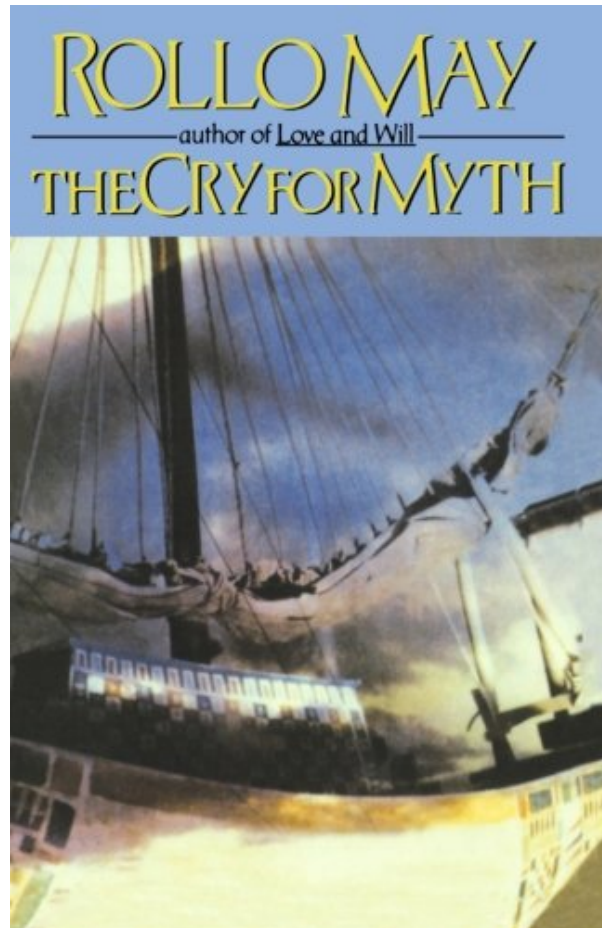
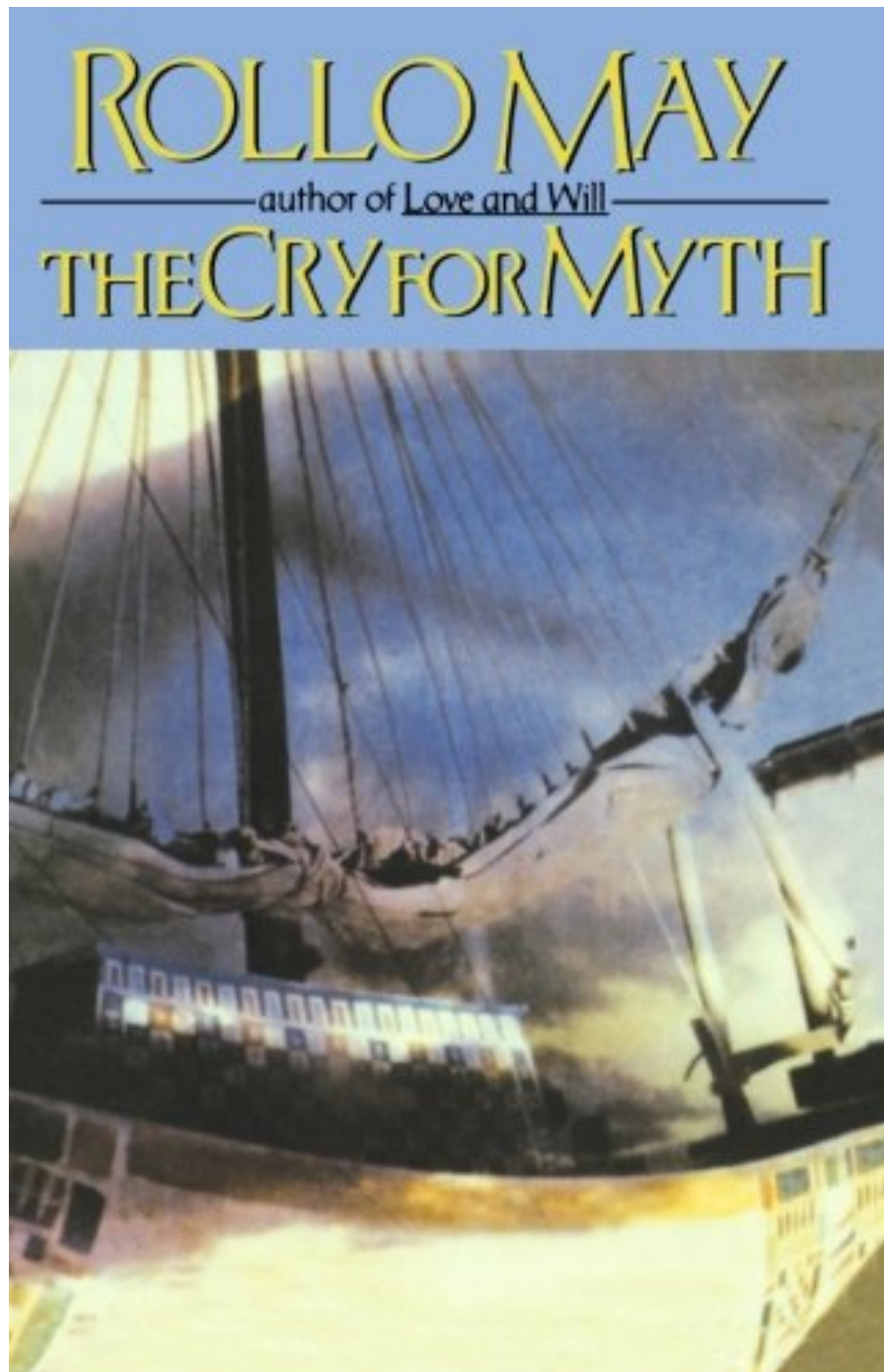


