

Myth Adaptations

Mythological stories help define and retell eras of a culture's history and beliefs. They serve as great time-capsules of information that allow glimpses into certain periods of history. As these stories live on and are told throughout time, elements of mythologies can be changed or adapted into popular culture. Western culture and modern artists constantly turn to classical ideas, as those found in mythological stories, for inspiration. When studying certain myths, it is already common to find variations on the same story, so it is only logical that some can be altered or borrowed through time for modern adaptations or reproduction. The adaptation of mythology can be reflected through different forms of art including: music, fashion, movies, or even books framing their own stories.

The resemblances in these adaptations can be very evident and although not always accurate, they can shed light on interesting parts of history. A good example of an adapted myth is the story of El Dorado which was adapted into Disney's animated movie 'The Road to El Dorado' (2000). This story was also referenced in an Edgar Allan Poe poem, and many other writings throughout time. The term *El Dorado* refers to a myth about a wealthy & mysterious lost City of Gold; its literal meaning is 'golden man'. Golden man is a reference to a coronation ritual once performed by a tribe in the high Andes called the Muisca. The origins of this story lie in South America, during the 16th century when Spanish explorers and pillagers during expeditions overheard stories of the Muisca and their coronation ritual. The coronation of the tribe's new king took place in Lake Guatavita, near Bogota and Colombia. The new ruler would be stripped naked and covered in golden dust, then sent to the middle of the lake to throw piles of gold and

jewels into the water as a sacrifice for an underwater god. The new king would then dive into the water to wash off the golden dust. Ancient Colombian tribes habitually threw mounds of gold into the water as a spiritual offering for pleasing gods and maintaining harmony. The Spaniards and Europeans sent to conquer the new land found such an abundant amount of gold that they believed there had to be a larger source coming from the tribe. The explorers managed to drain some of lake Guatavita and retrieve treasure but could never reach the bottom's sunken gold. Many Spaniards and Europeans were convinced el Dorado not only referred to a man, but an actual place, containing the rest of the wealth. Europeans led expeditions in search of the city of gold; these expeditions were reinforced after hearing accounts from a crew member 'Juan Martinez' who claimed he visited the city while lost, however most expeditions led to many deaths and were unsuccessful in finding el Dorado. Spaniard explorers hosted a dual thought process, some continued to believe in the existence of el Dorado, and others assumed that the tribal civilization was underdeveloped, and since they held no kind of currency (differing from Spain which used golden coins as currency) they managed their gold for other uses, like rituals, jewelry, art etc. They realized there was a difference in value of gold in the eyes of the tribe vs. spaniards.

The movie *The Road to El Dorado* (2000) though exaggerated, contains similar elements to the history of the Muisca tribe. This movie portrays spanish conquistadors set to conquer the new land, and depicts what the city and its people would actually look like had it been found. The story told in this movie followed two men who through a series of events get trapped on a spaniard boat on its way to one of these expeditions. They escape and manage to find the city of el Dorado, where they are confused as the

Gods of the city's tribe. This assumes that people actually found the city of gold just like the two main characters did and that the citizens of the city actually followed the religious practices in the movie, which involved human sacrifice along with gold and jewels. The movie version of el Dorado depicts a more fun story for modern viewers with nuances of the golden fantasy that once was.

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