

NOT SINCE JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S OBSERVATIONS ON THE
POWER OF MYTH HAVE WE BEEN GIVEN SUCH A COMPELLING
COLLECTION OF MYTHIC TALES." —*From J.B. The New York Times*



THE GLOBAL MYTHS

EXPLORING PRIMITIVE, PAGAN,
SACRED, AND SCIENTIFIC MYTHOLOGIES

ALEXANDER ELIOT

Introduction by

Preface by

NATHAN YOUNG

TAITETSU UNNO

"DRAWING ON A LIFETIME OF EXPLORATIONS THROUGH MYTHS AND THEIR LANDSCAPES, *THE GLOBAL MYTHS* EXTENDS ALEXANDER ELIOT'S MARVELOUS BODY OF WORK, FULL OF WISDOM AND DELIGHT."

—from the Introduction by Jonathan Young

What do Greek myths and ancient Navaho tales have in common? What thread of golden knowledge runs through time and space from feudal Japan to Cleopatra's Egypt? What do the gods of India and of Greece, the sages of China and the shamans of the American Southwest have to tell us about death and sex, folly and wisdom, danger and heroism? What deep and eternally pulsing vein of life-giving vision has been tapped by poets and philosophers throughout history the world over? Alexander Eliot leads us on a journey through myths and legends that transcend mere interpretation by academics and so-called authorities in their magical power to touch our most profound emotions, stir our imaginations, liberate our energies and expand our very beings. It is a new landmark work by the most important seminal thinker and writer since Joseph Campbell.

"A consummate storyteller reveals important contemporary ecological messages held within these stories."

—*Library Journal*

ALEXANDER ELIOT is the grandson of Harvard's Charles W. Eliot and cousin of T. S. Eliot. A Guggenheim Fellow, a Japan Foundation Senior Fellow, a world traveler and lecturer, he has established his eminence as an explorer and interpreter of myths in his acclaimed books *Earth Air Fire & Water* and *The Universal Myths*, the latter available in a Meridian edition. He currently lives in Venice, California.

"Eliot leads his readers on a journey, weaving a personal narrative into stories that originate from the sources he calls the 'four winds' of myth—primitive, pagan, sacred, and scientific. He shows how each strand is crucial to the world and to our understanding of knowledge, imagination, and compassion.

He presents the concept of the 'mythosphere' as the global interrelationship of myths. The stories themselves, beautiful retellings of unfamiliar tales, crop up like gifts amidst his ruminations about the presence and purpose of myth in our lives. In another section, 'The Labyrinthine Ways,' Eliot deals with the construction of knowledge, entwining myths with psychology, history, philosophy, and science. Stylistically, he drifts between telling stories and delivering historical and cultural tidbits from what we traditionally think of as academic disciplines.

In the two final sections, discussion centers on imagination and compassion. He acknowledges Nobel prize-winning chemist Herschbach's words that 'it can only do humankind good to become more aware that along with the dolphins and other incredible creatures, we really belong to a much wider universe of the mind.'"

—Patricia Austin,
School Library Journal

THE
GLOBAL
MYTHS

*Exploring Primitive,
Pagan, Sacred, and Scientific
Mythologies*

江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章

THE
G·L·O·B·A·L
M·Y·T·H·S

*Exploring Primitive,
Pagan, Sacred, and Scientific
Mythologies*

ALEXANDER ELIOT



TRUMAN TALLEY BOOKS/MERIDIAN

MERIDIAN

Published by the Penguin Group

Penguin Books USA Inc., 375 Hudson Street, New York, New York 10014, U.S.A.

Penguin Books Ltd, 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ, England

Penguin Books Australia Ltd, Ringwood, Victoria, Australia

Penguin Books Canada Ltd, 10 Alcorn Avenue, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M4V 3B2

Penguin Books (N.Z.) Ltd, 182-190 Wairau Road, Auckland 10, New Zealand

Penguin Books Ltd, Registered Offices: Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England

Published by Truman Talley Books/Meridian, an imprint of Dutton Signet,
a division of Penguin Books USA Inc. First published in a hardcover edition by the
Continuum Publishing Company.

