

Rebekka Pax

The Heart of the Harpy [Das Herz der Harpyie]

Germany (2015)

TAGS: [Aello](#) [Ares](#) [Harpies](#) [Olympus](#) [Thanatos](#) [Underworld](#)



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General information	
Title of the work	The Heart of the Harpy [Das Herz der Harpyie]
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Country/countries of popularity	Germany
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Target Audience	Young adults
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Creators



Rebekka Pax , b. 1978 (Author)

Rebekka Veronika Pax was born in Mühlheim, Germany in 1978. She studied Scandinavian languages and literature, classical archaeology and Runic writing at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Bochum (Germany). For several years she worked as a script-writer in the US and in Germany. She currently lives again in the city of Mühlheim, on the river Ruhr. Using her pseudonyms Rebecca Maly and Erin Hamilton she has already published eight dark fantasy novels dealing with demons and vampires. *The Heart of the Harpy* is her first novel for young readers and one of six she wrote under her own name. She now focuses on writing romance fantasy.

Bio prepared by Michael Stierstorfer, University of Regensburg,
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Additional information

Summary

The teenage girl Milena Weyergräber suffers every night from nightmares, in which she transforms into a harpy and guides the souls of the dead into the Underworld. One night, she watches a young man John Ossin dying. He is killed by a Mafia clan called Tsirpas. Although he is already dead, Milena manages to save his soul and bring him back to life. So the supervisor harpy Aello, who has big black wings, punishes her, because Milena has frustrated the rules of the Olympians. The gods do not want harpies to bring anybody back to life. Therefore she is cursed. Consequently she transforms herself step by step into a harpy in real life even during daytime. Every time she meets John, she tries to kill him, because the monster in her comes to the surface. By eliminating John Milena would restore the world's balance, but she doesn't want to do that at all. This refusal to follow the rules of the gods brings her pain, because she falls in love with John. Later she learns to control the harpy inside her and even helps John defeat the criminal Tsirpas-clan, which stems from Ares, the god of war. At the end, John turns out to be the son of Thanatos, the god of death. For that reason he was able to come back to life after Milena had saved his soul. The gods, who are not omniscient in this novel, are informed about that by Milena. As the plans of the gods were not frustrated at all, the teenagers in love are able to be together.

Analysis

Greek mythology is mixed with Christian and Nordic motifs in this novel. The harpy is a guardian angel, who has to guide the souls securely into the underworld according to the rules of the Olympians. With the transformation into a harpy, the phenomenon of first teenage love is depicted metaphorically. Also the change of Milena's body during puberty is represented as a metamorphosis into a monster. In the novel, Milena is a low ranking harpy striving to become an independent individual and deviating from the will of the gods and from the authority of stronger and elder harpies like Aello. This is an original and mythologically inspired treatment of the theme of growing up of teenage girls who separate from their parents and leave home. In ancient mythology, harpies have no hierarchy and they never resist the will of their masters, the gods. The transformation into a harpy is described and compared to the transformation into a werewolf. Thus the metamorphosis into a harpy becomes more familiar for well-informed fantasy fans, who know werewolves but no harpies. The

harpy Milena is described as a mythical creature with wings of a raven. In Greek mythology, harpies had impenetrable magical wings but they were not made from raven feathers. Yet, in the Middle Ages and in the Nordic mythology, the raven was considered a messenger of death, as it was often seen near battlefields. It was the traditional bird companion of the Nordic god Odin, the powerful godfather and god of death. This connection of ravens to death is also highlighted in the plot. In the book, there is no mention of mythical background. Consequently, the young readers might think that harpies are guardian angels instead of mythical daughters of the goddess of storm.

Classical, Mythological,
Traditional Motifs,
Characters, and
Concepts

[Aello](#) [Ares](#) [Harpies](#) [Olympus](#) [Thanatos](#) [Underworld](#)

Other Motifs, Figures,
and Concepts Relevant
for Children and Youth
Culture

[Adolescence](#) [Coming of age](#) [Death](#) [Love](#) [Relationships](#)

Further Reading

Janka, Markus and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte Antike. Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien*, Heidelberg: Winter, 2017.

Stierstorfer, Michael, *Antike Mythologie in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Gegenwart. Unsterbliche Götter- und Helden Geschichten? [Ancient Mythology in Contemporary Children's Literature. Immortal Stories of Gods and Heroes?]*, Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017, 160 pp.
