated society.

(Optional) If you were assigned two myths, what connection do you see between the two? Why do you think I gave you both?

Kolton Nay: They [Aphrodite and Athena] are both women of a particular niche, and though they are completely opposite, their narratives contrast in many ways. Aphrodite is loved for her femininity and attractiveness, while Athena is sometimes resented for not playing into those roles. Instead, she is lauded for her wisdom, strength, and bravery in battle. Comparing these two goddesses allows us to delve into the perceptions laid upon women living in ancient Greece and what expectations they would have been exposed to as they found themselves under the cultural housing of their gods and goddesses.
CREATIVE PIECE

This convo is a bore

Aphrodite: Omg. Did you hear what happened 2 my dearest son today?
Athena: ...does it truly matter what I have to say?
Aphrodite: Just let me speak.
Athena: Don’t be so meek!! lol
Aphrodite: Did you hear?
Athena: From the seer?
Aphrodite: What he heard?
Athena: Not a word!
Aphrodite: The seer told him he would find a new land and rule.
Athena: lololol That seer sounds like a fool.
Aphrodite: He’s no more foolish than your mortal man! >:(
Athena: You don’t understand...
Aphrodite: I understand fine!!
Athena: He’s not really… no man is mine.
Aphrodite: Of course he is! He would not have survived a day without you.
Athena: lol That’s sooo true.
Aphrodite: Imagine where he would be!
Athena: I cannot... That would hurt me.
Aphrodite: I can imagine where my son would be without me... He would be dead!
Athena: bahaha You’re so right! He would not know where to tread.
Aphrodite: But neither would Odysseus!
Athena: You’re right once again. He’s oblivious.
Aphrodite: For as smart as he is, he lacks common sense.
Athena: I know. He has a penchant for making uncomfortable situations super tense.
Aphrodite: ...but so does my son.
Athena: Good luck with that one. :P
Aphrodite: Thanks… (NOT!) but I don’t need any luck.
Athena: Oh no, my heart you hath struck! lol
Aphrodite: How witty.
Athena: Such a pity!
Aphrodite: What???
Athena: I think you’re in a rut.
Aphrodite: That’s rude!!!!
Athena: Not rude. Nor lewd! (hahaha that rhymed)
Aphrodite: NOT rude? How so?
Athena: You’re always the last to know!
Aphrodite: Just explain!!!
Athena: You spend so much time guiding your son. You’re practically his brain.
Aphrodite: Someone has to be!! lol
Athena: And if he should truly rule? Would you be free?
Aphrodite: A mother is never free. I’ll always watch over him.
Athena: Let me go out on a limb…
Aphrodite: Damn you and your logic.
Athena: The way you avoid your issues is pathologic.
Aphrodite: Stop with your big words, plz. You sound so pretentious.
Athena: The way you just asked me to stop using big words yet used one yourself proves you’re unconscientious.
Aphrodite: whatevs. This conversation’s a bore.
Athena: I don’t know why you act like this. You’re smarter than you give yourself credit for.
Aphrodite: But back to my son!
Athena: Yeah, back to that one…
Aphrodite: What should I do?
Athena: Whatever you want to.
Aphrodite: Why are you acting like this??
Athena: What did you expect—a kiss? Lol
Aphrodite: No, but I didn’t expect your attitude.
Athena: Get used to it, dude!
Aphrodite: You’ve certainly loosened up a bit.
Athena: And now I’m not as much of a misfit.
Aphrodite: That’s ridiculous. Is it because you don’t have sex?
Athena: It has nothing to do with that… It’s… complex.
Aphrodite: Nahhhh, I’m pretty sure that’s it.
Athena: …well that’s bullshit!!
Aphrodite: That’s our society!
Athena: At least people recognize my piety.
Aphrodite: You are nothing if not pious! Haha
Athena: Don’t laugh. You’re being biased.
Aphrodite: yeah, yeahhhhh. So what?
Athena: What what in the butt
Aphrodite: That was v mature.
Athena: And totally impure
Aphrodite: Which is shocking coming from you..!
Athena: Goddesses change. You have, too!
Aphrodite: Yeah, but no one knows.
Athena: We can surprise people—keep them on their toes!
Aphrodite: But we can’t do it forever.
Athena: Umm… except we can? We’re immortal. And we’ll die exactly never.
Aphrodite: Trueeee
Athena: Friggin mortals! Odysseus needs me to rescue him AGAIN. Who knows what’ll ensue?
Aphrodite: Better go save your damsel in distress!
Athena: Hopefully this time he won’t undress
Aphrodite: Does he always do that?
Athena: What are you trying to get at?
Aphrodite: Don’t start again. Just go save the day.
Athena: Okay, I’ll ttyl. Let’s just hope he obeys.
CREATIVE PIECE ANALYSIS

“This convo is a bore” is a conversation between Aphrodite and Athena over text message. The rhyme scheme is AABBCDDD and continues throughout. Goddesses were frequently trivialized in ancient writings as squabbling gossipers, and Aphrodite and Athena’s creative piece reflects that using modern colloquialisms and technology.

Gossiping serves several important functions, including establishing and solidifying social hierarchies, offering insight into both individuals and relationships between multiple parties, and the evaluation and control of specific behaviors (McDonald, 384). Those who lead in gossip are able to set standards to which the recipients of the gossip—and those outside of the gossip—must adhere. Aphrodite and Athena, because they share information with one another so frequently, are able to set behavioral standards. They have more knowledge about happenings than those around them, and they are able to use that social intelligence to guide the mortal men who rely on them. As stated in the poem, neither Aeneas nor Odysseus would have been able to survive their respective epics without their goddesses’ wisdom and power.

The piece also discusses Athena’s potential sexuality or lack thereof. As previously explicated, Kolton Nay perceived Athena as queer despite her vow of chastity. Lines 14, 55, and 61 all reference the possibility that Athena may not be heterosexual or heterromantic; she could very well be asexual but still have romantic inclinations toward women.
MONSTERS

Scylla and Charybdis, unlike some mythological monsters, have human origins. Their origins as mortal women are significant in that some modern scholars view the characterization of the female grotesque as “projections of male anxiety and ambivalence about female sexuality and control” (Pollak, 728). Scylla and Charybdis were both transformed into monsters as punishment for threatening the power of men, then ironically spent their beastly lives post-metamorphosis killing the men who sailed through their strait.

Monster, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary is “Originally: a mythical creature which is part animal and part human, or combines elements of two or more animal forms, and is frequently of great size and ferocious appearance. Later, more generally: any imaginary creature that is large, ugly, and frightening.” The feminization of monsters in Greco-Roman mythology is inconsistent, as many monsters are not femininely characterized. Satyrs, centaurs, and giants, for instance, are typically males.

Satyrs were fertility spirits who nearly constantly pursued nymphs and other classical objects of feminine beauty. As part of Dionysus’ cult, they traveled with the Maenads, reveled in sex, and caroused in pleasure. Their physical appearance resembled that of a horse or ram, and they had characteristics of both mortals and animals (Homer, *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*). Satyrs were used in an eponymous form of theatre in raunchy and satirical ways, with emphasis on their masculinity and virility.

Centaurs were considerably more monstrous to ancient people than satyrs. They had the upper body and face of a mortal man and the torso and legs of a horse. The myths
in which they appeared characterized centaurs as crude, primitive, and savage. They would kidnap mortal women and rape them, and they armed themselves for war with stones and branches (Homer, *Odyssey*, 21).

Giants, unlike the satyrs and centaurs, are more individualized in that they affect myths as individuals rather than as a group. (This is not to say individual satyrs and centaurs were not influential, but it is easier to categorize the previous two forms of monsters as a group than it is to summarize giants.) One giant referenced elsewhere in this thesis is Argus, who guarded Io before being defeated by Hermes (mentioned on page 33). Another famous giant is Polyphemus, who was blinded by Odysseus and his men when they escaped his cave in Homer’s *Odyssey*. Giants are not complete juxtapositions of other classical monsters, though; all three categories discussed here are hyperbolized representations of negative aspects of masculinity, just as Scylla and Charybdis are hyperbolized representations of what is perceived as the negative aspects of femininity.

Satyrs, although amusing, were overtly sexual and distinctly lacked the morals of the ancient world. Centaurs were barbarians who thought more of their basic instincts and necessities than any form of higher thought. Giants were often aggressive and were used as characters against which to compare the intellect and morality of heroes. The masculinization of male monsters—unlike the feminization of Scylla and Charybdis—do not make them monsters, though. Some of the same characteristics with which satyrs, centaurs, and giants are synonymous are utilized to describe classical heroes as well: Heracles’ virility was both welcomed and celebrated; Odysseus, although tactically
brilliant, often succumbed to the weaknesses and desires of his baser instincts—most notably sex; Achilles exhibited downright immoral and disgraceful behavior after slew ing Hector.

