Myth & Folklore: Heroes, Tricksters, & Zombies

MYTH & FOLKLORE: HEROES, TRICKSTERS, & ZOMBIES

JACQUI SHEHORN

Lemoore College

Contents

Part VII. Folklore

Part VIII. Adaptation and Influence

About the Book

Jacqui Shehorn is a Humanities and English Instructor at Lemoore College in the Central Valley of California. She has a Bachelor's degree in English from the University of California at Irvine and Master's degree in English with an emphasis in literature from California State University in Fresno. She has taken a wide variety of courses in a diverse array of subject areas, which honed her interest in the humanities. Jacqui is also an advocate for OER.

The content was reviewed by peers using the Academic Senate for California Community Colleges Open Educational Resources Initiative Evaluation Rubric and Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Anti-Racism (IDEA) Audit Framework.

Works Cited entries are provided in MLA format as models for students; attributions are also provided when appropriate.

Acknowledgements

A Myth of Devotion

When Hades decided he loved this girl
he built for her a duplicate of earth,
everything the same, down to the meadow,
but with a bed added.

Everything the same, including sunlight,
because it would be hard on a young girl
to go so quickly from bright light to utter darkness

Gradually, he thought, he'd introduce the night,
first as the shadows of fluttering leaves.
Then moon, then stars. Then no moon, no stars.
Let Persephone get used to it slowly.
In the end, he thought, she'd find it comforting.

A replica of earth
except there was love here.
Doesn't everyone want love?

He waited many years,
building a world, watching
Persephone in the meadow.
Persephone, a smeller, a taster.
If you have one appetite, he thought,
you have them all.

Doesn't everyone want to feel in the night
the beloved body, compass, polestar,
to hear the quiet breathing that says
I am alive, that means also
you are alive, because you hear me,
you are here with me. And when one turns,
the other turns—

That's what he felt, the lord of darkness,
looking at the world he had
constructed for Persephone. It never crossed his mind
that there'd be no more smelling here,
certainly no more eating.

Guilt? Terror? The fear of love?
These things he couldn't imagine;
no lover ever imagines them.

He dreams, he wonders what to call this place.
First he thinks: *The New Hell*. Then: *The Garden*.
In the end, he decides to name it
Persephone's Girlhood.

A soft light rising above the level meadow,
behind the bed. He takes her in his arms.
He wants to say *I love you, nothing can hurt you*

but he thinks
this is a lie, so he says in the end
you're dead, nothing can hurt you
which seems to him
a more promising beginning, more true.

"A Myth of Devotion" from *Averno* by Louise Glück. Reprinted on poets.org by permission of Farrar, Straus and Giroux, LLC.

Because like myth it is always evolving, OER is ongoing creation, nurturing, and revising. Like myth, every set of hands that OER passes through contributes to its becoming and its evolution.

To Lemoore College's OER Librarian, Kelsey Smith, my friend and colleague who feeds my excitement and is the ultimate sleuth no matter what I seek.

And to Rene Paredes, my friend, colleague, and editor whose passion for history encompasses myth and folklore, too. Thank you for the keen eyes and gentle feedback.

Introduction

Joseph Campbell writes that, "the chronicle of our species, from its earliest page, has been not simply an account of man the tool-maker, but-more tragically-a history of the pouring of blazing visions into the minds of seers and the efforts of earthly communities to incarnate unearthly covenants."

Myth and folklore has been an integral part of the human experience since time began. The stories people have told to better understand the world around them continue to fascinate people today. It is not possible to capture even a fracture of the world's myths in any text, so the collection here is simply a representation of myths and folklore from around the world.

Work Cited

Campbell, Joseph. *The Masks of God.* New York: Viking Press. 1959.

PART I

INTRODUCTION TO MYTH AND FOLKLORE

1.

What is Myth?

Attic Red-Figure Psykter by Smikros is in the public domain.

"Appear, appear, whatsothey shape or name,

Mountain Bull, Snake of the Hundred Heads,

Lion of the Burning Flame!

God, Beast, Mystery, come!"

-Euripideas, Bacchae

First, we need to try to define myth. One textbook offers a simple definition at the beginning of the introduction: "Myths symbolize human experience and embody the spiritual values of a culture" (Rosenberg xiii). The problem with this definition is the phrase "symbolize human experience." Just what does that mean? It **is** what myths do, but it doesn't really give us much in the way of definition without diving into the rabbithole of "human experience."

Joseph Campbell, another famous scholar and mythologist, defines myth as "A whole mythology is an organization of symbolic images and narratives, metaphorical of the possibilities of human experience and the fulfillment of a given culture at a given time."

Psychoanalyst Rollo May, in his book *The Cry for Myth* suggests that "A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world. Myths are the narrative patterns that give significance to our existence. Myths are

like the beams in a house: not exposed to outside view, they are the structure which holds the house together so people can live in it."

You will soon see that although most scholars of mythology agree that it is a foundational component of how any society, culture, and individual define *themselves*, none can agree absolutely on how to define *it*. But this isn't really a problem. They may all be right, given the aspects of myth they are emphasizing in their different definitions.

From the many definitions of myth in books and on the web, we can see that myths have four basic attributes in common:

- They are cultural. They reflect the beliefs and values of a group of people.
- They are sacred. They concern the spiritual or divine aspects of existence that human beings cannot understand.
- They are didactic. They seek to explain the unexplainable, and they teach humans how to behave, live, and relate to each other and the gods.
- They are foundational. They provide basic rules, beliefs, and rituals for a culture to establish shared beliefs and practices.

Joseph Campbell adds that all living myth must serve four primary functions. They are cosmological; the cosmological function is to describe the "shape" of the cosmos, the universe, our total world, so that the cosmos and all contained within it become vivid and alive for us, infused with meaning and significance; every corner, every rock, hill, stone, and flower has its place and its meaning in the cosmological scheme which the myth provides.

They are mystical; the metaphysical function is to awaken us to the mystery and wonder of creation, to open our minds and our senses to an awareness of the mystical "ground of being." Many would say that this is the primary function of myth-to find a way to communicate whatever mystical insight has been gained on the journey: an understanding of the mysteries that underlie the universe; an appreciation of its wonders; the sense of awe or rapture experienced. Since this experience often can't be communicated directly,myth speaks in metaphors, symbols, and symbolic narratives that aren't always bound by objective reality.

They are sociological; the sociological function is to pass down "the law," the moral and ethical codes for people of that culture to follow, and which help define that culture and its social structure. Joseph Campbell explains that "similar mythic tales are to be found in every quarter of this earth" (9).

They are psychological; the psychological (or pedagogical) function is to lead us through particular rites of passage that define the various significant stages of our lives-from dependency to maturity to old age, and finally, to our deaths, the final passage. These rites of passage bring us into harmony with the "ground of being" (a term used by Campbell to refer to an unnamed, unspecified universal mystical power) and allow us to make the journey from one stage to another with a sense of comfort and purpose.

Today, in mainstream Western culture in particular, we often dismiss myth as a falsehood, or fanciful, untrue stories, like urban myths. This is not the definition of myth we will concern ourselves with. For each of the myths we read, the culture from which they arose believed them to be true and foundational

to their individual and collective identities. It was how they understood the great mysteries of the universe and our place in it. It is how they answered questions like, how did the earth come to be? How was humankind created? What is my purpose? Can I know god? Is there a life after death?

Today, despite the ancient roots of most myths, we are still asking the same questions, and for many people, the answers are in their religious beliefs, many of which have their roots in the myths. Campbell once said, "a mythology is another person's religion, and a religion is your own personal mythology." As Campbell notes, "the fundamental themes of mythological thought," the cosmos, gods, heroes, have remained constant and universal, not only throughout history, but also over the whole extent of [humankind's] occupation of the earth" (21).

Work Cited

Campbell, Joseph. *Myths to Live By.* Arkana: Penguin Compass. 1993.

2.

Myth & Metaphor

"Ancient Greek depiction of a winged woman with a bird"
by The New York Public Library on Unsplash.

The Greeks believed human thought functioned through two separate avenues, Logos and Mythos.

Logos is the analytical, logical method for dealing with the information and complexity of the world. It is governed by "rules" such as we still use in arguments and more formal logical exercises.

Then there is Mythos, which follows our basic definition of myth: a collection of stories and beliefs held in common by a group of people. Unlike Logos, Mythos deals with non-logical, non-concrete, non-linear aspects of the world and our psyches. There are no rules governing how we interpret myths as they often deal with those things outside the realm of human consciousness and understanding.

The way that we can attempt to explain the unexplainable, those things beyond the world of Logos, is through metaphor. It takes a little work to wrap our heads around this concept, but it is important in helping us understand how to interpret the meaning of the myths. This idea of metaphor is not without controversy; it encourages us to view myths (and religion) in a different way.

Let's start with a simple definition of metaphor: it is a comparison between two different things without using the words "like" or "as." Simple, right? Maybe not so simple. Here is a comparison using like or as:

My love is like a red, red rose.

This clearly states a comparison, but let's look at it as a metaphor:

My love is a red, red rose.

Makes a difference, doesn't it? What the metaphor does is invite us to take the statement literally; we sometimes miss the idea of a comparison.

Let's look at another metaphor:

He is such a snake in the grass.

This we know not to take literally. The metaphor suggests a comparison between the person and the qualities or attributes we associate with snakes (evil, dangerous, slimy). Furthermore, we know that not all snakes are dangerous, and they are evil only because we are using the snake as a metaphor. The snake's association with evil is cultural. So our metaphor, he is a snake, invites us to attach various ideas about the man through associating him with ideas we have about snakes, whether they are accurate or not.

We use metaphors every day to describe our feelings (I'm feeling blue), our troubles (My life is a train wreck), our happiness (I'm on cloud 9). Our dreams are metaphors (dreams of flying, being chased, demons), still, we too often take our metaphors literally.

Myths are metaphors. The whole myth is a method of trying to convey things we don't understand in a way that we can begin to understand. How must it have felt, before science and technology, to look up at the night sky and try to explain all those points of light? Or how do you explain the phases of the moon and its disappearance for three days? Even with a "scientific understanding" of the world, myths help us to create narrative containers for the awe we feel at the very mystery of existence itself. And metaphors are the primary vehicles of myths.

The use of metaphor helped ancient cultures understand. They created pictures with the brightest stars and named them after their gods. The moon became the goddess, dying and being reborn, just like the crops in the spring. The metaphors tied humans to the earth and the gods; they were both a part of creation, and separate from the gods.

Question to Consider

How do you define myth?

PART II

WHY STUDY MYTHS?

3.

Has Myth Lost Its Power?

Has myth lost its power? If so, why? Most myths are ancient. They are retold in various forms. But does myth have a future? Or is myth dead?
If myth has a role today, what is it? How has that role changed through millennia?

