



Parallel Myths

J.F. Bierlein

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"Unusually accessible and useful . . . An eye-opener to readers into the universality and importance of myth in human history and culture."--William E. Paden, Chair, Department of Religion, University of Vermont

For as long as human beings have had language, they have had myths. Mythology is our earliest form of literary expression and the foundation of all history and morality. Now, in *Parallel Myths*, classical scholar J. F. Bierlein gathers the key myths from all of the world's major traditions and reveals their common themes, images, and meanings.

Parallel Myths introduces us to the star players in the world's great myths--not only the twelve Olympians of Greek mythology, but the stern Norse Pantheon, the mysterious gods of India, the Egyptian Ennead, and the powerful deities of Native Americans, the Chinese, and the various cultures of Africa and Oceania. Juxtaposing the most potent stories and symbols from each tradition, Bierlein explores the parallels in such key topics as creation myths, flood myths, tales of love, morality myths, underworld myths, and visions of the Apocalypse. Drawing on the work of Joseph Campbell, Mircea Eliade, Carl Jung, Karl Jaspers, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and others, Bierlein also contemplates what myths mean, how to identify and interpret the parallels in myths, and how mythology has influenced twentieth-century psychology, philosophy, anthropology, and literary studies.

"A first-class introduction to mythology . . . Written with great clarity and sensitivity."--John G. Selby, Associate Professor, Roanoke College

Parallel Myths Details

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From Reader Review Parallel Myths for online ebook

Dan Lalande says

The eclectic Bierlein crosscuts the myths shared by many of the ancient cultures. To his credit, it's not just the Norse, the Aztecs, the Egyptians, the Greeks and the Romans. You'll find sub-groups like the Hawaiians and various tribes of North American Indians. Further, the pool he draws from to explain this phenomenon is equally diverse.

Kazem Heidari says

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Tabitha Chamberlain says

anyone who believes reading will change their fundamental beliefs shouldn't worry about what they are reading, but what they believe. the book was pretty much written to be part of a college class on myths and mythologies. it is dry in places and repetitive in others. it's broke into different sections such as: creation, love, heroes, and underworld to name a few. reading these together is where the repetition comes in. the end of the book goes over some philosophy of why we believe what we believe and give you different views on such beliefs (the dry part as mind you some of this was written mid 1700)

i read the book because i thought it would be interesting and like myths, not because i was taking a class. it was what i expected and better, so if you're interested in such things its worth your time. :)

Ruby Hollyberry says

This was assigned for a college course on mythology. It is AMAZINGLY bad. There are so many errors in it, I can't tell you. The explanation of the origin of Christmas Trees is completely wrong from beginning to end, for one example. For another, the Finnish goddess Ilmatar is mentioned and her name is assumed to be "something-mother" on the logic that "matar" sounds like mother. It does sound like that, but this is not an Indo-European language, so you can't make those kinds of linguistic assumptions!! The author is apparently ignorant enough to do so. What a shame.

J.I. says

This book has a LOT of myths included. Too many, I would say. Not because there are really too many, but the summaries have made them EXTREMELY truncated, which hurts them a little bit, especially when you can see themes beginning to change a little bit. That being said, it also includes a lot of thought about myths from anthropology, philosophy and psychology (however it pretty much stops short at 1960 as far as these

field go, despite the fact that it was written in the '90s) which is extremely interesting, it's just a shame that almost all of the thought is VERY outmoded. It includes, sort of, contemporary myths and ends with an explanation that myth doesn't mean lie, as it has been construed to mean (and gives a nice historical reason for why this has happened), which is helpful.

In the end, it's not a great book, but it's a very solid introduction to the MANY myths out there and attempts to provide the vocabulary in which to speak about them.

Becca says

The first 200 pages of this book are a tsunami of gods and goddesses, floods, falls, monsters and heroes. Loki, Odin, Izanami, Amaterasu, Blue Jay, the Star Girls, Zues, Hera, Bran the Blessed, Angus Og, Ollantay, Hiawatha, Ishtar and Ra... it's overwhelming and wonderful to read these episodic myths, grouped into general theme: creation myths, early man, journey to the underworld, apocalypse and romance.

