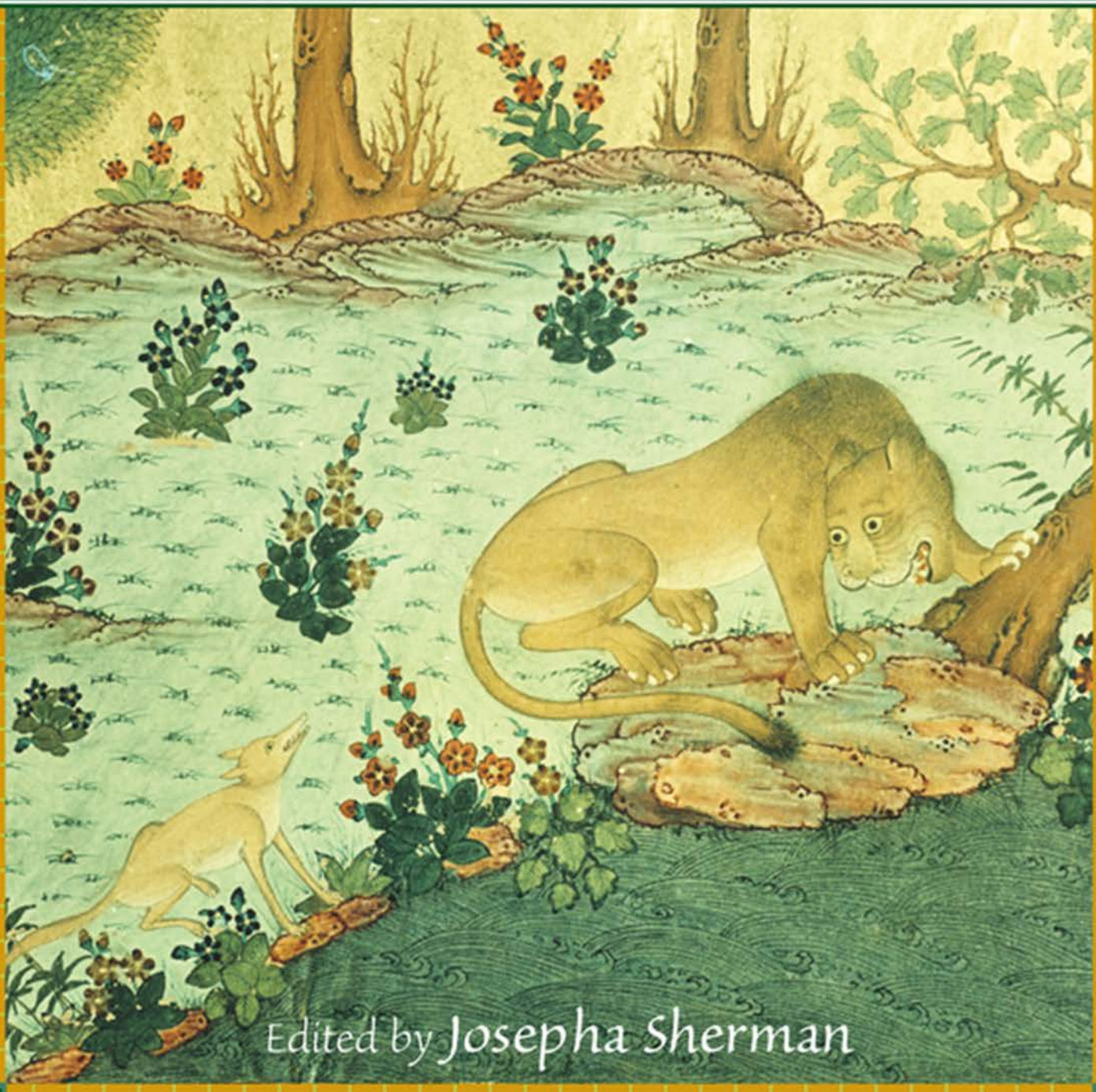
Storytelling

An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore



Edited by Josepha Sherman

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Volumes One–Three

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Contents

Volume 1

Volume 2

Volume 3

Retellings

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Preface

The world of storytelling is a vast one. It covers the entire world and everything in it, and every century in which there is a record of storytelling having taken place. In the early days of putting this encyclopedia together, it was soon apparent that the central dilemma was not so much what to include, but what to exclude. After all, almost every subject can be used by an enterprising storyteller, and, if every potential subject was to be included, this would have turned into an endless series of volumes.

It seemed important to include examples of world tale types, from which storytellers could spin off their own versions, basic world myths, and folktales. Also included have been some of the major characters in mythology, folklore, and popular culture, and discussions of how they are related to one another. Another inclusion has been short biographies of major figures in the realm of storytelling, such as Hans Christian Andersen and J.R.R. Tolkien.

Where data was available—wars, other major events, and cultural changes invariably got in the way—basic national storytelling styles have been included. Also included in this work are subjects more peripherally related to storytelling, such as role playing games and the connections of superheroes to folktales.

The general format of this encyclopedia is a collection of informative entries, organized in alphabetical order. This section is followed by a carefully chosen selection of appropriate retellings of many of the stories discussed in the entries. Appendices include a list of educational programs and courses focused on storytelling and a list of storytelling festivals. A selected bibliography and a comprehensive index are also provided for more in-depth research.

Taken as a whole, you will find this three-volume reference set to be a most definitive and fascinating study of the wide world of storytelling.

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Introduction

Once Upon a Time . . .

. . . there was a story. Story openings take a number of forms: "once there was," "once there was not," "once, in the long ago days," and many others. But no matter what shape the opening words take, the result is always the same—listeners are hooked.

Once a story has begun, there is something deep within the human psyche that must hear what will happen next. The pull of the story is universal. There is no known culture without some form of storytelling, and the craving to know "what comes next" has been felt by every human being, regardless of age, gender, culture, or century.

Storytelling is present in many aspects of human life. Stories are told by grandparents, parents, and other family members. Professional storytellers share their tales at fairs, festivals, schools, libraries, and other sites. Stories are integral to the mediums of television, film, opera, and theater, and storytelling sessions sometimes take place in the business world at special meetings. Campfire tales are meant to make campers shiver. And urban legends, contemporary folktales that usually are attributed to a "friend of a friend," are told and retold. No matter how unlikely the tale may be, the teller invariably insists, "It's *true!*"

Storytelling Throughout History

Storytelling is one of the oldest human activities, possibly as old as language itself. So who was the first to tell a tale? It may have been a hunter boasting of his skill or exaggerating the reason for his failure to find game. It may have been a mother who told stories of monsters waiting in the forest to keep her children from wandering off. Or it might have been a shaman, seeking to explain the creation of the world, the turning seasons, or the coming of birth or death.

There is no way to determine the first individual ever to tell a story. The history of storytelling can be traced back only as far as the development of written language. The oldest surviving written records show that storytelling was thriving by the second millennium B.C.E. Records of Egyptian storytelling date to about 2560 B.C.E., when the sons of Pharaoh Khufu (or Cheops) entertained their father with stories.

The first written stories are from the first millennium B.C.E. Early examples show that the basic elements for a good story were already in place by that time. The Egyptian tale "The Prince and His Three Fates," which dates to about 1500 B.C.E., includes familiar themes, such as the princess in the tower or, in some versions, on the glass mountain, who can be rescued only by a true hero. And this story certainly is older than the written version.

In general, by the time a story is written down, it has been told and retold, possibly for centuries. One of the earliest known storytellers is the Greek poet Homer, who lived in the eighth century B.C.E. Homer probably recited his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in front of an audience long before these epics were written down. Another storyteller from ancient Greece whose tales were later recorded, the fabulist Aesop, lived in the fifth century B.C.E.

A similar example of a traditional tale that was handed down is the Near Eastern epic of Gilgamesh. The earliest complete version dates to the seventh century B.C.E., but there are earlier, incomplete versions from about 1500 B.C.E.

There are written stories from Greece, China, and India that date to the end of the first millennium B.C.E. In the British Isles at that time, Celtic storytellers wandered the countryside telling stories of gods, heroes, and clan histories. The earliest Welsh storyteller for whom a name was recorded was Taliesin, who lived in the sixth century C.E.

In the Middle Ages, storytellers' names were regularly recorded, and, by the time of the Renaissance, individual storytellers were identified around the world. In China, the first storyteller whose life was well documented was Liu Jingting, who lived in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries C.E.

Throughout these early years, much storytelling—unrecorded but very real—was taking place. Mothers, fathers, and grandparents were telling stories to their families, wandering or amateur storytellers were telling stories to villagers, and people in general were telling stories on the job, on breaks, and whenever there was time—as they continue to do today.

Why Tell Stories?

The real question may be how can one *not* tell stories? Every conversation is rife with information-packed stories of what the teller has been doing recently. People share stories they have heard from others, retell stories they have read, and even rehash things they have seen on television. Anyone who chooses to formalize this sharing takes on the role of the "storyteller."

A storyteller has a repertoire of tales, skill at delivering those tales, and access to an audience. The sharing of stories serves the audience as well as the teller. For the audience, the storytelling event offers a moment of play, a shared experience, a bonding.

Participation stories allow listeners to be involved in an artistic event—and, in the hands of a skilled teller, they can play their part very well. Emotionally intense stories bring a group of people closer together in a shared caring. In such a group event, emotions that are not normally allowed to surface are released.

The most wonderful gift of story is the bonding of a group. Held close under the spell of a story, the group breathes as one. The shared experience softens the edges between individuals and brings everyone closer in the warmth of the moment. Together, the members of the group enter a "story trance." Storytellers benefit, in turn, as they experience the heartwarming feeling of holding the audience's attention and nurturing the group by sharing a beloved tale.

Many stories also serve the community in a broader sense. All societies use stories to pass on group values. Wrapped in the sweet pill of an entertaining story, a moral goes down easily. Stories also can be useful tools that allow individuals to chastise or expose negative behaviors without overtly speaking the truth. The Liberian storyteller Won-Ldy Paye related how Anansi spider stories have been used to "say without saying" in front of a chief. If the chief has behaved in a greedy manner, the storyteller shows Anansi in this incorrect behavior. Everyone knows whom the storyteller is talking about. The chief hears, and he knows, too.

Many families draw "catch-phrases" from their favorite stories, with which they can quickly refer to a story in the course of their daily lives. A phrase, such as "It don't take long to look at a horseshoe," can bring family members back to the original story, as well as remind them of the moral of the tale.

Communities and families also may wrap their history in stories in order to remember details of events long past. A moment in time can be preserved by creating a story and telling it a few times. The story format bundles the facts into a neatly tied packet that is more readily stored and retrieved than a number of separate details.

Stories also help to broaden awareness of other cultures. The folktale genre, in particular, reflects many traditions and helps to familiarize people with world cultures.

Stories also can be used for educational purposes. Stories can help to develop a child's literary sensibilities, and listening to tales impresses a sense of story structure into a child's mind. Stories aid in stretching vocabulary, and children who are able to tell stories often gain advanced verbal ability and an increased sense of self-worth.

Storytelling provides other growth opportunities, as stories help listeners to see through another's eyes and to share the protagonist's feelings of anger, fear, or love—all from a safe place. The Austrian-born American writer and child psychologist Bruno Bettelheim explained that stories are important to children because battling difficulties through story can help them face real-life troubles. Stories provide role models who show us how to face demons and overcome adversity.

Perhaps best of all, stories stretch the imagination. The teller takes the listener to distant places where remarkable things happen. And once stretched, an imagination stays stretched.

What Is a Story?

There are many different story categories, ranging from true adventures to tall tales. All stories can be organized roughly into four genres: true stories, folklore, fiction and literature, and fairy tales.

True Stories

A true story may be a personal account or a recounting of a historic event. The story may be embellished or exaggerated, but the facts generally are unaltered. News stories fall into this category, and newscasters, with their deliberate style of delivery, definitely can be called storytellers.

There are also folk performers, such as the *plena* singers of Puerto Rico, who present the news of the day and social commentary in music. Like the traditional town crier, who strolled the streets calling out the day's news, these storytellers provide information in communities that lack ready access to television or recent newspapers.

Family stories usually are shared among the members of a nuclear or extended family. These tales may include factual history, shared memories, family jokes, and exaggerated tales about the exploits or mishaps of family members and friends. In the past, family histories were fabricated to trace back the ancestry of a ruler, or a particular clan, to a deity. This gave early leaders and dominant peoples credibility among the masses.

The types of family stories range from personal memories to general family histories that include a family's shared beliefs, customs, and folklore. Stories of personal memories tend to be less complex than family histories. Personal memories might include seemingly trivial events, such as how a sister had a "bad hair day" on the day of a big date and what she did about it, or how the teller first planted a garden. In the right hands, however, this same material can be crafted into an engaging tale.

Family stories or histories generally encompass a larger view of the world. They might tell of how the family survived the Great Depression in the United States, how ancestors migrated from their homeland, or even explain the origin of family holiday traditions.

Related to family stories are fictionalized accounts that sound plausible and can be told outside the family. An example is James Thurber's hilarious "The Night the Bed Fell," which he included in a book of such tales, *My Life and Hard Times* (1933).

Folklore

The genre of folklore predates written literature and can be broken down into the following categories: folktales, nursery rhymes and some nonsense rhymes, myths, religious stories, epics, ballads, fables, and legends.

A folktale is literally a tale of the folk, or the people, that has no known author. Folklorists separate folktales into basic categories, such as wonder tales, moral tales, tales of fools, and *pourquoi,* or how-and-why, tales.

A wonder tale generally is a story of adventure and magic with familiar themes, such as the triumph of the third son, the magic sword, the talking animal helper, and so on. An example of a moral tale is the "Grateful Dead" tale type, in which a ghost rewards the man who gave his earthly remains an honorable burial. Fool tales, also known as noodle or numbskull tales, generally are good-natured tales of foolish or downright stupid people, such as the Jewish folktales of the people of Chelm, "to whom foolish things keep happening." Pourquoi tales explain the how-and-why of things that are too ordinary to be the themes of true myths, such as the West African story of "Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears" or the Indian story of "Why the Blue Jay is Blue."

Nursery rhymes are ideal for entertaining young children. There are many collections of nursery rhymes available, and the rhymes usually are in the public domain. Some storytellers invent their own rhymes. But the classic rhymes have been around for ages for good reason: They are fun for children to repeat and effectively use humor and musical language. Nonsense rhymes are also favorites with the younger age group.

Myths address daunting themes such as creation, life, death, and the workings of the natural world, answering major life questions such as "How did the world begin?" and "Why does the Sun rise and set?" Myths often include deities and other supernatural beings in their lists of characters, and they may tell of cosmic events, such as the birth of the universe.

Myths are closely related to religious stories, since myths sometimes belong to living religions. In addition to explaining questions about the world around us, these stories create a sense of community among believers, often giving comfort to the listeners. Religious stories are likely to be retellings from sacred books, such as the Judeo-Christian Bible and the Hindu *Bhagavad Gita*. Religious stories also may take the form of parables, or tales intended to teach a lesson, such as the Christian parable of the prodigal son.

Epics are long narrative poems about the adventures of legendary figures. While Homer's *Iliad* may not sustain the interest of a youthful audience, the tales of King Arthur and his knights or the adventures of the African heroking Sundiata would be appropriate. Shorter epic tales that are full of adventure and heroism are ideal for children.

Ballads are poems that tell a dramatic story in verse. Longer ballads may be too much for a younger audience, but a great many of the ballads—for instance, those about Robin Hood—can easily be told as stories.

Fables are short stories that teach a lesson. Many of the characters in fables are animals that talk and act like humans. Some fables, such as those written by the eighteenth-century French writer Voltaire, were meant for adults. Others, such as Aesop's fables, are more popular with children, because of the clear examples of right and wrong. In Aesop's "The Fox and the Grapes," the fox is unable to reach the grapes and so decides they are sour. The moral of this fable is, "It is easy to despise what you cannot get."

Legends are about historic or quasi-historic people or places. American legends, to take some familiar examples, include stories about larger-than-life but real people, such as frontiersman Davy Crockett (who invented many of his legends himself) and riverboat man Mike Fink. A legend may feature a real person but not celebrate an actual event. The American legend of George Washington and the cherry tree is based on an incident that never occurred. The legend has lasted, because peo-

ple wanted to believe that Washington was honorable even as a boy. Quasi-historic figures may or may not have lived, such as King Arthur or Robin Hood.

There are also legends attached to specific places. Such legends may relate to an actual event, such as the signing of a peace treaty under a so-called Treaty Oak. Or they may explain a feature of a place as being the result of a fantastic event, such as an indentation resembling a hoof print that is said to mark the spot where the devil stamped in anger after losing a soul.

Fiction and Literature

Storytellers often turn to fiction when searching for source material. Nonfiction books do not lend themselves as well to storytelling. The genre of fiction ranges from novels based on historic events to total fantasy.

Fantasy and science fiction describe adventures in both realistic and fantastic settings. Books such as J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series (1997–2007) and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937) and *Lord of the Rings* (1954–1955) are prime examples of the fantasy genre.

In general, science fiction adventures are centered on the impact that science and technology have on the characters. Popular themes include space travel, time travel, and alien beings, as in Jules Verne's *Around the Moon* (1870) and H.G. Wells's *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The War of the Worlds* (1898). Science fiction for children is fairly difficult to find, although many children love reading novels taken from the *Star Wars* (1977–2005) films and *Star Trek* (1966–2005) television series.

Mysteries engage listeners young and old, as the unraveling story leads the audience to discover "whodunit." Children's mysteries generally do not feature murders or other gruesome crimes, and early mystery series, such as the Nancy Drew books (the first was published in 1930), are still popular.

Animal stories can be about either wild or domestic animals. Within this genre are stories about the bond between animals and humans. These stories have long been favorites of children and have long been used by storytellers.

Adventure tales feature brave and clever heroes and dangerous villains. Early adventure stories might feature brave swashbucklers and pirates, while heroes in modern works may triumph over terrorists.

Historical fiction is exciting as well as educational, since it provides a glimpse of life ways and traditions from long ago. Realistic novels, also called problem novels, deal with real world issues, such as drugs and pollution. These have a more limited audience than some of the other "lighter" genres.

