

**How and why are the gods and monsters of Classical Greece used
in the modern Western World?**



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Abstract

This work looks at how the symbols of gods and monsters, from Classical Greece, are used today in the Western World. It focusses mainly on architecture and company logos, as well as looking at politics, cultural symbols and American fraternities where these symbols are used. The main argument is that symbols of Greek gods and monsters are in all aspects of everyday life. However, even though these symbols may be all around us, not everyone notices they are there. One point that sums up this work is why people and companies have chosen to use these symbols, something that brings into question the human psyche. The purpose of this work is to prove that while we may have come a long way, specifically in terms of technology, we are still very fixated on the Ancient Greeks and refuse to move away from their ideas and symbology.

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Introduction

By looking at how such imagery, as that of the gods and monsters of Classical Greece, is used in the modern Western World we should hopefully gain a better understanding of why it is used and what purpose it serves. The Grand Tour, which took place throughout the 18th and 19th centuries laid the foundation for many of the Greek influences we see today in everything from architecture to company names. The Grand Tour was not the first time these influences had been used in popular culture, this can be seen speckled throughout history especially in the artwork of the renaissance. The use of these Ancient Greek symbols in the commercial industry is quite different, but none the less consistent with their use in the private sphere. Purely because of the vast difference between architecture and commercial logos these two areas will make up the main body of this discussion. By looking at the two very different spheres it should become more apparent why the symbols of gods and monsters are still used today, at the very least showing us the different places they are used. It is also important to consider how these symbols are used as their usage can tell us a lot about the motivation behind using the icons, as well as perhaps eluding to why they were chosen. The public sphere of logos and company names is an industry which relies on custom and the ability to sell a product. Thus, it is very odd that such companies use symbols of monsters to sell their products. Gods and symbols with divine connection perhaps make more sense, but monsters are supposed to scare people away not encourage them to buy a product. This is where the private and public spheres differ as the architecture solely has a connection with the gods. This is enticing to us mere mortals as humans have been entranced by the divine for centuries and the thought of visiting a building, or even living in one that mirrors

the home of the gods would seem to be very appealing. In either case it is undeniable that the gods and monster of Ancient Greece are strong features in modern western society, the reason for why seems to be our indulging of the mystical.

Today the most influential and widespread mediums are that of novels, television and movies. There is no surprise that these industries have been using Greek influences in their characters for years, this can be seen in the characters of: DC's Wonder Woman and Aquaman; Disney's Hercules; and Rick Riordan's Percy Jackson.¹ These characters were all formed to add a little magic and mystery to the stories they come from. Greek Mythology was so rich with magic and stories of heroism that it is no wonder we borrow characters from them to entertain us to this day. Looking at historical texts as well as popular fiction today we can see that humans have been entranced by magic and mystery throughout history. However, it is not just the magic of the Ancient World that we are entranced by, it seems to be the whole culture. This is shown in films such as 300 and Gladiator, which both depict very un-magical aspects of the Ancient World.² This example of an industries usage of Ancient Greek, and in some cases Roman, culture and mythology is still something that entrances us today. In his 2008 book Robert Garland notes that our 'interest in the ancient world shows no signs of abating. Hollywood in particular has gone back to the Greeks repeatedly for inspiration'.³ Clearly it would seem that many need an old story to base theirs on (due to lack of original thought) and who better to look back to than the Ancient Greeks and their tales of monsters, heroes and gods. It also helps that by doing

¹ Johns.2013, Hercules.1997, Riordan.2005

² 300.2006, Gladiator.2000

³ Garland.2008: 306

this the story line feels familiar and so the audience have a hunch about what might happen but are still left guessing. Garland goes onto say that Hollywood is only one of the ways in which the ancients have invaded and ‘continue to colonize modern culture’.⁴ This suggests that rather than it being our choice to use the ancient and their stories, somehow, they are the ones that are infiltrating us: an interesting proposition.

This work hopes to uncover where and why we use the symbols of the Ancient Greek gods and monsters in our modern western society. It is clear that we use them in our films and books, but we also must try and look in the different spheres, as stated above, to better understand how we use these symbols. It also seems be the case that these symbols are used differently in different areas and by looking at these spheres in isolation and then in comparison we may be able to better understand why they are being used. There is a wide range of historical, political and even spiritual reasons why these symbols are still being used today and this is what will be shown in this work. Ultimately the sheer number of examples there are where Greek symbols are used is testimony to the importance Ancient Greek culture still has to this day.

⁴ Garland. 2008: 306

Architecture in Museums

Since the Classical Revival in the seventeen and eighteen-hundreds, certain symbols of the Ancient Greek life have weened their way into our modern Western way of living.⁵ This is perhaps most obvious and most striking in the architecture of some of the most famous buildings in the Western world, including The British Museum, The White House and Buckingham Palace. Such striking buildings make a huge impact when they glare down at you, their impressive stature making you feel small and insignificant in comparison. Buildings built in the Neoclassical style do more than simply impose, they also bring in the association of power and wealth. This association stems from the Classical Revival and those who had embarked on the Grand Tour returning only to build great houses in the style they had seen in the remanence of the Ancient World. It would have taken a lot of manpower and a lot of money to build these massive monuments and thus there is no surprise that money and power are intrinsically entwined.