Myth, like religion, helps people to explain difficult questions and to address uncertainties, so has myth lost power to more modern belief systems? Are they on the same evolutionary path or different ones?

In the modern Western world, how does technology contribute to the development or death of mythology? As the unknown, perhaps, shrinks, what is the role of myth? What is still unknown? Do we have modern myths about it?

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=45#oembed-1

What, then, are modern myths?

If myths are primarily stories about how things began, what are the modern counterparts to that? Modern creation myths are mixed with science about what we know about the origins of the universe and life on Earth. Because science and myth can be seen to be at odds, this would suggest that we do not have modern myths, which is not to say that people do not embrace the myths explored in this book to some degree or in some circumstances.

Question to Consider

What is the role of myth today in Western culture?

Works Cited

Campbell, Joseph. *Myths to Live By*. Arkana: Penguin Compass. 1993.

Tennant, Megan. "Did Technology Destroy Mythology? | Modern Mythology Explained." *YouTube*, YouTube, 4 June 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OnwF2G2U6bs.

4.

The Persistence of Myth

"Orpheus Playing the Lyre to Hades and Persephone, from Orpheus and Eurydice or The Metamorphoses" by Art Institute of Chicago is in licensed CCo

While perhaps not for the same purpose or with the same day-to-day relevance as before, myth persists. So why? And what role does it play today?

When one thinks of the most popular myths today (or asks a room full of college students), what do you think comes up?

The Greeks have never lost their popularity, but they gained renewer power through Percy Jackson novels, Rachel Smythe's *Lore Olympus*, Madeline Miller's *Circe*, and the Broadway musical *Hades*, Nike's Swoosh, a shape inspired by the wings of the Greek goddess Nike, the videogame *God of War* and also *Assassin's Creed*, which is based on the Ancient Greek *Odyssey* attributed to Homer. Superheroes like Wonder Woman, those in the Marvel Universe, and Shazam! modernize heroic archetypes.

The myths of Greece have earned universal fame and popularity. Recorded as early as approximately *775* B.C. (Homer's *Iliad*), and approximately *725* B.C. (Hesiod's *Theogony*), they reveal a universe that

closely resembles our own. Their gods, their heroes, and their depiction of the human condition arc consistent with our knowledge of human behavior.

The Greek gods are a large family, and each member of that family has a distinct personality. Love, hate, jealousy, and pride motivate their behavior just as those feelings motivate human behavior. The gods who first rule the universe are overthrown by Zeus. Zeus, along with his brothers, sisters, and children, then rules the world of human beings.

Zeus's sister, Demeter, and their daughter, Persephone, prefer the simple beauties of the earth to the majestic palaces of the gods on Mount Olympus. When Zeus's brother, Hades, abducts Persephone, we experience with Demeter the plight of every mother who has lost her beloved daughter. We also feel their bittersweet emotions when they are reunited: joy that they are together again and sorrow that their relationship will never be the same again.

Zeus expects human beings to conform to an unwritten code of respectable behavior. When King Lycaon and his nobility lose their respect for the gods and for other human beings, Zeus destroys almost the entire race with a flood. However, he promises to create another race in its place, and he keeps his word.

According to Hesiod, Zeus also created five races of human beings, each worse than the race that preceded it. People today speak of "the good old days" and wonder whether the human race will survive. Hesiod had the same concerns.

Heracles, whom the Romans called Hercules, is the most famous Greek hero. His accomplishments were so great that his name continues co be attached to any great task that humans face today. His courage, his strength, and his skill in the face of adversity provide a model of behavior for all of us.

Many other famous heroes walk through the pages of Homer's *Iliad*. Achilles and Agamemnon, among the Greeks, and Hector, among the Trojans, must choose between their own desires and the needs of their people. Their war is ancient, bur their agony is modem. Once again, the courage with which they meet the challenges in their lives makes them impressive, yet very human, models of behavior for all of us.

The myth of Jason and the Golden Fleece was well known in ancient Greece. In Homer's Odyssey, from the eighth century B.C., the goddess Circe tells Odysseus that the adventures of the Argonauts are known to all who walk the earth. However, we know the myth of Jason and the Argonauts primarily through Apollonius Rhodius's *Argonautica*, a Hellenistic epic from the third century B.C. Here, Apollonius depicts the youthful Jason and Medea who, in their maturity, will become the Jason and Medea made famous by Euripides. Apollonius's epic is a tale of youthful heroism and love. Jason is more human than traditional heroes, such as Heracles. Jason is successful because he is pragmatic and prudent. Being a man of words rather than a man of deeds, he is able to persuade others to use their courage, strength, and skill on his behalf. Medea's love for Jason in *The Argonautica* has given posterity one of the world's great love stories. Virgil so admired Apollonius's depiction of the maiden whose passion leads her to sacrifice family, home, and country for a heroic stranger that he adapted it for his own depiction of Dido in The Aeneid.

The myth of Medea has roots both in ancient Corinth, where Medea plays a prominent role in an eighth

century B.C. epic about Corinth's heroic history, and in ancient Colchis (former Soviet Georgia). Medea is one of the greatest women in all of literature. Euripides' depiction of her in his Medea, a tragedy from the fifth century B.C., has continued to capture the human heart. When Jason leaves Medea for a younger woman, Medea loses whatever rights and privileges she had as Jason's wife. Her universal appeal resides in the depth of her outrage against injustice and the extent to which she is willing to rebel against it. Medea's many literary children continue to confront her issues in their own time and place. Jason's self-serving ambition is as destructive as Medea's passion for revenge. Therefore, it is interesting to evaluate Jason as a tragic hero, both from an Aristotelian and from a contemporary point of view.

The Romans adopted the Greek gods and their myths. Virgil wrote his own myth, *The Aeneid*, to glorify Augustus Caesar and the founding of Rome. *The Aeneid* begins shortly after Homer's *Iliad* ends, and it describes the adventures of the Trojan hero Aeneas. Because Virgil patterned his epic upon Homer's two epics, it is interesting to compare the works of these two great authors, particularly their concept of the hero. Virgil's dramatic portrayal of the destruction of Troy is one of the most powerful descriptions in all of literature, and Aeneas' love, Queen Dido of Carthage, is one of the world's most noble heroines.

When Uranus becomes ruler of the world, his son, Cronus, dismembers him just as priestesses of the Great Goddess or Mother Goddess in the female-oriented religion dismembered the sacred king. They used his blood, which they considered to be a prime source of fertility, to fertilize the soil so that it would produce an abundance of crops. Uranus' blood, too, produces "crops," in the form of monstrous offspring. In the matriarchal, or mother-dominated, society, a son owes a greater loyalty to his mother than to his father.

When Cronus becomes ruler of the world, the divine family is in transition from the mother-dominated society to the father-dominated society that will follow under the rule of Zeus. Rhea is a Great Goddess or Mother Goddess, just as Gaea, her mother, is. In the contest for power between husband and wife, Cronus is winning until Rhea solicits the help of her mother. Then the females win. Yet, Rhea uses her son, Zeus, to carry out her plan, and with her approval, he becomes the next principal ruler, even though he is male. He will rule with greater authority than either Uranus or Cronus did.

Cronus disposes of his infant children by eating them. Cannibalism is not unusual in history. Primitive people believed that they could acquire desirable characteristics, such as courage, strength, wisdom, and skill, by eating the important organs of another creature, often a fearsome enemy, who had possessed those characteristics. Consequently, early peoples might eat the meat of an animal they had killed, or they might drink the blood or eat the heart of the person who, until they killed him, had been a great enemy. In the matriarchal society, the priestesses would eat the flesh of the sacred king in order to acquire his fertility.

So why have the Greek myths remained so influential and enduring?

Knowledge Check: Greek Myths

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=43#h5p-2

Question to Consider

Compare Hesiod's concern that each race of human beings is worse than the one that preceded it to prevailing attitudes of people today about "the good old days."

5.

Why Myths Remain Relevant Today

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=341#oembed-1

The manner in which the Ancient Greeks saw the world may seen distant from modern Western culture. However, it is obvious that some of their beliefs have stayed with us, argues Marie-Claire Beaulieu, Associate Professor of Classics at Tufts University and author of *The Sea in the Greek Imagination*. Ancient myths remain relevant today because they speak to universal human experiences, values, and questions that continue to shape people's lives through their universal themes and lessons. They continue to influence art, literature, film, and video games.

Intro to Myth Self-Check

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=341#h5p-9

Work Cited

Beaulieu, Marie-Claire. "Why Ancient Myths Remain Relevant Today." *YouTube*, YouTube, 11 Apr. 2018, www.youtube.com/watch?v=u4p-5-CxiyU.

PART III

COSMIC MYTHS

6.

Creation

Creation myths include myths of Creation and the Fall, the Flood, and the end of the world. These myths are found in almost every culture based on their experience. They share human understandings and concerns (birth, survival, death). In all of these stories, humans are at the center. These stories give us a sense of purpose, of significance, of place in a universe that is infinity bigger than ourselves.

They seek to explain "how it all started." There are 8 basic motifs (a recurring pattern or object) for creation myths:

1. Conjunction: mingling of waters or primal elements creates a first entity or a livable surface
2. Divine emission: blood or other body fluids create man or beings or other gods
3. Sacrifice: a god sacrifices himself or is sacrificed to achieve creation of the earth or humans
4. Division/Consumption: marriage of earth and sky or separation of earth and sky creates livable space for humans
5. Cosmic egg: all humans, and the earth sometimes, are contained in a great egg to be opened when the god wills it
6. Emergence: first "people" emerge from an original cramped or hostile world into a new world or a series of worlds
7. Deus Faber: the god consciously crafts the world and humans out of a substance necessary for the survival of mankind (like clay, mud, stone, corn)
8. Ex Nihilo-out of nothing: creation by thought, breath, dream or word

These eight methods are creation are easy to see in myths.

For example, the Meso-American (Aztec-Mexica) myth of Coatlicue, the World Mother, is a division/consumption creation myth derived from earlier traditions of the Olmec and Toltec civilizations and perhaps even the more ancient culture credited with Teotihuacan (Leeming). In this myth, Quetzalcoatl and his mysterious brother Tezcatlipoca are living in Heaven. They notice a giant goddess, Coatlicue, in the waters below, devouring everything she encountered. The brothers transform into giant serpents and tear Coatlicue apart, sacrificing her but creating our world. Half of her becomes the sky and half the earth. Her hair becomes plants, her eyes water, her moth rivers, her shoulders mountains.

Myths are narratives; they tell a story. It is the culture's way of trying to explain the creation of the

universe and mankind in a way everyone could understand. These stories (myths) were passed down through generations orally because they existed long before humans created writing.

