Robin Diver, "Entry on: Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths by Bernard Evslin, William Hofmann ", peer-reviewed by Susan Deacy and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/818. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Bernard Evslin , William Hofmann

Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths

United States (1967)

TAGS: Apollo Ariadne Atalanta Daedalus Echo Hades Hera Icarus Medusa Meleager Minos Narcissus Persephone Perseus Phaethon Prometheus Psyche Theseus Zeus





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

General information	
Title of the work	Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths
Country of the First Edition	United States of America
Country/countries of popularity	United States
Original Language	English
First Edition Date	1967
First Edition Details	Bernard Evslin, *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths*. New York: Random House Children's Books, 1967, 230 pp.
ISBN	9780553259209
Genre	Adaptations, Fiction, Myths
Target Audience	Children
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Creators



Bernard Evslin , 1922 - 1993
(Author)

North American author, playwright, screenwriter who is best known for adapting Greek mythology. He studied at Rutgers University and won many awards for his works. Evslin published more than seventy books and over thirty of which were for young adults. His book *Hercules* won the Washington Irving Children's Book Choice Award of the Westchester Library Association (from the NY times obituary). His books were widely read at schools and colleges. His most renowned books was *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths* dating 1984, which was translated into numerous languages and sold over ten millions copies worldwide. Bernard was married to the author and teacher Dorothy (the two had four children), who co-written with him (among other books) *The Greek Gods* and *Heroes and Monsters of Greek Myth*.

Sources:

Obituary at the nytimes.com (accessed: July 3, 2018).

Profile at the goodreads.com (accessed: July 3, 2018).

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William Hofmann

William Hofmann was an American artist and illustrator who illustrated a large number of 1950s and 60s works. In particular, Hofmann is behind many dust jacket illustrations.

Sources:

Back cover of the book and wikipedia.org (accessed: April 25, 2019).

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Additional information

Summary

This is an anthology book for children which presents the key figures and stories from classical mythology. The retellings are adapted only loosely from their ancient sources, much more loosely than other children's anthologies of a similar time (e.g. Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire, *D'Aulaires Book of Greek Myths*, 1962; James Reeves, *Heroes and Monsters: Legends of Ancient Greece*, 1969). The chapters are lightly illustrated, with most chapter titles accompanied by a line drawing, but no illustrations within the body of the text. The first part introduces the gods and the best-known stories about them. The second part, "Nature Myths", deals with stories loosely connected to some part of the natural world. Part three, "Demigods", gives much longer stories about Greek heroes. "Fables" gives long retellings of the Midas and Pygmalion stories. A section at the end looks at the impact of mythology on the English language.

- Introduction.

The Gods – Introduces the Olympian deities and some key stories about them.

- Zeus.
- Hera.
- Athene.
- Poseidon.
- Hades.
- Demeter.
- Birth of the Twins.
- Artemis.
- Apollo.
- Sons of Apollo.
- Hermes.
- Hephaestus.
- Aphrodite.

Nature Myths – Short stories with some ostensible link to nature.

- Prometheus.
- Pandora.
- Phaethon.
- Orpheus.
- Narcissus and Echo.

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- Eros and Psyche.
- Arion.

Demigods – Longer hero stories with more characterisation.

- Perseus.
- Daedalus.
- Theseus.
- Atalanta.

Fables

- Midas.
- Pygmalion.
- Mythology Becomes Language.
- Recommended Reading.

Analysis

This book appears to be compiled from two smaller works that Evslin wrote, *The Greek Gods* (1966) and *Heroes and Monsters of Greek Myth* (1967). Searches for Evslin's book in the modern day, however, overwhelmingly bring up this combined edition. Both earlier books are credited not only to Evslin as author but also to his wife Dorothy and to Ned Hoopes. Every combined edition I have been able to find, however, lists only Bernard Evslin as the author. In my 2017 edition, there is a dedication from Bernard to Dorothy, positioning her as a muse rather than a co-author.

Myth is adapted loosely in this anthology, and many of the retellings take a more literary tone than do other anthologies, focusing on character development and motivation. For example, Atalanta and Meleager have a romantic relationship to which his family is opposed, and loyalty to the memory of Meleager is why Atalanta does not want to get married after reuniting with her own father. Daedalus falls in love with Pasiphae. Theseus fights the Minotaur in front of an audience of viewers.

The amount of literary innovation in this anthology was apparently displeasing to some. In their 1994 guide to children's myth anthologies, Brazouski and Klatt were critical of Evslin's works, claiming of his *Monsters of Mythology* (1987), "Using (often abusing is the better word) the characters of classical mythology, Evslin creates

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new myths and rewrites existing ones." (p. 51). They add that "Students who take a classical mythology course after reading this set of books are bound to be confused." (p. 51).

