

COLLEGE ENGLISH

大学英语系列教材



ENGLISH READING

# 希腊罗马神话教程

A Course Book on  
Greco-Roman Mythology

主编 马建军

 广东人民出版社

# 希腊罗马神话教程

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# 前 言

希腊、罗马神话，又称西方古典神话，是西方乃至人类文化传统的基本渊源之一，它不仅对英语语言文化的学习不可或缺，而且也是大学人文教育的一个重要内容。但是迄今为止，我国在此方面还没有一本适合于大学本科教学的专门教材。国内外现有的相关书籍大多局限于故事片段，在文本上缺乏系统性和完整性，在阅读上缺乏启发性和研究性。有鉴于此，我们在数年试验教学的基础上，编撰了这本《希腊罗马神话教程》。

本书编撰的宗旨是：内容系统完整，形式生动活泼，将故事叙述、文学鉴赏和文化解读为一炉。

本书分为 15 个单元，各单元的基本课文为希腊罗马神话故事和相关的经典文学作品，课文后附有较简单的阅读理解题和难度较大的文学或文化鉴赏题。书中的补充阅读材料可根据学生情况或教学要求灵活运用。在人名、地名表中除了配有简要解释外，考虑到古希腊罗马语言与现代英语的差异，特别标出了词的读音。

本书的内容具有层次性，对于不同的教学对象可取用难易程度不同的内容。

本书可用作大学本科英语专业教材或非英语专业的文学、文化课程教材，也可以供有一定英语知识、对西方文化及其神话传说感兴趣的广大读者阅读和欣赏。

## Preface

Greco-Roman Mythology, also known as western classical mythology, is not only important to English Language, literature and culture study, but also an indispensable part in general university education. But so far there isn't a course book on the subject suitable to undergraduates in China. The English books available are mostly either pure stories for entertainment or academically purported, none of which can meet the overall requirements of university teaching in our country: interesting reading stuff, suitable language level, systematic (thematic) and comprehensive organization of the content, and feasibility of literary and cultural reinterpretation. After we tried, very successfully, teaching the course among our students in the past two years, we decide to compile our own course book.

*Greco-Roman Mythology*, as our course book is entitled, targets mainly at undergraduates who have had two years of university English study, whether major or non-major in English. But as a mere story book, the reader needn't have the same English ability, for the texts are in comparatively simple English.

The book is made up of 15 units. The texts are mostly adapted from popular Greek and Roman myths and some famous classical works based upon mythology. In each unit, there is a brief introduction, the text passages, with a few simple reading comprehension questions tailing each, and at the end of the unit a group of comparatively difficult questions for discussion. Notes are given at the foot of the page for the convenience of the reader. The Supplementary Reading and Glossary are for frequent intertextual reference, usually for the purpose of class teaching. The way to pronounce the names of people and places are also given, as they are quite different from modern English, and a real headache to Chinese students.

For different purposes (teaching or reading, analysis or pleasure), and working with different students (English major or non English major, literature and culture students or students of other specialties), one may choose different passages to read, different amount of reading, and choose different (levels of) questions for checking or discussion.

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## Unit One

### Introduction

#### Why Study Greco-Roman Mythology?

The objectives of Greco-Roman mythological study may include the following goals:

1. To enable the learners, through reading the myths and having fun with them, to gain exposure to some of the major Greco-Roman myths which have shaped western culture and the way western people think;
2. To increase intellectual maturation and clarification of learners' own values through the study of ideas and attitudes manifested in western myths and through a comparative study with those of our own nation and epoch;
3. To help cultivate in learners a cultural receptivity by encouraging their critical thinking and cultural reading;
4. To help learners better understand the enigma we call life through discussing and evaluating the ways myths shape human consciousness and behavior.

#### What Is Mythology?

The establishment of a single, comprehensive definition of mythology has proved almost impossible. No one definition can satisfactorily embrace all the various kinds of stories that can legitimately be classed as mythology on the basis of one criterion or another. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, the word "mythology" refers to 1) a system or a set of interrelated myths and 2) a systematic study or methodological analysis of myths, particularly their form, purpose, and function. In the text, the term is mostly used in the former sense, and often used interchangeably with "myth" or "myths".

