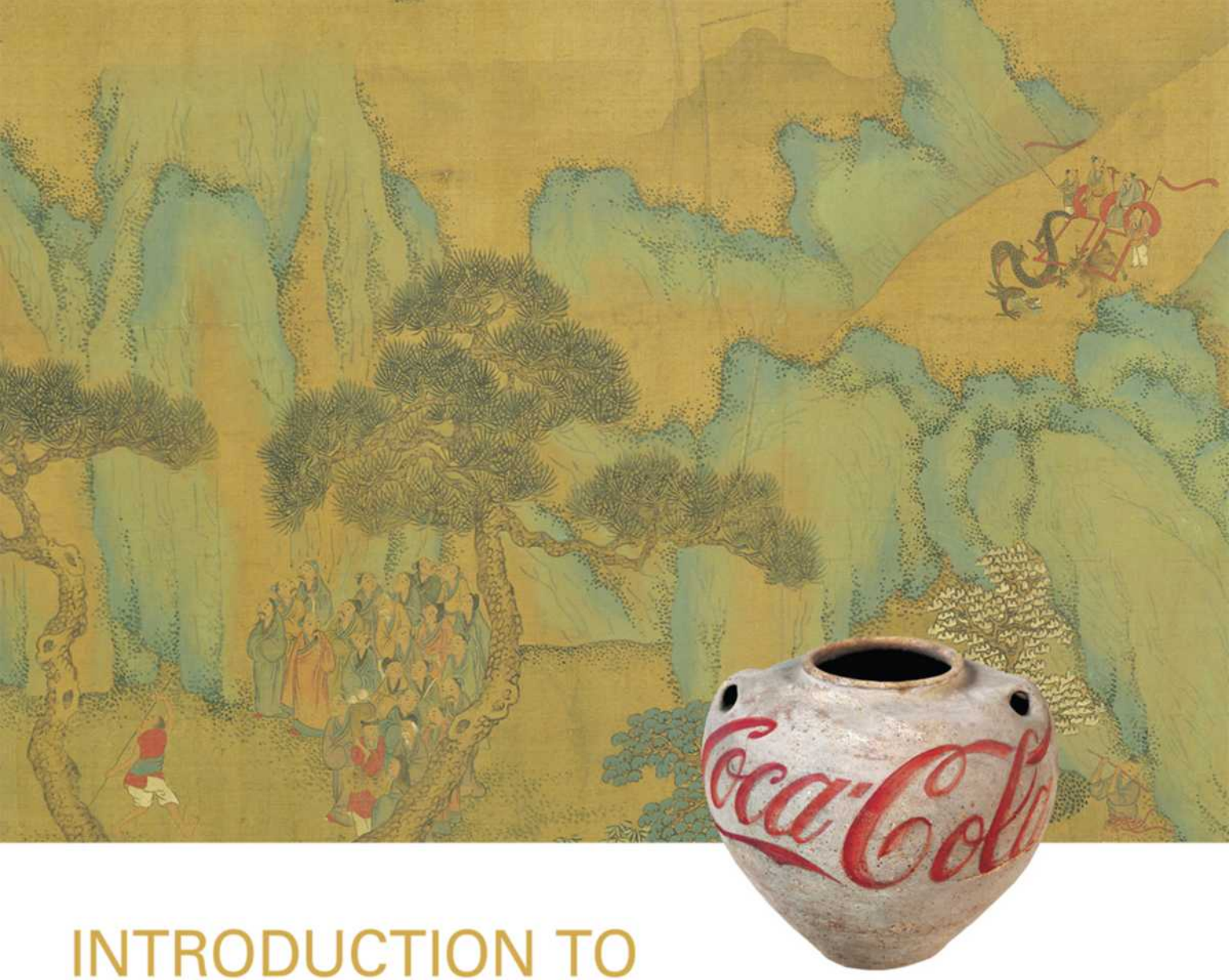

INTRODUCTION TO MYTHOLOGY

Contemporary Approaches to Classical and World Myths

EVA M. THURY · MARGARET K. DEVINNEY

FOURTH EDITION

OXFORD
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INTRODUCTION TO

Mythology

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About the Cover

Our cover juxtaposes photographs of two Chinese works representing different mythological perspectives: an ancient scroll illustrating a famous Taoist tale and a remade vase by contemporary artist Ai Wewei.

The scroll, attributed to 12th century C.E. painter Zhao Boju, focuses on the eight immortals of the Taoist tradition. Its painting is from the southern Song dynasty tradition which perfected Chinese landscape representation, and in this case integrated it with "The Eight Immortals Cross the Sea," which was a well-known story describing the battle between these eminent figures with great spiritual power and the Dragon King of the Eastern Ocean. The immortals eventually move a mountain over the Dragon King's palace to defeat him and incorporate into the world the power of the surrounding mountains. The painter employs a bipartite landscape scheme, showing activities on earth interrupted by the emergence of the Dragon King at the upper right.

The vase on the cover is by Ai Weiwei, who has worked in a range of media. He is a sculptor, a painter and has even made a music video parodying the K-pop artist Psy's "Gangnam Style." A highly politicized artist, Ai has been beaten and imprisoned in China for art protesting the corruption of the Communist regime that led to the death of thousands of children when an earthquake struck shoddily constructed schools in 2008. Ai has also used his art to showcase the plight of AIDS patients in China, who are denied their civil rights as well as adequate medical treatment.

Ai has been influenced by the work of Marcel Duchamp who noted that artists could change the value of ordinary objects just by reformulating them as works of art and putting them into museums or galleries. Though he has many famous works, Duchamp is also known for creating an artwork out of a urinal. These so-called "readymades" have inspired Ai's work with valuable vases from neolithic (10,000 B.C.E. to 8,000 B.C.E.) and Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.–220 C.E.) vases. He destroys these vases in various ways: he has made a video of himself dropping one and breaking it; he has also dipped some into industrial paint, and, as in the case of the Han vase on our cover, he has painted vases with industrial logos.

In making such works of art, Ai destroys the value of the traditional objects as such, but remakes them into very different works whose significance is in the protest they represent, thus expressing his view that his government has destroyed the traditional values built into Chinese culture. It is possible, then, to see Ai's work as the continuation of the mythological tradition that emerges from the inspiration of Nü Kwa who created human beings out of clay, as explained in Chapter 10.

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Contents

Preface *ix*
Timeline *xix*

PART 1 Introduction to Studying Myth 1

1 What Is Myth? 3
2 Ways of Understanding Myth 18

PART 2 Myths of Creation and Destruction 25

2A Creation 27

3 Greece: Hesiod 29
4 Rome: Ovid (Creation) 48
5 The Bible: Genesis (Creation) 56
6 Mesopotamia: *Enuma Elish* 64
7 Icelandic/Norse: *Prose Edda* (Creation) 85
8 North America: Stories from the Zuni, Hopi, and Navajo (Southwest); and from the Iroquois League (Northeastern Woodlands) 97
9 Africa: Uganda and Nigeria 121
10 China: Nü Kwa, Kuan Yin, and Monkey 130
11 Mesoamerica: *Popol Vuh* 158

2B Destruction 181

12 Rome: Ovid (Flood) 185
13 The Bible: Genesis (Flood) 196
14 Icelandic/Norse: *Prose Edda* (Ragnarok) 204

PART 3 Heroes and Tricksters 211

15 Theory: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* 217
Dave Whomsley
16 Mesopotamia: The *Epic of Gilgamesh* 225

17 Applying Theory: A Lévi-Straussian Analysis of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* 262
G. S. Kirk
18 India: The *Ramayana* 273
19 Icelandic/Norse: *Prose Edda* (Heroes) 292
20 Arthurian Legend: The Holy Grail 307
Donna Lynne Rondolone
21 Africa: The Mwindo Epic 349
22 Greece: *Oedipus the King*—Sophocles 387
23 Theory: The Structural Study of Myth 439
Claude Lévi-Strauss
24 North America: Raven 456
25 African and African-American Trickster Stories 467
26 Greece: Prometheus 483
27 Applying Theory: Different Versions of Myths 490

PART 4 Ritual and Myth 499

28 Theory: *The Forest of Symbols* 505
Victor Turner
29 Greece: Demeter and Persephone 519
30 Egypt: Isis and Osiris 538
31 Applying Theory: Meals in the Bible 554
Mary Douglas
32 Icelandic/Norse: The Rituals of Iceland 566
H. R. Ellis Davidson
33 Greece: Heracles and Dionysus 585

PART 5 Dreams and Myth 605

34 Theory: *Man and His Symbols* 609
C. G. Jung
35 Applying Theory: How to Perform a Jungian Analysis 629

PART 6 Folktale and Myth 641

36 Theory: *The Morphology of the Folktale* 647
Vladimir Propp
37 Applying Theory: A Proppian Analysis of *The Wizard of Oz* 665
38 Germany: Grimms' *Household Tales* 676

39 Rome: "Cupid and Psyche" 695
Apuleius
40 Applying Theory: Highlighting Different Aspects of the Same Tale Using Multiple Analyses 714

PART 7 Contemporary Myth 723

41 Daniel Boone: Building the Myth around the Man 727
Richard Slotkin
42 *Stagecoach* and *Firefly*: The Journey into the Unknown in Westerns and Science Fiction 743
Fred Erisman
43 Harry Potter: A Rankian Analysis of the Hero of Hogwarts 757
M. Katherine Grimes
44 The Vampire as Hero: The Undead in Contemporary Tales 771
Eva M. Thury

PART 8 Literature and Myth 787

45 Poetry and Myth 793
46 "Yellow Woman": Native-American Oral Myth in a Contemporary Context 819
Leslie Marmon Silko
47 Narrative and Myth 831

Glossary of Gods, Heroes, and Antiheroes G–1
Additional Works Cited B–1
Credits C–1
Index I–1

Preface

This fourth edition of our text incorporates into its cover design motifs that illustrate some of the ways we find mythology interesting: it represents a timeless tradition, and yet one that is ever being remade and reformulated to be completely fresh.

This edition includes a new chapter on Arthurian legend, focusing on the story of the Holy Grail throughout its history. The chapter on Native American mythology has been expanded to include not only southwestern tribes, but also those of the Northeastern Woodlands. Comparing the experiences and belief systems of these geographically widely separated groups provides interesting insights into the power of myth in a culture. Also in this edition, we have added the story of Sun Wukong, the Monkey King, to the chapter on Chinese creation myths, emphasizing the creative aspects of this trickster figure who is the source of the popular manga series *Dragon Ball Z*. We delight in continuing and expanding the multiple perspectives we have been able to provide in this book for traditional stories, suggesting that they are in some ways eternal and immutable, while showing how we see them differently because of the world we live in and the particular kinds of insights that have become available to us as a result.

From the beginning of our work on developing a mythology textbook, we felt we could not produce a work on mythology that did not recognize contemporary perspectives and beliefs as the cultural context for any study of mythological texts. In our view, this mitigates against the view that mythology is to be viewed as ridiculous stories told by uneducated peoples as they struggled to make sense of their world—a perspective we often hear from our students at the start of a mythology course. Rather, we wanted our book to show the kinds of meanings that scholars, artists, and thinkers of all sorts find in mythological texts today. And that meant presenting the original texts of myths along with twentieth-century interpretations of them by scholars in a variety of academic fields.

It has, over the years we have worked on this book, been a challenge to shape and structure the material we wanted to include into a coherent and meaningful whole. In various forms, the text you see today has been through many stages of scholarly review. At every stage of this review process, there were readers who suggested trimming the contents, while at the same time proposing additions to what was already here. It took fortitude and patience to consider and reconsider the suggestions of competing claimants, and in this edition we are continuing to hone the material we have, as well as adding sections that have been requested by students and instructors. We hope that our final choices will be useful to most students of mythology, although we understand that some will note the absence of stories and traditions that fire their imagination and their enthusiasm. Later in this preface, we will attempt to trace a series of what we hope will be interesting paths of discovery through the ensuing variety of mythological material.

HOW TO READ THIS BOOK

The organization of this book is based on the assumption that various readers have varied interests, so we include a variety of paths you may want to take. See the section below titled "Paths of Discovery through this Book." If you are reading the book as a text in a course, you may also want to pay attention to the course guidelines concerning areas to prioritize.

WHAT EVERYBODY SHOULD READ

We intend the first two chapters for all readers. Even if you already know what mythology is, you probably will want to read how we explain it, because that will help guide your thinking about the rest of the material in the book. In addition, if you are reading a chapter in any new part of the book, we suggest that you start with the introduction to that part, to provide a general orientation to why we grouped together the stories and mythological themes found there.

For the rest, we have tried to design the book so that individual chapters are self-contained and can be read as separate modules, so there is no need, after Part 1, to read the chapters in sequence. The "What to Expect" modules at the start of each chapter serve as advance organizers, designed to make suggestions about how to structure your exploration of the chapter. The "Paths of Discovery" section of the Preface could be considered a kind of wide-ranging "What to Expect" segment spanning the book as a whole.

You will see that the book's text is divided into a main column and marginal notes. The main column may contain two kinds of material: the texts of myths ("primary sources") and contemporary interpretations of them ("secondary sources"). Additional synthesized or interpretive material from us, the authors of this book, can also be thought of as "secondary source" material. The primary and secondary texts from other authors are given in a font that looks like this while the material from your authors comes in a font that looks like this. From time to time, the main column also contains tables, boxes, and illustrations to help you understand and appreciate the other material in the book.

