Chloe Roberta Sadler, "Entry on: The Pirates of Pompeii (The Roman Mysteries, 3) by Caroline Lawrence", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/551. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Caroline Lawrence

The Pirates of Pompeii (The Roman Mysteries, 3)

United Kingdom (2002)

TAGS: Ancient Slavery Cerberus Dionysus / Dionysos Roman Empire





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Pirates of Pompeii (The Roman Mysteries, 3)
Country of the First Edition	United Kingdom
Country/countries of popularity	United Kingdom, USA, Spain, Italy, Finland, Slovenia, Czechia, France
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	2002
First Edition Details	Caroline Lawrence, *The Pirates of Pompeii*. London: Orion, London: Dolphin, 2001, 197 pp.
ISBN	1842550225
Awards	2009 – Lawrence won the Classical Association Prize for a significant contribution to the understanding of Classics.
Genre	Historical fiction, Novels
Target Audience	Children (9–12)
Author of the Entry	Chloe Roberta Sadler, University of Roehampton, crs.sadler@icloud.com
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Creators



Caroline Lawrence (Author)

Born in England, Lawrence grew up in the United States of America and studied Classics at Berkeley. She won a Marshall Scholarship to Cambridge and went on to study Classical art and Archaeology at Newnham College Cambridge. Lawrence studied for her MA in Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College London and went on to teach Latin, French and art at a primary school in London.

Lawrence published *The Thieves of Ostia*, the first instalment in the *Roman Mysteries Series* in 2001. Lawrence has also worked on University of Reading's educational website *Romans Revealed*, which presents stories about Roman Britain related to archaeological finds.

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Additional information

Adaptations	*Roman Myteries*, BBC United Kingdom, 2007 & 2008.
Translation	Spanish: *Los pirates de Pompeya*, trans. Raquel Vázquez Ramil, Barcelona: Salamandra, 2003, 191 pp. Italian: *I pirati di Pompei*, trans. Giancarlo Carlotti, Casale Monferrato: Piemme Junior, 2005, 154 pp. Finnish: *Pompejin merirosvot*, trans. Pekka Tuomisto, Helsinki: WSOY, 2005, 235 pp. Slovenian: *Pirati iz Pompejev*, trans. Maja Ropret, Ljubljana: Grlica, 2007, 184 pp. Czech: *Piráti z Pompejí : záhady ze starověkého Říma*, trans. Hana Petráková, Praha: Albatros, 2008, 182 pp. French: *Les pirates de Pompéi*, trans. Amélie Sarn, Toulouse: Milan poche junior, 2011, 224 pp.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Prequels: • *The Thieves of Ostia* • *The Secrets of Vesuvius* Sequels: • *The Assassins of Rome* • *The Dolphins of Laurentum* • *The Twelve Tasks of Flavia Gemina* • *The Enemies of Jupiter* • *The Gladiators from Capua* • *The Colossus of Rhodes* • *The Fugitive from Corinth* • *The Sirens of Surrentum* • *The Charioteer of Delphi* • *The Slave-girl from Jerusalem*

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- *The Beggar of Volubilis*
- *The Scribes from Alexandria*
- *The Prophet from Ephesus*
- *The Man from Pomegranate Street*

Mini-Mysteries:

- *Bread and Circuses*
- *Trimalchio's Feast and other mini mysteries*
- *The Legionary from Londinium and other mini-mysteries*

Companion Books:

- *The First Roman Mysteries Quiz Book*
- *The Second Roman Mysteries Quiz Book*
- *The Roman Mysteries Treasury*
- *From Ostia to Alexandria with Flavia Gemina: Travels with Flavia Gemina*

Summary

After the events of *The Secrets of Vesuvius*, and the eruption of the volcano, the children are staying in a refugee camp. Jonathan, one of the main characters of the series – a Jewish child who is part of the new Christian faith – is in a coma from his asthma and his father is treating the sick and injured in the spa to which the camp is adjacent. Soon the children discover that children are being stolen from the refugee camp. They discover that it is probably the man known as the Spider of Patron. After some time the Roman Emperor comes to visit the camp and one of his important advisers is Felix, who is also called Patron. Felix has a villa nearby and is very wealthy. The children contrive to be invited to his villa to find out if he is indeed the Spider.

Whilst at the villa, the children become divided and Flavia starts to treat Nubia the same way as Felix's daughter treats her slave, being rude and impatient. Felix's daughter beats Nubia and breaks her special flute so Nubia runs away. Whilst trying to find her, the children including Felix's daughter are captured to be sold as slaves. Lupus manages to escape and go for help but Jonathan, Flavia and Felix's daughter all receive beatings. With the help of Nubia and Lupus the children manage to escape their captors along with the other children who have been stolen. It is revealed that though Felix is a very important person, he is not behind the kidnappings and is in

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fact a good man. At the end of the novel, Flavia frees Nubia but asks her to remain part of her family.

Analysis

The third instalment of Lawrence's series, *The Roman Mysteries*, provides the same treasure trove of ancient factoids and trivia that the previous two books do. However, *The Pirates of Pompeii* takes a more moralistic tone than the previous books in the series.

Through the chaos after the eruption of Vesuvius many slaves run away, including, briefly, Nubia, Flavia's slave. The book details what might happen to slaves when they were caught as well as providing an image of the slaves as people who just want to live their own lives. This may serve as a good talking point for the intended audience of the series, about freedom and the lack of it, both in relation to ancient notions of slavery and freedom as well as a possible launching point for discussions on the development of notions of freedom and what it means to be free or a slave today

During the course of the narrative, Flavia, Jonathan and the daughter of Felix, are subjected to whipping. This role reversal is compounded by the pirates who say that the slaves are people too. This is somewhat incongruous with the figure of the pirate who is about to sell all the children and runaway slaves (whom he has tricked into thinking he is taking to a new life) back to slave traders. However, it serves to clearly introduce the moral issue that Lawrence is putting forward for her readers. There is a clear sense that Lawrence wants her readers to think about the rights and wrongs of slave ownership in a historical context.

There is a fairly heavy focus on the character of Felix whose actions are at times questionable and who divides the central characters as they all have different feelings about him. Most notably Lupus views him as a father figure, inspiring a kind of blind loyalty. Felix serves two purposes in the narrative, to cause friction amongst the central characters but also to introduce some of the less favourable aspects of the ancient world, for example, the treatment of people and low social status or the violence used to enact punishment.

The book ends with Flavia freeing Nubia by inviting her to sit at the table. Whilst the tone of the scene perhaps smacks of wishful thinking, it sets a clear moral code for the young readers of the series. Whilst it

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	may be more interesting to consider Flavia as a good person that the reader likes or even identifies with, in light of her keeping of slaves, it is clear that Lawrence is interested in imparting some moral compass along to her readers. And since this scene happens at the end of this book, there is plenty of opportunity to open discussions on the matter whilst things are more complicated despite Lawrence's heavy-handed guidance of her readers. Such an interest in imparting a moral code to her readers may be connected with the way in which Lawrence seems to champion Christian morals both in this book and throughout the *Roman Mysteries* Series.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Ancient Slavery Cerberus Dionysus / Dionysos Roman Empire
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Boys Child, children Child's view Christianity Family Friendship Girls Orphans Social class

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