The organizational themes are both helpful and problematic-- the author makes sometimes arbitrary groupings of unrelated myths based on christian motifs that he identifies in (non-christian) stories. And the myths are decontextualized-- no context for collection, no dates-- just "authoritative versions". Sometimes the myths are in "original" language-- from the Old Testament or the Kalavala-- and sometimes there are retold by an anonymous interpreter. So there are some problems with the text that keep it from being a really useful collection for comparison and analysis. But the goal seems to be more to introduce myths in broad strokes rather than get quagmired in detail or analysis.

The most useful part of the book is the last few slim chapters-- these are collections of the author's favorite quotes about myth and meaning, interpretation of myth, theoretical and historical approaches to myth-- and a slightly preachy and out of place section on questions of faith. There the author explains that "myth" does not mean fictional or useless: describing the Christian drama of Christ's birth, death and resurrection as "myth" doesn't mean it is false-- rather it means that it is a Grand Story that links the everyday world with the divine. The author warns that abandoning myth cripples our spiritual bodies-- we lose our ability to imagine grandeur beyond our human lives when we refuse to dip into the mythic world.

The brief biographies of major players in the world of myth reading are very useful. The author attaches familiar names like Freud, Jung, Santayana, Watts, Mann, Schlegel, Muller, Bettelheim, Graves to specific theories, and illuminates their borrowings and relationships and summarizes their main ideas.

This book, even if its odd lack of context and occidental blind spots, is a wonderful basic resource to familiarize readers with some of the characters and motifs of world myths.

John says

I was greatly looking forward to re-reading this book for a book club and I was somewhat letdown. I am a bit of a student of mythology so I was quite excited to find a book that purported to draw on the work of Joseph Campbell, C.G. Jung, and Mircea Eliade. I found this book useful as a broad survey of censored myths. It is an easy and enjoyable read. I was disturbed, by some of the sloppiness. Just starting the book I soon found some embarrassing errors.

Page 6

MARS - the Mars bar was not directly named for the Roman god. "The Mars Bar was first created in 1936 and has become an instantly recognisable worldwide brand. However, in the United States, it is known as Milky Way. In the U.S., the Mars name was used until 2000 for a different bar, now known as Snickers Almond. (The worldwide Milky Way bar is known as 3 Musketeers in Canada and the U.S.; there is no longer a "Mars Bar" on the U.S. market.)" Further, it was named in 1936. Mars had been a hot topic since the publication of H.G. Wells' "War of the Worlds in 1898". The reddish interior of the bar sort of resembles the planet Mars, the flavour being out of this world. Source(s): www.spiritus-temporis.com/ & www.mars.com/

London - The name Londinium is thought to be pre-Roman (and possibly pre-Celtic) in origin, although there has been no consensus on what it means. It was common practice for Romans to adopt native names for new settlements. A common theory is that the name derives from a hypothetical Celtic place name, Londinion which may have been derived from the personal name Londinos, from the word lond, meaning 'wild'. The Celts themselves did not call it Londinium or any name attributed to Lugh (unlike Lyons in France). en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Etymology_of_Lo...

Jupiter – Though similar to the Greece God Zeus, through the eventual assimilation of Greek gods by the Romans. They are quite different (see www.nowpublic.com/culture/zeus-or-jup... point could be argued as a splitting hairs piece.

Page 11

"... the Egyptian year consisted of 13 lunar months of 30 days each, or 360 days."

Actually, 13 lunar months (30 days) are 390 days, 12 months of 30 days is 360 days, 13 lunar months (28 days) is 364 days.

Page 71

Apsu is described as the "sky god." No, An (or Anu) was the sky god, Apsu was the creature representing the freshwater abyss.

And the list on errors unfortunately goes on. One could say that the information/research was not available in the 1990 to catch these errors. Unfortunately, most of the data I quote was around since the 1980's. This is a shame because this ambitious undertaking and useful comparison is marred by this careless – an error that makes one unsure of what can be trusted.

