



The Women's Companion to Mythology

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All societies create myths to explain creation and sort out where each of us fits in the cosmos. The erudite *Woman's Companion to Mythology* is a wondrous, female-centered fount of legend, folklore, and mythic tales from many sources. The cross-cultural myths between its covers echo human fears and embody reasoning for taboos or placating rituals. They explain the mysteries of the natural world, too. In an Eskimo myth about the creation of the moon and sun, a brother who desires his younger sister steals into her bed one night. When she unmasks him the next morning as her clandestine lover, her face turns "glowing red from shame." In a fury, she lights a wick of lamp moss and spins in a circle, ascending higher and higher into the skies. Her brother follows her into the heavens, but his lamp wick is extinguished leaving just a cool glow.

Myths reflect the balance between the sexes at a given historical moment, positing a world where women hold the upper hand--as Egyptian goddesses often did--or are more likely to be pawns, as in certain Indian and Greek myths. Some stand as full-blown metaphor. When Saranyu, wife of the sun in one Indian tale, can no longer stand her husband's brilliant light, she fashions a double from her shadow and leaves it behind in her place. Paging through this insightful collection reveals volumes about "how we [women] see ourselves and how society regards us," says editor Carolyne Larrington. --*Francesca Coltrera*

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