

Greek mythology in sun, moon, and talia assignment

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Sun, Moon and Talia is an Italian fairy tale written by Giambattista Basile in his 1634 book, *Pentamerone*. It is one of the earliest and more sophisticated versions of *Sleeping Beauty*, following adult themes of rape, sexuality, infidelity and murder ??? far different from the later and softer versions of the tale (Hallett & Karasek, 2009). In *Sun, Moon, and Talia*, Basile uses various references to figures in Greek mythology. These references offer sophisticated portrayals of his characters' personalities.

Through examining these Greek figures, their identity, history and position in Greek mythology, one can draw parallels between the characters and their plights in Basile's tale. In Basile's story, Scylla and Charybdis are mentioned by the Queen when she says to the King's secretary, " Listen, my son, you are between Scylla and Charybdis, between doorpost and the door, between the poker and the grate" (Hallett & Karasek, 2009). Historically, Scylla and Charybdis were sea monsters situated across one another on the banks of the narrow Strait of Messina.

Scylla lived in a cave facing the west and was a gruesome sight with twelve feet, six long necks and heads with three rows of close-set teeth. She would capture sailors from every ship that passed by with each of her mouths. On the cliff opposite her resided Charybdis. Three times a day she would absorb and regurgitate the water of the passage creating a dangerous whirlpool (Keightley, 1838, p. 271). The Queen's mention of Scylla and Charybdis is grouped with other harsh and narrow conditions.

The phrase ' between Scylla and Charybdis' is a Greek idiom used to describe two equally perilous alternatives, neither of which can be passed

without encountering and probably falling victim to the other. It is used similar to the English idiom 'between a rock and a hard place'. The Queen uses the harsh words to compel the King's secretary to give testimony to the activities of her husband. Another Greek figure mentioned in the tale is Medea, daughter of King Aeetes of Colchis. In 431 B. C. Euripides wrote the play Medea in which she is betrayed by her husband Jason when he decides to take another wife. In her depression over her husband's actions, she takes the insane action of murdering her two children: And here I quit this theme; but I shudder at the deed I must do next; for I will slay the children I have borne; there is none shall take them from my toils; and when I have utterly confounded Jason's house I will leave the land, escaping punishment for my dear children's murder, after my most unholy deed. (Svarlien, 2008) The similarities between the Queen and Medea are subtle.

While Medea killed her own children out of distress over Jason's new marriage, the Queen ordered the cook to kill the children her husband had with Talia. The themes of jealousy, betrayal and infidelity are apparent and are shared between the two women. Finally, Basile mentions Charon, the ferryman of the dead. The souls of the deceased are passed on to him by Hermes, and Charon ferries them across the river Acheron into the underworld. In her fit of rage, the Queen ordered the secretary to bring Talia to her so that she may be killed by burning to death in a fire.

When confronted with this state of affairs, Talia asked the Queen if she could take the time to remove her clothes first. The Queen agreed and Basile narrates, " they were just going to drag her away to reduce her to lye ashes,

which they would throw into boiling water to wash Charon's breeches with (Hallett & Karasek, 2009). " The mention of Charon at this climatic part of the story indicates the gravity of Talia's situation. Basile alludes to the brutal end Talia was about to meet. Altogether, Basile's tale offers an early version of the classic Sleeping Beauty fairy-tale that most readers would be astonished to read.

The subtle comparisons to figures from Greek mythology and their relation to his characters' personalities create an atmosphere of grave seriousness and complexity. The tale is mature and creates a sophisticated, yet dark atmosphere with its seemingly tragic plot. References Hallett, Martin & Karasek, Barbara (2009). Folk & Fairy Tales: 4Th Edition. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press Keightly, Thomas. (1838). The Mythology of Ancient Greece and Italy. Whittaker and Co. Svarlien, Diane Arson. (2008). Medea. Hackett Publishing Charon. (n. d.). In Encyclopaedia Mythica Online. Retrieved from <http://pantheon.org/articles/c/charon.html>