Stories both realistic and far-fetched that are set in foreign lands give listeners a look into other traditions and cultures that add an exotic touch.

Fairy Tales

Fairy tales are stories in which a series of fantastic events befall the protagonist and almost always lead to a happy ending. The best-known fairy tales are those written by the nineteenth-century Danish author Hans Christian Andersen.

Fairy tales usually open with the conventional, "once upon a time," which still holds power over listeners. Other beginnings from around the world include (origins are listed if known):

- It all happened long ago, and believe it or not, it is all absolutely true . . . (Ireland)
- Long years ago, in the early ages of the world . . . (Hungary)
- In a place neither near nor far, and a time neither now nor then . . . (Denmark)
- Once there was, twice there was, and once there was not . . . (Scotland)
- Long ago, so long ago I wasn't there or I wouldn't be here now to tell you . . . (Ireland)

- Not in your time, not in my time, but in the old time, when Earth and the sea were new . . .
- At a time when people and animals spoke the same language . . . (Navajo)
- Once there was and once there wasn't . . . (Slavic)
- Back when it was a sin to talk too much . . .
- In the days now long departed . . . (Scandinavia)
- Long ago, when some folk were dead and others weren't born yet . . . (Tartar)
- It happened, it did not happen, it could perhaps have happened in the tents of our neighbors . . . (Arabic)
- Many years ago, in a time when memory was young . . . (India)
- Before the beginning of time, before the beginning of everything, before there was a beginning . . .
- Once, on the far side of yesterday . . .
- Once upon a time, and a very good time it was . . . (England)
- In a time not your time, nor my time, nor indeed anyone's time . . . (England)
- In a time when your grandfather was a wee baby, and turnips could talk . . . (Ireland)
- Long, long ago, in the days when animals talked like people . . . (used by many indigenous peoples)

All fairy tale plots follow a basic structure: The initial setup is a description of the setting and main characters—such as the poor farm and the poor family or the royal palace and the ugly princess. Then, a complication is presented—for example, the poor family's only son must leave home to find a fortune before his family starves, or the ugly princess must find a way to break the curse she lives under before she reaches her sixteenth birthday or she will never be free of it. The setup and complication are followed by a quest. This could be the son's efforts to succeed with royalty or rich merchants or the ugly princess's hunting to find the fairy who cursed her or a magician who can help her. Finally, there is the outcome, in which all problems are resolved and there is a happy ending.

There are also certain conventions that pertain to fairy tale characters. Listeners expect the characters to be somewhat familiar. The protagonist generally is possessed of one or more of the following attributes: He or she is young, is either of common or of noble birth, is the third son or daughter, has a good heart and is well mannered, and/or is a human without magical powers.

Similarly, villains generally fall into one of the following categories: He or she may be a wicked or insulted fairy, witch, or warlock, an evil aristocrat wanting the throne, a miserable miser, an officious official, a greedy or envious ruler, or a demon or devil (sometimes in disguise).

Descriptions of characters are minimal in fairy tales, as they are in folktales and myths. It is enough for readers to know that a character is kind of heart or fair of face. Peripheral characters often are not even given names but are placed in a story to move the action along. They simply go by descriptive monikers such as "the blacksmith" or "the tailor." Other detailed physical descriptions or identifications also are not included. In the Greek myth of Jason and the Argonauts, the Golden Fleece is never actually described. And further details are not required for such story elements as the "golden apples" or the "honest farmer."

Most, though not all, fairy tales include some element of the supernatural. When the hero is kind to an old woman, he may be given a magic box of never-ending coins or a flying carpet. These gifts are always taken in stride by fairy tale characters who accept the existence of magic without question.

Again, fairy tales almost always end happily, and villains are ultimately punished. The

penalties generally are not described in graphic, sadistic detail, as they often are in folktales, but there is a feeling of satisfaction and justice achieved at the story's end.

Interestingly, what is considered a happy ending may vary, depending on the tale version. For instance, modern fairy tales do not always end in the traditional way, with the princess marrying a handsome prince. Instead, the princess might choose to start a democracy and run for public office.

As with the variable outcome, there are many variants of the familiar ending, "and they lived happily ever after" from around the world (origins are listed if known):

- Snip snap snout, now my tale is out. (Caribbean)
- Wires bend, stories end. (Caribbean)
- Crick! Crack! (Caribbean; also may be used to open a story)
- And maybe they did all live happily ever after, but how you and I live is up to us. (Western Europe and United States)
- And they lived happily ever after, but you and I are left here sucking on our teeth. (Eastern Europe)
- And that's the end of that. (Ireland)
- And the party lasted four days and four nights, and I've only just come away from it to tell you this tale. (Eastern Europe)
- And if you don't believe this story is true, go see for yourself.
- And ever since then, that's the way it has been. (widespread)
- And what happened next? Well, that's another story for another day.
- And so it was, and so it is, to this very day. (Ireland and Western Europe)
- Such things do happen, you know.
- And they lived happily ever after, or if they didn't, it's none of our business. (United States)
- And that, as well as being the end, was just the beginning. (modern)

Stories can take on many guises. But no matter what type of story one chooses to tell, a successful performance should leave the listener with the secure sense that all's well that ends well.

Collecting Stories

When researching source material, storytellers have a number of options available to them. A natural place to start is in the storyteller's own life. Stories shared with family and friends and those that reflect the cultural and ethnic background of the teller can be honed for larger audiences.

Personal sources should be handled with care, however. Those who are new to the practice of storytelling often make these personal stories much too long for most audiences. Before attempting to share this type of story, it is a good idea to listen to recordings of personal stories told by professionals to see how they have made them appealing to listeners.

Note that while recordings of professional storytellers can provide inspiration, care should be taken not to borrow directly from these sources. Permission from the original teller must be obtained before using copyrighted material.

A personal collection of literature is another good source for stories. Even stories that are recalled from childhood can provide excellent material.

There are many story collections located in public libraries (found in the section designated by the call number 398.2). Most librarians are happy to assist in selecting an appropriate anthology or even popular children's books.

Folk literature collections in particular are filled with wonderful tales. Storytellers seeking authentic folk literature should check the bibliography and back notes of folklore collections to find the origins of the material. The advantage to using folk literature is that much

of it is in the public domain and free to use. If a folktale collection is made up of retold versions of the original tales as collected by tellers or scholars, this may not be the case and permission may be required. Another disadvantage is that some incidents in folktales may not make sense to modern listeners or fit into Western concepts of morality.

Care also should be taken in choosing folk sources, and storytellers must be respectful of other cultures when using this material. A Bantu tale, for instance, should not be told as a Cherokee tale, and the cultural source of any story should be mentioned in the telling.

The search for a story that a teller is comfortable with can be difficult and may entail reading dozens (or even hundreds) of stories before the right one is discovered.

Using Overheard Conversations

Many good stories are inspired by bits and pieces of conversation that have been overheard and even misunderstood in passing. Odd lines and weird phrases heard on the street or in a coffee shop can act as springboards for gripping stories. Storytellers should never intentionally eavesdrop, but using phrases or snippets of conversation that have been overheard accidentally as a starting point is a common practice.

Consider any of the following: "What did he do then?" "Did she really leave him?" "But what was a camel doing there?" "Are there dragons in the subway?" "What happened to it?" "But the cat found the passport first." When taken out of context, all of these bits of conversation are fragments of reality that can inspire stories.

The question, "What did he do then?" invariably leads to other questions, such as "Why did he do it?" "What was it?" or even "Who was he?" When a personality is created for this nameless character and "he" is given a situation that leads to action, all the elements are in place for a story to be spun.

Storytellers also should not overlook the possibilities that lie within their own families.

Collecting Family Stories

Family stories, whether from the storyteller's own family or other families, have a dual purpose. They provide new material and keep precious family histories and lore alive for later generations.

Some family members are more than happy to share stories, such as an uncle who loves to tell about how things were in his boyhood days. But some family members may be less enthusiastic about sharing information. They may claim they cannot remember the past or do not think their past experiences are important enough to repeat.

To use the former—the born family storytellers—as sources is simple. Their stories just need to be recorded and permission granted to share the stories. The latter, more reluctant informants may need some prodding to share their memories.

A storyteller who is gathering family or personal stories can ask the reluctant informant leading questions, such as, "Do you remember where you lived when you were five?" or "What was your favorite (television show, holiday, music, and so on)?" Other questions might include asking family members whether they had pets as a child, what they liked to do in their free time, who their friends were in school, and what the family did on vacations before the storyteller's time.

Such questions should not be delivered as a rapid-fire inquisition, but rather in the course of a general conversation. If a question receives no response, it should be dropped. The entire process should remain relaxed and cordial. As with any research, it is a good idea to dig for details. Remembered scraps of history can range from a teacher's name to what year the family went to Yellowstone National Park.

A family's history can be linked to historic events and eras, so that the past comes alive and remains vital. For instance, the story of a trip made during the Great Depression, as the family sought a new place to live and available jobs, ties the family history to the social history of the nation. Good stories also may lie in the

real reason behind a nickname or why someone in the family changed his or her name.

In addition to preserving family history, researching family stories also benefits the storyteller, by providing insight into the past on a personal level.

Effective Storytelling

An effective storyteller is one who is able to communicate with an audience and move the listeners emotionally. Successful storytelling requires hard work and patience. All professional storytellers have had to jump many hurdles in order to reach their level of expertise. But even those who only plan to be "just-for-fun" storytellers can experience a certain amount of anxiety and apprehension, and they may have many questions about the process.

There are several levels of performance in storytelling: everyday storytelling, in which the events of the day are shared with the family; casual storytelling, which takes place at gatherings such as reunions, picnics, parties, and other social occasions; and formal storytelling to a group, which is the form that requires the most preparation. A formal situation might be a case of incorporating stories in a prepared speech or a performance by either an amateur or professional storyteller at a school or library.

Certain guidelines should be considered in the preparation and delivery of a story, regardless of the storyteller's level of expertise.

Selecting and Learning a Story

The first rule of effective storytelling pertains to story selection. It is imperative that the individual is comfortable with the story. A performer's lack of involvement in a story will come through in the telling. A performer's body language can reflect how much he or she likes (or dislikes) a story.

Professionals use several methods to learn a story. Probably the most common is to read the story many times until the story's "voice" becomes familiar. Then, the first part of the story is practiced until it feels right. This process is repeated with each section of the story, until the entire tale can be delivered in its entirety with confidence.

Strict memorization of a story can get a storyteller into deep trouble. If something causes the teller to lose track of his or her place in the story, it can be awkward for both the teller and the audience. A better strategy is for the teller to break the story down into parts and put it in his or her own natural language. (It should be kept in mind, however, that literary material should remain true to the original, and that some authors will not allow their stories to be told unless they are recounted word for word.)

First, a concise outline of the story's plot or a storyboard is created to determine the most basic plot elements. This outline is used as a springboard to relate the story in the teller's own words. The goal is to make it sound as if the events happened to the teller or a close friend or relative.

In order for a teller to "own" a story, a connection must be made with it. Storytellers should find parts of the story that intrigue them and utilize the strengths and talents that they possess to enhance the performance. Some storytellers use musical instruments, mime, facial expressions, poetry, and song. Others sit and tell in the traditional style, letting the story go through them using just the voice. It is important to remember only to use props when they enhance, rather than distract from, the telling.

Practice Techniques

Many instructors of storytelling workshops suggest that their students should "tell the story to the wall" several dozen times before performing for a live audience. Others suggest performing for a small group and admitting to the audience that the story is a work in progress. In the latter instance, the audience will not expect a perfect performance, which can ease the tension for the storyteller.

Once a casual group has been assembled, the teller should remind the audience that the performance is a practice session. Once finished, he or she might ask the listeners what

they liked best about the story, encouraging them to discuss the performance. The audience should give suggestions about how story delivery might be improved. This type of feedback should not be sought until the performer is ready to accept constructive criticism.

Another technique is to share a variety of stories with friends and family. By telling and retelling, a performer can determine what works and what does not.

There are also organizations that provide venues and support for storytellers, such as the National Storytelling Network. Storytelling groups offer opportunities for sharing stories and getting feedback. The Toastmasters International club is another organization that provides opportunities for practicing speeches and stories. The members are happy to offer valuable feedback to budding storytellers.

After performing for a few small groups in a comfortable setting, a storyteller takes on the challenge of a larger audience. Schools, neighborhood scout troops, or any group of people in a community generally are happy to listen to stories. Another possibility is to volunteer at local libraries, daycare centers, and nursing homes. Most of these institutions welcome storytellers, and telling to these groups allows the performer to test material and discover the differences in telling stories to people of different ages.

Storytelling for a larger audience allows performers to refine both the content and delivery of their material. But the most important piece of advice for storytellers at all levels of expertise is to tell, tell, and tell some more.

Holding the Audience's Ear

There are several techniques that can help a storyteller keep an audience spellbound:

Know the Stories. The absolute first step is to know the stories well. Short pieces should be known by heart.

Use a Ritual. Much like athletes do before a game, storytellers create a "zone" just before going onstage. The best method of preparation is deep breathing, which feeds the brain cells with oxygen and makes you more alert. The audience can be brought into this breathing exercise. The storyteller might ask the audience to breathe along as follows: "In through the nose, one, two, three, four . . . and hold, five, six, seven, and exhale." Then, exhale through pursed lips (as if blowing out a match), "eight, nine, ten, eleven . . ." This is repeated slowly, three or more times. The exercise helps to increase the teller's energy, while also serving to calm and focus the audience. Once the ritual is complete, the audience is engaged and ready.

Discuss the Art of Listening. If the crowd is unruly or restless, the "art of listening" can be introduced. The audience is asked whether they ever have noticed that when a friend is talking, they are actually thinking of what they will say when their friend stops, rather than listening to what is being said. Most people will recognize the behavior immediately. The storyteller might mention that good listeners are never short of friends. This comment could be followed by simply saying, "Listen to this next paragraph." Now, the audience should be focused on listening.

Use Silence. Performers must be conscious of pauses between phrases. These natural pauses give the listeners time to absorb a story's images. Actors often use silence as punctuation, and, in performance terminology, *phrasing* is the use of silence and the way words are grouped between pauses to help shape what is being expressed.

Calm Your Nerves. It is believed that approximately 70 percent of people living in North American have an intense fear of speaking in front of others. This means that 70 percent of any audience would rather run away than trade places with a storyteller. Remembering this should help storytellers to keep their own "butterflies" in check.

Make the Best of Mistakes. If a mistake is made in an original work, the audience will not be aware of it. If the story is a "classic," however, the performer should not further

disrupt the rhythm by apologizing, but should just take a breath and continue.

Focus on the Story. The message is more important than the messenger. The focus should always be on the story and not on the teller.

Storytelling Time and Timing

Anyone who has told stories knows the importance of time and timing. If used wisely, time can be a storyteller's best friend. When used without thought, however, time can ruin a performance and rob a teller of credibility, reputation, and the joy of experiencing eager listeners.

First, tellers always should pay close attention to the time that has been scheduled for a performance. A professional is on time—or even early—for a performance. The same consideration should be given to scheduling and performance length as is given to the selection of material. For example, when telling at a birthday party, a performer should try to avoid being scheduled at the beginning in order to avoid being interrupted by the arrival of latecomers.

Several things should be considered when planning the length of a program for children. Children from preschool through second grade will be attentive for about thirty minutes, especially if interactive rhymes, rhythms, and singing are included in the performance. Mornings work better for this age group, because the children still are fresh and eager. Children from eight to eleven years of age will easily remain entranced for forty-five minutes. Any time of the day is fine for them, but it is usually best to avoid performing right before a special party or recess.

Performances at junior high or high schools usually are subject to more rigid time constraints than those for the lower grades. When the bell rings, signaling the end of the designated period, the students must go to their next class, no matter how gripping the story is. Knowledge of the allocated time helps the teller set the pace.

Thus, stories should be timed beforehand and carefully planned out. The stories must fit the time limit. Often, a performance will not start on schedule, so stories may need to be shortened spontaneously, or shorter alternatives may be used. Practicing with a kitchen timer or even while driving (safely glancing at the car's clock) are good techniques.

Storytellers should never exceed their allotted time when performing in concert with other tellers. If other tellers go over their time, a conscientious performer will shorten his or her segment to get the program back on schedule. A short, punchy story or a well-sung ballad can make as much of an impression on the audience as a long, drawn-out tale.

Attention to the timing, pacing, and rhythm of a storytelling program guarantees a successful outcome. It generally is a good idea to intersperse short stories between longer ones. Following a long, gripping story with a short, snappy one will offer a break in the rhythm and even give the audience a little rest. It helps if the shorter stories are humorous or involve the audience.

The timing and pacing within each story also should be practiced. If a storyteller fails to vary the speed or to use pauses, the audience will be lost to drowsiness. The audience should have time to laugh, to *ooh* and *ah*, and to wonder what is going to happen next. In other words, tellers should not race through their stories. And at the end of each story, as well as at the end of the program, the performer should stay on stage long enough for people in the audience to show their appreciation.

Storytellers also are advised to take time off from storytelling efforts each week. Be sure to make time for intellectual play or other creative pursuits to reawaken and maintain an active sense of wonder.

Dual Storytelling

Also known as tandem storytelling, dual storytelling is the act of two storytellers performing a story together. When two tellers perform a

story in tandem, different characters in the story are defined by the two separate voices and personalities. This technique adds variety to a story and makes a performance more like theater.

Dual storytelling requires carefully chosen partners. Obviously, the two must be compatible, as they must spend a great deal of time together, choosing and then practicing their story. Both tellers must like the story they choose. If only one of the partners enjoys telling the story, the difference in attitude will be obvious to listeners.

The shape of the story also must be considered. Some stories lend themselves better to two tellers. Dual tellers should look for tales that have two main protagonists.

Timing must be perfect in tandem telling. Seamless tandem storytelling requires a great deal of planning and practice, and both partners always must be ready to handle unforeseen mishaps. Dual storytellers must be sure that they know their parts and are familiar with each other's part, just in case one of them has a memory lapse. While a single storyteller may be able to recover with a simple, "Oops, I forgot to tell you," this tactic does not work as well with two storytellers.