The myths, although simple as narratives, are complex in trying to explain existence and the gods. In some cases, you will find contradictions, missing pieces, and some just plain confusing ideas. Remember, these are myths, not fact-based explanations. People need to read them differently than they would a history or science book. But when we know how to read them as intended, as metaphors for the journey of the soul back to the ground of its own being, then they can reveal timeless truth to us, whether we "believe" in them or not.

In the Indian (Hindu) creation myth, time is presented as cyclical, a constant repetition of creation, destruction and rebirth. The Mayan culture also saw time as cyclical as presented in their calendars. Most Western religions have from their beginning seen time as linear, having a clear, set beginning (On the first day, God created...) and a clear, set ending. When the world ends, there is no indication that there will be a regeneration or re-creation as there is the Hindu myth.

Yet, everything about our world indicates that time is cyclical, as evidenced by the track of the sun and moon through the sky, the passing of the seasons, the celebration of recurring events like Thanksgiving and our birthdays, even our clocks are round. Time is one of those puzzling questions that underlies many of the great questions of mankind. People are obsessed with time, and much of language is devoted to time; people try to save time (a bizarre notion); people spend time; people think time is money; people take time; people waste time. People even upset their lives twice a year by setting clocks ahead and back.

Scientists and philosophers tell people time is an illusion, it isn't real, and people can't measure it. Why then does it seem so real? People can't function without schedules or knowing what time it is.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=62#oembed-1

Question to Consider

How might believing in time as linear or cyclical influence a culture's attitude toward death or how people live their lives in the present time? What if people do come back for another try? What if X marks the spot and when people get there, there is no hope to return to life as people know it?

Works Cited

CrashCourse. "Creation from the Void: Crash Course World Mythology #2." YouTube, 3 Mar. 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4eVFgfQ2694.

Leeming, David A. *The World of Myth*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

7.

Darwin & The Big Bang

"Black and brown galaxy" by Brett Ritchie on Unsplash.

In opposition to creation myths are Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and The Big Bang theory of modern physics. How do these stories from science work with and against creation myths?

Charles Darwin's theory of evolution is still considered merely a theory (a myth?) by many religious fundamentalists today despite being accepted by the scientific community. According to this theory, life derived from a common source and developed gradually over time from simple to more complex structures based on his theory of natural selection. Natural selection means the strongest of a species survives in order to propagate the species. Darwin wrote, "Natural selection acts only by taking advantage of slight successive variations; she can never take a great and sudden leap, but must advance by short and sure, though slow steps." Creation by ex niliho, by emergence, instantaneously, is impossible in Darwin's conception (Leeming).

Creation stories are treated as truth by the culture from which they emerge until they are exposed as mere myths. A modern creation story is the big bang theory, which, like other creation myths, reveals the priorities of the culture that created it. Like all creation stories, it is a record of the culture's understanding of its placed in the universe. The big bang theory proposes that all the particles in the

universe were subjected to extreme heat and pressure, and what we now experience is the beginning of the resulting explosion of light. "We can see the dawn of the universe because the light from its edge reaches us only now, after traveling twenty billion years to get here," says Thomas to a youth in Brian Swimme's *The Universe is a Green Dragon: A Cosmic Creation Story*. We have only just learned to see it, and are therefore the first humans to "live with an empirical view of the origin maker" (Swimme).

Works Cited

Leeming, David A. *The World of Myth*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

Swimme, Brian. *The Universe Is a Green Dragon: A Cosmic Creation Story*. Bear, 2001.

8.

Apocalypse

The idea of a catastrophic or apocalyptic end of the world is a trope in popular culture, and it is a common story in many cultures. These stories often include a rising of the dead and the emergence of a new world. Examples include, with respect, the symbolic Christian *Book of Revelation*, the Muslim End of the World, India's End of Kali, and the Hopi Emergence of 5th World. More modern biological apocalypse stories include *The Last of Us* and *World War Z*. Environmental apocalypse stories like *The Day After Tomorrow*, *Mad Max: Fury Road*, and *Snowpiercer*. Nuclear apocalypse stories include *The Road* and *Fallout*. Technological apocalypse stories include *Terminator, Matrix*, and *Blackmirror*. These modern stories have mythic elements.

Mighty battles such as Armageddon in the Book of Revelation are fought between good and evil for the human soul. This Western apocalypse is the end of one world so that the Kingdom of God can be established, but the Eastern end and beginning but is rather more cyclical and less focused on human behavior. In some religions like Hinduism, creation and apocalypse endlessly repeat themselves (Leeming). The Hopi origin story has many of the trademarks of creation myths. As you view this four minute video, consider where you see echoes of other creation stories you may already be familiar myth.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=68#oembed-1

As evidenced by traditional myth and modern adaptations, the world can end in many ways, and apocalypse takes many forms in myths. Sometimes apocalypse leads to the death of gods, as it does in the myth of Ragnarok. Sometimes it is a final battle between good and evil, as in the Book of Revelation. Apocalyptic myths may be an attempt to explain chaos like natural disasters or other great upheaval.

These myths vary widely across cultures but share common elements that resonate with human experiences and existential questions.

Work Cited

Leeming, David A. *The World of Myth*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

PBS. "Hopi Origin Story | Native America | Sacred Stories | PBS." *YouTube*, 18 Oct. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D53yGnJwjTo.

9.

Flood Myths

Photo by Chris Gallagher on Unsplash.

The flood myth is common in many cultures. Why do you think this is? Weather disasters can be terrible, memorable, and lead to significant changes to a people in terms of where they live and how. Without a scientific understanding of such disasters, myths came to be as way to understand and perhaps to feel some control. Many flood myths involve a sacrifice that leads to rebirth, a positive end to a devastating event. Jung explains that Noah's Ark "crosses the waters of death and leads to the rebirth of all life." Thus life depends on death.

The flood myth manifests in personal rituals within many cultures, as well. Like a hero going to the underworld to confront death, a person can be reborn, often in faith, through water. Note similarities and differences in these brief summaries of flood myths.

Ojibwe Flood Myth

"Manabozho in the tree above the flood" by R. C. Armour is in the public domain.

Native American tribes have long told stories to preserve their language, and to teach values and moral lessons. Such is the Ojibwe myth of Waynaboozhoo (or Nanabozho) and the Great Flood. This story explores the time which is not commonly explored, the period between the flood and the receding of the water.

The story goes that the Great Spirit was unhappy with man and created a great flood. The only survivor was a man named Waynaboozhoo who had made a raft of logs and sticks for himself and other animals that were alive. They floated around for over a month, but the waters had not gone down. Waynaboozhoo decided that he was going to have to rebuild the earth, and he needed mud from the 'old world' buried deep underwater.

First, a loon tried, but the water was too deep. A beaver was also unsuccessful. While they were arguing about who would try next, a coon (small duck) named Aajigade said that he would try. All the animals told him to go away, that he was too small. Then they continued arguing until the sun went down. Suddenly someone noticed the body of the little coon floating on the surface. Waynaboozhoo picked him up and saw a small piece of mud in his bill. He revived Aajigade, who flew away.

Waynaboozhoo shaped the mud, and it became bigger and bigger. He needed a place to put it, and a snapping turtle, Mikinaak, offered his back. The land grew and grew until it was the size of the whole earth.

Mayan Flood Myth

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=66#oembed-1

Aztec Flood Myth

In the Aztec flood story, Titlacauan warned the man named Note and his wife Nena, of a coming flood. Note and Nena hollowed out a cypress tree, and Titlachahuan sealed them inside, telling them that they may only eat one ear of maize each. Here is where the story is wildly different from others.

The earth is flooded, but the people weren't killed, instead, they were turned into fish. After the flood, Nata and Nena disobeyed Titlacauan and ate fish. So Titlacauan turned them into dogs. The story ends with the world essentially starting all over again only this time with a hearty fish population and a couple of dogs.

Norse Flood Myth

The Norse flood story is starkly different from the others in that the world was flooded, but not with water. When Odin and his brothers Villi and Ve killed the giant Ymir, the blood that poured from his body flooded the earth. That's right, the world was drowned in blood. In this literal bloodbath, a single frost giant named Bergelmir and his wife made an ark, were saved, and repopulated the earth.

Hindu Flood Myth

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=66#oembed-2

Mesopotamian Flood Myth

Another flood myth comes from one of the earliest recorded stories, The Epic of Gilgamesh from ancient Mesopotamia. According to the poem, Gilgamesh was a Sumerian king who reigned for 126 years. After the death of a friend, Gilgamesh began to search for immortality and met an immortal man named Utnapishtim, whose story is much like the story of Noah. Utnapishtim had been granted immortality after building a ship called Preserver of Life and surviving the "great flood." Like Noah's Ark, Utnapishtim brought all of his relatives and all species of creatures aboard his ark to save the world. Other cultures' flood stories bear contain similarities to different extents to the story of Noah's Ark. They maintain the themes of the ark and an angry God.

Hebrew and Quranic Flood Myth

Finally, the Hebrew story in the Bible's Book of Genesis, emphasizes humanity's sinfulness. God seeks to destroy the humans he has created for their wickedness. Here the flood is a punishment, though rebirth follows the familiar pattern. Noah finds forgiveness in the eyes of God and is given instructions for building an ark and filling it with two of each animal, male and female. It rains for a hundred and fifty days until only Noah and the ark remained.

This story is also in the Quran. Allah told Noah to build the ark, the flood came, and then from Noah, the world began again.

Question to Consider

Which flood myth resonates most with you? Why?

Works Cited

Indian Monk. "Manu – the Father of Mankind." *YouTube*, 2 Jan. 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cw1eTc25wyw.

Jung, Carl Gustav, and Hull Richard Francis Carrington. *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*. Routledge, 2010.

Nanabozho in the flood by R.C. Armour, from his book North American Indian Fairy Tales, Folklore and Legends, 1905, is in the Public Domain.

SmithsonianNMAI. "The Creation Story of the Maya." YouTube, 14 June 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb5GKmEcJcw.

10.

Afterlife

Humanity's pervasive belief in an afterlife may stem from the cyclical patterns observed in nature. Natural forces both produce and destroy, and cultures have long turned to myth to explain these phenomena. If nature operates through continuous processes and recurring cycles, it is reasonable to see death as part of a similar pattern. Because humans are the only living things with a conscious awareness of these processes, the idea that a cycle could end by extinguishing consciousness itself may be profoundly difficult to accept.

The underworld is an idea found across cultures that explains what happens after death. The underworld is best understood as a symbolic realm with diverse meanings and functions. The underworld can be a transitional place that souls may or must pass through, a place of judgment, or a place of transformation.

