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Literature
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Subtopic
Western Literature

Myth in Human History

Course Guidebook

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Monterey Peninsula College



PUBLISHED BY:

THE GREAT COURSES
Corporate Headquarters
4840 Westfields Boulevard, Suite 500
Chantilly, Virginia 20151-2299
Phone: 1-800-832-2412
Fax: 703-378-3819
www.thegreatcourses.com

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Myth in Human History

Scope:

In 36 half-hour lectures, this course explores myths from around the world, focusing in particular on myths outside the Greco-Roman world, which are already covered in other Teaching Company courses. The myths are treated thematically rather than geographically or chronologically: One unit deals with creation myths; another with myths about gods and goddesses; a third with myths of heroes; a fourth with trickster myths; and the final unit deals with places made sacred by myth. Each thematic unit is illustrated with myths from Japan and China to North America; from Africa and India to Mesoamerica; and from such diverse peoples as the Celts, Scandinavians, Polynesians from Oceania, the Inuit, Australian Aborigines, Tibetans, and ancient Babylonians, Sumerians, and Egyptians. The occasional myth from Greece or Rome—or from the Hebrew Bible—is used as a point of reference for less familiar ones.

The first two lectures define terms and provide an overview of the entire course, and the next three treat some of the oldest and best-known cosmogonic accounts: from Egypt, Babylon, and Genesis in the Old Testament. Three more lectures take us around the world, looking at creation myths by type: emergence, world parent, cosmic egg, *ex nihilo*, earth-diver, and dismembered god, in each case trying to determine what aspects of creation and what values are foregrounded in each type of myth. The first unit ends with three lectures on topics logically related to creation stories: stories of the Great Flood and myths of cosmic destruction. Here, Mesopotamian, Hebrew, and Roman flood stories provide a point of reference for other deluge myths of other peoples, and the Norse Ragnarok provides the most compelling version of myths of cosmic destruction.

The second unit—Lectures 12 through 20—treats myths about gods and goddesses. After a look at pantheons (in particular, the Greek and Norse) and the ways they developed and were organized over time, four lectures are devoted to a biography of the goddess and four to a biography of God. The goddess lectures consider the hypothesis that there was a time in human

prehistory when human mythic and religious consciousness was dominated by one or more female deities. Developments in the human apprehension of gods and goddesses are related to important historical events, and the two biographies are interleaved, so that we can see how changes in one influenced the other. The Sumerian goddess Inanna and the Egyptian Isis are featured in the goddess part of the unit, and the unit ends with a summary of the developments in human apprehension of the deity, using the Indian pantheon as an illustration.

Lectures 21 through 28 make up the third unit, on heroes. After introducing a simplified version of the monomyth—the idea that all the heroic stories in the world conform in essential ways to a single transcultural template—and using the Greek myth of Herakles to illustrate, individual lectures are devoted to Gilgamesh (the Sumerian-Babylonian hero), King Arthur, and Jason and the Argonauts’ quest for the Golden Fleece. Then, more detailed versions of two famous monomyths—those of Otto Rank and Joseph Campbell—are presented and illustrated, after which, the African epic of Mwindo is set beside these templates to see how they work. The last two lectures of the unit treat female heroes, both in terms of their proximity to the idea of the monomyth and their differences from their male counterparts. Demeter from Greek mythology, Hester Prynne from Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, Psyche from Apuleius’s *The Golden Ass*, and Beauty from “Beauty and the Beast” are used as illustrations.

The trickster is one of the most popular and ubiquitous figures in world mythology, and he is the subject of the fourth unit in the course: Lectures 29 through 33. After introducing the figure and illustrating him with a famous cycle of trickster stories from the Winnebago people of Wisconsin, as well as Hermes from Greek mythology, Enki from Sumeria, Loki from Norse myths, and Ma-ui from myths of the South Pacific, we spend some time trying to decide what makes this figure so compelling by reviewing a variety of theories about what makes him tick. Then, various Native American tricksters—Raven, Spider, Coyote—are treated in ways that show the many facets of this complex character. The unit ends with trickster myths from another place where the trickster is a popular character: Africa, and the last lecture features accounts of two of the most famous African tricksters, Eshu

and Legba, and a consideration of some of the meanings of trickster myths for us in the modern world.

The last unit deals with sacred places: from Mt. Sinai to a magic lake in Tibet, from Jacob's Bethel to Australian Dreaming Time rocks, from Mt. Kailas in Tibet (perhaps the most venerated mountain in the world) to a humanized Buddhist mountain in China, from Yggdrasil in Norse myth to the inverted cosmic tree of India, from trees climbed by shamans to the creation of a sacred grove in Vietnam, and to trees climbed by people in Native American stories that carry them into the skies. This unit considers the ways in which sacred sites are centers of the world, located just beneath the pole star, the places where heaven and earth meet and the cosmic powers that created the world can still be accessed by human beings.

The course ends as it begins—with a few reminders that the myths of the world are still alive and well, still communicating wisdom that is sometimes difficult to get across in other ways, and still there as models and templates for us to use in the myths that we create to structure our own lives. ■

Myth and Meaning

Lecture 1

Simply by calling them “myths,” we are connoting that in some way these are fantastic, imaginative, imaginary stories; they are simply not true. ... we also know that there has to be more to myths than just this.

As we mature, we seem to spend less time with myths. This is partly because we are not sure how to read them and partly because most dictionary definitions of “myth” stress its fantastic elements, assuring us that even if a myth purports to be true, it is not. Such literature as Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or Kafka’s “Metamorphosis” isn’t literally or factually true either, but we still find that it has truth value. In part, this course will show us some ways that we can get at the kinds of truth that myth carries.

Myths are narratives that ask the big questions of human existence: How did the universe come to be? Who are we? How should we behave? What are the forces that are larger than we are and that in some measure regulate our lives? Myths are not the only human constructions that deal with these questions, and there is considerable overlap between myth and religion, science, and history. Myth and science, for example, cover some of the same ground but ask different questions. In a way, myth picks up where science leaves off by asking about our relationship to the great forces that stand behind all of life and how we should pass through the stages of our lifetimes. Myths contain the wisdom of the lived experience of all our ancestors; they contain truth of a different order from that of other human constructs.

The first thing to be said about the relationship between religion and myth is that a myth can only be myth if you don’t believe it; if you stand outside it in some kind of way. If you stand inside a myth, then it becomes something quite different: it becomes divine truth.

To show what kinds of truth can be teased out of myth, consider an urban myth known as “Alligators in the Sewers.” It is most likely not factually true, but it expresses our uneasiness about the possibility that terrifying things lie beneath the civilized veneer of our lives. It also expresses our awareness of the unmentionable physiological and biological processes that go on just under our skins and, perhaps, our fear that because we live in cities with strangers, we may have to deal with their monsters.



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William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* uses myth to express real-world ideas.

A study of the different ways that myths can be interpreted could make an entire course of its own. The approach of this course will be to use whatever approaches and tools yield results. We will look at the psychological, literary, social, structural, and political aspects of myth and will make use of Mircea Eliade's religious approach to myth.

As we compare myths from many places and times, we will confront the question of whether or not all the myths of the world, placed side by side, make up a “universal” story with common themes, motifs, and concerns. Opponents of this concept argue that every myth is uniquely deflected culturally and that the differences among cultures are overlooked or ignored by the very idea of a universal myth. Proponents argue that no single culture will ever be able to capture the entire human sense of God, or creation, or the hero, and that the only way to understand the human apprehension of any of these questions is to consider all the myths of the world as part of a universal human dream. This course will attempt to keep both sides of this question in mind. ■

Suggested Reading

Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker*.

Doty, *Mythography*.

Ford, *The Hero With an African Face*.

Leeming, *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology*.

Leonard and McClure, *Myth and Knowing*.

Thury and Devinney. *Introduction to Mythology*.

Questions to Consider

1. “Alligators in the Sewers” is an urban myth, a tale having some kind of currency in the oral (as opposed to the written) tradition. Can you think of other examples of urban myths (or legends, as they are sometimes called)? What kinds of truth do they contain?
2. What seems to you the most important things to be learned from the study of myths of other cultures and times? What do you hope to learn as you work your way through this course?

The Continuing Importance of Myth

Lecture 2

Many people across so many times from different cultures have asked the same kinds of questions: How did the earth and heavens get here? Where did they come from? Why are they the way they are?

Many different kinds of myth describe creation, each of which raises the same fundamental questions: How did things come to be the way they are? What keeps us from sinking back into primordial chaos? For whose convenience was this creation designed? The same kinds of questions can be asked about humans: Where did we come from? How and why did we turn out the way we are? What is our function in the cosmos? These questions will occupy our attention for the first unit of this course. We will notice some common motifs in creation myths, such as hostility among the first generations of gods, the importance of the separation of a primal unity into divisions (e.g., male and female), and the recurrence of flood stories, in which creation sinks back into primordial chaos.

Our second unit deals with myths of gods and goddesses, in which we will trace the changes in the human apprehension of God or the gods through time. We will consider some of the most famous myths in history, such as that of Isis and Osiris, and we will take special note of the transfer of power and authority from earth goddesses to sky gods.

Our third unit is about heroes, in which we will explore the myths of Gilgamesh, King Arthur, Jason and the Argonauts, the African Mwindo, and Demeter and Persephone, among others. We will also discuss the possibility of a “**monomyth**”—that is, a universal story of the hero that transcends cultural differences—especially as it has been proposed by Otto Rank and Joseph Campbell.

Our next unit focuses on myths about the trickster, a virtually ubiquitous figure in world mythology who can appear as a god in the Old World and is usually associated with such animals as Coyote and Raven in the New World. The trickster is also a **culture hero** who contributes in both positive

and negative ways to the lifestyle of humans; he is neither benevolent nor malicious but usually stands outside laws and rules that bind other people.

Our last unit features sacred places. In these lectures, we will consider Eliade's theories about the *axis mundi*, the "world axis," a place where the sacred and the profane intersect and give us access to the most powerful forces in the cosmos.

Myths are alive and well and are in constant circulation around us in many different guises.

In our own lives, we are inundated by myths, and many modern myth-makers draw on older myths to structure and give meaning to their own stories. J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series is one example, using materials from world mythology to provide the skeleton for the entire work. Harry's initial situation as an orphan living with the nasty Dursleys comes straight out of Otto Rank's "family romance," making Harry another version of the ancient hero. An analysis of Harry's career across the novels can also be described in terms of the stages of Joseph Campbell's monomyth, suggesting that Rowling drew on motifs and structures from myths as old as the human race itself. ■

Name to Know

Batara Guru: The supreme deity, creator, and human ancestor in a myth from pre-Islamic Sumatra.

Important Terms

***axis mundi*:** The "world axis"; most frequently a tree that unites the realms of heaven, earth, and the underworld, but Mircea Eliade argues that it can be anything that allows the divine and mundane realms to meet and intersect.

culture hero: A hero who brings culture to his or her people. He or she may help with creation but more often provides religious, social, and political rules and institutions and the techniques and technologies necessary for survival. The hero is usually of divine origin although not necessarily a deity.

monomyth: The template or paradigm that all heroes of all cultures more or less illustrate. The concept assumes that beneath all heroic myths there is a universal hero's story that speaks to all of us. The hypothesis is most closely associated with the work of Joseph Campbell.

Suggested Reading

Doniger, “Never Snitch: The Mythology of Harry Potter.”

Milum, “The Hero's Journey through Harry Potter.” http://mythichero/harry_potter.htm

Trankell, Ing-Britt, Willis. “Southeast Asia” in *World Mythology*.

Questions to Consider

1. If you were to write your own creation myth—or to look for one that satisfied your need for explanation—what questions would you consider crucial? What are the items that in your view need to be explained in any adequate account of how things came to be?
2. If you have read the Harry Potter books (or seen the films), it might be an interesting activity to think back over their various episodes, looking for parallels in other hero stories that you know. For example, Campbell considers it crucial that the hero die and be reborn in a good narrative (see his category, “In the Belly of the Whale”). How many deaths of various sorts does Harry undergo in his story? In each case, what old part of him or his attitudes die in the process, to be replaced with something new and more insightful? That is, how is he reborn each time?

Creation Myths

Lecture 3

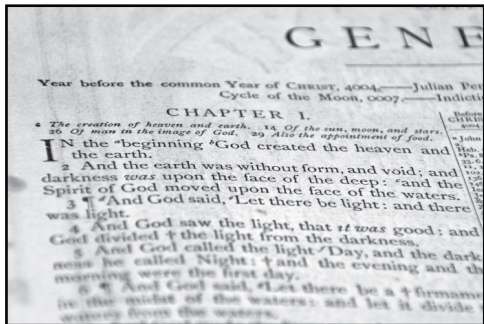
How does individual human life, how does my consciousness, emerge from the mysterious mystery preceding it? And then how does it again dissolve back via death into that unknown?

Our three goals in this lecture are to define the parameters of creation myths, to establish a classification system of creation myths, and to illustrate these points through Egyptian mythology.

The technical term for a creation myth is **cosmogony**, which derives from two Greek words meaning “order” and “beginning.” In many of these myths, a god or gods acts upon pre-existing chaos. The familiar first verse of Genesis in the Old Testament is typical in this respect.

Many creation myths are functional in affirming a culture’s values and practices. Thus, the Carabaulo myth of Timor in eastern Indonesia declares that the first people to emerge from the earth’s vagina became land-owning aristocrats, while those who emerged later became commoners and tenants. In Mesopotamia, humans were created to do work that the gods did not wish to do themselves, while in the Hebrew story, humans were given mastery over the rest of creation.

Some scholars see myths as integral parts of religion, asserting a central reality, then structuring values in relation to it. According to Eliade, a creation myth establishes an *axis mundi*, a “world axis,” a point where the natural and divine worlds intersect. Each time we return to an *axis mundi*, we come in contact with the forces that organize our world, creating moments of sacred



Genesis 1:1, a story of the Creation.

time. For modern believers, churches perform this function, but a creation story can also serve as an *axis mundi*.

There are many ways of classifying creation myths. In this course, we will use one created by Eliade, refined by Charles H. Long, and summarized by Scott Leonard and Michael McClure. This scheme divides cosmogonies into five different types. The first is creation *ex nihilo*, in which a deity creates the cosmos via thought, dream, word, or some effluent, such as seed or tears. The second category involves earth-diver stories, in which a deity sends an animal or bird down into the primal waters to bring up a bit of mud, from which the earth is made. The third involves creation by the breaking up of a primal unity, such as Mother Earth from Father Sky or form from chaos. The

**The individual
creation story
and the cosmic
creation story have
amazing parallels
between them.**

next type is that of creation by dismemberment of a primordial being, out of whose body the universe is made. The fifth is the emergence type, in which creation is a gradual process, featuring human-like creatures who must travel through many worlds before reaching this one.

In this system, the ancient Egyptian Heliopolis myth belongs to the type that involves the breaking up of a primal unity. Here, a vast, undifferentiated sea gives rise to Atum, who generates Shu and Tefnut, who produce Geb (Earth) and Nut (Sky), who lie in eternal and unchanging embrace. When Shu separates them, the primal unity is divided into sky and earth, male and female—which makes growth and development possible but also leads to the kinds of problems that have plagued creation ever since. Once the separation occurs, the sun is created to mark time: If the sun goes out, the entire cosmos returns to its initial entropy. There is no going back once we are launched on this voyage. ■

Important Terms

cosmogony: An account of the origins of the universe and the world.

***ex nihilo*:** Literally, “out of nothing.” This is a type of creation myth in which a deity creates by thought, word, or dream or from some bodily effluent, such as sweat or tears.

Suggested Reading

Ford, *The Hero With an African Face*.

Leonard and McClure, *Myth and Knowing*.

Van Over, *Sun Songs*.

Questions to Consider

1. Heliopolis creation myth reviewed in this lecture incorporates elements from several different types of creation accounts. How many can you identify, and how does the incorporation of these elements modify the values of the basic myth?
2. In virtually all creation myths that involve separation of elements, creation is understood as an interruption of primordial stasis or inertia. Does that make eventual disintegration, death, and a return to primeval chaos inevitable? What human activities does this possibility necessitate?

Mesopotamian Creation—Enuma Elish

Lecture 4

Matter is eternal in this kind of creation myth; nothing is ever lost, but it's constantly being transmitted back and forth from one to another.

In this lecture, we examine the *Enuma Elish*, a Babylonian creation myth dating from about 1900–1600 B.C.E. The poem was recited at the New Year festival in praise of Marduk, the principal god of the Babylonians.

The creation account begins with a vast expanse of waters, personified as the male Apsu (sweet water) and the female Tiamat (salt water). Through their mating, succeeding generations of gods are produced, including Anu, the high god, who becomes the father of Ea, god of wisdom. The younger gods disturb Apsu with their noise, and he decides to destroy them. Ea kills Apsu first, then he and his consort mate to produce Marduk. Tiamat is angered by the murder of her consort. She chooses a new one, Qingu, and produces an army of monsters to help her avenge Apsu's death. No other god dares to face her until Marduk steps forward. He kills his ancestor in an intense battle, then creates the universe out of her dismembered body. He then organizes the new cosmos and creates humans from the blood of Qingu to do the work that the gods find irksome.

The entire process, as happens so frequently in creation myths, begins with water.

In our classification system, this myth is of the type in which world parents are separated by their children, who then set up the cosmos as we know it. The earth, deprived of her original consort, takes another, usually the sun, which becomes a **fecundator**, making earth bountiful. The initial separation leads to other differentiations, including those of gender and time. The primary element out of which all life emerges in the *Enuma Elish* is water, which remains as a threat that the primeval chaos could return.

An interesting element is the creation of the cosmos out of the body of a dismembered god. Bruce Lincoln, in *Myth, Cosmos, and Society*, argues

that the parts of the dismembered god and the parts of the universe are **alloforms**, or alternative shapes of the same substance. In most myths of this sort, humans are then created from the materials of the cosmos, making humans and the cosmos alloforms of each other. Sacrifice is a reenactment of the original dismemberment, and the death of the individual is his or her sacrifice to restore the cosmos. In cultures that posit a life after death, there will be one final reversal, when the cosmos is dismembered once more to restore the bodies of those who have died.

Myth is often the enactment or reenactment of a ritual. The ritual in this case was a vegetation rite to renew the fertility of the cosmos and guarantee good crops for the year. The creation story, read on this occasion, may have served as an *axis mundi*, putting an entire culture in touch with the greatest creative forces of the universe.

Jungian analysts see a myth like this one as a story about the growth of consciousness, an individual's inward cosmos. But nothing is ever created without something else being killed: Here, the instinctive, infantile preconscious self (Tiamat) must be destroyed in order to achieve the consciousness of a mature human being. At the same time, what is killed is never lost—merely suppressed—so that Tiamat lives on in the cosmos. For Jungians, getting back in touch with her is part of the challenge of the second half of life. ■



A clay tablet containing the text of the Babylonian creation myth *Enuma Elish*.

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Important Terms

alloforms: Bruce Lincoln's term for alternative forms of the same element; for example, in a dismemberment creation myth, when a god's eye becomes the sun, these are the same substance in alternative forms.

fecundator: One who makes fertile or fruitful.

Suggested Reading

Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*.

Gaster, *Thespis*.

Questions to Consider

1. In how many different ways does the designation of Apsu as sweet water and Tiamat as salt water function in this Babylonian myth? What are the possible meanings of Ea killing Apsu, then becoming lord of sweet water himself?
2. Is it inevitable in von Franz's Jungian reading of the Marduk-Tiamat struggle that the female should represent the preconscious totality while the male should represent consciousness? Can you imagine rewriting the myth to reverse the gender designations?

Hebrew Creation Myths

Lecture 5

Life is thus in this sense a constant struggle against sinking back into entropy, and each of us does individually what we can for as long as we can with what we have to hold that entropy at bay; the cosmos is doing the same thing.

There are two creation stories in Genesis: the first from 1:1 to 2:3, and the second from 2:4 to the end of the third chapter. The second includes the story of the Fall and the expulsion from Eden. Scholars think that the first is the more recent story, written by a priestly writer (“P”), after the Hebrews had returned from the Babylonian Captivity—about 530 B.C.E. The second seems older, dating perhaps to 950 B.C.E., and may itself be a redaction of two separate versions.

The authors are referred to as “J” or “Y” and “E,” based on the names each used for God: Yahweh or Elohim. There are significant differences between the two versions, but they share the idea of a single, universal God.

We start with the second story, beginning at Genesis 2:4. God creates Adam out of dust, then breathes into his nostrils the breath of life. God plants Eden in the east and places Adam there to cultivate it. This version of the story calls attention to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil planted in the center of the garden. God decides that it is not good for Adam to be alone, so he first creates beasts and birds, then Eve out of one of Adam’s ribs. This marks the moment when a primal unity is divided, here into male and female. The creation account ends by stating

In many myths, creation is a kind of gradual process or one of trial and error; here everything is planned in advance, thought out in detail, already existing in the mind of the creator before he starts.

... *Ex nihilo* creators are absolutely free; they are untrammelled by any other kinds of structures or deities or past creations.

that Adam and Eve were naked and not ashamed, suggesting a world very different from ours.

The serpent tempts Eve into eating the fruit of the forbidden tree; she in turn tempts Adam. The first result of their disobedience is not immediate death but the awareness that they are naked. This is a complicated moment in the story, but it seems to look back to a confluence of sex, civilization, and death that runs deep in Mesopotamian thought. Another implication of this part of the story is that the created world is divided and contingent, meaning that it is subject to death. To be alive is to be imperfect and, hence, on the way back to the perfect equilibrium and entropy that existed before creation. God is immanent rather than transcendent in this account: He makes Adam with his own hands, plants the garden himself, and walks in the garden. The myth is **etiological** in that it gives us the origins of certain circumstances in the world: the legless serpent, the pain of childbirth, the need for toil, and death.



