

University of Thessaly
Department of History, Archaeology & Social Anthropology
School of Human and Social Sciences

MYTHOLOGY

A Study of English through Mythology

ENGLISH II

Instructor: Dr/Ms Anastasia Marina G.P. Tsoutsouloupoulou

Bibliography:

1. Donna Rosenberg, *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*. National Textbook Company: Lincolnwood (Chicago), Illinois, USA (1990)

Contents:

- (a) Introduction - pp. xiv-xx
CREATION OF THE UNIVERSE MYTHS
- (b) INDIA: The Creation, Death and Rebirth of the Universe - pp. 353-354
- (c) JAPAN: The Creation of the Universe and Japan – pp. 400-401
- (d) YORUBA: The Creation of the Universe – pp.425-426
- (e) NAVAJO: Creation – pp. 488-489
HEROES
- (f) CHINA: The Traditional Hero Bao Chu – pp. 394-395
- (g) CHINA : The Quest for the Sun – pp. 395-400
FERTILITY MYTHS
- (h) JAPAN : Fertility Ama-terasu – p. 405
- (i) AMERICA: Myths of the Americas – pp.456-457
- (j) INCA: Fertility Manco Capac – pp. 463-464
- (k) TRIO: Fertility Paraparawa - pp. 466-467
- (l) HAIDA/ TLINGIT: Fertility and Divine Hero Raven – pp. 499-500
NATIVE AMERICAN MYTH
- (m) TALES OF THE SUN, MOON, AND STARS in “American Indian Myths and Legends”: The Eye of the Great Spirit – pp.127-128

N.B.: The *Introduction* (pp. xiv-xx) of *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and epics* by Donna Rosenberg has been translated from English into Greek by the Instructor, Dr. Anastasia Marina Tsoutsouloupoulou. All footnotes have been added by her.

-
2. Part Three: “*The Eye of the Great Spirit*” – *Tales of the Sun, Moon, and Stars* – pp. 127-128 in: Erdoes, Richard and Ortiz, Alfonso (selected and edited by), *American Indian Myths and Legends*. Pantheon Books: New York (1984)
 3. *Aesop’s Fables* (trsl. by V.S. Vernon Jones). Wordsworth Classics: Hertfordshire (1994). [A selection of fables]
 4. Hesiod and Theognis: Hesiod, *Theogony & Works and Days* and Theognis, *Elegies*. (Translated and with introduction by Dorothea Wender). Penguin: London (this translation, 1973)
-

Introduction



The Nature of Myths

Myths are serious stories that reflect a society's spiritual foundations. They are symbols of human experience that each culture values and preserves because they embody the world view or important beliefs of that culture. Myths may explain origins, natural phenomena, and death; they may describe the nature and function of divinities; or they may provide models of virtuous and heroic behavior by relating the adventures of heroes. They may include legends as well as elements of folklore. They impart a feeling of awe for whatever is mysterious and marvelous in life, depicting a universe in which human beings take their place in a much larger scheme.

The Common Focus of Myths

Today, when our world has been united by the airplane, interdependent economic problems, and nuclear weapons, myths are a key to understanding ourselves and our connection to other human beings. They concern themselves with the individual and his or her place in the universe. Even though most of these myths were created by people who lived in societies that were much less complex than our own, they address the fundamental questions each thinking person still asks: Who am I? What is the nature of the universe in which I live? How do I relate to that universe? What do I need to do in order to survive? How much control do I have over my own life? How do I balance my own desires with my responsibilities to my family and my community? How can I lead a satisfying life? How can I reconcile myself to the inevitability of death?

The common focus of myths from around the world relates human beings to one another across the globe and throughout history. The questions that myths address have produced a body of myths from diverse cultures that closely resemble each other in subject, although the treatment of each theme naturally varies from one society to another.

The following themes are common in world mythology: The first parents are often the gods of sky and earth. The creator-god usually fashions the first human beings from parts of the earth—perhaps clay, trees, rocks, or plants. The gods destroy at least one world of mortals by causing a great flood. In the world as in nature—birth, maturity, and death are often followed by rebirth. Heroes are children of a god who have an unusual birth, possess extraordinary strength, kill monsters with the help of special weapons, embark on an arduous journey, descend into the Underworld as part of their tasks, and have an unusual death.

An inherent part of many myths is the belief in one or more divine powers who create life and control the direction of the universe. Throughout the world, these divinities, whether in human or in animal form, are anthropomorphic in that they think, act, and speak like human beings. They differ primarily in their attitude toward mortals. Some gods, like those of Greece, Egypt, India, and North America, appreciate the merits of human beings, are sympathetic to them, and try to help them. Some gods, like those of Sumer/Babylonia and northern Europe (the Norse gods), tend to be indifferent to the fate of human beings.

The Purposes of Myths

Myths were originally created as entertaining stories with a serious purpose. Their broad appeal has enabled them to survive for hundreds and sometimes thousands of years. A myth's serious purpose is either to explain the nature of the universe (creation and fertility myths) or to instruct members of the community in the attitudes and behavior necessary to function successfully in that particular culture (hero myths and epics).

A particular culture may be interested in the creation of the entire universe, beginning with divine beings who separate earth and sky. Most of the major cultures start with the beginning of the universe—a chaotic, formless mass that a god or pair of gods separates. The gods multiply so that each can have his or her particular role in the universal scheme, and the creator-god brings life to earth in the form of plants, animals, and human beings.

On the other hand, some cultures are interested only in myths that explain the origin of their own people and enhance their nationalistic spirit. For example, the Navajos depict their journey upward through four worlds into a fifth world. Similarly, the Irish Celts are concerned with the settling of Ireland, the Japanese explain the creation of their islands, and the Yoruba explain the creation of life, their sacred city-state.

According to many myths, human beings are not perfect creatures even though a god created them. In many cultures, the creator-god must fashion and destroy, usually through a flood, a succession of races. This theme is found worldwide: in the Greek writer Hesiod, in the Hindu myths of India, and in the myths of the Maya Indians of Central America and the Yoruba of Africa. One of the most elaborate flood myths comes from Sumer/Babylonia.

All cultures explain how human beings acquired particular foods and the agricultural tools that permitted them to become civilized. Some myths, like the Hittite myth of Telepinu and the African myth from Dahomey, involve gods who have been insulted and must be appeased for fertility to be restored. The Telepinu myth includes powerful, metaphorical incantations designed to enlist the god's aid. The Greek myth of Demeter and Persephone is a masterpiece of psychological complexity. The myths of other cultures involve a divine figure who teaches agricultural skills to human beings. Viracocha introduces the pre-Inca peoples to a more complex and civilized way of life. Other myths, like the Zuñi, the Chinese, and the Indian, show a divine or semidivine heroic figure rescuing humanity by killing a monster that has destroyed the fertility of the land.

The heroic myths and epics of a society teach its members the appropriate attitudes, behavior, and values of that culture. These myths are of particular interest and value to us. Not only are they exciting adventure stories, but in these myths we see ourselves, drawn larger and grander than we are, yet with our human weaknesses as well as our strengths.

Heroes are the models of human behavior for their society. They earn lasting fame—the only kind of immortality possible for human beings—by performing great deeds that help their community, and they inspire others to emulate them. Heroes are forced by circumstance to make critical choices where they must balance one set of values against competing values. They achieve heroic stature in part from their accomplishments and in part because they emerge from their trials as more sensitive and thoughtful human beings.

Yet heroes are not the same throughout the world. Achilles, Odysseus, Gilgamesh, and Sigurd, for example, come from cultures where individuals may earn fame in a variety of ways. This permits them to express their individuality. In contrast, Rama must always remember and follow *dharma*, the particular form of proper and righteous behavior that the Hindu culture expects of a person in his political, economic, and social position.

In spite of their extraordinary abilities, no hero is perfect. Yet their human weaknesses are often as instructive as their heroic qualities. Their imperfections allow ordinary people to identify with them and like them, for everyone has similar psychological needs and conflicts.

Many of the greatest heroes cannot accept mortality. Gilgamesh so fears death that he undertakes a long and perilous journey in search of the secret of immortality. Ultimately, he learns to be satisfied with the immortality that comes from enduring accomplishments. Achilles must choose between death with honor and a long, undistinguished life. When he feels deprived of honor on the battlefield, he chooses life—and only the unforeseen ramifications of

that choice cause him to change his mind. Hector and Beowulf are forced to choose heroic deaths because they cannot live with the stain of cowardice.

Unlike most heroes, Heracles knows that he will become immortal after he has accomplished his labors. His primary concern is to avoid the labors because he refuses to be ordered about by a cowardly king. Odysseus actually rejects the opportunity to become immortal because he cares more about the quality of life than its duration. He prefers his own mortal wife and the problems of running a kingdom to marriage with a beautiful goddess and a life of boredom.

The hero myths examine the relationship between the individual's desires and his or her responsibilities to society. Often the choice is crucial but uncomplicated: whether or not to risk death to save the community. The hero who chooses to risk death acquires honor and lasting fame; the hero who chooses safety is denied both. Heracles and Beowulf make the world a safer place by killing many monsters. The hero of *Kotan Utunnai* helps his people by fighting valiantly against the enemy.

In the major epics, the issue is the same, but the circumstances are infinitely more complex. When a leader places his or her own desires before the needs of the community, both the community and the individual suffer. Agamemnon and Achilles quarrel over a slave girl because public honor is the key to self-esteem. Similarly, Lancelot and Guenevere place their love above their loyalty to King Arthur, thereby destroying the Round Table and putting Britain into the hands of power-hungry local rulers. Aeneas places the needs of his community above his personal desires but loses his own humanity. Similarly, Rama places the needs of his community above his love for Sita, causing great personal tragedy for both of them. On the other hand, Gassire earns fame by placing his personal desires before the needs of his community.

Heroes define themselves by how they relate to external circumstances. They acquire lasting fame by performing deeds of valor, but they acquire even greater heroic stature by winning an inner battle against their desires. Hector fights a greater battle because he first must overcome his fear of Achilles. Both he and Beowulf fight against a superior foe, knowing that they will die in the process yet choosing to die with honor rather than to live without self-esteem and public approval. Odysseus' greatest strengths, his clever intelligence, and his self-confidence, cause his problems. He survives his homecoming only because he masters his need to assert himself and flaunt his superiority. In contrast, Quetzalcoatl is outmatched when Tezcatlipoca preys upon his vanity.

We should not be intimidated by the external characteristics of the hero: an immortal parent, unusual birth, aristocratic social position, and divine sponsorship. We could say that Heracles can perform great tasks because his father is Zeus. We do this in our own lives whenever we attribute someone's success primarily to luck instead of to individual courage, perseverance, and ability. However, this attitude is not personally helpful. Although these heroes lived long ago in cultures very different from our own, they can still serve as models for us. We too must often risk our self-esteem and our reputation by making difficult choices and by attempting tasks where we fear failure. We too want to live in such a way that we are remembered for our good deeds.

