

The Helmet of Horror - The Myth of Theseus and the
Minotaur by Victor Pelevin.

Lion's Honey - The Myth of Samson by David Grossman.
Canongate 2006.

These two books represent volumes three and four in Canongate's new take on ancient myths series, given a superb start by Margaret Atwood and Jeanette Winterson.

It is therefore disappointing to report that the third, The Helmet of Horror, is something of a blip. Pelevin takes the concept of the labyrinth and creatively sets it, well, precisely where he sets it is unclear. It could be inside Theseus' head or it could be in an internet chat room. Either way the labyrinth is peopled by a strange crew of people who converse in jerky dialogue and whose intercourse is presented in play style.

Victor Pelevin's brilliance as a writer is widely known and I am therefore prepared to accept that I just didn't get his point or get on his wavelength. Nevertheless I didn't enjoy this take on Theseus and the Minotaur at all.

Lion's Honey, by the acclaimed and courageous Israeli writer David Grossman sees the series back on form with a tour de force of incredible depth and panache. Adopting a style of textual analysis that is a graceful modern take on classical rabbinic exegesis, Grossman makes the character and life of Samson come alive and poses some provocative questions about his nature and mission. Grossman is at his most insightful when he teases out the nuances of Samson's tragic demise, the first literary incidence of suicide killing, and of the relationship between the biblical judge and his worn enemies, the Philistines.

Concluding this story my fervent desire is to see David Grossman turn his attention to other biblical stories and give them the same treatment. I am sure the result would be superb.

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