Dual storytellers must decide who will do the introductions, who will begin the story, who will end it, and so on. A program that includes a story told in tandem also may incorporate some solo stories. The two storytellers can take turns performing, or one may tell a story while the other provides musical accompaniment.

As with solo performances, dual storytellers should exhibit joy in what they are doing. This enthusiasm is contagious and enhances the audience's experience.

Storytelling for Children

Storytelling to a young audience has many benefits, but it also poses some problems.

When accepting an invitation to tell a story to a group of children, the teller should find out the size of the group and the age range. There is a big difference between entertaining an intimate group of ten and performing for an entire auditorium full of children. It is also very difficult to tell stories to an audience with a large grade spread; stories for kindergartners will not work for middle-school students, for example. Therefore, if possible, the audience should be limited to one grade at a time, or two at most.

Even the youngest children can enjoy a storytelling performance, but the storyteller must understand the needs of this audience. Telling to children between the ages of two and five poses special challenges to the storyteller, but it also offers special rewards. Children at this age have very finite attention spans, so the teller must take care to choose the right stories and the right props to use. Watching the audience is important, since little ones can change moods almost instantly. A storyteller must be prepared to drop one story if the audience does not respond well and go on to another.

It is important to remember that all children, not just the youngest, have short attention spans. No matter how engrossing a performance is, squirms and occasional sighs or whispers are normal reactions from small children and should be expected.

Vocal interruptions, particularly if they have nothing to do with the story, should not be tolerated. Prior to the performance, it is a good idea to ask the teacher or librarian if there are any disruptive children in the group. These children should be placed up front so that they feel included in the story and are less likely to interrupt.

In choosing material for children, it must be remembered that many stories are not suitable for a younger audience. Some stories are intended for adults only, and others are just too complex or long-winded for children. Children prefer stories with action, humor, and, preferably, a happy ending. Some longer stories can be condensed for youngsters.

Stories with catchy rhythms or repeated phrases can be used to engage the audience.

Children love to shout out repeated phrases. If a fairy tale is being read, it is customary to make a big deal out of the famous closing line, "and they all lived happily ever after." This guarantees contented sighs, happy squirming, and applause.

When setting up the performance space, there should be no distractions behind the performer, such as a window or bookshelf. It is best to perform in front of a bare wall or a blank blackboard. A story should begin after a moment of silence. This can be encouraged by telling the group that the story will not "work" until there is complete silence or by ringing a "magic bell" for quiet.

Once the story begins, the teller should try to make eye contact with each member of the audience. This is true whether the story is told or read from a book. In the latter instance, the storyteller should frequently look up from the book and out at the audience.

The actual performance should be as much theater as traditional storytelling, rather than a static recitation. The teller should interact with the audience and encourage children to participate by clapping hands, singing, and making funny noises. The storyteller needs to follow the children's guidance to know when to encourage them and when to quiet things down.

The basic rules are simple: Think like a child, have good material, have patience, and, above all, have fun.

Educational Storytelling

Storytelling is also a valuable teaching tool when used in the classroom, whether presented by a professional teller-guest or the classroom teacher. Except for an outside storyteller's fee, there are no costs to the school, and there is no expensive equipment to be bought or rented. Hearing stories told aloud trains students in their listening skills and the use of their imagination. The immediacy of live storytelling gives students a stronger sense of story than television or films. And the activity of listening to stories can help students become storytellers themselves, as well as better readers.

Storytelling can be smoothly integrated into the school curriculum. Although an outside storyteller may not have any input into the placement of a performance, a wise teacher will think about the most effective integration of stories into the school day. The most obvious place is during language arts, but storytelling also can work as part of social studies or history programs.

A lesson about the settlement of the West can be made more memorable by stories about the real but larger-than-life Davy Crockett or a fictional hero, such as Pecos Bill. Storytelling also can show the value of the cultural backgrounds of immigrant or minority students. Ethnic heroes such as West Africa's Sundiata, for example, appeal to all students and add to the self-worth of African American students.

The Journey

Students also can benefit from learning to tell stories. Storytelling improves imagination, language skills, a sense of plot and timing, and writing skills.

To help budding storytellers, a teacher or workshop leader can start out an oral storytelling session with a traditional story opening, such as "once upon a time" or a less familiar variant, such as "once there was and was not." Cumulative storytelling with a group is also effective, with one student taking the story as far as possible, then passing it on to the next student to continue. Even reluctant public speakers will become more comfortable the more often they tell a story.

The wonderful world of storytelling awaits in the following pages. Let the epic journey begin!

Ian Hutton
Flora Joy
Margaret Read MacDonald
Josepha Sherman
Suzanne Smith
Gail de Vos

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A–Z Entries

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Aarne, Antti

(1867–1925)

Finnish scholar Antti Amatus Aarne specialized in folktale classification, sorting the various types of tales into categories. Aarne's most important writings—particularly his best-known work, *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen (The Types of the Folktale),* first published in 1910—are valuable catalogs of tale types and story summaries.

Born December 5, 1867, in Pori, Finland, Aarne attended college from 1889 to 1907, where he earned his master's and doctoral degrees in folklore. While preparing a series of three monographs on folktales for his dissertation, Aarne encountered difficulties in collecting materials and suggested to his mentor, Kaarle Krohn (1863–1933), the possibility of creating a complete inventory of Finnish folktales. With Krohn's approval, Aarne created such a system, drawing on collections by Danish folklorist Svend Grundtvig (1824–1883) and *Kinder- und Hausmärchen (Children's and Household Tales),* a collection by the German Brothers Grimm, Jacob (1785–1863) and Wilhelm (1786–1859). Although previous attempts at cataloging these folktales had been made, Aarne's classification system was a more useful scholarly tool, assigning numbers to and providing a brief summary for every tale type.

Part of Aarne's education took place in Russia from 1893 to 1898, when he was named headmaster of the Kokkola Finnish Coeducational School, a position he held until 1902. For the next eighteen years, Aarne taught at the Sortavala Lyceum. During this time, he became a docent in the field of Finnish and comparative folklore at the University of Helsinki, where he was supplementary professor until 1922.

In addition to being a folklorist, Aarne was a literature historian and ethnographer, and his research included studies of legends, riddles, old Finnish poems, and nature sounds. In his writings, Aarne acknowledged the arbitrariness of classification, as illustrated by the indistinct line between animal and wonder tales, and the overlap between genres and subgenres. He died on February 7, 1925.

After his death, Aarne's many monographs—including numerous publications in the Folklore Fellows Communications (FFC), a series of scholarly articles published by the Finnish Academy of Science and Letters—continued to be recognized as significant contributions to the field of folkloristics. Aarne's work *The Types of the Folktale* (FFC 3) was revised and enlarged by American folklorist Stith Thompson in 1928 as *The Types of the Folktale: A Classification and Bibliography.* Thompson published another revision in 1961. He praised Aarne's work and noted the scholar's conviction that "folktales had a unity that transcended individual motifs."

Despite its Eurocentrism (focus on European tales), Aarne's work transformed folk narrative scholarship worldwide and continues to influence regional folktale indices. As recently as 1995, Aarne's/Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale* was translated into Spanish by Fernando Peñalosa and published as *Los Tipos del Cuento Folklórico: Una Clasificación.*

Maria Teresa Agozzino

See also: Tale Types; Thompson, Stith.

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Abassi/Abasi and Atai

(West African)

In the mythology of the Efik people in what is now Nigeria, Abassi was the supreme god and the father of humanity. His wife, Atai, was the mother.

Abassi and Atai had two children who wanted to leave heaven and settle on Earth. Abassi was concerned that the two children would raise a warrior race that could turn against him. But Atai convinced Abassi to permit the two children to live on Earth, as long as they agreed never to work or mate.

In spite of their promise, however, the children soon began to work at growing food and to mate. The Earth was soon full of their offspring. To save the world from overpopulation, Atai gave the people two gifts: argument and death. And so it is that humanity fights and dies.

However, even though Abassi never visited Earth, he did not forget about humankind, which was made up of his children's children. Abassi used Ikpa Ison, a fertility goddess who took the form of a vulture to fly between heaven and Earth, to let him know what was happening below. Thus, good people could be rewarded and evil ones punished.

See also: Death; West African Mythology.

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Abatwa

(South African)

In Zulu folkloric tradition, the Abatwa of South Africa are tiny, peaceful, humanlike beings.

Abatwa are described as living in anthills or wandering in the mountains, sometimes using anthills for shelter. Some accounts tell of Abatwa that live in dwellings that are only disguised to look like anthills for the safety of the Abatwa living there. The corridors and rooms within are ornamented with wall paintings and mosaics made of colored seeds.

These beings are so small that they can hide under blades of grass and ride on ants. Perhaps because of their small size, the Abatwa are shy of humans. Only children under the age of four, wizards, and pregnant women are able to see the Abatwa. If a pregnant woman sees a male Abatwa, it means she is carrying a boy; seeing a female Abatwa predicts the birth of a girl.

The Abatwa are said to enjoy helping people, often giving them aid and good advice. But if the Abatwa are offended by a foolish human or if someone is clumsy enough to step on one of them, they shoot tiny but very poisonous arrows at the offender.

See also: Elf Shot/Elf Arrow; Leprechauns; Zulu Mythology.

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An undated rock carving from Australia shows a mythic being that combines human and nonhuman aspects. It probably is a representation of a spirit from the Dreamtime. *(Werner Forman/Art Resource, NY)*

Aboriginal Mythology

(Australian)

Australia's Aboriginal mythology is characterized by two main features. First, it is a predominantly oral tradition. Aboriginal society was, and still is in many cases, one of hunter-gatherers. As the Aborigines moved in search of resources, and as seasons changed, the mythology developed regional variations and differences peculiar to tribal groupings. Second, the mythology deals primarily with creation and the way that humans and nature interact. To the Australian Aborigines, everything is permeated with life, and this life is grouped into related families connected by a spiritual concept known as "the Dreaming."

In many cases, Aboriginal mythology serves as a sort of oral map, defining the boundaries of tribal territory and identifying the natural features that mark those boundaries. Local traditions generally stop at the point where another tribal grouping takes up custodianship of the land. Therefore, traditional tales are shared only by communities within the same boundaries. And, as with the tribal groupings of people, things and animals are classified and grouped by kinships as well.

The Dreaming/The Dreamtime

The Dreaming, also known as "the Dreamtime," originated long ago with the beginning of creation itself. It describes how creator-beings, who were neither human nor animal but had characteristics of both, formed the land, plants, animals, and humans. The concept of the Dreaming is at the heart of Aboriginal culture.

The creator-beings described in the Dreaming also created sacred places imbued with *djang,* or residues of their own energy. The performance of rites and rituals in these sacred places ensures the continuance of creation, which is seen by Aborigines as simultaneously finished and endless.

In the Dreamtime, the earth was a featureless plain, partially covered by water. When the ancestors (including great serpents that lived below the earth) awoke, they started to move and shape everything, forming many of the planet's natural features.

The period of the Dreamtime is seen as a metaphysical concept as much as a period in time. The Aborigines seek to bring forth the djang of the ancestral archetypes by engaging in sacred ceremonies. They believe that the life within them is a spark of the ancestors' djang. By awakening that energy, one can

enter the Dreamtime, where all things are created and go on being created.

The Sky World

Above the earth lies the Sky World, seen by many as the home of ancestors that took part in the creation process of the Dreamtime. The stars are sometimes said to be the many campfires of the ancestors, or occasionally the light of the ancestors themselves. When a person dies, his or her soul may first go to the Island of the Dead, where it is purified, and then go on to the Sky World, the final resting place.

Most of the ancestors are totemic, taking the form of various native animals, including bandicoots, crocodiles, crows, curlews, dingoes, eagles, echidnas, emus, fish, flies, flying foxes, frogs, kangaroos, koalas, platypuses, seagulls, and several forms of serpents. These animal ancestors are woven into various fireside tales. Each tale contains a message about the Dreaming, the Dreamtime, or the natural order and continuance of the folkloric tradition.

All-Father and All-Mother

The most important deity in Aboriginal mythology is the All-Father. The All-Father came before the ancestors and before all things. Regardless of regional variations, the All-Father, or at times the All-Mother, is always known as the being from which all things came. Each All-Father sent a son to Earth to care for humanity, punish wrongdoers, and carry out the All-Father's plans.

The All-Father and his son are known by different names in different regions. In southeastern Australia, they are known as Biame or Biaime and his son Daramulun or Gayundi; in the Murray River area, as Nooralie and his son Gnawdenoorte; and in the Kurnai community, as Mungan Ngour and his son Tundun.

Biame, in the variants of the myths that are told today, experimented by creating the animals and then, based on this experience, created men and women. In the Dreamtime, animals had all the characteristics, emotions, and discontents of human beings. The kangaroo was ashamed of its tail. The insects wanted to be larger. The birds wanted to be like the kangaroos. The fish felt imprisoned in water. Biame gathered all the animals in a cave, removed these wishes and discontents, and placed the wishes and discontents in his new creations, the men and women. And so human beings, with all their discontents, became the custodians of nature, and they were watched over by the All-Father, who lives in the Sky World.

Biame also set out the laws by which humanity is meant to live and the sacred ceremonies that mark the passage from boyhood to manhood. These ceremonies occur in *Boro* circles, or *Boro* grounds, which are representations of the sacred Sky World where Biame lives. The uninitiated are forbidden to enter these sacred places.

The All-Mothers are also known by different names in different regions. The most important All-Mother is the chief wife of Biame, called Birraghnooloo. Gunabibi (or Kunapipi) is the northern Australian variant.

In some traditions, the Rainbow Serpent is said to be the mother of everything, but this deity is more often seen as either genderless or androgynous. The Rainbow Serpent is also the teacher and guardian of the secret healing rituals of the tribal shamans.

The Bull Roarer is an instrument, said to have been created by Biame, that is used in many of the ceremonies held in Boro grounds. A shaped and incised oval of wood, it is swung from the end of a long string, and the sound it produces is said to be either the voices of the ancestors or the voice of Biame himself. The sacredness of the instrument varies from area to area. In some regions, it is forbidden for women to look upon it. In other places, only the elders or initiated may see it. When carved with sacred designs, a Bull Roarer becomes a specific sacred object, known as *tjuringa* or *inma*.

Uluru

In addition to the Boro grounds, other sacred places are imbued with their own spirits or essences. In many communities, it is believed

that certain places hold spirit-children, and it is to such places that women go if they wish to become pregnant.

One of the most important sacred places is Uluru, also known as Ayers Rock, in central Australia. Here, it is believed that oral tradition and song cycles are embodied by the sandstone rock, which towers 1,100 feet (335 meters) above the surrounding countryside. Uluru is divided in two halves—a shady side and a sunny side—which represent the opposing positions in the vast battle that marked the end of the Dreamtime and the beginning of the current age, a separation also representative of the division between generations.

James A. Hartley

See also: Bunyips.

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Abracadabra

Used by modern storytellers and stage magicians only as a pseudo-incantation, the word *abracadabra* has a long history as an utterance with magical powers.

The first known mention of abracadabra was made by the Roman poet Quintus Serenus Sammonicus in the second century C.E., but the origins of the term remain a mystery. There are several theories as to when and where the term was first used: It may be a combination of the first few letters of the Phoenician alphabet *(A-Bra-Ca-Dabra)*; the name of a demon of disease, whose origin is unknown; the Phoenician *Aramaiz avada kedavra,* which means "may the thing be destroyed"; or *abra kadibra,* meaning "it will be made like it is said."

Another possibility is that abracadabra originated from the Greek *abrasadabra,* which is said to be a mystical word used by a Gnostic sect in Alexandria, Egypt. This sect, the Basilidians, was founded by Basilides of Egypt, and their chief deity was *Abrasax* (*Abraxas* in Latin). The name Abraxas was said to have magical powers as a word that, when written in Greek, added up to 365, the number of days in the year. For this reason, Abraxas was often engraved on amulets and precious stones.

The term may derive from the initial letters of three Hebrew words: *Ab,* "the father," *Ben,* "the son," and *Acadsch,* "the Holy Spirit." In this form, the word was used as a charm, written in the shape of a triangle on a piece of parchment worn around the neck, that was believed to have the power to cure toothaches, malaria, and other scourges. Whatever its derivation, abracadabra most likely came from Greek into French, and from French into English.

See also: Hocus-Pocus.

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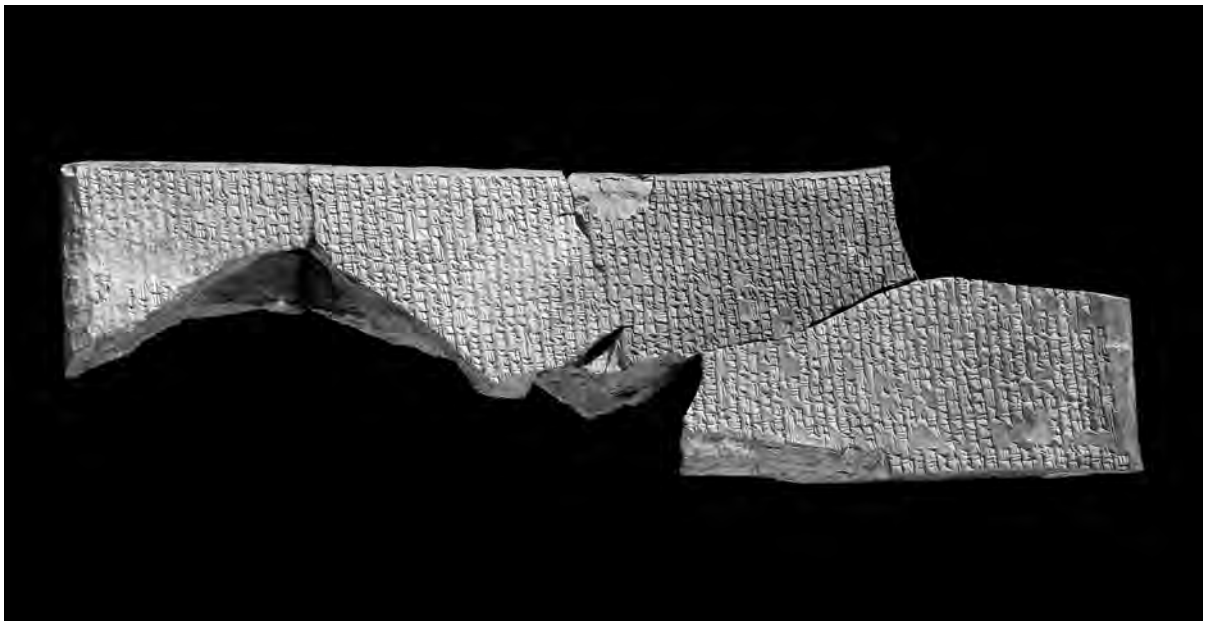
Abzu/Apsu

(Sumerian and Babylonian)

In the mythology of Sumer and Babylon, the creature called Abzu in Sumerian and Apsu in Akkadian was believed to be a vast ocean of freshwater lying beneath the earth. Water from this source sprang forth to the surface through springs, wells, streams, rivers, and lakes. Several Mesopotamian gods were thought to have inhabited the Apsu, including Enki; his wife, Damgalnuna; Enki's minister, Isimud; and a number of lesser deities.

