Michael Stierstorfer, "Entry on: The Heart of the Harpy [Das Herz der Harpyie] by Rebekka Pax", peer-reviewed by Markus Janka and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/863. Entry version as of November 14, 2026.

Rebekka Pax

The Heart of the Harpy [Das Herz der Harpyie]

Germany (2015)

TAGS: Aello Ares Harpies Olympus Thanatos Underworld





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Heart of the Harpy [Das Herz der Harpyie]
Country of the First Edition	Germany
Country/countries of popularity	Germany
Original Language	German
First Edition Date	2015
First Edition Details	Rebekka Pax, *Das Herz der Harpyie* (The Heart of the Harpy). Hamburg: Carlsen, 2015, 394 pp.
ISBN	9783551313621
Genre	Fantasy fiction, Novels, Romance fiction
Target Audience	Young adults
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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



Rebekka Pax , b. 1978
(Author)

Rebekka Veronika Pax was born in Mühlheim, Germany in 1978. She studied Scandinavian languages and literature, classical archaeology and Runic writing at the Ruhr-Universität Bochum in Bochum (Germany). For several years she worked as a script-writer in the US and in Germany. She currently lives again in the city of Mühlheim, on the river Ruhr. Using her pseudonyms Rebecca Maly and Erin Hamilton she has already published eight dark fantasy novels dealing with demons and vampires. *The Heart of the Harpy* is her first novel for young readers and one of six she wrote under her own name. She now focuses on writing romance fantasy.

Bio prepared by Michael Stierstorfer, University of Regensburg, Michael.stierstorfer@ur.de

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Additional information

Summary

The teenage girl Milena Weyergräber suffers every night from nightmares, in which she transforms into a harpy and guides the souls of the dead into the Underworld. One night, she watches a young man John Ossin dying. He is killed by a Mafia clan called Tsirpas. Although he is already dead, Milena manages to save his soul and bring him back to life. So the supervisor harpy Aello, who has big black wings, punishes her, because Milena has frustrated the rules of the Olympians. The gods do not want harpies to bring anybody back to life. Therefore she is cursed. Consequently she transforms herself step by step into a harpy in real life even during daytime. Every time she meets John, she tries to kill him, because the monster in her comes to the surface. By eliminating John Milena would restore the world's balance, but she doesn't want to do that at all. This refusal to follow the rules of the gods brings her pain, because she falls in love with John. Later she learns to control the harpy inside her and even helps John defeat the criminal Tsirpas-clan, which stems from Ares, the god of war. At the end, John turns out to be the son of Thanatos, the god of death. For that reason he was able to come back to life after Milena had saved his soul. The gods, who are not omniscient in this novel, are informed about that by Milena. As the plans of the gods were not frustrated at all, the teenagers in love are able to be together.

Analysis

Greek mythology is mixed with Christian and Nordic motifs in this novel. The harpy is a guardian angel, who has to guide the souls securely into the underworld according to the rules of the Olympians. With the transformation into a harpy, the phaenomenon of first teenage love is depicted metaphorically. Also the change of Milena's body during puberty is represented as a metamorphosis into a monster. In the novel, Milena is a low ranking harpy striving to become an independent individual and deviating from the will of the gods and from the authority of stronger and elder harpies like Aello. This is an original and mythologically inspired treatment of the theme of growing up of teenage girls who separate from their parents and leave home. In ancient mythology, harpies have no hierarchy and they never resist the will of their masters, the gods. The transformation into a harpy is described and compared to the transformation into a werewolf. Thus the metamorphosis into a harpy becomes more familiar for well-informed fantasy fans, who know werewolves but no

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harpies. The harpy Milena is described as a mythical creature with wings of a raven. In Greek mythology, harpies had impenetrable magical wings but they were not made from raven feathers. Yet, in the Middle Ages and in the Nordic mythology, the raven was considered a messenger of death, as it was often seen near battlefields. It was the traditional bird companion of the Nordic god Odin, the powerful godfather and god of death. This connection of ravens to death is also highlighted in the plot. In the book, there is no mention of mythical background. Consequently, the young readers might think that harpies are guardian angels instead of mythical daughters of the goddess of storm.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Aello Ares Harpies Olympus Thanatos Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adolescence Coming of age Death Love Relationships

Further Reading

Janka, Markus and Michael Stierstorfer, eds., *Verjüngte Antike. Griechisch-römische Mythologie und Historie in zeitgenössischen Kinder- und Jugendmedien*, Heidelberg: Winter, 2017.

Stierstorfer, Michael, *Antike Mythologie in der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur der Gegenwart. Unsterbliche Götter- und Heldengeschichten?* [Ancient Mythology in Contemporary Children's Literature. Immortal Stories of Gods and Heroes?], Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2017, 160 pp.

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