

# ELEMENTS OF CLASSICAL MYTHOLOGY IN MODERN FREEMASONRY

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## INTRODUCTION

For millennia, references to specific aspects of World Mythology and folklore have served to provide a foundation whereupon newer ritualistic, dramatic and literary structures have been erected. Classical mythological narratives, particularly those of the Greeks and Romans, have provided valuable subtext through the use of inference and allusion, if not outright appropriation, for many subsequent characterizations. To attribute grey eyes to a character in a modern novel, for instance, is to evoke an Athenian element, perhaps alluding to the possession of keen reasoning powers or a propensity for strategic thought – all aspects of the ancient Homeric depiction of “Grey-eyed Athena”. In the vernacular of literary criticism, this device is called intertextuality which, in applications such as the example above, functions as an economical method of utilizing short allusions to familiar themes as a means to add contextual depth to the subject at hand without having to unpack the root narrative in its entirety.

Thanks largely to Thomas Bulfinch’s and Edith Hamilton’s *Mythologies*, stories of the Titans, Olympians and Heroes of the Classical Era have survived into modern times as a source of popular influence. Even if we don’t know of them first hand, through direct exposure via the epics and tragedies, etc., we are aware of their personas from a near-constant referential barrage – everything from the names of the planets and the days of the week, to all ages of painting, sculpture, literature, and architecture bear the unmistakable stamp of Classical Mythology. We know what someone means when they say that one has the “Midas Touch” or an “Oedipus Complex”; commonplace words such as *fury*, *echo* and *panic*, each having its origin in a mythological persona, have been completely assimilated into our very language. The influence of Classical Mythology is socially and culturally inescapable.

When one examines Masonic ritual & symbolism through the interpretive lens of Classical Mythology, the correspondences immediately begin to present themselves and become, at times, strikingly obvious. These inferences and allusions are present to such a degree within the Craft – in the officer’s jewels, the Furniture of the Lodge Room, the Deacon’s rods, even in the rituals themselves – that almost everywhere one cares to look can be found some vestige of the great mythological systems of the world.

It is the purpose of this piece to enumerate some of these mythologically significant parallels and to illustrate that Freemasonry not only constitutes a living mythological system, replete with its own syncretized body of archetypes and lore, but also that the function of Masonic ritual and initiation serves an identical purpose to that of myth in other sociocultural systems. Considering that the further comparison and explication of our subject is predicated on an understanding of what we mean by the function of both Freemasonry and mythology, we will attempt to clarify the relevant aspects of these points in their turn.

## THE FUNCTIONS OF MYTH

The common consensus among most modern anthropologists is that the origins of the gods may be found in the personified forces of nature; Zeus – the thunderous sky-god, Poseidon – the god of the raging seas, Hades – the chthonic deity at the center of the Earth, along with various agricultural and fertility deities, dutifully placated by their respective cults, were personifications of natural objects and phenomena [1]. This animistic approach thereby afforded man an opportunity to form a relationship with his environment that could be influenced by ritualism and the practice of what Frazer had termed “sympathetic magic” [2].

Conversely, according to the works of psychologist C.G. Jung, the various pantheons, be they that of the Hindu, Egyptian, Greco-Roman, et cetera, were personified symbolic sets of archetypal forces within the collective psyche of man; the gods and heroes are rendered as compartmentalized aspects of the Self, engaged in a constant melee of dissonance and resolution [3]. “[...] the images of the great myths and religions still have about them a little of the “cloudy” nature of absolute knowledge in that they always seem to contain more than we can assimilate consciously, even by means of elaborate interpretations. They always retain an ineffable and mysterious quality that seems to reveal to us more than we can really know.” [4] Expressing an anthropologically complimentary sentiment, the mythologist Joseph Campbell once stated that “Dream is the personalized myth, myth the depersonalized dream; both myth and dream are symbolic in the same general way of the dynamic of the psyche. But in the dream the forms are quirked by the peculiar troubles of the dreamer, whereas in myth the problems and solutions shown are directly valid for all mankind”[5], thereby referring to the body of world myth and folklore as the collective dream of mankind. These psychoanalytical approaches to mythology seek to employ archetypal identities as placeholders for groups of concepts, both abstract and experiential, in an effort to catalog and eventually integrate these seemingly disparate aspects of the Self into a unified whole.

