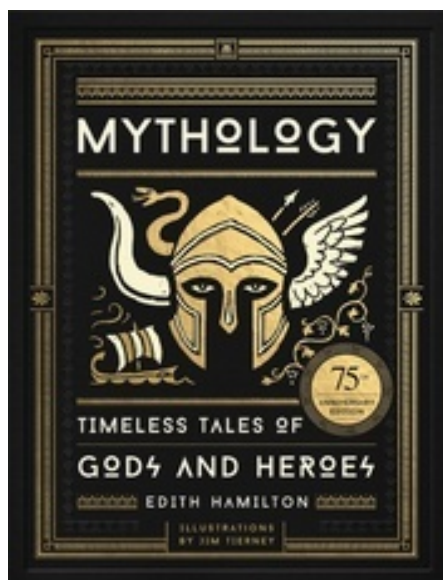




Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes

Edith Hamilton , Jim Tierney (Illustrator)

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Since its original publication by Little, Brown and Company in 1942, Edith Hamilton's *Mythology* has sold millions of copies throughout the world and established itself as a perennial bestseller in its various available formats: hardcover, trade paperback, mass market paperback, and e-book. For 75 years readers have chosen this book above all others to discover the thrilling, enchanting, and fascinating world of Western mythology—from Odysseus's adventure-filled journey to the Norse god Odin's effort to postpone the final day of doom. This exciting new deluxe, large-format hardcover edition, published in celebration of the book's 75th anniversary, will be beautifully packaged and fully-illustrated throughout with all-new, specially commissioned four-color art, making it a true collector's item.

Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes Details

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From Reader Review Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes for online ebook

David says

This is the second in a series of six reviews focusing on books about Greek mythology. The books included in this comparative evaluation are:

Bulfinch's Mythology (Modern Library Paperback Edition, 2004)

Mythology by Edith Hamilton (originally published in 1942; Back Bay Books edition of 1998)

The Greek Myths by Robert Graves (Penguin Books combined edition, 1992)

Gods and Heroes of Ancient Greece by Gustav Schwab (Pantheon Books, copyright 1946)

Don't Know Much About Mythology by Kenneth C. Davis (Harper Collins, 2005)

Myths of the Ancient Greeks by Richard P. Martin (New American Library, 2003)

Goodreads is not really set up to handle comparative reviews smoothly, so the discussion is split across the six book reviews. Thus, I've tried to evaluate each book on its own particular merits, and also give some idea of how it stacks up relative to the others. I based the comparative evaluation on three main general criteria - readability, accuracy, and scope (breadth and depth of coverage); I also looked at how each book handled two particular examples -- the life of Hercules and the story of Philomela and Procne. More details about the comparison can be found in the introduction to the first review:

Bulfinch evaluation

One of the problems in this whole undertaking is that some of the books on the list are acknowledged to be "classics", which makes it harder to review them objectively. You end up second-guessing yourself - maybe the classic status is causing you to be unduly deferential. Or maybe you're overcompensating by being too mean.

One thing became clear to me as I read these books. Although the myths remain unchanged, the way that we think about them has evolved considerably over the last 150 years. This is one reason why the bowdlerized myths presented to us by Bulfinch, in which each story is rendered moribund by being stripped of all reference to sex, violence, or any hint of unpleasantness, are so unsatisfactory to a 21st century reader.

Fortunately, Edith Hamilton is no prude. Her enthusiasm for the stories in "Mythology" is evident throughout the book. At times, she comes across as a woman on a mission - her conviction about the importance of these myths in Western culture is so passionate that she is determined to spread the message to a broader audience. She is scrupulous about identifying her source materials (on this point Bulfinch is, sadly, more dilettante than scholar). She knows how to structure a narrative. Her prose is clear and reasonably accessible - slightly dated, but largely unburdened by archaic language or academic jargon. "Mythology" even comes with a bunch of nifty illustrations, done by someone with the improbable name of Steele Savage (with a great fondness for winged horses, apparently). Though her first book wasn't published until she was in her sixties, her work achieved great popular success. Book-of-the-Month Club selection in 1957, honorary citizenship of Athens, a highly laudatory obit in the New York Times when she finally died at age 95 - what's not to love?