‘The Grand Tour’ as it become known, was not necessarily a specific tour that individuals undertook. Jeremy Black explains in his book *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour* that many individuals, especially young men, travelled around the continent in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as they still do today. Although there is a pattern to where groups and individuals visited, namely Florence and Vienna, many other places around Europe were also visited.⁶ Despite this it definitely seems to be that it was the Ancient Greco-Roman architecture and art that captivated the visitors. This was to such an extent that we

⁵ Mordaunt Crook. 1972: ix, 63

⁶ Black.1992: v

see copies and original pieces brought over to Britain during this period. As Lisa Mangiafico outlines in her master's thesis, a tour of the ancient lands was seen as part of a classical education, something valued by those among the upper classes. She explains how embarking on 'The Grand Tour' marked the end of their formal education, now seeing what they had read about in person.⁷ One could even liken these trips to those undertaken by the youth of today in the interim between school and university. These educational trips served a much greater purpose as a social experience and a form of training for those going into public service.⁸ If one thinks of it in this way, then it is no surprise that 'souvenirs' were brought back. How many 'lads holidays' have ended in odd tattoos and pointless souvenirs being brought back. This is exactly what the statues and artworks that were brought back were, memories from the holidays these 'lads' had. The older tourists who had embarked on a tour of Europe possibly took in a lot more of the culture than the younger men had as age perhaps made them wiser and more open to other experiences. In any case they were the ones who documented their experiences. Journals and letters written by these men act as much of our primary sources we have that tell us what The Grand Tour consisted of.⁹ These older men's experience and wealth is what ultimately created the first Classical Revival architecture in Britain. One of these men was...

Much of the surviving architecture we have from the Ancient World is that of temples. Because these were built to last an age and the craftsmanship so precise, it is no wonder that monuments built to house the gods are what have survived. Through our use of the architecture, even if unintended, we are

⁷ Mangiafico.1992: 2

⁸ Mangiafico.1992: 3

⁹ Mangiafico.1992: 3

transported back to the time where the Olympians ruled over the people of Greece (and wider afield). Thus, by using the architectural style that is associated with the gods of Olympus we are evoking the gods in the modern Western World, even if it goes unnoticed by many. The Grand Tour brought about the start of antiquarianism which in turn gave way to archaeology as a discipline, as well as the first modern museums. Here we see the connection with the style of architecture and knowledge and learning, a connection that was made in ancient times. Some of the first ‘museums’ were inside the temples in the ancient world.¹⁰ It is here that we find early examples of historical collections being kept, and thus the idea of preserving the past for future learning can be seen. It is even more fitting that these collections were kept in the temples and so we see the earliest forms of museums using the architectural style that we see in many museums today. Mordaunt Crook points out that ‘the modern museum was very largely a Neo-Classical creation’. He goes on to say that the libraries, museums and universities that make up the large proportion of examples of this architectural style are all part of the eighteenth-century idea of the ‘Neo-Classical Temple of the Arts’.¹¹ This is a sentiment that certainly seems to be the case as the temple architecture from Greece is used to create new spaces for worship, but this time to knowledge and learning, rather than to the gods of ancient times.

The British Museum

One institute that stands out as a beacon of the Neoclassical movement is the British Museum. Not only does the museum clearly look like the Parthenon

¹⁰ Woolley and Moorey.1982: 189

¹¹ Mordaunt Crook.1972: 107

(which can be seen in fig. 1 and 2), but it was purposefully built that way. Mordaunt Crook calls it a 'Grecian shrine' built to house the Elgin Marbles, among other things; the architecture being cleverly designed to elude to what was held inside.¹² The grand design of the building, which can be seen in fig. 3, emanates power and wealth as often this style is used to do. This however, is not just how the style is used today. In Ancient Greece this is how the temples to the Olympian gods were built to radiate the power of the gods, their huge size intimidating the mortals that resided on the Earth. And although the majority of the population are not necessarily familiar with this, it does not distract from the fact that both stand for power. From just looking at the pictures of the temples, in fig. 1 and 2, it is clear even from a small image the vast scale and the power that radiates from its simplistic design.

Sir Robert Smirke designed the British Museum in 1823, although the building was not completed until 1852. He purposefully used the Greek Revival Style to create the specific wings he had designed to house ancient artefacts from around the world. Only a year after its completion the quadrangle building won the Royal Institute of British Architects' Gold Medal; showing not only that it was an amazing piece of architectural design, but also a very popular style.¹³ But, why was it such a popular style? Because it took people back to the ancient world, equally for those who had visited the ancient lands, as well as those who could only imagine what it was like in such a land.

The British Museum, although designed to serve the same purpose, was built in a very different style to that of the Acropolis Museum in Athens. Despite

¹² Mordaunt Crook.1972: 108

¹³ The British Museum – Architecture. n.d.

both being built to hold parts of the Parthenon, the architect for the Acropolis Museum did not go down the Neoclassical stylistic road of the British Museum, but instead went for a very modern chic style. Although built very differently they both make the most of their space and design to optimise the presentation of their artefacts. The Acropolis Museum uses a lot of glass to create very large windows showing the visitors a view of the Acropolis whilst they gaze upon the artefacts once belonging to that very monument. The closeness of these two sites can be clearly seen in fig. 4. The museum also optimises its space by its usage of glass flooring in the centre allowing visitors on all levels to gaze upon the ancient ruins situated below the museum itself. Here they are not representing the temple of the gods in the architecture as there is no need to with the real temples being within sight. This shows that Classical style architecture isn't always needed to elude to the inside, especially as in this instance as both institutes hold material from the same site, exhibited in two very distinct styles.

Other institutions

It is unsurprising the sheer number of museums that have been built in the Neoclassical style, Mordaunt Crook suggests that by building in this style it makes the building almost part of the exhibit, a sentiment that certainly seems to be the case.¹⁴ Particularly when museums first started becoming popular, having the exterior of the building mirror what was held inside helped invite people into the museum. Museums became popular attractions around the height of the Greek Revival, when artefacts and copies of artefacts started to come into Britain from

¹⁴ Mordaunt Crook. 1972: 107

the ancient lands, and thus these artefacts made up the majority of early collections (Including that of the British and Fitzwilliam Museums).¹⁵ It is because of these early collections that these institutions seem to have chosen to build their museums in the Neoclassical style, as a way of advertising what they were exhibiting on the inside.