Heracles, Odysseus, and Achilles were undeniably heroes—the good guys. Satyrs, centaurs, and giants, while there were some positive representatives of each, were not the epitome of morality or social acceptability. Thus, masculinity was not the problem. Scylla and Charybdis’ problem, contrastingly, was their femininity and the way in which each used it to threaten the power of a man.
SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

INTRODUCTION

Scylla, a six-headed monster who dwelled in sea cliffs, and Charybdis, a personification of a whirlpool, are located in the modern world within the Strait of Messina, which is part of the Mediterranean Sea off the shore of Sicily.

They appear in multiple epics in both Greek and Roman literature, but most famously in Homer’s *Odyssey*. This poem recounts the difficult decision sailors face when they reach the home of Scylla and Charybdis: on one side, they have Scylla, who will take and eat one member of the crew for each of her heads; on the other, they face Charybdis, who could either do nothing or could swallow the entire ship, thus killing all of its passengers.

Although Odysseus’s crew in *Odyssey* urge him to take his chances and sail through Charybdis’s territory in the hopes that no one will have to die, Odysseus decides to sail past Scylla, who scoops up six men and eats them alive. He justified this behavior by explaining he would rather have six men die than the entire ship.

It is clear to *Odyssey*’s audience that Scylla and Charybdis are monsters. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (Book XIII, 729-760), however, presents a slightly different story, although it is equally as horrific. Scylla was once a beautiful mortal woman. After conversing with her friends, the sea nymphs, about the various men enthralled by her existence, she took a stroll along the beach in the nude and was approached by Glaucus, a sea-god. Glaucus was anthropomorphic in torso, head and arms, but had the tail of a fish
instead of legs. Horrified by his appearance and his proposition of love to her, Scylla ran as far as she could from him in order to reject him.

Glaucus enlisted the help of Circe, a witch who is also featured in *Odyssey*, to help him win Scylla’s love. Circe exclaims her own love for Glaucus, and when she is rejected, she plans to get revenge on Scylla, who she sees as having stolen Glaucus’s love. Instead of simply transforming her rival into an animal—as is her specialty—Circe transforms Scylla into a horrifying monster with several dog bodies at the bottom and six heads protruding from the top of its grotesque body.

Charybdis, too, was once a different being, although her story is detailed in ancient scholarship of Homer’s work (*Scholia Graeca in Homeri Iliadem*). She was a naiad, daughter of Poseidon and Gaia. During one of the power struggles between Zeus and Poseidon, Charybdis was used to help conquer land in order to help her father. When her immense power became evident, Zeus chained her to the bottom of the ocean and turned her into a monster. She was forced to swallow tons of water three times a day in order to keep the tides of the sea moving.

When discussing the modern implications of these two figures, it is interesting to note who transformed Scylla and Charybdis into monsters and why they did so. Scylla was transformed into a monster by a woman out of envy. Charybdis was transformed by a man because he was feeling threatened. These two motives are not uncommon in ancient narratives and are still utilized frequently in modern narratives.

Mads O’Brien, in the interview following this introduction, discusses the ways Scylla and Charybdis’ characterizations are seen in the modern world: “Modern women
are often described by others (especially men) as being complicated and volatile. The
description of the monstrous forms taken by Scylla and Charybdis made me think of that,
metaphorically—with their many heads and amphibious appendages, these women are
complex, difficult to understand. Because they are powerful, they are intimidating and
unpredictable.” She strips Scylla and Charybdis’ stories of their monstrous twists and
relates them to the plight of the modern woman dealing with the male gaze.

Cole Wojdacz says depicting women the way Scylla and Charybdis are,
“perpetuates the idea that women are incapable of making rational decisions based on
logic rather than emotions.” Such ideas about women also gained a national spotlight
during the 2016 United States Presidential Election. In a letter to the editor of the
Williamsport, PA Sun Gazette, Carl Unger stated the following: “They [liberals] call us
sexist just because we are critical of Hillary Clinton and her health. What if that time of
the month comes and she is sick at the same time?” Womanhood is often synonymous
with menstruation (although not all women menstruate and not all people who menstruate
are women), and menstruation is synonymous with PMS, volatile behavior, and
irrationality.

Women in the modern world, just as in the ancient world, are mysticized. Women
are perceived as confusing and emotionally unstable. One particular example of this
phenomenon is the “Crazy Ex-Girlfriend” meme, which is a picture of a white woman
with her eyes wide open and an unsettlingly large smile. The caption varies, but each
involves some sort of threat or stalker-like behavior. The meme clearly paints women as
irrational and even dangerous after they have their hearts broken.
INTERVIEW

How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?

Mads O’Brien: In their respective myths, both Scylla and Charybdis seem to be pawns or recipients of “collateral damage” from the actions of others. Zeus was mad at Charybdis for flooding so many villages in his war with her father, so he turned her into a monster. Circe wanted Glaucus to love her and not Scylla, so she turned her into a monster.

While it’s my understanding that real-world ancient Greece had relatively more empowered women than other ancient cultures, it still seemed that men ran the show, having the greatest voices in politics, education, and community decisions. The lives and livelihoods of wives and daughters often changed at the hands of others, much like they do in these myths.

Cole Wojdacz: Scylla and Charybdis also mirror the perception and role of women. They both affect the lives of the men around them and are in turn affected by the men around them. The power dynamics involved in the myth reflect those of the ancient world.

How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?
Mads O’Brien: Modern women are often described by others (especially men) as being complicated and volatile. The description of the monstrous forms taken by Scylla and Charybdis made me think of that, metaphorically—with their many heads and amphibious appendages, these women are complex, difficult to understand. Because they are powerful, they are intimidating and unpredictable.

Cole Wojdacz: Both of the myths [of Scylla and Charybdis] depicted the female typed protagonists as powerful creatures who were able to effect great change in the lives of the men around them; both were also victimized by the men whose lives they affected. This is a familiar modern narrative.

*How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media?*


Mads O’Brien: The ‘character’ I see repeated from the Scylla and Charybdis myths is the trope of the sulky, angry, passive woman who lashes out in her misery after something bad happens to her (examples: her boyfriend breaks up with her, she loses a job). And all of the other nearby characters simply tiptoe around her, seeking not to solve the problem but rather avoid her wrath (like the sailors trying to avoid Scylla and Charybdis on either bank of the channel). I can’t think of any shows/movies/etc. where this plot occurs off the top of my head, but I’m sure you probably can.

But this trope appears in more than just fictional representations—I believe that modern “non-fictional” literature also promotes or endorses these traits in women at
times. What comes to mind is women’s magazines like *Cosmo, Elle, Seventeen*, etc.: I know I’ve read plenty of articles that encourage the reader to be indulgent or slightly unforgiving in order to get over something: “Go ahead girl, eat that pint of Ben and Jerry’s! Bad mouth that guy with your girlfriends, that jerk deserves it! Go get a sexy haircut and buy a new dress—that’ll show him what he’s missing!” If Cosmo existed in mythical ancient Greece, you could imagine an article reading “Go ahead girl, cause a cyclone in the sea and drown those douchebags! You deserve it!” ;)

**Cole Wojdacz:** Scylla and Charybdis’ stories, specifically, are not frequently told in modern media, although the idea of an angry or overly-emotional woman attacking a man is popular. It can be seen in all forms of media, and it perpetuates the idea that women are incapable of making rational decisions based on logic rather than emotions.

*Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?*

**Cole Wojdacz:** I think that they have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time because they have always been held in high reverence. They’ve been passed down from generation to generation with high regard. They are also easily adaptable into relevant modern stories to continue the passage [of the myth].

*(Optional) If you were assigned two myths, what connection do you see between the two? Why do you think I gave you both?*
**Mads O’Brien:** Both [Scylla and Charybdis and Heracles and Hylas] involve mystical female characters with a hostility or disregard towards men – the water nymph who grabs Hylas, and Scylla and Charybdis who wreak havoc on sailors. Both of the myths associate these women with living in or originating from water, something that I think comes up a lot in ancient mythology. At the same time, both tales also illustrate the fraternity that forms among male parties of adventurers—Odysseus and his men, Hercules and his men but especially Hylas. When one or more men are lost to the water, the man left aboard the ship or on land responds with great grief. The myths depict or at least suggest the ancient man’s disdain and/or fear of the sea’s creatures (though I’m a little unclear if Hercules and his party ever found out that Hylas was grabbed by a water nymph). In reading these myths, I saw an interesting dichotomy form between the feminine waters and the masculine seamen or land-farers.

