

The Morning of the Gods Short Guide

The Morning of the Gods by Edward Fenton

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Overview

Carla Lewis's peaceful life in New York City with her American father and Greek mother is shattered when her mother is accidentally killed. Almost immediately, her father decides to send Carla to Greece to spend the spring and summer with her Great-Aunt Tiggie and Great-Uncle Theo in a small fishing village below Delphi. Stories that Carla had heard during her childhood about ancient Greek myths come alive as Carla gets to know this different, yet strangely familiar country. With the loving help of Tiggie and Theo, she begins to accept the loss of her mother and embrace her Greek identity. Despite the peaceful nature of the village, however she becomes aware of the difficulties brought upon by the dictatorship governing Greece. And as she feels her "Greek self" emerging, she burns to defy the Junta—her anger and fear growing side by side—and she yearns to make her own statement in defense of freedom in Greece.

From ancient myths to modern politics, Greece is brought to life for the reader through the eyes of a courageous girl who discovers her own faith in freedom.

About the Author

Edward Fenton was born in New York City on the seventh of July, 1917. He attended Amherst College in Massachusetts. He served with the American Field Service and as an ambulance driver in the British Eighth Army in North Africa during World War II. Being well traveled, he spoke at least five languages. Fenton lived mainly in Italy and Greece and was thus considered an "adopted Greek." Together with his wife, Greek psychologist Sophia Harvati, whom he married in 1963, he shared his time between Athens and Galaxidi, a town below Delphi. His writing included works for both children and adults, but his bestknown works are those for young readers, such as *The Refugee Summer*, which was nominated for the American Book Award, and *Phantom of Walkaway Hill*, which received the Mystery Writers of America Edgar Allan Poe Award in 1963. In addition to books about Italy and Greece, he has translated three of Alki Zei's Greek children's books, all of which received the Mildred L. Batchelder Award, an award for outstanding translated books for children. He also successfully translated books originally written in Spanish, German, Dutch, Polish, French, and Italian. Edward Fenton's poetry, short stories, and travel articles have been published in many magazines such as *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Cricket*, and *The Horn Book* as well as in other European publications.

Albeit the realism of the village setting in *The Morning of the Gods*, Edward Fenton insisted that the town was not Galaxidi and that the fictional heroes were not based upon any of his fellow villagers.

In his approach to writing stories for younger readers, Edward Fenton claimed that: "Children hunger for plot. The recognition of this desire for a story is another way of saying that they require form. . . .

They are absolutely logical and impossible to deceive. They know when the Emperor is wearing no more than his under drawers."

Setting

The setting of *The Morning of the Gods* is that of Greece during the Colonel's Dictatorship, which lasted from 1967 to 1974. The novel begins when young Greek-American Carla arrives at Athens airport, then travels by bus to a small village below the ancient site of Delphi.

Fenton's descriptions of the houses and the countryside and the setting in general are not stereotypical, but true to reality. The realistic and authentic depictions are confirmed when Carla turns to her uncle and says in a surprised tone that nothing looks like what she expected and that the house does not look like the ones in the poster in her room. It is interesting to see how the setting brings about the sense of a place that the heroine has been to before: "She had entered a new world, a world that seemed more than seven hours in time from New York. And yet, from the first moment she had stepped through the green doorway of the garden, it had been as though she had walked into something she had always known." This is naturally linked to the premise of Carla's subconsciously embedded Greek identity as well as memories of her mother's "Greek" stories. The theme of identity is one of the key themes of *The Morning of the Gods*.

There is a very interesting fusion between mythology and reality in the novel.

The ancient and contemporary ideologies and settings blend and stand side by side to create the atmosphere proper of the book.

The ties between the ancient and the modern are cleverly merged by the author and highlighted from the beginning of the first chapter when Carla glimpses the "marble cake" of the Parthenon floating above the hectic traffic of the modern city. Furthermore, the specific place that she has come to visit in Greece is laden with remnants of mythology and mystery. Mount Parnassus is one of the mountains on which ancient Greek gods were believed to have dwelled.