The Matriarchal Society

A knowledge of the basic differences between Mother Earth-centered matriarchal religions and the Father Sky-centered patriarchal religions (with which we are much more familiar) is crucial to an understanding of the symbolic content of many myths. The political, economic, social, and religious foundation of the matriarchal society was the agricultural year. The importance of agriculture fostered a cyclical view of life, emphasizing the progression of all living matter from birth to maturity to death to rebirth. Even in lands where the climate remained relatively stable from one season to the next, people could see the connection between the development of their own lives and the development of life among plants and animals.

In the matriarchal society, the Great Goddess or Mother Goddess personified Mother Earth and was the supreme deity. She was the source of all human life and the source of all food. To survive, societies needed to produce children and to produce food. They knew how dependent they were upon the blessings of the Great Goddess, and they worshipped her properly so they would receive those blessings.

The queen personified the Great Goddess, and she wielded great political, economic, social, and religious power. Other women were considered daughters, of the Great Goddess. Thus, all women in the matriarchal society were highly valued, and many of them held important positions. Women were the heads of their families, and inheritance passed from a mother to her daughters with the youngest daughter being most important because, presumably, she would be the last to die and thus would continue the family line the longest. Children were reared by their mother and her brother while the father lived in the home of his mother and helped rear his sister's children. The children's primary moral obligations were to their mother and their siblings.

When the male's role in procreation became understood and valued, the queen took a husband, called the sacred king, for one year. At first, he was her brother or her son, but later he was a youth who symbolized her son. Many youths competed for the great honor of being sacred king. They had to win many contests involving physical strength and the skillful use of the bow. Heracles' tasks against the Nemean lion, the Cretan bull, the Erymanthian boar, and Artemis' deer represent typical contests. Odysseus' participation in an archery contest where the winner will marry Penelope is an echo of this tradition.

Each spring, when the seeds of the new crops were sown, the past year's sacred king would be sacrificed as part of a major religious ceremony. The priestesses of the Mother Goddess would eat his flesh in order to acquire his powers of fertility, and the fields and farm animals would be sprinkled with his blood so they too would become fertile. Then in a religious ceremony the queen would take a new sacred king for the coming year.

The sacred king gradually gained more power. He increased the length of his reign to eight years by choosing a substitute sacred king to die in his place. At the end of each year, the real king would retire from public view into

a burial chamber or cave for one to three days, while the substitute king reigned in his place. The priestesses of the Great Goddess would sacrifice the substitute king in a sacred ceremony and use his flesh and blood to ensure the fertility of the community. Then the real king would resume his duties for the coming year. When Gilgamesh rejects Ishtar's marriage proposal, he relates the ways that she has destroyed previous mates. Ishtar retaliates by causing the death of Enkidu, who functions as Gilgamesh's substitute.

By 2400 B.C., aggressive tribes worshipping a supreme male god who was a father-figure or a successful warrior had begun to invade many matriarchal communities. They brought with them a new social and political order in which males dominated. Kings gained enough power to change the old social system to one in which kings ruled by heredity and animals were sacrificed to win the favor of the gods.

Some cultures depict a world view in which one generation of gods replaces another, the newer gods being more civilized and capable than the earlier ones. For example, Zeus conquers Cronus in Greek mythology, and Marduk conquers Tiamat in Babylonian mythology. The battle between one family of gods and another often reflects the political and religious conflict between the indigenous people, who were farmers and worshipped the Great Goddess or the Mother Goddess, and a war-like invading people, who worshipped male sky gods. Zeus' conquest of Cronus and the Titans reflects the political conquest of one people by another, and his liaisons with many Mother Goddesses in addition to Hera, his wife, represent a compromise in which the invaders' religion was united with each local religion. Similar changes are reflected in Babylonian mythology, where a religion in which Marduk is the principal god incorporates the older gods.

The Major Perspectives on Myths

Because myths are symbols of human experience, they can be analyzed in a variety of ways, depending upon the perspective of the scholar. Years ago, many scholars viewed myths as symbols of the external environment. Those who created myths were thought to have observed nature and interpreted the behavior of human beings in a parallel manner. For example, heroes were considered symbols of the sun, who wielded swords that symbolized the sun's rays against monsters that symbolized clouds and night, the enemies of the sun. Each hero story was thus a symbol of the conflict between day and night and, by extension, between good and evil.

In the 20th century, the symbolic interpretation of myths moved from the external environment to the internal environment of the unconscious mind. Sigmund Freud and his followers view myths as the expression of the individual's unconscious wishes, fears, and drives. For example, Otto Rank explains the characteristics of the traditional hero in terms of infantile hostility, childhood fantasies, and rebellion against one's father.

Carl Jung and his followers, among them Carl Kerenyi, Erich Neumann, and, more broadly, Joseph Campbell, view myths as the expression of a universal, collective unconscious. In their theory innate psychological characteristics, common to all human beings, determine how people throughout the world and throughout history experience and respond to the process of living. The contents of the collective unconscious are divided into archetypes—such as the mother, the child, the hero, the trickster, and the giant—but these are simply image frameworks. A particular individual's life experiences determine in what particular shape and form the archetypal images will be expressed. Thus, the fact that myths from around the world contain many similar themes reflects the existence of a common collective unconscious. The fact that they differ in their treatment of these themes reflects the influence of each culture's particular physical, social, economic, and political environment on the archetypes.

Scholars in this century have interpreted myths in other ways as well. Mircea Eliade, a historian of religions, views myths as the essence of religion, conceived from a genuine religious experience. It is the sacred experience that gives myths their structure and their utility. The ancient world contained a multitude of co-existing religious ideas and forms: different types of monotheism and polytheism (both female-dominated and male-dominated), nature worship, and ancestor worship. Consequently, numerous similarities and connections exist from one culture to another. This is evident from the study of various aspects of the religious experience, such as the nature of divinities, creation myths, sacrifices, rituals, death, and paradise.

The anthropologist Paul Radin views myths from an economic perspective. The individual's actual struggle for survival in the face of economic uncertainty, caused by an insufficient food supply and poor technology, creates fears that life will be unhappy and short. Religious leaders manipulate these fears for their own material benefit, often in concert with the political leaders of the community.

Anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss views myths as abstract constructions rather than narrative tales or symbols of experience. The structure of all human minds is identical and is revealed by the similar ways people solve their problems. Myths are identical products from identical minds, so myths from around the world possess a common structure. They reveal the conflict between opposing forces—such as life and death, or nature and culture. To discover the meaning of a particular myth, one must focus on its underlying structure rather than its narrative content or any symbolic meaning. This structure invariably reveals tensions in social relations or economic problems. The analysis of myths proves that human beings, no matter how primitive their technology, are not mentally inferior. Their myths demonstrate that they possess the intellectual capacity to understand the world in which they live.

Part of the fascination of mythology involves viewing it from a variety of perspectives simultaneously. Each discipline offers a valuable contribution, increasing our appreciation of the whole.

ΕΙΣΑΓΩΓΗ

Η Φύση των Μύθων

Οι Μύθοι είναι σοβαρές ιστορίες που αντανακλούν τα πνευματικά θεμέλια μιας κοινωνίας. Είναι σύμβολα της ανθρώπινης εμπειρίας που κάθε πολιτισμός εκτιμά και διατηρεί, επειδή περιλαμβάνουν τον τρόπο σκέψης (την κοσμοθεωρία) ή τα σημαντικά πιστεύω εκείνου του πολιτισμού. Οι μύθοι μπορεί να εξηγούν προελεύσεις, φυσικά φαινόμενα και το θάνατο μπορεί να περιγράφουν τη φύση και τη λειτουργία θεοτήτων ή μπορεί να παρέχουν μοντέλα ενάρετης και ηρωϊκής συμπεριφοράς, με το να αφηγούνται τις περιπέτειες ηρώων. Μπορεί να περιλαμβάνουν θρύλους όπως και στοιχεία λαϊκής παράδοσης. Μεταδίδουν ένα αίσθημα δέους για ο,τιδήποτε είναι μυστηριώδες και υπέροχο στη ζωή, απεικονίζοντας έναν κόσμο (universe), στον οποίο τα ανθρώπινα όντα παίρνουν τη θέση τους σε ένα πολύ μεγαλύτερο σχέδιο (scheme).

Το Κοινό Επίκεντρο των Μύθων

Σήμερα, που ο κόσμος μας έχει ενωθεί με τα αεροπλάνα, με αλληλένδετα οικονομικά προβλήματα και πυρηνικά όπλα, οι μύθοι είναι ένα κλειδί για την κατανόηση του εαυτού μας και της σχέσης μας με άλλους ανθρώπους. Οι μύθοι ασχολούνται με το άτομο και τη θέση του/της στον κόσμο (universe). Αν και οι περισσότεροι από αυτούς τους μύθους δημιουργήθηκαν από ανθρώπους που ζούσαν σε κοινωνίες που ήταν πολύ λιγότερο περίπλοκες από τις δικές μας, απευθύνουν τις βασικές ερωτήσεις που κάθε σκεπτόμενος άνθρωπος ακόμα ρωτά: Ποιος είμαι; Ποια είναι η φύση του κόσμου στον οποίο ζω; Πώς σχετίζομαι με αυτόν τον κόσμο; Τί χρειάζεται να κάνω για να επιβιώσω; Πόσο έλεγχο έχω πάνω στη δική μου ζωή; Πώς ισορροπώ τις δικές μου επιθυμίες με τις ευθύνες μου προς την οικογένειά μου και προς την κοινωνία (κοινότητα - community); Πώς μπορώ να ζήσω μια ικανοποιητική ζωή; Πώς μπορώ να συμφιλιωθώ με το αναπόφευκτο του θανάτου;

Το κοινό επίκεντρο των μύθων όλου του κόσμου σχετίζει τα ανθρώπινα όντα μεταξύ τους σε όλη τη γη και σε όλη την ιστορία. Τα ερωτήματα, που οι μύθοι απευθύνουν, έχουν δημιουργήσει ένα σώμα μύθων από διάφορους πολιτισμούς που μοιάζουν στενά ο ένας τον άλλο σε θέμα, αν και ο χειρισμός κάθε θέματος φυσικά διαφέρει από μια κοινωνία σε άλλη.

Τα ακόλουθα θέματα είναι κοινά στην παγκόσμια μυθολογία: Οι πρώτοι γονείς είναι συχνά οι θεοί του ουρανού και της γης. Ο δημιουργός - θεός συνήθως φτιάχνει τα πρώτα ανθρώπινα όντα από υλικά της γης - ίσως πηλό, δέντρα, πέτρες ή φυτά. Οι θεοί καταστρέφουν τουλάχιστον έναν κόσμο θνητών, προκαλώντας μια μεγάλη πλημμύρα. Στον κόσμο (world) όπως και στη φύση - η γέννηση, η ωρίμανση και ο θάνατος συχνά ακολουθούνται από την αναγέννηση. Οι ήρωες είναι παιδιά ενός θεού που έχουν μια ασυνήθιστη γέννηση, έχουν εκπληκτική δύναμη, σκοτώνουν τέρατα με τη βοήθεια ειδικών όπλων, ξεκινούν ένα επίμοχθο ταξίδι, κατεβαίνουν στον Κάτω Κόσμο ως μέρος των καθηκόντων τους και έχουν έναν ασυνήθιστο θάνατο.

