Robin Diver, "Entry on: Gods, Men and Monsters from the Greek Myths by Giovanni Caselli, Michael Gibson", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Daniel A. Nkemleke. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1179. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Giovanni Caselli , Michael Gibson

Gods, Men and Monsters from the Greek Myths

United Kingdom (1977)

TAGS: Achilles Aphrodite Ares Ariadne Athena Bellerophon Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Echo Hades Hera Jason Medea Midas Narcissus Odysseus / Ulysses Orpheus Pan Pandora Persephone Perseus Phaethon Theseus Zeus





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Gods, Men and Monsters from the Greek Myths
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1977
First Edition Details	Michael Gibson, *Gods, Men and Monsters from the Greek Myths*. Oxon: Peter Lowe (Eurobook Limited), 1977, 156 pp.
ISBN	0856540277
Genre	Anthology of myths*, Fiction
Target Audience	Young adults (Older children)
Author of the Entry	Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Giovanni Caselli , b. 1939
(Illustrator)

Giovanni Caselli is a Florentine painter, illustrator, children's author, anthropologist and archaeologist who has previously lived in London. He has been involved in creating paintings reconstructing historical life since the 1960s, and sometimes illustrates tarot decks.

Much of Caselli's work focuses on the classical or mythical world. He illustrated another child's anthology of myth, Jacqueline Morley's 2002 *Greek Myths*, and wrote books for the *In Search of* series about famous archaeological excavations such as Troy and Knossos, as well as the *History of Everything* series, which discusses history from specific points in time such as Rome and the Renaissance. He has also illustrated the card deck for the game *The New Mythic Tarot Deck*.

Sources:

Michael Gibson and Giovanni Caselli, *Gods, Men and Monsters from the Greek Myths*, Oxon: Peter Lowe (Eurobook Limited), 1977. Biographical information at front of book.

jacketflap.com (accessed: February 8, 2021).

penguin.co.uk (accessed: February 8, 2021).

macmillan.com (accessed: February 8, 2021).

Bio prepared by Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, RSD253@student.bham.ac.uk

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Michael Gibson (Author)

Michael Gibson is an editor, archaeologist and children's author. At the time of this book's printing (*Gods, Men and Monsters from the Greek Myths*), he had written over twenty children's books. Establishing which books are by him and which other authors of the same name is somewhat confusing, but Gibson appears to primarily write educational children's books on art, history and politics. He seems to be the author of *Genghis Khan and the Mongols* (1976), *The Vikings (Peoples of the Past)* (1977), *Knights and the Crusades* (1975), *Peter the Great* (1975), *War in Vietnam* (1991) and *Let's Discuss Unemployment* (1986).

According to the author bio at the front of his book *Gods, Men and Monsters* (1977), "The Greek myths and legends have always fascinated him, but took on a new meaning after he visited and came to know the places where so many of the stories are set."

Sources:

Michael Gibson. *Gods, Men and Monsters from the Greek Myths*. Oxon: Peter Lowe (Eurobook Limited), 1977. Biographical information at front of book.

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Additional information

Translation	Spanish: *Monstruos, Dioses y Hombres de La Mitologia Griega*, trans. Emilio Pascual, Anaya Publishers, 1984, 154 pp.

Summary

This is a collection of a select number of Greek myths retold for older children, with accompanying line drawings and bright colour illustrations of varied sizes depicting key scenes. The stories focus on detailed characterisation, particularly in the hero myths, and often bring up lesser known versions. The book opens with labelled line drawings of the major gods and a map of Greece. A section at the back explains the line drawing symbols that appear at the start of each chapter, e.g. a fennel plant appears at the bottom of the line drawing beside the Prometheus and Pandora chapter, and the back page explains this is because Prometheus carried fire in a stalk of fennel.

Featured Stories:

- The world of the gods (Cronus and Uranus).
- The new gods – Zeus and Hera (story of Cronus and his children, and a family tree).
- Hades, Lord of the Underworld.
- Persephone among the dead.
- Poseidon's Ocean Kingdom.
- Prometheus and Pandora.
- Aphrodite, goddess of love (Aphrodite's marriage to Hephaestus and affair with Ares).
- Ares, god of war.
- Artemis and Apollo.
- The chariot of the sun (Phaethon).
- Athene, goddess of wisdom (birth, Arachne and Pallas).
- Hermes, the messenger of the gods.
- Pan and Dionysus, the wild gods (Syrinx, Athamas and Ino, Lycurgis, Pentheus, transformation of pirate crew into dolphins).
- The labours of Hercules.
- The adventures of Perseus.
- The rival twins (Castor, Polydeuces, Idas and Lynceus).
- Jason and the golden fleece.
- The house of Thebes (Europa, Cadmus, Oedipus).
- Theseus, king of Athens.

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- Orpheus and Eurydice.
- Eros and Psyche.
- Pygmalion's statue.
- Echo and Narcissus.
- Midas, the golden king.
- The death of the Chimaera (Bellerophon).
- The fall of Troy.
- The wanderings of Odysseus.
- Symbols in the Greek myths (Explanation of line drawings beside chapter headings).
- Index.