Mictlan is the underworld of Aztec mythology. Most people who die would travel to Mictlan. Mictlan consists of nine distinct levels. The journey from the first level to the ninth is difficult and takes four years, but the dead are aided by Xolotl, a psychopomp (examples of similar figures go by different names depending on the myth, but they include (the ancient Egyptian god Anubis, the deity Yama in Hinduism, the Greek ferryman Charon, the goddess Hecate, and god Hermes, the Roman god Mercury, the Norse Valkyries, the Slavic goddess Morana and the Etruscan Vanth). The dead must pass many challenges, such as crossing a mountain range where the mountains crash into each other, a field with wind that blows flesh-scraping knives, and a river of blood with fearsome jaguars.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=70#oembed-1

Cosmic Myths Self-Check

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=70#h5p-10

Works Cited

Mythology Unleashed. "Mictlan | the Aztec Underworld." *YouTube*, 28 Dec. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aeoLqi7hxE4.

PART IV

GODS

11.

Pantheons

A pantheon is simply the primary gods of a particular culture or region. These pantheons illustrate how people crave similar myths, look to similar gods, and seek to explain similar phenomena. In fact, gods across different pantheons often play similar roles.

Pantheons often include:

- Gods of sky/thunder (Zeus, Shango, Indra)
- Gods of fertility (Isis, Parvati, Frigg)
- Tricksters (Loki, Hermes, Coyote, Anansi)
- Sun gods (Ra, Apollo, Huitzilopochtil)
- War gods (Anat, Kokou, Anann, Odin, Chiyou)
- Gods of the Underworld (Hades, Osiris, Hel)

Note that many gods play more than one role, like Nane, the Armenian goddess of war and wisdom; or Baal, the Canaanite god of fertility, storms, and war.

Orishas of the Yoruba

There is not a single African pantheon since Africa is not a single country or culture. So here just one pantheon, the well-documented pantheon of the Orishas of the Yoruba, is explored.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=77#oembed-1

Norse Gods

Modern interest in the Norse pantheon and its role in pop culture has made many of the members famous.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=77#oembed-2

Olympians

Because Western culture rises from Greece, the Roman origin stories and myths play an important role in the development of Western culture. As with most pantheons, their stories are complicated and knotty, and likely as a result of their evolution, the popularity of certain gods rises and falls. According to "Twelve Olympians," the Olympians were a race of deities who were worshipped as the principal gods of the Greek pantheon who resided on Mount Olympus. They gained their supremacy in a ten-year-long war of gods, in which Zeus led his siblings to victory over the previous generation of ruling immortal beings, the Titans, children of Uranus and Gaia. The Olympians were a family of gods, the most important consisting of the first generation of Olympians, offspring of the Titans Cronus and Rhea: Zeus, Poseidon, Hera, Demeter and Hestia, along with the principal offspring of Zeus: Aphrodite, Athena, Artemis, Apollo, Ares, Hephaestus, Hermes and Dionysus. Although Hades was a major deity in the Greek pantheon and was the brother of Zeus and the other first generation of Olympians, his realm was far away from Olympus in the underworld, and thus he was not usually considered to be one of the Olympians.

Question to Consider

For each pantheon, consider who created it. For what purpose? To explain what, specifically, for that culture?

Works Cited

CrashCourse. "African Pantheons and the Orishas: Crash Course World Mythology #11." *YouTube*, 12 May 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J2se_zimj40.

CrashCourse. "The Norse Pantheon: Crash Course World Mythology #10." *YouTube*, 30 Apr. 2017, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CyU54gV_PWM.

"Twelve Olympians." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 6 Apr. 2023, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twelve_Olympians.

12.

Tricksters

Photo by Joshua Wilking on Unsplash.

No pantheon would be complete without tricksters like Loki of the Norse and Coyote of Navajo mythology.

According to Guy Cooper in the article, "Coyote in Navajo Religion and Mythology," "Coyote is a key figure in Navajo mythology, representing both good and evil, humans and gods, and of course animals. He is unpredictable and ambivalent, a characteristic of all these beings. At the same time, however, by testing and pushing the limits of behavior, he demonstrates and reinforces concepts of harmony and order for the Navajo."

Tricksters appear in a variety of myths. The role of trouble-maker or prankster is a common one for the trickster. These characters often test boundaries, are sometimes foolish, often destructive, greedy and vain, but frequently quite powerful. They can be blamed, therefore, for any number of bad things. For example, in the Creation myth generally known to Navajos, Coyote causes the flood, originates death, and interferes with the placing of stars, as well as generally poking his nose into everyone's business.

Loki has become a familiar figure thanks to Marvel Studios films and series. He is the "god of mischief,"

though the original Norse Loki's origin story is murky. Marvel's incarnation shares a charming nature common in many trickster myths of the Hindu Narada and Shinto Susanoo as well as Coyote. James Deutsch explores Marvel's take on Loki in the article, "A Folklorist Explains Loki's Place in Mythology's Pantheon of Trickster Heroes" for Smithsonian magazine.

Works Cited

Cooper, Gary H. "Coyote in Navajo Religion and Cosmology." Coyote in Navajo Religion and Cosmology, Loyola Marymount University, 1985, https://academics.lmu.edu/media/lmuacademics/cures/urbanecolab/module12/Coyote%20Mythology%20M12.L1.pdf.

Deutsch, James. "A Folklorist Explains Loki's Place in Mythology's Pantheon of Trickster Heroes." *Smithsonian.com*, Smithsonian Institution, 9 June 2021, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/folklorist-explains-lokis-place-pantheon-trickster-heroes-180977935/.

13.

Gods of Death

Death

Death plays a huge role in myth. To understand the rites surrounding death, first consider the gods associated with death. Note that gods of death are often gods of regeneration and of sex. Why would these two be connected? What is the connection? Joseph Campbell explains that the death god Ghede of the Haitian Voodoo tradition is also the sex god. The Egyptian god Osiris is the lord of the dead but also the one who regenerates. All that dies is reborn in some form is the idea that predominates myth. You have to have death to have life (137).

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=96#oembed-1

Death Customs

The Tangihanga, or death customs of the Maori of New Zealand, include Hine-nui-te-po, the goddess of death. According to The Encyclopedia of New Zealand, "the mythological origins of death are associated with the ancestress Hine-tītama and her husband the forest god Tāne. Hine-tītama fled to Rarohenga, where the spirits of the dead dwell, after learning that Tāne was also her father. She was so overcome by the knowledge that Tāne could not persuade her to return. She said to him, 'Hoki atu koe ki te ao hei whakatupu mai i ētahi o ā tāua hua; waiho hoki au i raro nei hei kukume i ētahi o ā tāua hua ki raro nei. (Return and raise our offspring in the world of the living; leave me here to draw our offspring down below.) She would be known as Hine-nui-te-pō, the goddess of death" (Higgins).

Mot is the Canaanite god of death and the underworld. He is a favored son in the Elohim, the Children of God. Mot is vengeful, terrifying, and ambitious. Hell, or Sheol, is a dark place deep in the Earth, a threat to be avoided.

Mictecacihuatl, the Aztec "lady of the dead," guards the bones of the dead and presides at rituals. The modern Día de Los Muertos is a combination of early festivals of the dead and customs brought by the Spanish Conquistadors (Cline).

Works Cited

Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*. New York: Anchor Books. 1991.

Cline, Austin. "Who Was Mictecacihuatl in Aztec Mythology?" *Learn Religions*, Dotdash Meredith, 25 Jan. 2018, https://www.learnreligions.com/mictecacihuatl-aztec-goddess-of-death-248587.

Higgins, Rawinia. "Tangihanga – Death Customs: Mythological Origins." *Te Ara – The Encyclopedia of New Zealand*, http://www.TeAra.govt.nz/en/tangihanga-death-customs/page-2. Accessed 1 May 2023.

Mythos the Historian. "God of Death in Mythology and Folklore." *YouTube*, 13 July 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4h1joqOtaAc.

14.

The Underworld

For cultures that believe in an afterlife and an Underworld, how do those worlds differ? What are some common beliefs about the nature of those worlds? Some myths paint the underworld, or hell, as a "furnace of fire" (*Authorized King James Bible*, Matthew 13:50) like the Christian Hell, a frozen wasteland like the Inuit's Adlivun, or a "filled with splendid jewels, beautiful groves and lakes" like the Hindu Patala (Wikipedia Contributors).

Some of the gods attributed with death are also gods of underworlds, though not all. For example, Egyptian Anubis oversees the process after death, like embalming and guiding souls. But Osiris is the god of the Underworld (and rebirth). Greek Thanatos is a god of peaceful death while Hades is the lord of the Underworld.

As always, look for similarities and differences as you explore these myths. What motivates humanities' almost universal belief in a place souls go after death?

The Monkey King

Sun Wukong, also known as the Monkey King, is a trickster god and a central character in the novel *Journey to the West*. The Monkey King goes on a quest that is also a spiritual journey.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=98#oembed-1

Persephone

Persephone became the queen of the underworld after her abduction by her uncle Hades, the king of the underworld, who would later take her into marriage. The myth of her abduction, her sojourn in the underworld, and her cyclical return to the surface represents her functions as the embodiment of spring

and the personification of vegetation, especially grain crops, which disappear into the earth when sown, sprout from the earth in spring, and are harvested when fully grown.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=98#oembed-2

A culture's art can inform us about beliefs. In The Getty's Underworld: Exploring the Afterlife exhibit, arts from the ancient Greeks. The article, video, and images in the article illustrate the power of the Underworld and the myths set therein.

Gods Self-Check

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=98#h5p-11

Works Cited

Gillespie, Iseult. "The Myth of Hades and Persephone." *YouTube*, TED-Ed, 14 Apr. 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLAYGZeVTPQ.

Teng, Shunan. "How the Monkey King Escaped the Underworld." *YouTube*, TED-Ed, 7 Apr. 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xs-9vfWDJfU.

The Bible. Authorized King James Version, Oxford UP, 1998.

Wikipedia contributors. "Patala." *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia.* Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, 21 Mar. 2023. Web. 29 Apr. 2023.

PART V

HEROES

15.

The Hero's Journey

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=82#oembed-1

Not all heroes look or act alike, and it will be important to explore the many ways people look to each other for help, rescue, and salvation. We will begin at the beginning and explore the very first hero story ever written. Or at least, the earliest surviving example of one.

Gilgamesh is a great story; it has all the makings of a typical hero myth. Joseph Campbell briefly outlines the hero quest:

- The call to the quest–the hero consciously seeks the quest. In Gilgamesh, he seeks immortality. In another variation, the quest is thrust upon the hero—he or she may wander into a woods or area that is magical or strange and dangerous and have to navigate the dangers to return.
- The going out–the hero ventures out on the quest. There often are "helpers" along the way. Gilgamesh, in his first quest to kill Humbaba, has the help of Enkidu and other men, and the god Samash.
- Fulfillment of the quest–after a series of tests or challenges, the hero completes the quest.
- Return–the hero return with a great gift or boon for his people. It may be a physical item like gold or a magical object, or it may be some great knowledge that will aid his people. (Moses is a great example—his return with the Ten Commandments set up the principles for a new society.)
- The hero undergoes tests that change him, usually for the good. We can see the pattern in the lives of Buddha, Mohammed, and Jesus.