Αναπόσπαστο μέρος πολλών μύθων είναι η πίστη σε μία ή περισσότερες θεϊκές δυνάμεις που δημιουργούν ζωή και ελέγχουν την κατεύθυνση του κόσμου (universe). Σε όλο τον κόσμο (world), αυτές οι θεότητες, είτε με ανθρώπινη είτε με ζωϊκή μορφή, είναι ανθρωπομορφικές στο ότι σκέφτονται, δρουν και μιλούν σαν ανθρώπινα όντα. Διαφέρουν κυρίως στη στάση τους προς τους θνητούς. Μερικοί θεοί, όπως εκείνοι της Ελλάδας, της Αιγύπτου, της Ινδίας και της Β. Αμερικής, εκτιμούν τις αξίες των ανθρώπων, τούς συμπονούν και προσπαθούν να τούς βοηθήσουν. Μερικοί θεοί, όπως εκείνοι των Σουμερίων/Βαβυλωνίας και βόρειας Ευρώπης (οι αρχαίοι Σκανδιναβικοί θεοί), τείνουν να είναι αδιάφοροι για τη μοίρα των ανθρώπων.

Στόχοι των Μύθων

Οι μύθοι δημιουργήθηκαν αρχικά ως ιστορίες ψυχαγωγίας με κάποιο σοβαρό στόχο (σκοπό). Η ευρεία απήχρησή τους κατέστησε δυνατό για αυτούς να επιβιώσουν για εκατοντάδες και μερικές φορές για χιλιάδες χρόνια. Ο σοβαρός σκοπός ενός μύθου είναι είτε να εξηγήσει τη φύση του κόσμου (μύθοι δημιουργίας και γονιμότητας) είτε να καθοδηγήσει μέλη της κοινωνίας ως προς τις στάσεις [ζωής] και τη συμπεριφορά που είναι αναγκαίες, προκειμένου να λειτουργήσουν επιτυχώς ειδικά στον [δικό τους] πολιτισμό (ηρωϊκοί μύθοι και έπη).

Ένας συγκεκριμένος πολιτισμός μπορεί να ενδιαφέρεται για τη δημιουργία όλου του κόσμου, αρχίζοντας με τα θεϊκά όντα που χωρίζουν τη γη από τον ουρανό. Οι περισσότεροι από τους σημαντικούς πολιτισμούς ξεκινούν με την απαρχή του κόσμου - μία χαοτική, άμορφη μάζα την οποία (ξε)χωρίζει ένας θεός ή ζεύγος θεών. Οι θεοί πολλαπλασιάζονται, έτσι ώστε ο καθένας [θεός] ή η καθεμία [θεά] μπορεί να παίζει το δικό του/της ρόλο στο παγκόσμιο σχέδιο, και ο δημιουργός-θεός φέρνει ζωή στη γη με τη μορφή φυτών, ζώων και ανθρώπων.

Από την άλλη πλευρά, μερικοί πολιτισμοί ενδιαφέρονται μόνο για μύθους που εξηγούν την προέλευση των δικών τους λαών και αυξάνουν το εθνικιστικό τους πνεύμα. Για παράδειγμα, οι Ναβάχο [Ινδιάνοι της Β. Αμερικής] απεικονίζουν το ταξίδι τους προς τα πάνω μέσα από τέσσερεις κόσμους σε έναν πέμπτο κόσμο. Παρομοίως, οι Ιρλανδοί Κέλτες ασχολούνται με τον εποικισμό της Ιρλανδίας, οι Ιάπωνες εξηγούν τη δημιουργία των νησιών τους, και οι Γιουρούμπα [Αφρική] εξηγούν τη δημιουργία της ζωής, τη μυστική τους πόλη-κράτος.

Σύμφωνα με πολλούς μύθους, οι άνθρωποι δεν είναι τέλεια πλάσματα, ακόμη κι αν δημιουργήθηκαν από έναν θεό. Σε πολλούς πολιτισμούς, ο δημιουργός-θεός πρέπει να φτιάξει και να καταστρέψει, συνήθως μέσω μιας πλημμύρας, μια διαδοχική σειρά (succession) από φυλές. Αυτό το θέμα το βρίσκουμε σε όλο τον κόσμο: στον Έλληνα συγγραφέα Ησίοδο, στους Ινδουϊστικούς μύθους της Ινδίας, και στους μύθους των Ινδιάνων Μάγια της Κεντρικής Αμερικής και των Γιουρούμπα της Αφρικής. Ένας από τους πιο περίπλοκους μύθους πλημμύρας προέρχεται από τους Σουμέριους/Βαβυλωνία.

Όλοι οι πολιτισμοί εξηγούν, πώς οι άνθρωποι απέκτησαν συγκεκριμένες τροφές και τα γεωργικά εργαλεία που τούς επέτρεψαν να γίνουν πολιτισμένοι. Μερικοί μύθοι, όπως ο μύθος του Τελεπινού των Χετταίων και ο Αφρικανικός μύθος από τη Δαχομή, εμπλέκουν θεούς που έχουν προσβληθεί και πρέπει να κατευναστούν ώστε να αποκατασταθεί η γονιμότητα. Ο μύθος του Τελεπινού περιλαμβάνει δυνατές, μεταφορικές επικλήσεις, που έχουν σχεδιαστεί να ζητήσουν (και να λάβουν) τη βοήθεια του θεού. Ο Ελληνικός μύθος της Δήμητρας και της Περσεφόνης είναι ένα αριστούργημα ψυχολογικής περιπλοκότητας. Οι μύθοι άλλων πολιτισμών εμπλέκουν μια θεϊκή φιγούρα που διδάσκει γεωργικές επιδεξιότητες στα ανθρώπινα όντα. Ο Βιρακότσα (Viracocha) εισάγει τους λαούς πριν από τους Ίνκας σε έναν πιο πολύπλοκο και πολιτισμένο τρόπο ζωής. Άλλοι μύθοι, όπως των Ζούνι (Zuni), των Κινέζων και των Ινδών, δείχνουν έναν θεϊκό ή ημίθεο ήρωα να σώζει την ανθρωπότητα σκοτώνοντας ένα τέρας που έχει καταστρέψει τη γονιμότητα της γης.

Οι ηρωϊκοί μύθοι και τα έπη μιας κοινωνίας διδάσκουν τα μέλη της τις κατάλληλες στάσεις [ζωής], συμπεριφορά και αξίες εκείνου του πολιτισμού. Αυτοί οι μύθοι είναι ιδιαίτερου ενδιαφέροντος και αξίας για εμάς. Δεν είναι μόνον συναρπαστικές περιπετειώδεις ιστορίες, αλλά, σ' αυτούς τους μύθους, βλέπουμε και τον εαυτό μας να σκιαγραφείται μεγαλύτερος και σπουδαιότερος από ό,τι είμαστε, ωστόσο με τις ανθρώπινες αδυναμίες μας καθώς και με τα θετικά χαρακτηριστικά μας.

Οι ήρωες είναι τα πρότυπα της ανθρώπινης συμπεριφοράς για την κοινωνία τους. Κερδίζουν μακροχρόνια φήμη - το μόνο είδος αθανασίας που είναι δυνατό για τα ανθρώπινα όντα - εκτελώντας σπουδαίες πράξεις που βοηθούν την κοινωνία τους και εμπνέουν άλλους να τούς μιμηθούν. Οι ήρωες είναι αναγκασμένοι από τις καταστάσεις να κάνουν σημαντικές επιλογές, όπου πρέπει να ισορροπήσουν μία σειρά αξιών με [άλλες] ανταγωνιστικές αξίες. Αποκτούν φήμη ήρωα, εν μέρει από τα κατορθώματά τους και εν μέρει επειδή αναδύονται από τις δοκιμασίες τους ως πιο ευαίσθητοι και συμπονετικοί άνθρωποι.

Ωστόσο, οι ήρωες δεν είναι ίδιοι σε όλο τον κόσμο. Ο Αχιλλέας, ο Οδυσσέας, ο Γκιλγκαμές (Gilgamesh) και ο Σίγκουρντ (Sigurd), παραδειγματος χάριν, προέρχονται από πολιτισμούς, όπου τα άτομα μπορεί να κερδίσουν φήμη με ποικίλους τρόπους. Αυτό τούς επιτρέπει να εκφράσουν την ατομικότητά τους. Αντίθετα, ο Ράμα πρέπει πάντοτε να θυμάται και να ακολουθεί το *ντάρμα* (dharma), την ιδιαίτερη μορφή κατάλληλης και δίκαιης συμπεριφοράς, που ο Ινδουιστικός πολιτισμός προσδοκά από ένα πρόσωπο της δικής του πολιτικής, οικονομικής και κοινωνικής θέσης.

Παρά τις ασυνήθιστες ικανότητές τους, κανένας ήρωας δεν είναι τέλειος. Ωστόσο, οι ανθρώπινες αδυναμίες τους συχνά είναι τόσο διδακτικές όσο και οι ηρωικές ιδιότητές τους. Οι ατέλειές τους επιτρέπουν στους συνηθισμένους ανθρώπους να ταυτίζονται μαζί τους και να τούς αρέσουν, γιατί ο καθένας έχει παρόμοιες ψυχολογικές ανάγκες και συγκρούσεις.

Πολλοί από τους πιο σπουδαίους ήρωες δεν μπορούν να δεχτούν τη θνητότητα. Ο Gilgamesh τόσο φοβάται τον θάνατο, που επιχειρεί ένα μακρύ και επικίνδυνο ταξίδι για την αναζήτηση του μυστικού της αθανασίας. Τελικά, μαθαίνει να είναι ικανοποιημένος με την αθανασία που "χαρίζουν" τα αιώνια επιτεύγματα. Ο Αχιλλέας πρέπει να διαλέξει ανάμεσα στο θάνατο με τιμή και μια μακροχρόνια, ασήμαντη ζωή. Όταν νιώθει στερημένος τιμής στο πεδίο της μάχης, επιλέγει τη ζωή - και μόνο οι απρόβλεπτες επιλοκές εκείνης της επιλογής τον προκαλούν να αλλάξει γνώμη. Ο Έκτορας (Hector) και ο Μπέογουλφ (Beowulf) αναγκάζονται να επιλέξουν τον ηρωικό θάνατο επειδή δεν μπορούν να ζουν με την κηλίδα της δειλίας.

Σε αντίθεση με τους πιο πολλούς ήρωες, ο Ηρακλής γνωρίζει ότι θα γίνει αθάνατος αφού πραγματοποιήσει τους άθλους του. Η πρώτη του έγνοια είναι να αποφύγει τους άθλους, επειδή αρνείται να τον διατάξει ένας φοβιτσιάρης βασιλιάς. Ο Οδυσσέας στην πραγματικότητα απορρίπτει την ευκαιρία να γίνει αθάνατος, επειδή νοιάζεται περισσότερο για την ποιότητα ζωής απ' ό,τι για τη διάρκειά της. Προτιμάει τη δική του θνητή γυναίκα και τα προβλήματα κυβέρνησης ενός βασιλείου από ένα γάμο με μια όμορφη θεά και μια ανιαρή ζωή.

