THEORETICAL APPROACH	STRENGTHS FOR ANALYSIS OF MYTHS?	WEAKNESSES FOR ANALYSIS OF MYTHS?
New Criticism/Formalism	(1) Useful for undated texts in which no author is known or no cultural/historical background.	(1) It is pointless (or even misleading) to do a close reading word-by-word if you are reading the text translated into another language (like English). You must read the original Greek or Latin. (2) Approach is strictly non-chronological, so no room to trace changes in myth over time.
Traditional Biographical Criticism	(1) Works well for late authors--especially Roman ones--when we have life-records. (2) Works well for writings of political figures and interpreting political allegory.	Many myths are anonymous. Impossible to analyze author's life in such cases. Even in the case of attributed works, we usually have no documentation of early Greek writers.
Folklore Studies and Anthropology	(1) Excellent for exploring anonymous works since no individual creator of a tale is necessary in folklore. (2) Works well for comparative literature approaches. (3) Not limited to one version of a myth or one text of a myth--great for regional variety. (4) Works for well for discussion "non-literary" practices like superstitions, charms, Greek and Roman magic, etc. (5) You get to use really cool databases like the Aarne-Thompson folklore index.	(1) Doesn't explain much in the way of complex symbolism, treating them only as motifs (2) Best at showing similarities between myths and legends, (3) Few undergraduate students have taken courses in folklore or anthropology, so are ill-prepared to use it.
Traditional Historical criticism	(1) Works well for placing some narratives in a larger context. (2) Works well in conjunction with specific locations and in later periods where we have clear historical records or evidence. (3) Works well for writers in Athens, Corinth, etc. where we have solid historical records, especially in the fifth and fourth centuries. (4) Very good for late dramas and satires criticizing politics.	(1) It's been done for 300 years. Hard to say anything new about it. (2) Works less well for early and preliterate periods where little clear historical evidence survives. Spotty historical records before the eighth century BCE, (3) Works poorly in mythic stories that are divorced from "historical reality." (4) Works poorly in areas like Lacedemonian Sparta, rural Arcadia, early Macedonia, and Lycia where little textual evidence survives.
Oral-Formulaic Studies	(1) Excellent for explaining features of early epics when it comes to unusual repetitions or phrasing. (2) Leads nicely into Folklore studies.	(1) It's been done for 110 years. Hard to say anything new about a myth using this approach. (2) Only works with narratives that pre-date the written word and were later written down in future generations. (3) Doesn't handle textual variation well compared to textual criticism.
Linguistics	(1) Useful for explaining elements of diction. (2) Useful for analyzing fragments of texts when we do not have enough material to build a complete narrative.	(1) Temptation is to use etymology as an inductive method, which is hazardous if words are going through rapid or non-standard changes. (2) Also, tends to distract from literary analysis of art.
Semiotics	(1) Works well for combining Greek art, architecture, and rituals as "texts" to discuss in conjunction with narrative texts. (2) Reminds us that Greek symbols may be quite different in meaning when contrasted with our own understanding.	Works best if you know Greek or Latin and also art, architecture, and rituals. Without that knowledge, your wheels are often spinning in the air without traction.
Marxist/Materialist Criticism	(1) Useful reminder of class structure in Greece. (2) Helps prevent typical oversimplification or idealization of the Greek *polis* as the world's first democracies. Useful for discussing class issues, power struggles, Corinthian manufacture of pottery with mythic themes, etc. Reminds us that the rich are *literate*, and the ones who support the *rhapsodoi*, and thus must have been involved in surviving manuscripts.	(1) Marxist theory is really concerned with late nineteenth-century capitalism. Not all Greek cities were capitalist in nature. (2) In some regions like Sparta, and in some time periods generally, the power dynamics is one of slavery versus free citizen rather than proletariat versus bourgeoisie in an economic or political competition. (3) Not useful for talking about Greek *demes* and tribes.
