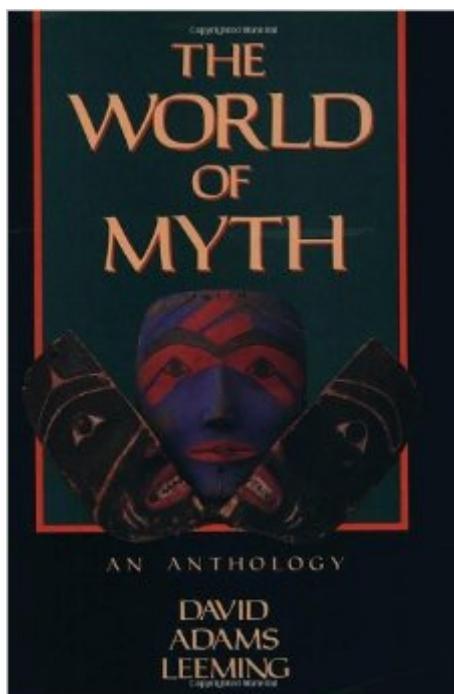


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# Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974 (Oxford History Of The United States)



## Synopsis

Hercules, Zeus, Thor, Gilgamesh--these are the figures that leap to mind when we think of myth. But to David Leeming, myths are more than stories of deities and fantastic beings from non-Christian cultures. Myth is at once the most particular and the most universal feature of civilization, representing common concerns that each society voices in its own idiom. Whether an Egyptian story of creation or the big-bang theory of modern physics, myth is metaphor, mirroring our deepest sense of ourselves in relation to existence itself. Now, in *The World of Myth*, Leeming provides a sweeping anthology of myths, ranging from ancient Egypt and Greece to the Polynesian islands and modern science. We read stories of great floods from the ancient Babylonians, Hebrews, Chinese, and Mayans; tales of apocalypse from India, the Norse, Christianity, and modern science; myths of the mother goddess from Native American Hopi culture and James Lovelock's Gaia. Leeming has culled myths from Aztec, Greek, African, Australian Aboriginal, Japanese, Moslem, Hittite, Celtic, Chinese, and Persian cultures, offering one of the most wide-ranging collections of what he calls the collective dreams of humanity. More important, he has organized these myths according to a number of themes, comparing and contrasting how various societies have addressed similar concerns, or have told similar stories. In the section on dying gods, for example, both Odin and Jesus sacrifice themselves to renew the world, each dying on a tree. Such traditions, he proposes, may have their roots in societies of the distant past, which would ritually sacrifice their kings to renew the tribe. In *The World of Myth*, David Leeming takes us on a journey "not through a maze of falsehood but through a marvellous world of metaphor," metaphor for "the story of the relationship between the known and the unknown, both around us and within us." Fantastic, tragic, bizarre, sometimes funny, the myths he presents speak of the most fundamental human experience, a part of what Joseph Campbell called "the wonderful song of the soul's high adventure."

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## Customer Reviews

The World of Myth was my textbook for a college course on world mythology. It is a handy reference that brings together several myths from different societies under the general headings of: Creation, Flood, Afterlife, Apocalypse, Hero, Place/Object Myths, and so on. The good news: it's useful to have these myths together in something of a synoptic format, such that the reader can easily draw lines of similarity and difference. All traditions are viewed equally, without preference to one or another as necessarily "more true". The author doesn't appear to take sides. Christian stories are told alongside those of ancient Greece, India, Africa, and so on. This seems like a reasonable way of doing business when it comes to mythology in an academic context. The bad news: while I appreciate the work of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung, their ideas do not represent the whole of scholarship on mythology. I agree with an earlier reviewer who pointed out a bias in the book toward universalist views. It would have been nice to see a broader palette of ideas represented, beyond just a couple of sentences in passing. Scholars such as Levi-Strauss, Malinowski, Burkert, Kirk, and Propp all presented interesting ideas that would be helpful to a study of mythology. There are certainly others as well, but these come to mind immediately. In favoring the psychological/universalist view, we miss the ideas of the functionalist and structuralist schools (among others) and end up assuming too much about the "facts" of mythology. So while there's no bias in this book with regard to a particular religion and its set of stories, there is an academic bias that comes through in the author's prefatory remarks for each section.

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