# Chapter 1
# Living Myths in a Living World:
## Mythological Studies and Green Studies Implications of Fandom

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## ABSTRACT

*This chapter considers fan studies in a mythological studies context and examines how green studies might use a similar approach to tap into the cultural and mythic power of modern fandoms. The first part defines the components of myth, considers existing fandom studies theories related to those components, and discusses on how fandom studies could impact the larger mythological studies debate. The second part describes the mythological roots of today's environmental crises and discusses the influence of specific fandoms on environmental activism. The chapter closes with some thoughts on how a mythological and green approach to fandom could provide further cultural impetus to positive environmental values much as feminist, ethnic, and queer perspectives on fandom have highlighted and supported a value shift in society as a whole.*

## INTRODUCTION

The stories people tell themselves about who they are make them who they are. This statement is a hoary truism in the field of mythological studies, and the various phenomena of modern fandom are a compelling and easily-grasped demonstration of its import and applicability. All people participate in a process archetypal psychologist Ginette Paris (2014, personal communication) calls "shopping for a metaphor," seeking for a story-based metaphorical context in which to place the events and emotions of their lives. These metaphors are pulled out of the rich mixture of psychological, communal, and religious ideas that inhabit a person's inner consciousness and unconscious mind. Fans, then, can be described as people who have intentionally stocked the shelves of their metaphorical shops with the characters, situations, and values important to a story of their choice. In a mythological studies context, this makes a fandom a specifically chosen personal myth. When people deeply engage with a fan object, they find success-

ful mythic identification with and experience meaningful mythic participation in a powerful story that moves, engages, or inspires them. They also find themselves drawn into a group of like-minded people who are similarly moved, engaged, and inspired. Opportunities for such mythic identification, participation, and community in the mundane, non-fan world have arguably declined along with the religious and communal rituals which supported those opportunities; the rise of fandom can be seen as a response to the unmet mythological needs resulting from that decline.

Many people, from scholars and activists to Hollywood executives and marketing professionals, have begun to recognize the vast cultural power with which modern fandom phenomena are imbued. Today's multimedia entertainment conglomerates are aware of, and indeed seek to endlessly exploit, the evergreen demand for fandom-related merchandise. Feminist, ethnic, and queer theorists examining the anthropological and sociological implications of fandoms and fan objects have proposed many positive revisionist ideas. Despite unfortunate regressions like Gamergate or the residual sexism and homophobia of many sport-related fandoms, acceptance of such ideas has brought an expansion of the cultural valuation of inclusivity on many different levels. While the emerging fields of ecocriticsm and green studies have occasionally touched on certain individual fan objects, however, they have been slower to approach the study of fandom as a whole. Considering the enduring influence of fans on much past and current environmental activism, this may be a missed intellectual opportunity. Today's environmental crises have mythological causes as well as scientific ones, and it is possible that an ecocritical examination of the powerful living myths of fandom could help identify ways to shift the unconscious mythic power of the stories people tell themselves about their relationship to the natural world from bad and destructive stories into more positive ones.

## DEFINING MYTH

Before mythological studies and fan studies can usefully be discussed, it is important to clarify what the first field actually encompasses. For many Western people, the term 'mythology' conjures up either serene marble images of Greek gods or charming and childlike collections of tales associated with premodern tribal peoples. The more widely-read individual might also think of Classical literature of the Homer or Virgil persuasion, and possibly recall the cheerful universalism of comparativists like Joseph Campbell, the cultural particularities of structuralists like Claude Lévi-Strauss, or the depth psychological tradition stemming from the archetypal work of Carl Jung. The word 'myth' also has strong modern connotations of something falsely believed to be true. This multiplicity of meaning breeds a certain kind of common confusion which every mythologist must face before trying to discuss the importance of mythology in today's postmodern world.

There are also as many definitions of mythology as there are mythologists, which does little to dispel any of that confusion. While current thought on the subject often veers into semiotic and/or phenomenological territory (Barthes, 1972 and Scarborough, 1994 are representative examples), this chapter will try and avoid delving too deeply into such terrain. Here the terms 'myth' and 'mythology' will refer instead to a composite concept found at the meeting point between religion, lore, and psychology. The generally understood meanings of religion and psychology are suitable for use in this context, but the term 'lore' requires a bit more explanation.

The word is somewhat archaic, but its very antiquity and rarity give it the flexibility to encompass most of the other story-related concepts which might be chosen in its place. Literature, folklore, supersti-

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