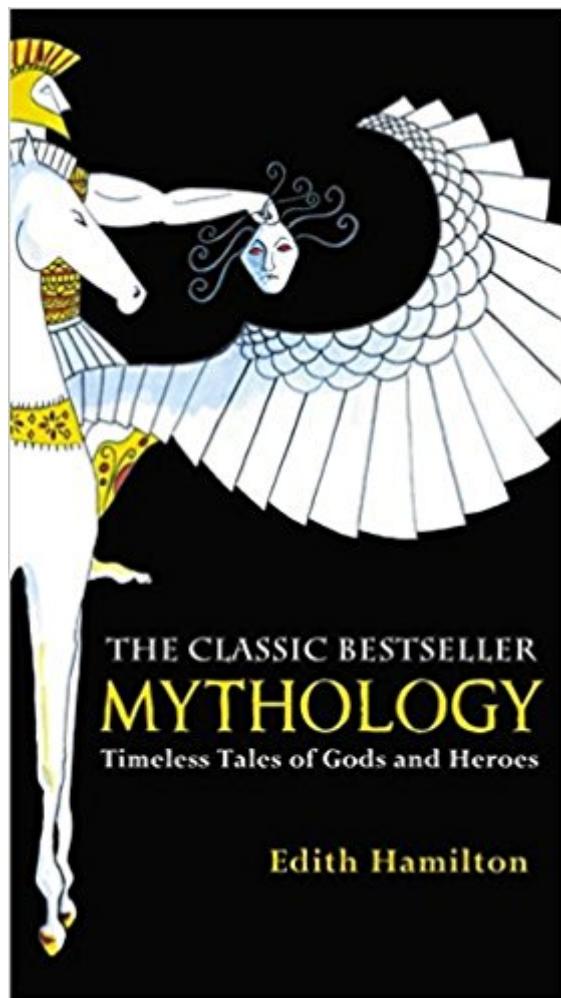


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Mythology: Timeless Tales Of Gods And Heroes



Synopsis

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. *Mythology* succeeds like no other book in bringing to life for the modern reader the Greek, Roman, and Norse myths and legends that are the keystone of Western culture - the stories of gods and heroes that have inspired human creativity from antiquity to the present.

Book Information

Mass Market Paperback: 512 pages

Publisher: Grand Central Publishing; Reprint edition (January 1, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0446574759

ISBN-13: 978-0446574754

Product Dimensions: 4.2 x 1.2 x 7.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ See all reviewsÂ (485 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #1,176 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > History & Criticism > Movements & Periods > Ancient & Classical #1 inÂ Books > Literature & Fiction > Ancient & Medieval Literature > Greek #2 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Social Sciences > Folklore & Mythology

Customer Reviews

Hamilton's mythology deserves its place with Bulfinch's mythology as one of the primary anthologies of classical mythology. Although the book covers Greek/Roman myths thoroughly, the Norse myths are touched upon only briefly, which is why I have given the book four stars rather than five.

Nonetheless, the quality of the book is excellent, and it is useful as a volume to be read for entertainment, and as a classroom primer (I myself have taught a *Mythology* class using it as the primary textbook). Hamilton's retellings are engaging, and her scholasticism is evident throughout--a small example is her use of the less popular Roman names for the primary gods (Jupiter, Juno, Mars, etc.) when they are found in myths of Roman origin. Hamilton also includes information at the beginning of most chapters about the source of the myth and its author, which is very helpful. She synthesizes the longer myths, such as the Trojan War (found in the *Iliad*) and the quest for the golden fleece in such a way as to highlight their major events and give the reader a flavor of their

content. Overall, I have not encountered a better survey of classical mythology in one volume.

Incidentally, if the reader desires more information on the Norse Myths, I recommend Kevin Crossley-Holland's *Norse Myths*, which is also an excellent volume.

"Mythology" covers all the major and most minor Greek, Norse and Roman gods, goddesses, stories and locales. Edith Hamilton makes no pretenses that this is all there is to say on mythology, but she gives a reader a fine start. Hamilton puts them into sensible structures so beginners can learn in a context which are easy to understand. She provides major section titles helping readers get straight to the required story, like "Stories of Love and Adventure" You'll find "Cupid and Psyche" as a chapter. Chapters are named mostly by story like, "The Trojan War." She quotes from the sources, so the reader knows how it is she got her information. Character-driven in format, readers can look up a name, find the subtitle with that name, and read why that character matters. She writes narratively, sounding a little like "Cliff's Notes." This is a good thing, because the poetry from which these myths are drawn can be overwhelming. Nicely organized is the geneological table section. It looks like a family tree, in a English royalty kind of way. As a writer, I use it for a quick reference guide. I usually only need a few nuggets of information, and she gives me plenty. I first acquired it high school, using it to get out of those tough jams when I did not understand books like "The Odyssey," by Homer. More than mere reference, "Mythology" is good reading for no other purpose than serendipitous curiosity. I fully recommend it. Anthony Trendleditor, HungarianBookstore.com

Edith Hamilton's "Mythology" tell the "Timeless Tales of Gods and Heroes" of classical mythology and this volume, first written in 1942, is now a timeless classic itself. This was the first book of mythology that I ever read and it is still the best. When Hamilton retells the love story of Cupid and Psyche or the tragedy of Agamemnon and his children, she does so with a full sense of what it meant when first told by Apuleius or Aeschylus. These are not children's tales, but the heroic legends and religious beliefs of the ancient Greeks. Furthermore, the illustrations by Steele Savage have the elegance of wood block prints, which, for all I know, is exactly what they are. I appreciate Hamilton's choice to avoid relying on Ovid, for while the "Metamorphoses" is the most comprehensive ancient text dealing with the classical myths, Ovid is an unbeliever. For Hamilton the writings of Homer, Hesiod and Pindar are more abbreviated in terms of providing details for the myths, but at least they take the tales seriously. Another strength of the book is how she organizes the myths in her seven parts: (1) Covers the complete pantheon of deities, including the lesser gods

of Olympus and Earth and the later Roman additions, as well as the earliest heroes. (2) Retells the various tales of love, between mortals and the gods or each other, along with the Quest for the Golden Fleece and other early heroic adventures. (3) Focuses specifically on the greatest heroes, Perseus, Theseus and Hercules, with Atalanta thrown in the mix in a curious but understandable editorial decision by Hamilton. (4) Puts together Homer's Iliad and Virgil's Aeneid into a giant epic stretching from the Judgment of Paris to the founding of Roman, with the Odyssey and the tragedies of Euripides. (5) Tells about the great mythological families, namely the House of Atreus (Agamemnon), the Royal House of Thebes (Oedipus and Antigone), and the Royal House of Athens. (6) Covers all of the lesser myths, most notably Midas. (7) Goes off in a new direction, providing a very brief introduction to Norse mythology that seems woefully inadequate given the comprehensive compilation of classical mythology that precedes it. I looked over other possibilities as a basic textbook for an introductory mythology course, but I keep coming back to this one. If you want analysis of these myths, then you certainly want to look elsewhere. But if you want a solid retelling of virtually every tale of classical mythology, then Edith Hamilton's volume is still at the top of the list.

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