First Truman Talley Books/Meridian Printing, March, 1994

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

Copyright © Alexander Eliot, 1993

All rights reserved



REGISTERED TRADEMARK—MARCA REGISTRADA

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Eliot, Alexander.

The global myths : exploring primitive, pagan, sacred, and
scientific mythologies / Alexander Eliot.

p. cm.

Originally published: New York : Continuum, 1993.

Includes index.

ISBN 0-452-01116-7

1. Myth. 2. Mythology. 3. Eliot, Alexander. I. Title.

[BL304.E433 1994]

291.1'3—dc20

93-41889

CIP

Printed in the United States of America

Without limiting the rights under copyright reserved above, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in or introduced into a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means (electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise), without the prior written permission of both the copyright owner and the above publisher of this book.

BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE AT QUANTITY DISCOUNTS WHEN USED TO PROMOTE PRODUCTS
OR SERVICES. FOR INFORMATION PLEASE WRITE TO PREMIUM MARKETING DIVISION,
PENGUIN BOOKS USA INC., 375 HUDSON STREET, NEW YORK, NEW YORK 10014.

*For Jane, May, Jefferson, and Winslow,
fellow athletes of the spirit
and Friends at the Rose Cafe*

Contents

Introduction by Jonathan Young, Ph.D. 9

Preface by Taitetsu Unno 13

Part 1: The House of the Four Winds 17

Thor in Trouble: Time and Tide • “In the Beginning” • Big Fish and Little Fish • Enter, the Mythosphere • The East Wind: Bead Woman’s Dress • The West Wind: Laelaps’ Last Chase • The South Wind: “Evident Nonsense” • The North Wind: Dancing in the Dark

Part 2: The Labyrinthine Ways 69

Holy Breath • The Tale of Tarantula • Terrible Twins: Psychology • Io’s Legend: Cause for Debate • A Dolphin’s Death: A Creed Outworn • The Wet-Lipped Deity • The Bold Cosmologists • Stand-off in the Agora • The Lesson of the Labyrinth • Cleopatra: The Long Way Home

Part 3: The World Reborn 145

The Epic Journey of Dineh • Bellerophon's Brilliant Career • Callisto: Mysteries of Art • "The Unknown God" • Perseus: The Perseverance of Poetry • Three Classic Poets • The Horns of the Prophet • Aeschylus: Mystery and History

Part 4: From Eternity to Here 217

Plato: The Disappearing Handkerchief • Aesop: His Fall and Rise • The Tale of the Jade Emperor's Mother • The Ocean-Warming Piglet • Po Chu-i's Mirror Poem • Socrates' Secret Dream • Chuang Tzu, Vishnu, and Manu • Psyche: All for Love • "Strange Minstrelsy" • One Last Legend • Unfathomable Abundance

Index 271

Introduction

BY JONATHAN YOUNG, PH.D.

Curator, Joseph Campbell Archives & Library
Pacifica Graduate Institute

Mythology allows us to reconnect with a dimension beyond ordinary time. The ancient narratives provide a stage upon which the great cosmic forces can be seen in human form acting out their vital dramas. The stories reveal that, despite their powers, the mythic characters need each other. We also learn that the interdependence of gods and goddesses extends to mortals. We have a crucial role to play in the unfolding of the sagas.

Not since Joseph Campbell's observations on the power of myth have we been given such a compelling collection of mythic tales. Drawing on a lifetime of explorations through the myths and their landscapes, this book extends Alexander Eliot's marvelous body of work with a series of memorable stories from around the world.

Mythology continually shows us how to align our energies and attention with the forces of the

natural world. Eliot assists the reader in this focusing by providing an unforgettable sense of place for each tale, which takes us beyond our particular locales to situate our concerns in the larger world community. Also notable are the animals and trees as active members of the mythic ensemble of players. There are constant reminders that we, too, are animal beings and part of nature, not mere observers. A timeless ecological awareness permeates the mythic worldview.