To sum up the points in its favor: Hamilton does well on the three basic criteria (accessibility, credibility, extent of coverage) the writing is clear, she is commendably rigorous about sourcing, and there are no glaring gaps in the extent of coverage. Both of my "test myths" were covered well; the story of Procne and Philomela particularly so. The family trees for the major Gods and important families of mortals are a really

useful feature.

I wish that I liked "Mythology" better. But I have no great love for this book. That 3rd star was given only because I felt obliged to acknowledge her superiority to Bulfinch. But, for me, the book has an inescapable "Reader's Digest" feel to it. Yeah, the writing is clear. It's adequate, but never more than that - it never takes off, even in those obvious places where you think it must. I know this is an unfair comparison, but earlier in the month I had been reading Oscar Wilde's stories for children, as well as some of Kipling's poetry, and I kept waiting for Hamilton to dazzle me, even just a little bit. But she never did. And those nifty illustrations? Cheesy beyond belief. It's not just the over-representation of winged steeds, there's also way too much use of the threatening dark thundercloud effect, and the human figures are invariably depicted as shrieking heavenward as they shake their evidently double-jointed limbs in panic.

Finally, it should be noted that Hamilton's retelling of the Greek myths is based solely on her study of the classical literature - she had never been to Greece, and had no archaeological experience. Examination of myth from an anthropological or psychological perspective is also absent. There is about a page of rambling prose in the introduction in which the words "myth", "religion" and "Nature" appear together prominently, but no coherent thesis is advanced.

Sometimes Hamilton is opinionated to a fault:

"Intelligence did not figure largely in anything he did and was often conspicuously absent." (about Hercules)
"The terrifying irrational has no place in classical mythology. Magic ... is almost nonexistent. Ghosts never appear on earth in any Greek story."

I don't really mind if she disses Hercules, but her gratuitous dissing of my boy Ovid really didn't win her any points.

All in all, reading "Mythology" was not as much fun as I had expected. I'm not sure that it deserves to be considered a true classic.

Christopher says

Only made it to page 180, but someday I'll finish it. In the meantime, some paintings of a few myths I did read:

John William Waterhouse, *Echo and Narcissus*, in which Echo (who can only echo what other people say) fails to save Narcissus from drowning himself while admiring his own wonderful visage.

Francisco de Goya, *Saturn Devouring His Son*, in which the titan Saturn eats all his children so that they won't be the death of him.

Peter Paul Rubens, *Leda and the Swan*, in which a woman is raped by Zeus in the form of a swan.

Amphora depicting Odysseus and his men blinding the Cyclopean Polyphemus, c. 660 BCE.

Roya says

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Ashley says

This is one of those books you hear about and then buy in a used bookstore and it languishes on your bookshelves for years until you finally pick it up, and then you just end up thinking to yourself, why didn't I pick this up sooner? Only, it's also one of those books that really works better as a reference than as a book you sit down and read from cover to cover. I read this book over the course of most of February, in bits and pieces, and it worked well that way.

This book is a classic for a reason. It's at once a primer on world mythology and a pretty exhausting compendium of pretty much any myth or godlike figure you'd want to know about (with an emphasis on western mythologies, which is a bit of a shame; I would have liked to see what Hamilton would have had to say about eastern myths, or African ones). But my favorite bits were actually her little insights here and there into how the mythology was influenced by the historical culture of the times. I loved when she took little digs at historical writers, like Sophocles or Pliny or whoever. There was this one guy, whose name I'm forgetting at the moment, whom you can tell she just despised, but was too polite to say. And this dude lived 2,000 years or more before she did! Hilarious.

She spends the most time on Greek mythology; it seems to be her favorite. And she made the claim in one of the intros that the Greeks' mythology was different from the others, because reasons. At that point I was like, okay lady, but maybe it's just your favorite and you're kind of biased.

Anyway, definitely a valuable book to have on my shelves.

Read Harder Challenge 2019: A book of mythology or folklore.

BAM The Bibliomaniac says

Audiobook #267

K.D. Absolutely says

"This book makes me feel smarter," says my GR friend in her review of this book. I worked the same for me.