Οι ηρωικοί μύθοι εξετάζουν τη σχέση ανάμεσα στις επιθυμίες του ατόμου και τις ευθύνες του/της προς την κοινωνία. Συχνά, η επιλογή είναι σημαντική αλλά απλή: να διακινδυνεύσει ή όχι [τη ζωή του/της] με θάνατο, για να σώσει το κοινωνικό σύνολο (παρoικία, κοινότητα=community). Ο ήρωας που επιλέγει να διακινδυνεύσει με θάνατο αποκτά τιμή και μακροχρόνια φήμη. Ο ήρωας που επιλέγει την ασφάλεια αρνείται και τα δύο. Ο Ηρακλής και ο Μπέογουλφ κάνουν τον κόσμο ένα ασφαλέστερο μέρος με το να σκοτώσουν πολλά τέρατα. Ο ήρωας του "*Kotan Utunnai*" βοηθάει το λαό του παλεύοντας με γενναιότητα κατά του εχθρού.¹

Στα σημαντικότερα έπη, το πρόβλημα είναι το ίδιο, αλλά οι καταστάσεις είναι απείρως πιο περίπλοκες. Όταν ένας/μία αρχηγός βάζει τις δικές του/της επιθυμίες πριν από τις ανάγκες του κοινωνικού συνόλου, υποφέρουν και η κοινωνία και το άτομο. Ο Αγαμέμνων και ο Αχιλλέας μαλώνουν για μία σκλάβο, επειδή η δημόσια τιμή είναι το κλειδί για την αυτοεκτίμηση. Παρομοίως, ο Λάνσελοτ και η Γκουίνεβερ (Lancelot and Guenevere) βάζουν την αγάπη τους πάνω από την πίστη τους στο βασιλιά Αρθούρο, καταστρέφοντας έτσι τη Στρογγυλή Τράπεζα (the Round Table) και αφήνοντας (θέτοντας) τη Βρετανία στα χέρια τοπικών ηγετών που διψάνε για δύναμη. Ο Αινείας βάζει τις ανάγκες του κοινωνικού συνόλου πάνω από τις προσωπικές επιθυμίες του, αλλά χάνει τη δική του ανθρωπιά. Παρομοίως, ο Ράμα θέτει τις ανάγκες του κοινωνικού συνόλου πάνω από την αγάπη του για τη Σίτα, προκαλώντας μεγάλη προσωπική τραγωδία και για τους δύο τους. Από την άλλη πλευρά, ο Γκασσιρέ (Gassire)² κερδίζει φήμη με το να βάλει τις προσωπικές επιθυμίες του μπροστά από τις ανάγκες της κοινωνίας.

Οι ήρωες αυτο-προσδιορίζονται από το πώς σχετίζονται με εξωτερικές καταστάσεις. Αποκτούν μακροχρόνια φήμη με το να εκτελούν γενναίες πράξεις, αλλά αποκτούν ακόμη πιο μεγάλη ηρωική φήμη με το να κερδίσουν μια εσωτερική μάχη ενάντια στις επιθυμίες τους. Ο Έκτορας πολεμά σε μια σημαντικότερη μάχη, επειδή πρέπει πρώτα να ξεπεράσει το φόβο του για τον Αχιλλέα. Και αυτός και ο Μπέογουλφ αγωνίζονται ενάντια σε έναν ανώτερο εχθρό, ξέροντας ότι θα πεθάνουν στη συνέχεια, αλλά επιλέγοντας να πεθάνουν με τιμή παρά να ζουν χωρίς αυτοεκτίμηση και δημόσια αποδοχή. Τα πιο δυνατά σημεία του Οδυσσέα, η ευφυΐα και η διάνοιά του, και η αυτοπεποίθησή του προκαλούν τα προβλήματά του. Επιβιώνει κατά την επιστροφή στην πατρίδα του, μόνον επειδή κυριαρχεί στην ανάγκη του να επιβάλλεται και να επιδεικνύει την ανωτερότητά του. Αντίθετα, ο Κουετσαλκοάτλ (Quetzalcoatl) νικάται όταν ο Τετσατλίποκα (Tezcatlipoca) χτυπά τη ματαιοδοξία του.³

Δεν θα έπρεπε να μάς φοβίζουν τα εξωτερικά χαρακτηριστικά του ήρωα: ένας αθάνατος γονιός, μια ασυνήθιστη γέννηση, αριστοκρατική κοινωνική θέση και θεϊκή υποστήριξη (divine sponsorship). Θα μπορούσαμε να πούμε ότι ο Ηρακλής μπορεί να κάνει σπουδαία κατορθώματα επειδή ο πατέρας του είναι ο Ζεύς. Αυτό το κάνουμε στη ζωή μας, όποτε αποδίδουμε την επιτυχία κάποιου κυρίως στην τύχη αντί στο ατομικό θάρρος, την επιμονή και την ικανότητα. Ωστόσο, αυτή η στάση δεν βοηθά προσωπικά. Αν και αυτοί οι ήρωες έζησαν πολύ καιρό πριν, σε πολιτισμούς πολύ διαφορετικούς από τους δικούς μας, ακόμη μπορούν να χρησιμεύουν ως πρότυπα για μάς. Κι

¹Μύθος από την Ιαπωνία

²Μύθος από τη Γκάνα, Αφρική: "*Gassire's lute*". - Gassire=βάρδος, τραγουδιστής. Lute=λαούτο

³Μύθος από το Μεξικό - Τολτέκου/Αζτέκοι

εμείς, επίσης, πρέπει συχνά να ρισκάρουμε την αυτοεκτίμηση και την καλή φήμη μας με το να κάνουμε δύσκολες επιλογές και με το να επιχειρούμε [να αναλαμβάνουμε] καθήκοντα, όπου φοβόμαστε την αποτυχία. Κι εμείς, επίσης, θέλουμε να ζούμε με τέτοιον τρόπο, που να μάς θυμούνται για τις καλές πράξεις μας.

Η Μητριαρχική Κοινωνία

Η γνώση των βασικών διαφορών μεταξύ των μητριαρχικών θρησκειών που επικεντρώνονται στη Μητέρα-Γη και των πατριαρχικών θρησκειών που επικεντρώνονται στον Πατέρα-Ουρανό (με τις οποίες είμαστε πολύ πιο οικείοι) είναι σημαντική για την κατανόηση του συμβολικού περιεχομένου πολλών μύθων. Το πολιτικό, οικονομικό, κοινωνικό και θρησκευτικό θεμέλιο της μητριαρχικής κοινωνίας ήταν το γεωργικό έτος. Η σπουδαιότητα της γεωργίας προώθησε μια κυκλική άποψη της ζωής, δίνοντας έμφαση στην ακολουθία όλης της ζωντανής ύλης από τη γέννηση στην ωριμότητα, στο θάνατο, στην αναγέννηση. Ακόμα και σε εδάφη, όπου το κλίμα παρέμενε σχετικά σταθερό από τη μια εποχή στην άλλη, οι άνθρωποι μπορούσαν να δουν τη σχέση ανάμεσα στην εξέλιξη της δικής τους ζωής και την εξέλιξη της ζωής ανάμεσα σε φυτά και ζώα.

Στη μητριαρχική κοινωνία, η Μεγάλη Θεά ή Μητέρα Θεά προσωποποιούσε τη Μητέρα Γη και ήταν η υπέρτατη θεότητα. Αυτή ήταν η πηγή όλης της ανθρώπινης ζωής και η πηγή όλης της τροφής. Για να επιβιώσουν, οι κοινωνίες χρειάζονταν να γεννάνε παιδιά και να παράγουν τροφή. Ήξεραν πόσο εξαρτιόντουσαν από τις ευλογίες της Μεγάλης Θεάς, και τή λάτρευαν έτσι όπως έπρεπε (properly), ώστε να λαμβάνουν εκείνες τις ευλογίες.

Η βασίλισσα προσωποποιούσε τη Μεγάλη Θεά και είχε στα χέρια της⁴ τεράστια πολιτική, οικονομική, κοινωνική και θρησκευτική δύναμη. Άλλες γυναίκες θεωρούνταν κόρες της Μεγάλης Θεάς. Έτσι, όλες οι γυναίκες στη μητριαρχική κοινωνία έχαιραν μεγάλης εκτίμησης, και πολλές από αυτές είχαν σημαντικές θέσεις. Οι γυναίκες ήταν οι κεφαλές της οικογένειάς τους, και η κληρονομιά περνούσε από μια μητέρα στις κόρες της, με την νεότερη κόρη να είναι η πιο σημαντική, επειδή, προφανώς, αυτή θα ήταν η τελευταία που θα πέθαινε και έτσι θα συνέχιζε το οικογενειακό δέντρο για πολύ περισσότερο. Τα παιδιά ανατρίφονταν από τη μητέρα τους και τον αδερφό της, ενώ ο πατέρας ζούσε στο σπίτι της μητέρας του και βοηθούσε στην ανατροφή των παιδιών της αδερφής του. Οι πρωταρχικές ηθικές υποχρεώσεις των παιδιών ήταν προς τη μητέρα τους και προς τα αδέρφια τους.

Όταν ο ανδρικός ρόλος στην αναπαραγωγή [του ανθρώπινου είδους] έγινε κατανοητός και εκτιμήθηκε, η βασίλισσα έπαιρνε έναν σύζυγο, που ονομαζόταν ιερός βασιλιάς, για ένα χρόνο. Αρχικά, αυτός ήταν ο αδερφός ή ο γιος της, αλλά αργότερα ήταν ένας νέος που συμβόλιζε το γιο της. Πολλοί νέοι ανταγωνιζόντουσαν για τη μεγάλη τιμή να γίνουν ιεροί βασιλείς. Έπρεπε να κερδίσουν πολλούς αγώνες που προϋπέθεταν σωματική δύναμη και επιδέξια χρήση του τόξου. Οι άθλοι του Ηρακλή κατά του Λέοντα της Νεμέας, του Ταύρου της Κρήτης, του Ερυμάνθιου Κάπρου και του Ελαφιού της Αρτέμιδος αναπαριστούν χαρακτηριστικούς αγώνες. Η συμμετοχή του Οδυσσέα σε έναν αγώνα τοξοβολίας, όπου ο νικητής θα παντρευόταν την Πηνελόπη, είναι ένας απόηχος αυτής της παράδοσης.

Κάθε άνοιξη, όταν σπέρνονταν οι σπόροι για τα νέα σιτηρά, ο ιερός βασιλιάς της προηγούμενης χρονιάς θα θυσιάζόταν ως μέρος μιας σημαντικής θρησκευτικής τελετής. Οι ιέρειες της Μητέρας Θεάς θα έτρωγαν τη σάρκα του για να αποκτήσουν τις δικές του δυνάμεις γονιμότητας, και οι αγροί και τα ζώα στα αγροκτήματα θα ραντιζόντουσαν με το αίμα του, ώστε κι αυτά να γίνουν γόνιμα. Μετά, σε μια θρησκευτική τελετή, η βασίλισσα θα έπαιρνε έναν καινούργιο ιερό βασιλιά για το επόμενο έτος.