In the Babylonian myth *Enuma Elish,* Apsu was the name of a primeval creature of the freshwater that lived before the creation of the world. From the mingling of Apsu and



This seventh-century B.C.E. clay tablet—found in the ancient city of Nineveh, now part of northern Iraq—is one of a series that tells the Babylonian story of the creation of the gods Apsu and Tiamat out of the primal waters. Apsu planned to destroy the younger gods and instead died at the gods' hands. *(© British Museum/HIP/Art Resource, NY)*

Tiamat, who was the primal goddess of fertility and the saltwater sea, the lesser gods were born. These deities created an uproar that disturbed Apsu, their begetter, and prevented him from resting during the day and sleeping at night. Apsu resolved to do away with them. When the gods heard about Apsu's plan, they were shocked and angered.

Ea, the god of wisdom and magic, offspring of Anu, chief of the gods, came up with a plan to save the lesser gods. He cast a spell on Apsu, placing him in a deep slumber, and killed him. After the murder, Ea set up his dwelling on the dead god's body and called his new abode the Apsu. Ea and his wife, Damkina, settled there. Their son, Marduk, was formed in the Apsu and was known as the "firstborn son of the Apsu."

In Sumerian myth, the E-abzu (Apsu House) was the name of Enki's temple in the Sumerian city of Eridu. (Enki was the Sumerian form of the Babylonian Ea.) Abzu shrines also have been found in cult centers in several Mesopotamian cities.

In Mesopotamian thought, the Apsu was a place connected with demons, from which various evil gods and monsters were said to have come forth. The so-called Land of No Return, or the realm of the dead, lay beneath it. The *apsu* was also the name given to a large water basin found in some Mesopotamian temple courtyards.

Ira Spar

See also: Creation Stories of Mesopotamia.

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Achilles

(Greek)

In Greek mythology, Achilles was the son of the mortal King Peleus of Phthia in Thessaly and the immortal sea nymph, Thetis. He is

often described as the greatest warrior of the Trojan War.

Thetis was worried about her newborn son and his defenselessness, due to his half-mortal parentage, so she took the newborn Achilles to the River Styx. She dipped the baby into the water, which had the power to make him invincible. But either Thetis neglected to dip the heel by which she was holding the baby or a leaf stuck to his heel and kept the water from touching it. As a result, Achilles's heel remained vulnerable. Still another version of the story states that when Achilles was a baby, Thetis rubbed him each day with godly ambrosia, and each night laid him on the hearth fire. His father, Peleus, came upon Thetis holding their baby in the flames and cried out in alarm. Thetis was offended and returned to the sea, leaving Achilles to his mortal fate.

When the Trojan War began, King Agamemnon of Mycene, the commander of the Greek forces, sent Odysseus and a group of soldiers to recruit Achilles. Thetis was afraid for her son and sent him, disguised as a woman, to King Lycomedes on the island of Skyros to live among the king's daughters. When the clever Odysseus arrived at Skyros, he saw through the disguise, tricked Achilles into revealing his identity, and convinced him to join the army.

During the last year of the Trojan War, Achilles quarreled with Agamemnon over possession of Briseis, a young woman Achilles had captured as a prize of war. When Agamemnon claimed her, Achilles took it as a deadly insult. He refused to fight the Trojans with Agamemnon and stayed in his tent. Without him, the Greek forces began to lose. Patrocles, Achilles's best friend, borrowed his armor to go into battle and was slain by Hector, prince of Troy, the greatest Trojan warrior.

Enraged, Achilles returned to the battlefield, slaughtering everyone in his path. He eventually killed Hector, aided by the goddess Athena. Hector's brother, Paris, shot an arrow into Achilles's one mortal spot—his heel—and Achilles died.

To this day, the phrase "Achilles' heel" refers to a vulnerable spot.

See also: Culture Heroes; Hector; Homer; *Iliad*.

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Adapa

(Babylonian)

In Babylonian tradition, Adapa was known as a wise man or sage from the early Sumerian city of Eridu. The myth of Adapa deals with the topic of mortality.

The Sumerian kings list, an ancient text listing the kings of Sumer, records the existence of five cities that predate the Flood. These early cities were ruled by eight legendary kings, each of whom reigned for one or more centuries. The first seven of these antediluvian rulers were served by semidivine counselors, called *apkallu,* who introduced learning and the arts to Sumer. In the *Epic of Gilgamesh,* the apkallu are said to have laid the foundation for the wall that surrounded Uruk. According to Babylonian legend, Adapa was one of the wise apkallu from the preflood city of Eridu.

An unnamed Babylonian poet penned a mythic story about Adapa that explores the enduring theme of human mortality. Why, the story asks, should humans be mortal and the gods immortal? The story opens with a description of Adapa as an ideal human being: ritually observant and perfect in wisdom. As a servant of the god Ea, Adapa performed the divine rites with great care, baking bread, preparing food and drink, setting the table with clean hands, and catching fish for Ea's cult at Eridu.

One day while Adapa was out fishing, a south wind came up and capsized his boat. Adapa was thrown overboard and spent the day "in the home of the fish." Wet and angry, he cursed the wind, and the power of his spell broke its wings. For seven days, the wind was incapacitated, and the air was still over the land.

Annoyed, the supreme god, Anu, summoned Adapa to appear before him. Ea, knowing that Adapa would be granted an audience in heaven and not wishing to lose his services, advised Adapa to humble himself and stand in mourning garb with his hair disheveled as a sign of grief before Anu's gatekeepers, Dumuzi and Gishzida. Ea's plan was to so bemuse these two deities that they would intercede on Adapa's behalf and plead his case before Anu. Ea also advised Adapa not to accept heaven's hospitality and to reject any food or drink offered to him, for such offerings were the food and drink of death.

Upon his arrival in heaven, Adapa followed Ea's advice. He so amused the gatekeepers that they interceded and pleaded his case. When Adapa appeared before Anu, the supreme god offered him food and drink, a rite of hospitality performed only for visiting deities. Adapa declined the offering, not realizing that acceptance would have granted him eternal life.

Anu laughed at the sage's naïveté and asked him why he did not eat or drink. Adapa answered that Ea had advised him in the ways of heaven and that he was merely following Ea's instructions. Anu told Adapa that he had offered him eternal life and that his refusal meant that he would remain a mortal.

And so, because of Adapa's choice, all humans are mortal.

Ira Spar

See also: Death; Wise Man or Woman.

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Adon/Adonis

(Phoenician)

Originally, Adon was a Phoenician god of fertility and resurrection who was associated with crops and the seasonal agricultural cycle. His cult became popular during the Hellenistic period, about 200 B.C.E., and it lasted until about the third or fourth century C.E. Major cult centers devoted to the god, who was usually portrayed as young and handsome, were located at Berytus, Aphaca, and Byblos, in what is now Lebanon.

It is the myth of Adon's death and rebirth that is most commonly known. Adon, the consort of the goddess Ashtar (Venus, in Greek tradition), was slain by a boar that he was hunting. The fatal wound is often said to have been to the groin, adding to Adon's reputation as a fertility deity. After suffering this fatal wound, Adon, like the Greek Persephone, spent fall and winter of each year in the underworld.

In late spring, the river known today as Nahr Ibrahim flows red from minerals stirred up by spring rains. This phenomenon was taken to be a miracle by Adon's priests and worshipers, who then celebrated his death and resurrection. During the first part of the festival, the priests made a ritual show of mourning Adon's death, up to and including gashing themselves with knives. The festival proceedings then switched to a joyous celebration of Adon's return to a new life. The priests ritually shaved their heads to indicate a new beginning.

The Greek story of Venus and Adonis was well known through the Renaissance; Shakespeare wrote a lengthy poem titled *Venus and Adonis*. Gradually, the name Adonis lost much of its mythic power. Today, it is generally used to refer simply to a handsome young man.

See also: Aphrodite; Dumuzi; Inanna/Ishtar.

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Adroa and Adro

(East African)

Adroa is a major god of the Lugbara, an African farming people living in what are now parts of Uganda and Congo.

Adroa was the all-good creator of everything, including himself. He divided himself in two to create the earth. But that which split off from his goodness became the evil earth-spirit Adro, who brought disease and other ills into the world. Because of this split, Adroa is represented as a tall, white-skinned man with only half a body, one arm, and one leg. Adro is rarely represented, but in those rare representations, he is portrayed as another half figure: half a body, one arm, and one leg, with jet-black skin.

Adroa's children are called the Adroanzi.

See also: Aiomum Kondi; An/Anu; Sius; Wele; Zeus.

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Adroanzi

(East African)

The Adroanzi are nature spirits, the children of Adroa, though some versions of the tales about them say that they are more properly the children of Adroa's dark half, Adro.

These beings live in streams, trees, and rocks. Those who live in water are described as looking like water snakes, possibly poisonous ones, but those Adroanzi who prefer to live in trees or rocks are not described.

The Adroanzi often follow anyone who is traveling at night. When they do, they generally act as protectors from human or animal predators. The human that is being followed must not look back at the Adroanzi. The protective creatures become fierce and attack to kill anyone who turns to look at them.

See also: Leshy/Leshiye; Tree Spirits.

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Aeneid

(Roman)

The literary epic the *Aeneid,* based on the story of the Trojan War, was written in the first century C.E. by the Roman poet Virgil. It follows the adventures of Prince Aeneas, son of Troy's doomed King Priam, after the fall of Troy and describes the myth about the founding of Rome.

The *Aeneid* begins with Aeneas and other Trojan survivors leaving the fallen city of Troy and setting out for new lands. The gods had heard a prophecy that the nation Aeneas founded would one day destroy Carthage, which was the favorite city of the goddess Juno. In an effort to save the city, Juno commanded the winds to drive Aeneas off course, but he landed in the countryside near Carthage.

Aeneas, the last prince of Troy, and his companions battle the monstrous Harpies. This scene from the first-century C.E. epic the *Aeneid,* written by the Roman poet Virgil, is illustrated in a fifteenth-century tapestry. *(Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)*

Aeneas and Dido

Dido, queen of Carthage, offered her hospitality to Aeneas and his men. Aeneas recounted the story of the fall of Troy. His version expanded on the account in the *Iliad* and included the tale of the Trojan horse and the defeat of the city.

Aeneas also told of his flight from Troy. He and his men wandered for seven years, searching for a new home. They landed on Thrace but found it a dangerous place full of murder, and so continued on to Delos and Crete. There, Aeneas was sent a dream by the gods, telling him to settle in Italy. While sailing to Italy, he and his men encountered the harpies and the Cyclops. The group eventually landed safely on the island of Sicily. As they attempted to reach the mainland, they were blown off course and finally landed in Carthage.

By this point in the story, Dido and Aeneas realized they had fallen in love. But the gods insisted that Aeneas go to Italy. He sailed off without Dido, and she committed suicide.

Aeneas's Journey

Aeneas and his men returned to Sicily, and a fire destroyed four of their ships. Once they finally arrived in Cumae, Italy, Aeneas went to the temple of Apollo and asked for guidance. Apollo told Aeneas that he had to enter the underworld, find his father, and ask his advice.

On this mission, Aeneas endured many dangers. He was eventually able to cross the Acheron River and reach Hades. From there,

Aeneas traveled through the underworld to the Elysian Fields, home of the blessed souls, where he was reunited with his father's spirit. The spirit told Aeneas the history of Rome. He told of the wars Aeneas would fight and of his destiny, which would lead to Rome ruling the world. When the story was finished, Aeneas returned to the world of the living.

Aeneas's ships reached Latium, ruled by King Latinus. This land was destined to belong to the Trojans, and Aeneas sent an envoy to the king with friendly messages. Latinus welcomed Aeneas and his men, and he offered his daughter Lavinia to Aeneas in marriage.

Victory at Last

Juno had not forgotten about Aeneas and created chaos throughout Latium. She roused King Turnus of the Rutulians against Aeneas, and the people of Latium against the Trojans. Aeneas traveled to Pallenteum to aid King Evander, but, in his absence, Turnus attacked the Trojans. Aeneas returned to Troy and won the battle. Turnus was killed in the fight. At last, Aeneas and the Trojans were free to begin building their nation.

The *Aeneid* has inspired several composers. Henry Purcell's 1689 opera *Dido and Aeneas* focused on the pair's doomed love affair. *Les Troyens,* composed by Hector Berlioz in 1863, told of the fall of Troy and ended with Aeneas's desertion of Dido.

See also: Epics; *Iliad;* Trojan War.

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Aesop and Aesop's Fables

(Greek)

According to the Greek historian Herodotus, Aesop was a slave who lived in Samos in the sixth century B.C.E. and was known for his fables. Although there is no real evidence of any fable having been created specifically by Aesop, one of the most familiar fables attributed to him is "The Hare and the Tortoise," in which "slow and steady wins the race." Another, in which a wolf disguises himself as a sheep only to be killed by the shepherd who thinks the wolf really is a sheep, has given us the phrase "a wolf in sheep's clothing."

There also is little hard evidence about the man himself. Aesop's birth date is unknown, and he is said to have died around 565 B.C.E. The folk process, by which folk stories are attached to a historic character over time, however, has added a series of adventures to Aesop's life that occurred after his master freed him. He is said to have visited and shared his wisdom with various Greek rulers, including Croesus. During the time when speaking freely

The artist and illustrator Arthur Rackham (1867–1939) pictured the characters in Aesop's fable "The Hare and the Tortoise" as nineteenth-century gentlemen. The elegant Hare is mocking the Tortoise before the start of the race. *(The Pierpont Morgan Library/Art Resource, NY)*

was dangerous in Greece, Aesop's name became associated with the use of fables to convey antityranny messages.

In the third century B.C.E., an Athenian politician named Demetrius of Phaleron collected a group of about 200 fables and gave them the title *Aesop's Fables,* or *Assemblies of Aesopic Tales*. In the first century C.E., a freed Greek, or possibly a Roman slave, named Phaedrus issued a version in Latin verse. It is through these two collections that the story of Aesop has reached modern times.

To further confuse the matter, in the second century C.E., a Buddhist collection of fables reached the West and was combined with the Demetrius collection by a Greek writer, Valerius Babrius. This new compilation became the accepted version of *Aesop's Fables*. Some scholars suspect that the addition of a moral at the end of each fable is a result of Buddhist influence.

So many other additions have been made to the collection from other sources, especially after countless retellings, that no definitive version of the fables supposedly written by Aesop exists.

See also: Fables.

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Aetheopis/Aithiopis

(Greek)

The *Aetheopis,* or *Aithiopis,* is a lost epic of ancient Greece, possibly dating from the seventh century B.C.E. This epic poem about the Trojan War fits chronologically between Homer's *Iliad* and the anonymous *Little Iliad*.

The *Aetheopis* begins soon after the death of the Trojan prince and hero Hector. The queen of the Amazons, Penthesileia, daughter of the war god, Ares, arrived at Troy to fight on the side of the Trojans. Penthesilea fought Achilles, the greatest Greek warrior—a fight that ended in her death.

Later, while Achilles was still full of battle rage, the Greek warrior Thersites made the fatal mistake of taunting him. Thersites claimed that Achilles had been in love with Penthesileia. Achilles was outraged and killed Thersites. This murder incurred the wrath of the gods and other Greeks, so Achilles was made to undergo a ritual purification.

While Achilles was being purified of his sin, another Trojan ally arrived. Memnon of Ethiopia was the son of Eos, goddess of the dawn. Memnon wore armor that had been forged by the master smith god, Hephaestus, and he led a contingent of warriors. Memnon killed the Greek warrior Antilochos in battle. Antilochos had been close to Achilles, who returned from his purification to learn of his friend's death. Achilles killed Memnon, but Memnon cheated death when Eos successfully petitioned Zeus to make her son immortal.

Achilles then rushed into Troy and was killed by an arrow that was shot by Paris, prince of Troy, and guided by the god Apollo. After some fierce fighting, the Greeks managed to drive the Trojans back so that Odysseus and Aias could retrieve Achilles's body.

The Greeks held a funeral for Antilochos and began a ceremony for Achilles. The sea nymph Thetis, Achilles's mother, arrived with her sisters and the Muses, who lamented over the body and carried it away. The epic ends with Achilles's armor and weapons being offered as a prize to the greatest hero.

See also: *Iliad;* Trojan War.

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African Bushmen Mythology

The traditional home of the African Bushmen is the vast expanse of the Kalahari Desert in South Africa and Namibia. Many different groups are considered to be Bushmen, but they have no collective term for themselves. Some Westerners call them San, but this name is actually derogatory and the term *Bushmen* seems to be preferred.

The African Bushmen are traditionally hunter-gatherers. In many areas, however, these groups are being forced off their traditional lands and are making new lives as farmers and ranch workers. Following is a summary of the major deities in the mythology of their ancient culture.