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In the book of Genesis, God creates Adam out of dust and creates Eve out of Adam.

The first creation story (Genesis 1:1–2:3) seems closer to other myths in some ways. It begins with a vast expanse of waters, which God stirs up to begin creation. Here, God is transcendent, speaking things into existence without opposition or hindrance. In this account, both males and females are created at the same time and as the crowning achievement of the creation. In our classification scheme, this is an *ex nihilo* (“out of nothing”) myth, which is characterized by a God who exists alone in the void of space, has no limits

on his power, is orderly and conscious in the process, and is unconstrained by circumstances, other deities, or history itself—one of the Hebrews’ important contributions to world religion and mythology. ■

Name to Know

Hwun-tun (Hun-tun): A figure without senses in a Chinese Taoist myth. His name is translated as something like “Chaos,” but the Jungian von Franz takes it to mean “Unconscious.”

Important Term

etiological: The adjectival form of “etiology,” which deals with the causes or reasons for things.

Suggested Reading

Long, *Alpha: The Myths of Creation*.

Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East*.

Genesis 1 in the King James version.

Questions to Consider

1. The conjunction of sexuality, the fall, civilization, and death in the second Genesis account is remarkably similar to the same combination in Gilgamesh (Lecture 22). Think about the meaning of the account here; then, after you have had a chance to study Gilgamesh, compare and contrast the implications of the two myths.
2. Compare the creation of humans in the Enuma Elish and the two accounts in Genesis. What are the common features? What are the differences? What kinds of human values and understandings are inscribed in the three myths?

Emergence and World-Parent Creation Myths

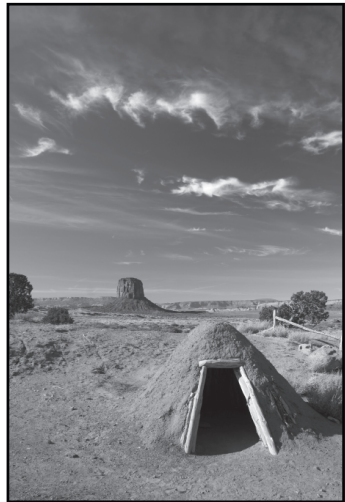
Lecture 6

These myths usually assume an already-created world, with a sun and sometimes gods already in place, but the creatures themselves are what have to change, they have to become human.

In emergence creation myths, creatures travel through a series of chambers or underground worlds until they emerge into this one. This kind of myth is especially characteristic of Native Americans from the Southwest and Mesoamerica.

The Navajo emergence myth begins with insect-like creatures (“Air-Spirit People”) living deep in the Earth, without light and in crowded circumstances. The chiefs of the four cardinal directions eventually force the creatures to leave this world by sending in floods. The Blue Swallow People help the Air-Spirit People enter another world by flying through a slit in the sky. The Air-Spirits attempt to live in harmony with the Blue Swallows, but their misbehavior and overcrowding eventually send them flying upward again. This same sequence of events ultimately leads them to a fourth world that is inhabited by a race of creatures who live in houses in the ground and practice agriculture. The Air-Spirits are determined to change their ways so that they can stay in this world. They also ask the Holy People to make humans, which they do, making man out of white corn and woman out of yellow corn. They are given life by the wind.

The creation of humans out of corn comes as a surprise here, because in most emergence myths, the original creatures become fully human themselves, either



The hogan, a traditional home, is considered sacred to those who practice the Navajo religion.

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through an evolutionary process or with the help of deities. The fact that each underground world in the Navajo myth is associated with a direction and a color is important in the re-creation of the myth in sand painting, which is part of the healing ceremony. The values inherent in the myth focus on harmony and self-discipline. The homologies of this story are with birth, moving from incompleteness to completeness in the journey from the underground womb to the light.

In world-parent creation myths, a primal pair is broken up, as we have already encountered in the Egyptian myth of Geb and Nut and the Babylonian one of Apsu and Tiamat. The Maori myth of Rangi and Papa is another example of a world-parent myth, in which Rangi is the male sky; Papa, the female earth. Forced by their parents' eternal embrace to live in cramped darkness, the children of this pair decide to open up their world. After various plans and attempts to reach this goal, the parents are pushed apart by Tane-mahuta, lord of forests; Rangi is sent high and far away. The siblings below are relentlessly attacked by Tawhiri-ma-tea, the god of winds and storms. Ultimately, Tu-matauenga, the ancestor of humans, stands up to the god of storms, though he never actually defeats him.

As an etiological myth, this story explains how the ancestor of humans comes to subordinate everything needed to survive: fish, reptiles, forests, cultivated foods—everything except the storms that forever attack human effort. In this kind of myth, the union of Rangi and Papa shows the primal stasis that must be disturbed to allow for differentiation. As in the myths of Apsu and Tiamat, mother and children become allies against the father, and the father's fecundating role is taken over by another. Father Sky then becomes remote from ordinary life, while Mother Earth retains her importance in the life of her offspring. ■

Suggested Reading

Long, *Alpha: The Myths of Creation*.

Sproul, *Primal Myths*.

Zolbrod, *Diné bahaanè*.

Questions to Consider

1. Use the psychological tool in our myth-reading tool kit to consider the following question: What does it say about us that our ancestors were repeatedly thrown out of different worlds for bad behavior and an inability to discipline themselves? What implications does the myth have for us as descendants of those erring Air-Spirit creatures?
2. In the Rangi-Papa story from the Maori, try to determine why each individual god is given his specific role. Why, for example, should Tane-mahuta, lord of forests, be the one who succeeds in driving his parents apart? What about the other gods and their parts? What does the choice of god and functions tell us about the way the Maori see their world?

Cosmic Egg and Ex Nihilo Creation Myths

Lecture 7

It's been suggested that the cosmic egg may be the most widely distributed kind of creation myth in the world.

In this myth, an egg, in which all elements are mixed and undifferentiated, breaks open to begin the next step of creation. A classic example is the Chinese myth of P'an Ku, an entity who is engendered inside an egg that also contains everything in heaven and earth, commingled. After 18,000 years, P'an Ku breaks the egg; the bright and light parts of it form heaven, while the dark and heavy parts form the earth. P'an Ku then works to keep the elements separate by bracing his feet against the earth and his shoulders against the heavens. He also makes mountains and valleys and channels for rivers. When his work is done, he lies down to rest and immediately dies. What happens next belongs properly to the dismembered creature type of myth. All the elements of P'an Ku's body are transformed into things needed to finish creation: his breath becomes wind and clouds; his voice, thunder; his eyes, the sun and moon; and so on. Parasites living on his body are impregnated by the wind to become human beings.

In this type of story, the undifferentiated chaos prior to creation is pictured as the inside of an egg, which then splits into at least two parts: male and female, yin and yang. Yin and yang in Chinese thought suggest the necessity of the duality that succeeds primal chaos. In Hindu thought, mistakes in the first creation bring about ignorance and night, which must be fought forever as part of what creation means: division and conflict. The egg itself is a symbol of fertility, but it is also an incubator, a womb, which makes it another female symbol. At the same time, the egg is androgynous, part of development in the creation process.

Chaos is always seen as the inside of an egg; breaking or cracking is what initiates creation.

Another type of creation myth is that of *ex nihilo*, as we saw in the Genesis accounts in Lecture 5. In the Mayan *Popol Vuh*, creation begins with a vast expanse of sea and sky, in the midst of which two gods converse. Their purpose is to create a world that will culminate in human beings, who will praise the gods and bring them food



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Yin and yang, an ancient Chinese symbol of male-female duality and universal balance.

in the form of prayer and sacrifice. The two gods create earth, mountains, forests, plants, and animals, all simply by meditation and words. The gods abandon *ex nihilo*, however, when they create humans, first out of mud, then wood. Both are failures in terms of what the gods want, and both are destroyed. Finally, humans are made out of yellow and white maize.

According to Charles H. Long in *Alpha*, the *Popol Vuh* is a late type of creation myth. Long assumes that most early people had sky gods, who were probably creator gods as well. These gods usually turn the later parts of creation over to assistants and retreat or are pushed away from earth; their fecundating function is often assumed by the sun. But sky gods do not vanish and, by the time of *ex nihilo* myths, they have become supreme again, able to create by word, meditation, or bodily excretion. ■

Names to Know

Hwun-tun (Hun-tun): A figure without senses in a Chinese Taoist myth. His name is translated as something like “Chaos,” but the Jungian von Franz takes it to mean “Unconscious.”

Mangala: The creator god of the Mande in Mali, whose creation, involving a cosmic egg.

Ta-aroa: The Tahitian supreme god and creator. His creation of the world from a cosmic egg.

Important Term

Popol Vuh: A Mayan epic poem.

Suggested Reading

Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*.

Leonard and McClure, *Myth and Knowing*.

Long, *Alpha: The Myths of Creation*.

Sproul, *Primal Myths*.

Questions to Consider

1. Why is an egg such a powerful image of both primordial chaos and the differentiation that defines the order of creation? What values in creation myths does the cosmic egg represent?
2. In Lecture 1, we looked at the creation myth in the Popol Vuh, focusing on the maize from which the first humanlike creatures were made. Combining the insights of that lecture with those in this one, how much of the worldview of the Maya can you reconstruct from their creation myth? How does the world look to them? What is their place in it? What are their privileges and responsibilities?

Earth-Diver and Dismembered God Creation Myths

Lecture 8

As in so many other creation myths ... the beginning element, the primal element is water. ... Water itself, of course, can never pass beyond potentiality, but what comes out of the water is always something that's subject to time, and to history, and to growth, and to change, and to death.

This lecture looks at two more types of creation myth: the earth-diver, illustrated by a Huron creation story, and the dismembered god, illustrated by the Norse myth of Ymir.

In earth-diver myths, common among Native American peoples and in some parts of Asia, a being dives to the bottom of a primeval sea and brings up a bit of mud, which is then transformed into the earth. Most such myths feature a creator god who turns the later stages of creation over to a subordinate, such as an animal.

In the earth-diver myth, someone dives deep into the primeval waters and brings up a piece of mud, which is then used, either stretched or grows somehow, to become the earth itself.

In the Huron earth-diver myth, a divine woman falls from heaven and is saved from her fall by loons, who summon all other animals to decide how to help her. Ultimately, a toad dives into the primal sea and brings up mud, which is placed on a tortoise's back and grows into the earth, where the woman can live. The woman gives birth to twins, one of whom kills her as he leaves her body. The twins share the job of preparing the earth for humans, but with different motives, because one twin is good and the other, evil. Eventually, the two brothers fight, and the good twin defeats the evil one, who travels to the far west where all humans, after death, will join him.

One feature that this kind of myth shares with others is the importance of water as the potential for all possible forms. The return to water implies

a dissolution of form back to formlessness, and emergence from water is always a creation or re-creation. In earth-diver myths, the bit of mud brought up from the water is, thus, symbolic of the entire creation, complete with differentiation, division, time, and death.

The Norse myth of Ymir, as told by Snorri Sturluson in *The Prose Edda*, serves as an example of a dismembered-god myth, in which the body of a god is used to make the cosmos. The Norse myth begins with spaces of freezing cold and intense heat, out of which a creature is formed, Ymir. He produces a man and woman from his sweat and a frost ogre from one of his legs. The yin-and-yang confluence of heat and cold also produces a cow, whose streams of milk nourish Ymir. In licking a block of ice for its salt, the cow releases Buri, who becomes the ancestor of three sons, one of whom is Odin, chief of the Norse gods. Those three sons kill Ymir, then dismember him to create the cosmos, including habitations for giants, humans, and gods. Humans are created from two trees, with Ask and Embla as the ancestors of all human beings.

This myth illustrates the idea of the reciprocity of matter: A dismembered body is used to make the cosmos, which in turn is used to make humans. The dismembered body, the cosmos, and the human body are all alloforms of each other. Sacrifice re-creates the world by dismembering a body and returning it to the cosmos; eating works in reverse by dismembering the cosmos to make the human body; and death becomes the final sacrifice, returning our bodies to the cosmos and recapitulating the original sacrifice. In mythologies that posit a life after death, at the final day or judgment, the cosmos will be destroyed to restore individual bodies. ■

Name to Know

Purusha: In the *Rig Veda*, he is the first man, who is also universe.

Important Terms

Prose Edda: A 13th-century Icelandic collection of myths, written by Snorri Sturluson.

Rig Veda: The oldest collection of Indo-Aryan hymns, dating from about 2000–1700 B.C.E.

Suggested Reading

Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society*.

Sproul, *Primal Myths*.

Thury and Devinney, *Introduction to Mythology*.

Questions to Consider

1. As Eliade notes, water is frequently a symbol of the chaos out of which order is created. To what extent, in the two earth-diver myths recounted in this lecture, is the entire process of creation captured in the story of some animal or bird diving into the water to bring something back up?
2. Bruce Lincoln's alloforms account for the alternation of matter between cosmic and microcosmic forms in Indo-European mythology. To what extent is this model a comforting one for us humans? To what extent is it consistent with modern scientific theory?

Mesopotamian and Hebrew Flood Myths

Lecture 9

Many creation myths have the original forms of creation emerging out of water, from a deep abyss, or from a void, or from a primal sea; something stirs it, something happens, and forms and differentiation occur and creation is underway.

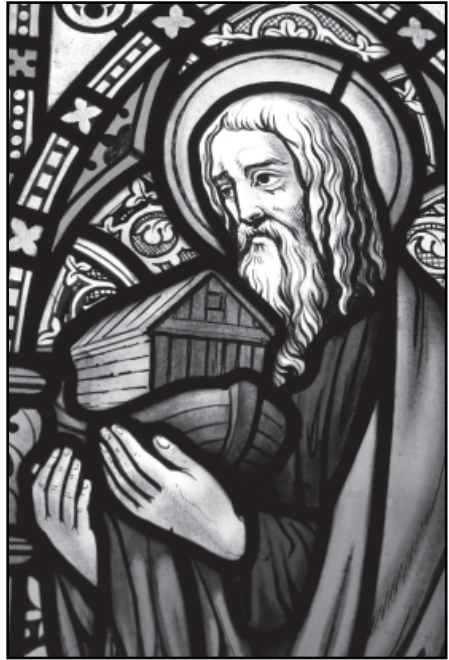
Flood myths are related to creation myths by the element of water, which is frequently pictured as the primal element that still surrounds creation in all directions. Many early peoples believed that prayer, sacrifice, and correct behavior were required to keep creation from slipping back into chaos. But floods are never ultimately terminal; instead, they allow the cosmos (or the earth) to be re-created, usually in ways that are slightly different from the one that was destroyed.

Some of the oldest flood myths in the world come from the Middle East, where the Tigris and Euphrates taught people much about flooding. One of these is the Sumerian *Atrahasis*, which we know in a Babylonian version. In this myth, Enlil, god of the earth, decides to destroy humans with a flood. But Ea, god of waters, warns King Atrahasis of Enlil's plan. Atrahasis builds an ark, survives the flood, and is later rewarded with eternal life.

The most famous Mesopotamian flood stories come from the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, some parts of which may date back to the 3rd millennium B.C.E.; the most complete version we have of the epic is from 7th century B.C.E. In it, King Gilgamesh, distraught at the death of his dear friend Enkidu, goes on a quest to find the secret of immortality. He comes to the island of Utnapishtim, the survivor of the flood in this version, who tells him a flood story that is similar to that of Atrahasis. Like Atrahasis, Utnapishtim was granted immortality for his part in saving humankind, but he assures Gilgamesh that this was a one-time gift from the gods and cannot apply to anyone else. Gilgamesh returns home defeated in his quest. This myth is etiological in accounting for death in human life and the kinds of compensations life offers in the face of mortality.

The Genesis flood story is likely derived from Mesopotamian accounts, memories of which the Hebrews would have brought with them when they emigrated. As most of us know, God decides that humankind has become wicked and must be destroyed, but he chooses to save Noah and his family, along with pairs of other living creatures. Noah builds an ark according to God's specifications, and he and his living cargo ride out the flood. Having survived, Noah offers a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and God makes a series of concessions: He will no longer expect perfection from humans; he gives Noah the right to kill animals for meat; he hangs his bow in the sky as promise never to send another such flood; and he removes some of the curse from the ground, presumably making agriculture a bit easier. While the Mesopotamian gods make post-flood covenants only with the heroes of the story, God makes his with all subsequent descendants of Noah.

The most famous flood stories in history are usually not just about endings but also about beginnings.



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A stained-glass image of Noah and the Ark.

All of these flood stories are about new beginnings as well as endings—a kind of cosmic purification by water, whose homologies include baptism in the Christian tradition, the descent of the hero into the underworld in hero myths, and the descent into the dark waters of the unconscious in psychological readings of myth. ■

Suggested Reading

Brandon, *Creation Legends of the Ancient Near East*.

Dalley, *Myths from Mesopotamia*.

Genesis 1 in the King James version.

Sandars, trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Questions to Consider

1. Read carefully Gilgamesh's entire interview with Utnapishtim and his wife, then decide exactly what it is that changes Gilgamesh's mind about the nature of his quest, when exactly it happens, and what factors go into his decision. What does Gilgamesh learn about the nature of the world, and how does his awareness square with all that we've learned about creation in our last five lectures?
2. Yahweh (God) in the Old Testament is generally irascible, quick-tempered, and testy. But the flood myth in Genesis gives a much more nuanced picture of him. How many concessions does Yahweh make in this account, and how do those concessions change forever the relationship between God and humans?

Other Flood Myths

Lecture 10

As in so many other flood stories, here the world emerges different and slightly better than it was before; the flood is always seen as a kind of purification, a kind of baptism, and the human race always begins again as the survivors of the flood.

One common motif of flood myths is that the deluge is sent to punish humankind for some transgression, as we've seen in the Genesis story of Noah and, to a lesser degree, the Mesopotamian myths of Atrahasis and Gilgamesh. But in these stories and others, the world is re-created after the flood, making it a purification rather than a terminal disaster.

Another famous flood story comes from Greece, told by the Roman poet Ovid. Here, Zeus, angered by the misdeeds of Prometheus and disgusted with



Zeus, the ancient Greek god of the sky.

humans, sends a flood to wipe out the race. One pair of humans, Deucalion and Pyrrha, manages to survive. Zeus recognizes them as pious, good people and allows the flood to abate.

Because Greece is not subject to floods, many scholars believe that this story comes from the Middle East. Prometheus may be the Greek version of Ea or Enki, who saves humankind in the Mesopotamian flood stories. This idea is strengthened by the fact that in some versions of the Greek myth, either Deucalion or Pyrrha is a child of Prometheus and Pandora. This flood myth differs from the ones we looked at in the last lecture in that Deucalion and Pyrrha are saved more or less by an accident, which is then ratified by Zeus.

In India, the flood story is part of the alternating cycle of creation and destruction, each phase of which begins with a flood. In this myth, humankind is not punished for wickedness, but the last age of each cycle is debased in comparison with the earlier ones. People destroyed in the flood will either achieve liberation from the cycle of birth and death or will be reborn in the next age to continue to work toward liberation.

The many Chinese flood myths were eventually conflated into three main versions. In one, a fight between Kung Kung and Chuan Hsu knocks down one of the four mountains that hold up the sky, causing a flood and other cosmic consequences. In another version, all four mountain pillars collapse. A goddess, **Nu Kua**, smelts stones to repair the sky and builds dams to stem the floods. Her actions usher in a golden age in China.

The most pervasive Chinese flood story involves Kun and his son Yu. Kun works nine years to stem the flood but fails. The gods execute him at Feather Mountain, where his undecayed body produces a son, Yu. Yu uses a winged dragon to dig channels to drain the flood waters to the sea. Interestingly, this flood, like others in Chinese stories, is not sent as punishment for wickedness; rather, it records the ways in which the world was perfected for human habitation.

One of the most terrifying flood stories is that of the Aztecs. The Aztec creation story describes four creations before this one, each one a failure

because of a moral lapse on the part of created beings or a conflict among creator gods. In the fourth creation, all living things are destroyed by a great flood, and the people are turned into fish. **Tezcatlipoca** and Zuetzalcoatl create the current cosmos out of the dismembered body of the great Earth Mother, while humans are created by grinding up the bones of fish and mixing them with the blood of the gods. ■

Names to Know

Chalchiuhtlicue: An Aztec water goddess whose floods end the fourth creation.

Nu Kua: A Chinese primeval goddess and creatrix of humans; over time, she lost her divine status, first becoming the consort of the god Fu Hsi and, later, a human woman who institutes marriage by marrying her brother. She is also featured in a southern Chinese myth as one of the survivors of the Great Flood.

Quetzalcoatl: The most important deity and culture hero of the Aztecs, involved in a series of creations.

Tezcatlipoca: A composite Aztec deity containing the dominant gods of the four creations. Also a single deity who stands in opposition to Quetzalcoatl (see above).

Tlaloc: An Aztec storm god who rules over the third creation.

Suggested Reading

Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*.

Bodde, "Myths of Ancient China" in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*.

Chinnery, "China" in *World Mythology*.

Gregory, trans. *Ovid*.

Leeming, *The World of Myth*.

Taube, *The Legendary Past*.

Van Over, *Sun Songs*.

Questions to Consider

1. Many flood myths are posited on the assumption that the deluge is a punishment for human wickedness or folly. What does this fact tell us about: (1) our sense of the relative fragility or stability of the created cosmos and (2) our own sense of ourselves in that cosmos? How are the responses to these questions different for the Chinese and Aztec myths, which are posited on different assumptions?
2. Is the Hindu Indian version of a recurring cycle of creation and destruction—in each of which a flood is involved—a more or less cheerful vision of the cosmos than those in which a flood is a singular event? How so?

