

PART I

CLASS PRESENTATION MATERIALS: A DETAILED OVERVIEW

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO GREEK MYTH

MAIN POINTS

1. The people of Athens (the city was named after the goddess Athene) built the Parthenon temple in her honor. Decorations on the Parthenon depict the birth of Athene, who springs fully armed from Zeus's head. This illustrates a mythical paradox, a male creating life without the participation of a female.
2. Zeus also gave birth to a male child, Dionysus, god of wine and intoxication, who emerged from his father's thigh.
3. Zeus's giving birth to these two children suggests that myth has the power to integrate polar opposites such as rationality and emotionalism.
4. When Zeus swallowed his pregnant first wife, Metis, he took into himself the cunning intelligence that she represented. Their daughter Athene was powerful like her father and wise in counsel like her mother.
5. Mythic events are subtly grounded in the values of the myth-producing society. Myth expresses a community's distinctive view of the world. Through story, it helps the members of the community to define, confront, and perhaps resolve tensions that its members perceive in the way their world works.
6. Myth has usefully been defined as "a traditional tale with secondary, partial reference to something of collective importance." (Burkert)
7. The word myth (Greek: mythos) literally means "utterance" or "something one says."
8. Greek myth was originally an oral phenomenon, transmitted by word of mouth from one anonymous storyteller to the next. As such, it was liable to change with each telling. Consequently, most myths, inherently flexible, survive in several versions, which may even contradict each other in particulars.
9. Greek literature reflects the influence of myth. Aristotle defines myth as a plot-structure in a literary work. In addition to the epics, other works of literature including mythic elements are the Homeric Hymns, the tragic drama, and some lyric poems.
10. There have been attempts at recording ancient traditions faithfully: the Library, attributed (erroneously) to Apollodorus of Athens, contains a large collection of ancient tales. Pausanias's Guide to Greece also attempts to record ancient traditions. Plutarch recorded local beliefs and myths of his homeland.
11. Legends are traditions that have a nucleus in historical fact, although poetic interpretation may have embellished it. Sagas are stories about a particular city or family, usually about a military aristocracy, while folktales tell about the experiences of the common folk and usually do not include myth's preoccupation with the struggles of the human spirit. Some works based on myth may contain elements of folklore.
12. The mythic past, which Greek storytellers regarded as their prehistory, included everything from the beginnings of the world through the aftermath of the Trojan War. At the end of that period, the gods, who had previously mingled with humans on earth, withdrew to Mount Olympus.
13. Some archaeologists believe that myth has some basis in actual events. Schliemann searched for Troy and Mycenae under the same assumption, and his discovery of these sites may suggest that the siege and fall of Troy is legendary rather than purely mythic.

14. Many scholars believe that Greek myth originated in the Mycenaean world of the Late Bronze Age in Greece (between about 1600 and 1100 B.C.). The art and architecture of Mycenae were influenced by the older Minoan civilization on Crete.
15. There are significant contrasts between the Minoan and Mycenaean civilizations: worship of the feminine principle versus introduction of a chief male deity; un-walled settlements often near the sea versus walled hilltop fortresses; and general lightness of artistic subject versus frequency of warlike depictions.
16. About 1100 B.C., for unknown and probably complex reasons, the Mycenaean civilization came to an end, plunging Greece into a Dark Age, which lasted for several hundred years. Mycenaean refugees settled and prospered along the coast of Ionia in what is now Western Turkey, where a Greek renaissance emerged.
17. The Greek “renaissance” occurred during the Archaic Age. Two important symbols of this “rebirth” after a period of isolation and relative material poverty were the institution of the Olympic Games and the production of the Homeric epics.
18. The label “Classical” belongs to the period of Greek history during which many works of literary and visual art that scholars have chosen as models of artistic achievement (“classics”) were produced.
19. The Greeks had no sacred text like the Bible or Torah or Qur’an. Instead, they learned about “holy things” (ta hiera) through customary rites, public and private, and by listening to stories about the gods and seeing the gods in visual art.
20. In the hands of the great poets, Greek myths acquire a focus on humanistic values, placing human consciousness in the center of the universe. Protagoras declared, “Man is the measure of all things.”
21. Although Greek myth emphasizes the great gulf between the human and the divine, in important ways the Greek gods resembled their human worshipers: they were anthropomorphic; while they could not die, they could be injured and “bleed” ichor; like humans they ate and drank, but the divine food was called ambrosia and the drink nectar.
22. The Greeks chose to organize their gods in a family characterized by the same tensions, affections, hostilities, and rivalry that marked their own intergenerational human families. Like human families in ancient Greece, the family of the gods was patriarchal.
23. According to one telling of Greek myth, gods and humans sprang from a common source—Gaea, Mother Earth. Humans often compete with each other and sometimes even with the gods, but such challenges to the divine powers usually have disastrous results for the vulnerable humans.
24. Greek myth emphasizes competitiveness and individualism. A character embodying individualism is Achilles; a tradition embodying competitiveness is the Olympic Games. The myths continually express the idea that the obsessive quest for preeminence is a noble goal, but it exacts a terrible cost—an element in the lives of the Greek gods as well as in the lives of the Greek heroes.
25. Ovid, a leading Roman poet during the reign of Augustus, created the most important collection of Greco-Roman tales: the *Metamorphoses of the Gods*.

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Athene, Zeus’s daughter and goddess of wisdom and military victory; protector of the city of Athens

Zeus, king of heaven

Dionysus, son of Zeus, god of wine and ecstasy

Metis, goddess of wise counsel or cunning intelligence, first wife of Zeus

Gaea, Mother Earth

Minos, legendary king of Crete

Achilles, the hero of Homer's Iliad, a Greek warrior at the battle of Troy

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Homer, Greek poet (eighth century B.C.)

Hesiod, Greek mythographer (eighth century B.C.)

Herodotus, Greek historian (fifth century B.C.)

Apollodorus of Athens, Greek mythographer (c. 140 B.C.)

Pausanias, Roman historian (second century A.D.)

Plutarch, Greek biographer (c. A.D. 46–c. 120)

Ovid, Roman poet (43 B.C. –A.D. 17)

Heinrich Schliemann, excavator of Troy/Hissarlik and Mycenae (late nineteenth century A.D.)

CHAPTER 2

WAYS OF INTERPRETING MYTH

MAIN POINTS

1. Most ancient Greeks seem to have accepted their myths without undue criticism. They apparently thought of them as old, respected stories that reliably recounted events and ways of the very distant past.
2. The Greek philosophical movement (after the sixth century B.C.) introduced some skepticism but was mainly used to rationalize certain “impossible” aspects of Greek myth.
3. Xenophanes of Colophon complained about the gods’ lack of moral values, which he understood as mirroring the sad behaviors of human society.
4. Theagenes of Rhegion is reported to have stated that when Homer tells of gods fighting each other, he is really creating allegories about natural processes in which the elements (hot, dry, wet, cold) are in perpetual conflict. Likewise, the gods can signify human dispositions.
5. Anaxagoras interpreted Homeric hymn as exposing the evil results of unethical conduct and promoting virtue.
6. Euripides describes the myth of the birth of Dionysus from Zeus’s thigh on the basis of linguistic confusion.

NOTE: Some of Plato’s best-known myths or fables include the “Myth (Allegory) of the Cave” and the “Myth of Er,” both from the Republic, and the “Myth of the Charioteer,” from Phaedrus. The term myth is used here to signify a symbolic story rather than a traditional narrative about gods and heroes. See Chapter 9.

7. Socrates and Plato, believing that gods should be perfect and free of passion, resented the poor moral example set by the Olympians in popular stories. They were, nonetheless, unable to dispense with them altogether: Plato used myths to illustrate his teachings about the spirit and its existence after death.
8. During the Hellenistic period, when successors of Alexander the Great were establishing kingdoms and claiming divine honors, Euhemerus of Messene claimed to have found written evidence that the Greek gods were once mortal, ancient kings. This theory is now known as Euhemerism.
9. In spite of criticism, myth remained a cultural factor until the legitimization of Christianity in the fourth century A.D. Classical myth was banned from Western culture through the Middle Ages; the European Renaissance reintroduced myth to the world of art and literature. The Enlightenment inspired new scholarly interest in the interpretation of myth.
10. Mythology has two general meanings: (1) a set or system of myths and (2) a methodological analysis of myths.
11. There have been numerous scholarly attempts to analyze myths into their component elements and then find a unifying element among them. Although none has succeeded to universal satisfaction, applications of various analytical theories have taught us a great deal about the nature and function of myth.
12. Scholarly theories of myth generally fall into one of two groups: those that assume an external basis of myth, and those that see mythmaking as an expression of the human mind.

13. The nature-myth theory is externalistic: myth is a reaction to the awe-inspiring powers of physical nature as they affect human experience—the cycles of day and night, summer and winter, plant life and death. Often the gods personify meteorological forces and astronomical functions or objects.
14. Example: Zeus is a weather god.
15. Criticism: the nature-myth theory fails to account for the full content of most myths: for example, Zeus's ethical, social, or political functions. Zeus defends justice, hospitality, and legitimate kingship.
16. The ritual theory of myth is externalistic: myths are stories invented to explain rituals and ceremonies. Proponent: Sir James Frazer.
17. Example: The myths of Demeter and Persephone and of the Lemnian women reflect elements of rituals intended to move the communities from a situation of danger to one of reassurance and continued life.
18. Criticism: the ritual theory does not explain why rituals develop in the first place.
19. The charter theory is externalistic: a myth is a narrative that supplies the foundation document (charter) for some ritual or custom in order to help maintain social stability. Proponent: Bronislaw Malinowski.
20. Example: Hesiod explains why the Greeks sacrifice the least desirable parts of animals to the gods: Prometheus tricks Zeus into choosing the bones and fat rather than the meat, saving the edible parts for humans to eat.

NOTE: Many myth systems contain a trickster god, who helps humans but also challenges or tests them. The popular Native American figure of Raven, who assumes various roles as creator or fertility god, is also an example of a trickster god in Haida, Tsumshian, and Tlingit mythology. Raven brings humans the gift of light by deceiving the old Grandfather/Chief who had hidden the sun in a box. In return for the light, Raven challenges humans to provide him with fish as a form of sacrifice. Similarly, Prometheus's trick helps humans survive but challenges them to cope with Zeus's anger.

21. Criticism: the charter theory fails to explain why in Hesiod's story of the origin of sacrifice human welfare is favored over divine prerogative.
22. The etiological theory is externalistic: (1) myth is primitive science, which attempts to explain natural phenomena; (2) myth can also give theological or metaphysical interpretations of the human condition.
23. Example: Hesiod explains how earth and sky and night and day originated; he also explains why the human possession of fire led to alienation between men and gods and why the presence of woman is part of a difficult human existence.
24. Criticism: many myths and heroic tales have little to do with etiology.
25. Freudian theory is an internalist theory, emphasizing the psychological character of myth: like dreams, myths allow humans to violate taboos safely through displacement, as a form of wish fulfillment. Proponent: Sigmund Freud.
26. Example: the story of Oedipus, who defeats the Sphinx (a displaced image of the evil mother), and then kills his father and marries his mother, acting out the unconscious drives of the id.
27. Freudian theory helps to explain tragic myths in terms of the psychological drama of life in a family.
28. Criticism: Greek male hostility toward females may have some particular ancient cultural roots.

29. The theory of archetypes is psychological: myths, like dreams, contain universal archetypes that spring from the collective unconscious. Proponent: Carl Jung.
30. The collective unconscious is the pool of memories, mental images, cognitive patterns, symbols, and basic assumptions shared by all members of a given society—or even of the entire human race.
31. An archetype is the primal form or original pattern of which all other things of the same kind (characters, situations, events) are representatives or copies.
32. Example: the anima, an internal expression of female wisdom and creativity, is found in the minds of humans of both sexes; likewise, the animus, which represents essential masculine qualities. In a healthy personality, the anima and the animus have a harmonious relationship.
33. Example: the myth of Icarus combines a form of Freudian wish fulfillment with the archetypal human desire to break through barriers and experience the unknown and forbidden.
34. Example: the shadow, Jung's term for unacknowledged negative elements of the psyche, contains repressed or undervalued aspects of the personality. The shadow exists in gods and heroes as well as in humans.
35. Scholars associated with psychological analysis of myth: Philip Slater, Joseph Campbell, Ernst Cassirer, Mircea Eliade, and Victor Turner. Myth and ritual are interpreted as structuring the human world and easing transitions in life.
36. Example: the rite of passage, in which a hero is separated from his environment, goes on a journey, is initiated into previously unknown experiences, and returns to his starting point. The journeys of Odysseus, Perseus, and Hercules allow the heroes to mature and fulfill their extraordinary potential.
37. The theory of structuralism views myth as a reflection of the mind's binary organization. Humans project a binary significance onto experience, dividing everything into polar opposites. Myth deals with and reconciles these opposites. Proponent: Claude Lévi-Strauss.
38. Example: myth mediates the conflict between the savage and the civilized, or the "raw" and the "cooked," or—particularly important in Greek society—individuality and community obligation.

NOTE: Whereas animals eat their meat raw, Prometheus's gift of fire enables humans to cook their food. Cooking removes the signs of blood and thus disguises the savage act of butchery that eating meat requires humans to commit. The transformation of dead cow to roasted beef fit for human feasts "civilizes" the human community. By sacrificing some of the cooked food to the gods, the humans remove the taint of murder and, in the same act, simultaneously remind themselves of and transcend their animal nature. Sacrifice thus reconciles the animal and the human as well as the human and the divine.

39. Scholars associated with the structural theory of myth: Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Nanquet.
40. Criticism: not all myths present a quantitative division of opposites.
41. Example: Odysseus and Penelope; their partnership is complementary, not competitive.
42. The theory of narratology anticipated some aspects of structuralism: traditional narratives employ distinctive, universal patterns. Proponent: Vladimar Propp.
43. Example: the typical hero's adventures include common events. The hero is born from a union of a mortal and a deity; he goes on a quest and defeats supernatural adversaries; he battles a dragon or rescues a princess; he marries a princess and gains riches or receives a crown.

44. Criticism: the order is not universal. The tragic hero may face his greatest obstacle after obtaining his rewards. And Greek tales rarely show heroes living happily ever after: most Greek hero myths end with the hero's death and descent to Hades.
45. Example: Oedipus, who acquired a wife, a crown, and a heroic reputation, only to lose it all in a fateful quest for his true identity. His narrative, like that of most Greek heroes, leads toward death.
46. Feminist scholars have applied many scholarly approaches to their study of myth. Feminist analysts have added a great deal to our understanding, particularly of goddess-worship as a widespread phenomenon in the ancient world.
47. Because myth speaks in a rich and varied voice and has its own peculiar internal logic, application of various theories to a single story often proves useful. One example is the myth of Athene's birth.
48. Procrustes was a cruel character of Greek tradition who tortured his victims to make them fit a certain bed. A frame into which all data are inappropriately forced is therefore called a "Procrustean bed."
49. In a sense, myth and ritual have a common function. Each assumes a threat to the continuation of life and/or society and offers some reassurance that disaster can be averted and life sustained.

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Athene, goddess of wisdom

Apollo, god of health, mental discipline, and artistic creativity

Artemis, Apollo's twin sister, patron of wildlife and the hunt

Poseidon, Zeus's brother, lord of the sea and earthquakes

Ares, god of bloodshed and war

Demeter, sister of Zeus and Poseidon, goddess of earth's fertility

Hermes, trickster god of thieves, gamblers, and businessmen

Dionysus, god of wine

Oedipus, king of Thebes, who killed his father and married his mother

Jocasta, mother/wife of Oedipus

Heracles, son of Zeus and Alcmene, who performed the famous Labors

Jason, leader of the Argonauts, who obtained the Golden Fleece with the help of the princess Medea

Theseus, slayer of the Minotaur

Prometheus, god of forethought, who provided the sacrificial ritual and the gift of fire to humankind

Perseus, slayer of the Gorgon Medusa

Procrustes, a cruel kidnapper who tried to fit each of his victims into a single bed

Sphinx, the monster (female) who devoured all travelers who failed to answer her riddle

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Euripides, Greek tragic dramatist (480–406 B.C.)

Theagenes of Rhegion (c. 525 B.C.)

Anaxagoras, Greek philosopher (500–428 B.C.)

Xenophanes of Colophon, Greek philosopher (sixth century B.C.)

Socrates, Greek philosopher (c. 469–399 B.C.)

Plato, Greek philosopher (c. 427–349 B.C.)

Euhemerus of Messene, Sicilian philosopher (fourth century B.C.)

F. Max Müller, German philologist (1823–1900)

Sir James Frazer, English anthropologist (1854–1941)

Vladimir Propp, twentieth-century folklorist

Bronislaw Malinowski, Polish anthropologist (1884–1942)

Sigmund Freud, Austrian psychoanalyst (1856–1939)

Carl Jung, Swiss analytical psychologist (1875–1961)

Claude Lévi-Strauss, French anthropologist (1908–)

Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994)

CHAPTER 3

IN THE BEGINNING: HESIOD'S THEOGONY

MAIN POINTS

1. The conception of the universe reflected in Greek verse is not a scientific one but a mythic one, with sources in ancient Near Eastern myth models and commonsensical observations of the environment.
2. According to the Greeks, the earth is a flat, circular disc with mountains touching the bowl of the sky; the land is surrounded by ocean, and below lies the Underworld, the land of the dead.
3. This model of heaven, earth, and the Underworld is called a cosmos. The subject of Hesiod's Theogony (the origin of the gods) is both a cosmogony (story of origin of the universe) and a cosmology (story of the nature and purpose of the universe).
4. Hesiod begins with Chaos and then tells of Gaea, Tartarus, and Eros springing into existence independently. A primary focus of the Theogony is divine genealogy. In this creation myth, Eros (love) is the driving force of creation in the universe.
5. Hesiod describes the cosmos as permeated by conflict. Hesiod's interest in conflict may have an autobiographical origin in a life of poverty and hard work and conflicts with his brother.
6. Hesiod ascribed the origin of his inspiration to the Muses, the nine daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne.
7. Myth-based Greek literature reflects a sophisticated and complex view of a world filled with paradox.
8. During the fourth millennium B.C., a Semitic people called the Sumerians created a stunning, civilized world in the land between the rivers Tigris and Euphrates, which the Greeks called "Mesopotamia." Not only did they build the first true cities, but they created a writing system and even used it to record literature—including the Epic of Gilgamesh.
9. Among the architectural achievements of the Sumerians was the ziggurat form—a massive many-tiered construction that included, at its pinnacle, a tiny sanctuary where a deity could reside.
10. The Sumerian ziggurat, the Tower of Babel from the Hebrew Bible, Jacob's dream ladder from the same book, and perhaps even the numinous mountains of Greece like Parnassus offered a place where (at least some) humans could rise to meet the gods as they descended to visit the earth.
11. Mesopotamian influence on Greek myth is pervasive and strong. In both myth systems, (1) the three-story universe is vertically structured; (2) the gods belong to generations that often quarrel among themselves; (3) gods are not eternal and are always liable to be driven out by other powerful gods; and (4) the hero is strong and ambitious and experiences a tension between his own limitations and the power of the gods.
12. Zeus's exploits as related in Theogony probably were based on the adventures of young Marduk in the Babylonian creation account Enuma Elish. Marduk killed the gods of the previous generation and became the new king.
13. Gilgamesh is the essential hero: he defends his city against its enemies and makes a journey in search of immortality.

14. In the Genesis account, a single deity only speaks and thereby creates an ordered universe out of watery confusion. In Theogony, the many deities are really only elements in a spontaneous evolution.
15. Zeus is the grandson of Gaea and her firstborn son, Uranus. Gaea's and Uranus's children are the Titans, including Cronus and Rhea, Zeus's parents.

NOTE: The myths about several generations of gods succeeding each other, often through combat, is common to many myth systems. The Norse god Odin is a third generation god; the Babylonian god Marduk rules after defeating the forces of his mother Tiamat in battle.

16. The castration of Uranus: Gaea resents Uranus for not allowing her to give birth to the children she is carrying. With a sickle made by Gaea, her son Cronus severs his father's genitals and throws them into the sea.
17. This act of separating earth and sky has a paradoxical effect, producing the spirits of violence and love. From the phallic blood spilled onto the earth, a race of giants is created, along with the Furies, female spirits of vengeance. The phallus itself, mixing with semen and foam, is transformed into Aphrodite rising from the sea.
18. The ambiguity of the story: it brings Zeus closer to preeminence among the gods, but it also introduces hatred and revenge. Also, the act of love can inspire acts of violent aggression along with joy and beauty. The fact that Aphrodite appears prior to Zeus and the Olympians implies the love goddess's primacy, in time and in significance.
19. Cronus attempts to avoid Uranus's fate by devouring his children.

NOTE: Many scholars have traditionally assumed that just as the name Uranus has a literal meaning ("starry sky"), so does the name Cronus (Kronos), since it is similar to the Greek word for "time," chronos. This has led to the famous symbolic interpretation that Time devours his children—i.e., all children born of time (including human beings) will, in the end, be devoured by time and die. However, other scholars believe that there is no etymological justification for this interpretation.

20. The separation of earth and sky is a theme common to many mythologies. In Egyptian mythology, Nut (sky) is separated from Geb (earth) by their father Shu (air).
21. The tale of a god whose body is mutilated and then used to form parts of the physical universe is a common theme. The Babylonian god Marduk cuts Tiamat's body into two sections, to form earth and sky. In Norse myth, the gods slay Ymir, a frost giant, and make earth, oceans, and sky from his body. In Chinese myth, it is Pangu whose body is the substance from which the world is created.

NOTE: Another example: the Aztec gods Tezcatlipoca and Quetzlcoatl also form the world from the body of a dismembered goddess.

22. Approaches to the castration myth from several theories of myth:
 - a. a feminist interpretation: a remnant of a matriarchal rite where the primal goddess's consort was killed and perhaps eaten as part of a fertility ritual
 - b. an etiological theory: an explanation of the psychological affinity between love and hate, of the division between masculine and feminine principles, and of why the "starry sky" is remote
 - c. a Freudian theory: a domestic psychodrama between father, son, and mother
23. The birth of Athene: Zeus marries his first wife, Metis. Worried that he may have a child strong enough to overthrow him, Zeus swallows the pregnant Metis; by assimilating her, he is able to give birth to Athene.
24. Athene combines in herself the wisdom of Metis and the power of Zeus. Lacking either of those qualities, Zeus would have found himself vulnerable. Thus, Athene is always depicted mythologically as the strongest support of Zeus's power.