Kaang, or Cagn, is the creator god of the African Bushmen. Kaang is said to have made all things but to have met with such opposition in the world that he went away. He is regarded as the god of natural phenomena, present in all things, but especially the mantis and caterpillar. He is a shape-shifter with many trickster and epic hero tales attached to him. Kaang has two sons, Cogaz and Gewi.

Other traditions name Hishe as the great self-created god who then created the lesser gods, the earth, humanity, wild animals, and vegetation. The northern Bushmen, however, call Huve (or Huwe) the beneficent Supreme Being and creator of all things. Huve is a deity of the forest. Mukuru is the benevolent ancestral god and creator god of the Herero Bushmen of Namibia. Mukuru brings the life-giving rain, heals the sick, and brings home the very old. Quamta is the supreme god of the Xhosa Bushmen of the Transkei in South Africa. The Xhosa god Xu is the benevolent and all-powerful Supreme Being and sky god to whom the souls of the dead go.

Tchue is a cultural hero and founder of the Bushmen.

As with other still-living mythologies, it is appropriate to research the beliefs of the Bushmen to ensure an accurate portrayal of current beliefs in any stories that are connected to them.

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Ahti/Ahto

(Finnish)

Ahti, or Ahto, is the Finnish god of the seas, lakes, and rivers.

Ahti's palace was hidden within a black cliff that was forever protected from the outside world, particularly from humans, by the waves and clouds. A gloomy deity, Ahti was forever jealous of the gods of the sky and spent a great deal of time brooding because the people prayed to them and not to him.

He could give humans fish if it pleased him. To punish them for not worshipping him sufficiently, Ahti often sent his servants, the water sprites, to whip up whirlpools instead.

Ahti's wife, Vellamo, enjoyed drowning humans.

See also: *Kalevala.*

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Aigamuxa

(South African)

In the mythology of the Khoikhoi people of South Africa (formerly called the Hottentot people), the Aigamuxa were man-eating monsters that looked like large, thin, long-armed apes with long fangs.

The Aigamuxa could sometimes be found hiding behind sand dunes, ready to catch and devour any unwary humans. Fortunately for those humans, the Aigamuxa were hampered by the fact that their eyes were positioned on the insteps of their feet, causing them to run blind.

If the Aigamuxa wanted to see where they were going or what was happening around them, they had to get down on their hands and knees or lie down. This gave their prey time to escape, which is presumably why the Aigamuxa were always portrayed as hungry creatures.

See also: Khoikhoi/Hottentot Mythology.

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Aino

(Finnish)

In the *Kalevala,* the collection of Finnish epic folk ballads, Aino, whose name means "the only one" or "the one and only," is the beautiful sister of the brash young magician Joukahainen.

When Joukahainen rashly challenged the old wizard Vainamoinen to a duel of singing magic, the youngster lost and, to save his life, recklessly promised his sister to Vainamoinen. When Aino discovered that she had been promised to Vainamoinen, she could not bear the thought of being the old man's bride. Her family wanted the marriage for the honor it would bring them, and Vainamoinen promised to be kind to her and vowed that as the master of song-magic he would give her anything she desired. In spite of this, Aino mourned that it would have been better for her never to have been born, and threw herself into the ocean to drown. Some variants of this tale imply that she transformed into a fish rather than dying.

Aino's tragic tale is one of the more popular in Finnish folklore. A postage stamp was issued in 1997 showing Aino escaping Vainamoinen and hurling herself into the sea.

See also: *Kalevala*.

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Aiomum Kondi

(South American)

In the mythology of the Arawaks of Guyana, Aiomum Kondi was the ruler of the gods and the sky.

Aiomum Kondi, or the Inhabitant of the High, created all living things, including mortals. But he soon became disgusted by the debauchery of humans and destroyed them in a fire from heaven. He remade the humans, but they disappointed him once again, and so Aiomum Kondi sent a flood to wash them away.

There was one good man, a chief named Marerewana, whom Aimum Kondi warned of the flood. Marerewana saved himself and his family by taking shelter in a large canoe that was tied to a tree.

See also: Amun/Amen/Amon/Amun-Re; An/Anu; Sius; Wele; Zeus.

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Ajok

(North African)

In Sudanese mythology, Ajok was the creator, a deity who made humankind in his own image. Ajok was believed to be a benevolent deity, who would remain compassionate only if the behavior of humankind allowed him to remain so.

When the child of the first man and woman died, the grieving mother pleaded with Ajok to return the child to life. Ajok complied. The woman's husband was so furious that he had not been consulted that he killed his wife and child.

Ajok, who had planned to grant immortality to humans, vanished from the earth and left behind a warning that from then on, death would be permanent.

See also: Death.

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Alalu/Alalus

(Hittite)

Alalu was a Hittite deity also known as Alalus. He was the king in heaven in the earliest days.

Later, Anu was the first among the gods, second only to Alalu. As second, Anu served as Alalu's cupbearer. He served for nine years. Then, he fought and defeated the older deity and dispatched Alalu to live under the earth.

See also: Anu.

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Amadis of Gaul

(Spanish or Portuguese)

The medieval work *Amadis of Gaul* and its sequels originated in either Spain or Portugal and is regarded as the first epic fantasy adventure series.

It is not known where or by whom the original *Amadis of Gaul* was written. The work may have been written by Portuguese author Joao de Lobeira in the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century, but no manuscript has been found. The epic was translated into Castilian Spanish by García Ordóñez de Montalvo in the sixteenth century. The latter was a best seller in its own time and is the version that is best known today.

The Story of Amadis

The plot of *Amadis of Gaul* is intricate, as are most stories of this genre. Set in and around England just after the Roman era, it follows the pre-Arthurian adventures of the great knight Amadis.

As an infant, Amadis, who was the illicit offspring of King Perion of Gaul and the lady Elisena, was put in a basket to float down a river to the sea. The baby was rescued by the noble Gandales, who called him "Child of the Sea." Gandales raised Amadis along with his

own son, Gandalin. King Perion and Elisena had two more children, a daughter named Melicia and a son named Galaor. The latter was kidnapped by a giant who raised Galaor as his own.

King Lisuarte of England placed his lovely daughter Oriana in the household of King Perion. Amadis had since returned to his father's house to work as a page, but his true identity was unknown. The young Amadis, known to all as Child of the Sea, became Oriana's page, and the two fell in love.

The sorceress Urganda the Unknown had prophesied that Child of the Sea would be the greatest of knights—the strongest, the most honorable, and the most loyal in love. King Perion knighted Amadis. In turn, the hero knighted his brother, Galaor, who had by then been released by the giant. It was at this point that the two brothers learned each other's true identities.

Amadis and Galaor became knights-errant, rescuing damsels in distress, eliminating false knights, and battling every menace, from giants and terrible beasts to evil wizards. And while Galaor dallied with many ladies, Amadis remained true to his love, Oriana. The tale ended happily and left an opening for further adventures.

Montalvo's translation was a great success. Like modern fantasy epics, the story was spun into a series that followed the adventures of Amadis and those of his descendants. The series included twelve books, the success of which led to imitators.

The Fantasy Fad

One such imitation was written by the Spaniard Francisco Vázquez de Coronado. His initial work, *Palmerin de Oliva,* about a heroic knight, and its sequel, *Primaleon,* about the adventures of Palmerin's son, were the first of many such tales. Portuguese writer Francisco de Moraes followed up with *Palmerin of England.*

The success of *Amadis of Gaul* eventually led to a glut of generic and often poorly written fantasy series. The craze for generic fantasy grew so large that it was parodied by Miguel Cervantes in *Don Quixote,* in which the old don went mad from reading too many fantasy adventures and thought he was a hero-knight himself. Cervantes's satire managed to put an end to the fantasy adventure craze—at least for that era.

See also: Fantasy.

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Amazons

(Greek)

In Greek mythology, Amazons were warrior women who lived apart from men.

In the *Iliad,* Amazons are described as *antianeirai,* a Greek word that means "those who go to war like men." The Greek historian and occasional tale teller Herodotus (c. 484–c. 420 B.C.E.) described the Amazons as *androktones,* which means "killers of males." Tradition says that they lived in Asia Minor, in what is now Turkey.

The Amazons are said to have gotten their name from the Greek word *amazoi,* or "breastless," referring to a belief that the Amazons cut or burned off their right breasts to make it easier to draw a bow. The Amazons, who are almost always pictured as fighting on horseback, are sometimes shown using swords or axes.

They were said to take their mates as it pleased them and then either enslave, kill, or sometimes release the men once the Amazons

This illustration from the thirteenth-century C.E. manuscript "*Li Livre des Ansienes Estories,*" or "The Book of Ancient Stories," depicts a fierce battle between the Amazons, who are led by their queen, and the Trojans. *(Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)*

had become pregnant. Female babies were kept and male babies were either killed or, in some accounts, returned to the father's people.

There are several tales in Greek mythology about the Amazons. In the *Iliad,* one of the nine labors imposed on Hercules was to travel to the land of the Amazons and bring back the girdle of Hippolyte, the Amazon queen.

In the process of completing this mission, Hercules fought and killed Hippolyte, and her sister Penthesilea became queen. She and her Amazon army fought on the side of King Priam of Troy during the Trojan War. In a slightly conflicting version, Theseus, king of Athens, abducted and married either Antiope, a sister of Hippolyte, or Hippolyte.

There is no proof that the Amazons of Greek myth were based on reality. There is, however, evidence throughout the world of the existence of women warriors.

The Sarmatian women, of Asia Minor, could not marry until they had taken an enemy's head in battle. Celtic women often fought alongside men. If a Celtic family had no son, the firstborn daughter was trained for combat. In Africa, the king of Dahomey was protected by a female bodyguard, as was the king of Thailand. The daughters of noble Japanese families were trained for battle. Vietnamese women were savage warriors who fought on both sides in their civil war, and many Russian women were decorated for valor during the two world wars.

A recent incarnation of the Amazons was the title character of the television series *Xena, Warrior Princess,* which aired from 1995 through 2001.

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Amled/Amleth

(Danish)

Amled, or Amleth, was a possibly historic but probably was a fictional fifth-century prince of Jutland. Amled's story is told in the *Gesta Danorum (Story of the Danes),* written in the late twelfth century by Saxo Grammaticus. Amled's story provided the basis for William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

Orvendel, son of a chieftain, was named by King Rork to be the leader of the armies. He married the king's daughter, Geruth, and they had a son, Amled. Orvendel's brother Fenge was jealous of Orvendel's success. He murdered Orvendel and forced Geruth to marry him, claiming that he had saved her from a cruel husband.

Amled knew that his life was in danger from his murderous uncle. He feigned insanity in order to protect himself. Fenge tried to prove that this was merely a ruse by sending a spy to watch Amled with his mother. Amled killed the spy and raged at his mother for so meekly giving in to Fenge. Geruth promised to hold herself back from Fenge.

Geruth's resistance led Fenge to further suspect Amled of treachery. But he could not murder the son after having murdered the father, so he sent Amled to England with two guards. The guards carried a secret message for the king of England that asked the king to kill Amled. Amled managed to switch the message to one that asked the king to have his daughter marry Amled. The hero killed the two guards and charmed the king, winning the hand of the princess.

Amled then returned home to take revenge. He set fire to Fenge's hall, killing Fenge's men, and finally killed Fenge. Amled succeeded Fenge as king of Jutland.

The story of Amled is told in the 1994 motion picture *Prinsen af Jylland (Prince of Jutland),* called *Royal Deceit* in the English version, and a 2002 Danish musical, *Amled*.

See also: *Gesta Danorum;* Saxo Grammaticus.

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Amphisbaena

(Greek)

The amphisbaena is an imaginary creature of ancient Greece—a poisonous snake- or lizardlike being with a head at each end of its body. It may well be an ancestor to the pushmi-pullyu character in the Doctor Doolittle books or to the cartoon character Catdog.

In medieval bestiaries, which are catalogs of real and imaginary animals and birds, the amphisbaena is described as a serpent (or sometimes as a lizard or even a cross between a bird and a snake) with a head at each end of its body and brightly shining eyes. Its name is Greek for "goes both ways," and the belief in such a creature goes back at least to the first century B.C.E. in Greece and Rome.

The amphisbaena is said to eat ants, which perhaps gives a hint as to its true origin.

Anteaters have tails that could be mistaken for a second head.

For the amphisbaena to travel swiftly, it held one head in the other's mouth and rolled. If it was chopped in half, the two parts joined up again. Unlike true reptiles, the amphisbaena could survive in cold temperatures.

The creature also was believed to have medicinal properties. According to tradition, wearing a live amphisbaena would protect a child in the womb—although how this was determined is difficult to say. Wearing a dead amphisbaena was supposed to cure rheumatism.

There is a real amphisbaena that was named for the mythical one. This amphisbaena is a type of legless lizard found in the tropical Americas that burrows in the earth. Unlike its imaginary cousin, it has only one head, but its tail is said to resemble a head.

See also: Bestiary.

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Amulets

Amulets are objects that are believed to have the mystical ability to ward off evil. Amulets are said to be a particularly effective defense against the so-called evil eye, which is the deliberate casting of evil from a look. Amulets also can be worn to bring good luck.

Some amulets may be natural objects, such as certain nuts or berries, the rare four-leaf clover, or a stone with a hole in it. Others may be worked out of almost any kind of material, including ivory. Amulets are often made out of metals such as iron, which is said in folklore to provide powerful protection against evil, and are frequently engraved with magic symbols or inscriptions.

This Persian glass amulet of a dolphin's head has blue eyes. Both dolphins and the color blue often were considered lucky. *(Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)*

Semiprecious stones are commonly used as amulets as well, as are images of eyes. Blue is said to be a good color to ward off evil. In the Near East, blue glass beads, often set with inlaid images of eyes, are sold as amulets against the evil eye.

Amulets are often worn around the neck or as rings, especially in the form of jewelry. In the modern world, many people who wear amulets or good luck charms as jewelry are unaware of their significance.

See also: Talismans.

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Amun/Amen/Amon/Amun-Re

(Egyptian)

Amun was the chief god throughout most of Egyptian history. He rose to prominence around 2061 B.C.E., when rulers at Thebes reunified the country after a time of political disunity. Amun was, over time, compounded with other deities, particularly the sun god, Re, and the creator gods, Atum and Tatanen. Amun became revered as a self-created deity who maintained his secrecy.

Amun became known as the *ba,* or life force, within everything in existence, including gods. Amun was considered to be unfathomable by any other being, mortal or divine. The Egyptians honored him as a supreme benefactor of humankind, who bestowed the individual blessing of life and received praise from powerful and poor alike. Amun was sometimes simply called simply Ankh, meaning "life."

This wall relief, which dates to the Twentieth Dynasty (1196–1080 B.C.E.) of the New Kingdom, is on the north wall of the main temple of Pharaoh Ramses III. It depicts the Theban Triad, the three main deities of the city of Thebes: (left to right) the god Amun, the goddess Mut, and the god Khonsu. *(Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)*

Amun was the local patron of Thebes, the paternal figure in a Theban triad of deities—Amun, the vulture goddess Mut (mother), and the youthful moon god Khonsu.

Although Amun's true form was said to be unknowable, artists have portrayed him as a man with a crown surmounted by two feathers. He also appears as a curly-horned ram or as a criosphinx, a ram-headed lion. His original, sacred animal was a goose.

The Greeks and Romans saw Amun as an aspect of Zeus and Jupiter.

Noreen Doyle

See also: Aiomum Kondi; An/Anu; Sius; Wele; Zeus.

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An/Anu

(Sumerian)

The sky god, An, was one of the principal deities in the Sumerian pantheon. Known as Anu in Akkadian, his name was often written with the cuneiform numerical sign for the number sixty. Other gods were assigned smaller numbers to show their lower status. In some myths, An is considered the father of the gods, while in other cosmological traditions he is the god in charge of the heavens following the separation of heaven and Earth.

An appears in a number of myths. Here are summaries of a few common tales:

- The story of Atra-hasis, in which An and a fellow deity, Enlil, grant him eternal life.

- The myth *Gilgamesh and the Bull of Heaven,* in which An's daughter, the goddess Inanna, threatens to release the dead from the netherworld if she is not given control over the bull, which she wants to use to punish the hero-king Gilgamesh for spurning her amorous advances.
- A myth about the elevation of the goddess Inanna, in which she states that the word of An, the father of the gods, is the ultimate authority; that his commands are the very foundation of heaven and Earth; and that it is An who conferred kingship upon earthly rulers.

Although the Sumerian mythic tradition accords An a place of prominence, his inner nature is never clearly defined, and his representation in ancient art remains obscure.

Ira Spar

See also: Aiomum Kondi; Amun/Amen/Amon/Amun-Re; Sius; Wele; Zeus.

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Anansasem

(West African)

In the storytelling traditions of the people of Ghana, Benin, and the Ivory Coast, *anansasem* are spider stories, a class of folktales named such after the spider trickster Ananse.

Ananse is said to have attained the title to all stories after winning a trial set on him by the sky god, Nyankomsem. Ananse was given three supposedly impossible tasks to accomplish, which he did, of course, by trickery.

Stories are referred to as anansasem stories, whether the spider takes part in the story or not. These stories are told for group entertainment and are distinguished from myths. They are also known as "words of a sky god" in honor of Nyankomsem, the deity who possessed the title for all stories before Ananse won them.

See also: *Retelling: Why Ananse Owns Every Story.*

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Animal Bride or Bridegroom

The world folktale type of the animal bride or bridegroom involves a human who marries an animal that is eventually transformed into a human (or at least a human-seeming being). The most familiar of these stories is the classic French tale "Beauty and the Beast," written by Jeanne-Marie Le Prince de Beaumont.

The main difference between this tale type and that of the animal helper (the animal who aids the hero) is that the former is always a human in its transformed shape while the latter may or may not be a human in disguise.

The animal bride takes the form of a variety of animals: frog, swan, cat, mouse, and even wolf. In some Slavic tales, for instance, the bride is a frog that becomes a beautiful princess when the hero keeps his promise to marry her. This is related in theme to the Arthurian story "Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell." In that tale, the bride is hideous until the hero marries her and gives her "what every woman wants," namely her own will.