Myths of Cosmic Destruction

Lecture 11

The common denominator of creation myths is differentiation ... light and dark, day and night, water and land, yin and yang, male and female. Undifferentiated unity is defined, is divided, and is split up into parts.

Cosmic destruction myths are usually creation myths told backwards, using the same terms, in which creation sinks back into its initial chaotic entropy. In this lecture, we will look at two such myths, one from India and one from Scandinavia.

A common denominator of creation myths is differentiation: light/dark, earth/sky, yin/yang, male/female, and so on, so that what begins as a unity is split apart. Many creator gods are androgynous, and creation begins when they create male and female out of themselves. In an Indian Upanishad, for example, the first Self is like a man and woman closely embracing. He/she divides into two, each a fragment of the initial unity.

Time is another product of creation: After Marduk kills Tiamat, he sets up the sun, moon, the zodiac, and the seasons, and God in Genesis starts time by creating the heavenly bodies that will mark its passage. In Revelations, the end of time is signaled by the erratic behavior of these timekeepers. Even the Big Bang theory includes a return to eternal unity and stasis once all energy has been used up.

With time ... comes linear progression and such concepts as youth, maturity, old age, and life and death, since every individual and the cosmos itself is now time-bound ... every bit of it is a fragment of some larger whole.

Destruction myths can be divided into two general categories, each reflecting the values of the cultures that produced them. In the first type, matter is eternal; thus, regardless of what happens to this cosmos, another one will replace it. The other category encompasses a termination of the cosmos, so



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Vishnu, the Preserver, one of the supreme triad of Hindu gods.

that when life goes on, it will be in an unearthly place and way. The myths in this lecture are both stories of continuation.

As we've seen, the Hindu myths of India posit a cycle of death and rebirth. Vishnu oversees the cycle, which rotates from a golden age to darker ages and then, after cosmic destruction, returns to a golden age. Hindu myths and treatises account for the degeneration that leads to the need for the entire cosmos to be destroyed and re-created.

One of the most vivid myths of cosmic destruction is that of the Norse **Ragnarok**, described in the myths recorded by Snorri Sturluson. As the end of time approaches, giants and monsters will be freed; their escape precipitates their final battle against heroes and gods. There are many signs announcing this final catastrophe, including the failure of the timekeepers of this cosmos. The giants and monsters will win, and the earth will be devoured by fire, but then the earth will again rise out of the sea, and a new and perhaps more generous age will commence.

Most myths of cosmic destruction are, in one way or another, positive: Either the cosmos is destroyed but humans are re-created to live in another way and place, or earth itself is re-created as (perhaps) a fitter place for humans to live. In all creation stories, creation implies death, which is the child of division and time. In creation, an initial unity is lost; in some myths, creation itself is a kind of fall from primal perfection, leading to fragmentation, desire, and death. Every birth is a re-creation of creation, an entry into a world of difference and individuation, delivering us into the gift of life but also starting us on the same journey the cosmos takes, back to entropy. ■

Names to Know

Kali: In Hindu mythology, the “Dark One” who gives her name to the final age of the cosmos. She is usually thought of as a manifestation of Parvati, consort of Shiva.

Lif and Lifhrasir: The names mean “life” and “desire for life,” respectively; they are the human survivors of Ragnarok in Norse mythology. They will be the ancestors of the next human race.

Important Terms

Chandogya Upanishad: One of the oldest of the Indian Upanishads (philosophical instructions), perhaps dating from 700 B.C.E.

Kali Yuga: The last and most degenerate age in the Hindu cyclical story of creation, degradation, destruction, and re-creation.

Ragnarok: “The end of the gods”; the apocalyptic destruction of the world in Norse mythology.

Upanishads: In Hinduism, books of philosophical/theological speculation, intended as commentary on the Vedas but sometimes departing significantly from the spirit and letter of those ancient hymns.

Vedas: Compilations of hymns to deities in the Hindu religion. The oldest is the *Rig Veda*, written down from 800-600 B.C.E. but containing much older material.

Suggested Reading

Rosenberg, *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*.

Thury and Devinney. *Introduction to Mythology*.

Questions to Consider

1. In Hindu Indian cosmogony, we are now living in the Kali Yuga, the “last age.” Is this characteristic of world creation myths generally—that we live in degenerate times, the golden age having long since passed? If so, why should one of the givens of human consciousness be that paradise is always a moment in the distant past and that the history of humankind and the cosmos itself from that point on has been one of deterioration, degradation, and disintegration? How does that square with our understanding of what creation is vis-à-vis the chaos out of which it was wrested?
2. When you think about it, does the return of the cosmos or the individual to undifferentiated stasis strike you as a good or bad ending to a story? Why would it appeal to so many people as a desirable termination? Or is it that we may not like the ending but feel that it is inevitable? What are the pluses and minuses of this kind of termination?

Greek and Norse Pantheons

Lecture 12

Gods become more like us, they're anthropomorphized, and then each one takes on a specific function: there's a god of music, there's a god of love, there's a god of war, there's a god of hospitality, there's a goddess of the fertility of crops.

Gods and goddesses are immortal beings, personified projections of the human dream of overcoming disintegration and death. They are also, in Eliade's term, "fecundators," creative forces contesting the tendency of the cosmos to sink back into chaos. They are metaphors for relationships in human society and personifications of aspects of both nature and human nature. In our age, gods and goddesses can also be archetypes that help us explore our own inner realities in the effort to become more integrated.

Historically, gods and goddesses seem to begin as generalities: the Great Mystery or the Absolute. Their first concrete embodiments are usually in animal form, such as that of a serpent; as part animal and part human; or as giants, such as Ymir or P'an Ku. Over time, these forces lose their monstrous qualities and take on departmentalized duties. They also are anthropomorphized as male and female.

A **pantheon** literally means "all gods" and refers to the deities of a people considered collectively. The genealogy of Greek gods is described for us by Hesiod, the *Homeric Hymns*, and Homer. Gaia, the Great Mother or Earth, is the oldest of the gods and generated her own mate, Ouranos, the Sky. Their offspring include Kronos and Rhea and the Titans. These gods are later supplanted by Zeus and his pantheon, organized as an aristocratic family. Zeus is the supreme

Because there are gods and goddesses, we have meaning, we have a reason for being; we are given responsibilities by those gods, we name the animals, we guard nature; we do the things they ask us to do.

ruler; his wife-sister is Hera; and his children include Ares and Hephaestus, along with Persephone, Athena, Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis, Hermes, and Dionysus. In the inter-generational conflicts of the gods, we may see a reflection of tensions within Greek aristocratic families.

The Norse pantheon is organized partly on familial lines, but its larger structure is provided by Yggdrasill, the cosmic tree, an *axis mundi*. The tree is at the center of the world, its roots reaching down into the underworld. Asgard is the home of the gods, housing two groups: the Aesir (sky gods) and the Vanir (earth gods). The giants live in the tree's roots, and beneath them is the land of the dead, ruled by Hel, daughter of Loki. Other parts of the tree house elves, dwarves, and Norns (something like the Greek Fates). Midgard, the place of humans, stands in the middle of these worlds.

Odin is the ruler of Asgard, but he lacks Zeus's ultimate control. He is the lord of warfare, of the inspiration that seizes poets, and of magic and **divination**. The Valkyries bring the souls of dead warriors to Valhalla, where they will fight with Odin and the gods in the last great cosmic battle. Odin's wife is Frigg, who is also the mother of Balder, the finest and most beautiful citizen of Asgard; he will be killed via a trick played by Loki. Thor is the god of the hammer and of thunder and storms; he is also the protector of agricultural communities, and many myths feature his prodigious appetites for food and drink. Two of the most important of the Vanir (earth gods) are Freyr and his twin sister, Freyja, originally the god and goddess of fertility. ■



Thor, the Norse god of thunder.

Name to Know

Hel: Daughter of Loki and a giantess, she is the goddess of the Norse underworld.

Important Terms

divination: The art of foretelling the future by learning the will of the gods.

pantheon: Literally, “all gods”; refers to the gods and goddesses of a culture considered collectively.

Suggested Reading

Davidson, “Northern Europe” in *World Mythology*.

Thury and Devinney, *Introduction to Mythology*.

Questions to Consider

1. In our two pantheons, organization is provided by the structure of the family (Greek) and that of Yggdrasill (Norse). In other pantheons of other peoples, what other organizational principles are used to establish a hierarchy among the gods and goddesses?
2. What aspects of human and natural life are accounted for in the concept of a pantheon of overlapping (and sometimes conflicting) responsibilities, managed by a figure who has barely enough authority to keep his unruly charges in line? What is added to this account by giving these deities humanlike passions and motivations?

The Great Goddess Remembered?

Lecture 13

The existence of these [female] figurines and carvings has led a number of archaeologists, anthropologists, and historians to assert that through most of the Paleolithic and into the Neolithic periods, the humans worshiped a powerful goddess; perhaps the societies she presided over would have been **matrifocal** (woman-centered), maybe even **matriarchal**.

The great goddess hypothesis, which asserts a time when most humans would have worshiped an all-powerful female deity, is based in part on figurines and engravings of the female form in Europe and as far east as Siberia, dating from 30,000–5000 B.C.E. Some archaeologists and historians have suggested that these ages may have been **matrifocal** (woman-centered) or even **matriarchal** and, perhaps, characterized by equitable gender relations, minimal violence, and a greater unity with the natural order. This hypothesis, however, has been strongly contested. In this course, we will assume a neutral stance on the question, while positing a time in prehistory when the great goddess was more important than she was later.

We begin by revisiting Hesiod's *Theogony* for a lesson in between-the-lines reading. Hesiod was a patriarchal misogynist, as evidenced by his story in *Works and Days* of the creation of the first woman, Pandora, who introduced disease, suffering, and death into the world. Hesiod's



In Greek mythology, Pandora opened the box that unleashed disease, suffering, and death into the world.

Theogony is an account of how Zeus came to be the supreme deity and, in it, Hera, who may at one time have been an important goddess, is reduced to a jealous and shrewish wife. But even in his account, the primary agent of creation is Gaia, Mother Earth.

In many cultures, we see the importance of the primeval goddess. In Estonia, for example, Ma Emma was worshiped as the source of all life. The original inhabitants of Ireland were Tuatha de Danu, “People of the Goddess Danu.” And in the *Enuma Elish*, the gods and goddesses were born from Tiamat; later, the entire cosmos is made from her body.

Three myths from various parts of the world highlight the role of the goddess as either the creator or an important culture hero. In a Vietnamese myth, the goddess Au Co comes to explore the newly created earth but is prevented from returning to heaven. As she weeps at her fate, her tears make rivers of water that support plant life. A dragon prince finds her, changes himself into a young man, and marries her, and the two have 100 human children. When the prince is summoned to succeed his father as emperor of the sea, Au Co is left as supreme deity of the planet.

According to Eliade, all important skills and techniques for survival on earth were attributed to gods or heroes. In a Brule Sioux myth, a goddess called White Buffalo Woman teaches the people how to live properly. When she leaves, the buffalo return to enable the people to survive. “The four ages of creation are in me,” says White Buffalo Woman. “I am the four ages.”

In a myth from Zimbabwe, a god named Mwetsi is given Massassi (the Morning Star) to be his wife for two years on earth, and she gives birth to vegetation. Massassi is then replaced by Morongo (the Evening Star), who gives birth to animals and humans. She retires from Mwetsi’s embrace, but when he tries to couple with her once more, the snake with which she now sleeps bites him, and he sickens and dies. In this story, the goddess plays all

The evidence for the existence of that goddess age has to be found in the margins and between the lines of historical documents.

of her roles: virgin, seductress, mother, and crone. And her consort must die and be replaced by a new one to guarantee fertility for another year. ■

Name to Know

Kunapipi: A mother-goddess of Australia, whose body is the earth and who deposited the souls of unborn children in Dream Time.

Important Terms

matriarchal: Having a woman as leader of a family or line.

matrifocal: Woman-centered.

Suggested Reading

Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return*.

Erdoes and Ortiz. *American Indian Myths and Legends*.

Ford, *The Hero With an African Face*.

Leonard and McClure, *Myth and Knowing*.

Nhat Hanh, *A Taste of Earth and Other Legends of Vietnam*.

Questions to Consider

1. In the Vietnamese Au Co myth, the first humans are created by the coupling of a dragon prince and a goddess. Compare the implications of human origins in this myth with those of the Enuma Elish, Genesis, the Popol Vuh, the Navajo emergence myth, and others we have treated in this course.
2. The White Buffalo Woman is a great illustration of the idea of the culture hero and of Eliade's assertion that all the ways in which we live were initially understood as gifts from the gods. How so?

The Goddess—Inanna and Dumuzi

Lecture 14

There might have been a time in human history when humans didn't understand the relationship between sex and procreation. If that's the case, then it would have made women seem even more powerful and magic than they already were, because they were then able to produce both males and females out of themselves, by themselves, without any male help.

This lecture looks at changes in the goddess that took place when people gave up hunting and gathering or nomadic pastoralism for settled agricultural life.

As the male role in procreation became clearer, male gods become more important, but the plough to work the ground was still considered female. Eventually, we come to the most famous and widespread of all vegetative myths: A goddess, embodying the fertility of the earth, mates with a male to ensure her fertility. But once he has accomplished his task, he dies and descends to the underworld. The goddess may follow him to retrieve him for a new year, or she may take a new consort to repeat the fertilizing action for a new season. This entire myth may have been based on human observance of the moon, which is in one way eternal, but which goes through cycles of waning and waxing, death and rebirth. Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* was about the ritual that grew out of this myth, in which a consort of the goddess must be either literally or ritually killed and replaced by a younger male, who can guarantee the fertility of the goddess.

One of the oldest of the vegetative myths is from Sumeria—that of the goddess Inanna and her consort Dumuzi. A poem called “The Courtship of Inanna and Dumuzi” describes the wedding of the pair in detail. In prehistoric times, Inanna was the goddess of the storage granary and Dumuzi, god of the date palm or grain; thus, the marriage was celebrated each year when the grain went into storage. The event was also celebrated at the New Year festival, when the king, representing Dumuzi, would enter the chamber of a priestess, representing Inanna, to consummate the divine marriage that

guaranteed crops. In the ritual, she is the eternal principle, while he is the essentially human consort who needs to perform certain tasks to get Inanna to bestow her blessings of fertility.

Another poem about the pair is “The Descent of Inanna,” in which Inanna goes to the underworld, escapes from it, and sends Dumuzi back in her place. Again, she is the immortal one; he, the one who dies. A psychological reading of this poem suggests that in confronting her sister Ereshkigal (goddess of the underworld), Inanna is coming to terms with the dark side of herself, her unconscious, a necessary step in human individuation. In doing so, she anticipates the journeys of many later heroes who will descend into the underworld in similar circumstances.

The transformation of the goddess from all-powerful creatrix and culture hero to an agricultural deity is not in itself a bad thing. In some cultures, the goddess marries one of the new gods to create a fruitful union. In Greece, a whole crop of new heroes suggests the importance of confronting the unconscious in creating a new kind of individuality. Theseus, Jason, Hercules, Perseus, and Odysseus, for example, all manage to get home after many adventures and heroic achievements. But each is also helped by a female, whose union with the hero suggests the rich possibilities of a union of consciousness and unconsciousness, intellect and intuition, when they operate in harmony. ■

Name to Know

Kunapipi: A mother-goddess of Australia, whose body is the earth and who deposited the souls of unborn children in Dream Time.

This may be a reenactment of Sumerian burial ceremonies in which humans were presumably buried naked and in a crouching position, showing their deference, their obedience, to death.

Suggested Reading

Baring and Cashford, *The Myth of the Goddess*.

Leeming and Page, *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine*.

Wolkstein and Kramer, *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth*.

Questions to Consider

1. Does the homology between the moon in its eternal and waxing/waning aspects and the myths of the eternal goddess serviced by a dying (and in some sense) reborn consort make sense to you? Does it explain the amazing number of occurrences of the myth in world mythology? What other homologies can you think of that might work as well and explain the same phenomena?
2. Does there seem to be any cultural or historical significance to Inanna's initial preference for a farmer over a shepherd as a husband—and the fact that she settles for the shepherd? In Lecture 8, in the Huron earth-diver story, we had a similar kind of face-off; the Genesis story of Cain and Abel is another; and we will come upon another in Lecture 17 in the myth of Wunzh and still another in Lecture 22 in the account of the development of Enkidu. What parts of a culture's experience seem embedded in this kind of confrontation?

The Goddess—Isis and Osiris

Lecture 15

We've reached the point in the biography of the goddess at which in agricultural communities she's given up some of her power to a male consort, whose job is to fertilize the goddess and to assure a new cycle of growth. But in most of these myths, the consort then dies and is in some sense revived, if not always quite literally.

The myth of Isis illustrates some of the same points made in the last lecture concerning goddesses who turn over part of their power to their male consorts but remain sources of fertility for the community.

Isis and Osiris were children of Nut and Geb and loved each other from the time they were in the womb. Osiris becomes the first king of Egypt, teaching humans the arts of agriculture, providing them with laws, instructing them about the gods, and generally lifting them into civilized life. When Osiris travels to other countries to spread these teachings, he leaves Isis in charge of Egypt, angering his brother Seth. Seth kills Osiris, but Isis eventually locates his body and resuscitates it enough for Osiris to engender a child in her: Horus. Osiris becomes king of the dead. After a series of trials and combat, Horus defeats Seth and is declared king of Egypt. Isis advises Horus to give Seth his liberty, thus keeping alive the great enemy of Egyptian civilized life and metaphorically maintaining the fundamental dualistic principle of creation itself.

Essentially, this myth is of the same kind as that of Inanna and Damuzia, involving a dying and rising god as consort of the goddess, who embodies the creative power of the natural order. Osiris is a metaphor for the annual flooding of the Nile. He was initially a fertility god, and his resurrection occurs when crops begin to sprout after the inundation. That Isis conceives a child from the dead Osiris is a symbol of the new life that emerges out of death. The dismemberment of Osiris by

Osiris himself was a metaphor for the event in Egypt on which all life depended: the annual flooding of the Nile.



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A bas-relief of Isis and Osiris, an ancient Egyptian goddess and her dying-and-reborn consort god.

Seth was understood as the cutting and threshing of wheat and barley, which resembles death but is the basis for new life. This myth also justified the idea of divine kingship: The living pharaoh is Horus, and when he dies, he becomes Osiris. Further, the myth provided a basis for the Egyptian belief in a life after death. Finally, the myth helps us understand the function and roles of the animal-headed gods so prevalent in Egyptian mythology. Each animal that becomes part of a god is carefully chosen for its function on earth, which becomes metaphoric in its mythological application.

The myth may seem to be more about Osiris than Isis, but it is still her story. Not only does Isis rescue and resuscitate Osiris, but she also gives birth to Horus, who is, in some ways, the resurrected Osiris. By bringing Osiris to life twice, Isis also becomes, in a sense, his mother, and in Egyptian texts, she is frequently referred to that way. One of the hieroglyphs in Isis's name is a throne and, by extension, she becomes the throne on which the pharaoh sits—like Horus nursing at his mother's breast. As Horus, the pharaoh is the son of Isis, and as Osiris, he is her adult consort—another of the son-lover relationships that recur in many vegetation myths. Each pharaoh thus becomes a consort of Isis.

Isis later became the central goddess in a mystery cult that spread over the Roman Empire and promised eternal life to its adherents. She lasted so long in world mythology that it has been claimed that the evolution of consciousness could be depicted in the many ways she was conceived and honored. ■

Suggested Reading

Baring and Cashford. *The Myth of the Goddess*.

Leeming, *The Oxford Companion to World Literature*.

Thury and Deviney. *Introduction to Mythology*.

Questions to Consider

1. How does Plutarch account for Isis's decision to free Seth when he is at Horus's mercy? In larger mythological terms, what is the meaning of the gesture? What are its implications?
2. In a myth whose purpose is (at least in part) to describe the recurring cycle of birth, growth, death, and rebirth, what are the precise functions of each of the characters in the story of Isis and Osiris? Given both the characters' "human" motivations and their mythological meanings, what overall picture of the cosmos and of human life emerges from the myth?

The Eclipse of the Goddess

Lecture 16

We can only guess at what might have happened next if these internal developments had been just allowed to go at their own pace, but that didn't happen. ... Farmers were always at a disadvantage because they weren't fighters, and they had to stay put since survival depended on the crops they had planted. The solution eventually was to take small communities and band them together into cities.

This lecture deals with two of the ways in which the goddess is eclipsed in history and turns much of her power over to male sky gods. Sky gods seems to have been important in early religion, but in most cases, they retreated, turning over their authority to others. The inevitable consequence of the agricultural revolution was cities, in which new roles and offices, mostly held by males, generated new deities to oversee these activities, who were mostly male, as well. Then came the invasions of Indo-Europeans in India and Greece and of Semitics in the Middle East. The invaders brought with them both advanced military technology and their own sky gods. The new gods either assimilated the goddess into their own pantheons, with reduced status, or marginalized her in other ways. Creation by the new male sky gods became something "made" rather than "given birth to," changing the relationship between deity and nature and, consequently, between humans and nature.

Myths tell the story of the challenges of the goddess's power by the new sky gods. A myth of the Dahomey people in Africa, for example, describes a challenge by Awe of the goddess Mawu. Mawu wins the contest, but as a consequence, death is introduced into the world. In the Greek myth of Eurynome, one of her creations, the serpent Orphion, takes credit for creating the universe. She defeats him, but the challenge to her authority is significant. In a Japanese

Here are stories in which the goddess does not survive the challenge to her power but actually yields a great deal of it up to males.

myth, Susa-no-o, brother of the sun goddess **Amaterasu**, nearly drives his sister into perpetual hiding, which would end life on earth.