The Fitzwilliam Museum is beautiful example of where the Classical style has been used on the main façade of a museum. The building was designed by George Basevi, finished by Charles Robert Cockerell after Basevi's untimely death, and opened to the public in 1848.¹⁶ The Fitzwilliam Museum, much like The British Museum and many others, first displayed mainly personal collections that had been donated. In this case the collection, consisting of paintings, etchings and a substantial library, had belonged to Viscount Fitzwilliam, which he bequeathed to the University of Cambridge with the intention of becoming the foundations of a museum in 1816.^{17 18} Although the original collection did not comprise of Classical artefacts, the architecture is still fitting as it associates the establishment with knowledge and learning.

This is in no way an exhausted list of museums that use the style as it is a very popular one with institutes of art and history. Other examples could include the Smithsonian Museum in Washington, Altes Museum in Berlin, or even the Louvre in Paris. Here we see that the style extends throughout the Western World continuing its association with its historical past.

¹⁵ The British Museum – History of the British Museum. n.d.

The Fitzwilliam Museum – About the Fitzwilliam Museum. n.d.

¹⁶ The Fitzwilliam Museum – About the Fitzwilliam Museum. n.d.

¹⁷ Roach .1959: 326-327

¹⁸ The Fitzwilliam Museum – A History of the Fitzwilliam Museum. 2016



Figure 1 - The Parthenon from the left angle

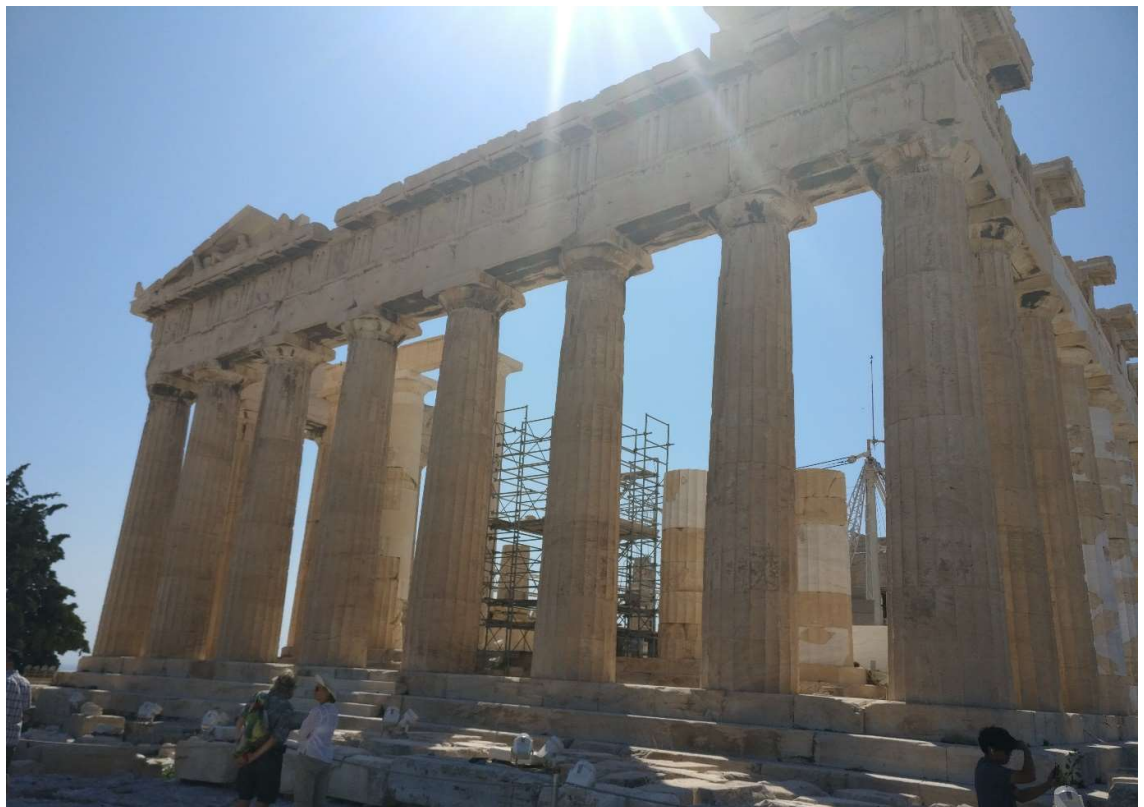


Figure 2 - The Parthenon from the right angle



Figure 3 - The British Museum



Figure 4 - The Acropolis Museum and Parthenon

Architecture in Homes

Neoclassical architecture heralds back to the temples of the Olympians, and if this style of building was supposed to house the gods what must we think of the people today who live in buildings of such style?

This style of building is classically associated with those of wealth and power. This stems from the Grand Tour and the styles that the elite who visited the ancient wonders, brought back. As they were the ones who had seen these styles in their original forms these elite were at the forefront of this new movement. As it were they who had paid the vast sums to visit ancient monuments this saw the first association with wealth. Then, when it came to the building of homes in such styles it again was among such gentlemen that the style was popularised as they could afford the grand and lavish estates that were erected. It is therefore no surprise that we see this style being used in the homes of the most elite in our society, namely the Queen of England and the President of the United States of America.

While the homes of the Queen and the President will remain the focus of this section, as they are such iconic buildings and represent whole nations, other individuals who have chosen to build in this style are also worth mentioning here. One of the first in Britain to be built in the Neoclassical style was Apsley House. Unlike others, such as Somerset House, this building has had Neoclassical features since it was built. Houses such as Somerset House only have columns and pediments as later additions to a pre-existing building.¹⁹ Apsley House was built in the 1770's by architect Robert Adam for Lord Chancellor Henry, 1st Barn

¹⁹ Richardson.1982: 21

Apsley, (hence the house's name).²⁰ Today the house is still just as grand as it was in the eighteenth century and is today cared for by English Heritage.²¹ The fact that English Heritage has taken over care for the building shows the historical importance of the building, as well as the collections it holds. The house stands as a solitary monument to Neoclassical architecture, clearly a purposeful design chosen by the architect to radiate power and wealth, as a Lord would want.

