Robin Diver, "Entry on: One Minute Greek Myths by Caroline S. Ewing , Shari Lewis ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/672. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Caroline S. Ewing , Shari Lewis

One Minute Greek Myths

USA (1987)

TAGS: Arachne Ariadne Daedalus Echo Hercules Icarus Jason Juno Jupiter Medea Medusa Midas Minerva Narcissus Oedipus Perseus Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Theseus





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

General information	
Title of the work	One Minute Greek Myths
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	English speaking countries
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1987
First Edition Details	Shari Lewis, *One Minute Greek Myth.* Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1987, 48 pp.
ISBN	0385234236
Genre	Fiction, Illustrated works, Picture books
Target Audience	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 Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Creators



Caroline S. Ewing (Illustrator)

Caroline S. Ewing is a photographer and illustrator of children's books, magazines and textbooks. She studied at the Art Institute, Kansas City, Missouri. (Source: Back cover to this book.) Her work deals with religion (*Festival of Freedom: The Story of Passover, Festival of Esther: The Story of Purim, Seasons in God's World, Parables for Kids*), Christmas (*Jingle Bells: A Holiday Book with Lights and Music* and *Nutcracker Activity Sticker Book*) and history (*Girls from America's Past*). She has also collaborated with Lewis on *One-Minute Bible Stories.*

Source:

Profile at oz.fandom.com, accessed: January 10, 2019.

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

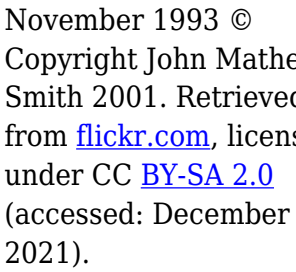


Shari Lewis from

Shari Lewis , 1933 - 1998 (Author)

Shari Lewis (b. New York 1933 as Phyllis Hurwitz) was a Jewish-American ventriloquist, puppeteer, symphony conductor, television host and children's book author. She studied drama at Columbia University. Prior to this, she attended New York's High School of Music and Art and the American School of Ballet. Lewis was the recipient of five Emmy Awards, as well as the Kennedy Center Award for Excellence and Creativity in the Arts and seven Parents' Choice

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awards.

Her shows include *Kartoon Klub/Shari and Her Friends/Shariland* (which underwent multiple name changes), *Hi Mom, The Shari Lewis Show, The Shari Show, Lamb Chop's Play-Along* and *The Charlie Horse Music Pizza. The Washington Post* paraphrases her as saying that 'when music education has been cut by more than a third of elementary schools nationwide, children needed more exposure to basic concepts such as notes, pitch, harmony, composing and rhythm' and that her content aimed to provide this.

Lewis performed as a child with her professional magician father. After a divorce from her first husband, she later married publisher Jeremy Tarcher, with whom she had one daughter, Mallory. Mallory was a writer and producer on Lewis' shows (see here, accessed: January 9, 2019.) Lewis also wrote over sixty books, the majority of them for children. These included *One-Minute Bible Stories – Old Testament, One-Minute Bible Stories – New Testament, One-Minute Bedtime Stories* and *One-Minute Favorite Fairy Tales* (see here, accessed: January 9 2019.)

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Additional information

Summary

This is a picture book anthology for young readers which presents key figures from classical mythology. The introduction implies the stories are meant to be read aloud to children by parents. The tone and word choice are fun, light and simple. Modern slang and pop cultural references are used to make the stories more relatable to the audience. Every chapter has one to four brightly coloured illustrations. Most chapters are two pages long, with the idea presumably being that each can be read in one minute.

- To the Parents – Note on how to read this book to children.
- How It All Began – Chaos, Titans and the creation of humans and animals.
- Mount Olympus – Jupiter's defeat of Saturn.
- Pandora's Box.
- The Flood.
- Apollo – Apollo's contest with Marsyas.
- The Midas Touch.
- Proserpina.
- Echo – Juno's punishment of Echo.
- Narcissus.
- Arachne.
- Medusa and Perseus.
- Atlas and Perseus.
- Perseus and Andromeda.
- Jason and the Golden Fleece.
- Oedipus.
- Theseus and the Minotaur.
- Daedalus and Icarus.
- Hercules– His early life.
- The Twelve Labors.
- The End of Hercules – Omphale, Deianira and Hercules' death.
- About the Author.

