Sonya Nevin, "Entry on: Greek Myths: Three Heroic Tales by Carole Hénaff, Hugh Lupton, Daniel Morden", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/359. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Carole Hénaff , Hugh Lupton , Daniel Morden

Greek Myths: Three Heroic Tales

United Kingdom (2017)

TAGS: Afterlife Architecture Ariadne Athena Athens Crete Daedalus Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Eleusinian Mysteries Fate Gods Greek Music Hades Hermes Icarus Immortality Katabasis Labyrinth Maze Minos Minotaur Nymphs Olympus Orpheus Pasiphae Persephone Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Theseus Underworld Zeus



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General information	
Title of the work	Greek Myths: Three Heroic Tales
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom; United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden, *Greek Myths: Three Heroic Tales*. London and Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books, 2017, 136 pp.
ISBN	9781782853497
Genre	Action and adventure fiction, Illustrated works, Instructional and educational works, Myths, Short stories
Target Audience	Children (c.10 and up)
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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



Carole Hénaff (Illustrator)

Carole Hénaff is a French illustrator based in Barcelona, Spain. She studied theatrical literature in Paris and design in Barcelona before going to work for the Peret Studio. Hénaff later established her own studio for graphic design and illustration.

Source:

Official website (accessed: July 2, 2018).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Hugh Lupton , b. 1952 (Author)

Hugh Lupton is a British children's author, oral storyteller, poet, and lyricist based in Norfolk, England. Lupton has a career spanning over 30 years which has seen him work in schools, run workshops and festivals and perform in theatres. He was influential in the movement to revive live storytelling. His work frequently focuses on retelling myths and folk tales. Lupton co-founded the Company of Storytellers (with Ben Haggarty and Sally Pomme Clayton) in 1985 which brought storytelling to an adult audience. Along with Daniel Morden, Lupton has co-authored 5 books on classical mythology- *The Adventures of Odysseus* (2006), *The Adventures of Achilles* (2012), *Theseus and the Minotaur* (2013), *Orpheus and Eurydice* (2013), and *Demeter and Persephone* (2013). In 2006, Daniel and Hugh received the Classical

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Association's Award for "the most significant contribution to the public understanding of classics".

Sources:

Official website (accessed: February 12, 2021).

wikipedia.org (accessed: February 12, 2021).

Bio prepared by Constantine Christoforou, University of Roehampton, christoc1@roehampton.ac.uk and Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk



Daniel Morden , b. 1964
(Author)

Daniel Morden is a British author and storyteller based in Abergavenny, Wales. Morden has been a professional storyteller since 1989. In 2006, Morden won the UK Classical Association's prize for contributing to public understanding of classics. In 2007 he won the Tir na n-Og Award for *Dark Tales from the Woods*, based on Welsh folktales (Gomer Press, 2005; 2nd ed. Pont Books, 2013), and he won the prize again in 2013 for *Tree of Leaf and Flame*, a retelling of the Mabinogion, a fourteenth-century collection of ancient Welsh myths (Gomer Press, 2012).

Source:

wikipedia.org (accessed: February 12, 2021).

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Additional information

Summary

*Greek Myths: Three Heroic Tale*s is a highly illustrated retelling of the myths of Demeter and Persephone, Theseus and the Minotaur, and Orpheus and Eurydice. There is at least one illustration on almost every facing pair of pages with the illustrations setting the events in antiquity. Each myth is divided into chapters in the manner of a novel.

Demeter and Persephone begins by prompting the reader to imagine a tri-part world, Olympus above, the world of mortals, and the realm of the dead below. Persephone is being watched from above and below as she walks through the land of the living. She is snatched into the Underworld by Hades. Persephone's mother, Demeter, sets out to find her. She arrives at Eleusis and is welcomed into the home of a kind family. She looks after their baby son, but this comes to an end when she is found at night holding the baby in the fire, attempting to burn away his mortal element to make him immortal. Demeter hears where Persephone has been taken. In her grief she stops making plants grow and humans begin to suffer. She is too grief-stricken to listen to requests to relent. Zeus tells her that the Fates have decreed that Persephone can return if she has eaten nothing in the Underworld. When it transpires that Persephone has eaten a few pomegranate seeds, Zeus brokers a compromise in which Persephone returns to the earth for half the year and remains underground for the remaining six months, the source of the changing seasons.