25. Hera, Zeus's sister and last wife, is a contentious partner who often challenges her husband's decisions. Her emphatic assertiveness may reflect conditions before the introduction of Zeus-worship to Greece, when Hera was a powerful independent deity.
26. Hera gives birth (without male assistance) to Hephaestus, who becomes his mother's political support.
27. The last threat to Zeus's power was from Typhoeus, monstrous offspring of Gaea, who represents the feminine principle. The dragonlike Typhoeus may be a perversion, reflecting patriarchal fear and disgust, of the Great Goddess's wise serpent.

NOTE: The same theory of patriarchal perversion has been advanced in connection with the model for the story of Zeus and the monster, the Babylonian story of Marduk defeating Tiamat. The giant snake-monster Tiamat is herself female and a creator-goddess in the original story of Enuma Elish, thus bringing the theme closer to its supposed origin of the snake-monster in an ancient goddess religion. See Chapter 4.

28. The battle between Zeus and Typhoeus may contain a faint memory of a geological catastrophe such as a volcanic eruption.
29. Support for the theory: one etiological tradition states that Zeus defeated Typhoeus by burying him beneath Mount Etna, the largest and most active volcano in Europe.
30. Hesiod's worldview embraces paradox and apparent contradiction. Proliferation of life is also marked by acts of violence. Results of one action are often mixed: Aphrodite and the Furies are born as a consequence of Ouranos's castration.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Hesiod, Theogony

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Gaea, the earth and the primordial mother

Eros, god of procreative love

Mnemosyne, a personification of memory

The Muses: Calliope (epic poetry), Clio (history), Polyhymnia (mime), Melpomene (tragedy), Thalia (comedy), Erato (lyric choral poetry), Euterpe (the flute), Terpsichore (light verse and dance), Urania (astronomy)

Uranus, firstborn son of Gaea

Titans, a race of giants born to Uranus and Gaea

Cronus, the Titan leader, Zeus's father

Rhea, Cronus's sister-wife, Zeus's mother

Aphrodite, goddess of love, beauty, and sexual desire

Athene, goddess of wisdom

Metis, Zeus's first wife, swallowed by Zeus

Hera, Zeus's sister and last wife

Hephaestus, Hera's son, disabled from birth or from an accident

Typhoeus, a reptilian monster, Gaea's youngest son with Tartarus; a monster/an abyss; defeated by Zeus in battle

Gilgamesh, hero of a Sumerian myth poem

Hades, brother of Zeus and ruler of the Underworld

Marduk, young god who achieves cosmic supremacy in the Babylonian creation account called Enuma Elish

Tiamat, personification of the salt sea, primordial dragon of chaos in Enuma Elish

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Hesiod, Greek mythographer (eighth century B.C.)

Sumerians, a Semitic people who established an advanced civilization in Mesopotamia (ca. 3200 B.C.)

Babylonians, a Semitic people of Mesopotamia who have left an early creation account, Enuma Elish (ca. 1300 B.C.)

CHAPTER 4

THE GREAT GODDESS AND THE GODDESSES: THE DIVINE WOMAN IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY

MAIN POINTS

1. Feminist scholars and archaeologists have demonstrated that from the Paleolithic through the Bronze Age there is evidence of Goddess worship.
2. The fact that Goddess worship was widespread in early Mediterranean and European societies does not indicate that the human societies were matriarchal.
3. The Great Goddess occurs in myth systems worldwide. Greek myths: Gaea and Demeter; Roman myths: Ceres and Terra Mater; Egyptian myths: Isis; Sumerian myths: Inanna; Babylonian myths: Ishtar; Norse myths: Nerthus.
4. Before the male's role in procreation was understood, the creative powers of the female were attributes of the Great Goddess, who is associated with three functions—as the source of life, of death, and of rebirth.
5. The Great Goddess's triple nature is repeated in the patterns of heaven-earth-Underworld and maiden-mother-old woman.
6. When agriculture was developed, the Goddess was identified as a grain or earth goddess, responsible for the annual agricultural cycle.
7. One of the Goddess's symbols is the serpent, associated with the Underworld and with rebirth through the shedding of its skin. A related symbol is the World Tree, often depicted with a serpent twined around the trunk.
8. The moon appears, swells from crescent-shaped to full, disappears for several nights, and then reappears. In many myth systems, a moon goddess who mourns for a dead lover or child descends to try to reclaim the lost (or for some other purpose) and then returns to the upper world. The lunar symbol links life, death, and rebirth and associates the physical and spiritual worlds over which the Goddess presides.
9. The vessel in its various forms (jar, vase, chalice, grail, even cave), containing the secrets and waters of life, also often symbolizes the Goddess. The cow, sow, and birds may also function as Goddess symbols.
10. The division of the three aspects of the Goddess into separate functions may in part reflect the invasion of Europe by martial, patriarchal Indo-European cultures worshiping sky gods. The Goddess is absorbed into forms not threatening to the sky gods, such as virgin-wife-mistress.
11. Patriarchy creates a new archetype, the hero, focusing on individual achievements that are linear and perpetuate the hero's reputation through time. Thus death becomes terrible as well as final, and the hero's aim is now to achieve immortality and to resist accepting the cycle of life, death, and rebirth.
12. To justify, confirm, and retain its own power, patriarchy often transforms the positive attributes of the Great Goddess into negative attributes. Example: the snake (representing renewal of life) becomes a dragon, with whom the hero must fight. Zeus's battle with the dragon Typhoeus represents the young god's battle with the World Serpent, who is the archetype of female power, knowledge, and regeneration.
13. The most powerful manifestation of the Great Goddess in Greek myth is Gaea, the parthenogenetic source of the universe. Hesiod's Theogony moves the cosmos toward concentration of power in the male when, in the second generation, Gaea compromises with (or yields to) the masculine principle by reproducing sexually.
14. The castration and overthrow of Uranus may represent the ritual motif of sparagmos—dismemberment and eating of the sacrificial victim to ensure new life. Since the form of

violence involved in Hesiod's story is castration, the reference may be more ritually specific: to rites in which the male deity or consort is dismembered and consumed. Although the violence against Uranus may be interpreted as an instance of frightening Oedipal envy, from a feminine viewpoint it effectively perpetuates the power of the Goddess and of life.

NOTE: Battles between sky gods and world serpents are frequent mythic themes; in addition to Zeus's battle with Typhoeus, Greek tradition contains the stories of Apollo and the dragon Python (see Chapter 7) and Cadmus and the dragon (see Chapter 13). A parallel in Sumerian tradition is the battle between Marduk and the creator-goddess Tiamat; a Scandinavian parallel is the battle between Thor and the Midgaard worm, the World Serpent of the Norse myths. (Thor does not succeed in slaying the worm, however, until the final days of the world, the Ragnarok; seconds after killing the worm, he perishes from his wounds.) Another famous battle between hero and snake is told by the British tradition where Beowulf slays not only a female monster (Grendel's mother) but also a treasure-guarding dragon and by the Norse tradition where Sigurd slays the treasure-guarding, and virgin-guarding, serpent Fafnir. The theme of the hero slaying the dragon remains strong in Western culture, where it not only is familiar through the medieval image of St. George and the dragon but also persists in films and literature of today: from Moby Dick (updated in the shape of the shark in *Jaws*) to the alien mother-monster in *Aliens 2* (slain by a female hero for a change).

15. Greek myth transforms the Great Goddess in her death-wielding aspect into an old hag, such as the Gorgon, or into a witch, such as Hecate. The maid and mother aspects of the feminine triad are reinvented in forms subordinate to Zeus: Athene, Hera, and Aphrodite.
16. Fear of the paralyzing or castrating goddess is reflected in the myths, as Ares is trapped and sexually humiliated by Aphrodite's jealous husband, and as heroes such as Heracles and Jason continue to feel trapped whenever they enter into relationships with women.

NOTE: Under the auspices of the patriarchy, powerful goddesses were often reinterpreted through the myth of the castrating goddess. The image of the spider-woman who traps her prey in her web persists in our own time in myriad incarnations of beautiful-but-dangerous temptresses. In the film *Fatal Attraction* (1987), for example, a happily married man has a fling with Alex, a sexually obsessed woman who will not accept her lover's rejection and resolves to destroy his life.

17. Although in Greek myth Hera is always aware of Zeus's superior power, she never submits comfortably to his direction. She is contentious and often opposes him, perhaps reflecting her own origin as a powerful, pre-Olympian deity—a representative of the Great Goddess.
18. Hera's position mythologically is complex and paradoxical: as goddess of lawful marriage and legitimate childbirth, she charts her own subordination.
19. The paradox of the Great Goddess's importation into the patriarchy and subordination to her "husband" Zeus is revealed in the persecution of Io—priestess of Hera whom Zeus has hidden in cow form—by Hera, herself called "ox-eyed."
20. Athene represents the wisdom aspect of the Great Goddess; because of her birth from the head of Zeus, she combines the male archetype with the domestic bonds of the female.
21. Athene's female aspect is represented by her association with childbirth and her role as goddess of weaving, as well as by the serpent coiled behind the shield of Zeus she bears.

NOTE: The ambivalence of the Greeks toward such a powerful female is revealed in one story that associates Athene with the spider-woman. Challenged by Arachne to a

weaving contest, which Athene loses, she turns her human rival into a spider, thenceforth called arachnids.

22. Aphrodite, as an embodiment of sexual attraction and love, was initially a powerful creative force, but under the patriarchy of the Greek myth she is transformed to a lesser figure of a flirt or a mistress.
23. Despite her youthful appearance, Aphrodite is a very ancient deity who participates in various archetypes: rising out of the sea, she is associated with the waters of life; her relationship with Ares signifies her dual role as goddess of love and war. Similar to other goddess-consort relationships (Isis and Osiris, Ishtar and Tammuz), Aphrodite's love for Adonis involves resurrection through love.

NOTE: The theme of the Goddess going all the way to the Underworld to search for her dead lover in order to bring him back is widespread in the ancient world. Although she does not go to the Underworld, Isis searches all over Egypt to find her dead husband, Osiris. Ishtar, powerful as she is, is only partially successful in buying her dead young lover, Tammuz, back from the land of the dead. Inanna goes to rescue her lover, Dumuzi. Demeter's search for Persephone is of course a related theme, although there is an important difference: Demeter is looking for her daughter, in effect her alter ego, not her lover. A Greek variation of the theme places the male in the role of the searcher going to the Underworld: Orpheus searches for his dead wife, Eurydice, in the land of the dead and almost manages to bring her back (see Chapters 8 and 9). The mythic theme is known in other cultures as well: among the Native American Modocs of the Pacific Coast, the culture hero Kumokum travels to the land of the dead to fetch back his beloved daughter but fails like Orpheus, and in an African myth, a young hero goes to the Underworld to free the young girl Wanjiru, who was sacrificed by her family. Of all these stories, only the story of Wanjiru has a completely successful ending: Wanjiru is saved, she and the warrior get married, and her family is ashamed for having sacrificed her.

24. Interactions of the beautiful Aphrodite with humans and divinities sometimes have tragic results. Example: She bribes Paris to choose her as "the fairest" of the goddesses and pays him with Helen, another man's wife. The result is the Trojan War. The paradox of beauty and danger in combination in one character may represent the Great Goddess's functions as bringer of life and dealer of death. It may also reflect feelings about the complexity of the human female.
25. Aphrodite's affairs sometimes cause grief to herself as well. Example: she loves Adonis, who is kept by Persephone in the Underworld and released annually to spend time with Aphrodite, much like Persephone herself. But Adonis is killed while hunting by Aphrodite's jealous lover, Ares, disguised as a boar. Adonis is transformed into the anemone, a flower that reemerges each spring. Like his Near Eastern counterparts Tammuz and Osiris, Adonis was the subject of a popular cult.
26. Artemis, one of the virgin goddesses, is also a deity of paradox. She is beautiful, but she also has a frightening power that springs from her independence. Perceiving any threat to her virginity, she defends her personal boundaries ferociously. Example: When Actaeon spies on her, she turns him into a stag to be devoured by his own hunting hounds—another example of the sparagmos motif.
27. Artemis inherits the chthonic (earth-related) aspect of the Goddess, being associated with the moon and Hecate. She is the guardian of women's mysteries and as guardian of wild animals, represents the power of instinct.
28. Hesiod attributes many varied powers to Hecate—in fact, the powers of all the gods—and he calls her the deity most honored by Zeus. For some reason, though, over time her connections to the Underworld have associated her with the dark, danger, and fear. The Homeric Hymn to Demeter announces that due to her active support of the two

- goddesses in their sorrow, she would thereafter always be the companion of Persephone, Queen of the Underworld.
29. Hecate is connected to the Underworld and has powers of earth and sea. She has come to represent the death-giving aspect of the Goddess and has become associated with fear. She is identified as a witch or an older woman.
 30. The triad of Persephone, Demeter, and Hecate represents the three phases of a woman's life—maiden, matron, and crone. The phases of the moon—waxing, full, waning—are also associated with women's life phases and menstrual cycles.
 31. Demeter has all the functions of the Great Goddess except the capacity for parthenogenesis: Zeus is Persephone's father.
 32. As a nature myth, the story of Persephone represents the seed, planted underground and sprouting in the spring.
 33. As an etiological myth, the story explains why there are seasons.
 34. As a charter myth, the story sets up social practices, from the Eleusinian Mysteries and male-initiated marriage to the setting of a place at the table in honor of Demeter.
 35. The Eleusinian Mysteries were a nine-day event celebrated each September and October in Eleusis outside of Athens. Not much information is available about them because of their nature as a mystery religion for initiates. Rituals may have included a hieros gamos (sacred marriage) and an epiphany of the Goddess showing a seed of grain symbolizing rebirth. Participants in the mysteries were promised joy in the afterlife.
 36. The ritual may have incorporated elements from the worship of Dionysus during his festival, since he and Demeter/Persephone share some attributes.
 37. The Thesmophoria was a sowing ritual, practiced by women only, that involved placing sacrificed pigs in a gully with snakes, pine cones, and cakes in phallic shapes. After three days, women would descend into the pit and retrieve the material, which would then be mixed with seeds for next year's crop.
 38. The myth reconciles the Goddess with the patriarchy through the mediation of Zeus, who arranges the compromise between Hades and Demeter for sharing Persephone.
 39. The Persephone myth also reconciles the Great Goddess with patriarchy through the institution of marriage. Persephone's marriage is presented as legal rape and brings about her symbolic death and descent to the Underworld.
 40. Demeter embodies the triple aspect of the Goddess as mother, grain goddess, and goddess of the mysteries, as well as mother (Demeter), the maiden (Persephone), and the older woman (Hecate). Persephone has a triple aspect symbolized by Athene, Artemis (both of whom are with her in the fields prior to her kidnapping), and Persephone herself.
 41. The Persephone myth upholds female values: self-fulfillment in terms of continuity of the generations and the bond between mother and daughter, as opposed to the masculine archetypal experience of individuality and hostility between father and son.
 42. The Persephone myth presents the female principle as a source of agriculture through Demeter's teaching the secrets of life to Triptolemus.
 43. According to one myth, civilization owed its start to Demeter rather than to Prometheus; Prometheus's gift of fire (and thus civilization, including weapons) makes humans more independent of the gods but also creates antagonism between the two realms; Demeter's gift emphasizes bonding, reconciliation, and continuance.
 44. The Persephone myth explores the psychology of the individual woman's life cycles, both as mother and as daughter.

45. Persephone matures sexually and marries; the pomegranate symbolizes sexual experience but may also be an emblem of menstruation. Persephone eating the pomegranate may be compared to Eve eating the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.
46. The Homeric Hymn to Demeter, probably dating from the seventh century B.C., tells about the abduction of Persephone; it also tells the story of Demeter's caring for the child Demophon and her attempt to make him immortal.
47. The story of Demophon serves as a charter myth for the mystery and models a way of achieving immortality through communion with Demeter.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Homeric Hymn to Demeter

key names of mythological characters mentioned:

(Reflecting the theme of this chapter, the male gods are identified below in terms of their relation to the goddesses, to break the patriarchal pattern of identifying the goddesses in relation to the male gods.)

Gaea, the parthenogenic earth goddess

Uranus, her son and spouse

Zeus, Hera's husband and Demeter's brother

Typhoeus, Gaea's offspring, a monster slain by Zeus

The Gorgons, three sister witches; best known is Medusa

Hecate, the death-giving aspect of the Goddess

Athene

Hera

Aphrodite

Demeter

Persephone (Kore)

Dionysus, the son of Semele

Hades, Persephone's husband

Artemis

Triptolemus, the holy child and first farmer of the Eleusinian myth

Prometheus, the Titan who stole fire from the gods and gave it to humans

Adonis, Aphrodite's lover

Demophon, the child in Demeter's care

Actaeon, who is turned into a stag by Artemis and mutilated by his own hounds

CHAPTER 5

THE OLYMPIAN FAMILY OF ZEUS

MAIN POINTS

1. Homer and Hesiod established for the Greeks the character and functions of the gods. We learn about the deities' physical attributes from Archaic and Classical visual art.
2. Some of the deities (Aphrodite, Artemis, Poseidon, and Hermes), who had been independently powerful even into Mycenaean times, were transformed, with the passage of time, into the siblings or children of Zeus and thus subordinated to him.
3. According to Homer, Zeus and his two brothers divided the world by casting lots. Zeus received the sky, Poseidon the sea, and Hades the Underworld. As Hesiod's firm focus, however, is on Zeus's progress to lordship, so in his poem the division of the universe among the three brothers belongs to Zeus alone.
4. Greek gods could have been organized in any number of ways. That the Greeks conceived of them as being members of a family is significant, as Zeus's power over the family unit was extensive but neither unlimited nor unchallenged.
5. The children of Cronus and Rhea (Zeus, Poseidon, Hades, Hera, Demeter, and Hestia) are depicted as having physically mature, perfect human forms.
6. Zeus is King of Heaven, the champion of justice, sworn oaths, and lawful order. He is also a sky god, the god who gathers clouds and creates storms.

NOTE: There is linguistic evidence that many of the European, Middle Eastern, and Indian cultures share a common ancestral culture. The ancient, Proto-Indo-European people whose territories have not been established firmly because of conflicting archaeological and linguistic evidence, but who may have occupied areas between the Danube and the Volga Rivers, north of the Caucasus mountain range, have supplied common words to Indo-European languages all the way from Ireland to Chinese Turkestan. The Proto-Indo-European words for "one-two-three" are "oinos-duwo-treyes"; "brother" is "bhrater," "sky" is "dyeus," and "father" is "pater." From this last constellation of words (sky-father) come the names of Zeus and Jupiter. However, linguists warn that we can't assume that gods have had the same roles in the ancient Indo-European culture as they had later in the Mediterranean area. Today, English and Spanish are the most common Indo-European languages in the world; the most ancient Indo-European language still spoken is thought to be Romany, the language of the Gypsies.

7. Zeus's character is paradoxical: the dignified King of the gods also has an uncontrollable sexual appetite, suggesting that the power of Aphrodite overwhelms that of the King of Heaven. Zeus's lust is both his "shadow" and his will to dominate. His desire is often treated humorously; he frequently assumes the form of an animal when pursuing a new lover.
8. Zeus's offspring include gods such as Apollo and Artemis, heroes such as Perseus and Heracles, and divine abstractions such as the Muses and the Graces, personifications of the highest values of civilization.
9. Poseidon's symbol is the trident, with which he generates huge waves. Poseidon represents the brutal power of nature: the restless sea, the shaking earth, and the virility of horse or bull.
10. Hades rules the Underworld with his wife, Persephone, and wears a cap of invisibility. He is also associated with the gems and minerals of the earth. His epithet "many-receiving" indicates that all human beings will one day be Hades's guests.

11. Hera, Zeus's wife and elder sister, is the patron of married life; her offspring are Hephaestus, Ares, Eileithyia, and Hebe. The Queen of Heaven, Hera alone among the Olympians retains the Great Goddess's parthenogenetic ability; she produces Hephaestus without sex. That he is physically impaired suggests that her power is somewhat diminished. She is often portrayed as a jealous, nagging wife, angry at Zeus's infidelities and resentful of his powers.
12. Hera's frequent appearance in myth as a jealous wife who resents Zeus's power may reflect her resentment at his usurpation of powers formerly her own.
13. On occasion, Hera joined other Olympians in open revolt against Zeus. Once, though, when she wanted to distract him from the Trojan war, she sought help from Aphrodite and seduced him.
14. Demeter represents the life-giving power of earth's soil. A manifestation of the Great Goddess, she is the giver of grain. By siring Persephone, Zeus effectively subordinates Demeter to patriarchal rule.
15. Demeter's function as the Great Goddess is clear when she has sex with Iasion in a fertile field. Their union represents the hieros gamos motif.
16. Although Athene is a virgin and also the goddess of victory in war, she is closely involved in women's lives: the snake, which hides behind her shield, associates her with the Great Goddess, and she is the patroness of weaving—the quintessential task of human women.
17. Athene, the patron of wisdom and military victory, also supervises women's crafts. Otherwise self-disciplined, one myth shows her engaging in a beauty competition with Hera and Aphrodite, which results in the Trojan War.
18. Athene is loyal to the heroes of intelligence and resourcefulness but cruel to humans who offend her.
19. Under terms of an agreement she made with Zeus, Hestia guards the Olympian hearth, never leaving her chosen place. As the principle of the unmoved center, she is crucial to any household, but she has no stories of her own. She becomes much more important in Roman mythology, where she is known as Vesta and guards the sacred flame of Rome itself.
20. Apollo, son of Zeus and Leto, is the giver of both mental and physical harmony. He is a prophetic god, whose Oracle at Delphi was widely consulted throughout the Greek world. He is the god of music and archery and is an embodiment of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment.
21. In late myths, Apollo takes over the function of sun god; in addition he is the protector of the muses. Paradoxically, he is associated with both health and disease. His invisible arrows bring sickness; his son Asclepius, the first physician, represents his healing aspect.
22. Artemis, Apollo's twin sister, is the patron of midwifery and childbirth but is also a virgin who guards her privacy.
23. Artemis is, paradoxically, both patron of the hunt and protector of wild animals. She is often identified with the moon. In Asia Minor, the Greeks associated Artemis with fertility.
24. Hermes, son of Zeus, is Zeus's personal messenger, depicted with winged sandals. Hermes invents the lyre and the panpipes, which Apollo takes over in exchange for cattle and the caduceus, a rod entwined by two serpents and topped by wings, the symbol of the physician's art.
25. A traveler who crosses all boundaries, Hermes was represented throughout Greece by Hermae, ithyphallic figures guarding the gates and doorways from which journeys start.

