

Essay on the four functions of mythology

[Literature](#), [Mythology](#)



Mythology as the gathering and study of myths, no matter their national or geographical identity, has always appealed to people. ' Myths' etymologically derive from the Greek word ' mythos', meaning any kind of information expressed within the borders of the first human societies, aiming at providing people with advice or guidelines concerning their everyday survival. During the evolution of humans' language as a code of communication, myths took over another role, the one they still possess nowadays. They acquired their own power, turning into the stories of older generations and surviving as a useful knowledgeable background through oral and written speech. Each nation developed its own myths in their effort to approach life's mystery, in such a way that fears and agonies, involved in the whole procedure of their survival, could be rationalized and dealt with successfully. Physical phenomena, like floods or earthquakes, and eternal questions on human existence such as the nature of death, love, soul - to mention but a few - were explained through myths. This essay aims at presenting you with the four functions of mythology, which will be achieved by illustrating their operations and demonstrating them in a specific myth.

illustrating their Operations

The four functions of Mythology, defined by the American mythologist, writer and lecturer Joseph John Campbell (March 26, 1904 - October 30, 1987) is as follows:

1. The Metaphysical: Awakening a sense of awe before the mystery of being
Mystery of life cannot be fully rationalized. Questions of metaphysical nature, can find shelter in mythological symbols which " touch and exhilarate centers of life beyond the reach of reason and coercion" (Joseph Campbell,

The Masks of God, vol. 4). Mythology operates as a healing machine for the incessant wounding questions: What are the existing powers, not visible or tangible at first sight - if there are any - leading our existence? What is the mystical, divine knowledge acquired during our journey in universe? What gives life to life itself? Fate and Destiny in Ancient Greeks predestine people's lives but never predefine it. Humans ultimately meet their universal destiny, whether carrying internal knowledge of their forthcoming experience or not. In Greek Mythology, Danae gave birth to Perseus, although imprisoned in a room by her father, since Zeus, the king of the Olympian Gods, entered the walls of her prison having turned into golden rain and fulfilled their union.

2. The Cosmological: Explaining the shape of the universe

Cosmos as a shape, its creation, the occurrence of physical phenomena, elements of nature, are approached differently, in terms of nations coping with their need for rationalizing them. The Greek myth of Persephone being kidnapped by Pluto, the god of Hades, rationalized the circle of seasons. Coming up on earth, Persephone brought spring and summer while her being taken underworld again, caused autumn and winter.

3. The Sociological: Validate and support the existing social order

Myths support the belief that members of any social group are expected to behave properly, otherwise punishment is to come. Operating like a law system, myths declare demand for preserving social order. Escaping the law or treating injustice individually, is wrong and unethical behavior. Prometheus, the semi-God hero of Greek mythology, accepted his punishment for violating Gods' law and providing humans with fire.

4. The Pedagogical: Guide the individual through the stages of life

Myths can be incorporated in the educatory means, contributing in the development of human maturity, through different stages of life. Mythology holds its own teaching value in fields of personal evolution. Eve tasting the forbidden apple, according to the Christian myth, was the reason why she and Adam lost their place in paradise. Punishment of disobedience is a pedagogically significant message. Research in the pedagogical effect of older or modern myths nowadays, would be interesting.

demonstrating their Operations

The divine reunion of Zeus, the king of Greek Gods, with a common mortal, Alcmena, brought Hercules to life, thus attributing metaphysical power to his existence. As a teenager, he found himself in front of a crossroad, having to choose his route. His choosing the route indicated by Virtue - instead of the one drawn by Evil, the fascinating, in looks, woman - teaches pedagogically people that maturity and real virtue cannot be gained without pain and hard work. The 12 Labors which ought to be successfully achieved as a means of purification for his 'unintentionally killing his wife and children'

([wiki/Greek_Mythology/Stories/Labours of Hercules](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Greek_Mythology/Stories/Labours_of_Hercules)) serves the myth's sociological function. The cosmological aspect lies in Hercules' trip to the end of the world in his 12th feat, where he saw Titan Atlas holding Uranus upon his shoulders and found the secret garden of Hesperides with the tree of golden apples.

Works Cited

Campbell Joseph, The Masks of God, vol. 4: Creative Mythology(New York: Viking, 1965), p. 4

http://en.wikibooks.org/wiki/Greek_Mythology/Stories/Labours_Of_Heracles