The meaning of the word "myth" is derived from the Greek word "mythos", which means "utterance," "tale," or "story," and that is essentially what a myth is: a story. But such a definition seems too general to be accurate. Myths, in the traditional sense, should include the following aspects: a tale, first told orally; of anonymous origin; set in the remote past, often a vague time outside human

chronology; dealing with cosmological phenomena; focusing on the lives and ways of the gods and divine heroes whose adventures represent significant aspects of human experience and reveal the origin and nature of early rituals or customs, and so on. In another word, a myth is a tale that gives a religious explanation to the world as it is. It is a story that has become traditional, explanatory in nature, and expressive of the universal beauties and truths of the human spirit. Such a story is timeless in that the events are symbolic rather than just the way it happened. It need not be told only orally, but may use no words at all as in religious rituals, or be conveyed by various media, individually or in combination, through mime, dance, painting, literature, drama, and film, etc. It is not uniform, logical and internally consistent, but multiform, imaginative, loose and often confusing or contradictory in detail. Moreover, its significance and emphasis can change from one generation to the next, from one nation to another.

It would also be helpful to recognize legend or saga as a category of myth which reflects some historical basis and to realize that some myths share characteristics that we associate with folktales, fairytales, and fables. They are stories of origins. They orient people to the metaphysical dimension, explain the origins and nature of the cosmos, validate social issues, and on the psychological plane address themselves to the innermost depths of the human psyche. Some of them are prescientific attempts to interpret the natural world. To make sense, they explain the world, making it manageable. Take the primordial pair of gods, Gaia and her son Uranus, the earth and the sky, for example. Uranus, the sky, lay upon Gaia, the earth, and made love to her without stop. The myth can be seen as a symbolic representation of the interplay between rain and soil that makes plants come to life and grow. Aeschylus wrote in his lost *Danaids* that "the holy sky passionately desires to penetrate the earth . . . rain falls and impregnates earth, and she brings forth pasturage for flocks and Demeter's life-giving corn". For another example, the myths worldwide in which human beings are fashioned from clay satisfy our need to know how and why we came to be here. Despite the fact that the wonderful creation of human life and the constitution of human body is still sort of mystery to us, scientific discoveries today about the components of human body have brought us closer to the mythical account of human creation.

Thus, as responses of people to the material and spiritual life in the prehistoric time, myths are designed to explain the causes or origins of natural

phenomena and give meanings to traditional practices, such as birth, death and sacrificial rituals. Many myths are of Nature myths or Ritual myths. Stories of gods or heroes descending into the Underworld in the west and emerging in the east actually reflect the setting and the rising of the sun. Myths in which Goddess Persephone lived for three months with her husband Hades in the Underworld and returned to live with her mother Demeter, goddess of corn, for the rest of the year reflect the return of spring after winter.

There are other stories which tell us about our relationships with the natural world, giving shape to the unfathomable and overwhelming forces in nature. For instance, human relation with Mother Earth, from which we come, and to which we return after death. Also there is the change of seasons which orders human life as it is, and the disastrous flooding and explosion of volcanoes which threaten people's life.

### How to Approach Mythology?

Today, mythology has become an independent subject of study and an important part of cultural studies. It has been studied from the approaches of history, religion, etiology, psychology, structuralism, gender, literature or art, etc. and has yielded a well of rich findings. The major approaches in the study of mythology include the following:

#### 1. Historical

Many anthropologists and historians have made important discoveries, especially with the help of archeology. Some lost traces of primitive life, in the form of buried towns and cities, ritual sites, and artistic products, have been unearthed and rediscovered. They are both aided by the ancient mythical accounts and supportive proofs to the historical soundness of the myth.

#### 2. Etiological

An etiological interpretation of myth demands that a true myth must give the cause or reason for a fact, for a ritual practice, or for an institution. Narrowly defined, etiology imposes too limiting and rigid a criterion for definition. On the other hand, if one broadens the concept of the cause of a myth to encompass any story that explains or reveals something or anything, the etiological approach

offers one of the most fertile ways of interpreting myth, although it cannot really define it. Mythical stories of gods and goddesses function as the beginning or cause of many a human happening. Take the myths of Eros for instance. As one of the oldest deities at creation, it corresponds to Freud's theory about love or sex as the most fundamental drive for humans<sup>①</sup>. And as the god of love, with his sharp and blunt arrows, he has brought about so many tragedies of human love. However difficult it is to prove his existence, a knowledge of him and his stories help people better deal with their emotional problems.

And though seemingly opposed to the scientific discoveries whose truths continuously change, mythology, being eternal, has a truth of its own that transcends mere fact. Conveying realities that may not be verified empirically, these ancient tales typically express a culture's worldview, its beliefs, customs and attitudes, or its explanation of natural phenomena (geological, meteorological, psychological, etc.) and serves to interpret the whole of human experience.