Hermes also led the souls of the dead on their last journey to the Underworld. The patron of travelers, traders, merchants, highwaymen, thieves, and gamblers, he is also associated with dreams and magic.

26. Hephaestus, Hera's son, is a gifted craftsman married to Aphrodite, who is unfaithful to him.
27. Aphrodite is a personification of human sexuality.
28. Eros is the masculine aspect of Aphrodite and, according to Homer, her son by Ares.
29. Ares is the god of war in its aspect of cruelty and violence. The Greeks worshiped but did not entirely respect Ares; the Romans, in contrast, saw Ares, whom they called Mars, as the patron of their expanding empire.
30. Dionysus, god of wine, intoxication, and ecstasy, is the only major god who is born human. He is the patron of the tragic drama.
31. Pan, who has the shape of a satyr, is a personification of wild nature; he produces enchanting music but also can strike the human heart with fear (panic).

NOTE: The god Pan is, in late Greek tradition, a minor deity, but the worship of Pan-type deities such as the Fauns seems to have been widespread; the mythologist Sir James Frazer mentions that Pan was known in Arcadia as the Lord of the Woods and was considered a woodland deity. According to Frazer, other goat-formed spirits of the woods can be found in Russian folklore, where the Ljeschie are believed to appear partly in human shape, but with the horns, ears, and legs of a goat. The theme of the Pan-type spirit of the woods may have continued with characters in human form such as the Green Man of the Forest in later European tradition, the Shakespearean character of Puck, the quasi-historical Robin Hood, and the children's trickster playmate Peter Pan.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Hesiod, Theogony

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Zeus (Roman: Jupiter)

Cronus (Roman: Saturn)

Demeter (Roman: Ceres)

Hestia, the virgin goddess caring for the Olympian hearth (Roman: Vesta)

Poseidon (Roman: Neptune)

Hades (Roman: Pluto, Dis)

Persephone (Roman: Proserpina)

Hera (Roman: Juno)

Hephaestus, the lame smith, Hera's son (Roman: Vulcanus)

Demodocus, blind bard of the Odyssey

Ares (Roman: Mars)

Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth (Roman: Lucina)

Hebe, a personification of youth (Roman: J uventas)

Athene (Roman: Minerva)

Phoebus Apollo (Roman: Phoebus Apollo)

Leto, Apollo's mother, daughter of Titans

Asclepius, Apollo's son, the first physician

Artemis (Roman: Diana)

Hippolytus, son of Theseus, he made a vow of chastity, which angered Aphrodite, who -
engineered his downfall

Hermes (Roman: Mercurius)

Maia, mother of Hermes

Aphrodite (Roman: Venus)

Eros, the masculine aspect of sexuality, Aphrodite's son according to Homer (Roman: Cupido)

Dionysus (Roman: Liber)

Pan, the personification of wild nature (Roman: Faunus)

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Herodotus (fifth century B.C.)

Homer (eighth century B.C.)

Hesiod (eighth century B.C.)

CHAPTER 6
THE WORLD IN DECLINE:
ALIENATION OF THE HUMAN AND DIVINE

MAIN POINTS

1. The ambiguity of Hesiod's creation account also exists in his view of human history: with Zeus as the new leader of the gods, the universe is less chaotic, but humans are worse off than before.
2. When Prometheus steals fire from the gods and gives it to humans, Zeus, already angered by Prometheus's tricking him into accepting the inferior parts of the sacrifice, chains him to a mountain crag, where an eagle feasts on his liver.
3. While Hesiod describes Prometheus as a mere trouble-making trickster (an archetypal character), other versions of the myth show him as cultural hero and even as creator of the first human being.
4. In Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, Prometheus suffers a terrible punishment after giving fire—a metaphor for all the arts of civilization—to miserable human beings.
5. To punish men for accepting Prometheus's gift, Zeus has Hephaestus make the first woman, Pandora. Before Pandora, men mingled with the gods; after her appearance, the gods withdraw from the world of mortals.
6. Here Hesiod emphasizes a connection between food, sacrifice, fire, cooking, and woman: the guilt of killing a fellow creature and the breaking of human ties to nature is compounded by cooking and eating the animal. As a result of this act, human ties to the gods are also broken: cooking and using the sacrificial ox as a medium of communication means that the gods will no longer dine with men but will only inhale the smoke of the sacrifice.
7. The Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions agree on seeing woman as the catalyst of humanity's historical decline.
8. Pandora opens a jar, her gift from Zeus, releasing all evils but retaining Hope. Her act ends the Golden Age. She serves the same mythic function as Eve in Genesis.
9. In Genesis, a serpent persuades Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, which gives knowledge of good and evil.
10. The forbidden fruit is the biblical counterpart of the Promethean fire: it represents enlightenment and cultural separation from nature.
11. In both the Bible and Greek myth, humanity pays a price for knowledge: loss of innocence, loss of peace, and loss of paradise.
12. Pandora may have been an earth goddess, the "Giver of All."
13. Other versions of the Pandora myth claim that the jar contains blessings, which she inadvertently lets out; only Hope is caught before it can escape.
14. A more positive view of woman's mythic role, the *Epic of Gilgamesh* tells of Enkidu, the savage male, who is civilized through a sexual relationship with a priestess of the goddess Ishtar.
15. Greek mythology is essentially male and typically views female intelligence as a threat to male security.
16. Hesiod saw the cosmos permeated with two forms of Strife: mindless aggression and healthy competition.

17. Hesiod's *Works and Days* divides human history into five ages, containing no account of man's creation.
18. During the first period, the Age of Gold, Cronus ruled the world. Humans lived in complete freedom and in company with the gods. Their bodies died after a long, vigorous life, but their spirits remained alive.
19. The Age of Silver, a lesser age, is characterized by opposites: people had a childhood of a hundred years, but died through violence soon after maturation. Zeus ordered their extinction because they refused to worship their creators.
20. During the Age of Bronze, men were created by Zeus from ash trees and pursued mindless, violent conflicts. In the end, they annihilated each other.

NOTE: The theme of the ash tree finds a parallel in Nordic mythology, which may have an ancient Indo-European root in common with Greek myth: the first man and woman are created from trees by Odin and his brothers, and in the middle of the world grows the world tree Yggdrasil, a mighty ash tree with roots in the Underworld and branches reaching to the home of the gods; humans live in the middle on its lower branches, in Midgaard.

21. The Age of Heroes: Probably inserted into an older tradition, this age has no corresponding metal and does not signify a steady decline. The great heroes of the siege of Troy and other battles live and die during this epoch; after death they are allowed to live in a remote paradise.
22. The biblical Book of Daniel has a similar account of four historical ages symbolized by a huge statue composed of four different metals.

NOTE: Other myth systems also include a succession of "ages," often ending in a present age of corruption that moves inexorably toward apocalypse. Aztec myth speaks of Five Worlds of earth, air, fire and water, followed by the present age; if this world is not kept in balance by continual sacrifice, it, too, will be destroyed. Norse myths tell of the present age ending in the cosmic conflagration of Ragnarok; afterward, a new world will be reborn, peopled by two humans who survive the destruction by clinging to the branches of the World Tree. Hindu myths speak of four gradually declining ages ending with the age of Kali, goddess of destruction. In all these stories, the themes of degeneration and apocalypse serve to characterize the real world of the mythmakers and their society as morally corrupt and to warn about the consequences.

23. The Age of Iron, the time of Hesiod himself, is brutal and harsh and will end when Zeus wipes out the present generation. The End is near when even newborns have gray hair and social order disappears.
24. Hesiod's view of history is apocalyptic: an end of the world, preceded by four mass extinctions. There is no way to escape the designs of Zeus.
25. The motif of the universal flood derives from Mesopotamian sources. Sumerian and Babylonian texts relate the gods' attempt to destroy humanity. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, as in the Genesis account and the Greek one that derives from it, the divine plan is foiled and human life continues.
26. Although not mentioned by Hesiod, the myth of the global flood is an important element in Greek mythology. Deucalion and Pyrrha survive the flood in an ark and, when the waters have subsided, repopulate the earth by throwing stones over their shoulders, which become men and women.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Hesiod, *Works and Days*

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Cronus, son of Uranus, father of Zeus

Prometheus, a Titan

Pandora, the first woman in the Greek tradition

Eve, the first woman in the J udeo-Christian tradition

Adam, the first man in the J udeo-Christian tradition

Yahweh, God of the J udeo-Christian tradition

Epimetheus, Prometheus's brother

Enkidu, the savage man, Gilgamesh's friend

Gilgamesh, the Sumerian king of Uruk

Ishtar, the Great Goddess of Sumerian tradition

Deucalion, Prometheus's son, survivor of the flood

Pyrrha, Deucalion's wife, survivor of the global flood

Hellen, eponymous ancestor of the Greeks

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Hesiod (eighth century B.C.)

Apollodorus (c. 140 B.C.)

Ovid (43 B.C.–A.D. 17)

Aeschylus, Greek tragic dramatist (525–456 B.C.)

CHAPTER 7
IN TOUCH WITH THE GODS:
APOLLO'S ORACLE AT DELPHI

MAIN POINTS

1. It is quite possible that worship of Apollo became prominent in Greece only during the Dark Age (1100–800 B.C.). No god of that name appears in the Linear B tablets, but he is central to the plot of the *Iliad*.
2. “Paeon” is the English term for a hymn of praise to a god, and its derivation is from “Paian,” a god attested at Knossos during the Late Bronze period.
3. Apollo, who kept his distance from humans, communicated in cryptic terms through the oracle, a term used to describe the gods’ prophetic shrines, the persons who conveyed the gods’ words to humans, and the messages thus conveyed. The most popular oracle was at Delphi, where a clairvoyant priestess gave predictions and advice. The sacred precinct of Delphi on Mount Parnassus included a theater, a stadium, and the temple.
4. Perhaps Apollo’s remoteness finds mythological emblem in his favorite weapon—the bow—from which derive his Homeric epithets “Far-Darter” and “Far-Worker.”
5. Like the other Olympians, Apollo has a dark side. Although he is associated with the civilized arts like music and philosophy and also with healing, he was famed and feared as bringer of plagues—as at the opening of the *Iliad*.
6. In many ways, Apollo seems to be associated with the education of young men. Some scholars derive his name from the Dorian term *apella*, denoting an annual assembly of adult males for the purpose of admitting newly tested youths into the responsibilities of adulthood.
7. The beautiful twin Olympians Apollo and Artemis both concerned themselves with a critical event in the life of the society—initiation of young women and men into their adult roles as wives/mothers and fathers/soldiers/citizens.
8. An *ephebe* was a young man just preparing to take on the responsibilities of adulthood. Some critics see in Achilles just such a youth, undergoing the scrutiny of his elders on the battlefield.
9. Apollo received the sacrifice of each *ephebe*’s long hair. Artemis was the focus of ceremonies in which young women acted out their “savage” state by dressing as bears before being “tamed” into the passive and secluded life that they would know as wives and mothers.
10. The myths that associate Apollo with Delphi and Delos are etiological in that they explain the existence of major cult sites of Apollo in those two locations in the historical period.
11. Delphi’s reputation reached its peak between the seventh and fifth centuries B.C. The facade of the temple was inscribed with maxims urging moderation in all things: “Nothing in Excess” and “Know Yourself.”
12. Delphi, which means “womb,” was believed to be the center of the earth’s surface; an *omphalos* (perhaps a meteor fragment), representing the navel, was kept at the temple. Some sources claimed that the *omphalos* stone was the same one that Cronus swallowed in place of Zeus.

NOTE: According to the mythologist Mircea Eliade, the phenomenon of pronouncing a place the center of the world is widespread in world religions. Not only does it generally signify the center of the world of humans, but it marks an axis going straight through the earth to heaven above and the Underworld below.

Through this axis, communication with the powers can take place. Interestingly, a culture may have several “centers”; it is thus often of more symbolic than geographic significance. Typical world axis places are temples and churches, large trees or posts erected in or outside the village, and mountaintops. The Maypole is probably a remnant of such a tradition.

13. Aeschylus mentions the prehistory of Delphi: after Gaea came Themis, her daughter and Zeus’s second wife, who taught Apollo the art of prophecy.
14. The origin of the Apollo worship at Delphi lies in the Olympic battle between male and female powers; according to the Hymn to Pythian Apollo, Hera, to spite Zeus, gives birth to the serpent Typhon (Typhoeus) parthenogenetically, entrusting his upbringing to the female dragon Python, guardian of the ancient sanctuary at Delphi. Apollo must kill Python to assume control of Delphi. (According to Hesiod, Gaea bore Typhoeus.)
15. Birth stories of heroes usually involve dangers for the child. Hera tries to prevent Leto from giving birth to Apollo and Artemis by refusing her a safe place for her delivery and the assistance of the goddess of childbirth, Eileithyia. Athene persuades Hera to reconsider, and Apollo and Artemis are born on a floating island, transformed by Apollo into Delos.
16. The tale functions etiologically as an explanation of the name of Delos (brilliant), referring to the birth of the sun god.
17. When only three days old, Apollo shoots an arrow through the dragon Python, who has been ravaging the countryside. In his honor the virgin prophetess at the oracle is called Pythia. The Pythian Games were celebrated every fourth year to commemorate Apollo’s victory.

NOTE: Apollo’s slaying of the monster Python reflects the mythological pattern mentioned in Chapter 4: the hero slaying the serpent or monster is a patriarchal perversion of an older theme. The serpent, which used to be one of the sacred symbols of the Great Goddess, has, within the patriarchal rule, become a monster that must be slain or tamed. Another common theme is incorporated in the story: the hero slaying monsters at a very early age. A similar story exists in American folklore, which claims (erroneously) that Davy Crockett killed a bear when he was three years old.

18. Apollo acknowledges guilt at having killed Python and exiles himself from Olympus to work as a shepherd. Hereby he creates a paradigm of expiation for mortals who seek to cleanse themselves of wrongdoing. The Delphic rites thus represent a new order in which guilt can be atoned for rather than paid for in blood.
19. After his purification, Apollo returns to Delphi and inaugurates the first Pythia, who foretells the Trojan War.
20. Every eight years the slaying of Python was reenacted in a religious drama, the Stepterion, by priests at Delphi.
21. The procedures at Delphi required ritual cleansing both of the questioners and of the Pythia. An animal without imperfections was sacrificed, and the priestess entered an underground chamber where, seated upon a tripod, she inhaled sacred vapors from underground, drank sacred water, and chewed bay or laurel leaves. Then, in a trance, she uttered unintelligible words that a priest took down and translated into Greek verse.
22. The oracles are typically ambiguous. Many oracles have been preserved, such as the one advising King Croesus, planning to go to war with the Persians, that a great nation would fall if he crossed the Persian border. Believing that the oracle had promised him victory, Croesus attacked, but the great nation that fell was his own. This oracle, like many others, may be more legendary than historical.

23. During the two Persian invasions of Greece (490 and 480–479 B.C.), the oracle advised surrender in the beginning but ended up supporting the defense of Greece with a “wooden wall,” interpreted by the leader Themistocles to mean warships. Employing the fleet, the Greeks sank most of the Persian armada at the Battle of Salamis.
24. Sophocles uses the myth of Oedipus to confirm that no one can escape divine prophecies.
25. Delphi’s prestige declined after the fifth century B.C. with first the demise of the city-state under Alexander the Great and later the Roman occupation of Greece.
26. Despite his beauty, Apollo was unlucky in love: the mountain nymph Daphne asked Zeus to save her from Apollo’s pursuit and was changed into a bay or laurel tree. The Greek word for laurel is daphne.
27. The youth Cyparissus loves his pet stag so much that when he accidentally kills it, he wants to die and ignores Apollo’s pleas to transfer his affection to the god. Drained by weeping, Cyparissus is transformed into a cyprus.
28. The handsome boy Hyacinthus returns Apollo’s affection but is fatally hit in the head by Apollo’s hurtling discus. Apollo transforms the boy’s body into a hyacinth flower.
29. Coronis, a princess of Thessaly, was already pregnant by Apollo when she fell in love with a mortal man. Although Apollo sent Artemis to kill Coronis, her unborn child was saved and was reared by Chiron, a centaur. The child, Asclepius, became the first physician.
30. When Asclepius learned to revive the dead and thus threatened to overstep the limits of mortality, Zeus killed him with a thunderbolt; Apollo retaliated by killing the Cyclops who forged Zeus’s lightning bolt.
31. The worship of Asclepius at Epidaurus involved reptilian symbols such as the caduceus, variously interpreted as either a phallic symbol or as the Tree of Life, symbol of the Goddess.
32. Employing sympathetic magic, the physicians at Epidaurus applied the ancient Delphic practice of cleansing to their individual human patients.
33. As late as the mid-fourth century A.D., a Roman Emperor, Julian, who wanted to revive paganism, tried to consult the Oracle at Delphi. The melancholy Pythia allegedly responded that “no longer has Phoebus a hut, nor a prophetic laurel, nor a spring that speaks.”

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Hymn to Pythian Apollo

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Apollo

Paian, a god whose name appears at Knossos on Crete in a context dated to the Late Bronze period

Pythia, the priestess at the Oracle at Delphi

Themis, the goddess of eternal law, Gaea’s daughter

Typhon (Typhoeus), the serpent son of Hera (Hesiod: Gaea’s son)

Leto, mother of Apollo and Artemis

Artemis, the virgin goddess of the hunt who was involved in initiation rites of young women

Python, the female dragon guardian of Gaea's sanctuary at Delphi, the foster mother of Typhon

Themistocles, Athens's leader during the Persian wars

Daphne, a mountain nymph transformed into a bay or laurel tree

Cyparissus, a young man transformed into a cyprus

Hyacinthus, Apollo's lover killed by his discus and transformed into a flower

Coronis, the mother of Asclepius

Chiron, the wisest of centaurs

Asclepius, son of Coronis and Apollo, the first physician

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Aeschylus (c. 525–456 B.C.)

Sophocles (c. 495–406 B.C.)

CHAPTER 8

DIONYSUS: ROOTED IN EARTH AND ECSTASY

MAIN POINTS

1. Each winter Apollo left Delphi to live with the Hyperboreans, a mythical tribe in the North, and Dionysus moved into Delphi for those three months.

2. The contrast between Apollo and Dionysus: moderation and mental balance versus an irrational power that allows people to explore their potential for emotional and behavioral extremes.

3. Qualities in common: both sons of Zeus, they share his will to power and his creative drive; both are born under difficult circumstances and both establish cults.

4. While both Apollo and Dionysus are associated with “ecstasy”—a standing outside of oneself—there are also important distinctions between them in that respect. Apollo remains aloof from the worshipers who are not themselves possessed by the god: only the Pythia, who speaks in tongues (glossolalia), is. On the other hand, any follower of Dionysus can hope to be seized by the god in an ecstatic frenzy.

5. One theory suggests that Apollo and Dionysus are two sides of the same divinity, combining moderation and excess. Apollo and Dionysus then may represent two equally important aspects of the human psyche. The worshiper may encounter the divine either through oracular knowledge or by orgiastic rites.

6. Both gods inspire poetry, song, and dance—Apollo with his lyre and Dionysus with his timbrel.

7. Dionysus and other male fertility gods of the ancient Near East with whom he is often identified—Tammuz (Dumuzi), Adonis, and Osiris—share a common fate: violent death, descent into the Underworld, and rebirth as immortal beings.

8. Some versions of the myth bring Dionysus to Greece from Thrace, others from Asia Minor. While he brings with him a foreign cult and strange companions and music, he also has the nature, in a paradoxical way, of a native son: his birth, after all, took place in Thebes.

9. Euripides’s play the *Bacchae* tells of Dionysus’s (Bacchus’s) return to Thebes from Asia Minor with a throng of Asian maenads (female followers of the god).

10. Dionysus’s birth follows the heroic pattern: Hera attempts to prevent Semele from giving birth; in disguise, she convinces Semele that the lover who visits her in the dark is an ogre. Semele persuades her lover to show himself as he really is, and when Zeus appears in a blaze of light, she is incinerated. From her corpse, Zeus takes the embryo of Dionysus and places it in his thigh, from which Dionysus is born. (See Note, p. 35.) For Euripides’s rationalization of this myth on the basis of linguistic confusion, see Chapter 1.

11. Sprung from Zeus’s genital area, Dionysus is a fertility god representing the growth, death, and rebirth of vegetation. He is a masculine counterpart of Persephone.

12. Dionysus was the god of life-giving fluid. As such, he was most difficult to control and liable to change form and nature: he could change instantaneously from a sweet adolescent to a savage bull or lion. He was capable of extreme cruelty as well as great benevolence. For instance, he drove the women of Thebes, including his own aunts, mad because the city would not accept his new ritual and him as a god.

13. The same duality characterizes his most famous gift: wine can give pleasure but can also cause disorientation and unrestrained actions, which have dire consequences.

14. Two motifs characterize the myths of Dionysus: he is foreign in many respects and he must confront hostility to himself and his religion.

15. Hera's persecution continued when Dionysus was an infant. Hermes took him for protection to Semele's sister Ino, who disguised him as a girl. In reprisal, Hera drove Ino and her husband mad. Zeus then took Dionysus abroad to Nysa and concealed him in the form of a goat.

NOTE: The story of the mortal woman or man who perishes by seeing the divine being in his or her true splendor is common. In Greek myth, it is found in stories such as Actaeon perishing after seeing Artemis and Tiresias losing his sight after spying on Athene. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, Moses witnesses the presence of Yahweh in the shape of a burning bush, because the full view of God would kill him. A frequent theme in folklore mirrors the lovers' aspect of the story of Semele and Zeus. In the Norwegian fairytale of "East of the Sun and West of the Moon," the young woman's lover is a bewitched polar bear by day and a handsome prince by night; by sneaking a peak at his true nocturnal nature, she ruins his chance of breaking the spell and becoming human again. However, since it is a fairytale, it does have a happy ending. A reversal of the theme happens in "Beauty and the Beast" and its variations, in which the young woman is supposed to "look beyond" the terrible facade to see her lover's true nature.

16. Dionysus's first lover, Ampelus, is gored to death by a bull, and Dionysus weeps for him; watered by his tears, Ampelus's body shoots forth a vine with grape clusters.

17. Dionysus teaches winemaking to the gardener Icarius, who then travels around the countryside instructing farmers in viticulture. While dressed in the skin of a goat, he is murdered by drunken shepherds.

18. The retinue of Dionysus, made up of "outsiders"—satyrs, silens, and maenads—clearly marks him as "other."

19. When kidnaped by pirates, Dionysus changes them into dolphins, an etiological explanation of why dolphins are friendly to humans.

20. Dionysus acquires a retinue in India consisting of satyrs, which combine human shape and goat shape; the goat is the favored sacrificial animal in the Dionysian cult and one of the shapes in which Dionysus often chose to appear.