In its innovation of ancient mythical narratives, its portrayal of Zeus as foolish and its desire to assign the daughters of Kronos a greater share of the power than they receive in ancient myth, this anthology is reminiscent of Robert Graves' 1960 children's anthology of seven years prior. These two stick out among mid-twentieth century children's anthologies, which more typically keep closely to ancient sources (e.g. Edith Hamilton, *Mythology,* 1942; Olivia Coolidge, *Greek Myths,* 1949; Rex Warner, *Men and Gods,* 1950; James Reeves, *Heroes and Monsters of Greek Myth*, 1969), portray Zeus as generally wise (e.g. the Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire 1962) and are content with the sons of Kronos as the holders of power and the daughters as wives and assistants (e.g. Edith Hamilton 1942; Ingri and Edgar D'Aulaire 1962). Graves and Evslin were, however, predictors of future trends. Anthologies of the twenty-first century typically adapt ancient material loosely, depict Zeus as foolish or comic and sometimes display discomfort with the lack of power assigned to goddesses. Whilst Graves dealt with the latter by asserting Hera did all the real work for her lazy husband, and recent anthologies such as Joan Vinge, *The Random House Book of Greek Myths* (1999) and Donna Jo Napoli, *Treasury of Greek Mythology* (2011) outright say that the lack of power assigned Zeus' sisters is unfair, Evslin merely has the daughters of Kronos be given the earth to rule over.

In places, Evslin's anthology is curiously sexual. For example, he preserves much of the erotic overtones in Ovid's description of Persephone's childish play right before she is abducted by Hades. This would not be obvious to a child, but would be apparent to an adult reading these stories to their children. Persephone displays an ambivalence to sexuality suggestive of a young teen – the plant she pulls up that causes Hades to appear is described in highly sexualised terms and she is not sure whether she likes it or not. ("It was a very strange bush, with thick, green, glossy leaves and hung with large red berries that trembled on their stems like drops of blood. She stared at the bush. She didn't know whether she liked it or not." (p. 23)).

Later, Persephone grows to desire Hades. ("Secretly, though, so secretly that she didn't even tell it to herself, she was rather enjoying the change…she admired the lofty set of his black-robed figure, the majestic shoulders, the great impatient hands, and his gloomy black

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eyes." (p. 27)). The sexualisation of her desires here is notable – in other children's versions that have Persephone grow fond of Hades (e.g. Geraldine McCaughrean, *The Orchard Book of Greek Myths,* 1992; A. Brack, M. Sweeney and B. Thomas, *Brick Greek Myths,* 2014), their connection is based on companionship or romantic, not sexual desire. In terms of Persephone's broader characterisation, Evslin paints her in the twentieth century image of the spoilt child and the demanding wife. ("But she made herself very difficult to please. She tossed her head, stamped her foot, and turned from him. She would not speak to him and said she would never forgive him. She said…that she hated him and always would. As she launched these tirades at him, he would stand and listen and frown and keep listening until she flounced away. Then he would go and get her another gift…Secretly she gloated upon her power over this most fearsome monarch." (p. 27)).

Whilst many children's anthologies idealise parent-child relationships, Evslin often adds hints of parental callousness or cruelty not present in ancient versions. For example, in Evslin, Phaethon almost dies trying to find Apollo and when asked by a servant if he will mind if this happens and would like Phaethon to be saved, Apollo says he is uncertain whether he will care if Phaethon dies. Whilst in Ovid, Apollo is grieved when Phaethon asks to drive his chariot, in Evslin he is angry at the request and shows little concern for Phaethon himself. Likewise, Midas in Evslin appears to view turning his daughter into gold as a minor inconvenience, telling her statue-self he will think on how to fix this when he is finished turning other things to gold. ("This is unfortunate. I'm sorry it happened. I have no time to be sad this morning. I shall be busy turning things into gold. But, when I have a moment, I shall think about this problem; I promise." (p. 205)). In most other children's anthologies, Midas is devastated when he realises he has turned his daughter to gold and this represents the turning point in his desires.

There is a typically 1960s framing of sexual interest in men as the defining feature of adult womanhood. For example, Acrisius knows his daughter Danae "is ready for a husband" because she has started to exhibit teenage behaviour; "Her eyes fog over when I speak to her" (p. 115). The Grey sisters, when speaking to Perseus, fight over their single eye and tooth specifically because they want to look at and smile at their visitor only once they realise he is a man. This is presented as the default female response to men.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Apollo Ariadne Atalanta Daedalus Echo Hades Hera Icarus Medusa Meleager Minos Narcissus Persephone Perseus Phaethon Prometheus Psyche Theseus Zeus
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Desires Family Heroism Journeys Love Violence

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