Ayelet Peer, "Entry on: I am Pan! by Mordicai Gerstein", peer-reviewed by Lisa Maurice and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1058. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

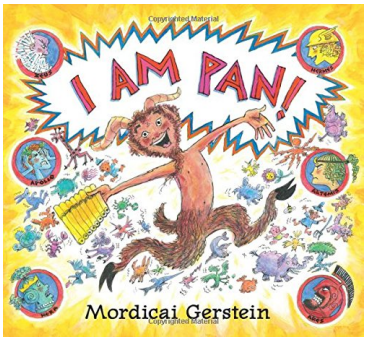
Mordicai Gerstein

I am Pan!

United States of America (2016)

TAGS: Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Echo Hera Hermes Marathon Midas Syrinx Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus





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General information	
Title of the work	I am Pan!
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	worldwide
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2016
First Edition Details	Mordicai Gerstein, *I am Pan!* New York: Roaring Brook Press, 2016, 80 pp.
ISBN	9781626720350
Genre	Comics (Graphic works), Myths
Target Audience	Children (5–9 years)
Author of the Entry	Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il
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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



Mordicai Gerstein , 1935 - 2019
(Author)

Mordicai Gerstein was a prolific American artist, illustrator, filmmaker and writer who wrote and illustrated more than 40 children's books. In 2004 he won the Caldecott Medal for U.S. picture book illustration for his book *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers* (2003). In 2006 he won the National Jewish Book Award (illustrated book category) for *The White Ram: A Story of Abraham and Isaac*.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: July 26, 2020, website currently unvailable).

Katharine Q. Seelye, *Mordicai Gerstein, Illustrator of Magical Worlds, Dies at 83*, nytimes.com, published October 4, 2019 (accessed: August 11, 2020).

Bio prepared by Ayelet Peer, Bar-Ilan University, ayelet.peer@biu.ac.il

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Additional information

Summary

This is a graphic novel adaption of myths relating to Pan, and told in the first person by Pan "himself". The colourful, whimsical illustrations take up most of the page, and the necessary information is given either as captions or speech balloons. The book follows Pan's birth and his later adventures. The narrated myths are: Pan's birth, his escapades in Olympus, his residence in Arcadia, his invention of Panic, his falling in love with the moon and other nymphs, his battle against Typhon, his invention of the Pipes, his marriage to Echo, the great music contest with Apollo, king Midas' donkey ears, Pan's involvement in the battle of Marathon and an afterword (or, where is Pan today?).

At the end there is an author's note about his inspiration and a short bibliography.

Analysis

Pan is not as popular god in children's books as the other Olympian gods. Perhaps his mischievous look, especially the goat horns (which can have anti-Christian connotations), may have put off some of the authors from devoting an entire work to his myths. He is a minor deity, yet, he does have a prominent place in mythology as well as in human psychology (panic). The author notes that Pan was "the silliest" of all the gods and therefore he deemed him "perfect for kids, because, though fully grown, at heart he's one of them." Hence, the author views Pan as a harmless, whimsical god, and does not refer to the more darker and lascivious side of the goat-like god. He refers to his child-like conduct (which of course is not presented in Greek mythology).

The first-person narration also makes this god (and book) stand out, as it is not as common. By hearing his story directly from the god, the readers can sympathize with him more and better understand his reasoning and conduct.

The author attests that he used Robert Graves' *The Greek Myths* (1957) as well as the translated works of Ovid, Hesiod and the *Homeric Hymns*. As a result, he could consult and compare the image of the god as it appeared both in the original (translated) texts as well as its adaptation/reception in Graves' book. The author's work

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displays therefore his own reception of these myths and his "embellishment", as he says, of the god Pan.

As part of this embellishment, we should note the colourful and whimsical illustrations which perfectly fir the light and informal tone of the book as well its subject matter. The illustrations shows Pan as he get bigger and exaggerate his reactions, for example, crying over his lovers or asking some silence. They greatly contribute to Pan's presentation as a playful god.

The stories are adapted for young readers and keeping with the light and quirky tone of the book. For example, we see Pan being heart broken and crying over his rejection by the moon, or his comical attempts to woe the various nymphs. His chase after Syrinx does not appear dramatic or tragic, even her metamorphosis to river reed presents Pan with the opportunity to create his pipes and invent "the first love song". There is no emphasis on the suffering of the nymph herself. Quite the contrary; the nymphs appear taken with Pan's love song to Syrinx. There is no mention of his satyrs at all. Perhaps they were considered too rowdy by the author to be presented here. Furthermore, Echo, whom Pan punished and cursed, falls in love with him and they marry in this version.

The author presents some of the other Olympians as contrasts with Pan: Zeus "the grumpy", Hera "the crabby", Apollo "the dreamy", Aphrodite "the lovely", Ares "the bully", Artemis "the sharp-eyed" and his father, Hermes. The other gods cower before Typhon (Typhoeus); they even disguise themselves as animals in Egypt out of fear), yet Pan saves them all.

Hermes is described as a loving father; he declares that Pan is the child he always wanted. He and Pan's mother (her name is not mentioned, perhaps because her identity is not certain; she could be a nymph called Penelope or the daughter of Dryopos), adored their strange looking child. The midwife is pictured running frightened from the birth room, while the mother happily plays with little Pan. This version follows the *Hymn to Pan*, in which it is narrated how the nurse ran in fear while Hermes and the other gods were delighted in Pan.

It appears important for the author to describe Pan's birth as a blessed event and his parents as proud and loving (maybe because the book is dedicated to the author's son).

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The author emphasizes Pan's voice and his fondness of creating havoc as his main source of power. This habit of his is also attested in the ancient sources about the god. For example, Herodotus narrates (*Histories* 66.105) that Philippides encountered Pan on his way to Sparta and Pan asked why the Athenians do not worship him when he is in their favour. Herodotus does not specify how Pan helped them, but the author of our book accounts that pan used his terrifying voice to scare off the Persians and induce panic in their ranks.

The last part of the book is not a myth adaption but the author's original addition. It refers to the aftermath of the gods. (A question other books have dealt with, for example, in Tanya Landman's *The World's Bellybutton: The Greek Gods Need a New Hero*, 2007. While we see a mortal child declaring that "there was no Pan! He and his family were just myths", we, the readers, who are told the story by Pan, know better. Pan says that the gods have disguised themselves and are living among us (in Greece or Canada) whereas Pan, who announced his own death to the world as a decoy, also hides amongst us, still playing his trick on unsuspected mortals. But, Pan reassures us, when we hear such strange shouting, we should not panic, it's just Pan. This ending makes the young readers part of this big secret concerning the continuing existence of the Greek gods; they were not just myths, they are still here and we should not fear them.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aphrodite Apollo Ares Artemis Echo Hera Hermes Marathon Midas Syrinx Typhon / Typhoeus / Typhaon Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Emotions Family Invention Journeys Love Nature Psychology

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