**Cole Wojdacz:** I think that these myths [Hera, Scylla and Charybdis] were paired because they have similar themes of angry women destroying the lives of men.
CREATIVE PIECE

Feed!

weary traveler

sea tumultuous

writhing rising

spittingfear

dread palpable

anticipation heart

Monsters

right

left escape

no nono nonono

in the past

beauty love

light

affection

Humanity

then

Change

no nonono nono

please
skin

blood

flesh

stopbeg

scales

reflection

lost(lost)

hidden(hidden)

gone(gone)

Transformed

sick

bile

scared

Different

now

inthe

present

Wrath

blind

fury

smell

sense

a.larm

occean

current.

spin

slosh

sloshlosh

spray

across

teeth

ready

hungry

need

humans

alive

b b

breathing

breathe

erratic

breath

erratic

pulse

blood
But not. The stomach settles. Other sailors get fed. It settles. It feels content. Now it's hungry. It needs some spiss swirls. It rumbles. It gets hungry. It needs some next time.
CREATIVE PIECE COMMENTARY

“Feed!” was directly inspired by the poetry collection Zong! By M NourbeSe Philip. The words of Zong! are masterfully scattered across pages. Each page seems to be unintelligible on its own, but put together the entire collection paints a powerful narrative of the slave ship Zong.

The narration of the poem is not chronological in nature. A flashback to Scylla’s transformation is denoted by “past” and ends with “present”. The italicized words are from the perspective of the sailors, and the rest of the words are from the perspective of either Scylla or Charybdis. The word layout is a visual representation of the churning water of Charybdis. The lack of syntax also hints at the mental state of the monsters themselves—a clear deviation of the lucid thoughts they would have had as humans. Both the visual layout and the lack of syntax are also representative of Wojdacz and O’Brien’s comments regarding the modern perception of women as overly emotional and irrational.
MALE HOMOSEXUALITY

Men who had sex with other men in the ancient world were usually members of a pederastic relationship, in which one man was the erastes and the other eromenos. Erastes and eromenos translate directly to “one [a male] who loves” and “one [a male] who is loved” (Hindley, 167). Pederastic relationships were structured by age—the older man was the lover and the younger man the beloved.

For the most part, sexual relationships between two male partners were legal. However, the relationships were not free of stigma. In Classical Athens, the passive partner or the beloved was sometimes thought to be prostituting himself for material gain, although this was not the standard perception of such behavior (Hindley, 171). The act of prostitution was a crime of hubris, or intentionally enacting violence against another. According to some scholars, the crime of hubris was overtly sexual in both law and language (Cohen, 172); others claim hubris applied far more to creating social stigma than to the legal condemnation of those who participated in pederasty (Hindley, 171).

Those who participated in pederastic relationships in ancient Rome were even more subject to moral condemnation. Adult men who acted as passive partners in the relationship were labeled cinaedi or “catamites,” “a word that often denotes luxurious, unmanly habits, in addition to homosexual proclivities, specifically the willingness to submit to anal penetration” (Fratantuono, 102). “Catamite” itself was a reference to Ganymede, a mythological character whose story is explicated later in this section of the thesis. Romans were cautious of those labeled as cinaedi, for they were thought to be sexually perverse. Boys who found themselves part of pederastic relationships were
expected to eventually stop submitting to the sexual desires of the older man; those who
did not, as well as adult males who continued to be the passive partners in a homosexual
relationship, were labeled “catamites”.

Homosexuality as a word to describe a male who has sex with other males was
not coined until the late 19th century (Lewis, 147). In this way, homosexuality is a
comparatively modern convention; the concept of homosexuality as an identity an
individual can claim is even more recent. Even more modern than homosexuality as a
personal identity is the concept of “queerness,” which rose specifically after the free love
movement and the gay liberation movement in the 1960s. Because of the modern world’s
relative acceptance of LGBTQIA+ people and movements, we are far more likely to view
and accept the homosexual behavior within ancient myths positively. There are even
instances in which our modern favor for homosexuality could cause us to see homosexual
relationships where there are none (Lewis, 150).

The following sections analyze the modern reconceptualization of the myths of
Achilles and Patroclus, Zeus and Ganymede, and Heracles and Hylas.
ACHILLES AND PATROCLUS

INTRODUCTION

Achilles, son of Thetis and Peleus, was the greatest Greek warrior of his time—and probably of all time. Achilles’ greatest feats were explicated within Homer’s *Iliad*, and the remainder of his story was referenced in the *Odyssey*. In order to explain Achilles’ death, later recollections of his life created reasons to explain his only vulnerability: his heel. Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica* (IV.865-885), claims Thetis “encompassed the child’s mortal flesh in the night with the flame of the fire; and day by day she anointed with ambrosia his tender frame” in order to grant Achilles immortality. His immortality was not fully created, though, when Thetis had to stop her actions after being caught by Peleus. A different explanation for Achilles’ famous heel comes from Fulgentius’ *Mythologies* in the “Fable of Peleus and Thetis” (3.7), in which Thetis attempts to rid Achilles of flaws by dipping his body in the river Styx—save his ankle, which according to Fulgentius is the gateway to human lust.

For most of the *Iliad*, Achilles refused to fight in the Trojan War. He was forced to give up his prize slave to Agamemnon, who had to give up his own slave in order to save the Greek army from Apollo’s wrath. He felt so enraged by the injustice of losing his slave that he could not humble himself to fight with his fellow men. As a result, Patroclus, Achilles’ friend and sidekick, took it upon himself to lead the troops in Achilles’ place. He donned Achilles’ armor and was a good enough warrior that neither the Greeks nor the Trojans realized he was not, in fact, who he claimed to be.
Despite his military prowess, Patroclus was killed by Hector, the greatest Trojan warrior. Achilles rejoined the war effort after Patroclus’ death in order to avenge him. He was so consumed by rage and loss that he slaughtered a good portion of the Trojan army by himself before killing Hector and dragging his corpse behind a chariot. He held games in Patroclus’ honor, and spent much of the rest of his life mourning his friend.

Achilles and Patroclus’ relationship can be interpreted as pederastic (as I have proposed for the purposes of this thesis). Their relationship is not always interpreted as such, and one particular modern scholar claims that viewing their relationship as homosexual in nature is simply the individual projecting the cultural views of the time period in which we live upon the myth (Lewis, 151). The scholars who do believe the relationship is pederastic, though, cannot agree about who is the beloved, or eromenos. Patroclus is the older of the two—which could mean he is the lover and Achilles is the beloved—but Achilles is the superior warrior and has a higher social standing—which could mean he is the erastes. Either way, it is clear the relationship between the two men is far more intimate and emotional than that of most platonic friends or brothers-in-arms.

A modern individual who recognizes that emotional bond could view the relationship between Achilles and Patroclus as that of a closeted homosexual couple. Both Achilles and Patroclus could be seen as bisexual men as well, considering their numerous sexual dalliances and emotional attachments to women. Queerness and sexual identities as a whole were not a concept in the ancient world, however. Emils Seitsins discusses the lack of sexual orientation identities in the interview following this introduction: “LGBT identities such as we know them today did not exist in ancient
Greece (since sexual identities is quite a recent and modern invention by the West, which due to globalization has become more and more normalized all across the world).
However, as we can see from the story of Achilles and Patroclus, some queer, deep and emotional bond between two men in ancient Greece was seen already.”

In the modern world, we have socially constructed sexual orientations like homosexual, bisexual, heterosexual, and pansexual, and we use those modern labels in order to understand the behavior of Achilles and Patroclus. Adilson Gonzalez explicates exactly why and how an individual currently alive could identify the couple as romantic and sexual in nature: “When looking closely into the story we can tell that these are the types of interactions [physical, sexual, emotional] that Achilles and Patroclus have with each other. Their relationship isn’t merely sexual, but the admiration, and the passion with which they FEEL for each other is what makes it truly loving.”
INTERVIEW

*How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?*

**Adilson Gonzalez:** I believe that in the ancient world just like nowadays there was certain kind of frowning upon queer individuals. Homosexuality has always been existent throughout history but our justification of it has changed a lot.

The comradery between these two subjects seems to be one of those justifications. To me, the illusion of apprentice and mentor sounds like one of those ways of justifying attraction from a male to another male. As friends, and moreover as people who learn from each other, the existence of an intellectual, socio-political, and sexual exchange/relationship is “more than natural.” What isn’t natural is the existence of a loving relationship.

