



INTRODUCTION

Greek myths were stories created by an ancient people to explain and justify the origins of values, the physical world, the vagaries of fate, the capriciousness of nature, the wanton and wonderful ways of humans, and to provide role models for good and evil. The Greeks' word *paradeigma* meant education by example, and their myths offered *paradigms* or models to imitate. The myths were peopled by beautiful gods and goddesses in human form who bore a melancholy resemblance to man at his best and worst.

We have tried to capture the fascination of these stories without compressing the colorful landscape to a mere black and white snapshot. At the same time, while we have included a graphic family tree, we were deliberate in our efforts to eliminate as much allusion as possible to complicated genealogy. Those convoluted branches often strangle and discourage understanding and appreciation of the myths by students.

Myths were the main form of education for the Greeks and, because of this, represent more than the charming stories of an ancient culture. The stories were the basis for great classical works because they carry a significance for humankind and the society in which we live as descendants of Greek culture. Here are stories of attitudes between generations, between men and women, and between men and gods. The myths reveal the nature of relationship between parents and children, penetrate to the origins of human love and fear of nature, explore the conflict between children and authority, and explain why evil exists alongside or together with good.

Myths, after all, have traditionally been much more important than mere entertainment. As speculative thought, they have served to explain natural and social phenomena; to convey a sense of morality and justice; and have offered some order to the chaos and mystery of life. "Myth" means "plot" or "order," and mythologic has meant communication in words about the order and origin of things.

All of this surely ought to be at the heart of education, whether of Greek boys or American children. What Greek myths reveal can be startling for making profound connections between people who are separated by the passage of more than 2000 years.

ABOUT THE GREEK GODS AND GODDESSES

Greek gods and goddesses had a checkered history. Their origins often were Asian, not Greek, which means they were timeless, reaching far beyond Western, Greek civilized history to primitive nature worship. The names of the deities reveal their Oriental roots. Most probably, the myths traveled with various ethnic tribes from Asia Minor, Crete and the Greek Islands to Mainland Greece (Hellas). Greek myths were therefore older than Greek culture but were formalized, written down, and ritually recited beginning in the seventh century B.C. by Greek poets such as Hesiod. They duplicate far Eastern, Mideastern, and other mythologies. This suggests that the stories and characters personify eternal ideas and raise profound questions about nature, life and death. Yet they were significantly altered in the transition to Greek culture, as they clearly express Greek values as opposed to Asian ones.

Goddesses of Crete and Asia Minor, for example, were *fundamentally* different from their Greek counterparts, many of whom bore the same names. The former were protectresses and nurturing figures; the Greek goddesses often mean-spirited, persecuting shrews who inspired fear, hatred and anxiety in Greek men. Greek mythology, then, conveys both universal questions and issues as well as specifically Greek ones. For both reasons, myths continue to address contemporary Westerners.

Greek gods and goddesses were most often portrayed in human forms. The deities, we are told, did not have blood running through their veins as you and I, but also a substance called *ichor* which made them invulnerable to the injuries suffered by mortals. They were, however, immortal and could change to any form they chose. They consumed heavenly foods called nectar and ambrosia as well as the animal sacrifices offered by humans. They lived on Mt. Olympus and they acted all too human! Their time was spent toying with the lives of human beings, using them for their own vengeance and pleasure; causing suffering or happiness at will. In short, they behaved like the people who had created them. They embodied fears and hopes, explained what seemed mysterious and altogether reflected the aspirations and nature of Greek culture.



I. BEGINNINGS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

OLDEST GENERATION

URANUS (you RAY nus):
GAEA (JEE uh):

Father Sky, ruler of the world
Mother Earth, mother of all things and oppressed by her husband

NEXT GENERATION: TITANS (GIANTS)--FIRST CHILDREN OF MOTHER EARTH:

KRONOS (KRO nus):
RHEA (REE uh):
APHRODITE (af ro DY tee):

god of time, youngest son of Uranus, clever and bold
wife of Kronos, Earth goddess
beautiful goddess of love, charged to make people fall in love

THE FURIES-ERINYES-
(AIR in eez):

three ugly goddesses of vengeance, charged with guaranteeing the punishment of criminals

THE FATES-MOIRAI-(MOY
rye)-- three sisters:

CLOTHO (CLO thoh)
LACHESIS (luh KEE sis)
ATROPOS (AT ro pos):

daughters of Themis, goddess of necessity

NEW GENERATION: OLYMPIAN GODS AND GODDESSES

ZEUS (ZOOS):

new god of heaven and Earth, keeper of lightning and thunder, his weapons

HERA (HAIR uh):

POSEIDON (po SY dun):

queen of heaven, jealous and vengeful, wife of Zeus
brother of Zeus, new god of the sea. His sceptre is the trident.