Ultimately, these challenges led to the suppression of the goddess and her replacement by male gods. Myths again tell the story of this usurpation. In the story we treated in Lecture 4, Marduk kills Tiamat, then creates the universe out of her dismembered body. His creation is something “made,” not “born,” of different substance from himself. In this myth the male gender is associated with light, order, and goodness; the female, with nature, darkness, and chaos. From this shift in consciousness came the idea that the feminine is chaotic and material and must be mastered by the male principles of order and rationality.

The shift in religious and mythological consciousness seems clear enough, but its implications are subject to various interpretations. For much of the 20th century, many scholars, supported by a Jungian reading of the development of human consciousness, considered the suppression of the goddess by male sky gods a good and necessary step in the process of human individuation and the maturity of the race. Some recent scholars, however, have questioned the valuation of the shift, seeing in the change from goddess to god, from birth to making, a drastic change in the human relationship to nature and an equally radical transformation of the idea of time. ■

Name to Know

Amaterasu: The Japanese Shinto goddess of the Rising Sun and ancestress of the emperor.

Suggested Reading

Birrell, *Chinese Mythology*.

Bodde, “Myths of Ancient China” in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*.

Leeming and Page, *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine*.

Questions to Consider

1. All myths, as we have seen, are multivalenced, carrying multiple meanings. What social meanings are suggested in the Japanese myth of Izanagi and Izanami and in the Chinese myth of Nu Kua? What can we tell about gender relations in the cultures that created these myths?
2. Given the conflicting evaluations of the triumph of the male sky gods described at the end of this lecture, what do you see as the positives and negatives that emerge from this profound change?

Shamans and Vegetation Gods

Lecture 17

The bear is, in a way, a kind of Animal God or Master Shaman; the hunter is an apprentice shaman, who takes the mysteries he's learned back to his people. In the future, he will wear that fur that was grown during the time with the bear, and he will teach his people the rites to perform over the killed bear so that it can be reborn to be killed again.

An account of the growth of human apprehension of God can plausibly begin with such cave paintings as the one in the cave of Les Trois Frères at Lascaux in France, dating to about 14,000 B.C.E. Its modern title is "The Sorcerer." It is a combination of human and animal, with antlered head, bearded face, human legs, and a torso in an animal position, parallel to the ground. This is possibly a shaman or animal master and may have been the earliest conception of God in human history. When humans still depended primarily on hunting for survival, the shaman or animal master's task was to ensure success in finding and killing game. He becomes one with the animal in order to convince it to give itself up and to kill it in such a way as to allow it to be reborn.

Alternatively, "The Sorcerer" may be a god in the form of a temporary male consort of the goddess, who dies after fulfilling his task and is reincarnated in the sacred king. Thus, such dying gods as Balder, Osiris, Dumuzi, and Adonis would be descendents of "The Sorcerer," either resurrected or supplied with surrogates to ensure continued fertility.

In a goddess age in which hunting is still the primary means of subsistence, the goddess must yield up her animal children to human need, but she does so in a way that guarantees that the slain animals will be reborn, making death a gateway to new life. The Yoruba myth of Red Buffalo Woman illustrates

The Paleolithic imagination would have conceptualized the eternal, the cyclical, the self-renewing nature of the cosmos as female, as the Great Goddess.



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A Native American chief consults the tribal shaman.

the necessary rapport between hunter and game. It also illustrates the need for the hunter to adapt himself to the rhythms of the goddess who supplies his needs.

The next human apprehension of God comes from the time of the agricultural revolution, overlapping the history of the goddess treated in Lectures 12 through 14. The shamans of earlier ages were absorbed into agricultural rituals. The idea of killing an old bull to make way for a younger, more virile, one would have become clear to people who had domesticated animals, but the killing of the old bull would still have been a ritual, designed to ensure its rebirth. And it is perhaps from this that the idea of the dying god—the basis for one of the largest bodies of myth in the world—came into being.

The best evidence we have for this stage in human consciousness comes from Çatal Hüyük in Turkey, where the goddess still seems supreme, but the bull as her male son/consort is important, even though his role demands that he die after ensuring her fertility for another year. Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* documents the rituals that accompanied these myths. The Canaanite myth of Baal from Ugarit illustrates this mythical pattern. Baal is

forced to die and go to the underworld, from which he is rescued by his sister Anath, who kills the god of the underworld, Mot, and then plants him. Mot's planting leads to the rebirth of Baal, and fertility is restored. This is what God became around the time of the agricultural revolution: more important than in earlier days but still subordinate to the goddess, who is still the source of life and fertility. The real challenges to her supremacy are still to come. ■

Suggested Reading

Ford, *The Hero With an African Face*.

Gordon, "Canaanite Mythology" in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*.

Leeming and Page, *God: Myths of the Male Divine*.

Questions to Consider

1. In Lecture 12, a scholar was quoted as saying that Odin, the chief Norse god, had borrowed some of his characteristics from the shaman. Now that we have a formal definition of the shaman to work with, what exactly does that scholar mean? If the assertion is accurate, how does it reinforce Leeming and Page's assertion that the shaman (or animal master) may have been the first human conception of God?
2. The Ojibway myth of Wunzh is another variation of the dying and rising god who represents the vegetative cycle. What similarities and differences do you find between this story and others of its type that we have looked at: Dumuzi and Osiris, for example?

Sky Gods and Earth Goddesses

Lecture 18

This is a common pattern: The original sky god gives over his importance to fertility gods, whose job is to fertilize the Goddess to assure abundant crops and livestock. Still ... the sky never entirely loses its significance. Even when cult and ritual focuses on more immanent gods, the sky god is out there, still thought of as supreme in some way.

Sky gods came to challenge the power and authority of earth goddesses during the agricultural revolution and as a result of Indo-European and Semitic invasions. As we have seen, most mythologies and religions seem to begin with a supreme sky god who later retreats. But when sky gods retreat, replaced in worship and cult by more accessible fertility deities, they do not entirely lose their significance, and the sky is always a starting point for metaphysical or transcendental speculation. Thus, one important motif in many cosmogonic myths concerns the separation of earth and sky. This separation also begins the process of differentiation that is central to creation accounts. Some African myths find the time when sky was accessible and near earth a kind of golden age, and the retreat of the sky introduces all manner of difficulties into human life, including death itself.

The invasions of the Indo-Europeans and Semites brought new warrior attitudes and supreme sky gods into cultures that were by now many centuries old. These weather/warrior gods would eventually tame and domesticate the goddess. The prototypal myth in this vein is that of Marduk and Tiamat, which we have considered in several lectures. Tiamat had been a creatrix, creating out of her body in a birthing process, while Marduk, after he kills her, creates the cosmos out of her body as something he “makes.”

The earth-mother becomes a monstrous dragon who has to be destroyed for creation to occur. We find myths of this kind all over the world, in which a sky god defeats a remnant of the goddess that has been made into a monster of some sort.

**One of the ways that
you can deal with the
goddess is simply to
turn her into a monster.**

In myths in which the goddess is not demonized, she is made into a temptress, as she is in the stories of Eve, Pandora, and Ishtar (in *Gilgamesh*). In a myth of the Native American Ponca people, Coyote kills and/or defeats the “Vagina Girls,” who have become monsters by having teeth in the wrong place. In the process, mystery, darkness, connections with the lunar cycle, the birthing process, intuition, and emotion are devalued in the face of the reason, light, clarity, and order represented by the sky gods.

In a slow but steady process, the fertilizer comes to be seen as more important than the one fertilized, and eventually, male gods are able to produce life without the help of females. Ouranos’s genitals by themselves create Aphrodite; **Izanagi**, in a Japanese myth, creates a generation of gods and goddesses as he bathes; Zeus produces Athena from his head and Dionysus from his thigh; and Indra not only fertilizes the world but actually gives females the power to procreate.

Social and political circumstances also favored the supremacy of male over female deities. Kings now presided over complex societies that featured new male-oriented occupations. As fewer people were needed for agriculture and more for other tasks, the powers of the fertility goddess waned, and new pantheons—largely male—emerged. By this time, the sky god was ready to consolidate all other deities into himself and finally to emerge as sole lord and creator, the ultimate Father. ■

Names to Know

Izanagi and Izanami: The first couple in Japanese Shinto mythology.

Suggested Reading

Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*.

Erdoes and Ortiz, *American Indian Myths and Legends*.

Ions, *Indian Mythology*.

Leeming and Page, *God: Myths of the Male Divine*.

Ògúngbilé, “God: African Supreme Beings” in *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

Radin, *African Folktales*.

Sproul, *Primal Myths*.

Questions to Consider

1. The distinction between “giving birth to” and “making,” which is the difference between female and male creator deities, has been discussed in the last several lectures. Revisit the remarks of the Abyssinian woman in Lecture 16, then think about the many ways in which these two very different metaphors imply different attitudes about the relationship between humans and the creator and between humans and the natural world. What are the virtues and problems of each?
2. In what ways does the ascendancy of male gods in history both reflect and reinforce developments in social and political circumstances?

Creator Gods

Lecture 19

This tendency toward consolidation [is] also reflected in myth, which, as we've noticed, tends to explain, justify, and sanction political, social, and economic structures. What emerged eventually mythically from all of this was the idea of a supreme male deity who had always existed and who was the source of all being. ... Most often, this newly powerful God creates by divine word.

The next step in the biography of God occurs when he becomes the supreme creator, prompting humans to expend enormous energy in the effort to minimize the distance between this remote sky god and themselves. One of the results of the victory of the sky god was his claim to be the ultimate creator, source, and essence of all being.

In most parts of the world, myths show a marked tendency toward consolidation and centralization: As the supreme God was to his creation, so the king is to his country and the father is to his family. What eventually emerged in myth was a supreme male deity who had always existed and was the source of all being. He usually had no family of any sort and created by word. It seems that this process would lead to monotheism and, with the Hebrews, it did. But even in polytheistic religions, there comes to be a “king of the gods”: Marduk, Zeus, Indra, Baal, Odin, and Ptah. The single male creator God could also be thought of as a craftsman, a manipulator of materials transformed by his imagination. The Chinese P’an Ku, Marduk, and the Egyptian Ptah are in this category. A craftsman God is no longer immanent in creation but, rather, shapes dead material into some form, standing in relation to his creation as an artist to his work rather than as a mother to her child. A craft can be an *axis mundi*, so that not all connections are broken between creation and creator, but these creation

The first Genesis account illustrates the ways in which male creator gods have taken over creation roles from the Goddess.

accounts all belong to the male, and each represents a usurpation of the role of the goddess.

The distance between a remote, transcendent sky god and humans has worried many people and, over time, it has led to a number of theories designed to minimize that distance. Once God became remote, he could be reached only via priests who had learned the proper formulae and could communicate in prayer and ritual. This constituted a significant shift in human consciousness because, for most of human history, nature itself was considered sacred given that the deity lives within it.

Over time, in many religions and mythologies, efforts have been made to reduce the distance between a transcendent God and humans and to bring him closer to what the deity was when it was immanent. In Hinduism, for example, Brahman is God, but it is also Atman (the Self); everything, including all the other gods and goddesses of the pantheon, are parts of Brahman,

which is always beyond comprehension. Taoism also asserts that God can be found inside the self, and Zen Buddhism claims, “The goal of the true Buddhist is to be rid of the Buddha,” so that prayer becomes meditation. Many practices, such as yoga, dervish dancing, drug use, fasting, and ritual chants, are designed to break down the barrier between the mundane and the eternal and to enable us to find God within ourselves. Modern psychological visions of religion also assert that gods and goddesses are archetypes in our own minds and psyches. In some religions, God becomes incarnate: Jesus



Brahma, the Hindu creator god.

is both the Son of God and God, and Vishnu is incarnated many times as Krishna to live among humans and to save their cosmos from destruction. ■

Important Terms

animism: The doctrine that inanimate objects or natural phenomena possess a soul.

deus faber: God as maker, who creates in the manner of a craftsman.

monotheism: The belief in a single god, vis-à-vis polytheism, the belief that there are many deities.

Suggested Reading

Erdoes and Ortiz, *American Indian Myths and Legends*.

Ford, *The Hero With an African Face*.

Leeming and Page, *God: Myths of the Male Divine*.

Sproul, *Primal Myths*.

Questions to Consider

1. The *deus faber* creation theory posits a creator who works with raw materials the way a craftsman does with gold or clay or iron. What are the implications of this metaphor for the relationship between creator and creation or between humans and the natural world?
2. Which of the methods of diminishing the distance between creator and creation—animism, the dismembered god, the idea that Brahman is also Atman (the god within), Taoism, Buddhism, mysticism—most appeals to you in either theoretical or personal ways? That is, which theory sounds most plausible or which offers the most abundant benefits to both the individual and the world in which he or she lives?

Gods and Goddesses of India

Lecture 20

Indian mythology is stunningly rich, and it's also stunningly problematic; and they turn out to be two sides of the same coin. ... It turns out there isn't anything like a final or orthodox version of anything. Hinduism is an amazing conglomeration of chance association, loose confederation, and syncretism; it makes Hinduism anything but a unified religion or mythology.

Indian mythology and theology is rich and complicated—the result of more than 3,000 years of continuous development, including two major religions that have grown out of Hinduism and, in turn, influenced their source. There are likewise a great many sources for studying the gods and goddesses of India, including the *Vedas*, *Brahmanas*, *Puranas*, *Sutras*, and *Upanishads* and the two great Indian epic poems, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Most of the later books are, in some measure, commentary on the original *Vedas*, but they also reflect developments and modifications in original Hindu thought, and thus, many of them reinterpret older myths and theological propositions.

The bottom stratum of Indian mythology dates back to before the Aryan invasions of about 1500 B.C.E. Only archaeological evidence survives as testimony to these ancient beliefs, but some remnants of them may endure in southern India and even in some elements of what became the classical Hindu gods and goddesses.

The Aryan invaders established the four-caste system in India, in which each caste had its own pantheon, although there was an early-established alliance between the gods of the first caste (the brahmins, or priestly class) and those of the second (the warrior and ruler class). By the time of the *Vedas*, Indra, a warrior, had become king of the gods. Indra's story has many parallels with those of Ouranos, Kronos, and Zeus in Greek mythology and Marduk and Tiamat in Babylonian. Despite his formidable deeds, Indra was later marginalized as gods of the brahmin class assumed supreme positions in the pantheon.

The three most important gods of fully developed Hinduism are Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu. Brahma became the creator god, with many different stories of creation under his management. Later, as Indian thinkers began to treat creation in more abstract and less mythological ways, Brahma, too, was moved to the sideline to make room for Shiva and Vishnu, the

central figures in classical Hinduism. Shiva is a complex combination of characteristics: He is both the destroyer and lord of the dance of creation; he and his consort Parvati haunt desolate spots and even cremation grounds, where he practices the yoga that gives him fantastic power. Vishnu is the most myth-friendly of the three great gods, especially in the stories of his incarnations to right the balance of good and evil in the universe. His two most important incarnations are as Rama and Krishna and are the subjects of the two great Indian epic poems.



Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva, the supreme Hindu triad of gods.

Without his feminine side, a god has no effective power.

The next stage in the Hindu biography of God occurs when all three great gods (Brahma, Shiva, and Vishnu) are seen as manifestations of Brahman, an impersonal force that lies behind everything that is. In this way, Indian philosophers and theologians complete the circle described in the last three lectures, in which the distance between God and humanity is diminished and even bridged by finding God not “out there” but “in here.” ■

Names to Know

Nanda and Yasoda: The putative cowherd parents of Vishnu in his incarnation as Krishna.

Vidyapati (14th century): An Indian poet who wrote elaborate erotic-theological poems on the love of Krishna and Radha.

Important Terms

Brahmanas: Theological revelations in prose attached to the Indian *Vedas*.

Puranas: A body of Hindu myths, legends, and ritual instructions.

Sutras: In Hinduism, books about ritual.

Suggested Reading

Archer, *Love Songs of Vidyapati*.

———, *The Loves of Krishna in Indian Painting and Poetry*.

Brown, “Mythology of India” in *Mythologies of the Ancient World*.

Ions, *Indian Mythology*.

Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*.

Questions to Consider

1. What social/political history is inscribed in the caste system that became such an integral part of Hindu religion, mythology, and philosophy?
2. In Lecture 19, we talked about some of the ways in which humans have tried to diminish the distance between a remote, transcendent god and themselves. In how many specific ways does the incarnation of Vishnu as Krishna fulfill this important function in Hindu religion and mythology?

Hero Myths

Lecture 21

The hero is always larger than life ... who does things that most of the rest of us can't do. He may also serve as a model for us, giving us deeds to emulate. ... Every time there's a hero, a hero makes us feel a little more proud of being humans because he's redefined human nature in a slightly larger way.

A “hero” is a larger-than-life character who achieves extraordinary things and, in some measure, serves as a model for the rest of us. The larger-than-life qualities of the hero can be accounted for by the fact that the hero is fully divine (e.g., Prometheus), semi-divine (e.g., Achilles or Aeneas), or purely mortal (e.g., Odysseus) but nevertheless able to perform deeds we might think impossible. Heroes are always connected in specific ways to specific cultures, so that many culture heroes from Native American and Mesoamerican myths are connected with corn, a staple crop. Others are credited with founding states or dynasties, as is the case with Yu of the Hsia Dynasty.

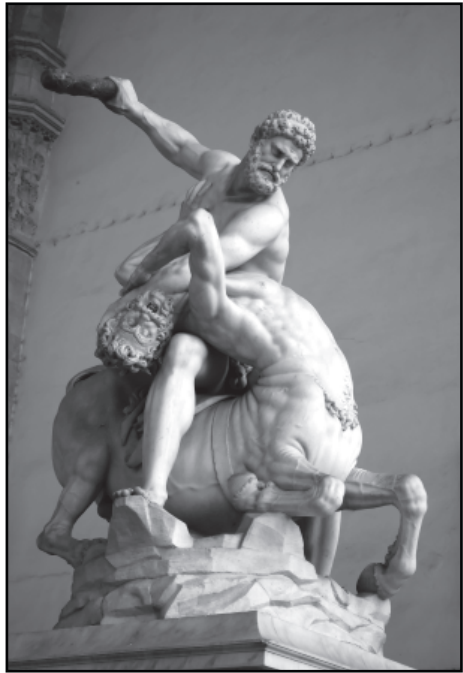
The fact that hero myths from different cultures share certain themes, motifs, and narrative structures has led some scholars to a search for a “monomyth”—that is, a universal story that transcends the definitions of any particular culture. Joseph Campbell, for instance, proposed a three-stage model for the hero myth: separation or departure from the familiar world in which the hero lives, trials and obstacles, and the winning of a boon that the hero brings back and that can transform the world left behind at the outset. Campbell’s monomyth owes debts to the psychological theories of Carl Jung, who asserted a “collective unconscious” made up of archetypes common to psychic activity in all cultures. Myths, according to Jung, are collective dreams, and dreams are the individual’s myths, which share many features across cultural lines. For Campbell, every individual myth is a cultural mask

For Jung, dreams are a manifestation of a culture’s unconscious; and so dreams and myths overlap to a great extent.

worn by the universal human psyche. The hero's journey for Campbell is not literal or geographic but an exploration of oneself. The concept of the monomyth is not universally accepted, and such scholars as Eliade have insisted that the basis of mythical experience is religious, not psychological.

Let's examine a simplified version of the hypothetical monomyth. In this scheme, a hero has a miraculous conception and/or birth, suggesting his emergence from eternal essence. Once born, he is usually set upon by guardians of the status quo, such as kings or demons. When he reaches adulthood, the hero is subjected to a period of isolation in preparation for his adventure. He then departs, sometimes reluctantly, on a quest—perhaps for a specific object or place or for understanding and enlightenment. When the successful hero returns, he brings back a boon for his people. Sometimes, the hero returns to the site of his vision or to union with the cosmos.

This schematic monomyth can be illustrated with the Greek myth of the hero Herakles, who is half divine. Exposed and abandoned as a child, he nonetheless performs extraordinary deeds, such as killing serpents with his hands while still in the cradle. He is sent on his quest in atonement for the crime of having killed his wife and children in a fit of madness sent upon him by Hera. The expiation involves his famous Twelve Labors. Herakles dies by his own hand after being poisoned by a shirt given to his wife by the centaur Nessus. Zeus



Hercules killing the centaur Nessus, who had attacked Hercules's wife, Deianeira.

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rewards the hero by granting him immortality. Through his labors, which make the world safer for humans, Herakles becomes a culture hero. ■

Suggested Reading

Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

Leeming, *The Oxford Companion to World Literature*.

Thury and Devinney, *Introduction to Mythology*.

Questions to Consider

1. Make a list of what seems to you the most important heroes in the modern world. Remembering that hero myths are always culturally deflected, what cultural values do these heroes represent? What do they say about the values of our culture?
2. Otto Rank posits the “family romance” as the psychological basis for myths of the hero. Either in the account of it given in the lecture or in your own further reading, what parts of the romance resonate most with your own experience? Do you see how it might lead to the creation of the hero? If you were to create a heroic myth based on your own family romance, what would the myth be like? Would its contours be similar to the one defined by Rank?

Mythic Heroes—Gilgamesh

Lecture 22

Like a lot of other early heroes, Gilgamesh is partly divine: His mother is a goddess, his father is a mortal. We're told in the poem that he's two-thirds of a god and one-third human; and while that's difficult to work out genetically, it probably means that he's more divine than human ... whereas Enkidu, which is the name of this new character, is half human and half animal.