There are many film and literary representations of the Hero's Journey, including *Star Wars*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. Can you think of others?

Question to Consider

What other stories illustrate the Hero's Journey?

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=82#oembed-2

Works Cited

"The Epic of Gilgamesh, the King Who Tried to Conquer Death – Soraya Field Fiorio" is licensed CC BY-NC-ND.

Fiorio, Soraya Field. "The Epic of Gilgamesh, the King Who Tried to Conquer Death – Soraya Field Fiorio." *YouTube*, TED-Ed, 1 June 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BV9t3Cp18Rc.

16.

Countering Campbell

The Singular Myth Structure

Naturally, in the years since Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* was published in 1949, his singular myth structure has been criticized. After all, scholars are the products of the time in which they are working, and as times change, values change. Consider society in 1949 and the changes that have ensued.

Binaries

One common criticism that appears in many modern analyses of Campbell's work is his establishment of simple binaries, like good versus evil, order versus chaos, sacred versus profane, human versus divine. In the Hero's Journey, the hero begins on one side of the binary (safety, order) and crosses to the other (danger, chaos) before returning transformed. Modern illustrations of this include Star Ward (light versus dark) and the Hunger Games series (freedom versus control).

Heroines

Another criticism that should be obvious to the modern reader is that Campbell sees heroes as overwhelmingly male. Only males leave home to seek adventure. The world is more nuanced than that. Stories about women generally involve looking inward, as in the Aboriginal story of the Pleaides, the Seven Sisters. Perhaps the traditional expectation of women in the home limits opportunity to answer the call to adventure. Or, at least, support for such action would be limited.

The concept of the "heroine's journey," also known as the female hero's journey, was developed in 1990 by Maureen Murdock, a psychotherapist and a student of Joseph Campbell, in her book, *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness.* According to the description on Bookshop.com, "*The Heroine's Journey* describes contemporary woman's search for wholeness in a society where she has been defined according to masculine values. Drawing on cultural myths and fairy tales, ancient symbols and goddesses, and the dreams of contemporary women, Murdock illustrates the need for and the reality of feminine values in Western culture: "The feminine journey is about going down deep into soul, healing and reclaiming, while the masculine journey is up and out, to spirit."

Marginalized Communities

Similarly, stories about people of color or marginalized groups within society sometimes follow different story archetypes. Joseph Campbell's hero's journey focuses on an individual hero, a hero with autonomy, power, and often means, rather than a broader social context. Stories about marginalized groups might center on communities reacting to oppression and navigating the rules set by the majority, instead of highlighting a single individual who proactively seeks adventure.

As we consider modern stories following mythic archetypes, keeps these counterarguments in mind.

Works Cited

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces.* Pantheon Books, 1949.

Murdock, Maureen. *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness*. Shambhala Publications, 1990.

17.

Departure

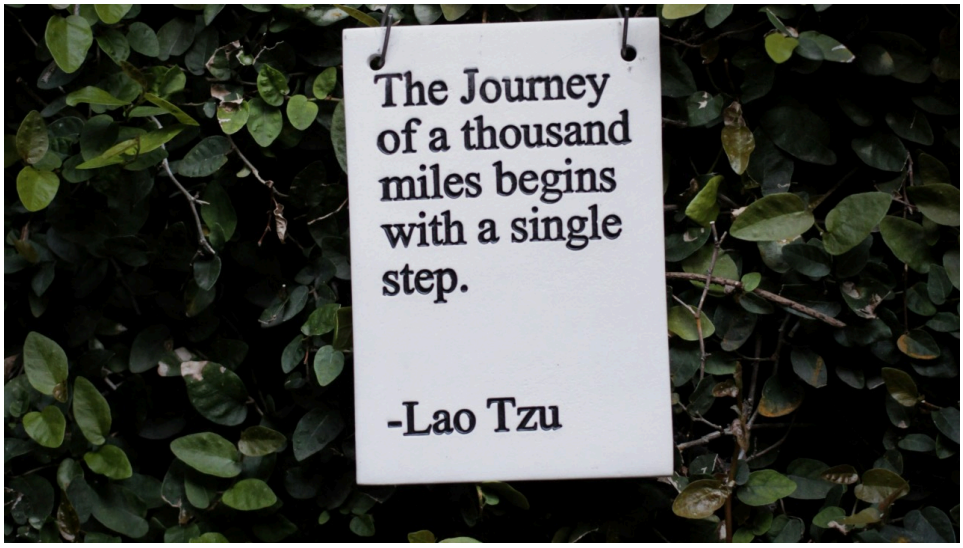


Photo by Hester Qiang on Unsplash.

David A. Leeming poses that, "This is a quest that we all understand, for only humans are endowed with the ability to be conscious, at any given time, of the universal scheme of things, or >mythos, of the beginning, middle, and end of a given process. In that sense we are all ultimately questers, voyagers on the mythical "road of life," the "path," the "Tao" (5). To depart on a journey is to seek something, to, in the most human of ways, need something, be it physical, spiritual, or otherwise. The loudest stories, perhaps, are those of when a physical quest is undertaken. This less familiar myth explains the existence of the Pleiades, the Seven Sisters, that can be seen in the night sky.

The Aboriginal version of the Pleiades story differs from the Greek. In the Greek myth, the daughters of Atlas, who are the priestesses of Artemis, are turned into stars (Artemis is goddess of the moon). In the Australian myth, the heroines, like their sisters in other cultures, are light coming from the darkness, life that can come from death. They are part of the hero's journey into darkness.

As the girls reach adolescence, they realize the need to bring the mind under the authority of the mind in order to restrain appetites, pain, and fear. They felt that this control would allow them to advance

their people. They present themselves to their elders who tell them that they would be tested, and it would be arduous. But the girls were resolved.

For every morning for three years, separated from their family, they were given a little food to teach them moderation. At the end of three years, they were taken on a long and difficult journey. After a week, the elders called the girls and questioned whether they had reached their goal of control of mind over body, and they said yes. They were asked to fast for three days while they continued to travel. The girls were weak, and the days were hot and long. On the morning of the fourth day they were offered meat and asked to take as much as they wanted. The girls took only a normal portion, resisting their hunger.

They were also tested to control pain and fear. When they had successfully met the challenges, they told girls from all of the tribes that they, too, should go through the same testing. They explained that happiness only comes from putting other before yourself. The girls were proud of the heroines of this myth, and agreed.

The Great Spirit was happy with all of the girls and sent a great star spirit to take the girls to the heaven without death or suffering so that they could shine in the sky as a symbol for all of the people. The constellation, the Seven Sisters, reminds the Aboriginal people what the girls did (Leeming 252-56).

Work Cited

Leeming, David A. *The World of Myth*. Oxford University Press, 2014.

18.

Transformation

Transformation refers to any major change in a character's form, identity, status, or spiritual state. These myths explain how the world works, why the humans behave as they do, or the consequences or rewards that follow certain actions. These transformations can be physical, social, moral, or cosmic.

In each of these stories, heroes (used inclusively to include heroines) are transformed. In each of these stories, consider the transformation.

Wanjiru Myth

The Kikuyu/Kenyan myth of Wanjiru explains that for three years, there was no rain, crops died, and hunger was prevalent. A wise man told the people that a young woman named Wanjiru must be purchased in order to have rain. Each man would have to contribute a goat for the payment. Wanjiru, learning that she had been sold by her family, was distraught, and her parents wept. Her feet began to sink into the ground. She sank to her waist, to her breast. But the rain did not come. When she sank to her neck, the rain came heavily. But no one came forward to save her, and she concluded that she had been undone by her people. She sank to her eyes. Whenever a member of her family moved to save her, someone would give him a goat, and that person would fall back. When Wanjiru vanished under the ground, rain began to fall heavily. A warrior who loved Wanjiru took his weapons and went to the place where she had disappeared. Then he, too, sank into the ground. Under the earth, he traveled a long road until he saw her. She was miserable. He picked her up, and they rose to the open air. At night, he went to his mother and told her what had happened to Wanjiru, pleading for her help. His mother killed goats and fed the fat to Wanjiru, and Wanjiru gained strength. At a dance the next day, Wanjiru and the warrior encountered Wanjiru's family, but initially he would not allow them to get close to her. In the end, however, he repented, paid her family the dowry, and married her.

Water Jar Boy Myth

Water Jar Boy is a Tewa myth. Here is a reading of that myth:

—

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=88#oembed-1

Question to Consider

When you think of other myths with which you are familiar, do any of them contain transformations? What is the transformation? To what end? How does the transformation contribute to the hero's journey?

Works Cited

Arizona Daily Wildcat. "Water-Jar-Boy Reading: A Traditional Santa Clara Pueblo Story." *YouTube*, 11 Feb. 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55Yh9JBTYzQ.

"Wanjiru Sinks into the Earth, and Rain Falls." *Oxford Reference*, Oxford University Press, 2023, https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803120822321.

19.

Return

The heroic journey ends with the triumphant return of the hero. After a challenge or challenges, a goal is achieved. That goal varies greatly depending on the nature of the myth. There may be a final battle, or a particularly difficult challenge may be faced and overcome. A wrong may be righted.

"Orpheus and Eurydice on the Banks of the Styx, 1878", Wikimedia is in the public domain

The return often signifies the completion of the hero's journey and a return to the world, a cycle ending. The hero returns home with whatever has been gained: treasure, knowledge, or power. Orpheus regains (and then loses) his true love, Eurydice. Typically, it marks a mastery of the natural and supernatural world. Not all returns involve literal treasure; often it is positive changes within, like Frodo's return to the Shire or Harry Potter return to the living world in "Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows."

Heroes Self-Check

—

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=90#h5p-12

Question to Consider

Envision a triumphant return. What comes to mind? What story informs that vision? Are there myths in which the return does not seem so triumphant? Some heroes face high costs in the overcoming of the challenges set before them. Do any of those costs seem to be too high?

PART VI

SEASONAL RITES

20.

Fertility Myths

Fertility myths are metaphoric and archetypal. They involve some kind of journey into the underworld where the goddess symbolically dies. Her death causes the desolation of the earth: crops shrivel, animals die, water disappears. You can imagine the human need to explain these natural cycles. These goddesses are tied to nature; they are the goddesses of the earth, the crops, and all living things. Salvation of the earth occurs when the goddess somehow manages to return to the earth.