I also believe that in the ancient world people were not ok with homosexuality because it was not something that happened. The actions of a man having sex with another man, or a man writing poems for another man had different names. They were just having fun and exploring their bodies, or being amused and inspired by their friends and peers, by the beauty of the youth. In the case of these two males, it seems that there’s a relationship of admiration, in which they protect each other, which is natural of friends.

However, I doubt that the idea of two males “loving” physically, sexually and emotionally each other, and the thought of the idea of making a life together existed.
When looking closely into the story we can tell that these are the types of interactions that Achilles and Patroclus have with each other. Their relationship isn’t merely sexual, but the admiration, and the passion with which they FEEL for each other is what makes it truly loving. Funny enough, it is perhaps the lack of the “ability” to produce offspring that could have determined what could have been called a relationship. It seems that many times males spent more time with their intimate apprentices, comrades, and male muses than with their actual wives. It also seems that their relations could have been stronger, having as the only divide the ability to produce more beings.

Finally, there was always a punishment in these stories, which reflects the views of that era. The punishment does not always come from others. Sometimes, it is destiny or the character themselves who brings death or hate into their own life. In the case of Patroclus, the punishment is brought to him by himself and by the love he had for Achilles: wanting to show him what he was capable of and to gain ever more of his admiration, he risks and loses his life. Judging by this scene and by Achilles grief, Patroclus was perhaps Achilles’ real heel, the one who kept him up and going.

**Emils Seitins:** LGBT identities such as we know them today did not exist in ancient Greece (since sexual identities is quite a recent and modern invention by the West, which due to globalization has become more and more normalized all across the world). However, as we can see from the story of Achilles and Patroclus, some queer, deep and emotional bond between two men in ancient Greece was seen already.
How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?

**Adilson Gonzalez:** Queerness is still being justified as something else, something that is not normal. When you justified, you don’t need to acknowledge it as something normal. Nowadays, around the world, queerness is justified as a phase, as a disease, as a mental disorder, as experimenting, as madness, as confusion.

Achilles and Patroclus, for example, reflects the role of queer man as being those who are deemed to suffer, lonely and that can’t live happily in the struggles of our society. However, at the same time there is a lot of beauty in these characters, and overall lots of values and qualities. They are strong characters who bring their soul into everything they do, they are passionate, brave and courageous. They fight for what they believe in and they stay together until the very end.

As a gay man, I feel that many times you are pushed into becoming the best of yourself you can, to show the world that you are more than your sexuality. Whether it is by helping people, bringing joy to others, creating art, music or focusing or making a positive impact on a community, queer individuals are known as activists who will always go a step further. Queer individuals always try to show the world that their sexuality makes up just a small percentage of the entirety of a human being who does beautiful things wherever they go.

**Emils Seitins:** Being queer in the modern world means something different than it did in ancient Greece. Now, we are more focused on embodying our sexual identities
even if we are not together with our loved one. Being queer thus in modern world does not only relate to being in same sex relationship but also establishing a life-long identity.

**How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media?**

**Have you seen similar storylines in modern television shows? Music? Movies? Magazines? Literature?**

**Adilson Gonzalez:** I have seen several renditions of this myth throughout plays, fairytales, operas, and TV shows. However, the idea of a homosexual relationship between these characters is always omitted. I think this reflects more of our modern society. There is still a lot of censorship and shame in even thinking about the sexuality of a character. In a more abstract way, queer characters never end happy with other queer characters, and there is a punishment for those who go against the norms.

**Emils Scitins:** The queer story line of Achilles and Patroclus is seen in many modern day gay movies. Yes – Brokeback mountain, but then also others where the queer story line ends with one of the main characters dying. Many gay characters in modern TV shows are killed because they are suicidal or because of AIDS or because of some other reason – heart attack, mass shooting, etc. So this Achilles and Patroclus story, in my perspective is very, very familiar even today.

What I would really like to see, however, is a gay story where there is only one main character and he/she/they have to figure out how to live their lives by themselves in the first place without a single romanticized ideal partner. I believe that our modern day culture has idealized gay relationship as this “meant to be” “the true love” theme, which,
in my opinion, gives a very wrong impression to gay community, making them believe that they will only be complete when engaged in a life-long relationship and if they fail to find a partner or fail to establish long term relationship with their partner, they fail at being gay, or even worse – fail at their lives.

Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?

Adilson Gonzalez: I would like to believe that it is because queer characters, in a way, bring a third level of excitement to the plot, but I honestly think that “war stories” sell well. The story between Achilles and Patroclus is a traditional bromance story, where the friendship of two cool straight guys becomes stronger goes on until the very end.

Besides this, its lyrical beauty is undeniable, and the word choice and the level of detail and perfection between intertwined stories is extremely well done. These stories are art pieces in form and content and thanks to this, they survived the passage of time. The stories are also easy to follow and to relate to, whether you are a queer character, an in-love person, or just someone who is trying to read some action literature, these myths will meet your needs.

Emils Seitins: I believe that there are just some themes in our human history that are immortal to age. This is the reason why we, in 21st century, find ancient Greek plays/myths still interesting. Queer relationships have existed in our world since day 1, maybe the wording of these kind of relationships have changed, however the human
nature to be with someone and enjoy another person (be it the opposite sex or same sex) has been there all along.

What else do you think is important to say regarding this myth and the way it connects the ancient and modern worlds?

Adilson Gonzalez: I think the most important thing is that there has been an improvement in the way queer and female characters are portrayed. I am truly honored to be living in an era in which homosexuality is discussed and talked about as such and not something else. It always makes me happy to go to a play or watch a movie that succeeds at portraying homosexual characters as complex individuals with talents and virtues, but also with struggles different from their sexuality. I also believe that myth or stories like these, written by individuals who were potentially queer, have played a strong role in the fight for equal rights. These stories are a time lock that helped those who were here before us to leave their own hidden message for those to come.
CREATIVE PIECE

Love is a Cunning Weaver

Oceans stretched for miles, waves rolled onto crying shores which sang of sorrow and pain in name of Patroclus, Achilles, and love which knew not how it came nor why.

Gods and mortal beings alike bemoaned the loss of such a powerful duo, both as warriors—unparalleled *kleos*, honor, duty—and lovers—lovers of each other and lovers of the gods. Their kinship militaristic yet close, formed by fate and torn by it, too, like two strands thereby entwined in hist’ry, laced together in tragic endings.

So although his death was foretold, Achilles, Shepherd of the People, could not foresee his dearest’s demise or stop it from occurring. Alas, his partner perished at the sword of the greatest Trojan soldier whilst disguised in Achilles’ armor, causing the world to tilt, composure fray, and connection wither. Hence, Achilles, sacker of cities, mourned by killing all who crossed his enraged tragect’ry. Chaos ensued as corpses scattered round the field, fallen off the walls of Troy, and yet he did not receive the vengeance he so wished to obtain by killing Hector and dragging
Hector’s body crudely behind a horse-drawn cart. His actions—shocking and vulgar—ceased to cure his pain, for love lost to death cannot be kindled anew; and

yet, despite their severed relation, neither man dismissed his love for the other. From the underworld, the shade of Patroclus surfaced, begging their ashes be combined. Upon the demise of the swift footed hero, having been struck by Paris’ arrow in his heel, they united in death; Loved and beloved, strands forever woven together into fabric which has weathered the passage of time, which has told the story of Patroclus, the real Achilles heel.
CREATIVE PIECE COMMENTARY

“Love is a Cunning Weaver” utilizes Sapphic meter, which in the modern poetic system is made up of a series of trochee and dactyl metrical feet. Trochees consist of a single stressed syllable ( _ ) followed by a single unstressed syllable ( u ). A dactyl foot consists of a single stressed syllable ( _ ) followed by two stressed syllables ( u u ). The first three lines of the stanza consist of the following pattern: two trochees, one dactyl, two trochees. The last line of each stanza is one dactyl followed by a trochee (Academy of American Poets). Represented visually, the meter looks like the following chart:

The ancient form of the meter—and ancient Greek poetry in general—utilized long and short syllables instead of stressed and unstressed syllables as the modern English version of the meter uses (Annis, 12). The visual representation of the ancient form of the meter is similar yet distinctly different:

Sapphic meter is named after the ancient poet Sappho, who is associated with female homosexual desire and love. Her influence is further discussed in both the Introduction of the thesis and in the section regarding Female Homosexuality (page 142). Although her poetry was rarely epic in nature, the rigorous metrical scheme heightened
the feel of this particular piece. The rigidity of the syllabic stress pattern was chosen to reflect the rigidity of both the military and the rules of gender and sexuality imposed upon Achilles and Patroclus.