The marginalia along each page feature notes, definitions, cross-references, headings, examples, and illustrations to guide and expand your appreciation of the main text. Since the book contains many different kinds of texts, the marginalia in some chapters are denser or more varied than in others. These marginal comments are intended to help you:

- highlight the structure of the discussion and thus make the argument easier to follow
- explain and expand concepts and expressions in the main text and thus make the complex material of mythology more accessible
- review the material by making skimming and navigating the text easier
- show links between parts of the book, allowing you to pinpoint connections that may have been lurking unspoken in your own thinking, or to notice relationships that may not have been obvious to you
- spell out connections between the material in the book and other aspects of contemporary life, like television; the movies; and other subjects, including other academic disciplines
- inspire further study by noting the sources of the ideas and perspectives in the text to give you access to concepts and ideas beyond the scope of the text

There is no right order in which to read the material in the main column, or even the chapters themselves. For example, we have chapters with primary sources like the *Epic of Gilgamesh* and secondary sources like J. S. Kirk's analysis of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (Chapters 16 and 17, respectively). Many literature teachers will tell you that it's best to read the literary text first and have your own thoughts about it, before you even consult the marginalia and especially before you read a secondary source about it. We don't disagree with this view: we are, after all, literature teachers ourselves. However, we recognize that, for some readers, the secondary material makes the stories more meaningful, and such readers who maintain their own views are not compromised by reading it first. So, if the choice is yours, try different approaches and select the one that results in the greatest enjoyment of the stories we include in the book.

Many readers will want to read the main column of text and jump to the margins only when they encounter material they have questions about. However, when you are looking at a chapter for the first time, you may want to skim through the marginalia to get an idea of the structure of what you are going to be reading. When you are studying for a test, you can use the marginalia as a guide as you skim the material you have read before. Sometimes the marginalia also contain definitions and concepts you may want to review, or to learn, depending on the guidance of your instructor.

PATHS OF DISCOVERY THROUGH THIS BOOK

The realm of "world myth" is vast, and the possibilities for exploration in it are many. As noted above, we suggest that, no matter where in the book your journey takes you, you start with the first two chapters, as providing a useful overview of the kind of material you will be reading. In addition, any use of material in an as-yet-unfamiliar part of the book is, we believe, best preceded by reading the introduction to that part.

Here are some possible paths you may take in reading this book:

Classical Myth

Chapter 3	Greece: Hesiod
Chapter 4	Rome: Ovid (Creation)
Chapter 12	Rome: Ovid (Flood)
Chapter 15	Theory: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*—Dave Whomsley
Chapter 22	Greece: *Oedipus the King*—Sophocles
Chapter 23	Theory: The Structural Study of Myth—Claude Lévi-Strauss
Chapter 26	Greece: Prometheus
Chapter 27	Applying Theory: Different Versions of Myths
Chapter 29	Greece: Demeter and Persephone
Chapter 30	Egypt: Isis and Osiris (the second half of this chapter deals with Isis' role in the Roman Empire)
Chapter 33	Greece: Heracles and Dionysus
Chapter 39	Rome: "Cupid and Psyche"—Apuleius
Chapter 45	Poetry and Myth
Chapter 47	Narrative and Myth

World Myth. In some sense, every chapter in this book is relevant to world myth: hence the title. However, it may be useful to point out the chapters in the book that deal with stories from parts of the world other than the United States, or ancient Greece or Rome. These are, grouped according to their cultures:

Chapter 5 The Bible: Genesis (Creation)
Chapter 13 The Bible: Genesis (Flood)
Chapter 31 Applying Theory: Meals in the Bible—Mary Douglas
Chapter 7 Icelandic/Norse: *Prose Edda* (Creation)
Chapter 14 Icelandic/Norse: *Prose Edda* (Ragnarok)
Chapter 19 Icelandic/Norse: *Prose Edda* (Heroes)
Chapter 32 Icelandic/Norse: The Rituals of Iceland—H. R. Ellis Davidson
Chapter 16 Mesopotamia: The *Epic of Gilgamesh*
Chapter 17 Applying Theory: A Lévi-Straussian Analysis of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—G. S. Kirk
Chapter 18 India: The *Ramayana*
Chapter 10 China: Nü Kwa, Kuan Yin, and Monkey
Chapter 9 Africa: Uganda and Nigeria
Chapter 25 African and African-American Trickster Stories
Chapter 30 Egypt: Isis and Osiris
Chapter 11 Mesoamerica: *Popol Vuh*
Chapter 15 Theory: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*—Dave Whomsley
Chapter 20 Arthurian Legend: The Holy Grail—Donna Lynne Rondolone

Literature and Myth. Most of the stories in this book come from literary works, and this certainly includes most of the chapters listed above as "Classical Myth" and "World Myth" (except Chapters 15, 17, 23, 31, and 32). Thus, we do not re-list these chapters here. Beyond this, what is included here depends on the definition each person accords to literary works. Some consider fairy tales, for example, to be "literary works," while others focus more on works of "high" culture. However, of particular interest in relation to this theme may be:

Chapter 18 India: The *Ramayana*
Chapter 20 Arthurian Legend: The Holy Grail—Donna Lynne Rondolone
Chapter 21 Africa: The Mwindo Epic
Chapter 22 Greece: *Oedipus the King*—Sophocles
Chapter 27 Applying Theory: Different Versions of Myths
Chapter 45 Poetry and Myth
Chapter 46 "Yellow Woman": Native American Oral Myth in a Contemporary Context—Leslie Marmon Silko
Chapter 47 Narrative and Myth

Oral Storytelling. Although the first two chapters below treat literary stories, these stories derive from an oral tradition, and we try to elucidate that tradition in our account.

Chapter 3 Greece: Hesiod
Chapter 5 The Bible: Genesis (Creation)
Chapter 8 North America: Stories from the Zuni, Hopi, and Navajo (Southwest); and from the Iroquois League (Northeastern Woodlands)

Chapter 9 Africa: Uganda and Nigeria
Chapter 21 Africa: The Mwindo Epic
Chapter 24 North America: Raven
Chapter 25 African and African-American Trickster Stories

American Myth

Chapter 8 North America: Stories from the Zuni, Hopi, and Navajo (Southwest); and from the Iroquois League (Northeastern Woodlands)
Chapter 11 Mesoamerica: *Popol Vuh*
Chapter 24 North America: Raven
Chapter 25 African and African-American Trickster Stories
Chapter 28 Theory: *The Forest of Symbols*—Victor Turner (Victor Turner bases his theories on the study of the Ndembu people of Africa but applies his theories beyond this culture to talk about postindustrial society.)
Chapter 37 Applying Theory: A Proppian Analysis of *The Wizard of Oz*
Chapter 41 Daniel Boone: Building the Myth around the Man—Richard Slotkin
Chapter 42 *Stagecoach* and *Firefly*: The Journey into the Unknown in Westerns and Science Fiction—Fred Erisman
Chapter 44 The Vampire as Hero: The Undead in Contemporary Tales—Eva M. Thury
Chapter 46 "Yellow Woman": Native American Oral Myth in a Contemporary Context—Leslie Marmon Silko

African Myth

Chapter 9 Africa: Uganda and Nigeria
Chapter 25 African and African-American Trickster Stories
Chapter 30 Egypt: Isis and Osiris
Chapter 28 Theory: *The Forest of Symbols*—Victor Turner (Turner bases his theories on the study of the Ndembu people of Africa, but applies them beyond this culture to talk about postindustrial society.)
Chapter 45 Poetry and Myth (Audre Lorde's poetry is steeped in West African/Caribbean myth-based religion.)

Contemporary Myth

Chapter 28 Theory: *The Forest of Symbols*—Victor Turner
Chapter 34 Theory: *Man and His Symbols*—C. G. Jung
Chapter 35 Applying Theory: How to Perform a Jungian Analysis
Chapter 41 Daniel Boone: Building the Myth around the Man—Richard Slotkin
Chapter 42 *Stagecoach* and *Firefly*: The Journey into the Unknown in Westerns and Science Fiction—Fred Erisman (This chapter raises the issue of the role of mythology in popular entertainment. Are such myths just "mindless entertainment" or do they tell us something about our culture and values?)
Chapter 43 Harry Potter: A Rankian Analysis of the Hero of Hogwarts—M. Katherine Grimes
Chapter 44 The Vampire as Hero: The Undead in Contemporary Tales—Eva M. Thury
Chapter 47 Narrative and Myth

Fairy Tales and Myth

Chapter 34 Theory: *Man and His Symbols*—C. G. Jung
Chapter 35 Applying Theory: How to Perform a Jungian Analysis
Chapter 36 Theory: *The Morphology of the Folktale*—Vladimir Propp
Chapter 37 Applying Theory: A Proppian Analysis of *The Wizard of Oz*
Chapter 38 Germany: Grimms' *Household Tales*
Chapter 39 Rome: "Cupid and Psyche"—Apuleius
Chapter 40 Applying Theory: Highlighting Different Aspects of the Same Tale Using Multiple Analyses
Chapter 47 Narrative and Myth (Angela Carter's "The Tiger's Bride")

Myth and Ritual

Chapter 28 Theory: *The Forest of Symbols*—Victor Turner
Chapter 29 Greece: Demeter and Persephone
Chapter 30 Egypt: Isis and Osiris (The second half of this chapter deals with a ritual of Isis in the Roman Empire.)
Chapter 31 Applying Theory: Meals in the Bible—Mary Douglas
Chapter 32 Icelandic/Norse: The Rituals of Iceland—H. R. Ellis Davidson
Chapter 33 Greece: Heracles and Dionysus
Chapter 27 Applying Theory: Different Versions of Myths (This chapter contrasts the "working version" of a myth that is used in a ritual with other forms of myth.)

Theoretical Approaches to Myth

Chapter 10 China: Nü Kwa, Kuan Yin, and Monkey (This chapter uses Chinese myth as an example to show how myths are constructed and applies feminist theory to show how they function in society.)
Chapter 15 Theory: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*—Dave Whomsley
Chapter 17 Applying Theory: A Lévi-Straussian Analysis of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—G. S. Kirk)
Chapter 23 Theory: The Structural Study of Myth—Claude Lévi-Strauss
Chapter 27 Applying Theory: Different Versions of Myths
Chapter 28 Theory: *The Forest of Symbols*—Victor Turner
Chapter 31 Applying Theory: Meals in the Bible—Mary Douglas
Chapter 36 Theory: *The Morphology of the Folktale*—Vladimir Propp
Chapter 37 Applying Theory: A Proppian Analysis of *The Wizard of Oz*
Chapter 40 Applying Theory: Highlighting Different Aspects of the Same Tale Using Multiple Analyses

The four chapters of Part 7, "Contemporary Myth," may be seen as theoretical: the first is a historical analysis with some application of Campbell's ideas about myth; the second uses literary theory to study mythic concepts; the third and fourth apply psychological concepts to contemporary stories. These chapters are:

Chapter 41 Daniel Boone: Building the Myth around the Man—Richard Slotkin
Chapter 42 *Stagecoach* and *Firefly*: The Journey into the Unknown in Westerns and Science Fiction—Fred Erisman

Chapter 43 Harry Potter: A Rankian Analysis of the Hero of Hogwarts—M. Katherine Grimes
Chapter 44 The Vampire as Hero: The Undead in Contemporary Tales—Eva M. Thury

Myth from a Feminine Perspective. The Graeco-Roman culture is highly patriarchal, but the stories it tells often represent the strength and resilience of women. Of particular interest in this respect is the discussion of the Greek gender gap in Chapter 3, p. 32, and in Chapter 29, p. 523. The Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* and the rituals involving it show the important role that the feminine force can have, even in a society where sexual equality is unheard of. "Cupid and Psyche" features the coming-of-age story of Psyche and her development as a significant force in Graeco-Roman society (Chapter 39).

The Egyptian goddess Isis is a power in her own right, as are the Chinese mother goddess Nü Kwa and Kuan Yin, the Chinese goddess of compassion. Chapter 10 also has methodological importance as it traces the ways scholars of mythology can identify feminine perspectives even in societies that have developed away from the espousal of these figures.

Modern psychological theories, including those of C. G. Jung (Chs. 34 and 35) and Otto Rank (Ch. 43) have made significant contributions to our understanding of the importance of women in mythology. The analysis of *Harry Potter* in Chapter 43, in particular, updates conventional Rankian theory to give more emphasis to the role of women.

In modern Western society, greater emphasis is placed on the contribution of women, and this is reflected in the stories that come from these cultures, including *Harry Potter* (Ch. 43), *Firefly* (Ch. 42), and "The Tiger's Bride" (Ch. 47). In particular, in Chapter 47, Angela Carter's tale serves as a tongue-in-cheek repudiation of societal norms subjugating women to the will of their fathers. In addition, fairy tales often feature strong heroines, including Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* (Ch. 37) and the Goose Girl (Chs. 38 and 40). In particular, Chapter 40 describes Marina Warner's analysis linking Mother Goose tales and the legendary figure of the Queen of Sheba as causing the "feminine disruption" of patriarchal society. In contemporary popular fiction, association with vampires often provides women with the power and the incentive to become heroic (Ch. 44). And finally, contemporary literature represents the importance of women's mythological insights, as shown in the work of Leslie Marmon Silko (Ch. 46), as well as Anne Sexton, Hilda Doolittle, and Audre Lorde (Ch. 45).

A comprehensive list of chapters involving women's influence includes:

Chapter 3 Greece: Hesiod (Creation)
Chapter 4 Rome: Ovid (Creation)
Chapter 6 Mesopotamia: *Enuma Elish*
Chapter 10 China: Nü Kwa, Kuan Yin, and Monkey
Chapter 12 Rome: Ovid (Flood)
Chapter 16 Mesopotamia: The *Epic of Gilgamesh*
Chapter 26 Greece: Prometheus
Chapter 29 Greece: Demeter and Persephone
Chapter 30 Egypt: Isis and Osiris
Chapter 37 Applying Theory: A Proppian Analysis of *The Wizard of Oz*
Chapter 38 Germany: Grimms' *Household Tales*
Chapter 39 Rome: "Cupid and Psyche"—Apuleius

Chapter 40 Applying Theory: Highlighting Different Aspects of the Same Tale Using Multiple Analyses
Chapter 42 *Stagecoach* and *Firefly*: The Journey into the Unknown in Westerns and Science Fiction—Fred Erisman
Chapter 43 Harry Potter: A Rankian Analysis of the Hero of Hogwarts—M. Katherine Grimes
Chapter 44 The Vampire as Hero: The Undead in Contemporary Tales—Eva M. Thury
Chapter 45 Poetry and Myth (Anne Sexton, Hilda Doolittle, and Audre Lorde)
Chapter 46 "Yellow Woman": Native American Oral Myth in a Contemporary Context—Leslie Marmon Silko
Chapter 47 Narrative and Myth ("The Tiger's Bride")

SUPPORT MATERIALS TO ACCOMPANY *INTRODUCTION TO MYTHOLOGY*

Students and instructors may visit the **Companion Website at www.oup.com/us/thury**. Chapter objectives and summaries, study questions, suggested essay topics, self-correcting review quizzes, and glossary term flashcards are available here. There are also web links to sites relevant to chapter content. Finally, instructors may access several sample syllabi and a PowerPoint®-based Lecture Guide.