The atmosphere of mystery, which is enhanced at Delphi with the depiction of the asphodel-covered hills and ominous Mount Parnassus, is broken suddenly with the realistic imagery of the souvenir shops, the neon hotel signs, and the tourist buses. All these elements of the setting help in preparing the reader for the importance of mythology in the plot. Furthermore, the diachronic countryside and everlasting ancient landscape are necessary in terms of plot and thus act as a type of indirect foreshadowing. The setting becomes a technique of literary style.

Greek cultural traditions and Christian Orthodox religious rituals (Easter in particular, which is the most important Christian holiday of the year) are also very clearly depicted throughout the novel. They are a further element that is significant to the creation of an authentic setting since Greece is a country that is very closely tied to its religious and cultural roots. In addition, certain of these depictions are very important in developing the character and identity of the heroine of the novel. A strong example of this is the Epitaphios on Good Friday, when a symbolic "coffin" of Christ is taken on a procession



around the church parish or village. This sequence is important in helping young Carla begin to come to terms with her mother's death. It is the first time that Carla sheds tears for her mother. The service is filled with grief and emotion, and it is usually a time when the followers are forced to consider their lives, weigh their thoughts, and think about life and death in general. It is a time of contemplation and soul-searching.

Alongside the setting Fenton includes social commentary and discussion of the inhabitants who live within this mysterious setting. The Greeks, their character and mannerisms, are described clearly by GreatUncle Theo who explains the reasons for various distinctly Greek characteristics and especially the reason for excessive gesticulation. The setting further includes stories of the inhabitants of the village. These tales set the scene and create the atmosphere that existed during the particular historical period. There are some especially comical descriptions of the villagers; one of particular note is the account of "The Inseparable Enemies" (Kyria Rinio and Kyria Katya) and their competitive attitudes towards each other.

Details of the period are also important in bringing about authenticity to the background of *The Morning of the Gods*. These details include the infamous "Greece for Christian Greeks" slogan as well as the emblem of the dictatorship (the image of the soldier holding a rifle and standing against a blazing phoenix), which appeared on posters plastered on walls throughout the whole country and used as the image on matchboxes. The emblem makes Carla shiver and thus aids in creating a sense of foreboding in the novel. These authentic details add to the political setting of the novel which is an especially fundamental element.

The political setting is brought to the surface very early in the book, beginning with commentary by Ismene, Carla's mother.

This makes the reader aware of the social and environmental differences of the country, introducing him/her to another element that is integral to the plot. All three elements in conjunction create an atmosphere and mood straight away. The setting is further crucial in the creation of Carla's Greek identity. The environment plays a vital role in the development of a person.

He or she may mature differently from someone in another place, time, and /or setting. This is highlighted through letters from Carla's New York friend, Honor, who writes letters about her school activities and how studying the Russian Revolution is more difficult than studying the French Revolution. For her, this is the most important thing at the time and it is her social environment, whilst for Carla, who is living in a completely different space, this matter is of trivial importance in comparison with her experiences.

The setting of *The Morning of the Gods* questions various important ideas and these are asked directly in the novel: "What constitutes one's country? Its government? The place itself, or is it, in the final reckoning, a state of mind?" Therefore, is the setting a geographical situation, is it a political setting, or is it the atmospheric psychological status that gives one the background on which a story may unfold?



Social Sensitivity

The death of a parent and the search for one's identity are two inseparable themes in this novel. *The Morning of the Gods* is a novel which can be clearly used for the discussion of the death of a parent and the manner in which a child can try to overcome his or her loss. This is naturally not an easy process, nor is it portrayed in this manner in the novel. It is made even more complex by the fact that the death of the heroine's parent has influenced her so negatively that she not only has to come to terms with the situation and with her loneliness, but also has to try and find her own unique character and her identity again. Upon the death of her mother she loses every sentiment, every feeling, every emotion. She feels numb and bereft; she even claims that she is no one. Thus, she slowly has to build the stepping-stones of finding her own character as well as dealing with her loss. Ultimately, through the support of her father (who sends her away to the place her mother was from), as well as her Uncle Theo and Aunt Tiggie, she is slowly helped step by step. When Carla finally goes to her mother's homeland and meets her relatives, sees places her mother would have seen and finds a chance to live her mother's kind of life—then she not only finds her identity, but finds a way in order to overcome her mother's death by living not only for her but also for herself. This novel can be read as an example of how such a loss can be overcome. As Tiggie tells Carla "the only way to erase pain is by facing it steadily."