Themes within the piece reflect some of those of the ancient world, such as kleos or glory, and akhos or pain/grief (for which Achilles is named). Such ancient themes are intertwined with more modern themes—despite the reference to Patroclus as Achilles’ “beloved” in lines 27-28—such as the inevitable separation and tragic ending of homosexual couples, although Achilles and Patroclus end up united by death and by the enduring relevance of their story throughout time. As the title piece of this thesis, “Love is a Cunning Weaver” exemplifies love as a creative and durable force as well as the ability of myth to illuminate aspects of the human condition in any time period.

The most emotional aspect of the piece is its relation in the final lines 43-44 to Adilson Gonzalez’s interview, in which he states, “Judging […] by Achilles’ grief, Patroclus was perhaps Achilles’ real heel, the one who kept him up and going.” Achilles’ invulnerability only remained as long as Patroclus lived; Achilles emotionally and mentally died with Patroclus, although his corporeal being existed shortly beyond his lover’s death. The final line in the poem deviates from the correct pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables to emphasize the importance of the line’s meaning.
ZEUS AND GANYMEDE

INTRODUCTION

As with the vast majority of Zeus’ lovers, Ganymede was not seeking his affections. Ganymede was a beautiful boy, the son of Tros of Dardania and brother of Ilus and Assaracus, who became the rulers of Troy/Ilium and Dardania, respectively.

Compared to his brothers, who were impressive in all aspects—especially in their competency to rule and overall bravery—Ganymede was valued very little. He was beautiful, but that was not of practical use to his family.

Zeus, however, as a connoisseur of sensual mortal beauty, found Ganymede’s physical appearance to be quite appealing. Zeus was so taken by the youth, he swooped into the mortal realm as an eagle and kidnapped the boy. Ganymede took over from Hebe as the cupbearer of Olympus, and because of that, was the only one of Zeus’ mortal lovers to be granted eternal youth and immortality. The kidnapping is mentioned in Homer’s *Iliad* to have been perpetrated by the gods in general. (Book XX, lines 233-235). Ovid’s *Metamorphosis* (Book X, lines 152-159) and Virgil’s *Aeneid* (Book V, lines 252-255) cite the kidnapping as perpetrated by Zeus himself in the form of an eagle.

The rape of Ganymede—meaning the capture of Ganymede—has appeared in art of several types from several time periods: “The Abduction of Ganymede” (1611) by Rubens, “Rape of Ganymede” (1635) by Rembrandt, “The Abduction of Ganymede” (1650) by Eustache Le Sueur, “Ganymede” (1804) by Jose Alvarez Cubero. Each of these pieces of art depicts a young man and an eagle. The age of the young man is inconsistent, though. He is shown as a child in some versions and a young adult in others.
Zeus is undeniably predatory in many of his interactions with mortals, but Ganymede’s capture could seem particularly sinister to people of the modern world. The “predatory gay” trope has existed within media for decades—watch The Celluloid Closet for hundreds of examples—and has continued to be perpetuated in modern media. Zeus could certainly be seen as an older gay man praying on a young, impressionable straight boy in order to convert his sexuality. Ashley Duchaine, in the interview following this introduction, views the situation similarly: “The way Zeus is depicted as a predator is very similar to how conservatives have been depicting transgender people using the bathrooms they best identify with, claiming that transgender people want to use different bathrooms to prey on women.”

While the Rape of Ganymede was a tale with little consequence in the ancient world, besides the changing of the Olympic Gods’ cupbearer, a modern individual could recontextualize the narrative using the trope of the “predatory queer person”.
INTERVIEW

How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?

Ashley Duchaine: This reflects what I believe to be true about the role of a queer person in ancient times because Ganymede’s most valued quality is his attractiveness. Due to his good looks and youth he attracts the affections of the older male character, Zeus. Ganymede takes the role of an obedient lover and seems to just accept his abduction. Ganymede is very similar to the character Giton in Petronius’ Satyricon, who has a tendency to accept when he’s taken away by other men that are attracted to his good looks.

Rachel Coury: In the ancient world to my knowledge, homosexuality was seen as more natural in comparison to the criticism it receives now. It was not necessarily abnormal to be homosexual and before biblical times it was not seen as sinful action. This is contrasting to biblical times and later when people were killed for being queer, and people had homosexual affairs outside of their heterosexual marriages secretly. In the myth Zeus is questioning his sexuality, but the myth does not explicitly say this; instead it only gives the reader clues to interpret it as they will. If the myth was attacked for involving homosexuality one could defend it and say Ganymede was dedicated to his apprenticeship with Zeus. However, with heterosexual stories in Greek mythology there are usually explicit word descriptions to explain the heterosexual relationships. This is a
deep contrast with the somewhat cryptic description used in Zeus and Ganymede. It is unknown what exactly is happening because we do not hear from Ganymede, and the nature of the abduction is unclear.

**How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?**

**Ashley Duchaine:** Zeus reflects the negative view that many conservatives have of queer individuals in our modern world. Often conservatives claim that queer individuals are perverts or predators that prey on those weaker than them for their own sexual delights. This was seen most recently with the way many conservatives tried to put fear into the public in regards to what bathroom a transgender person should be allowed to use. The way Zeus is depicted as a predator is very similar to how conservatives have been depicting transgender people using the bathrooms they best identify with, claiming that transgender people want to use different bathrooms to prey on women.

**Rachel Coury:** Because the myth is up for interpretation, it could be compared to the modern world in many ways. What I observe is that Zeus is exploring his sexuality when he becomes attracted to Ganymede, and in order to figure out how he feels he disguises himself as an eagle to kidnap Ganymede to explore his sexual inclinations. In modern day more people have openly questioned sexuality because they see that it does not make them “abnormal” or “sinful” and they explore their sexuality whether it be during teenage years, or in adult life. Zeus is having a similar sensation with Ganymede as he becomes attracted to him.
How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media?


Ashley Duchaine: In the media I partake in, queer individuals aren’t depicted in such a manner if they make an appearance at all. In the *Game of Thrones* series there is a homosexual character, Loras Tyrell and he is persecuted for being a homosexual by the series’ religious figures. The religious figures claim his sexuality is an abomination but unlike Zeus, Loras is not depicted as a predator. Unlike Ganymede, Loras is a strong character; he is a skilled knight and a guard before he is persecuted by the religious figures of the series.

Rachel Coury: There is an obscure comparison I thought of when trying to relate this myth to a modern reference. In Harry Potter Professor Dumbledore is very fond of Harry, and he specially caters to him and acts as his mentor. Dumbledore would be equated to Zeus while Harry would be the equivalence of Ganymede. Harry spends an ample amount of time in Dumbledore’s office during his time at Hogwarts, and Dumbledore entrusts him with important information about Harry himself and Voldemort in particular. Dumbledore is always curious what Harry is thinking, and he always expresses his fondness of him. Dumbledore and Harry have a teacher-student relationship loosely similar to that of Zeus and Ganymede. It has been questioned by many readers whether or not Dumbledore and Harry are homosexual because it has similar vague undertones of possibility in the writing that it could be true like in Zeus and Ganymede.
The two plot lines have major differences, but the questionable teacher-student relationships in both intrigued me.

Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?

Ashley Duchaine: It shows us an archaic view of homosexuals that has no place in our modern world but sadly is still around. Perhaps it has remained as a story that those who are more close-minded can use to tell others as an example of how “dangerous” homosexuality is.

Rachel Coury: I think since the beginning of time homosexuality has always been an area of interest for many people. In ancient times it was not even thought of as any sort of questioning of sexuality. Labels and sexual orientation did not matter in those times. Then in biblical times it became labeled as a sin so it became very secretive and it was not spoken about as much. From then on there has been an uphill battle for acceptance of the community. It has always involved a minority, as most people have identified as heterosexual. Since sexuality has always been a controversial topic I think that it why this myth has remained a story of interest. It is fascinating to observe how something that was once natural can turn extremely controversial, and now again society is slowly beginning to see it as natural.

What else do you think is important to say regarding this myth and the way it connects the ancient and modern worlds?
Ashley Duchaine: I think it is important to say that we cannot continue to use old stereotypes to judge women or queer individuals with. We should use these myths to remind us that we need to continue progressing with the way we view women and queer individuals. Women are not necessarily dangerous if their husbands are away for too long and queer individuals are not all helpless and effeminate or sexual predators.