An **Instructor's Manual and Testbank** accompanies this book. Here, instructors will find summaries, discussion questions, pedagogical suggestions, suggested essay questions, and sentence-completion and multiple-choice tests for each chapter. Also included is additional material: three more stories from the *Household Tales* by the Grimm Brothers (Supplement to Chapter 38: The Frog Prince, Aschenputtel or Cinderella, and Rumpelstiltskin), with marginal annotations and a theoretical reading (Supplement to Chapter 31: "I Gave Him a Cake: Two Italian-American Weddings") discussing the mythological significance of the design of rituals by individuals. This last piece also has marginal annotations. A computerized test bank is also available.

Designed specifically to accompany *Introduction to Mythology*, Fourth Edition, the second edition of **Now Playing: Learning Mythology Through Film** illustrates the ways mythological concepts play out in a variety of situations by showcasing mass media that are familiar and easily accessible to readers and teachers.

Integrating clips and descriptions from thirty-four films and four television episodes, this vibrant resource includes both classics and newly released material. For example, *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) provides an enjoyable and interesting way for you to discuss the rationalization of myths, changing audiences, and gender roles with your students, while *Clash of the Titans* (2010) addresses the complex relationship between the Greek gods and man, the role of fate, and the ancient Greeks' view of free will. Each entry includes details about the mythological concepts featured within the film or TV episode, a brief synopsis, and questions for discussions or written homework assignments. Both student and instructor editions are available.

Now Playing can be packaged with every new copy of *Introduction to Mythology*, Fourth Edition, at no additional cost to students. Qualified adopters will also receive a Netflix subscription that allows them to show students the films discussed in the book.

Please contact your local Oxford University Press sales representative or call 800-280-0280 for more information.

Introduction to Mythology, Fourth Edition, is also available as **a CourseSmart Ebook**: 978-0-19-986280-1. Please contact your Oxford University Press sales representative at 800-280-0280 for more information.

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We particularly appreciate the artistic work of Mickey Drott, who created the final illustrations we could get nowhere else; and we laud our editors at Oxford University Press, especially Robert Miller, who first saw the potential in our approach to mythology, as well as Charles Cavaliere, Lynn Luecken, and Theresa Stockton for their valuable direction in helping us develop the current edition and prepare the manuscript for publication.

Saving the best for last, we thank our husbands, M. Carl Drott and Edward Devinney, for their astute reading, their technical assistance, and most important of all—for their encouragement and support during the long gestation period of this labor.

We dedicate this book to Martha B. Montgomery, who hired each of us in her time as Head of what was then the Department of Humanities and Communications at Drexel University. Martha was an outstanding educator, a terrific boss, and an inspiring friend; we hope the work we do today carries on her vision of rigorous scholarship and dedicated teaching.

Eva Thury and Margaret Devinney

NEW TO THIS EDITION

- Chapter 8: "North America: Stories from the Zuni, Hopi, and Navajo (Southwest); and from the Iroquois League (Northeastern Woodlands)" now includes creation myths from the Woodlands tribes (Iroquois League) of the northeastern United States in addition to the southwestern Hopi, Navajo, and Zuni.
- Chapter 10: "China: Nü Kwa, Kuan Yin, and Monkey" now includes an excerpt from *Journey to the West* describing some of the adventures of the Monkey King.
- Chapter 18: "The *Ramayana*" contains an expanded introduction, with emphasis on Hinduism in its historical and contemporary contexts.
- Chapter 20 (new): "Arthurian Legend: The Holy Grail" is an extensive addition focusing on the story of the Holy Grail in its medieval as well as its contemporary emanations.
- Chapter 45, "Poetry and Myth," now includes works by Audre Lorde, which enriches the African/African-American mythological experience because of Lorde's American Afro-Caribbean base.
- Full-color design and many maps, photographs, and charts in color make the text easier to read and its illustrations more powerful and meaningful.

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8000 B.C.E. TO 2000 B.C.E.

8000 B.C.E.

7500 B.C.E. Early Egyptians live in what are today desert areas, which are green at this time.

7000 B.C.E.

7000 B.C.E. Mesopotamians begin living in towns.

ca. 7000 B.C.E. First farmers settle in Greece.

6000 B.C.E.

ca. 5400–4400 B.C.E. Farmers start to grow forms of wheat and barley and to keep animals nearer the Nile River in Egypt.

5000 B.C.E.

Native Americans are living in areas as far east as southern Maine.

4000 B.C.E.

ca. 3400–3200 B.C.E. Earliest known use of hieroglyphics in Egypt.

ca. 3200 B.C.E. The Bronze Age: name given to the time when this metal first begins to be used.

ca. 3200 B.C.E. Sumeria falls to the Akkadians.

3000 B.C.E.

ca. 3000 B.C.E. Writing system called cuneiform is invented in lower Mesopotamia.

2800–2500 B.C.E. Gilgamesh is King of Uruk.

2375–2345 B.C.E. Pyramid texts at Saqqara.

2350–2150 B.C.E. Akkadian Empire

ca. 2300 B.C.E. Sargon's birth, according to an inscription.

2125–2016 B.C.E. Thebes becomes an important city. Rulers from the 11th dynasty become strong and start to control large parts of Egypt.

ca. 2100 B.C.E. Earliest written versions of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*.

2000 B.C.E. TO 1000 B.C.E.

2000 B.C.E.

1831–1786 B.C.E. Egyptian art reaches a high point during the reign of Amenemhat III.

1792–1750 B.C.E. Reign of Hammurabi, a Babylonian king who developed a code of laws.

ca. 1700 B.C.E. A form of writing known today as Linear A is developed on the island of Crete.

1550 B.C.E. The Theban god Amun becomes one of the most important deities in Egypt.

ca. 1530 B.C.E. Volcanic explosion on the island of Thera. Today, some people believe this huge eruption may be the origin of the legend of Atlantis.

1500 B.C.E.

ca. 1500–1000 B.C.E. The Iroquois Confederacy is established under the Great Law of Peace agreed to by the Iroquois, Seneca, Oneida, Onandaga, Cayuga, and Mohawk tribes.

1352–1336 B.C.E. Reign of Amenhotep IV / Akhenaten, who closes the old temples and makes Aten the most important god in Egypt.

1336 B.C.E. Tutankhamun becomes king and restores the cults of the old gods.

ca. 1200 B.C.E. The version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* found in this book.

ca. 1200 B.C.E. Mycenean (Greek) civilization.

1183 B.C.E. Traditional date for the Trojan War. This legendary war was fought between an alliance of Greek cities and the Anatolian city of Troy.

1100–900 The Greek Dark Age: The skills of reading and writing are lost. Trade between Greece and other countries goes into decline. The population becomes much smaller.

1099 B.C.E. Ramses XI becomes king—the last of the New Kingdom.

1069–715 B.C.E. The south of Egypt is controlled by the High Priests of Amun.

1000 B.C.E.

ca. 950 B.C.E. Yahwist or Jehovist version of Genesis, the first book of the Hebrew Bible.

900 B.C.E. TO 700 B.C.E.

900 B.C.E.

ca. 850 B.C.E. Elohist version of Genesis.

800–480 B.C.E. Greek settlements, known as colonies, are set up in Asia Minor, Italy, Sicily, North Africa, Egypt, and around the Black Sea.

800 B.C.E.

776 B.C.E. The first Olympic games are held in honor of the god Zeus.

ca. 750 B.C.E. Traditional date for the Greek poet Homer, who composed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.

ca. 750 B.C.E. Supposed earliest version of the Oedipus myth. (Homer referred to it in his *Odyssey*.)

750–700 B.C.E. First temple of Pallas Athena is built in Athens.

ca. 740 B.C.E. The Greek alphabet, based on the Phoenician writing system, is created.

ca. 721 B.C.E. J-E version of Genesis.

700 B.C.E. Shabaka Stone placed in the Temple of Ptah in Memphis.

700–480 B.C.E. The Archaic Period in Greece: Greek cities increase trade with each other and with other cultures. Arts and crafts flourish. Great temples are built to honor the gods.

ca. 700–650 B.C.E. Hesiod the poet writes *Works and Days* and *Theogony*.

7th c. B.C.E. Composition of the *Hymn to Demeter*.

7th c. B.C.E. Ashurbanipal rules; creates a comprehensive library.

7th c. B.C.E. Earliest versions of the *Ramayana* are surmised to have originated at this time.

700 B.C.E.

671 B.C.E. The Assyrians capture the city of Memphis.

663 B.C.E. The Assyrians capture Thebes and control all of Egypt.

621–620 B.C.E. Drako issues the first written law code in Athens.

620–580 B.C.E. The Greek poet Sappho of Lesbos writes nine books of poetry.

600 B.C.E. TO 500 B.C.E.

600 B.C.E.

600–221 B.C.E. Classical/Pre-Han era in China

597 B.C.E. Start of the Babylonian captivity. Nebuchadnezzar II captures Jerusalem, takes the king and many other prominent citizens back to Babylon.

590 B.C.E. First Pythian Games held in Delphi in honor of the god Apollo.

587 B.C.E. Jerusalem destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar II, more Jewish prisoners are taken to Babylon.

ca. 560–480 B.C.E. Life of Pythagoras, Greek mathematician and philosopher.

ca. 550 B.C.E. Priestly version of Genesis.

550 B.C.E. Persian king Cyrus the Great conquers Media.

539 B.C.E. After the fall of Babylon to the Persian king Cyrus the Great, exiled Jews are allowed to return to the land of Judah.

534 B.C.E. The first tragedy is performed in Athens at a festival dedicated to the god Dionysos.

525–456 B.C.E. Life of the Greek playwright Aeschylus.

500–428 B.C.E. Life of the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras.

500 B.C.E.

495–405 B.C.E. Life of the Greek playwright Sophocles.

492–432 B.C.E. Life of the Greek philosopher Empedocles.

490 B.C.E. The Battle of Marathon, at which the Athenian army defeats the invading Persian Empire.

487 B.C.E. The first comedy (play) is performed in Athens at a festival dedicated to the god Dionysos.

ca. 485–425 B.C.E. Life of the Greek historian Herodotus.

480–323 B.C.E. The Greek Classical Period: artists begin to portray humans and animals in a more natural and realistic way.

ca. 480–407 B.C.E. Life of the Greek playwright Euripides.

ca. 456 B.C.E. Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*.

447 B.C.E. The building of the Parthenon begins in Athens.

432–404 B.C.E. Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta and their allies. Athens is defeated, and the city never fully recovers its military strength and power.

429–425 B.C.E. Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*.

427–347 B.C.E. Life of the Greek philosopher Plato.

425 B.C.E. Great plague in Athens.

400 B.C.E. TO 300 B.C.E.

400 B.C.E.

399 B.C.E. Socrates is sentenced to death.

387 B.C.E. Plato founds his school at the Academy in Athens.

384–322 B.C.E. Life of the Greek philosopher Aristotle.

341–270 B.C.E. Life of the Greek philosopher Epicurus.

335 B.C.E. Aristotle founds his school at the Lyceum in Athens.

335–263 B.C.E. Life of the Greek philosopher Zeno, who begins the Stoic movement.

332 B.C.E. Alexander the Great becomes the new ruler of Egypt.

331 B.C.E. New city of Alexandria is founded.

323–31 B.C.E. The Hellenistic Period: Greek ideas and styles of art spread throughout Alexander's former empire.

323 B.C.E. Death of Alexander the Great. His generals divide his empire among them. For the next 40 years, these generals fight to expand their territory.

300 B.C.E.

ca. 300 B.C.E. Euclid founds a mathematical school in Athens.

300–200 B.C.E. The Lenape people continue moving eastward, meet and become friends with the Iroquois.

290 B.C.E. The Library in Alexandria is founded. It holds half a million scrolls and conserves many of the great works of ancient Greek literature.

287–212 B.C.E. Life of Archimedes, Greek mathematician and philosopher.

279 B.C.E. Celtic tribes from the north invade Greece and reach as far as Delphi.

270 B.C.E. Greek astronomer Aristarchus announces that the earth revolves around the sun each year and rotates on its own axis each day.

264–241 B.C.E. Rome's First Punic War with the city of Carthage. Rome gains control of Sicily as its first overseas province.

254–184 B.C.E. Life of the Roman playwright Plautus, the author of over 130 comic plays.

221–220 B.C.E. Han Dynasty rules China.

300 B.C.E. TO 100 B.C.E.

300 B.C.E. continued

218–202 B.C.E. Rome's Second Punic War. Hannibal of Carthage crosses the Alps and invades Italy, but is unable to take control of the city of Rome and eventually withdraws to Africa.

200 B.C.E.

200–100 B.C.E. *Songs of Ch'u*, earliest known Chinese sacred mythological texts.

ca. 170 B.C.E. Romans begin to interfere in the government of Egypt.

ca. 150 B.C.E. The Venus de Milo, one of the most famous sculptures in the world, is created.

ca. 150 B.C.E. Valmiki writes the version of the *Ramayana* found in this book.

149–146 B.C.E. Rome's Third Punic War. Rome destroys and takes control of Carthage, along with much of North Africa.