Greek, Roman and Norse mythologies are so old because they have been in existence thousands and thousands of years even before Christ was born. No wonder that many literary works have been based on them. Even the names of the planets and the stars. Even the names of my, mortal as they are, relatives and friends. I have a nephew by a cousin in Canada whose name is **Hector** but he does not write stories as his

passion is on computers. In the island where I grew up, there was a boy named **Apollo** who was naked the whole day that I could see his wang dangling while we played and he oftentimes cried when he lost in our games and I thought that, while reading this book, he did not even have a slight semblance of the Greek god he was named after. Along Roxas Boulevard, there is a niteclub called **Athena** where I bring company male visitors if they are giving me hints that they would like to see naked dancing Filipinas. Well, I am just trying to be a gracious hospitable host allowing my foreigner friends happy during their visit. But I think that none of those girls exhibit wisdom, reason and chastity that are the virtues of the goddess their place of work was named after. Maybe their frequent ordering of ladies drink while they *reason* that they are thirsty can be considered as *wisdom*, but please pardon me if I don't comment about chastity.

My favorite part is the Trojan War. I know, I know. I have not read Homer's *The Iliad* and I am ashamed. Prior to reading this book, I thought that Troy is Brad Pitt. This book taught me that Troy was a city and Brad Pitt's name in the movie should have been **Achilles**. I was also amazed to learn that **Perseus** was really the one who severed **Medusa's** snake-decorated head just like in Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympian's The Lightning Thief*. So, Riordan really stuck to the myth after all.

Hamilton's re-telling of those old myths is considerably interesting. I just can't remember all those hard-to-pronounce many names. However, the knowledge that I got reading each story was really overwhelming. This is really a book that needs to be read by everyone.

Thank you, Atty. Monique for recommending this book to me. You're such a smart lady and I am happy to be your friend! Let's buddy read Bulfinch soon!

Paige Bookdragon says

You can never forget your first love.

Ana O says

Warning: this review is dark ~~not really~~ and full of ~~terrors~~-nerdiness.

Some of my favorite features include:

Titans and Olympians

Having children is never a good idea. Just ask the Titans.

OCEAN, the river that was supposed to encircle the earth; his wife **TETHYS**; **HYPERION**, the father of the sun, the moon, and the dawn; **MNEMOSYNE**, which means Memory; **THEMIS**, usually translated by Justice; and **IAPETUS**, important because of his sons, **ATLAS**, who bore the world on his shoulders, and **PROMETHEUS**, who was the savior of mankind.

Dionysus

Ah, the seductive Dion. The only god whose parents were not both divine.

This strange god, the gay reveler, the cruel hunter, the lofty inspirer, was also the sufferer. He was the vine, which is always pruned as nothing else that bears fruits; every branch cut away, only the bare stock left; through the winter a dead thing to look at. Like Persephone Dionysus died with the coming of the cold. Unlike her, his death was terrible: he was torn to pieces, in some stories by the Titans, in others by Hera's orders. He was always brought back to life; he died and rose again. It was his joyful resurrection they celebrated in his theater, but the idea of terrible deeds done to him and done by men under his influence was too closely associated with him ever to be forgotten. He was more than the suffering god. He was the tragic god. There was none other.

Some time during his wanderings, Dionysus came upon the princess of Crete, Ariadne, when she was utterly desolate, having been abandoned on the shore of the island of Naxos by the Athenian prince, Theseus, whose life she had saved. Dionysus had compassion upon her. He rescued her, and in the end loved her. When she died Dionysus took a crown he had given her and placed it among the stars.

Prometheus and Io

Prometheus and Io briefly united in their hatred of Zeus and Hera and their shenanigans.

They talked freely to each other. He told her how Zeus had treated him, and she told him that Zeus was the reason why she, once a princess and a happy girl, had been changed into a beast.

Narcissus and Echo

This is one of my favorite stories. Echo and Narcissus, a myth from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, revolves around a love stricken nymph Echo and a handsome Greek youth who fell in love with his own reflection.

The hero of it was a beautiful lad, whose name was Narcissus. His beauty was so great, all the girls who saw him longed to be his, but he would have none of them. He would pass the loveliest carelessly by, no matter how much she tried to make him look at her. Even the sad case of the fairest of the nymphs, Echo, did not move him.