Analysis

From the front, this looks like a book for somewhat young children. It is a square hardback ideal for reading on the floor rather than the paperback style designed for reading easily in one hand in which books for older readers tend to appear. The front cover shows a colourful depiction of a hero (Perseus) fighting a monster (Medusa), and has a bright orange background. Inside, however, this turns out to be a heavily factual and detailed anthology with sophisticated language and small text spaced closely together. The typesetting alone would likely be off-putting to very young children. Gibson also often focuses on lesser known details in myths, perhaps with the assumption his reader is an older child who already knows the basics and would like fresh material.

The illustrations are often gory, and further the impression this anthology is aimed at older children with some prior knowledge of myth. This is because major events in a myth often appear in illustrations in a chapter well before the event has actually been depicted in the text, effectively spoiling the story for a reader entirely new to it. If the reader already has some knowledge of the myth, however, this would not be a problem.

Gibson begins with a detailed introduction to Greek landscape and history. He then moves to the gods, about whom he is fairly negative: "The gods ruled, above all, by jealousy and by their desire for revenge. Again and again in the Greek legends, these two passions are the driving forces behind the immortals' actions." (p. 12). At the same time, conflict between heroes and monsters is framed as a war between good and evil: "The monsters represented the forces of evil, and the suppression of evil is a strong theme throughout the stories.

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Often the heroes tackled the most-daunting tasks single-handed for no better reason than to assert the triumph of good." (p. 13). The morality of the human world, if not the divine world, is therefore set out in fairly black and white terms.

The characters of Zeus and Hera in this anthology are somewhat complex. Unusually, Gibson hints at the abusive elements in their relationship. He describes the cruelty of Zeus' punishment to Hera after her failed rebellion against him and points out she is careful not to cause too much trouble when she is angry because she is afraid of him. This is depicted negatively, in contrast to Edith Hamilton's 1942 *Mythology* in which Zeus's threat to beat Hera is portrayed unproblematically. However, some of Gibson's language is more neutral; he calls them "a strange couple" and says Zeus tries to treat Hera with respect, although their problems are mostly his fault.

Zeus is also complex as a character in general. He "could hand out swift justice to wrongdoers, but he could also be compassionate and protect the weak, the poor and the ignorant" (p. 17). Hera is also shown to have a kinder side: "When not provoked by Zeus, Hera could be wise and compassionate. She had a great liking for the brave and noble among the mortals" (p.20). Some of the other gods get similarly balanced characterization: Hades is a "stern but at the same time always just king", for example (p. 21).

Dionysus and Pan are discussed together as "the wild gods", and here Dionysus is negatively contrasted to Pan. He does many of his deeds under madness sent by Hera, and after he is cured, "Though somewhat changed, Dionysus would not give up his band of satyrs and maenads and the kind of life which they had lived together." (p. 61). Dionysus' lifestyle is thus framed negatively; this sentence implies we would expect him to want to give up his previous lifestyle once cured. Pentheus' negative reaction to Dionysus is not shown to be a quirk of Pentheus' character as in Euripides, but is shared by most of the city and quite valid due to the unacceptable disruption caused by Dionysus in Thebes. However, the ending of Euripides' *Bacchae* with Pentheus' death is left out; Dionysus simply leaves Thebes, and satyrs rampage across the country killing people. This is all contrasted to Pan, the simplicity of whose lifestyle Gibson celebrates. Pan is a powerful god disowned by the other gods and his real father "because he looked so hideous" (p.60). Even though Pan's attempted rape of Syrinx is shown, he is still compared positively with Dionysus: "The story of … Dionysus contrasts starkly with that of the contented, unambitious Pan." (p. 60).

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Finally, however, Dionysus finds a woman to "fix" him; after he marries Ariadne, "perhaps because of her influence, his life ended more happily …. thought for others was new to Dionysus and showed that his evil days were behind him." (p. 61).

Gibson seems to want to present a wholesome, happy picture of Jason whilst also including darker elements from the myth. He does this by framing Medea's negative actions in a way that absolves Jason of blame. As in most versions, Medea cuts up her brother and throws him into the ocean to slow the pursuit of her father, Aeetes. Gibson, however, clearly acquits Jason of guilt by saying of he and his men: "If they had seen what she was doing, it is certain that the Argonauts would have stopped her." (p. 96). Aeetes, who is portrayed particularly negatively in this version, repeatedly said to have the same witchcraft powers as Medea, stops to gather the pieces of his murdered son; but is never mentioned as being sad or in mourning, possibly to avoid making him too sympathetic. After they return home, Pelias honourably cedes his throne to Jason, and Jason sends Medea away because he cannot get past her murder of her brother, marrying Clause instead. However, we do not then get the Euripides version where Medea kills Clause and her own children. Instead, we move straight to Jason sitting on the Argo, where it collapses and kills him.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Aphrodite Ares Ariadne Athena Bellerophon Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Echo Hades Hera Jason Medea Midas Narcissus Odysseus / Ulysses Orpheus Pan Pandora Persephone Perseus Phaethon Theseus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Authority Conflict Heroism Maturity Violence

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