Ο ιερός βασιλιάς βαθμιαία κέρδιζε περισσότερη δύναμη. Αύξησε το χρόνο της βασιλείας του σε οκτώ έτη, διαλέγοντας έναν αντικαταστάτη ιερό βασιλιά για να πεθάνει στη θέση του. Στο τέλος κάθε χρονιάς, ο πραγματικός βασιλιάς θα αποσυρόταν από τη δημόσια θέαση σε ένα ταφικό δωμάτιο ή σπήλαιο για μία με τρεις μέρες, ενώ ο αντικαταστάτης βασιλιάς κυβερνούσε στη θέση του. Οι ιέρειες της Μεγάλης Θεάς θα θυσίαζαν τον αντικαταστάτη βασιλιά σε μια ιερή τελετή και θα χρησιμοποιούσαν τη σάρκα και το αίμα του για να σιγουρέψουν τη γονιμότητα του κοινωνικού συνόλου. Μετά, ο πραγματικός βασιλιάς θα αναλάμβανε εκ νέου τα καθήκοντά του για το επόμενο έτος. Όταν ο Γκιλγκαμές απορρίπτει την πρόταση γάμου της Ίσταρ (Ishtar), αφηγείται τους

⁴wield (v.): hold - κρατώ στα χέρια

τρόπους με τους οποίους αυτή κατέστρεψε προηγούμενους συντρόφους. Η Ίσταρ εκδικείται προκαλώντας τον θάνατο του Ενκιντού (Enkidu), ο οποίος λειτουργεί ως αντικαταστάτης του Γκιλγκαμές.

Μέχρι το 2400 π.Χ., εχθρικές φυλές που λάτρευαν ένα ανώτατο αρσενικό θεό, ο οποίος ήταν μία πατρική φιγούρα ή ένας επιτυχημένος πολεμιστής, είχαν αρχίσει να εισβάλουν σε πολλές μητριαρχικές κοινωνίες. Έφεραν μαζί τους μία νέα κοινωνική και πολιτική τάξη, στην οποία οι άρρενες κυριαρχούσαν. Οι βασιλιάδες απέκτησαν αρκετή δύναμη, ώστε να αλλάξουν το παλιό κοινωνικό σύστημα σε ένα [σύστημα], κατά το οποίο η κυβέρνηση των βασιλιάδων ήταν κληρονομική, και ζώα θυσιάζονταν για να κερδίσουν την εύνοια των θεών.

Μερικοί πολιτισμοί απεικονίζουν μια κοσμοθεωρία, κατά την οποία μία γενεά θεών αντικαθιστά μια άλλη, οι πιο νέοι θεοί είναι πιο πολιτισμένοι και ικανοί απ' ό,τι οι πιο πρώιμοι. Η μάχη μεταξύ μιας οικογένειας θεών και μιας άλλης συχνά αντανάκλα την πολιτική και θρησκευτική σύγκρουση ανάμεσα στους ιθαγενείς, που ήταν γεωργοί και λάτρευαν τη Μεγάλη Θεά ή Μητέρα Θεά, και έναν πολεμοχαρή εισβολέα λαό, που λάτρευε αρσενικούς θεούς του ουρανού. Η υποταγή του Κρόνου και των Τιτάνων στο Δία αντανάκλα την πολιτική κυριαρχία ενός λαού πάνω σε έναν άλλο· και οι σχέσεις του [Δία] με πολλές Μητέρες Θεές, επιπροσθέτως προς την Ήρα, τη γυναίκα του, αντιπροσωπεύουν⁵ ένα συμβιβασμό, κατά τον οποίο η θρησκεία των εισβολέων ενωνόταν με κάθε τοπική θρησκεία. Παρόμοιες αλλαγές αντανάκλωνται στη Βαβυλωνιακή μυθολογία, όπου μία θρησκεία, στην οποία ο Μαρντούκ είναι ο κύριος θεός, ενσωματώνει τους παλαιότερους θεούς.

Οι Σημαντικές Προοπτικές των Μύθων

Επειδή οι μύθοι είναι σύμβολα της ανθρώπινης εμπειρίας, μπορούν να αναλυθούν ποικιλοτρόπως, ανάλογα με την προοπτική του ακαδημαϊκού μελετητή. Χρόνια πριν, πολλοί λόγιοι έβλεπαν τους μύθους ως σύμβολα του εξωτερικού περιβάλλοντος. Αυτοί που δημιούργησαν τους μύθους θεωρούνταν ότι είχαν παρατηρήσει τη φύση και ερμηνεύσει τη συμπεριφορά των ανθρώπων με έναν παράλληλο τρόπο. Για παράδειγμα, οι ήρωες, οι οποίοι θεωρούνταν σύμβολα του ήλιου, κρατούσαν σπαθιά που συμβόλιζαν τις ακτίνες του ήλιου ενάντια σε τέρατα που συμβόλιζαν τα σύννεφα και τη νύχτα, τους εχθρούς του ήλιου. Κάθε ηρωική ιστορία ήταν έτσι ένα σύμβολο της σύγκρουσης ανάμεσα στη μέρα και τη νύχτα και, κατ' επέκταση, ανάμεσα στο καλό και στο κακό.

Τον 20ό αιώνα, η συμβολική ερμηνεία των μύθων μεταφέρθηκε από το εξωτερικό περιβάλλον στο εσωτερικό περιβάλλον του ασυνείδητου νου. Ο Σίγκμουντ Φρόυντ (Sigmund Freud) και οι οπαδοί του εξετάζουν τους μύθους ως έκφραση των ασυνείδητων ευχών, φόβων και ορμών του ατόμου. Παραδειγματος χάριν, ο Όττο Ρανκ (Otto Rank) εξηγεί τα χαρακτηριστικά του παραδοσιακού ήρωα σε σχέση με παιδική εχθρότητα, φαντασιώσεις της παιδικής ηλικίας και επανάσταση εναντίον του πατέρα.

Ο Καρλ Γιουνγκ (Carl Jung) και οι οπαδοί του, ανάμεσα σ' αυτούς και ο Καρλ Κερένυι (Carl Kerenyi), ο Έριχ Νόϊμαν (Erich Neumann) και, πιο ευρέως, ο Τζόζεφ Κάμπμπελ (Joseph Campbell), εξετάζουν τους μύθους ως έκφραση ενός καθολικού συλλογικού ασυνείδητου. Στη θεωρία τους, έμφυτα ψυχολογικά χαρακτηριστικά, κοινά σε όλους τους ανθρώπους, καθορίζουν πώς οι άνθρωποι σε όλο τον κόσμο και σε όλη την ιστορία βιώνουν και ανταποκρίνονται στη διαδικασία του ζην. Τα περιεχόμενα του συλλογικού ασυνείδητου διαιρούνται σε αρχέτυπα - όπως η μητέρα, το παιδί, ο ήρωας, ο απατεώνας και ο γίγαντας - αλλά αυτά είναι απλώς πλαίσια εικόνων (images). Τα βιώματα ενός συγκεκριμένου ατόμου καθορίζουν με ποιο ιδιαίτερο σχήμα και μορφή θα εκφραστούν οι αρχέτυπες εικόνες. Έτσι, το γεγονός ότι οι μύθοι από όλο τον κόσμο περιέχουν πολλά παρόμοια θέματα, αντανάκλα την ύπαρξη ενός κοινού συλλογικού ασυνείδητου. Το γεγονός ότι [οι μύθοι] διαφέρουν στο χειρισμό αυτών των θεμάτων αντανάκλα την επιρροή του ιδιαίτερου φυσικού, κοινωνικού, οικονομικού και πολιτικού περιβάλλοντος του κάθε πολιτισμού πάνω στα αρχέτυπα.

Οι λόγιοι [μελετητές] αυτού του αιώνα⁶ έχουν ερμηνεύσει μύθους και με άλλους τρόπους, επίσης. Ο Μιρτσέα Ελιάντε (Mircea Eliade), ιστορικός θρησκειών, βλέπει τους μύθους ως την

⁵represent: αντιπροσωπεύω, εκπροσωπώ, συμβολίζω, απεικονίζω

⁶Ας σημειωθεί, ότι η συγγραφέας αναφέρεται στον εικοστό αιώνα!

ουσία της θρησκείας, ειλημμένη⁷ από μία γνήσια θρησκευτική εμπειρία. Είναι το ιερό βίωμα που δίνει στους μύθους τη δομή και τη χρησιμότητά τους. Ο αρχαίος κόσμος περιείχε ένα πλήθος από συνυπάρχουσες θρησκευτικές ιδέες και μορφές: διαφορετικούς τύπους μονοθεϊσμού και πολυθεϊσμού (με κυριαρχία και από το θηλυκό και το αρσενικό στοιχείο), λατρεία της φύσης, και λατρεία των προγόνων. Κατά συνέπεια, πολυάριθμες ομοιότητες και σχέσεις υπάρχουν από τον έναν πολιτισμό στον άλλο. Αυτό είναι εμφανές από τη μελέτη διαφόρων πλευρών του θρησκευτικού βιώματος, όπως [είναι] η φύση των θεοτήτων, οι μύθοι της δημιουργίας, θυσίες, τελετές, θάνατος και παράδεισος.

Ο ανθρωπολόγος Πολ Ράντιν (Paul Radin) εξετάζει τους μύθους από την προοπτική της οικονομίας. Ο πραγματικός ατομικός αγώνας για επιβίωση μπροστά στην οικονομική αβεβαιότητα, που προκαλείται από μια ανεπαρκή προσφορά τροφής και από τη φτωχή τεχνολογία, δημιουργεί φόβους ότι η ζωή θα είναι δυστυχισμένη και σύντομη. Θρησκευτικοί ηγέτες χειρίζονται αυτούς τους φόβους για δικό τους υλικό όφελος, συχνά σε συμφωνία με τους πολιτικούς ηγέτες της κοινωνίας.

Ο ανθρωπολόγος Κλοντ Λέβι-Στρος (Claude Levi-Strauss) εξετάζει τους μύθους ως αφηρημένες δομές παρά ως αφηγηματικές ιστορίες ή βιωματικά σύμβολα. Η δομή του νου όλων των ανθρώπων είναι ολόϊδια και αποκαλύπτεται από τους παρόμοιους τρόπους, με τους οποίους οι άνθρωποι λύνουν τα προβλήματά τους. Οι μύθοι είναι όμοια προϊόντα από όμοια μυαλά, έτσι οι μύθοι από όλο τον κόσμο έχουν μια κοινή δομή. Αποκαλύπτουν τη σύγκρουση μεταξύ αντίθετων δυνάμεων - όπως η ζωή και ο θάνατος ή η φύση κι ο πολιτισμός (culture). Για να ανακαλύψουμε τη σημασία ενός ιδιαίτερου μύθου, πρέπει να εστιάσουμε στη βασική δομή παρά στο αφηγηματικό περιεχόμενο ή στην όποια συμβολική σημασία. Αυτή η δομή πάντα αποκαλύπτει εντάσεις σε κοινωνικές σχέσεις ή οικονομικά προβλήματα. Η ανάλυση των μύθων αποδεικνύει ότι οι άνθρωποι, όσο πρωτόγονη κι αν είναι η τεχνολογία τους, δεν είναι πνευματικά κατώτεροι. Οι μύθοι τους δείχνουν, ότι έχουν την διανοητική ικανότητα να καταλάβουν τον κόσμο στον οποίο ζουν.