This was very hard, but hardest of all when Echo, too, with all the other maidens, loved Narcissus. She could follow him, but she could not speak to him. How then could she make a youth who never looked at a girl pay attention to her? One day, however, it seemed her chance had come. He was calling to his companions. "Is anyone here?" and she called back in rapture, "Here—Here." She was still hidden by the trees so that he did not see her, and he shouted, "Come!"—just what she longed to say to him. She answered joyfully, "Come!" and stepped forth from the woods with her arms outstretched. But he turned

away in angry disgust. "Not so," he said; "I will die before I give you power over me." All she could say was, humbly, entreatingly, "I give you power over me," but he was gone. She hid her blushes and her shame in a lonely cave, and never could be comforted. Still she lives in places like that, and they say she has so wasted away with longing that only her voice now is left to her.

So Narcissus went on his cruel way, a scorner of love. "May he who loves not others love himself." The great goddess Nemesis, which means righteous anger, undertook to bring this about. As Narcissus bent over a clear pool for a drink and saw there his own reflection, on the moment he fell in love with it. "Now I know," he cried, "what others have suffered from me, for I burn with love of my own self—and yet how can I reach that loveliness I see mirrored in the water? But I cannot leave it. Only death can set me free." And so it happened. He pined away, leaning perpetually over the pool, fixed in one long gaze. Echo was near him, but she could do nothing; only when, dying, he called to his image, "Farewell—farewell," she could repeat the words as a last good-bye to him.

The nymphs he had scorned were kind to him in death and sought his body to give it burial, but they could not find it. Where it had lain there was blooming a new and lovely flower, and they called it by his name, Narcissus.

Cupid and Psyche

A mysterious deity, a beautiful mortal maiden, a vengeful mother-in-law, jealous siblings, and a whole lot of misunderstanding. The tale of Cupid (Eros) and Psyche is perhaps the best known of all the Greek myths.

When at last he lay sleeping quietly, she summoned all her courage and lit the lamp. She tiptoed to the bed and holding the light high above her she gazed at what lay there. Oh, the relief and the rapture that filled her heart. No monster was revealed, but the sweetest and fairest of all creatures, at whose sight the very lamp seemed to shine brighter. In her first shame at her lack of faith, Psyche fell on her knees and would have plunged the knife into her own breast if it had not fallen from her trembling hands. But those same unsteady hands that saved her betrayed her, too, for as she hung over him, ravished at the sight of him and unable to deny herself the bliss of filling her eyes with his beauty, some hot oil fell from the lamp upon his shoulder. He started awake: he saw the light and knew her faithlessness, and without a word he fled from her.

She rushed out after him into the night. She could not see him, but she heard his voice speaking to her. He told her who he was, and sadly bade her farewell. "Love cannot live where there is no trust," he said, and flew away. "The God of Love!" she thought. "He was my husband, and I, wretch that I am, could not keep faith with him. Is he gone from me forever? ...At any rate," she told herself with rising courage, "I can spend the rest of my life searching for him. If he has no more love left for me, at least I can show him how much I love him." And she started on her journey. She had no idea where to go; she knew only that she would never give up looking for him.

Orpheus and Eurydice

Orpheus, the greatest musician that ever lived, and his love, the beautiful Eurydice. The tale of Orpheus and Eurydice proves that love is stronger than death.

Where he first met and how he wooed the maiden he loved, Eurydice, we are not told, but it is clear that no maiden he wanted could have resisted the power of his song. They were married, but their joy was brief. Directly after the wedding, as the bride walked in a meadow with her bridesmaids, a viper stung her and she died. Orpheus' grief was overwhelming. He could not endure it. He determined to go down to the world of death and try to bring Eurydice back.

With my song
I will charm Demeter's daughter,
I will charm the Lord of the Dead,
Moving their hearts with my melody.
I will bear her away from Hades.

Persephone and Hades

Persephone, the lovely Goddess of Spring. Hades, the dreaded God of the Underworld. Pomegranate seeds. What exactly happened? Did Persephone fall in love with Hades, and go with him willingly or was she abducted? We may never know.

She was gathering flowers with her companions in the vale of Enna, in a meadow of soft grass and roses and crocus and lovely violets and iris and hyacinths. Suddenly she caught sight of something quite new to her, a bloom more beautiful by far than any she had ever seen, a strange glory of a flower, a marvel to all, immortal gods and mortal men. A hundred blossoms grew up from the roots, and the fragrance was very sweet.