But a deal must be made; either the goddess or a representative must return to the underworld for a season.

This explains winter, the season when time seems to slow and few things grow, and it explains the cycle of the seasons. Spring is the return of the earth goddess. Summer produces the abundance of the earth. Fall celebrates the harvest and the preparations for the goddess's return to the underworld.

These myths seek to explain the mystery of life and death and the afterlife.

These myths are also known as fertility or vegetation myths. The gods are called "chthonic," pronounced "tonic." The term means "subterranean," or "below the earth," so you can see their association with growing plants.

But these myths evolved into a much deeper, much more complex meaning that goes beyond the fertility of the land. These goddesses represent life itself. If the goddess can return from death, is there hope for us? In this sense, we can see how these myths are echoed in many religious beliefs.

The cycle of human life mirrors the cycle of the seasons in that spring is birth; summer, growth to adulthood; fall, productive life when we bring forth new life; and winter, old age when we still nurture but will soon die. If the plants can be reborn in the spring, can we? These myths suggest that there is a life after our physical death.

As rituals grew around the worship of these goddesses, they became more formal and became cults, though not in our modern sense of cult. A cult used to be an organized system of religious devotion rather than something secretive or manipulative. The most widespread cult was that of Isis. Originating in Egypt, it spread to Greece, Italy, and beyond. It persisted until the 4th century CE. The early Roman Catholic Church had an extremely difficult time suppressing it; why do you think that was the case?

"Terracotta statuette of a woman" by The Met is in the public domain

Demeter

The next important cult was that of Demeter, in Greece. Historians from the earliest times knew little about this cult. There was an elaborate initiation ritual and certain requirements to join. Initiates had to be Greek speakers, and slaves could join at the consent of their masters. Every spring, initiates walked from Athens to Eleusis, the location of the shrine of Demeter.

The march was to honor Demeter's search for Persephone after she was abducted to the underworld by Poseidon. Initiates fasted, drinking only kykeon, a mixture of barley, water, and honey. Once the initiates reached Eleusis, they sacrificed a pig, cleansed themselves in the waters, and prepared to be admitted to the cult. Once in the temple, the ceremony included specific rites performed. The important thing about these rites was that they were secret.

Once initiated into the cult, members were forbidden under penalty of death to speak about the rites. Over time, scholars were able to piece together what we know about the cults today. As we can see from Homer's hymns to Demeter, part of the mystery involved a type of symbolic rebirth, giving a hope of life after death. Persephone, representing spring, is abducted by Hades, god of the Underworld. He intends to marry her. Demeter searches in vain for her daughter. In her grief, the land is rendered barren, and nothing can grow.

After Demeter's futile search, she finally bargains with Zeus for Persephone's return. But Persephone has already eaten a single seed of the pomegranate; she has eaten the food of the dead. So, she is allowed to return for the spring, summer, and fall, the fertile seasons, but must return to Hades for the winter.

Osiris, Isis, and Horus

For ritual and the message of life after death, the myth of Osiris, Isis, and Horus clearly shows the impact myths can have on a society. From the myth arose the complex burial practices of Egypt. The Egyptian Book of the Dead outlines the processes, the prayers, and the confessions one must perform in order to make the journey to the afterlife. Isis became a cult figure for several reasons: she did bring

Osiris back to life for the purpose of becoming impregnated with Horus. Here, the myth closely ties life and death; from death comes life.

As you read about these rites, you will see that there is a close tie between death and sex; Isis fans life into Osiris and he lives long enough to impregnate Isis with Horus. The cycle is complete, and the generations will go on. So, the message is, life comes from death. (For many centuries, people thought that every orgasm was like a little death: the French call it "la petite mort," literally the little death.)

Most religions address the issue of an afterlife in a very similar way to the Greek and Egyptian. Modern western funeral rites are a direct evolution of the Egyptian Book of the Dead. Why would we want to preserve a body for as long as possible? But more than that, our religions have us look to a movement to a life different than that on earth, but a life nonetheless, often with rewards and comfort we do not get in our earthly lives.

It's a great metaphor for the rebirth of the soul into the afterlife. Isis is also the goddess of crops and other growing things. She is fertility. Isis is mother, the giver and sustainer of life. Osiris takes on the role of final judge in the soul's journey to immortality. It is he who oversees the weighing of the heart, hears the confession, and welcomes the soul into the afterlife.

Sedna

How can a culture so far removed from the fertility of the Nile and Greece have such a similar myth? The Inuit do not grow any crops, yet Sedna represents fertility. Life comes from her very body. Unlike the other myths, Sedna does not return in the spring but stays beneath the seas. In place of winter, the fish and sea mammals are held back from the hunters when Sedna is angered because her hair is tangled. But notice the shaman must go down into the sea (the parallel of the underworld) to appease her and comb her hair so she will return the bounty of the seas to the people.

Dumazi and Inanna

The name "Tammuz" is derived from the Sumerian deity Dumuzi, a god of fertility and shepherds, who was believed to die and rise annually, symbolizing the cycle of vegetation and the seasons. The myth of Tammuz involved his descent into the underworld, which led to a period of mourning and lamentation, followed by his return, symbolizing the renewal of life and fertility ("Dumuzid"). Tammuz is also the first and primary consort of the goddess Inanna (later known as Ishtar). In *Inanna's Descent*

into the Underworld, composed around 1700 BCE, Inanna believes that Dumuzid has not mourned her death properly and, when she returns from the Underworld, allows demons to drag him down to the Underworld as her replacement.

Inanna later regrets this decision and decrees that Dumuzid will spend half of the year in the Underworld, but the other half of the year with her, while his sister Geshtinanna stays in the Underworld in his place, thus resulting in the cycle of the seasons.

Other myths with this same basic archetype are Dionysius, Orpheus, Attis, Adonis, and Innana from Sumer/Babylon.

The same metaphors are here as in the other myths. Perhaps more so than the creation myths, these myths show the archetypal pattern of the descent into the underworld and the return of the god or goddess with hope for life after death.

21.

Myths, Folklore, & Holidays

According to Gabriella Kalapos, author of *Fertility Goddesses, Groundhog Bellies & the Coca Cola Company: The origins of modern holidays*, "Practically all the known ancient sun gods were born on December 25th" (230). While the names of the gods differ, the stories have similarities.

This is evidence that people have long sought to explain the cycle of seasons and the passing of time with similar dates appearing across cultures.

Dies Natalis Solis Invicti

December 25 was the traditional date of the winter solstice in the Roman Empire, and the Roman festival Dies Natalis Solis Invicti (birthday of Sol Invictus) was held on this date since 274 AD.

The initiation rites of the Mithraic cult customarily included a form of entrance examination, which could involve either ritual questioning or a test of physical endurance. Upon successful completion of these trials, initiates participated in a lavish ceremonial banquet.

During the Roman Empire, Mithraism achieved widespread prominence, particularly among the upper echelons of the military hierarchy. These feasts were noted for their opulence; archaeological excavations continue to reveal silverware and other artifacts adorned with bull iconography within the secluded chambers of Roman villas. Mithras, also referred to as Mithra or Mythras, was venerated as a deity associated with warfare and solar power, frequently depicted in the act of subduing or slaying a bull. He served as the central figure of Mithraism, a mystery religion defined by its secret initiations and esoteric rituals.

Because of the sect's highly secretive character, much of its doctrine and ritual practice remains obscure. Nevertheless evidence suggests that Mithraic observances reached their zenith around the solstices, reflecting Mithras's symbolic association with the sun and the cosmic order.

Dumuzid

The name "Tammuz" is derived from the Sumerian deity Dumuzi, a god of fertility and shepherds, who was believed to die and rise annually, symbolizing the cycle of vegetation and the seasons. The myth of

Tammuz involved his descent into the underworld, which led to a period of mourning and lamentation, followed by his return, symbolizing the renewal of life and fertility ("Dumuzid").

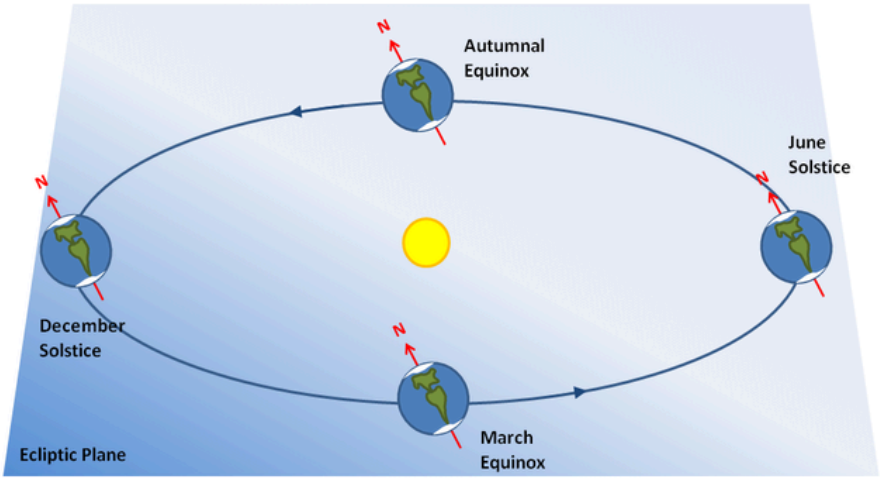
Works Cited

Wikipedia Editors. "Dumuzid." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 3 July 2025, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dumuzid.

Kalapos, Gabriella. *Fertility Goddesses, Groundhog Bellies & The Coca-Cola Company: The Origins of Modern Holidays*. Insomniac, 2006.

22.

Solstice & Equinox



Solstice

Twice a year, the Earth's axial tilt is at its closest or furthest point from the Sun, marking the solstice. The Latin word "solstitium," which means "the sun stands still," is where the word "solstice" originates. The reason for this is that many early people used sundials to track the sun, and during the solstices, the sun's position in the sky doesn't change as much as it does throughout the rest of the year. The longest and shortest days of the year occur during the solstice. Depending on the hemisphere, these days signal the start of either summer or winter.

These solstices are linked to festivals related to the changing of the seasons in many cultures. Solstice celebrations predate even religious ideology. People's desire to explain these markers of seasonal changes led to celebrations.

The triumph of light over darkness is celebrated on the winter solstice with the Persian festival of Yalda, also known as Shab-e Yalda. Persian families customarily get together at the oldest relative's home on this day, staying up all night to celebrate the return of more sunlight and ward off evil spirits. On Yalda,

some families have a custom where they make a wish for the coming year, then open a book of poetry (usually Hafiz) and read the poem, which provides guidance on how to make their wish come true. The sun god Mithra's birthday is also celebrated on Yalda. Mithra, since the sun god was reborn on the Winter Solstice, the longest night of the year, and Yalda, which means "rebirth of the sun."