### 3. Allegorical

A most commonly raised problem of mythical study is with what is incredible and fantastic. Often people equate myth with falsehood or superstition, such as in the expression, "It's a myth," uttered in derogative contrast with such laudable concepts as reality and the facts. This is a mistaken and unfortunate notion of myth. How do you interpret the birth myth of Athena, that she was literally born out of the head of her father Zeus? If you insist on reading the story in a factual way, you give dimensions of the fantastic to the gods. Yet, the story of her extraordinary birth is also the story of female wisdom and intellectual power—in the form of the mother, Metis—usurped by the devouring father. Metis, the old Goddess of Wisdom, was swallowed by Zeus, the new king of the Olympian patriarchy, who, instead of destroying the ancient wisdom and wiping out any element of threat to his kingdom, absorbed and incorporated it into his own system. This is already remarkable progress upon Cronus' practice<sup>②</sup>. So when we say myth is truthful, it is only figuratively so. It is not simply historical truth

① The Freudian term is "Libido", which he regards as the most fundamental drive of any human activity.

② Cronus swallowed his first five children as soon as they were born because he had learnt that he would be overthrown by his own children.



mixed with lies. The stories should sometimes be best understood as allegories, particularly at the level of culture, that give structure to humanity and civility, and help us imagine something spiritual beyond the basics of human survival. Through the stories of gods and goddesses we learn the politics of human interaction, the reaches of *homo sapiens*<sup>①</sup> behavior; we learn about how we live our life and how we treat each other. The gods, goddesses, and heroes, with their individual traits and feats, are incarnations of natural phenomena and abstract human qualities. Heracles' 12 labors are not only the difficult challenges he must take to complete his ordained fate or to obtain his final divinity, but also an embodiment of the necessity of human struggle with the wild nature and with himself.

#### 4. Psychological

In mythological study, the theories of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung are fundamental and far-reaching in their influence, and though continually challenged, they provide the most searching tools for profound, introspective interpretation of mythology.

Freud's most influential ideas for the interpretation of myth center on psychosexual development, the theory of the unconscious, the interpretation of dreams, and the Oedipus Complex. Developed in a work that attempts to explain the particularly uneasy and timeless dramatic import of Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*, the Oedipus Complex is a theory that concerns a universal phenomenon in early human growth: a male child's first sexual feelings are directed towards the mother with the concomitant arousal of jealousy and hatred towards the rival of those affections, the father. The female version has been identified by Jung as the Electra Complex, in which the daughter's love is towards the father, with hatred directed towards the mother.

Freud sees dreams as the expression of repressed or concealed desires. According to him, the "dream-work" of sleep has three basic functions: to condense elements; to displace elements, by changing them; and to represent elements through symbols. In this regard, symbols of dreams work in much the same way as the symbols of myths. They are both manifestations of people's inner

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① *Homo sapiens* is the Latin word for "human beings".

desires which have found no outlet otherwise. Myths help express what lies repressed or dormant in us because it is a taboo or because it is mere wishful-thinking. For instance, myths of incest and murder purge us of an unhealthy preoccupation with these things, whereas ritual bloodshed directs our sadistic desires into a socially acceptable, or even a useful, form.

Jung goes beyond the connection of myths and dreams with the individual being. He interprets myths as the projection of what he calls the "collective unconscious," that is, the revelation of the continuing psychic tendencies of a society. He makes an important distinction between the personal unconscious, concerning matters of an individual's own life, and the collective unconscious, embracing political and social questions of the group. Myths contain something universal to mankind, though their emphases vary from race to race, nation to nation, time to time. And his "collective conscious" notion has found ample proof in the shocking similarities among such mythical accounts as the creation of the universe and mankind.

According to Jung, myths are often a highly symbolic genre. Rather than the novel's traditionally particular realism, myths tend to favor the "archetypal." They contain images or "archetypes" — traditional expressions of collective dreams, or a pattern or original model for all its subsequent and particular manifestations— which have developed over thousands of years into symbols upon which the society as a whole has come to depend. These archetypes, revealed in people's tales, establish a well-known category or type, such as a story pattern (a genre such as fairytale, action movie, or romance novel); a familiar kind of character (the hero who goes on an adventure, facing challenges, rescuing a princess, and finally rewarded with a kingdom and royal marriage); or a meaningful image (the dove, the color red, a snake, or an apple). They are also patterns of behavior that serve as exemplars, e. g. the lives of many heroes and heroines share a remarkable number of similar features that can be identified as worthy of imitation and emulation. Similarly, other kinds of concepts are to be classified among the many and varied types of Jungian archetypes embedded in our mythic heritage, such as the great Earth Mother, the supreme sky god, the wise old man, the jealous or self-sacrificial wife, and the idealistic young lover.