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Since his introduction of modern philosophy to American psychiatric practice in the United States (*Existence* , 1958), May has provided readers with accessible texts on many psychological issues (including *Freedom and Destiny*, LJ 10/1/81). In his newest book he directs our attention to the psychology of our culture by providing a distinctly American portrait of the place--and displacements--of myth in our society. As is customary for this author, the text weaves case studies and considerable literary exegesis into his cogent analyses. May demonstrates his thesis--that "Each myth in human history is interpreted according to the needs of the society which it reflects"--and keeps good his promise to provide an American audience currently interested in the mythic realms of other cultures (witness the popularity of Joseph Campbell's works) with insight on our own mythology. Recommended for public and academic libraries.

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Here are case studies in which myths have helped Dr. May's patients make sense out of an often senseless world.

Rollo May, respected therapist and bestselling author of *Love and Will*, discusses the relationships between myths and the subconscious, showing how myths can provide meaning and structure for those who seek direction in a confused world.

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Myth is vital to the human experience.

By Jeannette

I read this book several years ago and I found it to be a fascinating read, from back to front. May's astute analysis of the place of myth within human life, sense of self and community is very sensible and relevant. Many may find his understanding of myth to be surprising, as it deviates greatly from the conventional existential perspective.

From time immemorial, cultures have woven intricate, fantastic stories, parables, myths and guiding narratives about the world, helping them to understand the universe, carve out a unique place within it and establish values. As societies grew, cultures passed these myths and stories down to their descendants. Communal traditions developed from these myths and guiding narratives, building among participants a sense of cultural kinship, identity and solace. People derived strength and direction from their guiding narratives, and these myths unified individuals in a commonality, supplying them with a vision.

Carl Jung's influence here is distinct, as May attributes the sense of meaninglessness, isolation and disoriented alienation of modern culture largely to the human "cry" for new myths (similar to Jung's *Weltanschauung*) that incorporate all facets of our humanity (both spirit and matter) and address our current reality.