## THE INITIATORY FUNCTION OF FREEMASONRY

There are many interpretive keys whose application may yield a greater understanding and promote a synthesis of the material inherent in Masonic ritual and symbolism. When one takes an interpretive approach to the rites of Freemasonry similar to those employed by Campbell, Jung and Frazer in their attempts to unravel the great mythological and Mystery systems of the world, many parallels begin to emerge and one begins to see that some very common mythological motifs have provided a mysterious source of buoyancy to Freemasonry. Furthermore, bearing in mind that both the general body of world mythology and the myriad initiatory tributaries to modern Masonry disappear in the mists of time, it is all but impossible to say at exactly what developmental stage the comingling of these concepts occurred.

Like all initiatory rites, those of Freemasonry are designed to bring the initiate from their previous station in life into a new one, hence the usage of the term *initiate* – to cause something to begin [6]. The transformational

element must occur; one in which the initiate finds himself irretrievably catapulted into a new paradigm in his consciousness. This is most commonly accomplished by means of an allegorical ritual-drama consisting of some form of ordeal. The use of an allegorical ritual-drama as the central component in the initiatory process is common to nearly all of the Ancient Mysteries of which we are aware [7]. Significantly, this device is also employed in Freemasonry's Blue Lodge and several of its appendant bodies.

## MYTHOLOGICAL MOTIFS IN FREEMASONRY

As was previously stated, it is the purpose of this work to enumerate some of the examples of mythological motifs present in Freemasonry. Considering the fact that it would be nearly impossible to exhaustively catalog every instance of possible mythological import, the following will be limited to a few of the more glaring examples.

### THE ORDERS OF ARCHITECTURE

The Orders of Architecture, as described in Vitruvius' *De Architectura* [8], are discussed in the Masonic Fellowcraft Degree lecture. Visual representations of these orders are also commonly found in the Lodge room, either in two- or three-dimensional form. Significantly, each of the three ancient Greek architectural orders, the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian, are associated with one of the Three Principal Supports of the Masonic Lodge, which are Wisdom, Strength and Beauty [9].

The Doric order is said to denote strength and was held sacred to Ares, the god of war. In ancient building practices, the Doric order was used in the construction of structures which served a martial purpose, such as those devoted to warfare or defense [10]. This style is especially notable for its relative simplicity. It is the least ornamental of the original Greek orders of architecture, thereby evoking a martial atmosphere through its clean, unembellished lines. In Freemasonry, the Doric column is associated with Strength – the Senior Warden's station.

The Ionic order of architecture denotes wisdom and was held sacred to Athena. Being between the Doric and Corinthian in overall complexity, it is moderate and tempered in appearance. This style was most frequently employed in houses of learning, such as academies and libraries [11]. In the Masonic Lodge, the Ionic column is attributed to Principal Support of Wisdom, which is further associated with the Worshipful Master's station.

The Corinthian order of architecture was employed when a structure was to be designated for an artistic or aesthetic purpose, such as a museum. This order was considered sacred to Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty. The Corinthian style was the most ornate of the three original, ancient Greek orders of architecture [12]. In Freemasonry, this Corinthian column is fittingly associated with Beauty and the office of Junior Warden, which is in the South.

## THE BRAZEN PILLARS

Representations of the Two Brazen Pillars that are said to have stood on the porch of King Solomon's Temple [13] are situated in the West of the Masonic Lodge room and are referenced in the lecture accompanying the degree of Fellowcraft. The capital of each pillar is decorated with pomegranates, lilies and netting [14]. Pomegranates have figured prominently in various mythological cycles from the Mediterranean. Perhaps the most notable appearance is in the myth of Persephone's imperfect ascent from the Underworld where Hades had given her pomegranate seeds, thus obliging her to spend a part of the year in his kingdom. The lily is associated with the Olympian goddess, Hera, and are said to have sprouted from drops of milk that had spilled from her breast as she nursed Herakles. The Brazen Pillars have also been equated to the Pillars of Herakles [15], which will be discussed below.

