Robin Diver, "Entry on: The Usborne Book of Greek Myths by Petra Brown, Simona Bursi, Anna Milbourne, Louie Stowell, Elena Temporin", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1493. Entry version as of November 11, 2026.

Petra Brown , Simona Bursi , Anna Milbourne , Louie Stowell , Elena Temporin

The Usborne Book of Greek Myths

United Kingdom (2010)

TAGS: Achilles Arachne Ariadne Athena Bellerophon Chimera / Chimaera Daedalus Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Echo Eurydice Hades Helen Hera Heracles Icarus Jason Medea Midas Narcissus Odysseus / Ulysses Orpheus Pandora Paris (Trojan Prince) Patroclus Persephone Perseus Theseus Zeus



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



General information	
Title of the work	The Usborne Book of Greek Myths
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	English speaking countries
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2010
First Edition Details	Anna Milbourne and Louie Stowell, *The Usborne Book of Greek Myths*. London: Usborne, 2010, 301 pp.
ISBN	9780746089316, 9780746089316
Genre	Anthology of myths*, Fiction, Picture books
Target Audience	Children (young children)
Author of the Entry	Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il

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



Petra Brown (Illustrator)

Petra Brown (born in Luton in Bedfordshire in England in the UK) is a British children's illustrator, photographer and artist, known for her illustrations of picture books including (in English) *If Big Can… I Can* (2006) and *When the Wind Blew* (2017) and (in Welsh) *Siencyn a'r Gêm Rygbi* [Siencyn and the Game of Rugby] (2016) and *Bwch* [Buck] (2018). Her work focuses on themes of animals and family though other works she has illustrated include *The Usborne Book of Greek Myths* (2010). She lives in Snowdonia in North Wales with her partner Iain. She also works under the name of Milly Teggle.

She says about her work: "I love drawing animals with human expressions. I find it such fun creating, for example, a thoughtful fox, a happy hippo, a shy sheep, or a caring bear! The other thing I like is creating landscapes, places where my characters can run about and have adventures. Living in a magnificent place like Snowdonia helps a great deal." (see Celebratepicturebooks).

Sources:

Official illustration website (accessed: August 2, 2022).

Official website (accessed: August 2, 2022).

Celebratepicturebooks interview (accessed: August 2, 2022).

Bio prepared by Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com and Susan DeacySusan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk

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Simona Bursi (Illustrator)

Simona Bursi is a freelance illustrator. She trained in applied art and animation at the Institute of Art in Urbino, Italy. She has worked for several TV stations and for a number of publishing houses in Italy and beyond. The works she has illustrated in English include *Black Beauty*, *The Usborne Book of Greek Myths* and *Story of Pegasus*.

Source:

Milan-illustrations (accessed: August 1, 2022).

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk and Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk



Anna Milbourne , b. 1972
(Author)

Anna Milbourne (b. Northwest England) is a British children's author and editor for Usborne Books. She has wanted to be a writer ever since childhood. As a child she also enjoyed drawing, and on leaving school, she took an Art Foundation course before moving to the University of Oxford to study German Literature and Philosophy. Milbourne has written over sixty picture books, dealing with subjects from Maths to Geography to animals to mythology. Her publications include: *Tadpoles and Frogs*, *Under the Sea*, *The Snowy Day*, *Stories from India* and *The Usborne Book of Greek Myths.*

Sources:

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Usborne (accessed: August 1. 2022).

Biblio (accessed: August 1, 2022)

Bio prepared by Robin Diver, University of Birmingham, robin.diver@hotmail.com and Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton, s.deacy@roehampton.ac.uk



Louie Stowell , b. 1978
(Author)

Louie Stowell is a children's author specialising in non-fiction and in retellings of myths. She draws comics and has published work on how to make comics. Louie Stowell is an in-house writer for Usborne Publishing and Editorial Director for Ladybird. She also writes interactive fiction for Fiction Express. Under the Usborne banner, Louie has written numerous activity books, story books, non-fiction texts and creative writing guides for children of all ages. Born and raised in London, Louie studied English Literature at Exeter College Oxford, and now runs story-writing and comic-making workshops at schools and literary festivals. She draws upon ancient myths and fairytales in her writing, and is the author of the webcomic, *Deus Ex Suburbia,* which is about gods living in the suburbs. Her debut literary series, *The Dragon in the Library*, is due to be published in 2018 by Nosy Crow Publishing. She has a forthcoming second series, with the same publisher, due to be published in 2019.

Sources:

Profile at the johnsonandalcock.co.uk (accessed: Sepember 28, 2018)

Profile at the greenhouseliterary.com (accessed: September 28, 2018)

Webcomic at the godsnextdoor.wordpress.com (accessed: September

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28, 2018)

Bio prepared by Sonya Nevin, University of Roehampton, sonya.nevin@roehampton.ac.uk and Kylie Constantine, University of New England, kconstan@myune.edu.au



Elena Temporin , b. 1970 (Illustrator)

Elena Temporin is an Italian illustrator. She was born in Alessandria and lives and works in Milan where she also studied at the European Institute of Design. She has been an illustrator since 1993, mainly of children's books, and mostly for Usborne Publishing. Her titles include *Snowy Day*, *Stories from Shakespeare* and The *Usborne Book of Greek Myths*.

Source:

Lionhudson (accessed: August 1, 2022).