The animal bride is featured in tales from around the world in a number of guises: a

mouse in a tale from Sri Lanka; a frog in tales from Austria, Germany, Italy, and Myanmar; a wolf in a tale from Croatia; a dog or a cat in tales from India; a tortoise in a tale from Arabia; a bear in a tale from the Nez Perce people of the American Northwest; and a monkey in a tale from the Philippines.

Related to these tales are those of the swan maidens and Celtic *selkies,* or seal people. In these cases, the transformation into human form is not permanent; the being is able to switch back and forth between forms.

The animal bridegroom also takes a variety of forms: a bear in tales from Scandinavia, the Pueblo people of the American Southwest, and the Tsimshian people of the Pacific Northwest; a serpent in tales from China, Russia, and the Passamaquoddy people of the northeastern United States; a dog in a tale from England; a pig in a tale from Turkey; and a lizard in a tale from Indonesia.

See also: Motifs; Tale Types.

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Animal Helper and Grateful Animal

The motif of an animal helper is found in folktales and myths from around the world. There are two main variations on this motif: either a human hero is aided by a magical animal or the animal is the hero of the tale. In the latter version, the animal hero generally aids a human character. Another closely related folk character is the grateful animal. This creature is not necessarily magical, though it may be able to speak, and the hero receives the animal's help in return for saving its life.

Perhaps the most familiar story featuring an animal helper is "Puss in Boots," in which a nattily dressed feline helped his human friend rise to nobility and achieve a happy marriage. Although the version most often cited is the one written by French courtier Charles Perrault, the story has earlier counterparts in world folklore. In Western Europe, these versions generally feature a cat, but in Eastern Europe the helper is more likely to be a fox, such as in the Armenian tale "The Miller and the Fox." In other folktales, the helper may be a wolf, as in the Russian tale "Ivan and the Great Grey Wolf"; a gazelle, as in some African tales; or even a fish, as in the Chinese Cinderella tale "Yeh-hsien."

The most common version of the grateful-animal folktale features a human hero who helps three animals. The three later return the favor, usually by helping the hero to overcome a monster and win a bride. The grateful animals often share a language in common with the hero—a phenomenon that is often explained away as having happened in the long ago days when people and animals could still communicate with each other verbally.

A variation on this theme is the tale of the ungrateful man. In this type of story, the man does not appreciate the animals' kindness. He usually comes to a bad end and is sometimes even slain by the animals.

See also: Motifs; Tale Types.

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Antar

(Middle Eastern)

Antar was an Arab warrior-poet in the seventh century who has become a cultural hero. Many epic poems have been written

about Antar and his real and fictional adventures.

Antar was said to have been the son of Shaddad, a well-respected member of the tribe of 'Abs, and an African slave woman. Because Antar was dark-skinned and his mother was a slave, the rest of the tribe treated him as an inferior in spite of his accomplishments.

A born survivor, Antar had to fight for food and at a very early age killed a dog over a piece of goat meat. At age ten, he slew a wolf that was after the tribe's herds. But when he fell in love with his paternal cousin, the beautiful Abla, her father would not allow them to marry. Antar had to face a series of challenges before the marriage could go forward, including a quest for a special breed of camel from a northern Arab kingdom.

Antar excelled as a warrior. Shaddad finally acknowledged him as his free son and asked Antar for help in battling another tribe.

It is not known how many stories of Antar's exploits are factual. Some of his poetry still exists. It is full of chivalry and love for Abla. He also included full descriptions of battles, armor, and other subjects that make his poetry useful for historians.

Antar's prowess as both a warrior and a poet gave rise to many tales over the centuries. He was the hero of the popular Arabic epic *Sirat Antar,* which was loosely translated as the *Romance of Antar* and thought to be the work of the writer Al Asmai (739–831 C.E.). In this story, Antar is presented as the ideal of a Bedouin chief—generous, brave, and honorable.

The nineteenth-century Russian composer Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov was inspired by the story of Antar and created a symphonic suite in four movements about his life. The first movement is set in the desert of Sham among the ruins of the ancient city of Palmyra. Antar had taken refuge there after becoming disillusioned with his fellow man. He witnessed a beautiful gazelle pursued by a huge dark bird. Antar attacked the bird and frightened it away. He then fell asleep and dreamed of a splendid palace ruled by the Queen of Palmyra, the fairy Gul Nazar. It was the queen, in the form of a gazelle, whom Antar had rescued. In gratitude, the fairy queen promised Antar the three great joys of life—revenge, power, and love.

Antar awoke among the ruins of Palmyra. The piece continues with Antar's use of the joys of revenge and of power. The last movement concentrates on the joy of love. Antar made Gul Nazar agree to take his life the moment she noticed that his passion for her was cooling. In the end, she does so, and Antar dies in her arms.

See also: Epics.

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Antero Vipunen

(Finnish)

The Finnish earth-giant and wise man, Antero Vipunen, resided just below the topsoil. As he slept, he absorbed nature's secrets.

The wizard Vainamoinen was building a magic boat and lacked an essential binding spell. He went to wake Antero Vipunen, who knew the spell and, in some versions of the story, kept the spell in his stomach. Shouting failed to awaken the giant, as did shaking him. At last, Vainamoinen poked a branch down the giant's gullet. Antero Vipunen yawned and swallowed Vainamoinen.

Stuck in the giant's stomach, Vainamoinen built a magic smithy. This finally disturbed Antero Vipunen, who coughed Vainamoinen back out again, along with the binding spell. The annoyance gone, Antero Vipunen slumbered on.

See also: Giants; *Kalevala;* Vainamoinen; Wise Man or Woman.

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Antichrist

(Christian)

In Christian belief, the Antichrist is said to be the archenemy of Jesus Christ and the powers of good. The New Testament warns that the Antichrist will appear and lay waste to all that is around him, corrupting the hearts of men and women, turning brother against brother, and heralding the cataclysmic end of the world. However, although the term *Antichrist* appears four times in the Book of John, it refers not to a specific figure but simply to anyone who opposes Christ.

By the end of the first millennium C.E., the Antichrist had been combined with other figures from the New Testament, such as the so-called second beast of Revelations. The general idea of an Antichrist as someone opposing Christ or Christianity had evolved into *the* Antichrist, a Satanic individual. It was generally believed in Western Christianity that the Antichrist would be known by the number 666 and that it would shrink from any symbols of Christianity, including the crucifix.

In the Middle Ages, it was believed that the Antichrist would first appear on Earth in the Holy Land, Jerusalem. This was given as one reason for the First Crusade of 1095—to expel the Saracens and other heathens before it was too late.

During the Renaissance, Christianity split into two factions, the Catholics and the Protestants; each accused the other's leader of being the feared arch-destroyer. Today, any unpopular public leader may be branded an antichrist without any significant religious meaning. The number 666 is frequently used in horror fiction and motion pictures.

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Antigone

(Greek)

The story of Antigone comes from Greek mythology, but its themes of civil war and defiance of authority are timeless. Antigone was one of the unfortunate children of Oedipus and Jocasta. Her story has been retold in many forms, including modern interpretations and plays.

When Oedipus blinded himself and went mad after learning that he had unknowingly married and mated with his mother, Antigone and her sister Ismene stayed at his side until his death.

Eteocles and Polyneices

The sisters guided Oedipus from Thebes to Athens. Their brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices, had been cursed by their father. They agreed to share the kingdom of Thebes by reigning in alternate years. In the first year Eteocles ruled, but when the year ended he refused to surrender the kingdom to his brother. Polyneices fled to Adrastus, king of Argos, who gave him his daughter in marriage and an army to help stake his claim to the kingdom. This led to the celebrated expedition of the so-called Seven Against Thebes, the battle in which seven champions fought against Eteocles. The Seven were defeated and killed.

The civil war continued for years, with limited success. Eventually, both sides agreed that the brothers should decide their quarrel in single combat. They fought and fell by each

other's hands. The armies then renewed the fight, and at last the invaders were forced to yield. They fled, leaving the dead unburied.

The uncle of the fallen princes was Creon, Jocasta's brother. Creon became king and had Eteocles buried with distinguished honor. He ordered that the body of Polyneices be left where it had fallen, forbidding anyone to give him a proper burial.

Antigone Returns to Thebes

After her father's death, Antigone's life had vastly improved. She returned to Thebes and was engaged to Creon's son Haemon. But following the death of her brothers, Antigone heard of the edict consigning Polyneices's body to the dogs and vultures. She could think of nothing but giving her brother a proper burial, and so she refused to marry Haemon. While Antigone was bound by Greek law to obey the king's commands, she was also bound by her sisterly need to see to her brother's eternal rest.

Ismene, Antigone's timid but loving sister, did her best to convince Antigone to obey the law, but Antigone refused to listen. When no one would help her, she visited the battleground alone at night.

The next day, the guards warned King Creon that someone had been interrupted trying to bury Polyneices. That night, the guards caught Antigone trying to dig a grave for Polyneices and brought her to Creon. He ordered the guards away. Since no one else had seen the arrest of his niece, Creon ordered her to go to bed and pretend to be ill. Antigone replied that she would return to the battleground again that night.

Niece and uncle engaged in a classic argument of the individual against authority. At the end of it, Creon had no choice but to arrest the unyielding Antigone and condemn her to death. In her cell, awaiting death, she wrote to Haemon, asking him for forgiveness and wishing him happiness.

Antigone was sealed in a tomb, but then Creon heard his son's cry of despair—from within. Opening the tomb, he found that Antigone had hung herself. Haemon had cut her body down and stabbed himself to death at her side.

Antigone's tragic story has inspired authors through the centuries. In approximately 441 B.C.E., the Greek playwright Sophocles wrote *Antigone.* Another Greek playwright, Euripides, also wrote an *Antigone,* but only fragments of that work have survived. In the twentieth century, the story inspired others, including French playwright and filmmaker Jean Cocteau, whose film titled *Antigone* premiered in 1922. French playwright Jean Anouilh premiered his *Antigone* in 1944, during the German occupation of France. Anouilh's version has a contemporary political slant. The story of Antigone also inspired composers such as Carl Orff, whose opera *Antigone* premiered in 1949.

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Anu

(Hittite)

The Hittite deity Anu started as a cupbearer, became king of the heavens, and finally was sent into exile.

Alalu was the Hittite king in heaven, yet the god Anu was more powerful. After serving as Alalu's cupbearer for nine years, Anu rose up and defeated Alalu, sending him to dwell under the earth. Anu assumed the throne of the Hittite god and took another deity, Kumarbi, as his cupbearer.

After nine years, the cycle repeated, and Kumarbi rebelled. Anu fled in the shape of a bird. Kumarbi caught Anu and bit off and swallowed his phallus, ending Anu's power.

Ira Spar

See also: Alalu/Alalus.

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Anubis/Anpu

(Egyptian)

Before his role was usurped by Osiris, Anubis was the premier Egyptian funerary god who ruled over the dead. Known as He Who Is Upon His Mountain and Lord of the Sacred Land, Anubis protected elaborate cemeteries, preserved the bodies of the dead, and guided souls to the afterlife.

Anubis, "opener of the mouth," was an Egyptian god of the underworld. He usually is portrayed as a jackal or as a man with a jackal's head. This mask, with its movable jaws, may represent him and may have been part of a religious ritual. *(Réunion des Musées Nationaux/Art Resource, NY)*

Anubis is represented as a black canine with tall, pointed ears and a bushy tail or as a man with the head of such an animal. The color of Anubis's fur has been interpreted as both the black skin of a rotting corpse and the black mud of fertile farmland.

During the Old Kingdom (c. 2687–2191 B.C.E.), Anubis judged the fate of the deceased, a role eventually taken over by Osiris. In *The Book of the Dead,* a source dating to c. 1600 B.C.E., Anubis attended to the scales in which the hearts of the deceased were weighed against *maat* (truth), while Osiris pronounced judgment. During the mummification process, a priest known as the master of secrets probably wore a mask and played the part of the canine god.

Anubis's background varies considerably in different sources. According to the Greek author Plutarch (c. 46–120 C.E.), Osiris mistook the goddess Nephthys for his wife, Isis, and impregnated her. Their child was Anubis. Isis raised Anubis, the product of this accidental affair, as her own son. Other texts name the cat goddess, Bastet, or a cow goddess as his mother, and later texts identify his father as Osiris, Re, or even Seth.

A peculiar symbol of Anubis is the *imiut* fetish, which, in ancient times, was identified with an earlier god, Imi-ut. This object consists of the stuffed skin of a beheaded animal tied by its tail to a pole, which rests in a pot.

The Greeks and Romans identified Anubis with the god Hermes Psychopompos and also knew him as Hermanubis.

Noreen Doyle

See also: Death; Dogs.

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Anzu

(Sumerian and Babylonian)

The Anzu is a demonic, eagle-like creature that lived in the realm of the gods in Mesopotamian myth. Anzu was born in the rocks of a mountain during a storm that brought forceful winds and flooding waters.

Artists depicted Anzu as a huge bird with outsized, broad wings, sometimes with a lion's head. In the Sumerian Lugalbanda epic, Anzu is pictured with shark's teeth and eagle's claws. In the Babylonian epic of Gilgamesh, the horrible-looking, lion-headed monster-bird is described as possessing a maw of fire and the breath of death.

Anzu and Ninurta

The Sumerian poem that is called "Anzu" in modern editions celebrated the valor of the heroic god Ninurta. It tells of Ninurta's rescue of the tablet of destinies from the hands of the wicked Anzu bird. After the introductory description of the god Ninurta as a strong and fierce hero, the poem describes the state of the world immediately after creation: The Tigris and Euphrates rivers existed but did not yet carry water; there were no clouds; the springs did not bear water to the land; the gods had not yet received their assigned positions; and sanctuaries for their worship had not been built.

When Enlil, god of the winds and divine order, first saw Anzu, he was taken aback by his appearance. Ea, the god of wisdom and water, explained to Enlil that Anzu was a product of the flood and that his energies could be harnessed and given direction by employing him as the doorkeeper of Enlil's throne room.

Positioned next to Enlil's seat of authority, Anzu eyed with envy the tablet of destinies, which was one of the objects that invested Enlil with his powers as ruler of gods and men. Control of the tablet gave Enlil the ability to determine the destiny of the world. Anzu stole the tablet, determined to possess the powers of the throne and to command the gods of heaven, and flew with his prize to his inaccessible mountain lair. Frightened of what Anzu might do with the tablet's power, the gods assembled, seeking a warrior to fight the monster and recover the tablet.

Anu asked for a volunteer. When none came forward, three gods were nominated to take up the challenge: Adad, Girra, and Shara. All three refused to encounter Anzu, afraid that they would be turned into clay. The gods became despondent.

Finally, Ea devised a plan. The mistress of the gods, Ninhursag, was called and exalted before the assembly. She was asked to volunteer her firstborn son, Ninurta, to do battle against wicked Anzu and return the seat of authority to its rightful place. Ninurta accepted his mission, and, seething with fury, he set out to confront the thief.

Ninurta and Anzu met on the mountainside, but Anzu, in possession of magical powers conferred on him by the tablet, repelled Ninurta's advance. Ninurta's arrows were turned back. His bow frame vanished, and its wood was turned back into forest trees. The bowstring turned into sheep sinews, and the arrows' feathers became the feathers of newly created birds.

Ninurta's Victory

When word of Anzu's successful defense reached Ea, he encouraged Ninurta not to give up the fight, advising him to be relentless in his attack. Ea told Ninurta that when he observed Anzu beginning to tire from the battle and saw his wings start to droop, Ninurta must cut off the monster's pinion feathers and throw them to the wind. Anzu's magical powers would then wane, and he would instantly call for his feathers to return, at which time Ninurta, newly rearmed with bow and arrows, was to shoot his feathered arrows at the monster. Being feathered, the arrows would be drawn to the target by the monster's own magic.

Ninurta heeded Ea's advice. When Anzu tired, Ninurta cut off his pinion feathers and

then shot his arrow into the monster. The arrow pierced the monster's heart and lungs. Victorious, Ninurta took hold of the tablet of destinies. Gathered in their assembly, the gods received word of Ninurta's victory. They rejoiced and looked forward to the return of the tablet. But Ninurta hesitated, initially refusing to comply, as possession of the tablet gave him the powers of kingship.

After a break in the text where a section has been lost, the story ends as Ninurta returned to the assembly with the tablet. The gods heaped praise upon him as the valiant conquering hero, the greatest among the gods.

Ira Spar

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Aphrodite

(Greek)

In Greek mythology, Aphrodite is the goddess of love, beauty, and lust.

There are differing accounts of how the goddess Aphrodite came to be. The Greek poet Hesiod wrote that Aphrodite was born out of violence. In the primal days, soon after creation, Uranus, the father of the early gods, was castrated by Cronos, his son. The genitals fell into the ocean, and from that unlikely mating Aphrodite was born, rising up out of the *aphros,* or sea foam. The poet Homer was the first to call her the daughter of Zeus, the chief of the Greek gods, and the mortal woman Dione.

When Zeus realized the beauty of his daughter, he was afraid that the gods would fight over her. He married Aphrodite to the smith god, Hephaestus, since Hephaestus was the calmest and most dependable of the gods. Unfortunately, Hephaestus was also lame and usually covered with soot. Although he crafted his wife beautifully worked jewelry, he could not keep her faithful to him, and Aphrodite had love affairs with many gods and mortals. Among these were the god of war, Ares, and the mortal Adonis, who died tragically when he was gored by a boar.

One of Aphrodite's sons was Eros, who served as her messenger. Eros is better known in the West by his Roman name, Cupid. Aphrodite's Roman name is Venus, and her festival, the Aphrodisiac, was celebrated in various centers of Greece and especially in Athens and Corinth.

There are strong links between Aphrodite and the older goddesses of the ancient Near East, Ishtar, Inanna, and Astarte, who were worshipped in what is now Iraq and Syria. All three of these were goddesses of both love and war, and Aphrodite is the lover of the god of war. The love story of Aphrodite and Adonis is very close to the older Babylonian love story of Ishtar and Tammuz and to the even earlier Sumerian tale of Inanna and Dumuzi, including the hero's death from wounds inflicted by a boar.