146 B.C.E. The Romans conquer Corinth. The Greek mainland becomes a Roman province.

146 B.C.E. Temple of Jupiter Stator is rebuilt. It is the first marble temple built in Rome and demonstrates the enormous wealth pouring into the city.

100 B.C.E.

59 B.C.E. Julius Caesar becomes a consul in Rome and is appointed governor of two Gallic provinces.

58–50 B.C.E. Gallic War. Julius Caesar greatly extends the territory that Rome controls in western Europe.

51 B.C.E. Cleopatra VII becomes the queen of Egypt.

48 B.C.E. Cleopatra VII's brother, Ptolemy XIII, tries to remove her from power, but the Roman leader, Julius Caesar, helps her to regain the throne.

44 B.C.E. Julius Caesar proclaims himself permanent ruler of Rome. He is assassinated a month later on 15 March. Civil war follows, leading to the end of the Republic.

43 B.C.E.–17 B.C.E. Life of the Roman poet Ovid, who writes the *Metamorphoses*, a long poem about people who change into plants and animals.

100 B.C.E. TO 200 C.E.

100 B.C.E. continued

41 B.C.E. Marc Antony comes to Egypt and forms an alliance with Cleopatra.

31 B.C.E. Marc Antony is defeated at the Battle of Actium by Octavian, who later changes his name to Augustus.

31 B.C.E.–476 C.E. Roman Imperial Period: Rome is ruled by emperors.

31 B.C.E.–14 C.E. Reign of Octavian, who is granted the title Augustus in 27 B.C.E.

30 B.C.E. Marc Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide, and the Roman emperor, Augustus, takes control of Egypt.

27 B.C.E.–200 C.E. Many religious movements spread throughout the early Roman Empire.

41–54 C.E. Reign of the emperor Claudius. During this time Britain becomes part of the Roman Empire.

54–68 C.E. Reign of the Roman emperor Nero.

1st c. C.E. The Roman philosopher Seneca writes his *Oedipus*.

1st c. C.E. Apuleius, a Roman from North Africa, writes a novel called *Metamorphoses*.

79 C.E. Mt. Vesuvius erupts, destroying the towns of Pompeii and Herculaneum in Italy.

98–117 C.E. Reign of the Roman emperor Trajan. The empire is at its largest extent, including territory in Europe, Africa, and Asia.

122–123 C.E. Hadrian's Wall is built across north Britain.

146–170 C.E. Astronomer Ptolemy, a Graeco-Roman from Alexandria, Egypt, writes that the earth is the center of the universe, and all the planets and stars revolve around it.

180 C.E. Alexandria becomes a center of the Christian religion in Egypt.

200 C.E.

220–280 C.E. China's Three Kingdom era. Hsu Cheng writes a version of the P'An Ku myth.

300 C.E. TO 1300 C.E.

300 C.E.

ca. 300–400 C.E. Earliest Mayan hieroglyphics on rocks and stelae.

303 C.E. Roman emperor Diocletian tries to destroy Christianity.

306–337 C.E. Constantine I becomes emperor. the Roman Empire, including Egypt, becomes Christian. Egyptian Christians are called Copts.

313 C.E. Christianity is tolerated throughout the Roman Empire.

329 C.E. St. Peter's church in Rome is completed.

360 C.E. First church of St. Sophia is completed in Constantinople.

393 C.E. The Olympic Games are banned by the Roman emperor.

394 C.E. The last known ancient inscription in hieroglyphic script is inscribed on a wall at the temple of Isis at Philae.

395 C.E. The Roman Empire is divided in two. Greece becomes part of the Byzantine Empire. whose capital, Constantinople, was previously known as Byzantium.

500–1100 C.E.

late 5th to 11th. C.E. European Dark Ages.

ca. 600 C.E. Earliest extant reference to King Arthur as the subject of oral tales in the British Isles.

1138 C.E. Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* sets the stage for Arthurian literature, establishing the circumstances of Arthur's birth, accomplishments, and extraordinary powers.

1181–1191 C.E. Chrétien De Troyes writes *Conte del Graal*, the earliest extant Arthurian epic on the quest for the Holy Grail.

1200 C.E.

ca. 1200 Gottfried von Strassburg writes *Tristan and Isolde*.

ca. 1200–1524 Quiché Maya civilization, under a deity called "Plumed Serpent," flourishes in Central America until Spanish takeover in 1524.

13th c. Pueblo cultures thrive in the southwestern United States.

1216–1223 Danish historian Saxo Grammaticus writes *Gesta Danorum*.

1270–1280 The Volsung Saga, Icelandic prose rendition of the origin and decline of the family of Sigurd and Brynhild.

1400 C.E. TO 1700 C.E.

1400 C.E.

1431–1476 Life of Vlad the Impaler, the historical figure associated with the title of Dracula.

1455 Printing press is invented by Johannes Gutenberg in Mainz, Germany.

1449 Sir Thomas Malory publishes *Le Morte d'Arthur*, the Holy Grail epic that inspires most Arthurian productions until the present.

1500 C.E.

1550–1750 Pastoral becomes a popular poetic form in England.

1534 Iroquois tribes in the St. Lawrence River valley greet French explorer Jacques Cartier and receive gifts. Initial friendship later turns to animosity as Cartier and others claim native lands and assets. Alternate periods of peace and war follow.

1554–1558 Reputed completion of written *Popol Vuh*.

1592 *Journey to the West*, attributed to Wu Cheng'en, is published. One of the great classical Chinese novels, it introduces the Monkey King.

1600 C.E.

1608–1674 Life of English poet John Milton.

1611 and 1616 George Chapman publishes English translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

1659 French writer Pierre Corneille's *Oedipe*.

1679 English writer John Dryden's *Oedipus*.

1697 French writer Charles Perrault's *Tales of My Mother Goose*.

1700 C.E.

1718 French writer Voltaire's *Oedipus*.

1734–1820 Life of Daniel Boone.

1784 Publication of John Filson's *Kentucke*, which incorporates a life of Daniel Boone

1795–1821 Life of English poet John Keats.

1800 C.E. TO 1900 C.E.

1800 C.E.

1812 Wilhelm and Jakob Grimm publish the first edition of their *Children's and Household Tales*.

1856–1936 Life of Austrian Sigmund Freud, the developer of psychoanalysis.

1865–1939 Life of Irish poet William Butler Yeats.

1869–1948 Life of Mahatma Mohandas Ghandi, great leader of India.

1870s U.S. government mandates education of Native American children in English-only boarding schools.

1875–1961 Life of Swiss psychiatrist and psychotherapist Carl Gustav Jung.

1882–1941 Life of Irish writer James Joyce.

1884–1939 Life of Austrian psychotherapist Otto Rank.

1897 English writer Bram Stoker's novel *Dracula*.

1889 Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*.

1900 C.E.

1904 American anthropologist J. R. Swanton collects Raven myth versions at Wrangell and Sitka, Alaska.

1904–1937 Life of American mythologist Joseph Campbell.

1922 First edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses*.

1932 American writer John Updike born.

1932 French writer Jean Cocteau's *La Machine Infernale* (an Oedipus drama).

1935 Anthropologist Ruth Benedict publishes *Zuni Mythology*.

1939 Release of John Ford's film *Stagecoach*

1939 The *Wizard of Oz* is released.

1947 India wins freedom from the British Empire using nonviolent tactics taught by Mohandas Mahatma Ghandi.

1948 Leslie Marmon Silko born; grows up in the Laguna Pueblo.

1900 C.E. continued

1960 Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko create the Marvel universe of separate comic titles whose story lines are interwoven and affect each other.

1963 French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss publishes *Structural Anthropology*.

1963 Debut of Stan Lee's *Avengers*, a comic featuring a team of superheroes originally including Iron Man, Ant-Man, the Wasp, Thor, the Hulk, and soon Captain America, a significant entry in the Marvel universe.

1966–1969 The three seasons of the original version of the television show *Star Trek*.

1971 English anthropologist Mary Douglas publishes "Deciphering a Meal."

1976 Anne Rice's novel *Interview with the Vampire* begins the movement toward sympathetic portrayal of vampires.

1987–1994 The seven seasons of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*.

1993–1999 The seven seasons of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*.

1993–2002 The seven seasons of *The X-Files*.

1995–2001 The seven seasons of *Star Trek: Voyager*.

1997–2007 Publication of the seven *Harry Potter* books by J. K. Rowling.

2000 C.E.

2001–2005 The four seasons of *Enterprise*, the last television series set in the *Star Trek* universe.

2002 The single season of Joss Whedon's science fiction program *Firefly*.

2005 Release of the film *Serenity*, set in the *Firefly* universe.

2013 Debut of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.*, a television show set in Marvel's Cinematic Universe, a shared world of heroes and villains based on the Marvel Comics' universe.

INTRODUCTION TO

Mythology

Contemporary Approaches to Classical and World Myths

FOURTH EDITION

Introduction to Studying Myth

What Is Myth?

WHAT TO EXPECT . . . This chapter introduces you to the style of presentation used in this book. You can see that there is a main text on the right, with definitions, cross-references, and other study aids in the left margin. In addition, wherever possible, the discussions are based not on retellings of myths, but on original versions. This allows you to enjoy and appreciate the literary style of the myths, and it makes your study of mythology more immediate—in many cases you are reading the same story heard by the original audience, not a watered-down version.

We start by defining mythology and explaining what a "contemporary" view of it is. Despite the widespread use of the word to mean fiction, mythology actually refers to stories that tell us about reality. One definition of myth that we introduce refers to it as "a traditional narrative that is used as a designation of reality."

In this chapter we show that the same story can provide a wide range of different kinds of insights into basic human questions, such as: What is it to be human? How do we fit into the scheme of things? How did our physical universe get to be the way it is? We illustrate these insights by examining the story of the Trojan War and several other examples.

Mythology allows you to take a journey into an exciting and mysterious world. In your travels, you can expect to encounter gods, heroes, monsters, exotic countries, and amazing adventures. For pure story value, readings in mythology have no match. In addition, the experience of mythology will enrich your understanding of literary and artistic works created throughout the ages. You will see that you have entered a living tradition: we continue to incorporate mythological themes and messages in our culture today. Even our modern mass media reflect the motifs and characters that can be found in ancient stories from around the world. Myths are as close to us today as the adventures of Indiana Jones, the Starship *Enterprise*, or *Game of Thrones*.

The title of this book uses the word "contemporary" for two reasons. In the first place, we will be considering stories from a variety of societies and time periods, including those told in modern times by novelists, poets, dramatists, and filmmakers. Secondly, we will not be satisfied to tell these wonderful stories for their own sake. We will also consider what the stories mean, what message they convey about the people and cultures that originated them. In this effort, we will bring to bear insights from a variety of academic disciplines. As far as we can tell, human beings have always collected and analyzed the stories they came across in their society: some early instances are the accounts of Herodotus in the fifth century B.C.E. and those of Apollodorus in the first century B.C.E. Our investigations will include the work of some modern scholars who delve into the meaning and significance of mythological stories. More detail on the structure and philosophy of this book is found in the last section of this chapter, p. 17.

▶ Andy Warhol, *Botticelli's Venus*, from details of Renaissance paintings, 1984 (left). Botticelli, *The Birth of Venus* (detail; right). We have juxtaposed detail from Botticelli's *Venus* with a modern version of the image. There is no need to prefer one rendering over the other: the meaning of each image is different. Each artist presents an artistic response to mythology. In this book, we are dedicated to demonstrating the effect of mythology on contemporary as well as traditional sensibilities.

Marginal comments are found throughout much of this text. For a description of the different kinds of marginal comments and suggestions on how they might be used, see the Preface.

WHAT MYTHOLOGY IS

In the first place, myths are stories. In every culture and every country, during every period of time from Ancient Egypt to the modern United States, people have told stories. Of these, perhaps the most captivating have been the sacred stories handed down as a part of religions, as well as the narratives that explain and define the great achievements of nations and peoples: in the strict sense, mythology refers to these. Usually these accounts are so old that their origins are shrouded in mystery. For us modern readers, part of their appeal is in their evocation of a long-gone era in which members of communities shared the same values and guided their lives by the stories they told. Rooted as we are in the ever-shifting, diverse, multifaceted world of the twenty-first century, we turn to mythology first for the entertainment value of a good story. Our impulse is sound; in the treasure house of mythological stories, we readily find the entertainment we are seeking.

"practiced at the time the myth is told"—Mircea Eliade believes that the power of myths is associated with their relationship to rituals, an aspect explored in Part 4.

▶ Marc Chagall, *The Creation of Man*, 1956–1958. Marc Chagall's 20th-c. painting captures a modern vision of the mystery and drama of creation. For more on creation stories, see Part 2, p. 25.

And yet, the term "mythology" is usually applied to a body of stories whose purpose is not limited to entertainment. As Northrop Frye puts it, the stories of mythology are often "charged with a special seriousness and importance." Some stories are associated with a living religion still being **practiced at the time the myth is told**; others are more secular in nature but still include values and perspectives that inform the society and culture of the storytellers.

Many people believe that myths are *false* stories that primitive people used to tell to explain the nature of the universe before a better, more "scientific" explanation for the world was available. This view is related to the popular use of "myth" to mean "false story." For instance, you may have heard people say that it is a myth that the sun travels around the earth, or that thunder is really the sound of two clouds colliding.

WHAT MYTHOLOGY IS NOT

We will see that mythological stories often contain elements that do not accurately reflect the scientific understanding of the societies that tell them, but this literal falseness can also be a reflection of their importance. Because mythological narratives are important to a society, they are often handed down unchanged from generation to generation. As a result, the scientific details embedded in these stories are unchanged even as new scientific discoveries alter the people's understanding of their world.