The Greek architectural style, although not commonly used today, lingers in the columns of large estates, as it has done since it was first copied in the 18th Century. The lavish houses in Beverly Hills are all adorned with columns, most of which were latter editions to the property and as such serve no structural purpose but are purely there for decoration.²² These houses have become temples in their own rights, not to the Greek gods, or any other deities, but temples to consumerism and greed. They have become places where the rich can show off their wealth by paying for large stone structures that are not even functional, they make themselves seem more intelligent by harking back to the age of knowledge. In this sense the Neoclassical style is being used in the same way that it was originally used for, as a place of worship, although there are no gods here other than the reality television stars that are worshiped.

Buckingham Palace

Buckingham Palace has famously housed British royalty for generations and has come to be a beacon of the British Isles. Unlike many European castles, this

²⁰ English Heritage – History of Apsley House n.d

²¹ English Heritage - Apsley House timeline n.d

²² Foster.2004: 234 Thompson.2008: 84

palace is not a remnant of the Medieval world, but instead at the forefront of Neoclassical architecture. This style is linked to the gods of Ancient Greece as it housed them in the temples that populated the ancient world, royalty is known for having a divine connection and so it is no wonder that this building whose style emanates power was chosen to house the monarchy. Before it was acquired by George III in 1761, Buckingham House, as it was then called, was a country estate belonging to the Duke of Buckingham.²³ It was designed in a style that was very fitting to the Duke as he was one of the greatest collectors of ancient antiques of his time.²⁴ This style clearly spoke to something in King George III compelling him to acquire the property as a private villa for the Royal Family. It wasn't until Queen Victoria remodelled the building and moved in that it was to be the official home of the British monarchy.²⁵ At this time the British empire was at its peak and by living in a building of such a style the architecture aided Britain's image as an empirical power, not only in terms of the nation but more specifically the power of the royal family.

The palace has more than just a few Neoclassical features, but the entire complex has been built in the style. As can be seen in fig. 5, the square shape of the building is very typical of the style, there are also the triangular pediments that stand out along the front of the building. These pediments do not seem to depict the stories and mythological scenes we see often copied from those of the Parthenon, but rather the central one features the emblem of England.

²³ Farrell.2003: 17

²⁴ Mordaunt Crook.1972: 3

²⁵ Farrell.2003: 17

This shows that although the old style may be being used, it is very much tailored to the royal family, as well as establishing them as a part of this history.

Although it is odd for anyone to be using the architecture of the gods in their home, if anyone is going to live in such a house then Royalty makes the most sense. It has been thought for many generations in many different cultures, that the king or queen were divinely appointed. As such they became an instrument through which their god or gods could communicate to the people. Since ancient times monarchs have used divine appointment as a way of legitimising their reign, especially in times of political unease. In some cases, rulers have even declared that they themselves are gods. This spans from Ancient Egypt where the Pharaohs were revered as gods and depicted as such in all artwork from the period.²⁶ This is something we also see in Japanese, Chinese, Incan and Roman cultures, as well as countless others. All of this shows that there is a strong connection between monarchs and divinity, this is strengthened in this case of the British Royal Family by the declaration of the 'Divine Right of King', outlining their divine rights as God's appointed monarch.²⁷ The head of the British Royal family is also the Head of the Church of England. This means that here we see someone who, although not actually a god, acts as his second command on Earth, thus justifying their right to live in a palace with such architecture designed for the gods themselves. However, it can still be construed as odd as this Christian nation has chosen to adopt an architecture that symbolises a pagan religion to house their monarchy and head of church in. One would think that they would choose a style more relating to that of a Christian Church, but

²⁶ Wilkinson.2003: 54

²⁷ Burgess.1992: 837

here we must remember that the house was not built to house the monarchy. Presumably had an architectural style been chosen to build the palace from scratch then perhaps one would have been chosen that better fits in with the Church of England and the heritage of Britain.

The White House

It is not only the British who have housed their nation's most important individual in a vast property that includes Neoclassical features. Although the White House may not use the Neoclassical features to quite the same extent as they are used in other buildings, the famous columns alone are enough to hark back to the temples of the gods. The sheer size of the building and the columns are among the main features of the Neoclassical style. While the shape of the building is not traditional of the style, it does not detract from the other features that make the building so iconic. Both the North and South Portico's were later additions to the building, both being added some thirty years after its construction.²⁸ Its pediments do not seem to be depicting any scenes as we have come to expect from the Parthenon, however it does parallel those found on the Temple of Hephaestus, as seen in fig. 7, which stands in the ancient agora beneath the Acropolis. Although America might not have a monarch whom they would house in such a prestigious building, they have a president who is the closest they get. However, the president is not a divinely appointed figure, or even a religious leader. Because of this it is not quite as understandable that they would choose such a style for the president to live in. It does, however, seem to

²⁸ The Whitehouse Building n.d

be their way of associating with Buckingham Palace, to an extent, and thus to divinity. This is pure speculation; however, the building was built shortly before the war of 1812 and thus this hostility with Britain could well have caused President Washington to choose such a grand style as a way of overshadowing Britain. Here it is important to point out that, unlike Buckingham Palace, the White House (as it is now called) was purposefully built for the President of the United States to live in. It was designed to be a house almost fit for a king and was even called 'the President's Palace' at one point in time.²⁹ Thusly there is a purpose to the style of the house, not a practical purpose, but a political purpose to emanate power and might, as this style does so well. This look is heightened even more by the edition of the white exterior to the house, something we associate with the buildings of Ancient Greece. In this case the white exterior is thought to be a way of covering up the scorch marks after the English tried to burn the President's house down in 1814.³⁰

Although we associated this style originally with the grand tour, and thusly with wealth, its association with wealth has remained but for different reasons. There is of course the White House and Buckingham Palace, as well as other grand homes of such design, that remind one of the wealth others who have this style possess. This can be seen linked in with popular thought today. Neoclassical features serve little to no purpose, other than as decoration and as a display of wealth. Thus, when even the most mundane of houses builds columns by their front door, as many people do, it is a conscious decision to make your house look

²⁹ The Whitehouse Building n.d

³⁰ The Whitehouse Building n.d

‘fancier’ and thus more expensive. These columns serve no practical purpose, if one wanted a shelter by the door then they would build a functioning porch, not just place two pillars by the front door.³¹ Nonetheless people use the style as a way of ascending the social ladder.