Rachel Coury: I think this myth is important in showing the reader that homosexuality was once accepted without question in ancient times before becoming a topic not discussed or tolerated during biblical times. It is interesting to think about the progression of the LGBTQ community over time because most of us think of the past as being very conservative, and how we now are slowly progressing towards acceptance, but in reality it is more like a wave going up and down, constantly changing with society. It makes me wonder if we will ever reach a point when it will be considered “normal” to be part of the queer community.

(Optional) If you were assigned two myths, what connection do you see between the two? Why do you think I gave you both?

Ashley Duchaine: I feel like they were both [Clytemnestra and Zeus and Ganymede] given because in ancient times one was viewed as unacceptable (Clytemnestra’s gender roles) and the other was acceptable (Zeus’s homosexual desires) whereas now they have shifted which is acceptable and which is not. I think I was given both because they both have to do with stereotyping a group of people that at the time
were considered to be less important than men and still struggle today with such prejudices.
CREATIVE PIECE
For all that he is not

Peacefully living—
As peacefully as he could—
Considering the

Huge expectation
To be, in every sense,
A man. Be a Man.

But he cannot hide
His unusual body
And graceful movement,

Indicative of
A different persuasion—fine
Unless you like it.

What others do not
See they cannot criticize,
But everyone sees

Him for what he is—
Although a warped version of
Who he really is.

Feminine in face
Lithe in body, a perfect
Specimen only

By unusual
Standards. Not what he should be,
And never can be.

Taught to fight with swords,
To slice and stab and defeat
His enemies with
Precision. He showed
Aptitude in battle, but
Never the passion

Needed to uphold
The family legacy
Passed down from father

To son and son to
Brother and so on and on.
But not to this boy,

No. For he is not
Brave or strong or masculine
Like his brothers are.

Like his father wants
Him to be. Like he wants to
Be. Instead, he is

Beautiful. The most
Wonderful physique. Ideal
In every way.

And thus, he is not
One of the men. He is not
Part of the same world.

Part of the human
World, where beauty is not an
Aid to average lives.

But that same beauty
Which ostracizes him from
The world around him

Attracts attention
From a new source: a suitor,
Of sorts. Of some sort.
Not a suitor, nor
A lover—not in the true
Sense—but something else:  

The King of the Gods,
Searching for a new plaything,
Came from Olympus

And found for what he
Longed in the young boy. None spoke Of him afterwards.

Like he never lived.

Taken from his home,
Scared of facing the unknown,
The boy wept for days.  

Handed a cup and
Told to bear it, but he could Not withstand the weight—

Especially with
The burden of attention From the highest god.

Leering stares, groping
Supple skin, lewd remarks, just A day in the life.

He supposes ‘tis An honor to be chosen For this position

(And the many he Is forced into throughout the Night by his captor).
But he cannot feel
Grateful for his situation
No matter how he
Might once have dreamt of
Something similar for his
future in the past.

But as the days go
By, as the youthful aura
Drains from his body,

He starts to accept,
If not enjoy, his new life
In captivity.

He is complacent
At the very least.
And yet, he is still

Required to be
Someone he is not—something
He will never be.

Subservient to
The higher beings in more
Than mind, but body.

Performing duties
Never done by him before,
A sacred kind of

Submissive service
Common enough for others,
But he had yet to

Reach the right age to
Engage in such intercourse
Back home—no—back there.
Here there are no such
Rules, no reasons to restrain
That behavior, no

Checks and balances,
No mutual benefit,
No apprenticeship.

Just a wanting god
And a confused younger man.
It all seemed so clear

Back there, where he came
From. Clear who he was and what
He stood for. And now…

Now it is not true.

But it never was
Clear, and never will be here,
But at least back there…

At least back there… he…
He was also beautiful.
He was then, he is

Now. And that is all
He has ever been, and all
He will ever be.
CREATIVE PIECE COMMENTARY

“For all that he is not” is a series of haiku only in appearance and syllabic breakdown, as they do not follow the thematic patterns of haiku. The simplistic style was chosen to represent Ganymede’s youthfulness and innocent curiosity as a contrast to the maturity and dominance of Zeus. The contrast between the two characters is strengthened by Ganymede’s perceived femininity.

Ganymede is referenced using terms typically characterized as both feminine and masculine; the lines of gender are blurred within the piece, although gender roles were specific and rigid in ancient Greece. Ganymede’s gender fluidity within the piece would thus have been superfluous if not unacceptable in the mortal realm, yet appreciated greatly by the gods of Olympus. Gender fluidity is a modern concept which has been imposed on Ganymede’s character in order to make sense of his capture and the comparisons made between him and his brothers within texts.

The “predatory gay” trope also appears within the piece. By the end, Ganymede has resigned himself to being a kind of trophy instead of a three-dimensional individual. While he is by no means “converted” into an individual with homosexual proclivities by Zeus, he does stop fighting back against the god’s advances.
HERACLES AND HYLAS

INTRODUCTION

Heracles was depicted as the epitome of Greek heroism—physically and mentally strong, faultlessly brave, and persistent. He was also notorious for his virility, and his sexual prowess provided the main plotlines for several of his myths. Although most of those dalliances involve women—sometimes even multiple women (up to 49 in one night!)—Heracles also took several male lovers. Of all Heracles’ male lovers, Hylas is the most frequently depicted in art due to their dramatic separation.

Heracles and Hylas’ relationship developed as they sailed with the Argonauts on the hunt for the golden fleece, as described in Argonautica by Apollonius of Rhodes and in the poem Idyll by Theocritus. Although their association began as something similar to an apprenticeship or assistantship, it is clear strong feelings of affection developed between the two throughout their time together.

During one of the Argonauts’ stops, Hylas was dragged into a spring by the nymphs who inhabited the water. They fell in love with him for his beauty, just as Heracles had some time before. Ancient authors disagree on whether Hylas stayed willingly or was unable to escape. Regardless, Hylas never resurfaced. Heracles was distraught and could not be comforted. He searched so hard and for so long that he was left behind by the Argo and its travelers.

The relationship between Heracles and Hylas is quite similar to that of Achilles and Patroclus, in that they can be interpreted as pederastic. Both relationships also end with the couples being separated by an outside force. Jon Martin, in the interview
following this introduction, latches onto Heracles and Hylas’ separation: “genuine queer relationships were tragic.”

Until recently, most LGBTQIA+ representation in the media ended with tragedy. Plays like *The Laramie Project* by Moises Kaufman and *Angels in America* by Tony Kushner featured the deaths of real homosexual people. A modern individual thus views queer relationships through a different lens. After the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s, anti-LGBTQ backlash rose out of fear and anger. In the 1990s and early 2000s, several hundred gay men and women were beat to death. With such narratives permeating the news, books, movies and plays still to this day, it would be impossible for a modern individual to read Heracles and Hylas’ relationship and its demise the same way an ancient individual would. Mads O’Brien supports the relatability of the tragic ending to their relationship: “Though you could argue it was a queer relationship or not, it was definitely a positive and loving one, and I’m sure people throughout history can identify with either or both of the characters in the way that they care for another person or mourn their loss.”
INTERVIEW

How does the depiction of the female or queer character in this specific myth reflect what you believe to be true about the role of women or queer individuals in the ancient world?

Mads O’Brien: (My answer is assuming Hercules and Hylas are the queer characters here. I actually didn’t read their relationship as a queer relationship that much—I’ll address that more in the next questions.) It seems to me from the readings provided—and from other things I’ve read/learned about ancient Greek culture—that queer relationships or actions were much more commonplace and not chastised or exiled like they sometimes are today. So I suppose the ‘nonchalance’ with which people regarded Hercules and Hylas’ relationship was normal or expected in the ancient world.

I’m not sure if you count the water nymph as a female character, but if so, her depiction doesn’t reflect what I believe the role of women to have been in the ancient world. The female nymph is entranced by Hylas’ beauty, she lusts for him and has to have him for her own. From my understanding of the ancient world, it was often the men who lusted after or tried to win over women. (However, in Greek myths nymphs and sirens are supposed to be much more sexual/”man-eating” by nature, so this might not count.)

Jon Martin: Well, they depicted what I thought exactly: Romantic/romanticized figures with a tragic end to either themselves or their lovers. Especially with Herakles, as his lover is drowned by nymphs, who are beautifully dangerous.
This myth reflects both what the author thought about queer people as well as what society thought about it—that genuine queer relationships were tragic. Personal and societal views influence each other heavily, so it would be impossible to say whether the myths represent a single ancient individual’s views or ancient society’s views as a whole.