The most complete version of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is from Assyria in the 7th century B.C.E., but it is based on materials that date back as far as 2700 B.C.E., the time when a historical Gilgamesh may have been the king of Uruk.

The first part of the poem concerns the heroic deeds of a partly divine, larger-than-life king of Uruk, Gilgamesh. At the outset, he seems to be exhausting his people. When the people ask the gods for help, they create Enkidu as



Ancient Assyrian wall carvings.

a companion for Gilgamesh, and the two become fast friends. After a series of heroic adventures, Gilgamesh angers the gods, who decide that one of the two friends must die. Enkidu is chosen, and he dies in Gilgamesh's arms after a long illness. Gilgamesh is devastated and frightened by his friend's death and vows to find the secret of immortality.

The second part of the poem takes Gilgamesh on a difficult journey, landing him finally on the island of Utnapishtim, the survivor of the great flood who was granted immortality for his part in saving humanity. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh that his situation is unique and cannot be repeated. As

a consolation, Gilgamesh is given a magical plant that can renew one's youth, but a snake eats it on the way home. Gilgamesh returns to Uruk empty-handed, having failed in his quest. He decides that he must settle for the kind of immortality that can be achieved by promoting great projects for his city.

As literature, this epic is a rich work. Its themes include the heroic deeds of the first part of the poem, a visceral coming to terms with death, the discovery that humans are born to immortality, and the need to make the best of the time and opportunities that life affords. It is also about the Middle Eastern understanding of human evolution, from wild man to shepherd to civilized man, as described in the story of Enkidu, and of the ways that civilized humans inevitably lose touch with their natural roots and contexts.

As myth, the poem illustrates the usefulness of the monomyth as an analytical tool. Gilgamesh has a miraculous birth, and his call to action comes when he acquires Enkidu as a dear friend. With Enkidu, Gilgamesh goes through the threshold experiences, confrontations with monsters, and even the symbolic death of the monomythic hero. In some ways, the first part of the poem constitutes a complete heroic adventure. But Enkidu's death sets Gilgamesh off on a different kind of journey, involving more thresholds, more confrontations with deadly foes, and another symbolic death. His second quest yields what seem to be lesser results, but they are, perhaps, more profound in their implications, including a new wisdom and a new understanding of the lot of humans in the world.

The episode involving Ishtar, the Bull of Heaven, and the death of Enkidu is the hinge on which the first part of the poem turns into the second, and it reinforces some ideas from Lecture 16 about the eclipse of the goddess. Ishtar (the Semitic version of Inanna) offers Gilgamesh a chance to become her consort. His refusal of the role signals the marginalizing of the goddess in favor of a sky-god (here, Shamash) and charts a new course for patriarchal society. ■

Gilgamesh's own story is a story about coming to terms with his own mortality.

Name to Know

Shamash: The sun-god in the epic of *Gilgamesh*.

Suggested Reading

Kluger, *The Archetypal Significance of "Gilgamesh."*

Sandars, trans., *The Epic of Gilgamesh*.

Questions to Consider

1. One of the most difficult moments in the heroic quest occurs when the hero is called to give up his or her safe, familiar, comfortable life to venture into unknown, dangerous places. Gilgamesh actually achieves this twice in the poem. What motivates him in each case, and what do his motives tell us about the nature of the hero generally?
2. We can be fairly certain about the boon Gilgamesh brings back for himself from his quests. But what is the boon for his community? What do his subjects gain from his adventures and his acquired knowledge?

Mythic Heroes—King Arthur

Lecture 23

As the Roman troops left [Britain], then began the invasions of the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes from northern Europe, who fought with the Romanized Celts. ... for control of the islands. It's in the context of these battles that the name "Arthur" first appears in the records, as a war lord ... leading his people against the invading Germanic peoples.

The King Arthur story seems to have originated with the Celts, who moved into central and western Europe in large numbers in about 500 B.C.E. The Celts in the British islands were invaded by Romans and, later, Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. It is in the context of these later invasions that the name Arthur first appears in records. Later Christian stories of the search for the Holy Grail were integrated into the original pagan version to transform Arthur into the ideal Christian king. The classical apotheosis of the story in this form is Thomas Malory's *Morte Darthur*, published in 1485.

In Malory's version, Arthur is the son of Uther Pendragon, king of the Britons, by Igraine, wife of the duke of Cornwall. Arthur is spirited away by the magician Merlin as soon as he is born, and his father dies two years later, throwing the country into civil war. Arthur is raised by Sir Ector, and when

he is about 15, in the famous episode of the sword in the stone, he becomes king of the Britons. In a long series of battles, Arthur ends the civil wars, then creates the Round Table, whose members are to embody the noblest ideals of chivalry.

The French added the Lancelot episodes to the story, leading to the famous love triangle of Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot and the split of the Round Table into factions. When war breaks out between Arthur and Lancelot, Arthur's child, Mordred, seizes Guinevere and the throne. Meanwhile, most of the Knights of the Round Table set off in a quest for the Holy Grail.

The Grail story itself seems to have been considerably older than the coming of Christianity to Britain.

Galahad, the son of Lancelot, finally achieves the Grail. In a last battle between Arthur and Mordred, both are killed. Just before he dies, Arthur boards a mysterious ship that carries him off to Avalon, from whence he will one day return in an hour of utmost need for his country.

The story is a treasure trove of motifs from the monomyth. The Grail, for example, is a perfect object for a heroic quest, and individual knights go through the individual steps of the hero: being summoned, receiving supernatural aid, crossing various thresholds, confronting monsters and temptations, and finally achieving the boon that can cure a blighted kingdom. Arthur's own story also incorporates many of the elements of the monomyth: the miraculous conception, the threats from the guardians of the realm, his exploits as a young man, a lifetime of heroic achievements, and an apotheosis at the end when he sails to Avalon.



King Arthur, legendary king of the Britons.

There are many possible readings of the Arthur myths, of which we mention two. Since the addition of Lancelot to the story, most versions have focused on the love triangle of Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot, which may diminish the story mythically and make it more human but has proven an irresistible lure for many reworkings of the tale. The myth also solved a problem for the Britons, who in the long run lost their battles with the Angles and Saxons (and much of their kingdom), despite the heroic efforts of Arthur and his knights to stave off defeat. Arthur's premature death enables him to be the perfect hero and still allows history to happen as it did. ■

Suggested Reading

Matthews, *King Arthur and the Grail Quest*.

Snyder, *The World of King Arthur*.

Vanaver, ed., *King Arthur and His Knights*.

Questions to Consider

1. The motif of pulling a sword out of a stone to establish one's identity and authority is a recurring one in mythology. You can find it in the Greek myth of Theseus and the Germanic one of Sigmund. What is the metaphoric meaning of the gesture? What are the meanings of its symbols?
2. What does an apotheosis like Arthur's at the end of the story contribute to his myth? (It is a motif that likewise appears in other myths.) How is it related to the hero's miraculous conception or birth?

Mythic Heroes—Jason and the Argonauts

Lecture 24

The first thing to notice about Jason is that if he's not quite a second-rate hero, he's at least a somewhat tarnished one. ... The credit really belongs more to Medea than it does to Jason. He couldn't have achieved any of this without her.

The myth of Jason and the Argonauts illustrates both our developing idea of the monomyth and some themes of our unit on the great goddess. The version of the myth that we know is by Apollonius of Rhodes in the 3rd century B.C.E.

The background for this story begins when Pelias usurps the throne of Iolcus from his brother, Aeson. After the deposition, Aeson's wife gives birth to a son, Jason, who is raised by Cheiron, the centaur. When Jason is 20, he returns to Iolcus to claim his father's kingdom. Pelias sends him on a quest to Colchis to retrieve the Golden Fleece.

Jason contracts with Argus to build a great ship, which he mans with an all-star crew. They have numerous adventures on their voyage before they arrive at Colchis. There, with the help of Medea, Jason captures the Golden



The Argonauts finding the Golden Fleece.

Fleece. Jason, *Medea*, and the Argonauts escape Colchis, and Jason and Medea wind up in Corinth. From the play "*Medea*" by Euripides, we know that Jason is then offered the hand of a Corinthian princess, which he accepts. (As an alien, Medea cannot be a legal wife.) Medea retaliates

by killing the princess, her father, and the two sons she shares with Jason, then escaping to Athens. Jason later dies when a rotting spar from the Argos falls on him.

In some ways, Jason is a second-rate hero; most of his important deeds are either performed by one of his crew or assisted by Medea. Despite this, Jason's mythical career conforms closely to the structure of the monomyth. A father-figure (Pelias) tries to kill him when he is a child. Later, he accepts Pelias's challenge to recapture the Golden Fleece in exchange for his rightful kingship. On his journey, he meets all of the threshold guardians—giants, dragons, and evil kings—although most of these are managed by his crew. He returns to his community with a boon (the Fleece and the restoration of the rightful king), but the return in this poem is treated ironically. The boon is not accepted by the people of Iolchus, and Medea's further intervention causes Jason and herself to be banished. Far from achieving an apotheosis, Jason spends his later life wandering through the beached wreck of his ship until a rotting spar falls on him and kills him. The most famous version of the poem was written in the 3rd century B.C.E., which was itself a slightly ironic age: Greeks ruled most of the known world, and they mostly hired mercenaries to do their fighting; thus, that Jason was more a CEO than a hero himself might have seemed appropriate.

In the story of Medea, the myth also illustrates some of the ways in which the goddess was downgraded. Medea's supernatural powers suggest that she may have been a goddess herself in earlier times. Young men might have competed for the right to become her consort by wrestling with a bull or plowing a field—precisely the tasks that Jason is set in Colchis. Even Medea's cutting Jason into pieces, then revitalizing him might have analogues in the kinds of rituals described by Frazer in *The Golden Bough*. Her expulsion from Corinth illustrates the now-greater control of the sun god, Helios. ■

It's a really ironic ending; but the text comes pretty late in Greek history, which may have been a pretty ironic age itself.

Suggested Reading

Euripides, *Mèdeia*. Euripides.

Green, trans., *Apollonius Rhodius: "Argonautika."*

Rosenberg, *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*.

Questions to Consider

1. Who finally is more responsible for Jason's success in capturing the Fleece—Jason or Medea? What kind of hero is each of them?
2. If you have not yet read Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, now might be a good time to find a copy and read some of his accounts of the vegetation rituals that stand behind or correlate with so many myths. An abridged version of the massive work is available, edited by Theodor H. Gaster (New York: Mentor, 1959). Particularly for this lecture, it would be helpful to read enough of the rituals to understand and think about the ways in which Rosenberg sees them lying behind the Medea parts of Jason's quest.

The Monomyths of Rank and Campbell

Lecture 25

When we make up these stories, we always do so in the third person, says Rank, so they're about somebody else; but by identifying with a hero, the mythmaker vicariously enjoys the hero's triumph, which is in fact his own. The self is thus always the real hero of the myth for Rank, and the heroic story usually ends with the attainment of a throne.

Otto Rank's monomyth is based on his concept of "family romance" and deals with the first half of life: birth, childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. The tasks of this phase of life imply separation from parents and mastery of one's instincts. The underlying motives are based on the (Freudian) Oedipal conflict, which is too horrid to face directly and, thus, is deflected into myth, in which the hero is an innocent victim and the incestuous drive is masked as a drive for power.

Joseph Campbell is more Jungian than Freudian, and his monomyth begins with the second half of life. For Jung, the goal of the first half of life is to forge consciousness; the goal of the second is to make a connection with the unconscious. Campbell's monomyth begins when an adult is called to action. When the call comes, the hero must be prepared to leave the comfortable

external world and confront the unconscious from which he has become separated. He ventures into a new world, has relations with a goddess (and may marry her), and defeats a male god. In the process, the hero becomes mystically one with the gods and, therefore, divine himself.

For Campbell, the basic pattern of the monomyth is a magnification of the formula of all rites of passage: separation, initiation, and return. The adventure begins with a call from another world, which shifts the center of gravity from the familiar world to an unknown zone. The hero usually encounters a supernatural protective figure, generated from within, to provide assurance

The adventure, for Campbell, always begins with a call from the other world; this is the world of the hero's own unconscious.

that all the forces of the hero's unconscious and of nature are on his side. Then comes the crossing of the first threshold, usually guarded. The ogres on the boundaries are the limits of the hero's current sphere, and beyond them is the unknown. In many adventures, the hero is swallowed at this point in a symbolic death and reentry to the world womb. Here, the amulets provided by the supernatural helper come into play. The hero is always entering his own spiritual labyrinth, and the figures he meets are symbolic figures of his own consciousness.

The meeting with the goddess is the ultimate adventure for the hero; she is his **anima**, his feminine side, and in connecting with her, he connects with the deepest core of his own being. If the hero is prepared, he can lay aside his infantile remembrances of his mother and see her as the totality of what can be known. If he possesses her sexually, which he frequently does, he assumes his father's place, not by rejecting the female part of himself but by embracing it and, thereby, becoming king of the world.

Next comes "at-one-ment" with the father, a passage into the adult world of action but purged of infantile responses. Becoming one with the father is also becoming one with the mother, because they are aspects of each other. The journey into the unconscious is now nearly complete. After the apotheosis and the ultimate boon, the hero returns to his normal world, which can be the most difficult step of all. Only those who have extinguished their personal wills and are open to things larger than the self will share the hero's awareness of the simultaneous existence of two worlds. ■

Names to Know

Caridwen: Welsh goddess of grain and fertility, she plays a large part in Gwion Bach's myth.

Gwion Bach: Welsh hero whose story as told by Joseph Campbell.

Taliesen: Welsh prophet and poet, who is the reborn Gwion Bach (see above).

Important Term

anima: In Jungian psychology, the female part of the male unconscious.

Suggested Reading

Campbell, *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*.

Segal, “Heroes” entry in *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

Questions to Consider

1. Either from what you have learned from these lectures or from your own reading, do the monomyths of Otto Rank and Joseph Campbell seem compatible with each other (Rank’s covering the first half of life; Campbell’s, the second, for example), or do they work with assumptions and principles that are mutually exclusive? Do we have to choose between them?
2. In question 2 for Lecture 2, you were asked to try to determine your own inclinations about the plausibility, viability, and usefulness of the concept of the monomyth. Now that you have more information about that concept, this would be a good time to revisit that question. What do you think of the idea of the monomyth now?

Mythic Heroes—Mwindo

Lecture 26

The Mwindo story has been passed down orally for many generations, so it's still a living myth. ... The differences among the four versions are instructive. All four have the same basic narrative, but there are some significant differences as well; and what those differences remind us is that when a myth is still alive, it has no definitive shape or structure.

The Nyanga people are from central Africa, in eastern Zaire, and their myth of Mwindo has been passed down orally for many years; it is still a living and developing myth, as witnessed by the four versions recorded by Daniel Beibuyck.

The chief of the village of Tubondo marries seven wives but promises to kill any sons that they bear. Nonetheless, one son, Mwindo, is born from his mother's middle finger. At birth, he is able to speak and laugh and has special possessions: a conga-scepter, an adze, and a bag containing a magic rope. His father tries repeatedly to kill the infant but is foiled each time. Mwindo eventually escapes to join his paternal aunt in a nearby village. After a series of perilous adventures and tests, the aunt accepts the infant and agrees to travel back to his village to sort things out with his father. After an initial defeat, Mwindo, with the help of Lightning, destroys his village, but his father escapes into the underworld. Mwindo pursues him, overcoming a series of opponents and eventually bringing his father back to the home village. Mwindo asks the village council to divide his father's kingdom in half.

He begins full of confidence—he's always been full of confidence—but at the end of the year, he's been reduced to being a passive sufferer.

Before he can begin his reign, Mwindo is sent on a year-long journey of suffering and deprivation into the heavens, where he endures great heat, cold, and thirst. In the process, he is taught that his heroism counts for nothing there. He is

finally sent back home a changed man, charged with creating a truly ordered, civilized life in his kingdom.

The first part of the poem clearly illustrates Rank's monomyth. Mwindo's special birth announces him as an extraordinary person, and he is savagely persecuted by his father as an infant. His aunt—a surrogate mother in Nyanga culture—protects him from his father in a classic instance of the "family romance." Mwindo defeats his father, then pursues him into the underworld, eventually bringing him home so that he can claim a kingdom that is rightfully his. Along the way, according to the terms of Campbell's monomyth, Mwindo leaves the everyday world of his father to enter the world of the unconscious, where he shows his readiness for the journey by being invulnerable to the many attacks made upon him by denizens of the dark. Still, the first part of the poem seems more illuminated by Rank's theory, in which the son, rejected by the father at birth, grows up to defeat him and take his place.

The second part of the myth corresponds more closely to Campbell's paradigm. Mwindo's call to adventure occurs when he personally goes out to hunt the dragon, a practice forbidden to chiefs of the Nyanga. Beyond the safe confines of the village, he encounters many threshold guardians, and in dealing with them, he leaves his ego behind, opening himself to possibilities that lie beyond the ego and consciousness. In his adventures in the sky, Mwindo dies as a warrior but is reborn as a great ruler who brings home a rich boon to his people. Based on the visions he has experienced in the sky, Mwindo institutes a new age of peace and prosperity in his kingdom. ■

Names to Know

Muisa: Lord of the underworld in the Mwindo epic. Kahindo, who helps Mwindo, is his daughter.

Ntumba the Aardvark: He lives in the underworld in the *Epic of Mwindo*.

Sheburungu: God of fire and denizen of the underworld in the *Epic of Mwindo*.

Shemwindo: Chief of the village and Mwindo's father in the *Epic of Mwindo*.

Suggested Reading

Biebuyck, *The Mwindo Epic*.

Ford, *The Hero With an African Face*.

Questions to Consider

1. Being reborn is part of every hero's journey; the rebirth may be preceded by death, literal or symbolic. Mwindo goes through a series of deaths and rebirths in his epic. What are they, and in each instance, to what does he die and to what is he reborn?
2. According to Daniel Biebuyck's notes, the listeners at the oral performance he records were made uneasy by Mwindo's arrogant boasting at the poem's beginning but warmly endorsed him by poem's end. The same pattern is evident in the story of Gilgamesh (Lecture 22), where his subjects complain bitterly about him at the outset but seem to recognize him as a good king (or at least the poet does) by the end. How far can these parallels be pushed? What are the similarities and differences between the rulers' failings early on and their achievements of mature rulership at the end?

Female Heroes—Demeter and Hester Prynne

Lecture 27

Men have been expected to be individualists, creating their own paths, developing themselves in personal ways. Women were understood either as temptresses, femme fatales, or helpmeets. ... The implication for much of history, unfortunately, has been that independent women were thought of as villains, not as heroes, and they were punished for their presumption.

Both of the paradigmatic monomyths we have considered in this unit—and most of the world's myths—assume a male hero, with females showing up in supporting roles. But since both Jung and Campbell consider the final achieved state of the hero as a blending of male and female characteristics, female heroes are theoretically possible. We can see what a female hero might look like by considering two of them who have survived the patriarchal rewriting of history and mythology.

Our own age has produced a lot of female heroes, especially in literature and especially that in the novel.

One of these is Demeter, goddess of grain and the mother (by Zeus) of Persephone, who is abducted by Hades. Demeter was at one time probably a goddess with two aspects: mother and maid, both producing the harvest and reappearing as a maiden in the spring. Later, she was divided into a mother-daughter dyad, with Persephone taking on the maid's role. Her myth is replete with goddesses, all of whom support one another and transform their grief into good for the community.

During the year that Demeter mourns her daughter, all crops fail. Zeus sends ambassadors to try to placate Demeter, but she remains unmoved. Finally, a compromise is reached: Persephone will spend six months of each year with her mother (spring and summer) and six months with her husband (winter). Demeter gives the gift of agriculture to humans and the Eleusinian mysteries to all initiates, offering them, through the "death" of her daughter, a chance at eternal life.

This myth is centered not on an individualistic hero, as male myths are, but on the dyad of mother and daughter, standing in opposition to the inflexibilities of male governance. Surrounding the dyad are other mothers and daughters—women whose concerns are always communal rather than individualistic. Demeter never leaves her community, and she does not challenge authority; she simply reacts to injustice in a positive way, without aggrandizing herself or bringing others into submission. The tribe is the beneficiary of Demeter’s grief, receiving the gifts of agriculture and the Eleusinian mysteries.

With her daughter, Pearl, Hester Prynne, from Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*, stands in precise parallel with Demeter and Persephone. Hester bears a child out of wedlock in 17th-century Boston and is forced to wear a scarlet letter A to tell the world that she is an adulteress. Years after she finally leaves Boston, she returns and becomes known for her charitable work.



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Demeter, Greek goddess of grain and fertility.

In many ways, Hester’s heroic journey corresponds to those of male heroes, but it has some uniquely female characteristics. Hester does not choose the way in which the call for adventure comes,

but she achieves her heroic status while standing for hours on a scaffold in Boston, emerging from her own inner journey with the knowledge that she must commit herself to the life-affirming act that generated Pearl and to Pearl herself. This is the boon she brings back to her community from her call, isolation, and journey into her own unconscious. Like Demeter and Persephone, Hester and Pearl are the dyad at the center of the story. And like Demeter, Hester accepts her position outside her society without standing in radical opposition to it. She becomes a ministering angel, her heroism expressing itself in communal gestures rather than individualistic ones. ■

Suggested Reading

Foley, trans. and ed., *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*.

Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*.

Powers, *The Heroine in Western Literature*.