21. Satyrs (Roman: fauns) are famous for their sexual prowess and are often depicted with exaggeratedly large and erect penises.

22. The silens (a human with a horse's tail and hoofs), Bacchantes (women followers), and Priapus (a fertility deity) also follow Dionysus. Dionysus's worshipers carry the thyrsus, a long staff topped with a pine cone and entwined with ivy. By the sixth century B.C., the silens (originally old men) and satyrs (half-human, half-goat) were used interchangeably.

23. In the sixth century B.C., a mythic association was made between Dionysus and Orpheus. Both Dionysus and Orpheus descended into Hades, died a violent death, and thereafter achieved immortality. Both were sexually ambiguous.

NOTE: Students may not be familiar with the tragedy of Orpheus and Eurydice at this point (see Chapter 9). Eurydice, Orpheus's beloved wife, died from a snakebite, and Orpheus vowed to go to the Underworld to fetch her back. With his music he moved everyone in the Underworld, including Hades and Persephone, to such an extent that they allowed him to make an attempt to bring Eurydice with him to the land of the living, while playing his music. However, if he turned to look at her before they had safely arrived, she would be lost to him forever. Accompanied by Hermes, Eurydice's shadow began following her husband, but he moved quickly in anticipation of her rescue, and she could not keep up. When he arrived at the land of the living, he turned around to see her, but she was still enveloped by darkness; at that moment, Hermes whisked her back to the Underworld. In desperation, Orpheus tried a second time, but Charon wouldn't ferry him across to the Land of the Dead.

24. After the loss of Eurydice, Orpheus renounces women and turns to captivate young men with his music. Some female worshipers of Dionysus tear him limb from limb in anger over rejection and cast his body parts over the earth.

25. Some scholars believe that Orpheus's physical dismemberment suggests that during prehistoric times, a young male was ritually sacrificed by being cut to pieces, which were then planted in the ground. This would be a variant of the sparagmos motif. There is not much evidence for this theory.

26. Orpheus's journey to the Underworld earned him an association with occult knowledge. Orphism was a mystery worship that offered spiritual guidance along a path of self-purification and preparation of the soul for life after death. Because its myth pictured the human being as a combination of divine spark and base physicality, Orphic teaching and practice sought to awaken that divine potential. Initiates who consumed a meal of flesh and wine (representing the body and blood of Dionysus) in a variant on the sparagmos motif could, in the next world, be united with the god for eternity. Orphism espoused the idea of reincarnation and viewed Hades as a place of renewal and rebirth.

27. Orphism promoted another variation of the Dionysian myth. According to that version, Dionysus was the son of Zeus and Persephone. Since Zeus planned to make his son king of the universe, Hera induced the Titans to tear him apart, burn his body, and eat it (sparagmos). Athene saved the boy's heart, which she gave to Zeus, who swallowed it and then impregnated Semele. Dionysus was reborn to Semele as Dionysus Zagreus.

28. Subsequently, Zeus kills the Titans with his thunderbolt. Humans spring from the ashes of the Titans and are thus descendants of rebel Titans as well as the divine flesh of Dionysus, so humans carry a divine spark within them.

29. Orphism taught that the body is a prison (soma sema), and death frees the soul.

30. The festival for Dionysus, the Dionysia, featured a procession with followers carrying a statue of the god and replicas of his phallus. The Dionysian Mysteries were very popular in Greece and Italy and persisted well into the Christian era.

31. Orphism created a balance between the passion of Dionysus and the austerity of Apollo, suggesting a unity of the two gods. Orphism anticipated many doctrines of Christianity, and early Christians used the figure of Orpheus or Dionysus to depict Jesus.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Hymn to Dionysus

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Apollo

Dionysus

Bacchus, another name for Dionysus

Semele, Dionysus's mother

Hera

Ino, Semele's sister

Ampelus, Dionysus's first lover, the origin of wine grapes

Icarius, the first viniculturist

Satyrs, half-human and half-goat, part of Dionysus's entourage

Silens, humanoid creatures with horse tail and hooves

Bacchantes, female followers of Dionysus

Priapus, a fertility god depicted with an erection

Orpheus, Eurydice's husband, musician, bisexual

Titans, offspring of Gaea, killed by Zeus

KEY NAME ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Euripides (c. 485–406 B.C.)

CHAPTER 9

LAND OF NO RETURN: THE GLOOMY KINGDOM OF HADES

MAIN POINTS

1. While the gods represent the Greek desire for perpetual youth, beauty, and eternal life, myths about the heroes show awareness of the finality of life and of every valued quality.
2. The terror that Odysseus felt when he learned that he had to descend into Hades's kingdom reveals the Greek dread of death. To Odysseus, death represented perpetual imprisonment in the dark. Traveling to the Underworld, Odysseus faces both his own mortality and the fate of the soul after death.
3. In the Underworld, Achilles tells Odysseus that he would rather be a poor man's living slave than king of the dead. His only joy in Hades derives from the news that his son Neoptolemus has become a well-respected and efficient warrior.
4. In the Homeric epics, death is final and satisfactory contact between the living and the dead is impossible.
5. The souls in Hades have lost memory, reason, and willpower.
6. Odysseus performs a ritual to summon the dead and communicate with them by digging a trench for them to drink from; the trench symbolizes both the grave and the boundary between life and death. The drink consists of elements of the earth's bounty as well as blood.
7. Odysseus travels westward to Hades across the River of Ocean, the earth's boundary. His journey parallels that of Gilgamesh traveling to the retreat of Utnapishtim.
8. The Homeric concept of the afterlife resembles Mesopotamian beliefs about the Underworld. According to the Hebrew Bible, all the dead, good and bad, reside in an underground region, Sheol, where there is nothing but inactivity.
9. Five rivers were said to flow through the Underworld: the Styx, the Acheron, Cocytus, Phlegethon, and a "river of unmindfulness" that runs through the plain of Lethe. The Romans called the river Lethe and maintained that a soul preparing for reincarnation first had to drink its waters of forgetfulness.
10. A few heroes are allowed to spend the afterlife in the Homeric paradise of Elysium or the Isles of the Blest. Menelaus received the privilege not because of his own virtue but because of his marriage to Helen, daughter of Zeus. This concept of Elysium echoes the Mesopotamian myth of Dilmun, where a few fortunate souls could live a pleasant afterlife.
11. Hades represents death, and Persephone, earlier associated with youth and flowers, takes on the same quality of pitilessness; only a few dead are allowed to return to earth, and they generally accentuate the inevitability of loss.
12. Hades is also the place for monsters such as the multiheaded hound of hell called Cerberus, the Furies, and the Gorgons.
13. Mythographers after Homer had the souls cross the river by boat to arrive in Hades. The ferryman, Charon, demanded money for his services, so it was a Greek custom to bury the dead with coins in their hands or mouth.
14. Two judges reside in Hades, Minos and his brother Rhadamanthus; Plato adds a third judge, Aeacus. In later traditions, these judges would determine the fate of the dead souls.
15. Thanatos (Death) has a brother, Hypnos (Sleep); Hypnos's son Morpheus, the god of dreams, shows himself to sleepers in human shape, sometimes bringing messages from the dead.

16. Because of his role as Psychopompos, the guide of dead souls to their final abode, Hermes is associated with the Underworld. Because he crossed the boundaries between life and death, Hermes became known as a repositior of occult secrets.
17. Hesiod introduces Tartarus as an elemental deity as well as an amorphous abyss into which the Titans are thrown. Tartarus foreshadows the Christian notion of hell.
18. Homer tells of three criminals suffering in Hades. Each had in some way overstepped his boundaries and intruded upon the divine prerogatives.
19. Tityus tried to rape Leto and is punished by being spread-eagled and having two vultures feed on his liver.
20. Tantalus, standing in a pool of water, is forever unable to slake his thirst, because the water recedes when he bends over; he can't reach grapes growing overhead for the same reason. There are various accounts of his crime: he stole the ambrosia of the gods and gave it to humans; he told secrets from the table of the gods; and he served the flesh of his son to the gods.
21. Sisyphus is forced to roll a boulder uphill, only to have it roll back again, so that he must endlessly repeat that meaningless task. Sisyphus is being punished for tricking the gods into letting him go back to earth from Hades once and hiding out until he died of old age.

NOTE: The character of Sisyphus became an important symbol for the existential philosophical movement of the mid-twentieth century: the French novelist Albert Camus sees him as a symbol of a human being, realizing that life is, in essence, absurd, since there are no preestablished, god-given rules. Each task is as meaningless as rolling the boulder uphill and watching it roll down again. Camus's twist to the story is to suggest that Sisyphus takes control of his life and obtains freedom from the slavery of absurdity by choosing to perform these meaningless tasks. See Chapter 21; see also Note on Odysseus's father in Chapter 12.

22. Ixion assaulted Hera and is in Hades bound to a perpetually rolling fiery wheel.
23. Later myths view Tartarus as the place where all human souls go to be purged and punished.
24. In Greco-Roman myth, only a few heroes travel to the netherworld (katabasis) and come back alive, usually as part of a trial.
25. Through the katabasis, the hero symbolically endures death and rebirth and renews his purpose in life. Examples: Odysseus, Aeneas.
26. The hero's successful descent is usually sponsored by an Olympian protector: Athene supports Odysseus and Herakles; Aphrodite protects Aeneas. Eros (Love) motivates the journeys of Orpheus and Dionysus.
27. Heracles, initiated into the Mysteries of Demeter and sponsored by Athene and Hermes, travels to the Underworld as the last of his Twelve Labors to kidnap the hound Cerberus. With Hades's (Pluto's) permission, he captures the dog with his bare hands; in addition he liberates Asclepius and gets Theseus released (Theseus had been imprisoned there for trying to kidnap Persephone).
28. Heracles can return to the gods in spirit, but his image must remain in Hades. Homer here anticipates the later theory of the dual nature of immortal mind and mortal body.
29. Orpheus travels to Hades to rescue his beloved wife, Eurydice, dead from a snake-bite. With his music he moves Hades and Persephone to tears, and they let him take her with him, provided that he promises not to look back during the ascent. However, he can't help himself; when he turns around to see her, he loses her to Hades forever.

30. Orphism was based on the belief that, having been in the underworld, Orpheus possessed esoteric knowledge of the afterlife; Orphism thus fostered a belief in metempsychosis—the transmigration of the soul by rebirth into a series of new bodies.
31. The doctrine of the soul’s transmigration seems to have been first articulated by Pythagoras, a philosopher who established a society in Croton in southern Italy during the sixth century B.C. Pythagoras claimed to recall his previous incarnations and to hear the music of the spheres. Empedocles, a poet and philosopher from Sicily, was influenced by his teachings, as was Plato.
32. Even in the Homeric Underworld, the soul retains some of its individuality. The Homeric view of Hades is like a Freudian or Jungian dreamlike state of paralysis.
33. The most important influence on the evolving Greek views of the afterlife was Plato, who argued that the human soul, originating in heaven, descends to earth and is trapped in a mortal body. In “The Myth of Er” Plato describes what happens to the soul when death releases it from the body. His tale, narrated by a soldier named Er, draws heavily on Orphic doctrines regarding purification and regeneration.
34. Greek philosophers came to believe that moral absolutes exist and that souls will be dealt with after death according to the moral quality of their lives. Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and others envisioned a compartmentalized Hades.

NOTE: Pythagoras reportedly believed in reincarnation, and there is some evidence (in the dialogues *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*) that Plato may have agreed. In *Phaedrus*, Plato lets Socrates describe the cycle of life and death as a movement of the soul between the world of matter and the world of spirit. While in the world of spirit, the soul is all-knowing and shares the company of the Forms, the eternal ideas that give meaning and reality to life on earth. Then, because of an imperfect previous life, the soul is compelled to be reborn into the world of matter, the world we know as reality, which for Plato is a shadowland of imperfection. However, the more we realize that the world of the Forms is the true reality (in other words, the more we become true philosophers), the closer we are to not having to be reborn again.

35. The notion of the Underworld has a dual nature: the place for the psyche’s destructive potential and a projection of the hope for immortality.
36. In the *Aeneid*, Virgil portrays Aeneas’s descent into the land of the dead as an exploration of the human subconscious. For Virgil, the Underworld is both the tomb and the womb of life.

37. According to early Christian writers, Jesus entered the netherworld on Good Friday to retrieve righteous souls who died before he had opened the way to heaven, a *katabasis* that medieval theologians called “the harrowing of hell.”

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Odysseus, the Homeric hero of Troy and the eponymous hero of the *Odyssey*

Achilles, the hero of the *Iliad*

Neoptolemus, Achilles’s warrior son

Thanatos, the personification of death

Circe, a sorceress in the *Odyssey*

Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk

Enkidu, his friend

Sheol, the Hebrew Underworld

Styx, Acheron, Cocytus, Phlegethon: rivers in Hades

Lethe, a plain in Hades (Roman: the river of forgetfulness)
Elysium, a paradise for select heroes
Menelaus, the husband of Helen of Troy
Aidoneus, another name for Hades (Pluto)
Persephone
Orpheus, a musician, the inspiration for Orphism
Cerberus, the hound of hell
Charon, the ferryman of Hades
Minos, Rhadamanthus, the Aeacus: judges in Hades
Hypnos, the god of sleep
Morpheus, the god of dreams
Tartarus
Tityus, a sinner in Tartarus/Hades, punished by vultures feeding on his liver
Tantalus, a sinner in Tartarus/Hades, punished by eternal hunger and thirst
Sisyphus, a sinner in Tartarus/Hades, punished by being made to repeatedly roll a rock uphill
Ixion, a sinner in Tartarus/Hades, punished by being bound to a rolling wheel of fire
Heracles, the strong demigod
Athene
Hermes
Psychopompos, Hermes's name as a guide of the soul
Er, a native of Pamphylia, killed in battle

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Homer (ninth century B.C.)
Anacreon, Greek lyric poet (sixth century B.C.)
Pythagoras, Greek philosopher and mathematician (sixth century B.C.)
Plato, Greek philosopher (c. 427–347 B.C.)
Virgil, Roman poet (70–19 B.C.)
Socrates, Greek philosopher (c. 469–399 B.C.)

CHAPTER 10 HEROES AND HEROINES OF MYTH

MAIN POINTS

1. The adventures of the Greek heroes typically follow a traditional pattern. The hero is often born in an unusual fashion, faces great danger early in life, and possesses great powers. On reaching adulthood, seeking to test his own powers, he embarks on a quest or series of quests during which he will learn about himself, his society, and his universe.
2. The hero's trip to the Underworld has been interpreted as a descent into the "womb" of the Earth-goddess, connecting the masculine ego of the hero with the feminine principle, the unconscious, or the realm of the instincts. Rejoining the animus with the anima, the psyche can be made whole.
3. The hero figure is isolated by his own uniqueness in striving toward excess and immortality. Gilgamesh also personifies this trait. This isolation extends to relationships with women, since domestic contentment can distract the hero from his task.
4. The hero is a phenomenon of a fallen world and has a redemptive function. By his half-divine nature, his glorious deeds, and his relentless pursuit of immortality, the hero uplifts humanity from its dismal condition and reminds us of our godlike potential.
5. In his role as protector of society, the hero is also a divided being. Paradoxically, the hero's great warrior skills, his potential for violence, and his often rash nature themselves become destructive and dangerous.
6. Most heroes are deified and enjoy veneration in cult. Example: Oedipus experiences apotheosis (transformation into a god) and will be a blessing spirit for the land.
7. The pattern of the heroic career includes miraculous conception/birth, threat to the hero in infancy and later, journeys and tasks, a return to society with a new understanding.
8. Perseus, one of the earliest Greek heroes, shares some characteristics with later heroes, but an important difference is that he maintains mutually supportive relationships with women. He may be a product of the time when goddess-worship was still widespread.
9. Perseus's special conception/birth: Danae was impregnated by Zeus, who assumed the form of a golden shower. Threat: Acrisius put Danae and Perseus into a chest and set them adrift on the sea. Quest: to protect Danae, Perseus seeks the head of the Gorgon, Medusa. Athene and the Graiae (who represent an aspect of the Great Goddess) help him with magic weapons.
10. Perseus uses his shield as a mirror when he attacks Medusa. He kills her. Pegasus springs from her neck.
11. Medusa is a complex figure. Her wings and hair of snakes are inherited from the ancient goddess. The Egyptian goddess Isis likewise was often depicted as a winged goddess.
12. Perseus saves the princess Andromeda, returns home, and saves his mother. He then returns his weapons to Athene.
13. The Perseus myth has an etiological function, as it explains the origin of several constellations. Perseus himself achieves immortality in the heavens.

NOTE: In one version of the myth of Medusa, Athene becomes jealous of Medusa's beauty and makes her so horrible to look at (hair of snakes) that all who look directly at her are turned to stone. Perhaps Athene's continued jealousy partly motivates her encouragement of Perseus to behead Medusa.

14. A new patriarchal type of hero succeeds Perseus: Bellerophon riding the Pegasus.

15. Heracles is semidivine, like Perseus, but more troubled and troubling than he. Heracles's characteristics: unnaturally brave and strong, protective of society, and capable of animal-like behavior.
16. Heracles's conception and birth: Zeus, disguised as Alcmene's husband, impregnates her. Threat: Hera is angry and threatens him in various ways. Quest: the Twelve Labors.
17. Heracles embodies the heroic predicament of how to fulfill the demand for godlike knowledge and achievement while bound to a mortal body. At the same time, such a hero is a threat to the gods.
18. Heracles's divided nature, half-man, half-beast, echoes that of the centaurs; the multiple associations of the hero with beasts suggest the battle with the beast within. Trained to use his strength to kill, how does a hero control the violence when he leaves the battlefield?
19. The Twelve Labors are Heracles's punishment for killing his wife, Megara, and their children in a fit of rage.
20. Heracles fulfills the hero's most significant function: to extend the parameters of human experience, imagination, and knowledge. In his journeys to the Underworld, he transcends the limits of the human condition and achieves a form of immortality.
21. Heracles's death is caused by his new wife, Deianeira, who tries to tame him. Some versions of the myth explain that Heracles's soul goes to the Underworld, while his reputation is immortal. Other versions tell of his uprising to heaven by the gods. Homer says that his human part remains in Hades while his divine self resides with the gods.
22. Theseus was the son of Aegeus or, in another version, of Poseidon. To claim his inheritance, he meets a challenge and is thus recognized as royal prince of Athens.
23. Theseus goes to Crete where he confronts and kills the Minotaur with the assistance of Ariadne. He deserts Ariadne after the adventure is over. Generally, in fact, his relationships with women—Helen, Persephone, Hippolyte, and Phaedra, as well as Ariadne—are unhappy.
24. The story of Theseus and the Minotaur may represent a shift in political power relations at the end of the Minoan Period, despite the fact that Theseus himself may be a later construction of Athenian mythology.
25. Despite political problems, Theseus unifies Athens.
26. Jason is grandson of the wind god Aeolus. Like Theseus, he has to meet a challenge to claim his inheritance. Threatened by his uncle Pelus, who does not wish to recognize Jason as rightful king, he goes in quest of the Golden Fleece. He sails in a ship named Argo with a crew called Argonauts.
27. Jason's helper-maiden is a protegee of Hecate, Medea. The power of Hecate helps Jason obtain the fleece and escape; Jason's quest is less heroic than quests of previous heroes since it deteriorates into a search for wealth and status.
28. Jason and Medea have to take refuge in Corinth when they antagonize the people of Iolchos. At Corinth, they produce two children. Jason deserts Medea. Medea, in revenge, wreaks havoc.
29. In her role as the source of fertility, as in her connection with dragons—the dragon who guards the Golden Fleece and the winged dragon who pulls the chariot—Medea carries out the creative and transformative functions of the ancient Goddess.
30. Jason dies when a ship's beam hits him on the head; contrary to previous heroes, he is not elevated to divine status.
31. Heracleian hero myths often emphasize that the hero is half-human and half-divine; other myths give an alternative perspective by reminding the Greeks of the ideal of

moderation. In his nature, which mingles strengths with attendant weaknesses, the hero urges consideration of human potential and also human shadows and the need to observe limits.

NOTE: The ideal of moderation became an integral part of later Greek virtue ethics. In the fourth century B.C., the philosopher Aristotle outlined the rule of the Golden Mean, which states that a good person must strive for the proper balance between too much and too little effort and feeling. In the story of Icarus, the son of Daedalus, he is given a pair of wax wings by his father so that they can escape the wrath of King Minos after Daedalus helped Theseus. Icarus does not heed his father's advice of moderate flying and flies so close to the sun that his wings melt; he falls into the sea and drowns. The flight of Icarus is traditionally used as an example of hubris, overblown confidence in oneself, but since Icarus refuses to listen to his father's advice of not flying too low or too high, it is also a classic example of the Greek moral value of doing things in the right amount, not too much or too little. See also Chapter 21.

32. Phaethon, the son of Helios, asks his father if he can drive the chariot of the sun for a day. Helios agrees, but Phaethon loses control of the horses, creating the Milky Way and setting fire to the earth. To save the earth, Zeus kills Phaethon with a lightning bolt. Moral: Even a semidivine being must observe certain limits or face disastrous consequences.
33. There are striking women in Greek myth but, unlike the heroes, they are rarely viewed as role models for the young.
34. The role of heroine in Greek mythology reflects the role of women in Greek society: submissive, obedient, and loyal.
35. The "heroine" usually does not go on a quest, engage in combat, or seek immortality.
36. The best-known rite of passage for young Greek women was the Brauronia, celebrated at Artemis's temple at Brauron, near Athens. The ritual is a collective celebration in which young girls dressed as bears dance in recognition of their wild nature before settling into the married life of the adult female.
37. There are several patterns of "heroism" for women. First, the woman may be the "perfect" mother (Semele, Danae) or wife (Alcestis, Andromache) of the hero. Mothers must consort with the divine, which often ends unhappily. Marriage to a hero also often proves deadly.
38. The woman may become the "Bride of Death" (Iphigenia, Cassandra, Antigone) by choosing, for some reason, death rather than marriage.
39. She may be a helper-maiden (Medea, Ariadne). If she becomes sexually involved with the hero, he deserts her. Athene is the model for the helper-maiden, but her divine status protects her from such serious complications.
40. Some women (Atalanta, Agave) are "hero impersonators." Such a woman challenges expectations, but since there is no socially acceptable avenue for such challenge, her attempt is doomed. She is often described as "monstrous" or "manlike." No glory awaits her efforts.
41. Greek myth includes stories of a very few "victorious" heroines (Nausicaa, Penelope). Such women use their wits to maintain a certain sort of independence.
42. Psyche, a victorious heroine, appears only in a late source. She marries Eros, travels to the Underworld, completes labors. She is assisted by nature. She falls into a deep sleep and awakens, changed, a mature woman ready for real marriage. She does not avoid marriage.

