

# Myths of Time and Eternity

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Your turn...

“What is time?”

# Theoretical Information I



# Chronos

- Greek term for “time”
- Chronologic: order depended on time, starting with the first and ending with the last event
- Mythology: Kronos = son of Gaea and Uranus,  
16<sup>th</sup> Titan, father of Zeus  
= Golden Age  
→ span of time

# Kairos

- Suitable moment of time
- Moment of decision (e.g. between belief and disbelief)
- Often perceived as divine moment

→ point in time

# Chaos

- Greek term for “empty room” or “disordered mass”
- Refers to cosmos or universe
- Also: Concept in physics describing a state of complete confusion and lack of order

# Theoretical Information II

## ■ Eternity

- “Infinite in past and future duration; without beginning or end; that always has existed and always will exist”
- “everlasting, endless”

■ Source: Oxford English Dictionary

# Germanic Mythology

# Germanic (Gmc.) Image of the World

- World is neither a disc nor a globe
  - “World tree” (ash tree) → Yggdrasill
  - Three parts
    - Asgard → realm of the gods
    - Midgard → realm of men
    - Utgard → realm of giants and other dark creatures

# The World Tree “Yggdrasil”



# Gmc. Myth of Creation

## ■ Beginning

- Fire from the south met Ice from the north
- Melting of Fire and Ice resulted in the creation of life (primordial giant Ymir)
- Yggdrasil was created from his corpse =

Beginning of Time

# Gmc. Conception of Life

- People believe their lifetime to be given to them to spend it serving their master.
- Two kinds of servitude
  - Peasant's life
    - Serving one's master by working fields for him
  - Warrior's life
    - Serving one's master by fighting for him

# Gmc. Conception of Death

- If a man died, he had to die for his master.
  - Surviving the master's death was the greatest shame imaginable.
- Dead warriors, who died honourably, were brought to Valhall by the Valkyries (“Wodan’s Girls”).

# Valhall(a)

- “Hall of the Slain” in Asgard – guarded by the god Heimdall
- Home to Wodan (Odin)
- A great hall of unimaginable size
- Warriors and gods await the gods’ final conflict with the giants (“Ragnarökr”)



# Attention!

“Ragnarök” ≠ “Ragnarökr”



“Götterschicksal”



“Götterdämmerung”

# Biding their Time for Eternity?

- In the morning: fight and slaughter
- In the afternoon: drinking and singing
- Those slain in the morning resurrect in the afternoon

→ Eternal circle (?)

Mind: General believe is that souls were created to last through eternity and never to fade.

# After Ragnarökr

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graph TD; A[After Ragnarökr] --> B[Renewal of the world]; B --> C[Eternal cycle will start again with other protagonists];
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Renewal of the world

Eternal cycle will start again with other  
protagonists

# King Arthur and Camelot

# Historical Development of a Legend

- No source ascertains King Arthur's existence
- Geoffrey of Monmouth: "Historia Regum Britanniae" (only extended account)
  - not historically credible
- Anglo-Saxon Chronicle: mention of a great king without giving a name

# Speculation and Truth

- Monmouth appears to be biased by family history: his father's name was *Arthur*
- Gildas (early notable Welsh historian):  
“a certain warrior, though brave, was not *Arthur*”
- *Annals Cambriae* (*Annals of Wales*) has a couple of *Arthur* entries

# What seems certain:

- Historical facts about a battle at Camlaun or Camlann (Cornwall) suggest the existence of a King Arthur:
  - a **minor figure**, important, yet less significant than legend has it

# Reasons for lasting Believe

- Psychologic necessity of a British equivalent to Charlemagne after Norman Conquest
  - crucial in building a national conscious
- Later: Hope and need for a strong king to lead country out of misery
  - Starting point: Celts claiming Arthur as one of their ancestor, returning one day to aid against invaders
  - Many kings (eg. Edward I) displayed him as a symbol of power.