## THE PILLARS OF HERAKLES AND THE MEDITERRANEAN MODEL OF THE LODGE ROOM

There is an interesting, though perhaps less-than-tenable, argument which posits that the basic layout of the Masonic Lodge room is a model of the Ancient World, particularly those areas that border the Mediterranean Sea [16]. It is notable that the Latin *mediterraneus*, the etymological predecessor of the word *Mediterranean*, means 'the middle of the Earth's surface'. According to this interpretation, the Two Brazen Pillars of the Lodge represent the Pillars of Herakles. The Strait of Gibraltar, which connects the Atlantic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea and divides the continents of Europe and Africa, has been conjectured to be the site of the Pillars of Herakles. Individually, the Pillars are represented by the Spain's Rock of Gibraltar to the North and Morocco's Jebel Musa to the South. Mythologically, Herakles is said to have brought down these pillars.

In this geographical Lodge room, the Grecian island of Crete inhabits the vicinity of the Masonic Altar. Crete was the site of the ancient Minoan civilization and King Minos' labyrinth, which was constructed by Daedalus to house the Minotaur, in Classical Mythology. The ubiquitous Taurian elements of Minoan civilization, and the attendant mythological corpus, are likely referential to the Taurian precessional age [17], which began in approximately 4000BCE – the Masonic *Anno Lucis*.

This situational relationship allows us to superimpose the template of mythological locales, events and narratives of the Ancient Mediterranean onto the Lodge Room and to, thereby, gain yet another intriguing vantage point from which to appreciate Masonic Ritual, furniture and symbolism.

## MASONIC LODGE OFFICERS AND MYTHOLOGICAL ARCHETYPES

There are many points of similarity between the attributes of mythological archetypes and the duties of Masonic Lodge Officers. We will elucidate but a few of these here, which will serve to establish a useful interpretive

lens, which one may employ in order to independently extrapolate the presence of many other mythologically archetypal functions within the Masonic Lodge.

Two of the Senior Deacon's duties, as stated in the opening of a Lodge, is to receive and conduct candidates and to carry orders from the Worshipful Master in the East. These functions are reflections of the hermetic or mercurial mythological archetype. Hermes, who was syncretized as Mercury in the Roman Pantheon, was often depicted as the *psychopompos* who conducted the souls of the dead – and, in a few cases, the living – into the underworld [18]. He brought Persephone back from Hades at the behest of Demeter; Hermes guided Orpheus to fetch Eurydice, he conducted Theseus, Psyche & Herakles on their brief sojourns into the underworld. Similarly, Herm-anubis (due to Ptolemaic syncretization, particularly in Hellenic Alexandria, Hermes became fused with Anubis in this archetypal role) conducted the recently deceased to the Duat, which, in Egyptian Mythology, corresponds to Hades or Tartarus [19].

An interesting astro-mythological explanation for this hermetic attribute may have something to do with the fact that the planet Mercury, whose orbit is in very close proximity to that of the Sun from the perspective of the Earth, appears to guide the Sun into the “Underworld” – night, in this analogy – at the close of every day. This is particularly significant when we consider the chthonic arc (i.e. “Low Twelve”) of a certain “perilous journey” upon which the mercurial Senior Deacon conducts the solar candidate in Masonic ritual. The Senior Deacon also serves the mercurial function of messenger within the Masonic Lodge, carrying messages from the Worshipful Master in the East to the Senior Warden in the West and elsewhere about the Lodge – just as the wing-footed Mercury, the herald, carried messages to and from the Olympians [20].

It is also notable that the Secretary of the Masonic Lodge is responsible for recording the minutes of the Lodge's communications; this was an attribute of Thoth, who was the scribe and hermetic archetype of the Egyptian pantheon [21]. Thoth was fused with Hermes in Hellenistic Egypt – notably, in the personage of Hermes Trismegistus (Thrice Great), to which Titus Flavius Clemens (Clement of Alexandria, an early Christian church father and convert from Pagandom) had attributed the forty-two books of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Due to his being considered the personification of the archetypal scribe, Thoth-Hermes was thus often referred to as the “writer of all books” [22].