May defines the myth as follows: "A myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world. Myths are narrative patterns that give significance to our existence [...] myths are our way of finding meaning and significance. Myths are like the beams in a house; not exposed to outside view, they are the structure which holds the house together so people can live in it." May is also careful to address our modern misunderstanding of what myth entails: "There can be no stronger proof of the impoverishment of our contemporary culture than the popular - though profoundly mistaken - definition of myth as falsehood." Read the book for more on this and for a clearer understanding of how the traditional "myth" is distinct from things like fundamentalism, or dogma. Nowhere is myth more evident than literature and the rich, vivid literature of past cultures demonstrates this. In fact, May goes to great lengths in his analysis to amply illustrate the crucial need for literature and the arts.

As scientific rationalism has swept in and usurped the position of omnipotent "God," our sense of meaningful myth has been eroded, particularly in America, where a strong sense of rich, cultural myth has not been as rooted in our understanding of community as it has in other cultures. (May discusses an entire spate of prevalent American myths, as expressed through literature.) The technological advances of the industrial age have all but completely divorced humans from the natural world, further contributing to our schizoid sense of spirit and matter. All in all, this has resulted in a severe fragmentation of community and knowledge of self, as we believe the appreciation of myth to be beneath our superior rationality and reason.

Despite this surface disdain for myth, we are still clinging to the old, impoverished myths which play a great role in our lives ("beams" in our "structure") and how we view the world, whether we realize it or not. We have not yet created new myths and guiding narratives to help us find meaning, and so we remain fragmented, repressed and separated from ourselves, the natural world and one another.

Like Jung, May asserts that self-knowledge and communal anchor arise from the search for the spiritual and awakening of the spiritual consciousness. May further asserts that our rejection of myth has left us drifting along, leaving us prone to depression, mental illness, dysfunction and fundamentalism of all kinds.

One of the elements I most appreciate about Rollo May is his ability to elegantly write readable books, without muddying the waters or losing the reader in a fog of dense language. I think that anyone who loves classic literature will also love this book, thanks to May's thorough discussion of Faust among a number of other literary and mythical characters.

21 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Why mythology is important

By D. Roberts

Rollo May was a psychologist, but don't let that bit of information scare you away from reading this book. May examines the importance of mythology thru the ages, as well as its nexus with psychology and psychological theories. In doing so, May points out the didactic properties that myths have had throughout human history.

Along the way, May takes a critical look at fairy tales and discloses hidden "messages" that we normally pick up on only subliminally. His inquiry helps to elucidate many of the themes that we teach to our children, and hints at why fairy tales have such an abundant popularity in diverse cultures.

May also describes to us how myths evolve and develop over time, changing with the sociological paradigms of each successive epoch. In doing so, he uses the Faust legend as an example. The text offers some nice highlights on the transcendence of the motif as it was first penned by Christopher Marlowe and subsequently revised by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Thomas Mann.

This is an excellent read for anyone who is interested in mythology, and is a serious warning of the consequences that go along with marginalizing the importance of liberal arts.

39 of 40 people found the following review helpful.

For all mythology-lovers and seekers of truth and meaning

By dr.

The Cry for Myth was May's last major work prior to his death at the age of eighty-four. It contains the hard-won wisdom of a lifetime. Much of it had been published elsewhere over the years--long before Joseph Campbell's sudden popularity-- but May felt strongly about making a cohesive statement regarding the vital importance of myth and how much we need it today. Myths are how we make meaning of life--no myth, no meaning. May's therapeutic approach to myths links him closely with figures such as Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank, and Carl Jung, and comprises an essential and enriching feature of May's own existential psychotherapy. In this fine collection, May analyzes the archetypal myths we are living out--or maybe better, that are being lived out through us--and offers some new myths and interpretations that may help us make it more meaningfully into the new millennium.

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