Μέρος της γοητείας της μυθολογίας [είναι ότι] προϋποθέτει την εξέτασή της από μια ποικιλία προοπτικών ταυτόχρονα. Κάθε επιστημονικός κλάδος κάνει μια πολύτιμη συνεισφορά, αυξάνοντας την εκτίμησή μας της ολότητας.

⁷conceive: συλλαμβάνω, σκέφτομαι, διανοούμαι

Myths of the Far East



The myths of the Far East represent a number of different cultures and were recorded over a wide range of time. The earliest myths from India reflect the culture of the Aryan peoples who invaded the country in about 1500 B.C. Later the Hindus adopted and adapted some of these myths, among them the creation myth and the myth of Rama.

Most of the Chinese myths were recorded during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–220 A.D.). They are the earliest Chinese myths still in existence because in 213 B.C. the first emperor of China burned all books that were not about medicine or farming.

The Japanese crossed the Korea Strait into Japan during the early period of the Han Dynasty. Much later, under the influence of the Chinese, they recorded their myths in the 8th century A.D.. The epic *Kotan Utunnai* is a modern transcription of a myth of the aboriginal Ainu people, who were living in Japan when the Japanese arrived.

Both the Indian and the Chinese creation myths begin with an egg, both involve creating the universe from the body of a divinity, and both explain the creation of human beings. The Indian myth, which is Hindu, involves regeneration and the cyclical nature of time. It sets forth four ages of man, which are similar to the Greek ages of man and the Navajo five worlds. The Japanese creation myth explains the creation of the Japanese islands. Its treatment of the relationship between men and women and its depiction of death give it special interest.

The three fertility myths are traditional in feeling. Both the Indian myth, which is pre-Hindu, and the Chinese myth are like the Zuni, Haida, and Fon myths in that they relate how a god or demigod saves the world from a great

threat. The Japanese myth, like the Greek and Hittite myths, involves a god of fertility who is insulted and must be appeased for fertility to be restored.

Each hero myth has its own special appeal. The Hindu *Ramayana* is one of the world's great epics. Not only is it a superb adventure story, but its emphasis upon responsibility and righteous behavior make us think about our own values. The Chinese myth is a delightful hero story, with appealing characters and a good plot. The Ainu epic from Japan is unusual in that its ancient, pristine quality gives it a primeval power. In its characters and the choices they must make, it invites comparison with the *Iliad*.

✓ INDIA: The Creation, Death, and Rebirth of the Universe

Just as the Hindu religion accommodates a number of different religious views, it accepts a number of different creation myths. Vishnu, who was associated with the sun, and Rudra, who was associated with storms, existed as divinities before the Hindus elevated Vishnu to major importance and incorporated Rudra into Vishnu's destructive aspect. The following myth was probably written down sometime between 300 and 500 A.D., and it contains a number of elements that are distinctively Hindu.

First, the idea of reincarnation is a Hindu concept. The Hindu creation myth reveals Vishnu in three forms: as Brahma, the creator of life on earth; as Vishnu, the preserver of life on earth; and as Shiva-Rudra, the destroyer of life on earth. The myth also explains how Vishnu often descends to earth and becomes reincarnated as a human hero to protect gods and mortals against the forces of evil beings (demons).

The duty of each person to live according to his or her *dharma*, a definite pattern of righteous behavior dictated by that person's position in society, is also a Hindu concept. Vishnu establishes *dharma* as a way of preserving civilization. Without it society disintegrates, war results, and civilization brings destruction upon itself.

Finally, the unending cyclical nature of time and life is a Hindu concept. Creation is always re-creation, part of a cycle that has no beginning and no end. The universe progresses from birth to maturity to death to rebirth, over and over again. The four stages of life on earth progress from the ideal golden age to the dark age and back to the golden age, over and over again. Vishnu, in his three forms, directs the life cycle of the universe from creation to disintegration to dissolution to re-creation, over and over again.

Thus, in Hindu thought, a sense of unity and pattern remains at the foundation of all apparent differences. Vishnu creates, preserves, and destroys. His names change, and his roles change, but the great god remains the same. The golden age will inevitably disintegrate into the dark age, which in turn will inevitably lead back to the golden age.

Like the four ages of the Greeks, the Indian ages reveal the moral disintegration of society and show how people bring suffering upon themselves through their selfish and unjust treatment of one another. In each case, the ages become progressively worse. The last age is always a time of cruelty, pain, grief, and unnecessary death, and it is always the age in which the reader is living.

Principal Gods

OLORUN: ruler of the sky; creator of the sun; most powerful and wisest god

ORUNMILA: oldest son, god of prophecy; advisor to Obatala

OBATALA: favorite of Olorun; creator of land and human beings

OLOKUN: ruler of the sea

ESHU: messenger god ✓

✓ NAVAJO: Creation ✓

Sometime between 1000 and 1700 A.D. the people who became known as the Navajo left the northern woodlands, bringing with them the bow and arrow. They were accustomed to hunting and fishing, but they settled among the agriculturally oriented Pueblo peoples in northern New Mexico and north-eastern Arizona.

The Navajo took the ideas of the peoples they met and adapted them to meet their own needs. When the Pueblo people fled from the Spanish invaders in the late 1500s, they took refuge among their Navajo neighbors. They introduced the Navajo to farming and weaving, and to their heritage of myths and religious ceremonies. With these new skills, the Navajo became known for their poetic, elaborate myths, their striking sand paintings, and their beautiful blankets.

After the first Spanish colonists brought sheep, goats, and horses into New Mexico in 1598, the Navajo became a nation of shepherds. They began to use Spanish silver and United States coins to fashion beautiful jewelry.

In 1980, the Navajo tribe contained about 150,000 people. Many Navajo are still shepherds, and many are well-known for their beautiful arts and crafts.

Every people has an explanation of how it came into existence. The Navajo progress from world to world as the Greeks and the Indians progress from race to race. Unlike the Greeks and the Indians, however, the Navajo believe that they become more civilized as they move upward from world to world. Like other peoples, the first Navajo are created from a plentiful local material—in this case, two ears of corn. Like other peoples, the Navajo are the victims of a great flood—but the Navajo survive.

The concept that four is a sacred number is emphasized throughout the creation myth. There are four seasons, four directions, and four winds. The Navajo tradition also speaks of four sacred mountains (one in each of the four directions), four sacred colors (black, white, yellow, and blue), four sacred plants (corn, squash, beans, and tobacco), and a progression upward through four worlds. Moreover, four important human beings are created in the image of the gods (First Man, First Woman, First Boy, and First Girl).

One of the interesting aspects of this myth is the close relationship among insects, animals, and human beings. A distinctive feature of American Indian mythology is the idea that all living creatures deserve respect, since they are all creations of the same Supreme Being.

One of the interesting aspects of this myth is the close relationship among insects, animals, and human beings. A distinctive feature of American Indian mythology is the idea that all living creatures deserve respect, since they are all creations of the same Supreme Being.

CHINA: The Traditional Hero Bao Chu

 ✓

The Quest for the Sun is one of approximately 400 myths and folktales collected in 1959 from people who lived in the area of West Lake, near Shanghai. West Lake is the most famous lake in China, both because of its ancient history and because of the beauty of its setting. Since olden times in the area, the Chinese have built beautiful structures. This folktale explains the origin of Bao Chu Pagoda, one such building.

The hero, Bao Chu, is similar to the heroes of myths throughout the world. His birth and growth are unusual. His task is to restore order to the

natural world by recovering the sun and, with it, the fertility of the earth. He is prepared to sacrifice his life for the good of society.

Like other heroes, Bao Chu endures a number of trials in the course of his great accomplishment. These tests exhibit his remarkable strength and his creative intelligence, and they win him great fame. Being mortal, he dies—but not until after he has saved the world.

Bao Chu's mother is also a heroine. She is presented as the ideal wife and mother. She is creative, intelligent, and self-sacrificing. She consciously chooses a life of loneliness and hardship when she encourages her husband and then her son to set off on a heroic pursuit.

Principal Characters

LIU CHUN: husband of Hui Niang;
young farmer; first to search for
the sun

HUI NIANG: wife of Liu Chun;
mother of Bao Chu; weaver

BAO CHU: son of Hui Niang; hero
who finds the sun

KING OF EVIL: demon king who
has captured the sun

ELDER: wise man of the
village; advisor

✓ THE QUEST FOR THE SUN ✓

Long ago, a small village sat at the base of Precious Stone Mountain along the shore of West Lake. In this village lived the young farmer Liu Chun and his wife, the weaver Hui Niang. Since they were a hard-working, prudent couple, the other villagers admired them.

One morning, soon after the rising sun glowed red upon the eastern horizon, black clouds blew across West Lake and brought with them a violent rainstorm. The sun immediately sank below the horizon, and even after the storm had blown past it did not reappear.

The world became dark and cold. The trees withered and turned from green to brown. The flowers shriveled and turned from red to brown. The crops dried upon the fields and turned from gold to brown. Demons, ghosts, and other evil creatures of the night ventured forth with great delight, for an endless night shrouded the world in blackness. Their wicked deeds caused much suffering.

"What are we going to do?" the people asked one another. "Where has the sun gone? How can we survive if we cannot grow food?"

Liu Chun went to see the oldest person in the neighborhood, an Elder who was 180 years old. "Can you tell me what has happened to the sun?" he asked.

"I think I can," the Elder replied. "A demon king lives beneath the Eastern Sea. It is he who rules over all of the wicked ghosts, demons, and other evil creatures. To these creatures the sun is a great enemy. They fear and hate it, for it exposes their terrible deeds. Therefore, I think that the demon king has stolen the sun."

Liu Chun thanked the Elder and returned home. He said to his wife, "Hui Niang, I must go forth and try to find the sun. The people are freezing and starving to death! I feel their pain burning in my heart."

"It is a good deed that you would do," his wife replied. "Go with a happy heart. I will send you on your way with special clothing."

Hui Niang made her husband a thickly padded cotton jacket. She then combined a lock of her long hair with strands of hemp and fashioned a pair of sandals from them.

As Liu Chun was leaving, the couple saw a bright golden light moving through the sky toward them. When it landed on Liu Chun's shoulder, they recognized it as a golden phoenix. Liu Chun asked it to accompany him on his journey, and the bird nodded.

Liu Chun then addressed his parting words to his wife. "Hui Niang, I will not return until I have found the sun. If I die first, I will become a bright star. In that form I will guide anyone who would find the sun." He and the phoenix began their journey.

Each day thereafter, Hui Niang climbed to the top of Precious Stone Mountain and scanned the horizon for the sun. Each day she was disappointed. The world remained shrouded in endless night.

One day as she watched, however, a brightly shining star rose from earth to the heavens. Then the golden phoenix came to rest at Hui Niang's feet with its head downcast. Hui Niang knew that her husband had died. Her heart was so filled with grief that she fainted.

When Hui Niang awoke, she found that she had given birth to an infant son. She named him Bao Chu. With the touch of the first gust of wind, the infant could talk; with the second gust of wind, he could walk; and with the third gust of wind, he grew to be 18 feet tall. Hui Niang was delighted to be the mother of such a great son but sad that the boy would never know his father.

