Chloe Roberta Sadler, "Entry on: The Secrets of Vesuvius (The Roman Mysteries, 2) by Caroline Lawrence", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/552. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Caroline Lawrence

The Secrets of Vesuvius (The Roman Mysteries, 2)

United Kingdom (2001)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Cerberus Pliny the Elder Pliny the Younger Pompeii Roman Empire Vulcan





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Secrets of Vesuvius (The Roman Mysteries, 2)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, USA, Spain, Italy, Finland, Czechia, Slovenia, Germany, France
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2001
First Edition Details	Caroline Lawrence, *The Secrets of Vesuvius*. London: Orion Children's Books; London: Dolphin Paperback; New York, NY: Puffin Books, 2001, 224 pp.
ISBN	1842550802
Awards	2009 – Lawrence won the Classical Association Prize for a significant contribution to the understanding of Classics.
Genre	Historical fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Children (9–12)
Author of the Entry	Chloe Roberta Sadler, University of Roehampton, crs.sadler@icloud.com
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Creators



Caroline Lawrence (Author)

Born in England, Lawrence grew up in the United States of America and studied Classics at Berkeley. She won a Marshall Scholarship to Cambridge and went on to study Classical art and Archaeology at Newnham College Cambridge. Lawrence studied for her MA in Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London and went on to teach Latin, French and art at a primary school in London.

Lawrence published *The Thieves of Ostia*, the first instalment in the *Roman Mysteries Series* in 2001. Lawrence has also worked on University of Reading's educational website *Romans Revealed*, which presents stories about Roman Britain related to archaeological finds.

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Additional information

Adaptations	*Roman Mysteries*, BBC United Kingdom, 2007 & 2008
Translation	Spanish: *Los Secretos del Vesubio*, trans. Atalaire, Barcelona: Salamandra, 2002, 185 pp. Italian: *I segreti del Vesuvio*, trans. Giancarlo Carlotti, Casale Monferrato: Piemme Junior, 2004, 149 pp. Finnish: *Vesuviuksen salaisuudet*, trans. Pekka Tuomisto, Helsinki: WSOY, 2004, 244 pp. Czech: *Tajemný Vesuv : záhady ze starověkého Řîma*, trans. Hana Petráková, Praha: Albatros, 2007, 168 pp. Slovenian: *Skrivnosti Vezuva*, trans. Maja Ropret, Ljubljana: Grlica, 2007, 192 pp. German: *Das Rätsel des Vesuv*, trans. Dagmar Weischer, München: Bertelsmann Verlag, 2008, 192 pp. French: *Les secrets de Pompéi*, trans. Amélie Sarn, Toulouse: Milan Jeunesse, 2010, 256 pp.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Prequels: *The Thieves of Ostia* Sequels: • *The Pirates of Pompeii* • *The Assassins of Rome* • *The Dolphins of Laurentum* • *The Twelve Tasks of Flavia Gemina* • *The Enemies of Jupiter* • *The Gladiators from Capua*

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- *The Colossus of Rhodes*
- *The Fugitive from Corinth*
- *The Sirens of Surrentum*
- *The Charioteer of Delphi*
- *The Slave-girl from Jerusalem*
- *The Beggar of Volubilis*
- *The Scribes from Alexandria*
- *The Prophet from Ephesus*
- *The Man from Pomegranate Street*

Mini-Mysteries:

- *Bread and Circuses*
- *Trimalchio's Feast and other mini mysteries*
- *The Legionary from Londinium and other mini-mysteries*

Companion Books:

- *The First Roman Mysteries Quiz Book*
- *The Second Roman Mysteries Quiz Book*
- *The Roman Mysteries Treasury*
- *From Ostia to Alexandria with Flavia Gemina: Travels with Flavia Gemina*

Summary

In this second volume in the Roman Mysteries Series, after the danger experienced by the children in *The Thieves of Ostia*, Flavius father decides to send Flavia and Nubia to his brother's farm near Pompeii. He invites Lupus and Jonathan as well as Jonathan's sister and father to join them. Whilst swimming one day, the children save the life of Pliny, and in thanks he gives them a riddle and sends them looking for a blacksmith named Vulcan. By solving the riddle the four friends discover that the blacksmith Vulcan is really the long-lost son of the people who own the villa next to Flavia's uncle's farm. Throughout the book Jonathan suffers from nightmares, as his father did whilst they were being persecuted as Christians before they managed to escape. It seems that Jonathan is being warned that Vesuvius will erupt. The four friends manage to escape from the worst of the volcano's eruption but they do lose some of their other friends during the eruption, including Pliny.

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Analysis

The second instalment of Lawrence's *Roman Mysteries* series contains some similar kinds of facts to the first book. However, the information about Roman life is more focused than in *The Thieves of Ostia*. Where the first book reads like a discovery book for children about life in the ancient world, the second book focuses on Pliny and the myth of Vulcan.

Lawrence includes details about food, transport and the arrangement of farms through the continued explanation of the surroundings to Nubia the African slave and Lupus the orphan who has lost his tongue. However, there are considerably fewer of these instances. Whilst Lawrence includes some information about mythology through the mention of Castor and Pollux in the first book as well as Cerberus, she goes into some detail on the myth of Vulcan in the second book, giving a closer look into how mythology functioned in Roman life. She retells much of the myth surrounding the god, from his birth, to being raised under the sea to his reinstatement to Olympus. Lawrence goes into the roles of the god, including connotations with fire and water and his role as the divine blacksmith.

The mythology surrounding Vulcan is reflected in the blacksmith who the children meet, who has a club foot, and is referred to as Vulcan. He has also been raised by people who are not his true parents, and he is on a mission to discover who they are. This drawing of parallels between mythology and a character in the book might help encourage imaginative thinking in young readers, inviting them to think about what might happen to the boy as the story progresses in light of what they have learnt about the god of the same name.

Lawrence creates an amusing and well-executed character in Pliny and weaves in historical facts with the story of Flavia and her friends. This kind of expansion upon historical facts may encourage young readers to undertake further reading on the historical figure of Pliny. By describing his death, she potentially provides motivation for independent learning on the matters as well as stimulus for class discussions not only about the historical figure of Pliny but about the creative writing technique of fictionalising historical characters.

Classical, Mythological, Ancient Slavery Cerberus Pliny the Elder Pliny the Younger Pompeii

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Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Roman Empire Vulcan
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Animals Boys Child, children Christianity Family Friendship Girls Orphans Social class

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