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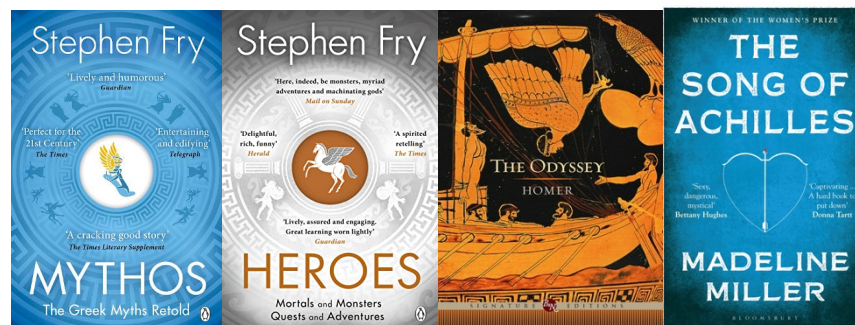
Finding a Good Read: Greek Mythology

A regular column to help you find a good read even if you can't get to the library yet!

Note to readers: Your library may not have all these titles or even any of them, but it's sure to have some of the authors and subjects touched on. So if you like the sound of any of the books mentioned, just include 'or any other books by / about ...' on your request app.

The Greek myths are some of the greatest stories ever told and they still inspire writers and artists today. There has been a surge of new fiction based on Greek mythology over the last few years, which has produced some fantastic reads.

If the subject of Greek mythology sounds intriguing but a bit intimidating then start with Stephen Fry's **Mythos** and **Heroes**, which will take you on a whistle-stop tour of the weird and wonderful characters and their stories, told with Fry's characteristic wit and humour. And the retellings use comparisons with contemporary people and events to make them more accessible to modern readers. Witness Athena born from the cracking open of Zeus's great head and follow Persephone down into the dark realm of Hades. Experience the terrible and endless fate of Prometheus after his betrayal of Zeus, and shiver as Pandora opens her jar of evil torments. There's something for everyone!



Western literature is sometimes said to begin with Homer's **Iliad** and **Odyssey**, epic poems about the ten-year siege of Troy (in modern Turkey) and the efforts of the Greek warrior Odysseus to get home to Greece at the end of it. The poems were first written down in about 750 BCE, so almost 3000 years ago, but had probably existed in spoken form for hundreds of years before then.

The Trojan War starts with the seduction by Paris of Helen, wife of King Menelaus of Sparta and said to be the most beautiful woman in the world. After Paris carries her back to Troy, the Greeks are mobilised to cross the Aegean Sea and re-claim her. The war is long and bloody. Each side has its heroes, above all the Greek warrior Achilles and his Trojan counterpart Hektor.

The story of the Trojan War has been re-told by many modern writers including Stephen Fry in **Troy**. There is also Madeline Miller's **The Song of Achilles**, a riveting version told from the perspective of Achilles' best friend Patroclus. It's a gripping read that is simultaneously modern and true to its source

Natalie Haynes' ***A Thousand Ships*** retells the Trojan War from the point of view of the women involved and in ways that suggest parallels with modern attitudes to sex and gender. Pat Barker's ***The Silence of the Girls*** also re-writes the Iliad to give the women of war a voice. And it reminds us that what stories mean depends on who gets to tell them.

Women writers have also re-imagined characters and events from The Odyssey. The heroine of Madeline Miller's ***Circe*** is a sea witch who appears only briefly in Homer's poem where she is portrayed as a dangerous enchantress with the power to turn men into animals. In Miller's novel she becomes a complex figure balanced between immortality and a longing for the life and love of a mortal man. Margaret Atwood's ***The Penelopiad*** centres on Odysseus's wife Penelope. In Homer's version her role is to wait patiently for her husband to return, spending her time weaving and putting off the men who come to woo her. Atwood's heroine is altogether livelier and more irreverent.



Modern writers – both male and female – have also used other Greek myths as their starting point. Jennifer Saint's ***Ariadne*** re-works the story of Ariadne, Theseus and the minotaur, the monstrous half-human half-bull who roams an underground labyrinth in Crete, devouring young Athenians sent in sacrifice. In Stephen Sherrill's ***The Minotaur Takes a Cigarette Break***, the monster re-appears in modern America as a line cook in a North Carolina diner, working shifts and living in a trailer park.

Neil Gaiman's ***American Gods*** is a looser fantasy novel described by one critic as 'a kaleidoscopic journey deep into myth and across an American landscape at once eerily familiar and utterly alien...sexy, thrilling, dark, funny and poetic'.

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