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Perseus, Greek hero

Danae, his mother

Acrisius, her father

Dictys, Perseus's foster father

King Polydectes, Dictys's brother

Athene

The Graeae, three old hags with one eye between them

Medusa, one of the three Gorgon sisters; turns men into stone

Pegasus, the winged horse

Andromeda, Ethiopian princess, later Perseus's wife

Bellerophon, Pegasus's rider

Heracles, the strong hero

Gilgamesh, king of Uruk

Hera

Megara, Heracles's first wife

Deianeira, Heracles's second wife

Nessus, a centaur

Theseus, Greek hero, son of Aethra and Aegeus (or Poseidon)

Aegeus, his father, the king of Athens

Ariadne, daughter of King Minos

Daedalus, Minoan inventor

Hippolyte, the Amazon queen

Hippolytus, her son with Theseus, accused of raping Phaedra

Phaedra, Ariadne's sister, Theseus's wife

Jason, Greek hero, grandson of the wind god Aeolus

The Argonauts, Jason's fellow heroes, the crew of the ship Argos

Aeson of Iolcos, Jason's father

Pelias, Aeson's brother

Chiron, the centaur who reared Jason and taught Asclepius

Medea, the daughter of Aetes, king of Colchis

Phaethon, son of Helios and mortal Clymene

Helios, the sun god

Asclepius, the first physician

Prometheus, the Titan who stole fire from the gods

Amazons, a race of warlike, outside-living, free women who live on the edge of the world

Alcestis, wife who agrees to die in the place of her husband Admetus

Ariadne, Cretan princess who helps Theseus in his confrontation with the Minotaur

Atalanta, a strong and energetic young woman who resists marriage and challenges suitors

Agave, mother of Pentheus, whom she kills in a Dionysian frenzy

Clytemnestra, wife of Agamemnon, whom she kills in revenge for her daughter Iphigenia

Iphigenia, daughter of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon, who offered her as a sacrifice in order to advance his war effort

Nausicaa, princess of Phaeacia, who meets the bedraggled Odysseus on the beach and assists his reception at the court of her mother and father

Penelope, wife of Odysseus, his equal in initiative and daring, who acts the helper-maiden for him upon his return to Ithaca

Psyche, the young woman ("Soul") who marries Eros and must go on a quest to recover his love

CHAPTER 11

HEROES AT WAR: THE TROY SAGA

MAIN POINTS

1. The ancient Greeks certainly believed that the Trojan War, in some form, was a historical event. Likewise, modern scholars think that the Iliad has some loose basis in fact.
2. Archaeological evidence indicates that around 1250 B.C., a settlement, which we label “Troy VIIa,” was looted and burned. The identity of the attackers is not certain, much less the motivation for the attack.
3. Heinrich Schliemann thought he had found the site of Homer’s Troy on the mound of Hissarlik in northwestern Turkey (see Chapter 1). Although scholars were long skeptical, due to inconsistencies between modern topography and the Homeric descriptions, recent geological studies have revealed that the land configuration has changed a great deal since the Bronze Age. It now seems quite possible to reconcile “Homer’s” account with the area around Hissarlik.
4. The decision of Paris is important as a paradigm of the complex world of myth and as the source of inspiration for many other myths.
5. Zeus has arranged a wedding between Thetis, a minor sea goddess, and a mortal man, Peleus; all the gods are invited except Eris, the goddess of strife, who shows up anyway with a golden apple “for the fairest.”

NOTE: The theme of the goddess who is not invited and who shows up with a curse is a familiar folklore motif: Sleeping Beauty (Grimm: Little Briar Rose) sleeps because the thirteenth Wise Woman who was not invited to a feast in Beauty’s honor (twelve were invited, because the king had twelve gold plates) cursed her with death, a curse ameliorated by the other women. In folklore, goddesses or fates often punish people with curses for their neglect.

6. Hera, Athene, and Aphrodite quarrel over the golden apple, so Zeus throws it off Mount Olympus. It lands in a field outside of Troy, where King Priam’s son Paris is tending sheep.
7. The goddesses offer him gifts in exchange for the golden apple: Hera offers power over Asia Minor, Athene offers wisdom, and Aphrodite offers the love of the most beautiful woman in the world. Paris gives the apple to Aphrodite.
8. Priam sends Paris on a diplomatic mission to Sparta; he meets Helen, wife of King Menelaus, daughter of the mortal woman Leda, and of Zeus, who visited Leda in the shape of a swan.
9. While Paris is a guest in their home, Menelaus leaves on a trip, and Paris seduces or abducts Helen. When Paris refuses to return her, Priam feels honor-bound to defend him; Menelaus has allies who come to his support, and the Trojan War begins.
10. The implications of the story of the judgment of Paris involve sequels, because Greek myth is essentially open-ended.
11. Myths occur in a timeless or nonchronological world. Thus, Achilles, son of Thetis and Peleus, would be too young to take part in the battle of Troy, but he is a renowned hero at its beginning. Human time cannot be meaningfully applied to mythic time.

12. Zeus sanctifies family values and social order; Paris violates this order, but family loyalty is also a value under the old clan and kinship system, and Priam's adherence to this value makes the value systems clash.
13. The cosmos itself is not stable; change is in the nature of things, and the gods must cope with the existence of evil. The disharmony in the human world reflects that of the cosmos.
14. The human and the divine are closely connected: humans and gods can intermarry, but they rarely understand each other. Thetis tries to immortalize her son Achilles by dipping him in the divine fire, holding him by the heel. This point of vulnerability remains his mortal, parental heritage: the "Achilles's heel" is the human condition.
15. The gods lack power over human fate; humans have, in a limited sense, freedom to act but must bear the responsibility of their actions. By making a choice, Paris defines himself, as the other heroes do, and each lives the life and death he has chosen.
16. The Iliad and the Odyssey are attributed to Homer, who may have lived on an island off the coast of Asia Minor between 800 and 700 B.C. Legend depicts him as blind, but that may be only a traditional attribute of a prophet who sees moral truths, undistracted by surface appearances.
17. Both poems have signs of oral composition, such as fixed epithets and adjectives, and they share quality of style; however, their perspectives on certain issues differ radically.
18. Many possible explanations for this difference have been proposed. The poet may have changed his mind, later editors may have made changes, or the poems may have been composed by different poets but recorded by the same editor.
19. Both poems use inherited mythic material, adding the device of dialogue and omniscient narrator, shaping the material into the form of the epic containing formal conventions. These conventions include the proem, the semidivinity of the hero, and the hero's katabasis.
20. The choice of the epic form establishes the author's conviction of the seriousness of the story, and the epic is itself an expression of pride in one's civilization.
21. Contrary to the myth, the epic is rooted in human time. The poet continually reminds the reader about the passage of time.
22. Homer's epic poems are not open-ended like the myth, but have a narrative plot structure with beginning, middle, and end.
23. Homer uses epic similes to make supernatural experiences understandable.
24. In addition, Homer uses cliff-hangers and flashbacks to shape the material. He interrupts the chase scene in the Iliad to describe the everyday experience of women doing laundry and thereby contrasts the mad situation of the heroes with the everyday values they are fighting to uphold.
25. The Iliad does not describe the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, the decision of Paris, the gathering of the troops at Aulis, or the sacrifice of Iphigenia. Odysseus is reluctant to come because he is devoted to his wife Penelope and infant son; Achilles is warned by his mother that he will die at Troy if he goes, and she insists that he hide, disguised as a woman. Both heroes eventually arrive, and when the wind dies down, Agamemnon, the appointed general, is led to believe that he must first sacrifice his daughter.
26. The Iliad's focus is the quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon and its consequences. The purpose is to explore questions, such as What does it mean to be a hero? How can a hero create a meaningful life for himself in the face of certain death? How can a hero defend civilized values through acts of violence?
27. The heroes are divided beings: they must be warriors, because it is their nature, but this means that they must violate their needs as social beings.

28. Achilles has two possible fates: a long life in obscurity or a short, brilliant one in battle. For both Hector and Achilles, to choose inaction means the death of the soul; however, to choose immortality through honor may require physical death.
29. The hero's reputation must be publicly confirmed by the community, and true heroism can be confused with the external signs of public approval.
30. Enraged by grief, Achilles believes that he can transcend human needs; only after Hector's death does he recognize the needs of the body and reconcile with Priam and the community. Similarly, Hector confuses honor with blind loyalty.
31. A moderate alternative is Diomedes, who has courage but does not exceed his limits. Only in the fifth century B.C., however, would the qualities exhibited by Diomedes become the moral ideal.
32. Odysseus is the most intelligent of the Greek warriors—and the best speaker. He uses a disguise to spy on the Trojans and invents the ruse of the Trojan Horse, but his habit of using deception makes him an ambiguous hero.
33. The gods take sides: Hera, Poseidon, and Athene side with the Greeks; Apollo, Artemis, and Aphrodite favor the Trojans. Zeus is neutral.
34. The gods intervene in human affairs, either as aggressors or as targets, but even when they are wounded, they do not die; the war is a game to them and the fate of the individual human being seems to lack significance.
35. The gods of the Iliad are not omnipotent; they can't control fate or human behavior. They do reinforce values such as courtesy and the guest-host relationship. Since the Trojans have broken these rules, they must lose in the end.
36. The human connection to the gods happens through their gratitude toward the gods and through prayers and rituals. The gods do not necessarily reward the humans for their pious behavior.
37. Human beings determine their own fate; the dual destinies offered to Achilles show that fate is not predetermined but conditional.
38. Zeus uses scales to weigh the fate of humans, but he does not control them. Example: Sarpedon.
39. The two urns from which Zeus doles out gifts are the image of the human condition: it is not possible to have a life without at least some suffering. The urns are like Pandora's jar, containing both blessings and curses.
40. The heroic code is ambivalent: we admire the dedication and courage of heroes, but we see how such attributes tend toward excess. While the code calls for high ideals, such as friendship, loyalty, courage, and courtesy, it also encourages contempt for inferiors.
41. The ideal mode of fighting was the single combat. Its goal was not to defeat an enemy but to enhance one's own glorious reputation. The hero could choose life, but life without repute was the same as death. He could choose glorious repute, but that was likely to be won only through death.
42. The real victims are the women: some are used as war booty or prizes in games; even those who are not slaves are equally trapped in the social expectations. Helen herself is not loved by Menelaus; Agamemnon despises his wife. Of the Greeks, only Odysseus has a happy family life. The Greek family bonds depicted in the Iliad are typically between father and son.
43. Hector and his wife, Andromache, are devoted to each other, and their household is a model family. They are, however, unable to agree upon a code of action that will answer the needs of both of them.

44. Ironically, the Greeks, who represent family values, have abandoned their own families to go to war, while the transgressors of family values, the Trojans, are depicted as ideal models of family love.
45. Andromache sees the truth that Hector's urge to fight is destructive to the family.
46. Neither Hector nor Achilles is allowed to acknowledge his anima. Each espouses an exclusively masculine heroic code, destructive to families and civilization but, nonetheless, part of the Bronze Age ethic: making war was masculine; staying at home was feminine.
47. From the masculine perspective, the traditional female role in the hero myths is that of the temptress who distracts the hero from his quest. Andromache tempts Hector with the comforts of the domestic life, just as the goddess Siduri in the Epic of Gilgamesh tempted the Mesopotamian hero. From the feminine perspective, however, she is the manifestation of the wise goddess who counsels commitment to family bonds and achievement of continuity through one's children rather than through reputation gained by military feats. Like Demeter in the Homeric Hymn, her priority is life and continuance.
48. Homer comments ironically on the limits of the heroic model, and the women are given the last word in the Iliad. Even so, the focus is on the hero; with the Odyssey, the focus shifts toward a reconciliation of the masculine (animus) and feminine (anima).
49. The Iliad ends on a conciliatory note, with Hector's funeral. The Trojan women carry out their traditional societal function; they raise lament over the body of Hector.
50. Unlike many mythic heroes, Achilles visits a hell that is interior. When he piles up corpses in his encampment, he recreates, in his grief and rage, the atmosphere of Hades. The shade (ghost) of Patroclus visits him. Eventually, after undergoing separation and alienation, he is reconciled with the community.
51. The Iliad does not describe the death of Achilles. According to the myths, he is killed by a shot to the heel by Paris or Apollo. The war goes on, involving additional tests for the Greeks through prophecies.
52. The Iliad also does not describe the end of the war, which, ironically, is not brought about by any battle. The war is not concluded until Odysseus thinks of creating the Trojan Horse as a peace offering. Odysseus and his men hide in the hollow horse and emerge at night to open the gates of Troy. The men of Troy are killed, and women and children are taken prisoner.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Homer, Iliad

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Zeus

Achilles

Thetis, a sea goddess, Achilles's mother

Peleus, Achilles's father

Eris, goddess of strife

Hera

Athene

Aphrodite

King Priam, ruler of Troy

Paris, his son

King Menelaus, king of Sparta

Helen, his wife, the most beautiful woman in the world

Leda, Helen's mother

Hector, Priam's son, Paris's brother

Diomedes, the moderate warrior

Andromache, Hector's wife

Odysseus, King of Ithaca

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Homer (eighth century B.C.)

Apollodorus (c. 140 B.C.)

Ovid (43 B.C.–A.D. 17)

Hyginus (c. 25 B.C.)

Aeschylus (c. 525–456 B.C.)

Euripides (c. 485–406 B.C.)

Sophocles (c. 495–406 B.C.)

W. B. Yeats (1865–1939)

CHAPTER 12

A DIFFERENT KIND OF HERO: THE QUEST OF ODYSSEUS

MAIN POINTS

1. A popular Greek tradition suggests that the *Iliad* is a work from Homer's youth and that the *Odyssey* is a product of his old age. Some modern critics assume that the *Odyssey*'s author is a woman.

2. Some differences: the *Iliad* takes place in a limited space, whereas the *Odyssey*'s world is the entire Mediterranean basin, and a tour of heaven, earth, and Hades as well.

NOTE: The geography of the *Odyssey*, while traditionally well mapped, has recently acquired a new, highly controversial interpretation: The Italian nuclear physicist Felice Vinci has, based on his research of Plutarch, published the theory that Calypso's island Ogygie is not in the Mediterranean, but one of the Faroe Islands (Denmark), which indeed include an island named Hogoyggi. On the basis of this anchor point, Vinci remaps the travels of Odysseus to include the coast of Norway (Scheria), Zealand of Denmark (Pelops), and the island of Bornholm with the town Nexø (Naxos). Ithaca itself he pronounces to be the Danish island of Lyø. He locates Troy by the town of Toija in Finland, and explains the shift in geography to Greece and the Mediterranean by a deterioration of the Nordic climate around 1600 B.C. that prompted a mass exodus south by the members of the local Bronze Age culture who brought their tales of war with them. Vinci supports his claims by pointing out that the weather in the Homeric poems is always cold and foggy, and the Greeks are described as fair-haired. Most classicists remain skeptical of his interpretation, however.

3. The structure of the poem: Odysseus does not appear or speak until Book 5 of the *Odyssey*. Reference to him in the opening line—as “man of many wiles”—brings him immediately into the listener's mind. The first four books can then describe conditions in Ithaca in his absence. The story itself covers the six weeks between Odysseus's departure from Calypso's island and his revenge on the suitors at Ithaca.

4. The central section tells of his exploits before arriving at Calypso's island. The end of the poem focuses on his return to his home.

5. Demodocus, the blind bard identified with Homer in the ancient tradition, has received the typical two-edged gift from Zeus. The Muse who inspires his poetic gift has made him blind.

6. Homer's loving descriptions of Demodocus help us to understand the creative process of such a bard. He takes requests for a theme and then constructs a poem around that theme. He may sing about gods or heroes, but his essential function is to preserve the hero's glory by embodying his name in a song that will be passed down through the generations.

7. Odysseus, constantly defined by his intelligence, is an extraordinary epic hero in that he prefers to use cunning rather than force. In addition, he has fully human parents (Laertes and Anticleia), in contrast to most Greek heroes, including Achilles.

NOTE: According to Sophocles and several other Greek sources, Odysseus's natural father was not Laertes, the old man anxiously awaiting his son's return, but the wily Sisyphus, who seduced Laertes's wife, Anticleia, during an argument with her father over stolen horses. This parentage was supposed to account for the cunning of Odysseus, since Sisyphus was the only human ever cunning enough to fool Hades into letting him go back to earth after death. For his cunning, Sisyphus was later punished in the Underworld.

8. Odysseus does not have the heroic stature of Achilles, either; he dons disguises, and Athene helps him look taller and handsomer when the situation requires it. This accentuates Odysseus's chameleon-like character.

9. Achilles argues for bravery, while Odysseus advocates prudence; the heroic warriors obsessed with personal glory die in battle, while Odysseus lives until old age.

10. The moral universe of the *Odyssey* reflects the idea of heavenly justice: people bring suffering on themselves, exceeding what evil Necessity brings.

11. Zeus's example: Aegisthus, who murdered Agamemnon and was slain by his son Orestes. The example illustrates three issues: (1) if the suitors kill Odysseus, his son must revenge him; (2) Odysseus will cause many of his own problems; and (3) there is retributive justice in the law of the Olympians.

12. Odysseus violates his own standards of prudence (1) when he loots the city of Ismarus and (2) during the encounter with Polyphemus, when he speaks his true name.

13. Odysseus seems to suffer a momentary moral blindness just after he kills Polyphemus. His boastful self-revelation is foolish and brings dire consequences. Odysseus is thus alerted to a weakness that can bring suffering to him and his men, and he thereafter behaves with special prudence.

14. In retribution for his act of blinding the Cyclops, Poseidon delays Odysseus's homecoming for ten years. The hero must descend into the Underworld to ask Tiresias's advice and eventually must accept the role of a nobody, deprived of identity as well as clothing.

15. Athene, the goddess of wisdom, is Odysseus's protector, and, acting as his mentor, restores order in Ithaca. Athene and Odysseus are an excellent match, as cunning, prudence, and general intelligence characterize both of them. The intimacy between this goddess and this hero who is not her son has no parallel in Greek myth.

16. Athena represents the arts of civic order. At the end of the poem, she and Zeus must step in to halt the bloodshed. Left to themselves, the mortals had no way of ending the violence, which was likely to continue through generations.

17. Post-Homeric traditions create many sequels to the *Odyssey* such as the narrative poem *Telegonia*, or *Alfred*, Lord Tennyson's "Ulysses" (see Chapter 21).

18. Odysseus meets women/goddesses at almost every stage of his voyage. Circe and Calypso represent isolated cultural pockets where the Goddess still rules. Circe's feminine power threatens Odysseus's masculine identity until Hermes helps him; once they are equals, they can establish a partnership.

19. Both Circe and Calypso play double roles in the *Odyssey*. At first, each poses a threat to the hero, but subsequently she assists him. Each is, then, both the death-dealing goddess and also the helper-maiden. This quick (and apparently, to the outsider, unmotivated) shift of allegiance may symbolize a masculine/patriarchal perception of the female character, whether human or divine, as mercurial and potentially deadly.

20. The power of Circe/Calypso/the Great Goddess/the feminine principle is clear in Zeus's repeated dispatching of Hermes to rescue Odysseus from the powerful female.

21. As a representative of the Goddess as well as of Odysseus's anima, Circe—as archetypal helper-maiden—teaches Odysseus much of importance. She gives him directions to the realm of the chthonic goddess, the Underworld. She advises him about the female threats—Scylla, Charybdis, and the Sirens. And she warns him away from the sacred cattle of Helios. She thus enables Odysseus to complete his rite of passage and undergo symbolic death and rebirth.

22. Calypso represents another threat, the demands of unrestrained female sexuality.

23. Calypso offers to make Odysseus immortal, but he chooses to go home to his aging wife. The offer may echo the custom of sacrificing the consort of the Goddess, thus making him immortal in death. Also, it reflects the sense that a Greek hero cannot fulfill his destiny, cannot be a hero, in complete isolation from other human beings in society.

24. Odysseus's refusal sets him apart from other heroes who seek immortality; he chooses to remain an earthly human and accept the natural law of the life cycle expressed by the Great Goddess.

25. Circe, Calypso, and Penelope weave. Athene is the patron goddess of the weaving art. Odysseus weaves stories and, like Penelope's, his weaving is often a means of self-protection

and delay. The inclusion of Odysseus in the community of weavers implicates him in a world quite different from that of the masculine hero. He participates uniquely in the feminine mode of creative action.

26. He is reminiscent of early heroes such as Perseus and Heracles but exceeds them in his solitariness.

27. In the Underworld, Agamemnon warns Odysseus not to trust any wife; Odysseus, however, has full trust in Penelope, who is his partner in intelligence and resourcefulness; this is evident in her delaying tactics with the suitors and in the ruse about moving the marriage bed.

28. As a weaver, keeper of the secrets of the marriage bed, and guardian of an olive trunk sacred to Athene that symbolizes the Tree of Life, Penelope functions as a priestess of the Goddess; she embodies her husband's anima, which is rejoined with her animus; in this she is the hero's counterpart.

29. The homecoming concludes the Odyssey, but the story implies further travels to placate Poseidon.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Homer,
Odyssey

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Odysseus, Greek warrior of the siege of Troy

Laertes, his father

Anticleia, his mother

Athene

Achilles, the hero of the siege of Troy

Aegisthus, the lover of Clytemnestra and killer of her husband, Agamemnon

Agamemnon, leader of the Greeks at Troy

Orestes, the son of Clytemnestra and Agamemnon

Telemachus, the son of Odysseus

Polyphemus, the Cyclops, son of Poseidon

Circe, a sorceress; Odysseus's lover for a year

Calypso, a nymph; Odysseus's lover for seven years

Tiresias, the blind seer in Hades

Penelope, Odysseus's wife

Poseidon

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Homer (ninth century B.C.)

Apollodorus (c. 140 B.C.)