She stole toward it, half fearful at being alone, but unable to resist the desire to fill her basket with it. Wondering she stretched out her hands to take the lovely plaything, but before she touched it a chasm opened in the earth and out of it coal-black horses sprang, drawing a chariot and driven by one who had a look of dark splendor, majestic and beautiful and terrible. He caught her to him and held her close. The next moment she was being borne away from the radiance of earth in springtime to the world of the dead by the king who rules it.

Daedalus

Have you ever heard the phrase, flying too close to the sun?

Daedalus was the architect who had contrived the Labyrinth for the Minotaur in Crete, and who showed Ariadne how Theseus could escape from it. When King Minos learned that the Athenians had found their way out, he was convinced that they could have done so only if Daedalus had helped them. Accordingly he imprisoned him and his son Icarus in the Labyrinth. But the great inventor was not at a loss. He told his son,

Escape may be checked by water and land, but the air and the sky are free, and he made two pairs of wings for them. They put them on and just before they took flight Daedalus warned Icarus to keep a middle course over the sea. If he flew too high the sun might melt the glue and the wings drop off. However, as stories so often show, what elders say youth disregards. As the two flew away from Crete the delight of this wonderful power went to the boy's head. He soared exultingly up and up, paying no heed to his father's anguished commands. Then he fell. The wings had come off. He dropped into the sea and the waters closed over him.

The heroes of the Trojan war

What can I say that hasn't already been said? We've all heard stories of the invincible Achilles, brave Hector, cunning Odysseus, noble Priam, foolish Paris, beautiful Helen, gentle Andromache, greedy Agamemnon and violent Menelaus.

More than a thousand years before Christ, near the eastern end of the Mediterranean was a great city very rich and powerful, second to none on earth. The name of it was Troy and even today no city is more famous. The cause of this long-lasting fame was a war told of in one of the world's greatest poems, the Iliad, and the cause of the war went back to a dispute between three jealous goddesses.

The judgment of Paris

Paris was chosen by Zeus to determine which of three goddesses was the most beautiful. The contestants were Hera, Athena and Aphrodite. Hera offered to make him king, Athena offered wisdom and victory in battle, Aphrodite offered the love of the most beautiful woman in the world, Helen of Sparta. Guess what Paris chose?

Of course all the goddesses wanted it, but in the end the choice was narrowed down to three: Aphrodite, Hera, and Pallas Athena. They asked Zeus to judge between them, but very wisely he refused to have anything to do with the matter. He told them to go to Mount Ida, near Troy, where the young prince Paris, also called Alexander, was keeping his father's sheep. Paris, though a royal prince, was doing shepherd's work because his father Priam, the King of Troy, had been warned that this prince would some day be the ruin of his country, and so had sent him away.

His amazement can be imagined when there appeared before him the wondrous forms of the three great goddesses. The choice was not easy. Hera promised to make him Lord of Europe and Asia; Athena, that he would lead the Trojans to victory against the Greeks and lay Greece in ruins; Aphrodite, that the fairest woman in all the world should be his. Paris, a weakling and something of a coward, too, as later events showed, chose the last. He gave Aphrodite the golden apple.

That was the Judgment of Paris, famed everywhere as the real reason why the Trojan War was fought.

Antigone

Oh, Antigone. Tragic, brave Antigone. Daughter of Oedipus, princess of Thebes, bride of death.

“Your choice was to live,” she said, “mine to die.”

Selene and Endymion

Selene, the goddess of the moon, fell in love with the handsome shepherd Endymion. She asked Zeus to grant him eternal youth so that he would never die. Zeus put him into an eternal sleep. Every night, she visited him where he slept.

He never woke to see the shining silvery form bending over him. In all the stories about him he sleeps forever, immortal, but never conscious. Wondrously beautiful he lies on the mountainside, motionless and remote as if in death, but warm and living, and night after night the Moon visits him and covers him with her kisses.

Daphne

Apollo has the worst luck with women. THE WORST. Daphne was a young huntress dedicated to Artemis, who, like the goddess, refused to marry. Obviously, though, Apollo had other ideas.

