Example of a close reading for Classical Mythologies.

Passage from the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes*, with key details underlined:

[1] Muse, sing of Hermes, the son of Zeus and Maia, lord of Cyllene and Arcadia rich in flocks, the luck-bringing messenger of the immortals whom Maia bare, the rich-tressed nymph, when she was joined in love with Zeus, [5] —a shy goddess, for she avoided the company of the blessed gods, and lived within a deep, shady cave. There the son of Cronos used to lie with the rich-tressed nymph, unseen by deathless gods and mortal men, at dead of night while sweet sleep should hold white-armed Hera fast. [10] And when the purpose of great Zeus was fulfilled, and the tenth moon with her was fixed in heaven, she was delivered and a notable thing was come to pass. For then she bare a son, of many turns, blandly cunning, a robber, a cattle driver, a bringer of dreams, [15] a watcher by night, a thief at the gates, one who was soon to show forth wonderful deeds among the deathless gods.

Example of a close reading of this passage:

Zeus and Hermes: Thieves in the Night

At the beginning of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* (lines 1-18), Zeus himself is portrayed as a kind of thief, even though Hermes is the one being called a thief and robber in the poem. A pattern of words having to do with sleep and night emphasizes the theme of sneakiness, inviting us to view Zeus as a wily, Hermes-like figure who sneaks into Maia's cave and steals her innocence. The hymn tells us that Zeus visited Maia in the "dead of night" because he was cheating on Hera. Night gives Zeus the cover of darkness, and it is a time when Hera is held by "sleep." When Hermes is then described as a "bringer of dreams" and a "watcher by night," we get the idea that Hermes likewise tends to stay awake when everyone else is asleep—because nighttime is a good time to commit crimes without being seen. After learning about these characteristics of Hermes, we can see the affair between Zeus and Maia in a fresh light. Zeus is a sort of robber, who makes "unseen" visits to Maia, and instead of bringing dreams, he brings a child into the world. Born from secrecy, Hermes will continue in his father's footsteps.