# Parallels to Barbarossa

- Both shall return to save their nation
- Both seem to be based on a historical figure but evolved through history:
  - Arthur's bones appear to be found, but the figure changed through time/romance writing
  - Barbarossa is a figure merged of Friedrich I and II who spent only little time in the area of today's Kyffhäuser
    - real kings existed but were changed into legendary figures

# Camelot

- Legendary court of Arthur's
- Medieval dream city which never existed anywhere
- Embodiment of ideals of Arthur's reign
  - Camelot is an eternal kingdom: It will always exist as a metaphor for an ideal place to live.

# Camelot's Location

- Probably never a geographic place, but rather the current castle at which Arthur resided at a certain time
- There is no hard evidence of the exact location, but a myriad of claims of possible sights, mostly based on similarity in name.

# Avalon

- Already in Celtic tradition “island of glass”, place of deceased heroes → place of eternity
- Name etymologically: “Island of Apples”
- Occupied by Morgan Le Fay and her eight sisters, all of whom have healing powers
- Supposed location: Glastonbury monastery



Isle of Avalon

Glastonbury  
monastery



# Avalon and Arthur I

- Monmouth: after being wounded in battle of Camlann Arthur was brought to Avalon for healing
- Many legends tell Arthur was healed indeed and is waiting in Avalon to return in times of great misery

# Avalon and Arthur II

- 1190: slab of stone and lead cross inscribed  
HIC IACET SEPULTUS INCLITUS REX  
ARTURIUS IN INSULAE AVALONIA
  - Found along with it: a tall skeleton with a damaged skull
    - Arthur's coffin found in Avalon(?)
- Skeleton has been buried and displayed several times

# Christianity Hand in Hand with Mythology?!

- Missionaries used well known mythology to introduce Christianity by adopting them to their Christian ideas:
  - Arthur, an originally Celtic figure, was concerted into a symbol of Christendom, serving as a paradigm for any Christian.  
eg.- Christmas, Easter and other high church days he spent in Camelot
    - search for Holy Grail incorporated into stories

# Renaissance and Age of Reason I

- Spread of rationalistic and scientific ideas ousted the need for Christian god as well as ancient mythology
- Need for supernatural explanation of the world was redundant

# Renaissance and Age of Reason II

## ■ Time

- Explained scientifically in hours, minutes and seconds

## ■ Eternity

- Weakened believe in life after death (eternal happiness or suffering)

# Mythology: “Rediscovered” (?)

- Romanticism and 20th century rediscover medieval topics, including mythology
- Reason: Industrial Revolution and Age of Computers foster new kind of insecurity about world
- Attempt to find refuge in imaginary worlds

# Three Contemporary Examples

- J.R.R. Tolkien “Lord of the Rings” (alongside “The Hobbit” and “Simarillion”)
- J.K. Rowling “Harry Potter”- series
- Gene Roddenberry “Star-Trek”

# J.R.R. Tolkien and “Middle-earth”

- Purposely created a new bit of mythology for England by re-assembling pieces of different existing myths and mythology.

# J.R.R. Tolkien: Time and Eternity

- Central focus of LotR are death and immortality
- Immortal Elves travel to Grey Havens where ships leave for the Undying Lands (Valinor).
- Tom Bombadil is a person older than the current age of time.

# J.K. Rowling and the World of “Harry Potter”

- Stories using mythological background and unexpectedly turning into a new kind of mythological fiction.

# J.K. Rowling and the World of “Harry Potter”

- Everything is magic – even time
- Subjective time (in form of clocks)
- Concept of immortality
- Possibility of time travel and intervening
- Laws for time travel

# Gene Roddenberry “Star-Trek”

- Science Fiction takes over functions of mythology: Roddenberry purposely creates a galaxy in which our contemporary worries and problems seem mostly solved.

# Gene Roddenberry “Star-Trek: Starship Voyager (‘Relativity’)”

- View of time based on Einstein’s theory of relativity
- Possibility of time travel and intervening
- Laws for time travel

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