She is said to have been Apollo’s first love. It is not strange that she fled from him. Her father, the river-god Peneus, was greatly tried because she refused all the handsome and eligible young men who wooed her.

She was hunting, her dress short to the knee, her arms bare, her hair in wild disarray. Nevertheless she was enchantingly beautiful. The idea made the fire that was devouring his heart blaze up even more fiercely and he started off in pursuit. Daphne fled, and she was an excellent runner. Even Apollo for a few minutes was hard put to it to overtake her; still, of course, he soon gained. As he ran, he sent his voice ahead of him, persuading her, reassuring her. “Do not fear,” he called. “Stop and find out who I am, no rude rustic or shepherd. I am the Lord of Delphi, and I love you.”

But Daphne flew on, even more frightened than before. She felt his breath upon her neck, but there in front of her the trees opened and she saw her father’s river. She screamed to him, “Father, help me!” At the words a dragging numbness came upon her, her feet seemed rooted in the earth she had been so swiftly speeding over. Bark was enclosing her; leaves were sprouting forth. She had been changed into a tree, a laurel.

Apollo watched the transformation with dismay and grief. “O fairest of maidens, you are lost to me,” he mourned. “But at least you shall be my tree. With your leaves my victors shall wreath their brows. You shall have your part in all my triumphs. Apollo and his laurel shall be joined together wherever songs are sung and stories told.”

The beautiful shining-leaved tree seemed to nod its waving head as if in happy consent.

Ted says

Pindar in the early fifth century tells the tale about the feast Tantalus made the gods and protests that it is not true. The punishment of Tantalus is described often, first in the *Odyssey*, from which I have taken it. Amphion's story, and Niobe's, I have taken from Ovid, who alone tells them in full. For Pelops winning the chariot race I have preferred Apollodorus, of the first or second century A.D., who gives the fullest account that has come down. The story of Atreus' and Thyestes' crimes and all that followed is taken from Aeschylus' *Oresteia*.

from the intro to chapter 17, The House of Atreus

I was stressing out last night over trying to get a handle on the third part of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*, *The Eumenides*. I'd started reading the introductory material by the translator, but it was so long, so involved ... almost as if it were a postmodern retelling of the play.

What's more (displaying my ignorance here) I was confused over the title of the play, and some of the main protagonists of the play, the *Furies*. They are represented by a chorus, pursuing Orestes for his murder of his mother. But where does the title come from?

I picked up some info somewhere in the edition I'm reading, and finally realized that in the climactic section of the play the *Furies* are rebranded by Athena into the *Eumenides* - a name that means Kindly Ones - thus changing them from a group seeking revenge and retribution (the old way that humans responded to murder) to a group which provides a higher moral choice to human kind, through the institution of justice.

But before I let it go, I picked up Hamilton's book, and checked out the index entries for Eumenides (248) and Furies (see Erinyes) - so to Erinyes, where among other entries was (Orestes pursued by, 246-248) - which closed the circle. Those three pages were near the end of an eighteen page chapter on the House of Atreus. As I started looking through this (to get to my point) I realized that this chapter told the story of this house in a more illuminating way than the somewhat overly cerebral, mammoth introduction in my copy of *Oresteia*.

So, I thought I'd throw in these words about this quite wonderful book, most of which I've never read in the decades that I've owned it (basically having used it as a reference book).

As hinted above, the book has a pretty detailed, and very useful, index. There are drawings by Steele Savage, some full-page (in my Mentor edition of sometime after 1970, which was at the time the forty-fourth printed of Hamilton's book, first printed in 1940. It is still in print.

In the spoiler I've put the table of contents. If you check it out, you'll see the wonderful way that Hamilton has organized it. And you'll see why the book isn't titled *Greek Mythology*.
(view spoiler)

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Previous review: March Violets

Next review: West-Running Brook

Older review: We Were the Mulvaneys

Previous library review: *The Sleepwalkers A History of Man's Changing Vision of the Universe*

Next library review: *The Dreamtime Book Australian Aboriginal myths in paintings by Ainslie Roberts*

Janus the Erudite Artist says

This book, aside from fairy tales, has introduced me to the world beyond our reach. I first had this book because back in high school, we were required to read it. I never really understood back then why it seemed that I was one of the few who enjoyed reading this and majority of our class despised having to be given the assignment to read it. I always found it entertaining. Well, the first few stories were a bit tedious but it was a foundation that helped me understand the other tales so it wasn't much of a big deal to me.