How does the depiction of those same characters reflect the role of women or queer individuals in the modern world?

Mads O’Brien: The Hercules/Hylas myth reminded me most of the modern trope of the “strong leader/CEO guy mentoring but taking advantage of a younger naïve guy in the office”—the superior makes the younger man his ‘pet’ who sort of follows him around and does him a lot of favors. Supposedly Hylas was passive in his relationship with Hercules and was very often just a trainee of his “mentor”, who he doted on when he went to retrieve water for him from the stream. The depiction of these men even made me think of the often corrupt “priest and choir boy” relationship—similar to the trope discussed above, but with additional romantic or sexual tension there. Their relationship could also be seen as one of domination and submission.

Jon Martin: Whether these plotlines and characters inherently reflect our modern society or not, we are able to project ourselves and our lives onto the characters and their situations. As human beings, we always find ourselves in what we see and what we read.
How are the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth present in modern media?


Mads O’Brien: I actually can’t think of any specific shows/movies/etc. where I’ve seen the plot of Hercules/Hylas myth reflected. However, if you make Hylas a woman, I think the Hylas-Hercules relationship mirrors another common trope in modern media. Countless TV shows and books feature a plot where someone in the workplace is sleeping with a woman in the office, and that’s how she secures her position or moves up in the company. Hylas reminded me of that female character: a little naïve, not greedy but eager to reap the benefits of being associated with someone so powerful like Hercules providing him with great opportunities (like the expedition they were on before Hylas was drowned).

Jon Martin: Zeus and Herakles [as characters] are still relevant in movies and T.V. today from Disney classics through mega blockbuster hits. The image of sirens/nymphs however, has evolved to a lot more sinister persona than the one portrayed from something to be feared to something that needs to be conquered.

This is difficult, because myths like those of Herakles are incredibly heteronormative—especially compared to modern portrayals of queer characters. Herakles is typically depicted as a hyper-masculine heterosexual hero. The way we depict homosexuality and the way the ancient myths depict homosexuality are completely different; either we tone it down or they tone it down.
Why do you think the themes, characters, and plotlines in this myth have remained relevant despite such a significant passage of time since its origin?

Mads O’Brien: Perhaps the story of Hercules and Hylas has remained relevant because humanity will always foster mentor-mentee relationships. I think that many readers would admire the relationship that Hercules and Hylas had, especially if they read more of the backstory of the myth than I got the chance to. Though you could argue it was a queer relationship or not, it was definitely a positive and loving one, and I’m sure people throughout history can identify with either or both of the characters in the way that they care for another person or mourn their loss.

Jo Martin: Well, they are stories about sex, love, loss and are just overall relatable to the human experience or at least emulate it enough to make it seem great.

What else do you think is important to say regarding this myth and the way it connects the ancient and modern worlds?

Jo Martin: I think it just connects [the two worlds] beautifully and you can see where a lot of different storytelling mediums have gotten inspiration, especially the fantasy genre.

(Optional) If you were assigned two myths, what connection do you see between the two? Why do you think I gave you both?

Mads O’Brien: Both involve mystical female characters with a hostility or disregard towards men – the water nymph who grabs Hylas, and Scylla and Charybdis
who wreak havoc on sailors. Both of the myths associate these women with living in or originating from water, something that I think comes up a lot in ancient mythology. At the same time, both tales also illustrate the fraternity that forms among male parties of adventurers—Odysseus and his men, Hercules and his men but especially Hylas. When one or more men are lost to the water, the man left aboard the ship or on land responds with great grief. The myths depict or at least suggest the ancient man’s disdain and/or fear of the sea’s creatures (though I’m a little unclear if Hercules and his party ever found out that Hylas was grabbed by a water nymph). In reading these myths, I saw an interesting dichotomy form between the feminine waters and the masculine seamen or land-farers.

   **Jon Martin:** They [Eurydice and Heracles and Hylas] are both tragic stories of loss and the length people will go to get the loved one they lost back. They are both stories about grieving and I appreciate that. I think you gave me them because they were very similar and one was primarily about male homosexual lovers, which I could relate to.
CREATIVE PIECE
*Where the lost things are*

Hylas becomes lost.

Seduced by the water, pulled in by an inviting gaze, by tepid, velvet lips, by soft skin, by the temptation of experiencing what he had yet to experience. Leaving the world he left behind is not difficult; leaving his earthly love, though, is far from easy. Greeted by the tight, fluid embrace, sliding through the spring as naturally as every other atom in the water and

Hylas finds himself.

Finds himself beyond his corporeal body, beyond earthly pleasures, beyond the man he loves. He finds himself beyond himself. Merging with the surrounding beings, life forces combining into one, seeping into the water, into the ground, into the world, finding a purpose, finding a meaning, skin melting, merging, forming something new and

Hylas knows he will not be forgiven.

He knows his love will never forget, will feel betrayed, abandoned, but he cannot care when for the first time he feels like he belongs. Belongs amongst the silent souls with the shimmering skin and the bodies which are no longer truly bodies, with those who have found a greater existence than life on the land, who understand that they are the lost things and

Hylas is where the lost things are.

He is where the lost things are, and hearing his lover shout his name to the sky, fall to his knees on the ground, pound his fists in the dirt, threatening the world to bring back the man he loves, he wants to tell the man to stop. Wants to tell him that this was meant to happen, that the Gods and fate had chosen him, had asked the nymphs to take him and

Hylas belongs to the world.

Belongs to the world of the lost where he has been found, belongs beyond while his love is above, belongs in the embrace of the water just as he now realizes he belonged in the
arms of the hero, belongs in this new being as he had only ever belonged in the eyes of the man crying for his loss, and now he does not feel like he belongs any longer, because he belongs with the man he left behind, but he cannot go to where he belongs ever again, can never return to where his heart is being called, will never see what he has given up, and

Hylas slips into the darkness.
CREATIVE PIECE COMMENTARY

“Where the lost things are” narrates Hylas being seduced into the waters of the nymphs; it attempts to demonstrate the difference between the modern ambiguous perception of love—which he has with Heracles—and the ancient Eros characterized by desire—which is a catalyst for his capture by the nymphs. The poem is free form, although it has a specific structure. Each paragraph is the start of a grammatically and syntactically errored sentence which ends with a phrase detailing exactly what is happening to Hylas. He has a battle within himself throughout the piece which focuses on several binaries: masculinity and femininity, the earthly world/his earthly lover and the world of the nymphs/supernatural love. By the end, Hylas discovers he would choose Heracles if he could, but the piece follows the tragedy of the original narrative.

As previously mentioned, Hylas’ disappearance served as the inspiration for several notable pieces of art—one of which is “Hylas and the Nymphs” (1896) by John William Waterhouse. The painting depicts a curly-haired man, Hylas, in a blue cloth reaching into a lily pond and being beckoned forwards by seven nude women who surround him on three sides. He is tanned and in ideal physical shape. The nymphs are pale and painted in a classical style with wide set eyes, strong noses, and thin lips.

“Hylas and the Nymphs” directly inspired “Where the Lost Things are”. The muted feminine color palette of the nymphs contrasted against the bright and deep coloring of Hylas’ clothing translated into the binaries explicated above.
Figure 1

FEMALE HOMOSEXUALITY

While pederasty was not necessarily shameful—at least for the “active” partner—it was recognized phenomenon in the ancient world. People had no doubt men and boys participated in sexual relationships with one another. In contrast, even when presented with potential evidence, people in the ancient world were quick to deny the possibility of two women engaging in a sexual relationship (Hallet, 449). Although such behavior was taboo and generally unaccepted, women who had sex with women, at least women who felt sexually attracted to other women, were mentioned by several ancient authors.

The Louvre Papyrus discovered by the French Egyptologist Auguste Mariette contains a portion of a maiden’s song by Alcman which depicts amorous intent from a chorus of women to the goddess Aotis: “. . .But I sing/ of Agido’s brilliance. She draws/ my gaze like the sun/ she invokes as a shining witness;/ but out dance’s glorious/ leader will not have another words of praise/ or blame,/ for she thinks that she herself/ is the one to notice, a thoroughbred/ in the common herd, a thundering,/ muscular steed, the kind/ you dream of, dozing in the shade” (Mulroy, 56). Like most other ancient depictions of women’s appreciate for other women, Alcman’s language creates a sort of uncertainty for the modern reader. Is the chorus actually speaking of sexual or romantic attraction for another woman? Was this normal? The answers to these questions, for the most part, remain dependent on the perspective of the individual providing information.