Seeing his mother's tears, Bao Chu questioned her, and she told him the story of his father's fatal quest. "Mother, with your permission, I will go and find the sun!" he exclaimed. "It will give me great pleasure to complete my father's task."

Hui Niang's heart was torn in two. One half thought of the honor to her husband; the other half worried over the danger to her young son. She felt obliged to do her part to save the people of the earth, so she gave her consent. Once more she made a thickly padded cotton jacket and a pair of sandals woven from a lock of her hair and strands of hemp. Once more the

golden phoenix arrived at their gate. It alighted upon Bao Chu's shoulder when he was ready to depart.

Hui Niang said to her son, "Notice the brightest star in the heavens, there in the east. Your father transformed himself into that star when he died. Follow it, and it will lead you to the sun. The golden phoenix is a friend. Just as it accompanied your father on his journey, it has come to accompany you on yours."

"I will do just as you wish, Mother," Bao Chu replied. "No matter how long I am away, do not let your heart grieve for me. Any tears you shed would break my heart, and I would not have the strength to complete my task." With these words, Bao Chu and the phoenix began their journey.

They headed east, in the direction of the brightest star. On and on Bao Chu walked, over 18 cliffs and 19 precipices. The bushes on the mountainsides tore his jacket to shreds and his body to a mass of bloody wounds. He looked worn, haggard, and very cold as he limped into a mountain village. When the villagers heard of his quest, each tore a piece of cloth from his or her own jacket and had it sewn into a new jacket for Bao Chu, which they called the "100-family coat."

Feeling warm in body and refreshed in spirit, Bao Chu and the golden phoenix went on their way again. They walked on and on, over many more mountains, and they swam across many rivers.

One day they reached a river so wide that even an eagle could not fly across it. A mighty current swept boulders as large as houses downstream. With no fear in his heart, Bao Chu stepped right into the turbulent water and set out for the far, invisible shore. Huge waves dashed over him and fiercely swirling whirlpools captured him, but Bao Chu mustered his strength and swam boldly on. When he could see the farther shore, his heart flooded with pleasure.

Suddenly, however, a frigid wind blew upon the river, transforming the fierce current into a river of ice that imprisoned Bao Chu and froze the phoenix. Miraculously, the 100-hundred family coat kept the ice from freezing Bao Chu. In fact, the magic coat kept him so warm that his body heat melted the ice that encased him. He warmed the phoenix against his own body with one arm while he pounded the ice into chunks with the fist of his other hand, making the water dance. The surging waves lifted him upon one of the floating pieces, and he made his way to shore by leaping from one piece of ice to the next.

Bao Chu walked on and on with the phoenix until they came to another village. When the villagers heard of his quest and the dangers he had encountered, the Elder of the village announced, "Without the sun, we are poor people. The best thing we can give you is our soil, for it has been watered by the sweat of our labor since the time of our ancestors. Maybe you will find our gift useful as you pursue your journey." One by one, the villagers each put a handful of soil into a large bag.

When the bag was full, Bao Chu placed it on one shoulder. With the phoenix on his other shoulder, he continued to walk toward the brightly

shining star in the eastern sky. He climbed 99 mountains and swam across 99 rivers. Finally he came to a place where two roads met.

As he stood there wondering which road to take, an old woman approached and asked, "Young man, where are you going?" When he told her the object of his journey, she said, "The distance is far too great! I advise you to return to your home before it is too late."

"I will not return home until I have found the sun!" Bao Chu replied. No matter how long the road or how difficult the journey, I will do what I have set out to do!"

"If you are so determined," she counseled, "follow the road to the right and you will find the sun. When you come to the next village, you would be wise to rest there."

While the woman was speaking, the golden phoenix repeatedly attacked her. It struck her eyes with its beak, scratched her face with its claws, and beat her body with its wings. Bao Chu was embarrassed, so he chased it away.

He took the path the woman had advised, even though the phoenix continually flew in front of him and tried to block his way. Given how difficult his journey had been until then, Bao Chu was surprised that the road was so smooth and easy. Before long he reached the village that the old woman had mentioned. To his amazement, it was a thriving town. The men were prosperous and fat, and the women were well dressed and beautiful. The villagers welcomed him warmly. They praised him as a hero and held a bountiful feast in his honor.

Bao Chu raised his wine bowl as the villagers prepared to drink a toast to him. "I wonder why these people are so prosperous when those in every other village are cold and starving?" he thought. The golden phoenix suddenly hovered above his head and dropped an object into his wine bowl. As Bao Chu stared in wonder, the wine caught fire and began to burn the object. Bao Chu noticed that it was a sandal just like his own, made of hemp and hair.

"This must be one of my father's sandals!" he exclaimed to himself. "My father must have died here!" He dropped the wine bowl to the ground and screamed at the villagers. At the sound of his voice, the entire village and all its inhabitants disappeared in a puff of smoke. In their place ran hundreds of frightened ghosts, demons, and other wicked creatures.

With the golden phoenix once more upon his shoulder, Bao Chu returned to the fork in the road and took the road to the left. Meanwhile, the evil creatures decided to try to harm Bao Chu in another way. They had been unable to freeze him in the river. They had been unable to kill him in the Village of Lost Souls. Now they turned themselves into high mountains and blocked his way, but one by one, Bao Chu climbed over each mountain. Next they turned themselves into wide rivers, but one by one, Bao Chu swam across each river.

Finally the demons turned themselves into the wind and blew themselves to Bao Chu's village at the base of Precious Stone Mountain. They

found Hui Niang and told her that Bao Chu had slipped while climbing up a cliff and had fallen to his death in the river below. They hoped that the news would fill her heart with grief and that her tears would weaken Bao Chu.

However, Hui Niang remembered her son's parting words. She tried not to believe their tale. Instead, she clenched her teeth and held back her tears.

Each morning since the day of Bao Chu's departure, Hui Niang and the other villagers had picked up a flat rock and walked to the top of Precious Stone Mountain. When they reached the crest, they would stand on the stone that they had carried and gaze intently into the east, hoping for a glimpse of the sun. Each day they stood higher than they had the day before, hoping for a better view of the sun. But day after day, month after month, and year after year, the sky remained black. The stones had become a high stone terrace, but the sun still had not returned.

Meanwhile, Bao Chu climbed mountain after mountain and crossed river after river until his journey seemed endless. Finally, from the peak of a mountain, he heard the sound of the sea far in the distance. He continued to travel eastward until he came to the shore of the eastern sea. "Now what do I do?" he asked himself. "How do I find the sun from here? How can I cross the sea?"

Bao Chu opened the bag on his back and poured the soil into the sea. As the soil hit the surface of the water, a great wind arose and transformed it into a chain of islands that stretched to the middle of the sea. Bao Chu swam from island to island. When he reached the last island, it suddenly sank to the bottom of the sea, carrying Bao Chu along with it.

On the ocean floor Bao Chu found a huge cave, with a giant boulder sealing its entrance. "Ah!" he exclaimed. "This must be where the demon king has imprisoned the sun!"

The King of Evil had gathered a large army of hideous demons at the cave entrance, all armed and ready for battle. "If I can kill the demon king, I will survive," Bao Chu thought, "for once their king is dead, the army will flee in panic."

So Bao Chu and the King of Evil fought one another to the death. Their battle raged from the bottom of the sea to its surface, and from the surface back down to the bottom. It created tempestuous waves over 100 feet high.

Finally the demon king retreated to the ocean floor. Bao Chu punched him in the nose, causing him to stumble and fall backward. Then the golden phoenix tore out his eyes with its beak. Screaming in pain, the wicked creature lunged blindly back and forth. Then he crashed into a huge boulder and died. The army of demons vanished immediately.

Bao Chu moved aside the boulder that was blocking the cave and found the sun within. Summoning the last of his strength, he held the sun in his hands and slowly swam up to the surface of the sea. He managed to

push the sun to the top of the water before his strength gave out, and he died of exhaustion.

The golden phoenix dived beneath the sun, spread its wings, and rose from the water with the sun upon its back. Once the sun was free of the water, it rose into the sky under its own power.

Hui Niang and the villagers were watching from their stone terrace on the top of Precious Stone Mountain when the sun at long last began to rise into the sky. First clouds of purple appeared on the horizon, followed by clouds of rose and gold. Then 10,000 golden rays appeared, followed by the golden disk itself. Its light turned all the demons to stone.

As the villagers shouted with joy, the golden phoenix came to rest at Hui Niang's feet with its head downcast. Then Hui Niang knew that her son had died. Her heart filled with grief, but she felt joy as well, for Bao Chu had completed his father's task and had become a great hero.

From that day until this, the star of Liu Chun shines brightly in the eastern heavens before dawn breaks across the sky. The people call it "the morning star." As the phoenix rises with the sun upon its back, its wings shine upon the clouds and paint them purple, red, and gold. A pagoda now stands upon the stone terrace where the golden phoenix landed. The people named it Bao Chu Pagoda in tribute to the young man who rescued the sun and made it possible for plants to grow upon the earth again.

✓ JAPAN: Fertility ✓ Ama-terasu

The myth of Ama-terasu and the Japanese creation myth are so closely related that the introduction to the creation myth applies here as well. Like the Japanese creation myth, the myth of Ama-terasu is told in the *Kojiki: Records of Ancient Matters* and in the *Nihongi: Chronicles of Japan from the Earliest Times to A.D. 697*.

The Ama-terasu myth is also part of the Shinto religious tradition, which assumes that every aspect of nature contains a divine spirit. Ama-terasu is the principal Japanese deity, and she is an awesome female. She is the sun goddess, the Great Goddess or Mother Goddess who is responsible for fertility, and she is the ruler of the gods and the universe. Moreover, she has the personality and skill to remain in power. In her multiple divine roles, Ama-terasu reflects the important role of women in early Japanese life, where they were warriors, rulers, and seers.

The myth of Ama-terasu reflects the Shinto interest in fertility and rituals associated with it. The myth explains the separation between the sun and the moon, the origin of food on earth, and the beginning of agriculture and the silkworm industry.

Although in many other cultures, two different deities are responsible for the shining of the sun and for fertility, a logical connection exists between the two. Without the sun no plants would grow, and without plants human beings would starve for lack of food. The gods would also starve, for they eat the same food that humans do, either directly or in the form of sacrifices offered to them. Thus, when Ama-terasu locks herself in the cave, her action brings the ultimate catastrophe upon both gods and humans.

Presumably, as long as Ama-terasu was treated with respect, the sun would continue to shine and human beings would prosper. This optimistic view of nature was supported by the abundance of plant life, wild animals, and fish in Japan at the time the myth was created.

Myths of the Americas



The New World has always been populated by many different cultural groups. The American tribes represented in this book include both those who were living in Central and South America when the Spanish invaded and conquered them in the 1500s and those who remain a living culture in North America.

The American creation myths fall into two patterns: some describe the creation of the universe and human beings, and others describe the origin of the particular tribe to whom the myth belongs. Like the creation myths of many other cultures, those of the Maya, the Aztec, and the Indians who preceded the Incas describe the creation of the world. In unusually poetic language, the Maya myth describes the great efforts of their creators to fashion a race of human beings who please them. It is interesting to follow the process and see what kind of people these gods desire and why.