Deconstruction	(1) Works well with Formalistic Close reading and with translation studies. (2) Works well with structuralist binaries. (3) Good for pointing out inconsistencies in myths, especially inconsistencies that have developed over centuries as the myths grew, changed, blended with one another, or split into separate versions that now contain contradictions.	(4) In spite of the advantages of the approach, I've never read a single deconstructionist essay focused on Greek or Roman myth that didn't seem arbitrary, artificial, or unhelpful by the time I finished the essay.

Archetypal Criticism	(1) Works well with comparative studies. (2) Ridiculously easy to find examples of archetypes in mythology. (3) Usually, pretty fascinating as an approach when you are reading myths and thinking about their significance.	(1) Tends to lead to subjective and touchy-feely readings when done by Joseph Campbell--in the worst cases turning into mere Reader Response. (2) Tends to lead to reductive, homogenous, "cookie-cutter" readings in which critics try to fit all symbols and characters to fit same dozen or archetypes.
Prosody, stylistics, and genre criticism	(1) Useful for poems in set genres and structures like the epic, the *epithalamion*, sapphic verse, etc. Especially useful for drama. (2) You get to put to use all those schemes and tropes you learned in Dr. Wheeler's other classes.	(1) Prose and style studies only legitimate if you read Greek and Latin. (2) Some works are fragments or do not fit into a known genre. (3) Some authors and poets only survive as fragments.
Reception Theory	Good for looking at how readers in later centuries used or changed myths as they read them. Especially good for medieval readings of classical myths and Christian or Victorian allegories built around classical myths.	(1) Modern reception of texts without the original cultural context can be "hair-raisingly ahistorical," as Terry Eagleton put it.
Feminist Criticism	Useful for highlighting how downright different the Greco-Roman world is when it comes to gender ideas.	(1) Very few female authors have left surviving texts. Often scholars limited to analyzing female-characters as seen through male-perspective.
Gender Theory/Queer Theory	Gender theory useful because Greek idea of the Divine is often gendered as male or female (or in some rare, weird cases, both). Helps with personification. Queer Theory useful because Greek culture is inherently bisexual (pansexual?) in a way hard to imagine in the modern post-Puritan West.	(1) Many modern preconceptions and stereotypes about gender and homosexuality are radically different from Greek ones. We may be superimposing our own ideas on top of theirs like a palimpsest when we read.
Translation Theory	(1) Excellent for pointing out untranslatable "holes" in language (either the original Greek and Latin languages or the modern languages that we try to use as translations. (2) Helps make Formalistic close readings possible.	(1) Works best if you know Greek and Latin. Useless if you don't.
Structuralism	(1) Its emphasis on binaries and narrative structure work splendidly with myths. (2) Good for connecting iconography in temples and rituals with mythic narratives since structuralism looks for connections between parts in larger abstract systems.	(1) You have to compete with some really smart French and German scholars who are still doing groundbreaking work after thirty or forty years in the field. (2) If the structuralist's prose isn't top notch, the resulting essays are jargon-filled quagmires of abstraction.
Narratology	(1) Helps break down complex narratives into simple components that can be individually analyzed.	(1) Vladimir Propp's ideas in narratology really designed to discuss Russian fairy tales, not Greco-Roman myths.
Ecocriticism	(1) Its emphasis on natural terrain works well for discussing animistic, agricultural, and nature myths. (2) Lots of publication opportunities, because little work has been done in this area.	(1) Ecocriticism is less applicable to urban myths. (2) It ignores much of ritual. (3) It doesn't deal well with deities who represent psychological abstractions like wisdom or violence. (4) Fairly new field of study, so hard to find essays in myth-focused journals dealing with nature on any level beyond simple theme.
Textual Criticism and Paleography	(1) Absolutely indispensable. No other theory is possible without the existence of the physical texts as objects of initial study from which we can extrapolate earlier versions. (2) Wins coolness points for geeks who want to show off their fancy charts and digital images of the Greek or Latin texts.	(1) Requires Greek and Latin knowledge. (2) Most students ignorant of codicology and paleography, so it works best in graduate school rather than at the undergraduate level. (3) Overwhelming complexity of some textual traditions. (e.g., over 3,000 different manuscripts survive of Homer's *Iliad*, and no two of them are exactly alike in content.)