In our study of mythological stories, it should become clear that any *false* or outdated science they contain is not intrinsic to the points they are making about the nature of human beings and their role in the world. Thus, even stories about the formation of the cosmos can convey important truths to subsequent generations, although the scientific views in them are outmoded. To a reader from outside the culture, however, the false science of a mythological tale may be much more obvious than its unchangingly *true* values and world view. As students of myth, we will see that mythological stories reveal true things about the culture that originated them, and may include values and perspectives that can be meaningful even for those of us outside that culture.

▲ *Genesis Frontispiece Depicting the Creation.* This 16th-c. illustration shows the artist's vision of the world as it was being created. Compare with Chagall on p. 4.

ALLIGATORS IN THE SEWERS: AN URBAN LEGEND AS AN ORAL TALE

In our print- and Internet-oriented culture, we do not have many examples of stories that are primarily oral. Among the few examples are the so-called urban legends found around the world. These are not myths in the strict sense, but they can help us see the nature of the oral tales that are still transmitted in our own time. These stories get retold over and over again, and are revised by their tellers to include details that relate them to the teller's own family, friends, or neighborhood. No one knows why urban legends spread, but Jan Harold Brunvand, who has studied them extensively, believes their power arises because they "have an element of suspense or humor, they are plausible and they have a moral" (Jensen B9).

You may have heard the urban legend that giant alligators live in the sewers of New York City. This is called a legend because it claims to have a historical basis, but that claim turns out to be tenuous, even though there are many versions of the story. Brunvand has compiled a discussion of all the different forms he could find. A common one has it that the animals were the survivors and descendants of pets given to children during the late 1950s when pet baby alligators were a fad. When the pets got too big or became too much trouble, they were flushed down the toilet and flourished in the sewer system. Some versions of the story say that the alligators are albino because they do not get any sun, or that they survive by eating rats. It turns out that all over the United States, people are familiar with this urban legend.

Brunvand traces the origins of the story to a *New York Times* account dated 10 February 1935 saying that an alligator was found in a New York City sewer. As far as we know, however,

▶ *Alligator*, the 1980 horror movie by John Sayles, represents one instance of the urban legend about alligators in the sewers.

the other elements of the story are false, and thus the story is a "myth" in the colloquial sense of the word—a false story that people told to explain a rumor about an alligator whose path to a metropolitan sewer was unknown, and therefore mysterious.

"not a myth in the same sense"—This story is actually, as its name implies, a legend. Myths and legends are related: both are oral stories that are refined through repetition by one storyteller after another. A legend, however, is usually associated with a historical basis.

Thus, the story is just a legend and **not a myth in the same sense** as most of the stories we will examine in this book. However, it is a tale that bears examination here because it helps us see that oral storytelling exists even in modern times, and emphasizes the themes and issues that concern human beings at their core. This urban legend is familiar throughout the United States, not because people literally believe it—though some do!—but because it seems to express concerns that many people believe are worth thinking about. We will examine this story in detail here to suggest some of the insights that can be gained from looking at the stories people tell, whether they are true or false.

This story comes from:
Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: Urban Legends and Their Meanings.*

THE MEANING OF THE URBAN LEGEND

Brunvand, who collected different versions of this urban legend about alligators, points out that the story is related to a whole family of other stories, like the one about the woman who found a rat in her fast-food fried chicken. You may be surprised to discover that we can gain a variety of different insights into our experiences even from simple stories like this one. They all suggest that there is something unclean and scary hidden underneath the pleasant surface of civilized life. We could add that the story about alligators in the sewers tells us a lot about the experience of living in cities. A city has a giant infrastructure that is unknown and mysterious to us. Under city streets are tunnels, subways, sewers, and conduits for water and steam, as well as abandoned buildings and structures of all sorts.

Psychologists tell us that an intricate maze like this represents our unconscious hopes and fears as we struggle to become mature human beings. By traversing the maze, we are working out problems that we may not even be aware of having. We will be studying more about these views in Chapter 34 on the mythological theories of Jung, who was a psychologist.

The story of alligators in the sewers can be taken more literally, as well. In a city, women and men do not walk on the ground. They are cut off from nature by the ground they walk on, which is not the ground at all but a thin veneer that masks our nature, the unmentionable biological and physiological processes that lurk beneath civilized life. The alligators, then, are an expression of the fears we have of all the unknown parts of living in a city, all the natural or instinctual parts of ourselves that, as civilized people, we are not completely comfortable or completely familiar with. The Sumerian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which dates from about 2000 B.C.E., is a widely studied myth, and it expresses some of the same worries about how civilization distances human beings from their natural selves (for excerpts, see Ch. 16, p. 225). We will be studying more about these views in Chapter 23 on the theories of Lévi-Strauss, who looks at all myth as a conflict between forces of nature and culture.

In addition to the other insights it provides, the story of alligators in the sewers expresses the fears we have of each other in a community. Working together in a community is a good way to get more done than could be accomplished by any single individual. Living in a community,

Psychological Insights

psychology—The study of the mental states and processes involved in the development of individuals.

Examples:
Otto Rank and Carl Jung study those workings of the human mind that occur without our notice. This "unconscious" is often represented by patients in their dreams as a maze or labyrinth. On Rank, see the introduction to Part 3, p. 211ff, and Ch. 27, p. 490.

Anthropological Insights

anthropology—The study of cultures: "culture" refers to the values and principles of a society, as well as to the artworks ("Culture" with a capital "C") that express those values.

Example:
Claude Lévi-Strauss (see Ch. 23, p. 439). Lévi-Strauss' theory, "structuralism," examines stories to study the mental structures or underlying concepts they represent. From these, he determines the values and principles of the culture that tells the stories.

however, also means being stuck with the ill effects of the actions of others. In a city, people live close together. If you flush away your pet alligator or other unwanted items, your neighbor may well have to deal with the aftereffects of your carelessness. The city involves you in the lives of people you do not know, some of whom lived in the distant past and left behind their triumphs and their failures to be dealt with by the next generation—which must build, literally, on their ruins. The story of the pet alligators points to the uneasiness most of us feel about other people's monsters.

Social or Sociological Insights

sociology—The study of the groups that people belong to or participate in. Groups of interest to sociologists can be as large as the American nation or as small as the family.

MYTHS AND LEGENDS AS TRUE STORIES

Looking back at the story of the alligators, we can see that the story was false in the literal sense: it is safe to say that alligators do not live in the sewers of New York City. And yet, **the story expresses some true concerns and conflicts** of human beings who live in cities and participate in cultures, concerns that have been true of humans for many thousands of years, if the *Epic of Gilgamesh* can be believed.

"the story expresses some true concerns and conflicts . . ."—An episode of the television series *The X-Files* contains much the same theme. In it, the monster in the sewers is human and was created by genetic mutations arising from the atomic accident at Chernobyl in the Ukraine. The themes expressed remind us of Brunvand's version of the urban legend, except on a global scale. For more on the meaning of *The X-Files*, see Ch. 42, p. 745.

Although it shares some characteristics with mythological accounts, an urban legend is not really a myth in the strict sense of the word. As you may already have known, myths are stories about gods and heroes performing fantastic and amazing adventures, rather than about alligators terrorizing nameless people in the streets of New York.

This book will introduce you to a great many gods and heroes, but thinking about the story of the alligators is appropriate to an introduction to mythology, because legends and myths are related to each other. Both are stories people tell, over and over, in different forms and versions. As you can see from the preceding explanation, the story about the alligators in the sewers is not just a false story. Rather, it tells us quite a lot about ourselves and our culture.

FUNCTIONS AND INSIGHTS

Even though mythological stories represent truth for the societies that tell them, this does not mean that we as readers should take them as accurate representations of the values of the societies they come from. For example, folklorist William R. Bascom notes that "characters in folktales and myths may do things which are prohibited or regarded as shocking in daily life." For example, he points out that Old Man Coyote, a trickster hero in many Plains Indian tales, has intercourse with his mother-in-law, whereas members of Native American society are subject to strict rules stipulating that a man must not speak to, or even look at, his mother-in-law (338). However, Bascom explains that the stories about Coyote actually reinforce the taboo by allowing members of the society to "blow off steam" and discuss something that is normally may not be discussed by its members.

Bascom's observations point up the importance of understanding the function of a story to the community that tells it. In fact, there are two interconnected ways to look at mythology. One approach is consider it from our own point of view, as we have been doing with urban legends, looking at the insights we gain about the lives of the people who tell a particular story. This is seeing mythology from the *outside* looking in. Another way to look at mythology is to think about its role *inside* a culture, examining the uses a story has for the people who tell it. Bascom points out the anthropological function mythology plays in what he calls "validating culture," which he explains as justifying "rituals and institutions to those who perform and observe them" as well as educating members of a community on how to perform the rituals which are being performed as part of their culture (344). That is, the stories told in a society have meaning and significance not just to us but to the people who tell them; this is what we mean by the **functions of mythology**.

functions of mythology—The various kinds of meaning and significance stories have to the people who tell them. This is the place of mythology *inside* a society, and corresponds to the insights we, on the *outside*, gain about the society. These perspectives are analogous to the operational and exegetic dimensions Victor Turner identifies in rituals in Ch. 28, p. 505.

The anthropological function Bascom ascribes to Old Coyote stories is the other side of what we have called the anthropological insights provided by the urban legend we discussed above, but it is not the only function ascribed to mythology. In fact, Joseph Campbell identifies four main functions of mythology in a society, namely, sociological, psychological, metaphysical, and cosmological. The first two correspond to the sociological and psychological insights we have been discussing for urban legends, and we will go on to discuss the latter two as insights provided by myths, but, depending on your perspective, they could as well be developed as functions. Campbell was a renowned teacher and researcher whose ideas about mythology have been very influential. See more about his views in Chapter 15, p. 217.

Both functions and insights highlight the truth value of mythological stories, but in somewhat different ways. These stories represent what the members of a society view as true: the stories function as the shared basis of their culture. And, if we, as students of mythology, interpret these stories carefully (see p. 15), they allow us to obtain insights that we can use to understand the culture and appreciate its values.

▲ Samuel Narh Nartey, *Nokia Cell Phone Coffin*, 2007. Since the mid-1950s, fantasy coffins have been used in Ghana to tell a story about a person's life. The shape of this coffin, produced for gallery use, reflects the importance of cell phone communication throughout Africa. Compare the "wallpaper" of the screen with Michelangelo's painting on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, p. 61.

WHAT ABOUT GODS AND HEROES?

Some of you may be surprised that we have gotten this far without mentioning gods and heroes. Many people understand myths as stories of gods and heroes, and so they are. Like the psychological accounts mentioned previously, these stories can provide us with an understanding of the nature of human life. The ancient Greek story of Heracles can serve as an example. Heracles, a human, is the illegitimate son of Zeus, the head of the Greek gods. Hera, Zeus' wife, is resentful of her husband's bastard by another woman and drives Heracles crazy, so he kills his own wife and children. Thus, his story gives us insight into the metaphysical views of the ancient Greeks and their understanding of the limits of human freedom: a fundamentally good man must deal with the consequences of actions that seem beyond his control.

Metaphysical Insights

metaphysics—This part of philosophy goes beyond ("meta" means "beyond") physics to study the nature and meaning of human life.

Heracles must perform a series of amazing deeds or labors to atone for his crimes. In addition, upon completing these labors, he achieves immortality. Although the story of Heracles' labors emphasizes the fact that, as a rule, human beings are subject to death, it also suggests that through great deeds, human beings can challenge and overcome this destiny by becoming immortal. For more about Heracles and his labors, see Chapter 33, p. 585.

MYTH AND SCIENCE

Many people think of myths as stories told to explain scientific facts or to describe the origin of natural phenomena. This is called "aetiology" or the "aetiological function," from the Greek

word αἰτία, or "cause." Corresponding to it is the aetiological insight we gain from a myth. For example, a Native American story from the Pacific Northwest explains that the raven is black because he once flew through the smoke hole, or chimney, of the house while trying to get away from Petrel after stealing fresh water from him. The story goes on to provide further aetiology, explaining that, in his flight, Raven dropped the water here and there as he went along, and that this is the origin of the great rivers of the world.

In the story, Petrel is hoarding fresh water until Raven distributes it freely. In thwarting Petrel, Raven's impulse is at the same time generous and mischievous, but his method of distributing his "gift" is not orderly or systematic. The story demonstrates the bounty available from nature, but suggests that **the world is not orderly or predictable** and that survival in it requires cleverness, generosity, and the flexibility involved in changing your colors to suit the situation.

It is clear that this story about Raven does not agree with modern theories about how rivers are formed or how animals obtain their coloration. It does, however, represent some important truths about the Native American view of the world.

On a more basic level, the story of Raven and Petrel provides its audience with an accurate mental representation of their uneven physical environment. Thus, **it incorporates what we might call the best scientific knowledge of its time**. Mircea Eliade would say that archaic societies used myth to master the universe, whereas we use science. In this view, myth does not contain science, but represents an alternative way of viewing the universe. Our argument here, however, is that science and myth cover the same domain: the characterization of the natural world for the purpose of understanding and predicting the behavior of nature. In this sense, we can say that myth performs some of the same functions as what we might call science. For example, from the story of Raven and Petrel, Native Americans could formulate a mental map of their area, so they could plan how to find fresh water, which is abundant in the region, but not distributed according to any discernible pattern—like the flight of a bird being pursued.

More than any other aspect or quality, the scientific views a myth incorporates are likely to make it seem outdated, irrelevant, or "false." However, if these views are understood in the context of what is known at the time, they may well provide us with insights into the science of the time that may be useful to our own science as well. For example, the myth of Raven and Petrel emphasizes the randomness found in nature. Mathematicians and computer scientists recently discovered that natural phenomena like clouds, trees, and bodies of water are not regular, and to study them, they have invented fractal geometry, which incorporates a random element in their description.

For some people, the most important question about myth is, "Did it really happen?" However, this turns out to be a more complex issue than it first seems. Some myths deal with events in the lives of historical characters. These figures range from Gilgamesh, the ancient king of Uruk in 2600 B.C.E., to Cyrus, who was the king of the Medes in the fifth century B.C.E., to Daniel Boone, the eighteenth-century American pioneer.