The first part of the Aztec creation myth describes a series of worlds, inviting comparison with the Greek ages of man and the Indian four ages of man. It emphasizes the idea of blood sacrifice, a practice that permeated the Aztec culture. The final section of the myth is remarkable because it reveals the Aztecs' great love of the arts. A beautiful poem, rendered in prose in this chapter, describes the creation of music.

The creation myth of the Indians who preceded the Inca in Peru presents a god who is both creator and benefactor. An interesting description of the creation of human beings is followed by a journey in which the god and his companions teach people how to lead civilized lives, with an emphasis on the humane treatment of other human beings.

In contrast, the creation myths of the Incas and the Navajo—like those of the Irish, the Japanese, and the Yoruba—focus on the origin of these particular

tribes. The Inca myth is interesting because of the difference between it and the myth of the culture it conquered. The myth describes how the Incas arrived in Peru and civilized the local people, whom they present as living like wild animals. The Navajo myth describes how their people moved upward through four worlds into our fifth world, developing from insects into human beings in the course of this journey. Two aspects of the Navajo myth give it a distinctive flavor: the use of the sacred number, four, and the depiction of the close relationship between human beings and the animal kingdom.

The fertility myths from the Americas also fall into two patterns: those in which a god or a supernatural figure teaches the people how to raise crops and thus achieve a higher standard of living, and those in which a god or a god-like hero protects the fertility of the earth from some threat. The Trio and Inca myths follow the first pattern. They form an interesting comparison because they both tell the same type of story, but from different points of view. Like the fertility myths from India and China, the Haida/Tlingit and Zuñi myths follow the second pattern. They also tell the same type of story, and in the process they reveal much about their own particular cultures.

Three of the hero myths resemble the traditional heroic pattern in that a hero performs a great task or tasks for the benefit of society. The Haida/Tlingit and Zuñi myths are both hero and fertility myths because of the double focus of their subject. The Crow myth involves twins who act like two little Heracles. They perform a number of heroic feats, while always behaving like the children they are.

The Aztec myth "Quetzalcoatl" is one of the most fascinating of all hero stories, and it is truly remarkable given when it was written. In the Aztec creation myth, Quetzalcoatl and Tezcatlipoca are depicted as divine creators and benefactors, but here Quetzalcoatl is a traditional hero, a god-like mortal, and Tezcatlipoca is his enemy. With a focus that is completely modern, the myth describes how Quetzalcoatl is conquered by his "alter ego" or "double," an artistic and intellectual accomplishment that effectively bridges the gap between the 16th and the 20th centuries.

PRE-INCA: Creation of the Universe (x)

Historical Background

Archaeologists have found the remains of a culture that lived along the northern coast of Peru from 2500 to 1800 B.C. It made no pottery, but it did weave baskets and cotton cloth. Further north, small carved figures have been found. Between 1800 and 1400 B.C., Peruvian farmers developed irrigation as the method of watering their crops. Thus, Peru had been settled by civilized peoples for almost 4,000 years before the Incas entered the area in the 13th century A.D. and built their empire.

✓ TRIO: Fertility Paraparawa ✓

This fertility myth comes from the Trio Indians, a tribe from the tropical rain forests of Brazil. Like many other tribes, these Indians live in thatched houses in large, semipermanent villages. They are primarily hunters and gatherers. They live without domesticated animals, so they have no wool. However, they weave cloth made of bark using primitive looms. They also weave baskets and make pottery from clay. They have neither metal or stone, so their tools are made from parts of plants.

Few of these tribes have patron gods or buildings in which to worship them. They believe in nature spirits—beings who personify aspects of nature—such as the sun, the moon, stars, thunder, and rain. Beings and animals often merge into and out of one another, as if each spirit has a double identity. The myths of these tribes are concerned with explaining what exists in the universe and how it came to exist—for example, the creation of farming.

"Paraparawa and Waraku" follows a pattern common to the myths of Central and South America. The fisherman Paraparawa lives by gathering the food he eats. His diet usually includes grasses, wild berries, wild fruits, and roots. He also catches fish and hunts small game. As long as an abundant supply of simple foods exists to provide for the needs of his relatively small community, he may relocate only occasionally. However, his survival is very vulnerable to changes in the weather pattern and the invasion of other tribes into his hunting and gathering area.

A supernatural being arrives to teach Paraparawa how to improve the quality of his life. The change from food gathering to food cultivation is a major step in the civilizing process and brings with it far-reaching changes in the

tribal way of life. The tribe that plants food knows it will remain in that location to cultivate and harvest that food. Consequently, the people can construct more comfortable, permanent housing. With a predictable crop, a community can grow enough food to have a surplus. Once the whole tribe does not have to spend all its time gathering food, some people are free to specialize in other occupations: building and repairing structures, weaving cloth, making weapons, implements, and pottery, and developing artistic talents.

✓ HAIDA/TLINGIT: Fertility and Divine Hero Raven ✓

The Haida and Tlingit Indians, who live along the coast of western Canada and southern Alaska, have traditionally been among the wealthiest of all Indian tribes because they have had the most abundant food supply. This, combined with the relatively moderate climate brought by the Japanese Current, gave them the time to develop a rich cultural heritage.

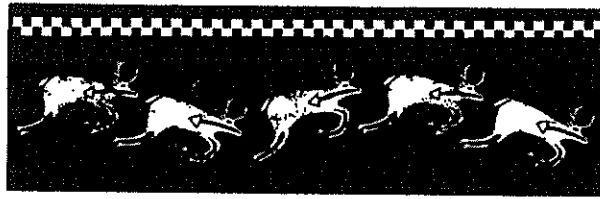
These tribes are known for their striking arts and crafts, their mythological dramas, performed in masks and costumes, and their potlatch feasts, in

which the host would give an incredible array of valuable gifts to his or her guests (and would receive them in turn as a guest at another potlatch). The Haida and Tlingit tribes began to carve the totem poles that have made them famous sometime between 1774 and 1779, when many American and European ships sailed up the Pacific coast, bringing the Indians their first iron tools.

These people lived among animals of the forest, the sea, and the sky, and these animals provided them with both food and spiritual nourishment. The raven, the eagle, the crane, the whale, the salmon, and the bear are familiar faces on their masks, their totem poles, and their carved wooden chests. In their cultures, animals are benefactors.

Like the role of the monkey Hanuman in the *Ramayana*, the role of Raven in this myth is that of animal hero and helper of human beings. Raven's actions reflect the close relationship between animals and human beings in the myths of many North American Indian tribes.

Raven is a trickster-hero figure among many of the Indian tribes of the Pacific Northwest coast. This myth combines Haida and Tlingit versions of the same myth. Although Raven is a creator, he is not a creator figure here. He brings light to the universe by taking what has already been created and placing it where it can benefit human beings. The Pacific Northwest is known for its heavy rainfall, so it is not surprising that the local tribes have a myth about placing the sun in the heavens.



AMERICAN INDIAN

MYTHS



AND LEGENDS

SELECTED AND EDITED BY
RICHARD ERDOES
AND ALFONSO ORTIZ



PANTHEON BOOKS
NEW YORK



1984

Just as trees, ponds, clouds, and rocks are thought of as living beings, so the sun, moon, and stars in their firmament are depicted in Indian mythology as alive and endowed with human passions and yearnings. The sun, the father of light who begets all living things upon mother earth, the illuminator of the primordial darkness, is life giver as well as destroyer. The sun is usually male, though it is female among the Juchi, Cherokees, and Eskimos (all of whom regard the moon as male). In the tales of many tribes, the sun makes love to mortal women, sometimes marries, and has offspring by them.

The great shining orb is the ultimate fertilizing agent in the universe, usually the embodiment of the male principle, though not necessarily the god at the center of religion. There may be other chief deities or supernatural phenomena and spirits which represent different powers. Tales depict mortal men and women turning themselves into the morning and evening stars, or even into the moon, and taking on lovers and spouses in those guises. In historical times, the only instance of human sacrifice among the Plains tribes occurred among the Skidi-Pawnee who, once a year, sacrificed a girl captive to the morning star. Representing the evening star, protectress of all growing things, the maiden was painted half red and half black (symbolizing day and night) and ritually shot to death with arrows to send her to her celestial husband. Very old people among the Sioux still tell of ancestors who, participating in a ghost dance in 1890, fell down in a trance and in that state of unconsciousness traveled to the morning or evening star, waking up with star flesh or moon flesh in their clenched fists.

The creation myth of the Bella Coola relates how the fierce Bear of Heaven guarded the place of sunrise. At the place of sunset an immense pillar upheld the sky. The sun's path was a bridge as wide as the distance between the winter, the "place where the sun sits down," and summer, the "place where the sun stands up." Three dancing slaves accompany him on his path, and whenever he drops his torch, an eclipse plunges the earth into darkness.

Indian myths, like those in every other culture, grapple with the basic paradoxes at the center of the human world, and certain primal themes emerge which we in the West have often come to associate with Greek prototypes, even though their evolution has been wholly separate on this continent. Thus one Northwest Coast myth closely resembles the Helios-Phaeton story of ancient Greece. A woman conceives by sitting in the sun's beams, and her son matures in one year. He shoots arrows into the sky and climbs up the ladder they form to visit his father. After

pestering his father, he is finally permitted to carry the flaming disk along the appointed path, but tottering under his heavy burden, he gets too close to earth. The oceans boil, the forests catch fire, and everything bursts into flames. The father quickly steps in to assume the load, and the presumptuous boy is turned into a mink.

Other themes include Promethean thefts and an Orpheus-like journey to the underworld in an attempt to defy the finality of death, seen in the story of a Cherokee tribe trying to help a grieving female sun retrieve her dead daughter.

The sun can also be reduced to a small object stolen from the other side of the world by a trickster or friendly animal to bring light to a tribe living in darkness.

Whether they are hunters or planters, people who live close to nature are keen observers of the stars and planets. They study the sky to determine the right time for planting and harvesting, or to discover where to find game at certain times of the year. The prehistoric mound builders of Cahokia, in what is now eastern Missouri, had their own Stonehenge, an astronomical observatory consisting of a circle of upright poles. Among the prehistoric ruins of Chaco Canyon in New Mexico, one kiva—a large, partially underground, circular ceremonial chamber—is so constructed that on the day of the summer solstice, and on this day only, a shaft of light shines through a slit in its stone wall.

From the spiral image of the sun chipped into a rock wall in the Southwestern United States to the Plains Tunkashila, Grandfather, whose sunbeams impregnated the Mother Goddess so that she gave birth to gods, humans, and animals alike, the sun plays a radiant role in Indian mythology. He is Shakuru of the Pawnees, who gives health and strength to warriors. He is Paiyatemu of the Keres, regulating the seasons and determining the time for planting and harvesting. He is Ataksak of the North, the personification of joy, clothed in raiments of brilliant cords, whose body shines even in death. He is T'ahn of the Tewa, with his face surrounded by rays of feathers. He is the shining, piercing embodiment of the Sioux Wakan Tanka, the Great Spirit, who is in and of everything.