Questions to Consider

1. Based on our analysis of Demeter and Hester Prynne, what differences do you see between male and female heroes? Assuming that you see a difference, how and in what terms would you account for it?
2. If you matched Demeter and Hester Prynne against either the Rank or Campbell monomyth, how do they measure up? Do they look like “universal” heroes? Do they illustrate the paradigm, or are they different enough that the templates themselves have to be modified to account for female heroes?

Female Heroes—Psyche and Beauty

Lecture 28

This is sometimes called a “myth,” but it probably strikes you more as a fairytale than a myth. The two genres have a lot in common; they’re maybe like first cousins: Both of them come from the oral tradition, both of them share qualities that we expect from that tradition. ... Both are, for psychologists at any rate, “collective dreams.”

The stories of “Cupid and Psyche” and “Beauty and the Beast” are probably more fairytales than myths, but they share some mythical elements and offer us another chance to consider the female hero.

The myth of Cupid and Psyche is found in Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses, or The Golden Ass*, from the 2nd century C.E. In it, the beautiful Psyche begins to attract worship and cult away from Venus. The goddess tells her son, Cupid, to make Psyche fall in love with the ugliest creature he can find. However, Cupid himself becomes Psyche’s husband, although she is never allowed to see him. When she discovers his identity, he abandons her and returns to his mother. Venus vows revenge on Psyche, giving the princess a series of impossible tasks. With supernatural help, Psyche manages to fulfill the tasks, but at the conclusion of the last one, she has been cast into such a sound sleep that she might well be dead. She is rescued by Cupid, who convinces Jupiter to grant her immortality. Venus is placated, Cupid and Psyche are married, and she eventually gives birth to a daughter, Voluptas, meaning either “joy” or “pleasure.”

This is probably more a fairytale than a myth, but the two genres are related. Both come from the oral tradition, and both Freud and Jung thought that the same methods of analysis could be used for both. Whether myth or fairytale, the story illustrates Campbell’s paradigm of the monomyth, complete with the call to adventure, the crossing of a threshold into a new world, adventures that suggest throwing light on the dark places in the unconscious, a death and rebirth, and a return with a boon. But Psyche’s achievements are nevertheless those of a female hero: No monsters are killed, and the ultimate goal of the adventure is not individuation but a communal reunion.

The myth equally illustrates Rank's Freudian "family romance." The story belongs to a fairytale subgenre of "animal grooms," in which brides who initially see their husbands as bestial and loathsome come to accept them and, in the process, turn the beast into a man. The ease with which Psyche is talked by her sisters into believing her husband is a



A statue of Eros, Cupid's Greek counterpart.

monster suggests the fears a young girl might have on entering marriage, particularly with a man she does not know well. When Cupid abandons her, Psyche attempts suicide, but during the course of her adventures, she learns to combine her new psychic awareness with adult sexuality. Venus also seems to come out of Rank's family romance: She begins by virtually seducing her son to get him to eliminate a dangerous rival for his affections, then reacts with rage when she finds that her son has chosen to marry the rival. Psyche's adventure turns out to be a growing experience for Cupid as well, who outgrows the Oedipal connection with his mother.

"Beauty and the Beast" is a modern version of the same tale. In this story, Beauty winds up in the Beast's castle out of love for and in order to save her father. Over the course of the tale, she manages to transfer her love for her father to the Beast, while at the same time changing him into a prince, suggesting symbolically her acceptance of adult sexuality. ■

That the marriage to the monster is celebrated as a funeral, not as a marriage, suggests that this is a rite of passage.

Name to Know

Kama: In Hindu mythology, the god of desire and so, roughly, the equivalent of Eros and Cupid.

Suggested Reading

Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment*.

Lindsay, Jack, trans. *Apuleius: The Golden Ass*.

Questions to Consider

1. According to Bettelheim, “The Frog Prince/King” belongs to the same genre of tales as “Cupid and Psyche.” We did a brief start on an analysis of the Frog Prince story—using Campbell’s terms—in Lecture 25. Find a copy of the story and finish the analysis, either in Campbell’s terms or (if you have modified the paradigm to account for a female hero) your own.
2. Using Freud’s and Jung’s idea that a tale can yield diverse symbolic readings based on which character we take as central, could the story of Cupid and Psyche be analyzed as Venus’s story? Does she grow and change in the course of it? If so, in what precise ways?

The Trickster in Mythology

Lecture 29

A trickster is almost always an apparently low character who outwits the high and the mighty; but in the process, he frequently overreaches himself and outwits himself, and gets caught in his own traps. ... In the Old World, the trickster is usually a human figure, maybe even a god or a giant. But in the New World and Africa, the trickster is usually associated with an animal that can assume human form.

The trickster is always on the move and is associated with doorways, crossroads, and boundary markers. He is frequently a messenger between heaven, earth, and the underworld. He is motivated by his appetites for food and sex, which he attempts to satisfy through deceit rather than hard work. His tricks often succeed, but the trickster is also frequently a buffoon, overreaching and getting caught in his own schemes. Further, he is a culture hero, assisting in creation or organizing the elements of creation into forms—either positive or negative—that define how humans live.

All these qualities are illustrated by the trickster cycle of the Winnebago people, which begins with the trickster violating taboos involved with going on the warpath. In a series of adventures, he causes harm to himself (eating part of his own intestines, consuming a laxative plant, and so on) and fails to duplicate the hunting techniques of other animals but gets his family fed anyway. At the end of the cycle, he gives over his mischief and clears the Mississippi of obstacles, then apparently goes to heaven.

Paul Radin, who collected this cycle, sees it as a fable about the first half of life, in which an infantile being gradually becomes a socially responsible one. Other scholars disagree with Radin. Some have pointed out that whatever he does, the trickster is an endearing character:

The cycle is a fable or a parable about the first half of life, in which an infantile character becomes a socially responsible being.

Parents tell their children trickster stories without moralizing them. The trickster might also represent infantile aspects of the self that are repressed but never overcome. Others have suggested that the trickster represents a delicate balancing act between creativity and destructiveness, making him both a revolutionary and a cultural savior. Still others—notably the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss—have argued that the trickster is a mediator between mutually incompatible positions: He can indulge his appetites without damaging the social fabric, allowing us to have our cake and eat it, too. It has also been suggested that he breaks down and intermingles all categories, creating new combinations, like a court jester or clown.

It has further been argued that in every culture, the trickster represents a liminal state—between here and there, right and wrong, culturally approved and disapproved. The trickster can break or invert social rules, mistreat guests, have sexual relations with taboo relatives, and defy sacred authority in order to move all those boundaries for his entire culture. Beyond all that, the trickster always teaches that no social order is absolute and objective. The anomalous is always excluded in classifying systems, and the trickster works in spaces between categories: male and female, good and evil, approved and disapproved, re-creating culture in the process. ■

Name to Know

Wakdjunkaga: The name of the trickster in the Winnebago cycle. His name means something like “the tricky one.”

Suggested Reading

Hynes and Doty, eds., *Mythical Trickster Figures*.

Radin, *The Trickster*.

Questions to Consider

1. If you know any stories about Till Eulenspiegel, Reynard the Fox, Rabelais's Gargantua and Pantagruel, or even Toad of Toad Hall, you already know something about the nature and character of the trickster. Based on these figures (or others that you can think of), how would you describe him?
2. Review the definitions and discussions of "culture hero" in earlier lectures and units. Who were the culture heroes we treated, and what kinds of contributions did they make to human life? What are some important differences between those culture heroes and the trickster, and how do those differences help us to see how the combination of trickster and culture hero should have elicited so many different kinds of explanation?

Tricksters from around the World

Lecture 30

The trickster qualities of Hermes in this story are clear in the way that he actually tricks his way into the pantheon; and he does, as we mentioned last time, what tricksters always do: brings something from outside into a stable culture. Here, he becomes part of that culture himself; he is what he brings from outside.

Hermes is the classical trickster: a guardian of doorways, god of luck (both good and bad), patron of thieves, a messenger god and transporter of souls to (and sometimes from) Hades, and a god of the marketplace and of language. He is the son of Zeus and Maia, but he has to trick his way into the Greek pantheon, which he does by inventing the lyre, stealing the cattle of Apollo, then braving it out before Apollo and his father, Zeus. Like all tricksters, Hermes brings something new into a stable culture and, in the process, changes that culture. In his case, he brings in himself.



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Hermes, a Greek god who sometimes played the role of trickster.

Enki is the Sumerian trickster god and a culture hero who provides many of the gifts of civilization to his people. He saves humankind from the flood by whispering a warning to the walls of Utnapishtim's house, then having the house convey the information to Utnapishtim. Like Hermes and other tricksters, Enki lives in the liminal state between categories, managing to confuse them by being located between them.

The mischief of Loki, from Norse mythology, ranges from the merely irritating to the disastrous. In one story, he carries off Idunn, the goddess who tends the apple trees of immortality in Asgard, making the apples available to the giants who are walled off from Asgard. He is also responsible for the death of Baldr, fairest of all the gods; when the other gods try to recover Baldr from Hel, Loki makes sure that Baldr stays dead. Loki, like other tricksters, lives on the borders between categories, and he disrupts the gods' efforts to keep Asgard pure, pristine, and changeless. In doing so, he helps to bring about the world's doom but also keeps Asgard from ossifying, from dying of its own purity and perfection.

Ma-ui is a trickster god from Hawaii who is credited with seven feats of cultural heroism, including bringing fire from the underworld to humans. Ma-ui wins away the wife of Great Eel Tuna, whom he kills (from the eel's head emerges the first coconut tree), and he invents harpoons, fish hooks, and fish nets. But he also introduces death into the world—or at least prevents humans from being immortal. His resume further includes having sex with his mother, killing many of his uncles, and playing tricks on the gods.

All cultures define themselves in ways that exclude some things and include others.

The trickster is always an odd combination of violator of taboos and culture hero. All cultures define themselves partly by what they exclude; thus, all cultures have garbage heaps outside the city walls for things they cannot use. The trickster lives on those walls, always confusing boundaries and categories and bringing material from one side of the wall to the other in a way that modifies both sides. He does this not because he is either benevolent or malicious, but because he is simply unconstrained by the rules and conventions that bind everyone else. It is perhaps part of the point of these myths that it is better to tolerate the trickster than to attempt to confine him or eliminate him. As the Norse myth has it, a society without a trickster ossifies into stagnation, death, and doom, while cultures that accept him can continue to change and grow. ■

Names to Know

Baldr (Balder): Son of Odin and Frigg, he is the most beautiful and best of the Norse gods. His death begins the chain of events that leads to Ragnarok.

Idunn (Idun): The Norse goddess who protects the golden apples of youth in Asgard.

Ma-ui (Maui): Trickster and culture hero of the peoples of Oceania.

Suggested Reading

Colum, *Tales and Legends of Hawaii*.

Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*.

Young, trans., *Snorri Sturluson*.

Questions to Consider

1. What is emerging from our trickster unit so far is the idea that all cultures and institutions need to be revitalized and re-created by material from outside—from what we've been calling (following Hyde's *Trickster Makes This World*) the garbage heap outside the town walls. Think of some examples from your own life or times in which forbidden or rejected material was brought inside the walls and revitalized everything within. Hyde, for example, cites Marcel Duchamp and his "ready-made" art, including a urinal displayed as a work of art in a museum, which forever changed the definition of "art" in our world.
2. Ma-ui is a particularly rich example of the odd combination of trickster and culture hero. Hunt up as many Ma-ui myths as you can find, then use them to create a full (and enigmatic) portrait of the trickster.

Native American Tricksters

Lecture 31

The first thing to notice about all of these creatures chosen as tricksters in Native American mythology is they tend to be loners, or at most they live in pairs rather than more gregarious groupings. ... All the animals chosen are solitary, they work outside of groups. Each one also has a special attribute or skill that helps in the trickster role.

In the Old World, tricksters usually have human shapes, but in the New World, they are animals, have animal names, or are associated with animals. In various parts of the continent, the trickster is Raven, Mink, Blue Jay, Coyote, Hare, or Spider. In myths, he can appear either as human or animal; sometimes, it is difficult to tell which he is, and it finally seems not to make much difference in the story. Most of the animals associated with the trickster are loners, and most have some special skill that fits them for their roles; for example, spiders can spin webs out of their bodies.

Spider is the trickster of the Lakota and Dakota peoples. Like all tricksters, he is a culture hero, and he lives by his wits. In one story, told primarily for comedy, Iktome of the Brule Sioux arranges to sleep with a young maiden but winds up sleeping with his wife instead. In the morning, his wife has her revenge for the unflattering things he said about her the night before.

The combination of culture hero and taboo-breaker has been of concern to some scholars. Laura Makarius, in a 1969 essay, attempts to show that the two aspects are sides of the same coin. She notes that among many peoples, blood taboos are the ones that contain the most power—for good and ill—and that in times of crisis, peoples deliberately violate blood taboos to have access to that power. For Makarius, a trickster is one who acquires the power that makes him a culture hero through violation of blood taboos. She cites the

The reason why these are taboo is the violation of a taboo releases a terrible power—which can be both positive and negative.

Algonquin trickster Manabozo, who commits incest with a sister and chooses his wife in the menstrual tent, among other violations; each violation gives him access to some power—as hunter, inventor of medicines, and creator of his people’s ceremonial life.

Some scholars, notably Eliade, have seen the trickster as a descendent of the shaman, downgraded in myth as shamans became less important but still surviving as troublemakers or as the *kachinas* of such people as the Hopi, Zuni, and Pueblo. This might make the trickster figure the oldest human conception of God.

Two of the most important embodiments of the trickster in Native American mythology are Raven and Coyote. Raven appears in myths from the eastern edges of Alaska and Canada, California, and parts of Asia from which Native Americans most likely emigrated. For all these peoples, he is a culture hero, sometimes rebuilding the world after a great flood, creating tools, or passing on useful skills. In one of his most famous trickster exploits, Raven steals the sun from the figure who hoards it and brings light to earth. Here, Raven does what tricksters always do: He finds holes in the boundaries that divide one thing from another and slips through them, bringing something back from one side to the other.

Coyote, like other tricksters, is both culture hero and buffoon. He is a god-like creator, bringer of light and fire, monster-slayer, and creator of cultural roles for men and women; he is also frequently responsible for the coming of death into the world. And he is always a thief, a cheat, and a lecher. ■

Important Term

kachinas: Spirits of nature who can produce rain and spirits of dead ancestors of the Pueblo and Hopi. They visit villages, where they are impersonated by masked dancers.

Suggested Reading

Erdoes and Ortiz, *American Indian Myths and Legends*.

Makarius, “The Myth of the Trickster: The Necessary Breaker of Taboos.” *Mythical Trickster Figures*.

Reid and Bringhurst, *The Raven Steals the Light*.

Zolbrod, *Diné bahanè*.

Questions to Consider

1. The fact that so many Native American (and African) tricksters are associated with animals makes them different from the more humanlike tricksters of the Old World (e.g., Hermes, Enki, Loki). How so? In what ways does the association with animals make these tricksters different? What do the animal associations contribute to the character of the trickster?
2. Makarius’s essay suggests that the link between trickster and culture hero is the violation of taboos. Review the Winnebago trickster cycle we discussed in Lecture 29 and decide how well her hypothesis works in terms of that body of trickster myths.

African Tricksters

Lecture 32

African tricksters are culture heroes; they do contribute a great deal to their cultures. ... Like other tricksters, they don't do this from altruism but from whim, from impulse; they just do what they do because that's the way they are. Some people have even suggested that the African trickster is willing to help others just to show what a big shot he is.

African tricksters appear most often in animal form, with Spider, Hare, Tortoise, and Jackal as some of the favorites. Sex is a lesser motivation for the African than for the Native American trickster, and he more frequently serves as an intermediary between humans and one or more sky gods. In other respects, he resembles his counterparts in other cultures, serving as both culture hero and buffoon.

Some scholars have found a somewhat greater emphasis in African trickster myths on validating religious, social, and moral concepts by having the trickster violate them and be punished for doing so. The idea is that allegiance to cultural codes is strengthened by submitting it to critical scrutiny. Scholars have also seen, in African trickster tales, the pattern of an initiation ritual, with separation, occupation of a liminal state, and a return to the social order with a new identity. The liminal state almost always occurs in nature, away from cultural definitions, and features animals and birds, temporarily snuffing out structured social life. The fact that so many African tricksters appear as animals or birds suggests this liminal state and, likewise, the idea that nature plays an important part in both ritual and myth. At the end of most trickster stories, the trickster becomes a culture hero and re-creates the world, just as initiation ceremonies end with a return to structured society with new roles and responsibilities. The liminality made available by the trickster loosens the cultural structure to create it in a different way.

The Yoruba people have a myth about one of their tricksters, **Àjàpá** the Tortoise, that is less about him as a cultural hero than as one who gets tripped up by overreaching. His friend **Ajá** the Dog, having fallen on hard times, keeps his family alive by stealing yams from rich farmers—just enough to

feed his family without causing the farmers to bother with trying to find the culprit. Àjàpá accompanies Dog on one of his raids but steals so many yams that he is caught trying to escape. When taken before the chief, Àjàpá tries to blame Dog. The Yoruba admire resourcefulness in a hard world, but Àjàpá is judged here for his greed and lack of reciprocity.

Three myths about Ananse (Spider) are more complicated. In the first, Ananse appropriates to himself all of the sky god's stories by performing four seemingly impossible tasks—all of which he achieves through tricks. In the second, the sky god, **Wulburi**, seeking to puncture Ananse's inflated ego, tells him to fetch him something, without specifying what that something is. Through a series of tricks, Ananse finds that the something he is to fetch includes the sun, moon, and darkness, which he succeeds in doing and, in the process, brings the sun, moon, and blindness into the world. In the third myth, Ananse outsmarts a man called Hate-to-Be-Contradicted. At the story's end, he and his children kill Hate-to-Be-Contradicted, cut him into pieces, and scatter the pieces, bringing contradiction, disorder, and confusion into human life. Especially in this final myth, we see that Ananse brings into a settled and stable community something from the dust bin on the other side of the fence, unsettling the community and forcing it to re-create itself. ■

Like so many tricksters, he always carries his schemes beyond the point of need, and in doing so he trips himself up.

Names to Know

Ajá: The Dog in the Yoruba Tortoise trickster tale.

Àjàpá: Tortoise trickster of the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin.

Ajeolele: The lucky traveler in the Ifa divination story.

Wulburi: A sky god of the Krachi people of Africa.

Suggested Reading

Owomoyela, *Yoruba Trickster Tales*.

Pelton, *The Trickster in West Africa*.

Radin, *African Folktales*.

Questions to Consider

1. In terms of the trickster myths we have looked at so far, what do you think of Vecsey's theory about the myths being used to reinforce cultural rules by subjecting them to critical scrutiny? In other words, are trickster myths ultimately subversive or ultimately reinforcing of cultural rules and conventions? Or, in some odd way, are they both?
2. The Ananse myth involving Hate-to-Be-Contradicted includes many of the functions of the trickster discussed in Lecture 30 and featured in the first question of that lecture. How does this story in fact illustrate one of the most important functions of the trickster for institutions and cultures?

Mythic Tricksters—Eshu and Legba

Lecture 33

So [Eshu] is a real trickster. But he's also—as almost all tricksters are—a culture hero, responsible for one of the greatest gifts of the Yoruba, the art of divination; of being able to read the will of the gods for us so that we know what the gods have in mind for us so we can direct our courses accordingly.

Eshu and Legba are two important African tricksters. Both are gods themselves or closely related to gods, both appear in more or less human shape, and both serve as intermediaries between humans and gods.

Eshu is a trickster of the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria who loves stirring up trouble among humans. In a famous myth, he gets two farmers who are close friends to quarrel so vehemently that they must take their case to the chief for arbitration. Eshu shows up to confess that he is the cause of the quarrel and is pursued by the chief's officers; he runs away, lighting houses on fire, then randomly distributing the goods saved from the fire to passers-by. But he also brings the art of divination to humans as a way of getting humans to resume their sacrifices to the gods in a quid pro quo that is useful to everyone: Humans can learn some of the gods' secrets, and the gods get to eat again.

Legba is the trickster of the Fon of Benin and is very like Eshu; the two may, in fact, be culturally deflected versions of the same figure. Legba is the son of the great goddess **Mawu**, and for a long time, he faithfully carries out her instructions, but he notices that she gets the praise for all the good things that happen, while he always takes the blame for the bad. He plays a trick on his mother that humiliates her, and she withdraws a short distance from earth. Later, Legba manages to get Mawu to move far away into the sky, leaving Legba as a mediator between earth and the world of the gods. In another story, Legba has six brothers, each with a specific domain: earth, sky, the seas, animals, the hunt, and iron. All six speak languages specific to

their realms and, hence, cannot communicate with each other or with their mother. Thus, all communication must pass through Legba.

Eshu and Legba are both wanderers, living in spaces between things; their special areas are crossroads, thresholds, and boundaries. They likewise live on moral boundaries, and both violate serious taboos of their people. In one myth, Eshu slips the creator god enough palm wine to cause the creation of cripples, albinos, and other misshapen creatures.

As we've seen, the trickster is perhaps essential for keeping a culture vital, healthy, and growing. Cultures that are not disturbed in any way tend to grow so pure and rigid that they die. Another way of saying this is that the trickster brings chance into places that have tried to rule it out. Divination should allow humans to know the will of the gods, but when a trickster is the voice of the oracle, chance is reintroduced even into this procedure. Tricksters unsettle places and shake them up, finding openings between worlds and passing back and forth between them. In a psychological reading, the trickster lives inside each of us, on the boundaries between wakefulness and dreaming, between the conscious and the unconscious. His functions are the same as they are for cultures, but the dust bins are now inside ourselves rather than outside the village walls. ■

As we've seen so often, language turns out to be one of the trickster's specialties.