In many instances, historical details may have been modified in mythical stories told about historical figures, or their emphasis changed. In this sense, the myth may not be true. It is, however, difficult to determine the motivations or character of any historical figure, and all the people in a society do not agree on the facts surrounding a figure or on the motivations for her or his actions. At the same time, though, mythical stories flesh out a historical framework that may otherwise be represented only in inscriptions and treaties, telling us how people of a particular era felt and thought. In addition, myths can often alert us to the existence of historical events that might be unknown except for their preservation in a story.

For example, the Supreme Court of Canada has recognized the claim of the Gitxsan tribe to 22,000 square miles of territory in British Columbia because a Gitxsan story shows that the tribe

Aetiological Insights

aetiology—Explaining the culture's understanding of the origin or cause of a custom or a fact of the physical universe. For the full story of Raven and Petrel, see Ch. 24, p. 462.

"the world is not orderly or predictable"—In contrast, the creation story told by Ovid (Ch. 4) emphasizes the orderly nature of the world. In it, the world is created by a god who lays out its boundaries like a surveyor. This image is especially appropriate coming from a Roman author, as Rome was especially proud of its technology, which included engineering and surveying.

Cosmological Insights

cosmology—The study of the origin and structure of the universe.

"[Myth] incorporates what we might call the best scientific knowledge of its time."—Campbell calls this the "cosmological function" of myth.

Historical Insights

history—The study of past events, especially in relation to a particular person or culture.

Example:
Imagine composing a mythic story about Ronald Reagan or Bill Clinton. Some people would disagree with some of the events you included as facts and with the motivations that underlie them. It may well be the case that everyone did not agree about Gilgamesh or Daniel Boone. If one of the brides whom Gilgamesh raped was a member of your family or village, or if Daniel Boone owed you money, you might not see these figures as heroes.

This story comes from: Anthony DePalma, "Canadian Indians Win a Ruling Vindicating Their Oral History," *New York Times*, 9 February 1998.

"an Indian woman is taken to the sky"—Leslie Marmon Silko, a contemporary writer in the Native American tradition, bases a story on this theme (see Ch. 46, p. 819).

has inhabited the land for hundreds of years. In the story, **an Indian woman is taken to the sky** and brought back by a man who turns into a grizzly bear. Without realizing the bear is their sister's husband, the woman's brothers kill and skin it. The brothers take the skin to "where the river calls back the salmon every year," and the story states that "the Gitxsan people have been in Kispiox ever since."

THE TROJAN WAR AS AN EXAMPLE OF MYTH

The preceding discussion showed that legends and myths can provide us with a variety of insights into the minds and aspirations of the people who tell them. We have given a series of examples of these insights. However, the in-depth discussion of one story can show more clearly the range and depth of the insights provided by the study of mythology. The Greek story of the Trojan War provides a good example.

Greek mythology has it that Greek forces destroyed Troy after a long siege. **Eratosthenes** put the date of the war at 1184 B.C.E. The war arose over the kidnapping of the Greek **Helen**, wife of Menelaus, by the Trojan **Paris**, son of **Priam**, the king of Troy.

According to the myth, Paris at least believed that he was entitled to Helen. He received her from Aphrodite as a reward for granting the goddess of love first prize in a beauty contest he was judging. The story is as follows.

One day, **Hera**, the queen of the gods, **Athena**, the goddess of wisdom, and **Aphrodite**, the goddess of love, got into an argument about which of them was most beautiful. Zeus decided to put the matter before a judge, and selected Paris, son of Priam, the King of Troy. At the time, Paris was living outside his father's city and working as a shepherd because there had been a prophecy that he would destroy his father's kingdom.

As it turned out, the prophecy was well founded. The three goddesses did not really want an impartial solution to the matter of who was most beautiful; each of them decided to win the contest by forming an alliance with the judge. The traditional way to do this was through the exchange of gifts, so each goddess offered Paris a gift. Hera offered him political power over Europe and Asia, Athena offered to make him the bravest and wisest warrior in the world, and Aphrodite offered him the most beautiful woman in the world, who was Helen, the wife of Menelaus. Paris rejected political power and honor as a warrior and chose success in love. Accounts differ about whether Paris kidnapped Helen or persuaded her to go with him.

Introduction

Eratosthenes—Head of the library in Alexandria, lived at the end of the 3rd c. B.C.E.

Helen—Wife of Menelaus.

Paris—Son of Priam.

Priam—King of Troy.

The Judgment of Paris

This story comes from:

- Euripides' fragmentary play, *Alexander*, ca. 415 B.C.E.
- A lost poem called the *Cypria*, of which we have only second-hand accounts.

Hera—Queen of the Greek gods.

Athena—Greek goddess of wisdom.

Aphrodite—Greek goddess of love.

▶ William Blake, *The Judgment of Paris*, 1811.

◀ Greece and Troy.

At the time of the Trojan War, Greece consisted of a group of city-states with separate governments. However, the leaders of these cities had made an alliance years earlier, when Helen was just a girl and all the men of Greece were competing with each other to be her husband. They agreed that they would all protect the rights of the man she chose. As a result, when Helen was kidnapped, the members of the alliance formed an expedition to get her back. This expedition accepted the common leadership of **Menelaus** and his brother **Agamemnon**. The Greeks sent a large force across the Aegean Sea to Troy and besieged the city for ten years. It was on top of a great hill and thus very hard to capture.

The greatest warrior among the Greek leaders was **Achilles**. When the war first started, however, it looked as if he would not take part in it at all. His mother **Thetis** knew of a prophecy saying that if her son went to Troy, he would die there. He would either have a short and glorious life, or a long and ordinary one. Thetis hid her son on an island and disguised him as a girl. However, Odysseus, a very clever Greek leader, persuaded Achilles to join the expedition. Throughout the war, Thetis made a series of attempts to save Achilles' life, most notably by having **Hephaistos**, the blacksmith of the gods, make a suit of armor to protect him in battle. Her efforts were not able to prevent her son's death in the course of the war, but Achilles' participation was able to turn the tide in favor of the Greeks—he died, as the prophecy promised, gloriously.

In the tenth year of the war, on the advice of Odysseus, the Greeks built a large wooden horse, filled it with armed men, and pretended to sail away. The Trojans, thinking the horse was an offering to the gods that would bring them luck, took it into their citadel. At night, the Greek warriors climbed out of the horse, opened the gates to their fellow soldiers who had sneaked back, and together they captured the city. The Greeks burned Troy and took Helen back home again to her husband.

Political Background of the Trojan War

This story comes from:

- Euripides, *Iphigenia in Aulis*, after 406 B.C.E.
- Apollodorus, *Library*, ca. 2nd c. C.E.
- Pausanias, *Guide to Greece*, 2nd c. C.E.

Menelaus and **Agamemnon**—Leaders of the Greek army at Troy.

The Decision of Achilles

This story comes from: Homer's *Iliad*, ca. 750 B.C.E.

Achilles—Noblest Greek warrior at Troy.

Thetis—Achilles' mother.

Hephaistos—Blacksmith of the Greek gods.

The Capture of Troy

"After the Trojan War was over"—The traditional date set by Eratosthenes for the fall of Troy was 1184 B.C.E. Archeologists today believe the settlement that may correspond to Troy fell ca. 1300–1200 B.C.E.

The Story of Odysseus

This story comes from: Homer's *Odyssey*, ca. 750 B.C.E.

Odysseus—Greek leader from Ithaca.

Poseidon—Greek god of the sea.

Penelope—Odysseus' wife, who rejected the advances of the suitors. Greeks considered her the model of the faithful wife.

Telemachus—Son of Odysseus.

The Coming of Age of Telemachus

After the Trojan War was over, many Greek leaders had a difficult time getting home. The voyage across the Aegean Sea was treacherous, and many of the leaders had offended the gods in one way or another while capturing and pillaging Troy. They suffered for their sins on the homeward journey. Some died in trying to get home. Some, like Agamemnon, were killed by conspirators after they got home.

Odysseus was the Greek leader who had the most extensive adventures while trying to get home. It took him ten years to return to Ithaca. This meant he was away for twenty years altogether, because the war itself also took ten years.

Odysseus was a strong, brave fighter and a great leader who was especially known for his intelligence and quick wit. He came up with the idea of the Trojan horse. Ultimately, however, it was his wit that got him in trouble; he offended **Poseidon**, the Greek god of the sea, and the god interfered with his attempts to get back to Ithaca. Odysseus' adventures as he struggled to get home form the bulk of the work called the *Odyssey* by the poet Homer. Even when he got back home, Odysseus' troubles were not over. He found that a group of rowdy young men had taken over his house and were trying to convince his wife **Penelope** to marry one of them so they could usurp his kingdom. With the help of his son **Telemachus** and of the goddess Athena, who was his special protector, Odysseus defeated the troublemakers.

Telemachus was only a baby when his father went off to war, but by the time Odysseus got home, he was able to help his father defeat his mother's suitors. In the *Odyssey*, Homer tells us the story of how Telemachus grew from being a helpless boy to asserting himself like a warrior.

The boy was raised mostly by his mother, Penelope. He looked on his family's swineherd, Eumaeus, as a father figure in the absence of Odysseus. At first, Telemachus felt powerless to stop the boisterous suitors who insisted on coming to his house every day to eat and drink and flirt with his mother. Eventually, with the help of Athena, Telemachus stood up to the suitors, organized an expedition to look for his father, and returned to fight the intruders, alongside the swineherd Eumaeus and Odysseus himself.

INSIGHTS PROVIDED BY THE MYTH OF THE TROJAN WAR

"archeological evidence"—The site of Troy is thought to be at Hisarlik in modern Turkey. Frank Calvert, who started in 1863, was the first archeologist to excavate this site in search of Priam's city. The excavation of businessman Heinrich Schliemann, which began in 1870, was perhaps the most famous. Further excavations were carried out by Wilhelm Dörpfeld (1893–94) and Carl Blegen (1932–38). In recent times, the area has been excavated by Manfred Korfmann, who says of the archaeological evidence found thus far, "at the moment everything indicates that we ought to take Homer seriously about the background information of a war between Trojans and Greeks that his epic provides" (2007, 26).

There is **archeological evidence** that suggests that the account of the Trojan War is not just a false story. The descriptions of Troy given by Homer have allowed archeologists to locate a city in a strategic position on a height overlooking the Dardanelles, the entrance to the Black Sea in modern Turkey. Many archeologists believe that this was the city Homer described in his poems. From the excavations of the site, we know that, over the centuries, people built different versions of this city, one on top of the other, in the same place. Archeologists numbered these cities. The one called Troy VIIa shows signs of having been burned and destroyed at around the time usually suggested for the Trojan War. Archeologist Carl Blegen believed that this confirmed Homer's account of the Trojan War. Other archeological evidence suggests the existence of commerce between the area widely identified as Troy and contemporary Greece, raising the possibility that a war occurred in relation to trade rivalries.

However, the kidnapping of Helen may have been part of the conflict at Troy. We know from our own experience that wars are not usually caused by just one event, but by a series of conflicts. You may remember from your modern European history that the cause of World War I was the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand, but that Europe had been undergoing a series of conflicts and rivalries for quite some time. The assassination simply triggered hostilities.

How much of Homer's tale corresponds to historical facts? Modern archeologists have made a range of discoveries that complicate our understanding of what happened at the site. Archeologist Manfred Korfmann says, "In its nucleus, the *Iliad* may reflect historical reality." He has

NOSTALGIA

The Greeks told many different stories about the adventures of leaders in trying to get home after the Trojan War. The Greek word for homecoming is νόστος (*nostos*), and this word was also used for a story about a hero's homecoming. Thus, our word "nostalgia" comes from the word νόστος or "homecoming" and -algia from ἄλγος (*algos*), meaning "pain." In its root sense, nostalgia is the pain you experience in trying to achieve a homecoming. In our language it tends to mean the sadness we feel about what we have lost in the past.

recently found defensive structures on the site matching those described in detail by Homer. This is remarkable in itself because in Homer's time the walls of Troy were no longer standing: he lived some 400 years after the date traditionally given for its fall and must have learned about the events at Troy from a vigorous oral tradition. Yet we do not know the extent to which the myth of the Trojan War was a false story, as we know that oral tradition often distorts historical events, reshaping them to express the concerns of the poet's own era. Kurt Raaflaub argues that the gap between the historical events and the era of the poet Homer may well reduce the "historical core of the Trojan War tradition . . . to a minimum."

Of course, there is another sense in which the myth of the Trojan War told a true story for the people who originated it and for us as we study it. As we will show, the stories about Troy provide a variety of insights into the culture, thinking, and way of life of the people who originated them.

The story of the Trojan War provides insight into Greek culture, at least at the time of Homer. From the decision of Achilles to choose a short and glorious life over a long and uneventful one, we can see that the Greeks attached great value to victory in battle. The use of the Trojan horse shows that, in their view, war represented a contest of wits as much as one of military prowess and strength. The war shows us that Greek society was based on the alliances a person made with others: this can be seen in the Greeks' willingness to mount an expedition that spent ten years trying to recover one man's wife. The judgment of Paris also suggests the same aspect of Greek culture: victory in the beauty contest among the goddesses was judged not according to any objective standards but according to which goddess could form the best alliance with Paris through gift giving.

From the story of the Trojan War, we can see how the Greeks saw human freedom and its limitations. It is easy to oversimplify the role of the gods and suggest that the Greeks believed they were enslaved by divine commands, or that they used the gods as an excuse for their actions, shirking responsibility for them by saying, in effect, "the devil made me do it." Neither view is accurate.

In Homer's story, the Greek gods represent higher forces in the universe that determine the fate of humans. For instance, the account of the Trojan War shows that human beings often feel powerless as they are swept away by forces like war that affect their destinies and change, or end, their lives. The actions of Aphrodite can be seen in this light: for the most part, **she represents the power of passion** to sway the decisions made by human beings, not an irresistible impetus that compels them to act in a certain way. Throughout the story, Helen and Paris take on themselves the responsibility for their actions and do not blame the goddess of love. For more on the Greek view of the gods in relation to events in human lives, see Chapter 33, p. 591, on the role of Hera in causing Heracles' madness.

