Myth

- When we hear myth, we may think of:
  - Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, the Titans (ancient Greece)
  - Romulus and Remus (ancient Rome
  - Isis, Osiris, Horus, Seth (ancient Egypt)
  - Thor, Odin (ancient Norse)
  - But **myths** are not just ancient…

Modern religions rely on their myths

- Adam & Eve (Judaism & Christianity)
- Brahma, Krishna, Vishnu, *many* more (Hinduism)
- The Jade Emperor/Heavenly Grandfather (Taosim)
- Muhammad and the Angel Gabriel (Islam)

Myths are religious & sacred stories that . . .

- provide basis for beliefs & practices
- describe the origins of humanity, creation of the universe, nature of death/illness
- lay the founding for values & morals
- can be passed down verbally or in writing

Worldview

- Myths help to shape a society's worldview, the way people perceive reality.
  - Book (p. 31-32 Navaho vs. Judeo-Christian)
    - Act in part with nature vs. control nature

Myths vs. Legends vs. Folktales

- **<u>Myth</u>**: Regarded to be true, accepted on faith, provides moral/ethical authority (takes place in a remote time/place)
- **<u>Legend</u>:** Based on real people, considered (mostly) fact, sometimes has to do w/ religion. Examples?
- **<u>Folktales</u>:** Fiction, meant for entertainment/non-religious purposes. Examples?

Changing nature of Myth

- If passed down <u>orally</u>...
  - Slight alterations with each retelling
  - Meaning of parts may change depending on the orator's emphasis.
  - Remember more completely what is most interesting about the story.
  - Ex: Illiad (Troy) & Atlantis
- If passed down in <u>writing</u>...
  - Change in written language/translation to other languages may also change the meaning.
  - Scribal errors may omit from or accidentally add to the myth.

Transmission discrepancies not the only reason Myths change…

- Changing society, changing culture, changing religion, so….change the mythology.

- Ex: Ptolemy, Egypt, Greece and Rome
  - Syncretism
    - The melding of different myths and religions with the goal of creating a mutually agreeable religion between disparate cultures.

- Ex: Egypt and Christianity
  - Isis/Horus vs. Mary/Jesus

Analyzing Myth

- Evolutionary Approach (outdated):
  How "primitive" societies advanced to more "civilized ones by starting with myth/magic, advancing to religion, and then finally reaching the pinnacle (science).

- Comparative Approach:
  By comparing the mythology of "primitive" societies, could get at a "common form" of myth which was seen as also occurring in early European society.
  Example: Frazer, *The Golden Bough*

Analyzing Myth

- <u>Functional</u> Approach:
  - Focuses on outcome: What is the function? What does the myth do?
  - Franz Boas: myths as a source of ethnographic data. A literal reflection of culture.
  - Malinowski: myths help explain religious rituals and social/moral rules.

Analyzing Myth

- <u>Structural</u> Approach:
  - What is the structure of myth?
  - Based on Levi-Strauss: myth as binary opposites
    - Light/dark, day/night, male/female

Analyzing Myth

- Psychological Approach:
  - Sees myth as composed of symbols
  - Sigmund Freud: Myth as a "shared dream"/childhood experiences (mother/father figure) becomes myth (god/creation figure).
  - Carl Jung: Our brains have "**Archetypes**" or certain characters that we, humans, have in our unconscious:
    - "The Prodigal Son," "the Hero," "the Helper" "The Fool": reoccuring not only in myths but also in our stories and fiction.
  - **Collective Unconscious**: shared elements of the human unconscious mind that are manifested in myths/dreams.

Themes

- **<u>Origin</u> Myths**
  - Where all other aspects of Myth usually branch out from
  - Ex: Egypt
- **<u>Flood</u> Myths**
  - Part of our collective unconscious because of our need to use the restroom during the night? -or- Natural occurrence for those who live close to rivers/oceans/seas
  - Ex: Atlantis
- **<u>Trickster</u> Myths**
  - Bringing a certain element into creation, often by the use of wily, sneaky ways.
  - Ex: Prometheus
- **<u>Hero</u> Myths**
  - A hero departs from ordinary life to pursue adventure. Here in a realm filled with supernatural wonders, he prevails against certain trials/foes, returning to humanity with some sort of boon. This is, as defined by Joseph Campbell the **<u>monomyth</u>**
  - Ex: Hercules