Carla has to come to terms with her mother's death when she is faced with Ismene's past life, and it is by living her mother's past life that she finds her own singular unique personality.



Literary Qualities

Literary techniques along with the plot, setting and characters of the novel, complete the cinematic image of *The Morning of the Gods*. These techniques include those of foreshadowing and flashbacks, intertextuality, natural dialogue, repetition, metaphors, similes, personification and other clever uses of language.

Narrative is held in the third person in order to keep a distance from the characters, the plot, and the political situation, which requires objectivity in its description. One should, however, admit at this point that the novel is rather reactionary to the situation, and the political setting is not simply there as a background, but does produce political discussion amongst the adult and young characters as well as highlighting their reactions to the setting.

Greek words are scattered throughout the novel in order to enhance authenticity of the setting. However Fenton does not try to imitate the dialect, since Carla understands Greek; thus, the Greek characters speak with fluidity. Dialogue is natural, and especially in the case of Tiggie and Theo, the dialogue is so alive and surprising that it can catch the reader off guard.

Descriptions of people and the countryside itself are often accomplished through metaphors and similes. Edward Fenton brings the use of all five senses into his descriptions and thus Tiggie and Theo's garden comes alive with its bursting aromas and rustling plants. The author further employs the method of personification— giving human characteristics to things—in order to bring life to his settings and characters: "A whoosh of fragrance rushed to meet them," "Morning light hammered at the window." His "literary illustrations" are precise, every word a splash of color, every phrase a brush stroke. His description of the religious liturgy in the Orthodox Church at the Easter Resurrection is so outstandingly written and compared so successfully to the acts of a Grand Opera, that one cannot but read the literary painting that he has written with approbation.

With such descriptions, and such a use of language, it is no surprise that poetic language and phrases with hidden meanings are included throughout the novel.

The importance of reading between the lines of the book is highlighted in the plot by the poet Angelos Iliou when he speaks to young Carla: "Now you will have to grow up and listen to the unspoken word as well as the spoken." This being the case, the techniques that are used—for example foreshadowing, flashbacks and intertextuality— aid in the creation of "unspoken" spoken words. It is rare that an author honestly and successfully plays the game of "reading between the lines," but Edward Fenton is one who does.

Foreshadowing is mainly used in conjunction with the theme of mythology.

Through this technique, the reader is subconsciously prepared for a forthcoming development in the plot, or given insight into a character's personality or traits through a



connection with a myth or legend. An example of this is the way in which Tiggie and Theo discuss their beliefs regarding life and death in conjunction with the myth of Philemon and Baucis and finally die in the same manner as those mythological heroes.

More evidence of foreshadowing is achieved through Captain Sarandis, who, after his first visit to the small harbor village, wishes the children goodbye, saying that he will see them again soon. The children naturally try not to take him seriously as they had only recently met him and they feel it is unlikely they will see him again. However, as he had predicted, it is he who ends up sailing with them to Italy.

A further literary quality especially accentuated in *The Morning of the Gods* is the strategic repetition of characters encountered again at the oddest moment, i.e. Captain Sarandis on the journey to Italy and the young man from the Hermes travel agency.

There is also the repetition of phrases, for example, the Python Lady may say something which is later repeated by another character, and the heroine wonders where she has heard that phrase or comment before. This repetition enhances the foreshadowing effect. When a phrase is thus said again, one queries where it came from and tries to find out when and why it was said.

Flashbacks are also an important technique used in the novel. Flashbacks are mainly made to things that Ismene used to say, memories of what she loved and despised. Fenton's aim in using flashbacks is to portray the memories that the young girl has of her mother. These are more frequent at the start of the book and taper off slowly as the heroine becomes stronger and stronger and less dependent on her mother's identity. Flashbacks are also necessary for Lefteris to narrate his story. In the beginning of the novel, because of the use of flashbacks, a small trick is played on the reader; it is not clear what has happened to Carla's mother until at least halfway into the first chapter.