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

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Additional information

Summary

This is a collection of a large number of the best-known Greek myths with a mixture of bright, colourful illustrations and smaller line drawings with faint colouration in panels to the side. The latter include short paragraphs giving additional information about the characters depicted. The book ends with a section of more overtly educational material; a guide to the Greek myths, a character guide, maps, a glossary, index and a guide to Greek and Roman names,

Featured Stories:

- The Birth of the Gods (Uranus, Cronus, Zeus),
- Pandora's Box,
- How the Seasons Came to Be (Persephone and Hades),
- The Chariot of the Sun (Phaethon),
- Perseus and the Snake-Haired Monster,
- Echo and Narcissus,
- How Spiders Came to Be (Arachne),
- Heracles, the Strongest Man in the World (with sub-chapter for each of his labours),
- The Minotaur and the Labyrinth,
- Daphne, the Girl who Turned into a Tree,
- Jason and the Golden Fleece,
- Icarus, the Boy who Flew Too High,
- Atalanta and the Golden Apples,
- The Midas Touch,
- King Midas's Secret (Midas and his Asses's Ears),
- Orpheus's Journey into the Underworld,
- Bellerophon and the Flying Horse,
- Eros and Psyche,
- The Life of Achilles,
- The Giant Wooden Horse,
- The Adventures of Odysseus (with sub-chapters for different adventures).

Analysis

This anthology presents a range of characters from Greek mythology in ambiguous ways, sometimes sympathetically, sometimes not. For example, in the Persephone and Hades retelling, a mysterious character abducts Persephone, and we follow Demeter in her grief for

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a while, not knowing what has happened to Persephone. Demeter is therefore for a while the obvious character of identification, but when she finally confronts Zeus, he challenges her with the fact she is an overprotective mother who would never have allowed Persephone to marry anyone. Demeter agrees with this assessment and says that no one is good enough for Persephone. At this point, she is implicitly depicted as unsympathetic.

When Hermes goes down to get Persephone, Persephone at first appears sad and says she misses Demeter and finds the underworld depressing. Over this, Hades keeps protesting that he loves her. Persephone then indicates that she does care for Hades and does not want to hurt him by leaving. Hades insists to her Demeter will never let them be together, and Persephone is upset by this. When it is proposed that Persephone should split her time between Demeter and Hades, both Hades and Persephone are overjoyed. This is therefore one of the large body of recent receptions that partially blames Demeter for the situation by making her an overprotective mother who does not really have her daughter's best interests at heart. *

Meanwhile, as in other recent versions, Echo is obnoxiously chattering and annoys everyone with her constant talk.** Echo's punishment from Hera in these is due to her being annoying. This is opposed to the Ovid version and many earlier children's anthologies (e.g. Buckley's 1908 *Children of the Dawn*), where Echo and her speech are genuinely charming. Thus more recent children's anthologies promote a particular sense of irritation with female speech, particularly what is seen to be frivolous or excessive, in a way not found in earlier versions.

The present anthology dedicates a large section to Heracles, who also appears on the front cover. The ease of Heracles' labours for him is emphasised to show his prowess, compared to for example Coats' 2002 *Atticus the Storyteller's 100 Greek Myths* where they are presented as genuinely incredible challenges for Heracles. In this version, however, Eurystheus struggles to come up with difficult tasks for Heracles, and Heracles goes off grimly to do each one and accomplishes most easily.

In the Heracles retelling, Hera also receives a character arc. At the start, she frequently inserts herself into the tasks to try to make them harder and complains to Eurystheus that he is not making the tasks difficult enough. As Heracles completes everything, however, she

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slowly begins to respect him against her will. Finally, she agrees to Zeus' request to make Heracles a god. There is something of a theme of Heracles' relationship with children present. After initially being driven to kill his own, he is later comforted by the attentions of worshipful peasant children in the Stymphalian birds episode.

The illustrations often focus on monster scenes. The Chimera illustration is an example of text and illustration not entirely lining up. In the illustration, Bellerophon stabs the Chimera with his spear. The goat and snake heads have their eyes widened in expressions of pitiful horror that in children's literature would typically be coded as inviting reader sympathy. Neither head appears fierce or threatening. The lion head, meanwhile, is growling and raising its paws threateningly, but it is still drawn with soft lines and fuzzy fur reminiscent of a cat.

If the illustration invites sympathy for the Chimera, however, this is not hinted at in the text, in which the Chimera is a straightforward monster requiring slaying. We are told that after being stabbed, the Chimera 'looked more fearsome than ever' (p. 182). The goat head is described as very fierce and having 'sickening yellow eyes' (p. 184).

Whilst this anthology is generally fairly cheerful and light-hearted in tone, the Midas retelling has a curiously dark ending. In other children's versions, Midas accidentally turns his daughter to gold and is later able to transfer her back. Here, however, it is his wife he transforms and she is never turned back because Dionysus does not see it as his job to correct foolish mortal mistakes. Midas also has his barber killed for telling others about his asses' ears. The Midas section is therefore somewhat tonally inconsistent with the rest of the text.

The lengthy informational material, guide to the myths and who's who at the end is written in a more comedic tone compared with the narrative stories that make up most of the book. Given that Stowell is a comic writer who started her career writing nonfiction, it may be that she is behind this section whilst Milbourne wrote most of the narrative retellings.

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* E.g. McMullan's 2002 *Phone Home, Persephone!*, the webcomic *Punderworld* and the large body of Persephone and Hades romance novels and erotica.

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	** See also Kimmel's 2008 *McElderry Book of Greek Myths*; McCaughrean's 1992 *Orchard Book of Greek Myths*.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Achilles Arachne Ariadne Athena Bellerophon Chimera / Chimaera Daedalus Demeter Dionysus / Dionysos Echo Eurydice Hades Helen Hera Heracles Icarus Jason Medea Midas Narcissus Odysseus / Ulysses Orpheus Pandora Paris (Trojan Prince) Patroclus Persephone Perseus Theseus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Heroism Parents (and children) Relationships Travel Youth

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