See also: Inanna/Ishtar.

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Apollo

(Greek)

In Greek mythology, Apollo was the god of music, poetry, the arts, prophecy, and archery. A god of light, he was also known as Phoebus, which means "radiant" or "beaming," and was sometimes identified with He-

In this painting, "Apollo and the Muses," by Italian artist Baldassare Peruzzi (1481–1536), the god Apollo is shown in his role as the god of music, dancing with the muses. *(Scala/Art Resource, NY)*

lios, the sun god. As the god of religious healing, Apollo bestowed ritual purification on the guilty.

Like many of the Greek gods, including his sister, Artemis, Apollo had a dark side. He was the god of plague and in that aspect was worshipped as Smintheus, a name that comes from the Greek word *sminthos* (rat). According to the *Iliad,* Apollo shot arrows of plague into the Greek camp during the Trojan War.

Apollo's Origins

Apollo was the son of Zeus and the Titan woman Leto. Zeus's wife, Hera, found out about her husband's infidelity and was furious. So jealous was Hera that she hounded the pregnant Leto from place to place across the earth, finally banning her from staying anywhere on solid ground. The only site where Leto could stop was Delos, which was a floating island and therefore not under Hera's ban. It was on Delos that Leto gave birth to Apollo and his twin sister, the goddess Artemis.

When he was grown, Apollo went to Delphi, where he slew the monstrous serpent Python with his arrows. Python had guarded the sanctuary of Pytho, where a psychic recited prophesies. Apollo, now in charge of the oracle, gained the name Pythian Apollo. He bestowed divine powers on one of the priestesses of the sanctuary, and she became known as the Pythia. The Pythia inhaled the hallucinating vapors issuing from a fissure in the temple floor and then recited her prophesies. A priest translated her murmurings and ravings for those who came in search of help.

Apollo's Trysts

Apollo, just like his father, Zeus, had many love affairs with both goddesses and mortals. One of his early loves was the nymph Cyrene, who bore Apollo a son. This son, Aristaeus, became a demigod protector of cattle who taught humankind the skill of dairy farming.

Another union, this time with a mortal woman, Coronis, daughter of King Phlegyas of the Lapiths, had a more violent outcome. While pregnant by Apollo, Coronis made the mistake of falling in love with a mortal man. When Apollo learned of this, his dark anger was roused. He asked his sister, the huntress Artemis, to kill Coronis. Artemis, just as darkly angry as her brother, did her brother's bidding. Apollo rescued the child from its mother's dead body and brought the boy, called Asclepius, to the good Centaur Cheiron. Asclepius became the god of healing.

Not all of those whom Apollo pursued wished to be caught. Apollo became infatuated with the nymph Daphne and harried her until she finally could bear it no longer. She asked Peneus, a river god, for help, and he turned Daphne into a laurel tree. Apollo, distraught by what had happened, made the laurel his sacred tree.

Apollo also fell in love with Hyacinthus, a handsome Spartan prince. Zephyrus, the west wind, was jealous, and when Apollo and Hyacinthus were throwing the discus, Zephyrus blew it off course, smashing Hyacinthus's skull. Apollo, grieving, created a flower in his love's honor: the hyacinth.

Yet another love of Apollo's was the boy Cyparissus. As a love gift, Apollo gave him a deer, which the boy adored. When the deer was accidentally slain, Cyparissus wanted to weep forever. Apollo transformed Cyparissus into a tree, the cypress, which became the symbol of sorrow, as the sap on its trunk forms tear-shaped droplets.

Apollo's dark side made him utterly without pity when he was angry. The mortal Niobe made the fatal mistake of boasting to Leto, Apollo's mother, that she had borne fourteen children, which made her superior to Leto, who had only two. This insult to their mother was too much for Apollo and Artemis to ignore. They worked as a merciless hunting team—Apollo killed Niobe's sons and Artemis killed her daughters. Niobe wept so much in her grief that she turned to stone.

Apollo and Troy

Apollo also has a part in the story of Troy, the city that was doomed to fall to the Greeks. He had a love affair with Queen Hecuba, wife of King Priam of Troy, and she bore Apollo a boy, Troilus. It was foretold that Troy could not be defeated if Troilus was allowed to reach the age of twenty. Unfortunately for Troy, the Greek hero Achilles lay in wait for the boy and killed Troilus before he reached that age.

Apollo was not yet finished interfering with the affairs of Troy. He fell in love with Cassandra, Troilus's half sister, and daughter of Hecuba and Priam. Cassandra made a bargain with the god. He could have her as a lover if he taught her the art of prophecy. Apollo agreed. Once she had learned prophecy, however, Cassandra refused him. The angry Apollo could not withdraw his gift but added to it the curse that none of her prophecies would ever be believed. This spelled Troy's doom, since when Cassandra warned of the danger from the Trojan horse, no one believed her.

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Apple Trees

Apple trees are among the world's most valuable fruit trees. Many types are found around the globe, all with beautiful blossoms and bountiful fruit. Apples are even believed to have medicinal properties, which led to the old folk adage "An apple a day keeps the doctor away." It is therefore not surprising to find a large body of myth and folklore surrounding this important tree.

Apple Trees in the Bible and Mythology

In biblical lore, an apple was the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden; however, not every scholar agrees with that. Obviously, there is no way to prove whether or not it was an apple.

In Greek mythology, the earth goddess, Gaea, gave Hera, wife of the chief god, Zeus, a tree of golden apples as a wedding gift. The apples were said to bring both health and beauty. The tree was guarded by a dragon and three virgin sisters, the Hesperides, but Hercules stole the apples as the eleventh of his twelve labors.

Many people have created myths and stories about apple trees, from beliefs in apple tree spirits to tales of the American folk character Johnny Appleseed. *(Ernest Quost/The Bridgeman Art Library/Getty Images)*

In another Greek myth, Prince Paris of Troy judged a beauty contest between Athena, goddess of knowledge, and Aphrodite, goddess of love. The prize was a golden apple.

In a third Greek myth, the swift young woman warrior Atalanta would marry only the man who could beat her in a race. Hippomenes, who wanted her, distracted Atalanta from the race by tossing three golden apples onto the track.

In Roman mythology, the goddess Pomona was known as the Apple Mother. It was she who watched over the apples that gave immortality. Apples were usually served at the end of Roman banquets as Pomona's blessing was recited.

In Norse mythology, the goddess Iduna guarded the apples that kept the gods young. When she was kidnapped by a giant, the gods began to age until the trickster god Loki—who had gotten the gods into the fix in the first place—was able to win her back again.

British Traditions

Apples also feature prominently in Celtic lore. The fairy folk, the Sidhe, are often portrayed in folktales carrying apple branches that are sometimes poetically described as silver with white blossoms or golden apples. When shaken, they make a sweet melody that banishes pain. There is also a tale of a fairy woman providing the mortal Connla with an apple on which he was able to live for a month.

Apples also feature in Arthurian lore. Avalon, the magical island to which the mortally wounded Arthur was taken, is the island of apples. In fact, some scholars think that the name Avalon comes from the Welsh word for apple, *afal*.

There were many English medieval folk traditions surrounding apples and apple trees, some of which remain. Villagers who wanted to be sure of a good apple harvest would tie cider-soaked pieces of toast on the branches of the largest tree in the orchard. By doing this, they hoped to attract robins, which were the good spirits of the tree. The villagers would then drive away evil spirits with blasts from their shotguns, since such spirits were said to be afraid of noise. The ceremony ended with a ritual pouring of cider over the roots of the tree. This custom is still sometimes performed.

The old custom of celebrating, or wassailing, orchard trees on Christmas Eve still exists in a few corners of England. A farmer and his family go out to the orchard at night with hot cakes and cider. The cakes are placed in the boughs of the best apple trees. A toast is made to the trees in which they are wished good health, and the cider is flung over them. Trees that are bad bearers are not honored.

The living embodiment of the apple tree in Somerset, England, was the Apple Tree Man, who was said to be the spirit of the oldest tree in the orchard. If honored, he would return the favor by keeping the orchard fertile.

See also: Ash Trees; Elf Shot/Elf Arrow; Johnny Appleseed.

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Arabic Storytelling

Arabic storytelling throughout the Middle East and North Africa has a rich, ancient history. The Arab storytelling tradition is considered to be an ancestor of Western frame stories, such as Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*.

Throughout the countries that make up the Arab world, professional storytellers, called *rawiya* or *rawi,* spend their lives traveling and entertaining audiences in towns, in coffeehouses, at family gatherings, and in nomad tents with folktales, poems, and legends. Other storytellers, called *hakawati,* are more like wandering bards, in that their stories are sung rather than told.

The folktales shared by both types of tellers are familiar in Western cultures as well, especially by those who have read the collection of stories known as *The Thousand and One Nights*. Subject matter covered in traditional Arab tales includes stories of the supernatural beings known as the *djinn,* magic lamps, flying carpets, and wishes fulfilled. World tale types also are represented, such as trickster tales, prince and princess stories, and "master thief" stories that tell of a fellow who can steal the eggs out from under a bird or the gold out of a rich man's purse.

Another important Arabic epic that may be told either in parts or in a single telling is a romance of chivalry entitled *Sirat Antar (The Romance of Antar)*. This work, ascribed to the writer Al Asmai (739–831 C.E.), includes elements of pure fantasy as well as chief events in Arab history before Islam. It is often referred to as the Arab *Iliad*.

One of the oldest forms of Arabic traditional story is the epic poem, but unfortunately none of the oldest story poems remain. There are no written records of Arabic tales prior to the sixth century, when the Syrian alphabet came into use, but many stories have survived through oral tradition. In the eighth century, many of these oral poems were collected by a man known as Hammad the Transmitter. He had committed many poems to memory that were later collected in an anthology called the *Mu'allaqat* or *Collected Odes*.

Poets of Hammad's era were looked upon as wise men or magicians, and they were expected to be able to utter spells or incantations against their foes. Many of the surviving poems follow the rules of nomadic society. A typical poem begins with a reference to forsaken camping grounds. The poet laments and asks his comrades to halt, while he calls up the memory of those who departed in search of other encampments and freshwater springs. Then he usually touches on romance, bewailing the tortures through which his passion puts him. The poet then generally recounts his difficult journeys through the desert and dwells on the lean condition of his steed, which he lauds and describes. The poem concludes with praise for the prince or other major figure in whose presence the poem is recited.

The exotic richness of this literature makes it a fascinating source of inspiration for storytellers.

See also: Djinn/Djinni/Jinn/Genie.

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Arachne

(Greek)

In Greek mythology, Arachne was a young woman, possibly a princess, who was a magnificent weaver. Her boasting brought about her downfall.

Arachne was so great a weaver that the nymphs came to watch. Arachne overheard them saying that only the goddess Athena,

patron of weavers, could have trained her. At this, Arachne lost her temper and boasted that even Athena could not produce such fine weaving.

Athena heard this and was angered by Arachne's boast. Disguised as an old woman, she went to Arachne and warned her to watch her words. But Arachne announced that she welcomed a chance at a contest of weaving skills against Athena.

With that, Athena dropped her disguise and accepted the challenge. Two looms were set up, and goddess and mortal woman began their work. Athena wove a beautiful scene of the victory of herself over Poseidon for the city that now bore her name, Athens. Arachne wove an equally beautiful scene of the many infidelities of Zeus, leader of the gods and Athena's father. Furious at Arachne for her daring and presumption, Athena ripped the weaving from the loom and willed that Arachne should be overcome with guilt. Arachne, devastated, hung herself.

Athena felt a twinge of guilt and brought Arachne back as the finest of weavers—a spider. The class of animals that includes spiders—arachnids—was named after the unfortunate Arachne.

See also: Athena/Athene.

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Arawn

(Welsh)

Arawn is the king of Annwfn, the pre-Christian Welsh otherworld.

In the first branch, or book, of the *Mabinogion,* a medieval collection of Welsh myths and folklore, Arawn encountered the mortal King Pwyll of Gwenydd as they were both hunting. Arawn transformed himself into a likeness of Pwyll and changed Pwyll into Arawn's likeness. They traded kingdoms for a year so that Pwyll could defeat Arawn's enemy, Hafgan. No explanation is given as to why a mortal man was the only one able to defeat Hafgan.

Pwyll defeated Hafgan, slaying him with a single blow. And although Arawn's wife was beautiful, Pwyll courteously remained chaste while in Arawn's form. Arawn, too, refused to take advantage of Pwyll's wife. Returned to their rightful forms and kingdoms, the two formed a bond of friendship so strong that Pwyll became known as Pwyll Pen Annwfn, or Pwyll, head of Annwfn.

Arawn also appears in the fourth branch of the *Mabinogion* as the giver of Annwfn pigs to Pryderi, son of Pwyll. Arawn also possessed a magic cauldron, decorated with pearls, heated by the breath of nine maidens, and unable to cook the food of a coward. This cauldron is described in "Preiddiau Annwfn" ("The Spoils of Annwfn"), a short Welsh poem of uncertain date, as one of the treasures of Britain that King Arthur attempted to steal.

"Cad Goddeu" ("The Battle of the Trees"), an obscure early poem contained in the thirteenth-century *Book of Taliesin,* refers to a war between Arawn and Amaethon, a plowman. This war began when Amaethon stole a white roebuck, a whelp, and a lapwing from Arawn.

Arawn's realm has sometimes been seen as an underworld, not an otherworld, but there is no evidence linking him to any demonic iconography.

Lisa Spangenberg

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Archetype

An archetype is an image or a figure that is hardwired into every human psyche regardless of culture or race. Examples of

archetypes include basic character types such as the Wise Old Man or the Trickster.

Swiss psychologist Carl G. Jung (1875–1961) introduced the idea that archetypes are instinctive thought patterns, or innate prototypes of ideas. In Jungian psychology, archetypal imagery is used as a therapeutic tool. In the context of storytelling and mythology, archetypes are unavoidable, universal elements of each story or myth.

Archetypes are easily confused with symbols. When archetypes are reduced to symbols, they become stereotypes. Symbols have a concrete message in that they stand for something specific. The American flag, for example, is a symbol representing the United States of America; gold, given as a reward in fairy tales, symbolizes inner wealth.

Stereotypes are locked into a single view of an image or concept, acting as a stricture that limits interpretation. Tombstones and witches are stereotypical Halloween images; however, when images, associations, and emotions that are normally associated with tombstones or witches are included in these concepts, they can become archetypal terms. The witch archetype might include good witches, evil witches, healers, the three witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth,* witches from *The Wizard of Oz,* innocent women burned as witches, and even a mother or another woman with witchlike qualities.

The hero archetype involves certain behavior—exploration, facing challenges, and independent achievement—as well as images—Samson, Hercules, Abraham Lincoln. Archetypal heroes in fairy tales are an amalgamation of valiant behavior and distinctive character traits. Heroes, for example, are persistent, trust their instincts, and do not expect assistance in return for their efforts from the animals and people they help on their journey. Consequently, heroes succeed.

In literature studies, *archetype* is often used as a synonym for *model* or *prototype.* It derives from the Greek *archee,* which means original. An example of an archetype in this context is the hero in Stephen Crane's novel *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), who is an archetype of a soldier. Philosophers may use the term *archetype* to categorize abstract concepts such as evil or strength.

Ruth Stotter

See also: Jung, Carl Gustav.

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Argonautica

(Greek)

The epic *Argonautica* tells of the adventures of the Greek hero Jason and his companions, the Argonauts. Both the epic and the Argonauts were named for Jason's ship, the *Argo*. There are actually two versions of the epic poem. The first was written by the Greek poet Apollonius of Rhodes in the third century B.C.E. In the first century C.E., the Roman poet Gaius Valerius Flaccus penned another version.

Apollonius was born in 230 B.C.E. Little is known about his life except that he was head of an academy or library as well as a poet. Flaccus lived during the reign of Titus Caesar. Apollonius's version of the *Argonautica* is better known, but Flaccus's work, which he never completed, has unique elements.

The *Argonautica* is the only one of Apollonius's works to have survived. Apollonius used myths and Homer's *Odyssey* as his source material. Apollonius ended the epic before Jason and Medea meet their tragic end.

In Flaccus's version of the story, the gods are portrayed viewing the events as a game, with each god encouraging his or her favorite and working to stop the others. It is Venus, for instance, disguised as Circe, who persuades

Medea to betray her father and fall in love with Jason. The epic breaks off as Jason and Medea leave Colchis aboard the *Argo,* pursued by the Colchians.

The Quest Begins

The *Argonautica* begins with King Pelias, who was warned that Jason would one day take his throne. Pelias sent Jason out on what he believed to be an impossible voyage: a quest for the mystical Golden Fleece. Jason and fifty heroes, including Hercules and the magical bard Orpheus, set out in the *Argos*.

After many perilous and exotic adventures, they reached the Bosporos. There they found Phineus, once king of Thrace, tormented by harpies. Jason's men drove off the harpies. The grateful Phineus told Jason how to reach the land of King Aietes of Colchis, where he would find the Golden Fleece.

Aietes, who had no intention of giving up the fleece, made Jason pass a test of courage. Jason was to harness the bronze-hoofed bulls on the Plain of Ares and plow the field with them. Aietes instructed Jason to then sow the teeth of a dragon (or giant serpent), from which a crop of warriors would spring up. Jason accepted Aietes's challenge.

Medea

Meanwhile, the gods had smitten Aietes's daughter, the sorceress Medea, with love for Jason. She met him at the shrine of the goddess Hekate and gave him a magical drug to help him in his ordeal. Jason fell in love with Medea and offered to marry her and carry her back to Greece.

At dawn, Jason made a sacrifice to Hekate and then bathed himself and his weapons with the magical drug. He proceeded to harness the fierce bulls, plow the field, and sow the dragon's teeth. But the warriors that grew from the teeth immediately began fighting with one another, so Jason killed them. Even though Jason succeeded in his test, King Aietes plotted to keep the fleece.