## 5. Ritualistic

Sir J. G. Frazer's *The Golden Bough* remains a pioneering monument in its

attempts to link myths with rituals. Its critical study of the relations between myths of primitive tribes and their rituals has provided a wealth of meaningful data. His discoveries, reconfirming the Freudian and Jungian theories, demonstrate the function of mythical ritual not only as wish-fulfillment, expressing human desire for divinity, heroism, or their appeal for aid from some unknown power, but also as spontaneous, unrestrained expressions of the human mind, expressing typically unconscious fears, anxiety or desires in a disguised or bizarre shape.

## 6. Structuralist

Claude Levi-Strauss, a structuralist anthropologist, sees myths as stemming from a human need to make sense of the world and to resolve cultural dilemmas. These dilemmas are embodied in the structure of myths, which is made up of binary opposites, such as heaven/earth, father/mother, male/female, good/bad, and day/night. And the mythic number three, a triad, is a number present throughout time as a cognitive formula of human endeavor: the three-part heroic quest/journey (departure, fulfillment, return), the holy Trinity in Christianity, the three branches of American government, etc.

For Levi-Strauss, myths are a kind of universal language. In his opinion, while the events of myths vary, the basic structures, like grammar, are similar in myths worldwide, because people are similar. Moreover, the mythical world is a world structured the same as the modern society, with its typical hierarchical organization, be it divine or human, matriarchal or patriarchal. The relations among the gods and goddesses themselves, between the divine and the mortal, and among the human beings are all based upon the notion of the structure. Wherever there is society, there is law and order. This is confirmed by the myth.

## 7. Comparative Structuralist

Vladimir Propp, a Russian folklorist, developed a structuralist approach to myth before Levi-Strauss, by analyzing a select groups of tales with similar features and isolating the recurrent, linear structure manifest in them. In this pattern Propp identified 31 functions or units of action (See Supplementary Reading), which have been termed motifemes. All these motifemes need not be present in one tale but those that are will always appear in the same sequential

order.

This comparative approach to mythology has proven useful in analyzing a wide range of seemingly dissimilar tales across many different cultures, which satisfy the sequential pattern, such as those about a hero's quest or, in particular, the thematic details concerning his mother and his birth, which Walter Burkert has broken down into 5 motifs:

1. The girl leaves home.
2. The girl is secluded.
3. She becomes pregnant by god.
4. She suffers.
5. She is rescued and gives birth to a son.

## 8. Feminist and Gender Study

Feminist critical theory focuses upon the psychological and social situation of female characters in terms of the binary nature of human beings, especially in the opposition or complementary relationship of the female and the male. Feminist scholars have used the critical methods of deconstruction to interpret myths from their points of view about political, social, and sexual conflict between men and women in the ancient and modern world. Their conclusions are sometimes determined by controversial reconstructions of such topics as the treatment and the position of women in ancient Greece, and the theme of rape and abduction. The stories of the raped, the wronged and maltreated female deities and mortals, and the notorious and distorted female mythical figures like Hera, Medusa, Circe, Medea, and the Sirens, etc. as traditional artistic archetypes, are of particular interest to them.

The study of homosexuality is also part of mythological criticism. Obviously, homosexuality was accepted and accommodated as a part of ancient life, certainly in ancient Athens. There were no prevailing hostile religious views to condemn it as a sin. Yet there were serious moral codes of behavior, mostly unwritten, that had to be followed to confer respectability upon homosexual relationships and individuals who were homosexual.

Homosexuality may be found a major theme in some stories, e. g. Zeus and Ganymede, Poseidon and Pelops, Apollo and Hyacinthus, Apollo and Cyparissus, Achilles and Patroclus, Orestes and Pylades, and Nisus and Euryalus. Thus



Greek and Roman myths both embrace the themes of homosexuality (and bisexuality) although, overall, they reflect the dominant concerns of a heterosexual society from the Olympian family on down.

Female homosexuality in Greek and Roman society and mythology is as important a theme as male homosexuality but it is not nearly as visible. Sappho, a lyric poetess from the island of Lesbos (sixth century B.C.) perhaps offers the most overt evidence.