³¹ Millen.2018.pers comm



Figure 1- Buckingham Palace



Figure 2- The White House



Figure 7 - The Temple of Hephaestus in the Ancient Agora, Athens

Traces of Greek gods and monsters in modern cultural iconography

The Grand Tour did not just influence our architecture, its influence went far beyond our building design, seeping its way into all aspects of our everyday lives. It is this influence on the day to day lives of people that shows just how entwined we find ourselves with the iconography of the Ancient Greeks, and yet we cannot explain why we are so entranced by their world. Had we been exploring the influence of Ancient Greek iconography on Greece then it would make sense as it is a part of their heritage and their history. Although the Ancient Greeks may not be a direct part of the Western World's history, that is not to say that we haven't been greatly influenced by them. It does seem that in one sense the Greeks are part of our history and that is in our democracy, we owe much of the calm and control in the Western World to the ancients and their law and order. This can especially be seen in America and in the way their government is run. But, it can also be seen wider in other social aspects of our lives. For hundreds of years and especially since the period of Greek Revival, Ancient Greek and Roman culture has been valued highly and treated as a part of our heritage, something that was taken over to America when it was colonised by Europeans. Because of this it is not only part of Western Europe's heritage, but part of the heritage of the Western World. Greece and Rome have long been thought of as the 'cradle of civilisation' and thus by associating ourselves with Greece and Rome and by making them a part of our heritage, we have made ourselves feel superior. This goes a long way to explaining why we are so adamant to use aspects of their cultures in our everyday lives, to remind ourselves of our connection with them.

American politics

It was thought for a long time that nothing paralleled an education in the classical world, this was for many reasons: the learned in such an area were among the elite as they could converse in Latin with others of such status; it also showed intelligence as one could wrap one's mind around such a wealth of culture, art and history; but most of all it showed wealth as one could afford a tutor in such a foreign subject and often afford to travel to such destinations themselves. But, for those who were learned in such a subject it allowed them to 'hold the Greeks and Romans responsible for many of the problems that society faces today.'³² This is because they were aware of the follies of the past they could learn from them, but those instances that couldn't be avoided could often be traced back to the Ancient World and the troubles they had laid down then. This use of the ancients can be seen in the democracy of America and the way in which their government functions. That is to say that the American government functions in a way that has been lifted from the Greeks and Romans. The democracy that America prides itself on can be traced all the way back to the Ancient Greeks, something they also prided themselves on. This is one thing we can see from Aristotle's *The Athenian Constitution* as he shows many examples of democratically resolved incidents. Their judicial system has acted as a basis for what the American's still use today, as well as the idea of having different political bodies.³³ This shows that our fascination, verging on infatuation, with the ancient worlds expands beyond the confines of Ancient Greek monsters and gods. Our use of the icons of the Ancient Greek gods and monsters is only part of how we use the ancient

³² Garland. 2008: 305

³³ Arist. *Athen. Const.*

worlds, the way in which we use them also suggests a larger interest as they are used on such a vast scale and in so many aspects of life.

The Owl and the Eagle

The great symbol of America, the eagle, is another fundamentally American icon that has its origins in Ancient Greek mythology. The eagle has been used by many groups as a way of expressing power, here we must look back through history to the Roman Legions and the Nazi's. These are two very different groups, but none the less they are connected in their use of the eagle as their representative symbol. The eagle was, in Greek mythology, the symbol of Zeus, the King of Olympus. From here it is understandable that the animal would retain its connection to power, having been linked to the god of gods. Thus, it is understandable that the Romans would have continued to use the symbolic imagery as their own gods were merely adaptations of those from the Greek world. Hitler on the other hand will have had a slightly different motive. Many nations throughout history have held flags that adorn images of an eagle and Germany is no exception to this. Throughout German history there has often been a connection with the eagle, stemming from the Holy Roman Empire, this is a history that Hitler would have been very aware of. Therefore, although he did not use the eagle on his flag, instead using the Swastika, he did incorporate the eagle into other aspects of the Nazi regime.³⁴ This can be seen on some of the meddles and art from the period that not only depict the Eagle Swastika, an eagle grasping the swastika in its talons, but also in some case the head of Athena is present in

³⁴ Karaschewski.2009

the image.³⁵ This is evidence that not only has the eagle been used throughout history as a symbol of power, but also in the not too distant past.

America is a very proud nation, their national animal, the bald eagle, is a testimony to their strength and valour. However, while they may use the eagle and its history of power, it is not the only bird, still used in cultural iconography, that has a connection with the Greek gods. There is the wise owl to also consider here. While owls may not be the heroic symbol of a great nation, that isn't to say that it isn't very much still used with the meaning embedded in it by the Greek god it symbolised. The owl was the symbol of the goddess Athena, patron god of Athens, where the owl was a feature on their drachma.³⁶ Being the goddess of wisdom, it is no surprise that the owl has become imbued in symbol meaning, becoming an embodiment of wisdom. Today we talk about the wise old owl, even having owls sewn onto pyjamas and tops is a common occurrence. This connection with wisdom has stayed with the bird in the same way that the connection with power has stayed with the eagle. Here we see how America and Britain use the Ancient Greek symbology in slightly different ways. Where America uses it as a way of dominating wealth and power, something that does happen in Britain but not on quite the same scale. In Britain it is much more common to see the Greek symbols being used to imbue places with knowledge. This brings in a much larger debate about the might and force of America vs. the knowledge and wisdom of Britain, something which will not be explored much further here. However differently these symbols are being used it is very clear

³⁵ Kasher.1992: 53

³⁶ Carpenter.1991: 46

that both show a use of Ancient Greek godly symbols in the culture of the Western World.