Medea, meanwhile, was sure that her father knew she had betrayed him. She rushed to Jason, telling him that she would help him get the Golden Fleece if he saved her. Jason calmed her fears and vowed to marry her. The couple went to the sacred grove, where a dragon guarded the Golden Fleece. Medea put the dragon to sleep, and Jason took the fleece. They fled to the *Argo* and immediately set sail.

King Aietes did know about his daughter's betrayal. The Colchians, led by Medea's brother, Apsyrtos, set sail in pursuit of the *Argo*. Jason and Medea plotted to kill Apsyrtos. They lured him with gifts and slew him. The Colchians retreated.

Jason and Medea, guilty of murder, went to the sorceress Circe to undergo rites to cleanse them of Apsyrtos's blood. Circe refused to help them.

The Journey Continues

The *Argo* sailed on. When they came upon the Sirens, Orpheus's music silenced the treacherous nymphs. The nymph Thetis and the Nereids brought the ship safely past the twin perils of Scylla and Charybdis.

Jason and Medea arrived at what is now the island of Corfu, where they were confronted by the Colchians. The Colchians insisted that unless Medea was Jason's wife, she must return with them to her homeland. Jason and Medea were married that night, and the Colchians let them go.

When the *Argo* reached Crete, Jason and Medea were attacked by the guardian of Crete, Talos. This gigantic man of bronze, created by the smith god, Hephaestus, tirelessly circled the island, throwing stones at any approaching ships. But Medea knew how to destroy him. Talos had a single vein, from his neck to his ankle, which was closed by a single bronze nail. Medea enchanted Talos and removed the bronze nail, causing his blood to run out and killing him.

After this last adventure, the *Argo* returned to Greece, at which point the epic ends.

See also: Epics.

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Arianrhod

(Welsh)

In pre-Christian mythology, Arianrhod was the niece of Math of Mathonwy, ruler of the kingdom of Gwynnedd. Her brother was Gwydion, the heroic magician. Some mythologists theorize that Arianrhod was originally a deity, rather than a mythologized historical figure.

Arianrhod's story appears in "Math, Son of Mathonwy," the fourth branch of the *Mabinogion,* a medieval Welsh collection of mythology and folklore. Arianrhod was chosen as one of Math's footholders, a virgin who kept the magical king's feet from touching the ground. But Arianrhod failed the virginity test when she stepped over Math's magic wand, or rod, and instantly bore a son. As soon as the baby boy uttered its first cry, Arianrhod fled, embarrassed or horrified. As she ran away, something small fell from her. Gwydion took up the small object, wrapped it in silk, and hid it in a small chest.

Math, meanwhile, had the infant boy baptized at the sea's edge, giving him the name Dylan, which means Son of the Waves. As soon as the boy was touched by the sea, he leaped into the water and swam off, clearly a child of the sea people.

The object that Gwydion had placed in the chest was a second fetus that grew in this magical incubator into a fine boy. Arianrhod refused to name this second son or to provide him with weapons, but Gwydion tricked her into arming the boy and giving him the name Lleu Llaw Gyffes (Lleu of the Sure Hand).

According to folklore, a reef off the coast of Gwynnedd is called Caer Arianrhod (Arianrhod Castle). The lore claims that it is all that remains of the castle where Arianrhod was tricked into giving Lleu Llaw Gyffes the weapons. Caer Arianrhod is also an alternate name for the constellation Corona Borealis. Mythologists consider this to be evidence that Arianrhod may have been a deity, as many constellations were named after deities.

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Armageddon

(Judeo-Christian)

In biblical lore, Armageddon is said to be the name of the final battle on Earth between the forces of good and evil. In the New Testament, it is also the battlefield described in Revelation 16:16 as the scene where the kings of the earth, the forces of good and evil, were to assemble for battle on the day of divine judgment.

However, the only mention in the Bible of Armageddon is ambiguous: "And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon." It does not say clearly whether or not any event actually is to take place there or whether the gathering of armies is to be seen only as a warning sign. The assumption that there will be a final battle at that sight may belong more to biblical lore than to fact. Like the Norse Ragnarok, Armageddon ended with the destruction of the world and the creation of a finer paradise.

Megiddo was a mighty, fortified Canaanite city in the first millennium B.C.E. In the New Testament Book of Revelations, Megiddo is said to be the site of the final battle of Armageddon. *(Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)*

The name *Armageddon* probably derives from Mount Megiddo (*Har-Megiddo* in Hebrew), located in present-day Israel. The ancient city-state of Megiddo occupied a strategic site on the trade route connecting Egypt with Mesopotamia. Many battles were fought on the plain of Megiddo between the Israelites and their enemies, and the location is mentioned in the Old Testament, in Judges 5:19.

Megiddo was also the site of a ferocious battle between Egyptian Pharaoh Ramses II and the Hittites in 1469 B.C.E. Although Ramses claimed victory, the battle ended without a clear-cut winner and resulted in the signing of what was probably the world's first peace treaty.

Today, the word *Armageddon* is often used to mean any sort of grand catastrophe, man-made or natural.

See also: Death.

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Asbjørnsen, Peter Christen

(1812–1885)

Peter Christen Asbjørnsen was a folklorist and naturalist known for his collections of regional folklore.

Asbjørnsen was born on January 15, 1812, in Christiana, Norway, which is now Oslo. One of his closest friends was the poet Jørgen Moe, who was born on April 22, 1813. Moe and Asbjørnsen first met as teenagers in school.

It was with Moe that Asbjørnsen began to collect the folktales of Norway. They traveled around Norway and spoke to old storytellers. Their first collection of tales, *Nor,* was published in 1837. The two men published their major collection as a four-volume work titled *Norske folkeeventyr (Norwegian Folk Stories)* between 1841 and 1844. The work was translated into other languages and was quickly praised in Norway and throughout Europe for its contribution to the world's folklore and literature.

Moe went on to become one of the finest Norwegian romantic poets, publishing *Digte,* a major collection of his work, in 1850. He also published a children's book in 1851 that became a classic in Norway, *I broden og i tjaernet (In the Well and the Pond).*

While Moe worked on his poetry, Asbjørnsen continued his interest in Norway's folklore. In 1845, he published the first in a series of *Norwegian Fairy Stories and Folk Legends.* In addition to his work as a folklorist, Asbjørnsen was also a forester and wrote numerous scholarly papers on the natural sciences.

Moe died in Norway on March 27, 1882. Asbjørnsen passed away on January 5, 1885.

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Asgard

(Norse)

In Norse mythology, Asgard was one of the nine realms of existence. It was the highest realm in the Norse mythic universe and the homeland of the Aesir, the race of warrior gods who were the dominant deities. The chief god was Odin.

Asgard was surrounded by a high stone wall that had been built by a stonemason called Blast. The vast plain of Idavoll was located at the center of Asgard. This was the site of the inner hall of Gladsheim (Place of Joy), where the Aesir gods met in council.

The hall of the goddesses, called Vingolf, was also within the walls of Asgard. Odin's castle was the mighty Valhalla. This great hall was where slain mortal heroes were brought to continue training and to wait for the coming of Ragnarok, the final battle, when they would fight on Odin's side against the foe.

Bifrost was a rainbow bridge that linked Midgard, the realm of humans, with the gate of Asgard. It was made with magic and great skill by the Aesir and would stand until Ragnarok, when it was foretold that this rainbow bridge would collapse.

At the entrance of Bifrost stood the god Heimdall, the guardian of Asgard. Heimdall's hearing was so keen that he was able to hear grass growing on the mortal earth or wool growing on the back of a mortal sheep. Heimdall also could see for a hundred miles.

The realms of Vanaheim and Alfheim also were found at this highest level of existence. Vanaheim was home to the Vanir, the secondary race of gods, many of whom intermarried with the Aesir. Alfheim was the domain of the *lios alfar,* the elf folk of light. The god Frey, said to be the father of the *lios alfar,* lived at Alfheim. Originally one of the Vanir, Frey was adopted into the Aesir pantheon and had his palace in Alfheim.

See also: Heimdall/Heimdallr; Norse Mythology; Valhalla.

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Ash Trees

(Western European)

The ash tree, particularly the type that is common to Western Europe, is found throughout world mythology, specifically in Norse and Celtic myths and folk beliefs.

The word *ash* is believed to derive from a poetic Anglo-Saxon word, *asec,* which means spear, or from the Norse name for tree, *ask*. Alternately, it may derive from the Middle English asshe, from Old English æasc.

Since ash is a hard, strong, but flexible wood, it was often used by the Norse, the Celts, and the Anglo-Saxons to make weapons, such as spears and axe handles. In Norse mythology, the spears of the gods Odin and Thor were said to have been made of ash wood. In the early twentieth century, the wood of the ash tree was used in aircraft wings.

The ash tree—like many trees—is the center of several folk beliefs. This pencil-and-watercolor picture of an ash tree is by English artist John Constable (1776–1837). *(Victoria & Albert Museum, London/Art Resource, NY)*

Both the Norse and the Celts shared a belief that the ash tree was protective. The mightiest of these in Norse mythology was Yggdrasil, the World Tree, a giant ash with roots in the lower realm, a trunk in the mortal realm, and leaves in the realm of the gods. The Irish Celts believed that three of the five legendary guardian trees of Ireland were ash. The ash tree was one type of tree found growing beside Irish holy wells, and it also was believed to keep springs pure. The ash was also known in both Norse and Celtic beliefs as a tree of healing and of rebirth.

In current folk beliefs of Europe and North America, the leaves of the ash tree are said to ward off evil witchcraft and to bring good luck. Ash sap is said to protect newborn babies and make them strong. Until fairly recently, newborns in Britain were often given a teaspoon of ash sap to drink. It was also British tradition to pass a sickly child through a cleft made in an ash tree in order to heal the child. The cleft was then bound up again, and as the tree healed, so would the child.

See also: Apple Trees; Elm Trees.

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Athena/Athene

(Greek)

In Greek mythology, Athena, called Minerva by the Romans, was the goddess of

This statue of Athena, found near Varvakeion in Greece, portrays the goddess of wisdom in all her finery. Athena carries a shield, as she is also a patroness of heroes. This work is currently part of the Acropolis Museum collection. *(Scala/Art Resource, NY)*

warfare, wisdom, and arts and crafts. She was also the patron goddess of Athens and the favorite child of her father, Zeus, chief of the Greek gods.

Athena's mother was Metis, the goddess of wisdom and Zeus's first wife. Zeus grew fearful that Metis would give birth to a son mightier than himself, so he swallowed Metis.

While Metis was within Zeus, she, or possibly Athena, began to make a helmet and robe for Athena. The noise of the helmet being hammered into shape gave Zeus terrible headaches. He called to his son the smith Hephaestus for help. Hephaestus split open Zeus's skull, and from it emerged the full-grown Athena, wearing her newly fashioned robe and helmet.

Athena assisted certain Greek heroes, including Perseus and Odysseus, and the half-divine Hercules. But Athena could be vengeful if crossed. As the goddess of arts and crafts, Athena was skilled at weaving, embroidery, and spinning. When a mortal woman named Arachne boastfully challenged Athena at weaving, following their contest, Athena turned Arachne into a spider.

Athena and the god Poseidon, king of the seas and brother of Zeus, both wanted to claim a certain Greek city. They agreed that whichever gave the city the finest gift would be the one to claim it. Poseidon struck the side of the cliff with his trident and a spring welled up. Athena's gift was an olive tree. The people chose hers as the better gift, since it provided food, oil, and wood. Athena named her city Athens.

Athena is usually pictured as a tall, regal woman wearing a crested helmet and carrying a spear and shield. On her shield is the head of Medusa. Athena is often shown with an owl, her patron animal, on her shoulder.

She is often called Athena Parthenos, meaning "virgin," because she chose to stay a virgin. The Parthenon, the Athenian temple dating to about 400 B.C.E., is dedicated to her.

See also: Zeus.

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Atlas

(Greek)

In Greek mythology, Atlas was the son of the Titan Iapetus and the nymph Clymene.

Unlike his brothers, Prometheus and Epimetheus, Atlas fought with the other Titans, supporting Cronos against Zeus and leading them in battle. As a result, he was singled out by Zeus for special punishment and made to support the world on his back.

Atlas was temporarily relieved of this burden by the hero Hercules, who needed the Titan's help in getting the golden apples of the Hesperides. Hercules then tricked Atlas into taking up his burden again.

See also: Giants; Upelluri/Ubelluris; Ymir.

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Atum

(Egyptian)

The Egyptian god Atum, whose name means "completed one," was the creator of everything, including himself. He was the chief deity of the ancient Egyptian city Heliopolis.

Atum created the god Shu and the goddess Tefnut, from whom rose Geb (earth) and Nut (sky). Shu and Tefnut were lost for a time in the primordial waters (Nun). When they returned to Atum, the god wept tears of joy, from which sprang humankind.

Artists typically represent Atum as a king, wearing the double crown of Egypt and a false beard (see illustration on page 42). He is also known as "lord of the two lands," a reference to Upper and Lower Egypt. At various points in Egyptian history, different animals were associated with Atum, including apes, scarabs, ichneumon (a kind of mongoose), fish, and nonvenomous snakes.

Atum has been combined with a number of gods, particularly the sun god Re. These two are sometimes encountered as a single god, called Re-Atum. At other times, Atum is associated specifically with the setting sun, counterbalancing Re as the rising sun.

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See also: Aiomum Kondi; Amun/Amen/Amon/Amun-Re; An/Anu; Wele.

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Aucassin and Nicolette

(Medieval European)

The popular medieval romance of Aucassin and Nicolette was created by an anonymous thirteenth-century troubadour. Written in prose, the story may have been acted out as well as recited. What makes the work interesting for storytellers and modern audiences is its feminist slant.

The tale begins with Count Bougar of Valence waging war on Count Garin of Beauclaire. Count Garin's son Aucassin was in love with Nicolette, goddaughter of Count Bougar. Nicolette was a slave bought by Count Bougar from the Saracens and converted to Christianity. Count Bougar had planned to wed her to a wealthy man, but Aucassin's father refused to let his son marry a former slave. Count Garin, dismayed by his son's insistence, plotted to kill Nicolette. To protect her, Count Bougar sealed her up in a tall tower.

Aucassin was willing to fight his father's war if it meant he would see Nicolette again. His father agreed to the deal, but the boy was captured in battle. Aucassin managed to escape and captured Count Bougar. But Count Garin reneged on his deal. Instead of allowing Aucassin to see Nicolette, he cast his son into prison.

This stele, or carved commemorative stone, of Lady Taperet may date to Egypt's Twenty-second Dynasty. The detail, which depicts the lady adoring the god Atum (see page 41), is painted on wood. *(Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY)*

Meanwhile, Nicolette had escaped from her lonely tower and had hidden in the forest. She bribed peasants to get word to Aucassin about where to find her. She believed that if Aucassin was unable to find her in the flowery bower she had built for herself, he was not worthy of her.

When Count Garin learned that Nicolette was gone, he released his son. Aucassin promptly ran off to find Nicolette, and the couple was reunited.

Now the two young people were forced to run for their lives. They set sail for the kingdom of Torelore. Upon their arrival, they discovered that the king was sick in bed and the queen had been forced to lead the army. Aucassin set things to right, but the king found Aucassin too violent and tried to deport him.

The king also wanted to keep Nicolette for himself.

Pirates attacked the harbor. Aucassin was carried off on one ship and Nicolette on another. Aucassin wound up back in Beauclaire, where he learned that his father had died and that he was the new ruler.

Nicolette went to Carthage, where she learned that she was actually the daughter of the king of Carthage. Nicolette's father planned to marry her to a pagan ruler, but Nicolette ran off to Beauclaire in disguise.

Aucassin and Nicolette were reunited once again, and the story ended happily.

See also: Romance.

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Avalon

(Celtic)

In Arthurian legend, Avalon is a mythical place of magic, a location variously described as an island or a valley in Britain. Occasionally, it is simply the home territory of one of Arthur's nobles. More often, it is an otherworld, a place associated with the supernatural.

Avalon is Arthur's destination after he is wounded in his last great battle. It is also the destination of the Holy Grail, carried westward by the family of Joseph of Arimathea. The island called Avalon is the residence of supernatural women, from Morgan le Fay to the fairy mistress of the knight Lanval.

Geoffrey of Monmouth and Wace

Geoffrey of Monmouth, who may have been a secular canon, a member of the Christian clergy who did not reside in a monastery, lived in Oxford, England. Sometime around 1130 C.E., he completed his work *The History of the Kings of Britain,* which related the ancient history of the Britons. While much of what Geoffrey wrote is inaccurate or unverifiable, his work has had a permanent effect on Western storytelling.

In Geoffrey's time, the Welsh and others still told the legends of Arthur, a leader who may have lived in the fifth or sixth century. Someday, it was said, Arthur would return to lead the Britons again. Geoffrey took the shadowy figure of Arthur and created from it a hero of enduring international fame, linked to an otherworldly Avalon. According to Geoffrey, there was more than one connection between Arthur and Avalon. Arthur's famous sword, Excalibur, had been forged there. After his final battle, King Arthur was carried to Avalon for treatment of his mortal wounds.

In another work, *Vita Merlini (Life of Merlin),* Geoffrey gave further details: Avalon was an island of apples, a place where, without cultivation, the land produced fruit and grain. A woman named Morgen ruled there, the wisest and most beautiful of nine sisters. She had the ability to fly and was said to have instructed her sisters in mathematics. She promised Arthur's companions that if the king remained on the island with her, he would recover through her healing arts.

In 1155, Wace, an Anglo-Norman clerk, finished his work *Roman de Brut,* a history of Britain written in verse that was based on Geoffrey's work. Wace restated that Arthur's sword was made in Avalun or Avarun; that his last battle took place in Cornwall, an area near Somerset; and that it was to Avalon that Arthur was taken when mortally wounded. Wace mentioned the legend of Arthur's possible survival but otherwise stripped the supernatural from these stories.

Chrétien de Troyes

In the decades between 1170 and 1190, Chrétien de Troyes translated the Arthurian tales into Old French and incorporated twelfth-century