Theseus and the Minotaur is an unusual retelling in that it weaves together the different parts of the myth, which are often separated from one another. The story opens with the inventor Daedalus, in Athens. Although he is gifted, he is envious of his more skilled nephew, Talos, and murders him, throwing him from a cliff. The gods turn Talos into a lapwing bird as he falls. Daedalus flees to Crete, where he joins the service of King Minos. Minos and Queen Pasiphaë are having trouble conceiving a son. Daedalus gives Pasiphaë a potion to drink when the constellation Taurus is overhead. She becomes pregnant, and the delighted king determines to call the boy Asterius, 'of the stars'. The Minotaur is born. Daedalus creates a labyrinth in which Asterius can be housed. Years later, servants sent to check on the monster are eaten, and after that, the Minotaur will eat nothing but human flesh. By now, Daedalus has a son, Icarus, whom he keeps secret to avoid Minos' envy. Daedalus suggests that Minos demand a tribute of human sacrifices from neighbouring kingdoms to keep the

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Minotaur fed. Minos himself selects Theseus to be one of the Athenians seized, although Theseus declares that he is willing to go. Theseus promises his girlfriend, Aegle, that he will make her his queen on his return. Ariadne falls in love with Theseus when she sees him defeating the Cretans in athletic competitions. He asks her to help him, promising to take her with him to Athens. Ariadne secures Daedalus' help. She gives him a sword and a ball of string. He defeats the Minotaur and he sails away with Ariadne. Pasiphaë is devastated by the death of Asterius and Minos is furious. Daedalus and Icarus are thrown into the labyrinth. Theseus abandons Ariadne on Naxos, but Dionysus finds her, turns her crown into the constellation Corona Borealis, and marries her on Olympus. Theseus' father, Aegeus, kills himself by jumping into the sea when he thinks Theseus is dead. Daedalus and Icarus escape the labyrinth and flee Crete on wings. Icarus falls into the sea and drowns.

Orpheus and Eurydice begins with their wedding. The following morning, Eurydice is bitten by a snake, dies, and is cremated. A devastated Orpheus travels to the entrance to the Underworld. He descends and his music is beautiful enough to make Chiron and Cerberus allow him to pass. Hades and Persephone are also moved by Orpheus' music. They grant his request to bring Eurydice back to the living, so long as he does not look at her until he feels the sun on his face. Just as he is about to reach the surface, Orpheus hears Eurydice slip and he instinctively looks back to see if she is all right. She is borne back down into Hades. Orpheus roams and plays his lyre; he is not interested in the many women who find him attractive. Dionysus hears Orpheus playing and wonders resentfully why Orpheus always dedicates to Apollo and not to him. The god stirs this resentment in the women Orpheus has rejected and they murder him, decapitating his body. Orpheus' head and lyre are swept along a river. They still make music. Apollo transforms the lyre into the Lyre constellation. Orpheus' shade reaches the Underworld. Persephone recognises him and takes pity on him. She restores Orpheus and Eurydice's' memories so that they can enjoy each other's company even in the afterlife.

All three myths are followed by a brief *More About the Myth* section. These offer information about the ancient sources of the myths and give a selection of examples of works of art inspired by the myths since antiquity. It also provides a little more information about two of the main characters from each myth. Following the three myths, there is a family tree of the gods and an illustration of the major Olympians captioned with their names and main areas of influence. An illustrated

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map of Greece and Asia Minor completes the work.

Analysis

This is a highly lyrical retelling of Greek myths. Two of the three stories begin with the word "Imagine", urging the reader to leave the everyday world and enter another. This is Greek myth as poetic escapism, even while some of the issues raised have relevance in the real world.

Demeter and Persephone places its focus on Demeter's experience of the events, much as the ancient *Homeric Hymn To Demeter* does (*Homeric Hymn 2. To Demeter*). As such, the storytelling prompts the reader to reflect on a mother's experience of the loss of her child, with no attempt to determine (as many modern retellings do) whether Hades "really" loves Persephone or not. Similarly, the retelling does not dwell on whether or not Persephone "meant" to eat the pomegranate seeds. The effect of avoiding these two issues is to avoid running into essentially modern concern of Persephone's level of responsibility; a concern which can all too easily slide into an unnecessary endorsement of rape culture. The focus on Demeter extends into the connected story about Eleusis, in which Demeter attempts to make the child immortal and to protect his mother from the inevitable death of her child. This helps to establish the myth's inherent connection to the concepts of loss, separation, and death. At the end of the story, this extends into an oblique account of the establishment of the Eleusinian Mysteries, rituals that ensured *that their harvests would always be plentiful*, partially challenging death. Sympathy is established for Demeter by a rare inclusion of the reader in the story-world. The narrator calls her, *Demeter… whom we must thank for every full mouth and every bulging belly*. This inclusive 'we' invites the reader to be appreciative of Demeter's gifts to the world which discourages any sense of blame when she withholds those gifts. Blame is also discouraged by the focus on Demeter's mourning; she does not hear the cries of humans because *she heard only the distant cry of her child*. Zeus is an essentially benevolent if not all-powerful figure in the story. There is no mention of him allowing Hades to take Persephone, as there is in many versions of this myth. When Demeter appeals to him, he reminds her that he is subject to the will of the Fates, but when he can, he steps in with the compromise that restores Persephone to her mother. The story concludes on the positive notes about "plentiful" harvests and a picture of Demeter and Persephone

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embracing. Overall this retelling emphasises the myth's ancient focus on death, rebirth, and the seasons, eschewing modern tendencies to focus on sexual desire.