Sappho, mentioned in several other sections of this thesis, is the strongest connection to female homosexuality in antiquity. The word “lesbian,” although it was not used specifically in its modern context until the late 1900s, connects directly to Sappho
and her home on the island Lesbos. For this reason, women displaying a proclivity for sexual or romantic attraction to other women were sometimes referred to as exhibiting behavior “like those from Lesbos” or would exclaim their passion to that of people from Lesbos (Gubar, 51). One of the words actually used to represent women with attraction to other women in antiquity was “tribade,” which refers to the act of “tribadism,” or a woman rubbing her genitals against another woman’s genitals (Rupp, 358).

While female homosexual tendencies were mentioned in the poetry of Alcman and Sappho, one cannot accurately argue that these representations of female to female amorous relationships were indicative of the experiences of real people in antiquity. Poetic (or any other fictional) representations of phenomena cannot be accepted as fact or reality without evidence, and thus far, there has been little evidence uncovered regarding the actual experiences of “lesbian” women in the ancient world. Perhaps the lack of evidence is because of the existence of women within the private sphere of society; any sexual transgressions committed by a woman would not necessarily have been advertised in the same way it would have been for a man. Perhaps the lack of evidence is because women were so closely monitored by the men in their life—either their fathers or husbands. Regardless, female homosexuality is an aspect of the ancient world which has yet to be explained fully.

Ultimately, modern scholars cannot create consensus on the answers for questions of sexuality in ancient Greece and Rome, because the ancient texts at a modern individual’s disposal were not written to answer those questions. The modern world’s perception of sexuality is varied and often polarized, and the same can be said for the
ancient world. While it is clear that some form of female homosexuality existed in antiquity, due to its presence in contemporaneous poetry, it is unclear how exactly those poetic conventions represented the reality of potentially homosexual women.
CONCLUSION

The relationship between the ancient and modern worlds is complicated and varies based on culture and personal perspective. It can be characterized by the tendency of those who are currently alive to apply concepts from their world to societies of the past. This is especially true when analyzing how modern individuals perceive queer and female characters in Greco-Roman mythology:

Clytemnestra, while she was hated by people in the ancient world for exhibiting masculine behavior and usurping her husband’s power, can be seen as a tragic hero to individuals in the modern world for escaping from an abusive relationship and gaining freedom and power over her own body. “Slice” characterizes her as almost jocular and a competent ruler—especially compared to Agamemnon. The poem reverses the power dynamic present in the original narrative. While Agamemnon sets the pace of their relationship in the Oresteia, “Slice” allows Clytemnestra to develop and keep the upper hand throughout the events.

Eurydice’s lack of autonomy and agency in her myth would not have bothered people in antiquity, for it was befitting of a woman in the ancient world, but modern individuals see the way her fate is determined solely by Orpheus as objectification. “The Sonnets of Eurydice and Orpheus,” compared to the Metamorphoses and Virgil’s Georgic, allows Eurydice to express discontent with her situation. While the original narrative focuses specifically on Orpheus and his talent, the sonnets illustrate Eurydice’s talents—in wit and the ability to quote the classics.
Daphne and Io’s plights depict a literal transformation of women into objects as punishment for denying the male gaze. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* describes their transformations as though neither woman has feelings, as though each woman is less than human before their plots even start. Contrastingly, “Her Legacy Prevails” fully develops the emotional state of Daphne and Io as individuals being victimized by instances of power-based personal violence.

Persephone’s abduction by Hades was acceptable in the ancient world specifically because of Hades’ divinity. Although the ancient construct of *hubris* and the modern construct of rape are not the same, they both similarly punish the aggressor. In the modern world, Hades would be considered a rapist, whereas he was not in the ancient world. “Come Springtime” focuses on Persephone’s power as both queen of the underworld and as the bringer of spring instead of focusing on her powerlessness and the wills of Zeus and Hades.

Hera, like Clytemnestra, could be seen by an individual in the modern world as the victim of an abusive partner, although instead of murdering her husband, Hera constantly rebels against him. Hera’s jealousy and pettiness caused some individuals in the ancient world—especially those who wrote about her, such as Homer—to dislike her. Yet these same qualities are perceived as understandable when observed through the lens of an abusive relationship. “The Lost Campaign” adds layers of complexity to Hera’s typically oversimplified characterization in myth; while she is irrational and obnoxious in myth, she is rational and capable in my poem.
Athena and Aphrodite, like Hera, are perceived drastically differently depending on the reader’s personal background. One interviewee saw Athena as a modern queer woman, and the other saw her as similar in essence to a Hindu goddess. While ancient myths tended to pose Athena and Aphrodite as opposites, “This convo is a bore” shows that they have significant similarities, especially as they relate to men. Each is undermined by gods and each acts as the guiding force for a mortal man.

Scylla and Charybdis, unlike monsters associated with masculinity, are inseparable from their original female identities, as they were transformed for violating the constructs of gender. Simultaneous to the violation of ancient gender roles, however, they were also upholding modern stereotypes regarding women—mainly that of the overly emotional and irrational aspects of womanhood. As with the other female characters examined within this thesis, Scylla and Charybdis are given complexity and power in my interpretation; “Feed!” contrasts directly with their depiction as a simple nuisance in epics like the Odyssey, and instead flushes out their backstories whilst simultaneously allowing their existences as monsters to retain some element of humanity.

Male characters in Greco-Roman mythology who exhibit sexual or romantic attraction to other male characters are often labeled with the modern concept of homosexuality or “queerness”. While neither of those identities existed in the ancient world, social constructs existed within which men were allowed to have sex with other males, preferably young in age. The concept of pederasty can be perceived within the relationships of Achilles and Patroclus and Heracles and Hylas. The ancient depictions of their relationships—in the Iliad and Argonautica, respectively—characterized the love
and adoration present as primarily one-sided. Achilles and Heracles each are shown dramatically mourning the loss of their lovers, while Patroclus and Hylas’ emotions are, for the most part, untapped. “Love is a Cunning Weaver” and “Where the lost things are” explicate the mutuality of the relationships.

A considerable age difference is also present within the relationship between Zeus and Ganymede, but the aspect of divinity and abduction by the divine excludes it from fulfilling the requirements of a pederastic relationship. “For all that he is not” emphasizes the power dynamic present in the relationship; the piece is similar to that of Daphne and Io’s in that it gives voices to the victim of a god’s unwanted attention. One could argue that relationships in the ancient world, both heterosexual and homosexual in nature, centered on uneven power dynamics.

The social construct of pederasty only labeled the behavior of the two parties as “passive” or “active” and did not label the sexual orientation of the individuals exhibiting the behavior, at least in the modern sense of sexual orientation. Thus, when an individual in the modern world refers to any of the aforementioned characters as homosexual or queer, they are using a current social construct to understand the behavior of individuals in antiquity.

Compared to male homosexual behavior in antiquity, female homosexual behavior seems to have been either ignored or treated as culturally suspect, with a few exceptions in the Archaic period (Alcman and Sappho). Although female homosexual behavior is present in poetry of the time, one cannot positively state whether the poetic representations of same-sex female amorous relationships were truly indicative of those
in the real world. Further research must be conducted before definitive statements can be made, despite the evidence that *tribades* (women interested in other women) were met with disapproval.

Humans apply familiar narratives and patterns to unfamiliar situations in order to understand new information. This phenomenon does not only take place when ingesting new information, however; it also applies to how people come to comprehend the actions and behaviors of other people both in the real world and in fictional representations of the real world. Humans use their own personal experiences to fabricate the underlying motivations of the actions of others. In that way, modern individuals use narratives in contemporaneous media sources as well as what they themselves have undergone in order to make sense of the characters, plotlines, and themes of ancient texts.

I am also a participant in this phenomenon. Before collecting research for my thesis, I looked upon aspects of the past such as homosexuality and gender with rose-colored glasses. I knew of the institution of pederasty, and I falsely assumed the individuals who participated in such social conventions were free of stigma and shame. I also made assumptions about gender roles and how they affected various aspects of ancient life based on how I understood our world and its relationship to the classical world. Nothing in the present is black and white, so it was wrong to assume matters in the past were. We must observe how our experiences affect our understanding of history and how our understanding of history affects how we perceive our experiences.

*Love is a Cunning Weaver: Myths, Sexuality, and the Modern World* weaves together narratives of both the ancient and modern worlds by entwining several modes of
exploration and study—including research, creative works, and interviews. Gender and sexuality have always been creative forces which shape the ideals and perspectives of entire generations, and as time passes, people will continue to be affected by narratives of love both old and new.
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