Finally, intertextual details are brought up often in the text. Carla compares many things to books that she has read before in order to understand situations better and finds she knows many details that she did not expect to know. It is through her love of literature, which leads to her discussion with Angelos Iliou (one of her mother's favorite poets), that she travels up to Delphi and becomes a heroine. The theme of the "dangerous" book is also interesting and is used in the novel often. First, it becomes risky to give books to Solon, the Judge (even if the Horsefly or the police do not know what the books are when they are found), and Carla is also careful to give Lefteris classic books.

The Morning of the Gods is complete with a myriad of elements, some related to setting, others to plot or themes, and others to the characters. Literary techniques are used in order to enhance one or more of these elements. *The Morning of the Gods* is a net of qualities, a net which is complex to unravel, yet a great enjoyment to read.

Themes and Characters

Due to the unique geographical and historical setting of *The Morning of the Gods*, a number of themes are inevitably brought into the novel. One of these deep-rooted themes is that of politics. Mention of this theme is present from the second page of the book when Carla's mother angrily comments on the Colonels' Junta in her country.

Throughout the book, however, there is constant political commentary discussing issues of freedom of speech and thought, political martyrdom, communist ideologies, and even a description of the Cyprus problem. The novel is naturally subjective in terms of descriptions of the Junta; the book obviously is not for the Junta but against it, and this is made clear through Ismene's feelings. However, when young Leteris turns to Carla and tells her that such a situation would probably not be possible in the United States, Carla is quick to reply to him with examples of racial prejudice that took place in Alabama as well as the murder of Martin Luther King. Therefore, a more global view is taken and politics is brought closer to home so the American reader may be made aware that unjust politics occur in their own country as well.

Details related to the Junta are unveiled through these teenagers' conversations and it thus becomes more dramatic and serious as it is narrated through innocent eyes. The descriptions become more powerful when the teenagers try to comprehend what is going on around them by using their rationale: Carla, for example, when confronted with the notion of freedom of thought cannot "imagine anyone stopping Ismene from saying what she thought. How is it possible for a group of Colonels to stop anyone from thinking?". Other such comments include: "How can I love my country where they let such things happen?" and "How can I believe in God when He lets such things happen?" Politics is a difficult subject to discuss with both children and teenagers, thus the way that comprehension is achieved, even if it is not a deep understanding, is remarkable. Further important themes in the book are also closely tied to the setting even though they are of global interest.

These include religion and myth and their cohabitation within the setting. Of the two themes, however, the most important is that of mythology, for the setting, the characters, and even the plot swim in and out of it. Whilst religion is used as an integral part of the setting, it does not help much in terms of plot development, only in one scene at the Epitaphios on Good Friday, when Carla is aided by this religious ritual to come to terms with her mother's death.

Mythology, however, in addition to being a key element of the plot, is also tied to the concept that nothing ever changes, that the ancients remain where they are whatever happens, that they never disappear from earth. Even if the shepherd trades in his wooden pipe for a transistor radio on his way up the hill minding his sheep, he shall always remain on that hill and he is still listening to music, whatever its form of creation. The principal notion, however, is that "The old gods never died. They are still among us. They still keep showing up in the guise of mortals." And thus most of the characters are compared to and described in conjunction with their mythological counterparts, i.e.



Hermes, the Python Lady from Delphi, Tiggie and Theo, Savvas/Hephaistus, Captain Sarandis/Odysseus, and so on.

Some characters are linked directly to their mythological counterpart from the first moment that they are introduced, as the story of Savvas is associated directly to the god Hephaistus. Others are linked to mythology slowly throughout the text with small discrete details until one realizes at the end that The Python Lady, for example, is most certainly the Pythia of the oracle of Delphi because Fenton uses several allusions to her knowledge of the future and her enigmatic statements. It is fun to follow the clues leading to the gods or legendary heroes (as in Captain Sarandis' case). However it is underlined that "We are the ones who remain." Life goes on and although there may be turbulence and changes in society, the ancients are the ones who always remain. One should naturally keep in mind that Greece is the country where myth and the twelve gods of Olympus dwelled. The country, although different and modern today, still has many remnants of the devotion and adoration of the gods in all parts of society, from daily sayings and everyday rituals, to architectural creations of the past standing amidst glass buildings. The ancient gods and their fundamentals live harmoniously side by side with all the social and cultural elements that make up the modern Greek inhabitant today. Tiggie and Theo still respect the ancient gods and Theo's invocations to the gods portray this. Furthermore, the aunt and uncle's disappearance and ultimate death at the end of the novel shows how their respect for the gods allowed them to die in the same manner as two other mythological heroes. Their respect of life, environment, religion, and myth allow them to live peacefully. It is the balance of life's elements without excess that assures one of a decent and happy life.