Dante Alighieri, Italian poet (1265–1321)

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, English poet (1809–1892)

CHAPTER 13 THE THEATER OF DIONYSUS AND THE TRAGIC VISION

MAIN POINTS

1. In the fifth century B.C., principally in Athens, the ancient myths were recast in dramatic performances in the Theater of Dionysus.
2. Tragic drama is a phenomenon of the new Athenian democracy. Its characters enacted questions of power, excess, and abuse. The people (demos) of democratic (ruled by the demos) Athens could learn from the dramas the immense costs of overreaching limits.
3. Greek tragic drama often confronted two characters, each of whom acted out a set of laudable convictions, but neither of whom was willing to compromise.
4. The vehicle of tragic drama taught the Athenian demos the value of restraint, moderation, and compromise for civic existence.
5. The city Dionysia, held annually for five days in March, included a procession of citizens carrying emblems of the Dionysus cult and celebrating the making of new wine; rituals also involved sacrifices.
6. Tragedies, satyr plays, and comedies were staged. The first Dionysia was celebrated by Athens about 534 B.C., when the tyrant Pisistratus instituted a competition among playwrights. The first winner of the tragic competition was Thespis, who reportedly created the first role for an actor by separating a single performer from the traditional choir. Aristotle notes that tragedy began with the dithyramb, a choral song to the god.
7. Tragedy, allegedly introduced by Thespis, originally means “goat song,” a reference to the goatskins worn by the choir or the chants during the goat sacrifice.
8. Thespis and other dramatists wrote tragedies committed to the spirit of Dionysus, but used myths about other gods and heroes as their primary subject matter.
9. Only one surviving tragedy has Dionysus as its leading character: Euripides’s *Bacchae*, presenting him as an irresistible natural instinct, contrary to the comedy by Aristophanes, *Frogs*, in which he is portrayed as a good-natured drunk.
10. Dramatic presentations then were communal rituals including music and dance.
11. Aristotle defined tragedy in terms of the audience’s emotional response: by having strong feelings aroused, the spectator is able to relieve or purge these emotions, achieving catharsis.

NOTE: While Aristotle was an avid defender of the moral value of the theater, his teacher Plato advised against letting one’s emotions be affected by the dramatic arts. Plato saw the arts as a threat to a person’s rational equilibrium, regardless of the fact that he himself wrote artful literature (the *Dialogues*) that affected his readers’ emotions as well as their reason; the debate still exists today in the current discussion of whether certain art forms are harmful to the spectator, or whether they have a calming, cleansing effect. The debate about violence in films and on television has clear Aristotelian and Platonic overtones; however, it must be remembered that Aristotle, being the defender of the ideal of moderation, never intended for people to be exposed to drama on a daily basis; he believed that too much of a good thing was harmful.

12. The satyr play, following a series of three tragedies, used mythic material but did not take it seriously. The chorus, composed of satyrs, would tell obscene jokes and provoke laughter. Most satyr plays have been lost.
13. The comedy was added to the Dionysia in Athens in 486 B.C. The comic festival, the *Lenaea*, was established about 440 B.C. Comedy began with the Dionysian band of

revelers walking in procession, answering calls from the onlookers. Komoidia is derived from “parade of revelers.”

14. Apollo encourages awareness of one’s human limitations; however, the tragic hero has a capacity for extremes of feeling and behavior that contradicts this. The Dionysian drive toward self-exploration through freedom explores the urges that violate the taboos of civilized life. This drive was especially problematic in the newly emerged democracy that had just been established at Athens: democracy requires submission to the will of the majority and a willingness to compromise that mythic heroes usually scorn.
15. In drama there is no narrative voice, so the characters may speak and act in ways that create several different perspectives on the occurring actions, leaving the audience to contemplate the possibilities.
16. Greek dramatists were expected to base their tragedies on myths, but they often questioned the traditional perspective of the myths.
17. The tragic protagonists are noble, as in the myths, but slightly more realistic: instead of tracing their descent from the gods, they are of noble families; and instead of performing superhuman feats, they are persons of unusual moral integrity.
18. The extraordinary qualities of the heroes are often what cause their predicaments—and their rise above those predicaments.
19. The tragic heroes are doomed to suffer, because they are trapped between conflicting demands. Their suffering ripples outward, affecting others, but their role is to take on the communal suffering, much like a scapegoat.
20. Through suffering they reach wisdom; the tragic quest is typically an internal journey of suffering and transcendence of suffering.
21. Those who are not strong enough to live through the suffering and reach wisdom die, like Oedipus’s wife Jocasta.
22. The tragic universe is ruled by divine beings, but the universe is anthropocentric; the words of the gods are ambiguous, and there is little communication between them and humans. The humans keep struggling to confront the limits of the cosmic order.
23. The tragic universe is not morally neat; there is no assured divine justice and no moral clarity in the end. Peripeteia (reversal) defines the tragic experience.
24. Even if the gods are incomprehensible, the protagonist accepts responsibility for his or her fate; defining ourselves as free moral agents means acting as if we were free and responsible.
25. The final insight of the tragic hero corresponds loosely to the epiphany of the Dionysian ritual: as the drives are released, the order of the drama is restored, and the community survives. In this way Apollo and Dionysus are reconciled.
26. Euripides’s *Bacchae*, taking the festival back to its roots, dramatizes the god’s return to his birthplace, Thebes, where he will take vengeance on the city for failing to honor his divinity.
27. The trait that causes Pentheus’s stubborn refusal to recognize Dionysus and the freedom he offers is his lack of Apollonian self-knowledge.
28. At the beginning of the play, both leading characters appear in roles that mask their real natures. Dionysus appears slight and effeminate, while Pentheus, the masculine defender of order, appears to be in charge. In the play’s major reversal (peripeteia), their masks are stripped away, revealing that each is the opposite of what he first appeared to be. Dionysus tricks Pentheus into unmasking his feminine component—the androgynous traits he finds so disturbing in the Stranger. Meanwhile the god has assumed total control: the king who tried to execute him will become his sacrificial victim.

29. Pentheus's fear of what may happen if human nature is liberated too completely from its socially imposed restraints is actualized in his own death at the hands of his mother, Agave. His dismemberment reenacts Dionysus's own sparagmos by the Titans (see Chapter 8). Like his cousin Actaeon, Pentheus learns too late the necessity of respecting the gods' will.
30. Liberated from the traditional feminine duties, Agave, like Artemis, revels in the freedom to hunt and use weapons. Like Artemis, she inflicts sparagmos on the male who spies on her, who turns out to be her own son.
31. Her plight dramatizes the tragic alternatives available to women in a patriarchal society: the inner destruction of the psyche from oppression and lack of opportunity for fulfillment in the world of action or the social destruction of murdering husbands and children. Medea and Clytemnestra are similarly trapped.
32. Agave compares herself to Heracles. But when Heracles slew his wife and children, he was given a way to expiate his crime, while Agave is condemned to permanent exile. The scene in which Agave slowly comes to recognize what she has done is an extraordinarily painful scene of madness.
33. When Agave returns to a state of sanity, she realizes that the god has robbed her of her choice, has exploited her potential for aggression. In the only kind of freedom still available to her, she rejects Dionysus. Her previous rationalism made her reject the idea that Semele's child was the son of Zeus. In this she resembles Jocasta, who is punished for doubting that the gods influence human affairs (see Chapter 16).

NOTE: Divinity cannot be demonstrated by logic or science. All religions depend on the "leap of faith" beyond the world of reason and the senses that allow the human spirit to perceive the divine intuitively. Pentheus and Agave have failed to understand that to believe in any god is to accept the possibility of the miraculous.

34. As the god's human pawn, Agave resembles Cassandra, a Trojan princess who was also Apollo's prophet. Both women found that union with a god is a poisonous gift that deprives them of their mental power. For both, religious commitment offers unparalleled rapture and insight, but the gods demand unconditional surrender. Only the Maenads, Dionysus's Asian followers, who find grace and peace with Dionysus, seem to be able to reconcile the opposing claims of religious devotion and Greek humanism.
35. Apollo's prophet Tiresias accepts Dionysus unconditionally. Joining the Bacchic dance, Tiresias balances Apollo and Dionysus, control and freedom. He is the only character in the play who is not punished. Another myth describes Tiresias as having been changed from man to woman and back again. Thus Tiresias can appreciate Dionysian mutability and androgyny.
36. Tiresias's accommodation of both Apollo and Dionysus, masculine control and feminine surrender, parallels Delphi's accommodation of two different aspects of godhead. By making room for Dionysus, whose temple also stood on Mt. Parnassus, the Delphic compromise between mental clarity and sensuous abandon helped to contain and control potentially dangerous human tendencies. Regulating Dionysian revels to annual dramatic festivals acknowledges and gives expression to but contains the irrational.
37. Cadmus's honoring of Dionysus is merely shallow expedience. As punishment, Dionysus condemns Cadmus to exile and eventual transformation into a serpent, like the one he had slain when he first founded Thebes.
38. Dionysus gave humanity two gifts, bread and wine, which played a part in some Greco-Roman mystery religions.

NOTE: Bread and wine, used in sacraments in many religions, are symbols of transformation—physically, through the fermentation of wine and the rising of bread; socially, as the ability to engage in agriculture allows humans to reside in fixed locations long enough to grow grain and

grapes; and spiritually, as symbols of the gifts that the gods gave humanity, as well as of the spiritual regeneration that worship can offer to humans. Odysseus points out that the uncivilized Cyclops can make neither bread nor wine.

38. Christianity also uses bread and wine sacramentally. J esus's first miraculous act is to change water into wine. At the Passover dinner he hosts for his disciples, he announces that the bread is his "body" and the wine, his "blood." His crucifixion is a form of sparagmos, the ritual sacrifice of God's beloved son.
39. J esus's supernatural abilities were also doubted, especially by his former neighbors. No one in Nazareth recognizes his divine origin. Unlike Dionysus, however, J esus does not punish the people for their rejection.
40. In interpreting the significance of J esus's life to a Greco-Roman audience, New Testament authors employed parallels to Dionysian myth. Both have a divine father and human mother; both perform miracles; both are killed—Dionysus by sparagmos inflicted by the Titans, J esus by crucifixion inflicted by the Romans; both descend to Hades/Tartarus; both are raised up to immortal life in heaven. The Book of Revelations makes another analogy between Dionysus and J esus. Here, J esus becomes the divine avenger, ready to destroy those who reject his divinity.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Euripides,
The Bacchants

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Dionysus

Apollo

Oedipus, king of Thebes

J ocasta, his wife and mother

Creon, ruler of Thebes after Oedipus

Agamemnon, leader of the Greeks at Troy

Achilles, Greek hero of the siege of Troy

Antigone, daughter of Oedipus and J ocasta (and sister of Oedipus)

Orestes, son and slayer of Agamemnon

Pentheus, king of Thebes

Agave, his mother and Semele's sister

Semele, Dionysus's mother

Cadmus, founder of Thebes; Agave's father

Tiresias, prophet of Apollo

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Friedrich Nietzsche, German philosopher (1844–1900)

Thespis, the first Greek tragic dramatist (about 534 B.C.)

Euripides (c. 485–406 B.C.)

Aristophanes, Greek comic dramatist (c. 450–c. 380 B.C.)

Aeschylus (c. 525–456 B.C.)

Sophocles (c. 495–406 B.C.)

William Blake, English painter and poet (1757–1827)

Euripides (c. 485–406 B.C.)

The New Testament

CHAPTER 14

COSMIC CONFLICT AND EVOLUTION: AESCHYLUS'S TRANSFORMATION OF THE PROMETHEUS MYTH

MAIN POINTS

1. Although most scholars attribute *Prometheus Bound* to Aeschylus, some critics wonder whether it may have been actually written by Euphorion, his son. The critical portrait of Zeus in *Prometheus* is completely different from the wise Zeus presented in the *Oresteia* (see Chapter 15).

NOTE: Aeschylus shaped tragedy into the dominant literary form of Greece's Golden Age, c. 480–404 B.C. His oldest surviving play may be *Persians* (c. 472 B.C.), one of the few based on contemporary history.

2. While borrowing the subject from Hesiod, Aeschylus changes Prometheus into a heroic rebel and makes Zeus a tyrant. This image of Zeus was radically different from what the audience was used to. Aeschylus also presents him as neither omnipotent nor omniscient—and vulnerable to fatal error.

3. *Prometheus Bound* is the first part of a trilogy; the other two parts, *Prometheus Unbound* and *Prometheus the Fire-Bearer*, remain only in fragments.

4. Aeschylus follows the tradition in which Zeus allows Heracles to kill the eagle feasting on Prometheus's liver. In Aeschylus's interpretation, this leads to a reconciliation between Zeus and Prometheus, in effect restaging Zeus's swallowing of Metis to assimilate her qualities.

5. The first part of the trilogy casts divine power against divine intelligence: Zeus versus Prometheus. The play opens with Prometheus being immobilized on the rock.

6. Prometheus admits to having helped humans because he has compassion for their suffering.

7. The poet Shelley interpreted Prometheus as an image of the human mind, remaining free despite its physical bondage.

8. From the human viewpoint, Prometheus is a savior; from Zeus's perspective, he is a lawbreaker. This reflects the Greek ambivalence toward an individualism that may disrupt social order.

NOTE: The punishment of Prometheus has a parallel in the story of the Norse trickster god Loki; however, Prometheus's crime is committed for the benefit of humanity, while Loki mainly looks out for himself. Son of the ancient giants (jǫtunn, in some ways comparable to the Titans), Loki's main function seems to have been to aggravate the Aesir in any way possible, including telling them truths about themselves that they did not want to hear, although he is also represented as Odin's travel companion and an occasional helper of the other gods. Loki transgresses against the gods, either by causing the death of the god Balder or by breaking up a party by slandering the gods (an older tradition). After a long chase, he is caught and chained to a rock; as chains, the gods use the intestines of one of his sons, killed by another son as part of his punishment. Above his head the gods place a poisonous snake with venom dripping onto his face. His faithful wife Sigyn remains by his side, catching the venom in a bowl, but every time she has to empty the bowl, the venom drips on Loki's face, causing him to shake in agony. That is the Norse explanation of earthquakes. Scholars have pointed out the mythological parallels between other trickster gods such as the Native American Coyote and the Ossetic trickster Syrdon, and some have pointed out that the "bound giant" may be a very ancient mythological theme. Christian monks collecting the Norse myths seem to have given Loki particularly diabolic traits to create a parallel between him and the devil.

9. Hesiod claims Prometheus is a second-generation Titan; Aeschylus identifies him as a son of Gaea.

10. The chorus of the play charges that Prometheus misses the mark of wise self-interest, displaying hubris.

11. The play's Prometheus is the last free mind in the universe to distinguish between good and evil; his virtue of intellectual honesty brings about his suffering.

12. A character's tragic error is hamartia, to "miss the mark." It can apply to any action that fails in hitting the target of divine approval.

13. Two scenes help convey Aeschylus's interpretation of Prometheus. In the first, the young woman Io is continually stung by a gadfly sent by Hera, victimized because of Zeus's lust for her. Both the King and Queen of Heaven are chillingly indifferent to the suffering they cause. In the climactic episode, the chorus sides with Prometheus against Hermes and Zeus, although the Greek chorus usually takes a mediating position. Thus the audience is asked to choose to support principle over power.

14. Prometheus's defiance gives Zeus an opportunity to save himself from a future downfall at the hands of a stronger son. In his turn, Prometheus is liberated when Chiron wants to die to escape suffering. In dying, Chiron vicariously atones for Prometheus's offense.

15. Because of an oath sworn by Zeus that he wouldn't release Prometheus, Prometheus must wear a fragment of the rock attached to a steel ring.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Aeschylus,
Prometheus Bound

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Zeus

Prometheus

Heracles

Chiron, the wise centaur

Io, Zeus's lover, punished by Hera by being transformed into a cow and stung by a gadfly

Hermes, messenger of the gods

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Hesiod (eighth century B.C.)

Aeschylus (c. 525–456 B.C.)

Percy Bysshe Shelley, English poet (1792–1822)

CHAPTER 15

THE HOUSE OF ATREUS: AESCHYLUS'S ORESTEIA

MAIN POINTS

1. Aeschylus's Oresteia, the only surviving Greek trilogy, examines the courses and consequences of the murder of Agamemnon by his wife, Clytemnestra, and the subsequent dilemma facing their son Orestes.
2. Orestes affords the gods an opportunity to redefine the natures of justice and divinity.
3. The evolutionary change in the human and divine spheres is Aeschylus's main concern; this change will unite opposites.
4. As in the Prometheus trilogy, Aeschylus explores the Greek belief that the gods are not unchangeable but, instead, grow into ethical maturity with the passing of time.
5. The Oresteia shows the influence of human society on Zeus's moral evolution.
6. In the third part (the Eumenides), the Furies are transformed into protectors; thus a moral revolution has taken place, shifting from personal vendetta to the institution of the court of law.
7. Aeschylus gives his trilogy epic scope in time and place. The first play, the Agamemnon, opens in Argos shortly before Agamemnon's return from Troy. The second play, the Libation-Bearers, takes place after Orestes has returned from exile several years later. The third play, the Eumenides, features Orestes seeking purification at Delphi.
8. From Argos to Athens, the theme shifts from vengeance to justice and ethics; the climax is the transformation of the Furies into the Kindly Ones (Eumenides).
9. Aeschylus also created a satyr play based on an episode in the Odyssey: Menelaus's encounter with Proteus.
10. The chorus of the Agamemnon is composed of older citizens of Argos, reduced to onlookers, even when the Trojan princess Cassandra describes her visions of Agamemnon's impending murder.
11. The chorus of the Libation-Bearers are captive Trojan women honoring the slain Agamemnon and hating his queen.
12. The chorus of the Eumenides are the Furies, half-sisters of Aphrodite, ancient chthonic powers opposing the ouranic deities (sky-gods) of Olympus. The Furies punish crimes against blood kin.
13. The father of Agamemnon and Menelaus, Atreus, inherits a proclivity toward evil from his ancestor Tantalus, serving his son's dismembered body as food for the gods; the act is repeated by Atreus in a feud with his brother Thyestes.
14. Before leaving Argos for Troy, Agamemnon, responding to the pressures of his soldiers, sacrifices his daughter Iphigenia to the gods for a fair wind to Troy.
15. At the fall of Troy, Agamemnon desecrates the city's shrines and abducts the virgin priestess of Apollo, the princess Cassandra.
16. Apollo gave Cassandra clairvoyance, but when she rebuffed his attempts at seduction, he put the curse on her that nobody would believe her prophecies.
17. Before her own murder, Cassandra throws down her prophet's emblems, a victim of the brutality of both humans and gods.
18. The Agamemnon confronts Agamemnon with his wife, who has been ruling Argos in his absence; Clytemnestra dares her husband to commit hubris, taking on an honor reserved for the gods for himself by walking on the carpet-covered steps.

19. She kills him in the bath, taking credit for the regicide, since she believes herself to be an instrument of justice. Her lover, Aegisthus, takes no part in the killing.
20. In spite of apparently representing matriarchal rights in her grieving for Iphigenia, Clytemnestra shows no solidarity toward other women nor even any affection toward her younger daughter, Electra.
21. Clytemnestra is a strong female character of the trilogy, embodying the question for the Greek community of how to deal with a powerful and intelligent woman. The play suggests that such a woman cannot be trusted.
22. In the Libation-Bearers, Orestes has to decide whether to obey Apollo's order to avenge his father by slaying his mother, which means he would incur the wrath of the Furies, who will claim his life and his soul.
23. Orestes's friend Pylades repeats Apollo's command, and Orestes kills his mother; afterwards he feels anguish at seeing the Furies, which nobody else can see.
24. In the prologue of the Eumenides, the Pythia reminds us that a succession of earth goddesses presided at Delphi prior to Apollo, signifying a shift from chthonic to ouranic powers.
25. In the trial scene of the Eumenides, binary tensions become pronounced. Athene uses skills necessary to a human being resident in a civilized democracy to reconcile the opposing factions. Her rationality and political skill mediate the binary tensions that threaten disaster.
26. The female principle is identified with the forces of darkness, whereas the male powers for Aeschylus stand for clemency, light, and moderation.
27. This identification of the female principle reaches a peak when Apollo declares that a mother is merely an incubator for the seed that the father deposits in her; as an example he cites Athene, produced without the aid of a woman. Legally, only a male has parental status.
28. This identification also serves to associate Athene with the masculine principle, and accordingly, she sides with male authority.
29. Aeschylus's primary interest in the third play is the change of the Furies into benign beings, based on conditions set up throughout the play.
30. In the Oresteia, the opposing aspects of divinity, the Furies and the Olympians, are merged into a harmonious whole by a democratic act of persuasion, as the Furies become the Eumenides, the Kindly Ones. Transformed, these spirits now perform stabilizing social functions.
31. For Aeschylus the ancient Mycenaean legacy has evolved into a new concept of social justice that finds completion in the Athenian court of law. The trilogy celebrates the civic order of democratic Athens and the progress of the city beyond the stage of vendetta (blood feud) to the institution of a citizen court.
32. In the Eumenides, all the principal characters are used to illustrate polar opposites, mediated by Athene to achieve harmony; this use of myth lends itself to a structuralist interpretation. Transforming the potential destroyers of the state into benign guardians unites Dionysian energy with Apollonian intelligence. Descending to their subterranean grotto, the Eumenides function as the Dionysian id to Apollo's superego.
33. The intervention of Athene settles the self-perpetuating violence, which, without outside intervention, will likely destroy all concerned. The scene recalls her joint intervention with Zeus to end the violence after Odysseus's slaughter of the suitors.

NOTE: In the Eumenides, the ghost of Clytemnestra appears, reproaching the Furies for not being able to find Orestes and avenge her, and spurring them on to hunt

Orestes down. As Clytemnestra evoked matriarchal rights earlier, so, too, does this aspect of her carry elements of the Great Goddess, in the form of Hecate. Hecate is often depicted as the leader of the Wild Hunt, a phantom chase of riders and dogs (usually consisting of the souls of the dead) across the night skies. The myth of the Wild Hunt is known in many traditions from Malay to Celtic folklore; among the most well-known leaders of the Wild Hunt in European folklore are King Arthur and Odin.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Aeschylus, *The Agamemnon*, *The Libation-Bearers*, *The Eumenides*

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Agamemnon, leader of the Greek army at Troy

Clytemnestra, his wife

Orestes, their son

Electra, their daughter

Iphigenia, their daughter, sacrificed at Aulis

Aegisthus, Clytemnestra's lover

Cassandra, a Trojan priestess, captured by Agamemnon

Atreus, the father of Agamemnon and Menelaus

Tantalus, their ancestor

Apollo

Furies (the Erinyes), nighttime spirits of vengeance

Eumenides, the Kindly Ones, the Furies after their transformation

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Aeschylus (c. 525–456 B.C.)

Homer (eighth century B.C.)

Euripides (c. 485–406 B.C.)