Analysis

Lewis' anthology has a degree of similarity to William Russell's, *Classic Myths to Read Aloud* (1989) of two years later. Both are featured in Brazouski and Klatt's (1994) brief summary of the 1980s (p. 11), suggesting that both were popular and successful at this time. Like Russell, Lewis begins with a 'To the Parents' note in which she

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discusses the educational qualities of myth and how best to present these stories to children. Her approach, however, is somewhat different. Unlike Russell, she quickly disavows herself of any academic expertise in a manner reminiscent of Hawthorne's anthologies – 'My relationship to Greek mythology is simply and delightedly on the level of "the story." I am trained neither as anthropologist, psychologist, or even as a thinker of any great depth.' (p. 6). She asks parents not to overly emphasise the grandeur and classic status of the myths to children. Instead, they should 'present these stories as the weird and wonderful tales that they are, and your youngsters won't feel burdened to "learn" from them.' (p. 6).

In contrast, Russell is keen to emphasise myths as 'time honored masterpieces to which the label 'classic' can be properly applied' (p.1). Russell also disapproves of '"up-to-date" retellings' of his own time 'that have deities speaking in "hip" lingo, as though that were the only way to maintain a child's interest' (p. 5). Lewis' anthology would probably qualify as one of these retellings. She makes use of colloquial slang (e.g. 'that is supposed to be how mankind got off to a rocky new start' in reference to Deucalion's stone people, p.15), anticipating the greater trend for colloquial and 'cool' versions of myth later seen in such twenty-first century authors as Rick Riordan, Kate McMullan, John Harris and Michael Townsend. Yet her introduction situates her anthology clearly within late twentieth century anxieties about classics and the 'crisis in education' more explicitly referenced by Russell.

Lewis establishes that she considers mythology didactic, citing 'hidden' lessons in the stories of Midas, Narcissus and Arachne about not being greedy, vain or boastful. The fact that these are not necessarily present in the same form in ancient versions and are to varying degrees a construction of modern children's retellings is not mentioned. Like Russell, Lewis also suggests that mythology is important for the stimulation of a child's imagination, apparently a matter of great concern in the late 1980s. Both Lewis and Russell also cite other authors in support of the arguments about education they themselves are making – in Lewis' case she references Houston's *Sacred Psychology*. Lewis shares Russell's preoccupation with learning the origins of classical words and phrases (e.g. 'cleaning out the Augean stables'), but whilst he frames such an understanding of language as important for cultural literacy, Lewis merely considers such discovery 'fun' (p. 6).

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Lewis justifies her use of Roman names on the basis that 'the Greek gods are most commonly known by their Roman names'; like Russell she provides a table of Greek/Roman names. The trend of using Roman names would fall out of fashion shortly afterwards – after 1993 almost all anthologies use Greek names. Modern day Amazon and Goodreads reviews of Lewis' anthology criticise her for her use of Roman deity names, as they do for most other older anthologies that use Roman names. (These reviewers often seem unaware of the fact that most source material for these anthologies is drawn from Ovid rather than a Greek source.)

The overall tone of this anthology is fun and light-hearted, with frequent use of slang and colloquial phrasing. The word choice seems to be attempting to minimise potentially disturbing elements, e.g. Pluto was 'god of the underworld, where people went after they stopped living' (p. 20). 'Stopped living' may have been chosen as a more child friendly alternative to 'died'. The anthology seems pitched to young children – it is short, with non-threatening illustrations. It sometimes reminds the reader of things just stated, e.g. Perseus 'pulled out Medusa's head, which, as you may remember, he was carrying in his sack' (pp. 30–31). This might reflect a need to cater to very young children with short memories.