I don't have many words to describe how I feel about this book. I look up to it so much for being the root of letting me grow as a reader and aided me to open my eyes and mind to a world of vast imagination, creativity and foreign culture.

For more of my reviews, please visit my blog:

The Blair Book Project @ www.theblairbookproject.blogspot.com

Welwyn Wilton Katz says

This book is very hard to classify. Doesn't the title make you think "World Mythology"? Well, if it did, you would be wrong. I bought this book, looking forward to (especially) a female viewpoint of comparative mythology from various different countries around the world. What I got was an extremely thorough set of retellings (with impeccably named sources) by Hamilton of virtually every classical (Greek and Roman) myth ever told), with the very strange inclusion of approximately 20 pages of Norse myths. I don't ever object to reading Norse myths. They are my favourite, since they make between them almost a linear single story with cause-and-effect leading us from the creation of the world to its inevitable destruction. I do admit to feeling offended, almost, that this amazing body of Norse myth should be included as an afterthought in 20 pages of a book nearly 470 main pages long, leaving out all the things that make the Norse world view make so much sense. I was pleased to see the Volsungasaga included, since it is so often replaced by the Nibelungenlied (the Germanic version of Siegfried and his messed up love life), but then as I read it I found to my dismay: "The story of Siegfried is so familiar that that of his Norse prototype Sigurd can be briefly told." Do you notice the word "prototype" in that sentence? Does Edith Hamilton not care that the prototype is more important than the bastardized version invented by Germanic peoples? There are reasons for the re-invention of the Sigurd story that are not entirely pleasant, and the re-invention of *that* story as the Wagnerian Ring Saga in opera. These reasons are unsavory and political, the stories are later, and they are unsatisfactory in the extreme, compared to the Volsungasaga. Okay, enough of my own particular hobby horse. It's time to ask why Hamilton was so extraordinarily thorough with Greek myth (and Roman, while aware that Roman stories are nearly all renamed versions of the Greek tales), and yet she left out so many other myths so much older and so much more important, for example The Epic of Gilgamesh, perhaps the oldest written story on Earth, which relates the story of the historical King of Uruk from Ancient Sumeria (2750-2500 BCE) originally on 12 clay tablets in cuneiform script. This astoundingly important tale in

human history is completely ignored by Hamilton. So are all the myths of the rest of the world. I would like to give this book five stars for its really complete and fairly narrated Greek mythos, but since it leaves out the whole rest of the world (except as above), I can only give two stars at most. If the title of the book had been "Greek Mythology", I think I could have given it five stars. But then it would have had to compete with so many other works about Greek mythology, that probably the publishers said to change the name and add something that wasn't Greek. Sorry for the disillusionment about the publishing trade, but I've been there.

Trish says

Hm. I declared August "History Month" and read, amongst various others, **Bulfinch's Mythology** of which I was quite disappointed. In my research of his work and how it came to be I found a reference to this book by Edith Hamilton, who superseded Mr. Bulfinch in most classrooms. Thus I read this book in an attempt to find a better written encyclopedia. Unfortunately, I did not succeed.

To clarify: this book IS better written than the one by Mr. Bulfinch. One reason is that Edith Hamilton was a scholar.

She was born in Dresden in 1867 but grew up in Connecticut and Pennsylvania, where she also got her BA and MA degrees for which she won the Mary E. Garrett European Fellowship. Her father had begun teaching her Latin, then French, German, and Greek when she was only 7 years old which probably was a factor in her interests later and her great scholarly success. In 1895 she moved back to Germany with her sister to study humanities and classics at the university of Munich (the then centre of classical studies). Edith Hamilton and her sister were among the first women to audit classes (her sister published an autobiography detailing their life in Germany even). Originally, her plan had been to earn a doctoral degree (definitely not easy at the time) but then she was persuaded to return to the US to become head of the recently opened Bryn Mawr Preparatory School for Girls in Baltimore. She never completed her doctoral degree but she did become an "inspiring and respected head of the school for twenty six years" (bringing new ideas to an old system).

