

Greek and Roman mythology provides a clear example of cross cultural influence and adaptation. Roman myth was not entirely original, was heavily shaped by earlier Greek traditions, with deities such as zeus transformed into jupiter and aphrodite reinterpreted as venus. This process demonstrates that myths are not fixed cultural artefacts but fluid narratives capable of being reshaped across societies. The roman adaptation of greek mythology was not just a simple act of copying rather it involved selective reinterpretation to reflect roman political ideology, social values and religious practices.

The study of cross cultural mythology is approached by two key frameworks, diffusion and structuralism. Diffusion theory argues that myths spread through cultural contact such as trade, migration or conquest. In the ancient Mediterranean, this process is clearly obvious as ancient Greece interacted with neighbouring civilisations leading to exchange of religious ideas and narratives.¹ Adaptation is central to this process, rather than just copying myths, cultures reshape them to reflex their own values. As Breanna Martin suggests, adaptation involves retelling narratives in ways that align with new cultural contexts and audiences.² This highlights that myths are continually reinterpreted. Structuralist scholars such as Claude Levi-Stauss offer a different interpretation arguing that myths share common patterns because they reflect universal structures of human thought.³ From this viewpoint, similarities between myths may arise independently rather than through direct contact. However, most modern scholarship recognizes that both diffusion and universally operate together. Studies of global mythological traditions suggest that myths are “layered” combining inherited elements with local innovation.⁴

The relationship between Greek and Roman mythology provides one of the clearest examples of cross cultural myth adaptation. As Rome expanded, it encountered Greek culture and increasingly absorbed its religious and literary traditions. However this process was not one just simple imitation rather roman authors and thinkers actively reinterpreted greek myths to suit roman values and political structures. A key example is the identification of Greek gods with Roman deities. Zeus became Jupiter, Hera became Juno and Ares became Mars. While the pairings suggest direct borrowing, the meanings associated with these gods often changed significantly. Mars for instance was not just a god of war but also a symbol of roman discipline and agricultural protection, reflecting the priorities of roman society.⁵ Roman literature further demonstrates this process of adaptation. In the Aeneid virgil reworks greek mythological material particularly the trojan wa into a narrative that legitimizes roman origins. Aneas, a mirror figure in Greek mythology, is transformed into a heroic ancestor of Rome, embodying virtues such as duty(pietas) and loyalty.⁶ This illustrates how myths can be reshaped to serve new political and cultural purposes.

While roman gods were similar with their greek counterparts, their functions did reflect the roman societal values. Jupiter identified with Zeus but was more explicitly associated with state

¹ Walter Burkert, Greek Religion. P.3.

² Breanna Martin, Adaption and Cultural study of Mythology. p.12.

³ Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology. p.210.

⁴ Hyunuk Kim et al, Deeply Nested Structure of Mythological Traditions Worldwide. p.5.

⁵ Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, Religions of Rome vol.1. p.47.

⁶ Virgil, Aeneid, Trans. By Robert Fagles, Book I.

authority and legal order, reinforcing the political structure of Rome.⁷ Similarly, Minerva derived from Athena, was integrated into Roman civic life as part of the Capitoline triad, highlighting her role within state religion rather than solely as a goddess of wisdom and warfare.⁸ This demonstrates that even when mythological figures are borrowed, their meanings are adapted to align with their politics. Artistic representation also played a key role in this cultural exchange. Roman sculpture and frescoes frequently depicted scenes from Greek mythology, yet these were often displayed in distinctly Roman contexts, such as villas and public buildings.⁹ This suggests that myths were not only retold but recontextualised becoming part of everyday Roman cultural experience. Furthermore, the educational system of Rome contributed to the preservation and transformation of Greek myths. Greek literature formed the basis of elite Roman education, ensuring that mythological knowledge was transmitted across generations.¹⁰ However, Roman authors did not simply reproduce Greek narratives; they engaged with them critically, adapting them to reflect Roman ideals such as duty, discipline and imperial destiny. This sustained engagement illustrates that cross-cultural myth adaptation is not a single event but an ongoing process. Greek mythology did not remain unchanged within Roman culture; instead, it was reinterpreted over time. This reinforces the argument that myths are inherently flexible, capable of maintaining continuity while undergoing significant transformation in response to new cultural contexts.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses* provides another example of adaptation. While drawing heavily on Greek myth, Ovid recognizes these stories into a unified narrative centered on transformation.¹¹ In doing so, he creates a distinctly Roman interpretation of myth, emphasising themes of change and continuity. Scholars have argued that this process reflects both cultural admiration and political appropriation.¹² Rome's adoption of Greek mythology allowed it to align itself with the prestige of Greek culture while simultaneously asserting its own identity. This demonstrates that cross-cultural adaptation is not just a passive process but an active and often strategic one. At the same time, the Greek and Roman example highlights the feasibility of mythological transmission. The close parallels between the two traditions show that myths can successfully be transferred across cultures while remaining recognizable. However, the differences between Greek and Roman interpretations emphasise that adaptation involves significant transformation.

While the Greek and Roman example demonstrates direct cultural transmission, the trickster archetype illustrates a broader form of cross-cultural similarity that combines diffusion with universality. Trickster figures appear in a wide range of mythological traditions, including Greek, African and Native American cultures.

In Greek mythology, Hermes can be understood as a trickster figure. As a god associated with cunning, theft and boundary crossing, he embodies many of the characteristics of the typical

⁷ Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* vol.1. p.59

⁸ Mary Beard, John North and Simon Price, *Religions of Rome* vol.1. p.63.

