Charles Bataille [Almasty] , Sylvie Baussier

Greek Gods & Heroes: 40 Inspiring Icons [Dieux: 40 dieux et héros grecs]

France (2017)

TAGS: Agamemnon Antigone Aphrodite Ariadne Artemis Athena Chronos Cronus / Kronos Demeter Gaia / Gaea Hades Hera Heracles Hercules Minotaur Oedipus Orpheus Pandora Persephone Perseus Phaedra Prometheus Themis Theseus Zeus



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General information	
Title of the work	Greek Gods & Heroes: 40 Inspiring Icons [Dieux: 40 dieux et héros grecs]
Country of the First Edition	France
Country/countries of popularity	France, United Kingdom
Original Language	French
First Edition Date	2017
First Edition Details	Sylvie Baussier, *Dieux: 40 dieux et héros grecs*. Paris: Gallimard Jeune, 2017, 87 pp.
ISBN	9781786031471
Genre	Anthology of myths*
Target Audience	Young adults (Older children and teenagers)
Author of the Entry	Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com
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Creators



Charles Bataille [Almasty] (Illustrator)

Charles Bataillie (professional name Almasty) is a French multi-disciplinary designer who specialises in geometric shapes, vivid colours and hints of texture. He loves working with map design, nature and science. For example, he created a Viking Explorers map for Georges magazine and has done art projects around robots and sci-fi themes.

Source:

Official website (accessed: February 8, 2021).

Bio prepared by Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, RSD253@student.bham.ac.uk



Sylvie Baussier (Author)

Sylvie Baussier is a French children's author and editor, specialising in mythology, history and horse books. She began her career as a librarian, then an editor for encyclopaedias for fifteen years, before moving fully to children's literature. Baussier has a Baccalaureate in Life Sciences, and according to her website gained the equivalent of an MA in sociologie de la littérature at Paris III.

On her website, Baussier says that she became a children's author because "books are my life" and "as a child, I would have liked to be surrounded by books" (translated from French). She particularly loves book fairs.

Her other works include educational children's books through Kidicoc such as *Les Vikings* [The Vikings] (2011) and *L'Egypte des Pharaons*

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[Egypt of the Pharaohs] (2011), Greek myth books such as *Moi, Ligia, Sirène* [Me, The Siren] (2020) and *Moi, le Minotaure* [Me, The Minotaur] (2020), children's mysteries such as the *Mystères à Versailles* series and horse books such as the *Le club des poneys* series.

Sources:

Official website (accessed: February 8, 2021).

waterstones.com (accessed: February 8, 2021).

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Additional information

Translation	English: *Greek Gods & Heroes: 40 Inspiring Icons*, London: Wide Eyed Editions, 2018.

Summary

This is a collection of profiles of Greek gods, heroes, antiheroes and monsters aimed at children. Each character occupies a double spread featuring the character's picture labelled with some of their main attributes, as well as a short intro, family tree box and other boxes with further stories. These boxes have regular themed headings; for example, "Descendants", "Lovers" and "Conflict" are recurring ones. At the bottom of the profile is a summary line for the character in bold; for example "King of the gods" for Zeus, "A hateful god" for Cronus and "Ally of the mortals" for Prometheus. The book ends with a family tree for Zeus and a map of Greece.

Profiles:

Gaia, Cronus, Zeus, Themis, Hera, Hestia, Prometheus, Pandora, Hades, Demeter, Persephone, Aphrodite, Hephaestus, Ares, Athena, Poseidon, Apollo, Artemis, Asclepius, Hermes, Dionysus, Perseus, Sisyphus, Oedipus, Antigone, Heracles, Orpheus, Jason, Medusa, Minotaur, Theseus, Ariadne, Phaedra, Tantalus, Helen, Agamemnon, Iphigenia, Electra, Achilles, Odysseus.

Analysis

The book begins with a prologue that alludes to myth helping the reader to understand painting, literature and film. To these practical claims of cultural capital, it adds that myths "make us dream and teach us about the world". Myths are thus painted as teaching philosophy, cultural capital, morality and the abstract quality of "dreaming". However, as the book unfolds, it does not turn out to obviously teach morals, nor does it allude to painting, literature or film. This is in contrast to the more blatant didacticism of earlier books that made similar claims; for example the addition of famous artwork in Kupfer's 1897 *Stories of Long Ago in a New Dress* and Baker's 1913 *Stories of Old Greece and Rome* and reading lists and insertion of famous relevant poetry in Forbush's 1928 *Myths and Legends of Greece and Rome.*

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This work features comparatively lesser known myths, points out little known family relations in the family tree boxes on some of the profiles and brings up alternative versions, such as that "Pandora's Box" is sometimes a jar.