As in Joseph Campbell's writings, this expansive work draws on a vast spectrum of mythic sources from all continents. As parallels and variations in the tales are recounted, we learn to see the metaphors. Then we can open to an appreciation of the significance underlying every part of the natural and social environment. It becomes clear that the material world has meanings beyond itself.

Every feature of each story is necessary to the whole. The brief appearance of what may seem like an inconsequential maidservant may end up being the turning event of the story. This helps us to enlarge our perceptions to embrace many aspects of life which might be overlooked by a consciousness that is all too socialized. The psychological counterpart is an acknowledgement of the many aspects of an individual personality. The least valued attribute may come to the rescue on some fateful day when that very quality is required.

Alexander Eliot is a master storyteller who evokes the vitality of the immortal characters. The reader feels the presence of the deities of old. In

each section, we can see why Joseph Campbell praised the enchantment of Eliot's retelling of age-old stories. Reflections on the tales and insights drawn from decades of scholarship are woven throughout the work. These personal moments are full of wisdom and delight.

In a time of individual and societal troubles, when there is less certainty about familiar guideposts, we may do well to reach back for the timeless wisdom of ancient stories. Every large event, personal or shared, takes us into unfamiliar territory. Mythology helps us to face the best moments and the worst. The gift of mythic vision is that it provides us with maps. We do not have to start from scratch. Bits of guidance have been left behind by those who traveled this way before.

By seeing the global quality of the mythic tales, Alexander Eliot joins such writers as Joseph Campbell and Mircea Eliade in celebrating the common ground that is shared by all humanity. Seeing the great similarities in the world's key teaching stories reveals that living on a shared globe in human form is a kindred experience for all peoples.

Receptive reading of mythology can open up our perceptions of reality so that a vast web of interconnections becomes evident. In this amazing collection, we find out how to live on this earth. The soul of the planet speaks to us through the mythic imagination.

—Santa Barbara, California
October 1992

Preface

BY TAITETSU UNNO

Jill Ker Conway Professor of Religion
Smith College

Alexander Eliot's new work is no catalogue of world myths such as undertaken by Eliade or even Campbell, nor is it a doctrinaire pronouncement in the manner of Freud and Jung; rather, he urges each of us to plunge deep into the mythosphere, our own and the world's, and become mythshapers ourselves. In his words: "Simply adding mythic treasure to one's personal store of knowledge does not in itself suffice. We must also imagine our way into myth, as best we can, like actors in a play. If we're not prepared to make that effort, how can we ever fulfill our own roles in the universal drama?" (p. 143). How can we become truly human? How can we truly cherish this life on earth and everything within it?

In retelling stories from his own boyhood, the ancient Greeks, Native Americans, and Taoist adepts, among others, the author opens the Way,

so that the reader too may follow his or her own path to the mythosphere. Myth is a liberating consciousness, and because Eliot speaks from the heart of that experience, the choice of his words and the turn of his phrases have in themselves a mythic quality. One is drawn into reading this book at one sitting; the palpable feel of the mythosphere cannot be denied.

Global mythology is especially relevant to our society today, where multiculturalism has become a nasty word in different ways for different people. Although it began with high hopes where we “value all people and all people are valued,” it has created more anger, division and mutual exclusivism than anything we have known in recent history. If we can break through the artificial constructs that separate people, cultures, races and religions, the differences highlighted by multiculturalism take on great significance, liberating us from provincialism, enriching our lives, expanding our horizons. Eliot makes this point succinctly: “Sometimes our faiths set us cruelly at odds with one another, true. However, their extreme diversity spells freedom for the human spirit” (p. 62).

This freedom enables Eliot to find the proper niche for art, science, poetry and metaphysics as meaningful, liberating endeavors. Without clashing and denying each other, they celebrate the human spirit containing and contained in the mythosphere. The “Tathagata-garbha” or “Buddha-matrix” invoked by Mahayana Buddhists has a twofold meaning: each of us is the matrix or womb from which