⁹ Paul Zanker, *The Power of Images in the Age of Augustus*. p.172.

¹⁰ Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds*.p.101.

¹¹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. By Mary Innes.

¹² Denis Feeney, *Literature and Religion at Rome*. p.23.

trickster archetype. His theft of Apollo's cattle as an infant demonstrates both his ingenuity and his capacity to disrupt social norms.¹³

Similarly in west african mythology, Anansi the spider is a well known trickster figure. Like Hermes, Anansi relies on wit and deception to achieve his goals. However his role within his cultural context differs significantly, Anansi is often portrayed as a folk hero, representing resilience and the ability to overcome adversity.¹⁴ The presence of similar figures in different cultures raises important questions about cross cultural influence, on one hand the spread of stories through migration and trade suggests that trickster narratives may have diffused across regions. On the other hand the recurrence of similar characteristics may reflect universal aspects of human experience, such as tension between order and chaos. Levi-Strauss argues that the trickster functions as a mediator between opposing forces, such as life and death or nature and culture.¹⁵ This structural role may explain why similar figures appear independently in different societies. However, the adaption of trickster figures in specific historical contexts such as the transformation of African trickster stories in the Americas demonstrates that diffusion also plays a significant role. The trickster archetype therefore illustrates both the possibilities and limitations of cross cultural adaptation. While core characteristics remain consistent, cultural meanings vary widely. This suggests that myths can be both universal and culturally specific, supporting the argument that cross cultural influence is feasible but complex. This adaptability is further highlighted when considering the role of trickster figures in periods of cultural disruption and exchange. In contexts where societies experience upheaval such as migration, conquest or enslavement the trickster often becomes a particularly significant figure. This is evident in the transformation of west african trickster traditions in the Americas, where figures such as Anansi evolved into characters like Br'er rabbit. These adaptations preserved core characteristics such as cunning and subversion while embedding new meanings related to survival under oppression and resistance to authority.¹⁶

Moreover the continued presence of trickster figures in modern literature and popular cultures suggest that their adaptability extends beyond traditional mythological frameworks. Tricksterlike characters frequently appear in contemporary narratives often embody ambiguity and challenging established social norms. This persistence reinforces Levi-Strauss' argument that the trickster occupies a fundamental structural role within myth, mediating contradictions within human thought.¹⁷ However the variation in how tricksters are perceived across cultures also highlights the limits of cross cultural uniformity. While some traditions celebrate the trickster as a creative liberating force, others portray such figures as dangerous or morally ambiguous. This divergence suggests that while the archetype itself may be transferable, its interpretation remains deeply shaped by cultural context. As a result the trickster shows both the feasibility of cross cultural adaptation and the importance of local meaning in shaping mythological narratives.

¹³ Homeric Hymn to Hermes, in Greek Lyric Poetry, trans. By M.L West.

¹⁴ Henry Louis Gates Jr, The Signifying Monkey. p.21.

¹⁵ Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology. p.224.

¹⁶ Henry Louis Gates Jr, The Signifying Monkey. p.24

¹⁷ Claude Levi-Strauss, Structural Anthropology. p.226.

The feasibility of cross cultural myth adaptation depends on how the myths are transmitted, in the ancient world oral tradition was the primary means of storytelling, this allowed myths to be easily modified as they were passed from one community to another. Trade and conquest also played a crucial role. The expansion of Greek culture through colonisation and the later spread of Roman power made for the exchange of myths across the Mediterranean.¹⁸ These interactions created opportunities for cultural blending and reinterpretation. The development of written literature further enhanced the transmission of myths. Texts such as Homer's epics and Roman literary works preserved and spread the mythological narratives, allowing them to reach wider audiences. However the process of writing also introduced new forms of adaptation as authors reshaped myths for literary and ideological purposes.

Despite the clear evidence of cross cultural adaptation, several challenges complicate the study of the spread of myths. One major issue is the difficulty of distinguishing diffusion and independent development. Similar myths can come from a shared human experience rather than just direct contact, which makes it difficult to establish clear lines of influence. Another limitation is the role of power dynamics. In the case of Greek and Roman mythology, Roman adaptation involved both admiration and appropriation. Greek myths were reinterpreted in ways that served Roman political and cultural goals, sometimes altering their original meanings. Additionally, cross cultural adaption can lead to the loss of cultural accuracy. As myths are reshaped for new audiences, subtle cultural meanings may be simplified, this raises important questions about authenticity and representation.

Overall, the evidence suggests that cross cultural influence and adaptation are highly feasible. The greek roman case study demonstrates that myths can be directly transmitted and extensively reinterpreted within a new cultural framework. The trickster archetype further shows that mythological can arise through a combination of diffusion and universal patterns.

The adaptation of myths across cultures is both feasible and central to the development of mythology. The example of Greek mythology's transformation within Roman culture illustrates how myths can be transmitted and reshaped to reflect new values and identities. The widespread presence of trickster figures further demonstrates that the mythological patterns can transcend cultural boundaries. However, this process is not straightforward. It involves complex interactions between diffusion, universality, and cultural reinterpretation. While myths can travel and adapt, they are always shaped by the contexts in which they are received. Ultimately, cross cultural myth adaptation reflects how inter connected human societies are. Myths are not confined to individual cultures but are part of a broader tradition of storytelling that evolves through contact, exchange, and creativity.

¹⁸ Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*. P.24.