The Marshal is the Lodge's conductor and Director of Ceremonies. His principal role is to organize and conduct processions – a tradition that comes to us largely from the martial victory processions of the Homeric epics, such as that which occurred at the termination of the *Iliad*. This ancient tradition of processions, victory laps and parades also forms the conceptual basis of such disparate points as the carousel (or, merry-go-round), trump cards and the very word *triumph* – the latter stemming from the Italian *trionfi* [23].

The foregoing examples, along with many other aspects of Freemasonry's initiatory degree work, substantiate the Craft's association with the Hermetic Arts and the mythological essence of Classical and Epic Literature.

#### THE OFFICER'S JEWELS AS MYTHOLOGICAL EMBLEMS

In Masonic regalia, the role of each officer is designated by a particular jewel which is either appended to a collar or fixed atop a rod. The Senior and Junior Stewards' rods are ornately capped with a cornucopia within a square and compasses. The cornucopia comes to us directly from Classical Mythology, where it is considered to be the horn of Amalthea, the she-goat that suckled Zeus in his infancy. The cornucopia also appears as a symbol of Demeter, the grain mother, whose Roman counterpart is Ceres, the etymological namesake of our word *cereal*.

The Senior and Junior Deacon's rods are adorned with depictions of the Sun and Moon, respectively, also within a square and compasses on their caps. This is mythologically significant in the case of the Senior Deacon who carries the Worshipful Masters' orders "from East to West" – following, of course, the apparent path of the Sun from the perspective of the Earth. The Sun, which was universally anthropomorphized in ancient mythologies (as in the cases of Shamash, Ra, Horus, Helios, Phoebus-Apollo, Sol Invictus, et. al.), was made to occupy a solar barque or chariot during its diurnal circuit from East to West [24].

By this analogy, it could easily be construed that the Junior Deacon's lunar symbolism is in relation to his position in the West of the Lodge – i.e. "at the close of the day". It is a common understanding, mythologically and otherwise, that the Sun is associated with the daytime and the Moon with the night – or, as it is stated in a certain Masonic lecture referencing the Three Lesser Lights of Freemasonry, "As the Sun rules the day and the Moon governs the night [...]".

Most mythological systems have some sort of lunar archetype – some with more developed narratives and attributes than others – to contrast and/or complement that of the solar. Some examples of these are Djehuti (Egyptian – an early, regional Thoth prototype whose attribution is lunar when depicted as an ibis or baboon with the Moon disc), Sin (Assyro-Babylonian), Cybele (Phrygian), Hecate (Greek) and, of course, Luna (Roman).

The crossed keys of the Treasurer's jewel is also a notable mythological motif, as they are also associated with the Anatolian, and later Greek, goddess Hecate [25], and also with the Leontocephaline, a lesser figure found in the iconography of Roman Mithraism [26]. Hecate, a lunar crone-goddess, was associated with crossroads, silver and currency – which is pertinent to the office of Treasurer. The Leontocephaline, or "lion-headed" – a common bas-relief in extant Mithraea – is sometimes depicted with crossed keys held over the chest – in the manner of Osiris' ever-present crook and flail, which later morphed into general symbols of pharaonic authority – and a set of hammer and tongs, the working tools of Hephaestus (Vulcan), at his feet. This gains Masonic significance when we

consider that \*\*\*\*\* inhabits the same archetypal role in the Abrahamic canon (i.e. metallurgical artificer) as Hephaestus and Vulcan do in the Greek and Roman pantheons, respectively [27]. Notably, most depictions of the Leontocephaline also include the *caduceus*, or wand of Hermes. It is also suspected that this figure was a zoomorphic representation of the *Leo* Grade in the Mithraic initiatory cycle [28].

The Masonic Tyler's jewel, being a sword, is an obviously martial symbol. The Tyler's duties are, in part, "to keep off all cowans and eavesdroppers and see that none pass or repass [...]". In these regards, and considering the fact that the Tyler is sworn to guard and maintain the security of the Lodge, his office may be construed as the most aresian or martial.