CHAPTER 16 THE TRAGIC HOUSE OF LAIUS: SOPHOCLES' OEDIPUS

MAIN POINTS

1. Sophocles lived through the classical age of Greece, witnessing the development of democracy, the political rise of Athens, and achievements of philosophers, artists, writers, and mathematicians.
2. The Peloponnesian War shattered many illusions, but even prior to the beginning of the war (431 B.C.), the rapid cultural changes caused people to reexamine their traditional perspectives on the world order.
3. Sophocles's tragedies reflect this transitional time of reevaluation of the role of the gods, coinciding with cultural progress.
4. Sophocles participated in public life, held various offices, and wrote more than one hundred twenty-five plays, of which seven have survived.
5. Three of these plays are about Oedipus, but they not a trilogy. The first, *Antigone*, is the last in the narrative sequence, dealing with Oedipus's daughter *Antigone*'s martyrdom.
6. *Oedipus Rex*, probably written between 429 and 425 B.C., speaks to a plague-weary Athens about the plague in Thebes.
7. Sigmund Freud argued that *Oedipus Rex* is relevant because every male child unconsciously desires to kill his father and marry his mother; the repression of these urges gives rise to the Oedipus complex.
8. Sophocles anticipates Freudian themes: *Jocasta* believes that appalling urges are common and are revealed in dreams, and that these urges must be repressed. Oedipus's own endeavor to find the truth can be compared with the psychoanalytic process.
9. Two forms of failure of knowledge produce illness: the people's indifference to the murderer of their king and Oedipus's ignorance of his own identity. His discovery of the truth has cathartic effects.

NOTE: It may be relevant to ask whether Oedipus himself suffered from an Oedipus complex; in Freud's scenario, the young male child of the nuclear family is attracted to his mother and is jealous of his father monopolizing her; unconsciously he wants to get his father out of the way but worries about his father's punishment, a fear translated into the fear of castration. Oedipus, having been told by the Oracle at Delphi that he will kill his father and marry his mother, refuses to go home to Corinth for as long as they are alive, because he doesn't want to risk placing himself or them in such a situation; the man he ends up killing is a stranger to him, and so is the woman he marries. It is debatable how well the actual story of Oedipus reflects what Freud refers to as the Oedipus complex.

10. Apollo is the one calling attention to the conditions through his oracle; so is Apollo decreeing the fate of Oedipus, or is he merely foreseeing it? Does Oedipus have freedom of the will, or is his life predetermined?
11. Apollo, as controller of fate, announces that the city of Thebes will suffer from the plague until the king's murderer has been exiled.
12. The series of coincidences also points to fate controlling human experience. But the oracle becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy; the mere fact of its revelation prompts Oedipus to leave home and go out to seek his fortune in the first place, thus setting in motion the whole chain of tragic events.
13. *Tiresias* also validates the oracle's authority. Being blind, he has the gift of inner sight, undistracted by surface appearances or gender restrictions. *Tiresias* was blinded by *Hera*

- for seeing her too intimately. Oedipus also tries to pierce the veil that separates the human and the divine and to see the mysteries of the gods—and of “fate”—for himself.
14. The myths about Oedipus’s family refer to a curse, but Sophocles never alludes to that.
 15. The sin that angers Apollo is not Oedipus’s murder and incest but the lack of civic duty displayed by the citizens of Thebes. Of course, patricide and incest were not to be acted out or even openly acknowledged as thoughts. Contrast with that the divine penchant for conspiring with mothers to kill/castrate/dethrone fathers (Cronus, Zeus) and marrying, if not mothers, at least sisters.
 16. Thebes had a reputation for evil and was an enemy of Athens, having sided with the Persians and having fought the Athenians during the Peloponnesian War. The Theban people are punished by the plague.
 17. Oedipus’s own punishment, blinding himself, exceeds the exile demanded by Apollo.
 18. Both the act of Laius exposing his child and the act of Oedipus leaving Corinth are intended to preempt the will of the gods, but instead they help bring it about.
 19. Father and son make similar behavioral choices, determined by pride and anger; when Oedipus is angry, his reason does not prevail; he may have inherited from his father not curses but personality traits.
 20. Riddles are essential to the story; Oedipus’s intelligence in solving the Sphinx’s riddle makes his marriage to Jocasta possible.
 21. The riddle of the Sphinx: what creature walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening? A human being.
 22. Oedipus solves the riddle but fails to see its significance: only for a short time in midlife are humans in relative control of their lives.
 23. Human beings are riddles to themselves and not in control of their psyches, where shadow selves are hiding. Oedipus is blind to the feminine component of his psyche. His “heroic” approach to experience, pursuing his quest for truth to the bitter end, causes typically destructive consequences to women and families.
 24. Oedipus Rex raises metaphysical questions, such as Why do terrible things happen to good people? Do humans have a destiny—or a choice?
 25. In the end, Oedipus accepts that there is no answer and that human logic cannot explain the intentions of the gods.
 26. He furthermore takes responsibility for his actions, even though he acted out of ignorance, and this leaves him free. When Oedipus accepts his role as a scapegoat, the plague is lifted from Thebes.
 27. By putting his eyes out, Oedipus becomes a parallel to Tiresias with his inner sight, the awareness of truth. Oedipus thus reenacts Tiresias’s role as the seer.
 28. Oedipus goes through a personal journey to an inner hell and returns; he is both hero and victim, freed by his own experience.
 29. In Sophocles’s last play, written twenty-five years later, Oedipus is on the road to Colonus, where tradition claims he was buried; Oedipus at Colonus has slightly different details than Oedipus Rex.
 30. Oedipus’s sons have taken over the government from Creon; despite their quarrel, they want their father back in Thebes because, according to the oracle, the city that earns Oedipus’s goodwill will prosper after he is dead.
 31. Sophocles’ Athenian audience would relate well to the praise of Athens at the expense of Thebes.

32. Similarities between the two plays include Oedipus still carrying the burden of his sins as well as his continued anger. But in Oedipus Rex, he took responsibility for his acts, whereas in Oedipus at Colonus, he insists on his innocence and victimization by the gods.
33. No longer self-sufficient, he has learned patience and suffers loneliness.
34. In Oedipus at Colonus, opposites are reconciled in a series of paradoxes; Oedipus becomes an avenger himself, and, blinded, he sees the truth of the mystery and is reconciled with the gods.
35. In Oedipus Rex, Oedipus rejects the feminine principle; in the last play, he embraces this principle by entering the sacred grove of the Furies (the Eumenides), who accept him.

NOTE: According to the mythologist Robert Graves, there may have been a historical King Oedipus; he may not have killed his father and married his mother, but he may have been the consort of a priestess-queen. Graves speculates that this event may have marked the transition between Goddess worship and patriarchal rule; Oedipus may have been one of a series of consort-kings, temporary sacrificial husbands (often referred to as sons) of the priestess-queen representing the Great Goddess but refusing to be sacrificed as tradition demanded, thus establishing a patriarchal kingdom and causing the downfall of the priestess-rule.

36. Oedipus finally experiences death and transfiguration, becoming deified; like the Furies, he has become one of the Kindly Ones.
37. The earliest of Sophocles' plays is the last in the narrative sequence; the action of Antigone takes place after Oedipus and his two sons are dead and Creon is again in power.
38. Antigone is the most overtly political of Sophoclean dramas. Creon, in precarious power over Thebes, pushes beyond limits in his attempt to stabilize his control.
39. Polynices, who attacked Athens, is left unburied, an act of impiety. Antigone, as so often the case with a female character, represents a completely different set of priorities. Their conflict can be interpreted in several different ways.
40. Although Antigone fulfills the traditional role of the woman in Greece—to lament over the dead—she simultaneously becomes the “hero.”
41. Creon is the first to interpret the conflict in gender terms. Antigone is seen as a threat to his masculine identity because she exceeds her own gender boundaries.
42. Haimon is the nexus between public and private, between masculine and feminine.
43. Tiresias reveals the falseness of Creon's position: the gods are angry at the failure to complete burial rites, and disaster will result.
44. Antigone is arrested and buried alive in a cave; when Creon relents at the advice of Tiresias and opens the cave, she has hanged herself, and her fiancé, Creon's son, takes his own life. So does Creon's wife, his mother.
45. Like the usual hero, Antigone journeys to the Underworld. Unlike most heroes, she is unable to return. She willingly becomes the “Bride of Death.”

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Oedipus, king of Thebes

Jocasta, his wife and birth mother

Laius, former king of Thebes, Jocasta's husband, Oedipus's father

Antigone, their daughter

Ismene, their daughter

Eteocles, their son

Polynices, their son

Creon, Jocasta's brother

Polybus of Corinth, Oedipus's foster father

Dorian Merope, his foster mother

Apollo

Tiresias, the blind seer

Theseus, Greek hero, ruler of Athens

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Sophocles (c. 495–406 B.C.)

Sigmund Freud (1856–1939)

CHAPTER 17

EURIPIDES' MEDEA:

A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE ON TRAGEDY

MAIN POINTS

1. Euripides' plays may have been considered too strange for the taste of the conservative Athenian audience.
2. Medea (431 B.C.) stresses the female perspective: Medea has given up everything for Jason; her reward is to have him desert her for a younger, richer, and prettier woman, a princess.
3. Medea plays the archetypal role of the helper-maiden, saving Jason from many threats. Indeed, his dependence on her for success and even survival is far more complete than that of the usual hero on his helper-maiden's assistance.
4. Jason denies Medea's role in helping him and wants to deprive her of her role as mother of their children, too.
5. Medea has all the strengths of the tragic hero: the intensity, the commitment, and the heroic acts. The chorus implies that motherhood is heroic in itself.
6. Medea believes that her gods, Hecate, Themis, and Zeus, are with her in her fury against Jason; he is a breaker of oaths and deserves punishment, but it is the princess and the children who are made to suffer.
7. The play opens with Medea engaging in a last-ditch attempt to use rhetoric, not violence. Jason is incapable of listening; in language as in life, he confuses style with substance. He often uses "truth" to establish his arguments, but the context reveals his twisting of that truth. He is a prime example of sophistic argument.
8. Medea announces openly her plans and acknowledges the deed afterward. But she can also use speech very cleverly to hide her true feelings and buy time and opportunity.
9. Like the male hero, Medea is a passionate character, driven by irrational forces to actions that hurt the ones she loves. Like Agave and Clytemnestra, Medea has at her disposal none of the expiatory rituals available to male heroes who kill their families. Medea's vague reference to a ritual she will establish may actually reflect the existence at Corinth of rituals associated with Medea.
10. Euripides uses the capacity of the drama to present multiple points of view, shifting angles to make a different perspective appear. Just as the audience begins to sympathize with Medea, the poet shifts our view, to expose a more frightening side of her character.
11. While most other female protagonists pay the price for their crimes in Greek tragedies, Medea escapes punishment by going to Athens, where King Aegeus gives her refuge.
12. In contrast to most other dramas, Medea's murder is described in detail onstage. It is possible that the child murder was Euripides's own invention, as other versions of Medea's story exclude it. If so, the event would have given the Athenian audience a frisson of horrified surprise.
13. There are many diverse myths about Medea. It is possible that she was a goddess of childbirth and nursing. Hera and Artemis, who also receive prayers from birthing women, can turn on such a woman, with disastrous results for her and/or her infant. Medea's behavior in Euripides' play may reflect that ambiguous potential of deities involved in the crisis of childbirth.
14. According to one version of the myth, Medea had to flee Athens after making an attempt on Theseus's life. She then settled in the country that was to be called "Media." Thus she became the eponymous ancestor/founder of the Medes.
15. In non-Euripidean versions of her myth, more attention is focused on Medea's struggle with the conflicting demands of love for Jason and loyalty to her birth family.

16. In Euripides's plays, the common people provide an important perspective, such as the women of Corinth in Medea who make moral distinctions.

17. The nurse in Medea advocates moderation as self-control and comments on the perversity of a self-indulgent upper class. The poet probably intended his democratic Athenian audience to sympathize and agree with the wise "common people" of this tragedy.

18. Medea and Jason belong to the upper class, but they are dispossessed; they are depicted at home, and not on some adventure; their problems are monetary, not metaphysical; in Medea, the heroes act like ordinary people.

19. Medea is the one who comes closest to the suffering protagonist of the Greek drama.

20. Jason will not acknowledge his complicity in Medea's crimes and is revealed as a coward who uses women for his own gain. His death is unheroic; he is struck on the head by a beam while asleep on his ship.

21. In traditional tragedies, important people commit appalling deeds, and their passions as well as their violence are portrayed nobly. In Medea, Euripides shows us the inhuman brutality of the murder by describing it in detail; the violence is not ennobling but merely sadistic.

22. If this is what heroes are like, then perhaps, the play seems to suggest, we should admire ordinary but virtuous people instead.

23. Tragedy takes place in an unpredictable universe where the tragic protagonist may suffer disproportionately; Euripides explores the converse idea that the wicked may also prosper, as in Electra, where the daughter who slays Clytemnestra lives happily ever after.

24. In Electra, Euripides incorporates parody, spoofing Aeschylus's recognition scene between the siblings Electra and Orestes.

25. In Medea, he mocks the traditional tragic vision of the ancient myths' heroic values.

26. In the play's final speech, the chorus comments on the unreliability of the gods. There is no sign of divine acceptance; no gods provide Medea with symbolic sanctions.

27. When Medea taunts Jason with the notion that he thinks the old gods no longer prevail, she may be referring to an older generation of chthonic gods such as Hecate who have taken over. A worshiper of Hecate, Medea appears to have powers beyond those of ordinary mortals: she drives the chariot of her grandfather, Helios; she renews the fertility of the old King Aegeus.

28. If so, we are back in an amoral universe of vengeance where irrational forces prevail.

29. Medea carries out the three functions of the Great Goddess: she gives life, she brings death, and she engineers transformations.

30. Though Athens was a city of justice and equality, it oppressed its women, just as Jason did. Since the city was preparing for the war with Sparta, perhaps the Athenians were receptive to Euripides' vision of the world gone mad.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Euripides,
Medea

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Medea, sorceress daughter of King Aetes of Colchis, wife of Jason

Jason, Greek adventurer who brought back the Golden Fleece

Aegeus, king of Athens, Theseus's father

Apsyrtus, Medea's young brother, whom she murders as the Argonauts make their escape

Electra, Orestes's sister, Agamemnon and Clytemnestra's daughter

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Euripides (c. 485–406 B.C.)

CHAPTER 18

THE ROMAN VISION: GREEK MYTHS AND ROMAN REALITIES

MAIN POINTS

1. Roman culture, including Roman mythology, often borrows elements from other cultures such as the Etruscans and the Greeks.
2. From the Etruscans, the Romans borrowed elements of religion, government, and lifestyle. The Etruscans were also an important conduit of Greek influence on early Rome.
3. Roman myth is heavily patriarchal, befitting a society where, at least early and by law, the pater familias (male head of household) had power of life and death over everyone in his household.
4. The Roman emperor Augustus boasted that he had transformed Rome into a city of marble; the reconstruction did not involve demolition, however, but adding false-front marble columns to brick buildings.
5. The Romans, feeling culturally inferior to the Greeks, had adopted Greek literature and mythology, while changing names and adapting the concepts to fit their ideas and values.
6. Through the works of Roman writers such as Virgil and Ovid, classical mythology was transmitted to the later Western culture.
7. According to the myth of Romulus and Remus, Rhea Silvia was assigned to the office of Vestal Virgin by her uncle Amulius, a usurper of the throne who hoped to prevent her from producing heirs. Seduced by Mars, she bore twin sons, Romulus and Remus.
8. Amulius set the infants adrift in a basket, but they survived and were nursed by a she-wolf. When adult, they restored their father to the throne of his city, Alba Longa.

NOTE: Worldwide, myths about the birth and upbringing of culture heroes include stories about the child being put in a basket and set adrift on the waters of the river or the ocean, usually in order to save the child's life from persecutors; however, such stories also reflect a common custom of exposing unwanted babies, placing them in the hands of the gods. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the story of Moses is the most familiar one. The Norse and German tradition tells of Siegfried (Sigurd), whose mother placed him in a glass vessel, which accidentally fell in the river; the boy arrived safely on an island in the ocean where a doe nursed him along with her young. The Hindu tradition tells of Kunti, who threw her son into the river, where he was rescued by a charioteer who raised the boy as his own, calling him Vasusena, later known for his great generosity. The Polynesian god Maui was born prematurely, and his mother Taranga cast him into the sea to prevent him from becoming an evil spirit; the sea deities preserved the child and put him ashore, where he was discovered and raised by his ancestor Tama'rangi. Other children exposed—on mountains, not on the river—include Cybele and Oedipus. The release of the child into the river may represent a return to the protection of the Great Goddess and also a purification ritual; the hero loses ties with his original parents, is often nursed by animals representing nature, and is reborn to a unique existence.

9. Romulus and Remus later fought over which of them their own city should be named after; Remus was killed, and the city founded was named Rome.
10. The men who joined Romulus were without women, so he prepared a festival, inviting the residents of neighboring cities, including the Sabines. The Romans abducted and raped the daughters of the Sabines and later married them.

11. The Sabines warred against the Romans until the Romans' wives assured their families that they were content; the Roman and Sabine territories were combined, and Romulus ruled for thirty-eight years until his disappearance during a storm.
12. The myth of Romulus and Remus focuses on the city and its origins, and although it begins with mythic components, it quickly moves into actual history.
13. Scholars are very interested in the origins of Rome's foundation stories. Oftentimes in the writing of Roman history, present-day political concerns have been incorporated into stories of the early days: Remus may have been constructed as a plebeian foil for Romulus in the late third century B.C., when there were serious tensions between patricians and plebeians.
14. The myth's perspective is patriarchal; there is no trace of a feminine perspective left in the rape of Rhea Silvia and the Sabine women, contrary to similar Greek myths.
15. In the Greek myths, the abduction of Helen is a violation of the gods' will, and the centaurs' attempted rape of the Lapith women is punished by the gods; in contrast, the Romans are rewarded for similar behaviors.
16. Roman myth has fewer fantastic components than Greek myth; Thebes is founded by Cadmus sowing dragon's teeth, which turn into an army of men; the armed men of Rome are disgruntled farmers, shepherds, runaway slaves, and criminals.
17. Plutarch suggests a demythologizing explanation of the divine conception of the twins—a rape by Rhea Silvia's uncle.
18. Plutarch likewise demythologizes the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur.
19. Horace also reinterprets Greek mythology in a realistic vein, seeing Zeus's appearance to Danae as a shower of gold as an image of bribery.
20. The Romans create a Greek connection by portraying Romulus as a son of Mars (Ares) and his mother as a descendant of Aeneas of Troy, himself a son of Aphrodite. Another story linked Rome with Latinus, a descendant of Odysseus and Circe.
21. The Romans took over the body of Greek mythology but refocused the myths, historicized them, politicized them, and reinterpreted them to reflect Roman ideals.
22. The Roman pantheon is less dominated by abstractions than by practical concerns; Ceres becomes more important than Apollo and Minerva.
23. Hestia is unimportant in the Greek pantheon but as Vesta, becomes the central symbol of Eternal Rome.
24. The Romans trace their ancestry to Mars, whereas the Greek attitude toward Ares is ambivalent.
25. Whereas Greek myths may be loosely based on historical events, Roman mythology is tied to real names, places, and events. Thus, Julius Caesar and Augustus trace their ancestry to Aeneas's son, Ascanius, nicknamed Iulus (Iulus).
26. Roman works of art, like Trajan's column, were intended to instruct as well as delight; the more grounded in reality the myths were, the better they could perform their didactic function.
27. Myths were also used to justify contemporary political realities, illustrating the secondary character of private emotions and worship compared to public duty.
28. In the home, Romans worshiped the Lares, guardian spirits, the Penates, spirits of the pantry, and the Vesta, goddess of the hearth; their public counterparts were Jupiter, Juno, and Ceres. In domestic life, the Romans paid service to the state itself.
29. Whereas the gods of Greece were not typically nationalistic in their political aims, the Roman gods were exclusively Roman, predetermining Roman destiny.

30. The open-ended dynamic universe of Greek myth gives way to a teleological, goal-oriented Roman mythology of patriotism.
31. In Rome, though not in the small Greek polis, we can see the beginnings of the modern nation-state, with its heavy demands of patriotic submission, discipline, and loyalty to the state.
32. In order to maintain their ideal of the Pax Romana, the Romans had to rely on civic duty as a virtue, and patriotism became a survival tool. Defiance of the gods of Rome thus constituted treason as well as impiety.
33. From the gods' perspective, all events were part of a divine plan; such a universe recognized no tragedy, only history incompletely understood.
34. The ego-driven Greek hero was too self-centered for Romans. The Roman hero had to exemplify the ideal Roman soldier and citizen.
35. Three qualities nostalgically associated with the early republic are essential for the Roman hero: gravitas, pietas, and frugalitas.
36. Pietas did not really have the same sense as our term "piety." It was a virtue of acted-out responsibility, or loyalty to family, gods, and the state, which was reflected in actions.
37. Duty also requires the hero to control his passionate excesses so that his life and death can contribute to the triumph of Eternal Rome. Such a hero will be rewarded in the Underworld.

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Rhea Silvia, the mother of Romulus and Remus

Amulius, her wicked uncle

Numitor, her father, the rightful ruler of Alba Longa

Romulus, twin son of Rhea Silvia and Mars and founder of Rome

Remus, twin son of Rhea Silvia and Mars and victim of his brother Romulus's rash attack

Helen, Menelaus's wife, abducted to Troy by Paris

Centaur, half-horse, half-human creatures

Mars, the Roman god of war (Ares)

Aeneas, warrior of Troy, Romulus's ancestor

Jupiter (Zeus)

Juno (Hera)

Ceres (Demeter)

Minerva (Athene)

Vesta, the virgin protector of the hearth (Hestia)

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Virgil, Roman poet (70–19 B.C.)

Ovid, Roman poet (43 B.C.– A.D. 17)

Plutarch, Greek biographer (c. A.D. 46–120)

Horace, Roman poet (65–8 B.C.)