I would get a proof-reader & an independent researcher to revisit the book and re-release it with better footnotes; uncensored myths (or admit they are tone-down for wider reading and/or general acceptance); readdress the compound errors of using Graves & Frazer as cornerstones in the beginning formulation of his premise (actually his lack of original content throughout this book as he large portions of the book are "cut and paste" from Mircea Eliade, C.G. Jung, and Joseph Campbell) and add a few more "voices" to the discussion.

One merit, he includes information on Indian, Hawaiian, Aztec, Iranian, African, Finnish, Chinese, Japanese, Polynesian, and North American myths. If you have an interest in these less studied myths, then this book would be a strong starting point. As for myself, I feel that these myths have less an impact on our general culture and psychology, though are extremely relevant to global consciousness and the Neo-Pagan Movement.

So, this book has its strengths though it is quite weak both faith & thought-wise. It could be a good general interest book for particular people who want no depth. I wouldn't call it an invaluable text but as a high school text, or as a very broad introduction to a non-scholar, I think it would decent starter book.

Elahe says

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Aubrey Hales-Lewis says

Not really my thing but I had to read it for work.

Edward Galway says

There are a multitude of factual errors, regardless of the version of myth being referred to. I believe that this was not intentional, as there is a blur between storytelling, explanation, and opinion in the presentation of the myths. This blurred change of narrative ruins the flow, and abruptly interrupts the feed of information, becoming either distracting or misguided, leading to the errors.

However, my main complaint is the lack of detail in many of the myths. Certain stories such as the Greek and Biblical ones will have an abundance of information, yet others such as the Americas or African stories will lack detail; many are simply glossed over without any thought. It comes across as lazy or misinformed, but I believe it was Bierlein's choice to focus on popular myths for reader interest as he clearly has done a hefty amount of research.

This was not what I was expecting when I picked up Parallel Myths, and I am disappointed. I wish I could recommend this book, but it may only be suitable for an introduction to mythology.

Meredith Haskins says

Book Summary from my son: Parallel Myths, by J.F Bierlein is a book about ancient myths. The stories come from the Ancient Greeks, Aztecs, Ancient Indians, and from many other people and places. These stories are cultural folktales based on not only religion but on moral stories. So these stories not only introduce you to god and morals and what not, they teach you life lessons that you should follow, not just for the religion but rules that everyone should follow in everyday life. According to ancient societies.

I learned a lot from this book including stories stories about Gods in Greek Mythology in this book I also learned some life lessons. Although I knew about these lessons before and I follow them, I learned new ways to see them. Like the story of Prometheus and Emptheus, where they are put in charge of creating mankind, and Prometheus' love for man forced him to give them the most powerful thing he could think of: fire. Although Zues got angered at him, he still gave fire to humans to protect them. this story teaches to show love for humans and to love them. Also reading all these stories helps you learn about some of the Gods of these religions. I think that these Myths are just like the bible's parables, in that they both teach morals about loving one another and having good values, I find the morals and Jesus' teachings very similar. I really liked this book because you can read stories that you have interest in and skip ones you don't like. I have interest in Greek Mythology so most of the stories I read were from the ancient greeks. I recommend reading this book if you like folk tales, or you like to read about stories with morals underlined in it.

Christy Stewart says

Just what I was looking for; something to use for quick referencing. Not for the more advanced student of mythology, it's a pretty light read.

Taylor Reece says

Interesting, but some of the myths were different from how I learned them...

Shannon says

I wish I could choose all three shelves. I've read a good amount of the stories featured in this book and while it is a textbook from class, I have every intention of keeping it. This is a collection of stories about love, life, and death taken from so many different cultures. When I have kids, I would love for some of these stories to be their introduction to the way life is (i.e. how they perceive death).

If you find this on half.com, I highly suggest buying it. The stories and myths in it are very imaginative and interesting, not just from an academic perspective but a personal one as well.

Cassandra Ankenman says

I read this after reading the books by Immanuel Velikovsky. Definitely worth the read and super interesting!