Names to Know

Ifa: The god of prophetic powers for the Yoruba of West Africa, whose will is revealed in divination.

Mawu: The female aspect of the creator deity for the Fon of Benin. She is the mother of Legba.

Oran: The chief's daughter given to Ajeolele (see above) in the Ifa divination story.

Suggested Reading

Ford, *The Hero With an African Face*.

Hyde, *Trickster Makes This World*.

Leeming, *The World of Myth*.

Questions to Consider

1. That both Eshu and Legba are intermediaries between the gods and humans is important in understanding the trickster function in world mythology. How many kinds of unreliability are involved in their intermediation, and how does that factor into the many functions of the trickster?
2. In the art of divination, the way the palm nuts fall is merely a starting point; what follows is a series of proverbs, sayings, and stories that relate to that combination of nuts, and the client must recognize which of them speaks to his or her question. Does this procedure simply reinforce some predisposition on the part of the questioner, or can the process lead to new insights that the client may not have been aware of when he or she posed the question? What is the role of the trickster in this process?

The Places of Myth—Rocks and Lakes

Lecture 34

Whether we can locate a sacred site on a map or not, even if the place is mysterious or maybe even imaginary, places become sacred sites because something important happened here; history and life change because of what played itself out on this spot. . . . Once a place becomes such an intersection, it remains so forever.

Eliade has argued that a sacred place is a spot where the sacred or holy breaks into the mundane; each such place becomes a “center of the world.” A mountain is a place where heaven and earth meet, and the pole star stands directly above it. Every temple or sacred palace or city is assimilated to a sacred mountain and becomes itself such a center of the world; thus, each temple or sacred city is an *axis mundi*, a point of connection between heaven, earth, and the underworld. Sometimes a sacred place is imaged as an *omphalos*, a world navel. All such places suggest a “nostalgia for paradise,” a desire to be at the heart of the world and of reality. That there are many “centers of the world” is not a daunting paradox, because the nature of a sacred place admits many centers, each revealing a longing for transcendent forms.

All of these symbols and images are for us a kind of “nostalgia for paradise.”

Vine Deloria, a Native American scholar, classifies sacred sites in terms of agency, from purely human to that of an exclusively higher power. The first kind of sacred site marks a place where something important has happened and whose agents were entirely human, such as Gettysburg National Cemetery. The second marks a site where something holy occurred, such as the Jordan River or Mecca in Saudi Arabia. The third category is that of an “overwhelming holiness,” where higher powers have revealed themselves to human beings, such as Moses’s burning bush near Mount Horeb or Ayres Rock in Australia. Deloria’s final category includes those places where new revelations occur, suggesting that the intersection of the mundane and the divine is an ongoing process, not simply a historical one.

Stones are perhaps the earliest markers of sacred sites, dating back to the Neolithic period. Examples include Shinto rocks decorated with straw garlands, single rocks in raked Buddhist gardens, or unworked stones in Hindu temples. Jacob erects such a marker to designate the place where God appeared to him at the top of a ladder.



Shinto rocks in a Japanese tea garden.

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He calls the place Bethel, “the house of God,” and it becomes a ladder itself, uniting heaven and earth. It designates not only a spot where God once appeared to Jacob but where the transcendent and immanent intersect for all time.

The Olgas and the Uluru (Ayers Rock) in Australia mark important places where, in Dream Time, the ancestors left landscapes soaked with their creative power. Initiates can access this power by performing certain rituals at the sites. Believers can participate in Dream Time via singing, storytelling, and dancing, making the land a living text that leads into an eternal dimension.

Other kinds of sites have power, as well. One in Tibet is called Castle Lake because its stillness reflects a nearby mountain, giving the impression of a magnificent castle underwater. In a Tibetan story, a young herdsman, badly treated by his mother, is befriended by a man who emerges from the lake and takes him to the castle. The boy eventually marries a beautiful maiden and becomes a rich and benevolent leader of his people. For the herdsman, the lake is an *axis mundi*, a place where the divine and the mundane intersect. ■

Names to Know

Biriwilg: Ancestor in Australian Dream Time who turns herself into a painting on a cave wall.

Olgas and Uluru (Ayers Rock): Sacred stone sites in Australia.

Rinchen: Protagonist of the Tibetan myth.

Important Term

***omphalos*:** The “navel”; in our context, the navel of the earth, as Delphi was for the Greeks. An *omphalos* is always an *axis mundi*.

Suggested Reading

Deloria, *God is Red*.

Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*.

Genesis 1 in the King James version.

Hyde-Chambers, *Frederick and Audrey*.

Questions to Consider

1. We have used the concept of *axis mundi* throughout this course. In this unit, it really comes into its own. How would you define it? Could you give 10 examples to illustrate the concept? Most importantly, have you had a personal experience with one or more of these sacred spaces? What are the values and meanings of an *axis mundi* for you?
2. In the Tibetan myth, the Castle Lake is an *axis mundi*. This is more a fairytale than a fully developed myth, but if you translate its fairytale terms into cosmic or psychological ones, what does the story say about the values for life of an *axis mundi*?

The Places of Myth—Mountains

Lecture 35

Each mountain becomes for the people who live near it an *axis mundi*. ... The mountain is the dead center of the universe, the navel of the world, the place where the past, the present, and the future, where the divine and the ordinary can intersect and thus redeem the ordinary, the profane, and make it meaningful and significant.

Mountains are the nearest thing on earth to the sky and, hence, share the sky's transcendent values; they are almost automatically the places where gods live. Further, they are almost always located under the pole star, making each of them an *axis mundi*.

Mount Sinai is one of the most sacred mountains in the world, a symbol of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. God appeared to Moses in a burning bush near here, and it is here that the Israelites came after their escape from Egypt. On the top of the mountain, God gave Moses the Ten Commandments.

The Decalogue illustrates what happens when the divine penetrates the ordinary, and mountains play a large part in similar revelations throughout the Old Testament: Noah's covenant with God, Abraham's near-sacrifice of Isaac, Elijah's contest with the prophets of Baal, and the establishment of the city of Jerusalem all occur on mountaintops. The New Testament likewise locates many of its important events on mountains, including the birth of Jesus, his temptation by Satan, the Sermon on the Mount, the Transfiguration, the Crucifixion, and the ascent into heaven.

In Islam, mountains are also important: Muhammad receives his call from Gabriel on a mountain; he departs on his midnight journey from a mountaintop; the final revelation of the Qu'ran occurred on a mountaintop; and Mount Mercy, just outside of Mecca, is the place where pilgrims gather to this day. The Ka'aba itself is an *axis mundi*, just beneath the pole star.

The San Francisco Peaks above Flagstaff, Arizona, are sacred to several Native American peoples, including the Hopi. For the Hopi, these mountains

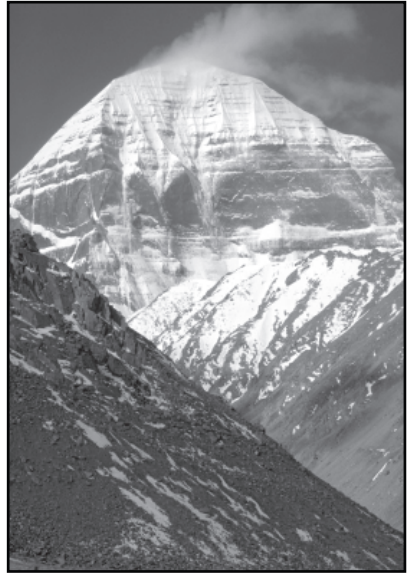
are the home of the *kachinas*, spirits of nature and/or dead ancestors who emerge at times and come to live in the villages. When they return, they carry messages from the people to the ancestors. In between these seasonal rituals, the Hopi take pilgrimages into the mountains, because through the *kachinas*, they have access to the divine powers that structure the universe.

Mount Kailas in Tibet is sacred to Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, and Bons. For the Hindus, it is the dwelling place of Shiva and his consort Parvati, and in the Indian epic the *Mahabharata*, Arjuna goes up the mountain to learn power from Shiva. For Buddhists, the mountain features in a contest

between a prophet of the indigenous Tibetan religion, Bon, and a Buddhist yogi. The summit is also the home of Demchog, “One of Supreme Bliss,” and 500 Buddhist saints. For both Hindus and Buddhists, a pilgrimage to the mountain is the most sacred journey possible.

There's also the idea that there's a power in the mountain that can cut across ordinary cause/effect patterns in our lives.

Mount T'ai Shan in eastern China is a “humanized” mountain covered with a staircase, shrines, temples, inns, and booths; at the top is the Temple of the Jade Emperor. At one time, Chinese Buddhists believed that souls of the dead came to this mountain to be judged and that T'ai Shan presided over everything that happened in life. Thus, for 4,000 years, pilgrims have climbed this mountain, passing through the three heavenly gates into more sacred zones. The Chinese fairytale of K'o-li, set in the Yangshou Mountains in southeastern China, further suggests



Mount Kailash, a holy mountain in western Tibet.

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that there is power in mountains—power that can cut across the ordinary patterns of our lives and provide access to divine creative energy. ■

Names to Know

Arjuna: One of the heroes of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. He is given a glimpse of the true nature of the cosmos by Vishnu in the *Bhagavad-Gita* in the epic.

Devi: In Hindu, the word means “goddess.” It is also the name of a manifestation of Parvati, consort of Shiva.

Draupadi: Common wife of the five brothers who are the central figures in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*.

Durga: The dark manifestation of Parvati in Hindu mythology—a warrior against demons; she emerges when Parvati becomes angry.

Ganesha: In Hindu mythology, the elephant-headed god, son of Shiva and Parvati.

Ka’aba (Ka’bah): The primary shrine of Islam, in Mecca in Saudi Arabia; the sacred center of the world, an *axis mundi*.

Milarepa: Buddhist yogi who brings Buddhism to Tibet.

Naro Bhun Chon: A Bon priest defeated by the Buddhist yogi Milarepa (see above).

Suggested Reading

Bernbaum, *Sacred Mountains of the World*.

Exodus 19, 24, 32-34 in the King James version.

Kuo, Louise and Yuan-Hsi. *Chinese Folk Tales*.

Questions to Consider

1. The *kachinas* in this lecture bring together a large number of the entire course's motifs, from shamans to gods/goddesses to culture heroes to tricksters to sacred places. What do *kachinas* actually do, and how do they function mythically in their cultures?
2. Throughout the course, we have reminded ourselves that myths are multivalenced—that is, that they do various kinds of work for a culture. The myth of K'o-li is primarily about a mountain as an *axis mundi*, but how many social, political, economic, and moral values are also inscribed in this tale?

The Places of Myth—Sacred Trees

Lecture 36

A cosmic tree is an *axis mundi* in a very clear symbolic way, since it connects the upper and the lower worlds with the middle world of humans, and allows energy from both of those other worlds to flow to us. This is really clear in myths in which the cosmic tree is actually planted right in the earth's navel: The roots reach down to the netherworld; the branches reach the pole star.

Sacred trees are less tangible than rocks, lakes, and mountains, but they underlie many world myths. The most famous cosmic tree is probably **Yggdrasill** in Norse myth, but such trees also occur in other places.

Common to all of them is the picture of the cosmos as a tree connecting the underworld, the earth, and the heavens.

The Arapaho people of Wyoming have a story about a woman who chases a porcupine up a tree, climbing until she pierces the clouds; both she and the porcupine then leave the tree, living together as husband and wife in a heavenly world. A Cheyenne myth also accounts for the logistics of the cosmic tree: A young girl and her seven brothers climb such a tree to escape a gigantic buffalo and wind up as the stars in the Big Dipper. China has a



Odin and Thor at Yggdrasill, the sacred tree of Norse myth.

“Building Tree,” located at the very center of the world, the place where gods descend and ascend to and from earth, while India’s cosmic tree grows upside-down, symbolizing creation as a downward movement.

A Vietnamese folktale involving two brothers and a young woman explains how an ordinary tree can become sacred. The young woman, Thao, marries the older brother, Tan, but is also loved by the younger brother, Lang. When Lang leaves home, Tan goes in search of him, but neither brother returns. Thao goes in search of both of them, and the three end up as a white rock and a tree next to a river, with a vine connecting them. Later, a king is told the story while chewing some fruit from the tree, wrapped in a leaf from the vine, and flavored with scrapings from the rock. This is how the betel nut became the traditional offering of marriage proposals and weddings. This is an etiological myth about the chewing of betel nut, but the combination of tree, water, rock, and goddess is a symbol of life, fertility, and regeneration, as well.

As we have seen, myths can “mean” in a variety of ways. The mystical or metaphysical awakens us to the mystery of being alive in the universe. The cosmological gives us a picture of the universe in keeping with the science of the time. The sociological accounts for the social order and explains how the individual should relate to the group. And the psychological can lead us to emotional and intellectual health and an internal harmony that allows us both to be ourselves and to integrate ourselves in society.

Myths likewise function on many levels. They are cultural dreams that try to explain why we are here and what we are expected to do. Families have their own myths, as do classmates and people who work together. The structures that we use to create the myths of our individual and communal lives are those of the myths that our ancestors from all times and places have handed down to us. Thus, coming into contact with the great myths of the past can help us find meaningful ways to structure our own lives as we make up and live our own myths. ■

Every human institution was originally understood as a gift of the gods ... and the myths remind us of that.

Name to Know

Yggdrasill: The Norse cosmic tree, an *axis mundi*, whose roots reach down to Hel and whose branches reach to Asgard; the worlds are linked by Bifrost (a rainbow or the Milky Way).

Suggested Reading

Eliade, *Patterns of Comparative Religion*.

Nhat Hanh, *A Taste of Earth and Other Legends of Vietnam*.

Questions to Consider

1. Eliade says that the combination of tree, rock, water, and goddess is one that resonates with all of us because it has recurred in so many ways throughout history to symbolically suggest the importance of an *axis mundi*. Can you think of other examples of this combination? What does the combination say to you personally? Are you moved by it in some way or another? And if so, can you describe its effect and perhaps even its source in your own mythical consciousness?
2. How would you define “myth” at the end of this course? What functions do you see it fulfilling in personal, social, and cultural life? In personal terms, how does myth function in your life?

Glossary

Ajá: The Dog in the Yoruba Tortoise trickster tale recounted in Lecture 32.

Àjàpá: Tortoise trickster of the Yoruba people of Nigeria and Benin.

Ajeolele: The lucky traveler in the Ifa divination story in Lecture 32.

alloforms: Bruce Lincoln's term for alternative forms of the same element; for example, in a dismemberment creation myth, when a god's eye becomes the sun, these are the same substance in alternative forms.

Amaterasu: The Japanese Shinto goddess of the Rising Sun and ancestress of the emperor.

anima: In Jungian psychology, the female part of the male unconscious.

animism: The doctrine that inanimate objects or natural phenomena possess a soul.

animus: In Jungian psychology, the male part of the female unconscious.

ankh: The Egyptian symbol for life.

archetype: For Jung, archetypes are universal psychic tendencies or primordial images that, when given cultural expression, become the motifs of literature, myths, and dreams.

Arjuna: One of the heroes of the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. He is given a glimpse of the true nature of the cosmos by Vishnu in the *Bhagavad-Gita* in the epic.

axis mundi: "Axle of the world"; most frequently a tree that unites the realms of heaven, earth, and the underworld, but Mircea Eliade argues that it can be anything that allows the divine and mundane realms to meet and intersect.

Baldr (Balder): Son of Odin and Frigg, he is the most beautiful and best of the Norse gods. His death begins the chain of events that leads to Ragnarok.

Batara Guru: The supreme deity, creator, and human ancestor in a myth from pre-Islamic Sumatra. The myth is summarized in Lecture 2.

bios: A Greek term for the individual living and dying life within time, vis-à-vis *zoe* (see *zoe*).

Biriwilg: Ancestor in Australian Dream Time who turns herself into a painting on a cave wall, as recounted in Lecture 34.

Brahmanas: Theological revelations in prose attached to the Indian Vedas.

bricoleur: Claude Lévi-Strauss's term for a kind of thinking and symbolization. It is characterized by using nonspecialized tools for a wide variety of purposes. Myth makers and myth tellers are bricoleurs in this sense. Some critics have said that the word "tinker" performs some of the same functions. Its opposite term would be "engineer."

Bujaegn Yed: A culture hero of the Malayan Chewong.

Caridwen: Welsh goddess of grain and fertility, she plays a large part in Gwion Bach's myth in Lecture 25.

Chalchiuhtlicue: An Aztec water goddess whose floods end the fourth creation, as described in Lecture 10.

Chandogya Upanishad: One of the oldest of the Indian *Upanishads* (philosophical instructions), perhaps dating from 700 B.C.E.

cosmogony: An account of the origins of the universe and the world.

culture hero: A hero who brings culture to his or her people. He or she may help with creation but more often provides religious, social, and political rules and institutions and the techniques and technologies necessary for survival. The hero is usually of divine origin although not necessarily a deity.

desacralized: Stripped of sacred status.

deus faber: God as maker, who creates in the manner of a craftsman.

Devi: In Hindu, the word means “goddess.” It is also the name of a manifestation of Parvati, consort of Shiva.

dharmā: In Indian Hindu philosophy/theology, the duty appropriate to one’s station in life.

divination: The art of foretelling the future by learning the will of the gods.

Draupadi: Common wife of the five brothers who are the central figures in the Indian epic *Mahabharata*.

Durga: The dark manifestation of Parvati in Hindu mythology—a warrior against demons; she emerges when Parvati becomes angry.

edinu: A Sumerian word for “steppe” or “plain” and a possible root for the Hebrew “Eden.”

etiological: The adjectival form of “etiology,” which deals with the causes or reasons for things.

ex nihilo: Literally, “out of nothing.” This is a type of creation myth in which a deity creates by thought, word, or dream or from some bodily effluent, such as sweat or tears.

fecundator: One who makes fertile or fruitful.

Ganesha: In Hindu mythology, the elephant-headed god, son of Shiva and Parvati.

Gayomard (Gayomart): The sacrificial victim of Iranian Zoroastrianism, out of whose body the cosmos is made.

Ginnungagap: In Norse mythology, the neutral space between the fiery south and the frozen north in pre-creation times.

gopis: Cowgirls or cow-herders in the Vishnu-Krishna myth discussed in Lecture 20.

Gucumatz: A sun-fire power and one of the principal creator gods of the Maya. He is also called “Plumed Serpent,” and he creates the cosmos *ex nihilo* by speaking the words.

Gwion Bach: Welsh hero whose story, as told by Joseph Campbell, is recounted in Lecture 25.

Harappa and Mohenjodaro: Pre-Aryan cities of the Indus Valley whose archaeological finds have provided the best evidence for the myths of the pre-Aryans in India.

Heilbringer: “Salvation bringer,” as Noah perhaps is for inventing wine and, thereby, mitigating the hard lot of agriculturalists.

Hel: Daughter of Loki and a giantess, she is the goddess of the Norse underworld.

Hoder (Hod): The blind Norse god who kills Baldr with a mistletoe spear.

Huracan: A sun-fire power and one of the principal creator gods of the Maya. He is also known as “Heart of Heaven,” and he creates the cosmos *ex nihilo* by speaking the words.

Hwun-tun (Hun-tun): A figure without senses in a Chinese Taoist myth referred to in Lecture 5. His name is translated as something like “Chaos,” but the Jungian von Franz takes it to mean “Unconscious.” He reappears in Lecture 7.

Idunn (Idun): The Norse goddess who protects the golden apples of youth in Asgard.

Ifa: The god of prophetic powers for the Yoruba of West Africa, whose will is revealed in divination in the myth recounted in Lecture 33.

Izanagi and Izanami: The first couple in Japanese Shinto mythology.

Jataka (Story of a Birth): An Indian Buddhist collection of stories about the 550 prior incarnations of the Buddha.

Joseph of Arimathea: In Luke 23, he is the one who takes Jesus's body down from the cross; in tradition, he is the first possessor of the Holy Grail.

Ka'aba (Ka'bah): The primary shrine of Islam, in Mecca in Saudi Arabia; the sacred center of the world, an *axis mundi*.

kachinas: Spirits of nature who can produce rain and spirits of dead ancestors of the Pueblo and Hopi. They visit villages, where they are impersonated by masked dancers.

Kalevala: The national epic of Finland, compiled in its final version by Elias Lonnrot in the mid-19th century.

Kali: In Hindu mythology, the "Dark One" who gives her name to the final age of the cosmos (see Lecture 11). She is usually thought of as a manifestation of Parvati, consort of Shiva.

Kali Yuga: The last and most degenerate age in the Hindu cyclical story of creation, degradation, destruction, and re-creation.

Kama: In Hindu mythology, the god of desire and so, roughly, the equivalent of Eros and Cupid.

Kamonu: Son of the supreme being of the Barotse (Lozi) of Zambia; he is a troublemaker who eventually drives his father from the earth to the skies.

kiva: Underground chamber used in Hopi ceremonies.

Kunapipi: A mother-goddess of Australia, whose body is the earth and who deposited the souls of unborn children in Dream Time. She is referred to in Lectures 13 and 14.

Lif and Lifhrasir: The names mean “life” and “desire for life,” respectively; they are the human survivors of Ragnarok in Norse mythology. They will be the ancestors of the next human race.

mandala: The Sanskrit word means “circle,” and it is often considered a container of divine energy, as in the example from Tibet in Lecture 34.

Mangala: The creator god of the Mande in Mali, whose creation, involving a cosmic egg, is referred to in Lecture 7.

Manuk Manuk: A blue chicken possessed by Batara Guru (see above); it lays three eggs, from which emerge the three gods who create the three levels of the universe.

matriarchal: Having a woman as leader of a family or line.

matrifocal: Woman-centered.

matrilineal: Descended from the maternal line.