CHAPTER 19 THE AENEID: VIRGIL'S ROMAN EPIC

MAIN POINTS

1. Having experienced the disorder of the Roman civil wars, Virgil became a supporter of the empire and Emperor Augustus.
2. His works include two pastoral poems idealizing the simplicity of rural life, an appealing theme to urban Rome.
3. His epic poem, the Aeneid, was funded by Augustus. At the end of his life, Virgil had not finished his revisions; he ordered his manuscript burned at his death, but Augustus prevented its destruction.
4. Written in Latin, the Aeneid is intended to make Latin a poetic vehicle with a cultural status similar to Greek and to assert Augustus's ancestral link to Aeneas. Virgil also intended to achieve the status that Homer as a poet had among educated Romans.
5. The first six books are modeled after the Odyssey; the rest are modeled on the Iliad.
6. The main focus is the historicizing of myth, linking its characters with individual events and persons in Roman history.
7. The narration includes the reign of Aeneas and his son, the conquest of Greece, the expansion of Rome, and the reign of Julius Caesar and Augustus.
8. The Punic Wars and the Carthaginian invasion of Rome are predicted in Dido's curse on Aeneas when he leaves her.
9. The first role of the city is to create good conditions for civilized life; to establish good government; to erect buildings and monuments; and to encourage arts, theater, trade, and commerce. If the city leader neglects these tasks, the city will suffer.
10. The second role of the city is to spread its civilization, even if it entails fighting wars. While we may regard this as imperialist aggression, many lands welcomed the Roman security, technology, improved economy, and opportunities for Roman citizenship and for advancement in the Roman bureaucracy.
11. The Roman concern with boundaries (walls, ramparts, legal and national borders) is evident in the Aeneid; the "walls of Rome" symbolize not just the nation but all of Roman culture.
12. While the Iliad and the Odyssey focus on the heroes of the epics, Rome—not Aeneas—is the true subject of the Aeneid. In the Iliad, Zeus sympathized with both sides, but the Aeneid is seen from a Roman viewpoint: fighting for Rome is honorable, whereas fighting for personal glory, as Turnus did, is not.
13. The Aeneid expresses a nostalgia for the imagined simplicity of the past, a sign that the price paid for civilization may have seemed too high.
14. The Greek heroes received some kind of reward for their troubles; Aeneas will not even get to see the Rome for which he has sacrificed everything.
15. While Achilles and Odysseus had a choice of fates, Aeneas must do as the gods have predetermined: go to Italy when ordered by Venus and leave his lover, Dido, when ordered by Mercury.
16. The gods impose suffering on a good man for the good of Rome. Aeneas is aware of his burden, literally carrying the household gods of Troy—the Lares, Penates, and Vesta—to Rome.
17. Whereas Achilles was excessive and Odysseus impulsive, Aeneas exhibits self-control, responsibility, and compassion.

18. In Book 10, Virgil contrasts the behavior of Turnus with that of Aeneas, a contrast between Greek and Roman heroic styles. Turnus kills Pallas (Aeneas's beloved friend) and wears his belt to boast of his victory. Aeneas treats a young enemy, Lausus, with respect and refuses to strip the armor when the youth is killed.
19. When Aeneas's anger is roused, it is terrible, but it is caused by moral outrage, not slights to his ego. In the course of the poem, Aeneas learns when to enact his anger and when not. By the end of the poem, he has adopted the gods' perspective as his own.
20. The women in the Aeneid are divided into those for and those against Rome. Pro-Roman are Creusa, Aeneas's wife, and his mother, Venus.
21. Creusa is killed by Greek soldiers; Aeneas returns and sees only her shade, an image of her insubstantial value. She instructs him to accept his fate and seek a new kingdom and wife.
22. Marriage is a sacred Roman institution, but one for which love is not essential. Aeneas weds the Latin Princess Lavinia for political reasons; Dido, whom he loves, he does not marry. Fatherhood is essential, while motherhood is subsumed in the larger affairs of state.
23. Thetis, Achilles's mother, is a messenger like Venus; while Thetis prefers a long life for her son, Venus has a political agenda for Aeneas, even if it means that he will suffer.
24. J uno and J uturna (Turnus's sister) are anti-Roman forces, interfering to prevent Aeneas's victory. J uno calls up the powers of Allecto, one of the Furies, from the Underworld.
25. J uno succeeds in delaying Aeneas but, in the process, kills those she supported.
26. Dido is portrayed sympathetically as a victim of the gods as well as of Aeneas. Abandoned by him, she kills herself. On a personal level, Virgil sympathizes with her, but he also sees her as having neglected her civic duties.
27. J uno and Venus meddle in the personal lives of Aeneas and Dido for their own political reasons. Likewise, Augustus was not afraid to impose heavy legal restrictions on marriage, remarriage, and child-bearing among Rome's upper classes—all in an attempt to improve the political resources of the state.
28. Like the rest of the Aeneid, Dido is deeply embedded in Roman history. Certainly her suicide after the loss of Aeneas would have reminded Romans of the suicide of another queen from Africa, Cleopatra. Cleopatra was associated with both J ulius Caesar and Mark Antony and the propaganda of Octavian portrayed her as the archetypal temptress who intended to divert the Roman man from his patriotic duty and destiny.
29. Venus removes the cloud from Aeneas's eyes so that he can see the destruction of Troy from the gods' viewpoint, but unlike the similar situation in the Iliad in which Athene lets Diomedes see the gods on the battlefield, humans in the Aeneid are merely agents in a divine plan, and their actions are insignificant.
30. Human destiny is a function of divine politics, including the love between Dido and Aeneas. The only choice is how to respond to the burdens doled out by the gods. - Aeneas's guide to the Underworld, however, is a helper-maiden: the Sibyl (priestess) of Apollo at Cumae. Cumae was an early (eighth century B.C.) Greek settlement in Italy.
31. In the Underworld, Aeneas learns the meaning of his suffering from the shade of his father, Anchises.
32. Using the Odyssey and Plato's *Phaedo*, Virgil describes the Underworld as divided into nine circles administering justice to human souls.
33. Where the highway divides, leading to Tartarus and Elysium, Anchises serves as Aeneas's moral guide and explains how the good are rewarded in eternity and how most souls are reincarnated in endless cycles, each getting what he or she deserves.

34. Anchises also explains the future of Rome; this brings Aeneas to accept his burden with a new commitment.
35. Some evidence suggests that the view of Rome triumphant is ironic; however, if that is the case, then Augustus as well as other readers have missed the irony for two millennia.
36. As a hero, Aeneas must go to the Underworld. The voyage is, however, presented by Virgil as an illusion or possibly as a reminder that every dream may turn into a nightmare. Virgil consistently presents Aeneas as a hero of history, not only of myth. His suggestion that the Underworld visit is mere illusion may be connected with that historicity of character.
37. The climax of the Aeneid, the combat between Turnus and Aeneas, parallels the combat between Hector and Achilles; however, in the Iliad the outcome was not determined beforehand, whereas in the Aeneid the gods know the outcome in advance.
38. Even Juno, Turnus's sister, understands the situation and bows to destiny. Seeing the Fury near her brother, she abandons him. His passion continues to blind him.
39. Achilles, in his rage, refuses to listen to pleas for Hector's body to be respected; Aeneas is willing to listen to similar pleas until he sees the general wearing the belt of Pallas.
40. Some readers argue that this shows Aeneas as an agent of a corrupt, imperialist government, his humanity destroyed. From being a model Roman hero, he has become a "Greek" hero. Others see the scene as representing a gap between the public figure and the private man.
41. Others argue that Aeneas starts out as a Greek-style hero but becomes a model Roman hero over time. Some scholars have even seen in Turnus the "second self" of Aeneas. If Turnus embodies the Greek-style hero, Aeneas closes the epic by killing off the old self, which he has outgrown.
42. The death of Turnus eliminates the long and hard struggle between the private man who must make painful sacrifices and the public hero for whom only his destiny remains.
43. Differences between the Iliad and the Aeneid include the characters of Patroclus and Pallas; Patroclus was an experienced fighter, whereas Pallas was a youth, and Turnus's boast of the kill was unwarranted.
44. The Aeneid's world consists of people who are suffering losses because they are burdened with the need to serve and are deceived by gods with political agendas. However, there is no alternative: war is recognized as the ultimate horror.
45. There is a conflict between humanism and war, and perhaps a conflict between humanism and government; but if war is too high a price to pay for civilization, then humans are condemned to live in a world where the forces of libido are in control.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Virgil, Aeneid

Key names of mythological characters mentioned:

Aeneas, the sole surviving hero from Troy, son of Venus (Aphrodite)

Creusa, his wife, dead at Troy

Anchises, Aeneas's father

Turnus, the military leader of the Latins

Pallas, Aeneas's lover, killed by Turnus

Dido, the woman he loves

Mercury (Hermes)

Lavinia, Aeneas's Latin wife

King Latinus, her father

Allecto, a Fury from the Underworld

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Virgil (70–19 B.C.)

CHAPTER 20

OVID'S METAMORPHOSES: THE RETELLING OF GREEK MYTHS

MAIN POINTS

1. Something in Ovid's writings offended Augustus, who banished him from Rome; perhaps he found that Ovid's cynical depictions of gods and humans undermined the official image of sober Roman citizens.

2. Ovid's theme in *Metamorphoses* is "bodies changed."

3. Narrative links allow one tale to grow into another, reflecting the theme of transformation in the structure of the poem itself.

4. Beginning with creation, Ovid's universe moves from chaos to order, where chaos is viewed as an intolerable condition; god, or nature, subdivides all creation and makes out boundaries, similar to the subdivisions of Rome.

5. Ovid is poking fun at Augustus, equating him with Jupiter, satirizing his attempt at imposing moral restraint on the elite patrician class.

6. Throughout much of the work, Ovid uses parody, mocking the gods and perhaps Augustus himself.

7. In the story of Echo and Narcissus, the comic overtones of this odd couple soon give way to a bleaker perspective. For both Echo and Narcissus, Eros, denied an external object, turns inward, with devastating results. Unable to express herself, Echo becomes a disembodied voice, while Narcissus, in love with his own image, is turned into a flower.

8. The myth of the Golden Age is in part an expression of nostalgia for a less complex and perhaps less frightening time.

9. Behind the witty surface lurks a bitter indictment; Ovid's section on the Ages of Man includes Rome as an example of the Iron Age, characterized by greed and violence.

10. Romans were caught between the terror of anarchy and the threat of law; for Ovid, the role of the government in the Iron Age is to use force to impose order.

11. Many of Ovid's tales portray a world of vice, characterized by lust, rape, betrayal, and revenge, perhaps a comment on the cruelty of those in power. The only escape is to be transformed into something less than human: trees, rocks, or constellations.

12. "The Story of Perseus" shows the compulsion toward immobility: Perseus turns all of Andromeda's suitors to stone at once by showing them the Gorgon's head. Literally, this is a Roman petrification of Greek myth.

13. The gods' sensual desires remain unfulfilled, as their human objects turn into inanimate things, such as Daphne turning into a laurel tree fleeing Apollo. The only escape for her is to be dehumanized.

14. In the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, the musician-hero, Orpheus, descends to the Underworld to retrieve his dead wife, Eurydice: he acknowledges her mortality; he just wants her death to be delayed. His wish is granted on one condition: he must not look back while ascending to the upper world.

15. His trip to the Underworld, an attempt to reverse time itself, fails. Despite instructions to the contrary, he looks back, and Eurydice is lost forever. Even seemingly perfect love does not last in Ovid's world. For humans, death is the final metamorphosis.

16. Spurning the love of women, Orpheus turns to homosexual love instead. As he wanders, playing his lyre, trees appear. Orpheus thus combines some qualities of Apollo, god of music, and Dionysus, in his capacity as a god of agriculture.

17. Angered at being rejected, Orpheus's Maenads (female followers like those of Dionysus) perform the sparagmos ritual, tearing Orpheus limb from limb. Apollo rescues his head and turns

it to stone, carrying out the theme of immobilization evident in the story of Perseus and other Ovidian tales.

18. Bacchus (Dionysus), mourning Orpheus, punishes the Maenads by turning them, as Apollo turned Daphne, to trees. Orpheus is rejoined with Eurydice in the Underworld, where he can make music forever. As in the Aeneid, for Ovid, in this world only sorrow lasts; only in the hereafter do the endless metamorphoses achieve their final form.

19. The Metamorphoses ends with the deification of Caesar, a fairly serious section; however, Ovid implies in the “Epilogue” that his own fame will rise higher than Caesar’s.

20. Even though Rome fell, Ovid remained one of the most important influences on Western culture.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTION: Ovid, Metamorphoses

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Jupiter

Apollo

Lycaeon, an Arcadian tyrant turned into a sheep

Deucalion and Pyrrha, survivors of the Flood

Themis

Daphne, the nymph pursued by Apollo

Peneus, her father, a river god

Perseus

Andromeda, the Ethiopian princess he saves

The Gorgon, Medusa

Narcissus, a young man who fell in love with his own reflected image

Echo, the nymph who loved Narcissus

Orpheus, a musician who followed his dead wife to the Underworld to try to bring her back

Eurydice, Orpheus’s wife

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Ovid, Roman poet (43 B.C.–A.D. 17)

CHAPTER 21 THE PERSISTENCE OF MYTH

MAIN POINTS

1. Classical mythology has continued to provide a cultural resource, long after its connection to belief systems has ceased.
2. During the Dark Ages, much knowledge and interest in classical learning was lost, and the hero of classical mythology was considered inappropriate for a Christian focus on humility and otherworldliness.
3. In the late Middle Ages, classical mythology was rediscovered through the works of Virgil and Ovid and was made acceptable through a Christian reinterpretation.
4. Such reinterpretations include Virgil's prediction of the Coming of Christ and Dante's transformation of Virgil's description of the Underworld with borrowed elements from Greek mythology.
5. The Courtly Love tradition sparked a revived interest in Ovid's Art of Love, and it inspired Dante and Petrarch.
6. The popular uses of classical mythology in the modern world include mythic materials in psychology, sociology, television, and advertising.
7. Mythic material is most frequently transmitted in four basic ways: (1) making ancient plays or poems accessible to modern readers through modern translations and performances; (2) updating ancient stories to make them relevant to contemporary audiences; (3) borrowing familiar mythic themes and images to create a double vision, ancient and modern; (4) using a mythic figure as an emblem or a symbol.
8. The study of Greek was revived in the Renaissance after having been unpopular during the Middle Ages; English translators include George Chapman and Alexander Pope.
9. Revisionist versions of the classics existed even in classical Greece, with Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Ovid continued the revisionist tradition.
10. When classical drama was revived in the Renaissance, playwrights began revising classical plays. European playwrights such as Shakespeare, Racine, Gide, Giraudoux, Sartre, and Anouilh have revised classical drama.
11. Anouilh wrote a version of Antigone (1944) intended as a criticism of the Vichy government during World War II.
12. Opera may have its origin in a desire to revive Greek drama in its supposed original form of a singing stage performance.
13. Opera composers incorporating Greek mythology in their works are Monteverdi, Purcell, Richard Strauss, and Stravinsky.
14. Writers of fiction using material from Greek mythology include Shakespeare, John Barth, James Joyce, and Derek Walcott.
15. Frequently, writers, artists, and composers have employed mythic images or mythic themes; some of these include Botticelli, Jean Cousin the Elder, Claude Lorrain, Lord Tennyson, Cavafy, Yeats, Dali, Auden, and Picasso.
16. The following novels include extended uses of mythic themes: Updike's *The Centaur*, Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and Malamud's *The Natural*.
17. In these cases, the mythic material provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of the human condition.

18. Some writers use specific mythic figures as a symbol of an idea, such as Freud's use of Oedipus, Camus's use of Sisyphus, ecologists' use of Gaea, and feminist psychologists' use of Athene, Artemis, and Aphrodite.
19. Psychologists have even used mythic figures for such purposes as exploring gendered patterns of communication or illuminating emotional disorders such as posttraumatic stress syndrome.
20. Myths can provide information about cultural changes, for example, through the study of revisions. The story of Orpheus and Eurydice has been interpreted as a grand but tragic passion, as a descent into the depths of the human psyche, and as a descent into existential despair. Artists revising the story include Monteverdi, Gluck, Haydn, Anouilh, Cocteau, Williams, Lumet, H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), and Abdoh.
21. Two seventeenth-century painters, Rubens and Poussin, each portrayed the rape of the Sabine women, one a violent and the other a more detached version. The differences mark the shift from baroque to neoclassical styles and corresponding worldviews.
22. Dali comments ironically on Ingres's painting *The Apotheosis of Homer* in his own painting of the same name.
23. Interpretations of Venus throughout the centuries reveal much about these eras, with the images ranging from a calm depiction of divine beauty, an idealization, and a sensuous portrayal to a modern parody.
24. A whole generation may latch on to a particular mythic figure as a cultural icon. Examples are Icarus in the Renaissance and Prometheus in the Romantic period.
25. The Renaissance included a revival of Greek classical mythology, and Christian humanists utilized classical mythic images without any sense of blasphemy.
26. For example, Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets deal with the conflict between Ovidian images and Christian belief, promoting a balance between the impulses of the heart and the journey of the soul to heaven.
27. During the Renaissance, biblical figures were portrayed as Greek gods while mythological stories were depicted in Renaissance costumes and settings.
28. For the Greeks, Icarus represented a lesson in the necessity of the Golden Mean of moderation; during the Renaissance, he became a symbol of the audacious spirit breaking through the limits of conventions and paying a high price.
29. Icarus becomes the mythic model for Doctor Faustus, the Renaissance man who, doomed to fail, must follow his ambition to exceed the preset limits.
30. The Baroque painter Breughel the Elder uses the figure of Icarus to signal a shift in cultural values from the human-centered world of the Renaissance to the asymmetrical Baroque perspective of a world in which the individual has no intrinsic significance.
31. In the Romantic period, Prometheus became the symbol of a generation of artists, composers, novelists, and poets, such as Byron and Shelley.
32. Shelley compares Prometheus with Satan but sees him as the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature in his rebellion against tyranny.
33. The Prometheus myth also affected the way people saw historical events. Napoleon was compared to Prometheus until he declared himself emperor; Beethoven removed the dedication to Napoleon from his Third Symphony for this reason.
34. The image of Satan-as-hero prompted a revival of interest in Milton and his *Paradise Lost*, and Shelley's wife, Mary Shelley, entitled her novel *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*.

35. During the Renaissance, such pursuit was identified with Faustus, symbolized by Icarus; in the Romantic period, the character of Faustus was revived by Goethe and others, but now symbolized by Prometheus.

NOTE: In the character of Doctor Faustus we witness the mythopoeic (myth-making) cultural force in modern times; the character was based on a scientist in Württemberg, Germany, in the sixteenth century, Johann Faust; Faust was an astrologer and an alchemist who had hopes of turning base metals into gold. Marlowe wrote his story of Faust some fifty years after Faust's death; since then, Faust himself has become a modern myth, an image of the person who is willing to give up everything most other people consider sacred for the sake of pure knowledge (or, in some cases, for profit) and who will pay dearly for this bargain. Although Faust himself was compared to Icarus in the Renaissance and Prometheus in the Romantic period, the mythologized figure of the doctor has emerged in modern times as an icon in its own right, used as a mythic theme in novels and films. Whereas Mary Shelley compared her Doctor Frankenstein to Prometheus, later film versions of the story tend explicitly or implicitly to compare Frankenstein to the single-minded, success-obsessed Doctor Faust instead.

36. Classical myths have retained their capacity to convey meaning to us and will undoubtedly continue to express the continuity of the human spirit.

PRIMARY TEXT SELECTIONS: Dante, *The Inferno*; Sir Philip Sidney, Sonnet 5 from *Astrophel and Stella*; John Lyly, *Song from Alexander and Campaspe*; John Donne, "Love's Deity"; John Milton, *Paradise Lost*; George Gordon, Lord Byron, *Prometheus*; Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"; William Butler Yeats, "Leda and the Swan"; W. H. Auden, "The Shield of Achilles" and "Musée des Beaux Arts"; Eavan Boland, "The Pomegranate."

KEY NAMES OF MYTHOLOGICAL CHARACTERS MENTIONED:

Narcissus

Oedipus

Sisyphus

Gaea

Athene

Artemis

Aphrodite

Orpheus

Eurydice

Icarus

Prometheus

Doctor Faustus, semihistorical character; sold his soul to the devil for knowledge

KEY NAMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE TELLING/CRITICISM OF MYTHS:

Virgil (70–19 B.C.)

Ovid (43 B.C.– A.D. 17)
Dante Alighieri, Italian poet (1265–1321)
Petrarch, Italian scholar and poet (1304–1374)
George Chapman, English translator of Homer (1557–1643)
Alexander Pope, English poet (1688–1744)
Aeschylus (c. 525–456 B.C.)
Sophocles (c. 495–406 B.C.)
Euripides (c. 485–406 B.C.)
Seneca, Roman dramatist (c. 3 B.C.– A.D. 65)
William Shakespeare, American dramatist (1564–1616)
Jean Racine, French dramatist (1639–1699)
Eugene O’Neill, American dramatist (1888–1953)
Andre Gide, French novelist (1869–1951)
Jean Giraudoux, French novelist (1882–1944)
Jean Paul Sartre, French philosopher and dramatist (1905–1980)
Jean Anouilh, French dramatist (1910–1987)
Claudio Monteverdi, Italian composer (1567–1643)
Henry Purcell, English composer (c. 1658–1695)
Richard Strauss, German composer (1864–1949)
Igor Stravinsky, Russian composer (1882–1971)
James Joyce, Irish novelist (1882–1941)
Sandro Botticelli, Italian painter (c. 1445–1510)
Jean Cousin the Elder (died c. 1560)
Claude Gellée, called Lorrain, French painter (1600–1682)
Alfred, Lord Tennyson, English poet (1809–1892)
William Butler Yeats, Irish poet (1865–1939)
Salvador Dali, Spanish painter (1904–1989)
W. H. Auden, American poet (1907–1973)
Pablo Picasso, Spanish painter (1881–1973)
John Updike, American writer (1932–)
Bernard Malamud, American writer (1914–1986)
Sigmund Freud, Austrian psychoanalyst (1856–1939)
Albert Camus, French philosopher and novelist (1913–1960)
Christoph Willibald Gluck, German composer (1714–1787)

Franz Joseph Haydn, German composer (1732–1809)
Jean Cocteau, French dramatist and film director (1891–1963)
Sidney Lumet, American film director (1924–)
Tennessee Williams, American dramatist (1914–1983)
Peter Paul Rubens, Flemish painter (1577–1640)
Nicolas Poussin, French painter (c. 1593–1665)
Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, French painter (1780–1867)
Tiziano Vecellio, called Titian, Italian painter (c. 1490–1576)
Sir Philip Sidney, English poet (1554–1586)
Christopher Marlowe, English dramatist (1564–1593)
Pieter Breughel the Elder, Dutch painter (1525–1569)
George Gordon, Lord Byron, English poet (1788–1824)
Percy Bysshe Shelley, English poet (1792–1822)
Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, English novelist (1797–1851)
John Milton, English poet (1608–1674)
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, German scholar, poet, and novelist (1749–1832)
Eugene Delacroix, French painter (1798–1863)
Charles-François Gounod, French composer (1818–1893)
Hector Berlioz, French composer (1803–1869)
Constantin Cavafy, modern Greek poet
H. D. (Hilda Doolittle), American poet (1886–1961)