Only after retiring did she start to write books, which explains why this book was published only when she was 62!

As she has said herself in some interviews, her passion was for the Greeks which definitely shows in this book and is my main criticism. This book is advertised as a source on mythology in general, but it isn't. The main body of work is about the Greeks, added to by Roman mythology (which mostly is adapted Greek mythology if we're being honest). Almost as an afterthought, she included only 20 pages of Norse mythology. Nothing else is mentioned!

The Greek parts are written very well and the author's passion for the subject is clear throughout. Moreover, she has a very clear structure (missing a few myths nevertheless *sigh*). All her knowledge came from classic literature; she has never been to Greece, and never participated in archaeology. Of course that isn't necessary in order to produce a good book but it shows that her views (although she was a scholar) were influenced and limited by the sources she read.

While I was pleased to see that Hamilton had included the Volsunga saga in the chapter about Norse mythology (in many books it is replaced by the Nibelungenlied which was penned much later), she dismissed the saga by saying that the story is so well-known thanks to the Nibelungenlied that the original can be told briefly and THAT is an absolute no-go for me.

It's almost as bad as Bulfinch telling the readers which myths are Christian enough to be included and which had to be shortened/changed for his "genteel" readers. It is precisely the original stories I want to be told

about or at least I want a thorough comparison!

Moreover, the one thing I expect at the very least from an encyclopedia of mythology is a good overview. Such an overview **MUST** include immensely important classics like the Gilgamesh epos! However, this book does not. Other cultures aren't even referenced. If she had titled her book correctly, I really wouldn't mind. It's a nice book about the very much related mythology of the Greeks and the Romans. However, I really need to point this out again: this is supposed to be a comprehensive work of mythology as a whole!

Sorry, but this was just as disappointing as Mr. Bulfinch's cuts and changes to myths which accounts for the low rating (if there was a half-star rating system here, it would get more than **Bulfinch's Mythology** but as it is ... alas). It is a shame since the writing style was much more engaging but it wouldn't be right to rate it any higher.

Jason Koivu says

Edith Hamilton may have written *Mythology: Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes* more than a half century ago and she may have been fairly ancient when she did so, but she still put out one seriously readable book!

Hamilton took from the best sources to cobble together slick summaries of all your old time myth favorites. Before giving each mythical story's highlights, she details the different writers who created a version of it and explains the qualities of the best ones. Sometimes she berates the lesser attempts and I appreciated the balance, especially since she explains her critique.

Now having said, I have to note the caveat that this is not a scholarly work. This is a summary, a boiling-down, a sugar-coating of a topic that frankly could have been presented in a much more academic, dry manner. I'm glad it wasn't. These are not cursory run-throughs. They're full of detail and color.

The main issue with a book with that title is that you expect a wide ranging survey of the topic. This, however, is almost entirely about the Greek Myths. The Roman versions are only mentioned, because the Romans stole their myths wholesale from the Greeks. Aside from that, we get a very superficial mention of the Norse myths that takes up *maybe* the last 5% of the book. Nothing else in all the rest of humanity is even slightly touched upon. Disappointing. But if you want an easy, fun read on the Greek stuff, this is the book for you!

Helena of Sparta ☆ says

This book is considered as a **classic** for a reason... And I just wanted to say that this edition is *GORGEOUS*. Please, **BUY IT!** I promise that it'll look as *AMAZING* on your shelves as it does on mine! :D

P.S. These beautiful photos aren't mine! ;)

Jennifer says

I believe, deep in my heart, that everyone who has attended high school in the past twenty to thirty years or so (in the United States, at least) owned a ratty, most likely used copy of this work at one time or another. This book has been on the required reading list of so many schools that nearly everyone has seen it, owned it, and opened it at least twice.

This is one only two such books I still have, 15 years out of high school: this and Strunk and White. This is a good book to have lying around the house, not because you need it every day, but because it is a great reference for things like settling family bets and cheating on the brown questions in Trivial Pursuit. Dig it out of the boxes in your basement sometime, under the term paper from freshman comp, and have a look over it. It really is a great reference guide to ancient mythos, it's easily accessible, and well written. Generations of high school teachers can't be all THAT wrong.

Well, except maybe for making us all read Moby Dick.
