

For several years, works on classics and popular culture have been devoted to film, for example Jon Solomon's *The Ancient World in Cinema* and Martin Winkler's *Classical Myth in the Cinema*. More recently, Karelisa Hartigan addresses mythological images in advertising. Not much, however, has been written on other areas linking popular culture and classics, or popular culture in the classics' classroom. While Peter Rose has addressed the classroom topic with respect to film and Akihiko Watanabe with respect to Latin cartoons, there is no treatment of the use of myth-themed cartoons from daily newspapers in a university classroom setting, as far as I know.

Cartoons presenting subjects from classical mythology are found the *New Yorker* and *Archaeology* magazine; while one may easily accept the idea of these types of cartoons in periodicals appealing to a select audience, it is slightly surprising to see comics with classical themes in daily newspapers catering to a more general population. However, the appeal of myth-themed cartoons may parallel the appeal of mythological themes in advertising. In *Muse on Madison Avenue: Classical Mythology in Contemporary Advertising*, Hartigan notes that it: "...seems that the mythic legacy of ancient Greece and Rome is still considered to be a part of American (and international) tradition. . ." (9). Ad and cartoon creators strip myth to the bone for maximum effect but with different assumptions about the audience. Ad creators assume that viewers understand references to well-known mythological images such as Aphrodite or Cupid, since contact with the observer is short and the featured product must make memorable impact quickly. In contrast, cartoons, no matter how brief, need longer "viewing." Cartoonist Gary Larson comments "Cartoons are...little stories themselves, frozen at an interesting point in time." (qtd in Higdon, 56). In creating "little stories" from myth, cartoonists assume readers not only recognize certain mythological images but also the original myth, which prompted the cartoon. Indeed, much the same would have been true for the ancient Greek who viewed the "little stories" depicted on the pediments and metopes of ancient temples, such as the Parthenon (cf. Havelock, 105-106). However, understanding of these "stories" is not always true for university students.

In this paper I will discuss my experiences presenting myth-based cartoons to students of a university-level course on Greek and Roman myth. Using these cartoons can reveal that students do not know as much as they think they do about a particular myth, and thus serve as starting points for discussion both on the details of the original story and on the myth-making process. Cartoons with mythological themes such as Atlas, the Trojan War cycle, and others found in daily and Sunday newspapers are used. Some of the cartoons are from: *Frank and Ernest* by Bob Thaves, *Non Sequitur* by Wiley Miller, and *Baby Blues* by Rick Kirkman and Jerry Scott. Discussions of these cartoons challenge students to examine their understanding of myths from popular conceptions, e.g. Atlas: holding the world (Thaves), and from the presentation of myths by ancient authors, e.g. Atlas holding the heavens (Hesiod *Theogony* 517-519), thus helping students see cartoonists as descendents of the ancient mythmakers creating "...little stories..." from elements at hand. These discussions lead students to a better understanding of the myths and of the mythmaking process from ancient and modern perspectives.

## SELECTED TEXTS

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### Selected Cartoons

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- Thaves, Bob. "I Don't Mind the Weight. . ." *Frank and Ernest*. Cartoon. 26 September 2005. 25 March 2007 <http://frankandernest.com/cgi/view/display.pl?105-09-26>