The Incas also celebrated their sun god, Inti, with a winter solstice celebration, Inti Raymi, which has been revived and is still celebrated in parts of Peru today.

One of the most significant holidays for the Hopi people of northern Arizona is the winter solstice, which they refer to as Soyal. During Soyal they welcome Kachinas, or katsinam, which are ancestral spirits that watch over them. After returning from the mountains, the Kachinas join together to dance and offer prayers for the return of the sun.

Equinox

A solar equinox is a moment in time when the Sun appears directly above the equator, rather than to its north or south. On the day of the equinox, the sun appears to rise directly east and set directly west. This occurs twice each year, around 20 March and 23 September.

Celebrations

Season	Event	Date (Approx.)	Traditional Celebrations	Modern Practices
Winter	Winter Solstice	Dec 21	Yule (Norse), Dongzhi (China), Saturnalia (Rome)	Candlelight ceremonies, bonfires, meditation
Spring	Spring Equinox	Mar 20	Ostara (Pagan), Nowruz (Persia), Holi (India)	Gardening, sunrise meditations, spring festivals
Summer	Summer Solstice	Jun 21	Midsummer (Scandinavia), Kupala Night (Slavic), Inti Raymi (Inca)	Outdoor festivals, sunrise gatherings, gratitude rituals
Autumn	Autumn Equinox	Sep 22	Mabon (Pagan), Chuseok (Korea), Mid-Autumn Festival (China)	Harvest festivals, gratitude ceremonies, community feasts

Adapted from "Celebrations for solstice and equinox" by ChatGPT.

Seasonal Rites Self-Check

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=426#h5p-13

PART VII

FOLKLORE

23.

What is Folklore?

What is myth? And what is folklore? We could also ask about fairytales and legends. What is required of a story for it to be a myth? How, then, is folklore different?

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary,

A myth is a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon.

Folklore includes traditional customs, tales, sayings, dances, or art forms preserved among a specific group of people

Paul Bunyan is a figure from *folklore* (Could this also be a tall tale?)

A folktale is a characteristically anonymous, timeless, and placeless tale circulated orally among a people

West African *folktales* like "The Squirrel and the Spider"

A fairytale is a story (as for children) involving fantastic forces and beings (such as fairies, wizards, and goblins)

The *fairytale* "The Little Mermaid"

A legend is a story coming down from the past

especially **:** one popularly regarded as historical although not verifiable

The *legend* of King Arthur

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=103#oembed-1

Folklore is inclusive of stories, practices, and beliefs of a particular group of people. The connection to an identifying group of people is a distinguishing characteristic of folklore. Often the stories, practices, and beliefs are linked.

Question to Consider

So, myth explains something that people seek to understand, folklore tends to be location-driven, folktales are oral, and fairytales have fantastic elements. Simple, right? So why do the lines between these stories blur?

Works Cited

"Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's Most-Trusted Online Dictionary." *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/.

Mythology & Fiction Explained. "Mythology & Folklore – What's the Difference?" *YouTube*, 4 Feb. 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ilIhWatZpAo.

24.

Folklore & Culture

Photo by Daniel Lloyd Blunk-Fernández on Unsplash.

Folklore is based on the culture shared by a particular group of people. In its broadest sense, folklore includes oral traditions such as tales, proverbs, and common songs. Folklore can also include aspects of culture such as style of dress, styles of art, how holidays are celebrated, and even the styles of buildings.

As a result, folklore provided insights into the deeper cultural psyche, highlighting themes like societal norms, taboos, and traditions. By analyzing folklore, one can gain a better understanding of a culture's underlying structures and how they shape behaviors and interactions.

American folklore includes Johnny Appleseed, an American bohemian eccentric who wandered the countryside in a tin-pot hat while planting apple trees and Paul Bunyan, a hero of lumber camps during the late 19th and early 20th centuries who was born a giant and gifted a large blue Ox named Babe. Bunyan and Babe eventually set out into the wilderness to clear forests. The lumberjack is credited with

carving out the Colorado River while dragging his axe behind him and the Great Lakes when he dug out watering holes for Babe.

Other folkloric creatures include the Chupacabra, Jackalope, and the Wendigo.

25.

La Llorona

La Llorona by KatyaMSL is licensed CC BY-SA 4.0.

A Library of Congress blog entitled, "La Llorona: An Introduction to the Weeping Woman," introduces the "ghost story" of the weeping woman that is prevalent in Spanish-speaking communities, particularly in Mexico. There are many variations of the story of La Llorona, as is often the case with folktales that have been shared orally. La Llorona travels in different ways depending on the variation of the story. She appears and disappears like a ghost. She can be sad or angry, scary or even dangerous. La Llorona has lost her children; they may have died by her own hand, which dooms her to be a ghost. La Llorona is sometimes used as a threat by parents to get children to behave.

La Llorona, or the Crying Woman, or the Wailer, is a vengeful ghost in Mexican folklore who is said to roam near bodies of water mourning her children whom she drowned in a jealous rage after discovering

her husband was unfaithful to her. Whoever hears her crying either suffers misfortune or death and their life becomes unsuccessful in every field.

26.

The Banshee

"The Banshee Appears, 1862" by R. Prowse – Wicklow Heritage is in the Public Domain.

The Banshee from Irish and Celtic folklore has some similarities with La Llorona. The Banshee is seen, though, as a harbinger of death. Her appearances varies widely, like La Llorona. She can manifest in different forms. The Banshee sings, screams, or howls to her family either in warning or anger. She can be vengeful.

A banshee, also referred to a woman of the fairy mound or fairy woman, is a female spirit in Irish folklore who heralds the death of a family member, usually by screaming, wailing, shrieking, or keening. Her name is connected to the mythologically important tumuli or "mounds" that dot the Irish countryside.

In Ireland, the tumuli are fairy mounds, and banshees are tied to the sídhe, the fairy people of Ireland.

27.

Onryō

Onryō are ghosts in Japanese folklore. They are the ghosts of people who died full of hatred, anger, jealously. They are stuck, unable to move to a final destination. They are powerful and motivated by vengeance. There are a number of famous onryō, each with a specific name and characteristic.

Ghost detail – Series-Mitate mon zukushi 見立もんつくしby Utagawa Kuniyoshi (歌川国芳) is in the Public Domain.

A well-known onryō is the ghost of Oiwa, a young woman who was brutally maimed and then murdered by her evil husband. As with many ghosts Oiwa has a curse that suggests that anyone retelling her story will suffer pain and even death (Meyer).

Yotsuya Kaidan (四谷怪談), the story of Oiwa and Tamiya Iemon, is a tale of betrayal, murder and ghostly revenge. Arguably the most famous Japanese ghost story of all time, it has been adapted

for film over 30 times and continues to be an influence on Japanese horror today. Written in 1825 by Tsuruya Nanboku IV as a kabuki play, the original title was *Tōkaidō Yotsuya Kaidan* (東海道四谷怪談, *Ghost Story of Yotsuya in Tokaido*). It is now generally shortened, and loosely translates as *Ghost Story of Yotsuya*.

Works Cited

Meyer, Matthew. "Onryo." *Onryō | Yokai.com*, https://yokai.com/onryou/.

"Yotsuya Kaidan." *Wikipedia*, Wikimedia Foundation, 26 Apr. 2024, en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yotsuya_Kaidan.

28.

Zombies

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=113#oembed-1

A zombie is a mythological undead corporeal revenant created through the reanimation of a corpse. The term comes from Haitian folklore, in which a zombie is a dead body reanimated through various methods, most commonly magical practices in religions like Vodou.

In modern popular culture, zombies appear in horror genre works. Modern media depictions of the reanimation of the dead often do not involve magic but rather science fictional methods such as fungi, radiation, gases, diseases, plants, bacteria, viruses, etc.

History & Adaptation

Zombies are real-life individuals in Haiti who have undergone a religious punishment called zombification for committing crimes such as rape or land theft. They are drugged, buried alive, exhumed, and then enslaved by secret societies in Haiti. This practice became the basis for the zombie myth of a resurrected corpse.

The English word "zombie" was first recorded in 1819 in a history of Brazil by the poet Robert Southey, in the form of "zombi". Dictionaries trace the word's origin to African languages, relating to words connected to gods, ghosts and souls. One of the first books to expose Western culture to the concept of the voodoo zombie was W. B. Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929), the account of a narrator who encounters voodoo cults in Haiti and their resurrected thralls.

A new version of the zombie, distinct from that described in Haitian folklore, emerged in popular culture during the latter half of the 20th century. This interpretation of the zombie, as an undead person that attacks and eats the flesh of living people, is drawn largely from George A. Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968), which was partly inspired by Richard Matheson's novel *I Am Legend* (1954). The word *zombie* is not used in *Night of the Living Dead*, but was applied later by fans. Following the release of such zombie films as *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) and *The Return of the Living*

Dead (1985), the latter of which introduced the concept of zombies that eat brains, as well as Michael Jackson's music video *Thriller* (1983), the genre waned for some years.

The mid-1990s saw the introduction of *Resident Evil* and *The House of the Dead*, two break-out successes of video games featuring zombie enemies which would later go on to become highly influential and well-known. These games were initially followed by a wave of low-budget Asian zombie films such as the zombie comedy *Bio Zombie* (1998) and action film *Versus* (2000), and then a new wave of popular Western zombie films in the early 2000s, the *Resident Evil* and *House of the Dead* films, the 2004 *Dawn of the Dead* remake, and the British zombie comedy *Shaun of the Dead* (2004). The "zombie apocalypse" concept, in which the civilized world is brought low by a global zombie infestation, has since become a staple of modern zombie media, seen in such media as *The Walking Dead* franchise and *The Last of Us.*

The late 2000s and 2010s saw the humanization and romanticization of the zombie archetype, with the zombies increasingly portrayed as friends and love interests for humans. Notable examples of the latter include movies *Warm Bodies* and *Zombies*, novels *American Gods* by Neil Gaiman, *Generation Dead* by Daniel Waters, and *Bone Song* by John Meaney, animated movie *Corpse Bride*, TV series *iZombie* and *Santa Clarita Diet*, manga series *Sankarea: Undying Love*, and the light novel *Is This a Zombie?* In this context, zombies are often seen as stand-ins for discriminated groups struggling for equality, and the human–zombie romantic relationship is interpreted as a metaphor for sexual liberation and taboo breaking (given that zombies are subject to wild desires and free from social conventions).

Folk beliefs

Haiti

Zombies are featured widely in Haitian rural folklore as dead persons physically revived by the act of necromancy of a *bokor*, a sorcerer or witch. The *bokor* is opposed by the *houngan* (priest) and the *mambo* (priestess) of the formal voodoo religion. A zombie remains under the control of the *bokor* as a personal slave, having no will of its own.