The jewel of the Lodge Organist is the lyre and, therefore, has some of the most developed mythological significance. The lyre is most commonly associated with Orpheus, to whom it was given by Phoebus-Apollo (Apollo in his most solar aspect). Orpheus is said to have charmed man and beast with the instrument and to have used it to gain access to Hades in order to fetch Eurydice, his ill-fated bride. This he accomplished by enchanting both Charon, the Stygian boatman, and Cerberus, the three-headed dog, with his music [29]. The myth of his chthonic descent/ascent is conjectured to have formed the basis of the Orphic Mysteries, which were an initiatory cycle in 6<sup>th</sup> Century Greece [30]. The influence of the Mystery Traditions, such as the Mithraic, Orphic and the Eleusinian, have been speculated to have survived in modern Freemasonry [31]. One may readily find depictions of the lyre in statuary and/or bas-relief adorning the many Orpheums and Lyric Halls across the Western World – these are, of course, in reference to Orpheus and his lyre, respectively.

Continuing with the theme of Hermetic allusions, we find the jewel of the Lodge Historian – the quill and scrolled parchment – which, in this context, could easily be considered a modernized reworking of the ever-present stylus and papyrus of Thoth-Hermes, particularly in his chthonic role. As we have mentioned, Thoth was the designated scribe of the Egyptian *Ennead*. This also applies, albeit to a lesser extent, to the crossed quills of the Secretary's jewel.

## THE MODES OF RECOGNITION

There is a body of Signs, Grips & Words that form Freemasonry's Modes of Recognition. These are the signals by which Masons are differentiated from non-Masons. While it would, of course, be imprudent to explicitly reveal the words here, we may discuss their mythological import and those to whom the words have been given should be able to deduce the word in question.

There is a certain craftsmen archetype present in many mythological sets who is specifically associated with metallurgy. Hephaestus is perhaps the most well-known of this type. He was the only son produced by the union of Hera and Zeus and was the husband and half-brother of Aphrodite. His Roman counterpart was Vulcan. In

the Abrahamic canon, this archetypal role was filled by the persona of \*\*\*\*\*, who was referred to as “the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron” [32] and an “instructor of every artificer in brass and iron” [33].

Cybele, who was worshipped throughout the Roman empire as Magna Mater but was originally a Phrygian deity, was both a mother and a harvest goddess and the consort of Attis. Her name is similar, and may be etymologically related, to the Syrian word *sibola*, which means “an ear of corn” [34]. This word, in turn, is reminiscent of the Ephraimitish pronunciation of the scriptural word \*\*\*\*\* [35], which in modern times has come to mean “a word or phrase frequently used, or a belief strongly held, by members of a group that is usually regarded by outsiders as meaningless, unimportant, or misguided” [36]. The word \*\*\*\*\* is associated with “a sheaf of wheat (or, alternately, “an ear of corn”) hung by a water ford”. Cybele was not readily assimilated as a separate entity into the Hellenic pantheon due to her syncretic similarity to Demeter, the chief mother and harvest goddess, whose popular status was largely due to her exalted station in the Eleusinian Mysteries. Fittingly, the Eleusinian Mysteries were of the agricultural variety.

Initiates into the Rites of Mithras were referred to as *syndexioi*, or “fellows of the grip” [37], and admission into the fraternity was completed with a handshake with the *Pater* – a comparable office to the Worshipful Master of a Masonic Lodge. Mithras and the Sol Invictus were commonly represented performing this grip in bas-reliefs found in many extant Mithraeum. This is, of course, Masonically significant particularly when we consider this grip *vis-à-vis* the Mithraic Grade of *Leo*, or Lion. The mythos and pantheon erected around the central figure of Mithras, himself a hermetic or mercurial archetype, included Sol Invictus (the “Unconquerable Sun”, an anthropomorphized solar deity), the Leontocephaline (the “lion-headed”, sphynxian personification of the Mithraic *Leo* grade), Cautus and Cautopates (the twin anthropomorphization of either the equinoxes or the solstices, depending on the interpretation applied), and other lesser figures.

