

Gods and Heroes: The Story of Greek Mythology

Michael Foss



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The travelling storyteller combined many talents: scholar, educator, linguist, poet and musician. He showed learning, curiosity and judgement, but most of all he could not resist a good story.

True to their original telling and stripped of the sanitization of later centuries, these powerful tales make compelling reading. The traveller's tales are shaped by the landscape, character, tradition and weather of the stops along his journey: standing below the snow-streaked, cloud-capped massif of Olympus, he feels the awe and majesty of the gods. In the wilderness of Thessaly, menaced by bears and wolves, he recognises the cruel, barbarian anger of Achilles and the ferocious extravagance of Hercules. In soft Eleusis, strong wine at the day's end brings him to the Mysteries of Dionysus and the Bacchic frenzy. The Mycenaean ruins impress on him the workings of the hand of fate: the frailty of empire, the waste of the ten year's Trojan war, the horror of Agamemnon's domestic grief.

Under the illumination of the startling Greek light the storyteller interprets for his listeners the sense they have of themselves. His stories of myth and legend are the oldest speculations of the first deep-thinking people of Europe. They are also the first and longest-lasting entertainments of the European imagination.

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