In addition to these more concrete themes, one may find, in *The Morning of the Gods*, other themes which have more to do with the psychological aspect of the characters in the novel and their ultimate development.

Survival, for example, is said to be "an internal affair, a matter of personal philosophy." Through the novel, one comes to realize that each person finds their own way to survive the cruel and difficult elements of life and to come to terms with them in order to be able to live contentedly.

Everyone is a fighter as well as a survivor in his or her own way. In the same way, heroism is a personal philosophy and each person can be heroic in the best way that he or she can find.

The characters develop during the duration of the novel and mature through harsh circumstances. They come to understand what it really means to be a hero and a survivor even though each character may survive or be heroic in a different manner.

The young characters, particularly Carla and Lefteris, obviously mature prematurely due to the family circumstances that they are in, in addition to the political environment which is surrounding them. Carla matures tremendously and changes almost completely. She develops into a different person with more strength than she had ever believed possible through her "Greek Experience." She finds inner strength and begins



to find her identity. The environment in which she finds herself almost asks of her that she mature earlier and take on more adult responsibilities. One can clearly see this when Carla's best friend Honor writes to her, and all she can talk about is school, pointing out that the one revolution that they are learning about in school is more difficult than another one. Her priorities are different than Carla's, and she cannot even imagine that, to Carla, Honor's difficulties in school are trivial next to the reality of living in a place seven hours from New York and governed by a Junta.

Having briefly gone over the most important themes of *The Morning of the Gods* and the way that characters are influenced by these themes, the setting and the plot itself, it is important to examine the main characters of the novel. Although there are many different individuals in the book, the main characters are: the heroine Carla (or Ersi depending upon if she is using her American or Greek name); her mother Ismene, who is discussed only in flashbacks as she is no longer alive when Carla travels to Greece; Great-Aunt Tiggie and Great-Uncle Theo; and Lefteris.

In order to describe and explain traits of the main character, Carla, it is necessary that her mother's character be outlined first.

Carla is very tied to her mother and her memory, and the development of her own character is consequently linked to her mother as well. Ismene was a very dynamic woman and loved by all who knew her and happened to meet her. She is said to have had a "certain something" about her. "It didn't matter what she looked like, what mattered was how she felt. She was always full of passion." Ismene is Carla's only connection to her Greek identity and her roots and once she loses her mother, Carla feels as if she is no longer Greek: "She isn't anything." Ismene's character seems to be so powerful and influential, that it almost overshadows Carla and makes it difficult for the young girl to develop her own separate and unique identity. She feels that she has to be like her mother and do what her mother would have done. Ismene is a perfect being to Carla and Carla finds it especially difficult to reach the expectations that the young girl has set for herself.

Carla, at the beginning of the novel, feels that she is no one, and is subconsciously searching for her own personal identity, her own aura. The death of her mother has devastated her and it is difficult, if not impossible, for her to open up her thoughts and emotions and talk about it. Even a visit to the psychiatrist does not help at all with the situation and she is left with all her feelings bottled inside until she travels to Greece. There, although her character is still overshadowed by that of her mother's, she slowly begins to discover her own personality and identity through her experiences. Carla is looking for the guidance and safety of her mother to "lead her into this new, unknown world" but she cannot have that. Every young girl needs her mother to lead her into and guide her through life. But Carla is lucky, for she is guided into her new identity and into this new world by her Greek relatives and other Greek people that she meets, such as the Python Lady, to whom Carla surprisingly confides her feelings. Young Carla physically looks a lot like her mother, and one may even say that ultimately, her mother lives on through her. Carla also keeps imagining what her mother did, felt, would have felt, and would have done and tries to apply her actions to those of her mother's. She



even has the same "winged bicycle Pegasus" that her mother did when she was young. Carla's sense of Greek identity however begins to develop the moment she is "baptized" with her Greek name, Ersi. She is not certain what is going on inside her, but already her new name makes her feel lighter. As she accepts her new name, so she makes her first steps at letting go of the past: "Carla, the name already seemed a faraway thing, something that belonged to another life."