## THE THREE LESSER LIGHTS

The Pythagorean Theorem is also mentioned in a certain lecture in Masonic Ritual. There is some evidence to support the idea that the Three Lesser Lights should be situated around the altar in such a way as to form a Pythagorean Triangle; this depends, largely, on the dimensions of the Altar and the situation of the “three burning tapers”. The mythological attribution to this triangle is that the base represents Isis, the vertical Osiris, and the hypotenuse Horus [38]. This has also been extrapolated to the attribution of “the Sun, the Moon and the Master of the Lodge” to the Three Lesser Lights.

## THE BLAZING STAR

The Blazing Star, a five-pointed star within a circle, is often depicted in the center of the Checkered Pavement. This symbol is alternately said to represent the Sun, Sirius (A & B combined, as seen by the naked eye)

and Venus [39]. The Solar interpretation is obvious, in terms of the Sun's Masonic significance as being the "glory and beauty of the day", et cetera, but the theory of the Blazing Star as a representation of Sirius provides us with much more symbolic substance for our contemplation.

Sirius, which is actually a binary system composed of the stars Sirius A and Sirius B, is the brightest star in the sky, apart from the Sun. This star resides in the constellation of Canis Major, hence the name "the Dog Star" (a name from whence we get the phrase, "the dog days of summer", or the Latin *dies caniculares*, denoting the heliacal rising and setting of Sirius during the summer months in that region). Sirius, or Sothis, as the star was known in Hellenistic Egypt, was especially significant to the agrarian cultures of the Nile River Valley due to the star's annual duty of heralding the coming inundation, which would eventually subside and leave the banks of the river fertile with silt. In light of the observational importance of this star, *vis-à-vis* the region's agricultural cycle, Sirius figured prominently in the symbolism of the region [40].

Sirius was later personified as the Egyptian Iachen, the Minoan I Wa Ko and thereby the Greek Iakchos, the torch-bearing son of Persephone. Interestingly, in the mythology of the North American Pawnee tribe, Sirius is referred to as the 'Wolf Star'; this fact speaks of the universality of Sothic Lore.

The Blazing Star's relationship to Venus (also anciently known as the Morning and/or Evening Star) may best be illustrated by the fact that it is represented in the form of a pentagram [41]. This significance comes primarily from the fact that Venus traces a five-petalled rosette at the completion of its synodic period, which is 583.9211 days – the amount of time it takes for the planet to return its originally observed position, relative to that of the Sun, as seen from the perspective of Earth – thus itself alluding to the pentagram.

## CHTHONIC DESCENTS AND THE ANCIENT MYSTERIES

The descent into the underworld, itself an allegorical representation of either night in the diurnal solar cycle or the winter solstice in the annual, is a culturally ubiquitous motif present in many world mythologies, occurring in the narratives of Osiris, Orpheus, Theseus, and many others [42]. Similarly, the ritual enactment of the "Dying and Resurrecting God", as exemplified by the mortal initiate, is also a common feature in many initiatory systems [43]. The chthonic descent as a liminal rite of initiation can be clearly discerned in the Egyptian *Book Of The Dead*, the Orphic Mysteries, the Eleusinian Mysteries, the Rites of Mithras and others.

## SOLAR AND AGRICULTURAL ALLEGORIES IN MYTH AND RITUAL

The solar allegory, as communicated by initiatory rites, was a common teaching method within the Mystery Religions of the ancient world [44]. These generally consisted of a personification of the Sun and dramatically documented his passage through the twelve astrological houses of the zodiac in one annual circuit. The practical

import of the annual solar allegory is largely agricultural. Copious examples of the allegorically rendered solar circuit, such as the “Solar Hero” narrative and the “Dying & Resurrecting God” cycle, may also be discerned in myriad variations within the body of world myth, fable, literature and the arts in general. The utilization of this solar personification may be found, to greater or lesser degrees, in such culturally and temporally diverse narratives as the *Twelve Labors of Hercules*, *Samson and Delilah*, the life of Jesus Christ, the *Nibelungen Cycle*, *Cinderella*, the Samurai films of Akira Kurosawa, the Spaghetti Western film genre and even *Star Wars*, if one applies the appropriate interpretive keys [45]. The general narrative arc of the solar allegory, be it based upon the diurnal or the annual circuit, is a story to which we, as a people, have been exposed for millennia.

