Most students of Japanese culture or comparative mythology are familiar with tales of the progenitor deities Izanagi and Izanami, or of Susano-o, rebellious scion of the next divine generation. But fewer people realize that such myths exist in radically different versions with challenging contradictions. Through close readings of two key narratives—Izanami’s death and afterlife, and Susano-o’s murder of a cereal goddess—this lecture places the sources of ancient Japanese mythology in historical context and considers how we might make sense of their variant accounts.

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