Fraternities and ‘Greek Row’

This topic harks back to the previous chapter’s investigation into the use of Greek architecture in homes. The American college tradition of sororities and fraternities draws an odd, but unmistakable, connection to Ancient Greece and more specifically to its alphabet. Alan DeSantis’ 2007 book explores the world of ‘Greek Row’, or the ‘Greek U’ as he refers to it³⁷. This ‘Greek U’ refers to the area in which the fraternity and sorority houses are located, identifiable by their use of the Greek alphabet in their name. It would seem to be an American infatuation to have college houses named using seemingly random Greek letters. These elite houses intrinsically hark back to Ancient Greece. But why? Because it links the rich to the rich? Or, because they are supposed to be intellectuals just like those who’s alphabet they have appropriated? Fraternities seem to have started from rival Latin groups in the late eighteenth century. After the war of 1812 there was a decline in such groups until later on in the nineteenth century when they became popular again and formed into the fraternities and sororities we known today. Here we see that not only do they have their own heritage but their reasoning for using Greek letters stems from the early classical clubs, as well as from their freemason heritage, using the letters as a way of hiding their meaning from laymen.³⁸

³⁷ DeSantis’.2007

³⁸ Sanua.2003: 32-34

In his book DeSantis looks at the culture and lifestyle of those that belong to such houses, as well as the idea behind the people inside the houses.³⁹ The students that live in these houses are not just any, they are often the most pristine and well-kept young adults, who also are often among the most affluent in collages. The American college system is funded mainly by individuals; or namely their parents. Fees for studying in the US are often higher than those in the UK, not helped by the fact that the loan system is very different to what it is in the UK. In the United Kingdom the re-payment of student loans does not financially cripple students and parents as it does in the US. Therefore, the weight of university costs can hang on the shoulders of the students and their families, if they are not in receipt of scholarships.⁴⁰

All one has to do is tune in to any chick-flick or sorority-based film to see what these people are like. The skinny girls and ‘buff’ boys are seen as at their peak of physical prowess, this is also how some see the Greeks as being. By those uneducated on the topic, the Ancient Greeks are often held up to be perfect beings who lived in a white washed, immaculate world. This, of course, is not the case, but this idea is certainly something that can be seen replicated in the inhabitants of the ‘Greek U’.

Away from the physicality and lifestyle of these people, there is also the actual ‘frat houses’ themselves. The architecture of these houses is not the only physical herald back to Ancient Greece; the shape that DeSantis points out, the ‘U’, is the same as that of the gods on Olympus. Their thrones are often depicted as being laid out in a ‘U’ shape with the King of the gods, Zeus, at the centre of

³⁹ DeSantis.2007

⁴⁰ Kennard. n.d

the semi-circle. It is a common thought that Zeus and Hera share the centre, with the goddess's thrones spanning out from Hera's side and the gods from Zeus'; this is then altered when Dionysus was deified and Hestia is often disregarded in favour of Dionysus so that he may sit on the council of the Olympians (creating a gender imbalance among the 12 Olympians).⁴¹ This positioning of the thrones of the gods, can be seen mimicked in how some sororities and fraternities arranged their houses, as suggested by the title of DeSantis' book title.⁴²

It may seem odd that a whole section entitled 'traces of Greek gods and monsters in modern cultural iconography' has not strayed far from the topic of America. However, the bases for this lies in the fact that the United States were set up as an experiment of democracy (although not a pure democracy, but a republic with democratic elections), away from the monarchy of Britain. In an attempt to look past monarchy, they seem to have ended up looking all the way back to the inventors of democracy: the Ancient Greeks. In doing so it appears to not only be their political system that has been influenced by the ancients, instead it has wormed its way into the very fabric of what makes the United States of America.

⁴¹ *Apollod.* - Hard.1997: 262

⁴² DeSantis.2007

Monsters and gods in commercial logo's and names

There is a great difference between the public and private spheres in which architecture and commercial logos exist. This section sees the shift between these two spheres as we move away from the intimacy of the home to the public sphere where we see commercial branding in our everyday lives. This is where we see that although these spheres are very different they are linked in the everyday lives we live. Everything we own today is branded in one way or another, and so this, along with our architecture, feeds into the branding of these symbols onto our subconscious. Commercial brandings are figurative representations in the same way that the architecture represents the very literal representation of the ancient gods and monsters. Both feed our desire to be linked to the Ancient World, as well as legitimising the institutes which they represent. The very obvious difference between these two mediums of representation is what makes them such good comparisons as they show how ancient symbology as worked its way into all aspects of our lives. Both architecture and commercial branding is something we see every day and so although they are very different they are also intrinsically the same in terms of being a constant presence.

Commercial logos and names are engrained in our everyday lives in the Western World, they are imprinted on our brains and branded on everything we own. And yet how many have stopped to think where the name of their favourite trainers comes from, or what the creature on their coffee cup is. Where architecture may have been more subtle, here we have a much more literal and physical use of the gods and monsters in the modern world. Not only is the usage of Ancient Greek gods and monsters in company names and logos of interest, but

also the messages that the companies are trying to convey through their names and logos makes for a compelling insight into the human psyche. Carl Jung comments on the subject of the unconscious mind saying that the unconscious mind is made up of archetypes. He goes on to say that these archetypes stem from our myths and fairy tales and we see this reflected in our work.⁴³ This is to say that we have no choice in our creation of a character or logo as there are archetypes engrained in us all that predetermine the basic characteristics of our creation. This insight by a world-renowned philosopher helps to explain why we feel the need to replicate images and symbols of the Ancient Greek gods and monsters in all aspects of our everyday lives.