Greece allows Carla to come to terms with the loss of her mother. In addition to being guided through the motions by Tiggie who gives her advice ("The only way to erase pain is by facing it steadily.") and talks to her about Ismene, Carla is helped by the Greek religious rituals in which she participates. What she comes to realize is that her identity is something embedded in her, flowing in her veins since birth. This is acknowledged by Theo when Carla asks him if she danced alright on Easter Sunday and he replies to her that of course she did because it is something in her veins, something she already knows and has no need to learn. Carla's ultimate search in the novel, which is alluded to by the Python Lady, is to find her mother. However, the concept of the mother may encompass various other concepts, such as heroism, identity, bravery, and maturity. At the end of the book, Carla finds Ismene in herself; she has found her true self and identity, and her mother lives on inside her memory. Carla is no longer a shadow of her mother, but is her own unique self.

As mentioned above, Carla's character depends very much on the secondary characters of Great-Aunt Tiggie and Great-Uncle Theo. They are the most original, authentic and natural of characters and their relationship is alive and vibrant. When Carla first meets them at the bus stop, they are described as holding hands as they come towards her and thus their very close relationship is highlighted from the beginning to the end of the novel. They are kind and clever, they are wise and strong, and they are dynamic and caring. Tiggie and Theo initiate Carla into Greek life and its mysteries. They introduce her to the incantation for the mythological gods, and tell her about the Second World War. They help her come to terms with the loss of her mother and understand her father. They are the key to the maturity and development of Carla's character for they give her the strength and the guidance to continue and they give her the information, the love, and the warmth that her mother can no longer give her, enabling Carla to proceed with her life.

They are magical beings in life and magical in death. They are atmospheric and down-to-earth. Tiggie and Theo are the great-aunt and great-uncle any young child would like to have.

Lefteris is also necessary in the novel in order to show Carla that she is not alone in her loss: she has experienced death and he has experienced separation. However, whilst Carla feels loss, Lefteris is angry at society and also at his parents for having left him in Greece, even though it was not wholly their fault. He brings the horrors of the Junta to the forefront of the novel. Up until that moment, although the reader is aware of the seriousness of the Junta through Theo's discussion of Solon the Judge, nothing can compare to the "eye-witness" account of a young child. With Lefteris, Carla becomes strong and matriarchal. She helps him and tries to guide him for he is weaker in



character than she is. She tries to build up his courage and together they take down the street sign with the new name of the avenue, thus becoming heroes in their own right. Together they build up their strength and courage and support each other as they are taken to Italy on Captain Sarandis' boat.

Other than these main characters, there are minor characters, with various quaint personalities. Most of them have nicknames.

The Python Lady, for example, reminds one of the oracle at Delphi and seems to understand and know more than she is saying. She meets Carla on the bus to the village and, with her cat sitting on her lap, talks to Carla and makes her open up and say more than she would ever have said to a stranger. The Python Lady is a quaint, yet important character filled with mystery, yet warm and caring. Other characters include those who are caricatures of classic villagers, i.e. "The Aunts," "The Bread and The Salt," "The Argonauts" and "The Horse Fly." Although described as fully as possible, they have a sense of flatness and a cartoonish quality about them. They are absolutely fundamental to the authentic and vibrant atmosphere of the Greek village and bring color and noise and life to the fictional village. Other characters in the novel such as Solon, the Judge, and Angelos Iliou, the national poet from Delphi, and the man from the Hermes travel agency all play a vital part in the novel. They either intensify a point or message that is being made, help in the embellishment of the plot, or give a boost to the development of the heroine's character.



Topics for Discussion

1. "The young don't care about history.

Today is enough for them," (Tiggie, in *The Morning of the Gods*). Do young people need to find out about the past in order to understand the present?

Discuss.

2. "The answer of your question is that you will find the person you are looking for," (The Python Lady, in *The Morning of the Gods*). Who is the person that Carla is looking for and does she find him/her during her "Greek Experience"?