The impact of *Theseus and the Minotaur* is considerably affected by the decision to include several aspects of the myth together, i.e. to weave the Daedalus and Icarus strand of the story alongside the Theseus/Minotaur element in the manner of Apollodorus. Daedalus' envy of Talos is captured effectively, and his murder of his nephew haunts his later actions. The death of Icarus reads as Daedalus' comeuppance. The story retains Icarus' disobedience and with it the moral lesson about doing as you are told, but the child's actions pale in significance against the earlier actions of his father. The story of the Minotaur gains a tragic quality through the inclusion of the parts of the story dealing with his conception and his parents' concern for him. He is referred to on several occasions by his human name, Asterius, which challenges the idea of his monstrosity. Pasiphaë's grief when the Asterius is killed complicates the simple monster-killing narrative that is familiar in retellings of the Minotaur myth. The story of Theseus is told in an unusual way through the inclusion of Aegle. Although Plutarch (Plutarch, *Theseus*, 29) criticises Theseus for deserting Ariadne for Aegle, in this retelling Theseus pledges himself to Aegle before going to Crete, meaning that he appears to be acting honourably in remembering his promise to her. Nonetheless, this is undercut by the emphasis on Theseus deceptively wooing Ariadne, and by the "mocking" laughter Ariadne hears as the Athenians' ship sails away. Theseus' role in Aegeus' death is also stressed, with Theseus even having to drag his father's body aboard the ship. This gruesome detail has a further effect. The narrative uses repetition to draw out the similar fates of Icarus and Aegeus, and, in turn, the responsibility and consequences for the loved ones who played a role in their deaths. *And for the first time in his life, Theseus knew sorrow* repeats as *… and for the first time, Daedalus knew sorrow*. The story closes with Daedalus confronting the memory of the nephew he murdered. This is a challenging and morally complex retelling of this myth. Theseus and Daedalus suffer for their actions, but the reader is confronted by the difficulty of acting decently in difficult situations and by the sense that someone will always lose.

*Orpheus and Eurydic*e is told as a difficult love story. Although the lovers are separated, they are reunited at the end, bringing an ultimately happy ending. The gods are variously kind and cruel within the story. The gods of the dead show mercy in allowing Eurydice to

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return to the surface and again in restoring the lovers' memories. On the other hand, Dionysus adds a disconcerting element of surprise and horror to the events, when he turns in anger against Orpheus. Even as he appears envious and cruel, Dionysus is still described beautifully as, *the god of drinking and drunkenness, of madness and ecstasy, of wild dancing and wild music*. These characteristically elaborate descriptions of the gods express their complexity and otherness. Overall this retelling has a charming emphasis on the power of music and its special role in moving living things.

The decision to put these three together works well. Persephone is taken to the Underworld in story one and the reader then finds out more about her life there through story three. Similarly, having two myths featuring Dionysus shows the reader two sides of his character, caring in *Theseus and the Minotaur* and vengeful in *Orpheus and Eurydice*. This combination of myths does not reflect the usual meaning of "heroic tales", but this is no bad thing as it stretches the reader's usual understanding of what heroism means to include less violent heroics.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Afterlife Architecture Ariadne Athena Athens Crete Daedalus Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Eleusinian Mysteries Fate Gods Greek Music Hades Hermes Icarus Immortality Katabasis Labyrinth Maze Minos Minotaur Nymphs Olympus Orpheus Pasiphae Persephone Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Theseus Underworld Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adversity Animals Child, children Coming of age Death Disability Family Friendship Gaining understanding Gender expectations/construction Heroism Identity Justice Love Morality Parents (and children) Sexuality Step-parents Storytelling Violence

Further Reading

Eisenberg, William D., "Morals, Morals Everywhere: Values in Children's Fiction", *The Elementary School Journal* 72.2 (1971): 76–80.

Kummerling-Meibauer, Bettina, "Orpheus and Eurydice: Reception of a Classical Myth in International Children's Literature", in Katarzyna Marciniak, ed., *Our Mythical Childhood… The Classics and Literature*

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for Children and Young Adults, Leiden: Brill, 2016.

Roberts, Deborah H., "The Metamorphosis of Ovid in Retellings of Myth for Children", in Lisa Maurice, ed., *The Reception of Ancient Greece and Rome in Children's Literature. Heroes and Eagles*, Brill: Leiden, 2015.

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Addenda

First published separately:

Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden, *Demeter and Persephone*, London and Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books, 2013.

Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden, *Theseus and the Minotaur*, London and Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books, 2013.

Hugh Lupton and Daniel Morden, *Orpheus and Euricide*, London and Cambridge, MA: Barefoot Books, 2013.

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