The book is obviously aimed at older readers who already have some knowledge of myth; parts would be confusing to a child lacking basic mythical context. Other parts would probably be considered scandalous for young children; for example the reference to Cronus cutting off his father's genitals. Baussier also tries to educate readers about different versions. In the introduction to Aphrodite's profile, she gives her parentage "according to Homer" (p. 12)* but adds "another tradition" has her born from Uranus' genitals.

The illustrations are cartoon-like in style, with the figures often almost resembling computer game characters in their blocky, pixelated design. They further suggest an older audience, since some are quite disturbing; for example, Phaedra in her illustration has tied the rope around her neck with which she will hang herself and is already pulling on it. At the same time, the illustrations are bright colourful and dominate the page, and the text is large and well-spaced, which still indicates a primary audience of children.

The book also engages with the recent reception trend of depicting monsters sympathetically. For example, the Minotaur is "an innocent victim" (p.30) and only becomes cruel in the labyrinth due to the circumstances of his life. He is called Asterius within the profile, although Minotaur in the heading. This reads like an abbreviated version of the sympathetic Minotaurs in young adult novels like *Dark of the Moon* (Barrett 2011) and *Bull* (Elliott 2017). In the illustration, the Minotaur is depicted dying with Theseus' dagger in him.

There is a recurring theme, as in ancient myth, that escaping one's destiny is impossible, but here it is given in the Oedipus and Perseus profiles almost as a didactic moral – "You can't escape destiny!" (p. 22) – which stands out given that this anthology mainly avoids obvious didactic morality.

The Titan Themis appears fourth in the profiles, after Gaia, Cronus and Zeus, implying that she is a central figure. In her picture, Themis clutches a sword and stands in an active stance, compared to, for example, Hera, who is sitting on a throne and drinking from a goblet in her profile. Themis has been a figure of some focus in reception of

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the past few years; for example, in Natalie Haynes' *A Thousand Ships* (2019) she is revealed to be the mastermind behind the war who nobody notices since she is part of the older Titan generation. This interest in Themis may be a feminist reception trend of recent times, perhaps as a variation on earlier feminist interest in the more central female goddesses. In spite of Themis' sword, Baussier claims in the Gaia profile that "The Titans are always ready for brutal fights, but the Titanesses don't want anything to do with them" (p. 1). This draws a distinction between supposed male interest in violence and supposed female disinterest.

Most of Hera's profile discusses her jealousy of Zeus' affairs and the unfairness of the fact she punishes the other women and the children born of these unions, not Zeus himself. Her summary line is "Jealous goddess", and this is thus her central character trait. Unlike, for example, Gibson's 1977 *Gods, Men and Heroes* myth anthology, Baussier does not suggest Hera punishes the other women and not Zeus because she does not have the power to harm Zeus and is in fact afraid of him. Instead, she merely seems like a character who unfairly transfers her blame and anger.

Ideas that the gods reflect bad forms of modern leadership and abuse of power, popular in modern reception and in particular Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* series, are also present here. The heroic Prometheus is explicitly contrasted with Zeus, who is a bad leader. Zeus expects submission and honour from humans whilst Prometheus is their friend.

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* Sylvie Baussier, *Greek Gods & Heroes: 40 Inspiring Icons*, London: Wide Eyed Editions, 2018.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Agamemnon Antigone Aphrodite Ariadne Artemis Athena Chronos Cronus / Kronos Demeter Gaia / Gaea Hades Hera Heracles Hercules Minotaur Oedipus Orpheus Pandora Persephone Perseus Phaedra Prometheus Themis Theseus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures,	Adventure Adversity Authority Gender expectations/construction

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and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Suicide Violence
Addenda	Entry based on: Sylvie Baussier, *Greek Gods & Heroes: 40 Inspiring Icons*, London: Wide Eyed Editions, 2018.

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