3. Discuss Tiggie and Theo's relationship, keeping in mind the mythological tale of Philemon and Baucis.

4. "Living, Dying, how can the one have any meaning unless you have been through the other? They are the two sides of the same coin" (Tiggie, in *The Morning of the Gods*). Carla ultimately comes to terms with her mother's death during *The Morning of the Gods*. Discuss the elements which help Carla accept her loss.

5. What is the significance of the title of the novel: *The Morning of the Gods*?

6. Compare Lefteris's character with Carla's.

Who is stronger and more self-confident? Do you think that this would have been different in another setting?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Greece was under military dictatorship from 1967 to 1974. Find out about another country that also had such a military dictatorship, i.e. Chile, Spain, etc.

and write a report about the dictatorship there. Where and when did it take place and how long did it last? Who was or were the dictator(s)? Was it similar to the military dictatorship described in *The Morning of the Gods*?

2. Ancient Greek mythology is an important element in *The Morning of the Gods* and as Uncle Theo says "the old gods never died and keep showing up in the guise of mortals." Find one of these "reincarnated gods" or characters compared to mythological heroes and describe him/her as fully as possible whilst highlighting the similarities and connections that he/she has to his/her mythological counterpart.

3. Find out what your name means just as Carla does with hers. Her real name is Ersi which means "dew of the morning" and "freshness of the dawn." Carla got her name "Ersi" because that was the name of her grandmother. Does your name have an underlying meaning to it? If so, what is it, what are its origins, why were you given the name that you have?

4. Why is it mentioned in the novel that "books can be explosive enough," that they can be dangerous in their own right? Find a book that you believe to be "explosive" and discuss why you think this to be true. If, however you do not accept this comment, discuss your reasons.

5. Discuss what constitutes one's country.

Is it the government? The geographical place itself with its buildings, its trees, its countryside? Is it the people who live there? Or is it just a state of mind?

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Roback, Diane. *Publishers Weekly* (June 12, 1987): 85. A review of *The Morning of the Gods*.

Related Titles

Edward Fenton's love for Greece can be witnessed through the number of books that he wrote about the country. He has written two picture books which include *Alekos's Island*, 1948, and *An Island for a Pelican*, 1963. These books are simple with straightforward stories. However, they are stepping-stones for the author to write his two other young adult historical novels: *The Refugee Summer*, 1982 and finally, *The Morning of the Gods*. Through these books, one glimpses authentic cultural and historical settings of Greece; the first novel is set in a suburb of Athens during the Asia Minor catastrophe, and the second in regional Greece during the Colonels' Dictatorship.

Fenton authentically and realistically portrays the setting of Greece during the specific historical periods, while he objectively outlines the political episodes that the plots unveil. Together, all four books make up a rich fictional archive of an author's love for his "adopted country." For American readers, the books can be used to travel back into time into a possibly unknown historical period of time. Through Fenton's work, one gets to know about the Greek culture and religion, as well as the thoughts and dreams of children who are not unlike any other children during times of strife and political unrest.

Other books which may be of interest in regards to the Colonel's Dictatorship and which can be discussed in connection with *The Morning of the Gods*, are Nina Bawden's *Rebel on a Rock*, 1978, and Cheli Duran's *Kindling*, 1979.

Rebel on a Rock tells of an English family's visit to a fictional country (certainly Greece in geographical and political description) that is being ruled by a dictator. The children get involved in a revolutionary plot to overturn the dictatorship, but this ultimately fails. As the book was published near the end of the dictatorship, Nina Bawden decided that the country should be given a different name.

Kindling, on the other hand, is definitely set in Greece in 1970. It tells of two boys who kindle a fire above their village in the mountains of Crete in order to clear forestland that belongs to their families. When the wind rises, however, and the fire spreads, the army is called in to extinguish it. The police are certain that men are responsible and when no one confesses, six boys are arrested along with the heroes of the novel and held without trial. The feeling of meaningless rights and powerlessness against the authorities is intensely and passionately depicted.

Both these books can be read and discussed in the same context and throw light on the different manners in which the Colonels' Dictatorship has been portrayed. They show how different children and young adults of both Greek and foreign descent cope and react to the political situation.



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