The Haitian zombie phenomenon first attracted widespread international attention during the United States occupation of Haiti (1915–1934), when a number of case histories of purported "zombies" began to emerge. The first popular book covering the topic was William Seabrook's *The Magic Island* (1929). Seabrooke cited Article 246 of the Haitian criminal code, which was passed in 1864, asserting that it was an official recognition of zombies. This passage was later used in promotional materials for the 1932 film *White Zombie*.

> Also shall be qualified as attempted murder the employment which may be made by any person of substances which, without causing actual death, produce a lethargic coma more or less prolonged. If, after the administering of such substances, the person has been buried, the act shall be considered murder no matter what result follows.
>
> —*Code pénal*

In 1937, while researching folklore in Haiti, Zora Neale Hurston encountered the case of a woman who appeared in a village. A family claimed that she was Felicia Felix-Mentor, a relative, who had died and

been buried in 1907 at the age of 29. The woman was examined by a doctor; X-rays indicated that she did not have a leg fracture that Felix-Mentor was known to have had. Hurston pursued rumors that affected persons were given a powerful psychoactive drug, but she was unable to locate individuals willing to offer much information. She wrote: "What is more, if science ever gets to the bottom of Vodou in Haiti and Africa, it will be found that some important medical secrets, still unknown to medical science, give it its power, rather than gestures of ceremony."

Kongo

A Central African origin for the Haitian zombie has been postulated based on two etymologies in the Kongo language, *nzambi* ("god") and *zumbi* ("fetish"). This root helps form the names of several deities, including the Kongo creator deity Nzambi Mpungu and the Louisiana serpent deity Li Grand Zombi (a local version of the Haitian Damballa), but it is in fact a generic word for a divine spirit. The common African conception of beings under these names is more similar to the incorporeal "zombie astral",[1] as in the Kongo Nkisi spirits.

A related, but also often incorporeal, undead being is the jumbee of the English-speaking Caribbean, considered to be of the same etymology; in the French West Indies also, local "zombies" are recognized, but these are of a more general spirit nature.

South Africa

The idea of physical zombie-like creatures is present in some South African cultures, where they are called *xidachane* in Sotho/Tsonga and *maduxwane* in Venda. In some communities, it is believed that a dead person can be zombified by a small child. It is said that the spell can be broken by a powerful enough sangoma. It is also believed in some areas of South Africa that witches can zombify a person by killing and possessing the victim's body to force it into slave labor. After rail lines were built to transport migrant workers, stories emerged about "witch trains". These trains appeared ordinary, but were staffed by zombified workers controlled by a witch. The trains would abduct a person boarding at night, and the person would then either be zombified or beaten and thrown from the train a distance away from the original location.

Folklore Matching Break

An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=113#h5p-14

Works Cited

Michael Jackson. "Michael Jackson – Thriller (Official 4K Video)." *YouTube*, 2 Oct. 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sOnqjkJTMaA.

PART VIII

ADAPTATION AND INFLUENCE

29.

Introduction to Adaptation and Influence

> "A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world. Myths are the narrative patterns that give significance to our existence. Myths are like the beams in a house: not exposed to outside view, they are the structure which holds the house together so people can live in it."
>
> -Psychoanalyst Rollo May, *The Cry for Myth*

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=115#oembed-1

The journey with these transformative narratives continues as long as we are alive, perhaps longer. Through myths, we are able to engage with the consciousness that is the basis of our very being.

The rich narratives of folktales, myths, stories, and cultures provide a vivid, experiential context of understanding that both honors the uniqueness of each individual and culture while simultaneously uncovering a deep human connection at the basis of all of them. The myths of our ancestors tell the stories of our shared becoming. The stories we tell today, of our struggles, our hopes, our fears, and our triumphs, will be the myths of future generations who look to us, their ancestors, for the eternal hope and spiritual grounding that only myths can provide.

Perhaps because myth and folklore play such an important role in our ongoing development, those stories, themes, questions, and explanations appear over and over, in a variety of formats.

One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: https://pressbooks.whccd.edu/mythologyandfolklore/?p=115#oembed-2

The manner in which the Ancient Greeks saw the world may seem distant from modern Western culture. However, it is obvious that some of their beliefs have stayed with us, argues Marie-Claire Beaulieu, Associate Professor of Classics at Tufts University and author of The Sea in the Greek Imagination. Ancient myths remain relevant today because they speak to universal human experiences, values, and questions that continue to shape people's lives through their universal themes and lessons. They continue to influence art, literature, film, and video games.

Works Cited

"Mythology in Modern Times." *YouTube*, Doha Film Institute, 2013, youtu.be/sz2tY6to83I?si=ztpXsDs-KvHIjD6F.

"Why Ancient Myths Remain Relevant Today." *YouTube*, Tufts University, 2019, youtu.be/u4p-5-CxiyU?si=y3bLhcxSRGVy9DSt.

30.

Adaptation and Film

Photo by Daniel Guerra on Unsplash.

Elements of myth and folklore are often appropriated into modern entertainment. Obviously creators also love retelling the myths themselves, but for our purposes, let's look for slightly more subtle appropriation of myth. They can manifest as allusions or the actual characters. Each of the following manifests ancient myth and folklore in modern film. Several of these have been told and retold in different formats:

1. *The Little Mermaid* (Read here about its origins in folklore)

2. *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (Loosely based on Homer's *Odyssey*)
3. *Pan's Labyrinth* (Read about its origins in Greek myth here)
4. *Lord of the Rings* (Watch the Norse myth that inspired it)
5. *The Secret of Kells* (Inspired by *The Book of Kells* and illustrating ancient Celtic folklore)
6. *The Secret of Roan Inish*, *Song of the Sea*, *Ondine* (all based on Irish myths about selkies)
7. *The Mummy* (Read about mummification here)
8. *Wonder Woman* (The origins of *Wonder Woman* are explored here)
9. Gods of Egypt (Based on the myth in which Set kills his brother, Osiris)
10. *Moulin Rouge!* is based on the Orpheus story but set in 1899

Research into adaptation and influence in other cultures, with much more limited production of movies, in particular, in most cultures, is difficult. Bollywood has had a renewed interest in myth, though the films tend to retell the original stories rather than adapting them. Japanese manga and videogames often rely on myth. The Chinese novel *Journey to the West*, "has strong roots in Chinese folk religion, Chinese mythology, Chinese Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoist and Buddhist folklore, and the pantheon of Taoist immortals and Buddhist bodhisattvas;" it inspired *Dragon Ball (*"Journey to the West"). If you know or find some evidence of other adaption outside of the west and its big budget films, please let me know.

Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, Game of Thrones, Star Trek, and *Harry Potter* are just a few of the names of the biggest movie franchises of the past few decades. There are a great deal of differences between these, but the similarities are also clear, including the power of prophecy, the guidance of an older and wise person, a wise and mysterious master, an unexplained force that binds the universe together, a band of warriors tasked with a particular quest, or the chaos of a king's court. Every single one of those characteristics could be just as easily attributed to the myths or legends of long-forgotten civilizations as they can be linked to any one of the series above.

More so than any other genre, the building blocks of science fiction and fantasy will always draw from mythology, both knowingly and perhaps in spite of itself. The fact is, almost every conceivable attempt to craft a chronicle will touch upon a facet of stories from a distinct culture. What other myths in their original form have you seen in recent media?

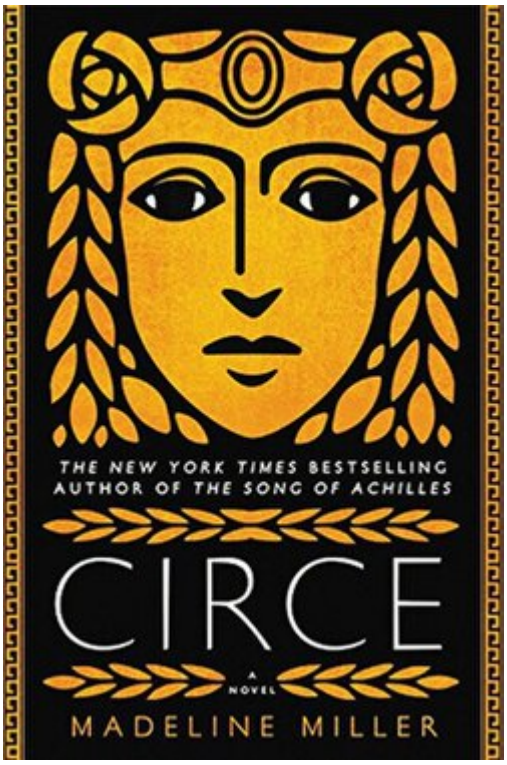
The fascination with the genre is pretty easy to explain. It brings the same world-building, character journeys, and impressive elements of the stories we all love and are familiar with. Yet, there's a historical precedent for them.

Work Cited

"Journey to the West." Editors of Wikipedia. *Wikipedia*. 8 May 2024. 12 May 2024.

31.

Adaptation and Literature



Circe (novel) by Wikipedia

Myth plays a significant role in modern literature, serving as a framework for exploring contemporary themes and human experiences.

Many authors draw on ancient myths to enrich their narratives, using archetypes and motifs that resonate with readers. Myths provide a shared cultural language, allowing writers to address complex issues like identity, morality, and existence.

Greek mythology is the focus of Homer's *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. These epic poems feature gods, heroes, and mythical creatures. As explained by Sadie Trombetta for *Bustle*, in *The Penelopiad,* Margaret Atwood's updated version of *The Odyssey*, "readers get to see a whole new side to Penelope, the hero's faithful wife, and her 12 (eventual) hanged maids. A brilliant account of Penelope's 20 years at home waiting for her husband, two decades spent fighting off suitors, ruling land, running a house, and raising her son."

Ovid's "Metamorphoses," written in 8 CE, is a narrative poem that recounts various myths, focusing on transformation and the interplay between mortals and gods. Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis*, written in 1915, echoes the theme of alienation.

In addition to Atwood, other modern authors also choose to retell ancient myths, often from different character's points of view or from modern perspectives, as in *The Song of Achilles* by Madeline Miller, which retells the story of Achilles and Patroclus.

Rick Riordan's bestselling children's series, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* has introduced countless young people to Greek mythology.

In *Circe*, Madeline Miller reimagines the life of Circe from Homer's *Odyssey.*

American Gods by Neil Gaiman juxtaposes ancient deities with modern American culture, examining the relevance of myth in contemporary society.

Work Cited

Trombetta, Sadie. "9 Modern Greek Mythology Retellings That Will Change the Way You Think about the Classic Tales." *Bustle*, BDG, 4 Jan. 2017, www.bustle.com/p/9-modern-greek-mythology-retellings-that-will-change-the-way-you-think-about-the-classic-tales-27572.