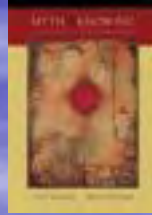


Myth & Knowing



Scott Leonard and Michael McClure

Chapter 1: Purposes and Definitions Contemporary Approaches

The materials given here are based on Leonard & McClure with additional notes added by Bill Stifler, Chattanooga State Technical Community College, 2005

Myth & Knowing

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William Doty's Toolkit

In *Mythography*, Doty recommends students approach myth from as many different mythological schools as seems appropriate to the material being studied.



(Leonard and McClure 23)

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William Doty's Toolkit

He suggests students think about myths by asking a "systematic series of exploratory questions" using a variety of "research procedures" centered around "five central concerns."



(Leonard and McClure 23)

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Central Concerns

- Social
- Psychological
- Literary, textual, performative
- Structural
- Political



(Leonard and McClure 23)

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A Tale From Decameron, 1916
John William Waterhouse

Bruce Lincoln

Ideological Narratives

In *Theorizing Myth*, Lincoln sees myth as "ideology in narrative form."

(Leonard and McClure 24)

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A Tale From Decameron, 1916
John William Waterhouse

Lincoln's approach involves studying a myth within its historical and cultural context to determine the ideologies which shaped it and continued to modify it as its telling progressed through time.

(Leonard and McClure 24)

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A Tale From Decameron, 1916
John William Waterhouse

Lincoln's approach is too complex and involves detailed scholarly analysis which is beyond the time constraints for the undergraduate student. Students using Lincoln's approach must depend on what scholars have determined.

(Leonard and McClure 24)

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Wendy Doniger

Telescopes and Microscopes

The 19th century ethnologist Adolf Bastian identified in myths what he called “elementary ideas” which he saw as universal to all myths.



(Campbell 3)

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Telescopes and Microscopes

Doniger uses a similar technique, “stripping individual myths to their ‘naked’ narrative outlines.”

This is her telescopic view, where individual details are less important than the universal traits shared between myths.



(Leonard and McClure 24)

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Telescopes and Microscopes

Bastian also argued that myths contain other "ethnic" or "folk ideas," which express local differences. It was the search for these folk ideas that prompted, for instance, the Grimm brothers research into German folktales.



(Campbell 3)

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Telescopes and Microscopes

Much like Bastian and others focused on the individual myth stories for their unique folk character, Doniger suggests students of myth focus on the individual social, political, and performative contexts of a myth in order to understand how myths operate ideologically. This is her “microscope view.”



(Leonard and McClure 24)

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Telescopes and Microscopes

Doniger sees these two approaches to the study of myth as a means of maintaining balance, shifting “between the ‘microscope’ of a single telling to the ‘telescope’ of the world’s numerous variations on a mythological theme.”



(Leonard and McClure 24)

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Robert Ellwood "Real Myths"



"Ellwood argues that what we call 'myth' does not exist." "[W]hat we call myth 'is always received from an already distance past, literary, . . . a step away from primal simplicity.'" The "real myth" is grounded in a lived experience. What we study are the literary artifacts recalling the myth.

(Leonard and McClure 25)

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Robert Ellwood "Real Myths"



As literary artifacts, the myths we read have been carefully crafted into a literary narrative that is distanced from the original sentiment that energized the myth.

Therefore, myth has meanings for its hearers which is separate from the literary story that has been preserved.

(Leonard and McClure 25)

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Reading Mythology

"[M]yths are literary truths told about the mysteries and necessities that always have and always will condition human experience."

(Leonard and McClure 25)



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Reading Mythology

A literary approach to myth allows us to use all of the tools from the various approaches to myth we have learned while still recognizing the literary qualities of the myths as interesting stories about human nature.

(Leonard and McClure 25)



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