Historical Insights

Deal with: **verifiable historical events reflected in mythical stories.**

Anthropological Insights

Deal with: **culture, the values and principles of a society.**

Metaphysical Insights

Deal with: **what it means to be human, typical characteristics and limitations of humans, their relationship to a larger reality or principle.**

"she represents the power of passion"—E. R. Dodds, in *The Greeks and the Irrational*, argues that the Greeks in Homer saw their gods as the source of what we would call unforeseen psychological powers that deprived them of their free will. Of course, as with us, different ancient authors portrayed the events of the war differently. In contrast with Homer, Euripides' play *Helen* represents Helen as never actually going to Troy with Paris, despite rumors to the contrary.

In addition, the story of the Trojan War has other metaphysical implications. It emphasizes the limitations that mortality places on human beings' attempts to achieve eternal fame. The decision of Achilles shows a human being's quandary in deciding between living a long, uneventful life and a short, glorious one. Achilles ultimately decides to extend his life beyond death by achieving fame and glory that will live on after him.

Cosmological Insights

Deal with: **the universe as understood by science. For more about Greek science, see Ch. 3, p. 30.**

The story of the Trojan War also provides insight into Greek cosmology by incorporating contemporary scientific explanations of the nature of the universe. This is especially clear in the various accounts we have of heroes' adventures on the way home from the war. They encounter gods who control natural phenomena, like Aeolus, god of the winds; Proteus, a sea god who can change himself into any natural phenomenon; and Poseidon, the great god of the sea. Early Greek science portrayed the physical universe as made up of conflicting and complementary natural forces—wind, water, air, and fire. The myths of the time portrayed these forces as arising from differences of opinion among the gods.

The Aegean Sea is a treacherous body of water even today, when traversed by modern ships. Greek sailors traveled in small vessels that held fifty to a hundred men. Their ships were not self-contained entities that reached their destination after many uninterrupted days on the ocean. Rather, they navigated along the coastline and landed on shore each night for sleep and provisions. The *Odyssey* makes clear that the open sea, out of sight of land, is a dangerous place; humans lacked control and were buffeted by forces that could easily destroy them. This account was scientifically accurate, representing the nature of the Aegean and the state of Greek science and technology at the time.

Sociological Insights

Deal with: **groups that people belong to or participate in—values about group behavior, standards for admission.**

In the story of the Trojan War, we can see the forces the Greeks felt were operating on their families and their cities. As we know from recent events like the United States' involvement in Iraq or Afghanistan, a war can have a significant effect on society.

Insights Obtained from Myths

Insight	Shows	Example
Historical	Verifiable historical events reflected in mythical stories	Homer's account allowed archeologists to determine an actual site that may have been Troy.
Anthropological	Culture—the values and principles of a society	Achilles was willing to die young because his culture valued glory in battle.
Metaphysical	What it means to be human—typical characteristics and limitations of humans; their relationship to a larger reality or principle	Aphrodite gave Helen to Paris: this represents the limitations passions impose on human freedom, and it shows that a complex event like war is determined by a variety of causes.
Cosmological	The universe as understood by the best science available at the time	Poseidon, the god of the sea, prevented Odysseus from going home. This story allowed its audience to understand the perils sailors encounter on the Aegean Sea.
Aetiological	Explaining the origin or cause of a custom or a fact of the physical universe	Ravens are black because Raven escaped from Petrel through the smoke hole.
Sociological	Groups that people belong to or participate in—values about group behavior; standards for admission	The Trojan War changed the nature of the family because fathers were away fighting and sons were often raised by their mothers, or by servants.
Psychological	The struggles of individuals to become mature human beings and useful members of society	Telemachus comes of age by defending his home against the suitors. He serves as a role model for those seeking a mature role in Greek society; his actions show what the society requires of a grown man.

Wars are especially hard on families. When soldiers go away to war, their property and family become vulnerable to other forces. We see this reflected in the story about the family of Odysseus, who was once the unchallenged leader of Ithaca. After he left, the suitors claimed his wife and property, and on his return, he had to fight for what had once been his.

Because his father was away, Telemachus was raised by his mother, who was not able to instill in him a good sense of what it is to be a man. He enjoyed a warm relationship with Eumaeus, a slave, who functioned as a father substitute and role model for the boy. This turned upside down several of the relationships formerly found in Greek society.

There were economic effects of the war as well. Before the war, masters protected slaves like Eumaeus, providing them with a livelihood and protection from enemies. After the war, Odysseus, the master, needed the help of his swineherd. He came to Eumaeus' house and asked him for clothes and lodging. Eventually he asked the swineherd to fight alongside him to help him regain his wife and property.

The story of the Trojan War represents the Greeks' struggle to deal with stages in their personal development. Their stories show how war affects individuals in what we might call their personal lives. There is the story of Telemachus, who grows up without a father, but finds suitable role models to become a man and take a responsible part in his society. There is Achilles, who chooses glory over long life. And Thetis, Achilles' mother, expresses her fears as a mother for the well-being of her child as he struggles to live out the destiny he has chosen for himself.

Psychological Insights

Deal with: **the struggles of individuals to become mature human beings and useful members of society.**

MYTH AND MANY VOICES

This book will suggest a variety of insights found in stories from different cultures and time periods. If we consider our own culture, however, we realize that not everyone in it shares the same beliefs. It is important to realize that the experiences of Odysseus do not sum up the experiences of all Greeks. In addition, for all the connections we can make between mythological stories and our own time period, it is important to note that there are differences as well. When you are looking at a culture from the outside, it is easy to think that you are seeing elements that resemble your own views and values.

Although reading myths can provide cross-cultural insights, it is important to remember the differences in cultures and historical periods while noticing the similarities in their stories.

We can look, for instance, at the story of the Trojan War and suggest that the effects of this war were like that of the Vietnam War in the late twentieth-century United States. Both wars caused a generation of young men to go off and fight in a foreign land for a cause they understood and valued only dimly and abstractly. Odysseus, who pretended to be insane to avoid going to Troy, might be considered the first draft dodger in the tradition of the Vietnam War protesters in the 1960s.

At the same time, it is important to remember the differences between the two nations and eras as well as the similarities. For example, **the Greeks practiced slavery**. When the citizens of its city-states sailed off to war, they left their culture and civilization in the hands of people whom they viewed as their property. To get a good sense of what the Trojan War might have been like, we need to consider not just the experiences of Odysseus, but also those of his slave Eumaeus.

"the Greeks practiced slavery"—Wendy Doniger points out that myths always express the political views of a particular segment of the population and must be studied with their historical and cultural context in mind. She gives the Old Norse myth of the Valkyries as an example. The stories about these worshippers of Odin (see Ch. 32, p. 573) took on a different meaning when included by Wagner in his operas. The Nazis then reinterpreted both the original stories and Wagner's version to express their vision of Germany and what they saw as its divine mission. C. B. Rose makes a similar point about stories of the Trojan War, which were used by the Romans to legitimize their empire by connecting its founding to Aeneas, a Trojan whose mother, Venus, is the goddess of love.

There are many other differences between the two societies as well. Homer's Greece was not actually a country; it was an uneasy international alliance forged for the purpose of the Trojan War, an alliance among city-states, many of which were used to thinking of each other as enemies. And during the war, Greek families are portrayed as completely out of touch with their loved ones' experiences for ten to twenty years, whereas Americans saw the day's events on Vietnamese battlefields as they ate dinner every night.

It is only with caution that parallels can be drawn between the experiences of different cultures. This is not to say that we should not apply the experiences of gods and heroes to our own lives: such identification is at the heart of the pleasure of reading mythology. At the same time,

however, it is important, while drawing parallels, to consider as much as possible the unique characteristics of each culture in the stories we read.

MYTHS HAVE MANY VERSIONS

If you research the stories about a god or a mythological event, you are likely to find different versions of it, often with conflicting details. Beginning students will sometimes ask, "Which is the true version?" Usually, the answer is that one version isn't more "true" than another. Sometimes such a question will come in relation to a modern version, or the speaker will assert, for example, that "Walt Disney's version of Hercules is all wrong." But is it really?

Well, if you want to say that many of the details in the Disney version don't correspond to the ancient story, that would be true, but that's a different statement. There is, by the way, a fine comparison of the Disney version with the ancient version on Carlos Parada's *Greek Mythology Link* website. It's not hard to see why Disney changed the story of the Greek hero so it could be appreciated by an American youngster in the last quarter of the twentieth century: we are not accustomed to starting such stories with adultery. In ancient Greek mythology, **Heracles** is the son of Zeus, the head of the Greek gods, and Alcmene is the wife of Amphytrion. It might be better to state that the Disney film doesn't accurately reflect the ancient Greek story, though the film might still be considered true in the sense of having meaning and significance to the community that tells it, as it inspires children to develop themselves from "Zero to Hero."

"Heracles"—The Greek form of the name Hercules.

But the ancient story of Heracles is not a unified version, either. You'd find, for example, that the story as told by the fifth-century B.C.E. author Sophocles is different from the one told by Euripides, who wrote during roughly the same time period. In many cultures, people expect to hear different versions of mythological stories, whether they are still actively being used as sacred stories or not. For example, Herodotus, the ancient Greek historian, tells us he went to Memphis in Egypt to a temple of Helen of Troy. There he says he learned that the Egyptians believed Helen never went to Troy because she and Paris were blown off course and wound up in Egypt. Proteus, the king, interrogated Paris and then forced him to leave without Helen, whom the monarch intended to keep safe until her husband could come fetch her home. Herodotus does not choose between this story and the one told by Homer (see p. 10), but he does say that he believes Homer knew the Egyptian story also. So it is up to the members of the community that tells a story whether they want to decide if a particular version is "true" or not, and even then, they are determining whether the story has meaning for them. As for us, we can be entertained by the range of stories and think about the insights that can be gained from them.

This story comes from: Sophocles, *Women of Trachis.*

This story comes from: Euripides, *Heracles.*

This story comes from: Herodotus, *Histories, Book* 2.112–115.

WHAT WE MEAN BY A CONTEMPORARY VIEW OF MYTH

In this book, we present a great many stories for you to enjoy. In addition, we have included a variety of theoretical readings that describe some of the kinds of insights you can gain from looking at mythology from the standpoint of different disciplines, including history, sociology, anthropology, and psychology. This introduction has previewed some ideas on mythology from the work of theoreticians like C. G. Jung and Claude Lévi-Strauss. This book will include excerpts from works like theirs, so that you can acquire first-hand experience of thinking about myths in different ways.

The next chapter will provide you with some techniques for reading myths. After that, the next three sections of this book are organized thematically. Part 2 is about creation and destruction myths; Part 3 is about heroes and tricksters; Part 4 is about ritual and myth. The final parts

Contents of This Book:

- Introduction

Mythic Themes:

- Creation and Destruction
- Heroes and Tricksters
- Ritual and Myth

Related Topics:

- Dreams and Myth
- Folktale and Myth
- Contemporary Myth
- Literature and Myth

of the book describe phenomena that are related to myths: Part 5 is about symbols and dreams; Part 6 is about folktales and fairy tales; Part 7 is about American myths; and Part 8 is about mythic themes found in literature.

FURTHER READING

Brunvand, Jan Harold. *The Vanishing Hitchhiker: Urban Legends and Their Meanings*. New York: Norton, 1981.

Campbell, Joseph. "Mythological Themes in Creative Literature and Art." In *Myths, Dreams and Religion*, edited by Joseph Campbell, 138–75. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970.

Wood, Michael. *In Search of the Trojan War*. Rev. ed. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.

Ways of Understanding Myth

WHAT TO EXPECT . . . People with widely varying fields of interest benefit from studying mythology. In this chapter, we explain why many professionals specializing in a wide range of areas study mythology. At the same time, we will build on an idea from the previous chapter: readers of myths are enriched by keeping in mind that the original goals of their tellers were different from ours today. That is, because myths represent a window into the world of the mythmakers, you can expect to gain through them an understanding of cultures other than your own.

Because myths are old stories, reading them requires some techniques not called for in reading modern retellings. This chapter provides you with guidance on the characteristics of old stories. To help you become an effective reader of the myths in later chapters, this one includes a discussion of the characteristics of oral myth (repetition, an abundance of names and titles, and parataxis) and of written myth (a literary framework, the author's goals, and rationalization).

There are many paths to the enjoyment of mythology. Your first appreciation for it may have come from storybooks read to you when you were little or even from popular television shows like *Duck Tales* or *Hercules*. Grown-ups also have a variety of choices in approaching the experience of mythology. Many books provide an introduction to the stories of gods and heroes; among the most popular are accounts like Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* and *Bulfinch's Mythology*, which is now available on the web. These are retellings: books by scholars who have read the original versions of mythological stories and retell them in their own style. The result is an exciting and pleasing story that can be enjoyed by a wide range of audiences.

This book is devoted to the understanding that a single mythological story may exist in a variety of different versions, each of which will have advantages for the audience and purpose for which it is designed. In writing this mythology book, however, we have decided whenever possible to present myths in translations that are as faithful as possible to the written texts that record the ancient versions of the stories. We have done this out of the belief that a college-level course can make these versions accessible to students and thus provide them with an understanding of certain aspects of the myth that are necessarily eliminated from such retellings as Hamilton's. We feel that some of the pleasure to be gained from the examination of mythological material comes from an appreciation of the literary style in which it is written. In many cases, mythological stories are very old, and they come from cultures that did not use writing, or did not use it for recording these stories, which may have been considered too important to store anywhere but within a living mind and an active memory. Learning about its genre, we believe, enhances the enjoyment of a text. You know what a short story is, and if you are reading one that follows the

rules for the genre, you know how to read and appreciate the text. However, when you are dealing with a prayer composed for inscription on the inside of an Egyptian coffin, or a poetic epic on the families of the gods composed for oral presentation in ancient Greece, you are less likely to be familiar with the characteristics that were considered appropriate to each genre.