HADES (HAY deez):

brother of Zeus, new god of the underworld, the dark kingdom of death and punishment

DEMETER (DEM uh ter):

sister of Zeus, new goddess of Earth and harvest

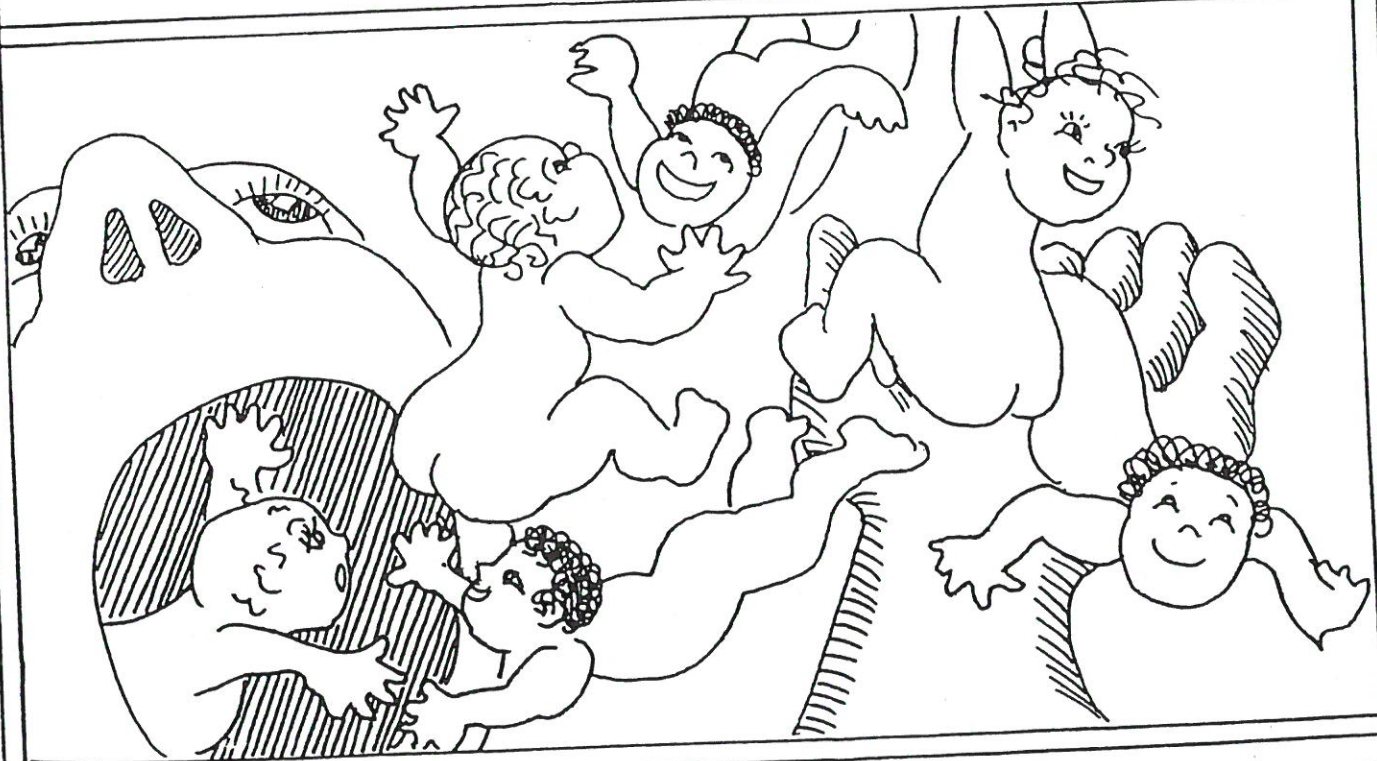
OLDEST GENERATION: PARENTS OF THE GODS

Uranus (Father Sky) and Gaea (Mother Earth)

At first there was only chaos. There was no order, no life, no nature--only a great misting and formless upheaval. The solid mass known as Earth did not exist. There was no sky with its celestial companions, sun, moon and stars; there was no water in lakes and oceans and not even air to breathe. But yet, from this state of confused primordial matter there arose, from an infusion of supreme power, the sky and the earth who were the parents of the gods. Father Sky was Uranus, and Mother Earth was Gaea, and the two

became the parents of the Titans, the first race of mythological giants known as "the Noble Ones." Uranus, Father Sky, liked peace and heavenly quiet. He thought that in order to keep this peaceful Golden Age of his, nothing should change or move. Some say he cherished the Golden Age so much he refused to let his children alter it. Others say he was jealous and afraid of his children. And so, as each of them was born, he kept them cruelly imprisoned deep within their mother, Gaea, who was the Earth.