Ma-ui (Maui): Trickster and culture hero of the peoples of Oceania.

Mawu: The female aspect of the creator deity for the Fon of Benin. She is the mother of Legba in the myths recounted in Lecture 33.

Melo: The sky in a Minyong myth from northeast India.

Midrash: Jewish commentary on the Old Testament, dating from the 4th to the 12th centuries.

Milarepa: Buddhist yogi who brings Buddhism to Tibet in a myth recounted in Lecture 35.

monolatry: The worship of one of several or many gods.

monomyth: The template or paradigm that all heroes of all cultures more or less illustrate. The concept assumes that beneath all heroic myths there is a universal hero's story that speaks to all of us. The hypothesis is most closely associated with the work of Joseph Campbell.

monotheism: The belief in a single god, vis-à-vis polytheism, the belief that there are many deities.

Mounts Meru, Harburz, and Himingbjorg: Sacred mountains of India, of Iran, and of the Norse.

Muisa: Lord of the underworld in the Mwindo epic in Lecture 26. Kahindo, who helps Mwindo, is his daughter.

Muspell: In Norse mythology, before the creation, the fiery southern region ruled by Surt.

Nanda and Yasoda: The putative cowherd parents of Vishnu in his incarnation as Krishna in the myth described in Lecture 20.

Naro Bhun Chon: A Bon priest defeated by the Buddhist yogi Milarepa (see above) in a myth recounted in Lecture 35.

Niflheim: In Norse mythology, the freezing northern region that exists before the creation; it contains a spring (Elivagar) producing rivers that immediately freeze.

Ntumba the Aardvark: He lives in the underworld in the *Epic of Mwindo* in Lecture 26.

Nu Kua: A Chinese primeval goddess and creatrix of humans; over time, she lost her divine status, first becoming the consort of the god Fu Hsi and, later, a human woman who institutes marriage by marrying her brother. She is also featured in a southern Chinese myth as one of the survivors of the Great Flood.

Nwewo: Supreme being of the Mende in Sierra Leone in West Africa.

Nyambi: Creator-god of the Barotse (Lozi) of Zambia, father of the troublemaker Kamonu (see above).

Ohrmazd: The chief god of the ancient Iranians. He is also known as Ahura Mazda.

Olgas and Uluru (Ayers Rock): Sacred stone sites in Australia.

omphalos: The “navel”; in our context, the navel of the earth, as Delphi was for the Greeks. An *omphalos* is always an *axis mundi*.

Oran: The chief’s daughter given to Ajeolele (see above) in the Ifa divination story recounted in Lecture 33.

orisha: For the Yoruba in West Africa, a deity not thought of as existing outside the self but a personification of energies within nature and human life.

pantheon: Literally, “all gods”; refers to the gods and goddesses of a culture considered collectively.

Popol Vuh: A Mayan epic poem.

Prose Edda: A 13th-century Icelandic collection of myths, written by Snorri Sturluson.

psychopomp: The term comes from a Greek word meaning “guide/conductor of souls,” and psychopomps frequently escort the newly deceased to the afterlife. As noted in our fourth unit, most tricksters are psychopomps.

Puranas: A body of Hindu myths, legends, and ritual instructions.

Purusha: In the *Rig Veda*, he is the first man, who is also universe, as is explained in Lecture 8.

Quetzalcoatl: The most important deity and culture hero of the Aztecs, involved in a series of creations described in Lecture 10.

Ragnarok: “The end of the gods”; the apocalyptic destruction of the world in Norse mythology.

Rig Veda: The oldest collection of Indo-Aryan hymns, dating from about 2000–1700 B.C.E.

Rinchen: Protagonist of the Tibetan myth in Lecture 34.

Sedi: The earth in a Minyong myth from northeast India.

shakti: In Hindu, a feminine noun meaning “power.” Every god in Hindu mythology has a *shakti*, without whom he is powerless to act.

Shamash: The sun-god in the epic of *Gilgamesh*.

Sheburungu: God of fire and denizen of the underworld in the Mwindo epic in Lecture 26.

Shemwindo: Chief of the village and Mwindo’s father in the *Epic of Mwindo* in Lecture 26.

Siduri: A Sumerian-Babylonian goddess who operates a kind of inn at the edge of the Ocean of Death in *Gilgamesh*.

soma: A hallucinogenic drink featured in Hindu Vedic sacrifices and a favorite drink of the god Indra.

Sothis: The Egyptian name for the Dog Star (Sirius); according to Plutarch, the name means “pregnant.”

Sutras: In Hinduism, books about ritual.

Ta-aroa: The Tahitian supreme god and creator. His creation of the world from a cosmic egg is mentioned in Lecture 7.

Tezcatlipoca: A composite Aztec deity containing the dominant gods of the four creations described in Lecture 10. Also a single deity who stands in opposition to Quetzalcoatl (see above).

Tlaloc: An Aztec storm god who rules over the third creation described in Lecture 10.

Upanishads: In Hinduism, books of philosophical/theological speculation, intended as commentary on the Vedas but sometimes departing significantly from the spirit and letter of those ancient hymns.

Urshanabi: In Sumerian-Babylonian mythology, the ferryman who takes Gilgamesh across the Ocean of Death.

Vedas: Compilations of hymns to deities in the Hindu religion. The oldest is the *Rig Veda*, written down from 800–600 B.C.E. but containing much older material.

Wakdjunkaga: The name of the trickster in the Winnebago cycle discussed in Lecture 29. His name means something like “the tricky one.”

wiyus: Creatures, both human and animal, in a Minyong myth from northeast India.

Wulburi: A sky god of the Krachi people of Africa.

Yggdrasill: The Norse cosmic tree, an *axis mundi*, whose roots reach down to Hel and whose branches reach to Asgard; the worlds are linked by Bifrost (a rainbow or the Milky Way).

zoe: A Greek term for infinite and eternal life, vis-à-vis *bios* (see *bios*).

Biographical Notes

Jalal-al-Din Rumi (1207–1273): Moslem Sufi mystic and poet.

Taliesen (fl. 6th century): Welsh prophet and poet, who in the myth in Lecture 25 is the reborn Gwion Bach.

Theresa of Avila (1515–1582): A Carmelite mystic nun and saint.

Vidyapati (14th century): An Indian poet who wrote elaborate erotic-theological poems on the love of Krishna and Radha.

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Doty, William G. *Mythography: The Study of Myths and Rituals*. 2nd ed. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000. An excellent introduction to the study of myth, tracing its development from the beginnings to the many contemporary schools of myth criticism. Includes Doty's own "toolkit" for analyzing myths.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Myth of the Eternal Return*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971. As Eliade himself suggests, this is the best introduction to his lifetime of work, encapsulating much that is treated in greater detail in other books.

———. *Patterns of Comparative Religion*. Translated by Rosemary Sheed. Cleveland: World Publishing, 1963. As the title suggests, this is an overview of various motifs and themes that recur in world religions, by one of the most important scholars of comparative religion in the modern world.

Erdoes, Richard, and Alfonso Ortiz. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York: Pantheon, 1984. A rich collection of Native American myths, with helpful introductory material. The myth of the White Buffalo Woman in Lecture 13 was taken from this text, as are the Diegeños myth and "The Vagina Girls" in Lecture 18, the Okanagan creation myth of the Old One in Lecture 19, and the myth of Iktome and Coyote and the origins of death in Lecture 31.

Euripides. *Mèdeia*. *Euripides: The Complete Plays*. Volume I. Translated by Carl R. Mueller. Hanover, NH: Smith and Kraus, 2005. A splendid modern translation of the plays of Euripides. References to *Medea* in Lecture 24 were taken from this text.

Exodus 19, 24, 32–34 in the King James Version of the Bible. As with the Genesis readings below, any version will do because the details of the story are the same in all of them.

Foley, Helene P., trans. and ed. *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994. A good modern translation of the hymn discussed in Lecture 27. There is also some fine commentary

and interpretation included. The hymn to Demeter is retold in prose by Rosenberg in *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics* (see below).

Ford, Clyde W. *The Hero with an African Face*. New York: Bantam Books, 1999. Ford is a professional psychiatric counselor, and he incorporates his experiences with clients into a work designed to illustrate Joseph Campbell's monomyth with African myths—a subject that he feels Campbell unfairly neglected. The myth of Mwetsi and his two wives—the Morning and Evening Stars—in Lecture 13 is from this text, as are the myth of Red Buffalo Woman in Lecture 17 and the account of Yoruba *orishas* in Lecture 19. Ford has a splendid reading of the *Epic of Mwindo* discussed in Lecture 26, and the story of Eshu's tricky hat in Lecture 33 is also from this book.

Gaster, Theodor H. *Thespis: Ritual, Myth, and Drama in the Ancient Near East*. 1950; rpt. New York: Anchor, 1961. An account of Near Eastern myths in the contexts of vegetation rituals, which, according to Gaster, eventually work their way into drama.

Genesis 1–3, 6–9, and 27–28 in the King James Version of the Bible. Actually, any version will do because the stories discussed are nearly the same in any of them.

Gordon, Cyrus H. "Canaanite Mythology." In *Mythologies of the Ancient World*. Edited by Samuel Noah Kramer. Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961. A summary essay about Canaanite mythology in a book of several such essays by various authors. The myth of Baal and Mot discussed in Lecture 17 is from this text.

Green, Peter, trans. *Apollonius Rhodius: Argonautika*. New York: Heritage Press, 1960. A good modern translation of the myth of Jason and the Argonauts, with useful explanatory materials. This was the text used for the myth in Lecture 24.

Gregory, Horace, trans. *Ovid: The Metamorphoses*. New York: Mentor, 1968. A good, readable translation of Ovid's epic poem, complete with a

fine introduction and a glossary/index of names. Used as the source for the poem in Lecture 10.

Hawthorne, Nathaniel. *The Scarlet Letter: Text, Sources, Criticism*. Edited by Kenneth S. Lynn. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1961. This is the text cited in Lecture 27. It contains, as its title suggests, a wealth of supplementary material on the novel.

Hyde, Lewis. *Trickster Makes This World: Mischief, Myth, and Art*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1998. A brilliant and beautifully written account of the trickster in world mythology. This book provided much of the framework for the unit on tricksters in this course, as well as the translation of the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* cited in Lecture 30. Most of the Eshu and Legba myths discussed in Lecture 33 were from Hyde's retellings of them.

Hyde-Chambers, Frederick, and Audrey Hyde-Chambers. *Tibetan Folk Tales*. Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1981. A collection of myths from Tibet. The story of Rinchen in Lecture 34 comes from this text, which is reprinted in Leonard and McClure below.

Hynes, William J., and William G. Doty, eds. *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993. A good collection of essays by various hands on aspects of the trickster figure in mythology. The section "Study of the Trickster" is a fine summary of the various theories about the figure put forward by scholars over time.

Ions, Veronica. *Indian Mythology*. London: Paul Hamlyn, 1967. A richly illustrated overview of Indian mythology from pre-Aryan invasions to the present. The myth of Indra's defeat of Vritra in Lecture 18 is taken from this text, and all the Indian myths in Lecture 20 can be found here.

Kluger, Rivkah Scharf. *The Archetypal Significance of Gilgamesh*. Einselden, Switzerland: Daimon Verlag, 1991. Kluger was a student and disciple of Carl Jung, and her reading of Gilgamesh is essentially Jungian,

interpreting the entire poem, in particular the episode in which Gilgamesh resists the advances of Ishtar, as a positive step forward in the development of consciousness in the human species.

Kuo, Louise, and Yuan-Hsi Kuo. *Chinese Folk Tales*. Millbrae, CA: Celestial Arts, 1976. A collection of Chinese myths and tales. The fairytale of K'o-li and Treasure Mountain in Lecture 35 is from this text; the story is also reprinted in Leonard and McClure below. [

Leeming, David. *The Oxford Companion to World Mythology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. An invaluable reference tool for the mythographer that includes entries on almost everything and extensive cross-references. The introduction to the work makes a good entry point for the study of myths. See the entry titled “Book of Going Forth by Day” for Lecture 15 and “Heroic Monomyth” for Lecture 21.

———. *The World of Myth: An Anthology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1990. A valuable collection of world myths, some of them highly excerpted, by one of the leading contemporary authorities on world mythology. Its introductory and explanatory materials are good—sometimes stunningly so. The description of the Kali age in Hindu mythology from the *Puranas* in Lecture 11 is reprinted in this book, as is the Legba story of the yam garden in Lecture 33.

Leeming, David, and Jake Page. *God: Myths of the Male Divine*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996. A collection of myths about God that correspond to those of the goddess in the Leeming-Page book below. This book provided much of the structure for the biography of God in Lectures 17 through 19. The Cherokee myth of the Bear Man and the Ojibway myth of Wunzh in Lecture 17 are from this text, as is that of Raven’s “vulva envy” in Lecture 18.

———. *Goddess: Myths of the Female Divine*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. A good collection of myths of the goddess, connected by commentary that makes this a kind of biography of the goddess across time. The general outline for the eclipse of the goddess in

Lecture 16 follows the pattern established in this book, and all the myths discussed in that lecture (with the exception of the Chinese myth of Nu Kua) were likewise taken from this text.

Leonard, Scott, and Michael McClure. *Myth and Knowing: An Introduction to World Mythology*. San Francisco: McGraw Hill, 2004. This is a university-level textbook, and its selections are splendidly chosen and presented by the authors. The book includes a history of myth criticism from its earliest days to the present. The Mayan creation myth discussed in Lecture 7 is in this text.

Lincoln, Bruce. *Myth, Cosmos, and Society: Indo-European Themes of Creation and Destruction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986. This book treats the theme of reciprocity between individual and cosmos in many Indo-European myths and explores the most important implications of the idea for life and thought.

Lindsay, Jack, trans. *Apuleius: The Golden Ass*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1962. A good translation of Apuleius's novel. This was the source of the text cited in Lecture 28. The "Cupid and Psyche" story from this book is reprinted in Thury and Devinney below.

Long, Charles H. *Alpha: The Myths of Creation*. Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1963. Long's is the classification scheme of creation myth types, via Leonard and McClure above, that is used throughout the first unit of this course. He includes useful descriptions of each kind of myth and provides the texts of many myths as illustrations of his categories.

Makarius, Laura. "The Myth of the Trickster: The Necessary Breaker of Taboos." In *Mythical Trickster Figures: Contours, Contexts, and Criticisms*. Edited by William J. Hynes and William G. Doty. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1993, pp. 66–86. A brilliant essay on the connection between the trickster as culture hero and as violator of taboos, suggesting that the power of the first comes from the violations of blood taboos.

Matthews, John. *King Arthur and the Grail Quest: Myth and Vision from Celtic Times to the Present*. London: Blandford, 1994. As the title suggests,

this is a survey of Arthurian materials from as far back as they can be traced to the present. It is richly illustrated, and it gives a good sense of the ways in which the King Arthur myth is still alive and being modified in our own time.

Milum, Lynne. "The Hero's Journey through Harry Potter." http://mythichero/harry_potter.htm.

Nhat Hanh, Thich. *A Taste of Earth and Other Legends of Vietnam*. Translated by Mobi Warren. Berkeley, CA: Parallax, 1993. Modern retellings of ancient Vietnamese myths by a Buddhist monk. The story of Au Co in Lecture 13 is from this text, as is the story of Tan, Lang, and Thao in Lecture 36. Both are reprinted in Leonard and McClure above.

Ògúngbilé, David. "God: African Supreme Beings." In *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 2nd ed. Edited by Lindsay Jones. San Francisco: Thompson Gale, 2005. A succinct account of African beliefs about "God" and his or her many manifestations. The myth of Ngewo's departure for the sky in Lecture 18 comes from this text.

Owomoyela, Oyekan. *Yoruba Trickster Tales*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997. A fine collection of Yoruba trickster myths, introduced and interpreted in ways that make the stories live. The Yoruba story of the Tortoise, the Dog, and the yams in Lecture 32 is from this text. It is also reprinted in Leonard and McClure above.

Pelton, Robert D. *The Trickster in West Africa: A Study of Mythic Irony and Sacred Delight*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980. The thesis of this book is that trickster tales in Africa follow the pattern of initiation rituals, complete with separation, time spent in a liminal state, and return to structured society with new roles and responsibilities.

Powers, Meredith A. *The Heroine in Western Literature*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1994. As the title suggests, this is an insightful study of the heroine from pre-Homeric to modern times in Western literature.

Puhvel, Jaan. *Comparative Mythology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987. This book focuses on Indo-European mythology. It is the product of a lifetime of teaching and research, and it both retells many myths in engaging fashion and includes comparative analyses that are brilliant and evocative. All the Indian myths in Lecture 20 can be found in this text.

Radin, Paul, ed. *African Folktales*. New York: Schocken Books, 1952. A good collection of African myths, with minimal but useful introductory and explanatory material. The Krachi tale of the departure of the creator god for heaven in Lecture 18 is from this text, as are the Ashanti tale of how Spider obtained the sky god's stories, the Krachi tale of the separation of God from man, and the Ashanti story of how contradiction came to the world in Lecture 32.

———. *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956. This book contains the entire Winnebago trickster cycle discussed in Lecture 29. Although not all scholars agree with Radin's reading of the cycle, this is a seminal work in the 20th-century study of tricksters.

Reid, Bill, and Robert Bringhurst. *The Raven Steals the Light*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1984. A fine illustrated collection of Raven tales of the Haida people. "Raven Steals the Light" in Lecture 31 is from this collection, which is also reprinted in Leonard and McClure above.

Rosenberg, Donna. *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Publishing, 1999. A collection of great myths and epics rewritten and retold by Rosenberg. Some details are left out in the retellings, but the versions, written for modern sensibilities, are still worth reading. The explanatory materials are abundant and helpful. The description of the Kali age in Hindu thought in Lecture 11 was taken from this book, as was the idea of an underlying goddess myth in the story of Jason and Medea in Lecture 24.

Sandars, N. K., trans. *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. New York: Penguin Books, 1972. A good prose translation of the epic, with helpful introductory and explanatory materials. This is the text of the epic cited in Lectures 9 and 22.

Segal, Robert A. "Heroes." In *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Volume 6, 2nd ed. Edited by Lindsay Jones. San Francisco: Thomson Gale, 2005, pp. 3956–61. A good introduction to the concept of the "hero" across history, including summaries of theories of the hero, such as those of Otto Rank and Joseph Campbell.

Snyder, Christopher. *The World of King Arthur*. London: Thames and Hudson, 2000. A good historical account of the growth of the myth of King Arthur, detailing both the sources of individual characters and episodes and the points in time at which they were added to the basic story.

Sproul, Barbara C. *Primal Myths: Creation Myths around the World*. 1979; rpt. New York: Harper Collins, 1991. A fine collection of creation myths with excellent introductory and explanatory materials. This is the source of the Maori myth of Rangi and Papa in Lecture 6; the Huron earth-diver myth in Lecture 8; the Melo-Sedi myth of the Minyong in Lecture 18; and the Io creation myth, the Australian creation myth of Karora, and the Tahitian myth of Ta'aroa in Lecture 19.

Taube, Karl. *The Legendary Past: Aztec and Maya Myths*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993. A good introduction to Mesoamerican mythology, complete with helpful illustrations. The Aztec creation myth in Lecture 10 is from this source.

Thury, Eva M., and Margaret K. Devinney. *Introduction to Mythology: Contemporary Approaches to Classical and World Myths*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. This is an excellent example of the kind of textbook used in mythology courses in universities. It includes a representative selection of myths, and its introductory and explanatory materials are user-friendly without sacrificing intellectual precision. Snorri Sturluson's *The Prose Edda*, discussed in Lecture 8, was cited from its reprint in this book, as was his account of Ragnarok in Lecture 11. Hesiod's

account of creation in Lecture 12 and Plutarch's version of Isis and Osiris in Lecture 15 were also taken from this text. There is a fine introduction to the idea of the monomyth and to the work especially of Otto Rank, Carl Jung, and Joseph Campbell in this text.

Trankell, Ing-Britt, and Roy Willis. "Southeast Asia." In *World Mythology: The Illustrated Guide*. Edited by Roy Willis. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, pp. 300–307. A collection of 19 brief descriptions of the mythologies of the world by various hands. The accounts are richly illustrated. This, like Leeming's *Oxford Companion* above, is a valuable reference work.

Van Over, Raymond. *Sun Songs: Creation Myths from Around the World*. New York: New American Library, 1980. An extensive collection of myths, some of them excerpted, from all over the world. The introductions to each section are very useful. The Manu flood myth in Lecture 10 is from this text.

Vanaver, Eugene, ed. *King Arthur and His Knights: Selected Tales by Sir Thomas Malory*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1975. An excellent Malory primer, complete with good introductory and explanatory material. Much of the King Arthur story in Lecture 23 was taken from this text.

Wolkstein, Diane, and Samuel Noah Kramer. *Inanna, Queen of Heaven and Earth: Her Sources and Hymns from Sumer*. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983. Fine translations and scholarly material on the important figure of the goddess Inanna in the Sumerian pantheon. Both of the Inanna poems cited in Lecture 14 were from this text.

Young, Jean I., trans. *Snorri Sturluson: The Prose Edda; Tales from Norse Mythology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954. This is the translation of Sturluson reprinted in Thury and Devinney above. The Loki materials in Lecture 30 were from this text.

Zolbrod, Paul G. *Diné bahanè: The Navajo Creation Story*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1984. This is more or less the Navajo bible in a readable translation with good editorial materials.

It is the source of the Navajo emergence myth discussed in Lecture 6 and the story of Coyote placing the stars in Lecture 31.