The goal of this chapter is to acquaint you with the literary characteristics of such mythological stories and to suggest techniques to help you read them. Before we embark on this subject, we will briefly consider all the different categories of readers who are interested in mythology, as well as the kinds of evidence they typically derive from it. An additional point to be made here is that the original goals of mythological composition do not necessarily match the uses to which mythological texts are put these days. Even for those well acquainted with how to read mythology, this multiplicity of purposes can add to its appeal.

WHO STUDIES MYTH?

As Chapter 1 suggests, there is more to mythology than false stories. This is why a lot of serious attention is paid to myths by people in all sorts of different fields and professions. People have been studying mythology for almost as long as human beings have been telling stories. And mythological accounts have been studied from a great many different points of view.

Why Scientists Study Myth

You may not have realized that mythology would be studied, for instance, by people interested in science. Scientists are always reexamining their understanding of the way the universe works. They may be looking for an answer to questions about the way the body heals, or where a star was in ancient times, or the best way to improve ecological systems. Often they can learn from stories about ancient healing rituals or dietary customs that are explained in mythical accounts. Or a myth might describe a journey taken by a hero in a way that gives insight into what the earth or the heavens were like at the time the story was told. Scientists study myths because they do not want to become so wrapped up in their own world view that they fail to notice a different perspective on the question at hand.

Why Historians Study Myth

Historians study past events, reconstructing what happened to a particular people, country, period, or individual. They base their findings on accounts written by the people they are studying, as well as on their laws and commercial documents. To complete the picture, they also use the evidence provided by archeologists, including samples of the houses the people lived in, the tools they used, how they dressed, what they ate, and so on.

Mythology also fits into this understanding. Historians get a better sense of the motivations and mind-set of the people they are studying by considering the stories they told, the heroes they patterned themselves after, and the customs or ceremonies in which they participated. All of these can be learned from a study of mythology.

HOW TO READ MYTH

A myth does not have to be old: at this very moment, our own society is full of stories of gods and heroes, and these narratives tell us about ourselves in the same way that the story of the Trojan War characterizes the ancient Greeks.

Introduction: Characteristics of Old Stories

Examples:
The Odyssey (Homer) (see Ch. 1, pp. 10–15)
The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (translation by N. K. Sandars; see also Ch. 16, p. 225)

However, many of the stories we will be studying in this book are very old, probably older than anything you have read before. If you have read Shakespeare or *Beowulf* in an English class, you know that texts from a different era require some getting used to. They may use language in ways we are unaccustomed to, or they may describe customs and habits with which we are unfamiliar. The writers of such texts may have goals and values that are different from what we expect from a novel or play today.

▲ Bust of Homer, Capitoline Museum. Homer, the ancient Greek poet, lived so long ago that no one knows what he looked like. This bust from the 2nd c. B.C.E. shows him as old, but infuses him with a vitality attributable to the power of his compositions.

Academic Disciplines That Learn from Mythology

Professions	What They Study
Psychologists	The mind and mental processes
Sociologists	Origin, development, organization, and functioning of human social relations and human institutions
Anthropologists	Origins, physical and cultural development, social customs, and beliefs of humans
Folklorists	Traditional beliefs, legends, and customs of people
Historians	Past events
Archeologists	Culture of people as revealed by their artifacts, inscriptions, and monuments
Scientists	Physical and material world
Philosophers	Principles of being, knowledge, or conduct
Artists	Production of work according to aesthetic principles

Since many mythological stories are so old, many of them were composed at a time when writing had not been invented or was not widely used for literary purposes. Of course, these stories were later written down or we would not have them today. However, many mythological texts originated in oral form, and have the characteristics of oral composition, including the extensive repetition of words and phrases and an abundance of names and titles. To help you in your reading, we will illustrate these and other characteristics of orally composed works.

Oral stories often contain lines, or even whole incidents that are repeated, sometimes word for word, often with some variation. Ancient audiences liked such repetitions and looked forward to them, but to our ears they may sound confusing or boring.

Here is an example from the *Epic of Gilgamesh* of the kind of repetition that is often found in oral myth:

Characteristics of Oral Myth: 1. Extensive Repetition

This example comes from: The *Epic of Gilgamesh*, 1200 B.C.E. For excerpts, see Ch. 16.

> Then Siduri said to him, "If you are that Gilgamesh who seized and killed the Bull of Heaven, who killed the watchman of the cedar forest, who overthrew Humbaba that lived in the forest, and killed the lions in the passes of the mountain, why are your cheeks so starved and why is your face so drawn? Why is despair in your heart and your face like the face of one who has made a long journey? Yes, why is your face burned from heat and cold, and why do you come here wandering over the pastures in search of the wind?"
>
> Gilgamesh answered her, "And why should not my cheeks be so starved and my face drawn? Despair is in my heart and my face like the face of one who has made a long journey, it was burned with heat and with cold. Why should I not wander over the pastures in search of the wind? My friend, my younger brother, he who hunted the wild ass of the wilderness and the panther of the plains, . . . Enkidu my younger brother whom I loved, the end of mortality has overtaken him. I wept for him for seven days and nights till the worm fastened on him. Because of my brother I am afraid of death, because of my brother I stray through the wilderness and cannot rest."

Why does myth contain this kind of repetition?

The oral poet would be composing the poem on the spot, in front of his audience. He would not be creating the story from scratch, however. An oral poet would learn a large repertoire of

fixed phrases or **formulas** to use as modular units from which to build his poems. This would mean that, as he was building his story, he would plug in a modular section and repeat it word for word. While he was doing this, he could think ahead and decide where his story would go next, what he would include or leave out.

"formulas"—The name for modular units of rhythm and sound from which oral poets composed their works. For more on oral composition, see Alfred Lord, *The Singer of Tales*.

The performance of an oral poet would be judged on a variety of factors. Of course, his story would have to be interesting and his language polished and elegant. Because the oral poet usually did not read or write, his success would depend in great part on his memory. A good poet knew not just the rough outline of the story, but even its most minute details, so oral poets would provide long lists of names and places to show how well they had mastered the story. Listening to an oral poet give these details accurately would please an audience as any feat of artistic virtuosity pleases its audience. Just think how audiences are impressed with the number of notes a guitarist like Eric Clapton can play at once and not lose the tune. That is virtuosity, as is the ability to remember and elegantly describe all the generations of the hero's family.

2. Abundance of Names and Titles

Here is an example of the extensive use of names and titles in myth written in an oral style:

> Loridi, who resembled his father, was their son. Loridi's son was Einridi, his son Vingethór, his son Vingener, his son Módi, his son Magi, his son Seskef, his son Bedvig, his son Athra whom we call Annar, his son Itrmann, his son Heremód, his son Skjaldun whom we call Skjöld, his son Bíaf whom we call Bjár, his son Ját, his son Gudólf, his son Finn, his son Fríallaf whom we call Fridleif; he had a son named Vóden whom we call Odin.

This example comes from: The Prologue of the *Prose Edda*. See Ch. 7, p. 85, for the complete text of the Prologue.

There are two ways of telling a story, paratactic and syntactic. The simplest example of paratactic storytelling is the speech of young children. They represent ideas, one after the other, without showing the temporal or logical connections between them. However, this style can be used very effectively to get the reader to make the connections that are missing in the text. For example, note the string of "and"s in the middle of the second sentence of this passage by Joan Didion: "I remember walking across 62nd Street one twilight that first spring, or the second spring, they were all alike for a while. I was late to meet someone but I stopped at Lexington Avenue and bought a peach and stood on the corner eating it and knew that I had come out of the West and reached the mirage" ("Goodbye to All That," in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, 228). Syntactic storytelling, in contrast, does include logical connections and temporal (time-related) indicators.

3. Paratactic Storytelling

Example of paratactic storytelling:
"So he spoke praying, **and** Phoebus Apollo heard him, **and** he came down from the peaks of Olympus, angered at heart holding his bow on his shoulders and the covered quiver. **And** the arrows clashed on the shoulders of the angered god leaping; **and** he came like the night then sat apart from the ships **and** shot an arrow; **and** terrible was the clash from the silver bow." (Homer, *Iliad* 1.43–46, from Peter Toohey's *Reading Epic: An Introduction to the Ancient Narratives*, emphasis added.)

Example of syntactic storytelling:
"**After** he had spoken in prayer, and **after** Phoebus Apollo had heard him, he came down from the peaks of Olympus, and, **because** he leapt in his anger, the bow and the covered quiver **which** he carried across his shoulders clashed." (Toohey 14, emphasis added.)

In paratactic composition, the reader or audience does not expect the author to provide logical connectives. In addition, this style of composition more readily permits logical inconsistencies. When a story is not written down, the listeners do not have written versions to put next to each other and compare word for word, the way we would. So the audience just does not think that way, and they are not interested in contradictions in the story. They are listening to the story for the main point, not checking for the consistency of incidental details.

The Genesis account of creation contains two creation stories, **one after the other**, within three pages or so of each other. In the first one, the world is created in six days by God. Humans are created at the end of the process on the sixth day. Right after this is an account, in which God creates man first, before anything else is created. These stories were originally told separately to different audiences. Eventually, they were combined into one account in the version we have today. The audience of this combined work would not be bothered by these inconsistencies because they saw both stories as illustrating the same thing: human beings were important to God.

"one after the other"—Walter Ong refers to this as the episodic construction of narrative.

There are two ways to show something is important: by placing it first, or by placing it last, the climax of everything else. One of the versions of the creation story does the former, one the latter.

Hesiod provides two stories about the origin of the human race. In the five ages of man, he explains that the first race of men were the Golden Age and that every age after them declined

Paratactic Storytelling in Biblical Myth

For the text of the creation story in Genesis, see Ch. 5, p. 56.

Paratactic Storytelling in Greek Myth

For the text of Hesiod's stories about the creation of the human race, see Ch. 3, p. 33.

Later Texts Imitate the Oral Style

Examples:
The Prose Edda (Snorri Sturluson) (see Ch. 7, p. 85)
Metamorphoses (Ovid) (see Ch. 4, p. 48)

until the Iron Age, in which we are presently living. From the description it is clear that Hesiod is talking about the origin of men and women, as the races are described as reproducing themselves. This suggests that women always existed, in every race of human beings. In the immediately following story, however, Hesiod suggests that human beings consisted only of men until a fateful day when Zeus punished them by giving them a woman.

It is no use trying to fit the two stories together. We cannot tell which age of mankind Pandora belonged to; she is simply part of a different story. In the first story, Hesiod is trying to make the point that the world is worse now than it once was. In the other, he is talking about what a great evil women are, in his view. The two stories are not meant to fit together, and their audiences would not have thought to consider their inconsistency, not because they did not notice it or know about it, but because it did not matter to the main point of the story.

Paratactic storytelling, then, is storytelling by an author who was not very interested in logical consistency or a sensible temporal order, because his audience was less interested in these elements than in the main point of the story being told.

The characteristics you have just been introduced to are well known to people studying mythology and to writers who want to compose narratives using mythological characters and places. It often happens, therefore, that authors who in other contexts would write quite differently nevertheless use these characteristics to make their writing seem more like the stories of traditional mythology.

Of course, not all myths come from texts that were orally composed. Some of them come from written works, and very sophisticated ones at that. These texts also pose problems for students of mythology.

Characteristics of Written Myth: 1. The Literary Frame

Unlike oral texts, these texts are usually not hard to understand; they are just hard to interpret correctly. To interpret these stories, the reader needs an understanding of the author's artistic perspective, style of writing, and goals in writing the text. Of course, all authors shape their texts to fit their artistic goals, but in written texts the revamping of the story tends to be more deliberate and free-spirited. An author may be writing a story with a particular theme in mind and may shape her or his characters and stories to make them fit this motif. The audience does not necessarily expect to hear a story that conforms to the versions they are familiar with. A good example is **Ovid**, whose *Metamorphoses* is often used as a source for mythological stories.

Ovid—A Roman writing poetic verse in Latin. He lived from 43 B.C.E. to 17 C.E.

Example:
The story of Medea as told by the Greek dramatist Euripides includes no shape changes, but as told by Ovid it includes at least three.

This literary work was constructed to have a very complex unity. Every story in it describes or refers to a shape change. The stories are chosen with this theme in mind, and stories that in other versions do not include a metamorphosis or shape change acquire one in this work of Ovid.

2. Goals of the Author

These quotes come from:
Charles Segal, *Landscape in Ovid's "Metamorphoses,"* 92–93, and K. Sara Myers, *Ovid's Causes*, 26, 59, 142–43.

Ovid may well have had a specific reason in mind for the stories he was telling. He was not just telling them for our information, or even just to collect a lot of stories about myth. He was using the stories he told to show different aspects of the theme of change or metamorphosis. In addition, Ovid describes the atmosphere of the times he lived in. Charles Segal explains that the world of the poem is one in which "the hard barriers of reality yield to the slightest touch of fancy and imagination," one which "holds out the risk of moral chaos, of purposeless change, movement without meaning or end." He describes the theme of *Metamorphoses* as "abrupt, radical, irreversible change at the hands of strange, impetuous divinities." K. Sara Myers suggests that by representing ceaseless change, Ovid was making a statement about the contrasting permanence of poetry; she also notes that scholars have found in Ovid's representation of the nature of the gods a political message about the arbitrary rule of the Roman Emperor.

"reflected his own times"—Augustus exiled Ovid in 8 C.E., forcing him to leave the Rome he loved and live the rest of his life in Tomis, a dangerous and culturally isolated border town.

The atmosphere Ovid created **reflected his own times**. When his *Metamorphoses* was written, Rome was ruled by the Emperor Augustus. To survive in this Empire, people had to accept and echo the Emperor's views. Cases were not decided according to justice, but according to what