Mother Earth grieved for her captive children and with her youngest and cleverest son, Kronos, plotted to overthrow Uranus. This was accomplished violently one dark night when Kronos fiercely injured his father with a sickle given him by his mother, Gaea. The father, Uranus, now wounded gravely, no longer had his former powers. Saddened and defeated, he knew he would be parted from his wife forever and that the first Age of Heaven was over. And so it was that his story explained the separation of the earth from the sky in Greek mythology. When the injured Uranus was to depart, the blood which flowed from his wounds churned in the sea. The blood, the waves and the roiling water produced a thickened foam. And from this foam there rose a goddess, iridescent with sea water. The glorious Aphrodite, goddess of love, was born, and the heavens sighed with admiration. But there was more, for when the blood of the deposed Uranus mixed with the earth, the vicious Furies were born. These three goddesses, the Furies (known as the Erinyes), were the last children of Uranus and Gaea. They were given a relentless thirst for blood and justice, for they were the punishers, the avengers of victims of violent crimes, especially within families. Their job suited them well since they themselves were born from such a crime. They were terrifying to see with their sharp talons and wings of brass. The whips they carried were a reminder of the torture they inflicted upon the guilty.



NEXT GENERATION--TITANS

Kronos (Father) and Rhea (Mother)

Kronos, intoxicated with his new power, replaced his father and rose to a mighty height as King of the Titans. He quickly saw that peace and quiet was much to be desired and, like his father before him, he demanded that the new Golden Age be unchanging. But now, inevitably, it was Kronos's turn to suffer violent trouble. He had been warned by his departing father, Uranus, that when it was his time to have a son, the story would repeat itself. It would be his own precious offspring, too, who would overthrow him ruthlessly. Kronos knew from his own experience that children create noise and unrest in a family as they grow. More importantly, he feared that with their increasing strength and power, his sons would begin to challenge the authority of their father. Wanting to keep life in his control, Kronos unwittingly made the prediction come true. With god-like treachery and no remorse, he swallowed each of his helpless children as they were born to his wife Rhea. Each babe in swaddling clothes disappeared with one convulsive gulp. Frantic and deeply saddened by this unloving treatment of her five children and the selfish indifference to her own wishes, Rhea courageously substituted a rock wrapped in infant's clothes for her last born son, Zeus. Her cunning was rewarded, for Kronos was deceived as he swallowed the rock believing it to be the baby. Rhea was then free to carry out her secret plan. She hid her last, most cherished infant in a cave on the island of Crete. Rhea attended to his care and nurture. He grew to manhood and was distinguished by his beauty and his smoldering desire for revenge.

NEW GENERATION--OLYMPIAN GODS AND GODDESSES

Zeus (Father) and Hera (Mother)

Zeus was not willing to hide for the rest of his life which meant for all eternity, for he knew his fate was intended to be luminous and greater--greater even than his father's. Zeus realized, however, that he would need extraordinary help to overthrow the mighty Father Kronos. With his vengeful mother, Rhea, he schemed cleverly to release his swallowed brothers and sisters so they might help him in his ambitious plan. Rhea concocted a dish which contained a tasteless emetic. She served this to her unsuspecting husband and stood by gleefully as she watched him vomit in great spasms--first the stone and then all their children, one by one. The plan was clearly a success, for they were all freed at last, and in the way of the gods, emerged fully grown from their father. With no time to lose, the clever Zeus immediately formed an alliance with his brothers and sisters. From their citadel on Mt. Olympus they waged a bitter war against their Father Kronos and his fellow Titans. Except for the wisest Titan, Prometheus, Zeus utterly defeated the race of giants.

And so began the rule of the Greek gods we know best, under the reign of Zeus, the all powerful. Zeus, the first one to know the sweetness of freedom, could not ignore his brothers and sisters because of their important participation in the monumental defeat of the Titans. As the first among equals, he struck a compromise of power with them. He gave the underworld and the dark domain of death to his sombre brother Hades, the deep mystery of the powerful seas to his brother Poseidon, and the life-giving fields, harvests and bounty of nature to his sister Demeter. All that was left over, in the sky and on the earth, he took for himself and his queen, Hera. It was in this way that the third Golden Age, some say the Silver Age, began under the rule of Zeus and his fellow gods and goddesses, collectively known as the Pantheon. Contented with new power and grace, they all agreed most amiably, to keep peace in the world and make no further changes. But we shall read more about the peace and quiet they created!

