

8/28/08

Interpretation and Definition

M&L Chapter 1 pgs. 3-17

NOTE: Was told to study facts: people, places, names, locations of major characters and today (i.e. Troy)

“Set aside enough time to read it through once, then read it again and make notes/outline”

–Professor Higgs on how he would prepare for an exam

DEFINING MYTH

-there is no single definition for the word “myth” because there are so many types of myth that not one definition can fully encompass all the qualities of “myth”

THE MEANING OF THE WORD MYTH

“Myth” is derived from Greek word “mythos”, which can mean tale, or story, and that is essentially what a myth is: a story. Some would argue that a myth must be a “traditional” story that has stood the test of time and is continually retold, whether that is through word of mouth, script, or painting, whatever. Distinctions are often made between “myth,” i.e., “true myth” or “myth proper,” and “saga” or “legend,” and “folktale.”

MYTH: doesn't include all stories, just those relating to the gods and their relations with humans and the world

SAGA OR LEGEND: a story containing a kernel of historical truth, despite later fictional accretions.

FOLKTALE: a story, usually of oral origin, that contains elements of the fantastic, often in the pattern of the adventure of a hero or a heroine. Its main function is entertainment, but it can also educate with all sorts of insights. Under this rubric may be classified fairytales, which are full of supernatural beings and magic and provide a more pointed moral content.

Won't be a clear cut-and-dry example of any of these stories in Greek/Roman mythology.

The most common association of the words "myth" and "mythology" is with what is incredible and fantastic. "Myth" sometimes has a derogatory meaning in everyday life, such as when someone suspects something may be too good to be true. Myth is like an art form. Myth serves to interpret the whole of human experience and that interpretation can be true or fictitious, valuable or insignificant, even if it's quite different from reality.

RELIGION

Religion and myth go hand-in-hand. CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS appreciates the "sacredness" of myth as a deeply and timeless world that it embodies.

ETIOLOGY

Derived from the Greek word for "cause" (aitia). An etiological interpretation of myth states that myth must give the reason for a fact, a ritual practice, or an institution. Thus narrowly defined, etiology imposes too limiting and rigid a criterion for definition.

Looking at myth in a broad etiological fashion is an effective way at analyzing myth.