## THE HIRAMIC TRAGEDY AS A MYTHOLOGICAL NARRATIVE

The second section of the Third Degree of Blue Lodge Freemasonry, or the Hiramic Tragedy, has been interpreted to be either a solar or agricultural allegory, replete with a chthonic descent/ascent, along the lines of many similar initiatory structures in the Mystery Traditions of the Ancient Mediterranean and Near East [46]. These ritual dramas were universally based on a regional variation on a common mythological narrative.

This allegory follows the general narrative arc of a tragedy, as was common in the dramatic rituals of the Mysteries. We may first consider the etymology of the word “tragedy” in order to gain insight into these structures. The word τραγῳδία, or *tragōidia*, can be broken into its components which are *tragos*, meaning goat, and *ode*, or song. The literal interpretation of tragedy is “goat song”. [47]. Initially, the tragedies were relatively simple hymns to Pan, performed during the Dionysiac or Bacchic Rites, but as these ritual dramatizations of folk mythological narratives developed in complexity of character, plot and performance, they gradually morphed into something recognizably closer to the modern conception of the theater.

## THE WEEPING VIRGIN OF THE THIRD DEGREE

The Weeping Virgin of the Third Degree is a statue made reference to in the Master Mason Lecture in Blue Lodge Freemasonry. The work consists of the figure of a virgin, her hands folded as in prayer, leaning over a broken column as an old man, holding a scythe, undoes the braids in her hair. There are several mythological allusions in this arrangement that readily present themselves to the mind. The old, male figure bears a likeness to Cronus (Saturn), the Titanic father of Zeus (Jupiter), present here in his popular personification as Father Time. The weeping virgin, in this context, could be construed as a representation of Persephone (Proserpina), the *kore*.

In this interpretation, we are reminded of an incident in Greek Mythology known as the *Rape of Persephone*. There are both astrological and agricultural keys to the allegory of this event and these, when used in conjunction, provide us with an interesting narrative. If we consider the figure of Father Time as representing Saturn then, through common and established astrological correspondences, we arrive at the Winter Solstice via the

zodiacal house of *Capricornus*, which is ruled by Saturn. In the myth, Persephone was abducted by Hades while she was collecting wild flowers – an obvious sign of Spring or the Vernal Equinox. He then carried her to his kingdom in the Underworld, which is also symbolic of the Winter Solstice – a place almost universally regarded as the abode of death. The whole scene can easily be read as a wonderful symbolic depiction of certain known aspects of the Eleusinian Mysteries [48].

## CONCLUSION

The mythologies and folk narratives of the world continue to inspire us and to provide subtextual buoyancy to our experiences today, aesthetic and otherwise. In terms of Jungian Psychology, myth and folklore may unite us with latent and vestigial aspects of ourselves. We encounter archetypal characters such as the anima/animus, the *Wise Old Man* or the *Shadow Self*, for example, and we are thereby given the opportunity to integrate these elements into a coherent whole – the *Individuated Self*. Anthropologically, world mythologies remain a cultural touchstone, inextricably linking us with the minds and imaginations of our ancient forebears from the dawn of human civilization – nay, the dawn of the human psyche itself.

The fact that these ancient personas and narratives are still charged with meaning, and that they continue to develop in proportion to our understanding of our collective experience of the world, surely places mythology as a living tradition, capable of providing us with valuable insights. When we consider these factors in the context of Freemasonry, we come to understand another facet of our eminent fraternity. Albert Pike, in reference to this “priceless heritage” inherited by Freemasonry wrote, “And so I came at last to see that the true greatness and majesty of Freemasonry consist in its proprietorship of these and its other symbols; and that its symbolism is its soul.” [49] Similarly, Manly P. Hall, in his 1928 work *The Secret Teachings of All Ages*, wrote, “A hundred religions have brought their gifts of wisdom to [Freemasonry’s] altar; arts and sciences unnumbered have contributed to its symbolism.”

So, at last, in Classical Mythology, we find yet another lens through which to view and interpret the symbolism of Freemasonry. It seems that no matter which lens we apply –the philosophical, the mathematical, the astrological and, presently, the mythological – Freemasonry stands up to the most intense scrutiny as being more than just, “a peculiar system of morality, veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols.”

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