Fashion Companies

Oddly the fashion industry makes up for a large proportion of the use of Ancient Greek gods and monsters. This may well be due to the sheer number of companies that exist in the industry but could also be due to the creative and revolutionary nature of the industry. Either way it is undoubtable that Ancient Greek gods and monsters are explicitly used. Few literary sources deal with the fashion industry and their choice of branding and so we must look to the industry's own 'literary' source: magazines. This is where we find much of the industry's gossip and also the information they provide about their image and how they are represented. Although magazines may not always be the most reliable of sources, due to the gossip and rivalry of fashion houses, here they are going to make up the main bulk of information on the topic. It is almost ironic

⁴³ Jung, 1972: 3-5

that it be the fashion industry to cling onto symbols of the gods as fashion models themselves are idolised. Here we see the most beautiful and mesmerising people in the world placed on pedestals as perfect human specimens. It is ironic that these godlike people are the ones who so publicly use the symbols of Ancient Greek gods as fashion statements.

One company that openly advertises its use of an ancient being as its logo, is Versace. In this example we see the face of Medusa being used to represent high-end fashion, which on the face of it is an odd use of the Gorgon. Medusa was known throughout the ancient land as a woman with snake hair and the ability to turn onlookers to stone. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* gives an explanation as to how the beautiful Medusa was made into the Gorgon we know. He describes how she was raped by the sea god (Poseidon) in 'Minerva's shrine' and the goddess punished her by turning her famed locks into snakes (nothing is mentioned about her being otherwise hideous).⁴⁴ However, in many other examples she was depicted as a hideous monster with boar tusks and in some cases a beard.⁴⁵ Having a hideous creature represent a fashion label seems an odd parallel to draw. However, when one better understands Gianni Versace's (the founder) reason for choosing such an image it becomes clear why the association was drawn. In the Italian village Gianni grew up in there were many relics remaining from when the Greeks had controlled the area in ancient times. This included depictions and myths of Medusa where she had been the most beautiful woman in the land, before she was turned, by Athena, into the Gorgon most

⁴⁴ Ov. *Met.* IV 776-803

⁴⁵ Such representations of this hideous Medusa can be seen in fig.9 and 10 which clearly depict her as far from beautiful and almost masculine, or even animalistic in her features.

commonly known.⁴⁶ Thus, in his logo design Gianni Versace decided to portray the beautiful Medusa before she was transformed (as can be seen in fig. 8); in doing so radiating the great beauty she was said to possess. However, when one takes a closer look at the image it becomes clear that the hair has been purposefully designed quite ambiguously, clearly eluding to Medusa's infamous snake hair. The label of Versace often chooses to lean very heavily into the Greek nature of its logo and regularly releases lines that feature Medusa more heavily, as well as their regular use of the Greek labyrinth pattern on many of their products. The very fact that they have such an unapproachable woman as the image for a fashion brand says quite a lot about high-end fashion. For many people the prices and sizes of the clothes are something that could never be attained, the figure of Medusa simultaneously embodies the desirable and the impossible to access making her quite fitting for a fashion icon. Gianni's sister, Donatella Versace, comments that her brother chose Medusa as "whoever falls in love with Medusa can't flee her", a very apt image for a high-end fashion brand.⁴⁷

Another company in the fashion industry who uses an Ancient Greek being in their company profile is Nike. Although, perhaps not a well-known goddess, Nike was in fact the winged goddess of victory who supposedly stood in the out-turned hand of the Athena Parthenos (the statue of Athena that originally stood in the Parthenon, before it's disappearance/destruction). The Athena Parthenos was sculpted by Pheidias, however the gigantic piece of art has not been seen since the 5th-10th Century AD.⁴⁸ According to Pausanias' description, the Athena Parthenos held in her hand the winged figure of Victory, this is the

⁴⁶ Kramer.2006

⁴⁷ Kramer.2006

⁴⁸ Herington.1955: 16

goddess Nike.⁴⁹ As Pausanias says himself, she was the goddess of victory, hence why she was so linked to Athena, as the use of wisdom in battle strategy (which Athena implored) should always lead one to victory. By using Nike as the name of their company, not only is the brand associated with the goddess Nike, but also more indirectly related to Athena and the ancient city of Athens by association. The goddess Nike was an interesting choice for a sporting brand to choose as their representative. Most people play a sport to win, so by associating themselves with the goddess of victory there is a suggestion that by wearing Nike's products you yourself will be victorious. However, to one not learned in the subject of classics, the name Nike refers to nothing other than the brand, it is only when one has a knowledge of the classical world that the association is made clear. This means that for most the connection goes unnoticed, but it does not stop it from being a very clever association. This more than any other shows our fascination with the Ancient World as the company chose to use a name with a very clever association that most customers would not be privy to. And yet the company chose to go with the name. One does have to question why they would choose a name that most did not understand, but perhaps this proves that the symbols of the Ancient World are not only used to draw in customers but used as often as possible to satisfy our infatuation with the Ancients.

Hospitality Industry

Fashion companies are not the only everyday industry to use Ancient Greek mythological figures and symbols as their brand. There seems to be several

⁴⁹ Paus. 1. 24. 7

companies within the hospitality industry that have chosen to use Ancient symbols as their logos and within their names. Where fashion brands and even architecture seems to have a rationale behind their choice, there does not seem to be any so logical reasons as to why the hospitality industry would be drawing these connections. This once again shows that we do not have to have a rationale, or even understandable association, but the use of these ancient symbols helps to satisfy our need to be connected to the Ancient World.

