Susan Deacy, "Entry on: Stories from Ancient Civilisations: Greece by Shahrukh Husain , Bee Willey", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/894. Entry version as of November 12, 2026.

Shahrukh Husain , Bee Willey

Stories from Ancient Civilisations: Greece

United Kingdom (2004)

TAGS: Apollo Athena Bellerophon Demeter Eurynome Gaia / Gaea Hades Hercules Judgement of Paris Persephone Poseidon Theseus Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Stories from Ancient Civilisations: Greece
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2004
First Edition Details	Shahrukh Husain, *Stories from Ancient Civilisations: Greece*. London: Evans Brothers, 2004, 30 pp.
ISBN	0237524449
Genre	Adaptations, Myths
Target Audience	Children (aged circa 8–11)
Author of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk
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Creators



Shahrukh Husain , b. 1950
(Author)

Shahrukh Husain was born in Pakistan and lives in London. She is a writer – of books for children and for adults – as well as, among other roles, a radio presenter, a screenwriter, a psychotherapist and a folklorist. Her adaptation of Anita Desai's *In Custody* for Merchant Ivory Productions was nominated for a BAFTA in 1995. She has written many books, on topics including on women's studies, folklore and myth. According to her Royal Literary Fund biography, she 'thoroughly enjoys writing for children because its demand for simplicity, clarity and brevity hones the craft.' The illustrators of her books for children include Bee Willey (see the biography for Willey for details).

Sources:

Profile at web.archive.org (accessed: August 15, 2019)

Profile at blakefriedmann.co.uk (accessed: September 2, 2019)

There is an interview with Shahrukh Husain (accessed: August 15, 2019)

Author's website (accessed: August 15, 2019)

Bio prepared by Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

Bee Willey (Illustrator)

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Courtesy of Bee Willey.

Bee was born in London and spent most of her childhood in France. She attended the Bath Academy of Art. In her career since graduation she has worked as a freelance illustrator for numerous clients, creating illustrations for a wide range of books – including over twenty for children – and also posters, montage, magazines, campaigns and emojis. The "sidelights" for Willey at encyclopedia.com include the comment that "her stylistic art has been credited for its eccentric and energetic design". She was shortlisted for the Kate Greenaway Medal in 2003 for *Bob Robber and Dancing Jane*. The many authors she has worked with include Shahrukh Husain, for whom she is the illustrator of *Egypt* (Evans 2004), *Rome* (Evans 2004), *Greece* (Evans 2004), *Indian Myths* (Evans 2005), *The Vikings* (Smart Apple Media 2005) and *African Myths* (Evans 2006).

Sources:

Profile at the Walker Books Australia website (accessed: June 28, 2018).

Profile at the illustrationcupboard.com (accessed: October 5, 2017).

Profile at the www.wordsandpics.org (accessed: June 28, 2018).

Bee Willey’s personal website (accessed: August 15, 2019).

Profile at encyclopedia.com (accessed: September 2, 2019)

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Additional information

Summary

This retelling of a selection of classical myths begins with a section on the importance of myth for ancient peoples, including as a means to explain aspects of the world and to explain concepts such as deities, who, Husain writes, were taken as "seriously" (p. 4) in antiquity as they are by religious people today. The author states that these stories were transmitted orally until they came to be written down, notably by Hesiod (dated here to c. 700 BCE), Homer (dated to 750–725 BCE), and Euripedes (sic.) (dated 455–408). The stories retold by Husain start with Eurynome at the "Beginning of time" (p. 6) and move to Gaia and then the rise of Zeus. Several stories about heroes' encounters with magical animals follow. After this, Husain narrates a series of stories with an aetiological significance including Athena's contest with Poseidon for patronage of Athens ("how Athena…came to be the most important goddess of the people of Attica", p. 20) and the kidnapping of Persephone ("about the seasons of the year", p. 26). Textboxes explain various features dealt with in the main text and the book ends with a glossary and index.

Analysis

The world of classical myth presented in Husain's text is one where evildoers get their comeuppance, monsters exist to be killed by brave heroes, and powerful goddesses create and sustain the world.

Although the introduction states that among the earliest authors to write down myths were Homer and Hesiod (p. 4), the book starts with the more esoteric Orphic story of Eurynome, the first "who rose out of darkness and disorder" (p. 6). Furthermore, whereas ancient authors, notably Hesiod, tell of how the first woman (Pandora – not included among the stories narrated here) came to be, in Husain's account, it is Eurynome who creates the first man: Pelasgus. This focus on the original centrality of goddesses echoes one of Husain's books for adults: *The Goddess: Power, Sexuality and the Feminine Divine* (London, Duncan Baird 2000). The emphasis upon goddess power in the text is mirrored in Willey's illustrations which show, for example Eurymone bringing her serpentine husband, Ophion, into existence (p. 6).

The depiction of goddesses as powers driving creation continues with the next story, about Gaia, who, having been ill-treated by Uranos,

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allies with her son, Cronus, and makes him king. The focus then turns, for much of the book, to stories centring on male mythological figures. This starts with the rise of Zeus – whose emergences as a thunderbolt-wielding cosmic ruler is also the subject of the image on the book's cover, and continues through various heroes, with some exceptions, notably Athena's contest with Poseidon for supremacy in Attica. The book ends, as it begins, with a goddess-centred story: Demeter's loss of, then reunion with, Persephone.

The retelling of the Demeter and Persephone story comes close to a depiction of sexual violence: Persephone "screamed" to her mother when "Hades…forced her into his carriage" (p. 26). Nothing is said about Persephone's own feelings about what goes on to happen to her. Indeed, her eventual fate, determined by Zeus, is presented as a happy ending both for her mother, who is "overjoyed to have Persephone back" and for the Earth, which "all the while Persephone was with her…was fertile and fruitful" (p. 28). The stories about heroes – who "use their intelligence and cunning to defeat fearsome enemies" (p. 14) and who "defended the forces of good and evil" (p. 18) – likewise avoid morally-problematic features. For instance, Ariadne tells Theseus that she will help him because "you look brave" (p. 17), and the story ends with Theseus's successful return from the labyrinth, omitting the escape from Crete with Ariadne. Indeed, Theseus hides the twine that Ariadne lent him to prevent her from getting into trouble.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Athena Bellerophon Demeter Eurynome Gaia / Gaea Hades Hercules Judgement of Paris Persephone Poseidon Theseus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Gender Good deeds Loss Nature Parents (and children) Relationships

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