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Mythology of Ancient Greece

Short Paper

Greek Mythology can be found in many TV shows and movies. It has a large influence on modern media. For example, the popular book series *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins and their film adaptations have strong ties to Greek mythology.

The first book of the series, titled *The Hunger Games*, takes place in the Capitol of Panem which was once North America. Panem is split into 12 districts, each with its own focus, such as mining or fishing. The Capitol holds control over these 12 districts by forcing them each to provide a boy and a girl, called tributes, to compete in a nationally televised event called the Hunger Games. In this event, the tributes fight to the death until only one remains. The main character of the story is a district 12 tribute named Katniss Everdeen who must use her hunting skills and sharp instincts to survive the game.

The story has major connections to the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. This ancient Greek myth tells the story of the Minotaur, “a bloodthirsty and brutal creature, with the body of a man and the head of a bull” (Davenport, “Story: Theseus and the Minotaur”). According to greekmyths-greekmythology.com, “the Minotaur was the son of Pasiphae, wife of King Minos of Crete'' (“The Myth of Theseus”). King Minos was so embarrassed of the creature that he hid it in a labyrinth. He demanded that Aegeus, the king of the nearby city of Athens, send seven boys and seven girls every year to the labyrinth for the Minotaur to eat. Athens was not strong enough to defend against Crete, so King Aegeus agreed to the deal.

Theseus, the son of King Aegeus, was distraught by this deal and volunteered to be one of the seven young men. “He was determined to kill the monstrous Minotaur, and so make an end of the tribute” (Davenport, “Story: Theseus and the Minotaur”). When Theseus arrived in Crete, he met Princess Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos. She fell in love with him and decided to help him defeat the Minotaur (“The Myth of Theseus”). Princess Ariadne came to Theseus at night and helped him devise a plan. She told him “‘The sound of his (the Minotaur’s) breathing will show you in what direction you must go. Here is a sword, and here is a clew of yarn, by means of which, after you have killed the monster, you can find your way back’” (Davenport, “Story: Theseus and the Minotaur”). Theseus manages to kill the Minotaur, retrace his way out of the labyrinth, and save Athens.

Suzanne Collins draws heavily from this myth to write *The Hunger Games.* In an interview with the author, she admits to being a big fan of Greek mythology as a child and explains how the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur both shocked her and influenced her book (I read YA, 00:00:05 - 00:00:56). The most direct relation between the two stories is the use of a powerful government and the use of sacrifices and tributes. Like King Minos of Crete, Panem is ruled by President Snow. They are both main antagonists of their respective stories for supporting the sacrifice of young boys and girls for entertainment. In *The Hunger Games*, the Capitol choses the tributes on the day of “reaping” where they pull a male and female name randomly from each district (Hopkinson, “Book Review”). Similar to Theseus choosing to be one of the seven male sacrifices, Katniss volunteers as tribute in place of her sister when her name is chosen. Although there is no labyrinth in *The Hunger Games*, the tributes compete in a large arena where they are trapped with many dangerous creatures such as tracker jackers and wolf mutts. The myth and movie have strong parallels between them.

I believe that the incorporation of the myth Theseus and the Minotaur into a modern dystopian story such as the Hunger Games works very well. I enjoy that the book and movie are not an exact copy of the myth and provide nuances to the original story. Details such as the tributes fighting against each other instead of united against a common goal makes the plot more suspenseful and unexpected. An aspect of the myth that I prefer over the book or movie is the idea of Theseus braving the beast alone. Throughout *The Hunger Games*, Katniss creates alliances with several others and even starts a romance with a tribute from her district named Peeta. Like Princess Ariadne, Peeta is the main love interest, but he has a larger role. In the end of the story, both Katniss and Peeta survive together, but I think it would have been more heroic if Katniss had only made a few alliances, but ultimately won the competition by herself.

In conclusion, both the myth and the movie are strong stories. I was surprised with how many similarities I could find between the two. I have heard of the Minotaur in Greek mythology and I have seen *The Hunger Games* movie, but I never thought about how similar the stories were until I began comparing them. The resemblance between the two illustrates how easily myths can be incorporated into modern media.

Works Cited

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