The Prometheus story is somewhat philosophical, describing 'man' as different from animals because he can see the stars due to not being on four legs. Prometheus' punishment of being torn at by the eagle is not included in the story. The potential misogyny of the Pandora story is slightly toned down in that it is not clear that she is the first woman.

Jupiter's blameworthiness in the story of Proserpina is ambiguous. He recommends her as a bride to Pluto, but says Pluto must 'get her to go with you' (p.20). Whether this means Pluto is supposed to get her *consent* is somewhat unclear. Pluto, in any case, 'didn't bother asking' and just abducts her. Pluto in the illustrations is a menacing black clad soldier figure, whilst Proserpina has the same flowing blonde hair and white dress she usually does in children's books. Less typically, she also displays muscular arms.

Like Russell, Lewis does not include the ending to Ariadne's story where she is abandoned by Theseus. This would change in later versions – e.g. McCaughrean 1992 and Coats 2002 both end with Ariadne and Theseus separated.

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The Echo and Narcissus stories are told separately in this anthology, and the two characters never encounter one another. As in Kupfer (1897), Jupiter's need to hide from Juno is justified as Juno being irrationally jealous of him spending time with other women. Jupiter is therefore not shown to be unfaithful. However, there is perhaps still a hint of Ovid's version – Jupiter is 'playing games with the water nymphs', a phrase which holds a hint of suggestiveness. This is, again, similar to Russell's 1989 anthology, where Jupiter is also described as playing with the nymphs, and Juno is jealous of their beauty.

The Narcissus retelling avoids the implication in other versions (e.g. Alexander 2011) that Narcissus is bad because he sexually rejects women. Instead, Narcissus in Lewis mocks women who fall in love with him – 'he made fun of her or acted as though she didn't exist.' This avoids the issue in Alexander of implying that rejecting someone's advances is in itself cruel behaviour. The gender of the rejected suitor who curses Narcissus is changed from male to female, but whether Narcissus reads his own reflection as male or female when he falls in love with it is unclear.

Three double page chapters at the end of the anthology are dedicated to Hercules, who's portrayal as a character is rather mixed. The first illustration of the first chapter, in which he strangles snakes as an infant, seems to undercut the essential violence of the scene. Hercules lightly squeezes two snakes, who wear dismayed expressions and appear more 'cute' than dangerous. There is a baby's dummy beneath Hercules' cot, modernising the setting. The nursery frieze in the background shows mythological scenes as they might be depicted for a baby, e.g. capering centaurs and friendly looking griffins. Later, however, Hercules becomes curiously vicious; for example he cuts off the nose and ears of tax collectors without explanation. After this and fighting a king, 'for some strange reason, he became such a hero he was given … prizes'. In this sentence, Lewis seems to express a disapproval of Hercules and to mock his celebrity cult in a manner reminiscent of the later 1997 Disney film. The attention excites Hercules to the point he accidentally knocks a statue onto nearby children. This is the second illustration of the first chapter. The two children appear very young, holding bundles of flowers and staring wide eyed and open mouthed at the falling statue of a goddess. A third child darts out of the way to the left, whilst some adults flee to the right. Hercules has his back to them, a hand to his chest, eyes closed and appears to be singing. The bright colours of the illustration again seem to undercut the darkness of the scene. This accidental murder is

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	why Hercules must undergo his labours in Lewis.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Arachne Ariadne Daedalus Echo Hercules Icarus Jason Juno Jupiter Medea Medusa Midas Minerva Narcissus Oedipus Perseus Pluto / Plouton Proserpina Theseus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Heroism Humour Journeys Learning Parents (and children) Travel
Further Reading	Adler, E., *Classics, the Culture Wars, and Beyond*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. Brazouski, A. and Klatt, M. J., *Children's Books on Ancient Greek and Roman Mythology: An Annotated Bibliography,* Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994. (Bibliographies and Indexes in World Literature, v. 40). Murnaghan, Sheila and Roberts, Deborah, *Childhood and the Classics: Britain and America, 1850–1965,* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.

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