One company that seems to be using ancient connections is Athena Houseware. A company that most notably provides hotels and restaurants with dinner sets. It is not often that one would find themselves looking at the bottom of their dinner plate when out for the evening, but if you ever did you would most likely find that your plate had been made by Athena Houseware. The likelihood is that if it is not Athena Houseware then it may be Olympia, another similar company who produce catering crockery, who also have chosen to connect themselves with Ancient Greece. Both of these companies seem to be trying to link Ancient Greece and more specifically Athens, to the items we use to eat our food off. There is no reasonable explanation as to why this connection would have been drawn. Perhaps they were trying to make themselves look more like established businesses, or more respectable as they are clearly superior in their knowledge of the Ancient World. It certainly has worked as so many hotels and restaurants choose to use these brands of plates. Maybe their reasoning for choosing these items is to subtly suggests to customers that they are dining off of plates like those the gods use, giving them a shortcut to high-class. In any case it shows how in our everyday lives we are surrounded by items intrinsically linked

to Ancient Greece, thus constantly linking our lives to the gods and monsters from ancient times.

Another company that would not necessarily be classed as part of the hospitality industry, but is not a million miles from there, is Ambrosia. Their custard can be found in most households in Britain. A delicious creamy desert, Ambrosia custard is something we Brits feed our children and indulge in when we are ill. But, why have this company chosen their name? Ambrosia was the food of the gods. If this food was that of the gods, then why would we mortals be eating it? If it is an attempt to make us feel superior as we must be gods ourselves to be able to eat it, that is still an odd connection especially as like many more of these connections it would not be understood by most people. Ambrosia's own website says that the name means 'food from the gods' (not necessarily accurate), especially interesting when one learns that their original product was dried milk for infants.⁵⁰ Their interpretation of the name suggests that they may have been trying to infer that their infant milk was sent from the gods for your children and thus was far superior to all other milks. . It is clear that in this instance the mythological concept of Ambrosia is being purposefully misrepresented to fit in with the ideas of the company. This seems apt when one considers that it came out at a time when most men, especially fathers, would have been away fighting in the First World War, making mothers desperate to do all they can to support and protect their children. However, the association becomes even more of an oddity when one considers that ambrosia was supposedly deadly to mortals. It then becomes a suicide mission to eat some custard, if one is to take the meaning of the name literally. Again, this is a very odd connection to make showing our

⁵⁰ Ambrosia – The Ambrosia Story n.d

desire to be connect everything in our lives to the ancient world, even if the connection is not necessarily a logical one. The connection itself would make little actual difference to the consuming customers, however it is used as a marketing ploy by the company to initially sell the product.

The last company to note here are Starbucks. Many people may think that the logo for this company is that of a mermaid, many people would therefore be wrong in this assumption. The woman on the front of everyone's morning coffee is in fact a Siren. When the company opened in 1971 the ex-English teachers who set it up wanted a literary name and thus chose 'Starbucks', from Moby Dick. They wanted to stick with this nautical theme as it evoked the memory of the early seafaring tradition of coffee traders.⁵¹ Oddly enough, the founders did not opt for a depiction of a Siren from Greek Mythology, where the creatures origins lie; instead opting for a very unique depiction from Nordic mythology of a twin-tailed Siren. Fig. 11 shows how over the years the logo has changed and become less and less sexualised, however the figure of the Siren has remained the same. This just goes to show that even in one's daily caffeine it is hard to escape the influence of Greek mythological figures.

⁵¹ Starbucks Company Profile n.d



Figure 8 - Versace logo



Figure 3- Medusa on Red Attic Ware



Figure 4- An engraving of Medusa from Greek Italy

Starbucks: An Illustrated History



1971

We start by selling coffee beans in Seattle's Pike Place Market.



1987

We add handcrafted espresso beverages to the menu.



1992

We become a publicly traded company.



2011

We mark 40 years and begin the next chapter in our history.

Figure 5- Evolution of the Starbucks logo

Conclusion

It is clear from this work that the images of Classical Greek gods and monsters have been weening their way into all aspects of our everyday lives since the 18th century. The examples given here have in no way been exhaustive of all that there could have been, but had I tried to discuss every instance of Ancient Greek symbology in the modern Western World then this work could have been infinite. The examples given here were chosen to show the scale of the spectrum that has been affected and it has become clear that, even if it goes unnoticed by most, the symbols of Greek gods and monsters are all around us. As Garland puts so definitively:

‘It is virtually impossible to shake off the influence of our classical past. It is evident in our way of thinking, in our concept of government and political theory, in our aesthetic judgement, in our architecture, in our science and mathematics, in our medical tradition, and in our literature.’⁵²

This perfectly sums up what this work has tried to show, that we almost have no choice in our decisions made to use the symbols of Ancient Greece as it is something we are so intrinsically linked to and subconsciously attracted to. It also helps illustrate what has been said earlier about it being not just the mythological side of Ancient Greece that has been influential. Politics and government have been two of the biggest and most influential aspects of the ancient world that have been directly taken and injected into the Western World. Here we see that it isn’t just wherever we look that we see Greek influence, but it is in every fibre of our

⁵² Garland. 2008: 307

being that we have a desire to link ourselves back to the world of the Ancient Greeks. Everything around us, from the buildings we sit in to the cups we drink out of are imbued with symbols of Classical Greece. Although we may not always realise just how heavily we are surrounded by these symbols the fact is that they are still there and ingrained on our brains.

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Images

Image on front cover:

The Parthenon. ©Martha Warren. 15th September 2017. The Parthenon, Athens, Greece.

Figure 1:

The Parthenon from the left angle. ©Martha Warren. 15th September 2017. The Parthenon, Athens, Greece.

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The Parthenon from the right angle. ©Martha Warren. 15th September 2017. The Parthenon, Athens, Greece.

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Figure 10:

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